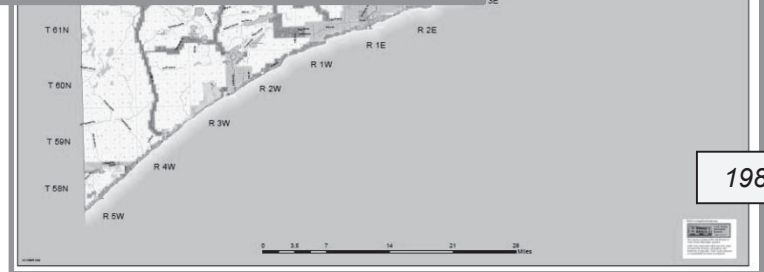
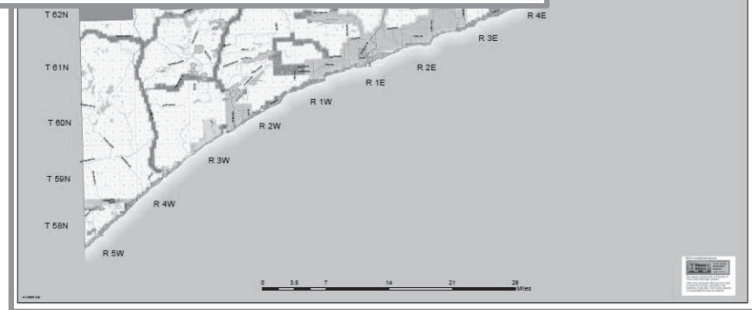


Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota

2016



1997



1980

Cook County

Land Use Guide Plan

2016 Edition

Adopted by the Cook County Board of Supervisors: 1/26/2016

Cook County Board of Supervisors

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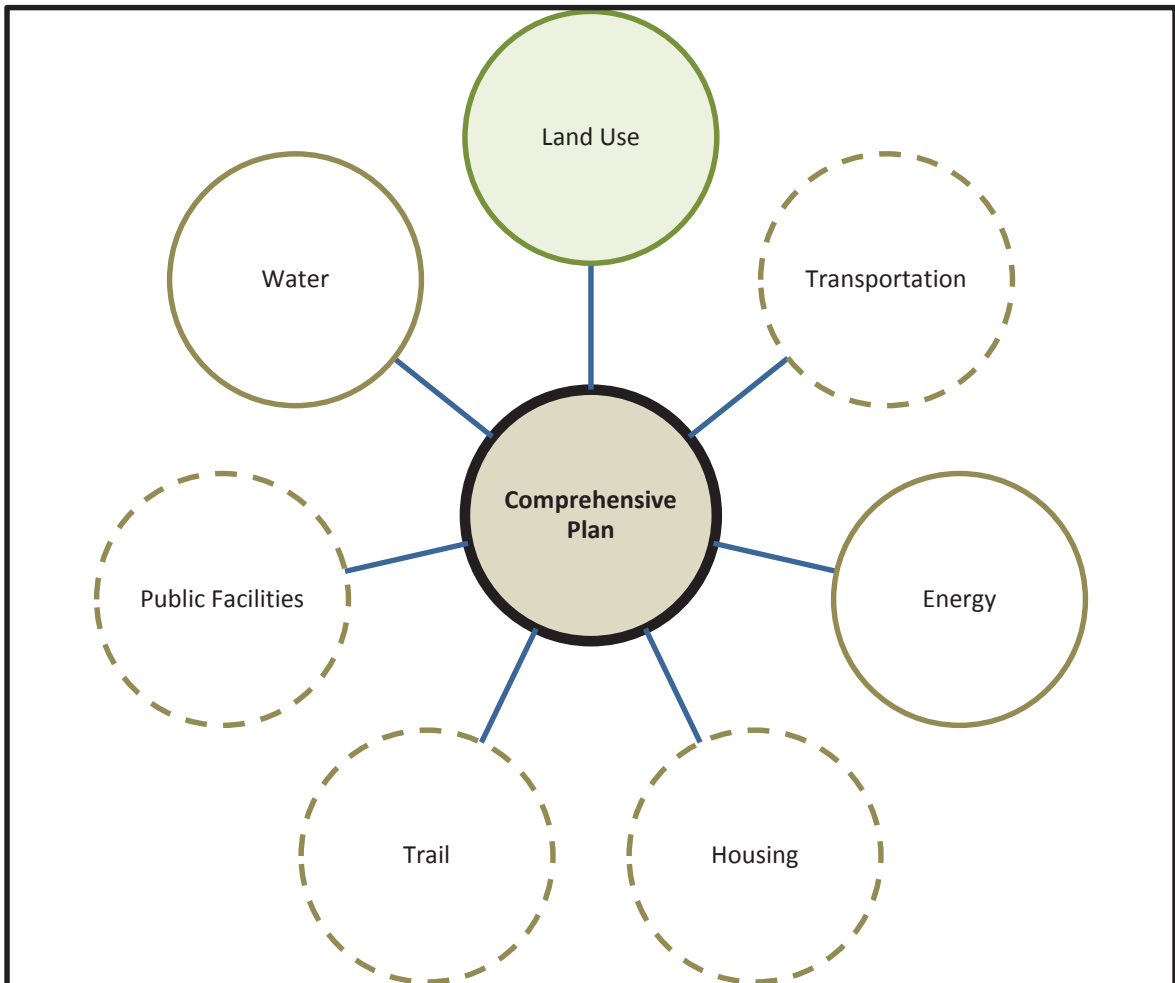
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The Land Use Plan as Component of County's Comprehensive Plan

Cook County's Comprehensive Plan is an amalgamation of separately created plans each focused on a specific topic. Three plans – land use, water management, energy – have been adopted. Others will be developed over time.



The Land Use Plan is a Living Document

Cook County adopted its first land use plan in 1980 and updated it in 1997. This, the third version, builds upon the previous two and brings the document into the current era; it updates where we are at, our perspectives on the county, and how we want it to change over time.

Specifically, this document is to guide County decision making and investments relative to land use and development. To truly make this a living, effective document each time the County, one of its commissions or staff make land use related decisions these questions should be asked and answered:

- ✓ Does this action affirm why we live here? *[Chapter 1]*
- ✓ Will this action sustain our desired Sense of Place? *[Chapter 2]*
- ✓ Does this action help shift the reality of Cook County in our intended direction? *[Chapter 3]*
- ✓ Will this action help achieve the desired future condition? *[Chapter 4]*
- ✓ Does this action adhere to our guiding principles? *[Chapter 7]*
- ✓ Does this action appropriately balance the rights of individuals and those of the community as a whole?

Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota

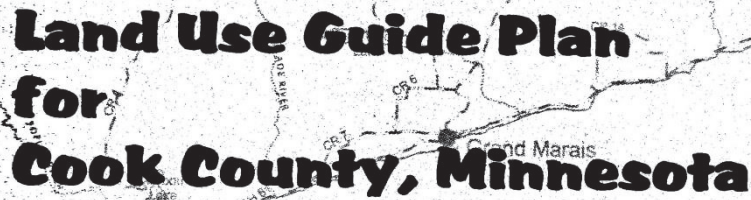
Chapter 1

We live here because

All aspects of this plan begin with the core reason residents choose to live in Cook County. From this statement of choice flows the understanding of the unique character of the county, the expression of residents' desires for the county's future, and the policies and actions intended to ensure that desired future.

Thus, the residents of Cook County assert that:

We live in Cook County because this unique place and community is where we choose to thrive amid an unparalleled natural environment for which we are dedicated stewards.

A map of Cook County, Minnesota, showing various geographical features and roads. The text "Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota" is overlaid on the map.

Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota

Chapter 2

This is a Special Place

eook County possesses a distinctive blend of characteristics that has evolved over hundreds of years of human interaction with the powerful North Shore natural environment. This distinctive blend is readily apparent to everyone who visits or lives here. This *sense of place* is what draws people here and keeps many of them here to live and work.

What is “sense of place” and does it change?

The “sense of a place” is rooted in the shared human experience developed over time within a specific landscape involving local knowledge and a place-centric folklore. Sense of place is how we identify ourselves in relation to a particular piece of land on the surface of planet Earth. It is the basis for our recognition of what makes a place special and unique.

All places exhibit a sense of place which may be positive, negative or a mix of both. Cook County’s sense of place is universally felt as positive. People are attracted to the place and how they fit within it. But, it is not perfect.

The statements that follow describe the essential attributes of Cook County’s sense of place. Nearly all of these characteristics are desired and it’s the mission of this plan to protect and enhance them. Yet, there are some that the plan deliberately seeks to alter making Cook County an even better place. These negative attributes lie within the county’s economic condition – lack of economic diversity, low wages, and insufficient amounts of affordable housing. All are targeted by the plan for marked improvement so that by 2035 Cook County’s sense of place, while retaining all that is positive today, will have changed for the better.

The Physical Setting: A Wild Land

Cook County's blend of diverse natural resources and features, including its climate, attracts people to visit and live in the county and is the foundation for most of its economic activity. The county's distinctiveness embodies relatively modest levels of development and population that are enhanced by a sense of undeveloped wildness and remoteness expressed, in part, by the presence of Lake Superior, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and other large tracts of publicly accessible land. This is furthered by its unique mix of seacoast, forest, lakes and mountains, its large expanses of relatively intact ecosystems, and its relatively unpolluted setting. Acceptance of the inherent value of these features and the need to sustain them into the future is broadly shared by the community.

Community: Independent and Cooperative

The combination of a relatively rugged, remote setting with deep winters functions as a filter, selecting people intentionally desirous of living in Cook County. Those who pass through this filter tend to be independent minded, creative, self-reliant people who nonetheless form a community that crosses economic and social lines to help individuals and meet common needs. The result is an open community evincing a pleasing small town flavor where an eclectic mix of people, including a large contingent of retirees, interact with each other within a variety of contexts, feel safe, care for each other, establish organizations and networks of problem solvers that spur interaction, and accept newcomers all while fostering an ongoing spirit of individuality.

People and Nature: The Active Life

A defining characteristic of Cook County is the direct, daily interaction between people and the natural world. Sometimes casual it is seldom taken for granted. It can occur through work and everyday living or by intentional activity including hiking, skiing, boating, snowshoeing, camping, snowmobiling, golfing, canoeing and kayaking, hunting, ATVing, dog sledding and observing. It occurs along undeveloped lake shores, in city yards, on well-groomed trails, down narrow deer paths, at quality resorts and recreational facilities, or upon clear streams. The wealth of opportunity for interacting with nature, at formal built facilities or in natural unformed settings, offers time and place of recreational and contemplative pursuits. What exists is an interdependency in which people and the environment are sustained by the presence of the other.

Economics and Development: Small is Vibrant

Cook County's economy is based upon natural resources and individual talent and determination. Few businesses can be considered large and nearly all are owned by local residents. While the higher cost of living, lack of economic diversity, large number of lower waged jobs, and lack of affordable housing are significant issues being addressed by the community, the county's highly desirable core qualities attract creative people capable of using their own and the area's resources to fashion their livelihoods.

We will work to change this to this.



The county's highly desirable qualities attract and keep creative people capable of using their own and the area's resources to fashion household supporting livelihoods within the county's vibrant, diverse and rurally scaled economy.

Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota

Chapter 3

Changing reality

Achieving Cook County's desired future will mean undertaking actions that in some cases seek to change certain current conditions to a desired state and in other instances to reinforce attributes essential to the county's future. This chapter summarizes the current status of key county characteristics. More complete details for some factors may be found in the Appendix.

Population

Cook County has been on a population roller coaster the past few decades. From 1980 to 1990 total population declined from 4,092 to 3,868. Then came the growth boom of the 1990s and the county's population surged to 5,165; but over the next decade growth stagnated resulting in a net gain of just 11 people (total of 5,176). The most recent projections by the State Demographic Center suggest modest growth the next 20 years to 5,264 by 2030.

Within the county, Grand Marais has the greatest concentration of people, although nearly half the county is scattered across the large amount of unorganized territory. Populations in 2010:

- Grand Marais: 1,351
- Grand Portage: 565
- Lutsen Township: 415
- Tofte Township: 249
- Schroeder Township: 208
- Unorganized area: 2,388.

As a way to set a target for planning and development purposes, the Go Cook Team set a 2035 population figure of 6,500.¹

Assessment / Population

- In-migration across all but the oldest age groups fueled growth in the 1990s.
- From 2000-2010 modest gains in 30-64 age groups were offset by losses young adult and older age cohorts.
- Number of births in the past half dozen years has rebounded from an earlier dip suggesting that growth due to natural increase might be in progress.
- According to Go Cook survey, over half of county feels that current population level is "about right" while a third feels there is a need for growth.
- There is a general concern regarding need to retain young adults as means to support current and new economic activity.

¹ The Go Cook County Team was a group of public, private and non-profit leaders from across the county that developed an economic development plan as a starting point for more deliberation, decisions and action. By the end of 2013 the plan was completed and since then various teams have been working to implement the recommendations.

Economy

Tourism dominates Cook County's economy representing 54% of wage and salary jobs and 55% of Gross Regional Product (this includes the retail sector). It is based on the county's outstanding natural resources, the arts, and North Shore culture. The next largest sector is public administration followed by health care, construction and educational services.

One-third of all jobs in the county are filled by sole proprietors. This includes businesses in tourism, professional services, and forestry/goods production.

Full-time employment is difficult to find in the county. Employment has a high degree of seasonality with winter unemployment nearly double that of the summer. Median household income is about 89% of the state average. Go Cook found that, "despite above-average median household income growth led by wealthier retirees, average wages grew slowly [2001-2011], and the income for many workers decreased when adjusted for inflation."

Mining: A century ago there was a brief iron ore mining operation near the Canadian border in the county. Since that nearly-forgotten episode mineral extraction has been limited to sand and gravel. However, it is widely understood by geologists that significant deposits of non-ferrous minerals probably exist throughout the county. No exploratory drilling has been conducted.

Assessment / Economy

- Tourism is and will remain the dominant economic activity within the county. It imports wealth into the county, creates business opportunities and employment, and builds on the county's inherent attributes.
- Self-employment reflects both the nature of the local economy and the creative spirit and skills of residents. A significant amount of future economic activity will be generated through such enterprises.
- Although previously dominant natural resource based businesses such as timber and fishing are still present, there are more activities built around local skill sets and creativity inspired by the natural setting.
- Cook County is renowned for its arts and crafts talent and business activity.
- In general, county enterprises are small-scale, locally-owned, and built around natural resources or creative activities (e.g., arts) sparked by the local environment and culture.
- Completion of the True North high speed internet access initiative will greatly benefit existing businesses and facilitate new ventures.
- Despite the heightened level of non-ferrous mineral exploration and mine development just to the west in St. Louis County, it is unlikely that any such activity will be undertaken in Cook County over the next 20 years.

Housing

Values and level of new construction are skewed by the strong second-home market. Seasonal homes were 87% of the new units built between 2000 and 2010. In 2011 the average new home in Grand Marais was 4.0 times the average household income for two service industry wage earners.

Assessment / Housing

- Too much of Cook County’s housing is unaffordable for too many residents. Cost of land, access, well and septic can easily total \$90,000 before any construction occurs. This greatly restricts the ability of new residents to move into the county.
- Go Cook identified factors raising housing costs as being: low supply of available land, lack of infrastructure, zoning restrictions, and limited financing.
- Competition for buildable land between year-round and second-home markets tends to raise prices beyond reach of year-round residents.
- Many properties once available to year-round residents have been converted into vacation rentals further reducing supply of housing stock.
- For every 100 new residents an additional 25-40 new housing units must be built.

Public / Private Landownership

Cook County is unique among Minnesota counties with just 9% of its land base privately owned: 136 square miles (87,549 acres) of 1,452 (929,280 acres). The remaining 91% is owned by the Federal, State and County governments and the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.²

The vast majority of the public land, roughly 93%, is in the interior of the county or as tribally-owned land within the Grand Portage reservation. On the other hand, only 39% of the privately owned land is in the interior.

The majority of privately owned land (61% or 53,192 acres) lies within the loosely defined North Shore corridor. Nearly 21,000 of these private acres are undeveloped.

Overall, roughly 51% of all privately owned land in the county is undeveloped.

Assessment / Public-Private Landownership

- The large public land base is vital to much of Cook County’s economic activity, especially tourism, and its sense of place.
- The relatively low amount of private land restricts development opportunities and contributes to high land values.
- Nonetheless, half of all privately owned land is undeveloped and a significant amount of this land lies within the North Shore corridor within easy reach of TH 61 and developed community centers.
- There is publicly owned land within the North Shore corridor, particularly county-administered tax-forfeit land, which could be evaluated for making available for development.

² Land owned by the Grand Portage tribe is not “public” in the same sense as, for example Federal or State land, but is included here as land owned by a governmental entity.

Land Use Pattern

The vast bulk of development in Cook County runs along the narrow North Shore corridor defined by Lake Superior and Highway 61, up several inland routes most notably the Gunflint Trail, and around a number of large inland lakes. Grand Marais is the county's commercial and service hub. Other community centers – Grand Portage, Hovland, Lutsen, Tofte and Schroeder – string along the corridor offering different mixes of businesses and services and most are focal points for major destination tourism facilities. The Lutsen Mountain Ski Hill and associated businesses including a golf course is the single largest tourism facility in the county.

Taconite Harbor stands uniquely as a heavy industrial and sole-purpose shipping facility. The coal-fired electrical generation plant is owned by Allete/Minnesota Power and the shipping facility by Cliffs Natural Resources. However, the facility has been slated for closure in 2016 with no announced plans for the future of either the plant or the shipping operation.

Most of the interior is publicly owned forest land with a scattering of mainly residential development. This public land is variously managed for timber production, recreation, and ecological values. A large portion is within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) and nearly all is within the Superior National Forest.

There are a number of state parks within the county – Temperance River, Cascade River, Judge C.R. Magney and Grand Portage – and there is the federal Grand Portage National Monument. There are numerous state forest campgrounds, wildlife management areas, and scientific and natural areas.

Cook County is laced with various recreational trails. Major routes include three state trails: North Shore Trail (mainly for snowmobiles), Superior Hiking Trail, and Gitchi-Gami State Trail (bicycling, inline skating, and hiking). There are many looped trail systems primarily for cross-country skiing.

Land Use Regulations: The County exercises a full array of land use controls including zoning, subdivision, stormwater and septic. The City of Grand Marais exercises extraterritorial subdivision authority up to two miles around the city. Grand Portage Reservation has its own land use controls. None of the three organized townships do their own planning and zoning. Schroeder, Tofte and Lutsen have adopted community plans and the latter two have used them to secure community-specific zoning provisions under the County's ordinance.

The Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa retains the inherent authority to protect and manage the use of the lands, waters and resources within the exterior boundaries of the Grand Portage Reservation. Land use management under the jurisdiction of the Grand Portage Tribal Council is regulated by the Land Use Ordinance, which regulates the six Land Use Districts (Preservation, Residential, Wildlife, Commercial, Forestry, Industrial, Parks and Recreation). The purposes of the ordinance are to: reflect land stewardship principles and environmental ethics of the Grand Portage Ojibwe value system; develop a land use management ordinance, fair to all residents and legally enforceable on all land, regardless of ownership, within the exterior boundaries of the Grand Portage Reservation; and, protect the environment and residents of the Reservation by developing regulations for commercial development, non-residential use, density and location of residential development, and preservation of sensitive areas.

The Grand Portage Land Use Administrator and Land Use Committee are responsible for permitting and enforcement of the ordinance.

Assessment / Land Use Pattern

- County's development pattern is long-standing and has been determined by a combination of historical development (e.g., fishing communities along the shore), access roads into the interior, distribution of privately owned land, and, of course, the strong linear force of Highway 61.
- Grand Marais is the commercial, service and institutional hub of the county. Other community centers are essentially neighborhood convenience centers.
- There is currently nothing to suggest that the basic land use pattern will or should change, although land use trends will continue to be monitored to evaluate whether any changes should be considered.
- Application of regulations is fair and open although some residents feel the regulations and enforcement make development difficult. Part of that perception is driven by Federal and State legislation that sets some key requirements (e.g., wetlands). Cook County's unique physical setting and limited private land base can make application of state-wide standards difficult or inappropriate. There is a need to review these regulations to determine if they can better reflect the unique terrain of the county, to make them more adaptable to various local conditions, and easier to enforce while retaining the core environmental benefits they were designed to protect.

Transportation

While the County will adopt a separate transportation plan, land use and transportation are vitally interconnected. This assessment focuses on transportation within the county as it relates to existing and future land use.

There are several components to Cook County's transportation system as follows:

- **Roads:** Roads are defined as serving one of three functions:
 - Arterial: provides the highest level of service at the greatest speed for the longest uninterrupted distance, with some degree of access control to adjacent property. In Cook County this is Highway 61.
 - Collector: provides a less highly developed level of service at a lower speed for shorter distances by collecting traffic from local roads and connecting them to arterials. This function is provided by County State Aid Highways (CSAH) and most county roads. Also, although not by design or intent, some US Forest Service (USFS) and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) roads also serve this function (e.g., The Grade).
 - Local: consists of all roads not defined as arterials or collectors; primarily provide access to land with little or no through movement. This function is provided by county roads, USFS and DNR forest roads although not by design, township and city streets, and Bureau of Indian Affairs/Grand Portage Reservation roads.
- **Airport:** The Grand Marais-Cook County Airport, located eight miles outside of Grand Marais, is a full service facility handling all general aviation needs. The 4,200' runway is scheduled to be lengthened to 5,000' by spring 2016; this upgrade will permit the airport's use by large firefighting planes, which currently are not allowed to use this site,

and by corporate jet aircraft, which will greatly expand the area's attractiveness for tourists that want to fly into the county. There are no issues with safety zones or impingement on surrounding private property.

- **Harbors:**

- The Taconite Harbor coal handling facility handles the largest vessels that can sail on the Great Lakes. Once also a taconite shipping operation this facility is now dedicated to handling coal for the Minnesota Power electrical generating plant. Site is served by railroad linked to east end of Iron Range but there has been no rail traffic for many years.
- There are several harbors, marinas and access points along Lake Superior serving local and transient recreational boaters.
 - Taconite Harbor: A designated safe harbor with emergency mooring buoys. limited dock mooring, and boat access.
 - Tofte Access: A semi-protected access with a breakwater; no mooring.
 - Grand Marais: A protected harbor with a city-owned marina that has limited number of moorings for transient boaters. Harbor also has two DNR landing accesses one of which is planned for upgrades including paving, runoff control, ramp and enhanced breakwall.
 - Horseshoe Bay: A protected boat access.
 - Grand Portage: Grand Portage Reservation owns and operates a protected marina with 30 slips and access. Voyageur's Marina is a private access that also serves as dock facility for ferries to Isle Royale; no transient mooring.

- **Trails³:** As noted in the land use section, there are several state-level recreational trails that provide access into Cook County for snowmobilers, ATV riders, bicyclists, and hikers. These include the North Shore Trail, Lake Superior Hiking Trail, and the Gitchi-Gami Trail.

- **Pedestrian/Bicycling Pathways:** These generally are short distance routes providing biking and walking access in and near community centers, especially connecting residential areas with community services and amenities. Pathways may be separate trails/paths or co-located with roads.

- **Transit:** Arrowhead Transit operated by Arrowhead Equal Opportunity Agency provides a number of services for Cook County residents including: twice monthly service from Grand Marais to Duluth, twice monthly service from Schroeder/Tofte/Lutsen to Grand Marais, week day service between Grand Marais and Grand Portage, and Dial-A-Ride service within one mile of Grand Marais.

³ As used here "trails" refers to systems that function as transportation routes between points; closed, looped recreational trails are not included.

Roads and Land Use

Cook County's road system is probably unique within Minnesota in many ways. It has a single arterial highway that traverses the entire width of the county. Most of its county roads are dead-end roads running north and south. Travel within its interior land including major east-west connections is dependent on two other entities neither of which are public road authorities nor receive funding from dedicated transportation funds such as a gas tax or local property taxes.

Highway 61 is the major arterial route and literal backbone for Cook County. Running from border to border along the shore of Lake Superior all major roads attach to it like ribs to a spinal column. Most county roads, especially the CSAHs, are collectors. All USFS and MnDNR roads are officially local roads although several serve as critical minor collectors.

Cook County itself has 296 miles of roads. Many of these are dead-end roads running off Highway 61. The bulk of the County system (180 miles) consists of (county state aid highways (CSAH) and 16 miles of regular county roads. Most (111 miles) of the CSAH routes are paved with the Gunflint Trail representing half this amount. CSAH roads are designed to a 10-ton standard but most are only built to 9-ton capacity. Gravel roads are designed for a maximum 5-ton limit.

The USFS has an extensive road network lacing the interior of the county. This system of approximately 227 miles of crushed aggregate surfaced roads is designated as "administrative" designed and intended to serve national forest purposes (e.g., timber management, access to federal recreation areas); they are not "public roads" in the sense of County roads and are not meant to meet general transportation needs such as providing access to privately owned land or serving as collector routes. Nonetheless, the roads are extensively used by private property owners to access year-round and seasonal homes. Also, the roads provide access to recreational facilities such as ski trails. Several roads such as The Grade are important for linking county roads. The USFS does not plow its roads in the winter. The County plows some USFS roads and private parties do the same for some USFS and DNR roads.

In addition, the USFS has 376 miles of "high clearance" rugged roads; 86 miles of these are closed to car and truck traffic.

The Minnesota DNR has a smaller but vital forest road system in the county. The DNR has two levels of roads: "system" roads that are maintained for year-round access for logging and land management, and, "minimum maintenance" roads that are irregularly used for access to logging areas. There are 45 miles of system roads and 48 miles of minimum maintenance roads. All but less than a mile of DNR system roads are in the East End of the county. Like USFS roads DNR roads are also used by private parties to access privately owned land and for recreational purposes.

The county's reliance on the USFS and DNR roads to provide access to private property is a major land use factor. The following table presents the results of an analysis of privately owned property parcels in terms of the nearest public road that serves them. Private roads were not included. This "near" analysis is not perfect but it suggests the relative level of dependence on a given road authority to provide access to these parcels. Example: if the cabin or house is on a private road but that private road leads to a USFS road then the analysis would say it is served by the USFS road system. "Developed" is fairly loosely defined using tax classification and value fields in the county's parcel database.

The intent is to produce a rough understanding of the magnitude of the level of dependence on a given road authority for property access. Results are shown in table below. Grand Marais is excluded from this analysis.

Cook County Parcels (by development status) Served by Road Jurisdiction				
Jurisdiction	Developed		Undeveloped	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
County	2,406	74%	1,371	58%
USFS	646	20%	697	29%
DNR	123	4%	237	10%
Township	61	2%	74	3%
Total	3,236	100%	2,379	100%

Clearly, the County system is the primary rural area access road network. At the same time, nearly a quarter of developed parcels rely on the USFS and DNR road networks. Looking to future development, the reliance on the USFS and DNR systems grows to nearly 40%.

Importantly, this analysis does not address the role of the USFS system in particular to provide critical connections between County roads and access to recreational facilities and areas.

Assessment / Transportation: Roads

- Nearly every County road is a dead-end generating very little connectivity between roads. Specific areas lacking connectivity include: Arrowhead Trail to Gunflint Trail, Gunflint Trail to Caribou and Sawbill Trails.
- There is no redundant all-weather east-west route for Highway 61 with a connection into Lake County.
- County is essentially in a “road surface maintenance” mode with no major rebuilding.
- Funding for maintaining County roads is deficient with at least \$27 million in unmet needs.
- County road network is heavily dependent upon the USFS and DNR systems which are not designed or intended to serve as public roads (i.e., to provide year-round access to privately owned property).
- In addition to serving their intended functions, certain USFS and DNR roads in effect function as important minor collectors.
- After the expansion and upgrading of USFS roads 30-40 years ago following the creation of the BWCAW, funding to maintain the roads has steadily and seriously declined. In 1999 the Superior National Forest’s road budget was \$1.745 million; by 2014 it was \$0.455 million. The annual need to maintain the system is \$4.824 million. Nothing suggests that the limited budget will not continue.
- There are 20 true bridges in the USFS system; replacement costs can run upward of \$600,000 per bridge exceeding the system’s budget. One has already been closed.
- USFS does not plow roads in the winter. County has assumed plowing for certain segments deemed important to link county roads.
- USFS has closed some low use roads and is conducting an assessment through which additional roads will be closed.
- Tight budgets have meant that the DNR focuses its road maintenance on its system roads with the minimum maintenance receiving little if any attention.

Assessment / Transportation: Air, Harbors, Trails, Pedestrian/Bike Pathways, Transit

- The airport runway expansion resolves a major need. If the expansion fuels significant increase in traffic, future needs could include more plane parking space and hangers.
- Grand Marais and Grand Portage provide marina and mooring facilities for transient boats.
- Other accesses provide landing points at adequate intervals along the shore, however, safe harbor facilities between Silver Bay and Grand Marais and Grand Marais and Grand Portage may be needed as pleasure boating traffic develops.
- Taconite Harbor is the lone large vessel commercial shipping and receiving facility although its current use is limited to offloading coal. As long as the rail tracks remain in place this facility has the potential for handling other in- and out-bound cargoes.
- Only two segments of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail have been completed within Cook County. These are a route within Grand Marais and from the Temperance River to Lutsen (with a short gap in Tofte).
- Additional safe pedestrian and bicyclist pathways connecting residential areas with amenities especially into and within community centers are needed.
- Pedestrian and bicyclist safety along higher volume rural roads need to be enhanced.
- There is no county wide trails plan nor is there a single entity that speaks for all recreational trail user groups/advocates. The creation of such a plan should recognize and seek ways to collaborate between motorized and non-motorized trail users.
- From the perspective of pedestrians and bicyclists, Highway 61 through Grand Marais is a major barrier that needs actions to lessen pedestrian/vehicle conflicts and should be perceived and designed as a multi-modal corridor.

Public Facilities

Public facilities can drive, influence or reinforce land use development. In the case of Cook County most of its facilities tend to serve and reinforce land use and few have shaped the location or intensity of other uses.

Key to understanding public facilities and services is the county's small size and remoteness. There are just 5,200 year-round residents, only one incorporated city, three organized townships, and the Grand Portage Reservation which is governed by the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa as a sovereign nation with its own tribal government. Consequently, necessity fosters cooperation as evidenced by the fact the county sheriff provides police service within Grand Marais, the County owns the two town halls for the unorganized areas of Hovland and Colvill, and the YMCA operates in a County-owned facility attached to the Cook County School in Grand Marais.

Cook County owns a wide variety of buildings and facilities throughout the county. The following identifies these and provides a brief assessment of their condition.

Courthouse and Law Enforcement Center

- **Courthouse:** The building is generally in good condition.⁴ There are some space usage issues but no major remodeling or expansion is required.
- **Law Enforcement Center:** The building is in good condition but its status as a detention facility is limited to be a 72-hour holding facility. As a result the County incurs substantial costs to transport and house its prisoners at facilities in other counties. While the county

⁴ As used here "good" means normal maintenance required but no major renovations or upgrades.

has not yet discussed if and how to correct this situation, one possible action would be to expand and upgrade the current facility into a one-year holding facility.

The recent connecting of all county buildings with broadband fiber optic cable allows for 24-hour surveillance of the buildings via security cameras from the Law Enforcement Center.

- **County Search and Rescue Building:** The building is in good condition.

Highway Department

The County had a detailed assessment of the Highway Department facilities conducted in 2013.⁵ The following highlights the findings:

- **Grand Marais main facility**
 - No on-site salt/sand storage
 - Buildings have considerable heat loss, some not meeting current Minnesota Energy Code
 - Most buildings lack fire suppression and security systems
 - No provision for current/future technology needs (networking, telecom, etc.)
 - Inadequate space leads to inefficiency as staff is forced to double or triple handle vehicles each day
 - No separation of exhaust from working areas for staff
 - Site and building are open, causing possible security risk to equipment and personnel
 - Some areas of the site have excessive grades
 - “Front door” to the site and main building not very inviting or attractive
 - Pre-engineered metal buildings are difficult to expand and modify
 - Inadequate parking for personal vehicles
 - The report reviewed four options for remodeling/rebuilding or building new on site. Another option that has arisen since then is to build a new facility on county owned land adjacent to the airport.
- **Hovland & Tofte facilities**
 - Inadequate ventilation
 - Inadequate size and number of parking spaces to store all equipment safely indoors
 - Energy inefficient
 - Inadequate/inefficient lighting levels
 - Lack of storm water management
 - No separation between vehicle and non-vehicle areas
 - No vehicle wash system
 - Aged/outdated fuel system
 - Building systems leak and vapor barriers hold water from the leaking roof
 - Buildings have outlived life expectancy

⁵ “Cook County Highway Department: Condition Assessment and Needs Report”, Oertel Architects, Ltd., April 11, 2013.

Recreation and Community Facilities

- **YMCA:** This new (built in 2013) recreation facility is attached to Cook County school, is owned by the County, and managed by the YMCA. County is responsible for repairs and upkeep.
- **Cook County Museum:** The County owns this facility but it is managed by the County Historical Society. Building is in good condition but there is a need for several upgrades including humidity control.
- **Cook County Community Center and recreation complex:** The major facility in this complex in Grand Marais is the community center building which houses offices, meeting space, and the curling rink. Included in the complex are: outdoor skating rink, outdoor hockey rink, tennis courts, skate park, picnic pavilion, children play equipment, and horse arena. All facilities are generally in good shape although the tennis courts need resurfacing and the Community Center is considered to be energy inefficient.
- **Former Search and Rescue building;** This building is currently not being used. It is not in good condition with options being demolition, significant remodeling, or repurposing as a warming shack for the rinks.
- **Hovland Town Hall:** This facility is in good condition. In 2015 the County approved construction of a pavilion and installation of play equipment.
- **Colvill Town Hall:** This facility is in good condition.
- **Boat accesses:** These include McFarland Lake (toilets, picnic area), Leo Lake and Clearwater Lake (ramp, portable toilets), and Saganaga Landing (two accesses; ramps; dock; toilets). All are in good condition.

It must be noted that a large number of various recreational facilities are provided throughout Cook County by other public and private entities. Among these are campgrounds (USFS, MnDNR, Grand Portage Reservation, Grand Marais), boat accesses, township parks and play areas, trail systems (e.g., cross country ski, snowmobile), swimming pool (Grand Marais), and downhill ski and associated adventure rides. While many of these are aimed at serving tourists all are available for use by county residents.

Other County-owned Facilities

- **Recycle Building:** This facility is in good condition.
- **Tofte Transfer Station:** This facility is in good condition.
- **Cemeteries:** These include Old Settlers (Hovland), Lutheran (Hovland), Chippewa Church (County-owned grounds but Grand Portage Reservation maintains the site), and Maple Hill (half of the site is County owned, the other half by the Hedstrom family).
- **Communication towers:** There are numerous towers with various combinations of public and private ownership of the towers and associated buildings. All are in good working order.
- **Disused parking lot near courthouse:** This empty lot has potential for a county purpose such as a storage/maintenance building.

Assessment / Public Facilities-Services

- Except as noted below, in general all structures are in good condition and working order with no need for a major change in the inventory of buildings and sites. A comprehensive energy use evaluation could be basis for lowering costs of operation and prolong building life.
- The Law Enforcement Center should be considered for upgrading to a one-year holding facility.
- All three major Highway Department facilities need to be upgraded or replaced.
- A County-owned empty lot across from the Courthouse could be evaluated for a needed future use.
- The former Search and Rescue Building is not in use and should be converted to another use, probably related to the community center complex.

Other Topics

Broadband Internet Service

High speed broadband internet service is an essential component of a community's infrastructure on par with transportation. It is essential for successful economic ventures and gaining access to educational opportunities. In 2010 the Arrowhead Electric Cooperative (AEC) was awarded over \$16 million in grants and low interest loans to build the "True North" Fiber-to-the-Home broadband network throughout Cook County. This investment was augmented by a \$4 million grant by Cook County from the 1% sales tax fund. Work is well underway with a completion date of spring 2016. When finished, the system will provide broadband access to every household and business served by the AEC or the Grand Marais Public Utility Commission.

Governance

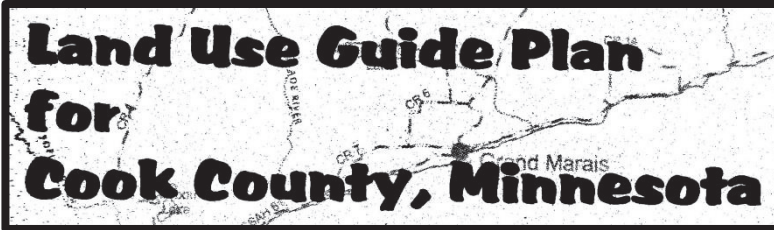
For a county of just 5,200 people Cook County has a large number of governmental entities – county, city of Grand Marais, three townships, Grand Portage Reservation, the school board and special functions such as the Soil and Water Conservation District. In addition, the Federal and State governments play large roles in land use, transportation and economic issues via the management of their respective large land bases and road systems.

Education

All of Cook County lies within ISD 166 which has a PreK-12 school in Grand Marais. There are three charter schools serving elementary students. Access to post-secondary learning is facilitated by the North Shore Campus of Cook County Higher Education.

Assessment / Other Topics

- Completion of the broadband access initiative will greatly enhance Cook County's opportunities for business development and expansion, access to educational and learning opportunities, and, in general, plug into the planet on par with the rest of the nation.
- In a small county with limited fiscal resources it is essential that the maximum amount of collaboration between units of government occurs to make service delivery efficient and cost effective. This can include alignment of goals, policies and investment strategies as well as shared services.
- County government does not have a direct role in education but the value of a quality educational system to the county's ongoing vitality is such that County support for education is critical. There is a critical need to ensure that students graduate fully prepared for a career and/or post-secondary education and possess the learning, skill sets and attitude for making a living in Cook County. In addition, post-secondary education can be an important economic activity drawing students and staff to the county.



Cook County in 2035

This plan has twin missions. One is exercise County governmental authority to protect, preserve and enhance the range of qualities of Cook County that attract people to live, work and recreate here. The other is use County governmental resources to help drive changes essential to making and keeping Cook County a place where people can live rewarding lives.

This and the following three chapters describe the Desired Future Condition of Cook County in the year 2035. They also state the guiding principles in the form of goals and policies that are to guide County government decisions and investments in seeking to achieve those future conditions.

The following narratives describe the general look and feel of specific areas within Cook County. This is intended to define how these areas should change and/or sustain themselves over the next 20 years. The areas are:

These narratives describe the Desired Future Conditions in the year 2035. They are written from the perspective of someone who has traveled to that year and is reporting what they see. Thus, the verbs are in the present tense and sometimes in the past as they describe changes that have occurred during the period 2015-2035.

- **General Conditions throughout Cook County:** Description of county-wide future conditions.
- **Highway 61 Corridor / Lake Superior Shoreline:** Area roughly bounded by the lake and the inland ridge but excluding community centers.
- **Grand Marais and Surrounding Area:** The plan has no jurisdiction within the city but it is important to describe what may be there in context to the rest of the county.
- **West End Community Centers:** These are Schroeder, Tofte and Lutsen.
- **East End:** Encompasses land east of County Road 14 including Colvill, Hovland and Grand Portage.
- **Gunflint Trail:** The corridor along the Trail beginning at the outskirts of the Grand Marais area.
- **Inland Lakes and Forests:** The inland areas tend to share traits separate from the rest of the county; where distinctions are required subareas are referenced.

General Conditions throughout Cook County

Regardless of where one is Cook County, certain images and conditions are experienced by residents and visitors. These conditions include:

1. The county's economy is healthy, resilient and growing; centered on a vibrant four-season tourism industry. It features a diverse mix of small businesses in the arts, light manufacturing, retail, services and professional enterprises taking advantage of the county's special sense of place, business clusters, and the creativity and talents of local workers and entrepreneurs. Economic activity emphasize locally produced and supplied goods and services and tends to be small-scale, locally owned, minimally polluting, and supports young workers and families attracted to or desiring to remain in the county. Compared to twenty years earlier, there is more economic diversity, wages have increased in real terms, and significantly more housing is affordable for working households.
2. The unique traditional character and authenticity of each community is retained and peoples' pride in their homes, businesses, properties and public amenities is evident.
3. Much of the developed land is near roads and community centers while remote areas are predominantly in public ownership supporting recreation, natural resource management and ecological values.
4. Natural and cultural features, which are essential to the county's sense of place, healthy residents and its ongoing economic viability, are sustained throughout the county especially in developed areas where direct access to open space, habitat, views, recreation and cultural features is maintained.
5. There is a diversity of recreational opportunities and enhanced access to public lands for recreation, featuring a system of recreational trails co-located within consolidated corridors where appropriate and, in all cases, designed to meet the intended type and level of use.
6. Developed areas where environmental concerns, development density, and financial capacity exist are served by public (or private communal systems) water and sanitary sewer service.
7. County government and residents sustain a quality environment and sense of place while encouraging jobs and innovative development.
8. Growth in residential and commercial development is concentrated in community centers helping to control public service costs and preserve the county's valuable wild and undeveloped character.
9. There are adequate amounts of quality, affordable housing for workers, families and the elderly that blends into the community, takes advantage of limited land availability and infrastructure, and is energy efficient.
10. Mixed use residential/commercial development situated in areas of denser development supports economic activity while meeting housing needs.
11. The county is served by utilities including up-to-date telecommunications service essential to underpinning a vibrant economy and dynamic community.
12. Electric power line and other utilities co-locate along existing road and utility corridors to the degree possible, are buried whenever feasible, and have rights-of-way maintained with environmentally sensitive methods; residents are encouraged to use renewable methods of electrical generation and telecommunication systems not requiring utility corridor extensions.

13. Cook County is a thriving rural arts, music, heritage and cultural center celebrating creativity and creative enterprises.
14. A viable transportation system meets the county's unique challenges to meet community and economic needs, provides for alternatives to motor vehicles, and innovatively seeks to provide mobility options for all people.
15. County government is responsive, organized and efficient, and supports the provision of public services and needed investments in critical infrastructure aligned with this land use guide plan.

Highway 61 Corridor / Lake Superior Shoreline⁶

The image of Cook County for both residents and visitors is defined in large part by the experience along this corridor as it supports most of the travel and exchange in and out of the county. It is arguably the most important portion of the county in aesthetic, economic and social terms. As viewed from the highway, it continues its appearance of being largely undeveloped with driveways and access roads to buildings that are kept out of sight. This appearance is broken by stretches that include sweeping lake vistas and other sites that have development adjacent to the highway. There are state parks and numerous informal and formal public areas, probably more than 20 years earlier, providing direct access to the lake or views of it. The various community centers are built-up adjacent to the highway and have distinctive edges. The developed lands between these community centers will be primarily residences. Non-resort commercial uses catering to travelers and residents alike have increasingly been located in the community centers. The highway itself remains essentially a two-lane roadway. Driveways and roads connecting with Highway 61 are minimized through the use of service and frontage roads. The entire roadway has paved shoulders enhancing safety without creating an overly broad swath through the woods. Traffic increases have been modest in keeping with changes in population and tourism. Passing lanes are strategically located to facilitate safe traffic flow along the length of the corridor.

The future of the Highway Corridor and Lake Superior Shoreline includes:

1. The Lake Superior shoreline and water quality are increasingly protected from excessive vegetation removal, failing septic systems, erosion, intensive chemical use (e.g., lawn care), road salt, pollution from boat traffic, non-local airborne sources of contaminants, and similar impacts.
2. Sanitary sewage treatment has gradually shared shifted to shared systems in densely settled areas or to systems less susceptible to failure (e.g. self-contained composting systems).
3. The scale, mass and orientation of structures as viewed from the highway or the lake have minimized their visual impact and sustain a small scale perspective of development.
4. As viewed from the highway or the lake, most developed areas are unobtrusive, dominated by the natural setting and vegetation; this is especially true of structures on higher elevations along the Lake Superior ridgeline.

⁶ This narrative covers the sections of the corridor between the community centers located along the highway and it directly supports the concept that the nodal aspect of the centers is to be strengthened.

5. Resorts/camps/parks and other recreational facilities are located along the corridor but other commercial uses will be located within community centers.
6. The corridor east of Grand Marais experiences a less intense and lower level of development than the stretch west of the city.
7. Rare coastal wetlands have been preserved.
8. The entirety of the highway has adequate shoulders providing for safe emergency stopping.
9. A fully developed bicycling / hiking trail system runs the extent of the corridor serving through traffic and providing access for residences and businesses.

City of Grand Marais and Surrounding Area

Grand Marais is Cook County's primary service and institutional center containing major public institutions and most of the county's businesses and services in the setting of a village-like residential community. Emphasis has been placed on keeping the community's distinctive low-key, North Shore feel in style and intensity of development and in the form and character of the community. A strong orientation to and direct connections with Lake Superior is sustained. Grand Marais is compact, sustaining a tight, dynamic feel to the business district; commercial development will be limited to the corporate boundaries. The outlying area is primarily residential in nature with the occasional resort or tourist oriented business. Industrial activity is focused at Hedstroms and the designated industrial park.

The future of the Grand Marais area includes:

1. Strong, definite edges to the community minimize sprawl along TH 61 or up the Gunflint Trail.
2. The small town feel of Grand Marais is retained through pedestrian friendly compactness, massing and pedestrian scale of buildings, relatively narrow streets, unique street scape and signage.
3. A strong orientation to Lake Superior through direct physical and visual access from public places is enhanced.
4. There is a mix of housing types with a density higher than elsewhere in the county.
5. In order to provide for orderly and planned expansion of the city, residential development in the first "tier" outside of the city is low-density rural allowing for cost-efficient provision of infrastructure and design of neighborhoods integrated into the existing urban form.
6. Commercial uses are retained within a vibrant town center except those requiring large amounts of land for outside storage or display (example: auto dealers and lumber yards).

West End Community Centers

The three historic community centers on Schroeder, Tofte and Lutsen continue to strengthen their function as developed centers in the West End, each playing a distinctive role. Tofte is the county's secondary commercial center with a strong commercial and public service hub and mix of housing contained in a village-like setting. Although Schroeder and Lutsen have some of the same uses and activities, the larger scale of buildings and the greater intensity of uses in Tofte reinforces it as the core village for the West End. The other two centers are more specialized:

Lutsen is a resort community with large-scale destination resorts and recreation facilities, concentrations of year-round and seasonal housing, and a small general business complex; Schroeder provides basic community commercial services, lower density housing, and smaller scale resorts. Even with greater levels of developed land, all three retain their natural setting and immediate access to open, public areas.

The future of the West End communities includes:

1. Each community center has been planned through local processes.
2. The communities, especially Tofte and Lutsen, have definite, recognizable boundaries.
3. Developed portions of communities extend inland with greater depth and are less dependent upon TH 61 in the role of “main street”.
4. Shared utility systems, especially for sewage collection and treatment, are used to support denser residential and commercial development in Tofte and Lutsen.
5. Green spaces and public areas are retained as integral components of each community’s overall design.
6. The Taconite Harbor facility and surrounding lands have been productively repurposed.

East End

Most of the East End of Cook County is undeveloped forested areas or rural lands with low density residential uses. Most economic enterprises are home businesses, home occupations, sustainable farmsteads, and an occasional rural industry such as a small-scale sawmill. Retail store and service development is in Grand Portage, the Hovland community center and the historical Colvill area. The village of Grand Portage is the largest community in the East End. The Grand Portage Band is also the largest employer in the county operating multifaceted enterprises and governmental departments and providing a wide range of services through offices, including accommodating businesses located in Grand Portage (see Appendix D for listing of businesses and services). In addition, Grand Portage Reservation hosts Grand Portage National Park Monument and Heritage Center, Grand Portage State Park, and U.S. Port of Entry Customs and Border Patrol. The Hovland community center features several businesses and community entities primarily oriented to meeting the needs of local residents.

The future of the East End includes:

1. Low density residential development with relatively greater density at Grand Portage village, Hovland, and Colvill.
2. Most rural development is discrete and unobtrusive as viewed from roadways.
3. Much of the inland area is managed for timber, wildlife, ecological values, and dispersed recreation.
4. Trail-based and dispersed (e.g., hunting) recreational activity is actively supported especially dog mushing, horseback riding, ATVing and hiking.

Gunflint Trail

The Gunflint Trail continues to be a portion of the county that is an extraordinary resource in North America nationally recognized as a scenic byway. This corridor into thousands of acres of public recreation and wilderness area contains private ownership with a variety of resorts, outfitters, camps, residences, and related commercial services. As access points to the vast

public areas, the commercial and private holdings benefit from a sphere of interaction with the public lands for their users and customers that extends miles beyond the limits of their private ownership.

The future of the Gunflint Trail includes:

1. A roadway corridor largely flanked by indigenous, iconic forest cover with increased number of roadside day use sites (e.g., picnic areas, viewing sites, hiking trails, access to historical and cultural sites) and restrained, well-designed private and public informational signage.
2. The number of resorts is probably unchanged from 20 years earlier although existing ones have expanded or been enhanced.
3. There is a strong concern for the scale, materials and design of buildings. The historic image of the Trail has increased in importance as other areas of North America become more homogeneous.
4. Commercial and social opportunities for trail residents and year-round visitors are provided at the various public resources and resorts; additional economic activity occurs in numerous home occupations and businesses.
5. A continuation of the change in visitor patterns that sees expanded winter and shoulder season use and increasing group sales to include retreats, lectures, history and education-oriented vacations as well as the traditional “experiential” trip-based customer.
6. A multi-use, year-round non-motorized recreation route runs the length of the Trail.
7. Water quality of lakes and streams is outstanding being maintained through citizen and agency monitoring, upgrading of sewage treatment systems, and enforcement of shoreland zoning regulations.

Inland Lakes and Forests

Large areas of Cook County remain as minimally developed forested areas mainly owned by public agencies (US Forest Service, Minnesota DNR, Cook County, Grand Portage Reservation). Public policy and management regarding forest management, habitat, recreation, and scientific designations drive land uses on these areas. Most of the public land is undeveloped but managed forest. Private development is primarily year-round and seasonal residences on large lots and has been encouraged to locate along the network of existing county, township and forest roads, on lakes possessing the capacity to sustain such development, and, in general, in areas where services (e.g. school bus, utilities, emergency responders) can be relatively efficiently delivered. Longstanding businesses and institutions remain vibrant. Water quality of lakes and streams is outstanding and being sustained through citizen and agency monitoring, upgrading of sewage treatment systems, and enforcement of shoreland zoning regulations. Within this general description, there are several sub-areas that exhibit distinctive characteristics including:

1. Kadunce Creek/Flute Reed River / Brule River: This area of low-density development dotted with home businesses is particularly noted for its concentration of dog kennels and dogsledding enthusiasts and associated businesses; and
2. Maple Hill / East End: These areas with a history of productive agriculture remain dotted with various types of agricultural enterprises.

Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota

Chapter 5

Coordination

Jn a small county making effective use of limited human and financial resources is essential. This makes coordination and cooperation between public and private sector entities a key component in realizing the county's potential. Various governmental entities in Cook County have launched an inter-governmental effort intended to enhance coordination. This chapter of the Land Use Plan addresses the subject relative to land use.

Grand Marais

Although the Cook County plan and land use ordinances do not apply within the corporate limits of Grand Marais, the land use interests of the two units of government are closely intertwined. Grand Marais exercises extra-territorial subdivision control in an area two miles around the city. In addition, city policy requires that landowners seeking public water or sewer service first must be annexed into the city. On the other hand, the city lacks the planning staff capacity of the county for undertaking planning and working with development projects.

Areas of mutual interest regarding land use and development shared by the County and City include:

- Desire to focus denser development in and around Grand Marais and sustaining the city as the county's primary commercial and service center.
- Coordination and synchronization of regulations regarding land use so that County land use controls support Grand Marais' growth and development plans.
- Coordination of services and consideration of shared services so as to reduce city costs and make service delivery more effective.

Sub-Area Plans

Each of the three organized townships in Cook County --Schroeder, Tofte, and Lutsen --has prepared and formally adopted a community plan.⁷ The Grand Portage Reservation has

⁷ "Schroeder Township Planning for the Future", March 2004; "Lutsen Town Center Plan: A Guide for Public and Private Actions and Investments", May 2004; "Town of Tofte Comprehensive Community Plan", February 10, 2005.

adopted a comprehensive plan and land use controls for its lands. The relationship between these plans and the County's land use plan and controls varies.

Township plans relate only to the authorities exercised by the townships including such matters as town roads, recreational facilities, community centers and the like. None of the townships has adopted and administers its own land use controls ordinance. Township plans have no legal authority to create, direct or govern the administration of County ordinances and services. The plans can serve as the basis for seeking to influence county ordinances such as to secure township-specific language in zoning or sign control. In fact, Tofte's plan called for development design controls specific to the township, which controls were incorporated by the County into its zoning ordinance.

The Grand Portage Reservation is governed as a sovereign nation by the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and is not under County authority and thus the relationship between plans is not an issue. However, the County does regulate land use of privately owned property within the Reservation; this is undertaken jointly with the Reservation which also issues permits for those properties.

Unorganized areas within the county can also develop community plans addressing a single topic or a range of issues. Lacking a unit of government to direct and adopt the resulting plan, these efforts would have to be driven by a local organization or an ad hoc group of citizens. The resulting plans would have no legal authority but, depending on the robustness of the community's participation in the process, would represent an expression of the community's desires. They could form the basis for subsequent actions such as community newsletters/websites, formation of non-profit organizations to accomplish a community objective, and petitioning the County to undertake a specific action (e.g., area specific zoning regulations).

Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota

Chapter 6

Strategic Initiatives

This plan is implemented through a combination of proactive initiatives and consistent decision making in accord with its desired future conditions, objectives and policies.

The following strategic initiatives address key issues or leverage vital opportunities. Pursuing any one of them will involve a host of actions that will further the objectives of this land use plan. While these are County initiatives, clearly each requires participation from a wide variety of private and public sector parties and in some cases the County's role may be primarily the instigating force. The initiatives are not offered in any order of priority or ranking.

Private / Public Land Ownership Pattern

Increase the amount of privately owned developable land within the North Shore Corridor and around community centers so as to encourage new development where physical and community infrastructure can most cost effectively support it.

Destination Higher Education Program

Build upon the existing Cook County Higher Education foundation and explore establishment of a distinctive, destination higher education program whose purpose, beyond providing high quality educational opportunities, would be to bring people into the community on a year-round basis through an activity that broadens the scope of the local economy.

Private Development Infrastructure Financing

Establish a program through which individuals desiring to build a year-round, homesteaded residence and needing financial assistance can finance essential upfront infrastructure costs (such as road access, water supply, and on-site sewage treatment) over time so as to eliminate an enormous barrier to construction of affordable housing.

Small-Scale Agriculture

Support agricultural activity appropriate in scale and scope that serves to retain locally spent dollars within the county's economy and sustain households in a fashion compatible with the county's social-economic fabric by devising and executing a strategy aimed at assisting such enterprises to be economically viable.

Land Use Regulations and Administration

Implement changes to County land use regulations regarding permits, project review, project phasing and fees, timeliness, and administration with the intent to streamline development and reduce costs for individuals and developers while retaining the purpose and integrity of the regulations. Regulations and their administration recognize the ability of individuals to build their own homes and structures and, where appropriate, should accommodate to their needs regarding such matters as project timing and inspections.

Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota

Chapter 7

Guiding Principles

The future is made one decision and one investment at a time. These principles are meant to guide County actions so that the sum total of decisions over time brings about the intended future described by the plan.

Overall Goal

Goal:

To achieve a pattern of land use in Cook County that reflects the Sense of Place and Desired Future Condition statements of this plan.

Policies:

1. The Sense of Place and the Desired Future Condition statements of this plan shall be explicitly considered and discussed by the County when making land use decisions, investing in public infrastructure, evaluating impacts of projects and programs, and considering other pertinent matters.
2. Land use planning and management decisions will incorporate an ecosystem-based management approach that:
 - a. Recognizes the economy, the community, and the environment are interrelated and that solutions to issues must reflect that economic prosperity and lasting livelihoods depend upon healthy landscape-scale ecosystems; and
 - b. Requires that government and people at the community, regional and state levels work together to face problems, identify opportunities and find common solutions.
3. The County shall establish a set of indicators to use in biennial evaluations of change within the county relative to the land use plan. The evaluations shall evaluate the degree and nature of change, review the ability of the plan to manage this change in an appropriate and desired manner, and identify an appropriate course of action through the plan and related processes to deal with the change and its impacts.

General Land Use

Goal:

To have an inventory of land suitable and appropriately located for the anticipated types of land uses, compatible with natural resources, and proximity to existing infrastructure.

To protect non-compatible land uses from one another.

Policies:

4. The primary use of undeveloped or remote areas, particularly areas not served by maintained roads or school bus service, should be forest management, recreation, and wildlife habitat areas.
5. Rezoning of land must consider the existing quantity of land available at the appropriate locations and at that time for a given purpose.
6. Up-to-date economic, natural resource use and population information should be used to adjust the amount and location of individual land use (zoning) designations to provide a variety of living and working situations.
7. Land uses with compelling location-specific requirements such as an industry's need to be adjacent to water and highway for shipping, special commercial facilities (such as ski hills, golf course or resorts, or uses utilizing existing structures or sites with extraordinary limiting features) must be evaluated in light of those unique requirements or features and the use's potential adverse impacts on adjacent property and uses.
8. Land ownership should not be a sole determining factor in the development or non-development of land. Overall development patterns of adjacent areas, the ability to economically provide needed public services, natural features, the land's importance or potential importance to larger ecosystems, impacts on the local economy, and other such intrinsic factors must be considered as well.
9. Agricultural activities are recognized as a valid land use and will be encouraged to continue where appropriate.
10. The County recognizes and supports the existence of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Area, existing state parks, and other Federal and State lands for appropriate uses within Cook County.
11. Potentially incompatible adjacent land uses shall be buffered from one another. Means to accomplish this may include open space, berming, plant material, building design, hours of operation, noise control, or other means.
12. Review of conditional uses and rezonings must evaluate impacts on but not limited to: relationship to land use plan, benefit to the overall community, adjacent use, air and water quality, traffic generation, public safety and health, area aesthetics, and economic impact on area.
13. Redevelopment of already developed lands is generally preferred over the development of undeveloped land.
14. Underground utility lines are preferred wherever feasible. While maintaining rights-of-way in a manner that reduces fire hazards, utility providers are encouraged to allow the growth of woody vegetation to serve as visual screen zones where corridors intersect public roads and trail and as water course protection zones.
15. Cook County may acquire through purchase or exchange and manage lands to provide recreation areas, open space, green areas, timber management, and access to public lands and lakeshore.

Natural Features and Environmental Concerns

Goal:

To maintain and enhance the quality of natural resources and native ecosystems within the county.

Policies:

16. Evaluate and minimize adverse impacts on air quality, surface and ground waters, wildlife habitat, ecological systems, and other natural features through land use decisions.
17. Consider visual impact of landscape alteration in new development.
18. The value of natural features as the basis for economic activity in the county should be maintained and enhanced.
19. Encourage the conservation and preservation of unique or distinctive natural features and systems (e.g., lakes, land areas or other features of scientific, natural history or archeological significance) in recognition of their importance to the quality of life in Cook County.
20. Consult the Cook County Comprehensive Water Management and Comprehensive Energy plans.
21. Support views from public roads, especially Highway 61, that are dominated by the natural setting with most forms of development unobtrusive, allowing view corridors from the development.
22. Evaluate cumulative effects of land use decisions on watershed and ecoregion scales; include riparian ecosystem function and the permanent conversion of land.
23. Minimize adverse impacts of noise and night lighting on adjacent properties and land uses.
24. Maintain the function and health of the county's hydrologic cycles by protecting wetlands, riparian areas, and streambeds.
25. Follow Federal, State and County wetland management plans.
26. Consider the inherent value of natural systems.
27. In order to participate in the effort to conserve, protect, and enhance natural features affected by global processes (such as atmospheric change, air born contamination, loss of non-renewable resources), Cook County will move toward an ideal of sustainability by conserving energy, reducing waste, and reducing pollution inland use practices and in the delivery of County services.
28. Encourage cooperative forest management between Federal, State, Tribal, private and County authorities to solve common problems, review each other's plans, develop common goals and management practices, and work with common resource data bases.
29. Encourage forest management plans and practices that ensure sustainable and biologically diverse forest ecosystems and provide merchantable levels of timber for harvest at a rate of consumption that is within the capacity of the forest for renewal.

Residential

Goal:

To provide a range of residential options with respect to cost, density of development, and locations within the county.

Policies:

30. Residential density should be greatest near areas of concentration of commercial and public services and employment opportunities.

31. Within Cook County there should be opportunities for a variety of residential development densities ranging from low densities in remote areas to village-like densities in the community centers and for a variety of residential types.
32. Areas not served by public services (e.g., utilities and roads), but in a location where service might be logically extended in an orderly way should be made available for recreational or year around residential uses.
33. Residential uses will be allowed in the remote unserved areas of the county only if the property owner accepts a waiver that relieves the County of the obligation to provide services to those uses.
34. Any parcel of land used for residential habitation, regardless of duration or type of dwelling, must have a compliant sewage treatment system.
35. Areas designated primarily for residential uses should be located so as to be free of any detrimental effects from commercial or industrial uses.
36. Encourage and support efforts by other entities (private for-profit, private non-profit, public) to provide an adequate supply of quality housing with prices affordable to the work force of Cook County.
37. Residential areas should have ready and convenient access to public parks, open areas or green space.

Commercial

Goal:

To provide commercial facilities to meet the needs of residents and visitors.

Policies:

38. Promote strengthening growth of the traditional commercial service centers of Schroeder, Tofte, Lutsen, Grand Marais, Hovland, and Grand Portage.
39. Encourage expanded development of tourist lodging, commercial services, worker housing and amenities to strengthen the county as a tourism destination.
40. Expansion should be provided for all commercial centers without adversely impacting residential or open space districts.
41. Location-specific commercial uses such as solid waste disposal areas, airports, radio towers, and gravel pits must be sited on an individual basis with accompanying standards to protect adjacent land uses.
42. Specialized commercial activity (e.g., resorts, campgrounds, ski hills, marinas, kennels, etc.) that depends on and requires specific site conditions can co-exist with residential and other land uses through the application of standards regarding screening from adjacent uses, traffic conditions, size and scope of the activity, and other similar concerns.
43. Commercial fishing on Lake Superior is an activity that should be encouraged and promoted by allowing small-scale fish houses, ramps, and boat houses along the shore provided that adjacent non-commercial property is not adversely affected.
44. Home occupations and home businesses are appropriate uses in all zone districts that permit residences.
45. Encourage farming, fishing and logging enterprises.

Goal:

To provide for industrial operations in the county in a manner that protects the health, safety and general welfare of Cook County residents and the integrity of the natural environment.

Policies:

46. The general siting standards for industry shall be:
 - a. Heavy industry shall be generally limited to the immediate area of Taconite Harbor and to the City of Grand Marais and its immediately surrounding areas.
 - b. The County may designate areas for such development. The County should consider areas within or adjacent the community centers. In all cases, consideration will be made to minimize adverse impacts on adjacent land through combinations of building design and construction, site configuration and design, and operations.
47. Standards and conditions will be considered when evaluating proposals for the exploration for and/or excavation of minerals, including gravel, building stone, and gemstones:
 - a. Standards for mining of gravel shall be developed which protect gravel resource areas from conflicting use, assure a future supply, protect the environment, protect the public health, safety and welfare, and provide for reclamation of mined areas.
 - b. Standards for mineral exploration or mining shall be developed which are compatible with the general land use of the county, protect the environment, and for which a public benefit is demonstrated.

Design and Scale of Development

Goal:

To insure that any public or private development utilizes place-specific design to create a built environment that: respects natural features, landform and vegetation; reinforces local character, sense of place and image of Cook County; and reflects the context of the site.

Policies:

48. Develop sign ordinance that allows for varying standards along different road corridors.
49. For ridgeline land parcels, locations for buildings should optimize the balance between views from the property and views of the buildings from travel corridors.
50. Design Districts may be designated within the county to apply standards specific to those areas.

Recreation

Goal:

To promote and support a variety of opportunities for recreational activity for the residents of and visitors to Cook County.

Policies:

51. Encourage recreational opportunities and facilities based upon the area's natural assets and sense of place.
52. Encourage the development of public recreational facilities which residents want for their use and enjoyment.
53. Cook County supports the provision of all types of designated trails through a comprehensive trail system and the multiple use of trails where appropriate.
54. Cook County recognizes and supports the existing system of State and Federal parks and recreational facilities as an integral part of Cook County's recreation and open space system.

55. In areas with dense residential development such as community centers, and in areas along Highway 61 and Lake Superior, provision for developed recreation areas and access to undeveloped open space, public land, Lake Superior, and similar areas should be made.

Transportation

Goal:

To provide for the safe, economical movement of people, goods and services through and within the county minimizing adverse impacts on natural features and people.

Policies:

56. Maintain close cooperation between the Minnesota Departments of Transportation and Natural Resources, US Forest Service and local government to ensure the actions of each are not in conflict with each other regarding roads, construction, designation, use, and maintenance.
57. Secure the provision of an all-weather road providing east-west connectivity as backup to TH 61.
58. Generators of heavy traffic, such as major commercial and industrial centers, should be located along or close to the Highway 61 corridor.
59. The County will support actions that retain Highway 61 as a two-lane highway with the following characteristics:
 - a. Adequate shoulders and passing lanes for safety and maneuvering.
 - b. Reduced speed zones in developed areas.
 - c. Ditching that adequately controls drainage but are small enough to minimize clearing.
 - d. Roadside vegetation that reduces attraction of deer to roadside.
 - e. Paths of bicycling, in-line skating, walking and similar means of transportation are provided within the corridor, usually the right-of-way, but not along the roadway proper or the shoulder.
60. Provide a County road network that appropriately provides access to development and use areas, facilitates safe and free-flowing travel, can be maintained within reasonable budget limits, and coordinates with Federal, State, Tribal and Town road systems.
61. Known hazardous areas for vehicles or pedestrians should receive priority for corrective action by the county, State or other responsible jurisdiction.
62. In general, the County will not accept ownership of or responsibility for new or existing roads whose primary function is to serve local or abutting residential, commercial or industrial uses. The County may consider accepting ownership of or responsibility for new or existing roads whose primary function is to serve as collector or arterial traffic routes and whose inclusion would result in areas of additional development potential that were consistent with all aspects of the Land Use Plan. Those new or existing roads for which the County does accept ownership or responsibility must meet all appropriate design standards.
63. Develop minimum acceptable standards for private roads, not including driveways, over which public (e.g., school buses) or emergency vehicles will travel.
64. The County will work with the State of Minnesota to encourage planning, improvements and maintenance of Highway 61 that will:
 - Maintains safety;
 - Identify, inventory and protect view corridors both landward and lakeward from the corridor;

- Recognize the aesthetic experience in driving this corridor as an economic asset of the County; and
 - Reinforce the urban and community centers.
65. Support current level of air transportation facilities in Cook County and as may be appropriate in the future, consider expansion of airport facilities and services at existing and/or new sites.

Public Facilities and Services

Goal:

To provide quality public facilities and the delivery of public services that meet the needs of residents and visitors and are justifiable in terms of cost effectiveness.

Policies:

66. Land use decisions will be made that support the ability to provide cost effective public infrastructure, utilities and services or, where appropriate, comparable privately provided services.
67. Areas designated by the plan as being remote, rural, or low density will be given low priority for public road construction and maintenance.
68. Lands with ecological or cultural values worthy of protection should be retained in public ownership. Those public lands that are better suited to private ownership in all respects should be offered for sale.
69. Public facilities such as maintenance garages, landfills, gravel pits, etc. should be sited with care so as to provide locations convenient to the need for such facilities but also in a manner that respects adjacent land uses and is a good example for private land uses.
70. The adequacy and economics of public services in the review of specific rezoning proposals or conditional use permits, is a valid part of their consideration and should be evaluated in every case.
71. Support reduction, recycling and reuse.

Economic Considerations

Goal:

To encourage the development of a strong local economy featuring diversity, potential for sustainability, a range of economic opportunities, and an efficiently serviceable development pattern.

Policies:

72. A capital improvement priority list should be maintained and observed for the maintenance and replacement of county facilities.
73. Support economic development concepts, strategies and specific projects that maintain or enhance economic opportunity and community well-being and sense of place.
74. Support the development of private and non-County public recreational facilities and systems designed primarily to serve tourists so long as such facilities and systems are in keeping with the general intent of this plan.
75. Support a diversification of the local economy through land use decisions that lessen dependence upon tourism. Businesses are to be encouraged that are small scale, locally owned, minimally polluting, and based on local resources.

Administrative and Intergovernmental

Goal:

To integrate land use concerns into all appropriate ongoing administrative actions.

Policies:

76. The adopted land use plan should represent a tool for public and private decision making regarding land use.
77. Land use related decisions shall recognize the need to duly consider the rights and responsibilities of the general public good with the corresponding rights and responsibilities of the individual.
78. County will coordinate with the City of Grand Marais regarding land use controls and administration in a manner that supports City land use and development plans, and, explore areas where City and County can coordinate, share or otherwise make the delivery of governmental services in Grand Marais more effective.
79. County supports efforts by townships and unorganized areas to create their own community plans.
80. The process by which land use related decisions are made is to incorporate the following principles for open and civil discourse:
 - a. Accept controversy. Controversy is the heart of spirited debate. It is the opposite of conflict, not disagreement.
 - b. Let the other person speak. Listen to what they say. Ask questions to clarify their position, not debate it. Each person is to have his or her say.
 - c. Debate is to be depersonalized. People can disagree with each other and still respect each other. Argue the issues, not the people supporting one side or another.
 - d. Focus on the process. View the process as child rearing not winning vs losing. Child rearing is a process that has its ups and downs but no precisely defined wins and losses. We can celebrate successes, but the success and the celebration are part of community building, not a win over somebody else.
 - e. Look for common ground. The first and most important step is to find or create areas that we share in common. When we have disagreements, we can return to this common foundation to begin building mutually acceptable solutions.
81. County involvement in and/or support of land exchanges between units of government or between government and private parties will be guided by the following:
 - a. The County should seek to exchange County-owned land with state and/or federal land so as to: consolidate existing County lands and acquire land with potential to serve County needs.
 - b. Lands acquired by the County should be reviewed for any potential public use. If no public use is present or anticipated in the future, these lands should be offered for sale or leased to the public if they are in an area where the land use plan specifies private development.
 - c. The County will only acquire land from private land owners for the purposes of achieving the goals of this plan from willing sellers. This policy does not apply to condemnation proceedings to remove unsafe structures, construct roadways, provision of essential infrastructure and services, or similar efforts.
 - d. The County will encourage and where necessary facilitate the exchange of federal and state owned land for privately owned land where the net exchange enhances the land

- use patterns, desired future conditions, and state land use plan objectives which overall ensure an adequate amount of appropriate private land for development.
- e. The County, where appropriate, will encourage and facilitate the transfer of federal and state owned land currently being leased by private parties to those private parties.
 82. The various levels of government having land use jurisdiction in the county such as the US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Department of the Interior, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation, and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, should be made aware of the county land use plan and incorporate its content into their planning, management and decision making regarding land use issues in the county.
 83. The County will cooperate with the Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa to guide the use of private, non-Tribal lands within the Grand Portage Reservation in a manner that supports both County and Band policies.
 84. Because Cook County's relatively large amount of remote, hard to reach areas hinders appropriately quick response times for emergency services, the County supports the training of residents to provide basic emergency skills to augment professional providers.

Education

Goal:

To encourage the development of a well-educated populace and the concept of life-long learning through support for academic institutions as well as recognition of the educational opportunities presented within the community itself.

Policies:

85. Encourage and support the continued presence of viable public schools in Tofte, Grand Marais, and Grand Portage as means to provide education and sustain dynamic communities.
86. Encourage programs to increase the amount and level of information available to residents in Cook County as a means to create a more informed populace regarding land use and community issues.

Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota

Chapter 8

Action Program

The following defines an initial set of actions associated with the strategic initiatives presented in this plan as well as a general group. Clearly there are more that will arise and, upon further consideration, some that are listed will fall by the wayside as no longer needed or appropriate. In each category the highest priority action is listed first.

<i>Private / Public Land Ownership Pattern</i>	
1	Determine which parcels of County administered tax forfeit land located within the North Shore Corridor are appropriate for private development, and, make qualifying parcels available for sale to private owners with priority placed on those parties that will develop affordable housing for year-round, homesteading residents.
2	Establish a mechanism by which the County can facilitate voluntary sales or exchanges of appropriate public land within the North Shore Corridor for private land in the remote interior.

<i>Destination Higher Education Program</i>	
1	Establish a task force under guidance of Cook County Higher Education to aggressively explore the expansion of secondary learning opportunities in Cook County.

Private Development Infrastructure Financing

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Encourage the Cook County-Grand Marais EDA to establish a program through which individuals desiring to build a year-round, homesteaded residence can finance essential upfront infrastructure costs (such as road access, water supply, and on-site sewage treatment) over time so as to eliminate an enormous barrier to construction of affordable housing. |
| 2 | Encourage the Cook County-Grand Marais EDA to establish a program for individuals desiring to build a year-round, homesteaded residence to finance remedial actions needed to make site usable for development including storm water management and other water quality best management practices. |

Small-Scale Agriculture

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Review all land use regulations to ensure they appropriately support or do not inadvertently pose obstacles for small-scale, homestead based agricultural activities. |
| 2 | Work with Cook County-Grand Marais EDA to establish a program providing financial support for agricultural enterprises in the county. |
| 3 | Work with County Extension to develop programs that encourage people to undertake personal and commercial agriculture. |
| 4 | Support state-wide actions to ensure that state law allows and supports agricultural enterprises of the type and level most likely to occur and are desired in Cook County. |

Land Use Regulations and Administration

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Ensure County zoning ordinance language meets the actual conditions found in the county and where necessary work with the State to change existing rules to meet Cook County conditions. |
| 2 | Concerning vacation rentals amend the zoning ordinance to require that any housing unit that is being rented out for short-term vacation use has an administrative permit that, among things, ensures the property meets appropriate health and safety standards for rental property (that do not attain the levels where inspections by Minnesota Department of Health are required) and contributes to the county's lodging tax. |

<i>Economic Development, Infrastructure, Planning and Cooperation</i>	
1	Concerning the City of Grand Marais use of extra-territorial subdivision ordinance two miles around the city, the County will work to resolve the disparity between county and city subdivision requirements by such means as having the City cease exercising extra-territorial subdivision control, both County and City adopting ordinances having the same standards, or similarly effective measures.
2	Coordinate with Grand Marais regarding land use regulations, including zoning maps that support city objectives regarding expansion, extension of utilities, and development on the city's periphery.
3	Support actions that expand role of Cook County-Grand Marais EDA into a broader, more activist force for driving economic development.
4	Work with State, USFS and Lake County to secure provision of an all-weather road providing redundant east-west connectivity to TH 61.
5	Encourage townships and unorganized areas to create community plans.
6	Promote subordinate service districts to handle proper winter road maintenance/plowing by private land owners on USFS and DNR roads.
7	Develop a county transportation plan that seeks to ensure a core county road system that provides a desired level of county-wide connectivity and serves as the backbone for providing access to land and development throughout the county.
8	As per recommendations of a to-be-developed county trails plan, pursue actions that enhance public recreational facilities that underpin county's tourism economy.
9	Establish an updated set of indicators (e.g., population, housing, progress on LUGP actions, etc.) for monitoring progress on the plan and determining when an update may be needed.
10	Cooperate with public and private agents such as the Cook County-Grand Marais EDA, Cook County Local Energy Project and AOEA to develop a multi-faceted housing plan seeking, among other objectives, to develop additional work force housing and affordable housing for year-round residents, connect more residents to existing and emerging housing financing programs, and enhance the use of "green" construction techniques.
11	Work with the current owners to repurpose the Taconite Harbor facility for economic use and encourage development for the roughly 2,000 acres owned by the companies in the area.
12	Use a variety of entities including the Cook County-Grand Marais EDA to enhance cooperation between Cook County and the City of Grand Marais.

Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota

Appendix

This Appendix contains background information that was used to prepare the Land Use Guide Plan or is referenced in it.

A. Demographics

Tables A-1 and A-2 present Cook County population figures by five-year age group for 1990, 2000 and 2010. They also show the change in the five-year age *cohorts* which are indicated by the colored squares; for example, Table A-1 notes that in 1990 the 20-24 age group had 135 people but ten years later this cohort which became the 30-34 age group in 2010 had 258 people for a gain of 123 persons.

Age Group	Population		Cohort
	1990	2000	Change*
<5	261	231	6
5 - 9	279	296	38
10 -14	256	322	61
15 - 19	206	302	23
20 -24	135	182	-74
25-29	223	238	32
30 - 34	332	258	123
35- 39	371	361	138
40 - 44	313	478	146
45 - 49	247	488	117
50 - 54	206	440	127
55 - 59	189	383	136
60 - 64	212	302	96
65-69	187	258	69
70 - 74	175	227	15
75 - 79	131	148	-39
80 - 84	88	130	-45
85+	57	124	-152
Total	3,868	5,168	

*Note: <5 change is measured against births in 1996-2000; 5-9 change is measured against births in 1991-95.

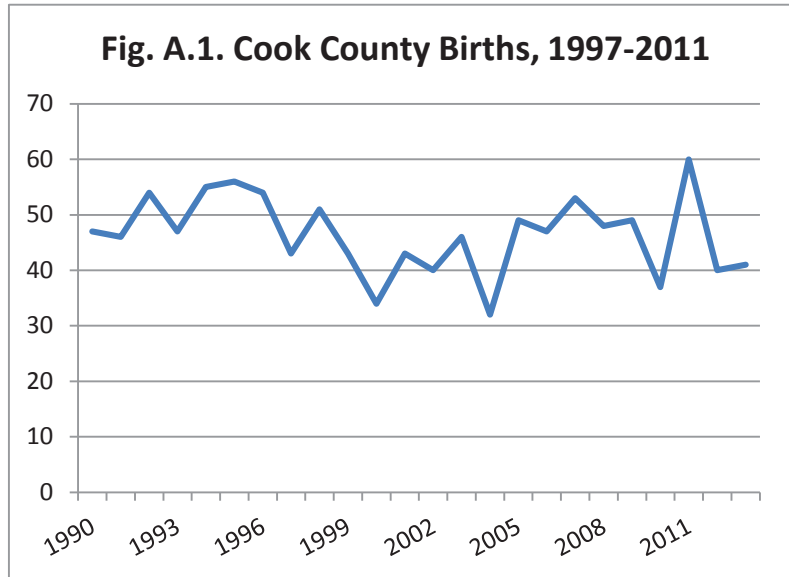
Age Group	Population		Cohort
	2000	2010	Change*
<5	231	218	-76
5 - 9	296	222	12
10 -14	322	251	20
15 - 19	302	259	-37
20 -24	182	200	-122
25-29	238	246	-56
30 - 34	258	243	61
35- 39	361	258	20
40 - 44	478	322	64
45 - 49	488	387	26
50 - 54	440	497	19
55 - 59	383	525	37
60 - 64	302	497	57
65-69	258	372	-11
70 - 74	227	246	-56
75 - 79	148	173	-85
80 - 84	130	118	-109
85+	124	142	-260
Total	5,168	5,176	

*Note: <5 change is measured against births in 2006-10; 5-9 change is measured against births in 2001-05.

The above tables indicate that during the 1990-2000 boom in population nearly all age cohorts gained via migration. However, during 2000-2010 the total population was essentially unchanged; fewer cohorts gained and those that did were at levels less than before.

Figure A-1 shows the trend of births to Cook County residents from 1990-2013.

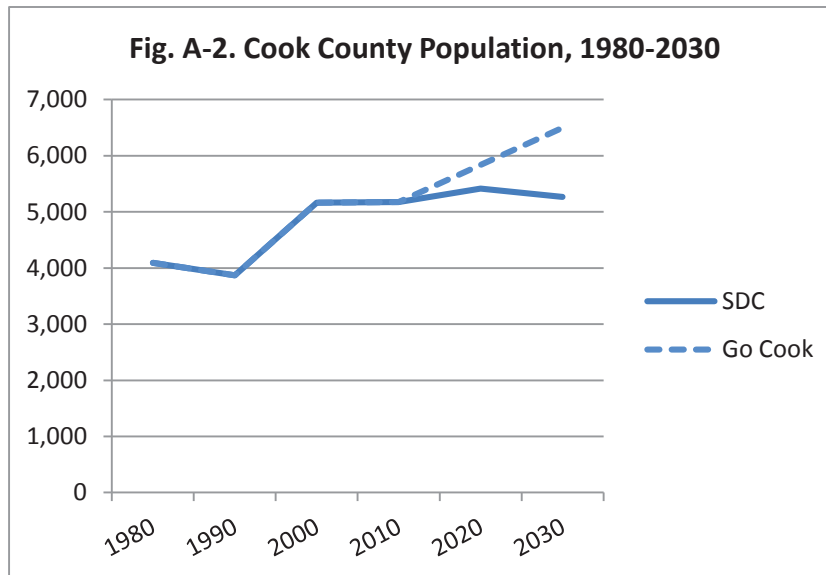
- 1990-94: average annual births = 50;
- 1995-99: 49;
- 2000-04: 39;
- 2005-09: 49;
- 2010-13: 45.



Source: Minnesota Department of Health

Cook County is one of the least population counties in Minnesota. Overall, there is a density of 3.6 persons per square mile. However, if the 90% of the county which publicly owned land is subtracted, the density of population on the remaining private land base is 37.7 persons / sq mi which is similar to the denser rural areas of the growth corridor running from Rochester to Fargo/Moorhead.

Figure A-2 shows recent county population levels and possible future levels.



	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
SDC	4,092	3,868	5,165	5,176	5,417	5,264
Go Cook	4,092	3,868	5,165	5,176	5,838	6,500

Source: US Census for 1980-2010; State Demographic Center for 2020 and 2030; Go Cook for target population of 6,500 in 2035 adjusted to 2030 for purpose of general comparison.

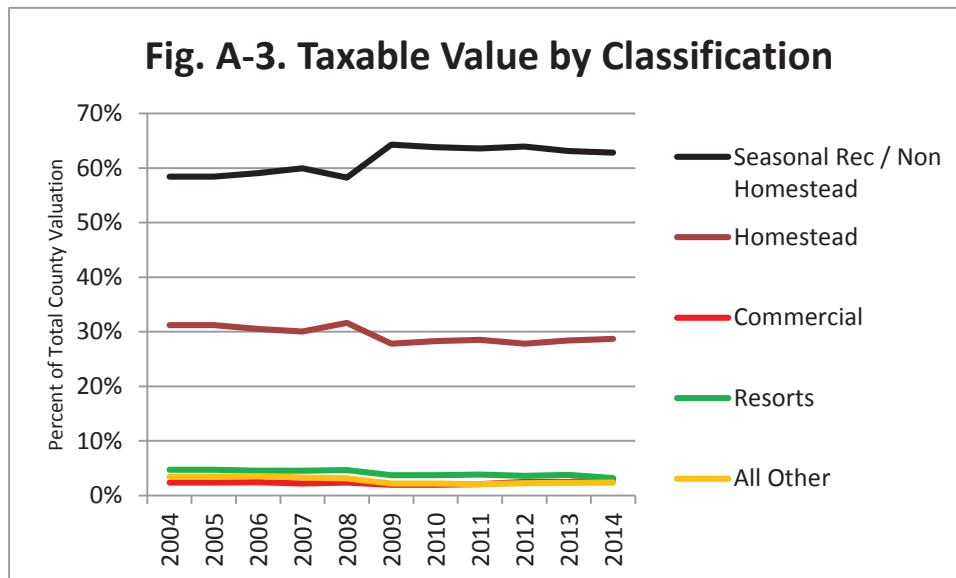
The Go Cook process generated a number of documents including “Community Perceptions Online Survey” (January 2013) which offered a number of perspectives on growth and development including:

- 1) Cook County’s population growth is “About Right” – 70%
- 2) Effects of Cook County’s growth on your quality of life – Somewhat Concerned (50%), Very Concerned (25%).
- 3) Impact of development growth on county aesthetics – Very Concerned (35%), Somewhat Concerned (43%)
- 4) Level of concern about impact of future growth on natural environment: Very (44%), Somewhat (39%), Not at All (17%).
- 5) Cook County’s 5,200 population level is “About Right” (60%); Needs to Grow (34%).

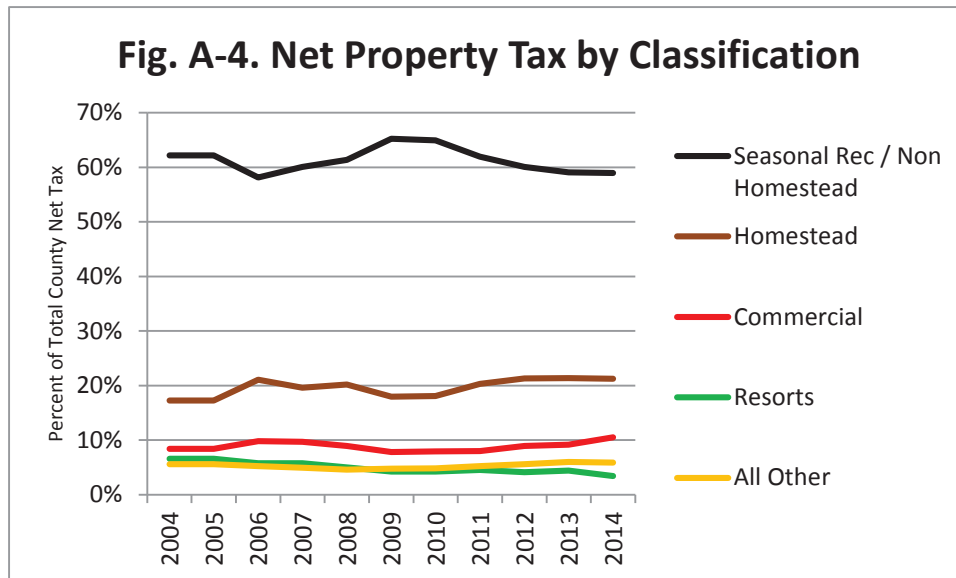
In addition, the Go Cook County “Economic Development Interview Survey, 2012” found that 59% of respondents felt Cook County’s population “needs to grow”, 11% thought it “needs to grow significantly” and 31% felt the level “is about right”.

B. Economics

Tables A-3 and A-4 provide a perspective on county development, land use and tax base. Table A-3 shows the percentage of property within the major property tax classifications in terms of the taxable value of the property. Table A-4 shows the distribution in terms of net property tax paid.



Source: Cook County Auditor.



Source: Cook County Auditor

Among the findings generated by these figures are:

- Seasonal recreational property dominates in terms of total property valuation and net property tax;
- Homestead property is next most important but it pays lower percentage of taxes relative to its valuation;
- Commercial is smaller portion of valuation (3%) but pays over 10% of tax;
- Resorts are little over 3% of valuation and pay roughly 4% of tax;

Table A-3 depicts the distribution of private property within the county in terms of its property tax classification. Among the findings generated by table are:

- The 87,549 acres of privately owned land is about 9% of the county's 1,452 square mile land area.
- The single largest category of developed land is seasonal recreation followed by homestead residential.
- Over half (45,111 acres) of the total privately owned land area is undeveloped non-homestead residential property and another 3,124 is undeveloped seasonal recreation land.

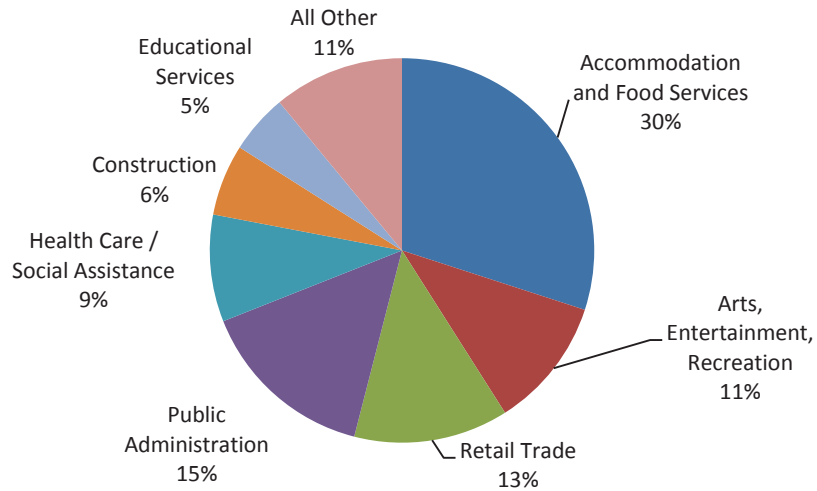
Table A-3. Amount of Property within Selected Tax Classifications, 2014		
Tax Class	Acres	Percent
Homestead	14,771	16.9%
Managed Forest	1,965	2.2%
Seasonal Recreation		
Improved	17,321	19.8%
Unimproved	3,124	3.6%
Non-Homestead		
Improved	1,827	2.1%
Unimproved	45,111	51.5%
Apartments 4-more	14	0.0%
Com/Srv/Student/MH/Golf	37	0.0%
Resorts	783	0.9%
Commercial	2,059	2.4%
Industrial	427	0.5%
Public Utility	94	0.1%
Personal Property	16	0.0%
Total Ad Valorem	87,549	100.0%

Source: Cook County Auditor

The Go Cook process generated the report “County Economic Analysis, June 2013” which examined the area’s economy. Among the findings were:

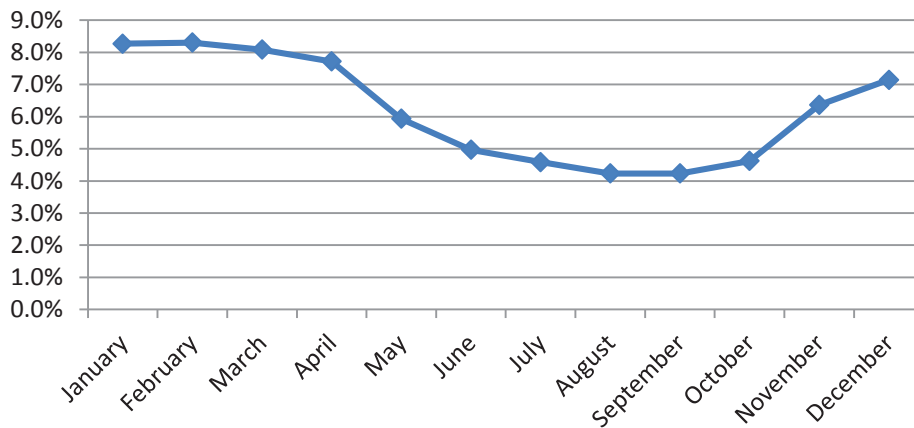
- 1) Main thrusts – after exceptional growth in 1990s
 - a. Tourism growth stagnated
 - b. Private sector jobs fell
 - c. Housing costs continued to rise
 - d. Businesses did not / could not invest in themselves
 - e. Population growth stagnated / community is aging
- 2) Tourism
 - a. Dominant sector in county (see Figure A-5)
 - b. 52% of sale tax revenues
 - c. 54% of public and private sector wage and salary jobs
 - d. 55% of Gross Regional Product
 - e. Built on high quality public lands and Lake Superior, arts, and North Shore culture.
 - f. Seasonality of activity (see Figure A-6)
 - g. Is a “traded sector”, that is one that brings outside wealth into the county.
 - h. County has a high quality amenity base that is uncommon in the Midwest.
 - i. County’s tourism economy is not in a growth mode.
 - j. Tourism will continue to be the economy’s driving force.

Fig. A-5. Public and Private Employment, 2011



Source: Mn DEED, Go Cook Economic Analysis

Fig. A-6. 2007-2011 Monthly Average Unemployment, Cook County



Source: Mn DEED, Go Cook County Economic Analysis

- 3) Sole proprietors represent one-third of all jobs in 2010; most in tourism or related business; 35% in professional/business/health care/education; 23% in forestry / goods producing activities.
 - a. "Much of the growth in sole proprietors was likely for necessity or supplemental income reasons."
 - b. Local decline in sole proprietor earnings over past decade

- c. States that these businesses are likely marginal in terms of opportunities for future growth
- 4) Full time employment is difficult to find / seasonality of employment
- 5) Natural resource economy in decline; Importance of county's forests has declined...Economic and technological trends suggest extraction based businesses will not be a source of major employment growth.
- 6) Government employment:
 - a. 34% of workers (double state average in 2010)
 - b. 67% in traditional public sector jobs – education, health/social services, public administration
 - c. Nearly one quarter (24%) are in leisure and hospitality (Grand Portage Reservation)
 - d. Provide full-time, well paid jobs
- 7) Income
 - a. “despite above-average median household income growth lead by wealthier retirees, average wages grew slowly, and the income for many workers decreased when adjusted for inflation”
 - b. Median household income is about 89% of State average
 - c. Real average wages (adjusted for inflation) grew 2.4% from 2001-2011; about equal to the State but slower than national gain of 4.5%
- 8) Workforce
 - a. Grew 33% during 1990s
 - b. Grew just 4.5% from 2000 – 2012 (State's grew by 5.8%)
 - c. Generally well educated but...lags behind State in bachelor's degree or higher attainment in 25-34 and 35-44 age groups; equals in 45-64 and greatly exceeds state in 65+ age group.
- 9) Affordable housing
 - a. Housing is not affordable
 - i. Values skewed by dominance of seasonal / second homes (87% of new housing built 2000-2010)
 - ii. 2011 median home sale price in county was \$225,000 (skewed by seasonal)
 - iii. Average new home in Grand Marais was \$183,000
 - 1. 3.7 times median income
 - 2. 4.0 times average HH with 2 service wage earners
 - b. There are efforts underway by CC/GM EDA via Cook County Housing Program to address workforce and senior citizen housing
 - c. Not enough buildable lots in Grand Marais to meet overall county needs
 - d. “A low supply of available land, lack of infrastructure, zoning restrictions, and limited financing are barriers to building quality, affordable housing near employment nodes.”
 - i. Any specific zoning regulations cited as limiting housing options and increasing costs?
- 10) Outlook
 - a. “The opportunities for many types of businesses in Cook County will still e limited by geographic distance from supplies and markets. Transportation costs, just-in-time supply chains, and the need for face-to-face interactions remain real challenges.”
 - b. Traditional rural strategies do not apply today: “Commodities and non-specialized goods also produce and retain little local wealth. Rural wages are neither low enough, nor skills high enough, to compete with newly developing economies for

global manufacturing.” Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. (2009). *Generating local wealth, opportunity, and sustainability through rural clusters*. Carrboro, North Carolina: Rosenfeld, S.

- c. Different approach needed
- d. High quality natural amenities & creative class individuals closely connected with entrepreneurship; high self-employment level suggests strong entrepreneurial bent to population
- e. Coming broadband service will greatly help

The “Community Perceptions Online Survey” produced by the Go Cook process found:

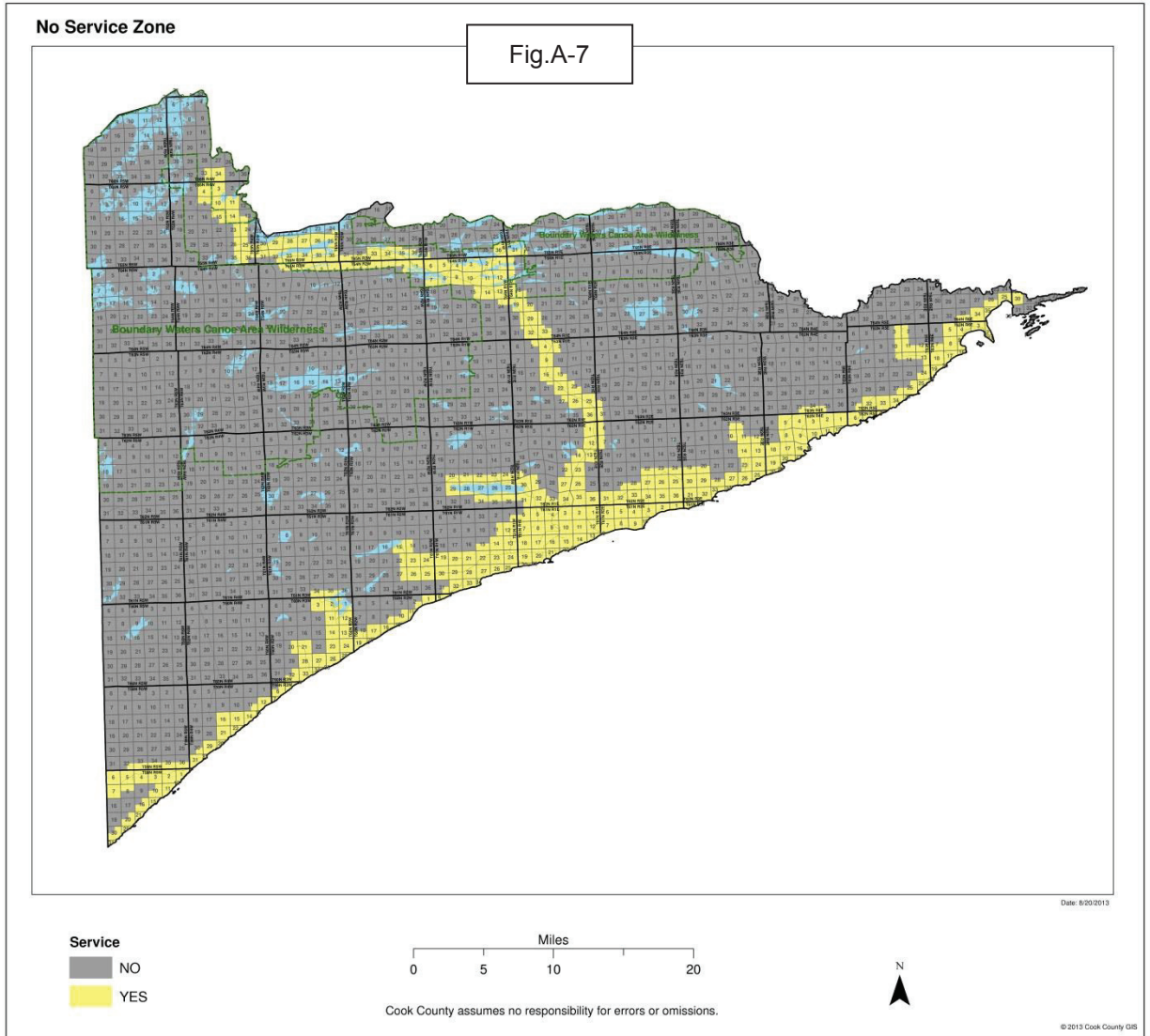
- 1) Feel about employment opportunities in Cook County: 74% Dissatisfied / Very Dissatisfied.
- 2) Commercial growth is good for quality of life: 55% Agree; 23% Strongly Agree
- 3) Overall economic health of county: 54% Poor; 36% Healthy.
- 4) Economy is Worse (41%) or Same (39%) than five years ago. Healthier – 8%.

The Go Cook “County Economic Development Interview Survey” found:

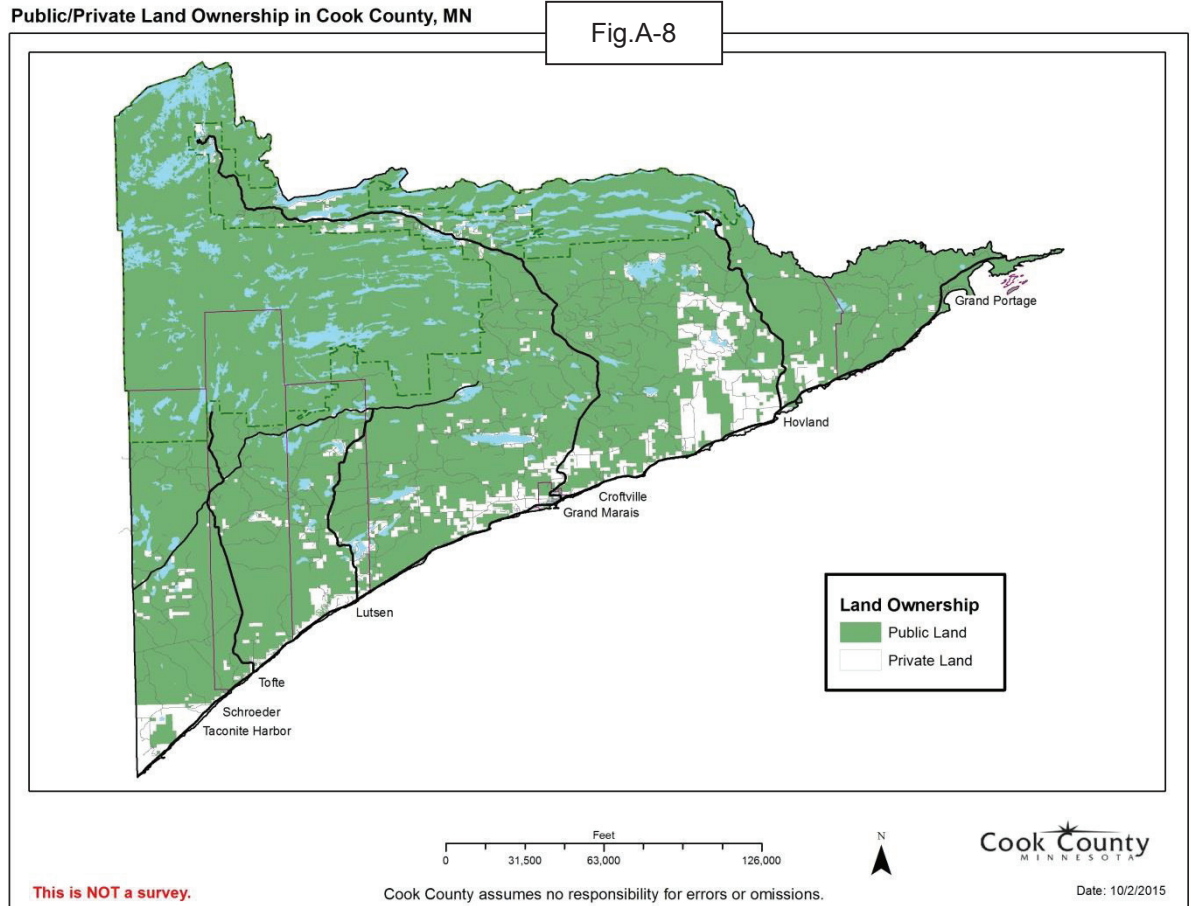
- 1) Primary reason for being here
 - a. Quality of life – 30%
 - b. Business opportunity / job – 28%
 - c. Environment – 27%
 - d. Native of area – 15%
- 2) Cook County’s type of businesses – Needs to diversify (60%).
- 3) Our distinctive assets/advantages
 - a. Outdoor recreation/natural resources – 39%
 - b. People – 31%
 - c. Lake Superior/natural beauty – 27%
 - d. Tourism destination – 21%
- 4) Major barriers / challenges
 - a. Lack of collaboration and leadership – 26%
 - b. Affordable housing – 20%
 - c. Distance from major markets – 20%
- 5) What do I value and should be preserved about Cook County
 - a. Natural resources / natural environment/beauty of area – 81%

C. Land Use: No Service Area

Cook County has by ordinance identified areas within the county where landowners can expect lower levels of specific governmental services due to remoteness. This “no service area” is shown on Figure A-7.



The no-service zone reflects the general distribution of private and public land ownership as shown in Figure A-8. The term “public land” includes a wide variety of governmental ownerships including Federal, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, State including tax forfeited, County, City and Township.

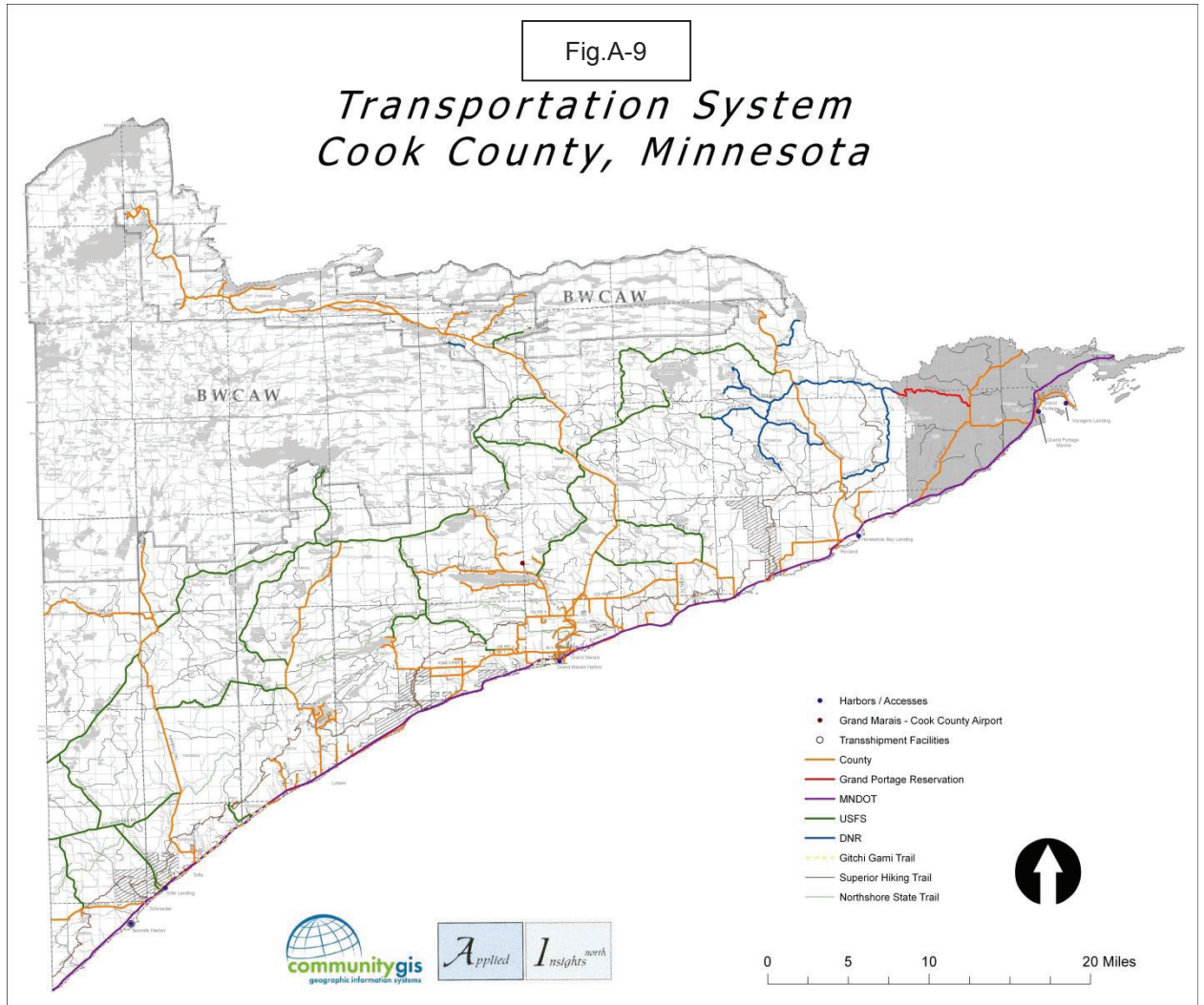


D. Land Use: Grand Portage Reservation

Businesses and services operated or provided by the Grand Portage Band include the following: Community Center, Head Start/Day Care complex, Oshki Ogimaag Charter School, Construction Company, Education Department, Elderly Nutrition Program, Elders Residence, Emergency Medical Services, Fire Department, Food Distribution, Health Services, Hollow Rock Resort, Holy Rosary Catholic Church, Housing Authority, Human Resources, Human Services, Information Technology Department, Lodge & Casino, Marina, Motor Vehicle Department, Moccasin Telegraph (local newspaper), Maamawitawin Mount Rose Community Church, Museum, Ningii-Ozhitoomin Ojibwe Art Gallery, North Shore Federal Credit Union Branch, Picnic Bay Estates, Safety Office, Sweet Grass Cove Guesthouse, Trading Post (Store and Gas Station), Reservation Tribal Council Office, Ryden's Border Store and Gas Station, Trust Lands and Natural Resources, Transfer Station, Tribal Court, Water and Sewer Department, Veteran Service Office/ American Legion Post 2009, Voyageur Marina, and Wellness Center.

E. Transportation

Figure A-9 shows the transportation system for Cook County including roads by jurisdiction, airport, harbors, and major regional recreational trail routes.



F. Land Use: Land Ownership Analysis

The following is a working paper prepared as part of the development of the land use plan.

Analysis of Land Availability for Enhanced Development in Cook County

PREPARED BY

APPLIED INSIGHTS^{NORTH} & COMMUNITY GIS SERVICES, INC.

Version Date: August 27, 2014

Purpose

This analysis was undertaken as part of the process to update the Comprehensive Land Use Guide Plan for Cook County, Minnesota. Less than 10% of the county is privately owned which has fueled the long-held perception that this limited private land base severely restricts development in the county by increasing land prices and limiting areas where development could occur. The purpose of this analysis is to provide information that could lead to increasing the amount of privately owned, currently undeveloped but probably developable land within the North Shore Corridor with the focus being on affordable, year-round residential housing.

This analysis seeks to address this situation by:

1. Identifying the amount of privately owned currently undeveloped land within the North Shore Corridor that might be developable.
2. Identifying the amount of County owned or administered land within the North Shore Corridor that could be offered for private development.
3. Identifying the amount of privately owned currently undeveloped land outside the North Shore Corridor that might be attractive to federal and state land management agencies to satisfy their management objectives, and, a corresponding amount of publicly owned land within the North Shore Corridor that could be exchanged for that private land.

The intent of the assessment is to create a list of parcels for additional site-specific investigation to determine which could be candidates for year-round residential development, or, in the case of public lands, which ones the management agencies might possibly consider for exchange.

No judgment has been made or is implied regarding the desire of individual landowners, public or private, to develop or sell their land for development, nor has any other assessment been made to identify parcel-specific impediments to development beyond those addressed in this analysis.

Defining the North Shore Corridor

The updated Land Use Guide Plan is anticipated to continue the current plan's focus on encouraging future higher density residential development along the North Shore especially near the community centers of Schroeder, Tofte, Lutsen, Grand Marais and Hovland. Map 1 shows how the North Shore Corridor was defined for the purpose of this analysis. While any such map is open to disagreement, the intent here was to establish a geographic area that reasonably encompasses what is generally understood to be the North Shore and associated inland areas readily accessible by the road network.

To aid in presenting the results of the analysis the corridor was divided into six segments: Schroeder, Tofte, Lutsen, Good Harbor Hill (which extends inland to include the Deer Yard / Pike Lakes area), Grand Marais and the East End. Grand Portage Reservation was excluded since nearly all land within the reservation is tribally owned and any private land there is assumed to be targeted for acquisition by the band.

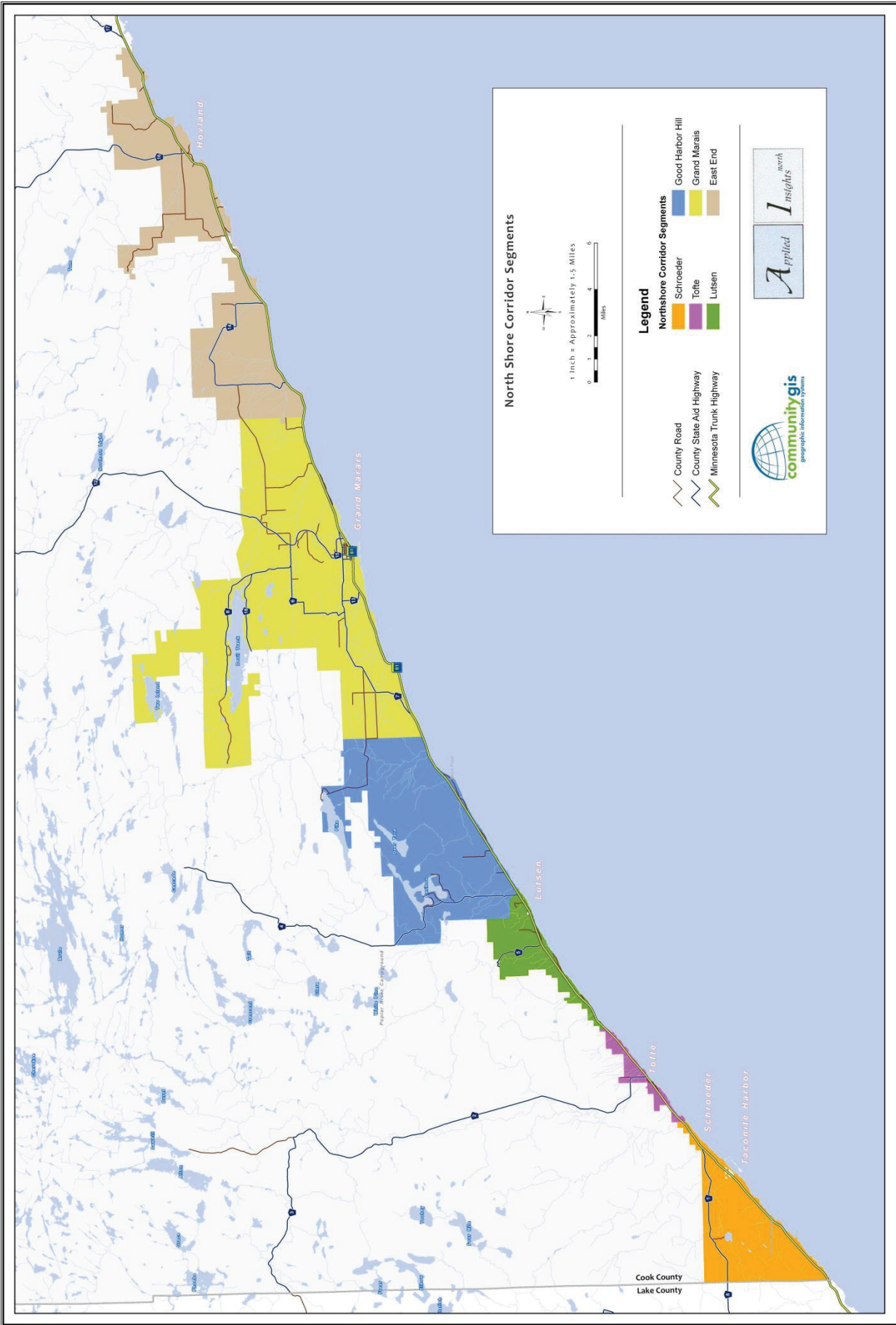


Table 1 shows general ownership within the corridor.

Ownership	Acres¹	Percent
Private, Undeveloped ²	20,759	17.9%
Private, Other	32,433	28.1%
Public	62,475	54.0%
Total	115,667	100.0%

¹ Calculated by GIS analysis; acres listed on property deeds may vary slightly.

² Defined as unimproved parcels listed as rural residential in the Cook County parcel database.

Findings: Developable Private Land within North Shore Corridor

The consultants took a conservative approach to determining what might be considered “developable” land. It was a deliberate decision to underestimate the amount of potential usable land. The process used in the analysis was as follows:

- a. The Cook County parcel database provided base information on parcels. Additional GIS data layers such as roads, lakes, streams, and such were applied as appropriate.
- b. Analysis only examined parcels listed as unimproved rural residential in the database.
- c. 2,662 acres owned by Minnesota Power/Allete and Cliffs Natural Resources in the Schroeder area were eliminated from consideration. While this land may indeed be available for residential development it may also be retained for some use associated with the Taconite Harbor power generation facility.
- d. “Developable” land was defined as land with slopes less than 20% and not including wetlands as identified in the National Wetlands Inventory.

Table 2 presents the summary information by corridor segment.

Segment	Total Acres	Developable Land	
		No. of Parcels	Acres
Schroeder	2,492	120	1,481
Tofte	155	29	109
Lutsen	1,627	122	1,221
Good Harbor Hill	1,981	114	969
Grand Marais	5,577	320	3,162
East End	6,274	276	4,827
Total	18,107	981	11,770

Table 3 offers additional detail on the developable lands grouping parcels by parcel size. The assumption is that larger parcels would be more attractive to pursue for housing development projects.

Table 3. “Developable” Unimproved Rural Residential Land within North Shore Corridor by Parcel Size				
Segment	Parcel Size	No. Parcels	Acres	% of Corridor Acres
Schroeder	< 1 acre	21	10	0.7%
	1 – 5 acres	33	82	0.7%
	5 – 10 acres	20	146	1.2%
	> 10 acres	46	1,244	10.6%
	Total	120	1,481	12.6%
Tofte	< 1 acre	12	6	0.0%
	1 – 5 acres	11	21	0.2%
	5 – 10 acres	2	14	0.1%
	> 10 acres	4	68	0.6%
	Total	29	109	0.9%
Lutsen	< 1 acre	28	12	0.1%
	1 – 5 acres	32	88	0.8%
	5 – 10 acres	27	212	1.8%
	> 10 acres	35	909	7.7%
	Total	122	1,221	10.4%
Good Harbor Hill	< 1 acre	30	12	0.1%
	1 – 5 acres	34	101	0.9%
	5 – 10 acres	18	122	1.0%
	> 10 acres	32	735	6.2%
	Total	114	969	8.2%
Grand Marais	< 1 acre	55	27	0.2%
	1 – 5 acres	104	299	2.5%
	5 – 10 acres	64	480	4.1%
	> 10 acres	97	2,356	20.0%
	Total	320	3,162	26.9%
East End	< 1 acre	36	20	0.2%
	1 – 5 acres	55	158	1.3%
	5 – 10 acres	47	361	3.1%
	> 10 acres	138	4,288	36.4%

Table 3. “Developable” Unimproved Rural Residential Land within North Shore Corridor by Parcel Size				
Segment	Parcel Size	No. Parcels	Acres	% of Corridor Acres
	Total	276	4,827	41.0%
Corridor Total	< 1 acre	182	85	0.7%
	1 – 5 acres	269	748	6.4%
	5 – 10 acres	178	1,336	11.4%
	> 10 acres	352	9,599	81.6%
	Total	981	11,770	100.0%

Findings: County Owned Land within North Shore Corridor

Table 4 shows the range of public ownership within the corridor.

Table 4. Public Land Ownership within North Shore Corridor		
Owner	No. of Parcels	Acres¹
Federal: USA	157	41,642
State		
General	69	11,584
DNR	3	664
DOT	104	2,098
State Park	18	2,496
University of Minnesota	2	122
County		
Tax-Forfeit ²	36	1,753
Fee owned	62	598
Cook Co Historical Society	1	1
City/Township		
Grand Marais	9	159
Schroeder Township	8	100
Tofte Township	10	78
Lutsen Township	2	8
Cook County/Grand Marais EDA	40	156
Other	2	6
Total	523	62,475

¹These are acres as recorded on parcel deeds.

²This land is State owned and County administered.

Of interest to this portion of the assessment are tax forfeited parcels that are State-owned but administered by the County. These lands are much easier to convey to the private sector for development purposes than are County or State owned fee lands.

For the purposes of this analysis, potentially “developable” tax forfeited lands are those which:

- Have a slope less than 20%;
- Have no wetlands as identified by the National Wetlands inventory; and
- Lie outside a 300’ buffer either side of a designated recreational trail.

The trail buffer was applied since it is generally difficult to reroute these high value trails once the original routes are severed.

The resulting number of developable County-administered tax forfeit acres by segment are:

- None in the Schroeder, Tofte or Lutsen segments
- 4 acres in Good Harbor Hill segment
- 476 acres in Grand Marais segment
- 100 in the East End
- Total of 580 developable acres out of the initial inventory of 1,753 acres.

As noted earlier, physical potential does not necessarily translate into actual availability. Any number of the identified acres may have valid, long-term public management values and objectives that will remove them from consideration for sale and development for residential uses.

Findings: Private / Public Land Exchange

The concept for this analysis is to increase the supply of privately owned land within the North Shore Corridor by exchanging publicly owned land within the corridor for privately owned land in the remote interior of Cook County. The mechanism by which such an exchange could occur is not of concern at this point; it is enough now to determine the potential and magnitude for such an action.

There are two components to this analysis: identification of publicly owned lands within the North Shore Corridor that potentially could be considered for exchange, and, identification of privately owned land in the county’s interior that may be of value to public land managers in meeting their management objectives.

Public Lands within Corridor

The analysis by which potential public lands for exchange were identified was conducted as follows:

- a. Lands considered were all Federally owned parcels and those State parcels identified as being owned by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or the State in general.
- b. Acres that met at least one of the following criteria were eliminated from consideration: within a State Park, Wildlife Management Area, Scientific and Natural Area (SNA), or adjacent to a SNA; within 300’ of a designated recreational trail.
- c. Developable acres with potential for private development, included lands with less than 20% slope and the absence of wetlands as determined by the National Wetlands Inventory.

Table 5 shows the estimated amount of publicly owned land within the corridor that with the likely potential for private residential development. Map 2 shows the locations of these parcels.

Table 5. Publicly Owned Land within North Shore Corridor with Potential to Exchange for Private Residential Development			
Segment	Federal	State	Total
Schroeder	0	494	494
Tofte	0	0	0
Lutsen	1	0	1
Good Harbor Hill	1,549	399	1,948
Grand Marais	4,326	1,389	5,715
East End	3,548	369	3,911
Total	9,424	2,651	12,075

It must be emphasized that many of the acres in Table 5 may have legitimate public management values and objectives that necessitate keeping them in public ownership. Determining the actual availability of any given parcel for exchange will require site-specific assessment and negotiations with the appropriate public owner.

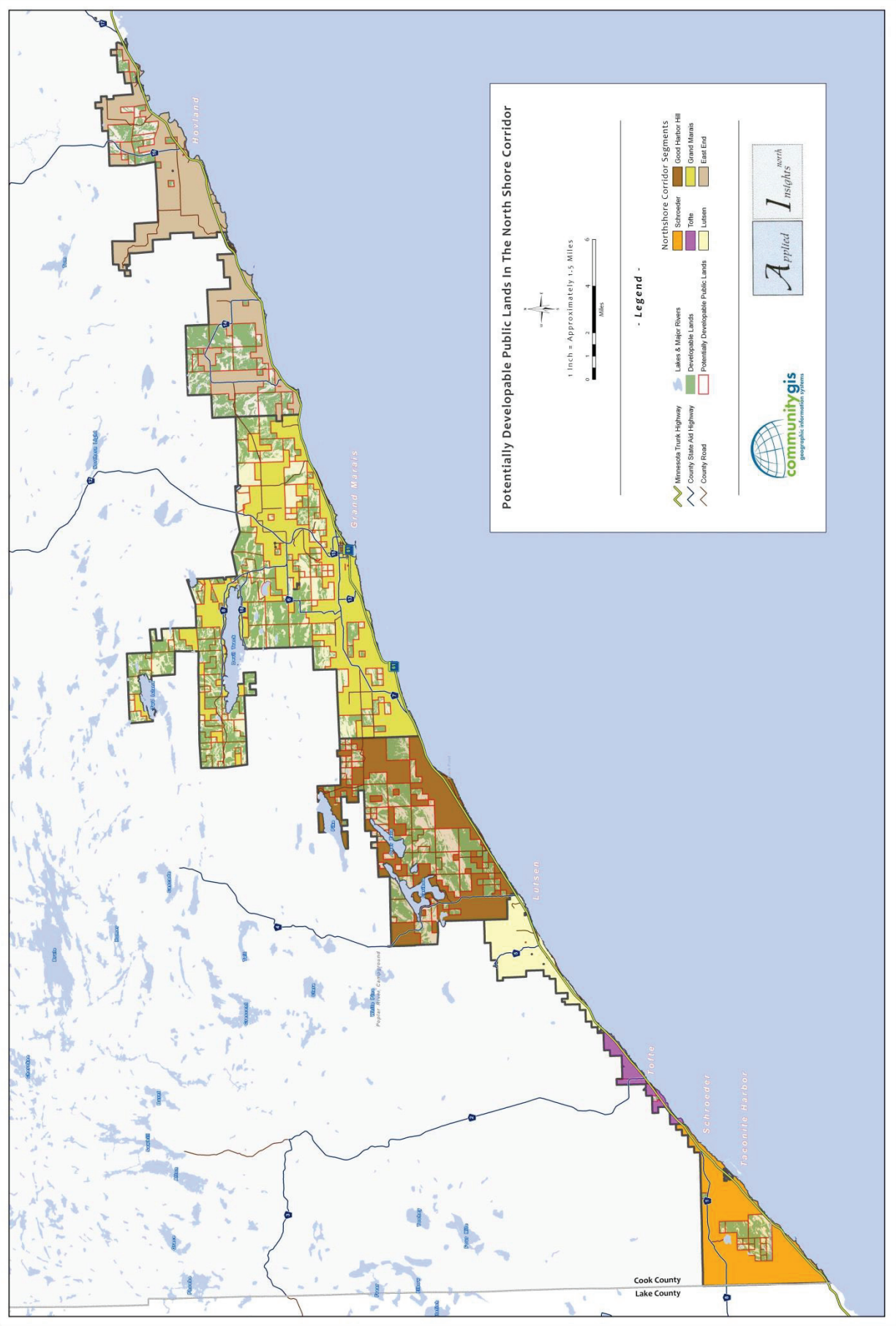
Private Lands in County’s Interior

The analysis by which potential private lands for exchange were identified involved property meeting these criteria:

- a. Privately owned, rural residential, unimproved property as listed in County’s parcel database.
- b. Located outside of the North Shore Corridor.

These parcels were evaluated according to four attributes:

- a. Distance from a public road: this was used to measure the degree of access. It might be assumed that owners of parcels on or near public roads may be less likely to sell while parcels further from public roads might be more attractive to public land managers. The distance from private roads was not evaluated as the nature of those roads could not be ascertained. Most of the public roads in consideration were US Forest Service roads.



- b. In or adjacent to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW): assumption being that these lands would be more attractive to public land managers.
- c. Adjacent to public land: assumption being that public land managers may be interested in consolidating land into larger blocks for more effective management.
- d. Adjacent to lake: assumption being these parcels may be more attractive resources for public use.

Table 6 shows all parcels by distance from a public road.

Distance from Public Road	No. of Parcels	Acres¹
Road intersects parcel	183	5,037
Adjacent to road	45	944
< .25 mile	242	6,281
.25 -- .50 mile	170	4,438
.51 – 1.0 mile	164	4,806
> 1.0 mile	89	2,991
Total	893	24,497

¹ Calculated by GIS analysis; acres listed on property deeds may vary slightly.

Table 7 indicates the number of parcels that were adjacent to the BWCAW; none were fully located within the area.

Distance from Public Road	No. of Parcels	Acres¹
Road intersects parcel	4	134
Adjacent to road	1	5
< .25 mile	2	41
.25 -- .50 mile	8	289
.51 – 1.0 mile	3	58
> 1.0 mile	8	86
Total	26	613

¹ Calculated by GIS analysis; acres listed on property deeds may vary slightly.

Table 8 shows the acreage of parcels that are adjacent to public land or a lake and the number that were adjacent to both.

Table 8. Privately Owned Unimproved Rural Residential Property in Interior Cook County Adjacent to Public Land or a Lake by Distance from a Public Road			
Distance from Public Road	Acres where parcel is adjacent to		
	Public Land¹	Lake	Both
Road intersects parcel	4,499	1,137	1,020
Adjacent to road	882	118	74
< .25 mile	5,385	1,071	894
.25 -- .50 mile	3,503	690	577
.51 – 1.0 mile	2,880	644	373
> 1.0 mile	1,448	80	55
Total	18,597	3,739	2,992

¹ Calculated by GIS analysis; acres listed on property deeds may vary slightly.

Again, it must be emphasized that desires of the individual property owners to retain, sell or exchange their property is unknown. Determining the actual availability of any given parcel for exchange will require site-specific assessment and negotiations with the owner.

Follow Through

This analysis will be directly applied in two ways:

- ❖ To help define land use, housing and development goals, objectives, policies and implementation actions in the updated Cook County Land Use Guide Plan.
- ❖ As essential information for housing and development initiatives undertaken by the Go Cook Team and county economic development entities.

The following is intended to help put the analysis in perspective. The amount of land needed to accommodate 100 new residents can be estimated as follows:

- 100 people divided by an average household size of 2.5 (state average; current average size for Cook County is under 2.0; assumption is that younger families with children are being sought through development initiatives) equals 40 new housing units.
- If all these units were to be located on rural land, say in the R-1 Rural Residential zone district, each unit would need 2 acres. Adding 20% for roads and such means that 40 units require 96 acres.

Clearly, there is plenty of land for development within the county in general and within the North Shore Corridor specifically. The question becomes more one of affordability than availability. Increasing the supply of land, through the public / private land exchange, may help reduce the cost of land. And, the more private land located within the corridor the greater the opportunity for development to occur.

Finally, it should be noted that maps and associated analysis of public lands identified for potential sale/exchange may be made available through the land use plan process. However, maps of preliminarily identified privately owned lands will not be made available out of respect for the owners; these maps and data, however, are available to authorized entities seeking to develop land and/or effect the public/private land exchange concept.