

GANGES TOWNSHIP
COMMUNITY PARKS & RECREATION PLAN
2021-2025
ALLEGAN COUNTY

Adopted by the Ganges Township Board on January 12th, 2021

Prepared by:
Ganges Township
with assistance from
Friends of Pier Cove Park

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1 INTRODUCTION

This document serves as the *Five-Year Community Parks & Recreation Plan* for Ganges Township. The plan was adopted by the Ganges Township Board on January 12, 2021. This plan expands upon the *Ganges Township Master Plan*, dated March 28, 2007. This plan satisfies the stated goal of the Master Plan:

“Natural Resource Objectives – Create opportunities for active and passive recreation in the Township - **Produce a Parks and Recreation Plan that satisfies the DNR checklist in order to position the Township for potential grant money.**”

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) requires this plan be approved by their Grants Management Division to be eligible for a variety of grant programs including Recreation Passport, Trust Fund, and Land and Water Conservation Fund Programs. The plan must be approved by DNR by February 1st of the year a community intends to apply for grants. The plan must also meet specific criteria as outlined by DNR and be adopted by resolution of the community. The next complete update of this plan should occur before December 31, 2025.

The development of this Community Parks & Recreation Plan included public involvement and comment through an initial public hearing November 10, 2020. The draft plan was advertised and made available for a thirty-day public comment period December 10, 2020 through January 12, 2021. A formal public hearing with the Township Board was held on January 12, 2021. Additional input was received through the period of October through January by means of the Township Board and Township Planning Commission members, various neighborhood meetings, and select property owner and community stakeholder meetings.

Ganges Township has provided an Action Program within this plan for future improvements that they will strive to follow. The Action Program presents project concepts that support the Township’s Goals and Objectives which were developed as part of the planning process. The Action Program is just a guide, and is meant to be a living document which can be updated and amended. Availability of funding and other events will undoubtedly shape priorities over time.

Township Board Members

John Hebert, Supervisor
Robin Phelps, Clerk
Cindy Reimink, Treasurer
Dick Hutchins, Trustee
Barry Gooding, Trustee

Township Planning Commission Members

Jackie DeZwaan, Chair
Barry Gooding, Trustee
Phil Badra, Secretary
Charlie Hancock, Commissioner
Dale Pierson, Commissioner

2 COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

Ganges Township is located in Allegan County along the shoreline of Lake Michigan. Ganges Township cherishes its rural character. The Township Master Plan emphasizes natural resources, open space preservation, and Lake Michigan access as major characteristics and priorities for life in the community.

This planning document was developed for the planning jurisdiction of Ganges Township. Ganges Township is located between the cities of Fennville, Saugatuck, and South Haven. The Township includes the community of Glenn. The west portion of Hutchins Lake is located within Ganges Township.

Life in Ganges Township includes a wide range of recreation activities typical of a rural lakeshore community. Opportunities exist for both passive and active recreation during all four seasons of the year. Many activities center around access to the Lake Michigan shoreline and enjoyment of the natural resources within the Township.

The *Ganges Township Master Plan*, dated March 28, 2007 includes a summary of social and environmental characteristics of the community. The DNR no longer requires a detailed description of these characteristics be included in this Community Parks & Recreation Plan. However, this information provides a better understanding of the recreation goals and of the community.



Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan

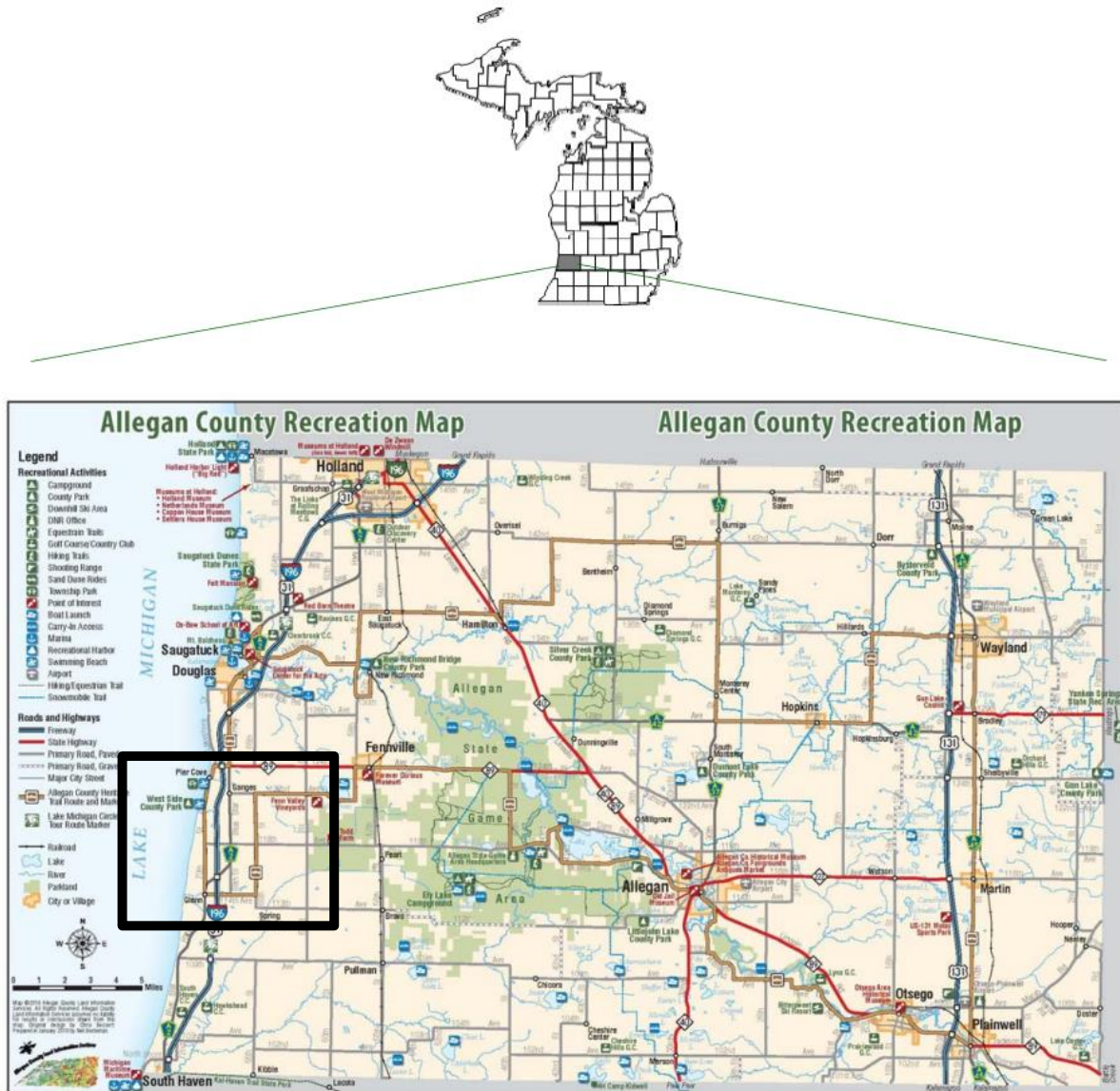
Map 1 – Overall Ganges Township Map



The yellow highlighted dashed line marks the limits of Ganges Township south of 113th Avenue and along 60th Street through the Allegan State Game Area and Hutchins Lake. The north boundary is M89/124th Avenue. Ganges Township has a total area of 32.7 square miles, around 2,600 residents, and 6.1 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline.

Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan

Map 2 – Allegan County Recreation Map



Ganges Township is shown in the boxed area. The Allegan County Recreation Map is available on the Allegan County website.

3 ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The governmental structure that provides, maintains, and administers parks and recreation facilities and activities in Ganges Township is described in this section.

Ganges Township

Administration and Planning

The Ganges Township Board is authorized to operate and maintain the Township's parks. The board has five elected members: Supervisor, Clerk, Treasurer, and two Trustees. Board members are elected by Ganges Township residents. The Supervisor chairs the Township Board at monthly meetings. Funds are authorized through the Township Board. Operation and maintenance of parks and recreation lands is their responsibility. The Township Board approves all park rules, ordinances, operation plans, development plans, property acquisitions, and special events within Township park properties.

Maintenance

Maintenance of township facilities is performed by limited Township staff, contractors, and volunteers under the direction of the Township Board. The Township employs a cemetery sexton and one part-time assistant responsible for cemetery operations and general maintenance.

Programming

Ganges Township does not facilitate recreational programming. Events and programs are available through active community organizations, local schools, and area business associations.

2019/2020 Budget

Funding for parks and recreation is provided through the Ganges Township General Fund. There is a specific line item within the general fund budget for parks maintenance and improvements. Annually, Ganges Township budgets \$6,000 per year for maintenance and improvements. Due to the continued high-water levels of Lake Michigan, maintenance costs for the 2020-2021 fiscal year will end up being approximately \$30,000. Fortunately, Ganges Township has historically had very conservative spending practices. As a result, the general fund reflects a fund balance that may support the financial match for future grants awarded. Going forward, maintenance costs for parks and recreation in the Township is estimated at approximately \$8,000/annually.

Allegan County

Financial assistance for local parks may be available from Allegan County when plans assist in advancing the Allegan County Recreation Plan. Allegan County operates and maintains eight parks that range in size from 4 to 320 acres. The County parks are administered by the County Parks and Recreation Commission, and include ten members with representatives from the

Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan

County Road Commission, the County Planning Commission, the County Drain Commissioner, County Commissioners, and ad-hoc members appointed by the County Board of Commissioners.

Allegan County Road Commission

The Allegan County Road Commission is an important partner in maintaining the accessibility of Ganges Township Parks. The public right of way provides for parking, mobility, and access to both Pier Cove Park and Glenn Beach. Road right of ways within the Township are controlled and operated by the Road Commission and offer many recreational opportunities for walkers and cyclists, as well as leisurely motorized travel around the Township's rural open spaces. The Road Commission maintains road ends and drainage facilities throughout the Township.

Glenn School

The Glenn School is the oldest public two-room schoolhouse in use in Michigan housing grades K-5. The school has areas for baseball, soccer, and an outdoor basketball court. The school playground is open to the public after school hours and on weekends. The playground is highly utilized in the summer. The school uses nearby Glenn Beach in its life science studies and STEM-based curriculum. At times the school will walk to the beach park with groups of 30 to 40 students and 5 staff members.



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Glenn Community Center and Glenn Square

Glenn Community Center & Glenn Square are operated and maintained by community organizations. The Community Center hosts events throughout the year including pick-up softball games, movie nights, pancake breakfasts, and community markets. The Glenn Square also hosts several events including the annual Circle of Lights Celebration, an outdoor library, and events with the Glenn School.



Fennville Public Schools

The majority of Ganges Township is located within the Fennville Public School District. In November 2020 voters passed a 0.5 mill levy for 4 years for the purpose of providing funds for operating a system of public recreation and playgrounds estimated to raise \$200,000 per year. School officials have stated these funds may be applied throughout the district to assist with future parks and recreation improvements with partnering communities.



(photo provided by Jim Hayden)

The school system also operates a 48,000 square foot Community Athletic Center located in the City of Fennville on the school's campus. The center provides:

- An indoor multi-purpose activity room.
- Indoor basketball, volleyball, pickleball
- Fitness center equipped with cardiovascular machines and strength equipment.
- Baseball/Softball cages, and Golf Cages.
- One-tenth mile multi-lane rubberized, cushioned jogging/walking track.
- Two locker rooms with ADA compliant restroom facilities.

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Volunteer Organizations

Volunteer services are not administered by Ganges Township, but these groups can bring resources to parks and recreation improvements and opportunities that may otherwise not be readily available.

The Friends of the Blue Star Trail is a volunteer non-profit organization that promotes the development of non-motorized trails between South Haven and Saugatuck. The Blue Star Trail is proposed to have a segment of paved pathway through Ganges Township along Blue Star Highway. This group hosts an annual Lakeshore Harvest Ride offering biking routes of 15 to 67 miles throughout Ganges Township that highlight various artistic, agricultural, and culinary stops.

Friends of Pier Cove Park is a recently formed volunteer group to help protect and maintain the park from shoreline erosion. Permission to fundraise for specific efforts, volunteer maintenance and cleanup events, and plan/grant writing assistance is offered on a volunteer basis as granted by the Township Board. The group helped raise funds to install 30 feet of sheet pile wall to protect the north side of the park from erosion.



4 INVENTORY OF EXISTING PARKS, NATURAL AREAS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

The recreation inventory describes parks, natural areas, other public spaces, and recreation facilities within Ganges Township and surrounding areas. Inventory information required by Michigan DNR for township facilities includes: park name, size in acres or length of linear parks, description of use, the primary service area, type and number of recreation and support facilities, an accessibility evaluation, and overall location and facility maps.

Additional local and regional parks, natural areas, and recreational facilities are listed as they are enjoyed by many Ganges Township residents and visitors.

Ganges Township Inventory

Pier Cove Park

- Public access to Lake Michigan shoreline.
- Public Beach Park (66 feet wide).
- Located off Lakeshore Drive south of M-89 near Pier Cove Creek outlet.
- Limited paved parking area off Lakeshore Drive.
- State of Michigan Historical Marker #L1628C erected in 1989, Public Act 488 of 2002.
- Steel frame/wood shore wall built in late 1980's.
- Steel sheet pile wall built November 2020 (30 ft).
- Chain link fence installed 2020.



Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan

Pier Cove Park (continued)

- Trash receptacle (contracted).
- Park rules and boundary signage.
- Seasonally provided portable toilet facility (contracted).
- Patrolled by Allegan County Sheriff's Office.
- Park affords access to several miles of uninterrupted Lake Michigan shoreline including a popular hiking loop south to West Side County Park public access and returning along scenic Lakeshore Drive.
- 2 Concrete Benches.
- 1 Bicycle Rack
- Landscape wood/earth steps.
- Park serves the general public and surrounding neighborhoods within walking distance.



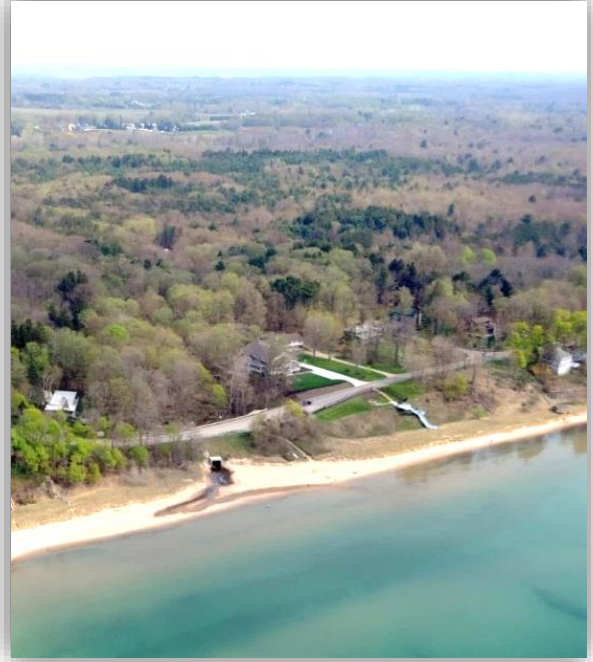
Pier Cove Park provides beach and shoreline access along a low-profile sandy Lake Michigan bluff. Lakeshore Drive bends near the park providing scenic vistas from the road and parking areas. Pier Cove Creek outlets as a small stream near the park with a steady year-round flow. The culvert is not part of the park. The park is 66 feet wide and park boundaries are signed.



Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan

The upper area of the park is largely undeveloped. It is supported by a shore protection wall originally built in the 1990's. This wall was recently extended on the north side to protect the park from high water level erosion. Natural surface steps lead down to the beach from a limited parking area.

The public beach is 66 feet wide. During times of average to below average Lake Michigan water levels there will be anywhere from 40 to 80 feet of sand west of the stairs. During high lake levels, the available beach can be limited to less than 10 feet and water will often come up to the existing shore protection wall leaving little to no available beach. Between 2013 and 2020 Lake Michigan water levels have risen six feet from record lows to record highs causing severe erosion throughout the state not seen since 1985.



Pier Cove is recognized as a historical site. Pier Cove was platted in 1851. A steam sawmill and wood shop were constructed. Two piers, measuring approximately 323 foot, were built. Pier Cove Village once had about twenty families, four stores, a tavern, post office, grist mill and three hotels. As the cord wood supply was depleted, the fire of 1871 occurred, and the railroad came to Fennville, the Village of Pier Cove diminished in population and importance. One pier remained in service into 1919. Both piers were destroyed by storms in the 1900's.

Today the park provides a public beach and access for shore-walking at all times of the year. In the summer, recreation includes swimming, sunbathing, and playing on the beach and nearby creek. The park is frequented year-round with beach hikers, rock collectors, and sunset watchers. In summer of 2020 the park was a popular place to watch comet Neowise and for viewing other celestial events. The park is enjoyed by all ages including families, multi-generational users, vacationers, locals, and the greater Ganges Township community.



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Glenn Beach (114th Avenue)

- Public access to Lake Michigan shoreline.
- Public Beach Park (roughly 93 feet wide).
- Located at the west end of 114th Avenue.
- Limited parking area off 114th Avenue.
- Park provides access to Wy-Ho-Co Shore Acres Park area with roughly 1,600 feet of public beach frontage.
- Patrolled by Allegan County Sheriff's Office.
- Park rules and boundary signage.
- Gravel access and drainage maintained by Allegan County Road Commission.
- Park affords access to several miles of uninterrupted Lake Michigan shoreline during average and below average water cycles. More limited access in high water cycles.
- Park serves the general public, surrounding neighborhoods within walking distance, Glenn School, and the greater Glenn community.



Glenn Beach provides a public beach and access for shore-walking along a high-profile clay Lake Michigan bluff. The 114th Avenue right of way provides access to the Township beach and Wy-Ho-Co Shore Acres Park. The public beach area is expansive, but access is limited for parking. Glenn Creek outlets near the park and flow can be intermittent and flashy.

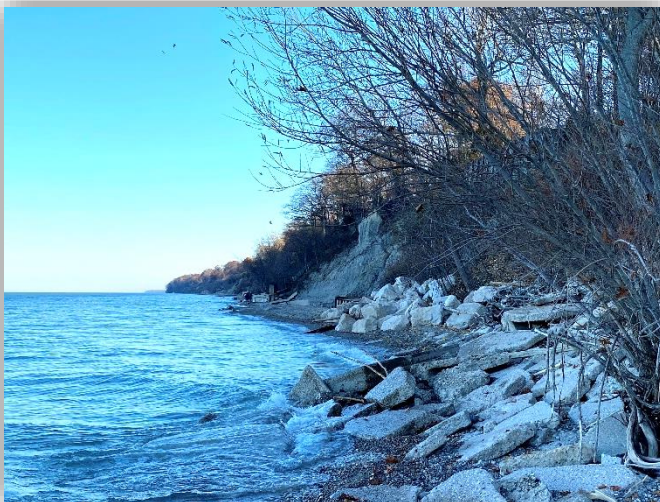


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The upper area of Glenn Beach is undeveloped. A gravel access path leads roughly 300 feet down to the beach with a steep ravine slope on its north side. The Allegan County Road Commission maintains the gravel access and storm drainage system. During the recent high-water period, the north slope of the access drive has become unstable. Parking is limited to defined areas along 114th Avenue. Many park users walk or ride bicycles.

In times of average Lake Michigan water levels there will be anywhere from 40 to 80 feet of sand available. During high water periods, the available beach can be limited to less than 10 feet and water will often erode the bottom of the gravel access drive leaving a steep drop off. Prior to high water damage, this access was one of few locations where emergency vehicles could access the shoreline. The park is used by the Ganges Township Fire Department for training exercises.

Glenn Beach is a popular beach and shoreline access point at all times of the year. Recreation activities at the park are similar to those at Pier Cove Park. The nearby Glenn School uses the beach multiple time a year for class field trips centered around life science studies and STEM-based learning. The school has also hosted beach clean up events.



Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan



Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan

Accessibility of Ganges Township Parks

The accessibility of each Ganges Township park was evaluated compared to the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design and given a ranking from 1 to 5. A score of 1 means the park is less accessible and 5 means that nearly all park areas are universally accessible. The MDNR recommends using the following rating system for assessing each park:

- 1= none of the site elements/facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines
- 2= some of the site elements/facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines
- 3= most of the site elements/facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines
- 4= the entire park meets accessibility guidelines
- 5= the entire park was developed/renovated using the principles of Universal Design.

Pier Cove Park

Rating: 2 - Some of the site elements/facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines. The parking area is paved and there are relatively few steps to get down to the beach compared to other parks in the surrounding area. Views from the parking area are enjoyed by people of all abilities to watch sunsets, the waves, and lake vistas.

Accessibility within the park could be improved by replacing the natural surface entrance area with a more level and barrier free (wheel chair) accessible entrance area, adding a defined barrier free parking space, providing an ADA compliant toilet, replacing the wood landscape steps with standard dimension steps, adding ramps or improving the upper areas of the park to be more universally accessible.

Glenn Beach (114th Avenue)

Rating: 1 - None of the site elements/facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines. The parking area is gravel and access to the beach is down a long gravel slope. None of the park features can be enjoyed from the parking area. Accessibility could be improved by replacing the natural surface entrance area with a more universally accessible ramp with landings and slopes that comply with ADA Standards. As land is available or acquired, the upper park area could be improved to have more universally accessible amenities.

For both parks, if improvements to toilet facilities, benches, signage, or picnic areas are made the principles of Universal Design should be consulted. Future improvement plans should consult with organizations such as the Disability Network Lakeshore for further recommendations on specific improvement plans. The Township should strive to maximize the accessibility of as much park space as possible for people of all abilities while recognizing the cyclical nature of Lake Michigan makes certain improvements less practical than others.

Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan

Local Inventory

These properties are located within Ganges Township and are included with the local inventory.

Ganges Township Hall

- Township Hall property at 64th and 119th intersection owned by Township.
- 1 acre parcel with Township Hall Building and gravel park areas.
- Used for public meetings and is the only office for Township business.

Hutchins Lake Sanctuary

- Unimproved Ganges Township controlled land fronting Hutchins Lake

Regional Recreation

Ganges Township also contains, or is within close proximity to, several excellent public and non-profit facilities of regional significance.



- **DNR Lands - Allegan State Game Area & Todd Farm.** State of Michigan DNR land offering hunting, fishing, camping, horseback riding, hiking, bird watching, and cross country skiing, equestrian trails, and snowmobiling. The DNR controls roughly 12,000 acres in the Black River Watershed. In Ganges Township there are 1,215 acres of DNR land within this watershed. The Todd Farm is a State of Michigan facility open for Goose hunting and general observation in the fall.
- **Allegan County Parks-** offering a variety of nearby outdoor parks including Westside County Park located on Lake Michigan, New Richmond Park with kayak access to the Kalamazoo River, Dumont Lake County Park, and Little John Lake County Park.
- **Wau-ke-na (Forest by the Water)** – is a 365 acre land preserve donated by the William Erby Smith estate to the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy. The north property offers scenic nature trails and Lake Michigan beach access. The south property offers scenic nature trails.

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- **Pier Cove Ravine Trust** – 70-acre sanctuary
- **Hutchins Lake** – Hutchins Lake is 300 acres with roughly one-third in Ganges Township and two-thirds in Clyde Township. The lake is a popular recreation destination. There is a public boat launch and lake access at the end of 59th Street.
- **Kalamazoo River and Watershed**
- **Black River and Watershed**
- **The Outdoor Discovery Center.** The ODC is a non-profit education and conservation organization focused on connecting people with nature through outdoor education. They have an educational visitors center and nature preserve in nearby Fillmore Township.
- **The Critter Barn.** Located in Holland, this is a favorite attraction for kids where families can learn how a farm operates and interact with farm animals like goats, ducks, chickens, rabbits, donkeys and more.
- **US Bike Route 35** – is a 500 mile route that runs from Indiana to Sault Ste. Marie, Canada. It generally follows the Lake Michigan shoreline and goes through the eastern Upper Peninsula. The full trail route can be viewed on MDOT's website.

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- **Scenic County Roads** – The Township’s many naturally beautiful rural roads offer many forms of recreation. The West Michigan Pike (Blue Star Hwy) is a Pure Michigan State Historic Byway that runs from New Buffalo to Ludington. The Allegan County Heritage Trail and Lake Michigan Circle Tour Routes include many routes in Ganges Township.
- **Gravel Road Biking** – A popular activity for many cyclists is riding rural gravel roads. Velo City Cycles hosts an annual Gravel Fondo event with proceeds benefiting local charities. The Gravel Fondo offers 7, 18, or 36 miles gravel cycling rides starting at Virtue Farms for mountain bikes, cross bikes, and fat bikes.
- **Lake Michigan** – the big lake is a tremendous recreational resource for the area. Activities afforded include boating, fishing, sunbathing and swimming, wind surfing, kayaking, sailing, sightseeing, scuba diving and snorkeling, plein-air painting, stargazing, and nature photography. Activities that have grown in popularity in recent years, particularly during the COVID19 pandemic of 2020, are hiking the shoreline and rock picking.

Ganges Township includes the offshore SW Michigan Underwater Preserve and State of Michigan Water Trails – Lake Michigan Water Trail Southwest stops.



Adjacent Community Parks

The adjacent communities of Saugatuck-Douglas, Casco Township, and South Haven also offer a variety of notable public parks including: Casco Township Nature Preserve, Oval Beach, Douglas Beach, Schultz Park, Riverbluff Park, Kids Corner, Black River Park and Boat Launch, Dyckman Park, and the Kal-Haven Trail Head. These parks support a variety of recreation including: public beach access, hiking trails, playgrounds, and pickleball courts. More complete information on adjacent community parks can be found in their respective recreation plans.

Commercial Recreation

In addition to public facilities, there are many privately owned and operated commercial facilities that offer recreational opportunities in the Ganges Township area. The area boasts several wineries, orchards, berry farms, agricultural experiences, private campgrounds, seasonal resorts, breweries, antique and artist shops. These private operations draw many people to Ganges Township each year and are an essential part of the character of the community.

Previous Grant-Funded Projects

Ganges Township has not received prior grant assistance for community parks. Future plans should incorporate Michigan DNR Post Completion Self Certification Reports as necessary if grant funds are received.

The Township should plan future applications for MDNR grants a year in advance. Applications are typically due April 1st with funds awarded in October of that year. Programs are available with matching grants to assist communities with park renovations, improvements, and land acquisitions. Be sure to check each annual notice of funding for any revised requirements.

Future projects to improve access to Lake Michigan may be eligible for funds from the Michigan Coastal Management Program. Coastal Zone Management priorities can shift from year to year, but applications are typically due in mid-December with funds awarded in October the following year. These funds are more often used for design and studies rather than physical construction, although some types of Low-Cost Construction may be eligible. Funding is through a NOAA federally backed program administered by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.

Recreation Programs

Recreation programming is performed by a variety of partners including local schools and community organizations. Fennville Public Schools offers active youth and adult recreational programming. Ganges Township itself does not coordinate recreational programs.

5 DESCRIPTION OF PLANNING & PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

Planning & Community Input

The planning process involved seeking community input and gathering background data from the Ganges Township Master Plan, site investigations and inventory of Township parks (namely Pier Cove Park and Glenn Beach), reviewing the social and environmental characteristics of the community, and considering the natural resources available within Ganges Township. Quality of life in Ganges Township centers largely around recreation opportunities, open spaces, and access to Lake Michigan. The Township recognizes its role in maintaining the character of the community and wishes to be responsive to citizens needs and desires through the process of developing well thought out goals and objectives to serve the entire community.

Public input was gathered through a variety of methods including an initial public hearing, social media outreach, small group meetings with park stakeholders, Regular Township Board and Planning Commission Meetings, and on-going public access to members the Ganges Township Board and Township Planning Commission. A community survey was conducted in 2007 and is included in the Township Master Plan. While outdated, some information from that survey is summarized below. No one specific form of input was used to outweigh another. Instead all input was reviewed and considered as a factor in the development of this plan.

Initial Public Hearing

An advertised public hearing to receive initial input prior to creation of the detailed plan was held on November 10th, 2020 at Ganges Township Hall. Notice of the hearing was advertised in the Allegan County News on October 29th, 2020.

In addition, a letter to the editor was published in the Commercial Record on October 22nd. The Ganges Township Planning Commission was notified of the park plan development and encouraged to provide input at their October 27th meeting. Additional outreach was done to notify neighborhood associations of the hearing. Posts with information about the meeting and how to submit comments were shared on social media via Friends of Pier Cove Park's facebook page and to online community forums. The public was invited to submit comments remotely via email, in writing to the Township, or to attend the meeting.

Minutes of the public meeting and input received is included in Appendix A.

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Stakeholder Meetings

Meetings with select groups of stakeholders were held to get specific input for Glenn Beach and Pier Cove Park. Notes from these meetings are included in Appendix A.

October 28th – a group of 9 stakeholders met outside at West Side County Park to discuss Pier Cove Park. The meeting included some members of the Lake Michigan Shore Association (neighborhood group), adjacent property owners to Pier Cove Park who do not rely on the park for beach access, and frequent users of the park from nearby walkable and drivable neighborhoods. Input and concerns varied. Some stakeholders wanted parking and access reduced while those who use the park frequently felt it was imperative to maintain the current level of access.

November 8th – a group of 3 stakeholders met at Glenn Beach. This meeting included neighbors familiar with the park who are supportive of improvements and maintaining, or expanding, access to the shoreline for the general public and Township residents. Of greatest concern was the failing slope and gravel access down to the beach area being currently threatened by high water levels and erosion. Input focused on encouraging action to keep the park open and accessible.

November 9th – Glenn School was consulted and encouraged to provide input on parks and recreation throughout Ganges Township and described their use of Glenn Beach.

Social Media Outreach and Fundraising

Friends of Pier Cove Park presented a plan for general improvements to the park focused on keeping the park open during the current high water cycle. This plan is included in Appendix B. The fundraiser to support the plan has a wide variety of donors and the facebook page quickly saw over 350 followers and continues to grow. In addition, emails and letters have been received at Ganges Township and to Friends of Pier Cove Park with additional donations and often express gratitude for the efforts to keep the park open when so many other beach access points have been closed due to high water.



Proposed improvements to Pier Cove Park have not been focused on parking, but instead on maintaining the current level of public access to the park and ensuring the park remains accessible to all people. The comments, donations, and gratitude received both verbally and in writing express a form of public input and show a level of support for the plan to protect the park and maintain its current level of accessibility for all park users. A November 4th update letter submitted to the Township Board on the park is included in Appendix A.

Summary of the 2007 Master Plan Survey

The 2007 Ganges Township Master Plan included a survey of property owners. Responses related to parks and recreation are summarized here. While somewhat outdated, this represents another form of general public input used to develop the goals and objectives of this plan. 415 households responded to the survey which was roughly a 28% response rate.

Types of activities/facilities respondents wanted to see developed in next 5 years

- Parks/open areas were highly preferred.
- Other mostly preferred items were: nature trails, bike trails, hiking trails.
- Scenic views of inland lakes and Lake Michigan be preserved 659 yes, 39 no
- Public access to inland lakes and Lake Michigan be expanded 342 yes, 272 no

Final Public Hearing

Once the draft plan was completed a 30-day public review period was advertised to encourage review and comment on the plan. A copy of the plan was made available at Ganges Township Hall and on the Ganges Township website on December 10th, 2020.

A 30-day notice of the draft plan availability and of the hearing date was advertised in the Allegan News on December 10th, 2020. A notice was also posted at Ganges Township Hall.

A public hearing to receive input on the draft plan was held on January 12th, 2021 at Ganges Township Hall. The Ganges Township Board received input and discussed the plan prior to adoption. Meeting minutes and input received are included in Appendix C.

A copy of notices published or posted are included in Appendix C.

6 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



Goals for this plan expand upon the Township Master Plan goals stated below:

- Preserve heritage of the land & protect natural resources.
- Enhance the economy and well-being of residents and visitors.
- Recognize natural beauty and wildlife.
- Create opportunities for active and passive recreation in the Township.
- Encourage purchase of parkland by the Township in order to permanently preserve environmentally sensitive areas with unique and attractive natural features, and create preserved greenways and waterways.
- Promote passive recreational opportunities, such as walking and biking trails along roadways and greenways, and provide pedestrian and non-motorized linkage with Village areas.
- Produce a Parks and Recreation Plan that satisfies the DNR checklist in order to position the Township for potential grant money.
- Work to provide additional public access to the Lakes.
- Protect and maintain the rural character and high quality of life of Ganges Township.

Ganges Township Goals and Objectives

Based upon the process of developing this plan Ganges Township has developed the following goals and objectives to help guide future decision making for parks and for providing recreational opportunities within the community. These goals and objectives are meant to inform the intent of actions taken over the next five-year planning period.

Goal 1: Provide multi-generational recreation opportunities for all people of all abilities.

Objectives:

- a. Provide recreational opportunities for each major age group living in the Township and provide activities and experiences to be enjoyed together with persons of multiple ages.
- b. As new facilities are developed and existing facilities are improved, provide recreational opportunities that meet or exceed Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.
- c. Integrate ADA accommodations such that they are seamlessly used by all residents within the community and do not cause separation of users based on abilities.

Goal 2: Maintain existing lands for appropriate recreational uses for future generations.

Objectives:

- a. Continue to maintain existing park access/facilities to the best of the Townships ability as a matter of public trust.
- b. Seek to maintain existing levels of access for the general public while providing a safe environment for park users.
- c. Continue to improve existing parks based on the Community Parks & Recreation Plan and as funding allows.
- d. Acknowledge the important role of Lake Michigan and the effect of its cyclical water level nature to better plan for uses, maintenance, and improvements with this in mind.



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Goal 3: Continue to utilize and develop existing park facilities as a focus for natural experiences, Lake Michigan access, and outdoor opportunities.

Objectives:

- a. Develop site master plans to support a community vision for the improvement and continued maintenance of park facilities.
- b. Retain Pier Cove Park and Glenn Beach as public parks with Lake Michigan frontage.
- c. Work with the Allegan County Road Commission on historical and appropriate uses of road right-of-way and road ends to maintain current levels of access.
- d. Recognize the continued and expanding year-round value of recreation provided along the Lake Michigan shoreline.

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Goal 4: Maintain funding for parks and recreation through regular Township budgeting processes and other non-Township funding sources.

Objective:

- a. Support regular budgeting and planning for maintenance and improvements of parks.
- b. Utilize budgeted and volunteer/non-profit funds to the greatest extent possible to match grant opportunities. Look for partnerships with local schools, community groups, and volunteers to share matching resources.
- c. Continue to allow for open use of the park lands and to not charge admission into the facilities. Maintain free use of the parks and facilities.

Goal 5: Continue to support and encourage regional planning and non-profit/volunteer participation in parks maintenance, planning, and improvements, as the community is small and financial resources are limited.

Objectives:

- a. Assist, as funds allow, non-profit organizations through the development and maintenance of facilities for recreational activities, programs, and events.
- b. Attend and participate in regional strategic planning activities on a regional basis which support parks and recreation for Ganges Township residents.
- c. Participate in the development of local and regional projects, as determined to be prudent by the Township Board.

Goal 6: Remain open to the idea of potential acquisition of additional lands as they might become available to support the goals of this plan, to protect open space, and to maintain the rural character of Ganges Township.

Objectives:

- a. Make it known that donations of land to Ganges Township will be considered.
- b. Where the opportunity arises, secure additional access to Lake Michigan, Hutchins Lake, wetlands, open space natural resources, streams, and dune lands.
- c. Seek grants as appropriate to assist with the acquisition of properties.
- d. Build relationships with property owners and local land conservancy organizations such as the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.
- e. Encourage private landowners in developing preservation strategies for their properties.

Goal 7: Seek to find the appropriate level of balance between the general public's use of park facilities and concerns of neighboring property owners.

Objectives:

- a. Access to parks, Lake Michigan public beaches, and the public's right to the shoreline should be promoted and protected as a matter of public trust for all Township residents.
- b. The protection of the interests of neighbors must be balanced with the public's right to access and use those properties.
- c. Access that ignores public encroachment onto private property cannot be ignored. The Township must continue to work with appropriate law enforcement agencies on enforcement of trespass and provide well delineated park boundaries.
- d. The public and neighbors should expect well maintained and accessible park spaces. As appropriate, and keeping in character with the surrounding neighborhood, the Township should consider improved barriers, signage, or enhanced landscaping to define park boundaries.

7 ACTION PROGRAM

This action program focuses on the future vision and plans for parks and recreation within Ganges Township. In this section specific project concepts are identified that are intended to meet and/or work toward the Goals and Objectives of the previous section. A brief explanation is provided for each proposed project concept.

A specific Capital Improvement Schedule is not included at this time. One may be developed and included in future plan updates. A proposed project does not have to be specifically listed in this Action Program to apply for grant funding. The project concepts included in this Action Program are those supported by the Township at time this plan was adopted. These concepts may be developed into future actions as recommended/guided by the Ganges Township Board.

Project Concepts

Pier Cove Park Shore Protection & Maintenance

Continue work to maintain access and keep the park open during this high-water cycle. A steel wall was recently added to protect the park entrance and existing shore wall with fundraising and general fund contribution. Monitor existing wall for signs of failure and work on improvements to steps as they wash out. Maintain and be proactive to protect existing shore walls and build temporary measures as needed to maintain access. Work to obtain design, permits, and grant funds well in advance of an emergency need. Coordinate with adjacent park agencies (Allegan County Parks and Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy) to encourage them to keep their access points open to the public during high water periods to relieve excess traffic at Pier Cove.

Pier Cove Park Accessible Entrance Plaza (Development and Construction)

Design and construct an accessible entrance plaza to the park with benches, improved views of Lake Michigan, donor bricks, donor plaque, and interpretive historical signage. A terraced wood retaining wall with dune grass plantings (or equivalent) to be built above the recently installed steel wall will restore the eroded slope. Project concept presented by Friends of Pier Cove Park with partial funding, project administration, and volunteer labor to be provided.

Consider engaging with a professional landscape architect to provide layout and design consistent with Pier Cove Ravine surroundings. Additional amenities may include: accessible toilet facility with enclosure, trash enclosure, picnic table, visual map of beach boundaries, improved park signage, and a barrier free parking space.

Potential design and construction may be eligible for grant funding or be good candidates for Fennville Public School's Recreation Millage funding. This concept could be done as lower cost park maintenance or be developed into a higher cost professional renovation depending on funding support and direction chosen.

Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan

Pier Cove Park Parking and Pedestrian Safety Improvements

Work with Allegan County Road Commission to maintain existing parking and access for the general public while creating a safer environment for traffic and pedestrians. Potentially add rumble strips to Lakeshore Drive near parking areas. Consider alternative parking layouts that maintain close to the current number of parking spaces while incorporating a barrier free space.

A way to mitigate pedestrian and vehicle safety concerns without limiting access for the general public would be to acquire additional property and relocate parking. This would maintain the current level of public access. Depending on location, a clearly defined crossing and pedestrian pathways could be designated to and from parking areas and the public beach. Simply reducing or eliminating parking is in conflict with the goals and objectives of this plan.

Pier Cove Park Public Lake Frontage Expansion

Potential acquisition of nearby property to provide additional Lake Michigan public beach frontage.

Glenn Beach Slope Stabilization (Development and Construction)

Design and construct a slope stabilization project to protect the existing gravel access path and north slope down to Glenn Creek. The slope is actively eroding and further failure may cause the access to the public beach to be closed. Project could include toe stabilization, natural shoreline and streambank restoration practices along Glenn Creek, reconstruction of the north slope, and vegetative restoration with native plantings. Project should be professionally designed and constructed through bid contracts.

Potential design and construction may be eligible for grant funding. Design may be a good candidate for Fennville Public School's Recreation Millage funding. Coordinate with Allegan County Road Commission to work toward solutions.

Glenn Beach Parking Expansion

Potential acquisition of nearby property to provide additional parking to Glenn Beach users. Development of parking may include ADA accessible amenities such as toilet facility, benches, and picnic area. Glenn Beach has expansive public beach frontage, but access by the general public is severely limited to available roadside parking. A designated parking area would provide increased access and the ability to relocate parking off adjacent roadways.

Glenn Beach Public Lake Frontage Expansion

Potential acquisition of nearby property to provide additional Lake Michigan public beach frontage.

Ganges Township Community Parks & Recreation Plan

Glenn Creek Ravine

Potential acquisition of nearby property to provide additional Lake Michigan public beach frontage, maintain open space, protect valuable natural resource property, and provide opportunities for hiking and trails.

Blue Star Trail Collaboration and Support

Continue collaboration with Allegan County, regional stakeholders, and Friends of the Blue Star Trail during planning and implementation phases of the regional trail vision from South Haven to Saugatuck.

8 PLAN ADOPTION

This section documents that Ganges Township has submitted copies of the plan to the required organizations, held a public meeting, and adopted the plan. Copies of the following documents are included in Appendix C.

Resolution from Ganges Township Board

Resolution approving the plan with meeting minutes from January 12th, 2021.

Minutes from Public Hearing

Minutes from the Public Hearing held January 12th, 2021 at Ganges Township Hall, 1904 64th Street are included as the first part of the Regular Ganges Township Board Meeting Minutes followed by the board resolution.

Notice of Public Hearing and Availability of Plan for Public 30-Day Review

Notice published in The Allegan News newspaper on December 10th, 2020 with public hearing to be held January 12th, 2021 at Ganges Township Hall, and notice that the plan is available for public viewing at the Township offices between December 10th and January 12th and online at www.gangestownship.org.

County Planning Agency Submittal

Letter was sent to Brandy Gildea, Parks Coordinator at Allegan County Parks and Recreation, 3255 122nd Avenue, Suite 103, Allegan, MI 49010 with a copy of the plan.

Regional Planning Agency Submittal

Letter was sent to West Michigan Regional Planning Commission, 1345 Monroe Avenue NW, Suite 255, Grand Rapids, MI 49505-4670 with a copy of the plan.

DNR Submittal

The plan and Certification Checklist were uploaded to MiRecGrants online prior to February 1st, 2021. Certification Checklist was signed by local unit of government also uploaded.