

Michigan State University

School of Planning, Design, and Construction
Urban Planning Practicum

Tourism Development Strategy For Idlewild, Michigan

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Spring 2013

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The practicum team is deeply grateful to the following individuals, whose information and insights were critical to the successful completion of the Idlewild Tourism Development Strategy:

- Our client, the Idlewild Community Development Corporation, including Mr. Hubert Brandon, Pat Williams, Jim Marbury, and Virginia Moye-Carr.
- Mr. John Meeks for his guidance while touring Idlewild and his historical knowledge.
- The Yates Township staff, specifically Township Supervisor Ron Griffin.
- Thank you to Lake County Equalization and its director, specifically John Kovalcik and Lena Lyles, for sending us much needed files for the county.
- Thank you to Betty Boone at the Michigan State Housing Development Authority for taking time out of her schedule to give us feedback on our draft.
- Additional thanks to Terry Sanford of Nederveld Associates, Inc. and Laura Ashlee of the State Historic Preservation Office for providing us with the Idlewild Downtown Development Plan, the Idlewild Historic Asset Inventory and National Register Nomination, and the Cultural Resources Management Plan.
- Another big thank you to Dr. Rex LaMore and Dr. Zenia Kotval, our practicum professors who also gave us feedback on our draft and answered our questions with their knowledge and professional experiences.
- We would like to also acknowledge Jason Cox, our graduate student assistant for practicum.
- Last but not least, thanks to the eight Idlewild community members who gave their time and insights for our SWOT analysis.

This project is supported in part pursuant to the receipt of financial assistance to the MSU Center for Community and Economic Development from the State of Michigan Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any federal, state agency or Michigan State University.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About Practicum

Practicum is a capstone course taught by the Michigan State University Urban and Regional Planning program. Through this course, undergraduate and graduate students gain practical planning experience by collaborating with community partners that are in need of planning assistance. It is the responsibility of the student team, the client and the community to determine a realistic scope of study for the project that meets the community's planning needs.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to help the historic community of Idlewild, Michigan achieve community and economic prosperity by researching and creating a tourism development strategy that leverages Idlewild's cultural and natural assets to attract year-round visitors.

Client and Project Partners

This report was prepared for the Idlewild Community Development Corporation (ICDC). The client contact was Hubert Brandon, a consultant for ICDC. Several other partners the project and provided information and assistance as needed; the project partners and their affiliations are summarized below.

Client Contact and Project Partners		
Name	Position	Organization
Hubert Brandon	Consultant and Client Contact	ICDC
Jim Marbury	Treasurer	ICDC
Pat Williams	Founder/ Small business owner	ICDC
John Meeks	President/ former Small Business owner/ Current Resident	Idlewild African American Chamber of Commerce (IAACC)
Ron Griffin	Township Supervisor	Yates Township
Virginia Moye- Carr	Small Business owner/ Current Resident	Paradise Lake Motel
Betty Boone	Director, Cultural Economic Development	Michigan State Housing Development Authority

Scope of Work

The scope of work for this project consisted of the following tasks:

Overview of Idlewild. This task involved gathering and analyzing information on Idlewild's background and physical characteristics. To begin this task, the team conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to provide a general indication of the current issues facing Idlewild; the data for this analysis were gathered through two focus groups with Idlewild residents, public officials, nonprofits, and business owners. Next, using background documents from the client, Internet and library research, and geographic information systems (GIS) data from Lake County, the team assembled a brief history of

Idlewild and an analysis of Idlewild's geography, topography, water features, land ownership, land cover, zoning, utilities, and key sites with potential for tourist-oriented development.

Socioeconomic Profile. The socioeconomic profile assessed the current condition and health of the economy and social environment of Yates Township and Lake County. Using data sets from the U.S. Census and American Community Survey, the team analyzed trends in Yates Township and Lake County over the two decades from 1990 to 2010, using comparison data from the State of Michigan as a frame of reference.

Tourism Asset Study. To help identify potential tourism-industry niches for Idlewild, the tourism asset study identified tourist attractions and tourism amenities that were currently available in Lake County and the surrounding region. The research consisted of (a) analysis of county-level business data by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes, (b) maps generated from Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) industry data; and (c) a qualitative assessment of the most important tourism assets as indicated by interviewees and by Internet research of the region.

Tourism Market Study. The tourism market study was designed to help the client agency understand their potential markets and market demographics regionally, statewide, and nationally. The research consisted of analysis of recent Michigan visitor profiles developed for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and included visitor demographics, travel behavior and spending, popular activities, states or Michigan regions of origin, tourist volume per region visited, and seasonal visitation patterns. The analysis also included visitor data for the Huron-Manistee National Park, which surrounds Idlewild. Finally, this section includes analysis of ESRI retail surplus and leakage data for the area surrounding Idlewild to provide a rough indication of what tourism-related retailers might succeed in Idlewild.

Summary of Planning Activities and Reports. To help the client make the best use of the many planning documents that have been developed for Idlewild or Yates Township since 2006, the MSU team summarized these recent plans, their recommendations, and the tentative status of those recommendations as of early 2013.

Case Studies. To identify promising, real-world approaches to inform the tourism development strategy, the team identified and described recent examples of similar communities that had leveraged a particular asset to draw tourism, and how they did it. The team developed case studies on aspects of tourism development that may provide lessons of value to Idlewild. With the exception of Eatonville, Florida, these case studies do not necessarily come from communities that are fully comparable to Idlewild; rather, they exhibit tourism development approaches that could be adapted to Idlewild and appear complementary to the recommendations already provided by other recent planning initiatives. The case studies include the following:

- Zora Neale Huston Festival of the Arts and Humanities, Eatonville, Florida
- Silver Lake Sand Dunes Apple BBQ Cook-Off Festival, Hart, Michigan

- Winter Comedy Festival, Traverse City, Michigan
- Nicodemus, Kansas National Historic Site
- Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site
- Mashpee Commons, Massachusetts

Tourism Development Strategy. The final product of this work is a tourism development strategy that provides specific recommended action steps, resources, and tentative timelines for rolling out a tourism development initiative over the next ten years. To help the client build and maintain momentum, the strategy emphasizes incremental changes at an ascending scale of effort and cost—from short-term, no-cost approaches to long-term, ambitious approaches.

Appendices. The report includes the following appendices:

- *Appendix A:* The discussion guide used to conduct the SWOT analysis.
- *Appendix B:* Considerations for the establishment of the ICDC as a community land trust.
- *Appendix C:* Historic walking-tour maps of Idlewild developed by Commonwealth Cultural Resource Group and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.
- *Appendix D:* A sample request for qualifications, memorandum of understanding, and development agreement to be used as a model for seeking a developer to rehabilitate and reopen the Flamingo Club.

The summarized tourism development strategy recommendations are shown on the next page.

Tourism Development Recommendations, 2013-2023

Short Term/Low Cost (2013-2016)	Medium Term/Medium Cost (2016-2019)	Long Term/High Cost (2020-2023)
<p>Capacity building--training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Nonprofit Association, Michigan Historic Preservation Network, Center for Community Progress <p>Capacity building—collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Idlewild Tourism Committee with Yates Twp, county officials; Lake County Chamber, Land Bank; Lake County MSU Extension District 5; West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission; nonprofits; business reps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate volunteers Coordinate subcommittees for activities below Meet regularly to discuss status of activities and address problems Monthly conference call with state partners 	<p>Capacity building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire part-time planning and development coordinator Establish official ICDC headquarters Expand Idlewild Chamber of Commerce 	<p>Capacity building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire full-time planning and development coordinator
<p>Physical development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue RFQ for Flamingo Club and Williams Island band shell Solicit DNR/DEQ funding for Williams Island bridge replacement Solicit USDA funding for broadband development 	<p>Physical development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICDC partners with Lake County Land Bank to redevelop strategic properties in target area Construct welcome center at US-10 and Broadway Issue RFQ for redevelopment of Casa Blanca Hotel Solicit SHPO grant for Casa Blanca Hotel 	<p>Physical development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hotel(s) established; commercial development occurring Raise funds locally to build permanent amphitheater on Williams Island
<p>Marketing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage volunteer for social media marketing—start with historical information and existing events. Content updates at least 3x/week Establish central Idlewild website (e.g., “visitidlewild.com”) During Idlewild Week, gather contact information (emails, addresses, phone) of all Idlewilders Club members Research Historically Black Colleges & Universities, Divine Nine 	<p>Marketing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire part-time marketing coordinator As events & attractions grow/diversify, increase marketing investment Hire marketing firm to create promotional videos Purchase ads in major Northwest Michigan markets as well as Detroit, Chicago, Grand Rapids Advertise in-state through Pure Michigan Targeted marketing materials, e-newsletters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Idlewilders Clubs Historically Black Colleges & Univs. “Divine Nine” Fraternities & Sororities 	<p>Marketing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Idlewild Convention & Visitors Bureau Purchase ads in major North American markets Advertise nationwide through Pure Michigan TV commercials in major Midwestern cities
<p>Beautification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a volunteer beautification subcommittee to set local priorities Wildflower Day—each year, plant native wildflowers at entrances and major corridor (seek donations from area greenhouses) Engage local artists to make decorative entry signs, wayfinding signs 	<p>Beautification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with DNR/DEQ to coordinate ongoing evaluation and maintenance of the lakes 	<p>Beautification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate sustained beautification activities through business improvement district or donations from local businesses
<p>Special Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form volunteer special events subcommittee; set priorities and assign tasks Begin Father’s Day BBQ Fest or other food festival Seek additional sponsors for Idlewild Music Fest 	<p>Special Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire a part-time special events coordinator Expand/seek additional sponsors for BBQ/food fest Seek major acts for Idlewild Music Fest Establish Flamingo Club Summer Concert Series (pending reopening of Flamingo Club) 	<p>Special Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full-time special events staff
<p>Preservation and Stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose nonbinding design guidelines using language from Cultural Resource Management Plan 	<p>Preservation and Stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Historic District Study Committee Develop updated report using existing historic resource inventory as starting point 	<p>Preservation and Stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish local historic district

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INTRODUCTION

About Practicum

Practicum is a capstone course taught by the Michigan State University Urban and Regional Planning Program. Through this course, undergraduate and graduate students gain practical planning experience by collaborating with community partners that are in need of planning assistance. It is the responsibility of the student team, the client and the community to determine a realistic scope of study for the project that meets the community's planning needs.

The goals of practicum include mastering basic techniques for data collection, interviewing, field work, map making, and report writing, as well as the application of analytical techniques to create an understanding of the condition of a community and its problems.

Throughout the course, the student team's work is guided by the client and by MSU's practicum faculty, Dr. Zenia Kotval and Dr. Rex LaMore.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to help the unincorporated community of Idlewild, Michigan achieve community and economic prosperity by researching and creating a tourism development strategy that leverages Idlewild's cultural and natural assets to attract year-round visitors.

The client's vision for the project is substantially similar to the overarching goal articulated by the Cultural Economic Development National Resource Team when it developed a cultural economic development readiness assessment for Idlewild:

"... to assist Yates Township citizens and property owners to preserve, restore and develop Idlewild, Michigan, as a national rural retreat, resort and high value tourism destination. The community also wants to achieve prosperity by leveraging its natural environment, historic buildings, cultural heritage, creative talent and cultural assets to spur financial investment and economic growth." (National Resource Team, 2006)



Figure 1: Practicum Team and Client Representatives at Entrance to Idlewild. Left to Right: Emilio Voltaire, Corean Reynolds, John Meeks, Hubert Brandon, Matt Wojciechowski, Jim Marbury, Cortney Dunklin, and Nathalie Winans. Photo by Pat Williams.

Client and Project Partners

This report was prepared for the Idlewild Community Development Corporation (ICDC). The client contact was Hubert Brandon, a consultant for ICDC.

ICDC’s mission is to “promote, preserve and protect the heritage and resources of historic Idlewild, Michigan that inform the world about the value and contributions of this National Register community, and to provide Economic Development opportunities in the Idlewild community that foster economic growth and quality of life improvement. The purpose of the ICDC is to engage local residents and business to work together to undertake community development, which improves the community in sustainable ways, and offer economic opportunities to low and moderate-income people in historic Idlewild, Yates Township and the region” (ICDC, 2012).

Although ICDC was the lead agency on this project, several other organizations and individuals supported the project and provided information and assistance as needed. The project partners and their affiliations are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Client Contact and Project Partners

Name	Position	Organization
Hubert Brandon	Consultant and Client Contact	ICDC
Jim Marbury	Treasurer	ICDC
Pat Williams	Founder/ Small business owner	ICDC
John Meeks	President/ former Small Business owner/ Current Resident	Idlewild African American Chamber of Commerce (IAACC)
Ron Griffin	Township Supervisor	Yates Township
Virginia Moye- Carr	Small Business owner/ Current Resident	Paradise Lake Motel
Betty Boone	Director, Cultural Economic Development	Michigan State Housing Development Authority

Scope of Work

The scope of work for this project consists of the following tasks:

Overview of Idlewild

This task involved gathering and analyzing information on Idlewild’s background and physical characteristics. To begin this task, the team conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to provide a general indication of the current issues facing Idlewild; the data for this analysis were gathered through two focus groups with Idlewild residents, public officials, nonprofits, and business owners. Next, using background documents from the client, Internet and library research, and geographic information systems (GIS) data from Lake County, the team assembled a brief history of Idlewild and an analysis of Idlewild’s geography, topography, water features, land ownership, land cover, zoning, utilities, and key sites with potential for tourist-oriented development.

Socioeconomic Profile

The socioeconomic profile assessed the current condition and health of the economy and social environment of Yates Township and Lake County. Using data sets from the U.S. Census and American Community Survey, the team analyzed trends in Yates Township and Lake County over the two decades from 1990 to 2010, using comparison data from the State of Michigan as a frame of reference.

Tourism Asset Study

To help identify potential tourism-industry niches for Idlewild, the tourism asset study identified tourist attractions and tourism amenities that were currently available in Lake County and the surrounding region. The research consisted of (a) analysis of county-level business data

by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes, (b) maps generated from Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) industry data; and (c) a qualitative assessment of the most important tourism assets as indicated by interviewees and by Internet research of the region.

Tourism Market Study

The tourism market study was designed to help the client agency understand their potential markets and market demographics regionally, statewide, and nationally. The research consisted of analysis of recent Michigan visitor profiles developed for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and included visitor demographics, travel behavior and spending, popular activities, states or Michigan regions of origin, tourist volume per region visited, and seasonal visitation patterns. The analysis also included visitor data for the Huron-Manistee National Park, which surrounds Idlewild. Finally, this section includes analysis of ESRI retail surplus and leakage data for the area surrounding Idlewild to provide a rough indication of what tourism-related retailers might succeed in Idlewild.

Summary of Planning Activities and Reports

To help the client make the best use of the many planning documents that have been developed for Idlewild or Yates Township since 2006, the MSU team summarized these recent plans, their recommendations, and the status of those recommendations as of early 2013.

Case Studies

To identify promising, real-world approaches to inform the tourism development strategy, the team identified and described recent examples of similar communities that had leveraged a particular asset to draw tourism, and how they did it. The team developed case studies on aspects of tourism development that may provide lessons of value to Idlewild. With the exception of Eatonville, Florida, these case studies do not necessarily come from communities that are fully comparable to Idlewild; rather, they exhibit tourism development approaches that could be adapted to Idlewild and appear complementary to the recommendations already provided by other recent planning initiatives. The case studies include the following:

- Zora Neale Huston Festival of the Arts and Humanities, Eatonville, Florida
- Silver Lake Sand Dunes Apple BBQ Cook-Off Festival, Hart, Michigan
- Winter Comedy Festival, Traverse City, Michigan
- Nicodemus, Kansas National Historic Site
- Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site
- Mashpee Commons, Massachusetts

Tourism Development Strategy

The final product of this work is a tourism development strategy that provides specific recommended action steps, resources, and tentative timelines for rolling out a tourism development initiative over the next ten years. To help the client build and maintain momentum, the strategy emphasizes incremental changes at an ascending scale of effort and cost—from short-term, no-cost approaches to long-term, ambitious approaches. The strategy also includes tools and tactics for fundraising and for increasing the likelihood of private investment.

Target Areas

Target Area for Tourism Development Strategy

The target area for the tourism development strategy is the center of unincorporated community of Idlewild. Idlewild is a part of Yates Township, which is located at the southern border of Lake County in Michigan’s northwestern Lower Peninsula. Yates Township sits within the boundaries of the Huron-Manistee National Forest, about one hour east of Ludington/Lake Michigan and 15 miles west of US-131 (see Figure 5).

Being an unincorporated community, Idlewild lacks official boundaries and does not correspond with any census tract. The Idlewild National Register Historic District has well-defined boundaries; however, these extend beyond Yates Township and into parts of Pleasant Plains and Cherry Valley Townships and also do not correspond with census tracts (see Figures 3 and 4). For purposes of this project, the target area of the Idlewild Tourism Development Strategy is defined as the area bordered by Highway M-10 to the north, Foreman Road to the west, South Nelson Road to the east, and Michigan Road to the south. This area encompasses the historical center of Idlewild—i.e., Williams Island and the small “downtown” area to the west of Williams Island (Idlewild Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009), as well as Idlewild Lake, Paradise Lake, and Tank Lake.

Figure 2 shows Idlewild within the larger context of Lake County and the Lower Peninsula.

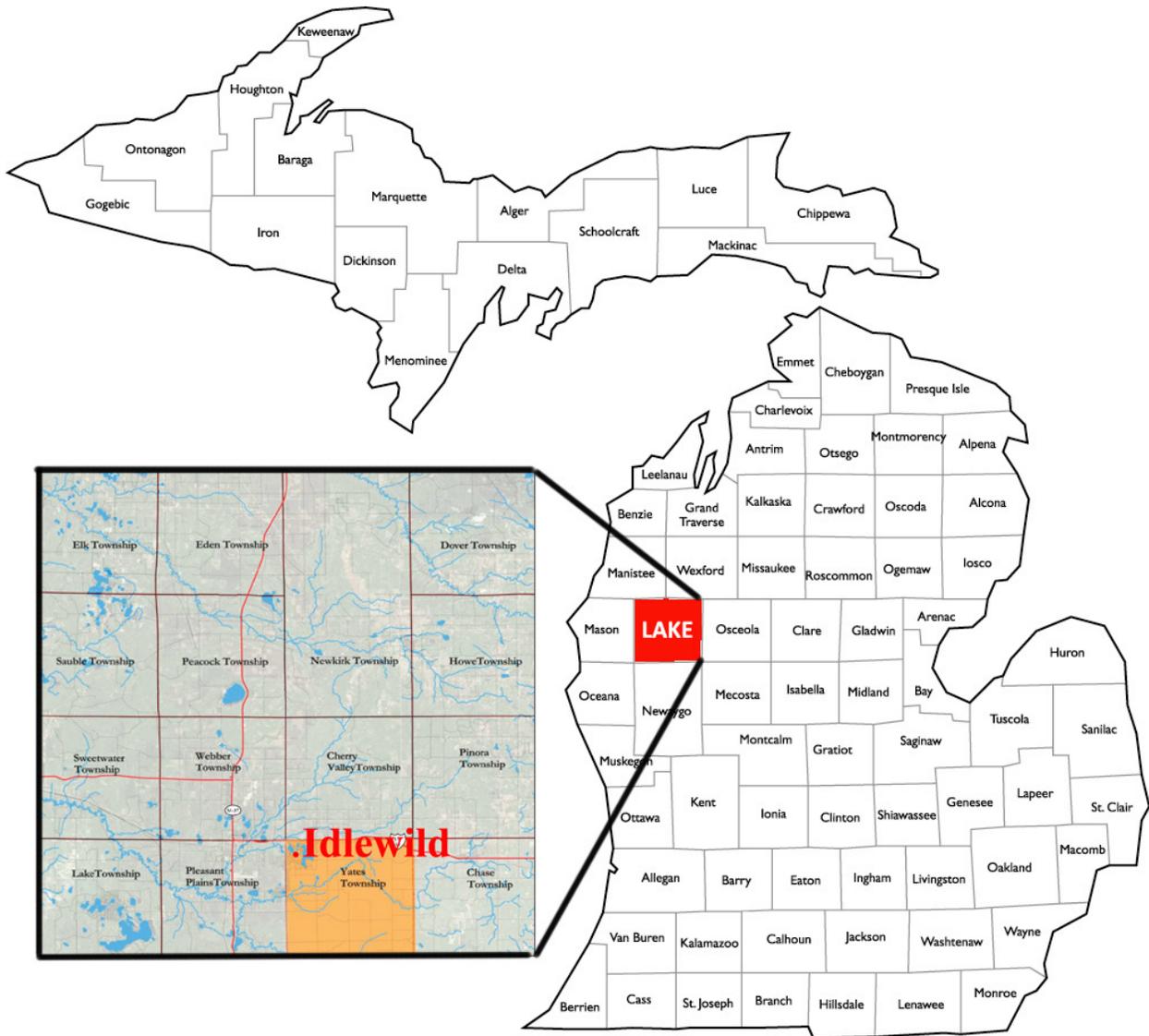


Figure 2: Idlewild in Perspective of Lake County and Lower Peninsula. Composite of maps by Jacobsen Daniels Associates (2010) and Worldatlas.com (undated).

Figure 4 shows the target area of the Idlewild tourism development strategy superimposed over the boundaries of the Idlewild National Register Historic District.

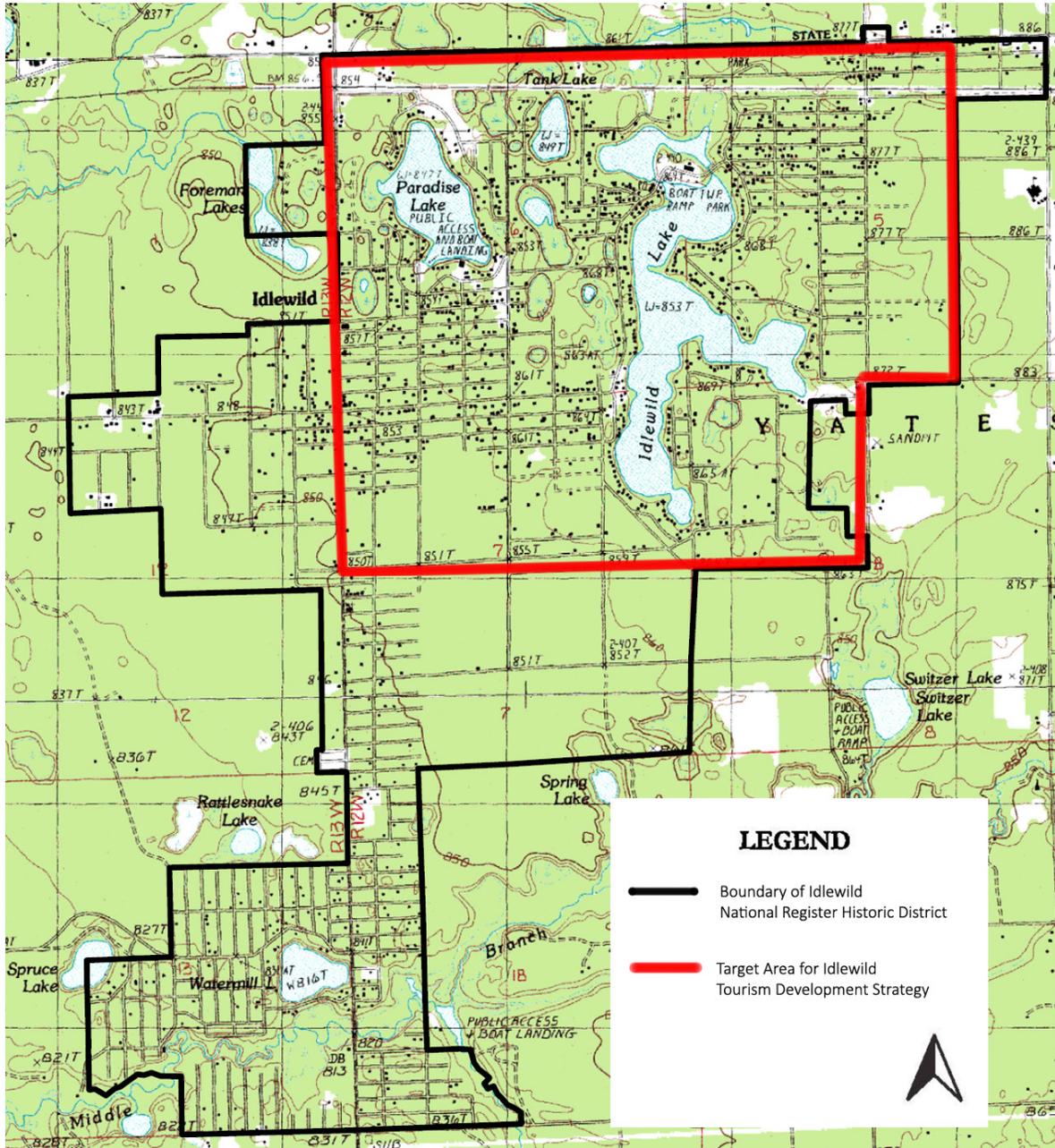


Figure 4: Idlewild National Register Historic District and Target Area For Idlewild Tourism Development Strategy. U.S. Geological Survey Topographic Quadrangle Map, modified for Idlewild Cultural Resource Management Plan (2009) and with tourism development target area added.

Idlewild is readily accessible by automobile. As shown in Figure 5, U.S. Route 10 runs immediately north of Idlewild, connecting with U.S. 131 to the east and U.S. 31 to the west.



Figure 5: Major Roads Surrounding Idlewild. Google, 2013.

Target Areas for Research

To create a tourism development strategy that helps Idlewild become a regional tourist attraction that draws visitors from outside Lake County and outside Michigan, some components of the research encompass larger areas beyond the target area for the Idlewild tourism development strategy. These research areas and their justification are described below.

Idlewild: An Overview. To understand the potential of Idlewild for tourism development, the overview of Idlewild focuses on Idlewild alone.

Socioeconomic Profile. To understand the current socioeconomic condition of Idlewild and its immediate surroundings, the study area for the socioeconomic profile is Yates Township and Lake County. To provide a frame of reference for the findings, the Yates Township and Lake County data are compared with socioeconomic information for the state of Michigan.

Tourism Asset Study. To determine what tourism assets and amenities already exist throughout the region, the tourism asset study encompasses Lake County and the five-county region surrounding Lake County (i.e., Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Wexford Counties). Tourism assets and amenities around the region could be complementary or competitive with Idlewild because the strategy hopes to draw tourists from outside Lake County. Therefore, the client should know what assets and amenities already exist throughout the region to avoid duplication where possible.

Tourism Market Study. To understand the preferences and visitation patterns of travelers who might visit Idlewild, the tourism market study analyzes data on tourism in Northwest Michigan, the State of Michigan, the Great Lakes region, and the United States. To be viable as a tourist destination, Idlewild will need to draw visitors from outside Lake County, which is very sparsely populated.

Summary of Planning Documents. The review of planning documents includes Idlewild alone (e.g., Idlewild Cultural Economic Development Readiness report and Cultural Resource Management Plan) as well as Yates Township (e.g., the Yates Township Comprehensive Plan or the Yates Township Parks and Recreation Master Plan).

Methods

The practicum team used the following research methods to carry out this study:

- Document review
- Secondary data analysis
- Interviews
- SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis

A copy of the moderator guide used for the SWOT analysis is provided in Appendix A. The format of the interviews was more informal, consisting of specific questions about Idlewild—e.g., the status of its utilities, the condition of the lakes, and the status of the recommendations from Idlewild’s recent planning activities. For this reason, no interview questionnaire was developed.

Data Sources

To inform the development of the economic development strategy, the practicum team gathered data from the following sources:

- Local Stakeholders
 - ICDC, Chamber of Commerce, Yates Township Officials, Lake County Officials, Business Owners, Residents
- State Employees
 - Michigan State Housing Development Authority, State Historic Preservation Office
- Planning Firm
 - Nederveld Associates, Inc.
- Existing Plans and Activities
 - Idlewild Cultural Economic Development Readiness Report, 2006
 - Idlewild Downtown Development Plan, 2007
 - Idlewild Historical Asset Inventory, 2009
 - Idlewild Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009
 - Yates Township Master Plan, 2010
 - Flamingo Club Feasibility Study, 2011
 - West MI Shoreline Regional Development Plan, 2012
- Secondary Data Sources
 - United States Decennial Census and American Community Survey
 - ESRI industry data and maps
 - Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data
 - North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) county business pattern data
 - Michigan tourism visitor profiles from Michigan Economic Development Corporation
 - Smithsonian Institution data on museum visitation by underrepresented audiences
 - National Park Service data on national park visitors

Deliverables

The project deliverables include the following:

- This report
- A PowerPoint presentation summarizing the research findings and strategy recommendations
- A poster summarizing the strategy
- Electronic copies of recent planning reports, GIS data files, and the full historical asset inventory

OVERVIEW OF IDLEWILD

This section describes the general characteristics of Idlewild, including its history, geography, land elevation, water features, utilities, and current land use.

A Brief History of Idlewild

For those who experienced its charms, Idlewild is almost a legend. Idlewild is America's largest African American resort (Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2010). During much of the twentieth century, Idlewild was literally a place apart—a forest haven where African Americans could relax and recover from the toxic pressure of legally sanctioned racism.

During the nineteenth century, the lumber industry eliminated the old-growth forest throughout Lake County and the surrounding region (Nolan, 2002). However, the sandy soil was not well suited for agriculture, and second-growth forest soon reclaimed the land. (The reconversion to forestland would accelerate in the 1930s, when crews from the Civilian Conservation Corps, including some 167 African Americans, planted trees on the federal land surrounding Idlewild—Stephens, 2001.)



Figure 6: Undated photo of bathers on Lake Idlewild. Photo by Stanley Kufta. Retrieved from Seeking Michigan, 2013.

In the second decade of the twentieth century, four white developers and their wives—

Erastus and Flora Branch, Adelbert and Isabelle Branch, Wilbur and Mayme Lemon, and A.E. and Modolijn Wright (Stephens, 2001)—saw potential in the recovering forest and quiet lakes. The consortium, christening itself the Idlewild Resort Company (IRC), homesteaded the land in 1912 and began purchasing and platting property in 1915. Shortly thereafter, the IRC began to invite middle-class African Americans to visit and buy building lots (ibid.). The IRC purchased advertisements in African American publications such as the *Chicago Defender* and organized tours of the site with prospective buyers from Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, and other major Midwestern cities. Some of buyers organized into the Idlewild Lot Owners Association, and the IRC turned the resort over to them in 1921 (Nolan, 2002).



Figure 7: Madame C.J. Walker. Photo by Scurlock Studio, 1915. Retrieved from Smithsonian Institution, 2013.

Because this initial development period took place in the midst of the First World War, Idlewild's growth was relatively slow at first. However, even in its early years, some of the most illustrious figures in African American history visited or purchased property in Idlewild. For example, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, the first doctor to successfully perform open heart surgery, spent his retirement years in Idlewild (Roberts, 2008); the landmark Williams Island, originally known as Island Park (Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009) bears his name. W.E.B. Du Bois, famed civil rights activist and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, 2009), vacationed in Idlewild. Madame C.J. Walker, America's first woman *and* African American to become a self-made millionaire as a result of her successful beauty-products business, owned land in Idlewild (Terborg-Penn, 2012). A portrait of Madame Walker is shown in Figure 7.

From its earliest days, Idlewild was recognized as something much more significant than a simple resort. At a time when African Americans were systematically pushed to the margins of society, Idlewild was viewed as a place where the luminaries of the black community could gather and discuss issues of vital collective interest. Madame Walker espoused this view in a 1918 letter to the Idlewild Resort Company:

I consider Idlewild a great national progressive movement ... it supplies a great pressing necessity to our people, namely, a national meeting place where the leading spirits from the various sections of the country may gather each year and discuss problems of national and race importance. Great good cannot but result from such a movement[,] and Idlewild[,] being located as it is in the heart of the Great Resort Sections of Michigan[,] makes it ideal for the combination of business and pleasure.

-Madame C.J. Walker, 1918, reprinted in Walker & Wilson, 2002 (p. 22)

W.E.B. Du Bois, recognizing Idlewild's symbolic importance, praised it eloquently in the official publication of the NAACP:

For sheer physical beauty—for sheen of water and golden air, for nobleness of tree and flower of shrub, for shining river and song of bird and the low, moving whisper of sun, moon and star, it is the beautifullest stretch I have seen for twenty years; and then to that add fellowship—sweet, strong women and keen-witted men from Canada and Texas, California and New York, Ohio, Missouri and Illinois—all sons and grand-children of Ethiopia, all with the wide leisure of rest and play—can you imagine a more marvelous thing than Idlewild?

– W. E. B. DuBois, 1921, reprinted in Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009 (p. 1)

During the 1920s and 1930s, Idlewild was known more as a place for rest, relaxation, and intellectual discussion than for music and dancing (Weible, 2012). However, Idlewild became much more boisterous during the prosperous years after World War II. A burgeoning clientele brought an increased demand for entertainment, and Idlewild became a stop on the so-called “Chit’lin Circuit,” a string of Midwestern venues where African American singers, dancers, and comedians could safely perform (Walker & Wilson, 2002). Nightclubs emerged in Idlewild to accommodate these performances, including the Flamingo Club, the Paradise Club, the El Morocco, the Purple Palace, and more (Stephens, 2001). From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, Idlewild hosted some of the greatest musicians of the twentieth century, including B.B. King, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Aretha Franklin, Dinah Washington, Sammy Davis Jr., and many others (Coates, 2002). At its peak, Idlewild boasted a full array of tourism accommodations, including hotels, motels, summer cottages, stores, restaurants, churches, beauty salons, a riding stable, a roller skating rink, and more (Nolan, 2002).



Figure 8: Jackie Wilson Performs at the Paradise Club in Idlewild. Photo courtesy of BJ Alvis. Retrieved from Weible, 2012.

Idlewild's heyday continued into the 1960s, but its fortunes took a turn for the worse after the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. With the end of legalized discrimination, African Americans could vacation anywhere, and Idlewild suddenly found itself in direct competition with resorts nationwide. Idlewild's hospitality businesses were too slow to respond to this new

challenge, and Idlewild had little to fall back on when tourists stopped coming (Walker & Wilson, 2007).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Idlewild began to stabilize and then—slowly—to grow again. With its listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979 (State of Michigan, 2010), people came to understand the historical importance of Idlewild as a safe space for African Americans during the segregation era. Retirees, who had experienced Idlewild in its heyday, began purchasing vacation homes or permanent homes there. In 1994, Lake County was designated a federal Enterprise Community. This 15-year designation enhanced the county's eligibility for federal grant funding and led to several benefits for Idlewild, including a new sewer system and major renovations to a former Yates Township Hall building to house the Idlewild Historic and Cultural Center (Lake County Enterprise Community Board of Directors, 2009). And throughout this period, the six Idlewilders' Clubs continued to support Idlewild. The Idlewilders' Clubs were established to maintain the friendships and social networks formed in Idlewild; they include two in Chicago and one each in Cleveland, Detroit, mid-Michigan, and St. Louis (Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009). To this day, the six Idlewilders' Clubs visit each year for Idlewild Week, which occurs in August. In addition to this event, the clubs take turns hosting an annual Idlewilders' Conclave in their home cities.

In 2006, the State of Michigan entered a formal partnership with Idlewild and Yates Township. This partnership, referred to as the Idlewild, Michigan Transformation Initiative, connects local officials, businesses, nonprofits, and residents with a coordinated effort by multiple state agencies to provide resources and technical assistance (Michigan State Housing Development Authority, 2007). As a result, Idlewild has benefited from a number of important planning and visioning activities as well as commitments of technical assistance and funding. In addition to the plans that are summarized in this report, these include the expansion of the Idlewild National Register Historic District, the establishment of a state park and boat landing on Idlewild Lake, the placement of several historical markers and historical walking tour signs (see Figure 9), the provision of funding for blight removal and community events, and much more.



Figure 9: Idlewild Historic District Walking Tour Sign. Photo by Nathalie Winans, 2013.

As the socioeconomic profile in this report will show, Idlewild continues to face challenges, but it enjoys a measure of stability in some indicators. More importantly, Idlewild benefits from the passion and dedication of residents, business owners, nonprofits, public officials, and a great many others who understand its enduring significance and are eager to spearhead the effort to bring a new prosperity to this beautiful and unique community.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

To provide a general understanding of issues affecting Idlewild's ability to cultivate tourism, the practicum team conducted an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) at the start of this study. In a SWOT analysis, a facilitator works with a group of stakeholders to identify positive and negative factors *within* their community or organization (strengths and weaknesses) as well as positive and negative factors *outside* their community or organization (opportunities and threats). (Renault, 2013.) Although it is not a rigorous form of data collection, SWOT analysis can be useful for quickly gathering impressions from stakeholders about important factors to consider when researching and developing a strategy such as this one.

The SWOT analysis for Idlewild took place on January 21, 2013 during two stakeholder focus groups. The participants included eight representatives of the client, local government, and businesses and eight citizens of Idlewild and Yates Township. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours.

Strengths

- Striking natural beauty of the lakes and surrounding forest
- National Register-listed African American resort
- Historic buildings with potential for rehabilitation
- Abundant land and wildlife
- Outdoor recreation opportunities
- Beach at Williams Island—"one of the best beaches in Lake County"
- Engagement/enthusiasm of local organizations and residents
- Recently created master plan
- Easy highway access
- Attractive gateway signage at US-10 entrance to Idlewild
- Idlewild Week (second week in August)—draws Idlewilders Clubs from all over the country
- Idlewild Music Festival (organized by Idlewild African American Chamber of Commerce)
- Lake Idlewild Park—recently installed by Department of Natural Resources

Weaknesses

- Low community capacity to initiate and follow through on development
- Local politics, not enough communication/collaboration—disconnects between residents and public officials, between seasonal and permanent residents, between Idlewild and rest of Yates Township
- Low population as a whole; small workforce
- "Low wealth community"—many retirees on fixed incomes

- Lack of funding; no major private investment
- Lack of entrepreneurial skills among local population
- Conflict on whether Idlewild should be a retirement community or a tourist attraction
- Few physical tourist attractions besides the lakes and landscape—only the Idlewild Historic and Cultural Center, which is only open on Saturdays in spring/summer
- No hotels; very few motels/restaurants
- Poor condition of historic buildings
- Lakes not well respected (e.g., crews dumping leaves in lakes)
- Community debt due to sewer installation (recently refinanced loan)
- Not enough promotional signage
- Lack of volunteerism (e.g., to keep Cultural Center open more than one day/week)
- No entertainment venues in Lake County
- Poor utilization of local people, resources—“we have a resident artist here, but we use clip art for our posters”
- Insufficient law enforcement
- Lack of high-speed Internet access

Opportunities

- Make Idlewild an important part of the continuum of tourist attractions in the northwest Lower Peninsula
- Draw visitors from entire region with entertainment venues, historical value
- Bring in diverse visitors—not just African American market
- Provide quality amenities (e.g., food, accommodations) to ensure that they return
- Development in Idlewild that benefits the regional economy
- Ongoing partnerships with State of Michigan and universities
- Rally community together around a common vision of economic development balanced with community prosperity
- Encourage engagement of local youth
- Maintain stewardship of lakes, natural environment
- Cultivate investment that brings dollars into community rather than exporting to outside corporations, developers

Threats

- Development that does not respect Idlewild’s historical status and character
- Development that exports dollars to outside companies
- Gentrification

Geography

The unincorporated community of Idlewild is located in the northwest corner of Yates Township, which in turn is located at the southern edge of Lake County. The land area of the current Idlewild National Register Historic District is 2,536 acres (State Historic Preservation Office, 2010). The target area for the practicum team's tourism development strategy encompasses Idlewild Lake, Tank Lake, and Paradise Lake and measures approximately 1,531 acres. The land area of Yates Township measures 22,656 acres (35.4 square miles), nearly half of which is owned by the federal government or the state of Michigan (Jacobsen Daniels Associates, 2010). Most of this public land belongs to the Huron-Manistee National Forest, which encompasses all of Lake Township (U.S. Forest Service, undated).

As shown in Figure 10, the driving distance from Idlewild to most cities in or near the Lower Peninsula is relatively short. For example, Idlewild is 260 miles (4 hours) from Chicago, 217 miles (3.5 hours) from Detroit, 84 miles (1.3 hours) from Grand Rapids, 148 miles (2.25 hours) from Lansing, and 70 miles (1.5 hours) from Muskegon or Traverse City. (Google, 2013).

Within these driving times, Idlewild is accessible to a significant number of people. The total estimated population within a one-hour drive of Idlewild is 245,627 people. Within the two-hour radius, the population climbs to 2,281,488. The three-hour radius reaches 5,870,509 people. The four-hour radius reaches into Chicago (historical home of some of Idlewild's earliest landowners, including the Chicago Idlewilders social clubs that continue to operate today), as well as parts of Indiana, Ohio, and Ontario. Within the four-hour radius, Idlewild is accessible to a grand total of 16,533,445 individuals. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009, via ESRI, 2013)

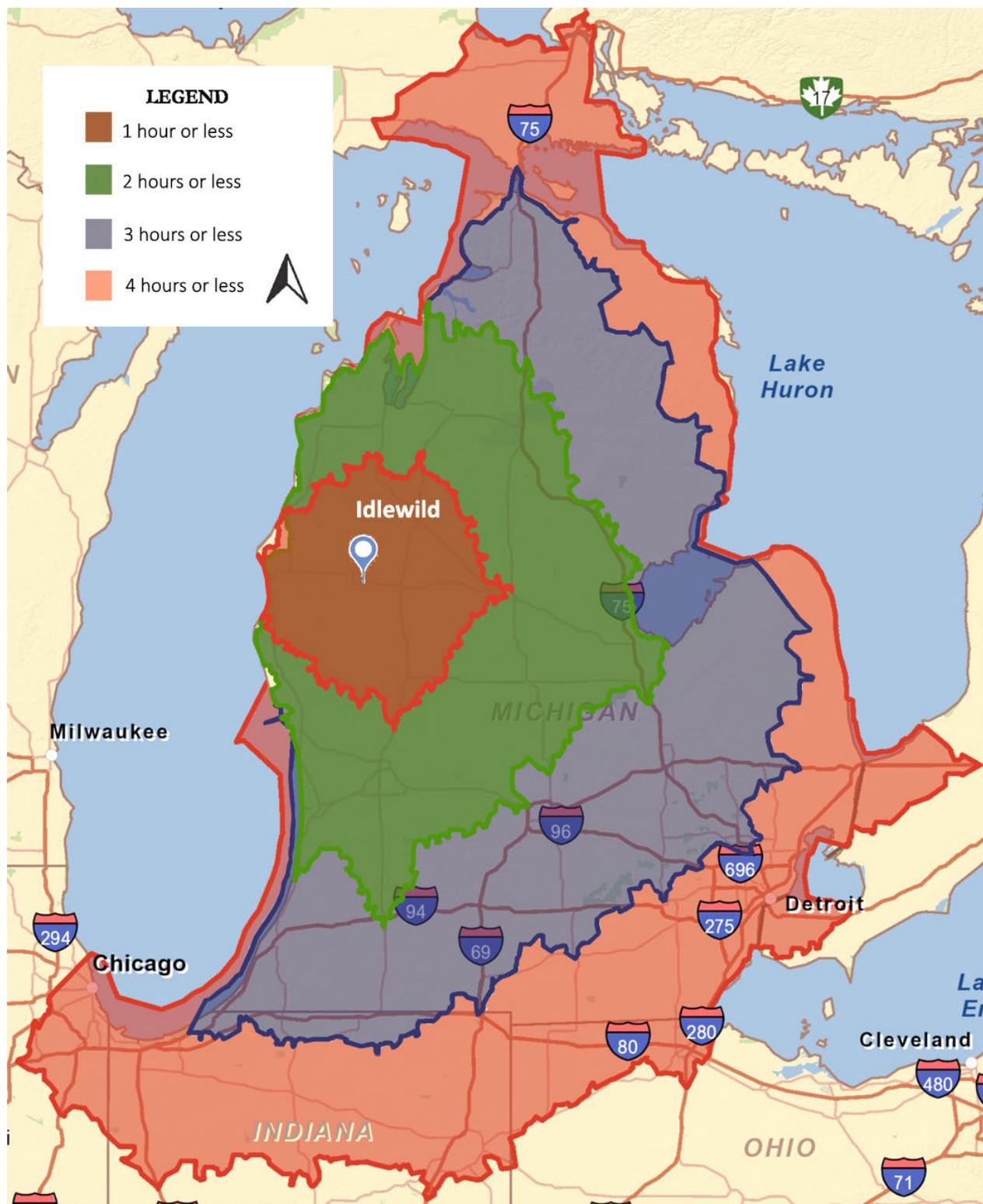


Figure 10: Driving Distances within a Four-Hour Radius of Idlewild. ESRI, 2013.

Land Elevation, Soil, and Water Features

Yates Township belongs to the Newaygo Outwash Plain, which encompasses much of Lake County as well as several surrounding counties. Its characteristic landforms include relatively uniform land elevation, sandy soils, and abundant bodies of water (U.S. Geological Survey, 2013). Idlewild departs somewhat from the prevailing topography, with gentle slopes curving toward the lakes; elevations range from 877 feet in the northeast corner of the target area to 850 feet in the southwest corner (see Figure 11). This feature adds a picturesque character that undoubtedly was a factor in the initial decision to settle Idlewild as a resort. At the same time, the slopes appear to be mild enough that they should not pose significant challenges to development.

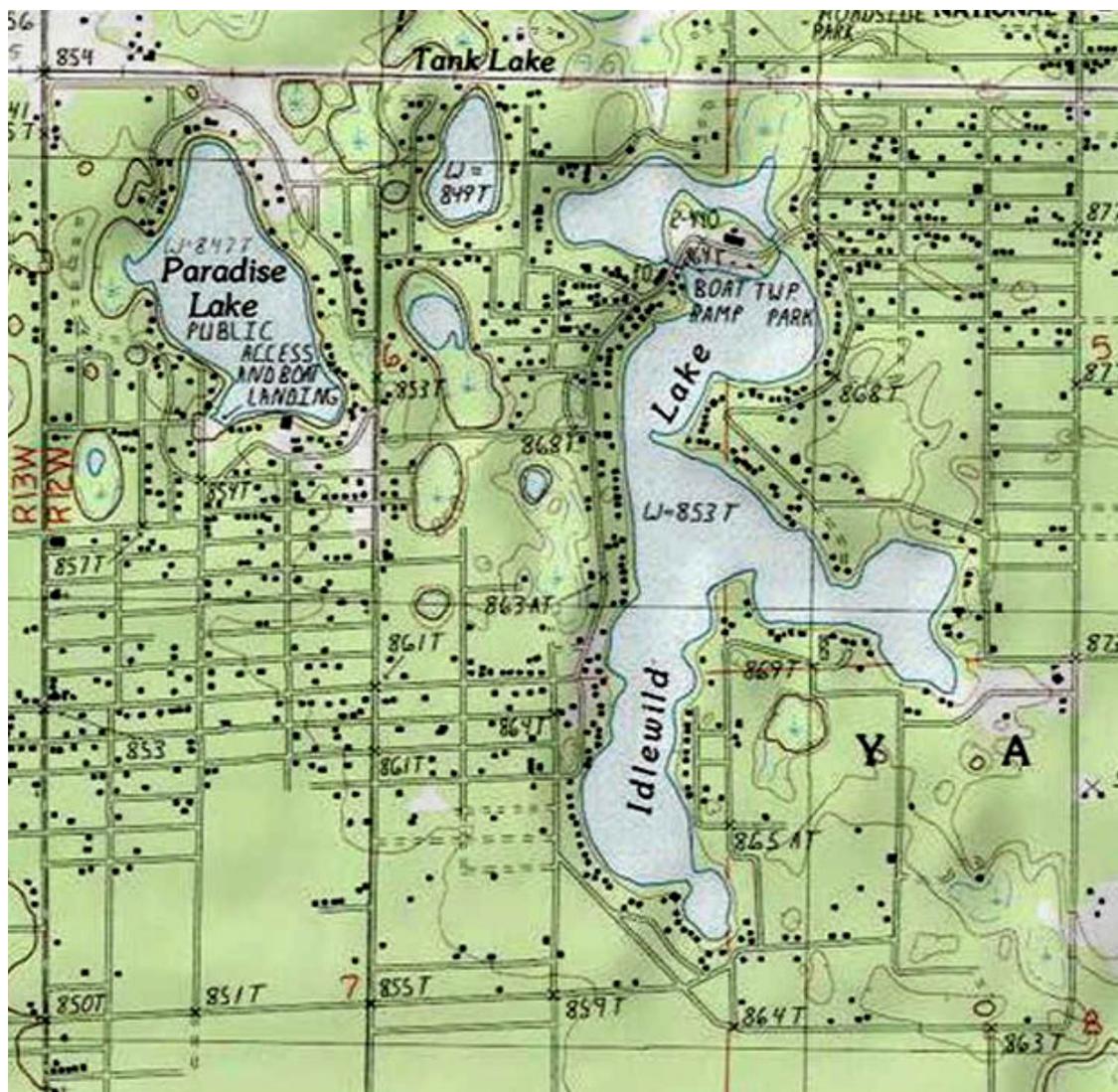


Figure 11: U.S. Geologic Survey Map of Idlewild Indicating Land Elevations. Michigan DNR, 2013.

The landscape of Idlewild is defined by its lakes—Idlewild Lake, Paradise Lake, and Tank Lake. Idlewild Lake is the largest in the county, with a surface area of more than 100 acres. Its maximum depth is 22 feet, but about 70 percent of the lake is less than 15 feet deep (Jacobsen Daniels & Associates, 2010). Idlewild’s bodies of water are kettle lakes, formed from depressions left behind by large blocks of ice when the Ice Age glaciers retreated (U.S. Geological Survey, 2013). They are landlocked, with no inlets or outlets (Jacobsen Daniels, 2010). According to one of the individuals interviewed for this paper, Idlewild Lake was becoming clogged with vegetation and sediment, and the Michigan Department of Natural resources was scheduled to begin dredging the lake in 2013.

Idlewild’s water features belong to the Pere Marquette River Watershed, which extends to Lake Michigan in the west (West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission, 2012).

A wintertime view of Idlewild Lake is shown in Figure 12.



Figure 12: Lake Idlewild in Winter. Photo by Cortney Dunklin, 2013.

Utilities

Water and Sewer Service

The distribution of utilities in Lake County is very limited, a reflection of the county's heavily rural character. The village of Baldwin—the county seat—is the only place in Lake County that has municipal water service (WMSRDC, 2012). The Yates Township Comprehensive Master Plan (2010) cites the lack of water service as a critical impediment to commercial development and recommends that the township consider options for water service provision and adopt a phased approach to water service installation.

Idlewild recently received an initial sewer system installation with help from a \$200,000 federal grant, a result of its Enterprise Community status (Walker & Wilson, 2007). Idlewild's existing sewer system and proposed sewer system extensions, developed as part of the Yates Township master plan of 2010, are shown in Figure 13 on the next page. According to an individual interviewed for this report, the sewage treatment facility for this system is located in Pleasant Plains Township, and the sewer system is managed by the Baldwin Water Department.

Gas, Electric, Phone, and Internet Service

The Enterprise Community designation also allowed for the installation of natural gas lines (ibid.). Electricity is supplied to Lake County by Great Lakes Energy and Consumers Energy, and DTE provides natural gas. Phone service is supplied by Michigan Bell and Frontier (WMSRDC, 2012). Cellular phone reception is excellent due to a nearby cellular tower.

Idlewild does not have broadband Internet access. According to interviewees, the main source for high-speed Internet access in Idlewild is through expensive data plans from cellular phone service providers; Baldwin is the only community in Lake County that currently has broadband service. The interviewees indicated that obtaining broadband service continues to be an important goal that the community is actively pursuing.

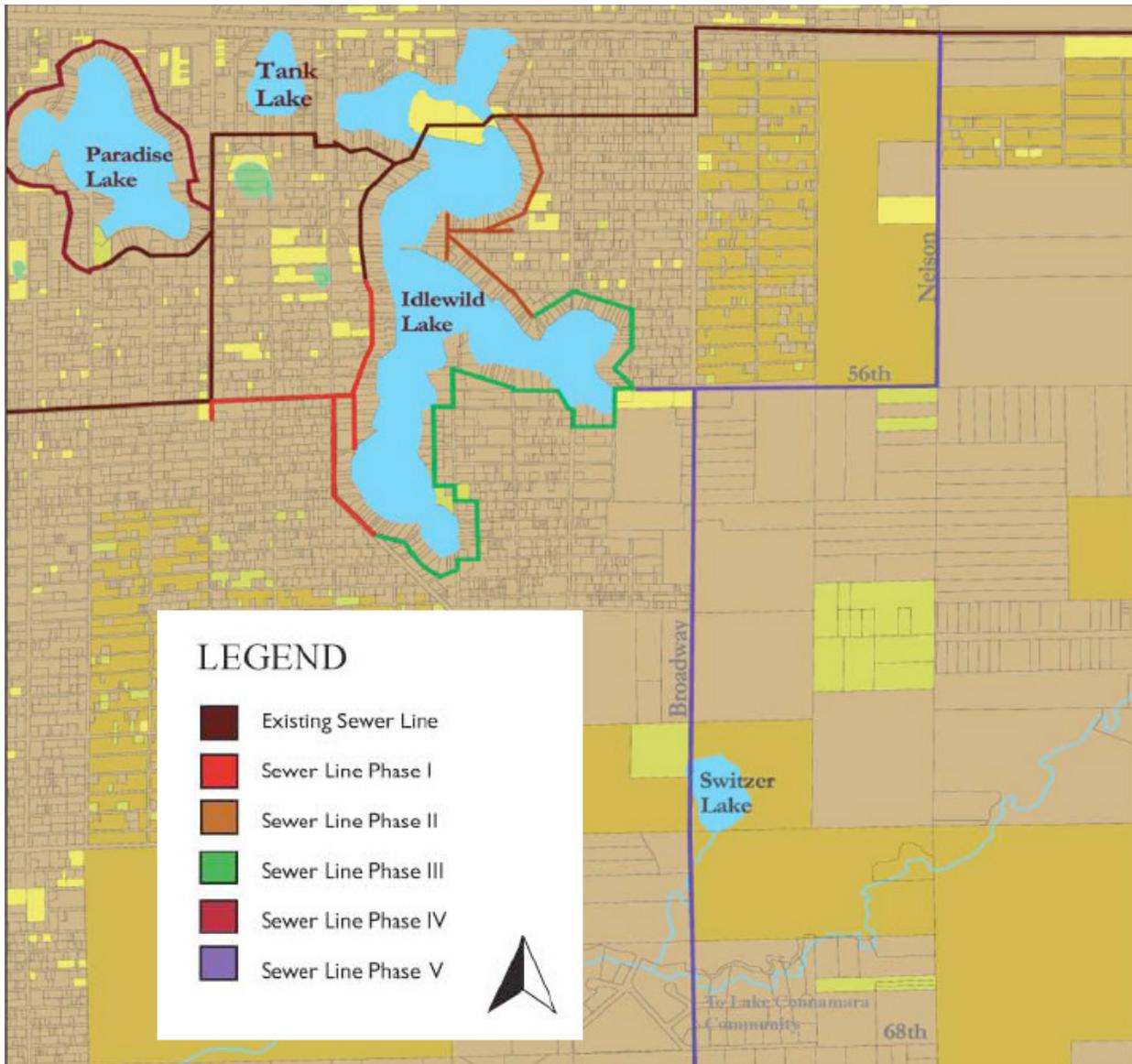


Figure 13: Current Idlewild Sewer System and Proposed Expansions. The existing sewer line runs roughly southwest to northeast, encompassing Idlewild’s small “downtown” and crossing Williams Island—former site of many of Idlewild’s historical entertainment and recreational facilities. Jacobsen Daniels Associates, 2010.

Zoning

As shown in Figure 14, nearly all of Idlewild is zoned for residential use (i.e., rural residential, community residential, and lake residential), with residential density increasing as one moves toward the lakes and Idlewild's small commercial district. This district, marked in brown on the map, is located immediately south of Tank Lake and west of Idlewild Lake. The Idlewild Cultural Resource Management Plan (2009) defines Williams Island and the Idlewild commercial district as the center of Idlewild.

Apart from Idlewild, nearly all of Yates Township (not shown) is zoned for agricultural use; however, Idlewild's sandy soils make farming difficult (U.S. Geological Survey, 2013).

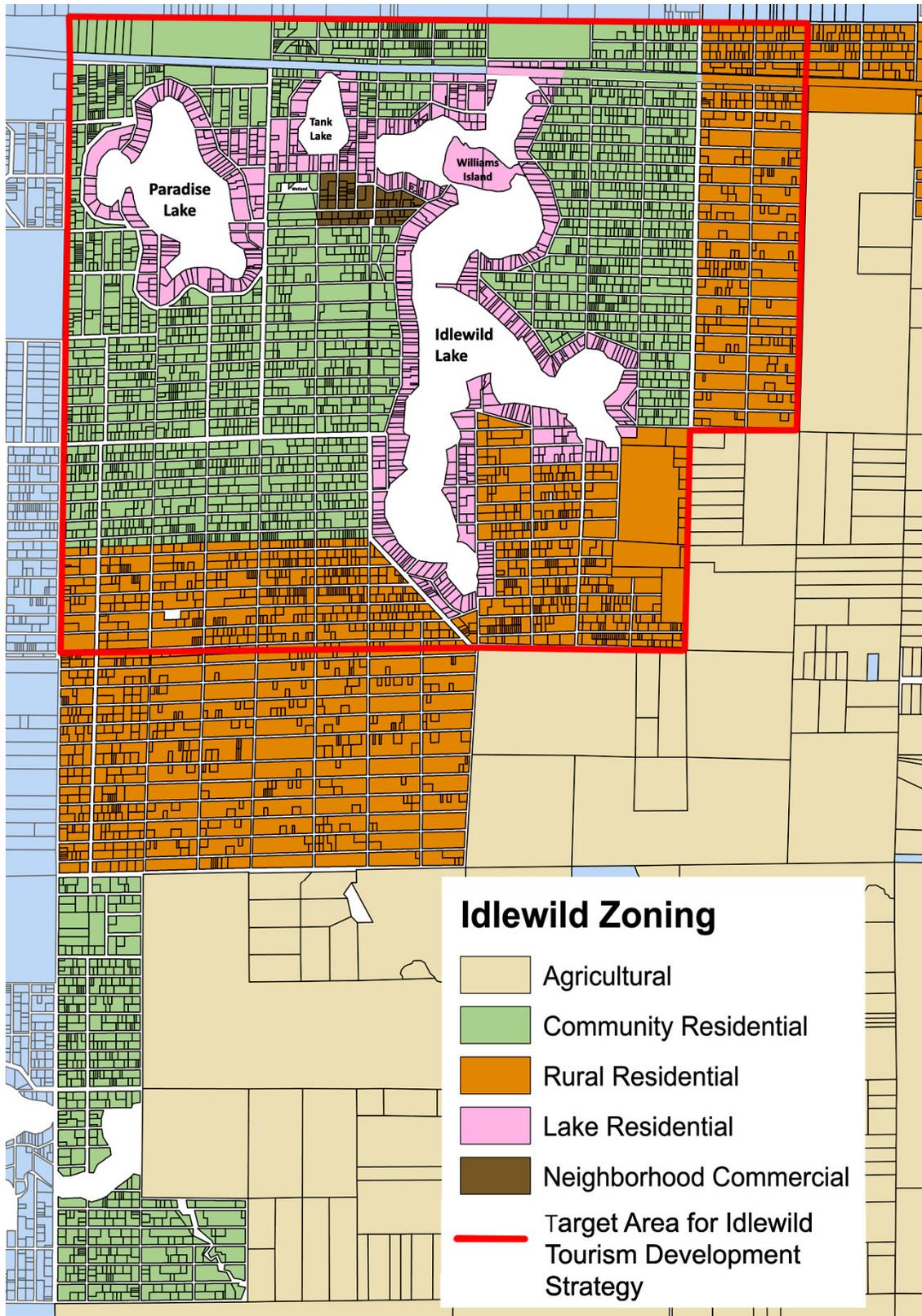


Figure 14: Zoning Map of Idlewild with Target Area of Idlewild Tourism Development Strategy. Generated from map in Jacobsen Daniels Associates (2010) using GIS files supplied by Lake County, Michigan (2013).

Land Ownership

Table 2 shows land ownership data for Idlewild.

	Parcels	Acres of Land	Average Parcel Size in Acres
Lake County Land Bank	549	86.84	0.16
Michigan Land Bank	70	13.53	0.19
State of Michigan	165	54.12	0.33
Federal Government	132	280.99	2.13
Yates Township	244	96.31	0.39
Private Ownership	4,479	1,385.84	0.31
Total	5,639	1,917.6	0.34
Percentage public land	21%	28%	
Percentage private land	79%	72%	

Calculated using GIS files supplied by Lake County, Michigan, 2013.

Almost half of the land in Yates Township is owned by the state or the federal government (Jacobsen Daniels Associates, 2010); much or all of this land belongs to the Huron-Manistee National Forest. These federal land holdings extend to the outskirts of Idlewild itself. However, as shown in Table 2, nearly three-quarters (72%) of the land acreage in Idlewild is privately owned. Of the remaining 28% of land, most is owned by the federal government, followed by Yates Township, the Lake County Land Bank, and the State of Michigan. When the acreage owned by the Lake County Land Bank is combined with acreage owned by the Michigan Land Bank, land banks are the second largest public landowners in Idlewild.

To ensure the affordability of the parcels in Idlewild, lot sizes were made intentionally small. The average lot size of the original Idlewild plat was only 25 feet wide by 100 feet deep, or 0.06 acres; however, many of the lots have been consolidated since then (Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009). As shown in Table 2, the current average lot size in Idlewild is 0.34 acres—much larger than the original size, but still very small by modern standards. The small lot sizes could be beneficial for retaining Idlewild’s historic character, and the Idlewild Cultural Resource Management Plan (2009) recommends retaining small lot sizes to the extent possible, as they are a character-defining feature of the community. On the other hand, they may pose challenges for land assembly and development; outside metropolitan areas, the national average lot size for new construction outside metropolitan areas is 0.66 acres (U.S. Census, 2011a).

As shown in Figure 15, several relatively large properties in the target area of the tourism development strategy—including all of Williams Island—are owned by Yates Township. These land holdings could provide the community with valuable leverage in its effort to stimulate tourism-oriented development. In contrast, land bank and State of Michigan properties are scattered throughout the target area.

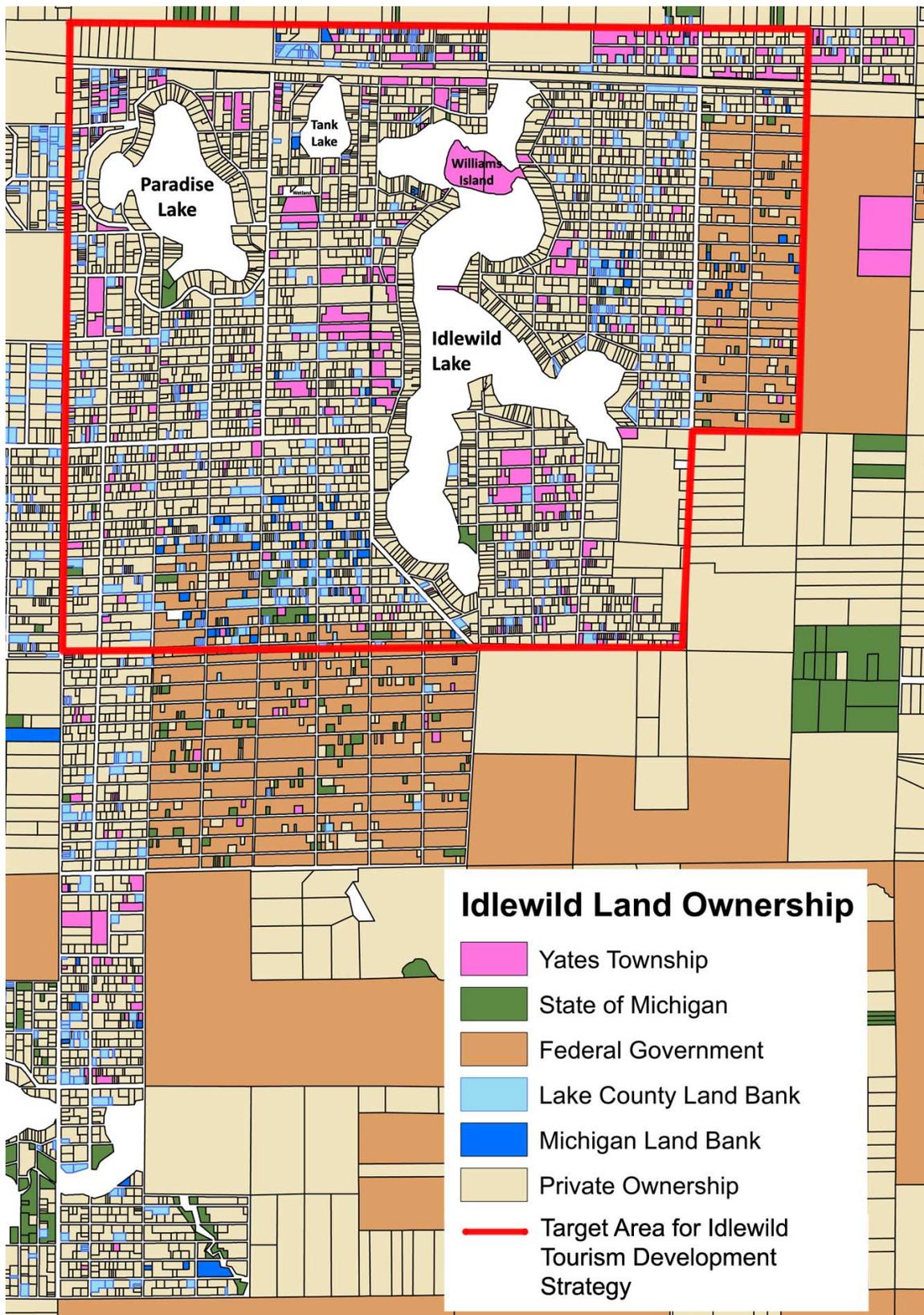


Figure 15: Land Ownership in Idlewild with Target Area for Idlewild Tourism Development Strategy. Generated from GIS files supplied by Lake County, Michigan, 2013.

Summary of Historical/Cultural Resources

Starting in 2009, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) carried out an extensive inventory of historic assets in Idlewild in preparation for the nomination of an expanded Idlewild National Register Historic District. The original 1979 National Register district encompasses the center of Idlewild and corresponds with the target area of the Tourism Development Strategy. The new Idlewild National Register Historic District, approved in 2010, extends outside the target area of this study to include parts of Cherry Valley and Pleasant Plains Townships. A map of the district is shown in Figure 3 (page 7).

SHPO's historical asset inventory documented every property's address, building style and material, and whether the property was considered "contributing" or "noncontributing" to Idlewild's historic character. Throughout the district, SHPO found that 482 properties were considered "contributing," and 393 were considered "noncontributing." SHPO provided the full historic asset inventory and nomination forms to the practicum team, and these materials are presented to the client along with this report.

Concurrently with the development of the revised National Register nomination, the State of Michigan retained Commonwealth Cultural Resource Group to compile a cultural resource management plan for Idlewild. This plan established standards and categories for defining Idlewild's cultural resources and issued recommendations for their management; these recommendations are summarized in the Summary of Recent Planning Activities and Reports in this paper.

The Cultural Resource Management Plan defines "cultural resources" as those characteristics that make Idlewild unique. They include tangible features like buildings or bridges, as well as intangible features like Idlewild's interesting street names (e.g., Righteous, Creation, Miracle, etc.), the personal stories of the people who have lived and vacationed there, or any undocumented archeological sites that may lie beneath Idlewild. The plan gives the following reasons for preserving cultural resources:

- *Cultural resources connect one generation to another.*
- *Cultural resources provide a means to reinforce identity.*
- *Cultural resources connect people from differing backgrounds. (p. 2)*

The plan identifies five categories of cultural resources as defined by the National Park Service:

- ***Archaeological resource.*** *Archaeological resources are the remains of past human activity that are usually found on or buried in the ground. Archaeological resources are valuable for what they tell us about past human behaviors. For instance, we can learn about social organization and even dietary patterns from archaeological resources.*

- **Cultural landscape.** *A cultural landscape is a setting created by humans in the natural world, and they reveal ties between people and the land. The Idlewild Historic District is a cultural landscape.*
- **Structure.** *In this category, the National Park Service includes all things that “extend the limits of human capability,” that is, things that allow humans to survive in and manipulate the world. Structures include things like buildings, bridges, roads, and trains.*
- **Museum object.** *Museum objects are collected records of human behavior or natural history. The Idlewild Historic and Cultural Center contains displays of museum objects.*
- **Ethnographic resource.** *Ethnographic resources are a society’s intangible record of its culture and include things like traditions, native languages, and religious beliefs. Stories told about Idlewild—the oral histories—are ethnographic resources. (p. 3)*

Within the above categories, the plan identifies five types of cultural resources:

- **Building.** *Buildings are resources created to shelter humans and their activities. A house or an indoor roller skating rink is an example of a building.*
- **Structure.** *A structure is a functional construction made for purposes other than shelter. A bridge is an example of a structure.*
- **Object.** *An object is a construction that is relatively small in scale and simply built. Streetlights and signposts are examples of objects.*
- **Site.** *A site is a location where there is evidence of human activity. Archaeologists excavate sites. Sites may also refer to parks or open recreational spaces.*
- **District.** *Districts are concentrations of sites, buildings, structures, or objects that are united historically by a plan or through physical development. The Idlewild Historic District contains buildings, structures, objects, and sites and, thus, is an example of a district. (p. 3)*

The Idlewild Cultural Resource Management Plan also provides a useful overview of the types of historic buildings identified in the historical asset inventory, including photographic examples of each building type. These are briefly summarized below. Photographs of a subset of key historic sites are shown in the next section, “Key Sites in Idlewild.”

Buildings Distinguished by Form, Style, or Material

This section, starting on page 23 of the Cultural Resource Management Plan, describes and shows photographs of historic building types in Idlewild according to their shape, architectural style, or construction materials. These building types are listed below, and one of the typical Idlewild building styles is shown in Figure 16.

- Single Lot Cottages (1915-1935)
- Bungalow Style (1910-1930)
- Concrete Block (1930-1970)
- Dutch Colonial Revival (1900-1930)

- Tudor/English Cottage (1910-1950)
- Minimal Traditional Style (1930-1955)
- Ranch Style, (1940-1990)
- Travel Trailer and Manufactured Home (1950s-2000s)
- Concrete Veneer (1950s-1960s)
- Brick (1940-2000s)
- Half-Log Siding (1930-2000s)

Figure 16 shows the Herman and Lela Wilson residence. This is a Bungalow Style house, characterized by a long, sloping roof line that extends over the front porch and is frequently accented with dormer windows. However, unlike the all-wood construction of most Idlewild bungalows, the lower story of this example was constructed in fieldstone. The Wilsons were Chicagoans who moved to Idlewild in 1921 and were important contributors to its history; they owned the Paradise Club (demolished) and Wilson’s Grocery (currently vacant). (Cultural Resources Management Plan, 2009)



Figure 16: Example of a Bungalow Style Residence: The Herman and Lela Wilson House, 6583 S. Paradise Path. Photo by Corean Reynolds, 2013.

Buildings Distinguished by Use

This section, starting on page 35 of the Cultural Resource Management Plan, describes and shows photographs of Idlewild’s building types according to their uses. These uses are listed below, and an example is shown in Figure 17.

- Guest cottages
- Boathouses and docks
- Screened rooms
- Lodging facilities (hotels and motels)
- Commercial/civic/municipal buildings
- Religious buildings
- Fraternal halls
- Social/entertainment buildings

Figure 17 shows the vacant Wilson’s Grocery, an example of a historic commercial building. Like many other structures in Idlewild, the building is made of concrete block. Most of Idlewild’s surviving commercial buildings are similar to this one—detached, one-story structures of modest design. (Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009.)



Figure 17: Example of Commercial Building and Concrete Block Structure: Wilson’s Grocery, 332 E. Wilson Drive (Vacant). Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009.

Key Sites in Idlewild

The entire Idlewild historic district contains historic sites that contribute to its significance. However, several sites within the tourism development strategy target area are of particular historical or scenic interest and, as such, are likely to play a key role in Idlewild's tourism development. These sites are discussed below. As the photos in this section show, most of Idlewild's buildings are humble by modern standards, being small in size and simple in design and construction. However, they provide an important record of Idlewild's history and are considered character-defining features of the Idlewild National Register Historic District (Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009).

Williams Island and Phil Giles' Flamingo Club

Williams Island, originally known as Island Park (ibid.), was the site of Idlewild's first homestead. During Idlewild's heyday, it became the resort's most important recreational center, complete with stores, restaurants, a hotel, the Purple Palace nightclub, Phil Giles' Flamingo Club, and an array of tiny single occupancy vacation cottages known as "doghouses" (ibid.). Today, Williams Island is owned by Yates Township and managed as a park. It houses only two structures—the vacant Flamingo Club and a small outbuilding. Figure 18 shows an aerial view of Williams Island and Phil Giles' Flamingo Club.



Figure 18: Williams Island, with Vacant Flamingo Club Marked in Red. Google Map modified by Jacobsen Daniels Associates, 2010.

The modest appearance of the Flamingo Club belies its former popularity. Founded in 1949, the Flamingo Club was one of Idlewild’s best loved nightclubs, hosting rhythm and blues entertainers LaVern Baker and Little Willie John, the musical comedy duo Butterbeans and Susie, and many others (Idlewild Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009). The Flamingo Club remained a centerpiece of Idlewild’s entertainment landscape until it succumbed to declining tourism in the late 1960s. However, the vacant Flamingo Club building has survived to the present and—although in need of much repair—still holds potential for rehabilitation, according to a recent development feasibility study that is summarized in the Recent Planning Activities and Reports section of this paper (Jacobsen Daniels Associates Inc., 2011).

Figure 19 shows a historical image of Phil Giles’ Flamingo Club. The photo appears to have been taken shortly after its closure, as the entrance seems to be boarded up but the original sign and awnings are still intact. (Although the sign in this photo refers to the establishment as the Flamingo Bar, all available reference documents refer to it as Phil Giles’ Flamingo Club.)



Figure 19: Historical Exterior Image of Phil Giles’ Flamingo Club, 1002 East Martin Luther King Drive. Photo undated; retrieved from Nolan, 2002.

Figure 20 shows a historical image of the Flamingo Club’s interior. In contrast with the building’s plain exterior, the interior was beautifully decorated with a pink and blue color scheme, a wall-length flamingo mural, and a bar in knotty pine.



Figure 20: Historical Interior Photo of the Flamingo Club, 1002 East Martin Luther King Drive. Postcard image courtesy of Robert Christensen, reproduced in Idlewild Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009.

Figures 21-24 show recent photographs of the still-intact flamingo mural, the exterior of the vacant Flamingo Club, and the beach at Williams Island.



Figure 21: Recent Closeup Photo of Mural at Flamingo Club. Jacobsen Daniels Associates, 2011.



Figure 22: Phil Giles' Flamingo Club, 1002 E. Martin Luther King Drive. Photo by Emilio Voltaire, 2013.



Figure 23: View of the Beach at Williams Island, Showing Phil Giles' Flamingo Club (Right) and Outbuilding (Center). Jacobsen Daniels Associates, 2011.



Figure 24: View of the Beach at Williams Island, Looking South. Photo by Nathalie Winans, 2013.

Figure 25 shows one of the two road crossings from Williams Island to Idlewild’s “downtown.” These relatively recent crossings were constructed over culverts, which make it difficult to see that Williams Island is actually an island and restrict the flow of water between the north and south ends of Idlewild Lake (Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009).



Figure 25: Bridge from Williams Island to “Downtown.” Photo by Emilio Voltaire, 2013.

Idlewild Neighborhood Commercial District

Idlewild's "downtown" neighborhood commercial district, located immediately southwest of Williams Island, once housed a cluster of small businesses such as LeeJon's Confectionery and Gift Shop, Winburn's House of Beauty, the Homesite Realty Company, and Rosana's Tea Room; most of these structures are gone today (Cultural Resource Management Plan, 2009).

However, several key historic buildings remain, including the former Rosana's Tea Room (now in business as the Red Rooster Tavern); a U.S. Post Office (in use as same); the former Chamber of Commerce building (vacant); the Tabernacle AME Church (in use as same), and the former LeeJon's, which rented boats and bicycles and sold bait, tackle, and refreshments (renamed the Idlewild Party Store and now vacant). These buildings could form the nucleus of a revitalized Idlewild business district that would complement recreational uses on Williams Island.

Much of the neighborhood commercial district is vacant, offering the potential for new commercial development. Figure 26 shows the district with the locations of key historic buildings. Figure 27 shows the ownership status of the business district. Photos of key historic structures in the commercial district are shown in Figures 28-31.



Figure 26: Idlewild Neighborhood Commercial District. Google Map (2013) with district boundaries and business names added.