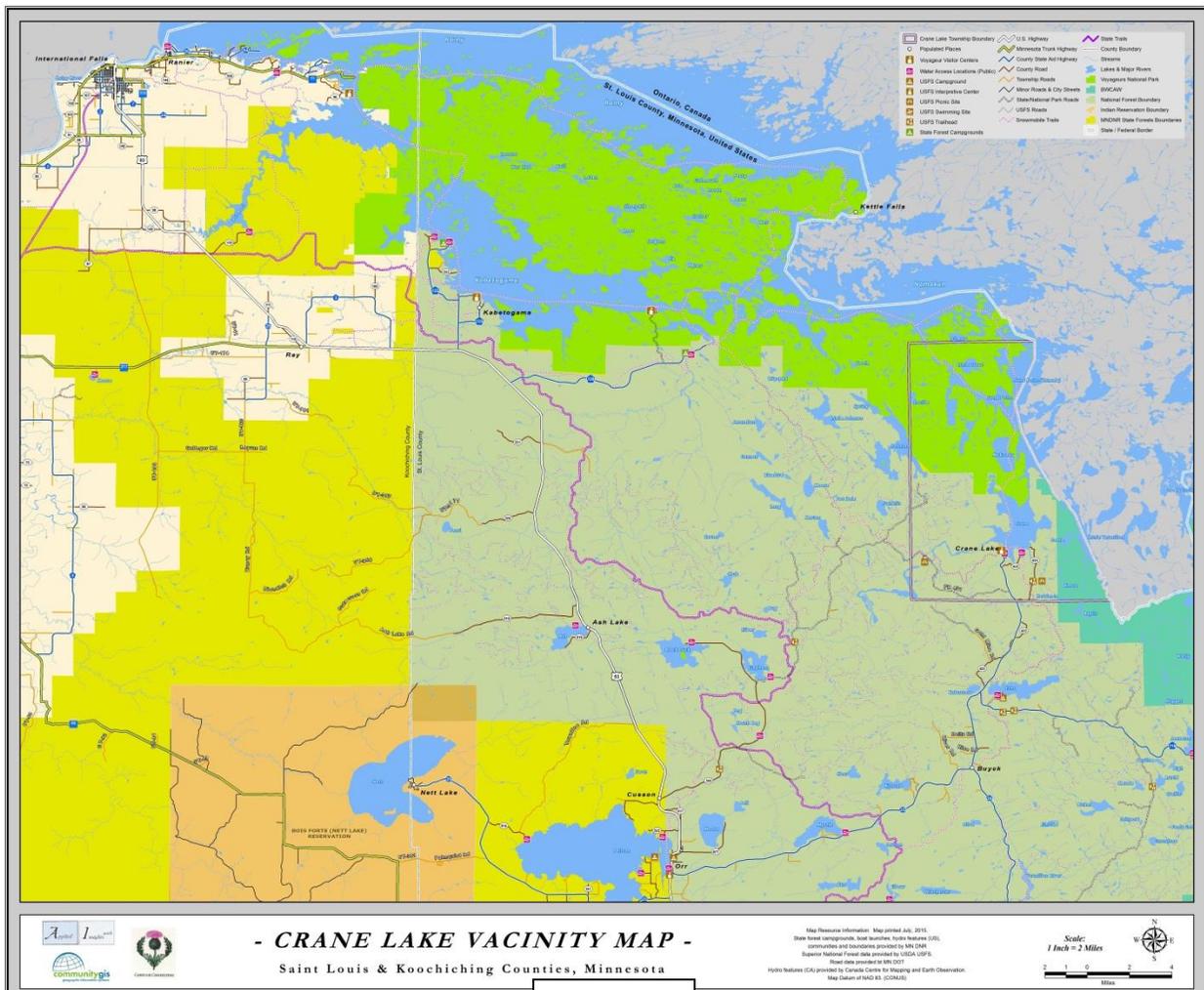


Crane Lake Township Background Paper for 2016 Community Plan

Prepared for Crane Lake Township by the Consultant Team of
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Regional Context

Map 1 locates Crane Lake within the context of the region and major land management boundaries. These include three that vitally impact Crane Lake: Voyageurs National Park, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and the Superior National Forest.



History and Context

The Crane Lake waterway has been traveled by Native Americans, French and then British fur traders, prospectors seeking Canadian gold, and “rum runners” during Prohibition. Access to the region was enhanced in the 1890s and early 1900s when timber baron Edward Backus and the Backus-Brooks Lumber Company established a network of railroads and roads to transport lumber out and workers into the area.

The roads and rail connections allowed Backus to invite his friends to enjoy the region’s scenic and recreational opportunities. The railroad brought travelers to Tower where they boarded steamboats to Vermilion Dam from which a portage road, built in 1906, connected Lake Vermilion and Crane Lake. The resulting traffic encouraged early settlers to establish resorts.

By 1910, entrepreneurs such as Andrew Koski, Oliver Knox and John Nelson began successful resorts establishing the foundation for a thriving tourism industry that endures today. The region’s unique attractiveness was enhanced with the designations of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in 1964 and Voyageurs National Park in 1975.

The community of Crane Lake emerged to serve the resorts and tourism industry, a growing second home market much of which is on water-access only parcels, and as home for workers in area logging operations.

Community Description

Crane Lake is literally at the end of the road where land transportation ends and water transportation begins. The closest convenience center is 30 miles away in Orr; the larger community of Cook with medical and more extensive commercial enterprises is 50 miles away. Students attend North Woods School located between those two cities.

In 2010 there were 82 year-round residents in Crane Lake; there were an estimated 76 in 2014. Although there are no figures for the large seasonal population, it can be approximated by looking at the number of households in the township. In 2010 there were 38 occupied housing units (i.e., year-round) as compared to 179 seasonal, recreational or occasional use units.

Befitting a community that is so oriented to lakes, a large amount of privately owned land can only be accessed by water. An analysis based on St. Louis County’s property parcel information suggests that 43% of all privately owned parcels in the township are accessible only by water. These parcels have an estimated 48% of the market value and generate about 49% of the net tax in the township.

Facilities within the community include year-round and seasonal residences, resorts, lodging, eating establishments, seaplane base, a post office, community church, Voyageur National Park ranger station, and a US Homeland Security office that is open year round. Gifts and provisions can be obtained at the resorts or local outfitter.

Crane Lake Township was organized in 2002. It includes the developed area at the south end of Crane Lake, the large number of cabins on Bear Island and along much of the shoreline of Crane Lake, and extensive undeveloped land to the north lying in the Superior National Forest and Voyageurs National Park.

Predating the township are the Crane Lake Fire Department and the Crane Lake Water and Sewer District. Both are separate entities. The Township contracts with the fire department to provide fire and emergency medical service to the community.

Land Use and Community Identity

Land Use

Historically, commercial fishing, logging or other industrial base may have had some presence, but these activities have not been a factor for many years. This might have been a different story

had E.W. Backus prevailed with his ideas for dams to facilitate water power, logging, and paper production in the entire region, but the Shipstead-Nolan Act of 1930 precluded this activity on federal lands.

The creation of Voyageurs National Park in 1975 is the most significant recent action relating to land use. Other recent changes include the closing of Borderland Resort and Water's Edge.

The town itself seems to be less of a destination and more of a departure point for getting on the water. This interface between the land and the water for visitors and water-based residences will continue as a predominant activity, but as it relates to land-use, it means that much of the area of town is devoted to launch ramps, docks and parking.

There has been active discussion with the National Park Service about construction of a Visitor Center for Voyageurs National Park in the Crane Lake area. This would represent a major new activity in the community. No site has been chosen but several are under consideration. A site must serve the needs of NPS and its visitors, but could also serve a secondary benefit of a catalyst for community activity, depending on the site ultimately selected.

The former Borderland Resort property is a prime location on the water at the entrance to town. The subdivision that replaced the resort has not yet produced any buyers of individual lots or development and is for sale.

A land exchange took place resulting in 80 acres of Town ownership. Although removed from the historic center of activity around the water, this public parcel represents an opportunity for new public and private development. Map 2 shows the location of this tract as well as that of privately owned land and other public ownerships.

The Water's Edge property was acquired by the State as a water access. It remains in an unimproved condition. This location is one of several under consideration for the VNP Visitor Center.

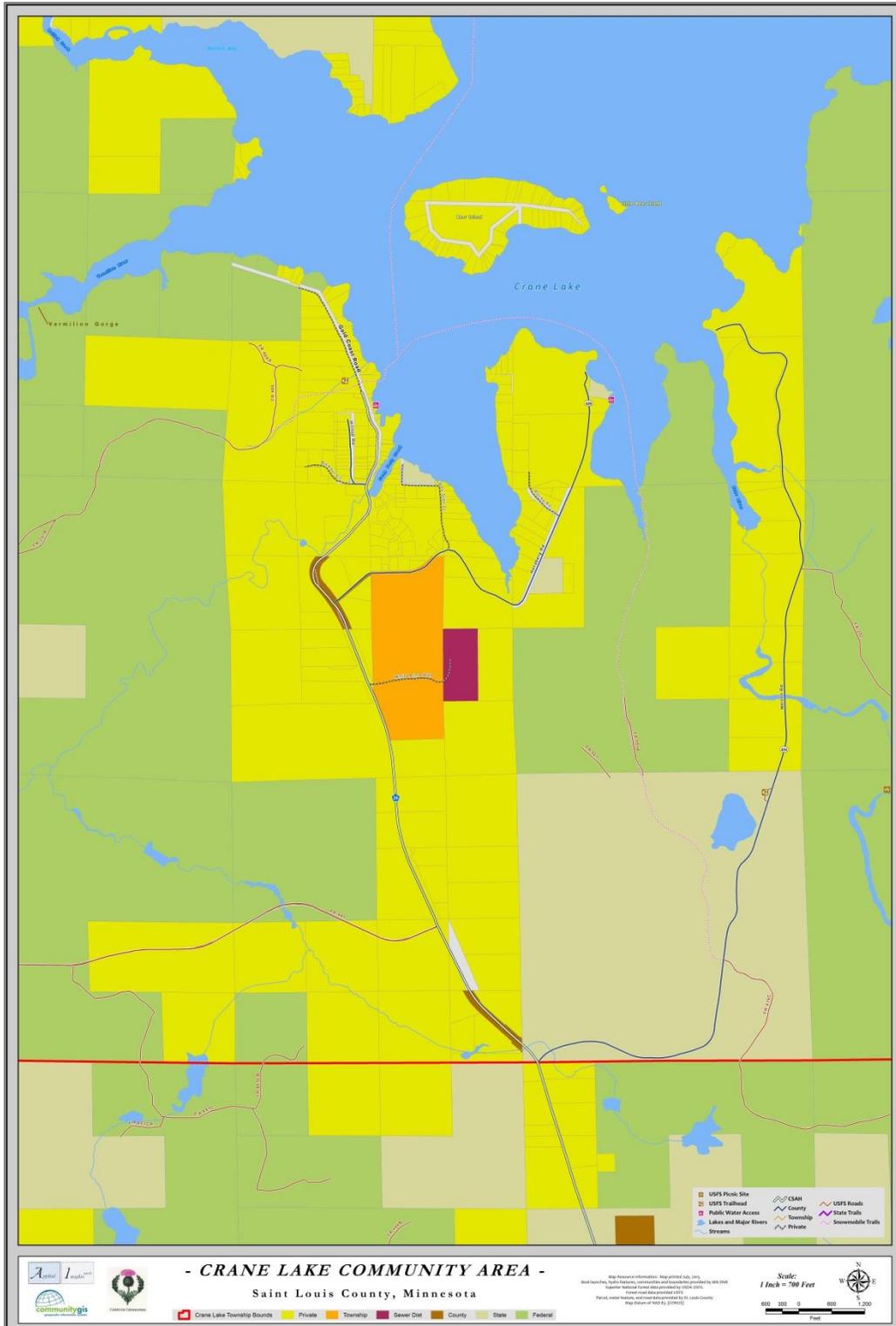
Community Identity

There is no strong physical community identity or town center. Elements which typically create or contribute to community identity are 1) public open spaces; park, beach, outdoor performance area, 2) in waterfront communities, public docking for visitors not arriving by car and 3) retail and food service within walking distance of public amenities.

The water is a compelling feature even though in the center of town the surrounding land is private. Providing new facilities and activities that would contribute to community identity will likely be located on the water. Making the town itself more of a destination, rather than access to the water, would greatly benefit from a stronger sense of place.

New recreational patterns which cause visitors to stay in town, rather than park and leave by boat would have beneficial effect on both the economy and identity.

Map 2



Township Government

Crane Lake Township has the power and authority of an urban town as provided in Minnesota Statutes 368.01. It manages the provision of services to residents, businesses and property through a variety of means including direct action by the township, contracting with firms and individuals, and using the services of other entities such as the St. Louis County Sheriff's office. The following narrative presents how Crane Lake Township manages the provision of desired services.

Town Board

- Elected by the voters of Crane Lake Township.
- Policy body for Township.
- Directs day-to-day operations of Township.
- Annual Town Meeting provides guidance to Town Board.

Town Clerk

- Primary administrative staff.

Treasurer

- Handles Township financial affairs.

Road and Bridge

- There are no Township owned and maintained roads.
- St. Louis County and the US Forest Service maintain their respective roadways within the township.

Public Safety

- St. Louis County Sheriff: Sheriff provides primary police protection and investigation services; other departments support sheriff through mutual aid agreement.
- Fire and Emergency Medical Services: Crane Lake Volunteer Fire Department owns its facility and equipment and provides fire and EMS services within township under contract with the Township.

Utilities

- Sewer service is provided to a portion of the township by the Crane Lake Water and Sewer District, a separate entity from the Township.

Planning and Zoning

- St. Louis County's land use control ordinances (zoning and subdivision) are in effect within the township. Township uses its Community Plan as basis for commenting on proposed actions within the township.

General Government

- Elections and all other general activities of the Town are directed by the Town Board and the Town Clerk.
- Legal Services: Town contracts with private attorney.

Other

- Recycling: ??????
- Town Hall: There is currently no town hall; meetings are usually held in the Crane Lake Chapel or Fire Hall.

Two External Forces

Crane Lake's economic engine is tourism. Thus, anything that acts to enhance or endanger that economic activity is of vital importance to the community. Two such forces are unfolding as this plan is developed – the potential investment by Voyageurs National Park in a new visitor center and a RV campground, and, the ever-changing nature of outdoors-focused tourism.

Voyageurs National Park

Founded in 1975 this national facility has boosted tourism in the region including Crane Lake. However, the community desires the enhanced impact that could come from a visitor center and land-based campground. Currently, the park has three visitor centers – Rainy Lake, Kabetogama and Ash River – but only a ranger station in Crane Lake. All campsites in the park are water-access only. Park staff has indicated a need and desire to locate a fourth visitor center in Crane Lake.

The value of a visitor center to Crane Lake can be seen from recent counts of visitors to the three existing facilities. According to information provided by VNP, in 2014 the Ash River center attracted 6,388 visitors during its May-September season; Kabetogama drew 7,907 during these months. The main center at Rainy Lake attracted 8,807 during those months and 10,203 for the entire year (it is the only center open year-round).

VNP also perceives a need for one or more land-access campgrounds to serve a broader range of park users. Currently all campsites are water-access only and this is proving to exclude a growing number of potential visitors from coming to the park.

Crane Lake has met with park staff pushing for both the center and campground to be located there.

Changing Tourism Landscape

Crane Lake was founded on tourism and exists today as a highly sought after tourist destination and locale for second homes. The following is a brief examination of trends impacting Minnesota and national outdoor recreation with clear implications for Crane Lake.

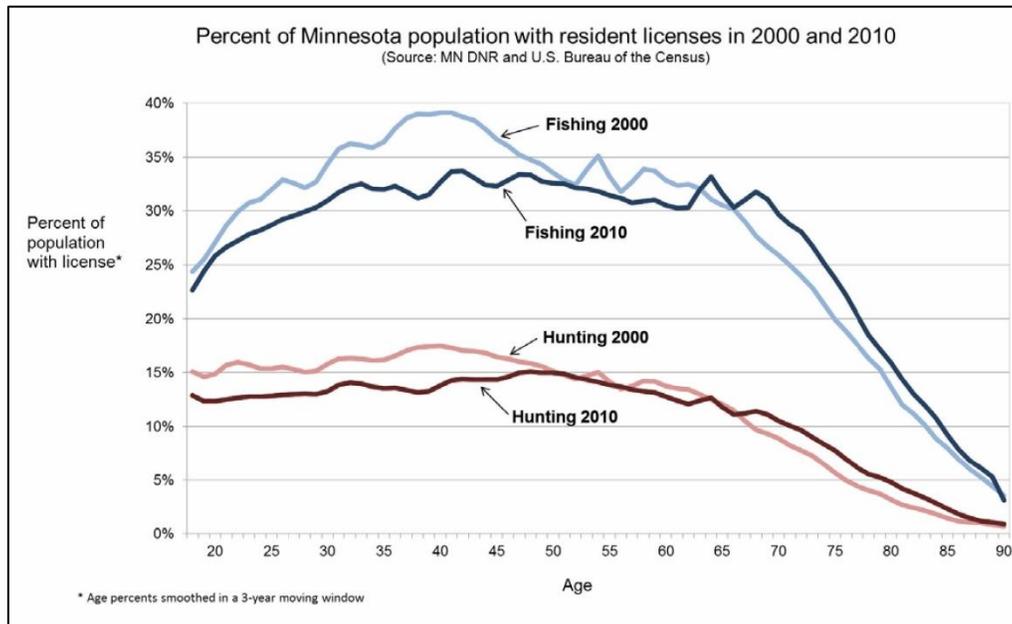
Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Tourism Assessment¹

The State periodically produces its outdoor recreation plan to guide state investments in facilities and programming. The following statements are from the current plan and highlight the type and direction of change in outdoor recreation in Minnesota.

“Minnesota is not escaping a broad trend – evident since the 1990s – of declining per capita participation in nature-based outdoor recreation in the United States.... The primary driving factor behind this trend is a decline in involvement among young adults (ages 20-45) and their children. Today's young adults and youth are not as engaged in traditional nature-based activities as older generations.”

“A number of secondary factors also contribute to the decline in participation rates for traditional nature-based outdoor recreation activities. As the population ages, participation in recreation activities generally declines. Similarly, as our state has become increasingly urban as well as increasingly racially/ethnically diverse, participation in traditional outdoor activities has declined. Whether or not this decline is partially offset by a shift to other non-traditional outdoor activities is unclear, but it is plausible that the state's demographic changes are also producing new users who enjoy outdoor recreation in different ways than traditional users.”

¹ *Minnesota's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2014-2018.*



US Forest Service 2010 Assessment²

As the state examines recreational trends for Minnesota, the US Forest Service analyzes them at the national level. The following is from the current analysis.

- “What people now choose to do for outdoor recreation is very noticeably different from choices made by and available to previous generations of Americans.”
- Outdoor recreation is growing even though some traditional activities are in decline.
- “[T]here is a clear trend in the overall group of nature-based activities named ‘viewing and photographing nature.’”
- “Three...activity groups – hunting and fishing, backcountry activities, and motorized activities – ended up toward the end of this decade at about the same level of participation as in 2000.”
- “...different segments of society chose different types and levels of participation in different mixes of outdoor recreation.”
- Motivations for seeking outdoor recreation include: get away from the demands of everyday life, to be outdoors, and experience nature.
- The five activities projected to **grow** or decline the most in terms of per capita participation:
 - **Developed skiing: 20 to 50%**
 - **Undeveloped skiing: 9 to 31%**
 - **Challenge activities: 6 to 18%**
 - **Equestrian activities: 3 to 19%**
 - **Motorized water activities -3 to 15%**
 - Visiting primitive areas: -5 to 0%
 - Motorized off-road activities: -11 to 0%
 - Hunting: -31 to -22%

² *Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures: A Technical Document Supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment*, H. Ken Cordell.

- Fishing: -10 to -3%
- Floating activities: -11 to -3%
- The five activities projected to **grow** or decline the most in terms of number of participants:
 - **Developed skiing: 68 to 147%**
 - **Undeveloped skiing: 55 to 106%**
 - **Challenge activities: 50 to 86%**
 - **Equestrian activities: 44 to 87%**
 - **Motorized water activities 41 to 81%**
 - Visiting primitive areas: 33 to 65%
 - Motorized off-road activities: 29 to 56%
 - Motorized snow activities: 25 to 61
 - Hunting: 8 to 23%
 - Fishing: 27 to 56%

Participation Topline Report³

A recent by a recreation-oriented foundation examined the national popularity of recreational pursuits by age groups seeking to reveal emerging trends. Among the findings were:

- Most popular activities among **young people** (ages 6-24) by participation rate:
 - Running, jogging and trail running (29.3%).
 - Bicycling (road, mountain and BMX) (23.7%).
 - Fishing (18.4%).
 - Camping (17.2%).
 - Hiking (13.1%).
- Most popular activities among **young people** (ages 6-24) by frequency of participation:
 - Running, jogging and trail running.
 - Bicycling (road, mountain and BMX).
 - Skateboarding.
 - Birdwatching.
 - Wildlife viewing.
- Most popular activities among **adults** (ages 25+) by participation rate:
 - Running, jogging and trail running (16.2%).
 - Fishing (14.8%).
 - Bicycling (road, mountain and BMX) (13.1%).
 - Hiking (11.4%)
 - Camping (10.6%).
- Most popular activities among **adults** (ages 25+) by frequency of participation:
 - Running, jogging and trail running.
 - Bicycling (road, mountain and BMX).
 - Birdwatching.
 - Wildlife viewing.
 - Hunting.

³ 2013 *Outdoor Participation*, The Outdoor Foundation, 2014.

Opportunities for Crane Lake

In 2001 and 2006 Crane Lake prepared Community Action Plans to direct energies on desired projects and activities. As a result, the community successfully organized as a township, executed a land exchange with the Federal government, and launched initiatives to expand recreational trail connections, especially for ATVs, to other regional destinations.

Note: This list of Opportunities is the initial list generated by the Consultant Team. The final list will reflect input from the community with opportunities added, deleted or revised.

The following are the current opportunities that pose the greatest potential for enhancing community viability.

Voyageurs National Park Visitor Center and Campground

Development of the fourth VNP visitor center in Crane Lake is the primary opportunity. The center would enhance Crane Lake's role as a gateway to the park, attract a new user base, and provide facilities for community use.

The campground, which would not necessarily be located on the same site as the center, would greatly expand the park's ability to attract users that are not inclined to camp at water-access only campsites.

Leveraging VNP Visitor Center/Campground to Community Benefit

The location and design of the VNP visitor center and campground will clearly need to meet VNP needs and standards. However, from the community's perspective, both the location and design need to also benefit Crane Lake. Within this balancing act the community needs to consider a location that reinforces visitor vehicle and foot traffic to businesses both existing and potentially new, reinforces the creation of a definable community focal point and identity, and provides/enhances interior and exterior space for community activities and functions.

Positioning and Marketing in a Changing Tourism Economy

Local tourism operators are well aware of the many changing faces of tourism. Trends seem to indicate further changes in markets driven by demographics and attitudes toward outdoor-based recreation. The market base for traditional outdoor recreation seems to be declining. One set of responses may revolve around seeking out entirely new-to-Crane Lake visitors including non-traditional and emerging forms of outdoor recreation, art and education-based programs, elder hostel, and the like.

Water's Edge DNR Property

The former Water's Edge campground property recently acquired by the State and managed by the DNR can serve a range of community-enhancing purposes. The property is centrally located with excellent shoreland and could possibly accommodate other uses in addition to the DNR's purpose of providing additional boat launching space.

Former Borderland Resort Property

There is no property more centrally located than this former resort. It was purchased for a real estate development that is not yet realized. Its location and size make the redevelopment of this property key to reinvigorating Crane Lake and establishing the sense of arrival into the community.

Township-owned Property

The 80-acre parcel obtained by the Township through the land exchange with the Federal government is an asset to be judiciously used. While it does not have the same intrinsic value as shore land property, its size and central location along an existing road provide the potential for substantive development of various sorts.

Recreational Trails

In conjunction with regional partners Crane Lake has embarked on a program of enhancing the community's connection to other regional visitor destinations via an expanded ATV trail system. This initiative needs continuing action. In addition, the community should consider development of other types of trails such as mountain biking to broaden the area's appeal to other tourist market segments.

Workforce Housing

Most seasonal workforce housing is adequately provided by the respective operations. However, there is an occasional need for housing to serve couples or workers with families. Building such housing that could also serve as vacation rental property when workforce demand is light should help businesses attract workers.

Community Beautification

A good part of Crane Lake's allure is its end-of-the-road and edge-of-the-wilderness rustic charm. That said, some form of community wide beautification could strengthen the sense of place and community.

Review of 2001 and 2006 Community Action Plans

Crane Lake created two prior community action plans. The following identifies the priority projects for each one.

In addition to the priority projects, the 2001 document also asserted a community mission statement:

Crane Lake will remain a safe and healthy community inviting new and creative ideas while working in concert with Natural Resources and Government Agencies, striving to protect the natural environment in a sound manner, nurturing growth for business, maintaining economic sustainability and integrating its youth to become engaged in partnerships for community stability into the future.

2001 Plan Priority Projects

- Sewer and Water System
The Crane Lake Water and Sanitary District was established in 1996.
- Form a Local Government
Research and recommend a form of local government that best serves the community.
- Internet and Cell Phone Service
Provide reliable and efficient Internet and cellular phone service to the community of Crane Lake to meet personal, business, educational, outreach and marketing needs.
- Connecting Multi-Use 4-Season Trail System
Support a variety of trail opportunities.

- Community Center
Develop a realistic building proposal that meets community needs and a strategy for funding acquisition.
- Community Beautification
Develop a coordinated vision for the appearance of Crane Lake.

2006 Plan Priority Projects

- Town Beautification
- Completed Functional Multi-Use Trail System
- Combined Park Visitor/Community Center
- Paid staff to facilitate plans and execute long range, comprehensive planning
- Eastern Service Area Sewer Completion