



**ADOPTED:
MAY, 2019**

NISSWA 2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CITY OF NISSWA
COUNTY OF CROW WING
STATE OF MINNESOTA

RESOLUTION 19-9

**RESOLUTION APPROVING THE ADOPTION OF THE
2019 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF NISSWA, MINNESOTA:

WHEREAS, the City Council has designated as one of the duties of the Planning Commission to write and revise its Comprehensive Plan when it finds need to do so; and

WHEREAS, the current Comprehensive Plan for the City of Nisswa was adopted by the City Council in 2007; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission determined the 2007 Comprehensive Plan was out dated, and it would be in the interest of the City and its residents to provide and update; and

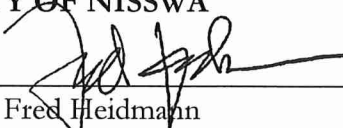
WHEREAS, the Planning Commission, with the assistance from Staff, and Region Five Development Commission and Sourcewell began the process of updating the Comprehensive Plan in late 2017; and

WHEREAS, after reviewing the proposed document and taking public comment, the Planning Commission recommended approval of the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City of Nisswa City Council has reviewed the proposed 2019 Comprehensive Plan on May 15, 2019 and does hereby approve its adoption.


Adopted by the City Council of the City of Nisswa, Minnesota, this 15th day of May, 2019.

CITY OF NISSWA



By: Fred Heidmann
Its: Mayor

Attest:



By: Jenny Max
Its: City Administrator

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“The destination appearance and draw to our downtown. Small-town feeling. Festivals, events to draw tourism.”



“A community that supports small and local businesses.”



“The vibrant downtown, the abundance of lakes and trees, the unique ‘up north’ feel of structures.”



“It is a special north country, multi-seasoned, small town that has a fascinating history and has grown into an attractive tourist location.”



“I find Nisswa to be very charming and welcoming. Would like to see more of this atmosphere aimed at attracting permanent residents.”



“Nisswa is a charming town with caring people who enjoy life.”



“People want to visit here and I am proud to live here.”



“Small town, great shopping and food, known for turtle races, and an amazing Elementary School!”



“Nice blend of small town, businesses, and outdoor activity.”



“A unique small town atmosphere with lots of friendly, helpful neighbors and business folks.”



“A charming destination for visitors as well as a friendly business community for residents who call Nisswa ‘home.’”



“A close-knit, up north town that places an emphasis on family values and appreciating the simple things in life.”



OVERVIEW

The City of Nisswa is located in north central Minnesota just 13 miles north of the Brainerd/Baxter micropolitan area. This location provides residents and tourists with access to larger market areas, government agencies, medical facilities, cultural performances, and numerous recreational amenities.

Nisswa can be considered a bedroom community of Brainerd, the Crow Wing County seat. As of the 2010 census, 1,971 people consider Nisswa their primary residence. Nisswa has a total area of 18.34 square miles, of which 10.78 square miles are land and 7.56 square miles are water. Surrounded by lakes, Nisswa is part of the Brainerd Lakes Area.

Minnesota Highway 371 serves as the main route in the city. Nisswa's abundance of natural resources, numerous lakes, and eclectic downtown bring tourists and second homeowners to the area especially during summer months. Many communities in the central lakes region are seeing a transition from primarily seasonal homes and cabins to year-round homes and primary dwellings.

Brief History

Small towns and unincorporated townships in north-central Minnesota were established largely due to the influence of railroad companies and the rail lines they constructed. In 1898 Ernest Smiley established a railroad stop and post office at his homestead located on what is now Poplar Avenue just off Nisswa's main street. The stop was called Smiley. When the township was founded in 1900 it was named Smiley Township. In 1908, when the village incorporated, the name was changed to Nisswa from the Ojibwe word "nessawae," which means "in the middle." In this case, it is in the middle of Clark, Nisswa and Roy lakes. In 1946, Nisswa became a municipality.

In the automobile phase (1920-1965), improvements were made along the Leech Lake Trail, now known as Highway 371, which allowed urban residents from Minneapolis/St. Paul and other urban centers to live and vacation in the Central Lakes area.

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Introduction

Overview

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- 02 Community Character
- 03 Economic Development
- 04 Natural Resources
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- 08 Implementation

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a tool that cities use to decide how to best allocate resources and services in the future to achieve a desired community vision. The plan provides an inventory of existing conditions and documents issues; provides policy framework to guide city leaders in decision making; and builds upon past and existing planning efforts.

Policy

Policies and strategies define the goals and actions to enact that vision.

- **Policy:** A general statement of goals the community seeks to achieve.
- **Strategy:** A course of action the community plans to pursue in order to achieve the agreed-upon goals.

Chapters

Some goals can be addressed in multiple sections. For example, maintaining pristine lakes affects the community character and draws tourists and citizens to live, work, and play in the city. This, in turn, impacts economic development, recreation, and housing. However, for clarity of goals and ease of implementation of actions, protecting the lakes is primarily addressed under the Natural Resources section of the comprehensive plan.

Demographics

Demographics can be an insight into existing conditions. However, a few statistics, especially out of context, may not represent the true picture. The statistics that are needed to make a truly informed decision may not exist. The reader is encouraged to go to the websites for the following entities to glean statistical information:

- U.S. Census Bureau
- Minnesota Demographer
- American Community Survey



Purpose

The comprehensive plan provides a vision for the future of Nisswa and steps for action. It should be viewed as a living document. Circumstances will continue to change as Nisswa continues to grow and evolve. This plan should be used for the activities of city officials and staff and should be referenced as needed to justify specific actions. This plan should be easily accessible to elected and appointed officials and city staff. This plan should be explicitly referenced in land use decisions.

To utilize the full potential of the plan, it should be used to:

Guide city officials and staff with a variety of tasks:

- Acquisition and use of land.
- Capital improvement planning.
- Development and infrastructure decisions.
- Reviewing future land use proposals and developing specific findings of fact to support or deny a given application.

Guide businesses, property owners, and residents in:

- Understanding the city's goals and policy directions.
- Determining potential property use.
- Understanding future infrastructure improvements.
- Improving and investing in property.

Guide developers with property acquisition and the coordination of plans with city goals, regulations, and infrastructure plans.

Planning Process

Public participation in planning is a mainstay of democratic governance and decision making. Public participation may be viewed as more of a requirement to meet, rather than an opportunity to foster meaningful input. Authentic participation programs go beyond the minimum legal requirements (e.g., conducting public hearings).

Authority to Plan

The State of Minnesota gives its communities the legal authority to adopt a plan according to the Municipal Planning Act (Minnesota State Statute Sections 462.351 to 462.364). The Municipal Planning Act creates a single, uniform procedure that applies to all cities. The comprehensive plan provides the legal framework to enact land use control and other municipal actions to implement long-term growth and development regulations and strategies. The city's land use (zoning) ordinances and official zoning map should be updated to conform to the Comprehensive Plan pursuant to the adoption.

A steering committee comprised of 12 members who represented a cross-section of vested interests, was appointed by the city to help lead the planning efforts from the fall of 2016 to the summer of 2017. Input was solicited via two online community surveys, two visioning sessions, outreach to community clubs, organizations, and churches; along with communication through the city's website, TV, radio, social media, and posters/flyers/postcards.

In addition, the comprehensive plans for the neighboring cities of Pequot Lakes and Lake Shore were reviewed and ideas and text were borrowed as appropriate. Their contributions are hereby acknowledged.

Future Challenges and Opportunities

Nisswa faces several challenges and opportunities. The main concern of both residents and city officials is to establish a progressive plan that enhances the city's quality of life for residents and visitors. A comprehensive plan is the first step in a continued process of asset evaluation and future city enrichment, which will be accomplished by addressing challenges and taking advantage of opportunities as they arise.

Challenges

Retaining Community Character

In the face of population growth, perhaps the biggest challenge Nisswa faces is keeping its small-town, north woods feel valued by residents and visitors. All future policies and actions dealing with housing, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, environmental protection, and recreation must strive to preserve and enhance Nisswa's distinctive community character. Growth will need to be managed to ensure the long-term vitality of species and the natural environment.

Budget Limitations

Like all entities, there are limited financial resources to accomplish the desired goals. Nisswa must set priorities and seek alternatives beyond tax revenues to meet its goals while being mindful not to overextend its infrastructure beyond its financial capacity to maintain it.

Lakeshore Privatization

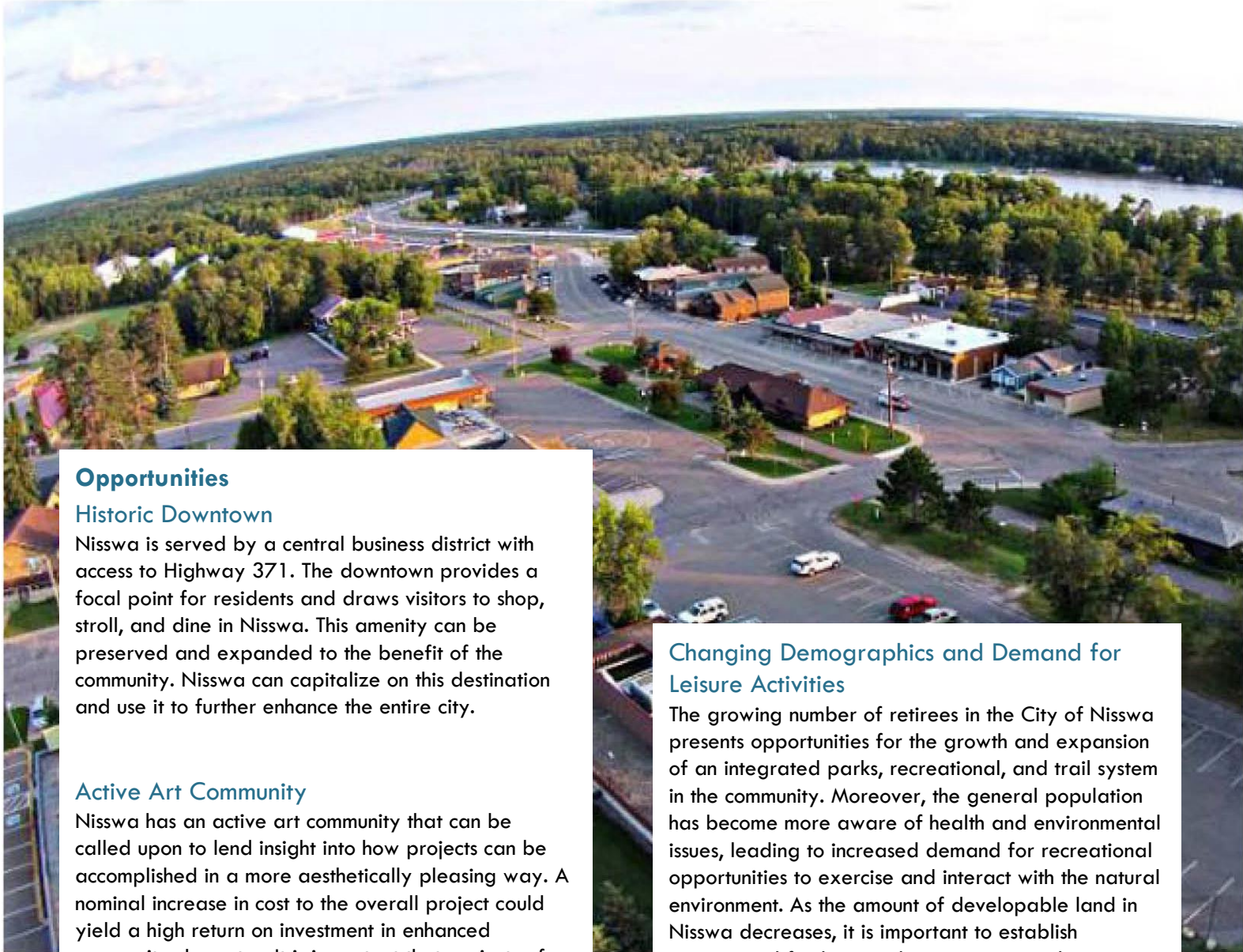
As a result of the expansion of resorts and lake homes from 1920 to 1970, most lakeshore property in Nisswa has been fully developed, with little to no public access points incorporated. Second-tier lake development further exacerbates this problem. Because lakes play such an integral role in the identity and economy of Nisswa, they must remain as accessible as possible to all residents and visitors in the community.

Water Quality

Water quality pertains to lakes and groundwater. Lake water quality is detrimentally affected by the runoff of salt that is used to maintain safer conditions on snow-covered roads in the wintertime. In addition, fertilizers used to maintain groomed yards negatively impact lake water quality. Water quality could be detrimentally affected over time by the prevailing use of septic systems and water softeners that use salt pellets. More environmentally friendly alternatives need to be implemented when they are invented or developed to address these threats to water quality.

Aging Infrastructure

Urban services such as roads, parks, sewers, utilities, and zoning are becoming dated, or are in need of investment and repair. These maintenance and update programs impose additional costs and resource needs on the city, which must maintain and expand this infrastructure into the future. Directing new development to areas with adequate public facilities will help with this problem, as will forest and lake preservation, recreational resource base expansion, and updated zoning ordinances. The current zoning map and ordinance in Nisswa descends directly from suburban zoning codes that do not meet the needs of rural communities. The end result is development that detracts from the distinct character of the city itself.



Opportunities

Historic Downtown

Nisswa is served by a central business district with access to Highway 371. The downtown provides a focal point for residents and draws visitors to shop, stroll, and dine in Nisswa. This amenity can be preserved and expanded to the benefit of the community. Nisswa can capitalize on this destination and use it to further enhance the entire city.

Active Art Community

Nisswa has an active art community that can be called upon to lend insight into how projects can be accomplished in a more aesthetically pleasing way. A nominal increase in cost to the overall project could yield a high return on investment in enhanced community character. It is important that projects of an enduring nature take aesthetics into consideration.

Tourist Economy

With its many resorts, the Paul Bunyan Trail, and local shops, restaurants, and businesses, the Nisswa area draws a large number of tourists that help to support its economy. Nisswa's economy depends on families, retirees, and youth groups stopping in town for recreational opportunities. By protecting and enhancing its recreational amenities, Nisswa will attract tourist dollars that might not otherwise be available. By preserving and enhancing its natural and recreational resources, as well as its local businesses and resorts, Nisswa will ensure its local economy will remain strong.

Changing Demographics and Demand for Leisure Activities

The growing number of retirees in the City of Nisswa presents opportunities for the growth and expansion of an integrated parks, recreational, and trail system in the community. Moreover, the general population has become more aware of health and environmental issues, leading to increased demand for recreational opportunities to exercise and interact with the natural environment. As the amount of developable land in Nisswa decreases, it is important to establish recreational facilities and open spaces in the near future if the community so desires.

Wealth of Natural Resources and Scenic Amenities

Nisswa is endowed with forests, lakes, streams, and wetlands. While the lakes are fully developed and second-tier lakeshore development is progressing, most of the area's natural resources and scenic amenities are intact and healthy. The health of these resources gives Nisswa an advantage over other area communities that have developed without enacting a framework for preserving these assets. By protecting its natural and scenic amenities, Nisswa can reap the added benefits of clean air and water, a community attractive to tourists and residents, storehouses of biological diversity and beauty, and increased property values.

Community Character

Nisswa visioning statement:

Committee members and project participants assisted in the creation of crafting a new vision statement to guide the development of plan goals and policies:

“Visitors and residents can enjoy the small-town charm of our eclectic downtown, adore our abundance of natural resources, and thrive in our culture of environmental stewardship and active living.”

Overview

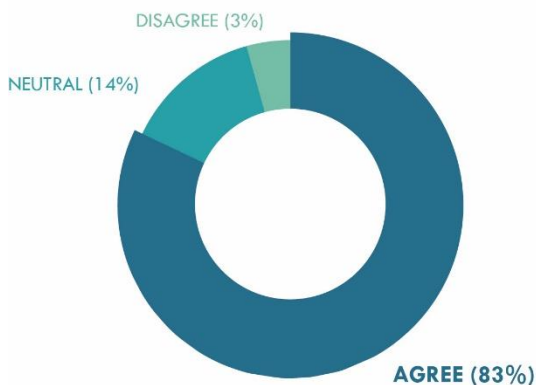
The character of a community is perhaps the most abstract, yet important, concept to define when creating a future vision. For many people, there is no reason to plan if the aspects of life that they have grown to enjoy and identify with the area cannot be maintained. It is critical that those defining components of Nisswa’s character not only be identified but be preserved and enhanced as part of any strategy for future growth and development. Citizens and visitors alike do not want economic development and expansion to occur at the expense of natural resources. Community character is the most critical component of our plan.

The Elements of Nisswa’s Community Character

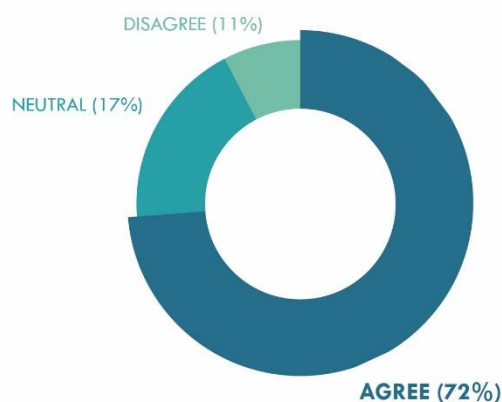
Location

Nisswa is situated just north of the Brainerd/Baxter area, which provides residents and tourists with access to larger market areas, yet Nisswa itself has a variety of shopping opportunities. The city is also located close to numerous recreational amenities, including resorts, golf courses, lakes, state parks, and recreation areas (Crow Wing, south of Brainerd, and the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area near Crosby), state forests, wildlife management areas, and historic sites.

MY NEIGHBORHOOD REFLECTS PRIDE AND OWNERSHIP:



MY NEIGHBORHOOD IS WALKABLE:





Downtown

Downtown Nisswa is the centerpiece of the community. The downtown establishes a distinct visual image and creates a defined destination that people identify with. The pedestrian-oriented flavor left over from the railroad days, combined with a unique mix of local shopping, makes Nisswa the quintessential “up-north” town.

Participants in community survey #1 identify the top three components they value in the downtown:



Source: Nisswa Community Survey #1

Sense of Place

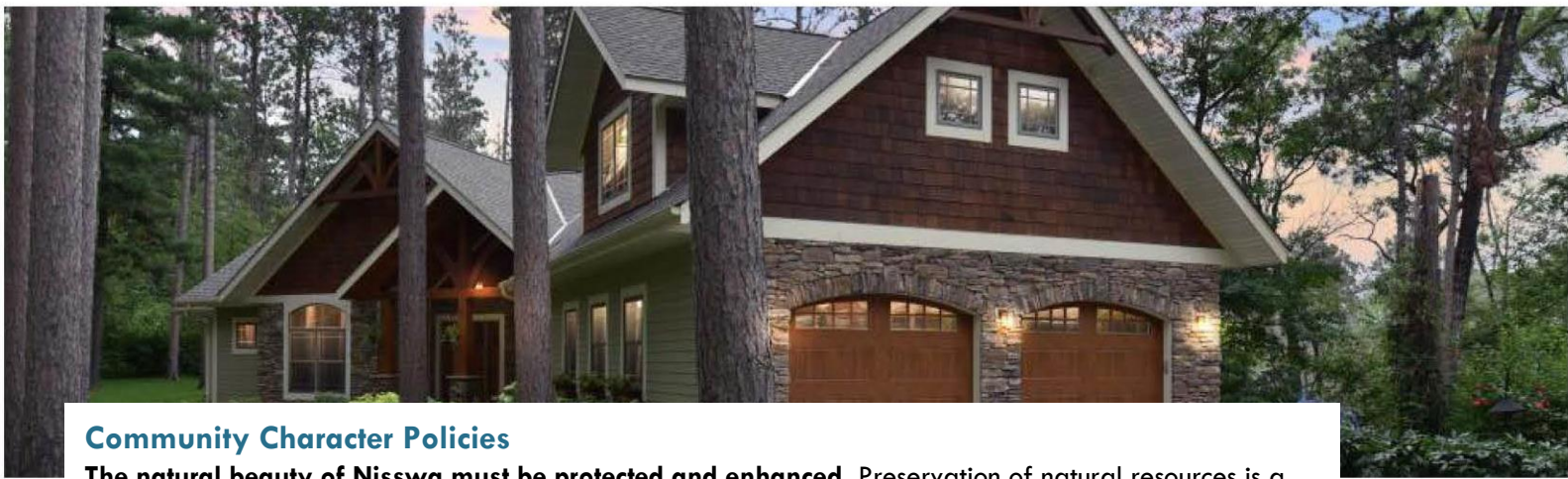
The city has retained its ties to the past and its historic days as a railroad stop. The small-town charm of Main Street and the downtown area create a destination that is a defining characteristic of the community. Numerous events, from festivals to sales to civic meetings, give Nisswa a distinct identity.

Social Institutions

Residents have strong connections to local social institutions, especially the school, churches, post office, public buildings, and the Pickle Factory. The elementary school is a defining component of the community, with activities for youth and a community library being two of its prominent features. Area churches are very popular and draw large numbers of people from outside the city. The post office and public buildings in and around the downtown are fixtures of the community and serve an important social role. The Pickle Factory, the city’s municipal on-sale liquor establishment, and the American Legion are area icons. A number of community service groups also maintain an important role in the community.

Lakes

The lakes have long been the driving force behind Nisswa’s growth and development, because they are a highly desirable place in which to live and vacation. It is commonly believed that as the area’s lakes go, so goes the City of Nisswa. The lakes are the attraction that brings people to the community as visitors and prompts many people to move here and become residents. The lakes stimulate a great deal of investment that has created new jobs, which add to the area’s economy. The health of the lakes is directly connected to the health of the community, and so protecting water quality is of paramount importance.



Community Character Policies

The natural beauty of Nisswa must be protected and enhanced. Preservation of natural resources is a key component of Nisswa's character and deserves to be mentioned here; however, it is better addressed in the Natural Resources section.

The following policies are designed to maintain the community character in the City of Nisswa:

01 The recreational lifestyle enjoyed by residents and visitors alike must be recognized as a critical component of growth and development in the City of Nisswa.

Enjoyment of recreational opportunities, whether at a resort, private cabin, or visiting the downtown, is typically the first experience people have in Nisswa. People who move to the community after visiting indicate that they want to enjoy the recreational lifestyle offered by the area. Maintaining and enhancing recreational opportunities is important to sustaining growth in the community.

02 The character and activity of the historic downtown should continue to be maintained and expanded.

The historic downtown is the focal point of the community, with a character that is individually Nisswa and would be difficult to recapture if it were ever lost. The activities that go on there, from the turtle races to the year-round festivals, bind the community together socially. These qualities and events are important to the character of the community and must be maintained.

03 Nisswa Elementary School is an important part of the character of the city that must be proactively supported by the community.

The neighborhood school is an important social institution in Nisswa. The community's ties to the school are deep, with many generations having attended the school. School-related activities and other activities using the school create social bonds that are reflected in other aspects of the community.

04 Maintain support for the area resorts in order to retain the resort lifestyle for future generations.

Nisswa has historically supported the area resorts, but the resort industry must be able to compete in an ever-changing economy and atmosphere. If the city is to retain resorts within the community, the city will need to adapt to those changes. It is important that the city do so because having resorts in the community fuels the local economy and, in terms of recreational offerings, provides an elevated quality of life for Nisswa's residents.

05 Public participation in an open and transparent local government system is needed to maintain Nisswa's character.

Without the stewardship of an engaged citizenry, Nisswa risks becoming just another city. Elected and appointed officials, local citizens, business owners, and landowners should be informed of and understand the goals and strategies contained in the comprehensive plan and city ordinance. The goals of the city cannot be met if the ordinances that enact them are not understood, followed, and enforced.



Community Character Strategies

To bring about these policies, the City of Nisswa should seek to implement the following strategies:

Short-Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Create a clear, simple, and straightforward process for making changes and improvements to existing resorts, and disincentives for breaking up a resort.
- Provide flexibility in the ordinance to allow small resorts to more easily upgrade buildings where density is not increased.
- Examine the ordinances and regulations for the commercial transition areas and provide performance zoning standards as needed.
- Review the enforcement portion of the city ordinance and update as needed to encourage compliance.

Mid-Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Require that the downtown areas adjacent to the trail be cleaned up and maintained in a manner that is inviting to the users of the trail.
- Strengthen the relationship between School Board of District 181 and the City Council by appointing a liaison to advocate on the community's behalf.
- Establish a program to involve students and younger people in community discussions and activities.
- Create and adopt a "Downtown Vision" document.
- Devise means to proactively educate property owners, business owners, and those who do business in Nisswa of the city's ordinances to encourage compliance.

Long-Term Actions (3 to 5 years)

- Develop an innovative approach to recruit and nurture community leaders through community leadership, learning and development opportunities, and network groups.

Ongoing Actions

- Review the comprehensive plan to evaluate progress on strategy implementation and report the findings to the public.
- Continue to support the Chamber of Commerce and others in annual year-round events, including running and bicycle events.

The survey also asked participants, "What do you feel is missing from the downtown?" The top five responses are as follows:

- > Range of restaurants
- > Adequate parking
- > Public gathering spaces (plaza, pocket park, town square)
- > Bike parking and bike lanes
- > Landscaping and streetscape (boulevard trees, plantings, etc.)

Seventy-one percent of survey respondents reported they visit downtown Nisswa once or more per week.

Economic Development



“Nisswa’s business district is distinctive. It should continue to offer stores, restaurants, and activities to appeal to visitors. It should not be materially changed.”

—Participant in Community Survey #1

Overview

The City of Nisswa is a widely recognized Lakes Area business community serving as both a business center that meets the services and goods needs of the local community and a shopping destination for tourists and Brainerd Lakes Area visitors.

Existing Commercial Development Patterns

Generally, the Nisswa downtown has an “outdoor mall” feel and character due to the traditional, but distinct, design features of the many storefronts, including zero-lot line development, outdoor market settings, and eclectic building facades.

The “Regional Business Corridor” is south of Nisswa’s downtown area along State Highway 371. This area has several businesses that serve a larger regional area, including service stations, retail and grocery, and light commercial businesses. This business corridor is characterized by its automobile-oriented design with larger space dedicated for parking.

While the neighboring cities of Baxter and Pequot Lakes have industrial parks, the City of Nisswa does not. The Highway 371 corridor provides good transportation access to and through the city and, in concept, would be an excellent backbone for industrial development. Nisswa’s configuration of lakes, wetlands, and forests, however, does not lend itself well to industrial development along this corridor. Industrial development off the corridor would have a difficult time competing with the Baxter and Pequot Lakes parks, both of which have excellent accessibility.

Health of the Resort Industry

Time-share and resort destinations in Breezy Point, East Gull Lake, and Lake Shore, along with those in Nisswa, provide tourists for the city’s retail shopping areas. So long as the resort industry in the area remains viable and healthy, visitors will continue to patronize downtown Nisswa. A local growing hospitality industry is essential to continuing growth and development in Nisswa’s commercial areas.



Financial Incentives

Financial incentives are an important economic development tool for the city to use. The city has the ability to utilize a number of incentives: Tax Increment Financing (TIF), tax abatement, revolving loan programs, direct grants, JOBZ designation and more. The city needs to be deliberative in the types of projects it provides financial incentives to. As a guideline, financial incentives would best be used to support import-replacement enterprises (those that serve the local market) that:

1. Are located in areas with existing infrastructure or for projects that do not require the extension of municipal utilities.
2. Redevelop blighted or underutilized properties.
3. Have a high potential to induce economic activity within the community beyond the operation of the enterprise receiving the subsidy.
4. Are scaled to utilize local services, such as a local attorney, insurance agent, printer, accountant, etc.

Business chains that would routinely handle professional services outside of the community in a corporate framework are not good candidates for tax subsidies. Businesses that meet these guidelines should be given strong consideration if a short-term tax subsidy is needed to facilitate their move to or expansion within the community.

Tax Base Distribution

It is also important context to have an understanding of the relative tax distribution within the City of Nisswa. Where other area communities, such as Brainerd and Baxter, draw a large percentage of their tax base from commercial development, Nisswa relies most heavily on residential areas. The vast majority of the local tax base comes from residences, including both homestead and seasonal properties.

Rival Retail Destinations

The character of Nisswa's downtown currently gives it an advantage in attracting tourist shoppers, but that advantage is being challenged by similar developments in Baxter, Pequot Lakes, and Crosslake. The success of these outside endeavors will determine the competitive challenges downtown Nisswa will face in retaining market share. The Nisswa brand is the strongest in the area, but proactive reinforcement of that brand identity may be necessary to maintain an advantage in an increasingly competitive market.

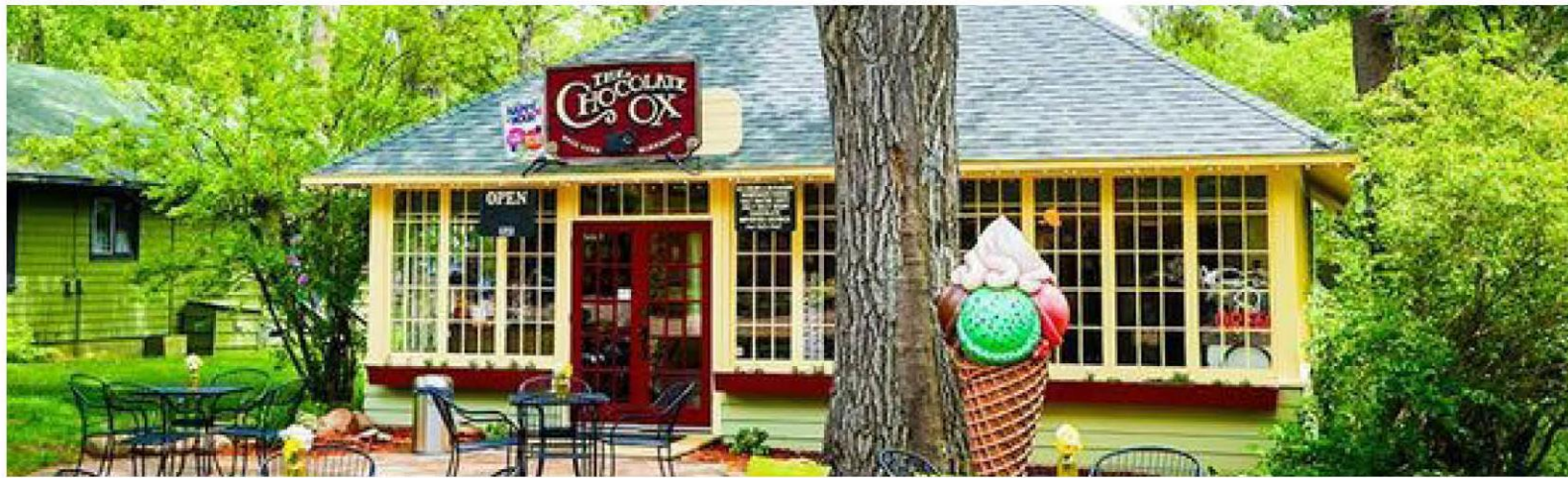


Economic Development Policies

The following policies are designed to guide the future economic growth and development in the City of Nisswa.

Research has found that the economic impact of trails is significant. Trail Towns are literally inviting trail users to spend time and money in their community; however, this goal is better addressed in the Recreation section.

- 01 Promote a strong and healthy business climate in the City of Nisswa.** Nisswa is a pro-business community. The community desires strong, growing, and competitive businesses. The city should do what it can, not necessarily to promote an individual project or business, but to promote a long-term, healthy business environment in the city.
- 02 Preserve and enhance the tourist-orientation and small-town character of the historic downtown area.** Promote walkability and evaluate ways to improve pedestrian connections. The success of downtown businesses is directly related to the number of people walking on the streets.
- 03 Have a sustainable, year-round economy through partnership with local businesses, resort operators, and other agencies that create opportunities for all.** Encourage service-oriented businesses on the periphery of downtown to serve year-round residents.
- 04 Provide for flexibility of layout, design, and density where a new commercial development will retain the desired character of the community.** Current standards provide only cursory guidance for development consistent with the community character. Some of the city's ordinances hinder alternative approaches that may produce more desired results. Flexibility needs to be provided where a development retains or enhances the character of the community. Flexibility should be provided, particularly where the new development can be connected to the downtown.
- 05 Maintain strong support for the area resorts and provide the flexibility needed for their continued growth and prosperity.** Having resorts in the community fuels the local economy and, in terms of recreational offerings, provides an elevated quality of life for Nisswa's residents and retains the resort lifestyle for future generations. As the economics of the resort industry change, it is important that new realities be understood and flexibility provided to ensure that area resorts remain strong and viable. The city's core values of natural resource protection, opportunities for social interaction, and strong economic health will be advanced by proactive cooperation with resorts.



Economic Development Strategies

To implement these policies, the City of Nisswa will seek to implement the following strategies:

Short-Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Examine the Land Use Classification of the ordinance to encourage businesses that will generate tax revenue for the city and employ people.
- Form an Economic Development Authority (EDA) to prepare a Strategic Economic Development Plan using asset-based economic development approaches.
- Identify parking areas available to the public in the Central Business District and evaluate improvements (e.g., wayfinding signage) to enhance the pedestrian environment.

Mid-Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Work with the downtown business owners to create minimum design standards that provide flexibility yet maintain a minimum aesthetic appearance that is compatible with the downtown.

Ongoing Actions

- None

Asset-Based Economic Development

Asset-based economic development is an economic development approach that focuses on building on local resources to strengthen local and regional economics. Asset-based economic development focuses on how community, natural environment, socio-cultural, and economic advantages can be leveraged into sustained economic growth while building capacity within the community and across the region.

Communities pursuing an asset-based approach should identify assets and evaluate these assets and their potential benefit to the local economy as a part of an economic development strategy.

Natural Resources



“As a business owner with property on a lake within Nisswa I could not feel more strongly about water quality best management practices. Tourism is our biggest industry and our lakes are the biggest draw to the area.”

—Participant in Community Survey #1

Overview

The blending of the everyday functions of a city with the beauty and accessibility of the surrounding natural resources is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the City of Nisswa. Residents embrace a recreational lifestyle that places a high value on maintaining the quality and abundance of natural resources.

Green Spaces and Native Plant Communities

Located in the Central Lakes Region of Minnesota, Nisswa is home to a variety of native plant communities, including wetlands, grasslands, and forested areas. Prior to European settlement, the area was populated by aspen and birch forests, conifer bogs and swamps, and jack pine barrens. The availability of quality timber was the primary reason for Nisswa’s establishment in 1900. Because much of the landscape is covered in water, open spaces amid forested areas have been in existence for centuries. These pockets were easier to develop for settlers; therefore, much of Nisswa’s growth has originated from such areas. Over 40 percent of Nisswa is covered with open water, which has led to fragmentation of both land development and the natural habitats of local plant and animal species.

Wetlands

According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, over 52 percent of the state’s wetlands have been lost due to development. Although Minnesota continues to lose wetlands, the rate of loss is decreasing. Ongoing losses can be attributed to exemptions from wetland protection regulations, inadequate enforcement and complicated, outdated, or mismatched wetland and drainage laws, rules, and procedures. Healthy wetlands reduce erosion along lakes, provide sanctuary for spawning fish and waterfowl, slow runoff, minimizing flooding levels, store nutrients while filtering pollutants, and provide sanctuary for rare species. Nearly 4 percent of the land area in Nisswa is native wetland. These areas are vital to ensuring the health of the area’s lakes and streams, as well as providing natural methods of stormwater management.



Groundwater Quality

Groundwater quality is affected by many things and is of great concern to the city and its residents. With both sewer and septic systems in place in Nisswa, wellhead protection and water contamination precautions continue to be addressed by residents and the city. Parcels using private wells and septic systems have a high potential of groundwater contamination due to the sandy soils in the area and due to the high percolation rates that result from these soils. With sandy soil overlying the aquifer, the time for contaminants to reach the water supply is shortened and a greater amount of toxic substances can enter the water. The city must protect its water supply from development or land uses that have the potential to cause contamination to these important resources. The presence of a municipal sewer in Nisswa reduces contamination risk in higher-density and commercial areas.

Good-quality groundwater can be maintained through sound land use practices and regulations. Decreases in the use of pesticides and fertilizers can improve aquifer and lake quality. Expanding the central sewer will service a greater area and reduce the number of individual sewage treatment systems. Regular testing and the regular pumping of septic tanks at least every three years will help prevent failures. Provisions for alternative, on-site sewage treatment methods are necessary for areas not served by the municipal sewer system.

Lakes

Nisswa is home to 13 lakes that provide residents and visitors with beautiful scenery, good fishing, and a variety of recreational opportunities. The water quality of the lakes in and around Nisswa is very good compared with other water bodies in Minnesota. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency classifies Nisswa's lakes as oligotrophic or mesotrophic.

Because local lakes are such a vital part of Nisswa's economy, ensuring their natural health and well-being is essential. Since a large portion of the shoreline in the city has already been developed with homes, the physical condition of the lakes could be negatively impacted. These effects may be further amplified when additional growth occurs.

Development on lakeshores has been shown to increase nutrient levels in the lake and increase shoreline erosion, leading to an increase in algae blooms and suspended sediments. This decreases a lake's water clarity and degrades the habitat for many species in the surrounding area.

Development-related activities that contribute most to degradation of the lake include removing aquatic and terrestrial vegetation along the shore; increasing impervious surfaces near the shore; the use, sometimes illegally, of nitrogen and phosphorous fertilizers; using rip-rap and other harmful landscaping practices; and compaction of the soil.³

Shorelines

A healthy shoreline supports a diverse community of fish and wildlife by providing native vegetation that fulfills their habitat needs where land and water meet. Native vegetation provides important water quality functions by slowing and filtering water runoff as it moves to the lake or stream. Shorelines with a diverse mixture of native plants extending inland as well as offshore from the shoreline are more resilient to wave and ice erosion. Our lakes, streams, and wetlands need healthy shorelines to reduce runoff, filter pollutants, and provide important habitat functions that benefit fish and wildlife.

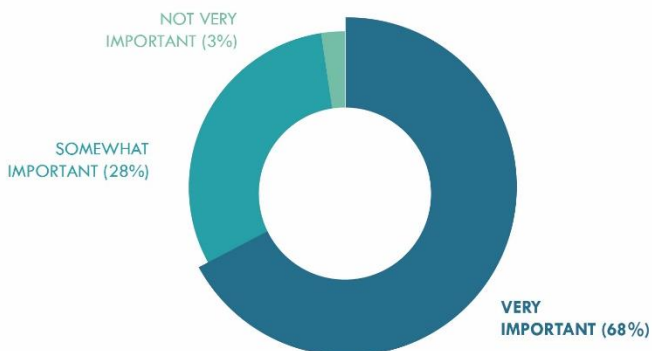
A 2003 study by Bemidji State University has shown that lakes with higher water quality boost lakeshore property values. To ensure lake water quality and the natural beauty of lake shorelines, the City of Nisswa must protect shorelines with natural buffers and encourage responsible future development that won't damage lake health or appearance, and promote better alternatives for drainage, retaining stormwater runoff, and building and landscaping practices throughout the entire watershed.

Wildlife Habitat

The large amount of forested area in Nisswa provides habitat for many species of flora and fauna. The area's rich biodiversity includes at least six rare and endangered species within the city limits. The northern shore of Edna Lake near Highway 371 is home to Twig-rush, *Cladium mariscoides*. Lower Cullen Lake is habitat for Least Darter, *Etheostoma microperca*. One site near Nisswa Lake and another site near Lower Cullen Lake contain Blanding's Turtle, *Emydoidea blandingii*. The national bird of the United States of America, the Bald Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, can be seen in Nisswa and throughout the Central Lakes region. Bald eagle habitat is found in Nisswa between the downtown and Nisswa Lake, on the southern edge of Hole-in-the-Day Lake, near the eastern edge of Gull Lake, and along the northwestern edge of Hubert Lake. Red-shouldered Hawk, *Buteo lineatus*, can be found near Clark Lake. The sixth rare species habitat within Nisswa is a Red Pine forest located along the southern border of the city. Each of these species and their habitat are special benefits to the city and its residents, and conservation should be considered to ensure the enjoyment for generations to come.

Surrounding jurisdictions feature additional rare species' habitat, and the ecosystems in and near to Nisswa are linked and should be considered in addition to those sites within the city. Species with habitat that extends into neighboring communities include Blanding's Turtle, Red-necked Grebes, and Bald Eagles.

Q4: NATURAL BUFFERS ADJACENT TO NATURAL AREAS ARE:



Environmental Health

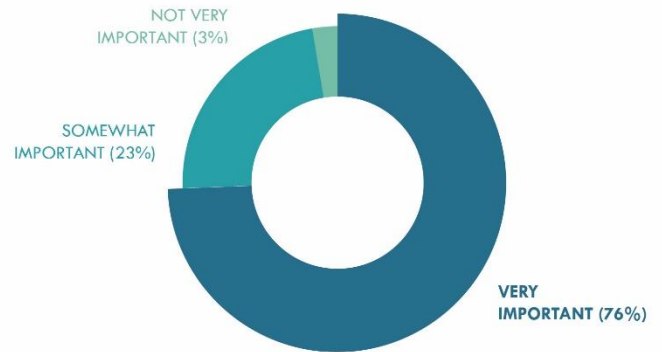
Nisswa’s environment is a complex system of flora, fauna, geologic and natural features (including lakes), and human use and habitation. These systems and influences are interdependent and impact one another.

The environmental health of the city as a whole is affected by the major components of the ecosystem. Green spaces and native flora help circulate nutrients, preserve habitat for wildlife and human enjoyment, and provide a balance to the development of the land.

Wetlands help filter pollution before it reaches lakes and streams. They sometimes also provide a buffer zone between human development and the valuable water features of the community, in addition to providing a vital stormwater management role by absorbing runoff.

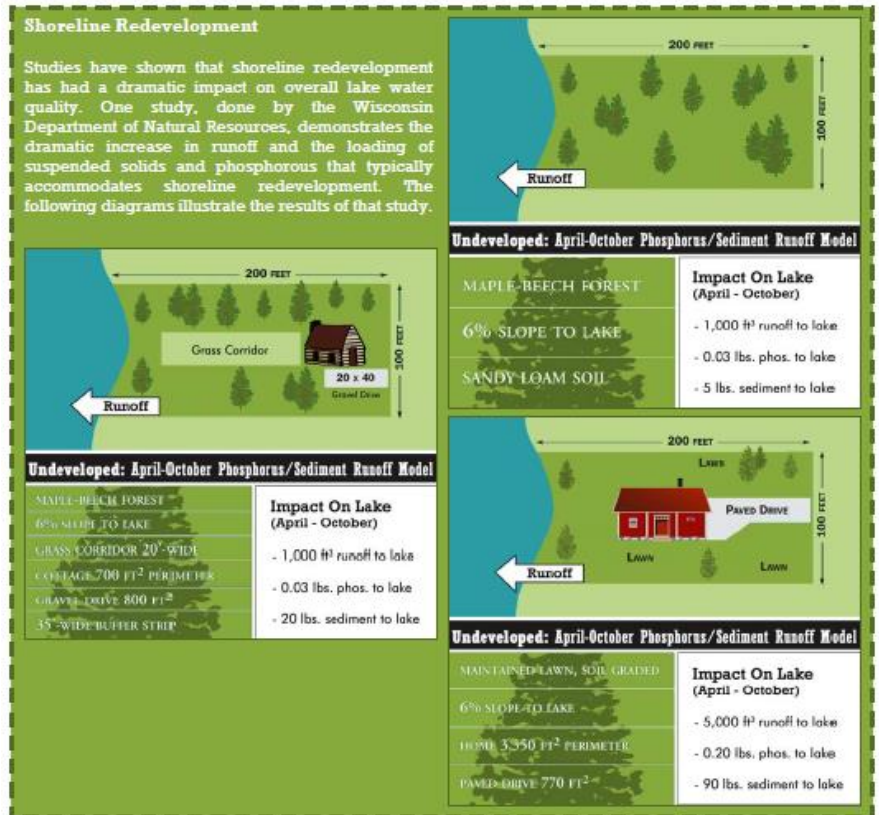
Habitat for wildlife and connected wildlife migration corridors provide for greater biodiversity, a healthier environment, and a high quality of life for Nisswa’s residents.

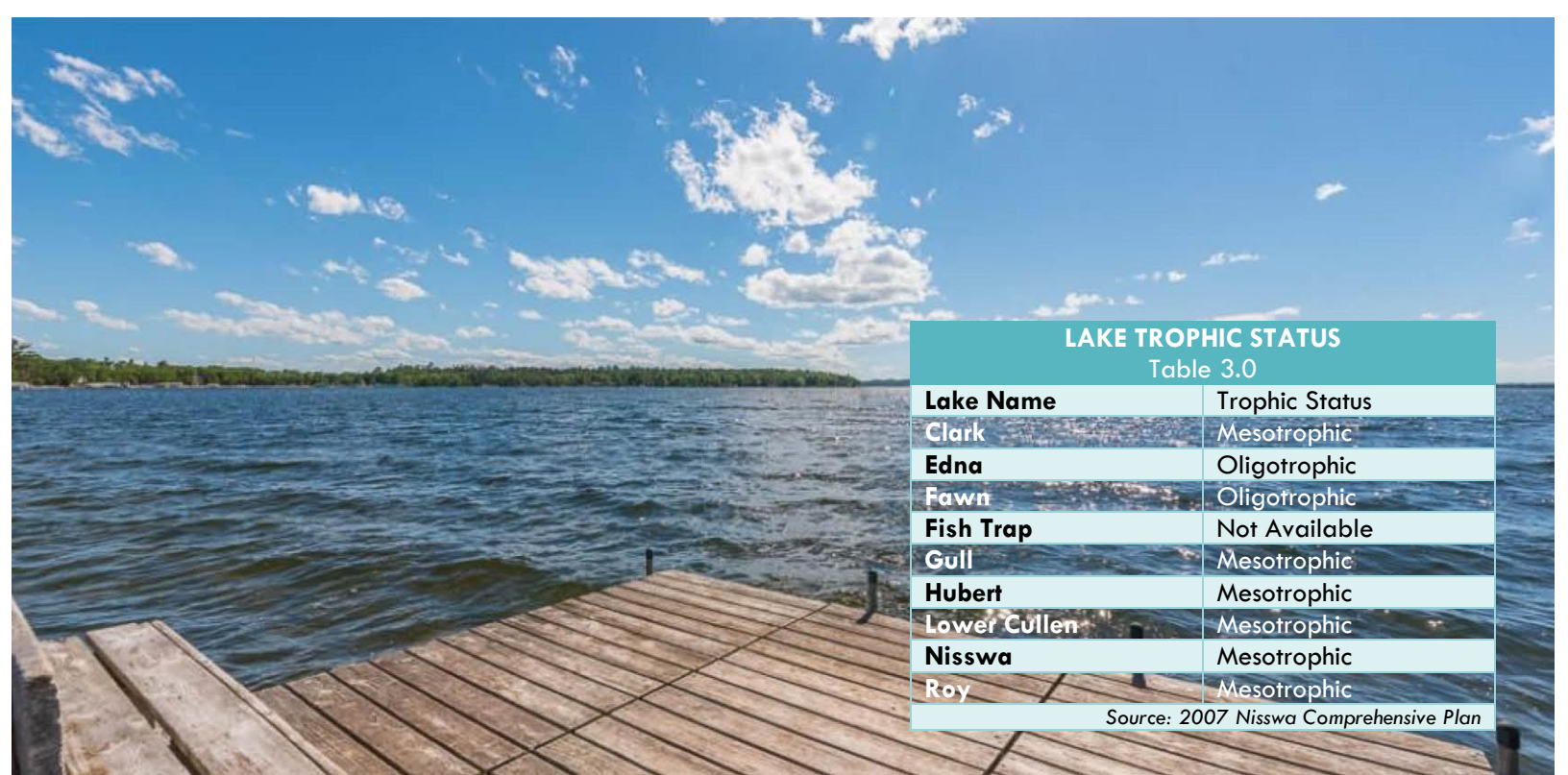
Q5: STORMWATER AND SHORELINE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ARE:



Soils and Geology

The City of Nisswa is situated on sandy soils that present unique challenges and opportunities for development. Following the last glacial activity in central Minnesota, large amounts of sand and gravel were deposited over the area that is now Nisswa. While the plains contain good building sites, the sand over sand feature is greatly susceptible to groundwater contamination, which must be considered for new development that is not supported by the municipal sewer system. Soil suitability for various types of land uses and construction projects also helps determine where the City of Nisswa should direct future development.





LAKE TROPHIC STATUS	
Table 3.0	
Lake Name	Trophic Status
Clark	Mesotrophic
Edna	Oligotrophic
Fawn	Oligotrophic
Fish Trap	Not Available
Gull	Mesotrophic
Hubert	Mesotrophic
Lower Cullen	Mesotrophic
Nisswa	Mesotrophic
Roy	Mesotrophic

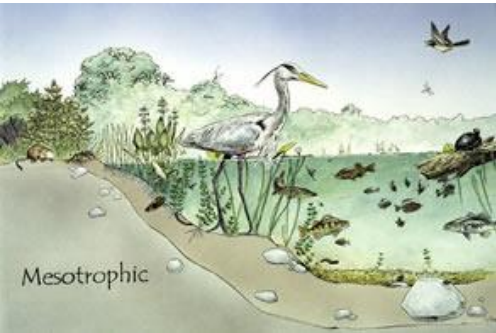
Source: 2007 Nisswa Comprehensive Plan

Lake Types

OLIGOTROPHIC LAKES: are usually typified as young, healthy lakes in the early phases of production and lake development. They feature clear water, high oxygen levels, and low productivity of vegetation, algae, and other aquatic microorganisms. They tend to be deep, and, while they do not support large fish populations, they do often support good food chains and large game fish.



MESOTROPHIC LAKES: are usually older and usually experience more run-off and sedimentation. They feature increased production of aquatic plant life and microorganisms. They tend to have a greater accumulation of organic matter and experience occasional algal blooms. Mesotrophic lakes support a diversity of fish and other aquatic wildlife species.



EUTROPHIC LAKES: are in advanced stages of production and development with poor water clarity, heavy sedimentation, high phosphorous and nitrate levels, and an accumulation of organic matter. They tend to be oxygen poor and do not support a healthy fishery, but rather rough fish species. Eutrophic lakes tend to be shallow due to the accumulation of organic matter. Those that are small in size are vulnerable to winter kills.





Natural Resources Policies

The following policies are designed to guide the natural resources and planning in the City of Nisswa:

- 01 Maintain the water clarity and quality of the area's lakes.** The defining characteristic of the Nisswa area is the lakes. Maintaining the quality of the city's lakes is essential to maintain the social, environmental and economic well-being of the community. This policy is the top natural resource priority of the community.
- 02 Ensure that development and redevelopment of shoreline properties does not detract and, where possible, improves the water quality of the lake.** The shoreline of Nisswa is being redeveloped with old cabins being torn down and replaced with larger, year-round homes. Unless care is taken, the more intensive style of the new development will, when cumulatively examined, degrade the lakes. Redevelopment of a shoreline property is an opportunity to make improvements to protect and even improve the water quality of the lakes.
- 03 Ensure that development and redevelopment within the watershed do not detract from the water quality of the lake.** Much like shoreline redevelopment, development of off-lake properties has an impact on lake water quality that is cumulative. There is a direct correlation between an increase in impervious coverage in a watershed and the quality of the water body. Care must be taken to ensure that stormwater within new developments is properly managed and erosion is controlled.
- 04 Protect wetlands as important components of the total environmental health of the community.** Wetlands serve an important function by removing nutrients from runoff and providing habitat and open space areas. The city must value and protect wetlands as the first component of placing value on total environmental quality.
- 05 Protect the quality of groundwater resources.** It is often easy to take groundwater resources for granted since groundwater is abundant and easily accessible throughout Nisswa. Threats to groundwater from contamination, whether through wells, water softeners, or surface discharges, are real. Even without a centralized water treatment and distribution system, the City of Nisswa should give ongoing consideration to the protection of groundwater.
- 06 Maintain forested tracts.** Forests serve many functions that are important to the environmental health of the community. But not only do forests provide habitat and catch and filter rainwater, they serve a valuable social function as well. Forested areas are one of the defining characteristics of the city, and they need to be maintained in a healthy state.



Natural Resources Policies Continued

07 Provide for wildlife habitat and migration. The assortment of wildlife in the city requires a variety of habitat types to support a healthy balance. While some species flourish with the segmenting of larger tracts by roads and development, many others require deeper and more buffered forested areas. While high-value habitat areas have been reduced by development, the remaining should be protected and linked to the greatest extent possible to provide for habitat migration throughout the community.

08 Foster environmental stewardship. Nisswa must educate residents and visitors about the value and importance of preserving natural resources for sustaining the environment, local economy, property values, and quality of life.

09 Establish regular communication with neighboring jurisdictions to coordinate standards and policies. Effective natural resource planning cannot stop at the boundaries of one city. What Nisswa does with the resources within its boundaries will impact adjacent communities, whose decisions will likewise create impacts to the community. Regular communication will help ensure that everyone's values are respected.

Natural Resources Strategies

To implement these policies, the City of Nisswa should seek to implement the following strategies:

Short-Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Evaluate the DNR Alternative Shoreland Management Standards, modifying and/or adopting those that are appropriate.
- Encourage efficient and sustainable lakeshore development and open space preservation by incorporating conservation design practices into the existing ordinance.
- Define preservation strategies for forested lands and wetlands.
- Create incentives, such as increase in density, for development that employs conservation design.
- Establish shoreline preservation standards to limit clearing of vegetation along shorelines and restore those areas where clearing has crossed a minimum threshold.
- Regulate the use of rip-rap on lakeshore properties to ensure its use is limited and effective.

Mid-Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Identify, maintain, and work to improve the quality of the area's lakes as measured by the TSI index. Work with area lake associations and the MPCA to monitor and track TSI for each lake.
- Establish an education program to encourage septic system maintenance and compliance.
- Establish and/or maintain trees and establish natural stormwater systems (e.g., rain gardens) within commercial and residential developments. Include provisions for ongoing maintenance of trees and landscaping.



Mid-Term Actions (1 to 3 years) Continued

- Require compliance inspections of existing on-site septic systems for all systems within the city.
- Identify and protect wildlife corridors linking patches of core forest habitat area.
- Partner with lake associations to monitor shoreline conditions and educate property owners about shoreline best management practices and the shoreline rapid assessment model.
- Develop programs to educate visitors, property owners, especially new owners, on the importance of lake water quality and best management practices for maintaining or improving.
- Encourage and, in cases of degradation, require, shoreline owners to establish natural vegetation along the shoreline and within the Shore Impact Zone (SIZ) to reduce erosion, filter stormwater runoff, and preserve scenic views and wildlife habitat.
- Educate citizens on wetland protection, conservation easements, shoreland restoration measures, and other best management practices by distributing information with building permits, utility mailings, and the city website.
- Consider implementing a groundwater monitoring program.

Long-Term Actions (3 to 5 years)

- Work with land trusts, Nature Conservancy, and the DNR to permanently protect open space, wetlands and forested lands through the use of conservation easements.
- Establish regular communication with neighboring jurisdictions and relevant agencies to coordinate standards and policies.

Ongoing

- Promote alternative storm water management designs (e.g., rain gardens, swales, French drains).
- Continue to evaluate the need for new or restricted pervious and impervious coverage, as well as forest preservation within the various districts.



“Wetlands should be intact as they act as our water filters.”

“Being stewards of our natural resources and environment.”

“Commitment to our lakes.”

–Participants in Community Survey #1

Park, Open Space & Recreation



“Keep the Parks & Recreation program going strong. Kids need those activities; it will help them in their futures. Children are the future!”

“Better connections are needed to safely link those who live on the west side of Highway 371 to the rest of the community.”

—Participants in Community Survey #1

Overview

Nisswa's vision is to provide an inter-connected and highly accessible citywide recreational system with adequate public and private amenities that offer diverse and quality indoor/outdoor recreation for all.

Existing Conditions

The City of Nisswa has a mixture of recreational amenities. Outdoor recreation is a primary reason many residents have chosen to reside in this part of the Central Lakes Region. Preserving and enhancing recreational opportunities is a high priority in continuing the standard of living for residents. The Park and Recreation Advisory Commission reviews and makes recommendations regarding the parks, trails, and recreation programs.

Trails

The Paul Bunyan State Trail, a paved path that currently runs from Crow Wing State Park south of Baxter all the way north to Bemidji, runs through downtown Nisswa. The trailhead in the southeast Central Business District provides residents and tourists local access. The trail is a significant tourist attraction that invites trail users to spend time and money in Nisswa. During the summer, the trail is used for bicycling, walking, and in-line skating. Snowmobiling is the predominant winter use. In addition, countless snowmobile trails crisscross the Nisswa vicinity.

Trail Towns

Communities are realizing the economic potential of trails as highly desirable destinations that bring dollars to the places they serve. In addition to preserving vital open space and providing multi-modal transportation options, trails and greenways attract visitors from near and far. These visitors directly facilitate job growth in tourism related opportunities such as local stores, lodging, and restaurants.



Parks

Downtown “Pocket” Park

The Downtown “Pocket” Park was built in 2014 as part of a project to create a tunnel under Highway 371 to provide access for pedestrian, rollerbladers and bicyclists to get from Main Street to Nisswa Lake Park, a planned DNR public access, and a planned connection to the Gull Lake Trail, a trail for nonmotorized transportation that goes around Gull Lake. Benches, bike racks, and landscaping surround this area.

Nisswa Lake Park & Recreational Area

Nisswa Lake Park is close to downtown Nisswa on the shores of Nisswa Lake and provides nature-based recreational opportunities and access to the Gull Chain of Lakes for residents and visitors alike. The 2.1- acre park is adjacent and north of another parcel acquired by the DNR for use as a future public water access. The Nisswa Lake Park is being developed in partnership with The Friends of Nisswa Lake Park, and proposed amenities are a biking and/or walking trail, interpretative signage, observation areas, a picnic pavilion, restroom facilities, benches, a pier, a swimming area and boat docking facilities.

Nisswa City Park

Nisswa City Park, just north of downtown, is the city’s largest park with the most amenities. Existing facilities include: playground for children of all ages, baseball field with lights and electronic scoreboard, softball field with electronic scoreboard, basketball court, batting cage, soccer nets, three picnic pavilions, 11 picnic tables, 3 barbecue grills, year-round ADA restrooms, pickle ball courts, a full-size hockey rink with boards and Plexiglas, a recreational skating rink, a warming house with concession stand, and a Zamboni to maintain a quality ice surface. The park is popular with both youth and adult leagues of baseball, softball, and hockey.

City of Nisswa Parks and Recreation Department’s Mission:

The mission of the Nisswa Park Advisory Commission is to provide rewarding recreational opportunities and facilities for residents and visitors alike, regardless of age, economic status, race, creed, or physical or mental abilities or limitations.



Nisswa Elementary School Playground

The Elementary School hosts many different activities that follow the needs of the students, ages 4-10. The school has a fully featured playground with many pieces of equipment, including tire swings, slides, swings, a tennis court, a basketball court, two baseball diamonds with benches and bleachers, and a pavilion with eight picnic tables. The playground is open to the public in the summer months and is used by locals and vacationers alike. Nisswa Elementary School and the Parks and Recreation Department at the City of Nisswa share a great partnership in providing programming and athletics for kids who live in or around the City of Nisswa.

Open Space

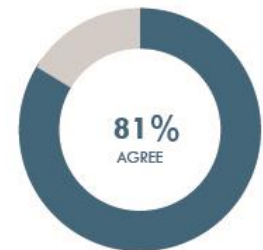
Open space is land that has been set aside in its natural state. No recreational or service facilities are needed to be recreational open space. Open space areas create a natural buffer between developments and allow for passive recreation, which can be as simple as walking along the beach or watching a bird fly over a lake. These types of opportunities allow people to enjoy nature and the surroundings that make Nisswa a great place to live and visit, as well as improve the well-being that makes for a better community. Passive recreation can be accommodated through setting aside open space for community enjoyment and nature preservation.

Nisswa Community Center

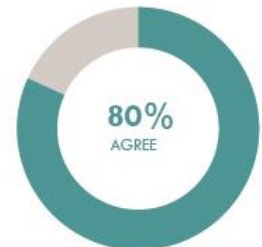
The Nisswa Community Center is used for indoor activities, public and civic group meetings, and is available for rent for private events. It has a commercial kitchen, multipurpose room, board room, restrooms and coat room. Storage lockers in the basement are provided free of charge to local civic groups.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONDENTS ANSWERED:

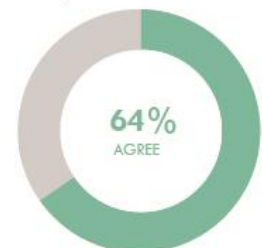
CITY PARKS MEET MY, OR MY FAMILY'S, DAILY RECREATIONAL NEEDS:



NISSWA IS EASILY ACCESSIBLE USING THE EXISTING TRAIL SYSTEM:



THE OFF-STREET TRAIL SYSTEM SHOULD BE IMPROVED/EXTENDED:

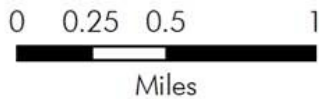


Public & Recreation Lands

Legend

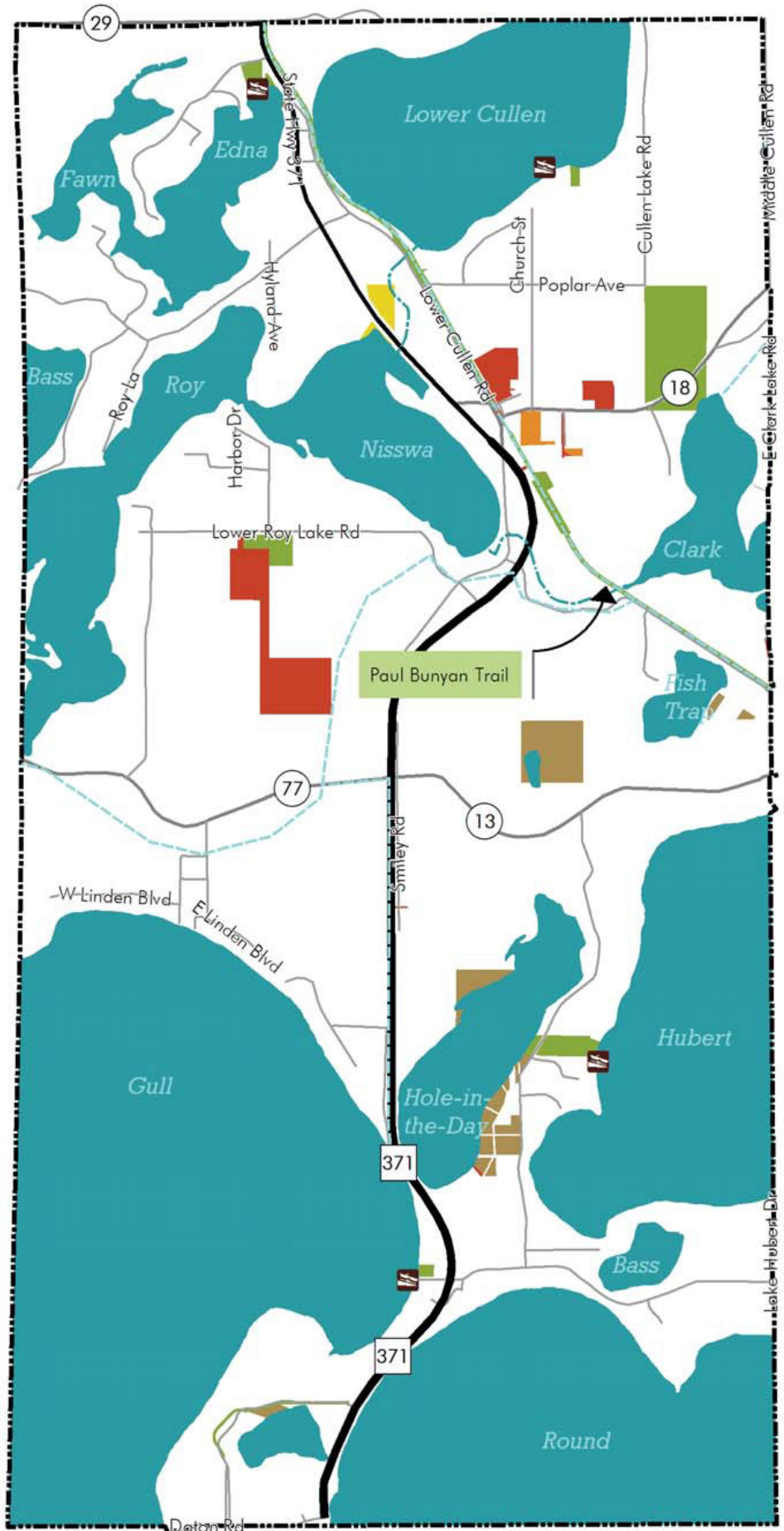
Property Owner

- City of Nisswa 
- Independent School District, #181 
- Department of Natural Resources 
- Tax Forfeited 
- United States of America 
- Public Lake Access 
- Snowmobile Trail 



Prepared July 2006

Sources: Crow Wing County, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

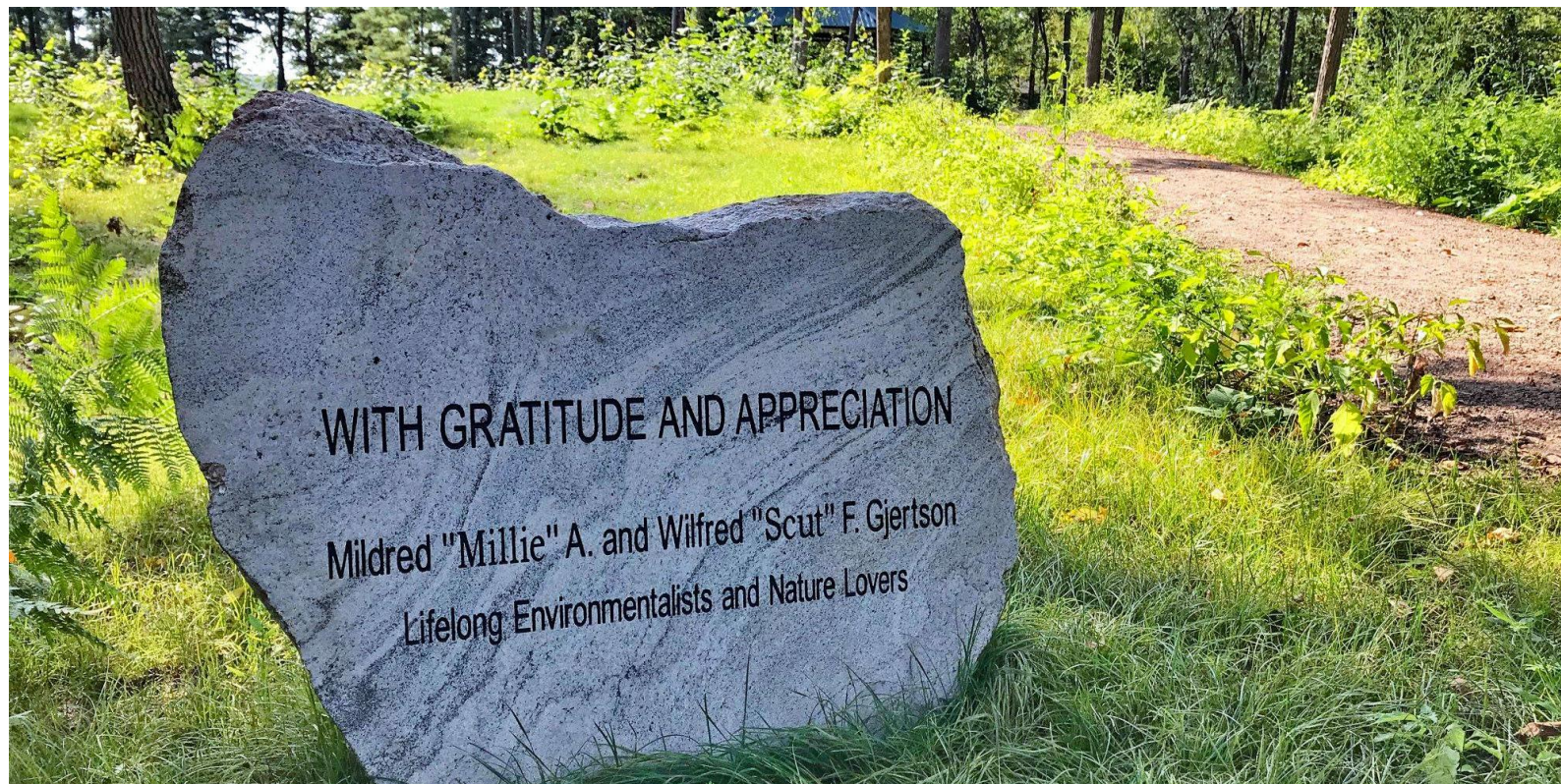




Park, Open Space, and Recreation Policies

The following are suggested policies of the City of Nisswa in relation to parks, open space, and recreational amenities and planning:

- 01 Expand the trail system to provide connections between the Paul Bunyan Trail, Gull Lake Trail, residential neighborhoods, commercial areas, and recreational sites within the city.** Trail connections enhance the recreational lifestyle of the city. They allow users to enjoy the experience of traveling in an environment safe and separate from the automobile. Having an expansive and connected trail network is Nisswa's top recreational priority.
- 02 Maintain and increase public access to the area's lakes through partnership with the DNR or other organizations.** Public lake access should be available for all residents and visitors so they can enjoy all that Nisswa has to offer and have a stake in protecting and enhancing the area lakes. Since most of the lakeshore is in private ownership, partnerships need to be forged to maintain existing access points and capitalize on other opportunities that may arise.
- 03 Provide a variety of options for recreational opportunities for residents and visitors of all ages, economic classes, and physical abilities.** Sports and recreational programs and facilities can benefit everyone and improve the collective health of the community. These offerings bring people together and engage them in activities that build a sense of community. There is a need to make sure that recreational offerings target a diverse group of participants.
- 04 Support increased opportunities for passive recreation and interaction with natural resources.** Passive recreation has universal appeal and caters to everyone regardless of skill or interest. The ability to enjoy the natural scenic beauty of Nisswa, whether during the course of everyday life or during a purposeful moment of solitude, gives great value to living in the community. The city should facilitate more ways for these opportunities to take place.



Park, Open Space, and Recreation Policies Continued

05 **Maintain and increase partnerships with the owners and operators of private recreational facilities and programs.** The City of Nisswa has some of the highest quality private recreational facilities built and maintained by those in the tourism and hospitality industry. The fact that these facilities are available for the public to access gives Nisswa residents a multitude of recreational offerings without having to pay the entire cost through local taxes and fees. Partnerships with those operating private recreational facilities and programs can increase participation levels and provide a mutual benefit to all parties.

06 **Encourage strong community involvement in the planning and locating of future park, recreation, and open space facilities.** Public recreation facilities are available for and used by the community at large. As such, the community should help determine where and when these facilities are installed to provide maximum benefit and availability. To maintain strong community support for recreational offerings, emphasis needs to be placed on involving the public in the planning of facilities.

07 **Develop and maintain a park, recreation, and open space master plan.** The development of a park, recreation, and open space plan will help coordinate the city's efforts to provide for the recreational needs of its residents by laying out a course of action and funding so people know what will be done, where, and when. Having such a plan is critical to sustaining and focusing the community's efforts.



Park, Open Space and Recreation Strategies

To implement these policies, the City of Nisswa should seek to implement the following strategies:

Short-Term Actions (within 12 months)

- None.

Mid-Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Create a park, recreation, open space, and citywide trail master plan.
- Seek funding opportunities for recreational programs and facilities.
- Work with the county to develop trails along the county road corridors.

Long-Term Actions (3 to 5 years)

- Develop an outdoor concert venue.
- Enhance existing recreation programs and facilities and work with neighboring communities to develop joint programs.
- Develop recreational swimming opportunities for the public.

Ongoing

- Continue to coordinate with area school districts on the use of school facilities.
- Continue to work with resorts, businesses, and individuals to increase recreational opportunities.



“Connect all current and future park land with a walking and bicycling system. All future development must provide green space and future trail access.”

—Participant in Community Survey #1

Transportation & Infrastructure



“Make certain there is a schedule for road improvements and followed.”

—Participant in Community Survey #1.

“A bicycle or walking trail along County Road 77. People are always there... it’s a very dangerous spot for both drivers and pedestrians.”

—Participant in Community Survey #1

Overview

The City of Nisswa’s transportation and infrastructure system will provide the foundation on which the city’s growth will be based. The physical form of the community will be shaped by these components and will play a part in promoting or limiting growth. Nisswa has a regionally connected transportation network and a centralized sewer system serving portions of the city. These investments, and the potential to expand them, provide a positive base from which the city can grow and continue to develop.

Roads

State Highway 371 is the main transportation corridor and runs north-south, bisecting the city. Highway 371 is the “gateway” to Nisswa and is a visitor’s first and sometimes only view of the city. The other two main roads are County Road 77 and County Road 13, which bisect the city north-south and provide local street access in addition to connecting Nisswa to the City of Lake Shore and Lake Hubert Township. County Road 18 begins just south of downtown Nisswa and extends to the east into Lake Edward Township.

Local roads are mostly low-capacity service roads. They tend to be very scenic, serving a limited amount of traffic in a neighborhood or a stretch of shoreline. They rarely meet city road standards, as local residents are generally not accepting of the extent of the improvements, specifically the clearing and ditching or the associated cost. The layout of the roads tends to parallel the shoreline, which gives them a lot of curves and bends.

Complete Streets

Complete Streets seek to change a paradigm so that pedestrian, bicycle, and transit accommodations are no longer seen as amenities to be included wherever possible. **It is the purpose of this policy to ensure that these are core elements of road design and implementation.**

The Complete Streets approach creates an integrated transportation system that supports safe travel for people of all ages and abilities. This approach redefines what a transportation network looks like, which goals a public agency sets out to achieve, and how communities prioritize their transportation spending.



Broadband

The term broadband refers to internet connections that can transfer data at high speeds. It is delivered through fiber and coaxial networks of cable providers; DSL service over the telephone network; optical fiber to homes or businesses; mobile and fixed wireless systems; and satellite connections. Border-to-border high-speed internet access is the goal throughout Minnesota to ensure that homes, schools, hospitals, and businesses have access to the technology and information resources they need to grow and thrive. This effort is being led in part by the Minnesota Department of Economic and Employment Development.

A key question for the community is: Can a business plan be created where the projected revenue stream exceeds combined capital and operating costs? Saying no doesn't necessarily relegate the community to modems and satellite, but it means creativity will be needed. Larger networks, such as county or regional geographic focus, are a way to offset that cost.

Sewer Capacity

Expanding the capacity of Nisswa's central sewer system and exploring a variety of alternative sewage management methods are central to residents' desire to protect water quality and promote strong economic development. The existing treatment system is nearing capacity, and geographically most of the city is not served. Alternative wastewater management systems need to be used in areas outside of the central sewer service area.

Stormwater




Stormwater runoff is of concern to Nisswa as it affects the quality of area lakes and can affect shallow wells and groundwater supplies. Ideally stormwater is reabsorbed where it falls by using green infrastructure. Most green infrastructure mimics the natural processes of soils and vegetation to capture, slow, and filter runoff, often allowing it to recharge groundwater, but some practices collect and store rainwater for future use. Examples include swales, rain gardens, and cisterns.

Infrastructure Expansion and Maintenance Funding Sources

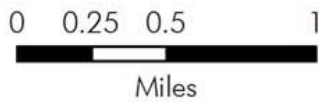
Nisswa residents realize that there must be a balance between desired improvements and maintenance and available funding sources. The city needs to explore alternative funding sources in addition to property taxes to provide the capital necessary to improve the community, not unduly overburden taxpayers, and promote innovative methods for accomplishing infrastructure and maintenance improvement goals.

Sanitary Sewer Service Area Plan

Legend

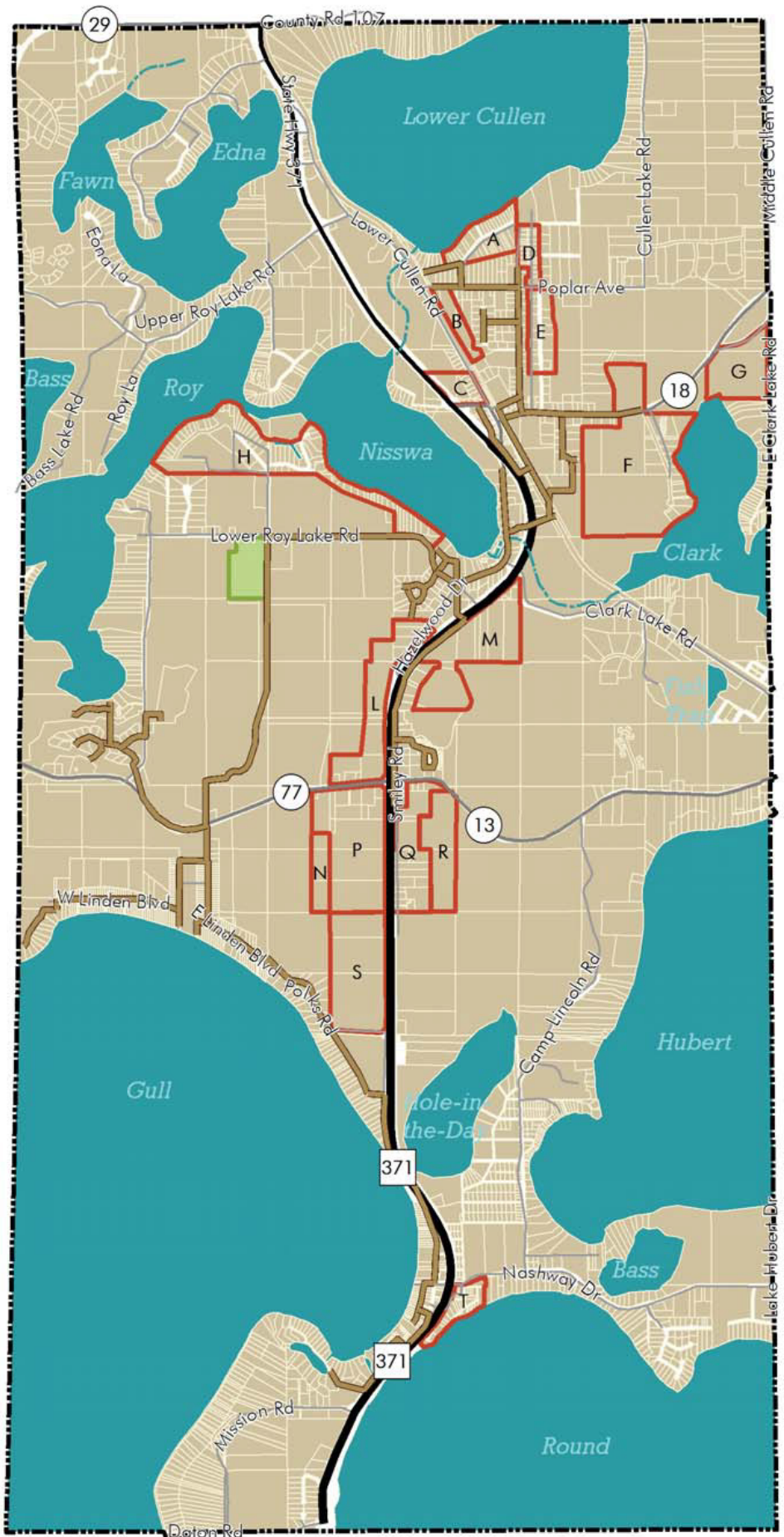
- Future Sewer Target Areas 
- Treatment Facility 
- Existing Sanitary Sewer Line 

The 20-year sanitary sewer service area plan was outlined by the City's Engineer, Widseth Smith Nolting, in October of 2005. This map reflects the plan originally prepared by WSN.



Prepared January 2007

Sources: Widseth Smith Nolting, Minnesota Department of Transportation, City of Nisswa, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.



Transportation and Infrastructure Policies

The following are suggested policies of the City of Nisswa in relation to transportation and infrastructure:

- 01 **Work to develop an efficient and high-quality transportation network that supports the land use development policies, is sensitive to environmental concerns, promotes safe and efficient transportation movements, supports multi-modal transportation uses, and is fiscally responsible.** Promoting interconnected roadways improves the overall safety of the transportation system, provides alternative routes for users, and ensures a more efficient transportation network. A well-developed transportation network also reduces maintenance costs and facilitates future growth and development in areas that are suitable and capable of handling this growth. Where possible, utilize a Complete Streets methodology in the design and reconstruction of streets.
- 02 **Provide flexibility to allow for a natural aesthetic in the design of local roads, where it can be balanced with safety and functional concerns.** Local streets are important to the functioning of the transportation system, but recommended standards often exceed what is needed or desirable on local streets. While safety and function remain paramount, a compromise needs to be maintained that allows for the natural and scenic beauty of local streets to remain as they are improved.
- 03 **Provide a municipal sewer system that would meet the needs of the current users and anticipate future growth.** Limited sewer capacity could put the city in a difficult position of having to artificially limit development in areas where it would be desirable and beneficial.
- 04 **Allocate excess capacity in the municipal wastewater system to those identified areas that maximize the effectiveness of the system.** An efficient wastewater system serves the greatest number of people with the least amount of infrastructure and maintenance cost necessary. The system also facilitates for the greatest investment along the installed lines and generally creates the highest tax base. The Nisswa wastewater system should serve those areas where the density is sufficient, or will be sufficient, to support the costs of installing and maintaining the system over the long term.
- 05 **The municipal sewer system must be fiscally managed to provide for the long-term capital costs of operation.** In a political environment, it is sometimes difficult to raise fees for the use of public services. Residents of Nisswa understand that fiscally sound management of the city's wastewater utility means that rates need to be examined routinely to make sure that revenues are keeping up with the long-term capital replacement costs. Large balances in capital improvement funds are necessary over time to ensure that large property tax increases are not necessary to maintain the wastewater system.
- 06 **Incorporate stormwater management systems into private development and public improvement projects.** Awareness has increased on the impact of stormwater on the area lakes. As lands are developed or public improvements planned, great care needs to be taken to manage stormwater to minimize the impacts of runoff and erosion.



Transportation and Infrastructure Strategies

To implement these policies, the City of Nisswa should seek to implement the following strategies:

Short-Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Identify priority areas for centralized sewer and plan for the demand to be generated from that area.
- Identify areas where density or environmental resources would warrant consideration of managed cluster wastewater systems. Plan for the creation of those systems.
- Perform an inventory and lifecycle analysis of all public infrastructure maintained by the city. Use this to create a Capital Improvements Plan that provides for ongoing maintenance of public infrastructure.
- A comprehensive traffic study should be completed in both the downtown and Grand View Lodge areas.
- Adopt an ordinance that meets the Crow Wing County SSTS (Sanitary Sewer Treatment System) Ordinance to ensure conformity with their standards.

Mid-Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Expand the centralized treatment facility as currently proposed to increase the treatment capacity of the existing system.
- Allocate wastewater capacity to commercial areas, high-density residential areas, and transient resort areas.
- Re-examine the city's official road standards to include trails, where practical, to ensure that they are consistent with the guidelines of this plan.
- Ensure that the city's road standards include trails as part of basic infrastructure, not a recreational amenity provided in lieu of park dedication.

Long-Term Actions (3 to 5 years)

- Explore partnering with neighboring jurisdictions and area communities, through a joint powers board, to discuss regional planning issues, coordinate planning and provision of services, and identify and consider work on projects of regional significance.
- Work with the state, county, and local providers to do a feasibility study to increase broadband speed to areas in Nisswa that are underserved.

Ongoing

- None



“Improvements in our streets and maintenance and safe crossings for pedestrians in the downtown area are things that need to change in the City of Nisswa.”

“A trail connecting Nisswa to Lake Shore would be beneficial to residents of Nisswa, Grand View Lodge, Nisswa downtown businesses, Nisswa Lake Park, and Lake Shore restaurants.”

—Participants in Community Survey #1

Future Land Use



“Balanced plan to allow reasonable growth for housing, manufacturing, business development and tourism growth, along with a clear understanding of the needed infrastructure and a responsible budgeting plan.”

–Participant in Community Survey #1

Future Land Use

Land uses within Nisswa follow the pattern of forested, lakeside resort towns in Minnesota. The two predominant features in the city are open water (largely in the form of lakes) and forested land.

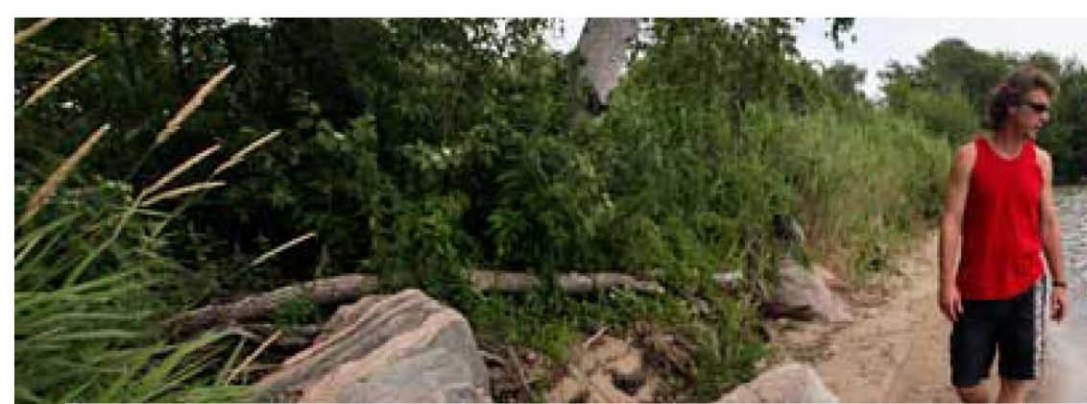
Future Land Use Map

A Future Land Use Map (FLUM) cares not about whether growth will happen, but rather where it will occur and roughly in what form.

The FLUM helps the Planning Commission and City Council respond to individual development and redevelopment requests. Land use planning provides general guidance for the development and use of all land within the city. It is important to understand that this plan is implemented through various private and public investments in land development, in addition to detailed planning, zoning, and subdivision ordinances, public improvement, and incentives. The FLUM does not share the same legal weight as the city’s zoning map. The FLUM should be considered a guide, an overall expression, or vision of the community, and should be used to influence future land use decisions – not regulate the activities in specific zones.

The land use plan is a statement of policies public and private decision makers depend on to guide land actions such as property purchasing, project design, approval processes, and development. It is important that the FLUM, as a decision-making tool, be viewed as general in nature and should not be used for site-specific decisions. For this reason, only general locations for designated land uses are mapped.

EXISTING LAND USE ACREAGE - Table 3.1		
Land Use	Acres	Percent of Total
Residential	4,839	44%
Commercial	882	8%
Public/Civic	365	3%
Park	92	2.2%
Recreation	481	4%
Right of Way	200	1.8%
Water	4,082	37%
TOTAL	11,037	



Future Land Use Categories

These categories are not current zoning classifications, although the integrated growth plan should be referenced when making future land use and zoning decisions. In addition to these categories, the City of Nisswa must consider design guidelines for future development and redevelopment opportunities. These guidelines would ensure that future signage, building exteriors, landscaping, and development designs fit in with the small-town, north woods feel of Nisswa.

Open Space: A designation for the preservation of publicly-owned lands, environmentally sensitive lands, wetlands, unique resources, historic sites, and land set aside as part of the development process.

Recreation: A designation for lands to be used for public and private recreational facilities.

Waterfront Commercial: Shoreline properties that are most suitable for commercial development, typically as a resort or restaurant.

Highway Commercial: A designation for non-shoreline property that is best suited for auto-oriented commercial development.

Historic Central Business District: A designation for property within the historic downtown.

Central Business District: A designation for property that is best suited for pedestrian-oriented, high-density commercial or mixed-use development.

Downtown Transition: A designation for property near or around a Central Business District that is suited for high-density residential development.

Shoreline Residential: A designation for shoreline properties to be developed residentially.

Neighborhood Residential: A designation for properties that are non-shoreline and have developed, or are suitable to be developed, in a residential neighborhood.

Rural Preservation: A designation for properties that are non-shoreline and have developed, or are suitable to be developed, to preserve the rural character of the area. Lot sizes would be greater than neighborhood residential.

Conservation Subdivision: A designation for properties that are non-shoreline and are most suited to being developed using conservation design principles. Conservation design would allow for preservation of open spaces and sensitive areas while allowing increased development flexibility in areas most suitable to development.

Definition of Low Impact Development

Low impact development (LID) is a more environmentally sensitive approach to developing land and managing stormwater runoff. It is a stormwater management strategy concerned with maintaining or restoring the natural hydrologic functions of a site to achieve natural resource protection objectives and fulfill environmental regulatory requirements. LID employs a variety of natural and constructed features that reduce the rate of runoff, filter out its pollutants, and facilitate the infiltration of water into the ground. By reducing water pollution and increasing groundwater recharge, LID helps to improve the quality of receiving surface waters.

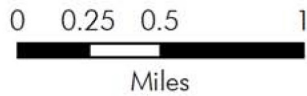
(Source: U.S. Department of Defense, UFC 3-210-10).

Future Land Use

Legend

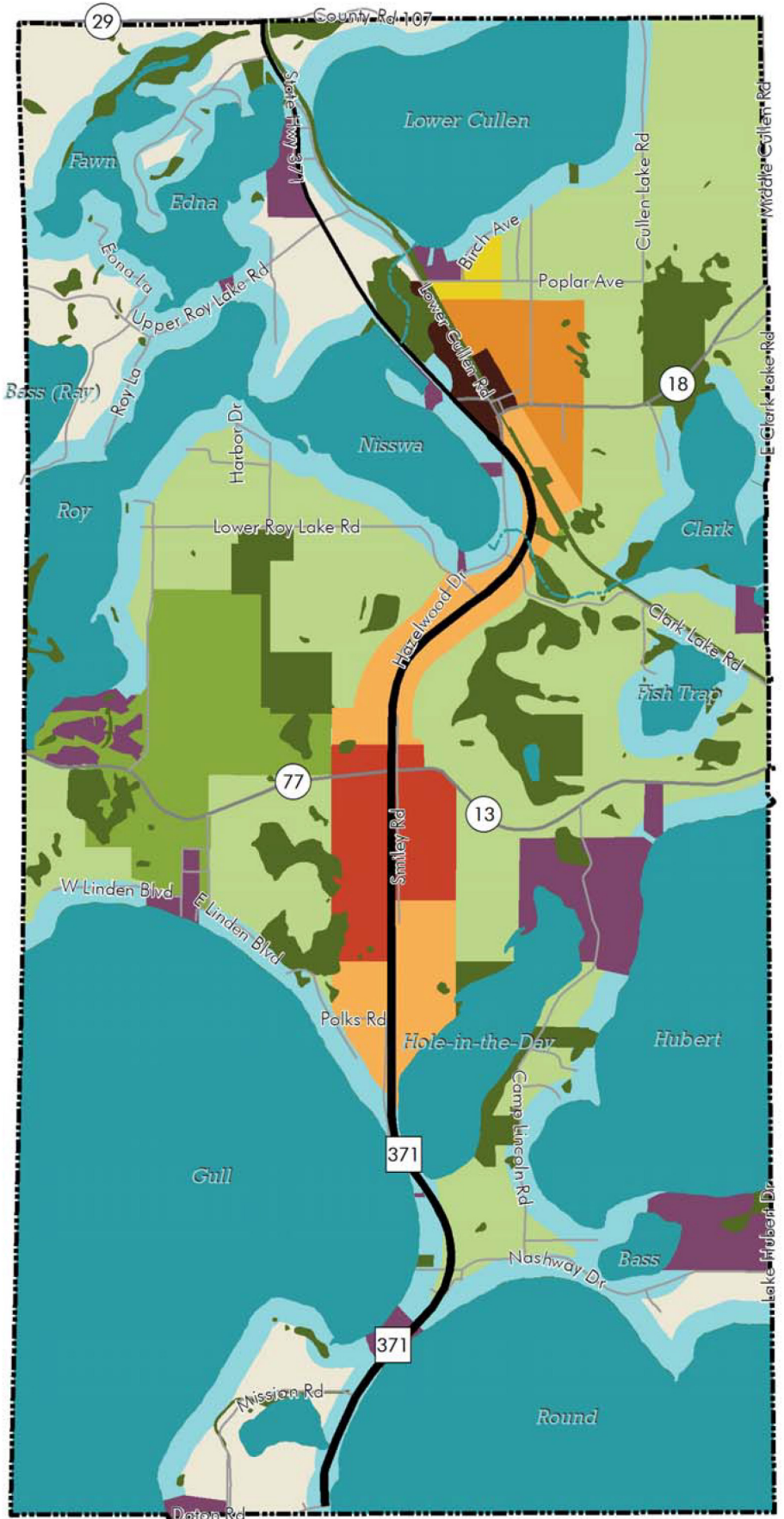
Future Land Use Category

- Open Space
- Recreation
- Rural Preservation
- Conservation Subdivision
- Neighborhood Residential
- Shoreline Residential
- Waterfront Commercial
- Highway Commercial
- Downtown Transition
- Historic Central Business District
- Central Business District
- Lakes
- Stream



Prepared January 2007

Sources: Citizens of Nisswa, Crow Wing County, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.



NOTE: The City of Nisswa will review and update the Future Land Use Map into the Comprehensive Plan within 12 months.



Land Use Strategies

To implement these policies, the City of Nisswa should seek to implement the following strategies:

Short-Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Review and update the Future Land Use Map.
- Complete a “Housing” chapter of this plan and proceed through the amendment process.
- Consider providing for a second Central Business District zone in the TH 371/CSAH 13 area.
- Provide for mixed-use development and higher densities, including housing options in and around the Central Business District so as to increase the year-round population that will have pedestrian access to the downtown.
- Create an urban growth area around the downtown where development standards can have the added flexibility needed for growth.
- Evaluate the need to adopt a commercial district that puts higher restrictions on impervious coverage and preserved forest tracts.

Mid Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Institute Low-Impact Development standards for commercial areas within the city.

Long-Term Actions (3 to 5 years)

- Create an inventory of developable land. Use this to create a master plan for future development.
- Plan for the improvement of connectivity among housing, recreational amenities, employment, and retail centers.

Ongoing

- Encourage redevelopment and infill development over new development of pristine sites.

Land Use Policies

The following are suggested policies of the City of Nisswa in relation to land use:

- 01** **Orderly development should be provided for by establishing suitable relationships among natural resources, commercial, residential, and other land uses.** Development should follow the patterns established in the Future Land Use Map.
- 02** **Development and redevelopment need to happen in a manner and scale that are sensitive to the character of existing neighborhoods.** New homes and buildings should fit in with the surrounding environment. The height, bulk, and design of new construction should be in keeping with nearby existing structures.
- 03** **The city should encourage development that would enhance and strengthen the downtown.** A successful downtown is one that provides for a range of needs: neighborhood goods and services; places to live, shop, eat, and be entertained; and opportunities for employment. Nisswa already has a successful downtown, but new businesses will need to be created for the success to continue. The city should encourage local ownership of retailers and businesses.

Implementation

Overview

Preparing the Nisswa Comprehensive Plan document has accomplished two important aspects for planning Nisswa's future.

First, it serves as an **organizing tool** that says who the citizens of Nisswa are and expresses their passion on the issues and challenges affecting the quality of life in Nisswa. It provides background information on Nisswa's social and economic assets as the basis for future policy and decisions.

Second, it provides a **community vision**, a look into the future at the kind of community citizens seek, focusing on what kinds of improvements need to be made, and providing a framework for how and where these improvements should occur.

A third piece of this plan that is crucial to its ultimate success is the **implementation system**. Implementation of the plan will take hard work and commitment, not just from elected leaders, but from appointed officials, city staff, local citizens, and a wide variety of volunteers and interest groups. Because there are too many strategies in this plan for the City Council to implement all on their own, cooperation among these stakeholders must happen to implement the plan and make the community vision a reality.

To do this, the City Council should utilize or create the following boards or committees to assist in implementing the strategies of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Planning Commission/Board of Adjustment
- Economic Development Authority
- Chamber of Commerce
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission
- Public Works Committee

The City Council should delegate implementation of specific strategies in this plan to each group, with city staff providing support to these groups and reporting back to the City Council. Each board/commission should prepare an annual report detailing their progress in accomplishing the goals and implementing the assigned strategies of this plan.

This Comprehensive Plan is a long-term vision and framework for action for the City of Nisswa. As such, it must be updated periodically, recommending minor changes when aspects of the plan no longer reflect the will of the community. Such changes will require a public hearing in order to take effect and should not be done half-heartedly. A communitywide review of the Comprehensive Plan should be done every five years.

The plan, once adopted, becomes the guiding document for city policy. Although the City Council is ultimately responsible for implementing the vision of the plan, the only way to make sure that the plan is implemented is for concerned citizens to stay involved.

HOUSING

The City of Nisswa recognizes the impact of housing on the entire community. With that in mind this document will be finalized without any policies or action plans for housing at this time. The city will take a deeper look into this topic and incorporate a robust Housing section to incorporate into the Comprehensive Plan within 12 months.



Minnesota GreenStep Cities Program

This program provides best practices and five steps in creating a sustainable cities program, free to cities, that will challenge, assist, and recognize cities that were “green stars.” The program recognizes that no one process fits all cities in organizing steps in order to become a GreenStep City. The following is an overview of the five steps to become certified:

Step One

- Build community knowledge and interest.
- Approve a city council resolution to work toward GreenStep Cities recognition.

Step Two

- Post initial information on GreenStep Cities’ website via the log-in page.
- Get organized to begin work on implementing best practices.
- Implement best practices.

Step Three

- Continue to work on best practices.

Step Four

- Measure and report a minimum number of core and optional metrics for the previous calendar year or most recent available data.

Step Five

- Demonstrate improvement in three eligible metrics, measured in step four, from one year to the next.

Public Engagement as a Form of Sustainability

Sustaining Places: Best Practices for Comprehensive Plans states that entities should, “Ensure that the planning process actively involves all parts of the community in analyzing issues, generating visions, developing plans, and monitoring outcomes.” Public participation is a backbone of demographic governance and decision-making. By actively involving the entire community in making and implementing plans, the unit of government fulfills its responsibilities to keep all citizens informed and to offer them the opportunity to influence actions that affect them.

The following are best practices to support authentic participation:

- Engage stakeholders at all stages of the planning process.
- Seek diverse participation in the planning process.
- Promote leadership development in disadvantaged communities through the planning process.
- Develop alternative scenarios of the future.
- Provide ongoing and understandable information for all participants.
- Use a variety of communication channels to inform and involve the community.
- Continue to engage the public after the comprehensive plan is adopted.

