

# Nisswa Comprehensive Plan – Text Version

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## Background Information

Since Minnesota became a state in 1858, the patterns of growth and change have largely been driven by changes in transportation and communications technology. Nisswa's existence is no different. Since the community's petition to become an organized township was granted on July, 9<sup>th</sup> 1900, various phases of technological innovation have had a significant influence both on the town's level of success as a center of economic activity and growth, as well as in the patterns and styles of development that have taken place. Each successive phase has been marked by an expansion of the amount of land on which it was economically and socially feasible to live or operate a business.

### The Railroad Phase (late 1800s – 1920)

The area surrounding Nisswa has traditionally incorporated a mixture of cultures and has been inhabited for centuries before French explorers came to the area. Small towns and unincorporated townships in north-central Minnesota, such as those in the Central Lakes Region, were established largely due to the influence of railroad companies and the rail lines they built. In 1899, the Minnesota Logging Railroad was established, preceding the Brainerd & Northern Minnesota, and finally the Minnesota and International (M & I) railroads.

The popular Paul Bunyan State Trail that stretches between Brainerd/Baxter and Bemidji runs along a former Burlington Northern Railroad grade. Regional production centers like Brainerd and Little Falls would transport agricultural products to Minneapolis and St. Paul for further processing or distribution. Due to the limited road network in place at the time, Nisswa and other towns had to be built in a very compact manner that placed most homes and businesses within walking distance of the rail line running through town.

Occupied Housing Units by Year Built							
	1939 and Earlier	1940- 1959	1960- 1969	1970- 1979	1980- 1989	1990- 1999	2000- 2002
Nisswa	160	224	223	308	193	342	91

Source: U.S. Census; City Building Permits

\* The Census reported units constructed through March of 2000. Because of weather conditions, it is assumed that permits for housing occupied housing in March 2000 would have been issued in 1999.

### The Automobile Phase (1920-1965)

After the invention of the personal automobile, steadily improving road networks escorted Nisswa into a period of new freedom and mobility. Residents in the area became more connected to the small towns located nearby for their daily needs and social interactions. The City of Brainerd emerged as a regional attraction for shopping and employment.

Improvements along the Leech Lake Trail (Highway 371) allowed urban residents from Minneapolis/St. Paul and other urban centers to live and vacation in the Central Lakes area (Table 1). The enhancement of this former Chippewa path allowed the growing population of Nisswa and Crow Wing County to spread out into residential areas further from the railroad lines and the central business district of the city.

Lake	1924 (End of Railroad Era)	1965 (End of Automobile Era)	% Built in Auto Era
Nisswa	29	58	67%
Lower Cullen	20	93	82%
Middle Cullen	8	88	92%
Upper Cullen	1	14	93%
East Twin	2	38	95%
Mayo	1	30	97%
Sibley	2	69	97%
Upper Hay	2	107	98%
Total	65	497	88%

(Source: Process of Lakeshore Development in Crow Wing County, George Orning's Masters Thesis)

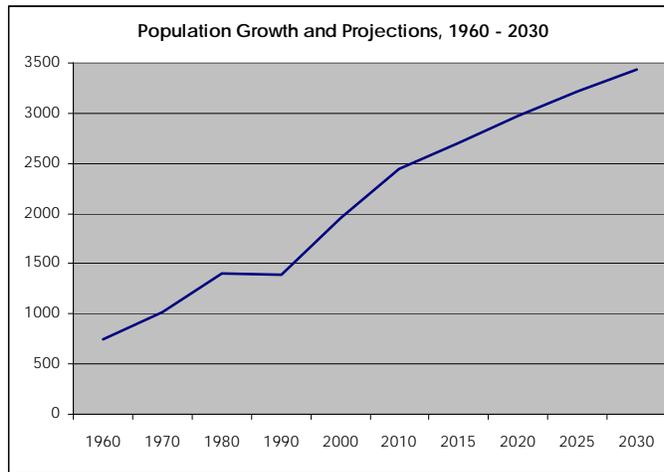
### Current Trends

The 1970s heralded the onset of the jet-satellite electronic era, which continues today. This era is marked by technological advances in telecommunications such as telephones, computers, internet service, and satellite service. The interconnectivity these services provide allow many to work at locations other than a central office, which may be one explanation for Nisswa's growth of both seasonal and year-round residents. This technology, coupled with expansions of sewer service and the Northern States Power gas line throughout the Central Lakes Region has resulted in its current status as the fifth fastest growing region in Minnesota.

The City of Nisswa is situated in the high-growth Central Lakes Region of Minnesota, which draws people with its abundance of amenities and natural resources. With its proximity to the regional hub of Brainerd and along State Highway 371, the City of Nisswa is perfectly situated to intercept much of that growth.

The City of Nisswa has a current population of 2,168 people based on the 2005 estimate from the Minnesota State Demographic Center. This figure is based on the number of people that claim the city as their primary home. This number does not reflect the visitors or seasonal residents that claim another home as their primary residence.

Nisswa's population has been steadily increasing and has nearly tripled since the 1960's, when there were 742 residents. According to the State Demographic Center and the U.S. Census Bureau, the city has experienced a 55.9% increase in population since 1990, with the exception of a stagnant period from the mid-1980's to the mid-1990's. The Demographic Center predicts that these growth trends will continue, projecting the city to grow an additional 58.3% by 2030, resulting in a total population of roughly 3,431 people.



The number of people per household has been steadily declining over the past thirty years. In 1970, the City averaged nearly three (3) people per household, but by the year 2000, this average had dropped to 2.37 people per household. This decrease in household size is similar to the regional trend, and is reflective of the growing number of residents choosing to live in the area following retirement.

The number of households in Nisswa increased from 338 households in 1970 to 819 households in 2000. The increase in the total number of households can be expected to mirror population, with the growth in households being slightly higher due to the decrease in the average household size.

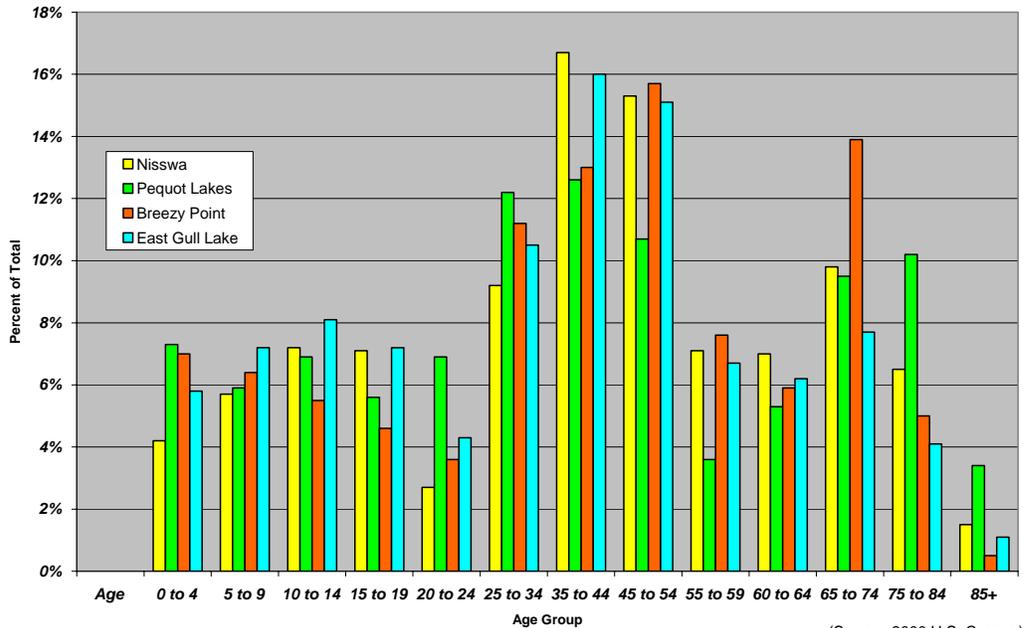
Another factor regarding population and housing trends is the ratio of year-round homes to homes used for seasonal or recreational purposes. Many communities in the Central Lakes Region have seen a transition from primarily seasonal homes and cabins to year-round homes. Many new residents have chosen to build year-round homes.

The City of Nisswa is no exception to this trend. In 1990, the proportions of seasonal and year-round homes were roughly the same, with roughly 49.3% of the homes being used seasonally. By the year 2000, the percentage of seasonal homes had dropped from nearly half of the houses in the city to about 42% overall.

This decline does not mean that all seasonal homes are being converted to year-round residences. On the contrary, the City experienced a 15% increase in the number of seasonal homes built between 1990 and 2000. Nisswa also saw a 52% rise in the number of year-round homes during the same time period.

When trying to estimate the number of housing units to expect from the projected population in the City, one must keep in mind the decline in household size and the conversion of seasonal homes to year-round homes. These factors, along with the availability of developable land and an aging population influence the amount and type of population and housing growth in the City of Nisswa.

**2000 Age Distributions of Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Breezy Point, and East Gull Lake**



The age distribution among residents of Nisswa mirrors regional trends. The numbers of children who are below high school graduation age is fairly evenly distributed between each age cohort. As expected, there is a decline in college-age young adults as they must leave Nisswa to pursue additional education. The largest percentage of City residents is made up of adults in their prime working years (ages 25-54). This large age cohort is due to the advances in technology and transportation which allow working adults to work remotely in Nisswa or commute to the Brainerd area for employment. As the baby boomer population ages and seeks out amenity-rich areas for retirement, the percentage of residents in these older cohorts will increase. With the continuation of large numbers of workers retiring and moving to the Central Lakes Region, the trend of large amounts of retirees in Nisswa is expected to persist.

## **Future Challenges and Opportunities**

Over the next 20 years, 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 rapid 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.

### **Lakeshore Privatization**

As a result of the expansion of resorts and lake homes from 1920 – 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.

### **Budget Limitations and Potential Reductions**

Over the past decade, funding for economic development, education, affordable housing, and parks and recreation has decreased at the county, state, and federal levels. Recent State budget deficits are likely to extend into the future. Despite relatively stable local funding in Nisswa, reductions in local government aid and the impact of economic instability could lead to fluctuations in funding over the long-term.

### **Aging Infrastructure**

Urban services such as roads, parks, sewers, utilities, local government mergers, 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.

### **Improvements and Changes to Highway 371**

Proposed changes to Highway 371 will greatly impact Nisswa. If the highway is widened, the City will face the challenge of providing a safe, visually appealing, and pedestrian-friendly environment for visitors and residents in the face of increased traffic volume and speeds. Nisswa will also have to work hard to retain its rural, small town feel with a major highway dissecting the town.

### **Opportunities**

#### **Wealth of Natural Resources and Scenic Amenities**

Nisswa is endowed with forests, lakes, streams, and wetlands. While the lakes are fully developed and beginning to witness second-tier lakeshore development, 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 now, 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.

#### **Tourist Economy**

With its many resorts, the expanded Paul Bunyan Trail and Scenic Byway, and local shops, restaurants, and businesses, the Nisswa area draws a large number of tourists that help to support its economy. Tourism in Minnesota is a growing industry, marked by a 31 percent increase in gross sales from 1996 – 2000, and over 21 million pleasure trips to or through Minnesota in 2001. Nisswa's economy depends on families, retirees, and youth groups stopping in town for recreational opportunities. By protecting 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's local economy will remain strong.

#### **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.

#### **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 and recreational system in the community. Moreover, the general population has become more aware of health and environmental issues, leading to increased demand for recreation 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.

**Improvements and Changes to Highway 371**

Improvements to Highway 371 have the potential to bring new people to Nisswa. If designed correctly, these changes can spur to new businesses, more tourists, and greater efficiency in connecting people throughout the Central Lakes Region.

## **Community Character Action Plan**

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. Community Character is the most critical component of our plan.

### **The Elements of Nisswa's Community Character**

**The 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, lake chains, state parks (Crow Wing, south of Brainerd, and the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area near Crosby), state forests, wildlife management areas, and historic sites.

**The 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.

**The Lakes.** The lakes have long been the driving force behind Nisswa's growth and development, because they are highly desirable to live and vacation near. Lake recreation is a major component of the lifestyle year-round in Nisswa. Many of the lakes have retained large stretches of natural vegetated shoreline and provide some of the area's best fishing and opportunities for watching wildlife.

**The People.** Nisswa has a strong sense of community. Residents represent a broad array of backgrounds, interests, and education levels, and respect each other for their differences. Volunteerism and appreciation for the arts and natural resources are integral components of community life, and residents are active in a variety of civic groups, local clubs, and activities.

**The Social Institutions.** Residents have strong connections to local social institutions; especially the school, the churches, the post office, the 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 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. There are also a number of community service groups that maintain an important role in the community.

**The Tranquility.** Residents feel that the tranquility and character of Nisswa sets it apart from other cities in the lakes area, many of which feel loud, crowded, and over-used. People find value in the low crime rate and the peace and quiet of the neighborhoods and downtown. Numerous local parks throughout the City, as well as large tracts of private open-space, create an atmosphere conducive to relaxation and reflection.

**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 that is not shared by surrounding communities.

### **Community Character Policies**

**The natural beauty of Nisswa must be protected and enhanced.** Nisswa is known for its natural beauty during all seasons of the year. Although beauty is in the eye of the beholder, in Nisswa the natural beauty of the trees, lakes, and quaint neighborhoods are all part of the identity that distinguishes the community from an average Minnesota city. It is imperative to preserve the natural beauty and, where it is possible, enhance it.

**The lake water quality must be preserved, as the City's lakes are its most important resource.** 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.

**The natural system of lakes, wetlands, forests and open spaces must be understood and maintained.** The lakes, wetlands, forests, and open spaces all work together in a natural system that, when in balance, promotes the health and vitality of each of the components. Changes that reduce or fragment the forest canopy, impact wetlands, or reduce open spaces all have a cumulative impact on the lakes and the other components of these natural systems. The City must recognize the importance of these systems and protect the ecological balance that exists.

**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, a 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.

**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. Changes have been made statewide that de-emphasize the neighborhood school; therefore, Nisswa needs to strongly support the school and work to keep it viable.

**Promote neighborhood character by encouraging diversity of housing design and style.** Nisswa is not another cookie-cutter community, but this is due more to history than design. With new properties being developed and new neighborhoods created, there is a natural tendency to homogenize with the styles of the day that have been adopted by neighboring communities. Ordinances and regulations need to be examined and, where appropriate, revised to allow development techniques that would be compatible with and retain the unique character of Nisswa.

**Provide a wider range of development options to allow for affordable work-force housing and/or senior housing options.** City ordinances can be an obstacle to providing the opportunities needed to create affordable housing options. Large-lot development at current land prices is cost prohibitive for many people. Opportunities should be provided so that Nisswa can retain and attract people of all income levels.

**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.

**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 transforming compete is 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.

**Maintain Nisswa's status as the finest tourist community in the State of Minnesota.** Downtown Nisswa is Central Minnesota's premier tourist shopping destination and, when combined with the resorts, the golf, the lakes, the cabins, the trails and all of the natural beauty, the Nisswa area is the destination of choice within the State. The City is committed to doing what it takes to maintain this status.

## **Community Character Strategies**

To bring about these policies, the City of Nisswa will 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.
- Develop standards to allow reasonable use of non-conforming lots where it can be done in a manner consistent with the character of the community.
- Create an urban growth area around the downtown where development standards can have the added flexibility needed for growth.

### Mid Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Review the Comprehensive Plan to evaluate progress on strategy implementation and report the findings to the public.
- 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.
- In all commercial zones, study the impact of signage and the allowable size, height and quantity so that signs are consistent with the character of the community.
- 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.
- Develop a parking plan for the downtown area.

### Long Term Actions (3 to 5 years)

- Develop parking for the downtown that is off-site, perhaps with a shuttle service in conjunction with the City of Pequot Lakes.

## Economic Development Action Plan

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

The original commercial offerings in the City of Nisswa were retail/service businesses located at the railroad stop in downtown Nisswa and resorts along the shorelines of the area's lakes. As the community has grown, the commercial offerings have matured and evolved beyond the original few.

Today, the downtown has grown into a premiere retail shopping destination. Auto-oriented commercial development has sprung up along the Highway 371 corridor. The resort industry has consolidated, with fewer businesses now competing in a nationwide market. Changing demographics and technology have induced an entire sector of home occupations. This growth and development is all having a dramatic effect on how Nisswa is growing and remaining competitive in today's market.

### Existing Commercial Development Patterns

Most people think of "Downtown Nisswa" as the town that has grown up around the old railroad stop. The downtown contains restaurants, gift shops, craft shops, general small-scale retail shops, and service sector small businesses. 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 the use of awnings and other building façade features. Adding to the character and success of the downtown area is its convenient, pedestrian-friendly design with wide sidewalks and well-marked crosswalks. Because of this design, shoppers are able to park their vehicles along Main Street or in other areas immediately accessing the downtown and walk easily throughout the area without the inconvenience of having to drive short trips from store to store.

The "Regional Business Corridor" is located south of Nisswa's downtown area along State Highway 371. This area has several businesses which serve a more 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. Generally, the majority of the larger scale businesses with bigger parking areas have developed to the east of Highway 371 on CSAH 13 with smaller scale, light commercial businesses located to the west of the Highway on CSAH 77.

Comment [clm1]: Side bar on the Riedl property

Grand View Lodge is the largest employer in the City, employing four-times more people than Schaefer's Market and six-times more than Nisswa Elementary School,

the next two largest employers<sup>1</sup>. Grand View Lodge embodies the modern incarnation of the historic resort. With rising shoreline property values and demand from retiring baby-boomers for lake homes, many resorts have sold to residential developers. The resorts that remain are left to compete on a national level by offering world-class recreational opportunities to a much broader market. A consolidation of resort ownership combined with new methods of raising capital and sharing risk have become essential tools for a continued resort presence in Nisswa.

Although Nisswa long has had a segment of the population that has had home-based occupations, improvements in technology and transportation have working from home increasingly common. Everyone from realtors to contractors to business executives are now able to telecommute, using technology to keep in touch with co-workers, collaborators, and customers. There is no hard data on how much impact this has had on the local economy, but observation suggests the impact is already significant and is increasing. This trend will impact the traditional relationship between local jobs and housing demand in ways that are difficult to predict.

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 of the corridor would have a difficult time competing with the Baxter and Pequot Lakes parks, both of which have excellent accessibility.

### **Factors Influencing Growth**

While Nisswa can do much to attract and retain competitive businesses, there are a number of outside factors that may have a greater impact on commercial growth within the City.

### **The Rise of Brainerd/Baxter as a Powerful Regional Trade Center**

Just ten years ago, a trip from Nisswa to the nearest regional center meant a near three-hour round trip drive to St. Cloud. The explosive growth of the Brainerd/Baxter regional center, particularly the consumer and industrial growth relating to the Highway 371 corridor, now provides convenient alternatives for many service and consumer needs. This center will continue to grow, but invariably there will be an impact to the viability of competing businesses within driving distance, including those in Nisswa.

### **Aging and Shifting Demographics**

The most significant demographic force shaping Nisswa and the entire Central Lakes Region is the aging of the baby-boom generation and the increased number of retirees moving to the State's recreationally rich areas. The median age in Nisswa is 43, compared to 35 statewide.<sup>2</sup> This disparity will continue to widen in the coming

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Employment and Economic Development, [www.mnpro.com](http://www.mnpro.com)

<sup>2</sup> 2000 Census

years and will impact the area labor force if the rise in retirees continues to be combined with the migration of young workers to urban centers. As a demographic subset, baby-boomers are the most affluent retirees in history. These factors will have implications on the availability of venture capital as well as demand for consumer goods and services. In addition, the baby boomer generation has the ability and assets to provide mentorship on entrepreneurship in a small-town economy to younger generations.

### **Transportation Improvements**

Improvements to Highway 371 south of Baxter have resulted in a high-speed, four-lane highway connecting the region to Minneapolis/St. Paul and opening up many opportunities for Nisswa. Additional improvements to Highway 371 through Nisswa will further improve safety and increase the lateral connections of the county road system. These upgrades will create a number of opportunities for expanding local markets, but also a number of pressures from increased competition. Highway development that is indistinguishable in design from Baxter to the south and Pequot Lakes to the north threatens the character of the Nisswa community.

### **Zoning Controls in Adjacent Cities**

Nisswa has been, and will continue to be, impacted by the planning and zoning decisions of adjacent communities. Strip commercial zoning in the unorganized territory south of Nisswa provides lower-cost raw land, facilitating low-budget and somewhat chaotic commercial development just outside the City's border. The same is true to a lesser degree in the City of Pequot Lakes, which has experienced some highway-oriented commercial growth southward towards Nisswa and generally has more affordable land for development. The overall style of development is impacted by the commercial development along 371 through Baxter. Nisswa, for the most part, has maintained high-quality commercial investments and has resisted the temptation to compete with inexpensive land and lower standards, but the City is still impacted by the quality of development in adjacent communities, including the City of Lake Shore and Lake Edwards Township.

### **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 locally growing hospitality industry is essential to continuing growth and development in Nisswa's commercial areas.

### **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 enacted to guide the future economic growth and development in the City of Nisswa:

**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.

**Preserve and enhance the tourist-orientation and small-town character of the historic downtown area.** The historic downtown that has been created around the old railroad stop is the premier tourist shopping destination in Central Minnesota. The draw of this area is the eclectic mix of shops and the historic character. As the buildings mature and redevelopment occurs, the essential nature and qualities of this area need to be captured and remain if downtown Nisswa is to continue to be the tourist draw that it currently is.

**Expand opportunities to increase pedestrian traffic in the downtown.** The success of downtown businesses is directly related to the number of people walking on the streets. Events like parades, festivals and turtle races all draw people to the downtown. So does nearby housing, which has the added benefit of providing pedestrian traffic during off-peak times. The City needs to build on opportunities to bring more people to downtown and get them out of their cars and interacting with the community.

**Provide for high-density residential development where it will support and complement commercial service centers.** Downtown businesses experience peak sales during summer, during festivals and in the time leading up to holidays. There are periods of the year where some stores close as it does not pay to be open. Having an increase in the year-round population that is within walking distance to the downtown will help bolster the downtown businesses, particularly during slow times.

**Provide for flexibility of layout, design, and density where a new commercial development will connect to and strengthen the historic downtown.** The downtown that has been built around the historic railroad stop is the focal point of the community. The entire community benefits when this area is enhanced or strengthened. Since much of the area in and near downtown is already developed, added flexibility is going to be necessary if additional development or redevelopment is going to occur. Flexibility should be provided, particularly where the new development can be connected to the downtown.

**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.

**Maintain strong support for the area resorts and provide the flexibility needed for their continued growth and prosperity.** As the economics of the resort industry changes, 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.

**Encourage local ownership and management of downtown commercial properties.** The City wants to attract and encourage outside investment, but too much outside ownership can lead to disconnect between the community, the City, and the downtown property owners. In an ideal situation, the individual businesses in the downtown would be owned by the operator of the building, thus making the owner's priorities and the operator's priorities the same. This would create a more accommodating environment for the City to work with downtown business owners on improvement projects. The City should encourage local ownership and give preference for business incentives to those businesses that are locally owned and operated.

### **Economic Development Strategies**

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

#### Short Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Zone for a second, mixed-use Central Business District as a complement to the Historic Downtown.
- Zone the areas around the downtown for higher density housing options so as to increase the year-round population that will have pedestrian access to the downtown.
- Ensure that the City's ordinances have both a high standard for all future development and a clear path to approval for applicants.

**Comment [clm2]:** Explain the desire for a restaurant and how it relates to this strategy.

#### 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.

## Natural Resources Action Plan

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 (See Presettlement Vegetation and Land Use Maps). 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 water fowl, 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.

Comment [clm3]: Wetland resources map

### 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 present 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 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 to prevent failures. Provisions for alternative on-site sewage treatment methods are necessary for areas not served by the municipal sewer system.

**Lakes**

The City of Nisswa has experienced a 55 percent increase in population since 1990; this trend is likely to continue throughout the region and, in turn, to affect the community. The primary reason for this growth is the attraction of the area’s lakes. Nisswa is home to thirteen lakes which 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.

**Comment [clm4]:** Diagram outlining lake quality.

<u>Lake Name</u>	<u>Trophic Status</u>
Clark	Mesotrophic
Edna	Oligotrophic
Fawn	Oligotrophic
Fish Trap	Not Available
Gull	Mesotrophic
Hubert	Mesotrophic
Lower Cullen	Mesotrophic
Nisswa	Mesotrophic
Roy	Mesotrophic

Because local lakes are such a vital part of Nisswa’s economy, ensuring their natural health and wellbeing 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. Further complicating this process is the high proportion of lots in Nisswa that have a high potential for redevelopment.

<b>Lake Name</b>	<b>Total Number of Parcels Adjacent to Lake</b>	<b>Number of Developed Parcels</b>	<b>Number of Parcels with High or Very High Redevelopment Potential</b>	<b>% of Developed Parcels with High or Very High Redevelopment Potential</b>
Lower Cullen	126	100	95	95.0%

Edna/Fawn	123	84	78	92.9%
Roy	164	130	129	99.2%
Nisswa	79	57	53	93.0%
Clark	71	53	50	94.3%
Fish Trap	16	6	2	33.3%
Bass (North)	1	0	0	0.0%
Gull	256	183	179	97.8%
Hole-in-the-Day	20	6	5	83.3%
Hubert	114	87	86	98.9%
Bass (South)	17	6	2	33.3%
Round	85	61	60	98.4%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1072</b>	<b>773</b>	<b>739</b>	<b>95.6%</b>

Table (X) denotes lots by lake that show potential for redevelopment as a comparison between the value of the existing structure and the value of the land itself.

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.<sup>3</sup>

### 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*, and 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.

Comment [clm5]: Rare species and core forest habitat map

<sup>3</sup> According to The Water's Edge, published by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and University of Minnesota, 2003

## 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 Nisswa today. 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 help determine where the City of Nisswa should direct future development. Crow Wing County compiled a Soil Survey in 1957 that identified areas suitable for various types of development. By directing growth to suitable areas that can support it with minimal property damage to landowners or negative impact to the natural environment, the City of Nisswa can accommodate future growth without compromising groundwater quality.

Comment [clm6]: Map and analysis on soils and geology.

## Environmental Health

Nisswa's environment is a complex system of flora, fauna, geologic and natural features (including lakes) and human use and habitation. Each of 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 to 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.

## Natural Resources Policies

**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.

**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 at a rapid rate, 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.

**Comment [clm7]:** Slide on cumulative impact of shoreline redevelopment.

**Ensure that development and redevelopment within the watershed does 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.

**Comment [clm8]:** Sidebar on the impact of increased impervious coverage.

**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.

**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, either through wells 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.

**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.

**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.

**Comment [clm9]:** Map of forest cores and migration areas.

**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 to ensure that everyone's values are respected.

## Natural Resources Strategies

To enact the City's policies, the following strategies have been adopted:

Short Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Evaluate the new 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 conservation design)
- Define preservation strategies for forested lands and wetlands as part of the future land use plan.
- Create incentives for development that employs conservation design.
- Continue the stringent wetland setback standards currently in use.
- 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.

Comment [clm10]: Provide a definition of rip rap.

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.
- Manage stormwater on a parcel-by-parcel basis through the permitting process.
- Promote alternative storm water management designs (i.e., rain gardens, swales, French drains).
- Establish an education program to encourage septic system maintenance and compliance.
- Establish and/or maintain trees and establish natural stormwater systems (i.e., rain gardens) within commercial and residential developments. Include provisions for ongoing maintenance of trees and landscaping.
- Require compliance inspections of existing on-site septic systems for all systems within the City. Establish a record-keeping system for monitoring compliance.
- Identify and protect wildlife corridors linking patches of core forest habitat area.

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.

- Educate citizens on wetland protection, conservation easements, shoreland restoration measures, and other best management practices by distributing information with building permits, utility mailings, and in a City newsletter.
- Establish a recycling education program.
- Develop lake management plans for each lake in the City that include lake-specific management guidelines.
- Document and map existing shoreline conditions. Develop a program for doing this on an ongoing basis.

## Recreation Action Plan

The recreational amenities that are found in Nisswa and the surrounding area epitomize people’s perceptions of the good-life that is Minnesota. Tall pines, clear lakes, and a sense of separation from a hectic lifestyle are enough to champion Nisswa as a wonderful place to which to relocate or just spend a relaxing weekend. The current residential population of Nisswa chooses to remain in the City due to the abundance of natural scenery with trees and lakes, recreational amenities within the city and nearby communities, and a thriving downtown. The same benefits are attracting new residents and tourists to Nisswa. This high quality of life needs to be preserved for all who call Nisswa home whether for a day or a lifetime. Maintaining top-tier recreational programs and facilities will continue to attract residents to live in the community and visitors to relax and support local enterprises. Preserving the character of natural splendor and enhancing recreational opportunities is a pressing challenge that Nisswa must address.

### Trails

A distinctive feature in Nisswa is its downtown district. Although there are geographical constraints limiting expansion efforts, area residents have expressed interest in enhancing the trail system in the City. A benefit of this would be to capture additional bicycle and pedestrian traffic from the Paul Bunyan Trail, which runs through downtown.

This well traveled pathway is spreading deeper and deeper into the woods of northern Minnesota. Trekkers can now traverse 65 miles from Brainerd through Nisswa and Hackensack into the Chippewa National Forest, and eventually stretch onto the Heartland Trail for another 50 miles from Park Rapids to Cass Lake. This expanding system will also include the Cuyuna Trail through Crosby stitching together a string of small towns and State Parks into a vibrant traveling experience. As interconnectivity of growing communities continues in the Central Lakes Region, so, too, will the system of trails.

During the winter months, countless snowmobile trails crisscross the Nisswa vicinity. Heavy traffic flows along groomed trails between Brainerd-Baxter north to Canada. Recent climatic cycles have forced snowmobile enthusiasts to move farther north in order to find sufficient snow. This could mean additional “off-peak” visitors to Nisswa, which could provide economic opportunities for local businesses.

Residents have expressed concerns that snowmobile trails passing through private property are threatened as properties are developed. These ad-hoc trail networks are an important component of the recreational offerings within the City. To balance the interests of snowmobile enthusiasts, residents and property owners, these issues will need more attention.

Comment [clm11]: Existing trails and parks map.

### Parks

At a town meeting in June 2006, Nisswa residents expressed the need for more public parks and recreational facilities. One of the main concerns was the absence of public beaches. Because the demand for land and lakefront property is incredibly high in Nisswa, it is becoming more difficult to justify open spaces and public dedications of expensive lands. Nevertheless, communities without such amenities often lack walkability and character.

Currently, the “City of Nisswa Park” serves as an inviting locale for recreation. The open space and ball fields are often filled with children playing baseball or soccer. Thriving parks and recreation services accentuate a community’s identity and can even enhance economic activity. As numbers continue to decline at the Nisswa School, identifying ways to ensure the livelihood of the parks and recreation department becomes increasingly significant. At the Nisswa Recreation Action Plan meeting residents expressed interest in partnering with other local communities to collaboratively protect parks and recreation efforts.

It was also noted that, in order to garner maximum potential, Nisswa would need to reach beyond youths and provide activities for all members of the community.

### **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 provides land to just enjoy the surroundings and being in Nisswa. It is what sets Nisswa apart from larger, built-up communities. Open space areas create a natural buffer between developments and allow for passive recreation.

Passive recreation can be as simple as walking along the beach or watching a bird fly over a lake. This type of recreation is available to all residents and visitors regardless of physical ability. The 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.

### **Recreational Activities**

Although Nisswa will undoubtedly encounter changes due to an increase in population, the lack of developable land will stand as a constant challenge. As one local resident said, “Any loss in natural resources results in a coinciding loss of recreational opportunities.” Providing organized recreational activities should not be at the expense of altering the natural environment. Examining options that can promote the health and well being of community residents as well as their natural surroundings is an exciting opportunity. Potential challenges include providing the services and offerings that residents will actually use and enjoy and the trade-off between using land for development or as recreational space.

### **Resorts**

Resorts in Nisswa play a part in the recreational provisions in the City. Resorts provide a combination of golf courses, beach access, water recreation equipment and facilities, and open space. These private ventures can be used to satisfy certain recreational needs of residents and visitors provided they are available for public as well as private use.

### **Recreation Policies**

The following are policies of the City of Nisswa in relation to recreational amenities and planning.

**Work to provide trail connections between the Paul Bunyan 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. Trail connections allow residents to use multiple modes of local transportation. Having an expansive and connected trail network is Nisswa's top recreational priority.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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 in the world, which are 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.

**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.

**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.

### **Recreation Strategies**

To enact the City's policies, the following strategies have been adopted:

#### Short Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Continue park dedication fee with regular evaluation of fee schedule.
- Continue to coordinate with area school districts on the use of school facilities.

#### Mid Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Continue to work with resorts, businesses and individuals to increase recreational opportunities.
- Pursue funding to hire a facilitator to initiate the development of a park, recreation, and open space master plan.
- Develop a plan and funding options for a City-wide trail system.
- Seek funding opportunities for recreation programs and facilities.

#### 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.
- Work with the County to develop trails on the County Road 29, 77, 18 and 13 corridors.
- Develop seasonal recreational swimming opportunities for the public.

## Transportation and Infrastructure Action Plan

### Vision

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.

The vision for Nisswa was brought out through the planning process. Residents and stakeholders identified issues and opportunities regarding future infrastructure and transportation in and around the City of Nisswa. The issues of the greatest concern are:

**Sewer and water capacity.** Expanding the capacity of Nisswa's central sewer system and exploring a variety of alternative sewage management methods and the feasibility of a water system are central to residents' desire to protect water quality and promote strong economic development. Sewer and water service affects the pace and style of growth. The existing treatment system is at capacity, and geographically most of the City is not served. Expansion capability of the centralized system is limited, so efficient use of the added capacity is essential. Alternative wastewater management systems need to be used in areas outside of the central sewer service area. The addition of a community water system is an important local issue to provide fire protection in critical areas and ensure that plenty of safe, high-quality groundwater is available for human needs.

**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 and sales 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.

**Road Network and Traffic Congestion.** There is increasing concern about traffic congestion and parking among the residents of Nisswa. Improving or realigning Minnesota Highway 371 to ease traffic congestion and improve safety is a priority for Nisswa residents. The lack of downtown parking is the other major transportation and congestion issue for the City. Parking needs to be expanded in a tasteful manner to accommodate more residents and tourists. Possible solutions include more parking lots, parking ramps, or shuttles/trolleys ferrying visitors and shoppers from outlying parking areas to the downtown.

**Alternative energy sources.** Residents are concerned with the environmental and human health impacts of everyday living. This interest extends to practices on a community-wide level. Acquiring and using alternative energy will help retain the environmental beauty and community character of Nisswa. The City can provide good leadership and guidance to residents by using renewable and clean energy sources for City-owned or -operated buildings, vehicles, and machinery.

### Background

Nisswa has a transportation and infrastructure history similar to many small cities and communities in central and northern Minnesota. Early transportation methods consisted of walking and horses, followed by carriages and bicycles followed by trains and culminating in the automobile, which is still the dominant mode of transportation.

**Comment [clm12]:** Side bar on the relationship between transportation and land use, specifically the development pattern of the downtown (rail era) versus the development pattern of TH 371 (auto era).

Development has trended towards the shorelines and proceeded based on the degree of accessibility. When trains were the primary mode of travel, penetration of the forests to build lake homes was minimal. As the highway system opened up more areas to cars, the pace of shoreline development increased and there was a demand for local road improvements, wastewater service and private utilities like phone, electricity, and natural gas.

Continued growth has increased awareness of the impacts of development and induced demand for improvements to existing infrastructure systems (roadways and sewer), as well as spurred the creation of new systems (water and stormwater).

The Paul Bunyan trail system converted the old railway line to a recreational trail, restoring non-motorized transportation alternatives for recreation and local excursions. In the winter, the trail is heavily used for snowmobiling, with some users skiing and ski joring. When snow is not on the ground, walking, biking and inline skating are the predominant uses of the trail.

**Comment [clm13]:** Side bar on the Paul Bunyan Trail system.

### Highway 371

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 highway is a high-capacity, four-lane divided highway south of the historic downtown. Plans currently underway by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) would extend the four-lane north beyond the edge of the City.

The highway is a tremendous asset to the community, providing quick access to the Brainerd/Baxter regional center, providing safe access for residents and visitors and creating a number of development opportunities along the corridor.

There are a number of threats from the highway, however, that need to be balanced. The highway allows as many people to leave as it does to enter, which means that Nisswa businesses compete directly with those in the regional center, but with much less of a destination effect for service-related offerings. The highway also induces development ahead of other improvements, such as sewer, which can lead to development that has lower long-term value to the community. Also, improvements to the regional highway through Nisswa create local expenses that must be paid by the Nisswa taxpayer. These costs are not always clear in the years and sometime decades preceding an improvement when the City is making land use decisions along the corridor.

### **County Roads and Local Streets**

The other two main roads are County Road 77/County Road 13 which bisect the City east-west and provide local street access in addition to connecting Nisswa to the City of Lake Shore and Lake Hubert Township and County Road 18. County 18 begins in 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. The condition of these roads tends to vary. They are not often found in terrible shape because the traffic is low, but 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.

While Highway 371 serves as the main route through the City, the remaining streets and roadways serves as collectors to one degree or another. In other words, all traffic is funneled to the highway ultimately. One of the disadvantages of Nisswa's transportation system is that there are few redundancies, often referred to as local shortcuts, that provide alternative routes during periods of high congestion. Since most traffic flows north and south, most vehicle trips eventually end up on Highway 371. This creates a high peak congestion point and creates a difficult problem for balancing access control (intersection management) and traffic flow on the highway.

With non-auto modes of transportation increasing in importance, capacity for safe travel for bicyclists and pedestrians needs to be provided. Separated trails would be the preferred alternative along road corridors for safety reasons, but an extended shoulder of the roadway would be the minimum needed.

### **Parking**

Parking in the downtown area is often difficult to find within close proximity to shops and events, particularly during peak seasons. This shortcoming is a major concern for shop-owners and visitors alike. In an economy that relies on visitors, parking is essential. There is an unclear balance between not having enough parking and having excess parking that robs the downtown of valuable developable space. That balance tilts based on the time of year and the strength of the local economy. In

the end, short of a comprehensive parking solution (e.g. a parking ramp), it is likely that Nisswa will have to continue to try and do more with less when it comes to parking.

### **Sanitary Sewer**

The sanitary sewer system currently serves a portion of Nisswa and primarily includes the downtown and the State Highway 371 corridor. The sewer system is currently at capacity and treated wastewater is disposed of by Grand View on their golf course, which is slowly impacting some of the vegetation on the course due to the high sodium (salt) concentration in the wastewater. In March of 2006, a Facility Plan for Wastewater Treatment Facility Expansion was completed for the City, which details issues with increasing capacity and coverage of the city's sanitary sewer network. The proposed twenty-year sanitary sewer service area incorporates land in the vicinity of Nisswa Lake and Round Lake along with parcels around the downtown that are not currently serviced.

**Comment [clm14]:** Sanitary sewer service area map

The City's current centralized wastewater treatment system is limited by the amount of land it must have available for disposal. Even with a large upgrade in treatment capacity, disposal of the treated wastewater is still the limiting factor. High land costs, combined with the large amount of land necessary under the current system, will limit the ability to do an appreciable expansion of the system in the future.

### **Water Supply**

Nisswa does not have a central water system in place to serve residences and businesses. The addition of a water system would provide increased fire protection to the downtown, especially the school property. The water system could also be used in seweried areas to provide softened water so that people did not use salt to soften their well water. Removing salt from the system would decrease the stress on the golf course vegetation that currently receives the treated wastewater.

### **Stormwater**

Stormwater runoff is of concern to Nisswa as it affects the quality of area lakes and can affect shallow wells and groundwater supplies. Progressive methods to prevent runoff as well as detain it prior to entering a wetland, lake, or stream should be considered with new and existing buildings and lots.

### **Additional Infrastructure Concerns**

The City needs to continue to work to conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act and provide a living environment sensitive to the needs of the disabled.

### **Transportation and Infrastructure Policies**

The following are policies of the City of Nisswa in relation to transportation and infrastructure and planning.

**Promote a safe and efficient transportation system for motorists and pedestrians.**

Safety and efficiency are the main goals of any transportation system. Nisswa’s transportation system must be safe for residents and visitors, whether traveling by car or not. The system also needs to provide for efficiency, which, for Nisswa, means that alternative routes need to be improved to increase demand on the highway intersections.

**Balance the needs of merchants and customers for availability of parking without compromising the character of the community.** When parking is most needed, there is never enough available, but it is not clear that using developable downtown area for parking would provide a long-term benefit for the community. The availability of parking is essential, but innovative ideas need to be embraced to make existing parking go further and provide more alternatives that do not compromise the quaint character of the downtown.

**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.

Comment [clm15]: Side bar on the standards contained in “Residential Streets”.

**Provide a municipal sewer system that would meet the needs of the current users and anticipate future growth.** Limited sewer capacity puts the City in a difficult position of having to artificially limit development in areas where it would be desirable and beneficial. Although the growth in Nisswa has been robust and has exceeded many expectations, the City should invest in systems that are designed to accommodate future growth, even if it means a greater short-term cost.

**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.

**Work to provide a water system to improve municipal fire protection and meet consumption demand in high density areas.** A water system would provide fire protection and thus create flexibility to downtown businesses looking to expand and to School District 181 when and if they evaluate the future uses of the Nisswa school. High-density areas existing and to be created near the downtown would also benefit from a water system. A supply of treated water to residences on the sewer system may also be one of the answers to wastewater treatment concerns.

**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.

**Incorporate stormwater management systems into private development and public improvement projects.** Awareness has increased on the impact of stormwater on the areas 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 enact the City's policies, the following strategies have been adopted:

#### Short Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Require developers to extend the collection system and provide service to new developments within the sewer service area.
- 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.

#### Mid Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Expand the centralized treatment facility as currently proposed to double the treatment capacity of the existing system.
- Allocate wastewater capacity to commercial areas, high-density residential areas and transient resort areas.
- Implement a system to track and manage maintenance and compliance of individual on-site sewage treatment systems.
- Reexamine the City's official road standards 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.
- To ensure that local road construction is not subsidized by the City, conduct a 20-year cost/benefit analysis on new roads. New development proposals should not be accepted if taxes from the development do not cover the road maintenance.

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 work on projects of regional significance.
- Work with the cities of Pequot Lakes, Lake Shore, Breezy Point and East Gull Lake, the Brainerd Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and area resorts to explore the possibility of establishing a shuttle service that runs between Breezy Point, through Pequot and Nisswa and then around the west side of Gull Lake, stopping at resorts, shopping and attractions.
- Develop a local ride-share/transit program.

## Land Use and Residential Development

### Land Use Trends

Nisswa has established itself as a desirable place to live. The beauty of the natural surroundings mixed with the charm of small town life invites new residents from Minnesota and beyond. As mentioned in previous sections, the City of Nisswa will experience a continued pattern of population growth over the next couple of decades. One strategy to accommodate the influx of new residents is to provide a variety of housing options. Most current residents live adjacent to one of the area's several lakes, but the availability of lakefront property is becoming scarcer.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Nisswa had a total of 1,532 housing units, of which only 95 were listed as rental properties. Although this figure may suggest the prominence of the local housing market, the relative age of the population is increasing significantly. There may be an increased demand for senior housing or assisted living for residents who choose to remain in Nisswa into their 70's and beyond in the foreseeable future.

Household Trends - 1980-2001						
	1980 Households	1990 Households	% Change 1980-1990	2000 Households	% Change 1990-2000	2001 Estimate
Nisswa	517	548	6.0%	819	49.5%	834
Central Lakes	3,273	3,882	18.6%	5,510	41.9%	N/A
Crow Wing	15,171	17,204	13.4%	22,250	29.3%	22,810

Source: U.S. Census; Minnesota State Demographer

The City of Nisswa added households at a faster rate than population. Between the 1990 Census and the 2000 Census, the City added 271 households, for an increase of 49.5%. Nisswa's household rate of growth was higher than the surrounding area. The household growth rate for Crow Wing County was 29.3%, and the growth rate for the Central Lakes Market Area was 41.9%.

Average Number of Persons Per Household 1980-2001				
	1980 Census	1990 Census	2000 Census	2001 Estimate
Nisswa	2.72	2.54	2.37	2.35
Central Lakes	2.87	2.62	2.51	N/A
Crow Wing	2.69	2.52	2.43	2.42

The average Nisswa household size has decreased from 2.72 persons per household in 1980 to 2.37 persons per household in 2000. Nisswa's average household size has been consistently lower than the Central Lakes Market Area's average household size in the 1980's and 1990's.

<b>Household Projections Through 2006</b>			
	2000 Household Census	2006 Projection from 10 year growth trends	2006 Projection from 20 year growth trends
Nisswa	819	1,062	963
Central Lakes	5,510	6,896	7,770
Crow Wing Co.	22,250	26,166	25,365

The following table presents household projections using two different sources. The 10-year growth trend is based on the rate of change between 1990 and 2000 using figures from the Census, and this rate of growth is projected forward between 2000 and 2006. The 20-year growth trend uses the same methodology, but calculates an annual growth rate from 1980 to 2000.

<b>Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income - Nisswa 1999</b>		
Percentage of Household Income for Housing Costs	Number of Renter Households 1999	Percent of All Renter Households 1999
0% to 19.9%	37	38.9%
20% to 29.9%	19	20.0%
30% to 34.9%	2	2.1%
35% or more	17	17.9%
Not Computed	20	21.1%
Total	95	100%

The Census reported that 20% of renter households in Nisswa are paying more than 30% of their income for rent, with 17.9% of all renter households paying more than 35% of their income for housing. Most owner-occupants, which would include both households with and without a mortgage, reported paying less than 30% of their income for housing. However, 13.7% of all home owners reported that they paid more than 35% of their income for housing.

<b>Home Ownership Costs as a Percentage of Household Income - 1999</b>		
Percentage of Household Income for Housing Costs	Number of Owner Households 1999	Percent of All Owner Households 1999
0% to 19.9%	318	52.4%
20% to 29.9%	166	27.3%
30% to 34.9%	34	5.6%
35% or more	83	13.7%
Not Computed	6	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>607</b>	<b>100%</b>

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 which combine to form 84 percent of Nisswa's surface area. Residential and commercial areas comprise 7.6 percent of the city's surface area. Much of the housing is located along the shores of Nisswa's 13 main lakes. Commercial uses are predominantly located in the city's downtown and along Highway 371. Nine of the lakes also have commercial waterfront areas along their shores.

<b>Nisswa Land Uses</b>	<b>Crow Wing County</b>		
<b>Land Use Category</b>	<b>Total Area (sq. mi.)</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
Open Water	7.82	42.4%	14%
Wetlands	0.71	3.8%	14%
Grassland	0.82	4.4%	16%
Forest	7.63	41.4%	50%
Farmsteads & Rural Residences	0.07	0.4%	2%
Other Rural Developments	1.23	6.6%	<1%
Urban / Industrial	0.12	0.6%	3%
Gravel Pits & Open Mines	0.04	0.2%	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.43</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	

A majority of the lakeshore properties are considered to have high redevelopment potential. A high redevelopment potential does not mean that the use will change or

a new residence or business will be constructed, but it merely shows properties where the value of the land exceeds the value of all buildings present.

Land values in Nisswa fluctuate depending on use and location within the city and demand for that particular parcel. The downtown area has over half of the lots with a land only value that is under \$50,000 as determined by the Crow Wing County Assessor's Office. Between 35 and 40 percent of lots have a value between \$50,000 and \$100,000. Fewer than 15 percent of the downtown parcels are valued over \$100,000.

A variety of parcels of land are currently in public ownership under different jurisdictions. The two landholders with the largest holdings are the City of Nisswa and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Other smaller landowners include Crow Wing County with tax-forfeited land; Independent School District, Number 181; and the United States.

### **Land Use and Residential Development Policies**

**Increased housing density and flexibility of design should be provided in those areas where municipal utilities are in place and there is direct pedestrian access to commercial areas.** New developments should be encouraged which are compact, utilize the existing infrastructure and designed in a manner that facilitates pedestrian traffic.

**Residential development should be encouraged in those areas that are most suited for development. Low impact development should be encouraged in environmentally sensitive areas.** Nisswa's greatest asset is its lakes and steps should be taken to ensure their future viability. Developments should not negatively impact the environment and should preserve open space, especially in environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands.

**Comment [CGI 16]:** Provide definition for areas "most suited" and environmentally sensitive areas

**Development and redevelopment needs to happen in a manner and scale that is 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.

**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.

### **Land Use and Residential Development Strategies**

Short Term Actions (within 12 months)

- Evaluate the new DNR Alternative Shoreland Management Standards, modifying and/or adopting those that are appropriate.
- Provide for mixed-use development and higher densities in and around the Central Business District zone.
- Provide for a second Central Business District zone in the Sportland Corners area and connect it to the existing downtown.
- Enact standards that encourage conservation design and discourage the standard lot/block subdivision approach to development within low-density residential development areas.

Mid Term Actions (1 to 3 years)

- Enforce the Uniform Building Code within the City of Nisswa, following a public discussion and education process.
- Institute Low Impact Development standards for commercial areas within the City. Require new commercial developments to be certified as a Low Impact Development.

**Comment [clm17]:** Provide a definition of Low Impact Development

Long Term Actions (3 to 5 years)

- Work with the cities of Pequot Lakes, Lake Shore, Breezy Point, East Gull Lake, the area Chambers of Commerce, and area resorts to explore the possibility of establishing a shuttle service that runs between Breezy Point, through Pequot and Nisswa and then around the west side of Gull Lake, stopping at resorts, shopping, and attractions.

## Future Land Use

A future land use map has been prepared as part of implementing the vision of the City. The future land use map is not a zoning map, but a visual representation of how the community would like to see the City developed in the future.

The map contains the following land use designations that will serve as a guideline for making decisions on future rezoning and development requests:

- **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.

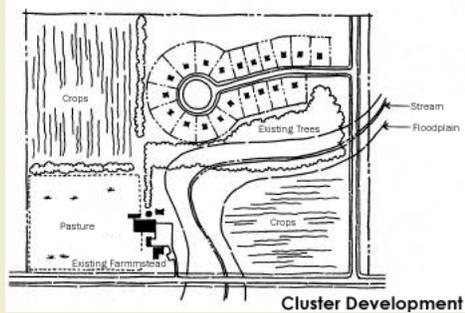
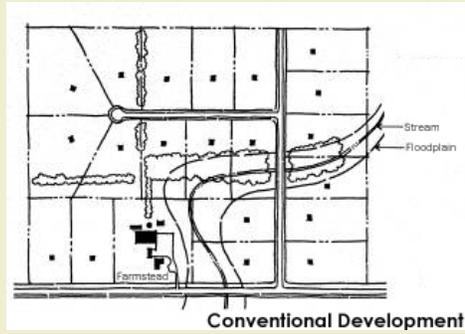
## What is a conservation subdivision?

The basic premise of a conservation subdivision is to group new homes onto part of the property to be developed and preserve the rest of the property as open space. The grouping of the homes can have dual benefits:

- building more homes than would otherwise be permitted
- protecting natural resources

Typically, subdivision design divides up all the development property so that the entire property is designated as private residential parcels or as roadway, regardless of the natural resources, topography, or surrounding development in the area.

On the other hand, conservation design would place the new homes on smaller lots usually using no more than half of the development property while designating the remainder of the property as public open space through conservation easements, land trusts, or homeowners associations.



## Implementation

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 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 community-wide 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.

## **Sidebar Text**

### Riedl Property

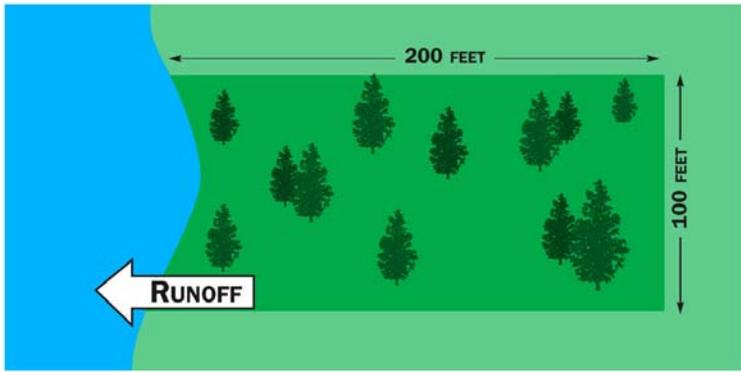
The large open property to the south and west of the Sportland Corners intersection is referred to as the Riedl property, commonly named after the current owners. With the location along the major highway, a high degree of visibility and access to utilities, there has been a great deal of speculation regarding plans for the future development of the Riedl property. With the unique opportunity the property presents, participants in the planning process agreed that it is important to the long-term future of Nisswa that the property be developed in a thoughtful way. There is consensus for the creation of a high-density, mixed-use development that would provide a modern downtown area as a complement to the existing historic downtown.

### Desire for a Restaurant

Public input received in putting together the plan frequently referred to a desire to attract and sustain a restaurant in the historic downtown, with Pequot Lakes' Sibley Station most frequently cited as a model. While Nisswa's downtown has had restaurants in the past, they have been difficult to sustain. As opposed to subsidizing a restaurant, strategies in this plan are designed to increase the year-round population within walking distance of the downtown, improving the chances of a restaurant being successful in downtown Nisswa.

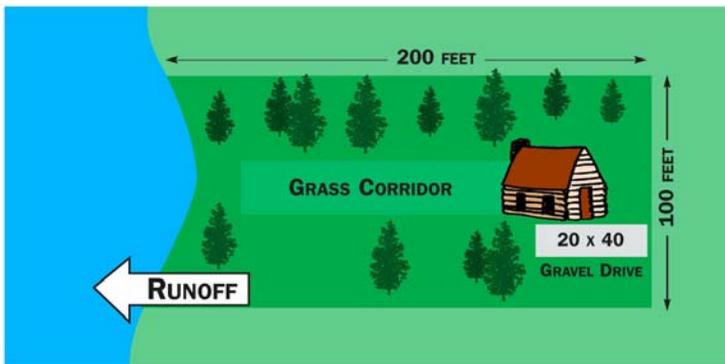
### Slide on shoreline redevelopment

Studies have shown that shoreline redevelopment has had a dramatic impact on overall lake water quality. One study, done by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, demonstrates the dramatic increase in runoff and the loading of suspended solids and phosphorous that typically accommodates shoreline redevelopment. The following diagrams illustrate the results of that study.



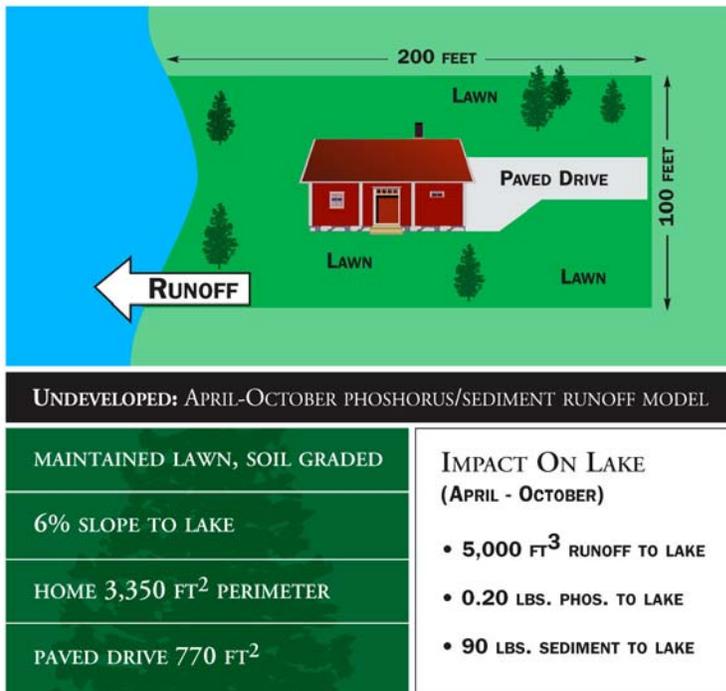
UNDEVELOPED: APRIL-OCTOBER PHOSPHORUS/SEDIMENT RUNOFF MODEL

MAPLE-BEECH FOREST	<b>IMPACT ON LAKE (APRIL - OCTOBER)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,000 FT<sup>3</sup> RUNOFF TO LAKE</li> <li>• 0.03 LBS. PHOS. TO LAKE</li> <li>• 5 LBS. SEDIMENT TO LAKE</li> </ul>
6% SLOPE TO LAKE	
SANDY LOAM SOIL	



UNDEVELOPED: APRIL-OCTOBER PHOSPHORUS/SEDIMENT RUNOFF MODEL

MAPLE-BEECH FOREST	<b>IMPACT ON LAKE (APRIL - OCTOBER)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,000 FT<sup>3</sup> RUNOFF TO LAKE</li> <li>• 0.03 LBS. PHOS. TO LAKE</li> <li>• 20 LBS. SEDIMENT TO LAKE</li> </ul>
6% SLOPE TO LAKE	
GRASS CORRIDOR 20'-WIDE	
COTTAGE 700 FT <sup>2</sup> PERIMETER	
GRAVEL DRIVE 800 FT <sup>2</sup>	
35'-WIDE BUFFER STRIP	



### Impact of increased impervious coverage

Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between lake water quality degradation and the amount of ground covered with materials that shed water (impervious areas). As the amount of impervious coverage increases, lake water quality decreases. The additional impervious coverage creates more runoff, which in turn carries damaging nutrients to ditches, streams and, ultimately, lakes. To address the problem, new Department of Natural Resource recommendations would have the maximum allowable impervious coverage for shoreline properties reduced from the current 25% to as low as 13%.

### Definition of Open Space

Open space is a general, all-encompassing term to describe the following: green space, wetlands, woodlands, waterways, wildlife habitat, critical environmental areas, public and private conservation lands (including nature preserves, conservation easements, green corridors, landscape linkages, wildlife corridors and wilderness areas), private working lands of conservation value (including forests, farms and agricultural greenbelts), scenic vistas, trails and parks. Open space should

not be isolated pockets throughout a community, but should be connected to form a contiguous network of hubs and linkages. Hubs are large conservation areas that are connected by links, which can be conservation corridors, riparian corridors, greenbelts and even utility corridors. These interconnected, preserved areas should be designated as priority areas where development should not occur. Any development near these areas should be regulated to have minimal impacts on the adjacent open spaces. One development tool to protect open space is clustering homes to protect a minimum of 50% of the buildable land as undivided open space. Open space should define the outer edge of a community (in order to limit sprawl). (Source: Brainerd Lakes Conservation Collaborative).

### Relationship between Transportation and Land Use

The commercial areas in Nisswa have developed during different eras, and that fact more than anything has shaped the way they function. The historic downtown was developed around the railroad stop at a time when the railroad was the dominant form of long-distance transportation. The compact design of the downtown was a necessity because people walked between shops. In contrast, development along the highway has been done with deference to the automobile. The highway development pattern is more spread out and aligned, with parking lots and greater setbacks, along the major transportation corridor.

It is important to understand how the mode of transportation used to access a commercial business – whether it is train, car, boat, bike, snowmobile or foot – will impact the design and function of that commercial business. Changes to the transportation system will create changes in the land use pattern, just as changes in the regulations regarding land use will facilitate changes to Nisswa’s transportation networks.

### Paul Bunyan State Trail

The Paul Bunyan State Trail was developed as a multiple-use trail in the mid 1990s. When completed, the trail will be 100 miles long and provide critical recreational connection between the Brainerd/Baxter area and Bemidji. The trail primarily follows the Northern Pacific (and later Burlington Northern) railroad grade. Nisswa is located along the first phase of the trail.

Numerous recreational opportunities along the Paul Bunyan Trail benefit Nisswa’s residents, as well as attract visitors to the City. During the summer, there are opportunities for hiking, bicycling and in-line skating. Snowmobiling is the prominent winter use of the trail. Once fully completed, the Paul Bunyan State trail will network to form one of the longest rail-to-trail conversion projects in North America.

### Road Standards in Residential Streets

Rural land use specialist Randall Arendt was the featured speaker at a conference on conservation subdivision design that was held in the City of Nisswa. At the conference, Mr. Arendt discussed the conflict between the common engineering approach to roadway design and construction, which frequently involves wide roadways with extensive tree removal and grading, and the desire of most residents to maintain a less urbanized landscape. Arendt recommended rural communities adopt the standards contained in “Residential Streets, Third Edition”, a handbook developed by the Urban Land Institute in cooperation with the American Society of Civil Engineers. The standards contained in the handbook maintain the required safety and functional considerations, but do so in a way that is more compatible with the desires of Nisswa residents.

### Definition of areas “most suited” for development

While the entire City of Nisswa can theoretically be developed, there are some areas that are more suited for development than others. Areas that have access to existing transportation or utilities are better suited for development than those that do not. Areas that are relatively flat and naturally lacking thick tree cover are easier and less intrusive to develop than those areas with a lot of topographic variation and a thick tree canopy. Wetlands and areas with poor soil conditions create less than ideal conditions for building.

Nisswa has an abundance of land available for development. As such, there is no compulsion to intensely develop lands that are marginally suited for development while land more suitable sits idle. Development standards designed to limit the impact of development are naturally more burdensome on those properties that are not well suited for 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).

**Maps**

Wetlands and Water Resources

Rare Species

Forest Core and Migration Areas

Existing Trails and Parks

Lands in Public Ownership

Current Land Use/Land Cover

Current Zoning

Future Land Use Map