

Introduction

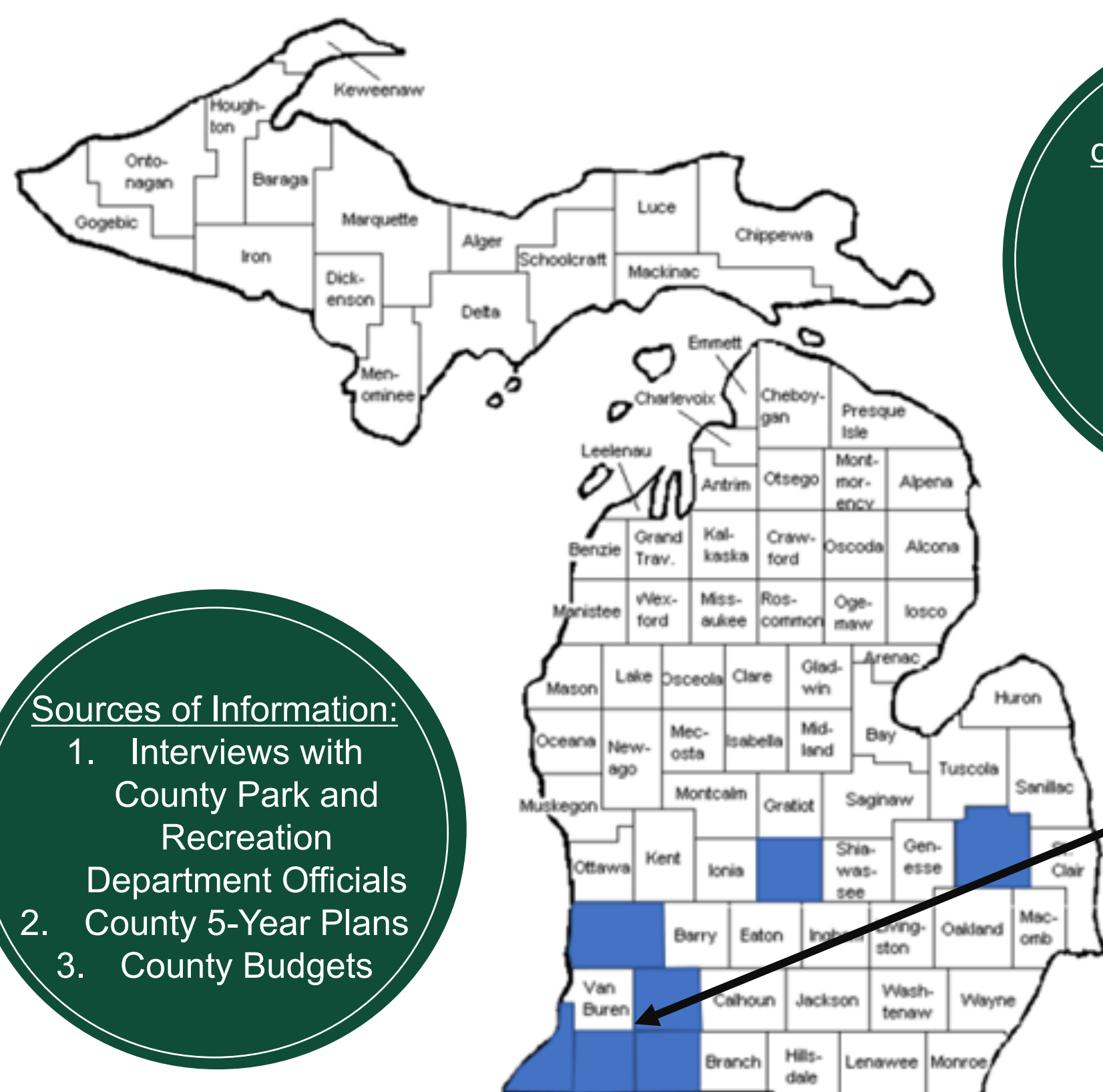


Van Buren County Board of Commissioners began developing an ADA accessible kayak launch.

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission created the 2021 Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan, adopted by the Board in June of 2021

The Van Buren County Administrator secured a MSU Urban and Regional Planning practicum team to examine the feasibility of establishing a county parks department for Van Buren.

Research



Comparable counties examined:
Allegan
Berrien
Cass
Clinton
Kalamazoo
Lapeer
St. Joseph

- Sources of Information:
1. Interviews with County Park and Recreation Department Officials
 2. County 5-Year Plans
 3. County Budgets

Comparable Counties' Locations within Michigan

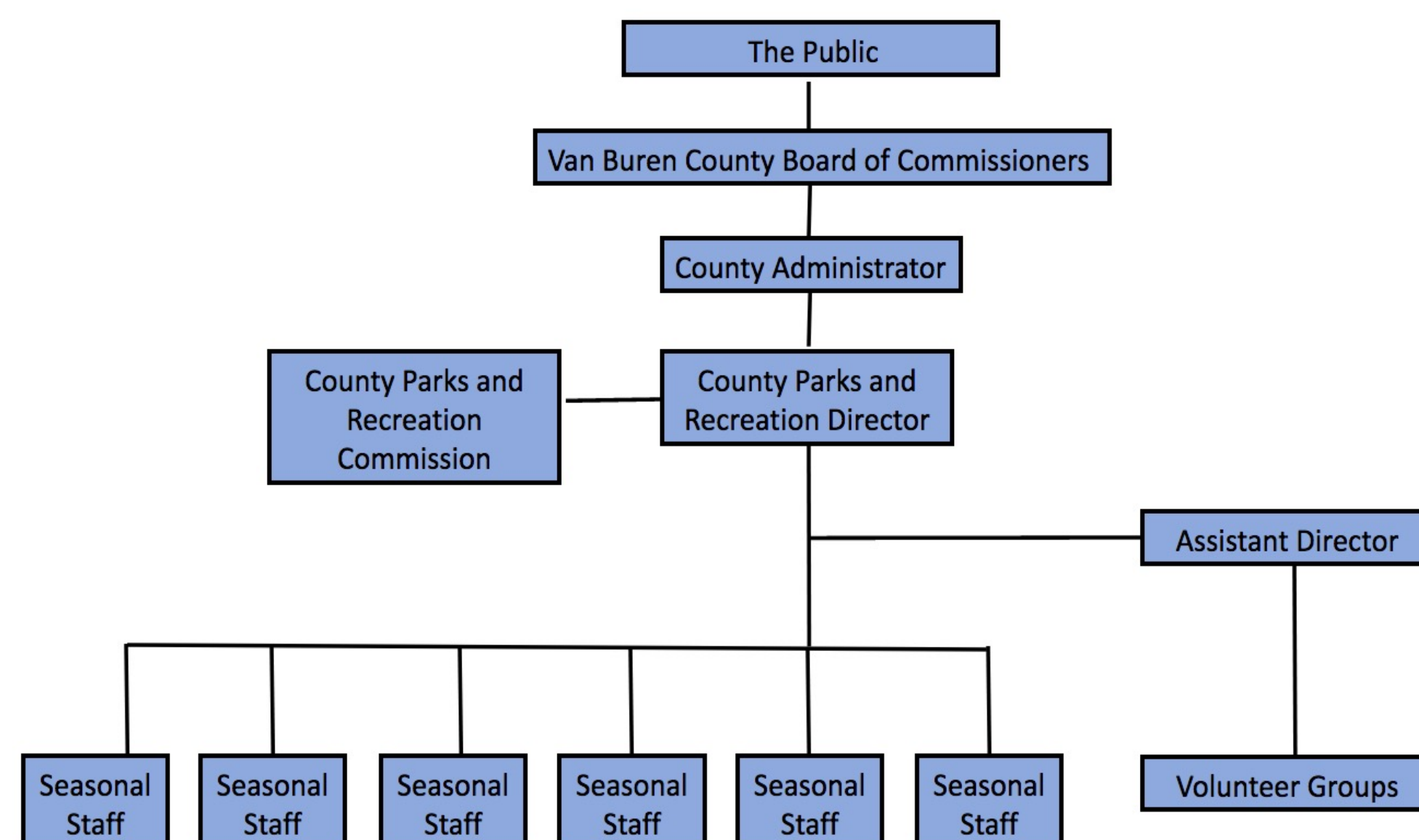
Most counties examined:

- Managed 0.01 acres per county resident
- Averaged approximately 13.68 FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) needed to manage their department
- Relied heavily on seasonal hires and volunteers
- Began with a small department and expanded overtime as they acquired more land

Counties most comparable Van Buren County (Cass, Clinton, and Lapeer):

- The average FTE was 4.42
- Approximately 164.33 acres per 1 FTE
- Managed 0.01 acres per county resident

Recommendations



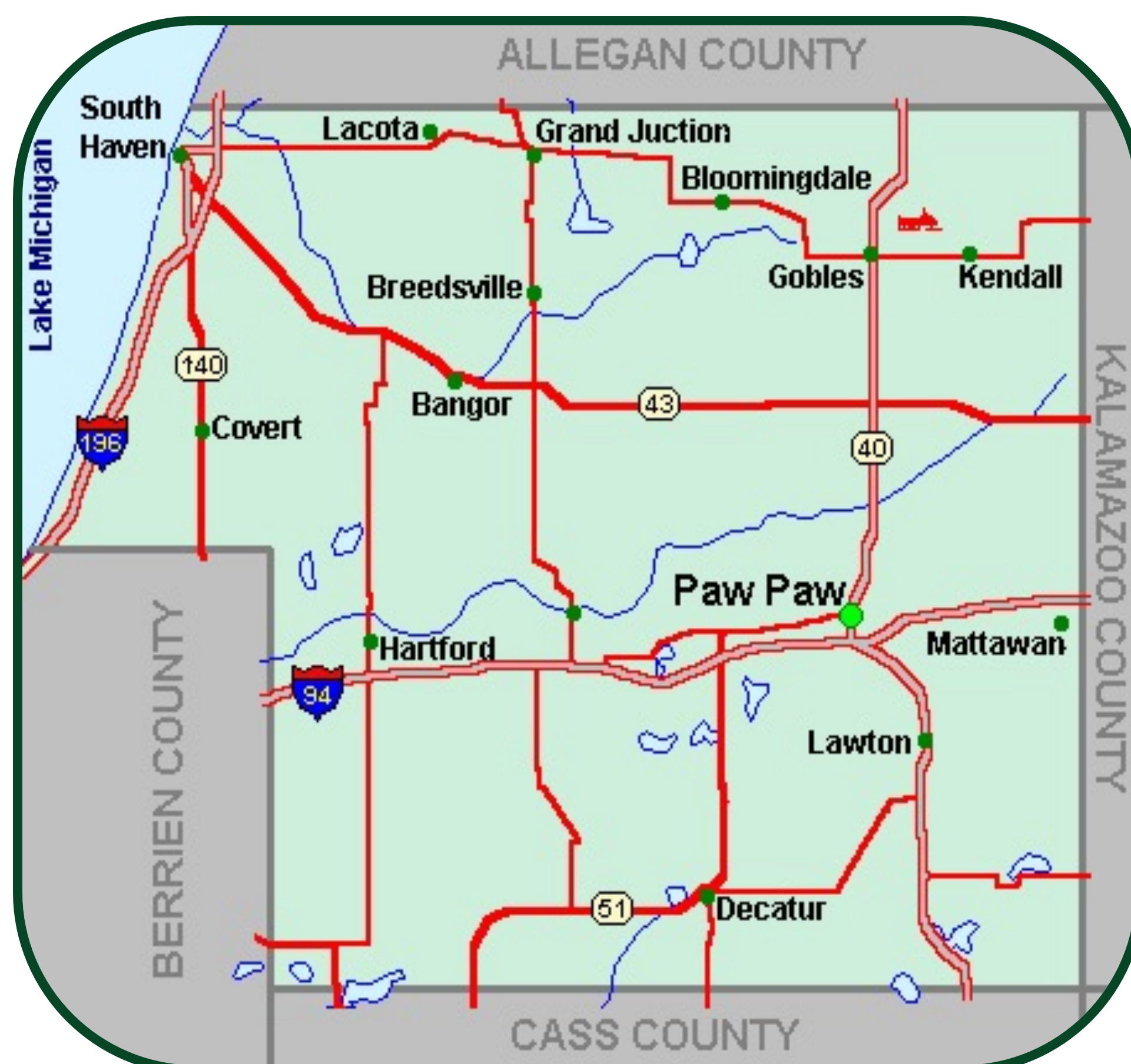
- Fund an **annual budget of approximately \$245,000** for operations of this size and scope
- Begin by leveraging a **0.07 PA 90 Millage** for park improvements, management, and maintenance (generating approximately \$247,240 annually)
- **Diversify funding** sources beyond a millage, such as,
 - Hosting events and programs
 - Securing grants
 - Implementing an annual park pass/ or park user fee
- **Promote partnerships** at the local and regional level
- **Diversify promotional strategies**

- On average, **4.5 FTE** is needed to run a department with Van Buren County's Park size
- Hire the following positions
 - **Parks and Recreation Director**
 - **Assistant Parks and Recreation Director or Parks Manager**
 - Approximately **5 seasonal hires** for maintenance and operation
- Creating a volunteer system



Implementation

	Low Investment	Moderate Investment
Short-term (1-2 years)	Request funds to offset initial costs of establishing a County Parks and recreation department, such as ARPA or MRTMA funds	Budget from the County's General Fund
	Diversify across free social media platforms, like Instagram	Hire a Director, an Assistant Director/ Parks Manager, and seasonal maintenance staff
	Partner with local organizations, like the Conservation District, to create educational programs and signage for parks.	Create event programming with local organizations to increase park visitation
Long-term (2-5 years)	Leverage a 0.07 PA 90 Millage for sustainable funding	Adopt a 5-Year Plan to qualify for DNR grants for park improvements which align with local and regional goals
	Request and organize volunteers with locals	Allow for park space rentals through user fees, such as allowing campers into Northpoint Conservation Area
	Implement an annual park pass	Plan for acquisitions to expand the county park system, with particular interest in extending and connecting trails both on land and water



Map of Van Buren County