

INTRODUCTION

Location

Iron County is located in northern Wisconsin and borders the south shore of Lake Superior and the Upper Peninsula of the State of Michigan. Iron County borders the counties of Ashland, Price, and Vilas in Wisconsin, and Gogebic County in Michigan. Iron County is 757.3 square miles in size, had a population of 6,861 according to the 2000 U.S. Census, and includes ten towns and two cities. The City of Hurley is the county seat. See Map 1.0 for location and political subdivisions.

History

Iron County was created on March 5, 1893 when the Wisconsin legislature passed and had published an act creating Iron County from portions of what was a much larger Ashland County and four townships from Oneida County. It was named after the iron deposits found in the area. The act that created Iron County specified among other things that the then Village of Hurley was to be the county seat.

Three townships comprised Iron County when it was created. They were the Towns of Knight, Saxon, and Vaughn. At this time these towns were quite large. In the years to follow, they were divided into two cities and ten townships. See below for more information.

Municipality	Date Organized	Total Area (Sq. Mi.)	Municipality	Date Organized	Total Area (Sq. Mi.)
Anderson	March 14, 1900	83.61	Mercer	1908	184.76
Carey	March 29, 1909	43.02	Montreal	April 1, 1924	2.25
Gurney	April 25, 1914	37.00	Oma	April 23, 1912	277.75
Hurley	April 1, 1918	3.31	Pence	May 7, 1923	36.10
Kimball	April 1, 1913	37.11	Saxon	March 1, 1893	66.13
Knight	April 19, 1892	95.08	Sherman	April 19, 1907	136.57

As with the aforementioned cities and towns in Iron County, a number of small, unincorporated communities or hamlets developed and served as town centers. Included in this list are Iron Belt, Upson, Saxon, Pence, Gile, Springstead, Mercer, and Gurney.

Ample natural resources and reliable transportation to move products and people was key to communities in Iron County. Some settlements failed to grow or faltered if either of these two components were missing. There are 25 communities that have been lost in Iron County over the years, these include:

Town of Anderson

- Tyler Forks
- Moore
- Plummer
- Rouse
- Iron Center
- Potato Junction

Town of Gurney

- Curry

City of Hurley

- Germania

Town of Kimball

- Kimball
- Hinkle
- Meadville
- Fourche
- River Branch
- DeFer

Town of Knight

Osborn

Town of Pence

Hamilton

Hoyt

Town of Sherman

Emerson

Powell

Town of Oma

VanBuskirk

Sandrock

Magnetic Center

Pine Lake

Carson

Town of Saxon

Ironton

Topography

Topographically, Iron County varies from level swampy lowlands to rolling uplands to the rugged Penokee Range, which towers over historic mining communities. The lowest points in Iron County are along the south shore of Lake Superior where they range from 600 to 800 feet above sea level and the highest points are located along the Penokee-Gogebic mountain range where elevation reaches nearly 1,900 feet above sea level. Below are some of the highest points of elevation in Iron County.

- 1,493 ft at Hurley
- 1,860 ft at the hill northwest of Iron Belt
- 1,819 ft at Upson Lookout Tower Hill
- 1,777 at Trimble Hill
- 1,774 ft at the hill south of Weber Lake

The Penokee-Gogebic is probably the most noticeable geologic landform in Iron County. It extends in an east-west fashion across the county from Mellon in Ashland County to about Iron Belt.

Climate & Weather

Iron County has a humid-continental type of climate. The humid-continental climate is noted for its variable weather and its large temperature range due to its interior location in mid-latitude continents. Long, cold winters with rather short, moderately warm summers characterize this climate type. However, this climate is somewhat modified by the tempering influence of large bodies of water and by local variations in topography. Lake Superior tends to act as a storage basin for heat or cold, thus increasing the number of frost-free days along the lake, but also acting as a coolant during the summer. The northern part of Iron County adjoining Lake Superior has longer growing seasons, cooler summers and slightly more precipitation than is found in the southern part of the county. The growing season along the south shore of Lake Superior is nearly as long as the growing season in southern Wisconsin.

Northern Iron County is located within the *Southeastern Lake Superior Snowbelt*, one of seven unique snowbelts that are associated with the five Great Lakes. This belt extends almost 300 miles along the south shore of Lake Superior and the northern shores of Upper Michigan. The influence of Lake Superior on the northern face of Iron County can be extreme, as cold air flows over the unfrozen waters of Lake Superior picking up moisture. The resultant lake-effect snow showers can be locally heavy, often falling at the rate of 2 to 4 inches per hour. Parts of the Gogebic Range in Iron County from Upson to Hurley have an average winters snowfall of 135-165 inches.

Iron County boasts some of Wisconsin's snowfall extremes including the greatest monthly total of 103.5 inches (Hurley) in January 1997, greatest seasonal total of 277.0 inches (Hurley) in 1996-1997, greatest annual average of 139.8 inches (Gurney – 1971-2000, 30-year average), and the deepest snow on the ground at 60 inches (Hurley), on January 30th 1996.

Comprehensive Planning in Iron County

The Iron County comprehensive planning process began in 2001 when all ten towns in Iron County passed resolutions entering into an intergovernmental cooperation agreement for the purposes of developing a comprehensive plan. All plans were developed at the local level using direct input from local citizens. Iron County, being the lead applicant in the process, contracted with Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NWRPC) to serve as the primary consultant in preparing the application and the comprehensive plans. The application for state grant funds to prepare the comprehensive plans was funded in March 2002.

Purpose & Scope of Plan

Before the Iron County comprehensive planning process began, it was the intention of the Iron County Comprehensive Planning Ad Hoc Steering Committee, that each town prepare their own comprehensive plan at the local level, and that the county comprehensive plan be a compilation of data from the individual town plans, and done at a broad and general planning scale. This was done in part by staying one step behind the towns in the development of each component of the plan.

The Iron County Comprehensive Plan is intended to assist local officials make future land use decisions regarding growth and management issues at both the local and county levels. The plan will also address short and long-term concerns regarding growth, development, and preservation of the county as a whole. The Iron County Comprehensive Plan has been prepared under Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning legislation contained in Wisconsin Statute 66.1001. The plan is organized into nine chapters or elements. They include:

- Issues and Opportunities
- Housing
- Transportation
- Utilities and Community Facilities
- Natural, Agricultural, and Cultural Resources
- Economic Development
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Land Use
- Implementation

Iron County Zoning

The comprehensive planning process that began in 2002 marks the first countywide planning effort for Iron County. The City of Montreal completed the only other comprehensive plan called "A Comprehensive Plan for Montreal Wisconsin" in 1981. Land use activities in the county are regulated by the Iron County Zoning Ordinance, which was originally adopted by the Iron County Board of Supervisors on January 21, 1971. The only major amendment to this ordinance occurred in August of 1998 when the county lakes classification system was added. All of the towns in Iron County are comprehensively zoned. Incorporated communities (Hurley and Montreal) have statutory authority to develop and enforce their own zoning ordinances. The

purpose of the Iron County Zoning Ordinance is to promote and protect the public health, safety, and welfare by:

- guiding orderly development, growth and expansion
- protecting forests, lakes, and other environmentally sensitive areas
- protecting natural beauty and enhancing recreational opportunities, and
- prevent conflicts between different land uses.

Public Participation

The main goal of the Public Participation Plan was and is to make all the citizens of Iron County aware of the progress of the comprehensive planning process and to offer the public opportunities to make suggestions or comments during the process. To reach these ends, Iron County adopted the Iron County Public Participation Plan on October 28, 2003 to encourage public participation throughout the entire planning process. See Appendix A for the Iron County Public Participation Plan.

Survey

The first public participation strategy to engage the residents of Iron County on the planning process was the development of a countywide survey. Tax roll mailings were obtained from Iron County in the fall/winter of 2002 and surveys were sent to all landowners in January 2003 to gather input from residents and property owners on the future development of the county. The Comprehensive Plan Survey consisted of 52 questions, focusing on a range of social, demographic, environmental, and recreational topics. The survey included ten open-ended questions allowing respondents to voice concerns and opinions in their own words.

The intent of the survey was to provide every household and landowner in Iron County with an opportunity to express opinions related to community development and land use. The survey is a result of the participating planning committees meeting on two different occasions at regional meetings where potential survey questions were reviewed and discussed. As a result of the regional meetings, a final Iron County survey was developed. This survey was thoroughly reviewed, discussed, and approved by consensus by all participating planning committees. A total of 6,624 surveys were sent and 2,278 surveys were remitted, yielding a **34.4 percent** response rate. Refer to Appendix B for Iron County Comprehensive Plan Survey synopsis and results.

Issues Identification

In early 2002, the Iron County Comprehensive Planning Ad Hoc Steering Committee met to identify some of the most important issues that the county currently faces, or may face in the future. The goal was to compile concerns, priorities, and future opportunities at the county level. Most local units of government in Iron County also conducted an issues identification meeting concurrent to the county process for the same purpose. Results of the issues identification meeting can be found in Appendix C.

Goals, Objectives & Action Planning

The Iron County Comprehensive Planning Ad Hoc Steering Committee (appointed by the county board chair) began to develop planning goals in the fall of 2002 after survey results were

compiled and disseminated. The committee and citizen participants in this part of the process developed several broad goal statements. The planning goals represent the desired future conditions. Plan objectives were drafted through a series of meetings with committee members and county officials assigned to specific plan elements. The plan objective statements developed by the committee were based on the results of the survey, strategic issues identification process, and background information. The objective statements developed in this process will assist the county in achieving the overall goals and form the basis for designing county policies, actions, and programs. Local community goals and objectives were developed through a process running ahead of the countywide process, as it was the ad hoc steering committee's objective to have the local towns develop their goals and objectives before the county in order to ensure the county was in line with the towns wishes and desires. Goals and objectives developed at the local level were integrated into the county planning process. The overall process included a review and analysis of local goals and objectives to ensure consistency with the countywide process. Local plan objectives also assisted in forming the countywide plan by identifying common issues and concerns, which would be most appropriately addressed using a countywide approach.

In order to realize the objectives of the comprehensive plan, a series of plan recommendations (actions) were developed by the county planning committee. These recommendations take on several forms, including: development of policies, programs available to achieve plan objectives, and direct action statements.