

FINAL REPORT:
CHASSELL TOWNSHIP RECREATION PLAN SURVEY



FORD CENTER and FOREST
School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science
Michigan Technological University
Special Report FCF-2017-01

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December 20, 2017

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1.0 Introduction

Chassell Township mailed a postcard notice of the recreation plan survey to all recorded households and post office boxes in the Township in late July 2017. Residents and a few adjoining non-residents were encouraged to complete a SurveyMonkey questionnaire online, or pick-up a hard copy of the questionnaire during the month of August 2017. A total of 165 residents of Chassell Township and 9 non-residents completed the questionnaire. This report presents the results of 129 residents who completed the questionnaire online, and 36 residents who completed a hard copy questionnaire (N = 165). A breakdown of resident respondents' age is provided in Figure 1.

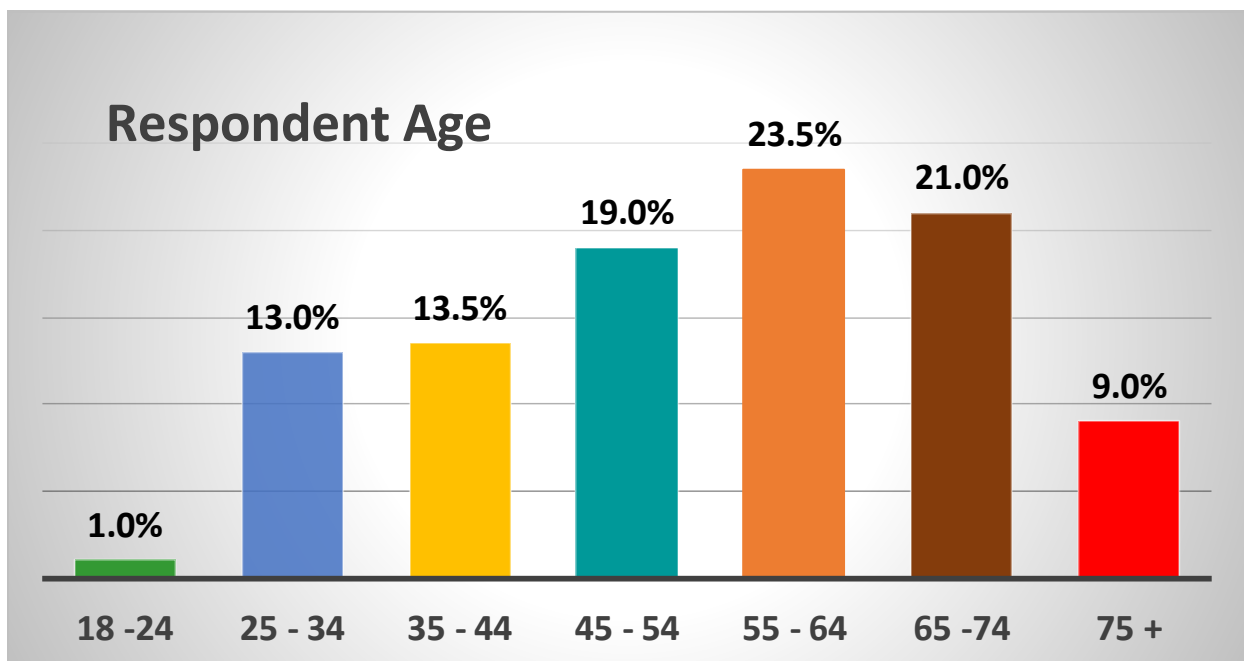


Figure 1. What is your age? N = 162

The U.S. Census (2010) recorded **1,812** residents of Chassell Township, Houghton County, Michigan. Of that total, **1,330** residents were age 20 or older. Therefore, the resident response rate for the survey can be estimated at about **12.5%** (165 respondents / 1,330 residents). **Note:** There were only two respondents age 18 – 24. This age category of “young adults” is not adequately represented in the results of the survey.

The U.S. Census (2010) also recorded **755** households in Chassell Township. There were **115** survey respondents who indicated they were the head of household. Therefore, the household response rate can be estimated at about **15.0%** (115 respondents / 755 households).

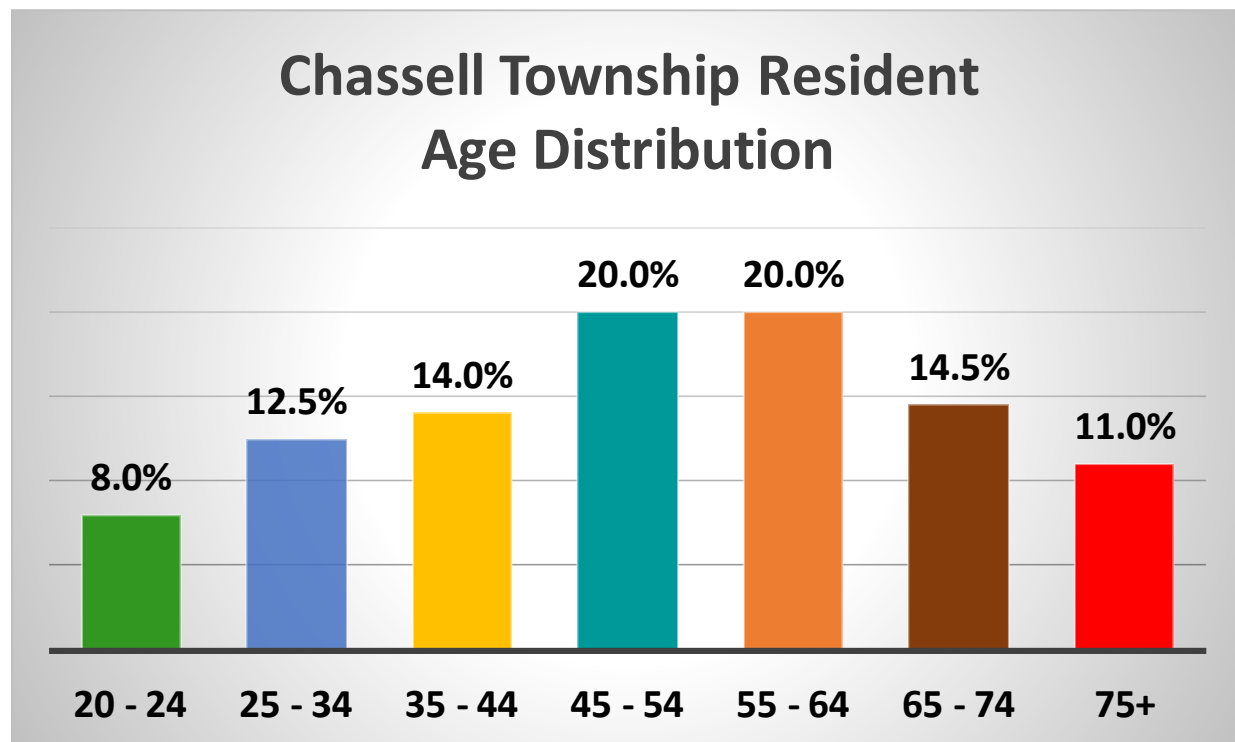


Figure 2. U.S. Census (2010) Resident Age Distribution. N = 1,330

Response rates of **35 – 40%** are usually needed to generalize confidently from survey results to the larger population under study (in this case, residents of Chassell Township). Although the survey response rate was below this benchmark, the age distribution of respondents is similar to that of U.S. Census data (2010), with exception of age 18 – 24 (Figure 2). In addition, **53.5%** of survey respondents were age 55 and older (i.e. “retirement age”), while **45.5%** of census residents were age 55 and older. This indicates some possible response bias in survey results toward age 55 and older.

Lastly, the U.S. Census (2010) recorded **50.5%** of Chassell Township residents as male, and **49.5%** as female. The gender of survey respondents was fairly consistent with the census data (i.e. 3.5% difference), indicating a slight bias in survey results toward male responses (Figure 3). Of these respondents, **70.0%** indicated they were the head of household (Figure 4).

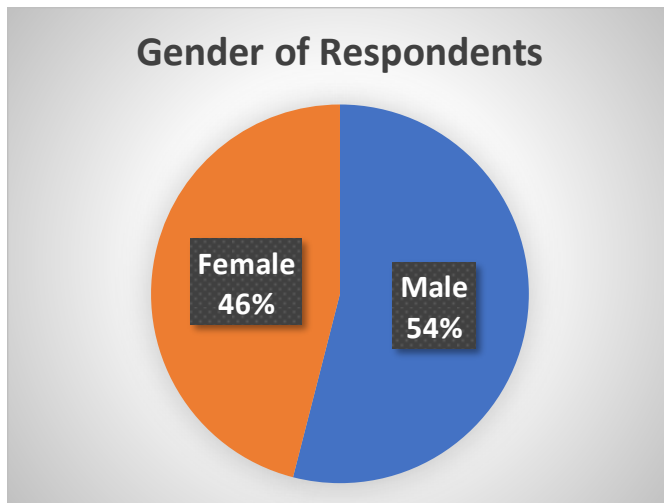


Figure 3. N = 160

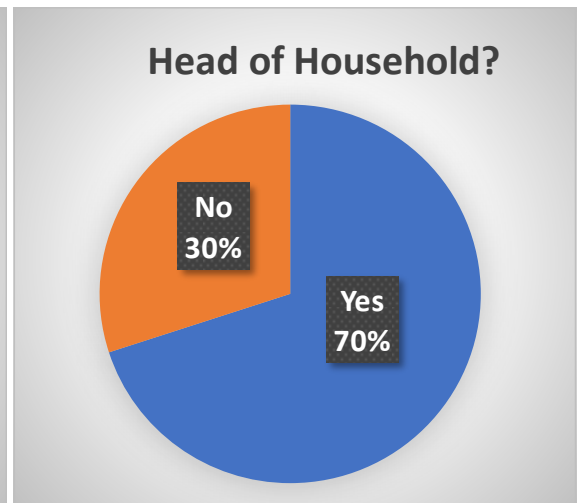


Figure 4. N = 159

2.0 Survey Results

The results of the Chassell Township Recreation Survey are broken down in the following pages by enhancement of Centennial Park, other recreation improvements, and recreation program development. Within these categories, the results are presented in descending order from those enhancements/improvements with the largest support to those with the least support.

2.1 Enhancement of Centennial Park

A large majority of respondents have visited Centennial Park within the past 12 months. In addition, about **41.0%** of respondents have used the boat launch at Centennial Park (Figure 5). Of those using the boat launch, a large percentage (**71.0%**) purchased daily passes, followed by annual passes (**27.0%**). Only **2.0%** of respondents purchased monthly passes (Figure 6).

The survey questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their support for four general enhancements to the Township's Centennial Park (i.e. public marina, recreational vehicle campground, rustic campground, and dog park) (Figures 7 – 10). The enhancement with most support (and least undecided responses) was a dog park, defined in the questionnaire as "a place for dogs to exercise, train, and play off-leash in a controlled environment under supervision of their owners" (adjacent to Centennial Park). A small majority of respondents also supported the concept of a public marina and rustic campground, but the large number of undecided responses suggest that residents need additional information before registering their level of support for these enhancements. The enhancement with least support was a recreational vehicle (RV) campground (**42.5%**). The concept of a RV park also generated a large

percentage of undecided responses. It is assumed that enhancements involving substantial planning, design options, and financial resources would raise concerns and associated reluctance by residents to indicate their support on the survey questionnaire.

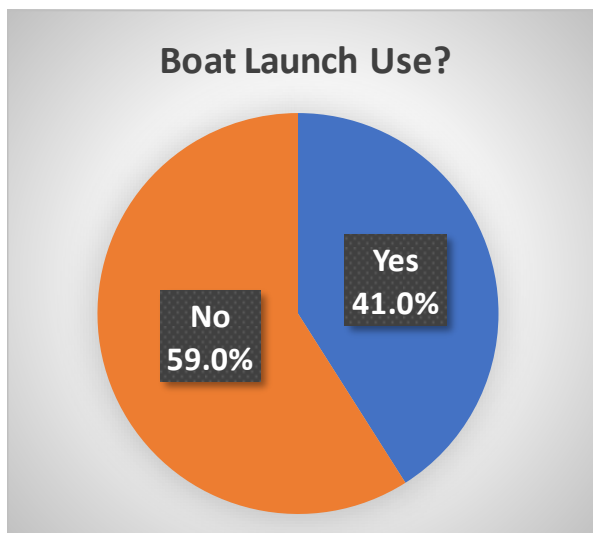


Figure 5. Do you utilize the boat launch?
N = 160

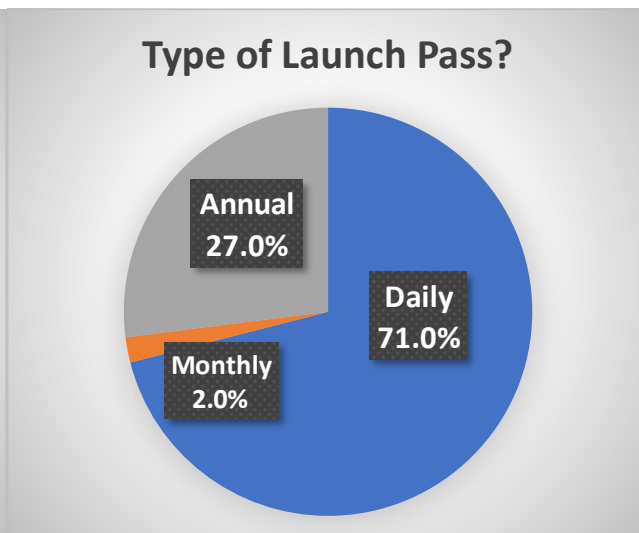


Figure 6. Which launch pass do you purchase?
N = 55

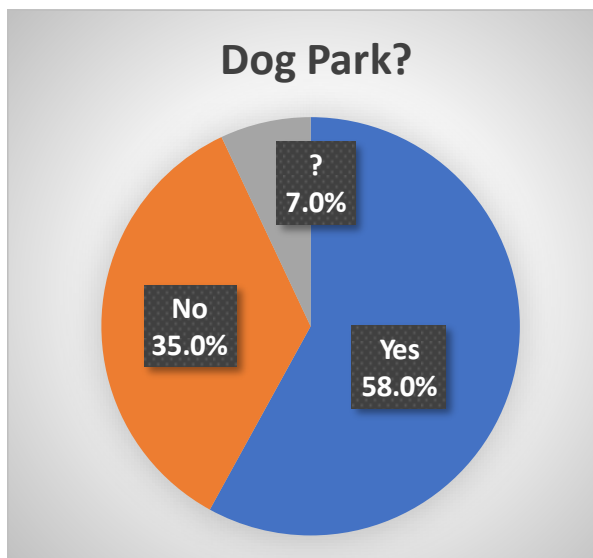


Figure 7. Are you in favor of a dog park?
N = 163

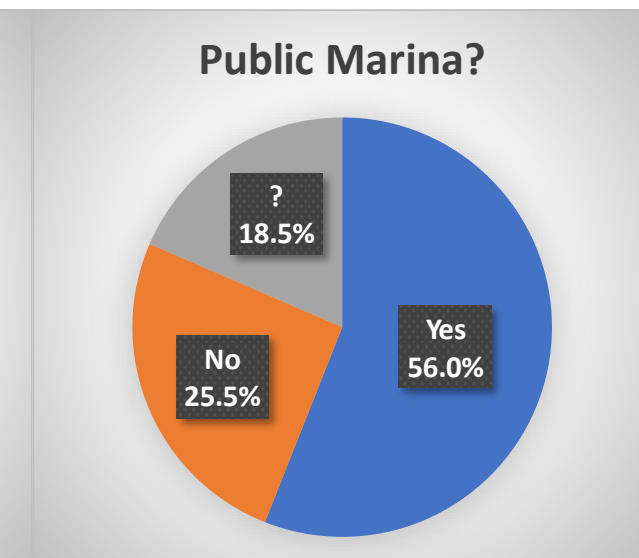


Figure 8. Are you in favor of a public marina?
N = 162

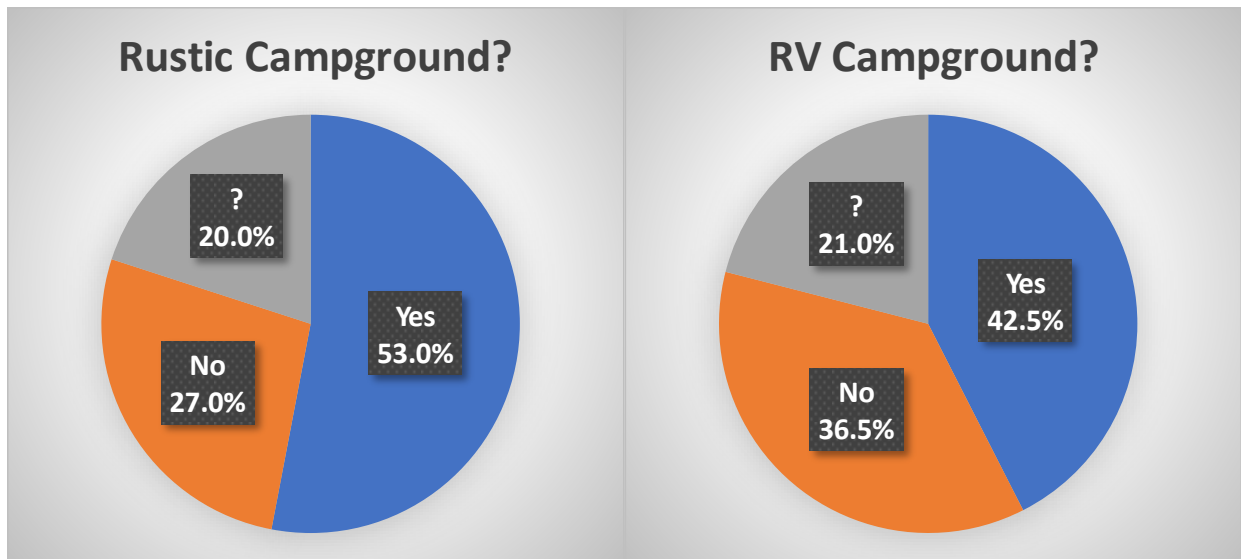


Figure 9. Are you in favor of a rustic CG?
N = 163

Figure 10. Are you in favor of a recreation vehicle campground? N = 162

2.2 Other Recreation Improvements

The recreation improvements generating the largest support were a water trail (**74.0%**) and fitness trail (**71.0%**) (Figures 11 and 12). The water trail was described in the survey questionnaire as “encompassing Chassell Bay, Portage Lake, and the Sturgeon River for kayaking and canoeing.” The fitness trail was described as “a rustic walking or running trail with exercise stations positioned at intervals along the trail, in Chassell Township.”

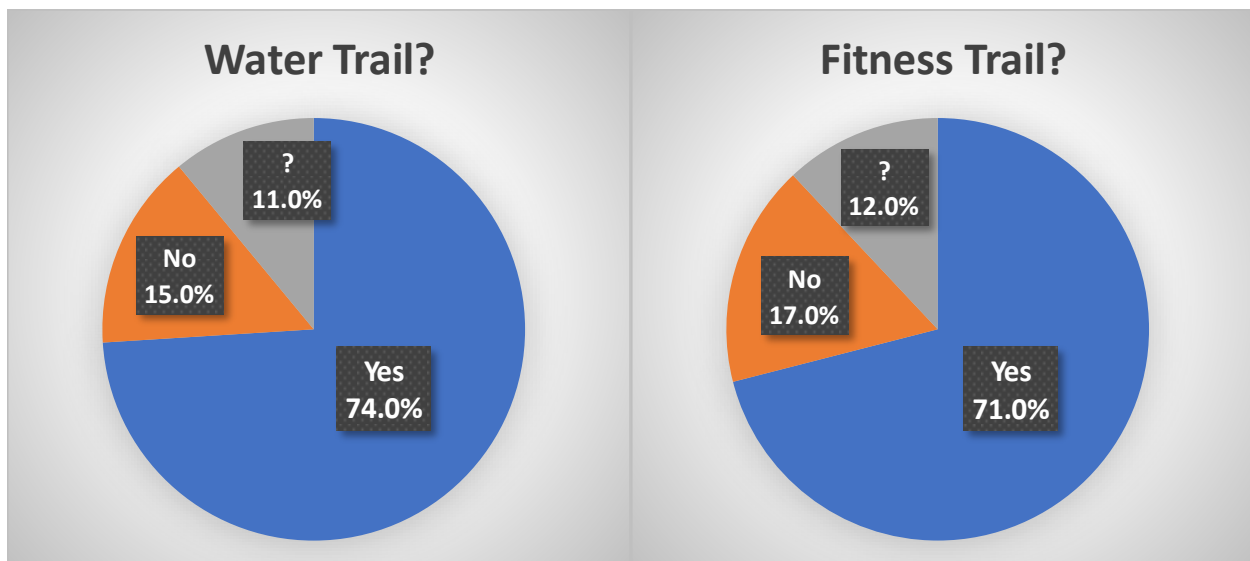


Figure 11. Are you in favor of a water trail?
N = 163

Figure 12. Are you in favor of a fitness trail?
N = 161

The control of Milfoil in Chassell Bay was also supported by respondents by a ratio of over 2:1 (Figure 13). Several written comments indicated that Chassell Bay was the single most important recreational feature in Chassell Township, and should be protected and preserved for its aesthetic qualities and recreational opportunities. Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) is a non-native, invasive freshwater plant that can negatively affect the ecology of a small water body.

On the other hand, respondents were exactly split on the question of allocating more resources for the maintenance of Misslitz Field (Figure 14). However, the low response rate (N = 120) and some written comments indicate that many respondents are either not familiar with this sports field, or require additional information before weighing in on this potential recreation enhancement.

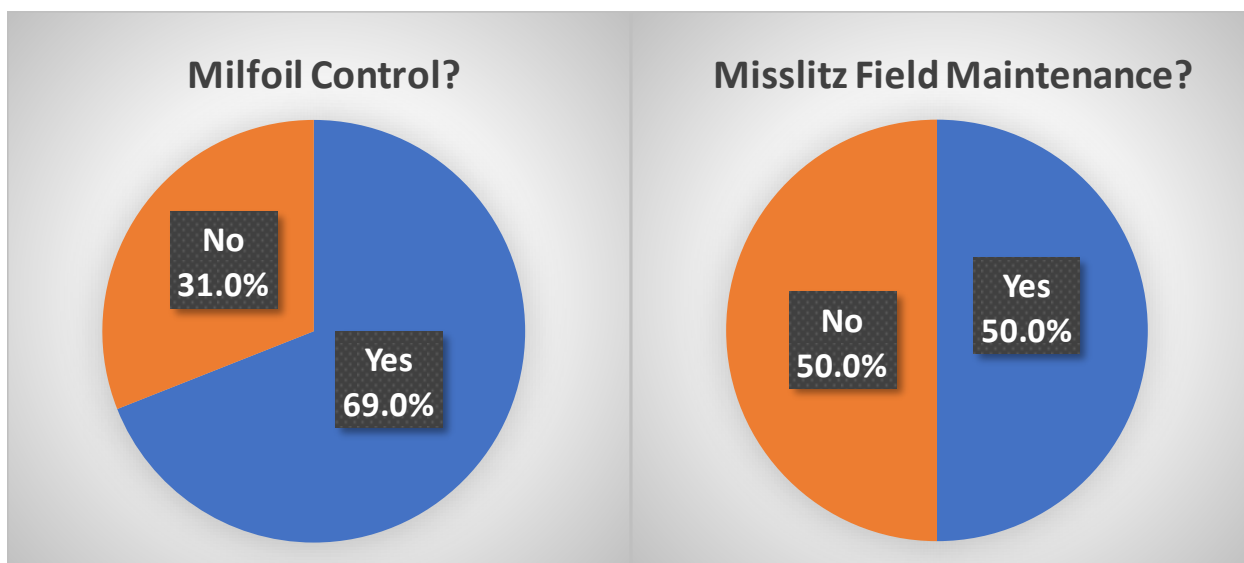


Figure 13. Should Chassell Township invest more resources to combat Milfoil in Chassell Bay. N = 150

Figure 14. Should Chassell Township invest more resources for the maintenance of Misslitz Field? N = 120

2.3 Recreation Program Development

Four survey questions were categorized as potential areas of recreation program development (i.e. youth and teen programs, adult and senior programs, tourism marketing and development, and collaboration with the Chassell Heritage Center) (Figures 15 – 18). The largest support indicated by respondents was for more investment in youth and teen recreation programs (**67.0%**), followed by tourism marketing and development (**63.0%**) and collaboration with the

Chassell Heritage Center (**62.0%**). The least support in program development was for adult and senior recreation programs (**54.5%**).

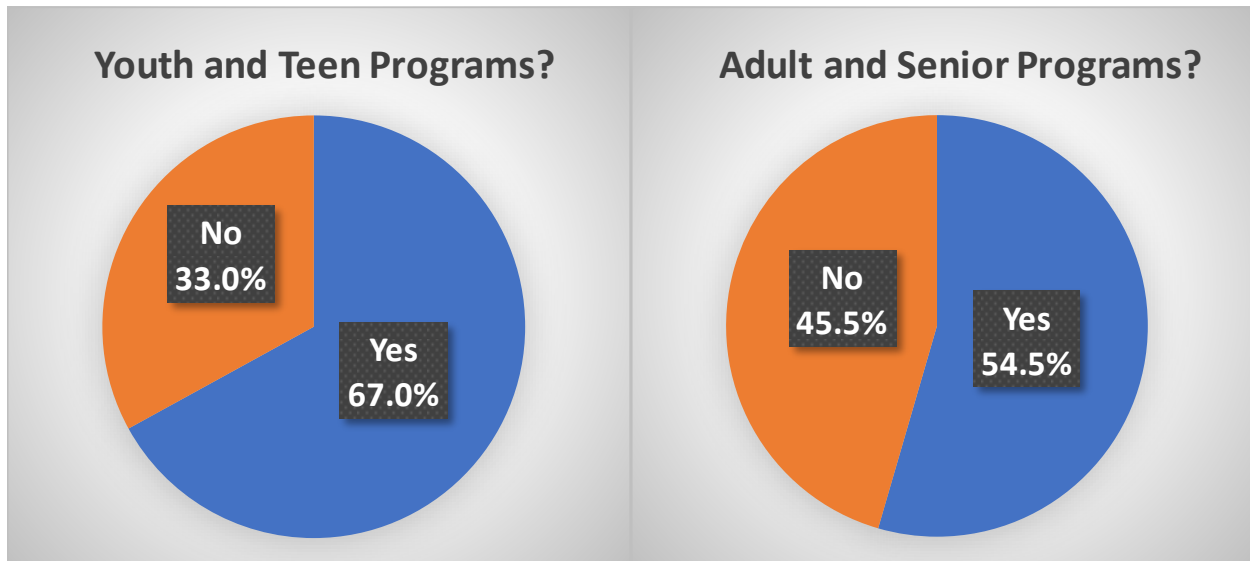


Figure 15. Should Chassell Township invest more resources in youth and teen recreation programs? N = 145

Figure 16. Should Chassell Township invest more resources in adult and senior recreation programs? N = 143

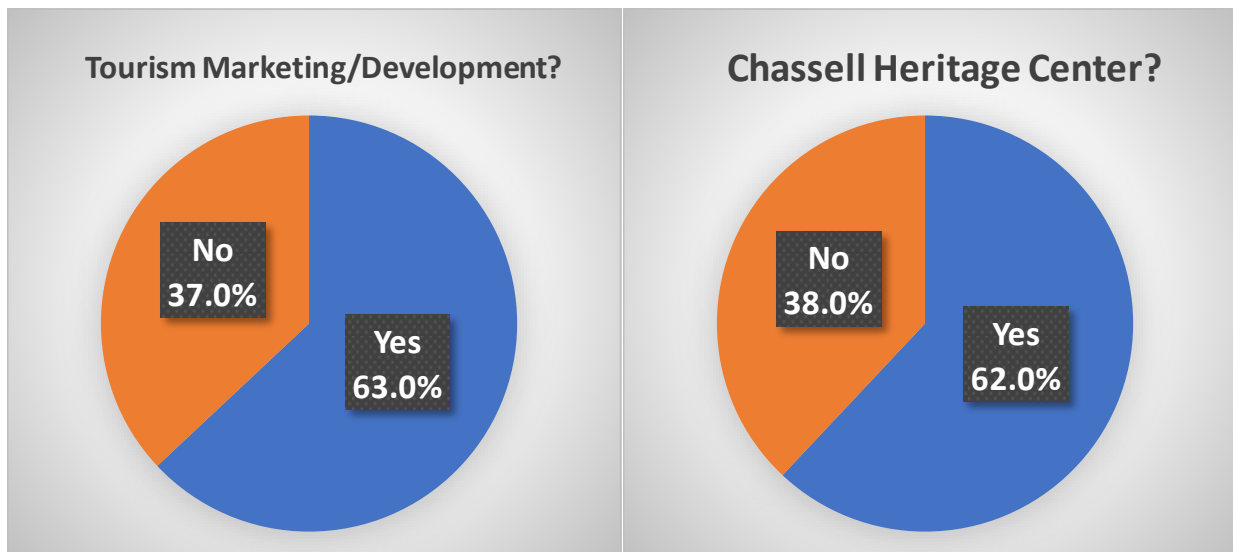


Figure 17. Should Chassell Township invest more resources in tourism marketing and development if economically beneficial to residents? N = 149

Figure 18. Should Chassell Township collaborate more with the Chassell Heritage Center in offering more programs on the history and culture of the region? N = 145

The last survey question asked residents whether they were willing to volunteer and assist to implement the five-year action program in the new Chassell Township Recreation Plan. Nearly 1/3 of respondents indicated they were willing to assist the Township as volunteers (Figure 19).

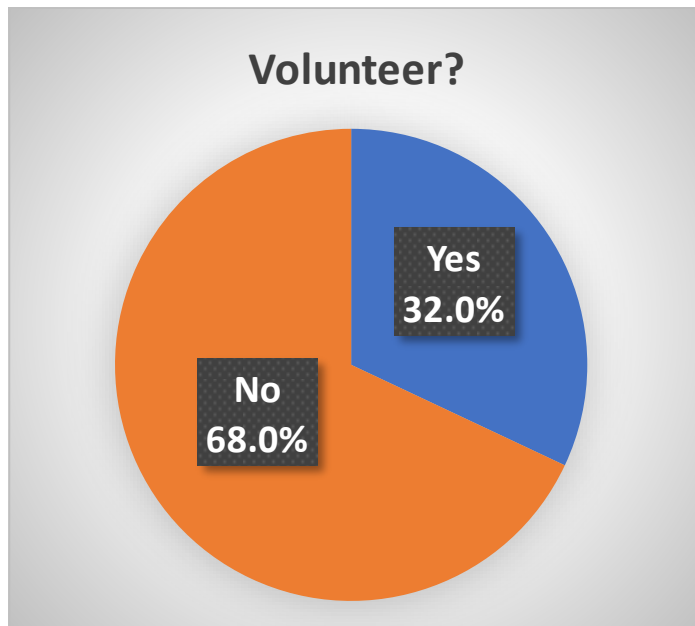


Figure 19. Are you willing to volunteer and assist to implement the “five-year” action program in the new Chassell Township Recreation Plan? N = 139

3.0 Word Clouds of Written Comments

Word clouds are visual representations of text data, commonly used to depict keywords in survey responses, or to visualize free form text of different types (www.wordclouds.com). Word clouds were created as a means of depicting the written comments for survey questions #5, #6, #14, and #15. The following paragraphs summarize the method used to create the word clouds (Figures 20 – 23 at end of report).

The written comments from the mailed and on-line questionnaire were recorded on an excel spreadsheet (i.e. the responses for each question were copied and pasted onto an individual excel spreadsheet.) Once entered, “find and replace” was utilized to remove commas, periods, explanation points, and, the, etc. The responses were then highlighted and the text split into multiple cells from paragraph form to individual words. This allowed individual words to be analyzed and placed in the same cell as similar words (e.g., “strawberry” and “festival”). An “~” was placed in-between certain obviously related words. (The “~” is used to keep words from separating.) The scattered cells were placed into one column and organized A - Z. The

words were then analyzed again to combine and generalize similar responses, and for word cloud visual appeal (i.e. paddle was combined with *canoe*; music/music festivals combined with *concerts*; jog combined with *run*; ski combined with *xc ski*; ski, running/walking, and biking trails combined as *trails*; ORV and riding were combined as *ATV*). In addition, some words were shortened for visual appeal: Centennial Park changed to *Cent. Park*; railroad grade changed to *R.R. grade*; Strawberry Festival changed to *Strawb Fest.*; Old Fashioned Christmas changed to *Old Fashioned Xmas*; cross-country/cc ski changed to *xc ski*; quality changed to *qlty.*; and mountain bike changed to *mt. bike*.

Although the word clouds may not present the exact words used by respondents, the method used in creating the word clouds assures that the main points of respondents are represented. Some words were deleted because they were irrelevant to answering the question. In addition, the word clouds do not provide details of individual responses, such as the lack of width and pavement on the railroad grade trail. Lastly, please keep in mind that these word clouds should *not* be used to generalize to larger populations. However, they do provide insight on the intensity of certain respondents toward recreational opportunities and issues in Chassell Township.

4.0 Preliminary Conclusions and Recommendations

A final draft survey report was distributed to the Chassell Township Recreation Committee prior to the business meeting of the Chassell Township Planning Commission on November 2, 2017. After review and discussion, the Commission accepted the report without substantive change. The authors also agreed to include word clouds of written comments in the final report. Preliminary conclusions and recommendations include the following:

- The development of a dog park adjacent to Centennial Park received the most support of respondents in terms of enhancement of facilities and services at the Park. Although the other possible enhancements (i.e. public marina, rustic campground, recreational vehicle campground) received majority support, the large number of undecided responses indicate that the Township should further engage residents to discuss these potential enhancements in greater detail.
- Of all recreation enhancements and improvements presented in the survey questionnaire, the concepts of a water trail and fitness trail received the most support by respondents (almost 3:1 in favor). In addition, the control of Milfoil in Chassell Bay was favored by respondents by a ratio of over 2:1. The control of Milfoil can also be viewed as an enhancement of water quality and aesthetics that benefit any recreational activities making use of Chassell Bay. However, the Township should be cautious about

devoting more resources to maintenance of Misslitz Field until the underlying reasons for the strong opposition is better understood by Township leadership.

- As for recreation program development, respondents indicated the greatest support for more resources for youth and teen recreation programs. This may reflect current societal concerns about the lack of youth and teen involvement in the outdoors as well as the lack of recreation opportunities for this age group in general. Additional resources for adult and senior programs were much less favored by respondents than youth and teen program development. The respondents were also supportive of more resources devoted to tourism marketing and development (if economically beneficial), and collaboration with the Chassell Heritage Center, which is located within walking distance of the Centennial Park.
- The survey results also generated many written comments, which have been analyzed using word clouds (**Figures 20 – 23**). The written comments can help in understanding some of the reasons for resident's responses to the survey questions as well as providing ideas and perspectives not captured by the survey results.
- These survey results are valuable in planning and preparation of a new Chassell Township Recreation Plan (which expires in 2017), and in turn, preparation of grant proposals to the **Michigan Land and Water Conservation Fund** (deadline April 1, 2018 at www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-58225_58672---,00.html); **Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund** (deadline April 1, 2018 at www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-58225_58301-257945--,00.html); **Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program** (deadline December 15, 2017 at www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3313_3677_3696--,00.html); and other capital improvement and operational funding sources.

Sincerely,

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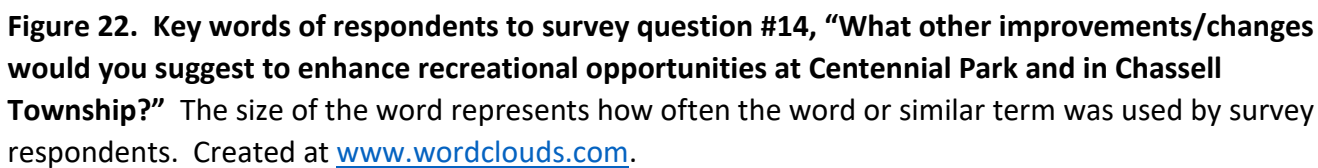


Figure 22. Key words of respondents to survey question #14, “What other improvements/changes would you suggest to enhance recreational opportunities at Centennial Park and in Chassell Township?” The size of the word represents how often the word or similar term was used by survey respondents. Created at www.wordclouds.com.

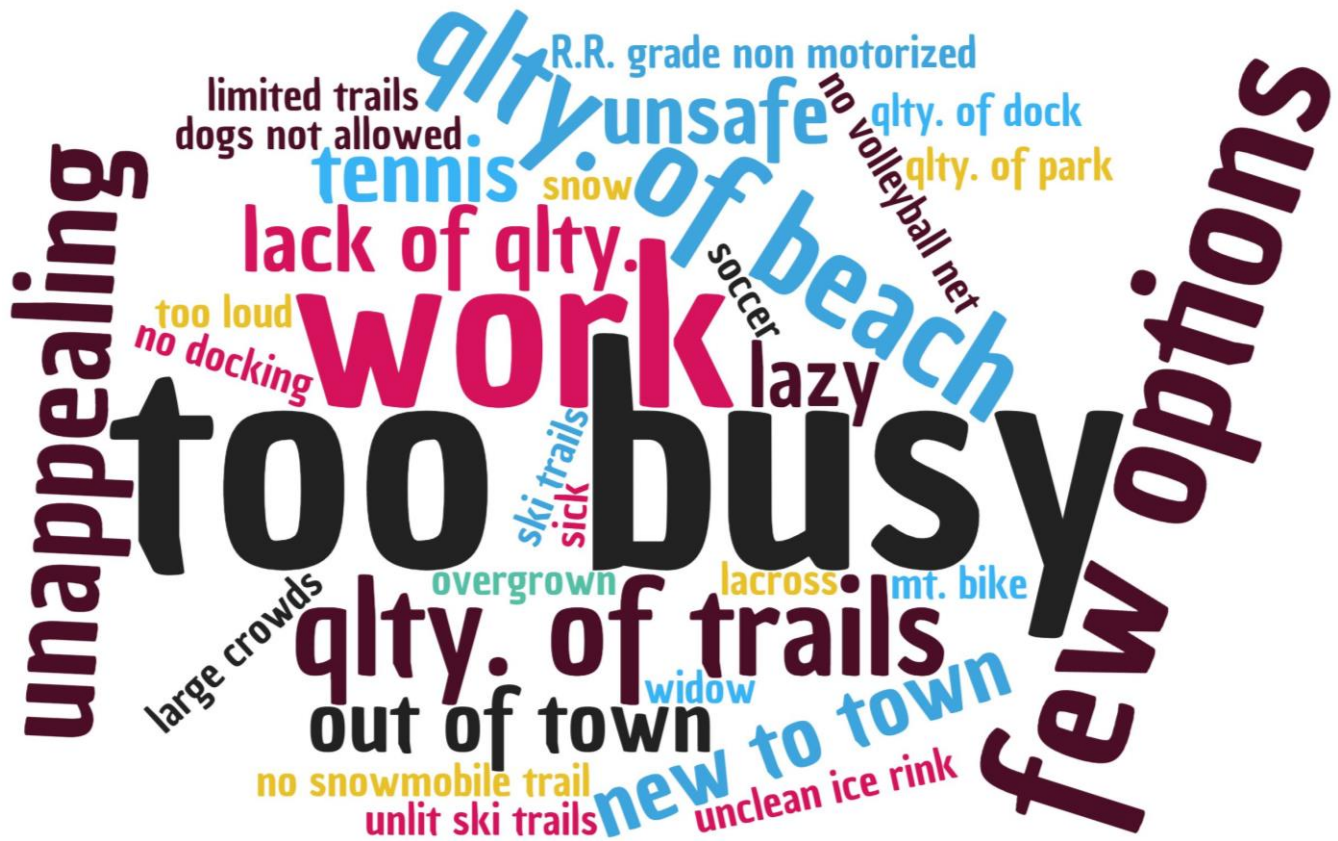


Figure 23. Key words of respondents to survey question #15, “Why don’t you participate more often in recreational activities in Chassell Township?” The size of the word represents how often the word or similar term was used by survey respondents. Created at www.wordclouds.com.

Notes: The words “too busy” and “work” indicate that lack of free time is a barrier to recreational participation for some residents of Chassell Township. “New to town” suggests a lack of knowledge of recreation activities and events in Chassell Township. “Out of town” indicates that some respondents travel to surrounding towns for certain recreation opportunities or facilities (e.g., cross-country skiing, mountain biking) that are *not* offered in Chassell Township.