The National Recreation and Park Association knows why parks are important in this country. From Top 10 Reasons Parks Are Important, an article on www.nrpa.org:

1) Public parks provide millions of Americans with the opportunity to be physically active.
2) Parks have true economic benefits.
3) Parks provide vital green space in a fast-developing American landscape.
4) Parks preserve critical wildlife habitat.
5) Parks and recreation facilitate social interactions.
6) Leisure activities in parks improve moods, reduce stress and enhance a sense of wellness.
7) Recreational programs provide organized, structured, enjoyable activities.
8) Community recreation services provide a refuge of safety for at-risk youth.
9) Therapeutic recreation is an outlet that individuals with disabilities have.
10) Public parks embody the American tradition of preserving public lands.

Overview of Manistee County’s Recreational Assets

Within Manistee County are twenty local municipalities, which include one city, five villages, and fourteen townships. Many provide local parks and community recreational facilities. State and federal agencies also provide recreational opportunities. The management of these public facilities is the responsibility of the elected boards and commissions of the respective entity. The Manistee County Planning Commission recognizes the health benefits, positive economic impacts, and overall contribution to quality of life that these recreational assets provide to the residents of Manistee County. As such, the Planning Commission supports efforts to improve all recreational facilities and services within the county. The county is committed to cooperating with these organizations on recreation projects when goals identified within this plan can be satisfied. The following overview summarizes the recreational assets in Manistee County that are owned and operated by other agencies and governmental entities.

Cities, Villages, and Townships  Of the twenty local municipalities in the county, sixteen own and operate their own parks. As shown previously on the list of recreational assets, this amounts to 50 parks ranging in size from 0.15 to 97 acres. Most are either Mini-Parks or Neighborhood Parks. Figure 5 is an overview of where many of these parks (noted in yellow, pathways noted in red) are generally located.
Figure 5: Public parks in Manistee County owned and operated by cities, villages, and townships. Parks are noted in yellow, pathways in red. (Data: Google Earth)
County Properties  Road ends owned by the Manistee County Road Commission provide access to five inland lakes, Lake Michigan, and the Manistee River. These water bodies are shown on Figure 6. Road names, and the water body they provide access to, are provided on the list of recreational assets. The 56 road ends owned by the Manistee County Road Commission are classified as Special Use Parks. Currently, the Manistee County Road Commission has no policy for managing these road ends. Also shown in Figure 6 is the Manistee County Fairgrounds. Located in Onekama Township, the 20 acre facility is owned and operated by the Manistee County Fair Board.

State and Federal Properties  Property in Manistee County owned and operated by state and federal agencies is provided in the list of recreational assets. Of the 557 square miles of land in Manistee County, 143 square miles are federally owned and 45 square miles are state owned. Figure 7 shows the federal land holdings (green) to be comprised of the Manistee National Forest, about 26% of the total land area in the county. Also shown are the three largest state property holdings, all managed by the Department of Natural Resources: Pere Marquette State Forest (yellow), Manistee River State Game Area (orange), and Orchard Beach State Park (red). Together, these three assets account for 8% of the total land area in Manistee County.

Little River Band of Ottawa Indians  The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians (LRBOI) is a sovereign and federally recognized Tribal government. Governmental offices are based in Manistee, within the boundaries of a 70,000 acre reservation along the Manistee River, established under the 1836 Treaty of Washington. The LRBOI and the United States reaffirmed their government-to-government relationship in 1994. The LRBOI land use plan, adopted in 2005, shows property in Manistee County that is under Tribal ownership, about 2,000 acres. These parcels (orange) are shown in Figure 8. The land use plan does not refer to any specific parks or recreation development goals for Tribal lands in Manistee County, a priority for a Greenway/Linear Park is described in the Planning Areas chapter.
Figure 6: Water bodies with road ends that are owned by the Manistee County Road Commission. (Data: Google Earth)
Figure 7: State and federal land holdings in Manistee County. (Data: Google Earth)
Figure 8: Land owned by the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians. (Data: Google Earth)
**Other Properties**  There are ten unique sites shown on the list of recreational assets, encompassing over 2,200 acres in Manistee County. Of special note is the Lake Bluff Audubon Center, located on 76 acres in Manistee Township overlooking Lake Michigan. This is a good site for viewing many kinds of birds, especially along the shoreline during times of migration. The Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy has significant holdings in the county, including 1,650 acres at the Arcadia Dunes Preserve.

**Lakes and Rivers**  The list of recreational assets describes 61 lakes and rivers in Manistee County. The 48 lakes and 12 rivers in Manistee County are shown in Figure 9. Among the five major rivers – Manistee River, Little Manistee River, Pine River, Betsie River, and Bear Creek – it is estimated they stretch across the county for about 276 miles. There are nine inland lakes in Manistee County with an area greater than 50 acres in size, and about 8,248 acres of natural or artificial lakes and ponds. These water bodies offer a variety of fishing and boating opportunities for residents and tourists.

**DEQ Coastal Communities**  There are eight communities in Manistee County, shown in Figure 10, on the list of recreational assets that qualify for grants under the Department of Environmental Quality’s Coastal Management program. The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), passed in 1972, enables Michigan to develop a coastal management program to improve protection of sensitive shoreline resources, to identify coastal areas appropriate for development, to designate areas hazardous to development, and to improve public access to the coastline. Grants are passed through each year to local communities and non-profit organizations located on the Great Lakes shoreline for a variety of projects. Manistee County’s coastal zone boundary (green area in Figure 10) generally extends a minimum of 1,000 feet inland from the Ordinary High Water Mark of Lake Michigan and connecting channels, or further to include coastal lakes, river mouths and bays, floodplains, coastal wetlands, designated sand dunes, public parks, and recreation areas.
Figure 9: Lakes and rivers in Manistee County. Numbers correspond to the water body names provided on the inventory of recreational assets on pages 14 and 15. (Data: Google Earth)
Figure 10: Communities that qualify for grants under the DEQ Coastal Management program. (Data: Google Earth)