

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The image of a cold, snowy climate; a distant, northern, isolated location; and a dwindling economy are part of the folklore for Crystal Falls Township. In fact, that image is partially accurate and bears acknowledgment in the planning process. But there is more to Crystal Falls Township than that image.

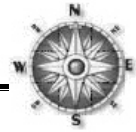
Part of the advantages the township has is really some of the things it doesn't have: there is no busy traffic, no bustling crowds, no high pressure jobs, no detours for continuous construction and no complex social structures. This simplicity is an asset for many citizens.



The Crystal Falls area may have simplicity, but it also has abundant outdoor recreation opportunities. There is camping, swimming, golfing, hiking, hunting, fishing, boating, canoeing, color appreciation, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. It is a true four seasons environment with the recreation opportunities changing as the year moves through its cycle of seasons. These recreation opportunities are underscored by the Fortune Pond large and beautiful Copper Country State Forest and Bewabic State Park.

As a passive experience, Crystal Falls Township has a pristine and beautiful environment of hills, trees, lakes, rivers, waterfalls, wetlands, wildlife, wild flowers and stark snow in the winter. With its excellent physical recreation opportunities, attractive and pleasing environment and fine infrastructure, Crystal Falls Township is a fortunate community.

Change is slowly occurring in the Township. Crystal Falls has endured changes from iron mining to forestry and now to a growing tourist industry. There is also a strong desire to provide more jobs in the community and to provide additional goods and services. Accordingly, the Township prepared this master plan through its planning commission to adjust to unfolding change and to control the character of change so it can maintain the vision of its residents and seasonal visitors.



REGIONAL LOCATION AND CONTEXT

The City of Crystal Falls is the County Seat for Iron County and is surrounded by the Township near the eastern county boundary. The township is very large at nearly seven times the size of a “normal” township of 36 square miles. Much of the approximately 240 square miles in the township is sparsely inhabited, with the bulk of the population residing closer to the City. Iron County is one of only two counties in the Upper Peninsula without any Great Lakes shoreline (the other is Dickinson County to the east). The township land is primarily owned by the State of Michigan for the Copper Country State Forest and the paper companies that need trees to produce paper.

Crystal Falls Township is part of or near the small urban areas of the Cities of Crystal Falls and Iron River in Michigan’s western Upper Peninsula. The Crystal Falls/Iron River urban area has some functions similar to a single urban area over 6,000 residents because the communities are only about 16 miles distant. The County’s overall population is 13,138 persons. The nearest other concentrations of urban population are Iron Mountain, 30 miles southeast; Escanaba, 72 miles southeast; Houghton-Hancock, 85 miles north; Ironwood, 98 miles west; and Marquette, 70 miles northeast. The Township is located just a few miles north of the Wisconsin boundary on the Brule River. Iron Mountain is the largest City in the immediate area – only thirty miles from Crystal Falls and with a steadily growing urban area.

The Township land has a base elevation at about 1,300 feet above sea level with a tilt southeasterly. Hills are the dominant land form and cover much of the township rising to an elevation of nearly 1,800 feet. As part of the Gogebic Hilly Upland, the township is almost entirely wooded with Aspen-Birch deciduous forests being dominant and Spruce-Fir coniferous forests.

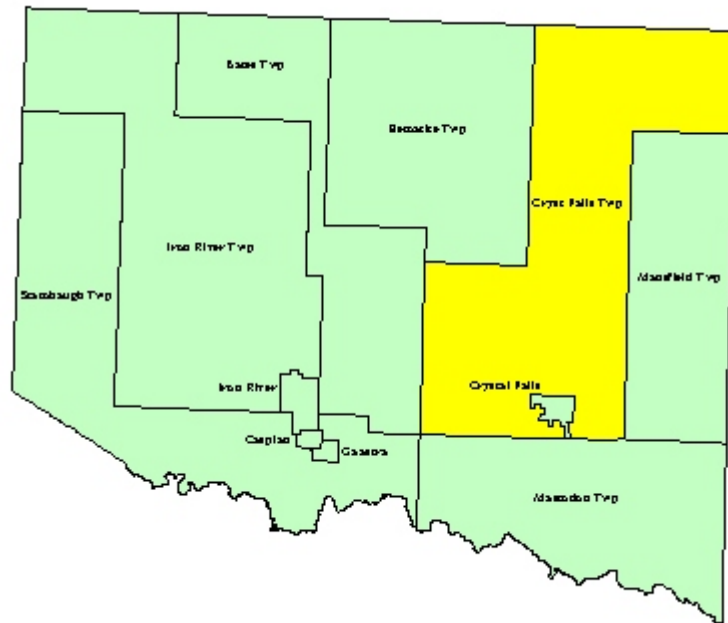
There are three major roads serving Crystal Falls Township. One is US-2 which is an east-west

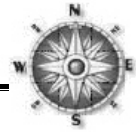


highway and another is north-south highway US-141. The only state highway is M-69 which terminates in the City after traversing from the east near Escanaba. There are only two all-season, primary, paved county roads in the Township. The Iron County Airport is close to Crystal Falls Township in nearby Mastodon Township and serves as a general aviation airport without scheduled passenger service.

The regional location leaves Crystal Falls Township relatively isolated. But the growth of telecommunications, computers, broad-band technology, satellite service and electronics mitigates that isolation and brings new challenges and opportunities to Crystal Falls Township.

Regional Location Crystal Fall Township





BRIEF HISTORY

As the original inhabitants, Native American Indians are thought to have been sparsely populated in Iron County. The few Indians were mainly itinerant along the Brule River between Michigan and Wisconsin. However, there is an Ojibwa Bands Indian Burial Grounds with wooden burial structures still intact. This was also a permanent settlement and area headquarters for the Ojibwas. It is now a tourist destination and preserved site on the south end of Chicagon Lake just west of Crystal Falls Township on County Road 424. The Indians are also known to have hunted and traveled along the Paint River in Crystal Falls Township and City.

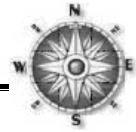
The Brule River was named after the French explorer Etienne Brule. The then unnamed Iron County became part of an European economic system when fur-trading started in the 1600's. The Paint River and Deer River in Crystal Falls Township were probably populated by beaver during that time. Crystal Falls was the name of falls that now are part of an electrical generating dam across the Paint River in the City. Reportedly a logger in the area awoke next to the falls and noted the falls had changed the shrubs and trees to "crystal" ice one evening. Thus the name Crystal Falls stuck even though the falls are now encapsulated into a dam.

The mining of iron ore, which became the county name, was first noted in 1846. Shortly after 1850 numerous small mines began to operate in the area. In 1880 the Crystal Falls Iron Company was organized and became the most important mining operation in the county. The first frame building for a permanent residence in the area was by Dr. H.C. Kimball in 1881. In 1882 the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad was extended from Stager, near Wisconsin, north to Crystal Falls and that City became a dominant shipping point for iron mining.

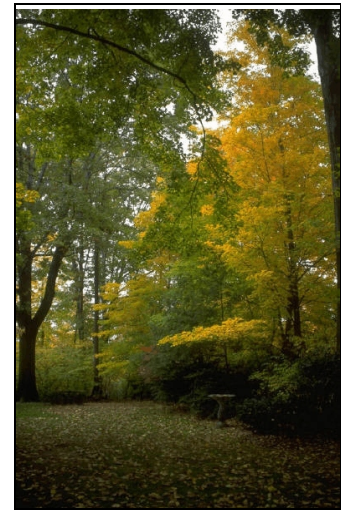
The mines developed throughout Iron County, including Crystal Falls Township. In most cases the mines resulted in concentrations of homes in walking distance to the mine shaft. Some of the houses near the mines were relocated, became dilapidated or disappeared after the mines closed but many still remain.

An impressive Court House was built in 1890 as the center of County government. Mining shrunk dramatically after an 1894 depression but limped on until the last mine closed in 1978. Population peaked in 1910 and 1930, but declined dramatically after that.

George Runkle from Florence, Wisconsin became the first Supervisor of the Township (there



was no village or city at that time) and his friend from Florence, WI – S.D. Holister – became a significant factor in the area’s early growth. Later, as mining shrunk, logging started to become a more significant venture. First trees were made into structural lumber and then paper. Iron County – including Crystal Falls Township – is now a center of commercial logging in the area.



The City built a large City Hall in 1935 and the golf course in 1935. A new Crystal Falls Community Library was finished in late 2002. Crystal Falls Township built its current Township Hall in 1931 and is now expanding it. There also remains an Old Town Hall Site near Gibson Lake.

Farming is very limited in Crystal Falls Township because most of the land is hilly and wooded. In addition, the soils are not well suited for agriculture. But the lakes, rivers, woods and hills are now providing an attractive environment for seasonal dwellers and tourists.

Population declined in the early 1900's as mining began to leave the area and has only recovered in the last twenty years as the shift to tourism began. Consistent with life styles, more retail activity has moved from the City to the Township.

Crystal Falls Township is currently an important part of the local economic structure with timber operations and tourism growing in importance.