



Heartland Counties

Material Management Plan Frequently Asked Questions

Clare, Gladwin, Gratiot, Isabella, Mecosta, Midland, Ogemaw, and Osceola counties are jointly developing a Materials Management Plan (MMP), as required under Michigan's solid waste law. This FAQ provides information about the plan and state requirements, the collaborative effort, and next steps, including resident feedback.



ABOUT THE PLAN

What is the Heartland Materials Management Plan?

The Heartland MMP is a regional plan that lays out how the eight participating counties will manage recycling, trash disposal, composting, and other materials in the coming years. It replaces each county's older, individual solid waste plan (most of which date back to the early 2000s) with a single, coordinated plan covering the whole region. It's often referred to informally as a “recycling plan,” but it covers all non-hazardous materials management, not recycling alone.

Who does the plan apply to, and what's actually in it?

The plan applies to every city, village, and township within the eight counties. It has four main parts: 1) a profile of the region's current population, waste generation, and recycling infrastructure; 2) five shared regional goals (see below); 3) the funding, enforcement, and facility-siting mechanisms that support those goals; and 4) an administration section describing who runs the plan day-to-day. Each county also has its own appendix with county-specific actions, timelines, and responsible parties.

What are the plan's five regional goals?

- Goal 1: Improve recycling rates and meet the state's new Benchmark Recycling Standards.
- Goal 2: Reduce food waste and build out composting and organics management.
- Goal 3: Expand recycling education and outreach.
- Goal 4: Track and report actual recycling program data, rather than relying on estimates.
- Goal 5: Build out shared, regional processing infrastructure centered on the Isabella County Recycling Center.

Each county's appendix spells out how it plans to pursue these goals locally and on what timeline.

Does the plan approve a specific new landfill or facility near me?

No. The plan doesn't approve any specific facility. It sets out the process and criteria — called a “siting consistency determination” — that any new or expanding materials management facility must meet before the state issues it a permit. That process still requires local zoning approval and, in most cases, approval from the host community. The region's two existing landfills (in Clare and Midland counties) are not affected by this plan.

What's the region's current recycling rate, and what is the plan trying to achieve?

The Heartland region's estimated recycling rate is about 12.6%, based on state per-capita data. This is a general estimate, as the region doesn't yet have enough measured, on-the-ground data to calculate an exact rate. Goal 4 aims to address this. Michigan's current statewide recycling rate is 26%. The state has a long-term goal of 45%, with an interim target of 30% by 2029. The plan is the region's roadmap for closing that gap.

WHY ARE THE COUNTIES PLANNING TOGETHER?

Why plan as a region instead of each county writing its own plan?

No single county in the region has the population base or infrastructure to manage materials entirely on its own. Together, the eight counties cover roughly 4,500 square miles and about 330,000 residents, almost entirely rural. Michigan's solid waste law allows counties to form a joint, multi-county plan instead of separate ones. The counties agreed that a shared plan offers real advantages, including lower costs, shared infrastructure and staff, a stronger position when negotiating with haulers and processors, and coordinated education, data, and funding efforts.

What is the “hub-and-spoke” model and why does Isabella County anchor it?

Isabella County already hosts the region's only full-service Materials Recovery Facility (MRF), the Isabella County Recycling Center, and serves as a processing hub that other counties informally feed into. Goal 5 formalizes that relationship. Rather than each of the other seven counties building its own smaller-scale processing facility, Isabella County plans to expand the Isabella MRF to handle material from across the region. The other counties will commit to material volumes and share governance and revenue as the facility grows.

How is the regional effort organized and governed?

The eight counties are joined through an Interlocal Agreement, authorized under Michigan's Urban Cooperation Act, that each county's Board of Commissioners approved after a public hearing. That agreement sets up three bodies:

- Each county's own Board of Commissioners acts as its “County Approval Agency,” retaining local implementation and enforcement authority.
- Isabella County serves as the region's single “Designated Planning Agency,” staffing the day-to-day regional process and coordinating with the state.
- The Heartland Materials Management Planning Committee, with three appointed voting members from each of the eight counties, develops the plan and, once approved, continues to oversee it. This includes reviewing future facility proposals for consistency with the plan.

Does this take decision-making away from my local government?

No. Local zoning authority is untouched. The plan explicitly defers to each community's zoning ordinance to determine where within that community a facility may be located. The regional committee determines whether a proposed facility is consistent with the plan; it does not have authority to override a local zoning decision. Most facility types still require local zoning approval and, often, host-community sign-off before they can move forward.

12.6%

Heartland Region
Recycling Rate

45%

Statewide
Recycling Rate
Goal

WHY DO WE NEED AN MMP?

What is “Part 115,” and why does it matter here?

Part 115 is the section of Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act that governs solid waste and materials management. It requires the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) to ensure every county/group of counties has a current, state-approved MMP. Developing the Heartland MMP is how the eight counties are meeting that requirement.

Why is this happening now?

In 2022, the Michigan Legislature passed a package of bills that substantially rewrote Part 115, shifting the framework from “waste management” to “materials management” and modernizing planning rules that in many of these counties hadn't been updated since the early 2000s. The rewrite requires every county in the state to undergo an updated planning process, which is why all eight Heartland counties are updating their plans collaboratively now.

MATERIALS MANAGEMENT

Instead of simply disposing of trash in landfills or incinerators, the MMP looks to manage valuable materials through reuse, recycling, and composting.

What does the updated law actually require?

- Benchmark Recycling Standards (BRS): By 2028, any city, village, or township with more than 5,000 residents must ensure twice monthly curbside recycling is available to at least 90% of single-family households; by 2032, every county must provide drop-off recycling coverage for residents without curbside access (one site per 10,000 residents, open >24 hours per month, not served by curbside).
- An approved plan that assures adequate materials management capacity for the region's non-hazardous waste, and a state review process that denies permits to new facilities that aren't consistent with an approved plan.
- Statewide recycling goals of 30% by 2029 and 45% over the long term. Counties must show progress toward assisting the state in reaching these goals.
- State funding to help counties pay for the planning process and, later, for implementation.

What happens if the plan isn't approved, or a step in the process stalls?

Ultimately, if a plan is not approved or the process stalls, the state will intervene to write a binding plan for the Heartland region.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Where does the plan stand right now?

The Heartland Materials Management Planning Committee voted to approve a draft plan on August 21, 2026, which opens a formal 60-day public comment period.

When and how can I comment on the plan?

A 60-day public comment period will run from Monday, August 24, 2026, until Friday, October 23, 2026. State law requires a public hearing during that window. Exact hearing details will be published through each county's communication channels. To submit comments and feedback on the plan, go to www.heartlandmmp.org.

What happens after the comment period closes?

The Designated Planning Agency (Isabella County) may choose to revise the plan based on public and committee feedback before the committee gives final approval to send the revised plan to each county's Board of Commissioners. Each of the eight county boards then has up to 60 days to review and approve the MMP. If any Board of Commissioners rejects the plan, it will return to the committee for revision before being sent back to each county's Board of Commissioners. Once all boards approve, local cities, villages, and townships (CVTs) each get up to 120 days to review and approve the MMP. From there, the plan is submitted to the state (EGLE) for final review, which can take up to 180 days. The plan is due to EGLE by July 1, 2027. If a Board of Commissioners rejects the plan a second time or if the plan fails to secure 2/3 of all voting CVTs, EGLE will take over the process and write the plan itself.

When will the plan actually take effect?

At this time, the precise timing is uncertain, though current estimates suggest sometime in 2028.

Is this the only chance to weigh in, or will there be future opportunities?

This comment period is the main opportunity to weigh in on the plan itself before it's finalized, but it isn't the only touchpoint, as the plan requires a full review at least every five years.

Learn more and submit questions at:

www.HeartlandMMP.org

