

Search Interest Source for Upper Peninsula

During 2024, Upper Peninsula search interest has underperformed forecasts. Lower search interest during the first months of the year was undoubtedly partly caused by a very warm winter with little snow limiting winter sports often popular in the Upper Peninsula. However, this low search interest has continued into the 2024 summer peak.

While investigating this issue, I found that inconsistencies in Google trends data pulls has led to an inconsistent story for Upper Peninsula interest. In some data pulls, search interest increased until 2023, only falling in 2024. In other data pulls, search interest was already declining in 2023, making the 2024 trend less shocking.

In other investigations, I found that the fall in search interest has impacted a large variety of places. For instance, the fall in search interest isn't limited to places of a certain geographic location or a certain search interest level.

Finally, I used online data from Mackinac Bridge crossings to show that this trend wasn't mirrored in bridge crossings. This data is important because the Mackinac Bridge is the only connection between the Upper and Lower Peninsula and a lot of search interest for the Upper Peninsula comes from tourists south of the bridge. This aligns closely with the original project findings that much of the original increase in search interest for the Upper Peninsula after 2020 (which was also not reflected in bridge crossings) actually came from other people in the Upper Peninsula.

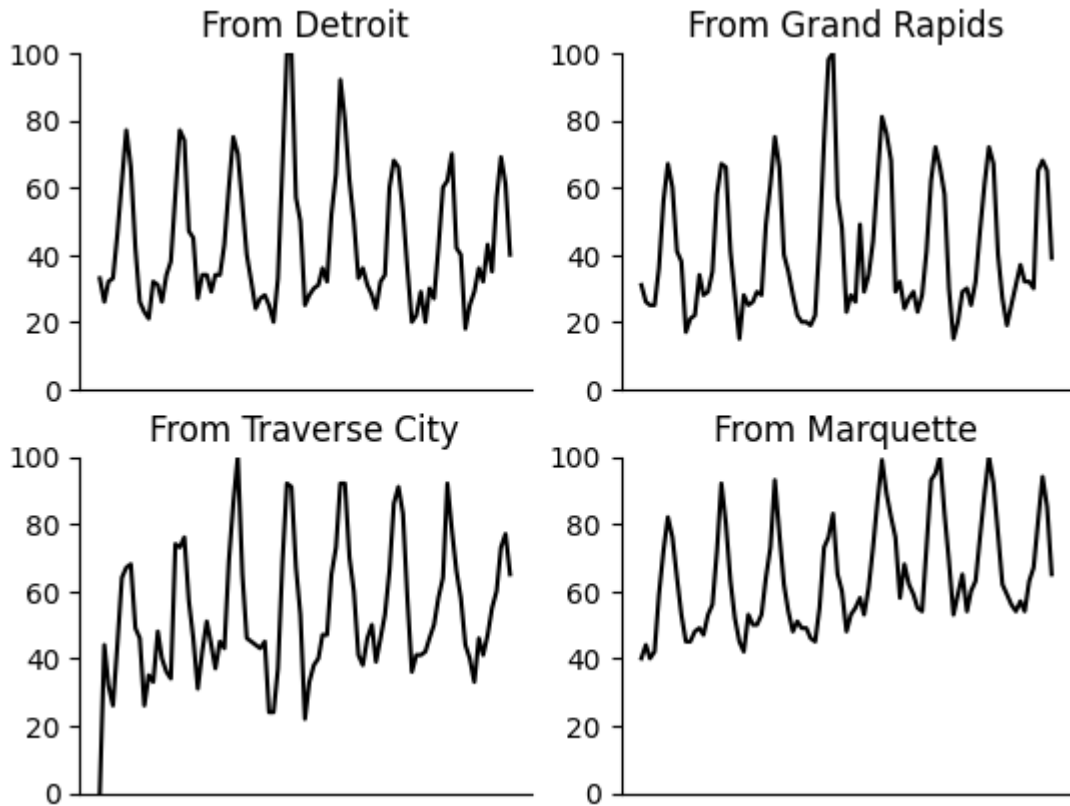
Consequently, I decided to update the analysis I did showing that the increase in search interest was from other Upper Peninsula residents. I wanted to find if the recent decrease is due to them as well. Originally, I looked at many different places that were growing in search interest the most, but only presented Manistique publically. But now I will present four different places that were growing in search interest when I started this project: Manistique, Escanaba, Newberry, and Ironwood. I will look at trends in search interest FOR these four places FROM four places: Marquette, Traverse City, Detroit, and Grand Rapids. Marquette is the most significant urban area in the Upper Peninsula. Traverse City is the most significant urban area in the Northern Lower. Detroit and Grand Rapids are the most significant urban areas in all of Michigan.

Below, I refresh my look at search interest for Manistique from Detroit, Grand Rapids, Traverse City, and Marquette. Search interest from Detroit shows virtually no change from the prior years. Search interest from Grand Rapids shows a small decrease from 2023 to 2024 and no decrease from 2022 to 2023. Note that search interest from Grand Rapids hasn't fared well after 2020 in general.

Looking at Traverse City (especially) and Marquette, however, we see a clear departure from the trends of immediate previous years. While search interest from Traverse City wasn't a clear contributor to increases

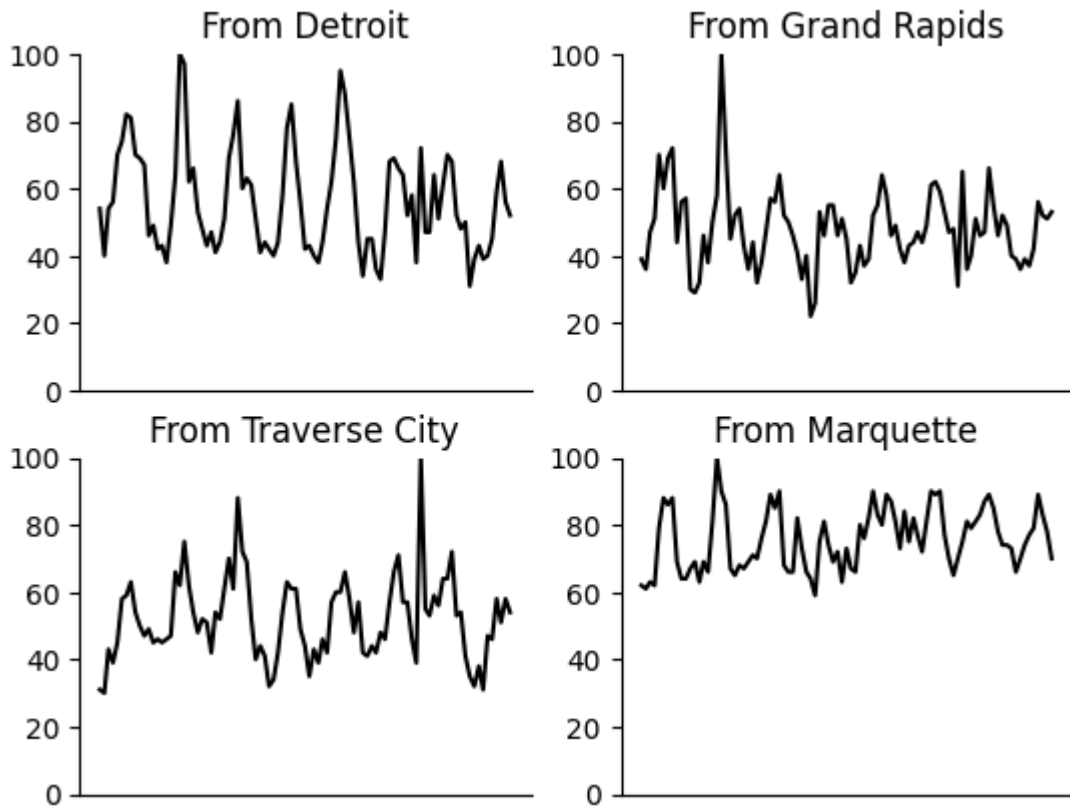
in search interest for 2021-2022, there is a sharp search interest decline in 2024. Also, while search interest from Marquette was previously elevated in 2021-2023, 2024 shows a return to 2019 levels.

Search Interest for Manistique



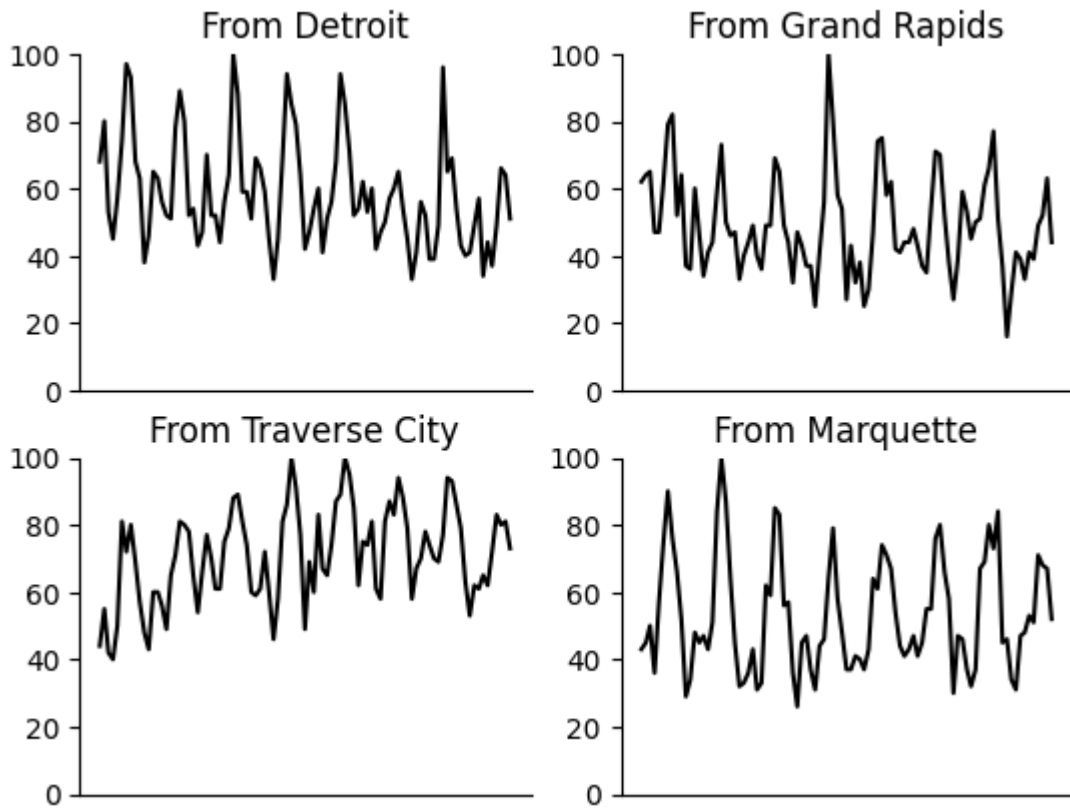
Now turning to Escanaba, we again show no clear trend from Detroit and some decline from Grand Rapids. Again, we see the greatest decline in search interest from Traverse City. In the case of Marquette, it does not appear that search interest for Escanaba fits the mold as, based on this data pull at least, there is no evident previous increase or current decrease in search interest from Marquette.

Search Interest for Escanaba



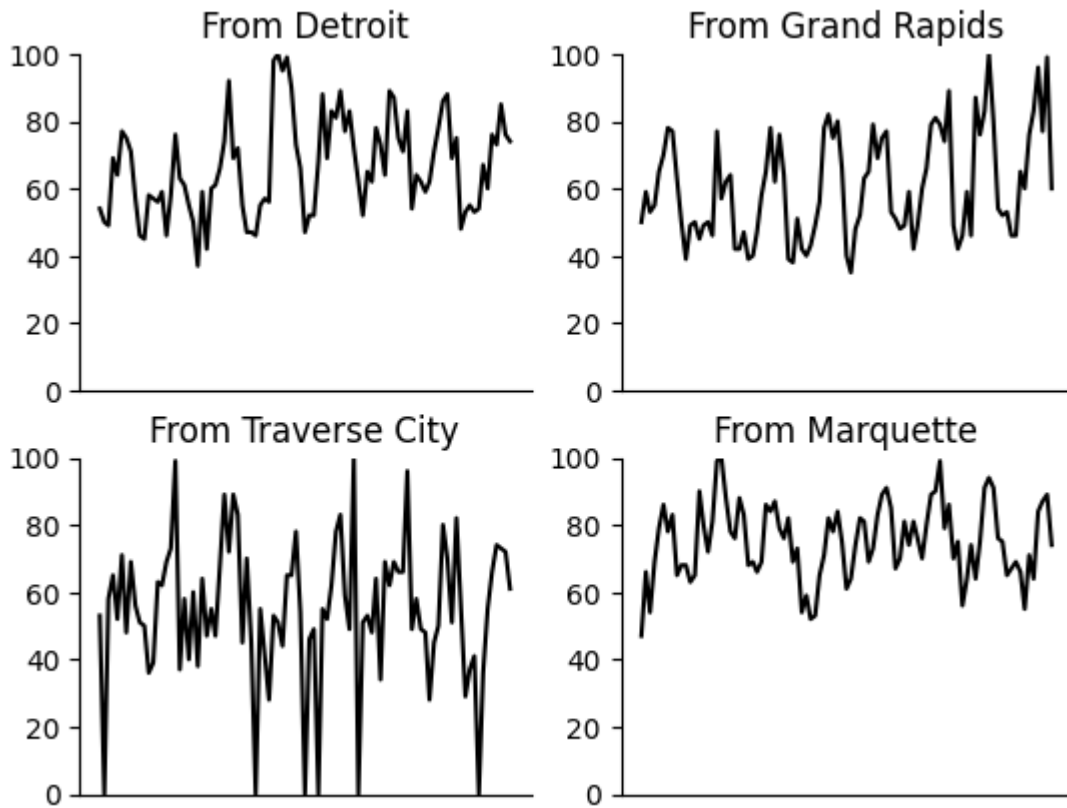
In the case of Newberry, we see a similar trend to Manistique. We definitely see some decline for Grand Rapids (unlike Detroit) and the greatest relative decline is from Traverse City. However, search interest from Marquette both increased in 2021-2022 and decreased in 2024. Although, the increase in 2021-2022 compared to 2019 and prior is not evident here.

Search Interest for Newberry



The search interest for Ironwood (on the Wisconsin border) probably most perfectly tells the story matching the aggregate trend. Detroit and Grand Rapids show no decline for 2024. Traverse City shows no real increase in 2021-2022, but a clear decline in 2024. Search interest from Marquette, on the other hand, shows a clear upward trend from 2020-2022, but then a downward trend into 2024. This trend for search interest from Marquette to Ironwood most closely mimicks the trend for search interest for all Upper Peninsula places from all of Michigan.

Search Interest for Ironwood



Conclusion

I have made the point many times in this project that different places follow different trends not necessarily matching the aggregate or the average. Nonetheless, I presented four examples below and some consistencies emerge:

- 1.) The large metropolitan areas of southern Michigan (Detroit/Grand Rapids) don't explain the rise in search interest from 2020-2022 and only Grand Rapids probably contributes to the fall in search interest in 2024.
- 2.) Traverse City doesn't explain the post-2020 rise in search interest for these Upper Peninsula places, but the 2024 fall is pretty large.
- 3.) The search interest from Marquette, with one exception, often mirrors the full aggregate trend.

There are many ways to explain this, and most cannot be directly tested with the search interest data. However, it's hard to believe that the post-2020 trend in search interest wasn't at least partly explained by the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, people became much more interested in outdoor recreation and many professionals achieved work from home status moving to second homes located in Northern Michigan. This likely led to a spurt of interest in areas with public land and natural resources.

However, this spurt of interest seems to have come from areas closest to the public land and natural resources. I found places with increasing search interest in the Upper Peninsula was mostly from Marquette

and for the Northern Lower mostly from Traverse City (note, Google trends only segments by these relatively large urban areas). Conversely, those in southern Michigan probably fall into two groups:

1.) Summer vacationers, who saw their vacation plans interrupted in 2020 but continued similarly to the past after 2021.

2.) Those with second homes who either moved north and contributed to northern search interest or continued their past habits not needing to Google search information due to already being familiar with the area.

Why has search interest recently declined, especially from those in Northern Michigan? It's important to note that while Traverse City did not contribute much to the increase in search interest for the Upper Peninsula, it contributed to the decline. Also, Traverse City was probably impacted similarly in recent years to Marquette. Specifically, I can think of three issues.

1.) During the last two years, the labor market has tightened and many employers have clawed back remote work potentially eliminating the people in these areas searching.

2.) Fatigue in the interest for outdoor recreation. In a separate project, I found that the interest in many forms of outdoor recreation also increased and then decreased following 2020.

3.) People acclimated to their new home or new hobbies and no longer need to search.

Number 3 is an interesting point. As an analogy, if someone is learning Python, they will likely websearch about Python a lot for the first few years but then web search about Python less. That isn't because they are less interested in Python but rather because they are now so acclimated with Python that web searches aren't necessary. In this way, often search interest is a better gauge in new interest in a topic as opposed to established interest.