CHAPTER **7**

POLICY ACTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

7. POLICY ACTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

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7. 1 INTRODUCTION

An integrated assessment (IA) brings together policy makers, scientists, and key stakeholders to address a common issue of concern through collaboration and a formal analysis process. An IA is an approach to synthesizing and delivering relevant, independent scientific input to decision making through a comprehensive analysis of existing natural and social scientific information in the context of a policy or management question (Michigan Sea Grant [MSG], 2005). The goal of an IA is to link existing natural and social scientific knowledge about a problem with policy options in order to help decision makers evaluate possible actions.

The Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment (NEMIA) - the first IA led by MSG – was conducted for the three-county region of Presque Isle, Alpena, and Alcona Counties in Northeast Michigan. This coastal area in along Lake Huron includes rich natural and cultural resources. Historically, the region has depended on its natural resources and accessibility to the Great Lakes for economic development. However, in recent years, as the traditional economic base (lumbering, mining, manufacturing, agriculture, hunting, and fishing) has declined, community leaders have turned to tourism to boost the economy by promoting the natural and cultural resources unique to the area, especially those associated with the coast. Despite the potential for economic development, the communities located here wish to proceed cautiously to avoid overdevelopment and destruction of the area's unique resources. These resources represent not only a growth opportunity but also a quality of life for local citizens (Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment [NEMIA], 2005). A desire to strike a balance between these two interests is reflected in this IA's key policy question, as developed by the NEMIA stakeholders:

> How can coastal access be designed, in a regional context for sustainable
> tourism that stimulates economic development while maintaining the
> integrity of natural and cultural resources and quality of life?

After working with stakeholders to identify the policy or question to be addressed by the IA, assessment teams were built to conduct value-independent descriptions of the status and trends of environmental, social, and economic conditions related to the question, as well as consider the causes and consequences of those conditions. (For more information on the NEMIA process, see Chapter 1.)

The primary objective of NEMIA is to use the analyses conducted by the assessment teams (socioeconomic, ecological, cultural, and planning and zoning) to draft and evaluate policy options related to sustainable tourism and economic development that can be implemented by the appropriate decision-makers in the region. These policy options were referred to in the NEMIA process as "potential actions."

7.1.1 Development of Potential Actions

The development of the potential actions began at the October 2006 meeting, where the following terms, drawn from the guiding policy question, were defined by members of the workgroup: coastal access, regional context, sustainable tourism, economic development, integrity of natural and cultural resources, and quality of life.

Subsequently, the Integration Team (Schroeder, Read, Powell) qualitatively grouped these definitions into policy theme areas. The team used workgroup meeting summaries and related documents, produced through other Northeast Michigan area initiatives that have influenced the NEMIA process, to record the number of times that the definitions of the terms and actions related to those definitions appeared in the targeted documents. The following documents were used:

- NEMIA Meeting Summaries from September 23, 2005, February 9, 2006, June 8, 2006, and August 24, 2006;
- *Huron Greenways: A System of Land and Water Trails* – Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, 1999;
- *US-23 Sunrise Side Coastal Highway Management Plan* – Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, 2003;
- *Sustainable Design Assessment Team: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis* – American Institute of Architects, October 5, 2006; and
- *Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) Report: Envisioning a Future for Northeast Michigan* – American Institute of Architects, October 5, 2006

The definitions that appeared most frequently and were therefore of greatest interest to the NEMIA workgroup were further grouped into overarching policy theme areas. The following five themes resulted:

- Natural, Cultural, and Maritime Heritage Resources Tourism;
- Preserving Sense of Place and Community Character;
- Government Coordination and Communication;
- Growing an Entrepreneurial Community and Attracting Business Interests; and
- Incorporation of Modern Technologies.

Potential actions were then developed for each policy theme area. These actions reflected workgroup comments and concerns expressed at the NEMIA meetings as well as relevant actions identified in related regional documents. Using these methods, the Integration Team identified 35 potential actions.

7.1.2 Prioritized Themes and Potential Actions

At a workgroup meeting on January 23, 2007 the Integration Team used the instant display, audience polling technology, Turning Point®, to have the workgroup prioritize the five theme areas using paired comparisons. The top three theme areas were *Preserving Sense of Place and Community Character* (which was chosen over the other four options 65 percent of the time), *Natural, Cultural, and Maritime Heritage Resources Tourism***,** and *Growing an Entrepreneurial Community and Attracting Business Interests***,** which were each selected before the other four themes 55 percent of the time.

Additionally, the workgroup rated each of the 35 potential actions under the five themes according to their relative importance and relative achievability on a scale of 1 to 8, with 1 being not at all important and unachievable and 8 being very important and achievable.

The Integration Team decided to provide implementation advice for the top scoring potential actions, defined as those that scored 6 or higher on both importance and achievability. There were six potential actions that fit this criteria (See Figure 7.1). Interestingly, none of the actions in the *Growing an Entrepreneurial Community and Attracting Business Interests* theme scored in the top six. In addition, although the workgroup did not place the theme of *Incorporating Modern Technologies* as high as *Growing an Entrepreneurial Community and Attracting Business Interests*, one of the actions within that area scored high on importance and achievability.

Figure 7.1. Prioritized Themes and Potential Actions

Preserving a Sense of Place and Community Character
- Increase public awareness of regional resources through education and outreach campaigns (6/6)

Natural/Cultural/Maritime Heritage and Resources Tourism
- Balance the tourism portfolio by maintaining traditional tourism opportunities and connecting natural resources, cultural resources, and maritime heritage (6/6)
- Market NE MI as a maritime heritage and nature-based tourism destination (6/6)
- Capitalize on the presence of the Marine Sanctuary to build complimentary enterprises (6/6)
- Utilize TBNMS as a gateway visitor center for regional opportunities (6/6)

Incorporating Modern Technologies
- Increase visibility of the area's resources to non-residents by marketing regional tourism opportunities via the web, providing itineraries for various types of tourism (drive-thru, vacation destination, second or retirement home) (7/6)

In this chapter, the Integration Team provides implementation guidance for meeting the six potential actions (hereafter called objectives) prioritized by the stakeholders. It should be clarified up front that it was not the job of the authors to judge or critique the selected actions; rather we were tasked with providing implementation guidance for the actions *as chosen by the stakeholders*. In developing the guidance for meeting these objectives, we drew from a number of resources including scientific literature, products developed by the technical assessment teams, and case studies, to identify best practices used in other places to meet the objectives.

At the final workgroup meeting on May 10, 2007, the Integration Team provided the workgroup an overview of the selected best practices for comment, question, and refinement. The result of the research, input from that meeting, and subsequent peer review is incorporated into this chapter.

7.2 GUIDING CONCEPT: GEOTOURISM

The results of the theme prioritization exercise show that the primary concern of the workgroup is to have successful coastal tourism while protecting sense of place and community character. The concept of geotourism, and the way in which it has been developed and applied, appears to address much of this concern. As such, the implementation advice provided in this chapter is guided by the concept of geotourism.

7.2.1 What is geotourism?

Geotourism is sustainable tourism taken to the next level. Sustainable tourism holds as the primary principle: "First, do no harm" (National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations [NGCSD], 2007). Sustainable tourism conserves natural and cultural resources and provides a quality experience for fewer visitors rather than multitudes. The approach anticipates and plans for demands on a destination to avoid degradation of natural and cultural resources through overuse.

Geotourism builds on sustainable tourism through recognition that a locale's uniqueness is based on its history, culture, natural resources, and other unique features. These all combine to define a unique sense of place. The locale is attractive because it is unique and it sustains residents; it provides them economic opportunities, activities, and amenities that enhance their lifestyle. This also makes it an attractive place to visit. Residents who are not directly engaged in tourism-related industry nevertheless recognize the industry's value because geotourism encourages tourism businesses to hire, secure services, and shop/supply locally. This improves the local economy and multiplies the economic impact of external visitors.

According to the NGCSD (2007), geotourism involves community members in developing and promoting the authentic experience that represents the region. Education among community members – in order that they can, in turn, teach visitors – and tourists is a critically important aspect of geotourism. As such, geotourism provides mutual benefits for visiting tourists *and* community residents. Residents have opportunities to discover and learn about their community, contributing to their quality of life and pride in community. Tourists gain an authentic cultural tourism experience, learning and interacting with residents who are informed and engaged in promoting their region. Geotourism focuses on retaining the integrity of the region through educational activities focused both on tourists and residents, an emphasis on resource conservation, and respect for local culture and traditions.

Additionally, geotourism strategies are designed to appeal to "quality" tourists rather than "quantity" tourists. This strategy promotes economic growth by seeking visitors who stay longer or invest in repeat visits, resulting in more money spent per visitor. Reducing the number of visitors overall promotes sustainability because lower visitor traffic ensures resident quality of

life and that cultural/natural resources are not negatively affected. Having fewer visitors also provides an opportunity to better educate those that arrive, contributing to their positive visitor experience. (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary [TBNMS], 2006).

Sense of Place

Having a strong sense of place is key to the geotourism concept and experience. A simple definition of sense of place is "the collection of meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, and feelings that individuals or groups associate with a particular locality" (Williams & Stewart, 1998). However, sense of place is a complex concept that is difficult to capture in a single definition. For the purposes of this project, it is most useful to consider what components contribute to developing a sense of place rather than defining the term precisely. An individual's sense of place about a location is a combination of the place's environmental features and the interactions an individual has had with significant others there (Shamai & Ilatov, 2004; Eisenhauer et al., 2000). In the case of this project, sense of place plays two roles: it is something felt by the residents of each locale, *and* it is a characteristic of each locale that makes it attractive to visitors from outside the region – either as an attraction by itself or as an integral piece of the complete visitor experience. The common theme is an emphasis on people's tendency to form strong emotional bonds with places.

The Visitor Experience

Geotourism has, at its root, the goal of creating a visitor experience so memorable that the visitor leaves changed in some way and talks about the experience with his/her friends. Word-of-mouth advertising is free, credible, effective, and powerful (Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Pritchard, 2003; Morais et al., 2004). (It is wise to be very careful, however, as negative word-of-mouth can be very difficult to overcome, for all the same reasons.) The goal of geotourism is to provide a complete and authentic experience for the visitor that connects him/her to the locale through cultural/historical/archaeological, natural, recreational, and/or scenic resources which together sum to a holistic experience. An integral part of the experience is the service that goes along with the resource – interpretation, food services, accommodations, and other supporting infrastructure. However, the visitor experience also includes interaction with people and businesses that are not directly connected to the tourism industry. The visitor's experience is heightened by encountering residents who understand and have pride in their community's natural and cultural assets. It is the residents' knowledge and pride of place that leads the visitor to feel they "know" the people and the place, that they had an authentic experience (NGCSD, 2007).

7.2.2 Applying Geotourism to Northeast Michigan

Conceptually, the goals and principles of geotourism fit nicely with the themes and potential actions prioritized by the NEMIA workgroup, but how can tourism and economic development partners put these principles into action on the ground?

A tourism strategy based on the concepts of geotourism would involve the actions listed in Figure 7.2 below, with the involvement of community members critical throughout the process.

Figure 7.2. How to apply geotourism.

(1) Identify the region's cultural and natural resources and assets
(2) Protect the resources
(3) Identify the stories that tie the resources together
(4) Market the region as a tourist destination through these stories
(5) Enhance the tourist experience

(Clark & Gray, 2006)

The implementation advice in this chapter utilized tools and information generated by the technical assessments and best practices identified in other regions to put these steps in action in Northeast Michigan.

7.3 EXISTING EFFORTS IN THE NEMIA STUDY AREA

There is already significant work being done in Northeast Michigan that aligns with the goals of geotourism. Three significant regionally-developed initiatives that inventory, describe, and market the coastal resources of this region include (1) The *Huron Greenways* study, (2) the designation of US-23 from Standish to Mackinaw City as a State of Michigan Recreational Heritage Route, and (3) the development of the *Lights of Northern Lake Huron* driving tour.

7.3.1 Huron Greenways

The *Huron Greenways* study (Northeast Michigan Council of Governments [NEMCOG], 1999) provides an inventory and mapping foundation for collecting and describing coastal assets. This community-driven process identified coastal, land-based features, access points, and trails (e.g., biking or hiking trails) in Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Alpena, and Alcona Counties. Conducted by the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG), the study resulted in a database that catalogued data related to these features and assets, generated regional and county maps, and the development of a website that maintains information and maps for the public.[1] Several recommendations resulting from this study address the protection of existing resources and the involvement of the community in the process of planning and resource management.

7.3.2 US-23 Heritage Route

With regional leadership by the Sunrise Side Travel Association, the US-23 Heritage Route was designated through the Michigan Department of Transportation as a recreational byway in 2004. The US-23 Heritage Route, known as the Sunrise Side Coastal Highway, includes nearly 200 miles of the coastal US-23 corridor running from Standish (south) to Mackinaw City (north). The designation provides a structure and process for regional cooperation and development of tourism opportunities along the US-23 corridor. Heritage Route planning and coordination occurs on two scales: county-level planning and project development in each of the six participating counties, and regional coordination among counties via the management team.

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[1] *Huron Greenways* study website: http://www.nemcog.org/greenways/greenways.html

The *US-23 Sunrise Side Coastal Highway Management Plan* (NEMCOG, 2003), a requirement for designation as a Heritage Route, reflects a regional planning process to identify and describe significant recreational, natural or ecological, cultural, and historical assets along US-23. The management plan identifies a suite of strategic priorities and actions related to tourism development along the route. It sets strategic goals and objectives for the region, identifying projects and priorities for marketing and promotion, transportation and tourism enhancement, and environmental and beautification. Among these are a significant number of actions that directly relate to community enhancement and engagement, and resource protection. These recommendations identify opportunities for preserving and enhancing Northeast Michigan's sense of place.

7.3.3 Lights of Northern Lake Huron

The region also recently invested in the *Lights of Northern Lake Huron*, a regional maritime heritage-based driving tour intended to enhance cultural tourism. The tour links coastal cultural and historical artifacts through the story of Lake Huron's storm of 1913 and Captain James B. Watts and his ship, the *Durston,* which survived this storm by sheltering along the northern Lake Huron coastline. This initiative focused on developing a tourism product that promotes Northeast Michigan as a maritime heritage tourism destination. This regionally-developed project included leadership from Michigan Department of History, Arts, and Libraries (MDHAL), the NOAA Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary (Marine Sanctuary), and regional tourism leaders, including the Sunrise Side Travel Association, Alpena Convention and Visitor's Bureau, and others (Sandra Clark, personal communication, September 7, 2005).

The purpose of the *Lights of Northern Lake Huron* driving tour was to establish a story that connected multiple historical or heritage assets across the region, enhancing the visitor experience and fostering cooperative tourism marketing connections among coastal communities. This also allows the region to focus on and market specific tourist attractions in the context of the region's history and heritage. The process resulted in web-based maps and marketing products delivered through the Travel Michigan (the State of Michigan's official tourism agency) website. [2] This lighthouse-themed tour is the first of several regional tours to be completed (Sandra Clark, personal communication, September 7, 2005).

These three efforts are examples of existing, regionally-coordinated planning and development efforts that promote coastal access and tourism. These initiatives identify important regional resources and provide stories and related information that both educate residents and provide interpretative material that could support the development of local, coastal-dependent businesses. Northeast Michigan stakeholders should work cooperatively to use these existing platforms to expand opportunities to advance geotourism in the region.

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[2] Lights of Northern Lake Huron driving tour website:
http://www.michigan.org/travel/drivingtours/detail.asp?cid=951AACA5-53F0-491B-ADAB-FC4A3558FAAA&m=9;4

What follows is implementation guidance for meeting the six objectives prioritized by the workgroup, organized by theme. Drawing from peer-reviewed literature, products developed by the technical assessment teams, and case studies, the Integration Team identifies best practices used in other, similar locations and opportunities to build on existing efforts such as those outlined above.

Throughout the chapter, four case study locations are referenced. These locations – Blackstone Valley, MA/RI; Olympic Peninsula, WA; Queensland, Australia; and Lake Erie Coastal Ohio – all have tourism industries that exhibit the aspects of geotourism outlined above to some degree. These common themes made them excellent choices from which to select applicable best practices with the potential to profoundly shape the already exciting activities underway in the NEMIA study area. More detailed information can be found about these locations, their tourism industries, geographical and historical context, and similarities and differences to the Northeast Michigan study area in Appendix A.

7.5 THEME: PRESERVING SENSE OF PLACE AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

The NEMIA workgroup identified *Preserving Sense of Place and Community Character* as one of the three priority themes to focus on while pursuing sustainable costal tourism and economic development.

7.5.1 Introduction

As described in section 7.2.1, sense of place plays two roles in Northeast Michigan: it is both felt by the residents of a locale, *and* it is a characteristic of the area that makes it attractive to visitors – either as an attraction by itself or as an integral piece of the complete visitor experience.

The Integration Team broadly organized activities geared towards fostering a sense of place in Northeast Michigan into two categories: internal and external marketing. Internal marketing activities mainly target local residents and are more closely aligned with sense of place as a *feeling toward a location.* This is because in order to promote geotourism the region needs residents with a strong and clearly defined sense of place, who display knowledge about their regional resources, and enjoy a good quality of life. In order to be effective "internal ambassadors," residents need to be aware of the unique natural and cultural features of their region. Further, they need to develop emotional attachments to these places by learning about them and developing memories involving them through direct experience (Tuan, 1977).

External marketing activities target tourists, and therefore focus more heavily on the *characteristics of a location.* This is because tourists are ephemeral, and the region needs to develop and promote the unique, authentic, and memorable cultural and natural resources of the region to which visitors can become emotionally attached during brief trips to the region. These emotional attachments will make them want to return year after year and convey their experiences to others by word of mouth.

Internal and external marketing activities are mutually supportive. Internal marketing efforts to increase public awareness of regional resources will enhance the quality of life for residents and develop their sense of place, which in turn supports external marketing. For example, a resident may learn about, and become fascinated by, Northeast Michigan's karst topography because she took part in a tour of local geological features. When a tourist at a gas station asks her advice on local attractions, she can contribute to external marketing efforts by conveying her knowledge and interest in karst features to an outsider. The result of the geology tour, which was intended to be an internal marketing activity, is not only enhanced quality of life for the resident who has developed a new interest in local geology, but is also a more personal, authentic visitor experience for the tourist, which contributes to the tourist's sense of place of Northeast Michigan. Conversely, marketing efforts aimed at tourists – such as interpretive signage at heritage site or a pamphlet highlighting popular birding hotspots – will inevitably reach locals as well and may stimulate residents' interests in their communities. .

The remainder of this section provides implementation guidance for using internal marketing to define and preserve Northeast Michigan's sense of place and community character in the context of coastal access, tourism, and economic development. Activities to develop sense of place among tourists – outsiders to the region – fall under external marketing and are discussed in Section 7.6.

7.5.2 Tools from the NEMIA Assessment Teams

Identifying the assets that are unique to Northeast Michigan are important first steps in prioritizing the resources and characteristics to preserve, as well as the stories and experiences that communities can market internally and externally. This integrated assessment determined that Northeast Michigan is rich in coastal cultural and natural resources and that there is interest in developing these resources for tourism and other economic opportunities. In addition, the process has identified and engaged many of the key local, state, and federal partners and programs that can support development of a shared understanding of the past and a shared vision for the future.

The Ecological Assessment Team identified and organized GIS layers representing the natural features in the area and then surveyed both the workgroup and a group of research ecologists, asking them to prioritize the layers according to their value (see Chapter 3). Similarly, the Cultural Assessment Team inventoried, described, and charted (e.g. underwater shipwrecks) cultural resources (see Chapter 4).

These tools can be used by decision-makers and community leaders in mapping, identifying, and prioritizing potential protection, restoration, or research projects. They can also be used to consider strategic interpretation, wayfinding, development needs and opportunities. For example, if a significant distance gap exists between two well-known assets or areas, these tools can be used to identify areas where signage might direct a traveler from one point to the other; or they might help identify a lesser-known asset or feature that could serve as a point of interest for a visitor moving between two well-known points.

7.5.3 Identifying Sense of Place

Before developing internal or marketing strategies based on the region's sense of place, it is important to invest in exploring and understanding sense of place in Northeast Michigan.

Northeast Michigan already works to enhance awareness of community resources and involvement in developing the region's sense of place. Presque Isle County leaders hosted "be a tourist in your own town" community bus tours, and held brown bag lunches with guest speakers to enhance community learning and sharing. In addition, community members have participated in exchange programs, such as with Ireland, to bring back lessons learned from other areas facing similar challenges.

Exercises Exploring Sense of Place - Presque Isle County

In the summer of 2005, Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) in Presque Isle County initiated an intensive sense of place project that included 28 participants. The group was selected for diversity —youth, seniors, newly arrived, born in the area, farmers, businesses, and local officials. The participants first identified their own perceptions of what is unique and special about the region, discovering that although their individual senses of place were different, there was a common theme that linked them together regardless of where they lived in the county. The group designed and participated in a bus tour in October 2005 to highlight specific places they associated with their sense of place. Group members were then given cameras to photo-document their special places, resulting in over 1500 photos. These photos were developed into an exhibit which traveled around the county sharing 99 selected photos and associated stories. Each picture tells a story, relaying what is special about the place where the photographer lives (Dave Glenn, personal communication, April 20, 2007).

This type of county-wide project can be duplicated in other Northeast Michigan counties as a method of capturing, describing, and sharing the community's perspective of its own sense of place. In addition to identifying regional assets that may not yet have been considered, these interviews, discussions, and photographs can provide content for developing community tours, and interpretive and educational products.

Residents as Tourists - Blackstone Valley, Rhode Island

In 2007 the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council (BVTC) participated in a Rhode Island Tourism Division program called Tour Rhode Island: There's No Place Like Home. The program developed bus tours for Rhode Island residents, with the purpose of building an understanding of and appreciation for Rhode Island attractions both to enhance residents' lives in general but also to provide them with information and experience to draw upon when visitors in their homes and communities are searching for activities. Rather than send visitors to out-of-state attractions, the assumption is that residents will direct visitors to in-state activities with which they are familiar. These tours provide additional support to the tourism industry by informing non-industry residents about the goals of the tourism industry, thus building support among the people visitors will encounter and helping to enhance the visitor experience. There were three Blackstone Valley tours in this series that highlighted the narrative upon which the BVTC is building geotourism

efforts – the Valley's history (settlement through the industrial revolution), agricultural, and natural heritage (Rhode Island Tourism Division, 2007).[3]

In addition to participating with state-wide sense of place activities, the BVTC developed its own presentation highlighting the areas they believe to be the most attractive areas. They present the material at community meetings to sell the idea of how special the Valley is and all the ways people can experience it. The goal is to create an understanding about the purpose of tourism activities and therefore reduce resentment that could surface among an uninformed public (Robert Billington, personal communication, April 23, 2007).

The Blackstone Valley case study provides a model for Northeast Michigan in developing education and outreach programs that engage community members in identifying sense of place and teaching them about (and taking them to) the many unique natural, historical, and cultural features, assets, and attributes of their region.

Monitoring Sense of Place – City of Calgary, Alberta

Monitoring Northeast Michigan's sense of place is an important consideration, particularly given the desire to preserve it. It would be valuable to develop an ongoing evaluation or survey instrument to monitor sense of place. In addition to asking questions that provide a meaningful description of the regional sense of place, the instrument could also determine how strong it is and whether it has changed/is changing as a result of actions. This tool can be used periodically to identify the characteristics that define the region's sense of place, and should seek to measure the level of attachment to these characteristics of the community, region, and state (Samai, 1991).

The City of Calgary has developed a Sense of Community Index as part of its innovative Sense of Community Project. The project's goals are to develop a reliable method of measuring sense of community, determine how strong the sense of community is, and understand how the city can help sustain and enhance the levels of sense of community that exist (City of Calgary, 2007). The Sense of Community Index asks telephone respondents how much they agree/disagree with 18 statements, such as:
- When I travel I am proud to tell others where I live;
- I like living in this city;
- There is a strong sense of community in Calgary;
- I feel very much like I belong in Calgary;
- It would take a lot for me to move from this city; and
- I help out by volunteering in Calgary (City of Calgary, 2007)

Northeast Michigan could use the Calgary Sense of Community Index as a model to develop a sense of place index that would allow decision-makers to gather baseline information about the region's sense of place, incorporating this information into decision-making process, and then as a tool to monitor how sense of place changes in response to various projects and initiatives.

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[3] For a complete list of all of the tours available through the Tour Rhode Island: There's No Place Like Home program, see http://www.visitrhodeisland.com/tourri/tourri.aspx

7.5.4 Preserving Sense of Place through Planning, Design, and Community Development

Developing coastal access that balances resource protection, retention of the community's quality of life and sense of place, and generates tourism and economic development benefits must be thoughtfully considered and incorporated into broader regional planning, and community design, and development initiatives.

The *Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) Report* (American Institute of Architects [AIA], 2006) provides suggestions for considering the coastal focus of the NEMIA process within the context of broader regional planning, design, and development. Most importantly, the *SDAT Report* notes the importance of development that benefits the community first and foremost, and protects the assets and resources that define the community character.

The *SDAT Report* provides several recommendations directly related to preserving community sense of place. It suggests that Northeast Michigan communities should "first focus on enhancing their spaces for residents" because "tourism can be a secondary outcome which can continue to be fostered." The report points out improvements that strengthen community vitality and sense of place will also enhance the experience for visitors to the region, reminding the region that tourism should only be considered as "one slice of economic development pie." It cautions Northeast Michigan decision-makers to not to focus too much on tourism. Coastal development work should be considered primarily through a "quality of life for residents" lens; seeking first to enhance local access, information, and opportunities for residents or as a means of recruiting new folks to live and work in region. Coastal access, as a component of a high quality of life, does have important marketing implications for economic development. For example, coastal access can be presented as an asset for attracting and retaining an excellent labor force to the area (AIA, 2006).

Figure 7.3. Sense of Place principles relevant to the NEMIA region.

1) Design on a human scale;
2) Provide choices for housing, shopping, recreation, employment etc.;
3) Encourage mixed-use development;
4) Preserve urban centers;
5) Vary transportation options;
6) Build vibrant public spaces;
7) Create a neighborhood identity;
8) Protect environmental resources;
9) Conserve landscapes (Lake Huron, pastoral, coastal cities); and
10) Recognize that design matters.

From the *SDAT Report* (AIA, 2006):

Additionally, the *SDAT Report* recommends managing lands for specific uses at the local and regional level, and developing a regional plan that responds to future growth while managing today's needs. The report notes that "connections to waterways and lakefront are underused spaces or opportunities." At the same time, it also indicates that new infrastructure development along the shoreline outside of existing coastal communities and marinas is unnecessary and should be minimized, and that the region should instead focus on providing adequate access, information, and wayfinding related to existing cultural and ecological resources. Finally, the *SDAT Report* recommends that Northeast Michigan focus any new development on downtown coastal areas: "build a community to which visitors, retirees, and investors will flock – NOT Anywhere, USA." Alpena, Rogers City, and Harrisville are three unique urban centers along the Northeast Michigan lakeshore; these should be utilized as physical gateways to engage residents and visitors (AIA, 2006).

Additional planning tools to help the community preserve sense of place and quality of life were generated by the Planning and Zoning Assessment Team, who provided an overview of planning efforts in the region and forecasted potential impacts of planning and zoning decisions. The team provided buildout scenarios based on current planning and zoning for the region that provided both a picture of the region at total buildout and what it might look like in ten years based on the rapid growth experienced in northwest Michigan. These buildout scenarios were then evaluated for potential environmental impacts, e.g., habitat fragmentation and wetland loss. The buildout scenarios enhance the community's understanding of how current planning efforts could potentially impact the region's valuable natural resources. The planning and zoning team also provided buildout scenarios under an alternative zoning regime that reduced rural density and clustered development in urban areas in order to demonstrate that there are still good options for protecting resources. (See Chapter 5 for more on the buildout scenarios.) These buildout scenarios are not intended to serve as recommendations for a specific planning or zoning scenario. Rather these tools demonstrate the value of using GIS tools to forecast potential buildout scenarios under current or other potential conditions. These data are housed with NEMCOG for use and application by the region in future planning, design, and development projects and initiatives.

Finally, the planning and zoning assessment team provided protocols and best practices for Sustainable Communities/Smart Growth, as well as significant web resources for managers and decision-makers (See Chapter 5 Appendices A, B, and C).

Putting the Community First - Northwest Ireland

Several NEMIA workgroup members participated in an exchange program to northwest Ireland, and these members developed case studies based on their interactions, observations, and lessons learned through the exchange. Their case studies focused on programming that develops sense of place and tourism focused on enhancing quality of life.

Dave Glenn (personal communication, April 20, 2007) provides a case study of how northwest Ireland focused on developing their sense of place as an economic development strategy. Rural communities in this region struggled despite national economic boom. Kiltimagh, in County Mayo, was considered a "decimated town with no hope." Work to overcome these economic development challenges focused first on developing Kiltimagh "for the people who live there 365 days a year." Enhancement of the tourism industry was a secondary impact resulting from positive community development; the residents felt if they improved the community first, visitors would enjoy their experience and return. Their emphasis on community development began by identifying and developing their assets: people, community spirit, and pride in the place where they live. Strategies developed by the community, for its own benefit, included identifying local assets, retaining jobs and young people, revitalizing the town and surrounding areas, and fundraising and earmarking a special community tax for revitalization projects.

Ed Lamb (personal communication, February 22, 2007) provides a case study of a local development association with specific tourism interests. The Murrisk Development Association's (MDA) initial charge was to develop tourism focused around two major National Heritage listed attractions: Croagh Patrick pilgrimage mountain climb and Famine Memorial Park. The MDA initially engaged the local community about their mission and role, and through that process realized that their tourism development work would be most successful if they refocused their work on improving the community first.

Initially, the MDA served as a voice for the community, facilitating local group activities and encouraging local entrepreneurship and innovation which, in turn, helped to optimize community assets to enhance quality of life and foster a spirit of community development. These efforts resulted in significant investment in community infrastructure, streetscapes, and community festivals. They found an increase in volunteerism for these projects, possibly because the primary benefits were for the community itself. Efforts were also invested in various fundraising activities, including increased support for sustaining existing and growing new local businesses. As a result of this initial investment in community, the MDA describes significant tourism impacts. They have since facilitated partnerships with 15 other local communities in the Tochar Valley region, formed a tourist development network, and developed the regional Clew Harbor Archeological Trail. Communities are invested in and support these tourism efforts in their own and neighboring communities, encouraging tourists to stay longer in region.

Northwest Ireland's work represents the importance and value in planning and developing tourism-related projects that seek to serve the community first. This is a key point and recommendation to Northeast Michigan also made by the *SDAT Report* (AIA, 2006). Through this strategy, the MDA was not only able to enhance their community's quality of life, but they identified that community members had a stronger sense of place, increasing their own investment in the community. For this region in Ireland, tourism was a secondary consideration, but they found a more vibrant community fostered a more vibrant tourism industry.

Creative Product Development – Olympic Peninsula, WA

An example of development to preserve and enhance a sense of place and maintain quality of life that has had considerable "spin-off" tourism impacts comes from the Olympic Peninsula case study. In Washington State's Olympic Peninsula, the Sequim-Dungeness Valley is known as the Lavender Capital of North America and annually holds a festival that attracts upwards of 30,000 visitors over a three-day period. Lavender farming began in the mid-1990s in response to the loss of prime dairy agricultural land to development. A group of people, intent on saving the agricultural base which contributed considerably to their sense of place and quality of life, identified lavender as a great potential specialty crop requiring little water and plenty of sunshine, both of which describe the valley's climate. According to the Lavender Growers Association, the first focus of the farmers was to convince their neighbors that the valley was more valuable as working farmland than in housing. Lavender, a scenic, scented, and profitable crop, seemed to be the ideal solution. Gradual success resulted, both in terms of product development and marketing, and the simultaneous growth of the Lavender Festival. The growth of the festival is a textbook example of the development of geotourism. It began initially as local people went to the farms to see how "regular folks had transformed small plots of land into arable, productive gardens and farms." From there the festival grew; community members volunteered as the event grew, promoted the "lavender legend," and learned about lavender alongside the farmers (Sequim Lavender Growers Association, 2007). In Northeast Michigan, development of a water heritage festival associated with local natural and cultural assets, initially developed by and for the community, is one way to foster sense of place and develop something that will be attractive and engaging for tourists as well.

7.5.5 Preserving Sense of Place through Resource Protection

After identifying the valuable cultural and natural assets, the next step in preserving sense of place is protecting the resources. The ecological and cultural assessment teams have demonstrated that Northeast Michigan is rich in coastal cultural and historical resources. Multiple processes and projects find that a primary consideration for decision-makers and community leaders is protecting and enhancing these resources. The American Institute of Architects *Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) Repor*t (AIA, 2006) emphasizes protecting existing resources/access/infrastructure (assets, marinas, trails, etc.), while the *Huron Greenways* study (NEMCOG, 1999) emphasizes resource protection as a priority over acquiring new properties or undergoing new physical infrastructure developments. Additionally, the *US-23 Sunrise Side Coastal Highway Management Plan* (NEMCOG, 2003) outlines environmental protection as an important goal for the development of this regionally-developed initiative. The management plan outlines the following environmental protection objectives:

- Maintain existing recreational, historical, and cultural attributes currently found along Coastal Highway;
- Encourage preservation of natural environment along coastal highway;
- Encourage preservation and enjoyment of forests, open spaces and scenic views; and
- Encourage cities and communities along coastal highway to continue to improve attractiveness.

Risk Assessment

Degradation or loss of resources may result where there is not appropriate attention and resources given to their protection, such as for oversight and management processes, and public education. An immediate activity to preserve sense of place should be to identify individual assets or artifacts that are of special concern and at high risk of degradation or loss. A priority for protecting these assets should then be established. A regional resource risk assessment process would prioritize resource protection projects based on an evaluation of level of damage/loss risk, and the current level of investment in resource protection. Types of risk considered would vary and include both human and environmental risks. Human use, such as excessive visitor traffic or vandalism, may generate resource risks. Environmental impacts might include such things such as artifact weathering for land-based assets and the impact of colonization of shipwrecks by zebra and quagga mussels underwater.

Queensland, Australia

In Queensland, Australia, resource protection is built into tourism strategic planning and development. In fact, Queensland's cultural and natural resource agencies leverage ecotourism businesses as the education and outreach mechanism that provides resource protection information. Their resource protection strategies depend on collaboration among tourism businesses, community members, and resource managers. Two documents outline the strategic planning, development, and working partnerships that have been developed to implement this approach:

1) *Successful Tourism at Heritage Places: A Guide for Operators, Managers, and Communities* (Australian Heritage Commission and CRC for Sustainable Tourism [AHC and CRC], 2001) is an example of a collaboratively developed, research-based document that provides tools and best practices for cultural economic development with sustainability and resource protection in mind. The document identifies the following guiding principles for development in heritage places, including:
   - Recognize the importance of heritage places;
   - Look after heritage places;
   - Develop mutually beneficial partnerships;
   - Incorporate heritage issues into business planning;
   - Invest in people and place;
   - Market and promote products responsibly;
   - Provide high quality visitor experiences; and
   - Respect indigenous rights and obligations.

2) *Tourism Management in Queensland Protected Areas* (Tourism in Protected Areas Working Group, 2003) provides strategies and best practices for ecotourism businesses, including advice on partnering with resource managers, developing eco-friendly businesses, and incorporating resource protection into visitor programming. This document outlines "visitor codes of practice for industry, government, and community." Additional strategies include "decreasing impediments, increasing incentives for industry to adopt ecotourism best practice and technologies." In practice, Tourism Queensland (the regional entity supporting the tourism industry) provides multiple training resources and programs, such as nature/ecotourism accreditation programs for businesses that adopt sustainable tourism practices."

Finally, Queensland's marketing and visitor management approach functions as a resource protection strategy, while simultaneously supporting smaller tourism businesses. The goal is to disperse visitor pressure by attracting customers based on high profile attractions (e.g., Great Barrier Reef); once the customer is "captured" they work to "reduce growth of visitor pressure on icon sites by focusing on alternative regional ecotourism opportunities" (Tourism Queensland, 2002; AHC and CRC, 2001). This strategy allows them to capture visitors for "more than a day," as noted on their welcome signs, and reduce pressure on any given attraction or feature. Additionally, many local businesses achieve economic benefits through longer visits by fewer customers who spend more money.

Lake Erie Coastal Ohio

The Coastal Ohio case study is an example of tourism development that focuses on identifying and protecting coastal assets, and then packaging and marketing these assets in an appealing and accessible manner for visitors. It also provides ideas for education and outreach tools for businesses and visitors to enjoy their experience in a more resource-friendly way.

In developing their tourism strategy, Coastal Ohio identified several theme areas for tourism development, one of which is resource protection. According to the *Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan 2005* (LECO, 2005), tourism development should:

"focus on protecting the valuable natural, historic, and cultural resources that provide a foundation for the tourism industry. This focus area includes development of protection tools and "best practices" for both tourism industry and visitors, and seeks to enhance awareness, appreciation, and interpretation of attractions and resources visited. Investing in conservation and restoration efforts of historic, cultural, and natural resources is also a priority here."

To support this priority, the region provides business tools, interpretive resources, and eco-friendly best practices to educate and empower community members and tourists about resource protection. Specific examples include promoting natural resource awareness through interpretive guides and checklists (such as for birders) and developing and distributing fact sheets providing eco-tips for tourists.

Northeast Michigan has a wealth of similar interpretive materials and resources relevant to the region's coastal resources, and would benefit from developing opportunities for strategically organizing and delivering these products among community members, to visitors, and through coastal businesses. In Ohio, tourists can acquire business cards that identify themselves as someone who cares about Lake Erie coastal resources; tourists are encouraged to leave these cards with businesses where they spend money, so that businesses can recognize the value of supporting sustainable ecotourism activities in their communities. These educational products and interpretive resources are made available publicly through the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio website.

Agencies such as the MDNR or the Marine Sanctuary in Northeast Michigan could provide leadership in developing resource protection best practices for businesses. At the same time, tourism and economic development partners can help new businesses consider how cultural and ecological assets can best serve a new or growing business venture. Business training and support programs can educate business owners about resources and management strategies, establish appropriate partnerships between management agencies and businesses, and consider interpretative and educational opportunities that they can provide for the customer. The customer then receives an enhanced ecotourism experience from the business, while management agencies have leveraged the business to deliver important resource conservation messages and best practices.

7.5.6 Preserving Sense of Place through Stewardship

Educating community members and coastal-dependent businesses about local resources through internal marketing is the key to empowering them to become stewards of Northeast Michigan's unique cultural and national resources, and thus, sense of place. Environmental stewardship can be defined as empowering "learners with skills to address environmental issues and to take positive environmental action with a sense of personal and civic responsibility within their community" (Athman & Monroe, 2001). The Great Lakes Fishery Trust's (GLFT) Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative defines stewardship as "increase[ing] awareness and understanding of the ecology of the Great Lakes so that Michigan's residents become active and effective stewards of the Great Lakes and advocates for strategies that support the long-term sustainability of the Great Lakes [resources]" (Great Lakes Fishery Trust [GLFT], 2007).

Hungerford and Volk (1990) describe essential precursors or variables critical for fostering environmental stewardship at the entry level, ownership level, and empowerment level: (1) Entry-level variables include basic *awareness* and *positive attitudes* about resources as first steps in engaging learners in stewardship activities; (2) Ownership-level variables include more *in-depth knowledge of resources and related issues*, as well as a *stronger personal investment* in these resources; and (3) Empowerment-level variables, which include *knowledge and skills related to action strategies*, *locus of control* or belief that one's actions can make a difference, and a commitment or *intention to act*.

Outreach

Interpretative signage and informative fact sheets are simple examples of outreach and education products that raise awareness of resources, convey their value, and identify potential impacts of a user's actions. Developing and providing best practices to be used in information and programs for residents and visitors can empower tourism-related businesses, community members, and visitors to exercise stewardship practices during their activities.

An example from the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio case study is the website which offers many valuable products, including maps, field guides, books about the local area, and fact sheets offering tips for environmentally conscious residents and visitors.[4] One example is a tip sheet offering guidance for minimizing impacts on habitats and wildlife to wildlife-viewing residents and tourists (see Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4. Lake Erie Coastal Ohio – wildlife-watching tipsheet.

Source: Lake Erie Coastal Ohio, Inc. Retrieved on November 28, 2007 from
http://www.coastalohio.com/discover/ecoguidelines.asp

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[4] See http://www.coastalohio.com

Another example of educational signage that informs residents and visitors is from the case study in Queensland, Australia. The area's Daintree Rainforest is the last remaining habitat for the Cassowary, an endangered bird. Signage about this unique bird and its habitats are located at strategic spots so that they can be viewed throughout a visit. The signs include biological information about the bird, the importance of their habitats, and what visitors can do to protect it (see Figure 7.5). In addition, the heavy emphasis on the Cassowary allows visitor centers and businesses to sell postcards, posters, books, stuffed animals, and many other related items. A souvenir for the informed visitor provides revenue for the local economy.

Figure 7.5. Queensland, Australia – endangered Cassowary signs.

Source: Brandon Schroeder, Michigan Sea Grant

In Northeast Michigan, Michigan Sea Grant (MSG) partners with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and MDNR to place signs related to the negative ecological and economic impacts of aquatic invasive species with information about what boaters and anglers can do to prevent their spread (see Figure 7.6).

Figure 7.6. Preventing spread of Invasive Species.

Source: Todd Marsee, Michigan Sea Grant

Of immediate relevance to this project, the Marine Sanctuary is developing trail markers along the Thunder Bay River which has been designated as the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail. These markers will interpret historic and cultural aspects of the river front. The NEMIA study area offers many miles of publicly owned coastal properties where many unique natural resources and significant historical features provide interpretation opportunities for residents and visitors.

Place-based Education

Engaging youth (e.g., school projects) and community members (e.g., "friends groups" or agencies) in research or management projects is a more intensive educational effort that both engages users in stewardship activities and can foster a sense of investment in the resources with which they are working. This type of education should be considered a long-term commitment that includes continued, multiple, and connected learning opportunities for various ages, audiences, and contexts.

Youth development provides an opportunity to engage students in describing and developing their community's sense of place and then engaging them in community service projects that enhance conservation and management of important coastal cultural and natural resources. Williams (2007) describes the importance of school-community partnerships in recognizing students as valuable assets of the community, and that community organizations and conflicts can provide youth education opportunities. Successful school-community partnerships depend on committed community partners and resources; the community becomes the context for

learning, and learning is focused on community issues. Communities that engage students can accomplish work that is meaningful and productive in addressing environmental needs and locally important issues, providing mutual benefits for both the community and students.

In the same way, place-based education is a process that encompasses and enhances student academic achievement, environmental stewardship, and community engagement and vitality (Sobel, 2007). Researchers from the Great Lakes Water Studies Institute have concluded that place-based learning provides an opportunity to foster stewardship in learners through knowledge about local resources, enhanced sense of place, and community connections (Great Lakes Water Studies Institute at Northwestern Michigan College, 2005). Sobel (2007) describes how community issues and environmental issues/projects can become a learning opportunity for students. Students engage in service projects that benefit both the community and the environment, and in turn learn about issues that are important to their community through hands-on lessons or problem-solving. Students become important players and leaders within the community, empowered to contribute to it, and enhance their own commitment and sense of place within it.

Place-based education can be applied to discovering and interpreting local culture, history, and natural resources. Sobel (2007) provides two examples from New Hampshire. In Littleton, NH, high school students worked with community leaders to develop plans and maps for a trail that loops through historic sites in their school district. Third grade students in the same area produced a book outlining Littleton's history; this book was later sold in local bookstores and visitor centers. In Keene, NH, Keene High School students developed a weekly newspaper column called Tracing Places, researching and telling stories about significant history and places in their town. Keene students, working at the Rachel Marchall Outdoor Learning Lab, are involved at various grade levels in the stewardship and study of all 2000 acres of Keene's public land. Some of their projects include developing a riverwalk with interpretive signs explaining both natural and built environments along their river. Currently students are working with community leaders in developing a River Discovery Center Museum. These students' stewardship efforts, research contributions, and educational products provide community assets that benefit local residents and visitors alike.

Research and literature on place-based education provide a framework for community partners to engage schools and students in developing the priority projects identified throughout the NEMIA process. The NEMIA process has established that sense of place, quality of community, and resource protection are important aspects of coastal tourism and economic development activities undertaken in the area. Schools and students can be challenged to develop projects that address these priorities and, in the process, can learn about their community and its historical and natural resources and heritage. With little creativity, these can in turn become lessons in biology, mathematics, history, social studies, government, or any other subject or topics required for school degrees.

Existing Place-based Education Efforts in Northeast Michigan

Northeast Michigan boasts several schools already invested in experiential, service-learning that incorporates Great Lakes and aquatic education programming and demonstrates strong

community partnerships. The Northeast Michigan Great Lakes and Aquatic Education Networking Summit, held in 2006, brought together education and community partners invested in youth development and aquatic education, including those from Alcona, Alpena, and Presque Isle Counties.[5] Three projects providing evidence of this include:

> (1) Presque Isle County: Onaway School's and the Ocqueoc River Commission's Ocqueoc River Project, where a 5th grade student-led study of the watershed occurred over a six week period, culminating in a "River Celebration" event where students provided educational presentations for the community;

> (2) Alpena County: Alpena-Montmorency-Alcona Educational Service District sponsored a film festival where local schools studied, developed, and produced maritime heritage-related documentary films in cooperation with the Marine Sanctuary; and

> (3) Alcona County: Alcona High School Agriculture and Natural Resources Program engages students in entrepreneurial, resource-based activities in the region such as maple syrup making, aquaculture through connections with a local trout farm, and aquatic invasive species projects with local MDNR and MSG staff.

The 2006 Aquatic Education Networking Summit participants identified the need to support, enhance, and expand these types of in-school aquatic education efforts that make strong community connections. In 2007, Northeast Michigan was funded to conduct a second, follow-up regional networking meeting that focused on bringing school and community partners together to learn about and strategize on the application of place-based education opportunities that promote Great Lakes stewardship in the region.

Currently, the Great Lakes Fishery Trust (GLFT) is developing a Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative which applies place-based education theory to coastal communities with the purpose of supporting Great Lakes stewardship. Starting in 2007, GLFT is funding regional hubs to support school and community partnerships with these goals (GLFT, 2007) Given the region's 2006 Summit investment, Northeast Michigan is well-positioned to apply for and use these funds to engage schools and students in developing coastal projects identified throughout the NEMIA process.   A regional team for Northeast Michigan has been established to explore this funding resource and to host a 2007 Great Lakes and Aquatic Education Regional Networking meeting focused on the topic of place-based education.

7.6 THEME: NATURAL, CULTURAL, AND MARITIME HERITAGE RESOURCES TOURISM

After the theme of *Preserving a Sense of Place and Community Character*, the workgroup gave highest priority to *Natural/Cultural/Maritime Heritage and Natural Resources Tourism.* Four of the six potential actions prioritized by the NEMIA workgroup fell under this theme. The

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[5] For more information on the Great Lakes and Aquatic Education Networking Summit, see
http://www.miseagrant.umich.edu/education/gl-aquatic-edu-network.html

workgroup prioritized maintaining traditional tourism opportunities while also diversifying the tourism portfolio to include new tourism opportunities (See Figure 7.1).

7.6.1 Introduction

Northeast Michigan already boasts a strong coastal tourism industry. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Lake Huron sportfishing industry has been and continues to be an important contributor to the region's tourism economy. However, coastal tourism trends have changed. These changes reflect declining participation (and travel to participate) in the Lake Huron fishery. These trends are driven by economic conditions (such as increasing fuel prices) and changes to the Lake Huron fishery due to ecosystem alterations caused by aquatic invasive species that negatively impact the Chinook salmon fishery (Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 2007). Nationally, there is a decline in participation in nature-based recreation generally (Pergams and Zaradic, 2008). Coastal tourism trends also reflect an increasing interest in maritime heritage and diving, a trend influenced by an increasing regional presence by the Marine Sanctuary. These changes present an opportunity for the region to develop a stronger and more diverse coastal tourism portfolio by focusing attention on (1) protecting and enhancing traditional coastal tourism industries such as those connected with the fishery, and (2) supporting growth in tourism businesses focused on new coastal tourism opportunities, such as diving, kayaking, or ecotourism.

Coastal tourism development, whether it means sustaining existing business or growing new businesses, should be considered in the context of the larger community's economic development vision and direction, goals, and objectives. The *SDAT Report* (AIA, 2006) provides recommendations for supporting downtown development opportunities, as these collective set of businesses support and enhance appeal for coastal tourism customers and, more importantly, they contribute to the local quality of life through services and jobs provided. The *SDAT Report* notes that coastal tourism development can benefit from linkages to and growth of other industries, such as agriculture and coastal city centers that define the regional culture and landscape. Specifically, the *SDAT Report* urges attention to development efforts within coastal city-centers and rebuilding downtown vitality, noting that "these businesses and vitality support healthy tourism and quality of life."

7.6.2 Supporting and Sustaining Existing Coastal Businesses

The workgroup prioritized developing new coastal tourism business opportunities, but also emphasized supporting and sustaining existing coastal businesses to maintain its traditional tourism base. Specifically, commercial and charter fishing, marinas, and boating industries that rely on the Lake Huron sportfishery are examples of existing coastal businesses that have recently faced challenges due to declining participation, increasing travel costs for visitors, or simple competition from other similar coastal tourism providers. Investing in programs or initiatives that address emerging issues, needs, and opportunities can help businesses adapt and grow as markets change. Michigan Sea Grant (MSG) is one regional partner that provides this type of business assistance to the more traditional Great Lakes tourism industries.

The Lake Huron sportfishery has made news headlines with its changing fishery. However, despite changes, the fishery continues to be productive and diverse, providing both sport and commercial fishing benefits to the region. Closely associated with the region's heritage, culture, and sense of place, these industries warrant additional investment to sustain them. Investment strategies include shifting marketing focus and differential pricing.

A simple shift in marketing focus can have big dividends. For example, Northeast Michigan can successfully provide several types of fishing opportunities from river, nearshore, and open water fisheries where anglers can catch a diversity of species. Currently, Lake Huron charter fishing trips are closely grouped in a three-month window (Charles Pistis, personal communication, April 21, 2007) with between 75-80% of business occurring in June, July, and August, that is associated with the optimal Chinook fishing season. Opportunities exist to expand the charter fishing window if coastal communities and charter captains invest in marketing early and late season species and strategies. While a previously popular month and/or species may be in decline, communities can continue to profit by charter captains adding days of fishing and targeting different species. For example, while Chinook salmon have declined in size and numbers, Saginaw Bay walleye – which also feed northern Lake Huron fisheries – and lake trout are greatly improved, and pink salmon are unique to northern Lake Huron altogether. A regional marketing strategy that focuses on these other, excellent sportfishing opportunities would benefit both the charter industry as well as the coastal communities that host it. As interest in other species develops, there will be additional anglers fishing without guides who will provide additional revenue to Northeast Michigan's coastal communities.

The concept of differential pricing provides another strategy that the recreational fishery could employ to attract customers in what have previously been considered the off-peak seasons. Essentially, charter captains would offer different prices for the same product, a half-day or full day on the lake, on the basis of customer type (repeat or first-time anglers) or time of purchase (season). Other coastal businesses, such as motels or bed and breakfasts, might offer lower prices in off seasons to complement differential charter pricing. Together these prices serve to extend the season and to attract new customers during off-peak seasons or attract repeat visits from already captured customers. This strategy will help to attract customers during off-peak seasons, and attract completely new and different markets to the fishery, such as different demographics or regional markets.

Michigan Sea Grant has historically provided support for the Great Lakes sport/charter and commercial fishing industries. Northern Lake Huron is a primary producer of lake whitefish, and home to a significant number of state licensed and tribal commercial fishermen. Currently, MSG is conducting Great Lakes whitefish marketing studies and product development with the commercial fishing industry. The concept is that education regarding the quality and value of these fish products can help commercial fishing businesses thrive economically, while harvesting sustainably. The Great Lakes Whitefish website (http://www.greatlakeswhitefish.com) offers visitors information about the fish, the cultural and historical stories behind the fishermen, and health information regarding the value of spending money on buying Great Lakes whitefish (see Figure 7.7). These commercial businesses and their northern Lake Huron product, if protected and supported, can add value to markets and restaurants serving residents and visitors of the region.

For the sport/charter fishing industry, MSG hosts annual spring workshops for Lake Huron sport and charter anglers. These workshops offer business education opportunities for charter captains, and in 2007 local tourism partners played an important role in offering captains ideas and opportunities for diversifying their charter fishing product and connecting with other regional tourism development and marketing efforts. These types of opportunities for networking and support should be continued.

Figure 7.7. Screenshot of Great Lakes Whitefish marketing website.
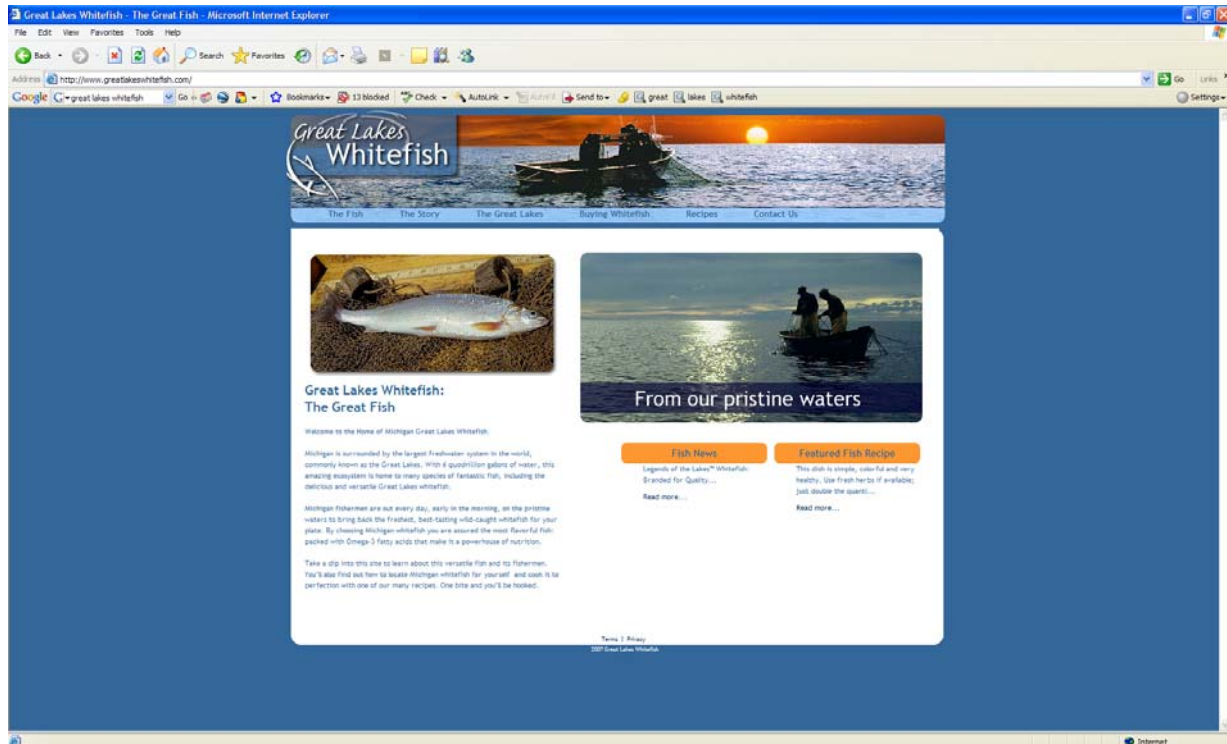
Source: Retrieved from http://www.greatlakeswhitefish.com on December 6, 2007.

Finally, MSG, in partnership with MDEQ and Michigan Boating Industries Association, offers the Michigan Clean Marinas Program, a training and certification program for marinas. This program offers environmentally friendly best practices toward which marinas can voluntarily work. Certified marinas receive marketing support for their efforts. This opportunity can provide tools and resources for marinas to protect the coastal resources they depend upon, while obtaining certification and a competitive advantage as a marina operating within a specialty market niche. Northeast Michigan can adopt this and other coastal business accreditation programs to develop resource protection strategies and best practices for businesses while fostering a competitive marketing advantage for participating businesses.

Education programs, market research, product development, and marketing strategies can help existing businesses establish market niches that are relevant and representative of the Northeast Michigan "experience." The *SDAT Report* (AIA, 2006) recommends querying existing local businesses about their needs and growth interests. It is important to know what these businesses

will need to survive, grow and expand, and continue to remain an active business working and employing from within the region.

7.6.3 Identifying New Tourism Assets and Opportunities

Several projects and initiatives in Northeast Michigan have inventoried and compiled coastal assets, however they could be more complete (e.g., quantity) and extensive (e.g., data-rich) to serve the purposes of geotourism. On-shore inventories should be revisited in a more comprehensive manner, with the purpose of filling gaps and adding new resources that would be identified if looking at the region through a broader geotourism lens. Also, there is always room for adding depth and detail of information and interpretation for each asset identified. The *Huron Greenways* study (NEMCOG, 1999) provides a database of assets, as well as other relevant data indicating ownership, status, and details related to access. This project provides a format and foundation for collecting and mapping data and, as such, additional data should be compiled within the context of this existing work. Sense of place exercises, such as those conducted for Presque Isle County, can serve as opportunities for identifying additional data and attributes useful in developing these inventories further.

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio inventory could be used as a template when expanding the information available for each asset in Northeast Michigan inventories. Their inventory is similar to the inventories developed through the *Huron Greenways* study and in the designation of the US-23 Heritage Route. However, Lake Erie Coastal Ohio invested significant resources in both identifying assets and in developing detailed descriptions of each asset. The Coastal Ohio inventory provides information on a wide array of assets including harbors, museums, lighthouses, boat tours, scenic tours, gardens, restaurants, bed and breakfasts, wetlands, theaters, springs, stargazing, rivers, beaches, forests, farmlands, neighborhoods, main streets, galleries, state parks, festivals, fishing, and craftspeople. In addition, each asset has its own dedicated webpage where maps, images, a detailed description, driving directions, and contact information (if applicable) on the Coastal Ohio website.

The Marine Sanctuary is completing an inventory of shipwrecks and other underwater resources in the region as part of the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail. This activity should be coordinated with other state and regional partners and inventory projects compiling data related to both cultural and ecological assets. This rich data source could then serve as the foundation of the system of water trails for which NEMCOG is seeking funding to complement the *Huron Greenways* study (NEMCOG, 1999). These data can be used to organize and map water assets, trails, and access points accessible by water, such as by boat or kayak.

7.6.4 Supporting Emerging Coastal Tourism Industries

The *SDAT Report* (AIA, 2006) reaffirms that there are ample opportunities along the northern Lake Huron coastline to support diverse and multiple uses, indicating that, "commercial and sport fishing, sailing, motor boating, kayaking, canoeing, diving, snorkeling, swimming, beach activities, or simply strolling along water's edge can all thrive without new coastal development." Diverse coastal tourism opportunities take advantage of multiple seasons, increase opportunities for small business development, and decrease dependency on any one type

of tourism market. The designation of the Marine Sanctuary provides an opportunity for growth in diving, snorkeling, and kayaking tourism in relation to the increased investment in preservation, interpretation, education, and access to shipwrecks and other underwater artifacts. This type of tourism can also be built upon the significant coastal natural resource assets and areas in public ownership through local, state, and federal agencies. Many of these natural areas remain largely undeveloped, such as the state-owned Negwegon State Park, Rockport State Forest, and Thompson's Harbor State Park. These areas lend themselves to entrepreneurial ecotourism businesses, such as guided nature hikes or birding tours, that can highlight these unique natural areas and require little physical infrastructure. The Blackstone Valley case study and the Presque Isle sense of place project provide two examples of getting these types of hikes/tours started. In the short-term, these may be community tours developed through the tourism industry, or possibly a place-based education project for a local school. In the long-term, established tourism businesses might provide these services in trade for the marketing services of the community.

The *SDAT Report* (AIA, 2006) suggests the region's existing businesses consider expanding into cultural or ecotourism areas and service. For example, a restaurant could expand to include a bike rental service that allows visitors to take advantage of existing investments in byways. This requires a lower investment than recruiting new businesses altogether, presents less of a business risk to the entrepreneur, and provides an immediate opportunity to generate new jobs (even if part time). The *SDAT Report* also suggests businesses expand to take advantage of seasonal tourism opportunities. Color tours and farm harvest tours in the fall, snowmobiling and cross country skiing in the winter, or birding tours in the spring are all examples of seasonal activities that can provide a more sustainable, year-around tourism economy.

Recruiting and supporting new coastal tourism businesses (e.g., a kayaking business or guided nature hike service) is a higher investment tourism development strategy than expansion of existing businesses. To be successful, it is important for the tourism industry to make strong linkages with the economic development partners in the region. Northeast Michigan can look to Queensland's tourism industry as a model for providing economic development tools, assistance, and support for tourism businesses. Tourism Queensland's support toolbox is delivered through training and a web-based clearinghouse targeting entrepreneurial tourism businesses. The NEMIA process brings together regional tourism and economic development partners and initiatives such as the US-23 Sunrise Side Coastal Highway that can serve as platforms for delivering a web-based coastal tourism business support tool.

NEMIA economic development partners have been participating in Michigan State University Extension's "Creating Entrepreneurial Communities" training program, which provides access to resources and expertise necessary to generate a toolbox targeted to aspiring entrepreneurs. This team has been trained and is cooperating with MSU Extension economic and community development experts, the MSU Product Center, and the national Energizing Entrepreneurs (E2) Institute. This team is exploring entrepreneurial development initiatives, specifically youth entrepreneurial education programming. In addition, the NxLevel Training[6] offered through local MSU Extension offices or the Small Business and Technology Development Center[7] staff and

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[6] For more information, see http://www.nxlevel.org

[7] For more information, see http://www.gvsu.edu/misbtdc/region3/

programs offered through Alpena Community College can provide resources, training, and assistance for newly emerging and entrepreneurial businesses. The MSU Product Center provides support and assistance in product development, business start-up, and marketing strategies for new businesses.

Ecotourism Business Development and Support – Queensland, Australia

The Queensland, Australia case study provides an example of how to support the ecotourism industry through the development and delivery of business tools and training programs. Training and support for businesses to create a quality experience based on the region's scenery, natural resources, recreational activities, agricultural products, history, culture, and small town/village centers is the focus of the Queensland program. Similar to the NEMIA process, the *Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2003-2008* (Tourism Queensland, 2002) is a strategic plan developed through planning and consultation with the tourism industry – specifically ecotourism industry stakeholders, visitors, government bodies (federal, state, and local), natural area managers, conservation groups, local community leaders, aboriginal communities, education and research institutions, and other special interest groups. The group determined that for Queensland, ecotourism should encompass a spectrum of "…nature-based activities that foster visitor appreciation and understanding of natural and cultural heritage and are managed to be ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable.**"**

Core values identified in this strategic planning process articulate that: (1) ecotourism is a significant contributor to Queensland's tourism industry and economy; (2) ecotourism depends on healthy natural resources; (3) conservation and protection of area attractions is a priority, considering both quality and diversity of resources accessible throughout the region; and (4) ecotourism depends on providing education and support that empowers the tourism industry. Education support can allow the tourism industry to provide leadership in adopting ecologically sustainable principles and practices while continuing to grow their businesses.

Tourism Queensland, the State of Queensland's tourism agency, focuses on providing business support specifically to the ecotourism industry. The *Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2003-2008* identifies actions and deliverables participants would like in support of the ecotourism industry, many of which have been accomplished or are underway including. A sample of these actions includes:

- Consumer and industry ecotourism research and product development;
- Self-help guidelines published to assist government, industry, and community to implement best-practices;
- Ecotourism training workshops;
- Web-based clearinghouse;
- Nature/ecotourism accreditation program;
- Broad community involvement in ecotourism planning and product development; and
- Tourism management system for Queensland protected areas.
       (Tourism Queensland, 2002)

The Tourism Queensland website serves as a clearinghouse, housing many of the products identified in the ecoutourism plan: market research, strategic plans, training and support for business development, customer service and visitor experience, involving local communities and citizens/stakeholders, and best practices for ecotourism or heritage tourism developed with resource protection as a priority. Some examples of tools and products offered by Tourism Queensland include[8]:

- *Environmental Impact Monitoring: A guide for tourism operators* (2002)
- *Working with Communities: A guide for tourism operators*
- *Innovation in Interpretation: 30 Case Studies* (2000)

In Queensland, ecotourism certification and recognition/reward-type programs offer an opportunity to provide quality control of businesses. Ecotourism businesses can achieve various types and levels of certification offered by units of local and state government, inter-industry programs, all based on international standards and programs. There are also award programs and promotional opportunities for businesses adopting ecotourism best practices. They are rewarded by receiving premier designation which, in turn, adds value to their individual marketability and by being spotlighted on the Tourism Queensland website as successful, ecofriendly businesses.

7.6.7 Adding Value by Connecting and Linking Coastal Tourism Assets

Strong linkages between coastal tourism assets add value to existing and new coastal tourism-related business by providing for a richer visitor experience reflective of the diverse and abundant coastal natural, cultural, and historical resources of the region. These linkages also increase the likelihood that customers will stay longer, repeat visit, and share their positive experiences with others (Tourism Industry Planning Council, 2006).

For example, archeological research and interpretation of underwater artifacts can add tremendous value to the tourism product that a dive or snorkel charter business can provide for customers. These same resources can complement other businesses indirectly. Charter fishing captains who provide interpretive resources for lighthouses their customers see or shipwrecks they pass over, or provide information about restaurants, festivals, and other events while also catching fish, will enhance the customers' flavor of the community and region. The same charter fishing captains can also serve as marketing outlets when they refer customers to visit the Marine Sanctuary's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Visitor Center, or other cultural resource organizations.

Connecting Coastal Assets through Coordination and Partnerships

Successfully linking tourism opportunities requires coordination between and among natural resource and cultural/historical resource agencies and organizations, tourism businesses, outreach experts, and economic development partners.

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[8] all are available for download on http://www.tq.com.au/tqcorp_06/index.cfm?5F2C8EAD-FACA-8356-5B7D-CE7ACCFD5C34 as of December 6, 2007

Federal, state, and local cultural resource organizations are the most credible partners for developing interpretive materials and business training programs that focus on best practices for cultural/historical tourism, such as managing tourists on fragile shipwreck sites so as to ensure resource protection. Partnerships between the Marine Sanctuary, MDHAL, and local historical societies can be used to interpret shipwrecks, lighthouses, and other coastal historical artifacts, thus adding to the tourism value of regional maritime heritage assets. MSU Extension and MSG should also be considered partners for developing these programs and for packaging and delivering research and interpretive materials for coastal business development opportunities.

In Queensland, both natural and cultural resource agencies utilize tourism businesses as partners in developing interpretive and educational products related to these resources that the business depends upon. Businesses are considered spokespeople for resource protection and conservation, and agencies provide resources, best practices, and training opportunities for businesses to learn more about the resources they are sharing with their customers. For example, a recreational canopy surfing experience includes information about the rainforest ecosystem and conservation issues/preservation needs related to old growth vegetation and trees. The businesses provide a service for the agency and in doing so they also offer quality and depth of resources and information for the visitors participating in their business and seeking to learn more about the resources they are visiting. This results in a quality visitor experience, and offers some awareness, investment and ownership for the visitor in the resources they are exploring, potentially leading toward stewardship oriented actions on the end of the visitor.

Opportunities exist for cultural resource partners to coordinate and partner with natural resources partners to add to the tourism value of coastal resources. As an example, MDNR manages several coastal properties, including Harrisville State Park, Sturgeon Point Lighthouse, Negwegon State Park, Rockport State Forest, Thompson's Harbor State Park, and Hoeft State Park. These areas contain significant historical and archaeological resources. For example, Rockport and the Besser Natural Areas host the shipwreck CZAR, an abandoned deep draft port that once loaded raw material for the Mackinaw Bridge, Native American artifacts, and the abandoned early settlement of Belle. The Marine Sanctuary, MDHAL, and local historical societies can all serve as partners in developing, interpreting, and marketing these maritime heritage resources in complement to the natural resources management, interpretation, and marketing done by the MDNR. As an example of such a partnership, MSG is currently partnering with the Marine Sanctuary in developing trail markers for the Thunder Bay Maritime Heritage Trail. While the trail is primarily history-oriented, the MSG program provides interpretive content regarding ecological aspects of this area's history, such as fisheries (e.g., sport and commercial fisheries) and impacts of aquatic invasive species which have been introduced throughout past years. Connections between cultural and natural resources are important considerations in developing strong geotourism opportunities.

These partnerships can strengthen regional connections among cultural resource partners, interpretative and education products, and coastal tourism assets. Businesses themselves can be key partners in developing and delivering interpretive opportunities relevant to the coastal assets around which their businesses may be built.

Tourism partners in Northeast Michigan should continue to seek additional national and even international support, ideas, and resources through programs such as the National Scenic Byways Program, Preserve America, or National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations Geotourism program. In terms of funding support, the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio initiative utilized the federal designation and grant funding ($25,000/year for three years) through the NSBP provided the opportunity and incentive for continued regional collaboration. These opportunities enabled the region to hire a consultant to facilitate an inventory that built upon existing work, adding depth and detail to these assets already identified. The region started with 160 assets, now there are over 350 identified. This consultant also facilitated development of the regional marketing message and target market, then fostered the networking and coordination required to develop and launch the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio website. Eventually, the effort required an executive director dedicated to sustaining these relationship and partnership networks, core website clearinghouse, and oversight of new funding and development opportunities. This position is sustained through a partnership that includes The Ohio State University, Ohio Sea Grant College Program, and local partners (Frank Lichtkoppler, personal communication, March 2007).

Partners in Northeast Michigan could also encourage the State of Michigan to adopt a strategy identifying a series of potential UNESCO World Heritage Sites and a parallel series of potential UNESCO biospheres. There are ample examples for the state to review, the latest example being the Rideau Canal World Heritage Site in nearby Ontario. The economic potential of a World Heritage Site is tremendous.[9]

Connecting Coastal Tourism Assets by Expanding Wayfinding and Mapping

The *SDAT Report* (AIA, 2006) indicated mapping and wayfinding as opportunities for enhancing the tourism value of both cultural and natural coastal resources. The US-23 Sunrise Side Coastal Highway, inventory and maps from the *Huron Greenways* study, and *Lights of Northern Lake Huron* driving tour offer examples and products that address mapping and wayfinding needs. Partners should continue to use, and expand usage of these initiatives and products, making maps and information more widely available. For example, by offering information and maps from the *Huron Greenways* study more widely available via regional and local tourism websites.

Two additional opportunities exist to expand mapping and wayfinding among coastal cultural resources of the region. First, continue partnerships with MDHAL and Travel Michigan in developing additional thematic regional coastal heritage driving tours. This integrated assessment provides a summary of resources and assets that can be used as a foundation for developing these regionally themed driving tours.

Second, consider developing water-based trails, as much of the framework is established for inventorying, developing, and marketing them. The Marine Sanctuary is providing leadership to the Maritime Heritage Water Trail which involves interpretive signage and infrastructure to enhance walkability along the waterfront. This effort also involves inventorying and developing "water trails" in Thunder Bay for tourists to visit shipwrecks and view lighthouses from the

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[9] For more information on the Rideau Canal WHS, see: http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1221.

water. NEMCOG is also seeking funding to conduct an inventory and generate maps related to the Huron Blueways which is a system of water trails that would complement and connect with the *Huron Greenways* study. Huron Blueways is intended to highlight assets (access to features, views, etc) for tourists such as kayakers. The expertise and archival assets at the Marine Sanctuary, such as the shipwreck inventory, will be critical in developing, interpreting, and even marketing these types of tourism trails on the water.

The Huron County Coastal Paddling Trail is an example of a countywide water trail that connects cultural, historic, and ecological features along the Lake Huron coastline.[10] The trail guides paddlers on a tour of the county's coastline, highlighting local assets and information specific to access points and communities. This trail is an example of a regional project using maps and internet tools to provide interpretive and wayfinding services targeted at a specific user group. Similar to Northeast Michigan, Huron County is a rural county, with land uses primarily in agriculture. The county has looked to tourism to add economic value, and also promotes other assets such as natural resources (fishing, hunting, and bogs), agricultural, historical (petroglyphs), and cultural resources (art trails, festivals, etc.). The Huron County Coastal Paddling Trail is a tool that connects visitors along the entire county-wide coastline; individual towns and areas are then able to connect paddlers with other tourism assets as locally available and appropriate.

Other opportunities for connecting assets using inventory work might include adding historical assets to state and federal historical registries or adding new assets and details to the existing *Huron Greenways* study database framework. Data can also be organized in developing GIS data layers, generating regional maps, and other educational or interpretive materials. These products should be available for use by resource managers, stakeholder interest groups, tourism and economic development partners, businesses, and others in developing and marketing cultural assets through various initiatives. Tourism partners should also seek opportunities to make inventory data available for tourism and other economic development opportunities.

Adding Value through Cross-Promotion – Queensland, Australia

Queensland, Australia's coastal ecotourism industry has focused on developing formalized regional linkages among tourism businesses resulting in an effective cross-marketing strategy that seeks to capture visitors for multiple days. A sign entering the Daintree Cape Tribulation Rainforest area boasts, "Experience the Daintree Cape Tribulationo Rainforest, where the Rainforest meets the [Great Barrier] Reef. You need to stay for more than a day." This message emphasizes the region's interest in drawing linkages among multiple assets, and marketing to attract customers that stay multiple days (increasing visitor expenditure per person) in the region.

The Queensland region attracts customers based on individual and high profile assets, such as the Great Barrier Reef or the World Heritage Daintree Cape Tribulation Rainforest. Once visitors are in the region they are on their own to explore and engage in various tourism activities. The region hosts many smaller scale tourism operations that benefit from tourists that visit for the larger attractions. These businesses flourish and attract visitors to stay longer by a cooperative culture of businesses that cross-market each other.

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[10] For more information, see http://www.thumbtrails.com

In Queensland, rather than emphasizing "package deal" marketing where the customer pays a discounted price for a group of services (food, lodging, tours, etc.) prior to arriving, the customer is exposed to an a la carte tourist experience, resulting in more time and resources spent in the region (see Figure 7.8). This strategy is successful because most businesses and visitor bureaus are positioned to recommend, and even book and take money for tours and trips, lodging, and restaurants, thus passing their customers on to the next community business. In trade, many of these businesses build in a twenty percent overhead that serves as a commission for the businesses that successfully refer a customer. This allows an additional profit for businesses that effectively promote themselves, and a financial reward for businesses that successfully refer customers from which they have already benefited.

This strategy promotes a culture of competitive businesses that also seek to cross-promote other ecotourism businesses in the community. For the visitor, these businesses provide a service of sharing all of the authentic experiences, large and small, that the region has to offer, and then helping the customer to move between and among different venues and activities. This promoting a positive customer service and visitor experience resulting in longer visits and increased investment by the customer in their visit to the region (Alison Gotts, personal communication, April 20, 2007).

Figure 7.8. How an a la carte trip (compared to a packaged trip) can add up in time and resources spent in one location.
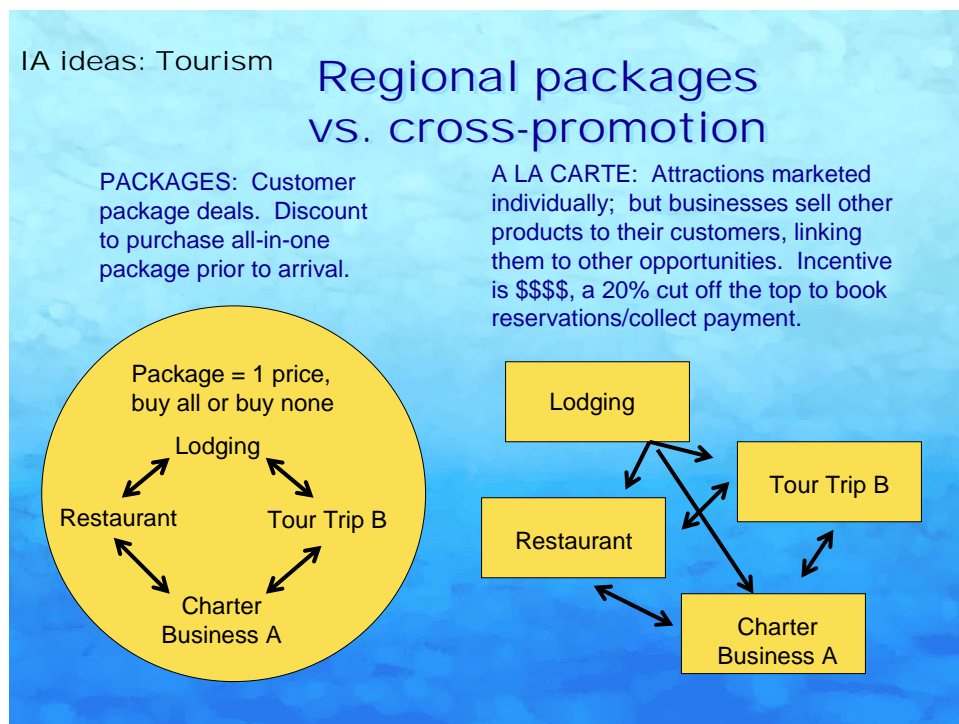
Source: Brandon Schroeder, presentation at May 10 NEMIA meeting.

Packaging and Marketing Assets through Regionally-developed Themes and Stories

The Lake Erie Coastal Ohio initiative is an example of using an asset inventory to connect regional assets thematically (Lake Erie Landscapes, Lake Erie Cultural History, or Lake Erie Natural History), by audience (active outdoor recreation, history buffs, etc.) and by geographic sub-region (Western, Central, Eastern) and disseminating this information to tourists and the community tourism partners via the web. The inventory and thematic organization has also provided a foundation for developing regional partnerships, pursuing funding and Federal Scenic By-way designation, and has resulted in a fully funded regional director who oversees the marketing and web development related to the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio initiative.

Northeast Michigan already has the interest, ability, and infrastructure necessary to support connected tourism experiences based on geography or theme. The *Huron Greenways* inventory and maps, the US-23 Sunrise Side Coastal Highway initiative, and the Sunrise Side Travel Association provide the products and platform necessary to support coordination across the region. More importantly they can link regional projects with efforts and initiatives of local tourism bureaus or coastal businesses that continue to develop and market their own local products unique to a particular county, community, or subregion.

Figure 7.9. Examples of Coastal Ohio assets grouped under each thematic category.

- Lake Erie Landscapes
    - Bays, Ports and Harbors
    - Forests and Farmlands
    - Glacial Islands
    - Grasslands and Savannas
    - Lakes and Beaches
    - Rivers and Streams
    - Wetlands
- Lake Erie Cultural History
    - Legacy of Freedom
    - Patterns of the People
    - Pursuit of Leisure
    - The First West
    - Working Waterfronts
- Lake Erie Natural History
    - Geological Influences
    - Glacial Beginnings
    - Smoke on the Water
    - Renaissance

(LECO, 2005)

The SDAT process identified that Northeast Michigan's "sellable" assets can broadly described or categorized as: (a) Lake Huron and Thunder Bay, (b) Natural Resources, (c) Pastoral Landscapes, and (d) Coastal Cities and Villages (AIA, 2006). The maritime heritage initiative led by MDHAL and Travel Michigan that resulted in *Lights of Northern Lake Huron* driving tour has also identified several additional themes or stories to market to visitors. Among these potential themes are: (1) Harbors, Towns, and Ports, (2) Lake Huron Commerce "Lake Huron Bluewater Highway," (3) People Power of the Great Lakes, and (4) Fins, Fur, and Feathers (this category added by the NEMIA working group). Regional tourism partners should leverage the existing inventory work to develop these additional themes into additional driving tours or other packaged experiences.

7.6.8 Leveraging the Thunder Bay Marine Sanctuary

The Marine Sanctuary should be leveraged to develop cultural tourism opportunities, connect cultural attractions throughout the region through "satellite" partnerships, and support cultural resource management.

The federal and state resources brought by NOAA and MDHAL to Northeast Michigan through their co-management of the Marine Sanctuary can be used to support regional decision-making and provide educational programs on resource protection, interpreting and marketing, and managing tourism for sustainability. For example, MDHAL helped facilitate the *Lights of Northern Lake Huron* driving tour hosted online via Travel Michigan website. The Marine Sanctuary can help leverage additional such activities and support through MDHAL on similar such projects.

As mentioned above, the Marine Sanctuary, MDHAL, and local historical societies can partner to interpret coastal historical artifacts. At sites where historical assets are focal tourism attractions (e.g., Sturgeon Point Lighthouse or 40-mile point), the Marine Sanctuary can use these attractions as satellite locations for delivering regionally developed programs and resources developed by the Marine Sanctuary. At these satellite displays, historical society volunteers could interpret local resources, and also link local resources back to regionally significant attractions, such as the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Visitor Center, or other local historical museums and other satellite locations. Regional support in developing these satellite products or displays can generate partnerships, leverage resources, and add significant value for a local non-profit that is volunteer run.

The Marine Sanctuary's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Visitor Center's Internet 2 and tele-presence capabilities can benefit regional cultural resource protection, education, and tourism projects. Partnerships with the Sanctuary can help utilize this technology for various projects, ranging from enhancing education and local residents ability to virtually travel to other parts of the country/world, marketing Northeast Michigan and the Marine Sanctuary to other parts of the country/world and even attracting "virtual visitors," and just connecting with outside resources, partners, and such in developing program planning, development, marketing, and implementation (such as virtual meetings with key researchers from somewhere else in the country).

As mentioned above, Queensland, Australia uses big draw attractions (such as the Great Barrier Reef) to draw visitors to the area. Once people are "captured visitors" they downplay the main attraction and focus marketing and attention toward many smaller, less known, lower profile businesses and activities (Tourism Queensland, 2002). A parallel opportunity for Northeast Michigan is to market the Marine Sanctuary and the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Visitor Center as a high profile attraction, and then develop management and marketing strategies for diverting visitors to other attractions once visitors arrive.

7.7 THEME: INCORPORATING MODERN TECHNOLOGIES

Incorporating modern technology logically follows on the implementation advice related to both preserving sense of place and increasing tourism opportunities. Sense of place exercises help determine the stories to tell, best practices to develop tourism opportunities help determine what resources best tell those stories, and ideas for incorporating modern technology can provide the means to package these resources into tourist itineraries and advertise them to the desired audience(s).

The Integration Team identified a number of best practices to increase visibility of the area's resources to non-residents by marketing regional tourism opportunities via the web.

7.7.1 Introduction

Existing regional activities, upon which NEMIA is building, including the *Huron Greenways* study and the *US-23 Sunrise Side Coastal Highway Management Plan*, emphasize the importance of building a well-linked web presence as an important strategic element.

The *Huron Greenways* study (NEMCOG, 1999) recommends that regional tourism partners "develop a website, connected to existing tourism bureaus and chambers." Similarly, the *US-23 Sunrise Side Coastal Highway Management Plan* (NEMCOG, 2003) calls for significant marketing and promotion as well as tourism enhancement activities that could easily be reflected in web-based, as well as on-the-ground, activities. The following Priority Projects from the Management Plan can draw upon web technology in implementation:

Marketing and Promotion:
- Develop and distribute educational and informational brochures and other promotional literature and a website about the Route.
- Identify where to establish informational and educational tourist centers at strategic places along the Route. Determine how the tourist centers will be designed, staffed and maintained.

Tourism Enhancement:
- Improve hiking, non-motorized and snowmobile paths in public lands as a part of a regional network system.
- Plan to develop self-guided theme tours (e.g. ghost towns, genealogy).
- Delineate and mark water trails.
- Develop and deliver hospitality training programs for tourism related businesses.

In addition to the regional web building blocks and material, Travel Michigan's Lights of Northern Lake Huron driving tour places regional stories in a state-wide context. There are several additional stories that have been identified through regional tourism visioning sessions that should be developed and added to the Travel Michigan website immediately *and* then to the web presence developed for the region. These include:
- Harbors, Towns, and Ports;
- Commerce (or "Lake Huron Bluewater Highway");
- People Power of the Great Lakes; and
- Fins, Fur, and Feathers

A strategy for promoting these stories and tourism in Northeast Michigan via the web must include the following components: website hosting, website content and design, and Internet marketing and search strategies. This section will first quickly review the region's current tourism web presence then it will consider how each of the components above can be used to improve the regional web presence. It will conclude by highlighting some best practices

regarding web presence from the case studies, and finally important things to keep in mind when developing web-based products.

7.7.2 Existing web presence

Presently, the Michigan Sunrise Side Travel Association maintains the only regional tourism website at http://www.misunriseside.com. A sample of local tourism websites includes the following:

- http://www.alpenacvb.com – Alpena tourism website, which is maintained by the Alpena Convention and Visitors Bureau
- http://www.downtownalpena.com/ - information on Downtown Alpena, maintained by the Alpena Chamber of Commerce
- http://www.presqueislemi.com/main.html - Presque Isle County tourism website, maintained by the county tourism council
- http://www.rogerscitychamber.com – information on Rogers City, maintained by the Rogers City Chamber of Commerce.

Other tourism-related websites include the *Huron Greenways* study (NEMCOG, 1999), found at http://www.nemcog.org/greenways/greenways.html and the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, found at http://www.thunderbay.noaa.gov.

The tourism-related content of these websites is focused on providing information for potential visitors and promoting attractions and events. When combined, these websites provide information on the overwhelming majority of recreational opportunities for tourists. However they could be much more effectively designed, organized, and linked to maximize the number and duration of visits they receive. Although the importance of linking between local websites is recognized in the region, (for example, it is a recommendation in the *Huron Greenways* study as shown above) these linkages have not been made. The only way to access the *Huron Greenways* study is to know to look for it at the NEMCOG website. In addition, while the inventory and maps from the *Huron Greenways* inventory are available online, they are NOT linked to local tourism websites.

The Northeast Michigan websites reviewed by the Integration Team also lack an important component that is common to the case study websites which is a section that supports geo-tourism businesses and/or regional entrepreneurs. Typically this provides a series of tools for local businesses that promote the regional sense of place, provide a uniform image (e.g., through branding items such as logos, tour maps, checklists) and enhance the service the business is able to provide visitors to the region.

7.7.3 Promoting Tourism in Northeast Michigan via the Internet

Although website design falls under the category of information technology, a website has the potential to be much more than a conduit of information. A website provides capacity to control the information people gather about the region as well as the ability to shape how people perceive the region from a distance. All of which should be guided by the sense of place

developed by and for residents. Creative design and careful consideration of content allows the development of a web presence that is not only an information gateway to the region, but also reinforces the sense of place that residents want visitors to experience while in Northeast Michigan.

Web hosting

The first component to consider for marketing the region's tourism opportunities more effectively is the "location" of the website. Who will host the website and what will be the Internet address, its uniform resource locator or url? There are two possibilities. A new url could be purchased and an entirely new website developed. It would need to link to and from the existing websites but could provide a new face for the region. Conversely, an existing website and url could be redesigned to provide continuity for web visitors already used to visiting the website while attracting new visitors. A good candidate for that might be the US-23 Coastal Highway website that would logically link all of the communities in northeast Michigan.

If it is decided that a new url is the best choice, it is important that the url reflect the regional identity and desired tourism experience. Even the url can tell a story! It should invoke images, feelings, symbols, connotations, or memories that you want the user to associate with northeast Michigan. For example, the url www.visitnemichigan.___ is quite literal, and while it is direct and reflects the content of the website, it does little to stir the mind of the web visitor. On the other hand, a url such as www.truenorth.___, is more descriptive, evoking images and associations in the user's mind even before they visit the website.

Regardless of which option is pursued, the design phase is the best time to give thought to issues such as maintenance, adding content and sustainability – who can update the website and how frequently does that occur, how are additional pages designed and added, who pays for hosting the website?

Website Content and Design

When developing a web presence, there are four essential components to consider: content, navigation, visual appeal/design, and updates/maintenance.

Content

It is important to have the information that people are looking for when they are considering and/or planning vacation travel. The website provides the first opportunity for potential visitors to discover the region's identity; the message on the website must match other message/marketing tools used to advance the region.

According to an analysis of the top five websites returned by a Google search of the five most searched keywords, there were several elements of content that the top websites hold in common (Webcredible, 2007):

1. The websites were *frequently updated*, many once a week or more. This reduces frustration among users when something interesting is no longer available or well past the event date;
2. There were *few or no spelling or grammar errors* which helps ensure credibility of the website;
3. *Paragraphs* were short, 1-4 sentences, with few or no blocks of text. Most people skip over long blocks of text as the Internet promotes a get-in-and-get-out approach to information gathering;
4. *Sentences* were also short, with 10 words or fewer. Medium and longer-length sentences were avoided and definitely not clumped when unavoidable;
5. Frequent use of *bulleted and numbered lists*. This breaks text into "digestible" chunks and prevents information overload;
6. The text content contains many *terms related to the keyword* as possible, including as many variations of the keyword.

Navigation

It is equally important, however, to organize information on your website in a way that is familiar to the average Internet user. It does no good to have a great looking, content rich website unless people can find the information for which they are looking where they generally expect to find it.

There is a lot of information related to website design available addressing design standards and criteria. Some of the best resources include material developed by the Neilsen-Norman Group founded by Jacob Neilsen and Donald Norman[11] and Internet pages with design tips related to website accessibility. The primary factor to remember is that people are looking for results that are fast and easy to achieve – they should take no more than three clicks to get where they want to go or they may be lost to another website.

Websites that use the same navigation template on all pages are most effective. Select a navigation bar with logical, but broad categories that can be further divided. Visitors will be looking for key categories such as: Home; About Us/the Region; What to Do/Events/Activities; Lodging; News/Media; Tools for Business. These broad headings can be further divided through the use of drop down menus or pop-up boxes.

Visual Appeal/Design

The consistent message conveyed by the website begins with the website's design. Design should be simple, but not boring. That can be achieved through the use of HTML and cascading

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[11] Jakob Nielsen, Ph.D., is a User Advocate and principal of the Nielsen Norman Group which he co-founded with Dr. Donald A. Norman (former VP of research at Apple Computer). Until 1998 he was a Sun Microsystems Distinguished Engineer. Dr. Nielsen founded the "discount usability engineering" movement for fast and cheap improvements of user interfaces and has invented several usability methods, including heuristic evaluation. He holds 79 United States patents, mainly on ways of making the Internet easier to use. (from http://www.accessibility101.org.uk/tips/7.htm, retrieved June 14, 2007)

style sheets (all stylistic elements, e.g., fonts, color, spacing, look the same regardless of the page visited on the website. Flashy or gimmicky elements such as blinking boxes, moving objects, flashing banners are distracting and are negatively associated with pop-up advertising which can turn-off some visitors. Additionally these elements are challenging to keep up. The best advice is Keep It Simple, Stupid also known as the KISS Principle (Accessibility 101, 2007).

Keeping design simple does not mean it cannot be visually stunning and also help meet one of the key internal and external marketing objectives – building, enhancing and maintaining a strong sense of place and community character. Websites offer an opportunity to reflect the sense of place that visitors can expect to experience when they are in the region. A well-designed website can help sway a potential visitor, leading them to explore regional offerings on the web further and therefore increasing the chance they will select the region as their travel destination. For travelers committed to traveling to the region, a website reflective of the region's identity will prepare them for the regional experience, building expectation and anticipation.

Maintenance

Since one of the keys to website content is frequent updating, it is important that updates be easy and fast, especially if the website will not be maintained by the designer/builder after its initial unveiling. Developing an easily maintained website may take more planning time initially and cost a little more, but will be worth it in the long run because it is so integrally linked to the ability to maintain content.

Internet Marketing

A website is only effective if people visit it. Resources spent designing and building a website can only be maximized if considerable resources are also invested in ensuring people will visit the website. Two ways of directing visitors to a website are search engine optimization and search engine marketing.

Searching for "Northeast Michigan travel" in three popular search engines (Google, Yahoo, and Ask) resulted in surprisingly few optimal returns. The goal in <u>search engine optimization</u> is to have your website come up on the first page of search results, preferably on the top half of that page using natural, that is, organic or algorithmic search results. You can improve the quantity and quality of visitors to your website if it ranks high in searches.

There are several strategies that can be employed when constructing and maintaining a website that will optimize the results of web searches. One factor Internet search engines use in ranking a website is its <u>link popularity</u> which is a measure of both the quantity and quality of the links to and from the website in question. Link quality relates to the types of websites that are linked to the website in question with certain types of websites considered higher quality than others. Securing high quality links can be challenging and potentially expensive. Securing the advice of an experienced search engine optimization consultant is well worth the resources and time that will be saved as a result.

Link quantity is also important, especially incoming links, which are websites that link to yours. Links from other websites bring visitors with them. They also offer search engine spiders, virtual robots that comb the Internet indexing pages in order to provide fast search results when the search engine is queried. Finally, links from other websites are more significant in providing higher ranking search engine results than links to other websites. They demonstrate that the editor of another website finds your content a valuable addition to his/her readers and is willing to potentially lose them to your website in exchange for that information.

As noted above, there are a good number of websites in Northeast Michigan that could provide relevant content for potential visitors. If all of these websites linked to and from each other, they would all increase their popularity and most likely their rank in search engine results.

The other, relatively inexpensive, way to promote more visitors to your website is to engage in search engine marketing. This is typically the paid or advertising space on the right-hand side of the search results page that are typically called "sponsored links." Variously, Google "click-ads," Yahoo "search marketing," and Ask "sponsored listings," these paid links can be useful ways to get visitors to your website. Website managers select a list of keywords that the target audience is most likely to use to search for information. People who search using those key words will see the ad developed by the website manager and the website is only charged for that advertising if the person actually clicks on the ad and goes to the website in question. This type of advertising begins as low as $0.05 per click and, with most search engines, can be capped after a daily limit is reached. That way the website controls how much is spent on advertising (Google, 2007).

Technology Support for Business

In addition to information to convince potential visitors and help confirmed visitors plan their trips, the best websites also included materials to support local tourism businesses. Business support materials include maps and itineraries that can be used to enhance guest experiences. One of the Olympic Peninsula tourism-related websites[12] provides tourist-related businesses with a list of events in their community that they can provide to visitors. Good photos and graphics to be used on brochures and other materials developed by the business and promoting regional identity are also useful. Research related to the tourism industry such as jobs and wages, tax information, visitor spending profiles and other useful information can also be found on these websites.

Additional best practices that supported geotourism from the case study websites included providing interpretive tools for local businesses. This ranged from theme-based maps and itineraries, to ecotourism interpretive tools. For example, the Queensland, Australia Regional Tourism Association website (http://www.tq.com.au/index.cfm) and the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio website (http://www.coastalohio.com) provide materials such as guidelines for managing visitor impacts, wildlife watch check lists, and other materials that enhance the individual and collective visitor experience.

7.7.4 Best Practices

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[12] http://www.peninsulaevents.com/industry/index.html

The following examination of best practices from the case study regions and other locations will illustrate how design, navigation/organization, links and support for geo-tourism business have been incorporated into an effective web presence that definitely enhances the regions' visibility.

The first example is the **Blackstone Valley** website: http://www.tourblackstone.com.

1. Content: This website provides a lot of well-organized material. The content is presented in short paragraphs with short, simple sentences for the most part. Bullets and/or numbers are used whenever possible. The website has a calendar displaying the current week's events that conveys the number of activities a visitor can enjoy. Potential visitors are able to click on the calendar button and see events for the period in which they are interested in visiting. Some of the key activities – biking, dining, tours, and local festivals – are also highlighted on the front page and illustrated with thumbnail images; this attractive presentation will draw the potential visitor to explore further.

2. Navigation: The website has a common vertical menu bar used throughout with drop-down menus.

3. Visual: The website is attractive with lots of photos. It has a fairly simple design and is not graphic-heavy. Later examples will demonstrate how with just a little additional effort, the visual element can be further enhanced to convey sense of place/community character with even more strength.

The **Olympic Peninsula** website at http://www.northwestsecretplaces.com is one example of the many websites available for potential visitors to the Pacific Northwest to explore. This website is profiled here because it is the most comprehensive; it represents all of Clallam County and it is the most visually appealing of the websites.

1. Content: This website is very comprehensive and includes specific information on activities and/or attractions specific to the region for which a potential visitor might be searching specifically such as information on weddings, and water adventure.

2. Navigation: This website provides a horizontal navigation bar along the bottom of the front page and a vertical navigation bar along the left side of interior pages. This website breaks some of the fundamental navigation rules – there is no "home" tab, nor are the vertical navigation bar contents the same for all the interior pages. That makes the website somewhat cumbersome to navigate and might curtail additional exploration by potential visitors.

3. Visual: This website has a clean design with beautiful, evocative images and interior pages that convey the sense of the activity, if not always the place.

4. Special Features: Northwest Weddings pages that include links to help plan all aspects of the wedding from a distance; Military Appreciation Program provides a page of links to businesses that provide discounts to active members of the armed services; Two Nation Vacation provides information for US and/or Canadian citizens and permanent residents on border crossing procedures and opportunities. The front page button for requesting a travel planner (in reality a link to the Chambers of Commerce website which provides "additional information;" it is unclear what that means).

A selection of interior pages from the Olympic Peninsula site: Trails, Weddings, and Industry Support

Images retrieved 6/15/07 from www.northwestsecretplaces.com

An even richer example of what can be done with a regional website is the example of the **State of Minnesota's** "Explore Minnesota" tourism website: http://www.exploreminnesota.com.

1. Content: This website has all of the material a potential visitor needs to plan a trip to Minnesota.

2. Navigation: The navigation is horizontal across the top. The website search tab is an excellent feature because visitors who are not finding what they seek are likely to use this resort before leaving the website in frustration.

3. Visual: The Minnesota website reflects sense of place in look, photo album design, wood carving, and powerful photos. There are no gimmicks or flashy elements.

4. Special Features: Travel Tools is an excellent feature that leads to a page with a secondary menu including "travel counselor" telephone and e-mail contact for people located in Minnesota to answer travel-related questions; "e-newsletters" provide an opportunity to sign up for e-mail updates on places and events; "brochures" a host of brochures on lots of travel topics to be sent via mail; "general travel information" answers common questions such as sales/accommodation tax, tipping, transportation; "travel information centers" lists where travel information can be located on the road; and

"local tourist information" connection to local chambers of commerce and tourism information websites. My Favorite Minnesota is an excellent example of how sense of place can be used to pique and/or enhance a potential visitor's interest in the location. "Real" Minnesotans recommend their top ten places in a variety of categories, such as family fun, outdoor adventure, scenic byways, golf, camping, etc.
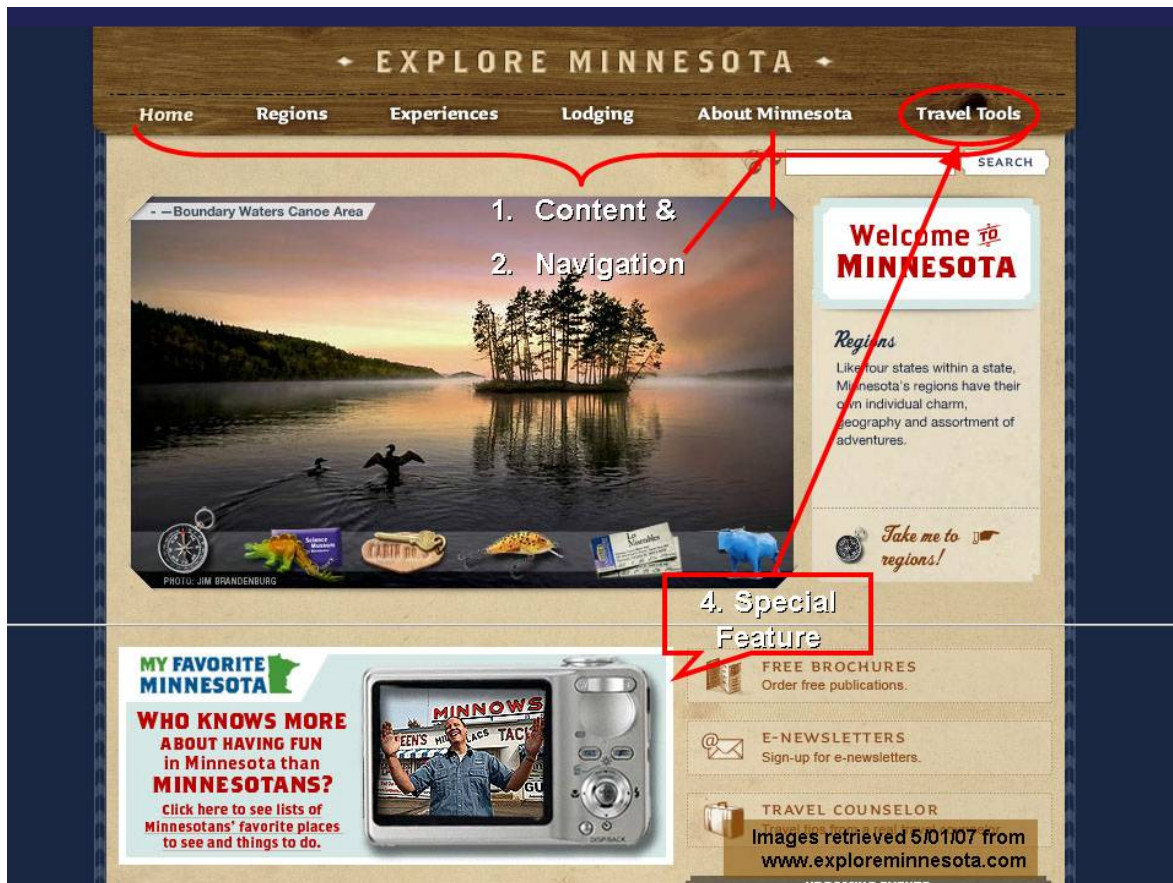

The **Queensland, Australia** Regional Tourism Association website, called Travel Queensland, is an excellent example of Internet use to support the tourism industry: http://www.tq.com.au/index.cfm. There appears to be a division of labor in Australia, in that the local websites provide information for potential visitors planning trips, while the regional website primarily provides support to the tourism industry itself. The website provides a library of tools, research (data, information and reports), and other resources such as marketing products and best practices. The material includes specific content directed to the cultural and eco-tourism specific businesses practicing geo-tourism.

On a regional scale, an ecotourism web-based "clearinghouse" provides a foundation for organizing and delivering products and services for the ecotourism industry. While the Travel Queensland website serves valuable information to visitors, the website specifically targets the ecotourism industry for delivery of plans and strategies, industry research, tools and best practices, publications and training, and current news. Some examples of specific

products/training services available on the website that support ecotourism business development with resource protection in mind include: (1) *Successful Tourism at Heritage Places: A guide for tourism operators, heritage managers, and communities* (Australian Heritage Commission and CRC for Sustainable Tourism, 2001); (2) *Tourism Management in Queensland Protected Areas* (Tourism in Protected Areas Working Group, 2003); and (3) *Environmental Impact Monitoring: A guide for tourism operators* (Tourism Queensland, 2002).

For new or existing businesses, a significant amount of market research is provided on the Tourism Queensland website (Tourism Queensland, 2007), for example, providing information about: (1) "what tourists are looking for in nature tourism," (2) birdwatching tourism, (3) "markets for nature-based activities," and (4) snorkeling and diving tourism. Finally, tools, best practices, and accreditation programs provide support for businesses ranging from resource protection, business planning and start-up, visitor management, engaging communities, and using technology for interpretation.
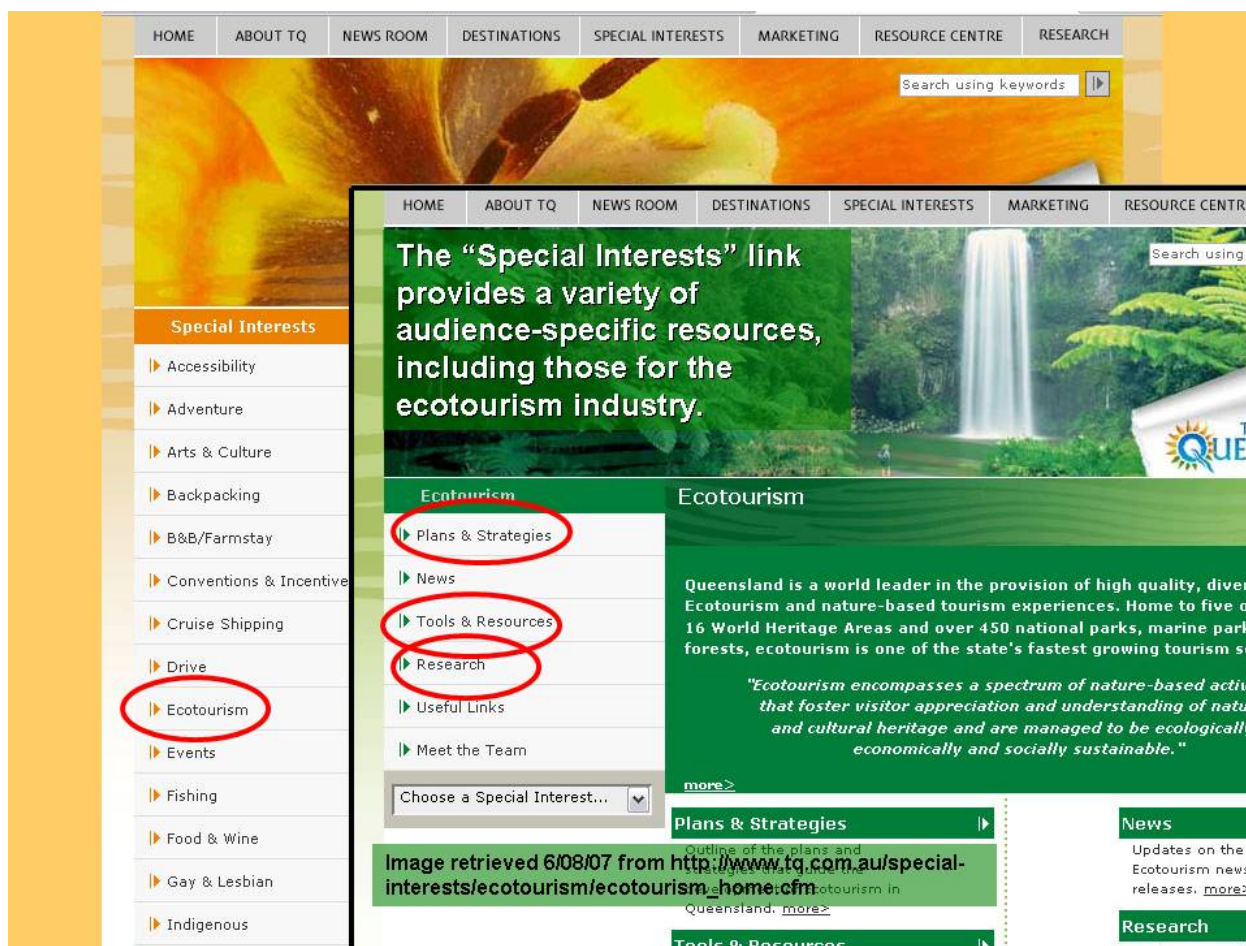

The **Lake Erie Coastal Ohio** initiative utilizes the Internet as a primary tool for connecting and marketing coastal tourism regionally. Federal grants through the NSBP were pivotal in developing the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio website as one deliverable. This regional website (http://www.coastalohio.com) serves the dual purpose of providing tools and resources for the

tourism industry, as well interpretive information, maps, and announcements useful to visitors traveling to and through the region. The background and process in arriving at this regionally serving product was equally important in fostering cooperative relationships and partnerships toward sustainable tourism development.

As a primary tourism tool, the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio website serves as a clearinghouse to organize and disseminate coastal tourism related information, tools, and resources in support of the tourism industry and for the benefit of providing a better tourism experience for visitors. For the industry, this website provides a clearinghouse format by which to collect and organize tourism relevant tools, such as interpretive maps and resources, best practices for businesses, media resources, and trainings and other business development products. For the visitor, this website provides information organized in three primary categories: 1) Discover, 2) Explore, and 3) Experience.

Visitors seeking to "Discover" find information and attractions related to specific regional themes, such as the natural world, Lake Erie origin (geological history and features), history and culture, reading resources, and relevant Internet links. Visitors "Exploring" Coastal Ohio can search natural, historical, and cultural features, attractions, and businesses by sub-region (e.g., northwest, central, or northeast Ohio). Finally, the "Experience" section provides activities and events by which participants can actively participate; these organized by history, culture, nature, active travelers (i.e., biking), and water lovers (i.e., boating) (LECO, 2007).
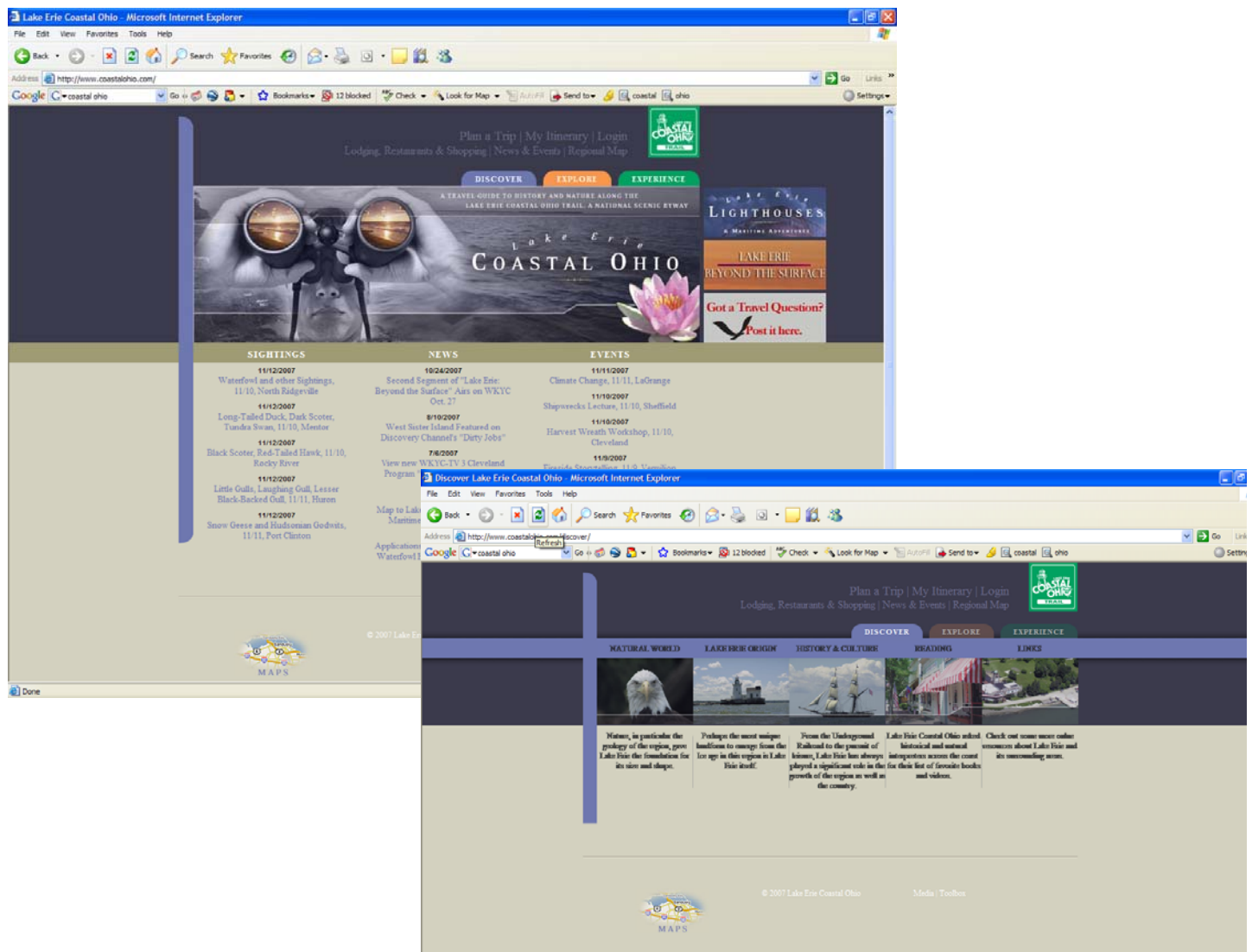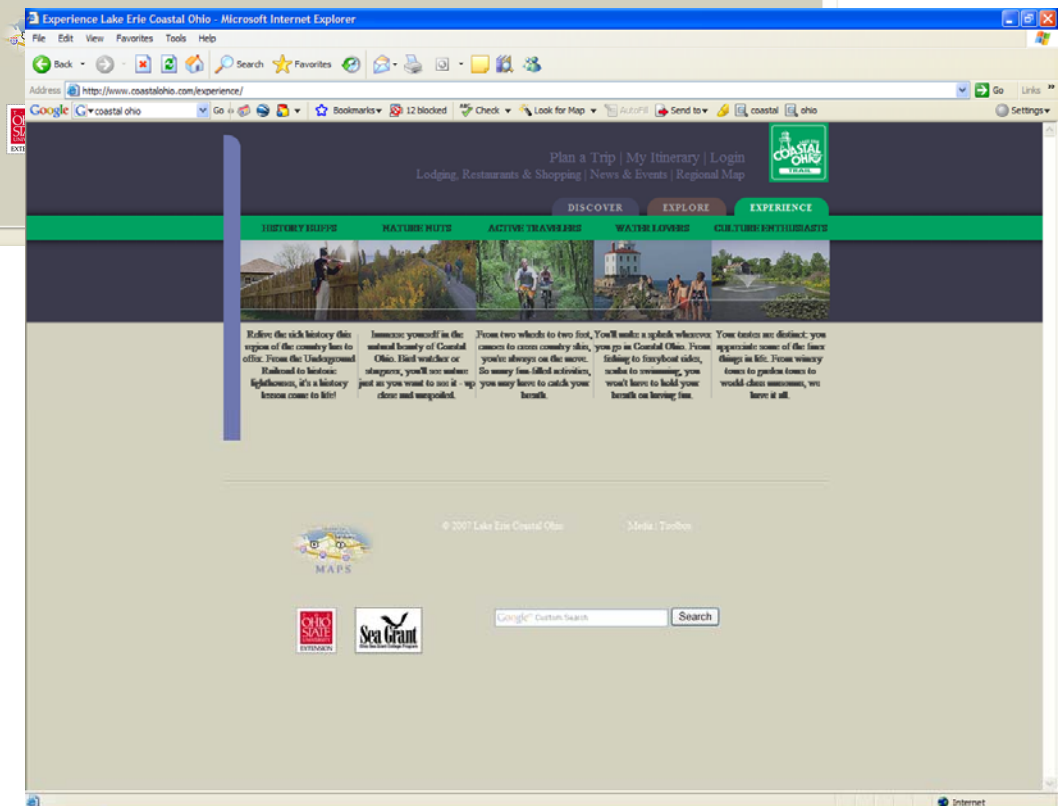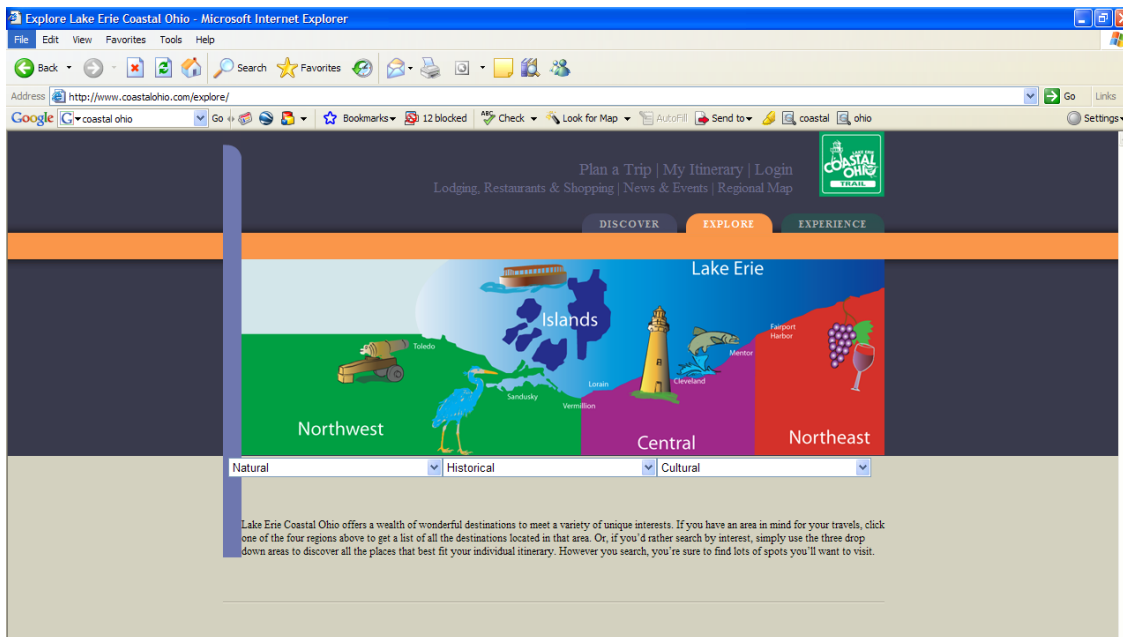
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APPENDIX A. CASE STUDIES

The four case studies that follow – Blackstone Valley, MA/RI; Olympic Peninsula, WA; Queensland, Australia; and Coastal Ohio – have several themes in common that make them excellent choices from which to select applicable best practices. They all exhibit a geotourism focus to their tourism industry, a strong sense of place, and a quality visitor experience. In so doing they provide a variety of best practices that have the potential to profoundly shape the already exciting activities underway in the NEMIA study area.

1. Blackstone Valley, MA/RI

Overview

Blackstone Valley is a river valley shared between Massachusetts and Rhode Island. It encompasses twenty four communities, some 400,000 acres and over 500,000 people. The valley was the first industrialized region of the United States and led the country in manufacture of everything from automobiles to locomotives to textiles. As the industrial revolution moved through and beyond the Valley, it left behind significant environmental degradation so that by the early 1970s and the emergence of the environmental movement, a movement to "take back the landscape" began to emerge there too (Robert Billington, personal communication, April 23, 2007; A significant step forward in that activity occurred in the mid-1980s when Congress declared the valley a National Heritage Corridor under the auspices of the National Park Service (Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, Inc., 2007).

Similarities to the Study Area

Blackstone Valley had a reputation as an environmentally degraded and economically poor community, described in a national magazine in the 1990s as the "poor corner in a poor house." The comment referred to Rhode Island's challenging economic situation at that time and noted that in this poor state, the Blackstone Valley was even poorer. Reference was made to "bombed out" mill-towns, degraded land and polluted river water. The area also had a reputation as a heavily immigrant, blue-collar area with negative stereotypes related to violence and illicit drugs (R. Billington, personal communication, April 23, 2007). Northeast Michigan is not environmentally degraded. It has, however, in recent years experienced some environmental issues that have negatively impacted some perceptions of the region. These include the health of the deer herd on which bovine tuberculosis has had a significant impact (Michigan Department of Natural Resources [MDNR], 2006; MDNR, 2007) and a relatively recent dispute between the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and LaFarge North America Plant in Alpena related to mercury discharges (WOODTV, 2006; Alpena News, 2006).

In the mid-1980s discussion began to focus on tourism and the idea that there was a unique story to tell about Blackstone Valley in which others might also be interested. The initial, and ongoing, focus was on community development, rebuilding from the roots of the valley's culture and history. By the end of the 1980s the valley had been designated a National Heritage Corridor within the National Park System, which provided the necessary cachet to begin building an experience that would lure visitors to the area. It also allowed the region to access critical

federal resources to support the new tourism activities. The National Heritage Corridor designation covers about 600 square miles within which around 500,000 people reside. Despite the large population and "near-urban" location, the valley has a strong rural character.

Differences

The Blackstone Valley is not identical to the study area. However the differences, as significant as they might appear, are ones of scale, not qualitative. The Blackstone Valley is somewhat smaller geographically, than the study area – 600 square miles compared to the 1,909 square miles of the three counties. Average population density is also different, with portions of the Blackstone Valley having upwards of 5,000 people per square mile (Wikipedia, 2007). Comparatively, the three counties of the study area average 27 people per square mile (NEMCOG, 2001a, b, c).

Tourism Industry

The perceived tourism competition for Blackstone Valley is with areas within an hour's drive – such as Newport, RI; Boston, MA; Mystic, ME; Plymouth, MA. There was no tradition of tourism in the valley therefore tourism infrastructure has been developed from scratch, building upon the residents' understanding of themselves and their past. The approach has been geotourism based. They have built upon culture and history, while commercial, educational, and natural resources are important too. The focus has been on connecting all these resources in one holistic package.

In 2004, Blackstone Valley had approximately 2.3 million visitors with an associated $474 million in travel expenditure generating 6,400 travel-related jobs. Overnight trips broke down to 48 percent of visitors staying in hotel/motel/B&B accommodations, 41 percent in private/friend homes and 11 percent in vacation home/camps (Tourism Industry Association of America, 2006). Between 1987 and 2003, there has been some $21.8 million of federal investment associated with the National Heritage Corridor. The Blackstone Valley has been able to leverage this money, garnering more than three

> Blackstone Valley Tourism Council Director, Bob Billington says, *"Tourism will come, if you make the place right and true to the heritage, stories, [and] truth of the place. Once you have a sense of place and pride of ownership, you are much of the way you need to go."* (Robert Billington, April 23, 2007)

times as much ($73.5 million) in private investment. This indicates how public investment can be leveraged but also demonstrates that private investment will not necessarily occur at a steady state but sometimes happens almost all at once. For example, $70.3 million of the private funds have been invested since 1999 (Billington, 2004). One of the goals identified by the NEMIA workgroup is to capitalize on the presence of Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary to build complementary enterprise – this may be a long-term strategy but, when it pays off, obviously well worth it.

2. Olympic Peninsula, WA

Overview

Washington State's North Olympic Peninsula is located just northwest of Seattle and is accessible by ferry, plane, boat, or highway. The area boasts a multifaceted landscape encompassing ocean beaches, the Olympic Mountain range, lakes, waterfalls, rivers, and a temperate rain forest. Just over one million acres in size, the peninsula boasts Olympic National Park at its center and the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary along its north and west coasts.

The Olympic National Park is set in the center of the peninsula and combines the Olympic Mountain peaks, the unique rain forests covering the Park's western coastal valleys, and the rocky Pacific Ocean coast. The Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary boundary encompasses approximately 2500 square nautical miles of coastal and ocean waters, and associated submerged lands, and runs more than 65 miles along a landward boundary with Olympic National Park and Cape Flattery on the Makah Indian reservation.

Port Angeles, the county seat, has airline service to William R. Fairchild International Airport. Port Angeles is also the gateway city to Victoria, BC, Canada with two modes of ferry travel available at the waterfront.

Similarities to the Study Area

In the early 1990s the Olympic Peninsula suffered economic displacement due to significant changes in harvest regulations for National Forests. These regulatory changes were in response to concerns over endangered spotted owl populations and associated habitat in old-growth forests (Phillips, 1999). The federal government provided a significant economic recovery program – the Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative – for the three states most affected: California, Oregon, and Washington. These resources, to a certain extent, allowed residents in the region to develop a variety of nontraditional business opportunities including ecotourism. Recent concern that the region, or at least some communities within it, might be overrun by tourists has led to the consideration of geotourism-related issues (Allen, 2003).

The region's geography is similar to the Northeast Michigan study area. It shares a similar rural character and its location on a peninsula with one major highway for access to the region is similar to transportation in the study area.

Differences

Because of the national and international discussion of the controversy causing the economic displacement outline above – the fate of the spotted owl and its habitat – the region has had considerable "free" advertising among a key tourist market – the ecotourists – which the region has subsequently been able to exploit. To a certain extent the region also benefits from being more closely connected to major metropolitan locations, such as Seattle, than the study area. It is also able to take advantage of the general trend of investment and self-employed income moving to coastal and mountain regions along the west coast (Nelson, 1999).

Tourism Industry

There is no doubt that tourism is a significant economic driver for the Olympic Peninsula. Like the Northeast Michigan study area, tourism opportunities range from breathtaking natural resources – mountains, oceans and alpine meadows – to historic and contemporary cultural resources in the relatively few and small coastal communities sprinkled across the peninsula. Olympic National Park alone boasted just over 3.3 million visitors in 2000. Those visitors spent about $89 million related to their stay in or proximate to the Park. This economic activity resulted in an additional $45 million in value added to the local economy and 1,881 tourism-related jobs (Stynes et al., 2001).

3. Queensland, Australia

Overview

Ecotourism is considered a significant contributor to the Queensland economy and the northeast coastline offers many businesses that benefit from the area's unique assets. This coastal region has branded their area as the place where the "rainforest meets the reef," and has developed ecotourism opportunities that build around these assets, such as:

- scenery in jungle and ocean vistas highlighted on various maps and at turnouts;
- natural resources both in Daintree Rainforest wildlife and aquatic life of the Great Barrier Reef showcased through night hikes and diving;
- agricultural products that include tropical fruits marketed through fruit tasting farms and fruit wineries;
- recreational activities such as jungle canopy surfing, diving, and snorkeling; and
- town centers providing shopping and dining that reflect local history and culture.

Queensland, Australia has developed a regional strategic *Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2003-2008* (Tourism Queensland, 2002). Similar to the NEMIA process, this strategic plan was developed through planning and consultation with the tourism industry specifically ecotourism industry stakeholders, visitors, government bodies (federal, state, and local), natural area managers, conservation groups, local community leaders, aboriginal communities, education and research institutions, and other special interest groups. This group determined that for Queensland, ecotourism should encompass a spectrum of "…nature-based activities that foster visitor appreciation and understanding of natural and cultural heritage and are managed to be ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable.**"**

Similarities to the Study Area

Northeast Queensland's coastal cultural and natural resources, including the world heritage Daintree rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef, are unique to this region of Australia and different from those of Northeast Michigan. However, there are also many similarities. Both regions take pride in their significant undeveloped, unspoiled resources, and have little built infrastructure outside of major city centers.

The regional economies are dependent on tourism, and while they draw tourists based on major attractions (e.g., the Great Barrier Reef), the majority are "mom and pop" or smaller entrepreneurial businesses developed around a diversity of coastal tourism opportunities and

activities. City and towns in this region are rural, and populations of villages, towns, and cities are similar to less populated than those of Northeast Michigan. The Daintree Village (<100 residents) and Port Douglas (~1000 residents) are examples of small coastal communities in this region; Cairns (~125,000 residents) is the nearest major city center, located 70 kilometers (approx. 43 miles) south of Port Douglas. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006a, b, and c).

Northeast Queensland's geographic context is similar to Northeast Michigan. This area is peninsular in nature, and somewhat difficult location for tourists to get to (with increasing difficulty and equipment needs as you travel farther north). Therefore, this is an area that people must go out of their way to visit, and have to consciously choose to visit, and would not likely be only passing through. Finally, Australian fuel prices ($3.76 in Sydney in May 2006, (Cable News Network, 2007)) are not necessarily considered a hindrance to tourism. It is interesting to note that these prices are similar and still higher than the highest fuel rates in Michigan in 2007 (state average of $3.52/gallon in May 2007 (Mlive.com, 2007)) where increasing fuel costs are commonly blamed for impeding tourist travel. Therefore, the region's geographic location, socio-economic contexts of the region, and the region's interest and investment in ecotourism and cultural/heritage tourism provide a comparable connection with the NEMIA study area.

Differences

Queensland, Australia is different from Northeast Michigan in that its tourism visitors are drawn from a worldwide market, with a majority of the visitors traveling from outside the region (and even country) to visit the Northeast Australian coastline. Queensland represents an entirely different continent, and so there are differences in governmental structure, types of programs, and resource management rules, regulations, and culture. Finally, the coastal tourism industry in Northeast Queensland has a significantly different climate, their latitudinal position offering year-round warm weather tourism opportunities (so longer seasons for recreational boating, diving, etc.).

Tourism Industry

Northeast Queensland's tourism industry structure is comparable to that of Northeast Michigan in that there are many localized tourism associations or visitor bureaus, many of these working on limited budgets and even voluntarily run. Specific examples include the Daintree Village Tourism Association, the Port Douglas Tourism Association, and the Daintree Cape Tribulation Tourism Association. The role of these organizations is to promote local tourism and provide visitors with local travel information and resources. In many cases, the local tourism offices are able to reserve and book tours or services offered by local businesses for the visiting customer. Currently there is little cooperation between local tourism agencies, but they are working to develop some cooperative projects of common, strategic interest in response to incentives by funding agencies including criteria for cooperation among tourism groups (Alison Gotts, personal communication, April 27, 2007)

Similar to the regional Sunrise Side Travel Association or even Travel Michigan (the State of Michigan's tourism agency), Tourism Queensland is the regional or state governmental body supporting tourism in this part of Australia. Tourism Queensland is governmentally subsidized,

and focuses primarily on providing services and support for businesses within the tourism industry, including a web-based clearinghouse, market research, business development training, and best practices. Tourism Queensland has facilitated focused strategic planning processes (similar to the NEMIA process) and industry support products and best practices specific to ecotourism (Tourism Queensland, 2002) and heritage tourism (Australian Heritage Commission and CRC for Sustainable Tourism, 2001). Connections and collaborative work among local and regional entities has yielded mixed results; by one local account, some larger businesses work with regional tourism organizations, but the majority of smaller businesses are simply "trying to make ends meet" and not able to take full advantage of regional programs (A. Gotts, personal communication, April 27, 2007).

4. Coastal Ohio: Ohio's Lake Erie Coastal Tourism Initiative

Overview

The Lake Erie coastline stretches 293 miles across northern Ohio. Similar to Northeast Michigan, the Ohio tourism industry recognizes the opportunity to enhance economic returns from these resources through sustainable coastal tourism development and marketing. This challenge involves understanding opportunities to diversify the types of tourists that visit the region (and the seasons in which they visit). This region continues to place significant investment in various forms of coastal tourism initiatives, such as the Lake Erie Circle Tour.[13] One challenge for this region has been sustaining regional commitment to the Circle Tour, as well as determining next developmental steps for this project. The region, rich in coastal tourism assets, has faced challenges in how to best connect multiple disparate, disconnected, and competing efforts along the coastline (Frank Lichtkoppler, personal communication, March 2007).

To address these challenges and opportunities, this region has drawn upon local, regional, and federal Scenic Byway program resources in developing the Lake Erie Coastal Ohio initiative (heretofore Coastal Ohio). The mission of Coastal Ohio is to: "…improve the tourism economy and quality of life by telling the story of Lake Erie while advocating for the preservation and enhancement of the lake's natural, historical, and cultural resources**"** (Lake Erie Coastal Ohio, Inc. [LECO], 2005). In accomplishing this mission, Coastal Ohio has focused their investment and work in four primary areas, including:

1. Regionally coordinated asset inventory;
2. Resource protection and interpretation;
3. Providing support tools for industry; and
4. Marketing to "improve experiences for visitors"

In mission and strategic focus, this regionally-developed initiative (and corresponding planning process) provides a similar parallel to Northeast Michigan's US-23 Sunrise Side Coastal Highway and the specific policy question and work being conducted through this integrated assessment and study area.

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[13] For more information, see http://www.circle-erie.com

Similarities to the Study Area

This Ohio region is comparable to Northeast Michigan in that their work is focused around packaging and marketing their collective coastal assets, including natural, cultural, historical, scenic, and recreational assets. Through Coastal Ohio they seek to accomplish this through coordinated and collaborative regional partnerships.

Ohio and Lake Erie share a Great Lakes identity with Northeast Michigan. In this context, their tourism industry is marketing the same general types of historic, cultural, and natural resources that are relevant across the Great Lakes Basin or associated with the Midwest United States. Geographic location means the tourism industry and types of coastal activities are limited by similar climate and varying seasons, so Ohio would have similar timeframes for marketing tourism based on varying seasons. They draw visitors from same types of tourism markets; their target audience being mainly within the Great Lakes region with additional tourism from around country (and few international visitors).

Differences

A primary difference between coastal Ohio and the Northeast Michigan study area is that the Lake Erie coastline is not as peninsular as Michigan's Lake Huron coastline. One can often just be traveling through Lake Erie (by water) or Ohio (by land) to go from one place to another. To arrive in Northeast Michigan requires a traveler to deviate from the more heavily traveled I-75 north-south route in order to travel the US-23 corridor. Given the east-west traffic flow along the Lake Erie corridor, coastal Ohio also has higher population densities and more city centers. Correspondingly, there are more built, developed assets along this shoreline, such as coastal access facilities and tourism serving businesses (e.g., hotels, restaurants, etc.).

Tourism Industry

Tourism development in coastal Ohio is centralized around identifying and protecting diverse coastal assets, and then packaging and marketing these assets in a manner appealing and accessible for visitors. In developing this strategy, the region has developed several core goals or theme areas for tourism development including visitor experience, education, resource protection, and management goals. According to the *Lake Erie Coastal Ohio Trail Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan 2005* (LECO, 2005), these include:

- *Experience goals:* focus on enhancing how the visitors can engage, participate, or feel when they visit the region, including making them more aware of tourism opportunities, informing them of coastal access point and trails (i.e., maps), developing and providing interpretive materials, and enhancing wayfinding along the coastline.

- *Education Goals:* focus on how information will be distributed among businesses and visitors. Information shared includes byway marketing and promotion products, public awareness campaigns. Education also targets coastal business entrepreneurs to provide support for guide/outfitter services and cultural programming, such as providing interpretive tools or environmentally friendly "best practices" for the tourism industry.

- ***Resource Protection Goals:*** focus on protecting the valuable natural, historic, and cultural resources that provide a foundation for the tourism industry. This focus area includes development of protection tools and "best practices" for both tourism industry and visitors, and seeks to enhance awareness, appreciation, and interpretation of attractions and resources visited. Investing in conservation and restoration efforts of historic, cultural, and natural resources is also a priority here.

- ***Management Goals:*** focus on facilitating the appropriate local, regional, state, and federal networking and partnerships necessary to accomplish all goals. These partnerships are intended to generate and enhance funding support, coordination of efforts, and evaluation efforts.

The tourism marketing strategy for this region has been to focus on regional investment in developing and promoting a marketable brand for their regional product. This effort includes the regionally-coordinated inventory and efforts to link and market natural, historic, and cultural assets toward an enhanced regional visitor experience. As a strategy, this region is not necessarily seeking to attract new customers, but rather to capture visitors along coastal corridor to stay additional days or repeat visits; therefore rather than increasing the number of visitors, they are looking to economically benefit from the increased economic quality of a customer who stays longer, spends more money, and has more of an appreciation and investment in the region. Finally, their marketing strategy is dependent on internet technology to provide delivery of a consistent message and marketing tools among residents, visitors, and businesses alike.
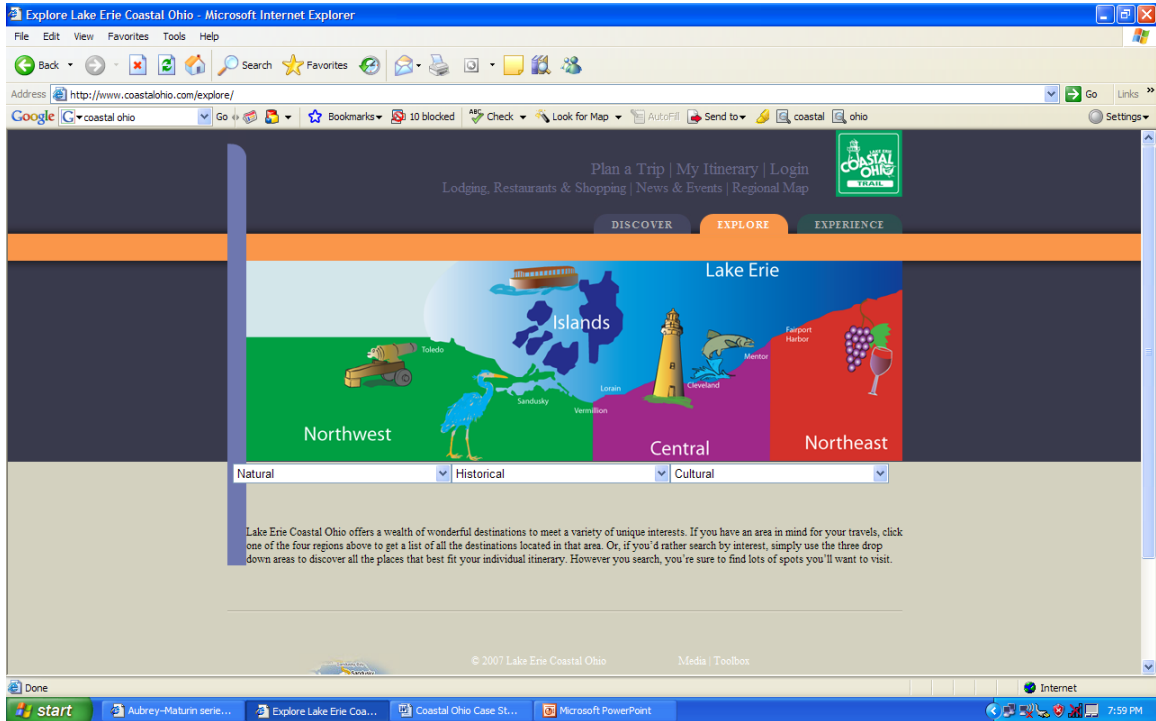
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