

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment (NEMIA) was conducted for the three-county region of Presque Isle, Alpena, and Alcona Counties in Northeast Michigan. The goal of this integrated assessment was to address the following question, as selected by 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?

To address this question, assessment teams were assembled 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. This report documents the work of the assessment teams, as well as an introductory chapter outlining the project process, and a concluding chapter that provides guidance for implementing the actions identified through the process.

The introductory chapter (Chapter 1) provides a history of the project, detailed background on the method and process, the Northeast Michigan region, the stakeholder meetings, and the policy context surrounding the topic of this assessment. The socioeconomic assessment (Chapter 2) uses demographic, economic, recreation, and travel data to create Geographic Information System (GIS) layers, a traffic flow model, and a tourism economic input model that estimates total visitor spending in the area and associated economic effects. The ecological inventory (Chapter 3) compiled existing digital spatial data layers and developed maps to highlight the ecologically valuable features throughout the region. The goal was to illustrate the ecological features that policy makers should focus on protecting and promoting for their ecological value as well as their value in developing regional ecotourism.

Similarly the cultural assessment team used data from existing documents, databases, and initiatives to inventory, describe, and chart (e.g. underwater shipwrecks) coastal cultural assets of the region, both on coastal lands and in Lake Huron waters (Chapter 4). Assets are organized by county (Alcona, Alpena, and Presque Isle) and by themes (lighthouses, shipwrecks, etc.). The goal of this assessment was to organize existing data into formats that can be used to support and inform coastal access-related actions.

The planning and zoning assessment team conducted content analyses of local comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances, interviewed local elected officials and decision-makers to examine the extent to which local governments appear to be taking steps to advance sustainability goals through their current planning and development management efforts. They also analyzed potential build-out scenarios illustrating the various land development patterns the region might experience in the foreseeable future based on current zoning.

The findings from the planning and zoning assessment (Chapter 5) set the stage for the analysis and recommendations made by the Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) report (Chapter 6). Northeast Michigan was chosen by the American Institute of Architects to receive a Sustainability Design Assessment Team grant. The program included an intensive 3-day site visit

by a multidisciplinary team of professionals with experience in sustainability principles. This chapter emphasizes the need to think regionally about Northeast Michigan's future. The team provided input on five issues relevant to the future of northeast Michigan: sustainable vision, economic prosperity, sense of place, environmental resources, and land use.

The final chapter is Policy Actions and Implementation Guidance (Chapter 7), which concludes the integrated assessment by providing approaches and activities for implementing preferred policy options as selected by the NEMIA stakeholders

The Ecological and Planning and Zoning Assessments and Implementation Guidance were peer-reviewed by at least two experts with extensive experience and knowledge about the subject matter. The Sociological Assessment was reviewed by one expert. The authors took the reviewers' comments into consideration when preparing their final reports. Peer review comments and authors' responses are available upon request.