

Ecotourism on the Sunrise Coast

A Marketing Report for Alpena, Alcona, & Presque Isle Counties



EB Allen in 100 feet of water in the
Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary

Foreward

Purpose

This report was funded by a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture and completed by the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments. The project consisted of an extensive asset inventory of existing local businesses which are of interest to tourists. These businesses represent those which already engage in some type of ecotourism activity and those who do not. In addition, the project included an extensive inventory of the natural, historic, and cultural features present in Alcona, Alpena, and Presque Isle Counties.

This report is intended to serve as a guide for ecotourism business development in the area covered by the Maritime Heritage Trail. The report shows detailed ecotourism opportunities in the three-county area as well as locates the existing businesses with ecotourism potential or with potential as a supporting partner in ecotourism. In addition, the report highlights visitor trends in ecotourism, Northeast Michigan, and characteristics of the Pure Michigan markets. Lastly, the report serves as a reference guide to marketing for potential and existing ecotourism businesses and the Maritime Heritage Trail.

This report is intended to supplement regional coastal tourism business development efforts already underway.

Northeast Michigan Council of Governments

80 Livingston Blvd Suite U-108

PO Box 457

Gaylord, MI 49734

989.705.3730 (v)

989.705.3729

www.nemcog.org



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1 Background & Demographic Profiles



Chapter 1

Background & Demographic Profiles

Ecotourism Principles

The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as: "*Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people*" (TIES, 1990). Ecotourism is about *uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel*. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism principles:

- Minimize impact.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to host's political, environmental, and social climate.

This report intends to draw on already successful ecotourism principles and practices to outline the mechanism for developing ecotourism marketing in northeast Michigan. The highly successful ecotourism program in Queensland Australia has identified the following ecotourism principles:

Natural Setting

Ecotourism is based in the natural environment, with a focus on natural and cultural heritage. Conservation and sustainable management of the natural environment are essential to planning,

development, management and marketing of ecotourism.

Education and interpretation

Environmental education and interpretation is the key to creating an enjoyable and meaningful ecotourism experience, and is one of the key points of differentiation between ecotourism and other tourism products. Successful interpretive components of ecotourism products will foster appreciation and support for conservation efforts, local communities and culture.

Visitor satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction with the ecotourism experience is essential to the ecotourism industry's long-term viability. Accurate information about ecotourism opportunities at a particular destination should be available for people planning holidays. The ecotourism experience should meet or exceed realistic visitor expectations.

Product marketing

Visitors should have realistic expectations and understanding of potential tourism experiences to help them choose a vacation and product that is suitable for their needs and desired experiences. Responsible marketing will inform potential visitors of available and appropriate activities in particular areas. Responsible marketing of ecotourism opportunities is the

responsibility of the ecotourism industry and protected area management agencies.

Ecotourism accreditation and certification

Accreditation and certification programs can provide an industry-led approach to developing and implementing ecotourism best practices. Accreditation and certification of ecotourism products can provide tourists and the travel trade with a recognizable and authentic ecotourism product; natural area managers and local communities with a guarantee that the ecotourism business is operating at best practice; accredited operators with a measure of their performance against established ecotourism criteria; and marketing advantage in attracting consumers looking for genuine ecotourism products.

Economic Impact of Ecotourism

Alexandre Noel¹ states “In the US, there has been an increased demand for quality, natural-heritage, resource-based experiences, cultural and heritage resource-based tourism, and interpretive cultural experiences that respect the values and lifestyle of the area. In addition, there has been an increased demand for rural tourism and agro-tourism (rural vacations including working farms, self-catering cottages, and B&B accommodations in villages and towns) and for better health, identity, spiritual and mental renewal which fuels the demand for health tourism.”

The outdoor enthusiast market has several relevant sub-segments, including ecotourists, outdoor recreationists, and agritourism. Ecotourism continues to be the fastest-growing travel and tourism sub-segment.

Accurate statistics regarding the ecotourism market are difficult to obtain. TIES has published figures which they believe best represent an accurate assessment of the strength of ecotourism. Since 1990’s, ecotourism has been growing at approximately 20-34% per year. It is among the sectors that are expected to grow most quickly over the next two decades. Sustainable tourism could grow to 25% of the world’s travel market within six years taking the value of the sector to over \$473 billion a year. Analysts predict a growth in eco-resorts and hotels, and a boom in nature tourism and suggest early converts to sustainable tourism will make market gains.

A report entitled “Innovative Development and Strategic Promotion of Ecotourism in Northeast Michigan” states the following: “As a new/emerging economic sector, ecotourism is generally underdeveloped. According to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, North American (US, Canada, and Mexico) travel and tourism represented 11.6% of the total GDP, 12% of total employment, and 10% of total capital investments in 2000. Tourism is the world’s largest industry and the one of the fastest growing. Since the 1990’s, ecotourism and nature tourism have grown 20-30% per year, and this growth is three times greater than the traditional tourism industry in 2004. This growth of nature tourism including ecotourism could create an estimated economic impact of \$473.6 billion per year.”²

In addition, TIES states the following:

- Experienced ecotourists spend from \$1,000 to \$1,500 per trip compared with \$425 for all other U.S. travelers.

¹ Alexandre Noel. (2005) *Marketing of Eco-Tourism Products*.

² Michigan State University Center for Community & Economic Development. (2010) *Innovative Development and Strategic Promotion of Ecotourism in Northeast Michigan*.

- More than three-quarters of Americans (78%) participate in outdoor recreation at least once a month.
- Two-thirds of the American public (66%) engages in some type of outdoor activity at least several times a month.

Profile of an Ecotourist

Profile from TIES

The daily expenditures of cultural tourists (\$90) are higher than visitors on a touring vacation, beach vacation, city vacation, or rural vacation. More than two-thirds of US and Australian travelers and 90% of British travelers consider active protection of the environment and support of local communities to be part of a hotel's responsibility. Nearly a third (46 million) of US travelers buy specifically from companies that donate part of their proceeds to charities. Profiles of ecotourists in Europe indicate that they are experienced travelers, have a higher education (82% college graduates, however it is expanding into mainstream markets), have a higher income bracket, are typically aged 35-54, are opinion leaders, and ask and tell their friends and colleagues about their trip (TIES: The International Ecotourism Society).

Research has also indicated the following:

- **Gender:** 50/50
- **Party:** 60% travel as couple, 15% as families, 13% alone
- **Trip duration:** 50% preferred trips 8-14 days
- **Expenditure:** 26% spent more than \$1,001 - \$1,500 per trip
- **Important elements of trip:** (1) wilderness setting, (2) wildlife viewing, and (3) hiking/trekking.
- **Motivations for taking next trip:** (1) enjoy scenery/nature, (2) new experiences/places

Profile from Queensland, Australia

Research from Tourism, Queensland indicates that males are more likely to be ecotourists. Young couples trend toward

being definite ecotourists, families with children towards being probable ecotourists, and older couples without children at home towards being possible ecotourists. Lower income groups trend toward being possible ecotourists and upper income groups trend toward being probable ecotourists.

Tourism Queensland undertook research to identify the needs and wants of Australians while on vacation. These same target markets can be applied to tourism in the US when researching brand development.

Active Explorers – Vacations are about pushing boundaries through challenging themselves via physical activity. They enjoy the company of others, but their focus is on exploring the extremes of their physical environment and themselves. It's about feeling alive.

Stylish Travelers – A vacation is a chance to demonstrate their achievements both to themselves and others. They do this by seeking out unique and exotic experiences and products that will make them feel discerning, stylish and successful.

Self Discoverers – Vacations are about discovery, nourishment and enrichment of the self (physically and intellectually). They seek to immerse themselves in holiday experiences that deliver this, gaining insight or a sense of well-being.

Social Fun-seekers – Their vacation is about having a fun time. While they do a lot of different activities, sharing the experience with friends and others is what makes the difference.

Unwinders – For Unwinders, vacations are all about relaxation and release, focusing on themselves as an escape from their busy lives. They seek an unstructured vacation. Decisions are made when at the destination. This allows them to catch their breath, feel calm and peaceful and gain perspective.

Connectors – They see vacations as a chance to connect with the people they care most about. They will often compromise their own activity choices to ensure everyone has a good time. It's about what is real and what is important.

Profile of a Northeast Michigan Tourist

Prizm™

To target marketing efforts for the Maritime Heritage Trail and ecotourism businesses in Northeast Michigan in the most efficient and effective manner, it is crucial to understand the nature of visitors to the region. Their needs, desires, attitudes, and perceptions should be carefully considered when developing a marketing campaign and during product development. The nature of these various visitor segments will dictate where print advertising is placed, the content of that advertising, and the appearance and content of all collateral marketing materials such as brochures, signs, maps, and visitors' guides. Prizm™ is a neighborhood lifestyle segmentation system developed from such sources as the U.S. census, and it works because people with similar cultural backgrounds, needs and perspectives naturally gravitate toward each other. In the market segmentation system, each micro-neighborhood in the United States is defined according to 62 distinct types or "clusters" that exhibit similar demographic and behavioral characteristics. These characteristics include income, family type, age, education, occupation, purchase behavior, and media habits. These clusters are then used to identify and locate marketing targets.³ The variables that explain most of the differences among the clusters include:

- Socioeconomic ranking
- Family type
- Educational attainment
- Race and/or ethnicity
- Occupation
- Housing type

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) has studied the top Prizm clusters for the six counties of the

"Sunrise Coast" – Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Alpena, Alcona, Iosco, and Arenac Counties as compared to all of Michigan. The ten top Prizm Clusters in NE Michigan are more traditional, families, older/retirees, small town/rural segments. These market segments account for over 35% of the visitors. While the top four may not be made-up of upscale audiences, they are not necessarily low-potential travel markets.

- Mayberry-ville – Small-Town Couples and Families, Middle Aged, high school grads, middle income.
- Big Sky Families – Young to Middle-Aged rural families, high school grads, blue collar, middle income.
- Fast-Track families – Upscale rural/towns families, some college, affluent, kids, disposable income.
- Back Country Folks – Older Downscale Rural Couples, high school grads, lower income.

It should be noted that the Toledo, South Bend, Fort Wayne and Columbus markets also are made up of these clusters, thereby providing nearby marketing potential for the type of visitor that northeast Michigan attracts.

Table 1
Top Prizm Clusters in Northeast Michigan

	6 County Area* %	Michigan %
Back Country Folks	5.0	2.0
Traditional Times	5.0	4.6
Mayberry-ville	4.6	3.6
Big Sky Families	4.2	3.7
Fast-Track Families	3.7	3.2
Country Casuals	3.5	3.3
Blue Highways	3.3	1.8
Blue Blood Estates	3.2	2.0
Red, White & Blues	3.2	1.5
New Homesteaders	3.1	2.7

Michigan Economic Development Corporation: Corporate Research Unit 2009

*Alcona, Alpena, Presque Isle, Arenac, Iosco, Cheboygan Counties

³ A Feasibility Study for the Golden Isles Parkway: Selected GREDC Counties, 2003

Research conducted by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation Corporate Research Unit (2009) has indicated that leisure travelers are less likely to be on an overnight trip in northeast Michigan compared to the rest of Michigan. When on an overnight trip in the area, visitors in this region tend to stay longer than the rest of Michigan. (3.6 vs. 2.5 days). Also, the travel-party size in the area is about the same as the rest of Michigan. (2.2 vs. 2.3 persons)

The Huron Coastal region captures less tourism from Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana than the rest of Michigan. Marketing should target both within the State of Michigan and to the neighboring states to the south.

The region is mostly a destination for in-state travelers. It is much more dependant on Michigan residents as a source of visitors that other destinations in Michigan. (82.6% vs. 73.3%). Unlike the rest of Michigan, very few visitors come from surrounding states (8% from Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin).

	Alcona County	Alpena County	Presque Isle County
Leisure Travel (% of travelers)	93.2	68.2	85.4
Day Trips (% of travelers)	59.5	26.0	74.4

Michigan Economic Development Corporation: Corporate Research Unit 2009

	6 County Area* %	Michigan %
Michigan	82.6	73.3
Wisconsin	2.5	2.4
Ohio	2.3	6.5
Illinois	2.1	4.4
Minnesota	1.5	0.5
Nebraska	1.3	0.1
Indiana	1.1	4.2
South Carolina	1.1	0.2
California	0.8	0.9
South Dakota	0.8	0.0

Michigan Economic Development Corporation: Corporate Research Unit 2009
*Alcona, Alpena, Presque Isle, Arenac, Iosco, Cheboygan Counties

	6 County Area* %	Michigan %
Detroit, MI	26.5	25.4
Flint-Saginaw-Bay City	19.5	11.9
Traverse City-Cadillac	15.2	17.4
Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo-Battle Creek	9.7	18.8
Alpena	5.3	0.5
Lansing	3.9	5.8
Chicago	2.2	4.7
Green Bay-Appleton, WI	1.9	1.2
Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN	1.4	0.4
Lincoln & Hastings-Kearney, NE	1.3	0.1

Michigan Economic Development Corporation: Corporate Research Unit 2009
*Alcona, Alpena, Presque Isle, Arenac, Iosco, Cheboygan Counties

Southeast Michigan and Flint/ Saginaw/Bay City are strong markets for the region. Very few visitors come from the state's second largest market – Grand Rapids/ Kalalmazoo/Battle Creek. There exists significant potential for growth in this market. There exists significant potential

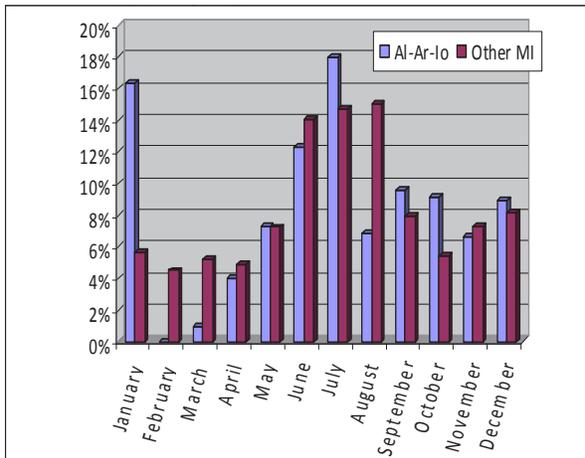
for day visit increase from other markets including northwest Michigan. In fact, statistics have shown Traverse City ranks as having one of the highest use rates of the US 23 Heritage Route website (*discussed in Chapter 3*).

Outdoor activities rank higher for travelers in the Huron Coastal area than for the rest of the state. Touring/sightseeing, beach/waterfront, parks, hike/bike, historic sites, hunt/fish, and camping are among the top leisure traveler activities in northeast Michigan.

Table 5
Top Activities for Leisure Travelers

	6 County Area* %	Michigan %
Touring/Sightseeing	40.8	16.9
Shopping	29.7	22.6
Dining	29.6	27.9
Entertainment	26.7	20.7
Beach/Waterfront	20.5	9.8
Parks: National & State	17.0	6.0
Hike & Bike	15.1	3.0
Visit Historic Site	13.7	3.5
Hunt & Fish	12.3	5.3
Camping	8.1	4.1

Michigan Economic Development Corporation: Corporate Research Unit 2009
*Alcona, Alpena, Presque Isle, Arenac, Iosco, Cheboygan Counties



Significant potential exists for ecotravel in February, March and April. The top travel months in the region are January and July. The region performs well in the fall season. Late winter and early spring are relatively lower performers.

Pure Michigan Advertising Markets

The Pure Michigan primary markets are:

- Chicago
- Indianapolis
- Cleveland
- Cincinnati
- Milwaukee
- Ontario, Canada
- Columbus
- Dayton
- St. Louis

The Pure Michigan Feeder Markets are:

- Toledo
- Ft. Wayne
- South Bend
- Green Bay

The Pure Michigan In-State Markets are:

- Detroit
- Grand Rapids
- Lansing
- Flint
- Traverse City

Table 6
What Feeder Markets Do

	Toledo	Fort Wayne	South Bend
Beach/Waterfront	✓	✓	✓
Touring/Site Seeing	✓		✓
Boat/Sail		✓	
Outdoor Recreation (hike/bike/hunt/fish)	✓	✓	
Entertainment		✓	✓
Nature Eco-Travel	✓		
Nightlife			✓

Michigan Economic Development Corporation: Corporate Research Unit 2009
*Alcona, Alpena, Presque Isle, Arenac, Iosco, Cheboygan Counties

**Table 7
Feeder Markets PRIZM Clusters**

	Toledo	Fort Wayne	South Bend
Mayberry-ville	✓	✓	✓
Fast-Track Families	✓	✓	
Traditional Times	✓	✓	✓
Close-In Couples	✓		
2 nd City	✓		
Heartlands		✓	
Kid Country USA		✓	
Big Sky Families			✓
Home Sweet Home			✓
Blue Highways			✓

Michigan Economic Development Corporation: Corporate Research Unit 2009
*Alcona, Alpena, Presque Isle, Arenac, Iosco, Cheboygan Counties

**Table 8
Feeder Markets Destinations**

	Toledo	Fort Wayne	South Bend
Toledo	✓		
Detroit	✓		
Cleveland	✓		✓
Flint/Saginaw/ Bay City	✓		
Los Angeles		✓	
New York		✓	
Orlando		✓	
Chicago		✓	✓
Grand Rapids			✓
Indianapolis			✓

Michigan Economic Development Corporation: Corporate Research Unit 2009
*Alcona, Alpena, Presque Isle, Arenac, Iosco, Cheboygan Counties

Wildlife-Watchers Characteristics

In 2006, the US Fish and Wildlife Service conducted a survey of fishing, hunting, and wildlife-associated recreation in the State of

Michigan⁴. The “Wildlife Watchers” portion of the survey found the following:

Wildlife Watching Activities in Michigan by Michigan Residents & Nonresidents

- 3,227,000 (1,034,000 away from home)
- 10,043,000 (days of participation away from home)
- \$1,622,521,000 (total expenditures)
- \$339,188,000 (trip related)
- \$1,283,334,000 (equipment and other) Other includes magazines, membership dues & contributions, land leasing & ownership, and plantings.

Wildlife Watching Activities in Michigan by Nonresidents

- 281,000 (away from home)
- 1,443,000 (days of participation away from home)
- \$84,556,000 (total expenditures)
- \$61,301,000 (trip related)
- \$23,256,000 (equipment and other)

Wildlife Watching Activities in Michigan by Residents

- 2,946,000 (participants)
- 753,000 (away from home)
- \$1,537,965,000 (total exp)
- \$277,887,000 (trip related)
- \$1,260,078,000 (equipment and other)

Away from home wildlife watchers – in Michigan

- Observe wildlife: 977,000
- Feed wildlife: 429,000
- Photograph wildlife: 542,000

⁴ US Fish & Wildlife Service. (2006) National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (Michigan).

Wild Bird Observers in Michigan

Bird watching attracted many wildlife enthusiasts in Michigan. In 2006, 899,000 people took trips away from home to watch birds.

- Songbirds: 594,000
- Birds of prey: 518,000
- Waterfowl (ducks, geese, swan): 696,000
- Other waterfowl (shorebirds, herons, cranes): 438,000
- Other birds (pheasant, turkey, road runners): 417,000

Away from Home Land Mammal Watchers:

- Total land mammals: 769,000
- Large (bear, bison): 623,000
- Small (prairie dogs, squirrels): 629,000
- Fish: 311,000
- Other wildlife: 437,000

Characteristics of Michigan Residents Participating in Wildlife Watching

The 2006 US Fish and Wildlife study also determined characteristics of wildlife watchers in Michigan.

Place of Residence

Urban Residents:	72%
Rural Residents:	28%

Sex

Male:	47%
Female:	53%

Age

16-17 years:	5%
18-24 years:	9%
25-34 years:	15%
35-44 years:	22%
45-54 years:	19%
55-64 years:	14%
65+ years:	17%

Annual Household Income

Under \$10,000:	3%
\$10,000 - \$19,999:	7%
\$20,000 - \$29,999:	9%
\$30,000 - \$39,999:	9%

\$40,000 - \$49,999:	8%
\$50,000 - \$74,999:	14%
\$75,000 - \$99,999:	10%
\$100,000+:	10%

Education

11 years or less:	14%
12 years:	37%
1-3 years of college:	25%
4+ years of college:	25%

Trip Expenditures

	MI Residents	Nonresidents
Food & Lodging:	\$152,086	\$37,863
Transportation:	\$111,845	\$21,815
Other trip costs:	\$13,956	x
Equipment:	\$772,790	x

x: sample size too small to report reliably

Current Ecotourism Business Trends in Northeast Michigan

In June of 2010, a study was completed by Michigan State University in cooperation with the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, and the Eastern Upper Peninsula Regional Planning & Development Commission. The study, titled *Innovative Development and Strategic Promotion of Ecotourism in Northeast Michigan*, identified 20 companies in northeast Michigan that provided tour/services in a natural area, provided tour guides or educational materials, and had sustainability goals of protecting sensitive areas or providing leadership in natural resource protection. These 20 business offered tours, lodging, on-site guides, equipment, and watercraft sales/rentals as well as other services. The geographic scope of the study included an eight-county northeast Michigan region (Alcona, Alpena, Cheboygan, Crawford,

Montmorency, Oscoda, Otsego, and Presque Isle Counties).⁵

The most offered activities by these businesses include:

1. Fishing
2. Kayaking
3. Boating
4. Canoeing
5. Bird Watching
6. Wildlife Observation
7. Fly-Fishing
8. Hunting
9. Hiking
10. Snowshoeing
11. XC-Skiing
12. Other
13. Rustic Camping
14. Rafting
15. Underwater Diving
16. Snowmobiling
17. Biking
18. RV-Camping

Over half of the 20 ecotourism companies use Michigan's extensive water resources for their services. Most of the services were offered in the summer with fall and spring also being popular seasons for ecotourism. Winter ranked the lowest despite the extensive winter activities that are available in the area.

The study also identified specific needs of ecotourism businesses in northeast Michigan. Resource-based recreation promotional and marketing assistance was the number one need identified in the study. They expressed support of internet-based marketing. Also, the businesses cited the lack of good relationships with local governments, neighbors, and the region which highlights the need for community connections and public support for ecotourism.

Lastly, the study finds that the biggest challenge for ecotourism development in Northeast Michigan is the lack of stakeholders' unified participation and action due to the lack of a leading organization in northeast Michigan for ecotourism development.

⁵ Michigan State University Center for Community and Economic Development. (2010) *Innovative Development and Strategic Promotion of Ecotourism in Northeast Michigan*.

A scenic view of a sandy beach with waves crashing against the shore under a blue sky with white clouds. The beach is wide and sandy, with some debris scattered across it. The water is a light greenish-brown color, and the sky is a deep blue with scattered white clouds. The horizon is visible in the distance.

2 Ecotourism Assets & Opportunities

Chapter 2

Ecotourism Assets and Opportunities

Geographic Scope

This report focuses on the Lake Huron coastal region including the geographic area covered by the planned Maritime Heritage Trail including Alcona County, Alpena County, and Presque Isle County.

The Lake Huron coastal area is not as well known as a tourist and recreational destination as other Great Lakes areas of Michigan, therefore many potential tourists never come to the area. Many of the visitors who do come to the region are not aware of all of the recreational, cultural and historical points of interest clustered along the Lake Huron coast, so do not fully enjoy the area's amenities. Efforts to promote this area by local, regional and state tourist organizations have done much to raise the public's level of awareness about this area, but there is a great deal work left to be done. The vast majority of tourists still visit this area only during the months of July and August, making the successful operation of a small tourist-based business very difficult. High unemployment rates and low incomes are still the norm in this part of the State, which makes a livable family income difficult to sustain.

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary & Maritime Heritage Trail

A phenomenal cultural asset exists on the Lake Huron coast in the City of Alpena - the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary was designated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on

October 7, 2000. It is jointly managed by the State of Michigan and NOAA to protect and interpret a nationally significant collection of shipwrecks and other maritime heritage resources. The Sanctuary encompasses 448 square miles that has as its boundaries the northern and southern limits of Alpena County. Expansion of these boundaries is currently in the legislative process. If approved, the Sanctuary boundary will include the waters off Presque Isle, Alpena, and Alcona Counties to the International Boundary.



The Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center provides a first-class visitor experience of the historical aspects of the Lake Huron shipping industry along with the cultural aspects that are found along the coast. The Center provides a glimpse of the shipwrecks discovered within the current boundaries on the Lake Huron bottomlands (upwards of over 200 shipwrecks are estimated to be in the expanded boundaries). In addition to the shipwrecks are all the ancillary services and features that supported the historical (and to some degree currently support) shipping industry: lifesaving stations, lighthouses, historic boats and ships, commercial fishing camps, docks and working ports.

Maritime Heritage Trail

Below the waves and along the shores of Lake Huron is an impressive cultural landscape that connects us to centuries of maritime transportation on the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail will interpret and promote this rich history of Northeast Michigan through a variety of connected, innovative displays. Focusing on Presque Isle, Alpena, and Alcona counties' connection to the Great Lakes, the trail will link transportation-related archeological, historical and interpretive sites along Lake Huron and the US 23 Heritage Route. By providing increased access to the past through meaningful interpretive experiences, the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail will foster strong personal connections to the past. These connections will provide a stimulus for heritage tourism and foster an improved public awareness of the importance of historic preservation.

The designation of US 23 as a Heritage Route in 2004 enabled both Michigan residents and visitors to enjoy an uninterrupted experience of the significant recreational, ecological, historical, and cultural sites of Northeast Michigan. The Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail will enhance the Heritage Route by featuring the areas' shipwrecks, lighthouses, life saving stations, maritime industries, working ports, historic vessels, and many other maritime-related cultural resources. Rather than consisting of a physical trail system, interpretive points will be spread along the three counties, linking the rich maritime transportation resources of the region. Priority locations for interpretation include existing MDOT supported trails, DNR properties, Heritage Route attractions, public waterfronts, marinas, and lighthouses.

A grant provided by the Michigan Department of Transportation allows the Maritime Heritage Trail to be completed in

2012. The trail will consist of 60 signs along the coastal area at selected sites. In addition, three outdoor sheltered learning stations will be installed at strategic locations along the trail in which more substantial exhibits will be displayed. Podcasts and documentary videos (available via QR code on the signage) are other planned elements of the Maritime Heritage Trail.



Example of planned signage along the coast

The Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary along with the Maritime Heritage Trail is a magnet from which additional business and tourism opportunities can be cultivated. A state-of-the-art visitor center/ museum and marine sanctuary has been in the development and expansion stage since its inception. There exists extraordinary potential for ecotourism and business development to be built upon from this asset. However, due to funding limitations the majority of allocations have been prioritized and focused on the physical development aspects of the project with few dollars remaining to develop a comprehensive approach for community development and marketing.

US 23 Heritage Route

The 200-mile stretch of US 23 from Standish to Mackinaw City is designated as a Recreational Heritage Route by the State of Michigan. The existence of this coastal

corridor gives the area a great opportunity to market itself and its ecotourism assets as a regional ecotourism destination. The US 23 Heritage Route program, coordinated and staffed by the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, consists of a team in each of the six counties of the route (Alcona, Alpena, Arenac, Cheboygan, Iosco, and Presque Isle) as well as an overseeing Management Council. The Management Council recognizes the importance and impact that tourism has on the region and focuses on its enhancement and the delivery of a strong voice in the marketplace. Representatives to the Management Council are appointed by the respective County Boards of Commissioners, thus keeping the local governments involved in the program.

The volunteers on the county teams and the Management Council have made a concerted effort to work together as a region rather than as individual counties to achieve the major goals of the program. Working together, they have achieved a great deal in a very short period of time. Their major focus has been on tourism development and marketing the coast as a destination and US 23 as the pathway to that destination. Their goal is to coordinate with as many groups as possible so that no duplication of efforts happens along the coast. The US 23 Heritage Route program involves coordination between NEMCOG, MDOT, MDNR, the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, US Forest Service, River Road National Scenic Byway, Sunrise Coastal Coalition, Saginaw-Chippewa Indian Tribe, Michigan Sea Grant, Pure Michigan, and numerous local tourism bureaus, road commissions, local units of governments, harbors and marinas, historical societies, bicycling groups, and interested citizens.

With the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary/Maritime Heritage Trail providing the anchor attraction for the coastal

Northeast Michigan area and the US 23 Heritage Route providing the physical pathway to access the sites as well as the regional collaborative to engage in ecotourism development and effective marketing, the feasibility of successful ecotourism development in Northeast Michigan is positive.

Asset Inventory

The first step in determining the feasibility of significant ecotourism development in the area of the Maritime Heritage Trail includes the completion of an extensive asset inventory of existing natural, cultural, historic, and business resources in the 3-county project area. NEMCOG staff in collaboration with community partners along the coast completed this asset inventory in order to give a more comprehensive picture of existing ecotourism businesses and sites as well as the feasibility of new ecotourism development. Location and descriptive data on assets was collected and loaded into an online database at www.heritage23.org. This data is currently being used for promotion of the existing assets as part of the US 23 Heritage Route program. While the promotion of these assets is beneficial, the completion of this database provides a secondary benefit by providing an aggregate resource to be used for analysis.

Recently NEMCOG completed the Huron Greenways and Huron Blueways program inventory providing detailed data on water routes, land trails, and natural features in coastal Northeast Michigan. This data has also been incorporated into the US 23 Heritage Route program and was uploaded into the same asset database for use in this project. This asset database and website was designed by the Land Information Access Association.

Asset data (including public and private sites) that was collected was grouped into four categories: (1) Active Recreation (2) Art, Culture & History (3) Natural Resources and Agri-Tourism and (4) Services. Detailed data was also collected for each assets including:

1. Asset name
2. GPS Coordinates
3. Address (if existing)
4. Contact information
5. Descriptive information
6. Activities available at the asset
7. Amenities available (i.e. restrooms)
8. Seasonal availability
9. Fees
10. Hours of operation
11. Website information
12. Photos

Asset Attraction Categories

Following is a list of the attraction type categories in which the assets were grouped as well as the number of assets recorded in each category.

<u>Assets</u>	<u># Recorded</u>
Access Points to Lake Huron	56
Agricultural Tourism	14
Art	11
Bed & Breakfast	14
Biking Locations	51
Birding Sites	30
Boat Launch	13
<i>(Boat Launch sites refer to sites where the only feature available is a boat launch. Many other boat launches are found at sites which are classified in another asset category i.e. park).</i>	
Campground	19
Culture	10
Dog Sledding	1
Education	6
Fishing Sites	96
Food	63
Geologic Features	98
Golf Course	10
Guide	15
Historic Site	20
Historic Trail	1
Lighthouse	7
Maritime	12

Maritime History	2
Museum	4
Natural Area or Preserve	3
Natural Features	77
Park	69
Plant Communities	47
Resort	33
Scenic View Area	4
Shipwreck	45
<i>(The actual number of shipwrecks in the waters off the 3-county area is greater, however the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary has publicly provided detailed location and descriptive information on 45 shipwrecks)</i>	
Shipwreck Trail	1
Shop	55
Sleep (hotel/motel)	23
Tour	1
Trails (non-motorized)	40
	(724 miles)
Visitor Center	5
Waterfall	2
Wildlife Refuge or Sanctuary	1
Wildlife Viewing Area	3

Activity Categories

For each asset mapped, it was necessary to assign it to only one attraction category for the purposes of data management. However, each site could be assigned multiple activities associated with that site. Following are the significant ecotourism activity categories present in the study area. This list represents those activities available at sites which were classified in a specific attraction category (for example: a park which is in the "Parks" attraction category might have hiking, biking, and improved camping as associated activities).

Artist Demonstrations	4
Arts & Crafts	16
Boating	61
Camping (Improved)	33
Camping (Rustic)	41
Canoeing	79
Cross Country Skiing	36
Dining	81
Fossil Collecting Sites	3
Hay Ride/Sleigh Ride	8
Hiking	87

Horseback Riding	18
Hunting	20
Kayaking	84
Kite Boarding	6
Music & Theater Performances	10
Native American Cultural Event	1
Outfitter	9
Recurring Cultural Event	6
Sailing	13
Scenic Viewing	33
Scuba Diving	57
<i>(Scuba diving encompasses both accessible shipwrecks and scuba guides/shops)</i>	
Self-Guided Touring	23
Short Term Rental	9
Sledding	2
Snowshoeing	33
Swimming	95
Touring	19
U-Pick Farms	3
Wildlife Watching	42

Ecotourism Assets

The following information has been generated by overlaying this asset information with ecotourism data that was collected as part of the Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment (NEMIA) by Michigan Sea Grant as well as by the Huron Greenways and Blueways project (NEMCOG).

Water Trails and Access Points

The Huron Blueways consists of recommended water routes from point to point in Lake Huron. In addition, 56 public access points to Lake Huron exist in the 3-county area.

Greenways Features and Birding Sites

The Huron Greenways consists of a network of trail systems in the 3-county area totaling over 724 miles of non-motorized trails. In addition, over 250 “greenway” attractions were mapped which can be viewed either from the trail systems or from public roads. Greenway attractions include animal viewing areas; geologic features including sinkholes, kames, drumlins, sand dunes, old shorelines, eskers, kettle lakes, and other

glacial geologic features; plant communities including specific forest types; and natural features including bogs, swamps, various types of beaches, meadows, coastal lakes, creeks, dune and swale complexes, coastal fens, islands, grasslands, and other natural features. In addition, 51 birding sites were mapped in the 3-county area. The maps contained in this chapter display these sites overlaid upon the eco-regions mapped by NEMIA.

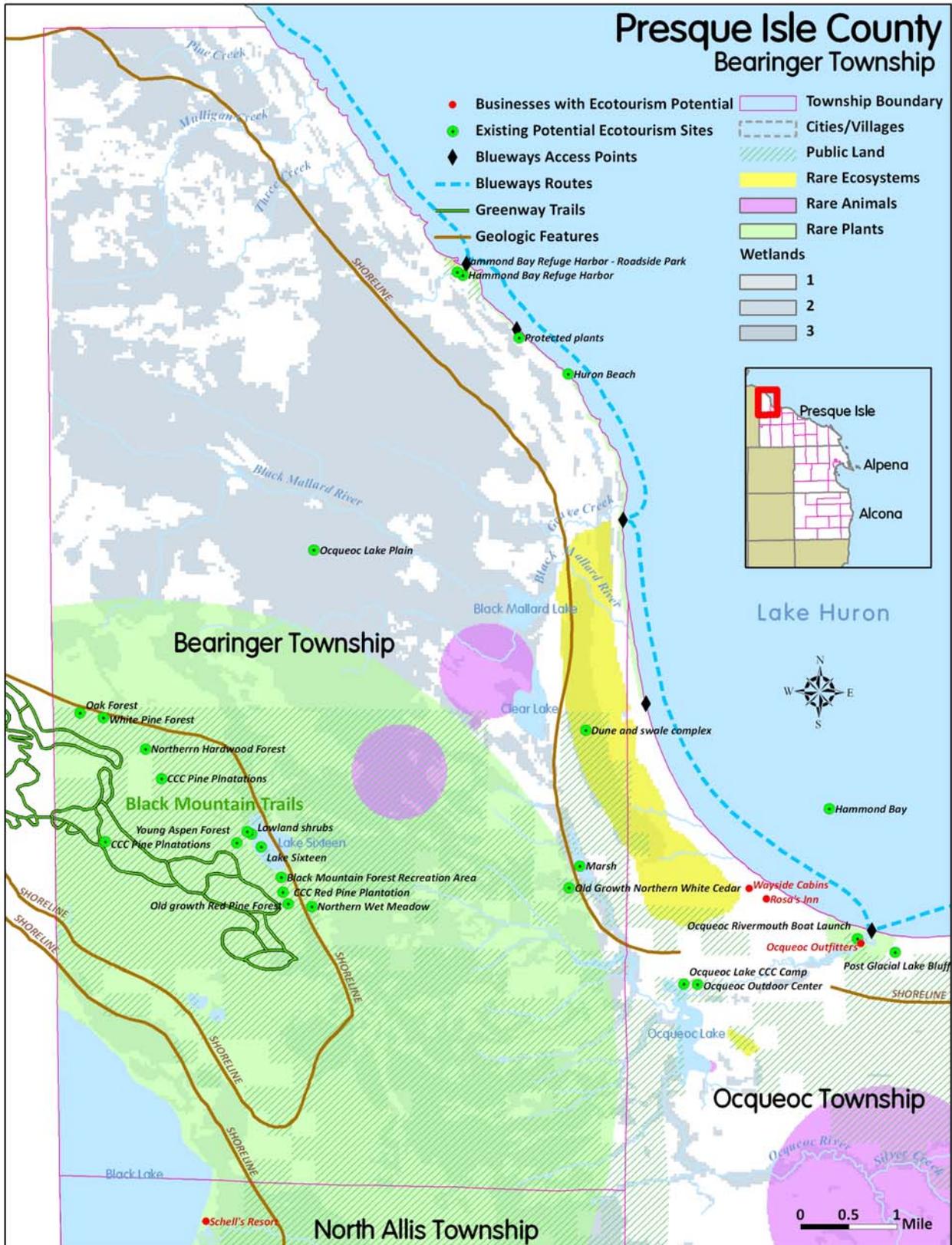
Ecotourism Opportunities

The following maps show the ecotourism opportunities available in the area covered by the Maritime Heritage Trail. While the trail follows the Huron coastline, this report highlights opportunities across each county since visitors are unlikely to visit only the coastal area. Instead, this report encourages ecotourism development in inland areas as well using the Maritime Heritage Trail as the attraction which first draws visitors to the area in order that they discover inland ecotourism as well. The maps display ecotourism opportunities by township. Existing businesses with ecotourism potential are shown in red on the maps. All businesses which would be of interest to tourists were included in the inventory. These businesses include those that are already engaging in some type of ecotourism activity (i.e. dive shops, shipwreck tours, kayak rentals, outfitters) as well as those businesses which are not engaging in an ecotourism activity. In addition, the inventory includes businesses that do or could play a supporting role in ecotourism business development (i.e. restaurants, shopping). These support businesses have the potential to develop partnerships with a primary ecotourism business. For example, a restaurant which is nearby to a business which offers ecotours has the potential to partner with the ecotour business to offer packages which include discounted meals at that restaurant

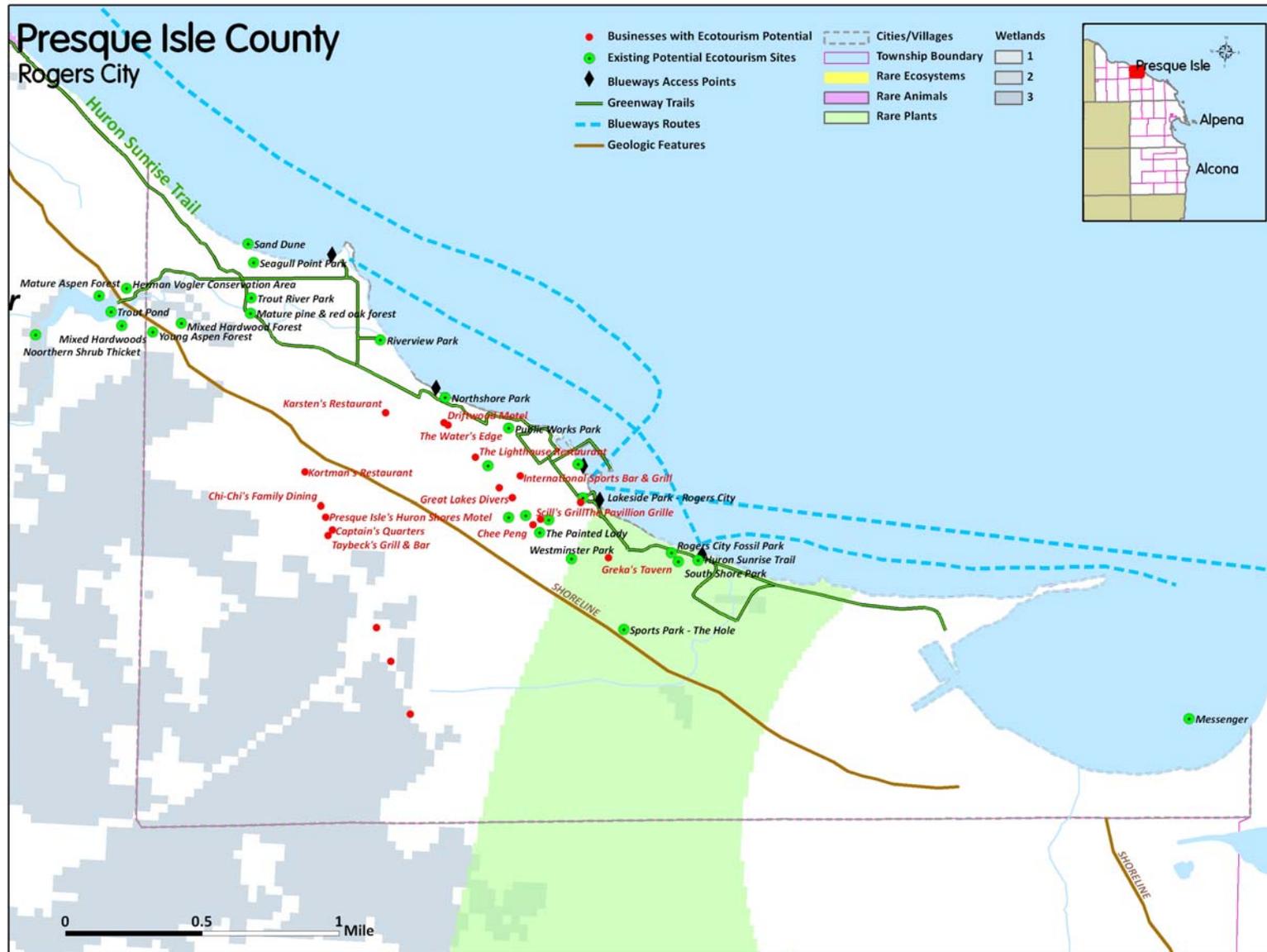
for ecotourists. Lastly, each map contains a short descriptive statement relating to the major ecotourism features available.

In summary, the ecotourism opportunities in Alpena, Alcona, and Presque Isle Counties are extensive due to the abundant natural, cultural, and historic resources available. While the asset inventory has shown that some businesses are utilizing these resources to add value to their businesses, much opportunity abounds for existing businesses to expand into additional areas of ecotourism and for business start-ups centered around ecotourism. This report utilizes the following maps to best display where ecotourism opportunities exist in conjunction with existing businesses and lack of existing businesses.

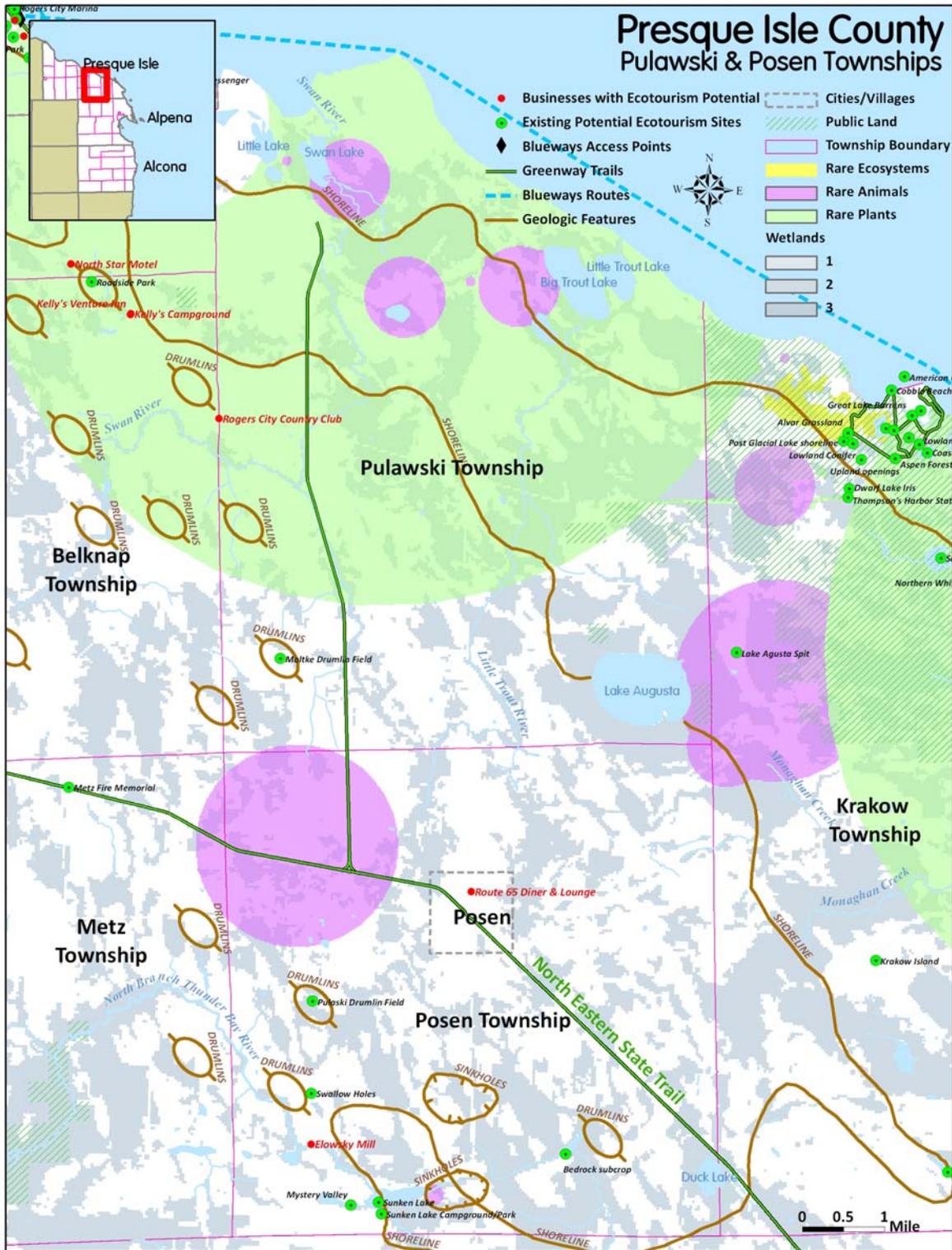
Bearinger Township: Significant ecotourism opportunities exist in Bearinger Township around the Black Mountain Trail area where visitors can see examples of a CCC Pine Plantation, northern hardwoods forests, old growth pine forests, shrubs, rare plants, and wet meadows from miles of winding trails. In addition a dune and swale complex exists along the Huron coast.



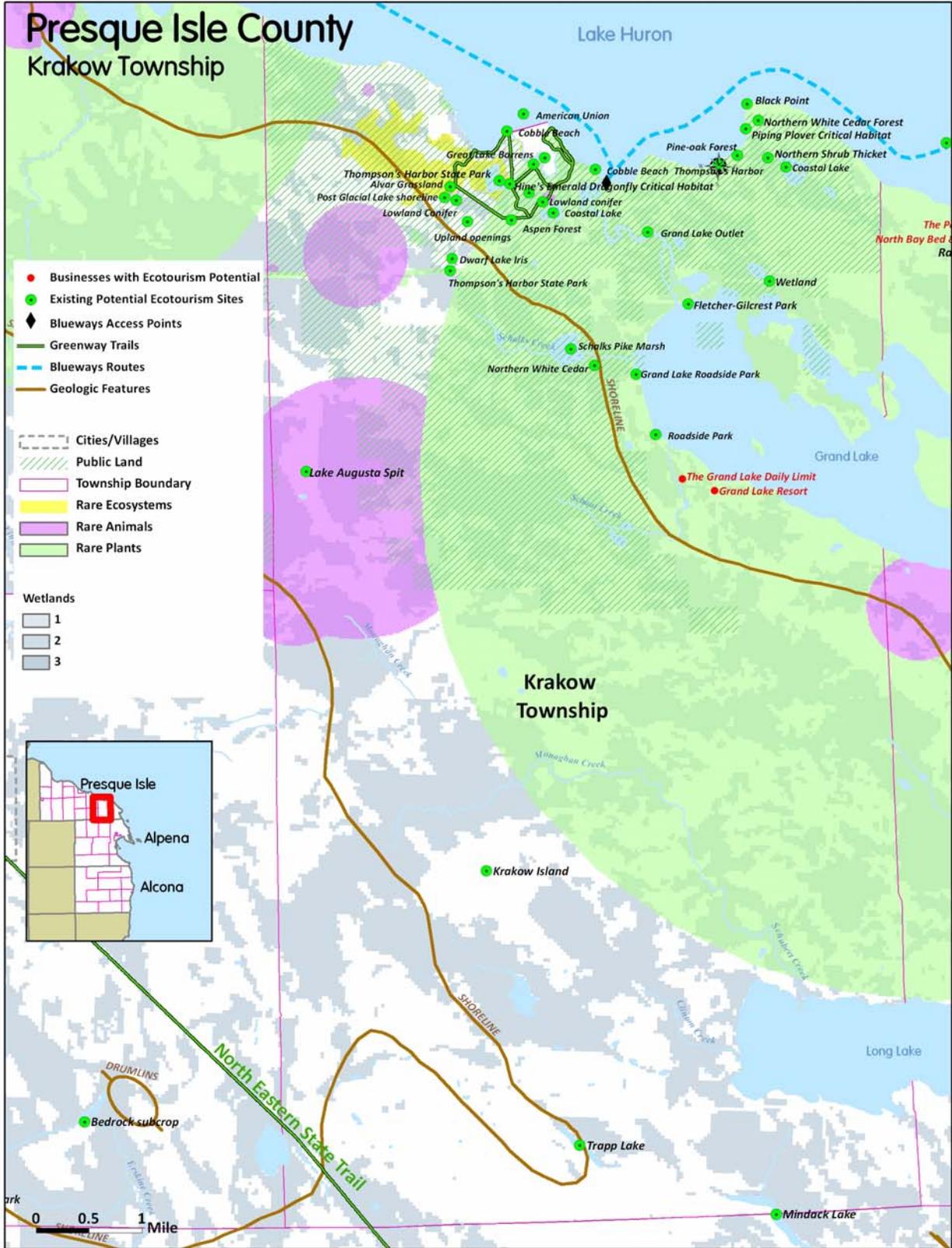
Rogers City: Rogers City contains numerous parks on the Lake Huron coastline as well as a natural area (the Herman Vogler Conservation Area) in the northwest portion of the city. Examples of pine and hardwood forests can be seen there. In addition, a working limestone quarry make fossil hunting plentiful. The Huron Sunrise Trail begins in the city and connects to 40-Mile Point Lighthouse.



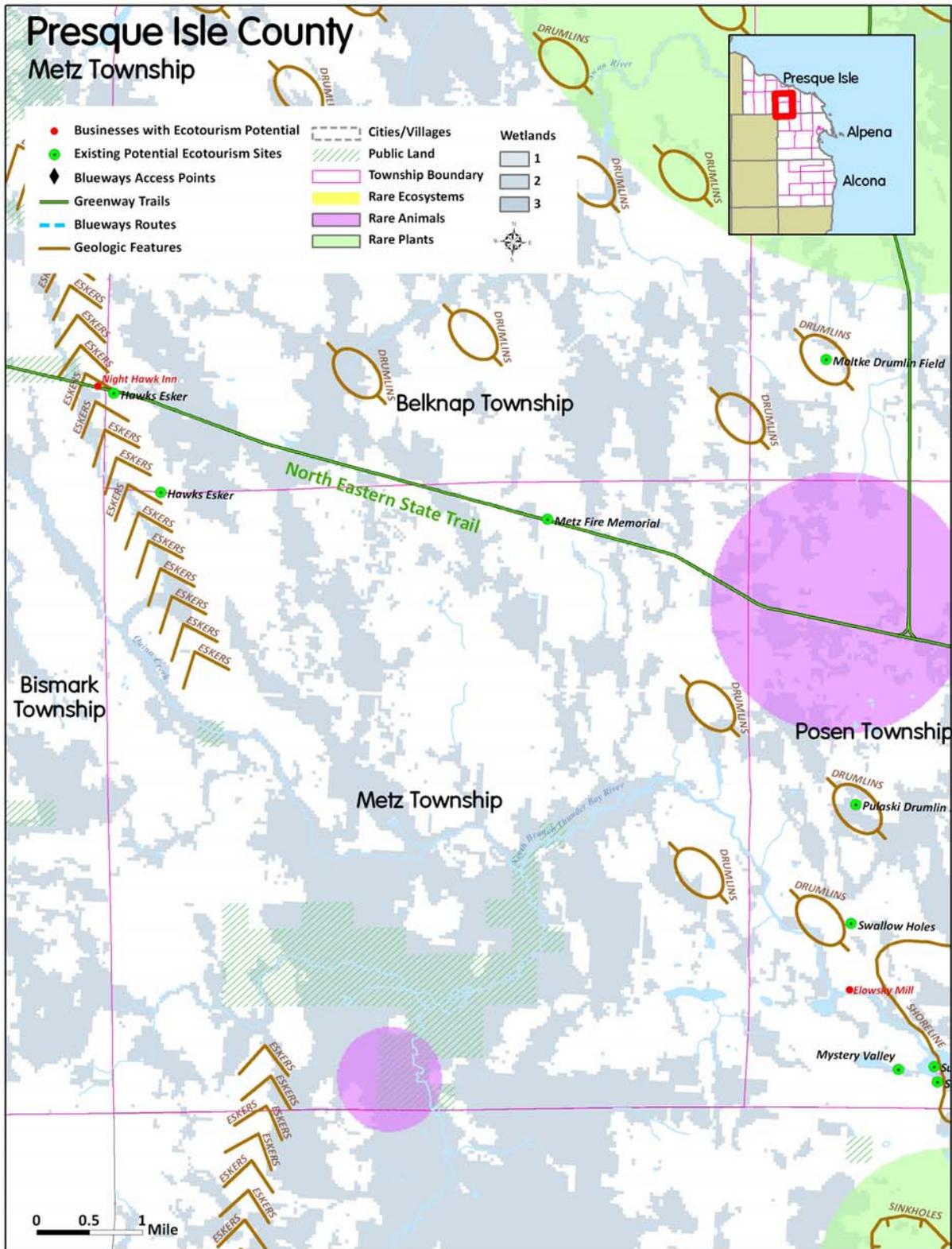
Pulawski & Posen Townships: Pulawski Township contains extensive areas of rare plants and animals as well as old shorelines. Posen Township contains examples of sinkholes, rare animals, and the North Eastern State Trail. While many of the sinkholes are privately-owned (providing an opportunity for ecotourism development on private lands), the sinkholes in the area of “Mystery Valley” are available to the public. Mystery Valley is a 76-acre Karst Preserve and Nature Sanctuary which contains one of the largest “collapse valleys” in the Great Lakes region, several dramatic earth cracks, and a lake that rises and falls.



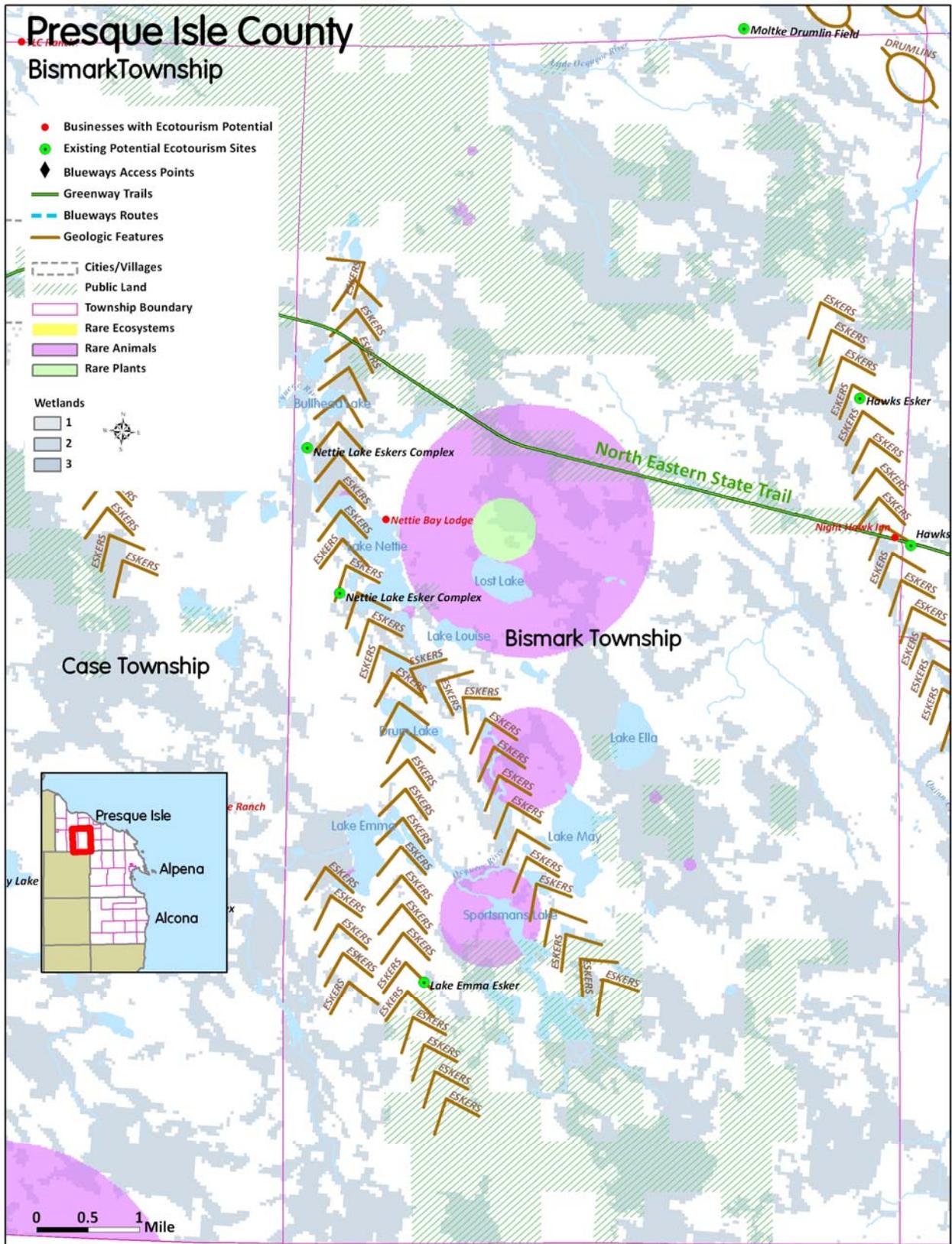
Krakow Township: Krakow Township contains extensive areas of natural features along the coast including rare plants, rare animals, grasslands, conifers, cobble beaches, cedar forests, wetlands/marshes, pine-oak forests, and parks including Thompson’s Harbor State Park. In addition, Krakow contains large areas of state forest.



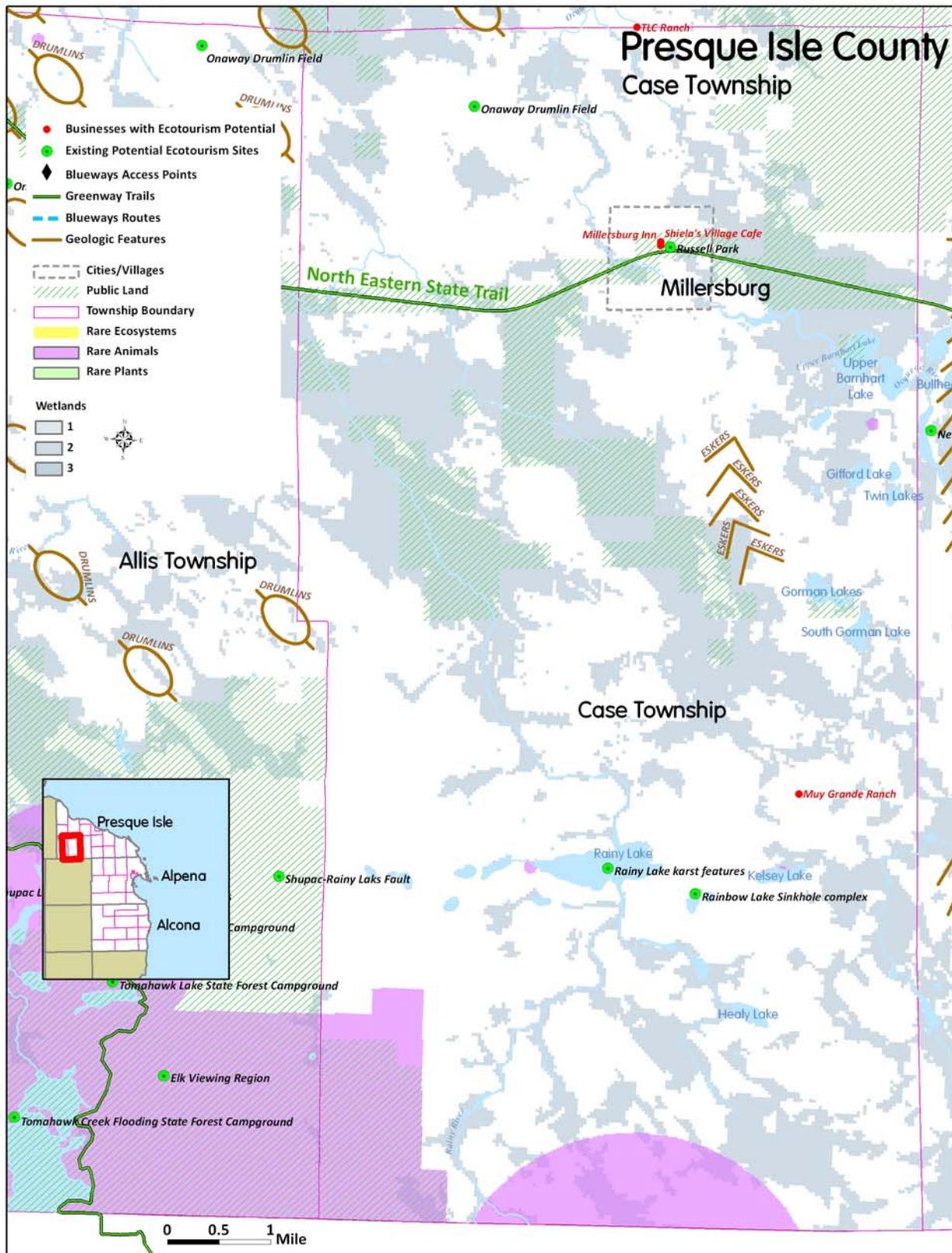
Metz Township: Metz Township contains the southern end of the Hawks esker, the western end of the Pulaski Drumlins, and a portion of the North Eastern State Trail. Only a small segment of public land exists in the southern portion of the township necessitating viewing from a public road.



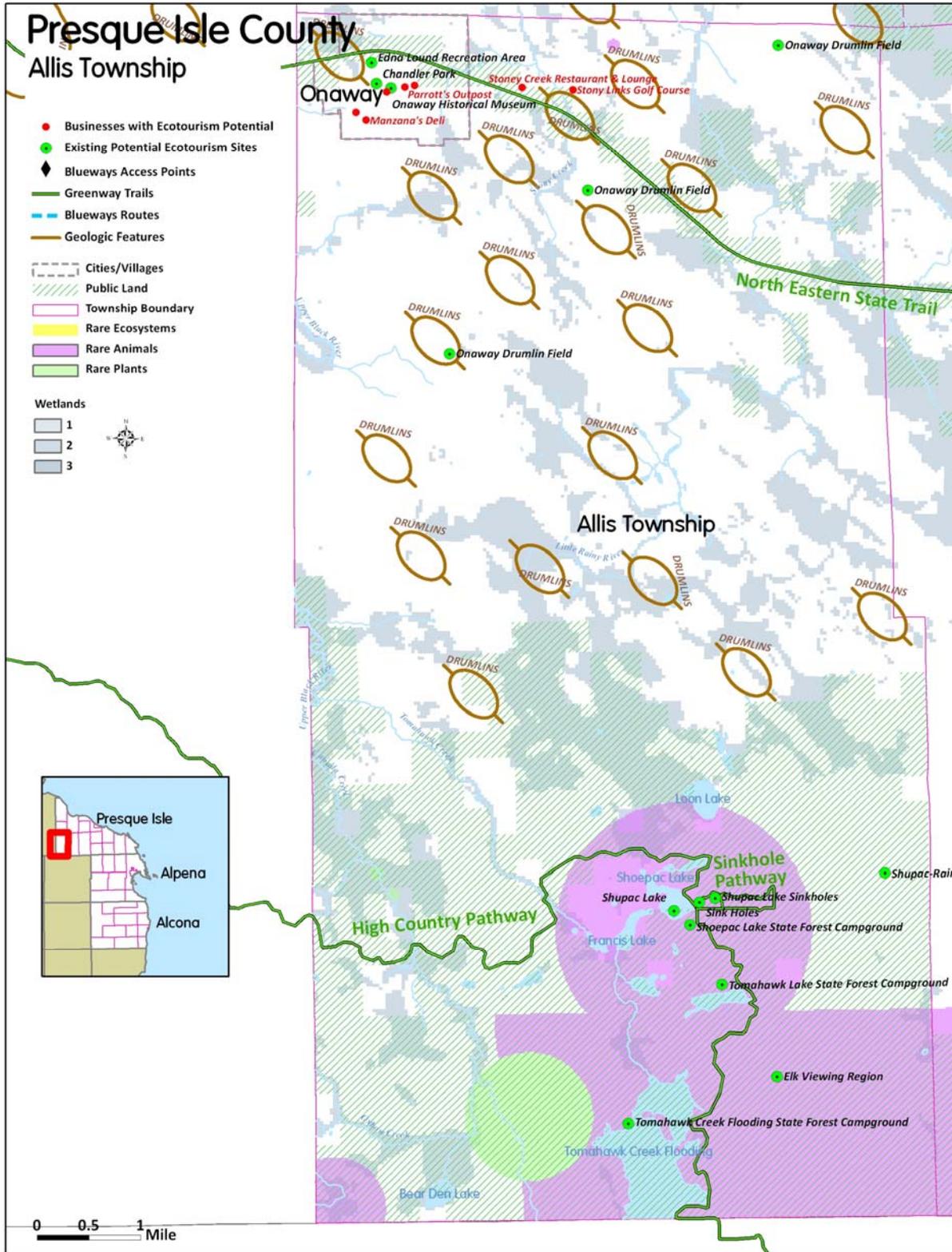
Bismark Township: Bismark Township contains great examples of several eskers which are crossed by the North Eastern State Trail. In addition, large areas of rare animals are found in the central portion of the township. Extensive areas of state forest also make this township prime for ecotourism.



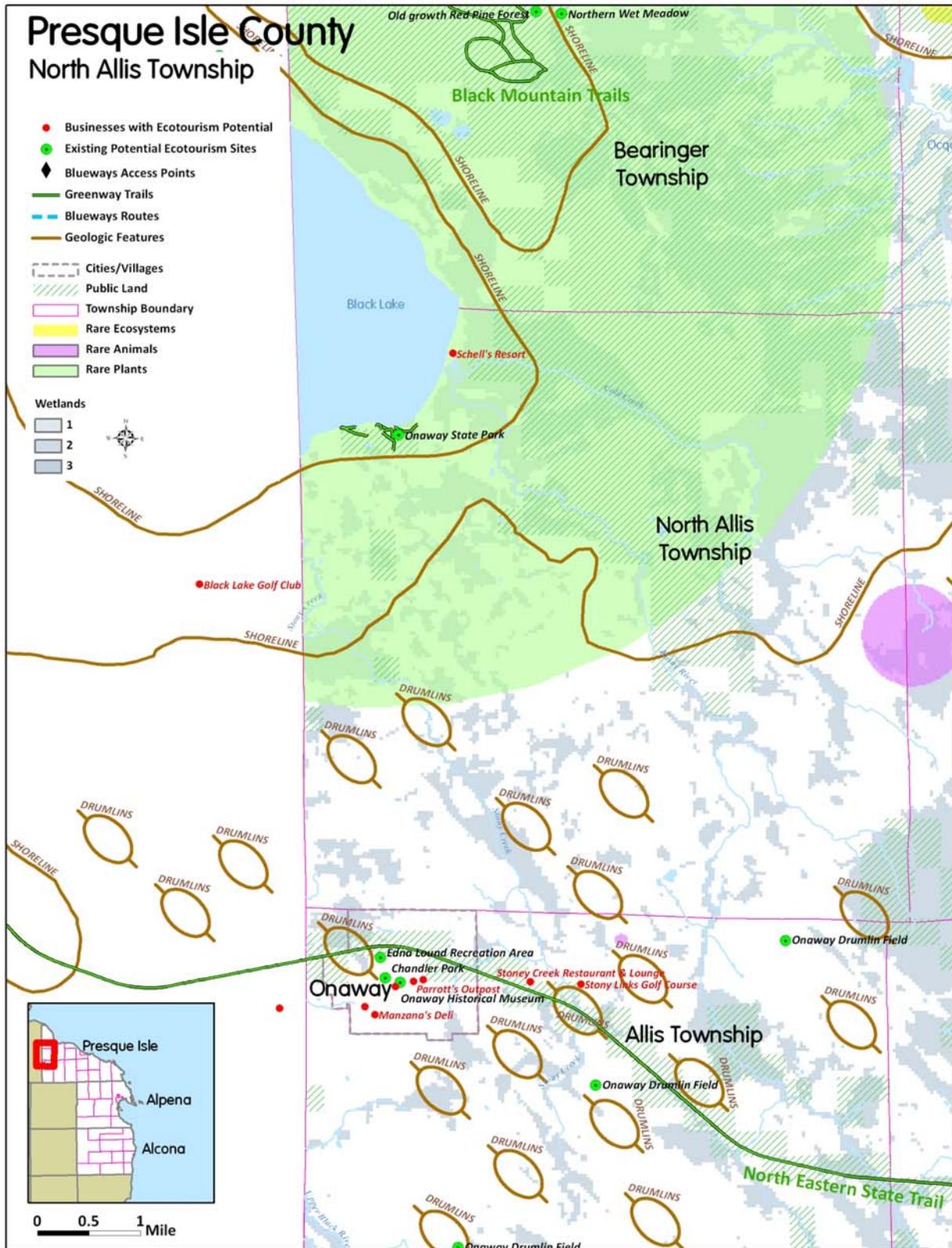
Case Township: Case Township contains a small esker, a sinkhole complex around Rainy Lake, and is bisected by the North Eastern State Trail. An area of rare animals is also found in the southern portion.



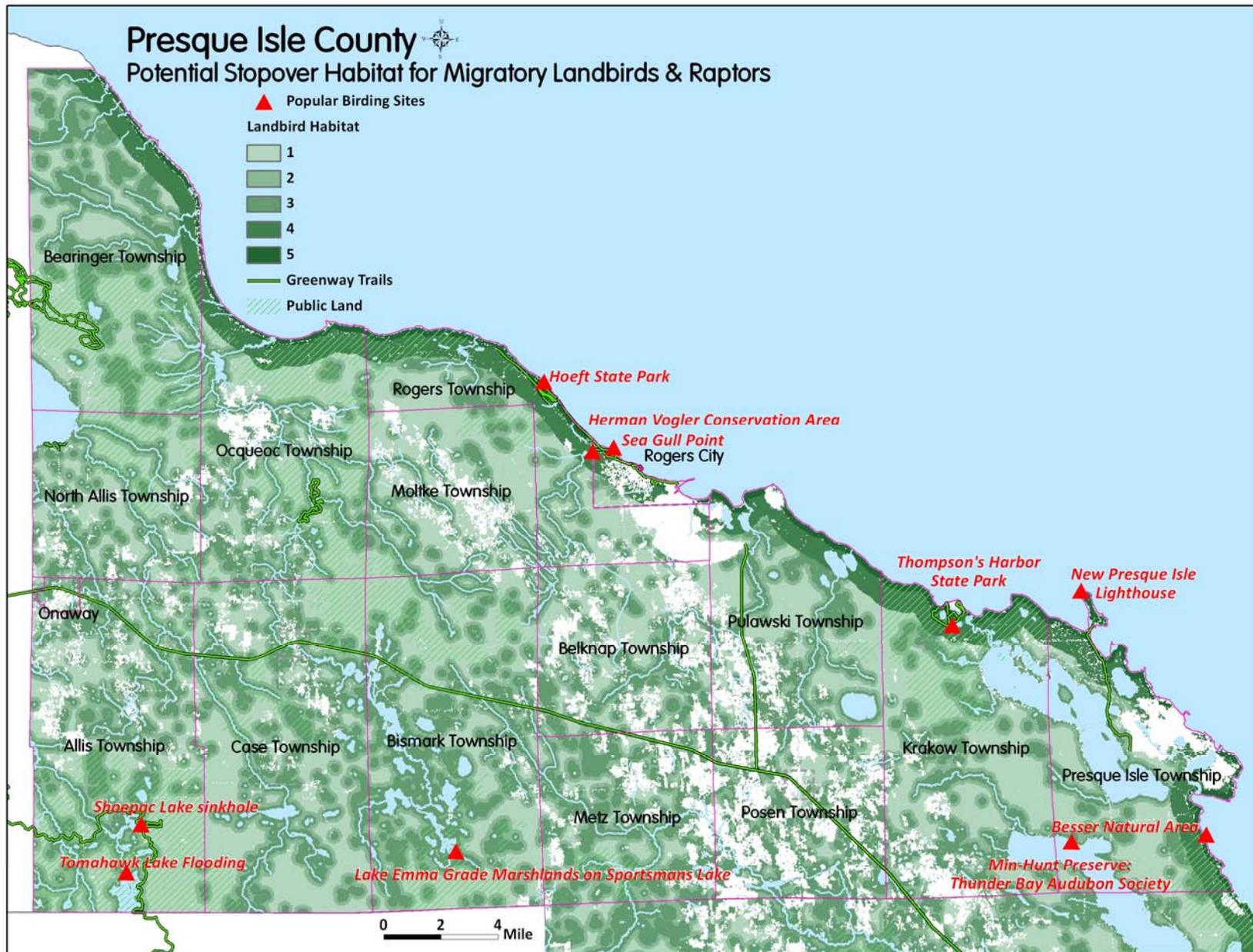
Allis Township: Allis Township is covered on the northern half by a drumlin field which is crossed by the North Eastern State Trail. The southern portion of the township contains a large area of rare animals as well as an elk viewing region. The area around Shoepac Lake contains significant sinkholes which are viewable from the Sinkhole Pathway. In addition, the High Country Pathway traverses the township providing ample opportunity for eco-tours.



North Allis Township: North Allis Township contains a drumlin field as well as great examples of old lakeshore lines. In addition, an extensive area of rare plants is found in the township. Onaway State Park and Black Lake also contribute to the ecotourism opportunities here.



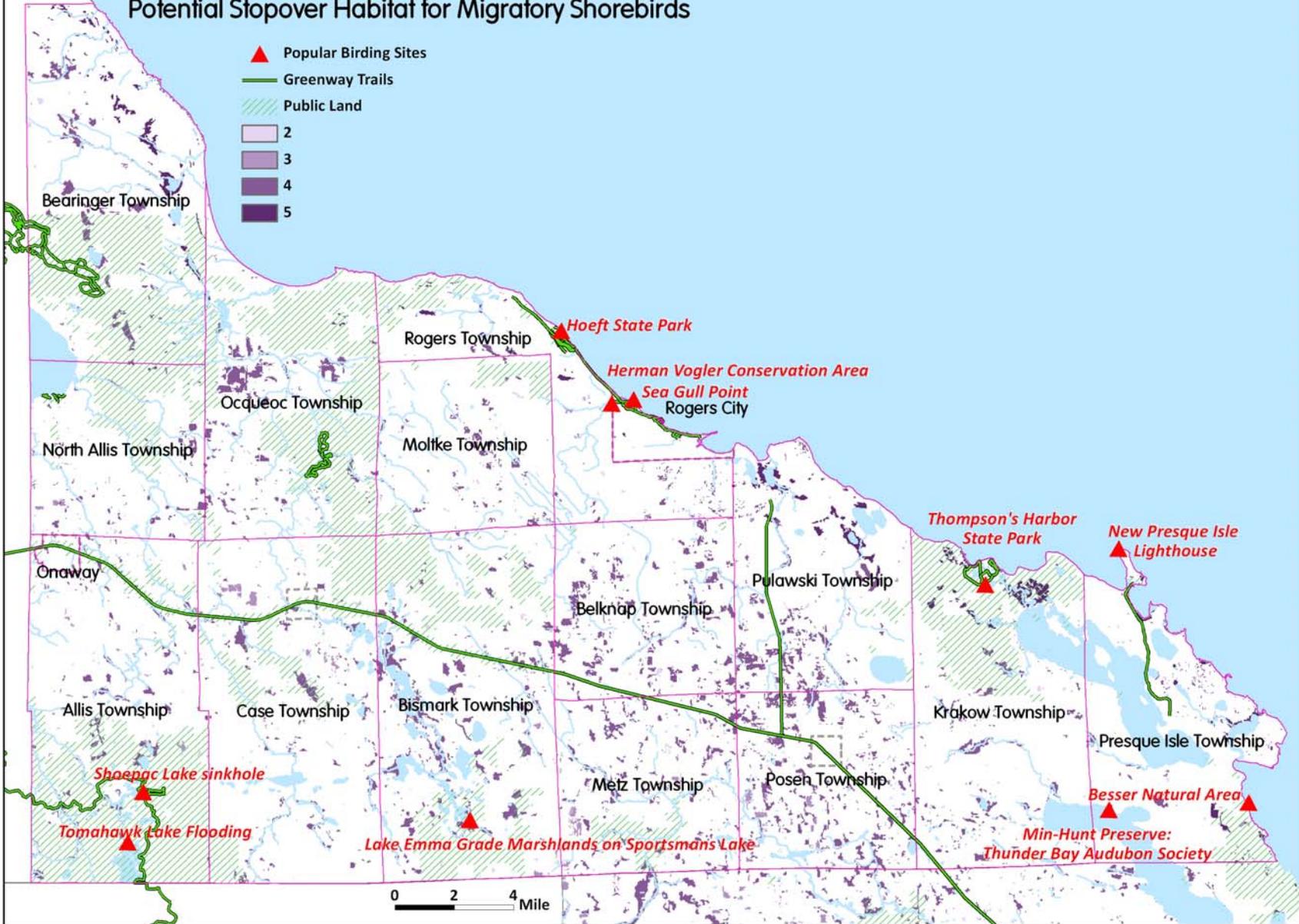
Birding Opportunities: The following three maps show the birding opportunities in Presque Isle County. The maps depict habitat for land birds, shore birds, and waterfowl. The habitat values were generated as part of the Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment project (higher numbers indicate higher valued habitat). The specific birding sites were mapped by the Thunder Bay Audubon Society and the Au Sable Audubon Society.



Presque Isle County

Potential Stopover Habitat for Migratory Shorebirds

- ▲ Popular Birding Sites
- Greenway Trails
- ▨ Public Land
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5



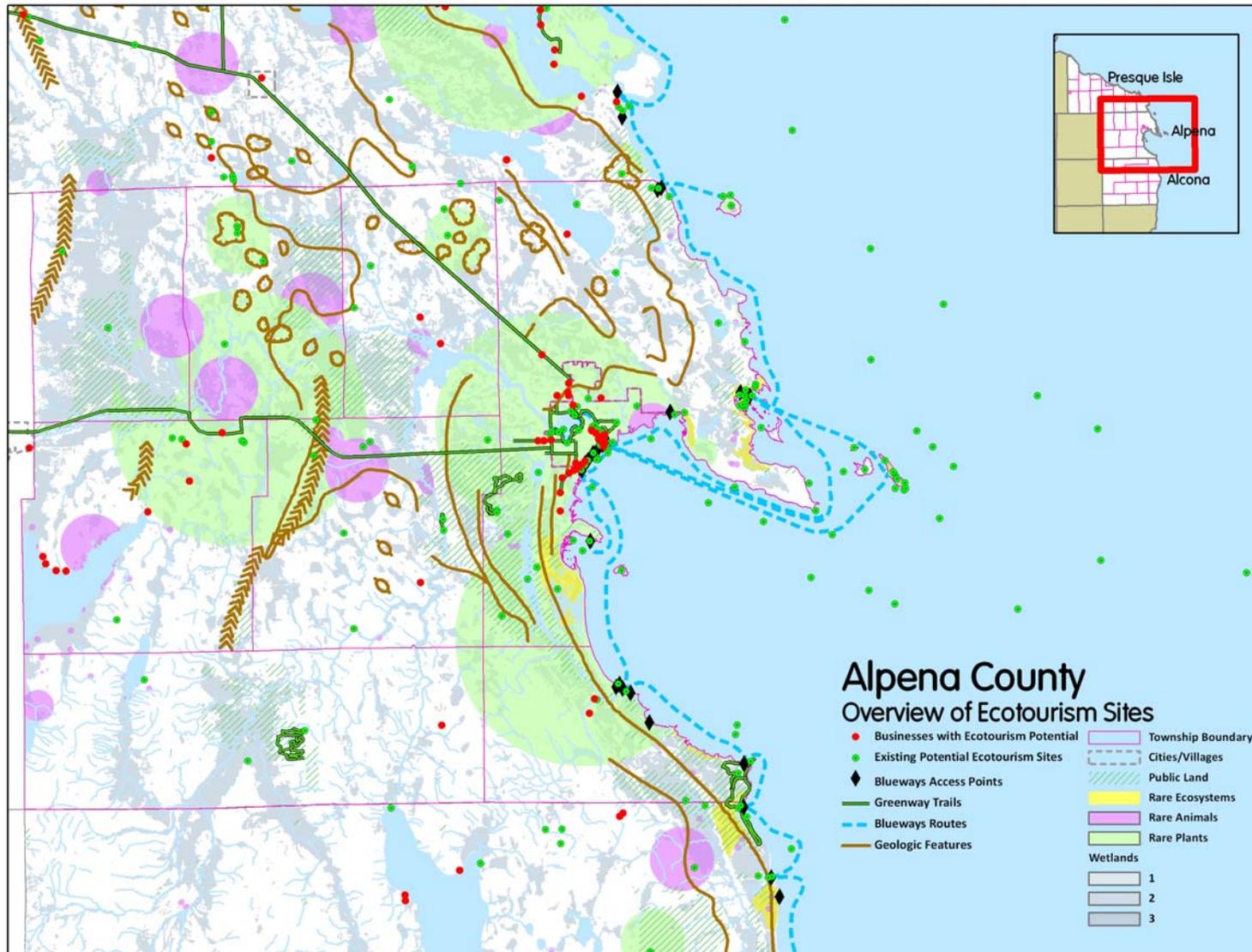
0 2 4 Mile

Presque Isle County

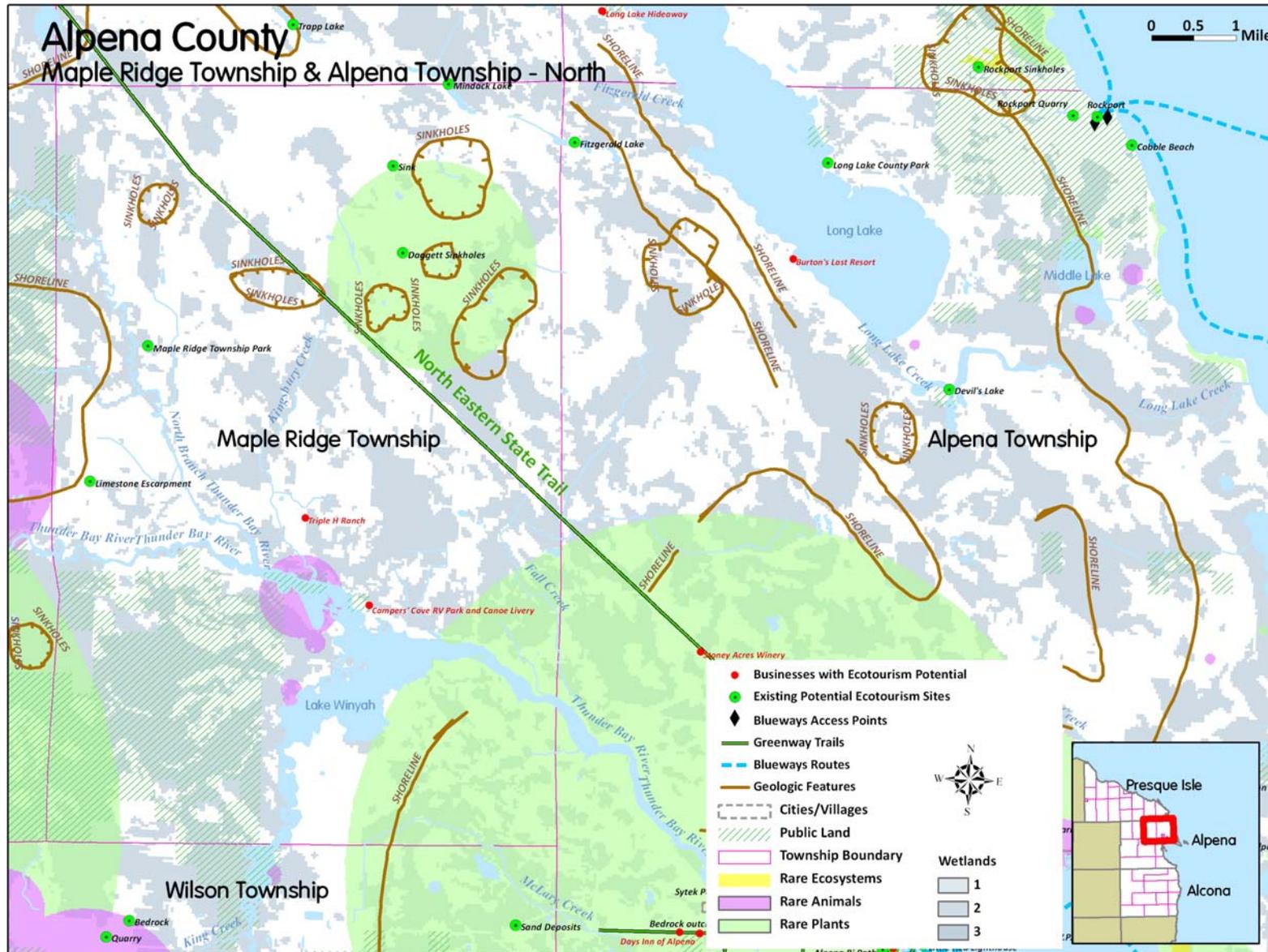
Potential Stopover Habitat for Migratory Waterfowl



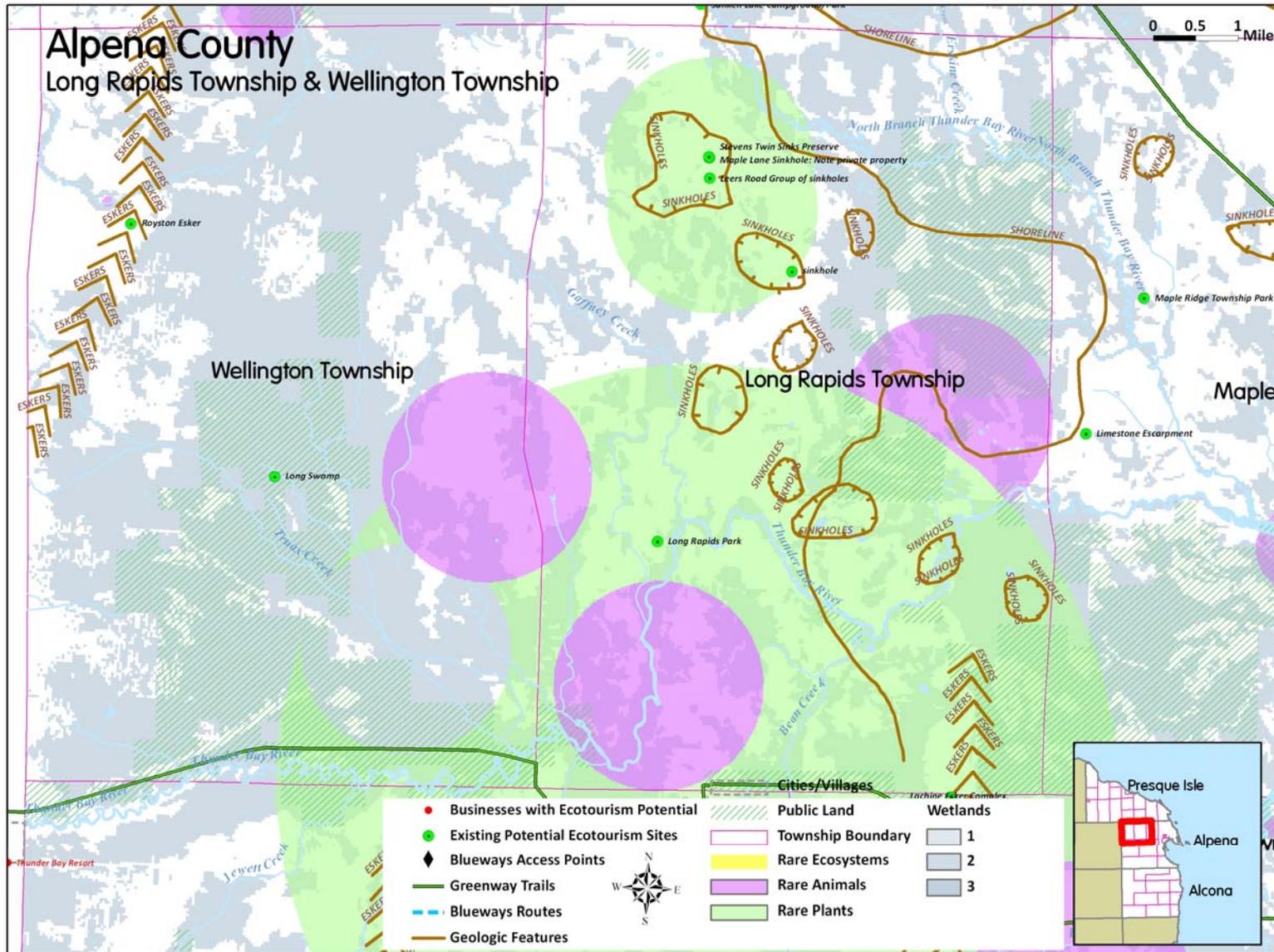
Alpena County: As seen on the overview map below, there are significant potential ecotourism opportunities in Alpena County. Large areas of karst topography including sinkholes, eskers, and former lake shorelines provide interesting glacial geologic features. Many Lake Huron access points combined with extensive natural features, and public land make Alpena County a significant ecotourism region. In addition, the NEMIA report identified extensive areas of rare plants and animals along the coast and in the central Alpena County region which also present great opportunities for ecotourism development. The shipwrecks in Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary provide an unmatched opportunity for ecotourism development in the coastal region.



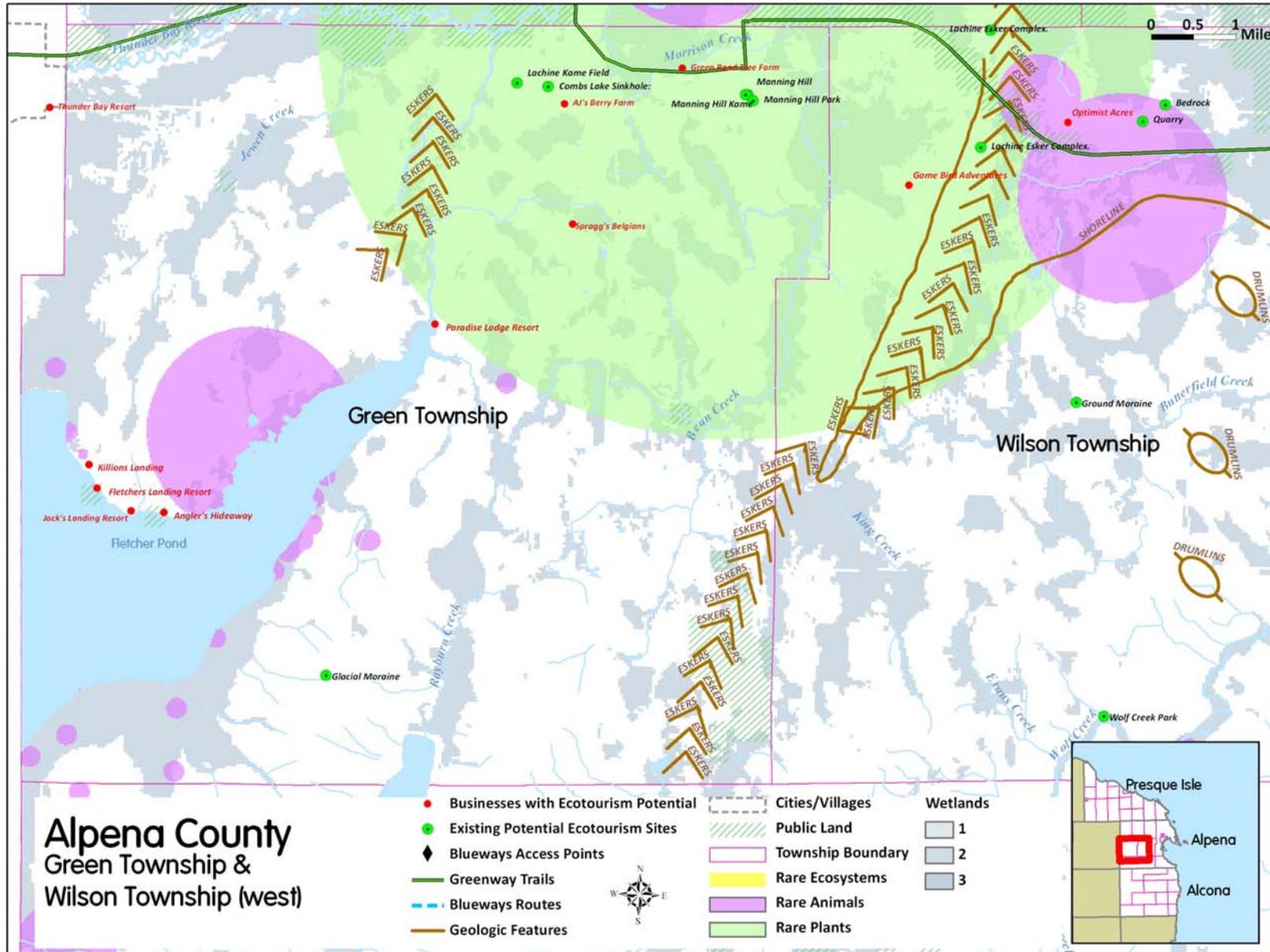
Alpena Township (north) and Maple Ridge Township: Extensive areas of sinkholes exist in both townships along with examples of old lake shoreline providing excellent ecotourism opportunities. In addition, the sinkholes in Maple Ridge coincide with a rare plant area and the North Eastern State Trail. Rockport, in the northern portion of Alpena Township contains sinkholes on public land and a nearby Lake Huron access site. In addition, the Thunder Bay River is a prime site for ecotours.



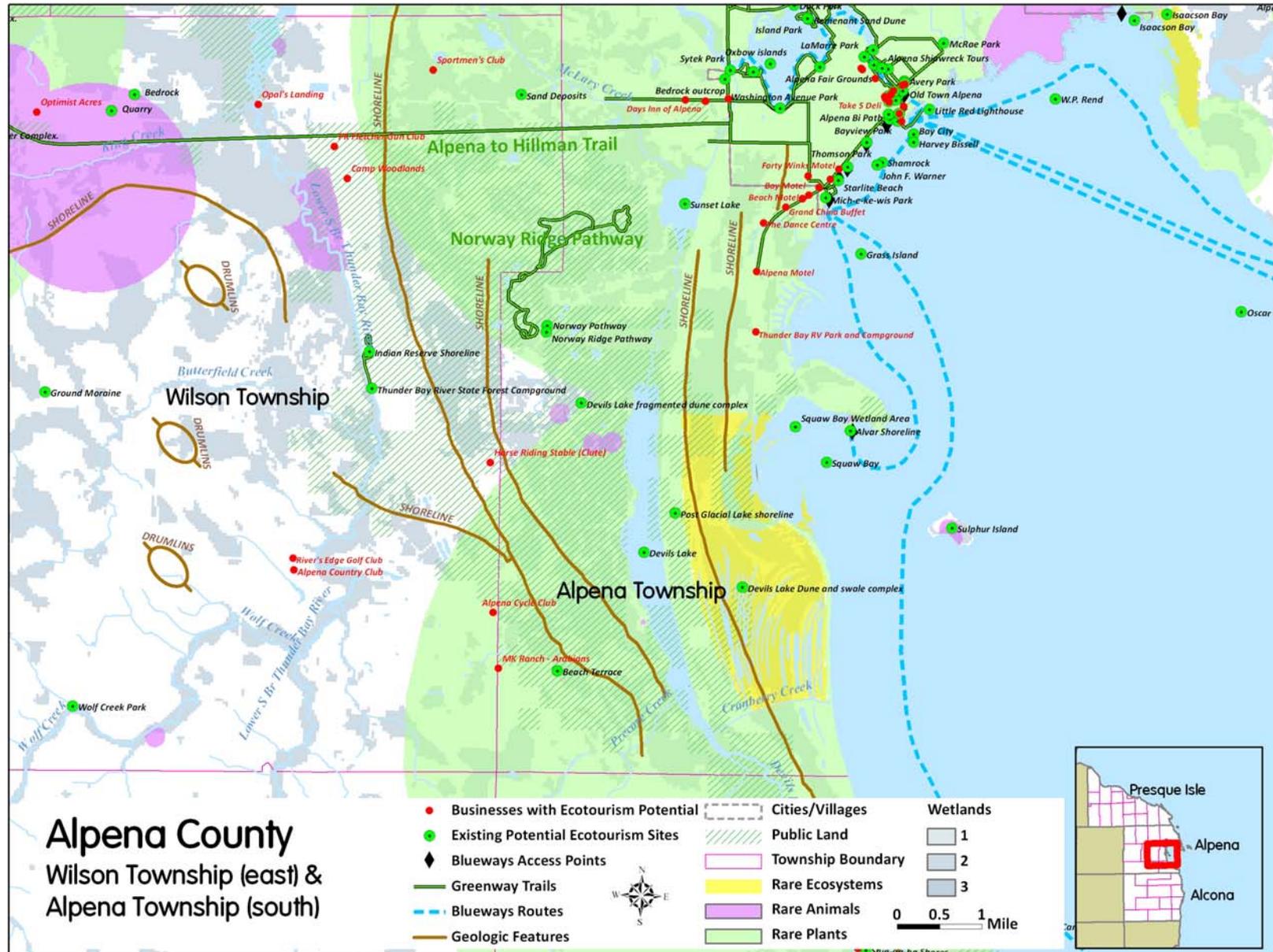
Long Rapids Township and Wellington Township: Extensive areas of sinkholes exist in Long Rapids Township along with large areas of rare plants and animals. While many of these sinkholes are privately-owned (and thus providing an opportunity for private ecotourism development), some are already accessible to the public. In addition, other geologic features also exist including an esker and old shoreline. Wellington Township contains an esker and large tracts of public land. The Alpena to Hillman Trail is currently used for a snowmobile route but could be improved as a multi-use trail in the future.



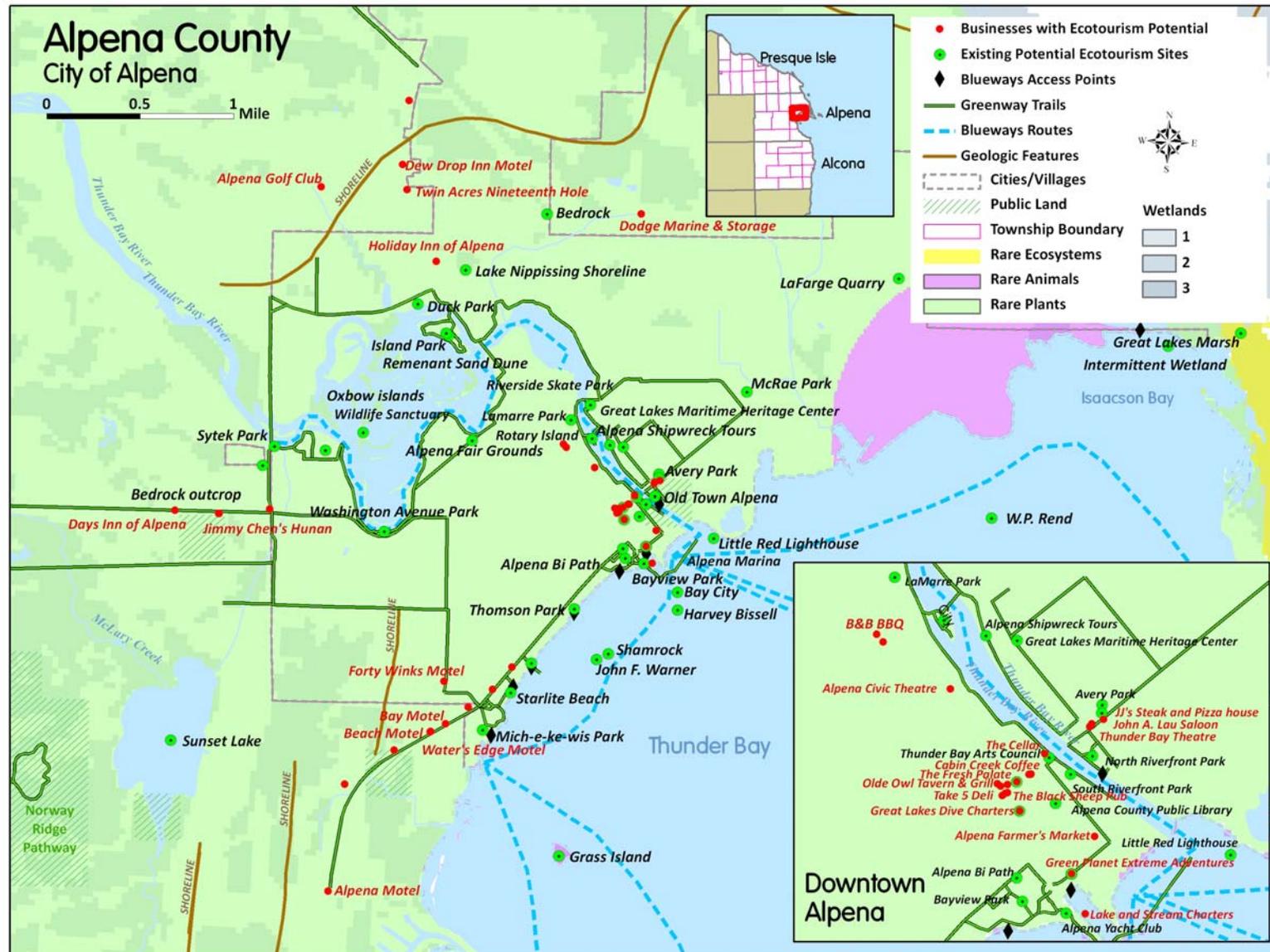
Green Township and Wilson Township (west): Green Township contains a prime area for animal viewing and birding around Fletcher Pond. In addition, both townships contain an esker and Wilson Township contains drumlins as well. A large area of rare plants exists in these townships as well.



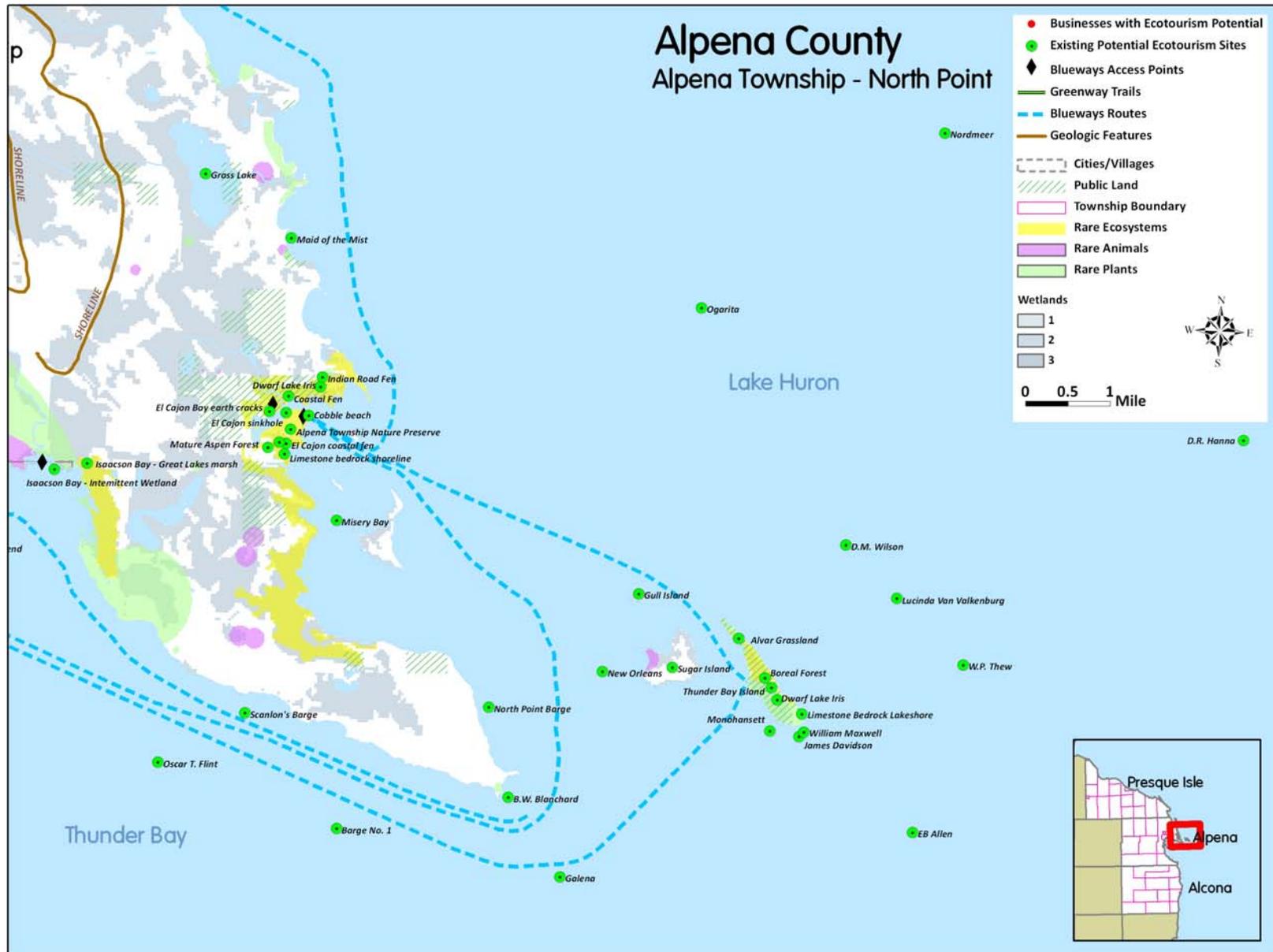
Wilson Township (east) and Alpena Township (south): Extensive areas of rare plant viewing exist in both townships. Large tracts of public land also make this area highly desirable for ecotourism development. The Norway Ridge Pathway provides a great trail system from which to view natural features. A prominent dune and swale complex exists in the area of Devils Lake. The area around Squaw Bay provides an example of a protected wetland.



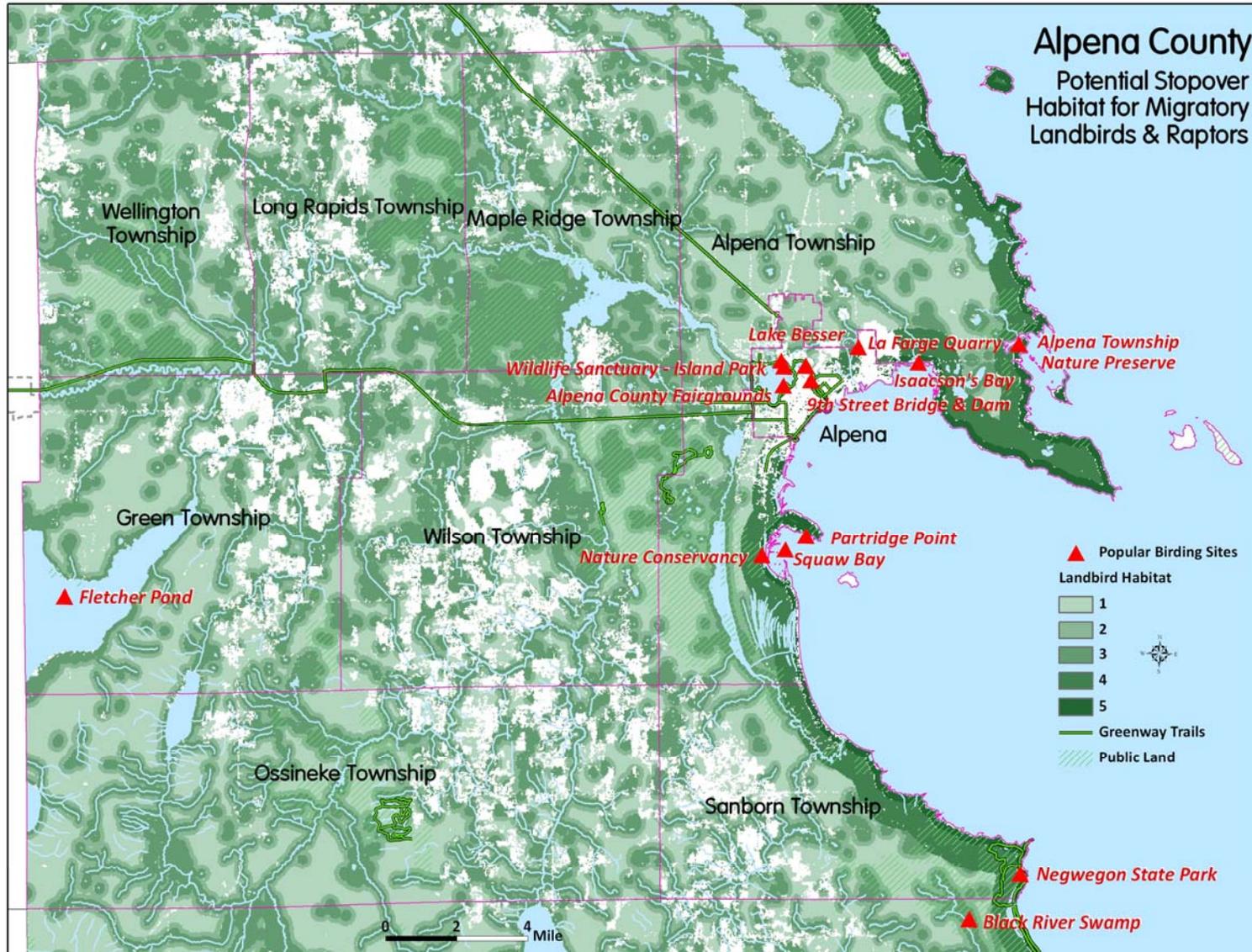
City of Alpena: While Alpena is the largest urban area in the 3-county region, many opportunities exist within the city for ecotourism business development. A system of parks and trails connects opportunities around the city. The Thunder Bay River and wildlife sanctuary provide many ecotourism sites including waterfowl, oxbow islands, and old lake shorelines. Numerous shipwrecks are accessible within Thunder Bay. Isaacson Bay provides an opportunity to visit a Great Lakes marsh area. Alpena is the location which should be the ecotourism hub of the region due to the presence of the Great Lake Maritime Heritage Center in the city along the Thunder Bay River.

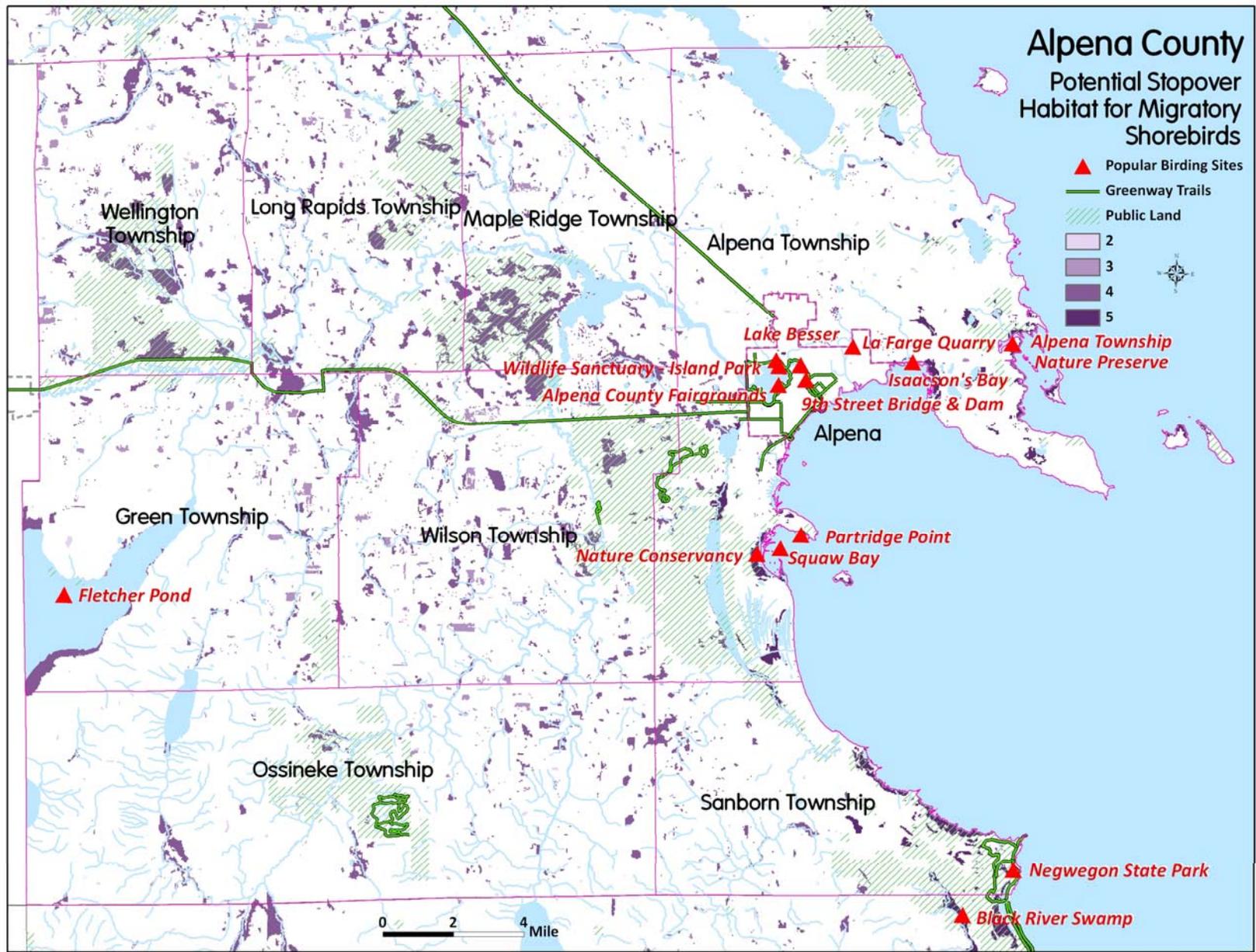


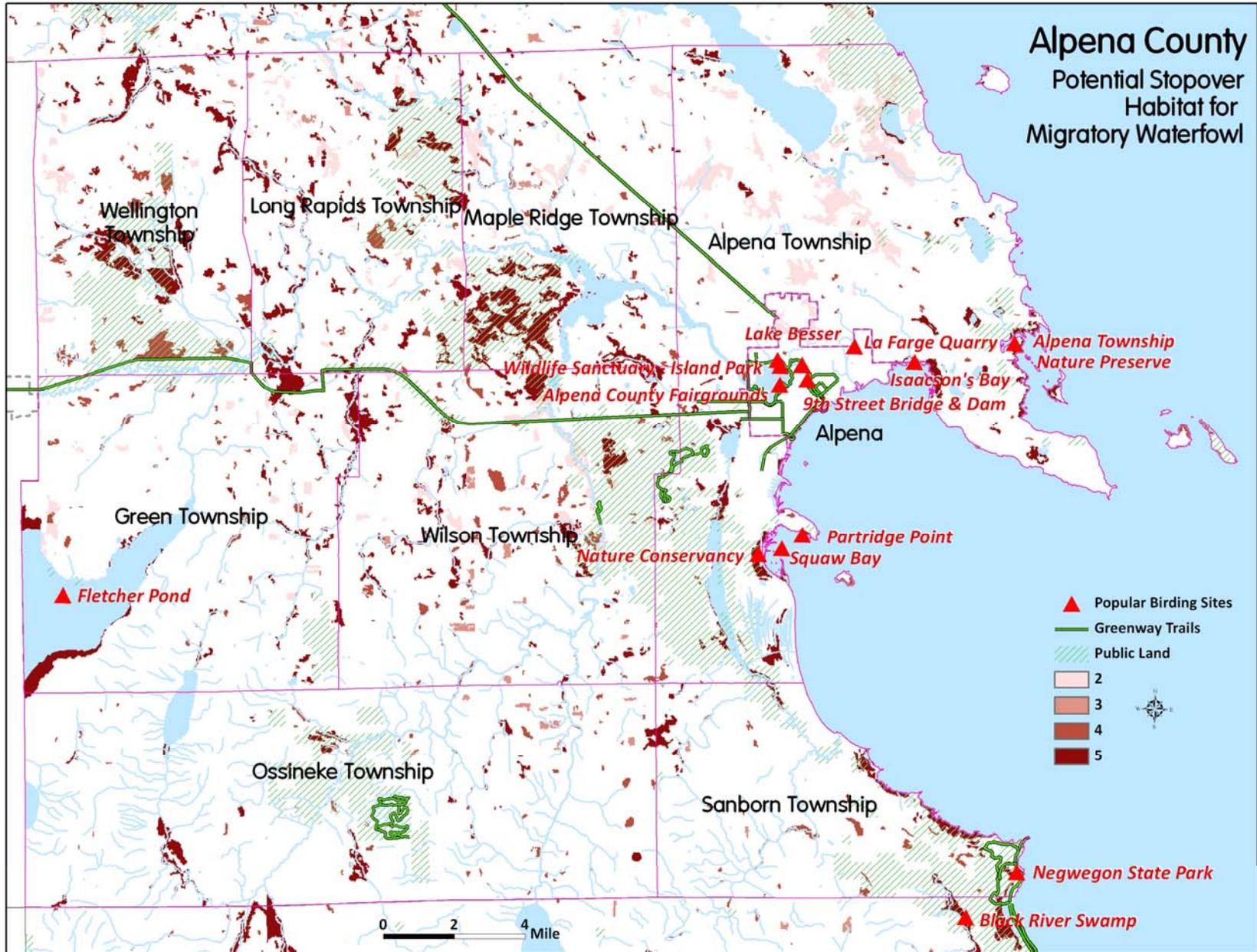
North Point: The North Point and Thunder Bay Island area is a prime ecotourism area which is densely populated with natural and cultural features. The Misery Bay/El Cajon Bay area contains features such as a coastal fen, cobble beach, earth cracks, sinkholes, and aspen forests viewable from the Alpena Township Nature Preserve. A large variety of shipwrecks can be found around North Point and Thunder Bay Island.



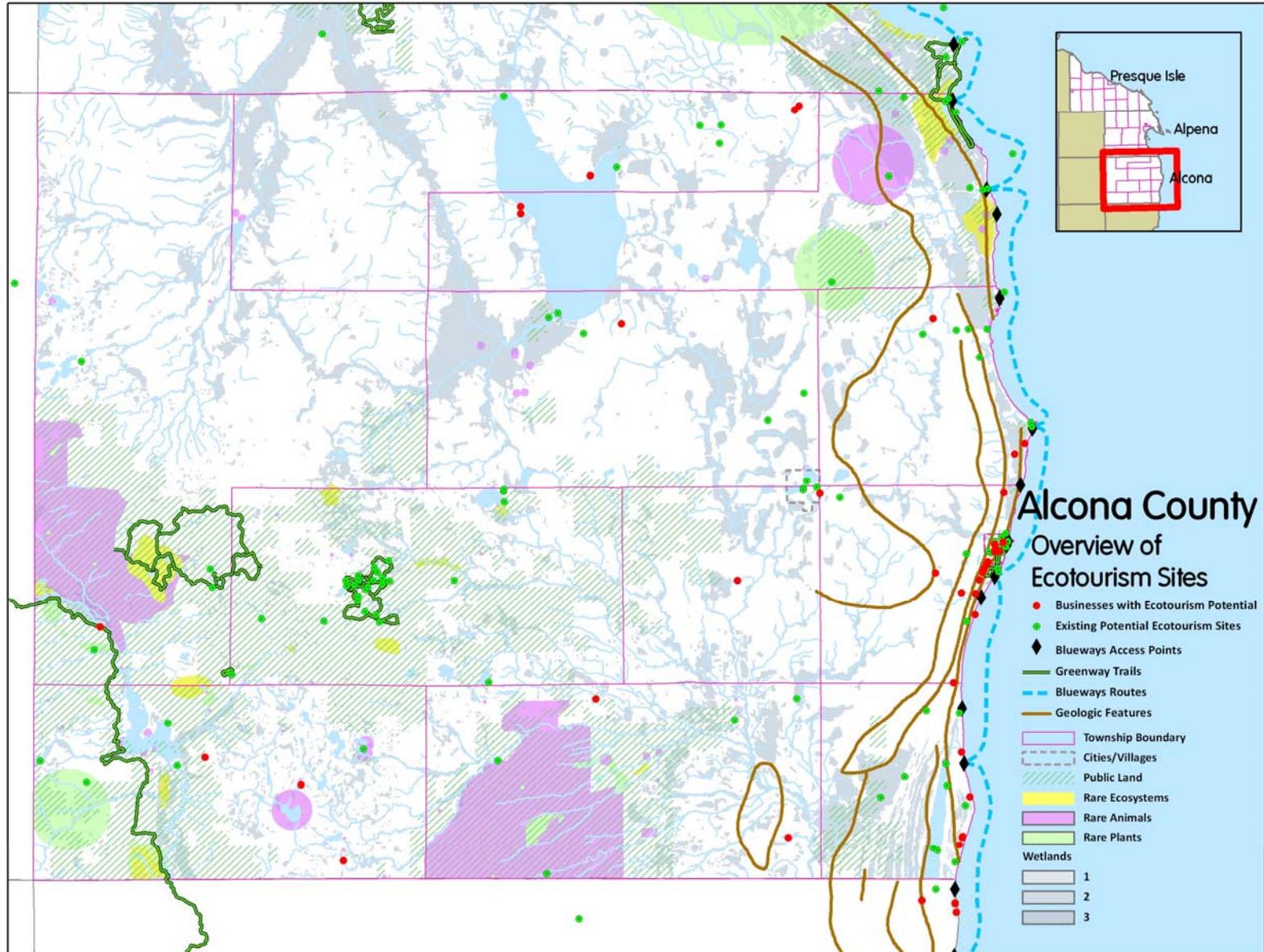
Birding Opportunities: The following three maps show the birding opportunities in Alpena County. The maps depict habitat for land birds, shore birds, and waterfowl. The habitat values were generated as part of the Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment project (higher numbers indicate higher valued habitat). The specific birding sites were mapped by the Thunder Bay Audubon Society and the Au Sable Audubon Society.



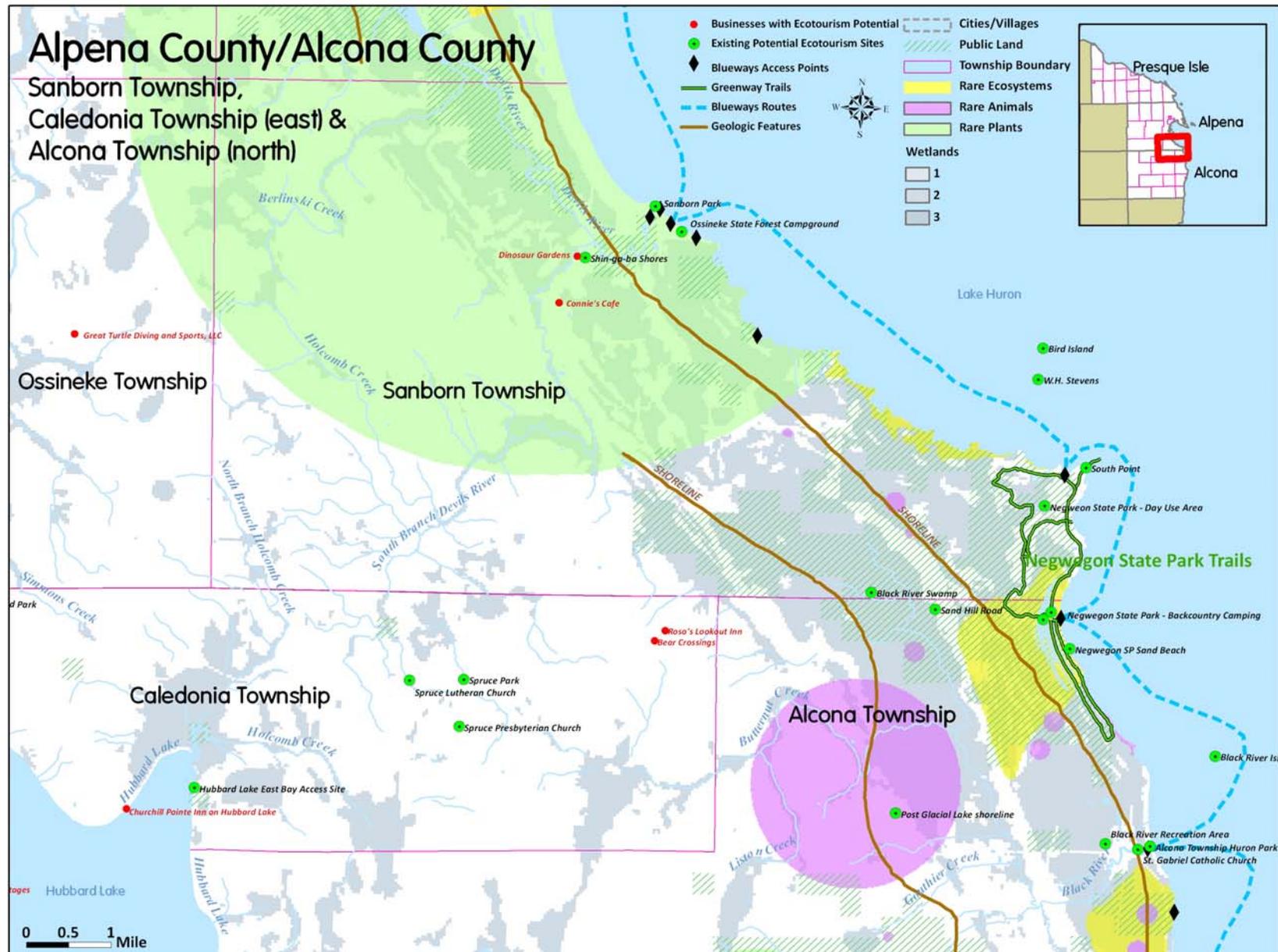




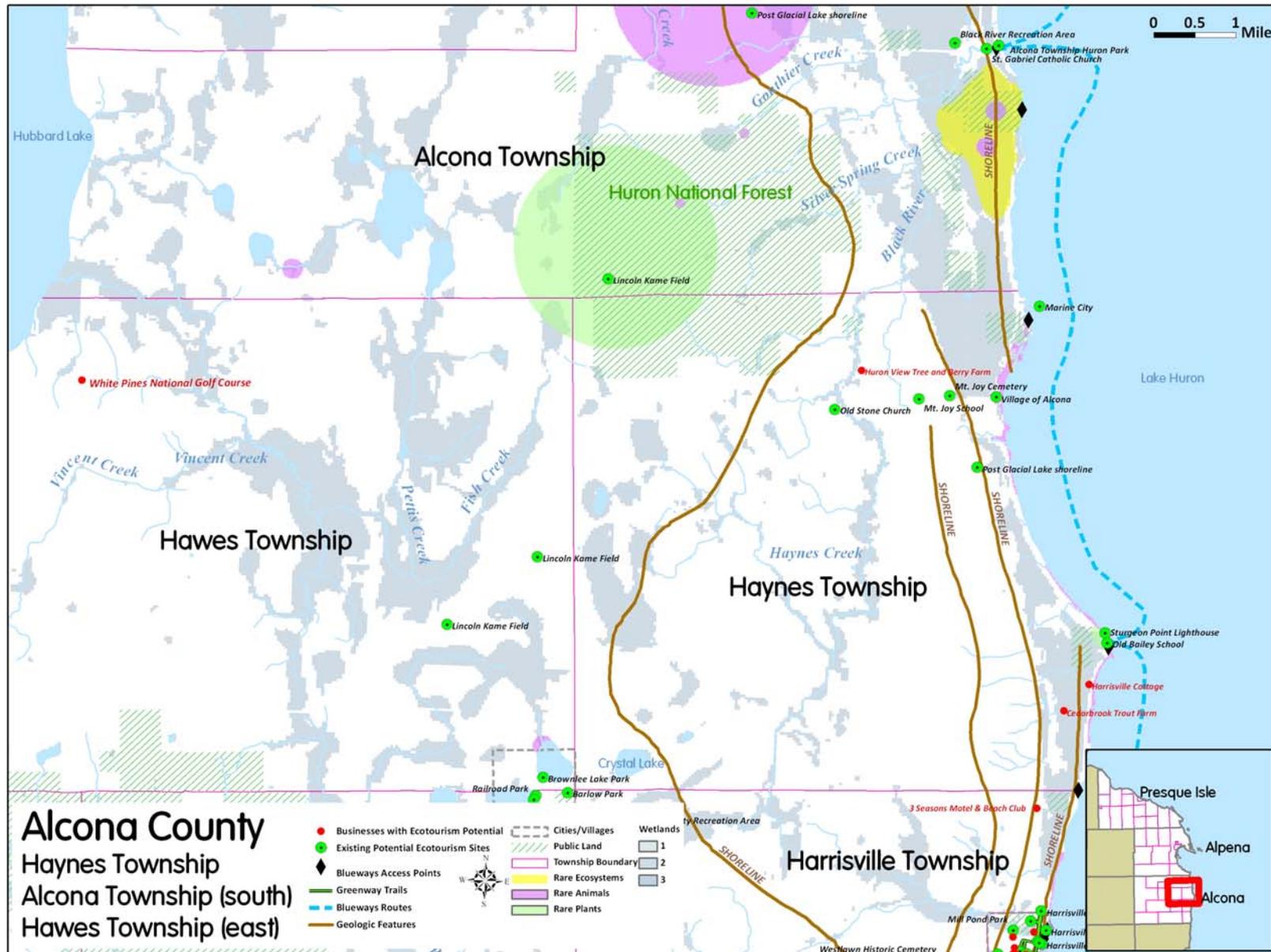
Alcona County: As seen on the overview map below, there are significant potential ecotourism opportunities in Alcona County along the Lake Huron shoreline. Inland ecotourism opportunities exist due to the presence of the Huron National Forest which covers a large portion of the county. Lake Huron access points are available all along the shoreline and Negwegon and Harrisville State Parks provide accessible public lands. Trail systems in the western portion of the county provide unique opportunities for ecotours. In addition, the Shore to Shore Trail and the Au Sable River traverse the southwestern corner of the county.



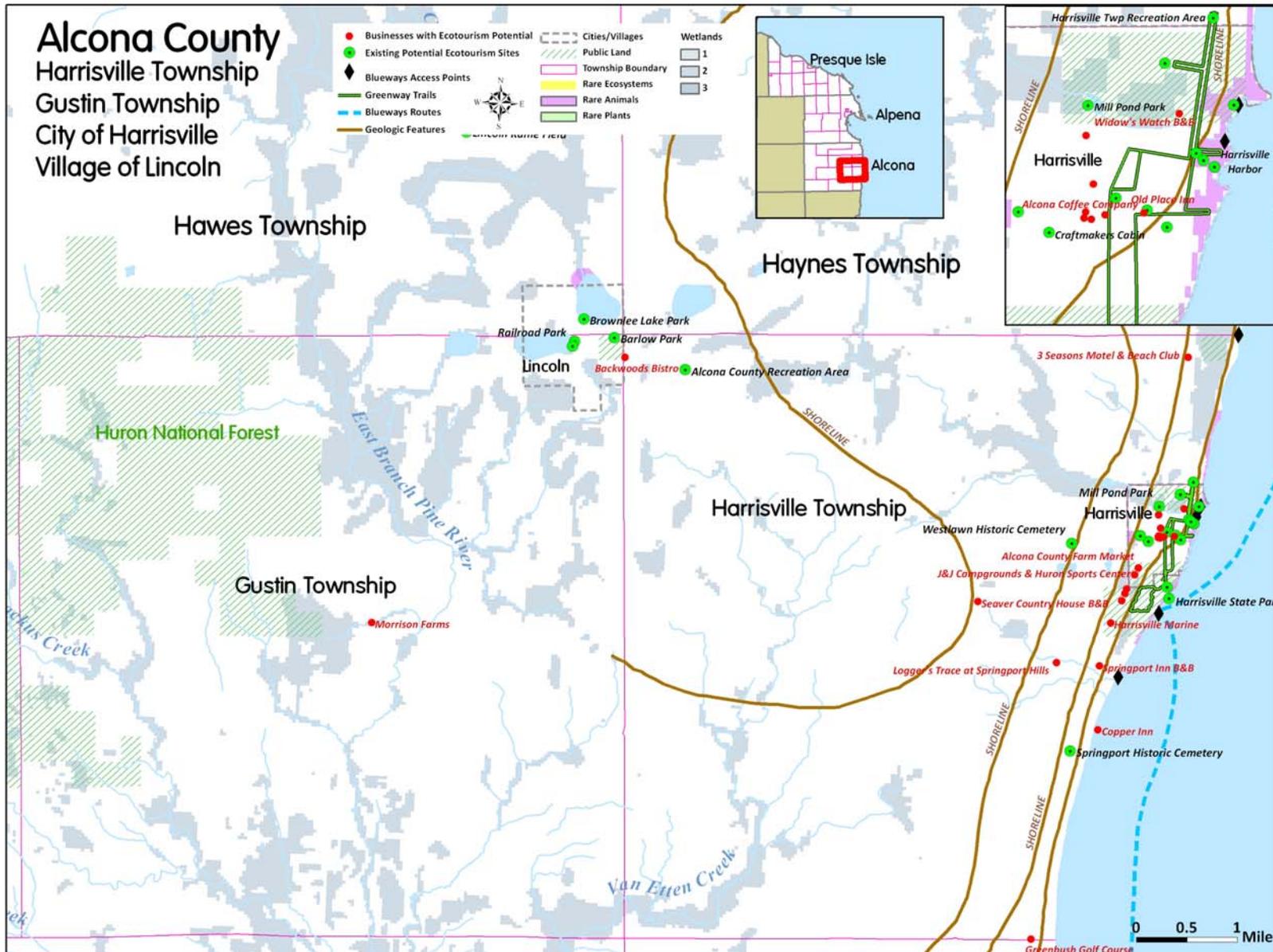
Sanborn Township (Alpena County), Alcona Township, and Caledonia Township (east): Sanborn Township contains a large area of rare plants. The undeveloped Negwegon State Park and excellent trail system provides ample opportunity for ecotourism. This primary ecotourism area extends into Alcona Township which also includes rare ecosystems and rare animals.



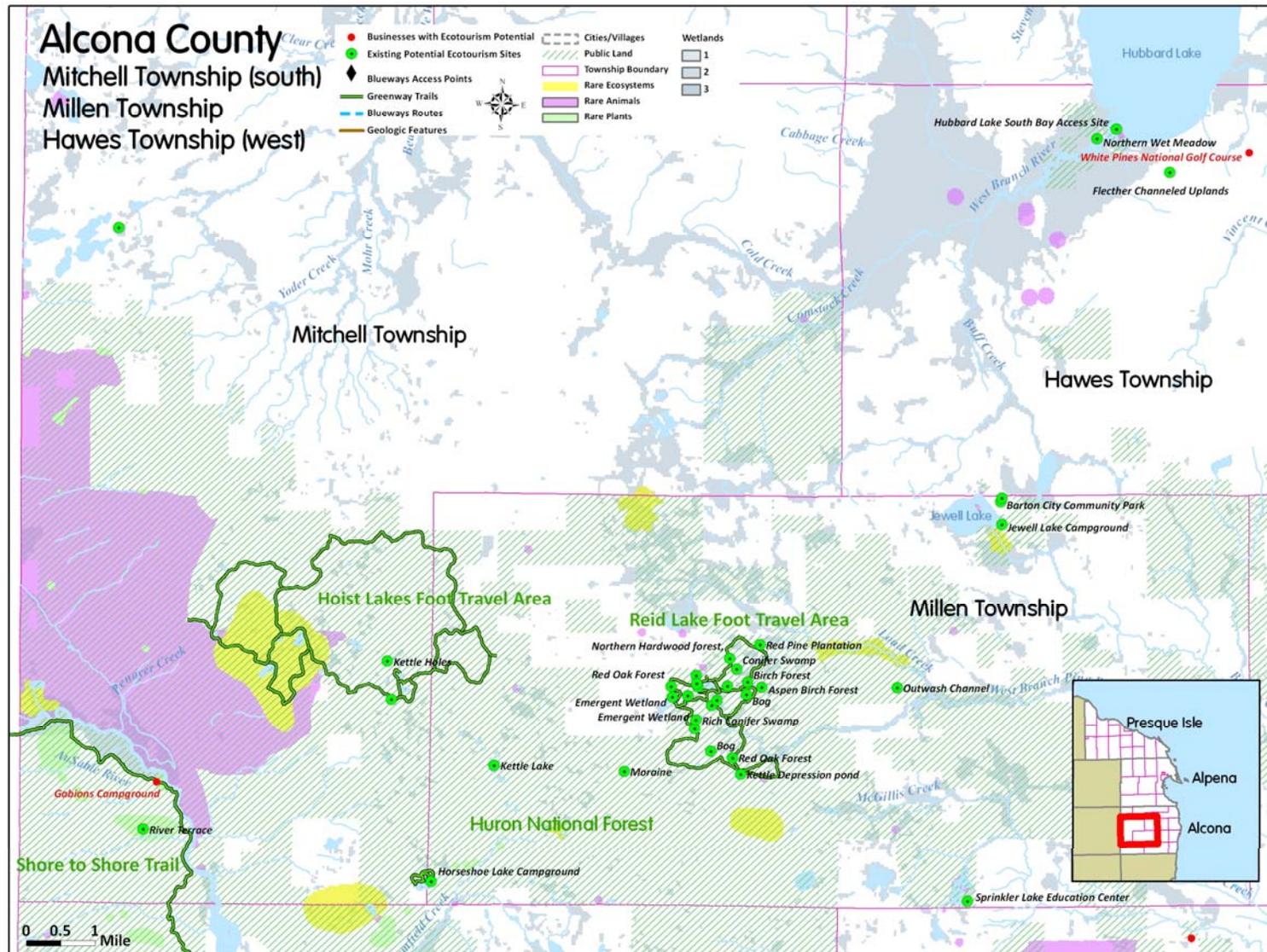
Alcona Township, Haynes Township, & Hawes Township (east): Alcona Township contains areas of rare plants and animals as well as a rare ecosystem along Lake Huron. In addition, the Huron National Forest is present in the eastern portion of the township. The Lincoln kame field extends across Alcona and Hawes Townships while Haynes Township contains old lake shorelines. Hubbard Lake and the many creeks and rivers make riparian ecotourism a significant possibility.



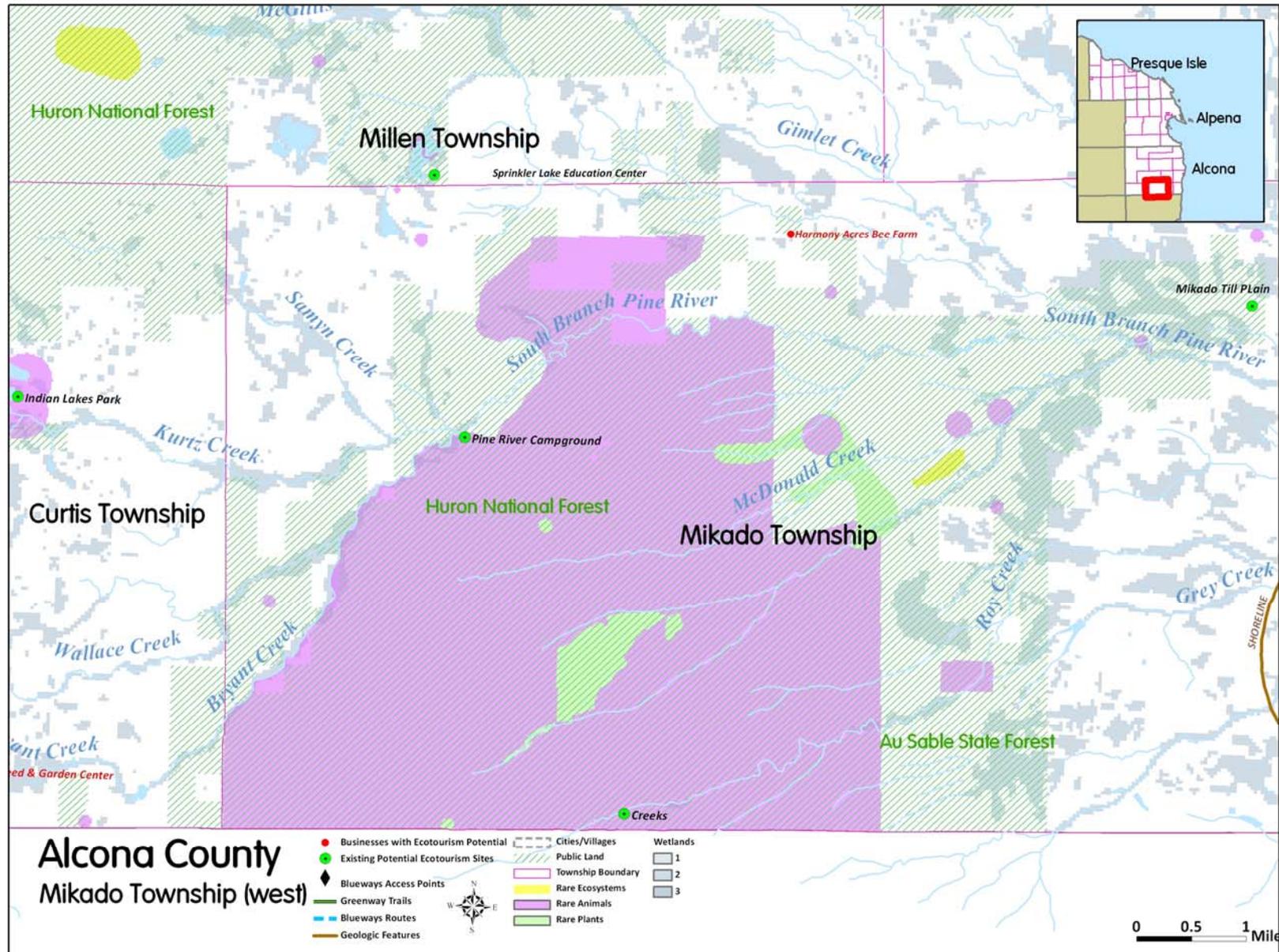
Harrisville Township and Gustin Township: The presence of the Huron National Forest in Gustin Township provides ecotourism possibilities. Harrisville Township's old shoreline ridges combined with numerous historic sites and Harrisville State Park provide numerous opportunities for ecotourism business development.



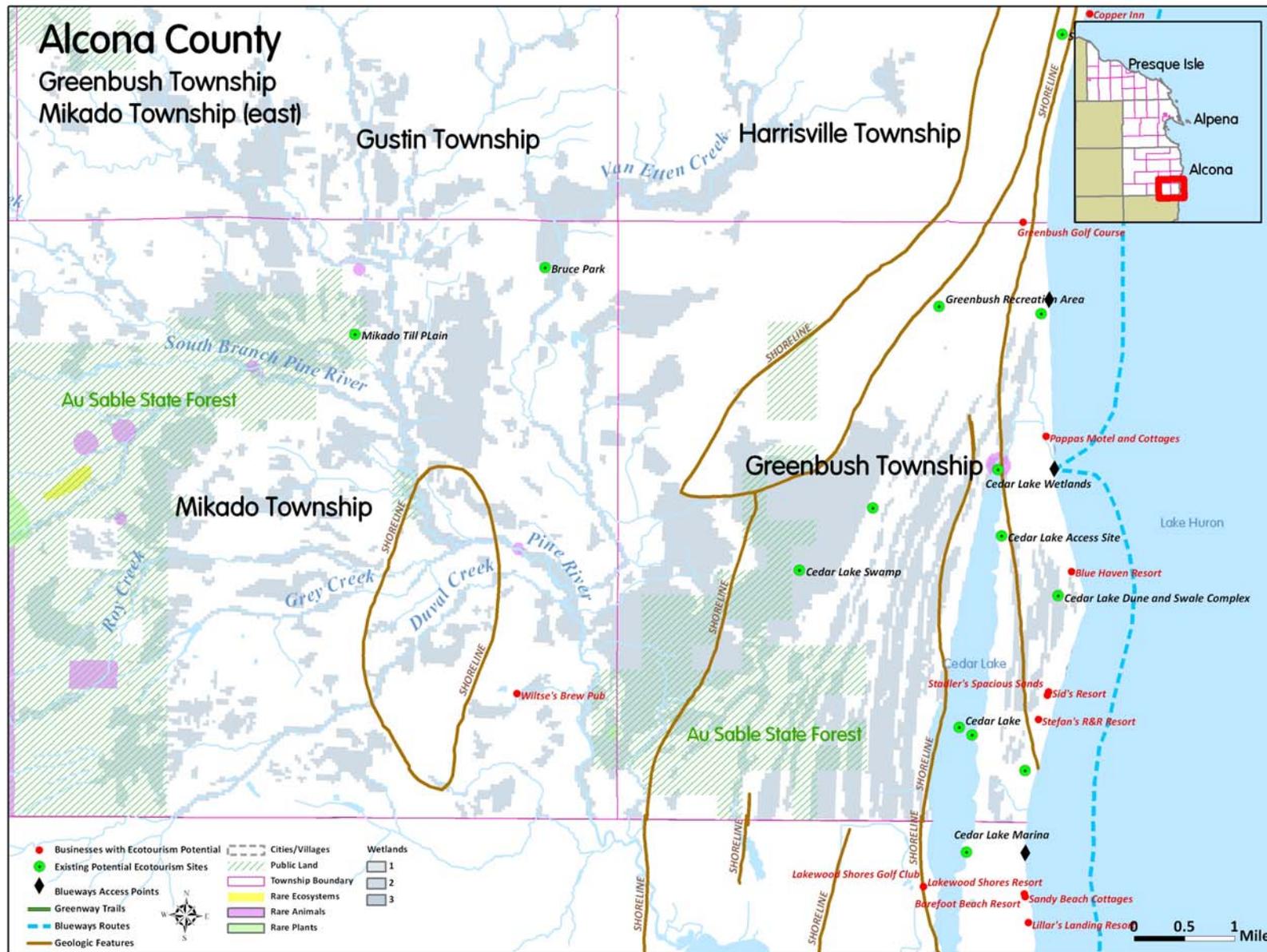
Mitchell Township (south), Hawes Township (west) and Millen Township: Mitchell Township contains extensive areas of rare animals and rare ecosystems within the Huron National Forest. These rare ecosystems also appear in Millen Township. Three significant trail systems in the Huron National Forest also make this area a prime ecotourism region. The Hoist Lakes Foot Travel Area provides access to kettle holes while the Reid Lake Foot Travel Area provides examples of northern hardwood forests, red pine plantations, conifer swamps, aspen birch forests, emergent wetlands, red oak forests, kettle lakes, bogs, outwash channels, and moraines. Additionally, the Au Sable River and Shore to Shore Trail (a hiking/horse trail which connects Lake Huron to Lake Michigan) provides more opportunities for ecotourism development.



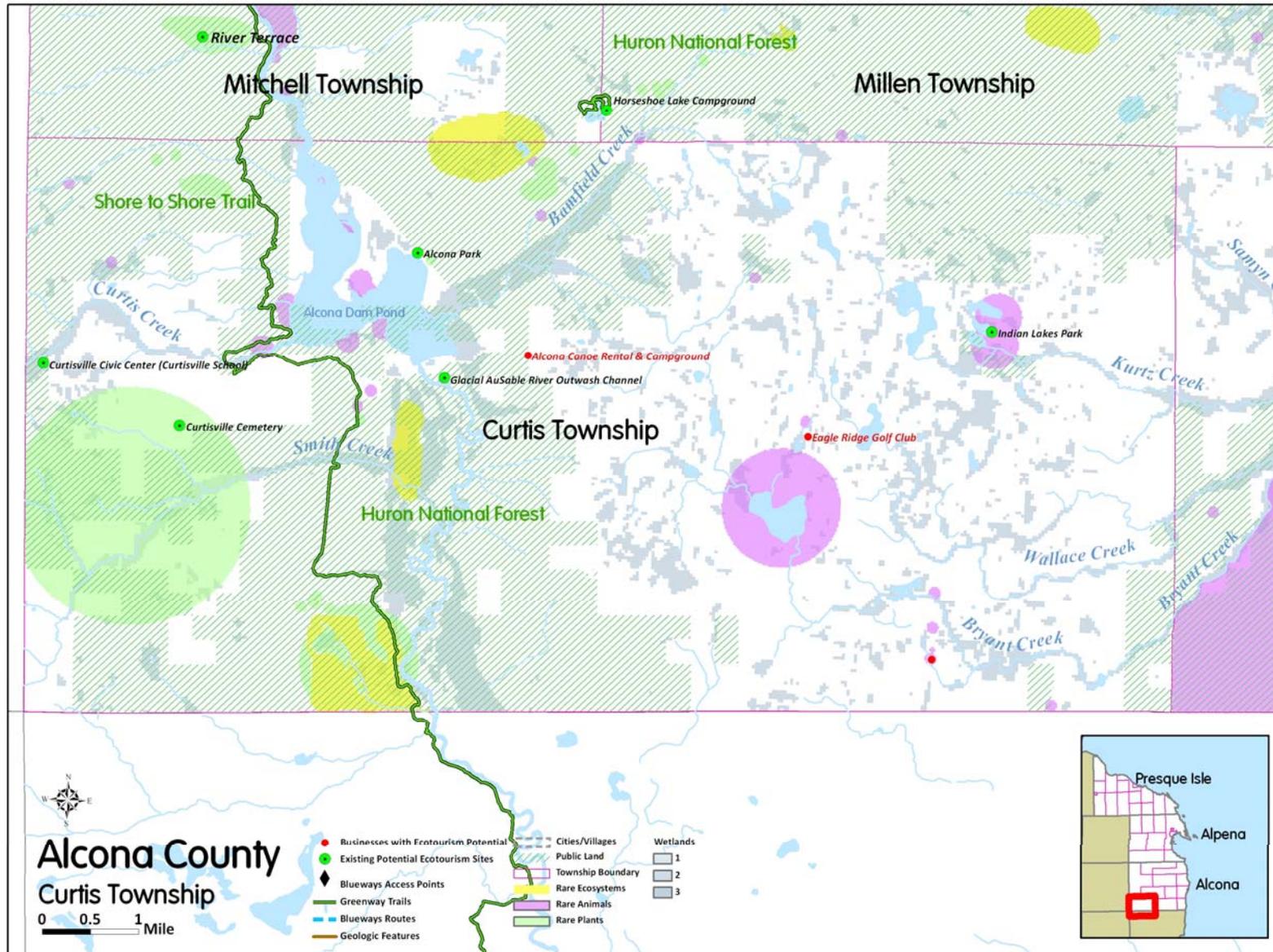
Mikado Township (west): The western portion of Mikado Township is nearly covered with areas of rare animals in the Huron National Forest. Smaller pockets of rare plants and a rare ecosystem also occur in this area. Ecotourism development appears significant along the prevalent riparian systems in this township.



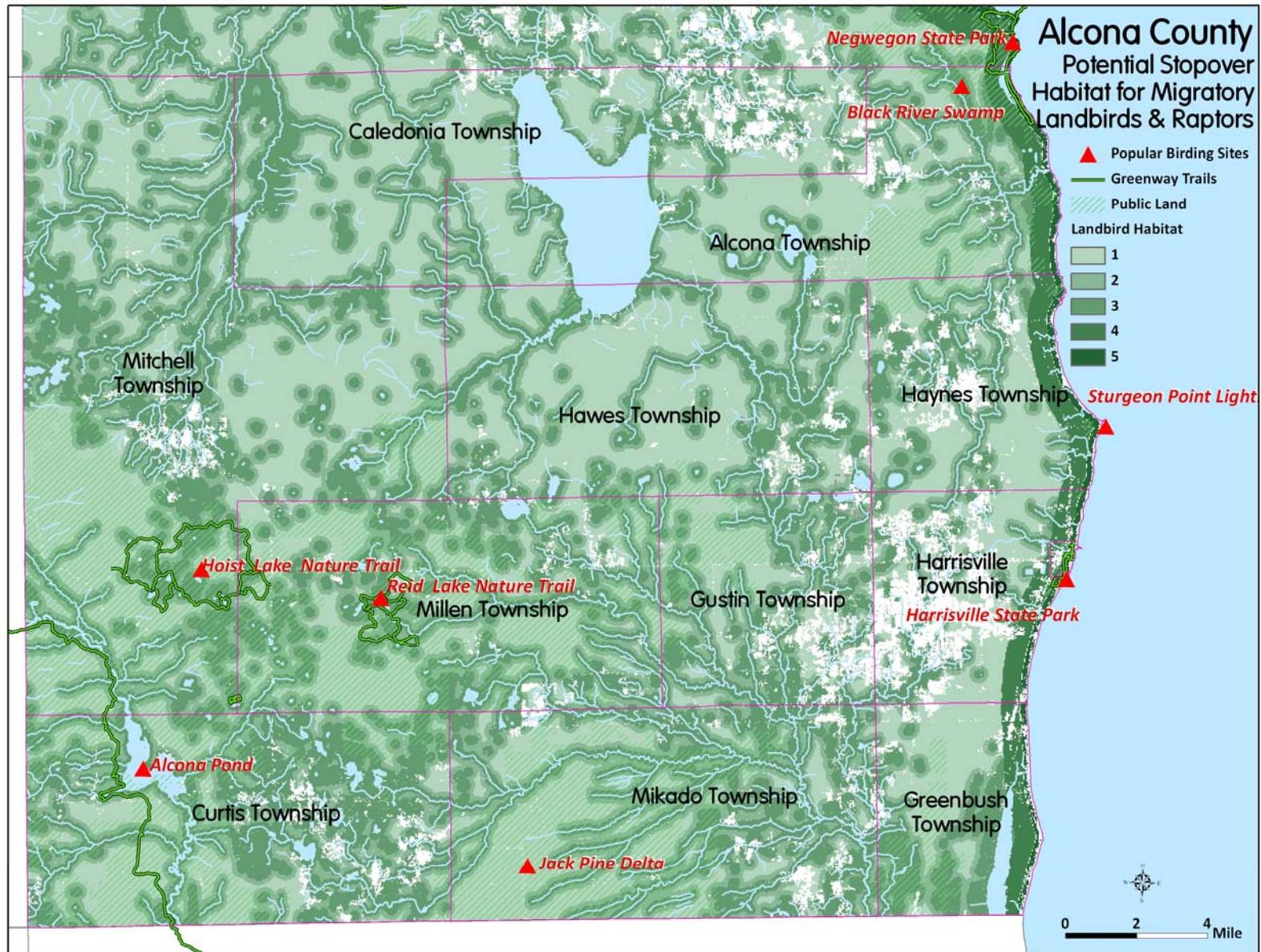
Mikado Township (east) and Greenbush Township: Old shoreline ridges are prevalent throughout this area. In addition, the Au Sable State Forest makes these ridges accessible. This area is populated by numerous resorts and cottages along Lake Huron and Cedar Lake which provides many opportunities for ecotours to be developed at existing businesses.

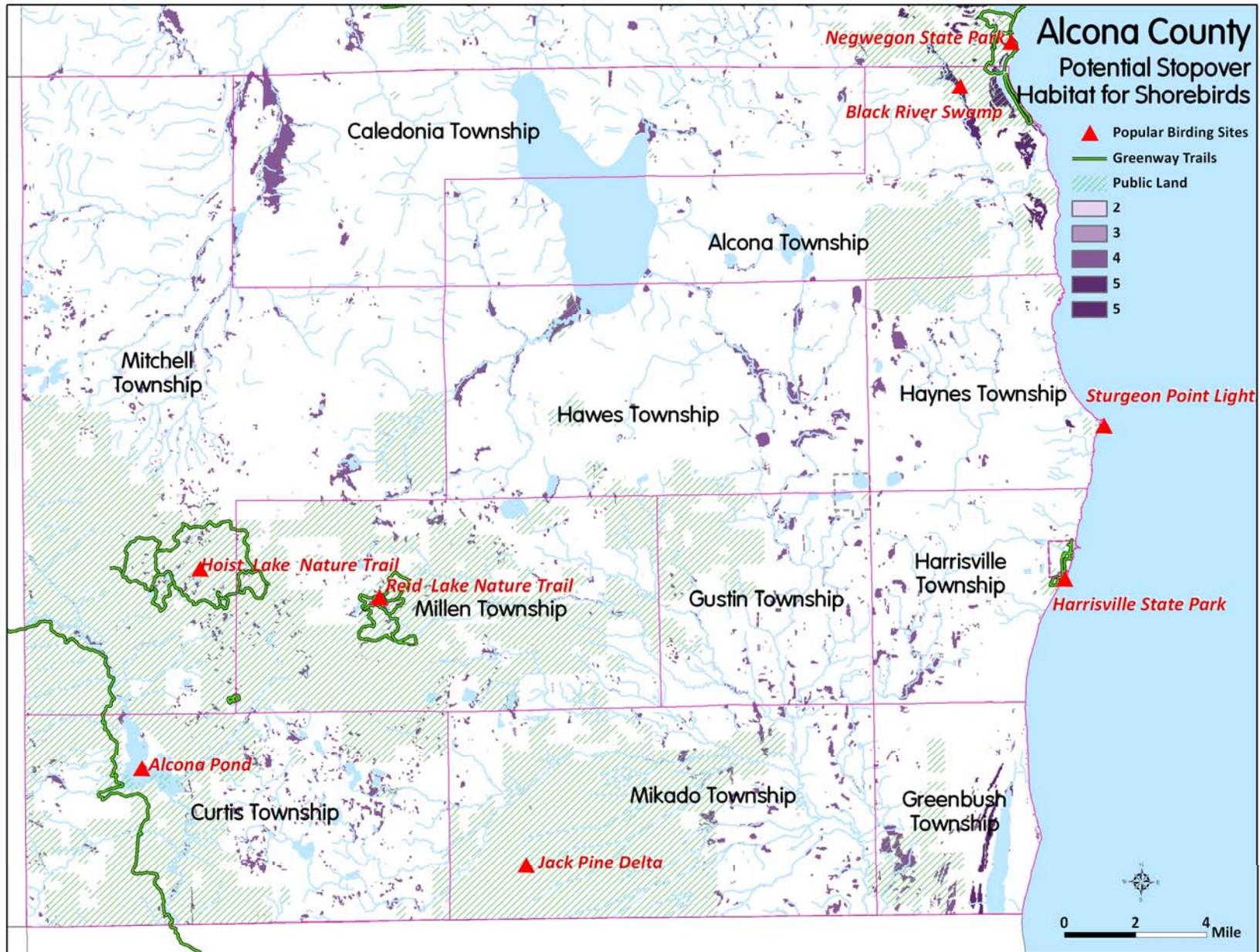


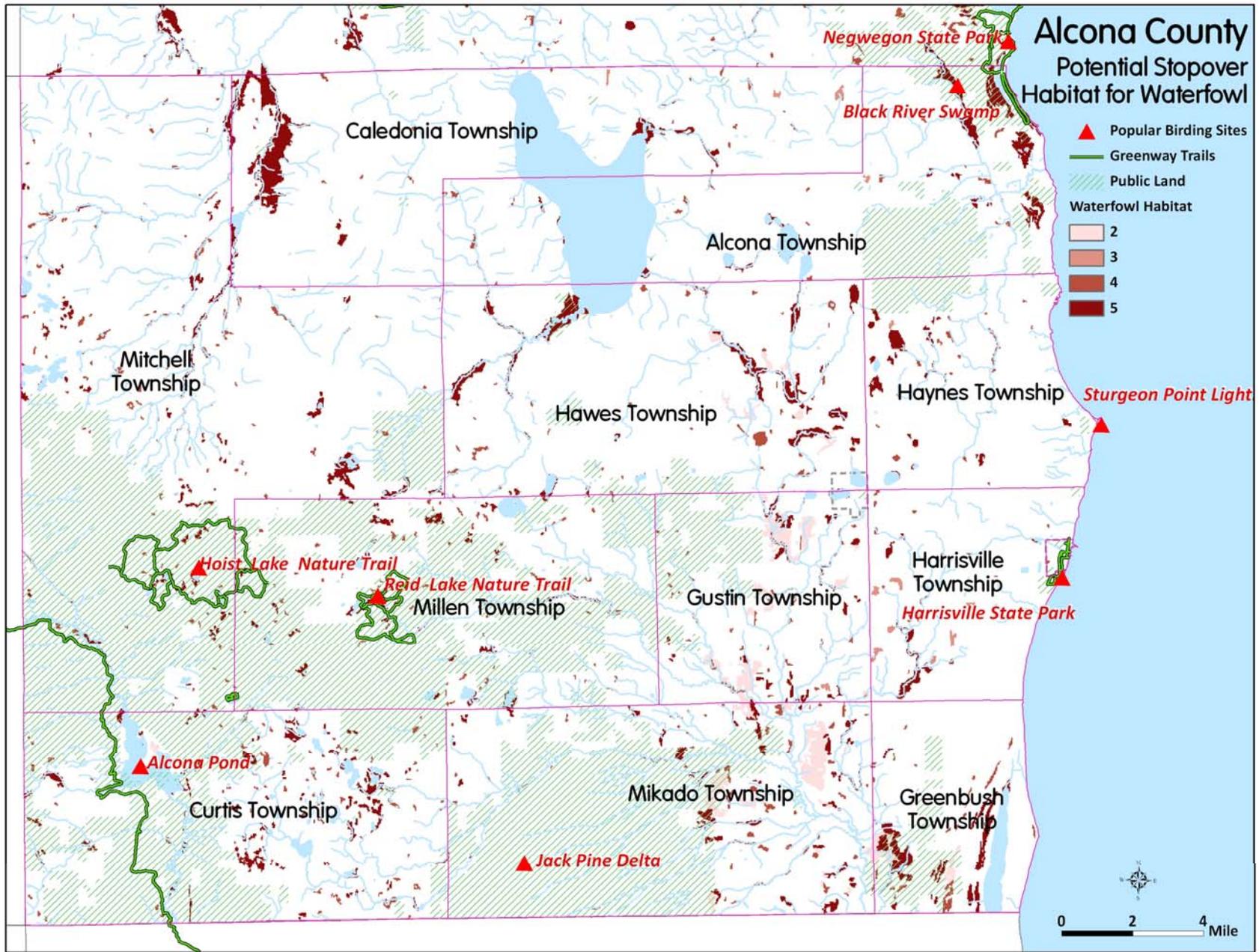
Curtis Township: Curtis Township contains a wide variety of resources which lend themselves to ecotourism development. The Huron National Forest covers the majority of the western half of the township and includes areas of rare plants and rare ecosystems in addition to the Au Sable River and Shore to Shore Trail – a hiking/horse trail which connects Lake Huron to Lake Michigan.



Birding Opportunities: The following three maps show the birding opportunities in Alcona County. The maps depict habitat for land birds, shore birds, and waterfowl. The habitat values were generated as part of the Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment project (higher numbers indicate higher valued habitat). The specific birding sites were mapped by the Thunder Bay Audubon Society and the Au Sable Audubon Society.







Recommendations for Community-Based Ecotourism

If a successful ecotourism program is to be implemented on the Sunrise Coast, it is necessary to first create the conditions for ecotourism including:

- Working relationships with conservation agencies and community stakeholders
- Local support
- Development of facilities
- Effective signage
- Tours/Packages
- Certification program
- Recognizable brand
- Promotion and marketing

Following are excerpts from *Tourism Queensland* addressing the need for local participation in ecotourism, marketing and promotion, and training.

- (1) Local participation and partnerships are essential in ecotourism development: *“For tourism to produce a positive social cost-benefit ratio, a large proportion of local people must benefit from the influx of tourists, rather than merely bear the burden of its costs. Local participation in ecotourism development needs to be a strategy of conservation organizations to provide the opportunity to integrate conservation with economic development.*
- (2) Marketing and promotions are essential in attracting tourists. *“Those community-based ecotourism projects that have been less than successful are predominately the result of not attracting a sufficient number or quality of visitors. A lack of tourism knowledge among local communities and supporting agencies often leads to common mistakes. This often includes overlooking the supply side such that marketing and promotions or partnerships with the private sector are neglected, or the supply driven approach is often misunderstood.”*

- (3) Ecotourism training is a necessity for a successful ecotourism program. *“A permanent training strategy targeting specific and immediate training needs will be required. Furthermore, while ecotourism is developing, attention can be given more to communities and how they can begin start-up businesses. Local individuals or communities selling products or running their own businesses can take the following form:*

- Local individuals selling produce and handicrafts to visitors directly or through tourism businesses or the ecolodge, is often an effective small-scale way of spreading benefits within a community
- Individuals, with links to the broader community, run small tourism businesses, with success dependent on level of skills and tourism knowledge (important consideration in the training phase)
- Communally owned and run enterprises - which can suffer from lack of access, skills, organization, and incentive can be overcome by support from various sources over time. Another important component will be to form a close working relationship with specialist tour operators. A dominant factor in the limited success of community-based tourism ventures is the inability of communities to market and promote themselves to adequately meet the ever increasing, sophisticated tourism market. The use of a tour operator to promote, organize, and facilitate tourists to these community-based tourism ventures is often overlooked, however, it can greatly reduce the risk. The operator's knowledge of products and consumers, their experience with operations management, their connections and strong networks with outbound tour operators, their understanding of the tourism system and its linkages, and their established marketing and

promotion networks gives them a significant advantage over communities trying to do it themselves. Other considerations include ensuring that products developed are based on the community's traditional knowledge, values and skills rather than trying to create a supply link that does not exist, as well as the community deciding which aspects of their cultural traditions they wish to share with visitors.

Business Support

A business support network is critical to the success of new and expanding ecotourism businesses. In addition to local tourist associations and chambers of commerce, Michigan Sea Grant has established a website titled "Discover Northeast Michigan: Coastal Tourism Resources for Your Business".¹ The site serves to provide resources that enhance sustainable, interpretive coastal tourism development, foster partnerships with resource managers and leaders, and supply marketing materials, tips, and information. In addition, the website highlights best practices for coastal tourism business development.

A 2011 report from Michigan Sea Grant recommends five overall strategies to assist business operators in reaching their goals of sustainable coastal tourism²:

- Collaborate
- Cross-promote
- Understand natural resource significance
- Educate and interpret
- Empower community

Best Practices from Tourism Queensland³

In addition to the best practices available on the Discover Northeast Michigan site,

following is a summary of best practices published by *Tourism Queensland* to use as a quick resource guide.

Interpretation

A key to successful ecotourism is to provide visitors with information, guiding service, educational experience, and entertainment service. Interpretation improves the tourism product by creating visitor experiences that cannot be duplicated anywhere else. Interpretation is enhanced by pre-visit information, orientation upon arrival that confirms the decision to visit was a wise choice, opportunities to experience and learn, and opportunities to acquire mementos to ensure positive recollection of experiences. Interpretation needs to be assessed regularly. Following are bulletpoints of findings from case studies done in Australia:

- Focus on strengths (what natural or cultural product you have that others don't)
- Plan all stages before beginning
- Know your target audience
- Visitor safety and resource conservation are crucial
- Interpretation should be fun, encourage involvement, stimulate the senses, and pose a challenge.
- Plan all activities to reflect a strong theme
- Choose media that involves and engages the senses
- Face to face interpretation is the most effective
- Use caution with technology. Can you afford and maintain it?
- Collaborate with experts. Ask for input.
- Interactive displays must be meaningful and related to the display
- Use appropriate materials for the site and the purpose
- Train staff
- Be creative but be accurate and truthful in the interpretation.

¹<http://www.miseagrant.umich.edu/discovernemi/>

² *Coastal Tourism Development in Northeast Michigan*

³ *Tourism Queensland*

Guiding

Best practice guiding provides the critical link between the community and the environment. It encourages visitors to interact and learn about the environment that they are experiencing through skilled communication.

Research has shown that people are seeking guided experiences. Concentrating promotional activities more strongly on the unique coastal experiences that visitors will have on tours, rather than on specific sites they will see, increases the tour's appeal to visitors.

Types of guided activities:

- Theme walks – highly planned, predetermined stops.
- Special interest walks – focus on a specific aspect of the natural or cultural environment (birdwatching or geology tours). Need to have adequate knowledge. Connect what visitors are looking at with a story.
- Discovery (or Senses) walks – use all senses. Tour guide facilitates the process of discovery by providing clues and allowing visitors to find out the answers for themselves.
- Night walks – new perspective of the natural environment
- Heritage walks – focus on cultural sites such as historic buildings
- Overnight tours – Take visitors to places they might not go to.
- Vehicle tours – experience a number of attractions in a short time span.
- Time your tour correctly:
 - Guided tour – 30 min to 1 hr*
 - Birdwatching – 45 min to 1 hr*
 - Guided walk – 1-2 hrs*
 - Cycle tour – 1-2 hrs*
 - Canoe trip – 90 min – 2 hrs*
 - Overnight walks – 1-2 nights*

Key points: Plan and prepare; make the introduction interesting and explain to visitors what they can expect, plan regular

stops, be flexible, choose a simple theme, tell stories, keep it interesting, and involve the audience.

Signage

Signage encourages visitors to appreciate, be involved in, learn and understand the environment they are visiting. Who are Clients? Are signs the most appropriate way to communicate? What message? What are the basic sign elements? Are features naturally interesting? Can feature be used to explain a message? Can it be observed?

Visitor Information

Visitor information may be presented in a form of printed materials, verbal communication, the Internet, audio visual, or in combination.

Visitor Management

Use most appropriate methods to minimize environmental impacts, maximize visitor safety, and ensure ongoing monitoring.

Energy & Waste Management

Use the most energy efficient technology. Manage waste in the least environmental impact.

Product Management

Assuring the quality of the ecotourism product incorporates an understanding of customer expectations, maintenance of information flow, maintenance of customer satisfaction, and cooperative arrangements with people affected by the operation.

Safety/Risk Management

Ensure visitor safety is maximized. Consider having guides trained, standing procedures in place, checks on procedures, safety equipment adequate and checked, and staff trained. Have emergency procedures in place.

Brochures

Identify the target market. Ensure text communicates the message. Use high quality graphics and photos. Have the brochures professionally printed and designed.

Business Plan Development

It is critical to develop an ecotourism business plan which includes:

- Overview of product, market, and company
- Analysis of market and finances
- Objectives – goals and directions linked to performance targets and market
- Strategies – marketing, production and financial
- Implementation and Monitoring

Working with Communities⁴

Practical examples of everyday activities that build win - win partnerships with local communities include:

Supporting the Local Community

- Purchase locally whenever possible - food, fuel, equipment, souvenirs and services.
- Employ local residents.
- Host community functions.
- Sponsor local events, sporting teams, etc.
- Sponsor local charities or community based organizations.
- Support community group through the provision of clerical and business service support.

Educational Partnerships

- Provide work experience opportunities for local residents.
- Make specialist equipment or staff expertise available to local groups.
- Speak at local functions.
- Hold 'open days' for the community.

- Provide opportunities for local groups to participate in 'familiarization' tours.
- Participate in cooperative research. Make contributions either financially or in-kind.

Responsible Product Development and Marketing

- Incorporate opportunities for tourists to support local businesses, events or organizations into your products.
- Provide a positive profile of the local community in your interpretive programs and promotional materials.
- Provide locals with regular information updates on your business, photo opportunities and media opportunities.

Best Practice

- Lobby for things that will benefit the local community as well as the local tourism industry.
- Use environmentally friendly products or systems to conserve precious local resources.
- Educate your clients on how they can also conserve local resources.
- Incorporate interpretive material on tourism industry 'best practice' to encourage visitors to make informed decisions and to purchase accredited tourism products.
- Mentoring new entrants to the local tourism industry.

Collaboration and Communication

- Undertake direct consultation with the community, especially during planning stages of your operation if possible.
- Cooperate with local public land /facilities managers in upgrading visitor facilities used by your clients and the broader community.
- Work with your neighbors (adjoining property landholders) and encourage them to adopt and extend your conservation initiatives on their own properties.
- Provide information on the results of your monitoring systems to other operators and public land /facilities managers.

⁴ Tourism Queensland

- If your business refers to an advisory board, ensure the local community is represented.

Infrastructure

Provide maintenance of:

- Public toilets
- Visitor information centre
- Tourist information
- Maps
- Signage
- Public facilities on private land including walking paths, picnic facilities and toilet facilities

3 Marketing



Chapter 3

Marketing

Marketing Inventory

Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary Marketing: Current Strategies

Pure Michigan Campaign

Partners in the 2009/2010 Alpena Pure Michigan campaign included the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary (TBNMS), Alpena Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Michigan Historical Center, City of Alpena, Alpena County, and the Alpena Downtown Development Authority. After the summer 2009 campaign, the following statistics were noted:

- CVB internet, phone, *Michigan Travel Ideas* reader response and live operator referrals: up 50%
- TBNMS GLMHC Visitors: up 9%
- Old Presque Isle Lighthouse Visitors: up 17%
- New Presque Isle Lighthouse Visitors: up 15%
- In 2008, on www.michigan.org, Alpena ranked #359 most clicked on properties. In 2009, Alpena ranked #33.
- Click-throughs:
 - Alpena CVB: Up 615%
 - TBNMS: Up 301%

Website

TBNMS maintains a website at <http://thunderbay.noaa.gov/>. Links from this website provide information about the sanctuary, visitor information, research information, educational programs, and how to get involved in maritime heritage.

Facebook

TBNMS also maintains a Facebook page which provides up to date information on events and news.

Travel Articles

Following is a list of travel articles which have featured the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

April 2011

Detroit Free Press "Study Michigan's Civil War history at these spots" Alpena: Among the approximately 200 shipwrecks in the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary in Lake Huron are several with Civil War connections.

<http://www.freep.com/article/20110424/NEWS06/104240424/Study-Michigan-s-Civil-War-history-these-spots>

May 2011

Smithsonian.com "The Wonderful Wilderness of Michigan's Upper Peninsula" <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/The-Wonderful-Wilderness-of-Michigans-Upper-Peninsula.html?c=y&page=1>

May 2011

Discover Magazine
"Dig into the Past"

<http://discover.coverleaf.com/discovermagazine/201105/?pg=31&pm=1&u1=friend#pg31>

June 6, 2011

The Traveler's Journal

"Shipwreck Alley"

<http://www.travelersjournal.com/press2.php?ID=7613>

Summer 2011

Discover Northeast Michigan Magazine

"Heritage Center provides education and entertainment"

Summer 2011

Michigan Blue

"Gathered Treasures"

TBNMS is mentioned in article as a great place to visit for both divers and non-divers.

August 11, 2011

Detroit Free Press

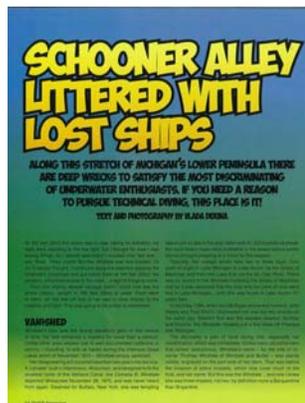
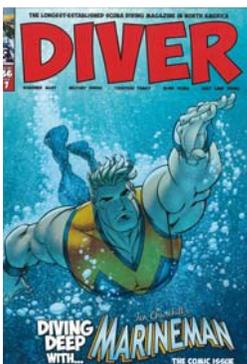
"Eric Sharp: Shipwrecks in Thunder Bay offer sanctuary for divers"

<http://www.freep.com/article/20110811/S-PORTS10/108110573/Eric-Sharp-Eric-Sharp-Shipwrecks-Thunder-Bay-offer-sanctuary-divers>

Fall 2011

Diver Magazine

"Schooner Alley Littered With Lost Ships"



August 18, 2011

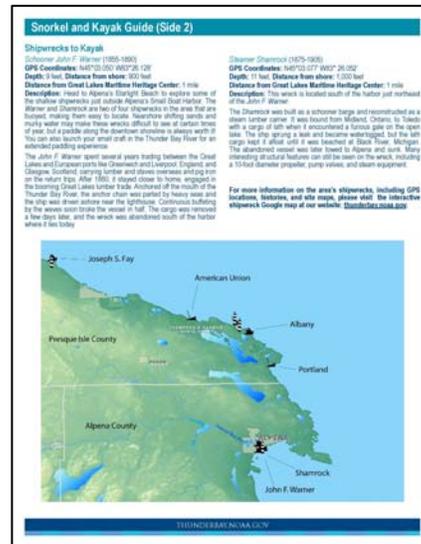
Detroit Free Press

"Ron Dzwonkowski: Sleeping Bear Dunes the most beautiful place in America?"

<http://www.freep.com/article/20110818/C-OL32/108180537/Ron-Dzwonkowski-Sleeping-Bear-Dunes-most-beautiful-place-America->

Snorkel and Kayak Guide

TBNMS provides a printed kayaking guide which provides information on the shipwrecks which are visible from a kayak. The information provided includes GPS coordinates depth, distance from shore, and a shipwreck description.



Rack Cards

TBNMS distributes rack cards to the Alpena County Airport where a display is located and to the Alpena CVB and other local businesses in Alpena, Alcona, and Presque Isle Counties (upon request). In addition, rack cards are distributed to MDOT visitor centers each year and are sent to outreach events throughout the state and Midwest such as:

- Quiet Water Symposium, Lansing, MI (1,425 attendees)

- Great Lakes Ghost Ships, Ann Arbor, MI (100 attendees)
- Great Lakes Shipwreck Festival, Milwaukee, WI (700 attendees)

Travel Shows

TBNMS teamed up with the Alpena CVB and other local businesses to man a booth at the Heartland Travel Showcase in February of 2011. Along with the booth at the Detroit based show (for motor coach tour operators) TBNMS hosted a "Fam" tour for operators - 30 tour operators attended the Fam Tour.

Print Ads & Signage

TBNMS maintains a billboard on US 23 northbound near Negwegon State Park. In addition, wayfinding signage in downtown Alpena features the Maritime Heritage Center. Lastly, print ads also advertise the sanctuary each year in northern Michigan publications.

Regional Marketing Current Strategies: Heritage Route 23/ Sunrise Coast

The US 23 Heritage Route program has been engaged in a collaborative effort to market the "Sunrise Coast" as a regional 6-county destination with US 23 as the pathway to access the coastal area. US 23 is designated as a recreational Heritage Route by the State of Michigan along the 200-mile length from Standish to Mackinaw City. The US 23 Heritage Route program consists of the following partners:

- Michigan Department of Transportation
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources



- Sunrise Coastal Coalition
- US Forest Service/River Road National Scenic Byway
- NEMCOG
- Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary
- Michigan Sea Grant
- Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe
- Local CVBs, DDAs and Chambers of Commerce in each of the 6 coastal counties.
- Representation from local governments along the route
- Representatives from private business and interested citizen groups
- Historical societies

The US 23 Heritage Route program has recognized the importance that travel and tourism has had on the region and focuses on its enhancement and the delivery of a strong voice in the marketplace. Following is a summary of the tourism promotional activities that have been engaged in by the US 23 Heritage Route Program in partnership with the Sunrise Coastal Coalition.

Pure Michigan Campaign: Sunrise Coast

The US 23 Management Council (the overseeing organization for the US 23 Heritage Route with NEMCOG as staff) has incorporated members of the "Sunrise Coastal Coalition" as part of the Council and has incorporated the Coastal Coalition as a marketing partner of the Heritage Route. The route and coast are on their way to being successfully branded through partnership with the Pure Michigan campaign and the diligent efforts of local communities to raise money to participate in this highly successful ad campaign. The Sunrise Coast program is currently in the second year with Travel Michigan's Pure Michigan campaign for the summer and fall seasons. The Sunrise Coast is a featured destination on Pure Michigan's website. Two "Sunrise Coast" radio ads were

produced in collaboration with the Pure Michigan campaign.

Logo and Brand Development

The “Sunrise Coast” brand was developed in conjunction with Travel Michigan for use in the Pure Michigan campaign. In addition, a logo was developed which unifies this “Sunrise Coast” brand with the US 23 road shield. The resulting logo has become a recognizable symbol for the Sunrise Coast region.



Heritage 23 Website

Funding was received from MDOT to develop a website which was completed in partnership with the Land Information Access Association (LIAA). This website provides a regional resource to the potential visitor to access information on over 1,200 public and private attractions along the coast. The website has had over 80,000 page views in just over one year.

Visitors are able to search the site based on either their local destination or by area of interest which are called “Active Adventures”, “Outdoor & Farm Fun”, “Arts, Culture, & History”, and “Eat, Shop, & Sleep”.

Users can view maps of all attractions within each category or choose subcategories to view maps of only one type of attraction. In addition, users can view attractions in specific geographic regions. Once they click on an attraction on the map, they are directed to a page for that attraction which gives them detailed information and photos (including icons showing activities available, seasonality and fees).

There is also a “plan your itinerary” feature where users can make multiple selections relating to what they want to do along the

coast and the site will search through the database to come up with all places that match those needs. For example, if a person is interested in bird watching, kayaking, and staying at Bed and Breakfasts, the site will return all attractions which have any of those activities listed. The visitor can then add those sites to a “shopping list” and print out their own itinerary. Maps are part of this site to give the visitor a geographic perspective of where the attractions are. A coastal events calendar is another popular feature.

The website features both publicly-owned and privately-owned attractions. All attractions on the site are tourism-related, and there is no charge to private businesses for appearing on the site. NEMCOG staff and volunteers from the coastal communities work together to keep the site updated and the events calendar current. The website is a truly unique method of presenting information for the tourist in a comprehensive, user-friendly, and detailed manner. The ability that it gives the tourists to design their own tours and itinerary maps is groundbreaking because of the scale in which it is accomplished.

Recently the US 23 program and website were selected for an "Innovation Award" for advancing the economic growth and sustainability of the nation's regions and communities." At the NADO conference in Miami, Fl, Innovation award winners from across the country competed for the top prize in the nation from NADO, the prestigious “Trailblazer Award” which was awarded to a project which demonstrated unique partnerships, creative thinking, and strategic leveraging of resources to deliver results. At the conference, the US 23 Heritage Route program was selected to receive the national “Trailblazer Award” for 2011.

US 23 Brochures

In 2010, brochures were created for each county highlighting the recreational attractions along the route. The brochures are coordinated in design and have the look of a unified tourist destination. NEMCOG designed the brochures and worked with each county to put together funding for a joint printing. 15,000 brochures were printed per county and are available at Michigan Welcome Centers, online at www.heritage23.org, and at local tourism



information locations.

Facebook

The Heritage Route has two presences on Facebook. The travel/tourism side of 23 is represented by the Facebook page of Michigan's Sunrise Coast. The Sunrise Coast regularly posts events, comments and photos up and down the route. A separate Facebook presence is also maintained by US 23 from a Management perspective. On that Facebook page, members of the US 23 Management Council & County Teams can participate in discussion boards about various issues up and down the coast as well as keep up with the progress that other county teams are making.

Print Publications

Other print publications for the Heritage Route have been created and are available to the public including a Harrisville Heritage Route Bike Trail Map, Alcona County Quilt Trail Map, Sunrise Trail Map, and Alcona County Bike Route Maps. The route recently

received grant funding from the National Scenic Byways program to develop additional interpretive maps and a guidebook of the coastal area.

Telling the Story of the Sunrise Coast

The Heritage Route Teams are currently working on a project in conjunction with the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary to "tell the stories of the Sunrise Coast". The final product will be a mile by mile web travel guide for the traveler along the coast which will detail the historical/cultural stories as well as the natural features that abound in coastal northeastern Michigan. In addition, travelers will be provided with a mile by mile account of nearby amenities. The proposed video documentary project includes the creation of mini-documentary stories which will be scripted depicting interesting history, cultural features, natural features, and legends/lore. Travelers will be able to click on a segment of US 23 and read the written stories available for that segment, view photos, listen to an audio segment or watch a video then develop and print out their own itinerary. GPS coordinates of each mile segment will also be available for download in order to assist the traveler in locating the actual site of the stories, photos, and videos. In addition, on the website travelers will be given an opportunity to post their own stories of their adventures along the Sunrise Coast. The stories will also be available to the traveler in route through the use of QR Codes at each point of interest that has an associated story. The QR code will be available on print materials as well. In addition, a US 23 app for mobile devices is in progress. All of these interpretive resources will help to enhance the information available for ecotours.

Basis for Marketing to Travelers on the Heritage Route (Scenic Byways)

According to the report, *National Scenic Byways: Image and Advertising Position*

Research Findings (Strategic Marketing and Research Inc., 2001), most respondents to the researcher's survey favored taking the most interesting travel route as opposed to the quickest one. 53% of respondents claimed that they take a driving tour every once in awhile; 33% said they never took a driving tour; and 14% said they often took a driving tour. The study also found that people enjoy scenic byway travel by taking an historic or scenic drive after they have arrived at a destination. This approach to traveling scenic byways can be easily promoted at specific destinations, where travelers can also be informed about this option. The findings suggest that the economic potential for scenic byways is quite significant.

Travel Segments

According to the National Scenic Byways study, history buffs represent the largest segment (20%) of those respondents interested in byways. This segment is interested in historic sites, museums and culture, archeological sites, and educational attractions and activities. They enjoy nostalgia, scenic beauty, local flavor, and memorable attractions. History buffs use a greater number of media sources than the average traveler, including magazine articles, newspaper ads, newspaper articles, brochures, toll-free numbers, billboards, travel clubs, and magazine ads. History buffs are 51 years of age vs. 47 years of age for the average traveler. History buffs are more likely to be retired—28% vs. 18% among travelers overall.

Outdoor enthusiasts have a high level of participation in outdoor recreation including water and beach activities, scenic beauty, and adventure. Activities for children are more important to this segment. Three-fourths of outdoor enthusiasts in the National Byways study favored the most interesting route when traveling. They had a similar tendency to

take a scenic or historic drive once at a destination. Outdoor enthusiasts take more overnight leisure trips per year than do typical travelers; however, their trips tend to be shorter. Outdoor enthusiasts are likely to gather travel information through television (36%), the Internet (47%), and magazine ads (30%). However, a large share of outdoor enthusiasts also said they gather travel information through toll-free numbers (43%), magazine articles (39%), brochures, and newspaper articles and travel clubs (39% combined).

Outdoor enthusiasts are more likely to have children living at home. 54% live with children under 18 years of age. This segment is more diverse in education level, as fewer have some college education or are college graduates and more have high school or post-graduate degrees than those in the other traveler segments. Outdoor enthusiasts are younger (fewer retirees) and earn substantially higher incomes. Outdoor enthusiasts prefer activities such as backpacking and water sports.¹

Marketing Guidelines

The following marketing recommendations include best practices which have been developed as part of the *Tourism Queensland* program. These marketing recommendations can be utilized by regional marketing efforts (i.e. Sunrise Coast), marketing efforts focused on a specific attraction (i.e. Maritime Heritage Trail), or marketing efforts by individual or a collaboration of private entities.

Niche Marketing²

Positioning, not mass marketing, is an effective approach in ecotourism

¹ *A Feasibility Study for the Golden Isles Parkway: Selected GREDC Counties, 2003*

² *Alexandre Noel. (2005) Marketing of Eco-Tourism Products*.

marketing. The basic idea of positioning is that the eco-product occupies a place in the mind of the people in your target market. Noel states: "Marketing and positioning is therefore strongly based on market segmentation and target marketing. Market segmentation is the process that identifies which segments of the market to target. Market segments usually are *demographic* (age, family status), *socioeconomic status* (occupation, income levels, education), *purpose of visits, geographic* and *life style* (activities, interests, opinions such as escapers, renewal seekers). Most targeting will combine several segments. However, tourism businesses and communities often make the mistake of attempting to be all things to all people. It is difficult, and risky, to develop marketing strategies for the mass market. Strategies designed for the "average" customer often results in unappealing products, prices, and promotional messages. It is therefore often wiser to target smaller segments that are presently not being served or served inadequately, than to go after larger segments for which there is a great deal of competition."

Branding

A brand creates in the mind of customers and prospects the perception that there is no product or service on the market that is quite the same. Most of the time, in the case of tourism, branding is used by destinations in order to create a brand image and compete with the others destinations (brands). In tourism, while factors such as cost of travel, convenience, and quality of facilities are important, a strong motivator is "image". The Sunrise Coast brand has been effectively utilized by the coastal communities in Northeast Michigan as an overall brand which ties the region to its main natural feature. While many communities have their own unique identity and brand, it is important that they

all tie into the Sunrise Coast in some way. In addition, private businesses should position their business by tying into the Sunrise Coast brand.

Packaging³

There are three types of packaging:

1. Packaging your own product
2. Packaging with other compatible product in your region – also known as bundling. This method is used to create a more complete experience package that will attract and keep your customers in the region for longer.
3. Packaging through your distribution partners - when one of your distributors such as a wholesaler chooses to package your product with other operators aimed at the same target market.

Place³

Distributing the product can be done in the following ways:

- Regional tourism brochures or travel planners
- Visitor information centers (MDOT Welcome Centers, local CVBs)
- Pure Michigan
- Direct to Consumer
- Online
- Cooperative marketing
- Travel agents

Traditional systems have changed to meet emerging consumer trends in how vacations are planned and booked. Consumers may:

- Research, plan and book online
- Research, plan and book through a shop-front travel agent
- Research and plan online and then book through a shop-front travel agent
- Research and plan online then book direct

³ Tourism Queensland: Big Marketing Guide

- any combination of the above

Advertising⁴

Advertising is a powerful means of communicating a message and builds brand presence and familiarity in the marketplace. Before advertising, it is important to be clear about:

- who you want to target
- what you need to say
- the way you're going to say it

Consider using a combination of Above and Below the Line advertising methods. Above the Line (ATL) advertising uses conventional means to reach the audience, e.g. TV, radio, newspapers and magazines, internet and billboards/transit, while Below the Line (BTL) activities may include direct mail, email, public relations and sales promotions.

Cooperative Advertising

Advertising with partners can be advantageous by spreading the costs such as was done by the Alpena Pure Michigan campaign and the Sunrise Coast Pure Michigan campaign.

Brochures

Besides engaging in the production of brochures, take the opportunity to advertise in other travel and tourism brochures. Considerations include:

- How many are being printed
- How they are being distributed
- Is there a theme to the brochure and what types of other products are involved

When creating brochures include:

- all package details
- prices
- booking conditions
- contact details, including website

- validity dates of the brochure
- maps
- high quality images of product,
- unique aspects about product and a regional context

Traditional Advertising

Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and billboards are the traditional mass media for advertising.

- Keep the message simple and brief for billboard and transit advertising
- Let pictures tell the story – use no more than 5 to 8 words plus the call to action, i.e. either a website address or telephone number.
- For newspapers and magazines - buy space on the odd pages i.e. 3, 5, 7, etc. - these are the first pages readers see when they turn the page.
- For radio and TV consider working with a media buyer on a schedule with a mix of 15-second and 30-seconds ads to give more coverage.
- Where possible, schedule advertising in the time and with the programs target audiences watch and listen to.
- Print publications often offer discount rates on distressed space, i.e. advertising space that hasn't sold close to the print deadline.

Advertising with Pure Michigan

Travel Michigan recommends the three-tiered approach to marketing. See Chapter 1 for information on Pure Michigan markets and Prizm™ clusters.

1. Protection of existing visitor markets.: Marketing activity needs to be continued through coordinated and effective campaigns that provide a distinct Sunrise Coast message.
2. Identify and target the “preferred visitor”. Preferred visitors are a select group of market segments that, through their pattern of expenditure, collectively provide economic benefits beyond their number. Economic benefits include increased visitor

⁴ *Tourism Queensland: Big Marketing Guide*

expenditure across all Sunrise Coast destinations. By specifically targeting the “preferred visitor”, the Sunrise Coast will increase its ability to maintain and grow the benefits of tourism across the region. A strategy will be implemented to identify source markets and market segments with the highest potential to increase visitor expenditure. A detailed picture must be developed which delivers the characteristics, expectations and demands of preferred visitors.

3. Develop tourism product that aligns with the “preferred visitors” desired experiences. Prepare marketing strategies built on the outcomes of the preferred visitor research.

Pure Michigan Partnership Programs

Travel Michigan offers advertising packages for both in-state and out-of-state markets. The Pure Michigan program is a dollar for dollar matching fund program. The Instate marketing program is intended to keep Michigan residents instate, extend stays and further promote destinations by leveraging Travel Michigan and industry marketing dollars. The program’s key awareness target markets are Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Flint, Saginaw/Bay City, Battle Creek/Kalamazoo, and Traverse City.

The out-of-state marketing program extends the limited marketing reach of the Michigan travel industry to key awareness target markets in Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Dayton, Columbus, St. Louis, and southern Ontario. Feeder markets are Toledo, Green Bay/Appleton, South Bend, and Fort Wayne.

Based on a financial commitment from Travel Michigan and potential partners, a specific strategic promotional campaign is jointly created utilizing television, radio, digital and print advertising, website and online promotion, public relations, and social media efforts. Specifically, Travel

Michigan offers a Pay-per-Click partnership program, advertising opportunities in *Michigan Travel Ideas*, an eNewsletter campaign, monthly eSpecials, fall color updates eMail campaign, social media campaigns, public relations, website listings, and Michigan Welcome Center opportunities.

Media Releases⁵

Getting the message to consumers through the media often requires sending a media release to travel and tourism journalists.

- Get to know travel writers and the travel press and build a rapport with them.
- Only issue media releases when there is important news to tell about the product. There must be a point or hook to the release, e.g. a new tour, major upgrades, received an award.
- Start with the facts of who, what, when and where, then explain the how and why later in the release.
- Stick to the facts – short, sharp and truthful.
- Put the main information in the top few paragraphs – one sentence per paragraph.
- Don’t ask to see what a journalist’s article says before it is printed.
- Consider including the media release in the body of the email rather than as an attachment.
- Before quoting someone, introduce the person in the paragraph prior and end the first quote with the name of the speaker.
- Keep quotes brief and to the point. Make it easy for journalists to get the facts.

Familiarizations (FAM)⁵

FAMs enable trade and media contacts and partners to experience the product first -

⁵ *Tourism Queensland: Big Marketing Guide*

hand. Below are some general tips for managing FAMs.

- For media FAM, do research on the publication and what each is looking for, i.e. what is their story angle, story style, areas of interest
- Plan an interesting and relevant itinerary
- Pre-prepare the information they'll need and give a small memento to remember you by
- Allow time for interviews and filming/photography
- Allow time to fully experience the product,
- The best stories highlight authentic and unique experiences.
- Be a good host. Greet FAM guests and treat them as VIPs during their stay.
- Take the time to show them the product.
- Be on time and well organized with scheduling.
- Cater to their individual needs.
- Check on how they are doing throughout their visit.
- Don't pack too much in to the day – let them take time to enjoy the best of your experience.
- Get their contact details.
- Don't offer them anything you wouldn't give a regular guest.
- Say good bye and follow up in a few days with a short note of thanks.

PR Kits⁶

Include brochures, business cards, media releases and CD or DVD of high-res images of the product and experiences. Give easy-to-pack promotional gifts that are either unique or everyday items branded with logo and contact details such as a toll-free number and website address.

Trade Shows⁶

Trade shows provide a cost effective way to reach “trade partners” all at one time.

These provide an opportunity for one-on-one discussion about the product.

Consumer Shows⁶

Consumer shows offer an opportunity to sell direct to your consumers. Different shows target different audiences. If you are an exhibitor:

- Select a site close to the action, close to the entry or centre of the exhibition or on the main isle of the venue
- Try to share costs and find a product that is complementary to your own and partner in an exhibit
- The stand needs to reflect your experience. Attract consumers with music or action footage or some other kind of interesting/captivating feature
- Have plenty of brochures and information materials on hand and consider giveaway coupons or vouchers as added enticement.

Direct Marketing⁶

For a personalized approach with consumers, use direct marketing options. These include telephone, mail out and email. Direct marketing is most likely to succeed when you keep on message, provide a good offer or deal and use a high quality and validated database. Direct mail response depends upon the quality of the mailing list and the quality of the direct mail piece. It is more probable to get very high responses from direct mail offers to previous guests, whereas a 2 to 5% response rate for direct mail is considered good if it is a cold prospect list.

- Create your own customer database or buy a contact list that is based on your target markets.
- Insert promotional brochures/vouchers and coupons in your local, regional or national newspapers and magazines or send direct to your mailing lists.

⁶ *Tourism Queensland: Big Marketing Guide*

- Mailings can be effective; companies offering this service can provide you with statistics on which locations will most likely match your target market.
- Consider advertising and offering coupons in local business directories.
- Use e-newsletters and subscriber notices to promote up-coming promotions.

Web Advertising

80% of consumers use the internet to research vacation options and it is the primary source for tourism information and booking transactions. It is critical to have a powerful online presence. Following is a summary of information gathered from the Tourism Queensland Tourism E-Kit⁷.

Website

80% of website users start their search on a search engine. Users want to be engaged in an online experience, want access to information that answers questions, and want to be able to plan their trip easily. To succeed online, you need to have a website that meets the needs of the demanding target market. Website needs to be fresh, easy to understand, provide timely information, and encourage contacts.

Some of the common features of quality tourism websites are:

- Large image headers with support calls to action (links to bookings, more info, etc)
- Good use of images combined with offers
- Use of video and testimonials
- Multiple ways of navigating
- Good balance and use of white space, not too cramped
- Distinct accent colors

Content Management System:

A content management system is a program that allows editing of a website's content and adding of pages without needing to know a programming language. It is a must-have for all tourism operators. Having a content management system saves money as there will be no need to pay a web developer to modify the content of the website. It will also add agility to the online business by allowing the addition of modules such as photo galleries, blogging, shopping cart etc. very easily to the website.

Domain Name

A meaningful domain name is needed and easily remembered. It is important to purchase similar domain names and have them redirected to the site. Also, ensure the web server is sufficiently large enough to host the site.

Images on the Web

Use images on the website to help potential ecotourism travelers imagine a vacation to the Sunrise Coast. Images provide the first impression. The messages the first visible images send should convey an enjoyable, positive experience. Images used on the website should set the scene, show the action (show people experiencing ecotourism in Northeast Michigan), and evoke emotion. Ensure a sufficient image resolution used on the website. Use two to six images per page.

Design

The website should appear high quality and professional. The design of the website gives the first impression.

Write Content for the Target Market

Use appropriate vocabulary for the target market. Give directions, have maps available, and link to transportation options. Showcase experiences on the

⁷ Tourism Queensland E-Marketing

website. RonCastle.com⁸ provides the following list of quality content necessary for a target audience:

- Calendar of events
- Maps
- Before/after experiences
- Photos from customers
- Blogs or forums
- Articles or new pages of interest
- Expert Q & A
- Product Reviews
- Short tips
- How-to guides
- Content that solves a problem
- Historical data
- Interviews
- Seasonal articles

Usability of Website

Ease of usability is necessary for survival of a website. Usability includes readability and accessibility. Use contrasting colors and break up text into short segments because users scan-read online text. Use a clean font style and size. Provide text alternatives such as large print, Braille, speech, symbols, or simple language. Provide ways to navigate and find content. Use techniques such as blogs, forums, or newsletters to engage the target audience.

- Blogs – diary online (a web-log). The blog owner can post daily entries and users can interact with the author.
- Forums – online discussion spaces.
- Newsletters – regularly communicate with the web audience.

Video

Video will make the website more entertaining for visitors and allows the showcasing of tourism products in an immersive way. Use high-quality commercial videos, but also provide for users to upload their own content. Use YouTube to host videos.

Customer Reviews

Research from the opinion research corporation indicates that 82% of consumers research online before they travel. 80% of those agree that online word of mouth posts influence their decision. The implication for the tourism operator is that all this user-generated content is being indexed by search engines.

TripAdvisor is the most visited online tourism community. It receives more than 1 million unique visitors every day. Accommodation, attractions, restaurants and resources (such as tour companies) can be listed on TripAdvisor at no charge. It is highly probable that a past customer has already written a review about a business without the business owner ever knowing it. If the review was negative and the owner hasn't acknowledged it and responded to it, it could impair the best marketing efforts. Tourism operators should monitor, manage and grow their online reviews. Managing and growing your online reputation will improve search engine visibility and therefore could positively affect sales.

Blogs

The main aim of a blog is to share thoughts with the rest of the world. Recent research revealed that 60% of people now turn to the Internet when they need to address problems and issues. Only 25% turn to traditional media and even less to libraries or other sources. Blogs are the biggest resource of user-generated content. Just like websites or customer reviews on TripAdvisor, they get indexed by search engines.

If people visit a blog and are interested in the content, they will subscribe to receive regular updates using the universal feed icon. A feed simply is a list of recent articles in a machine-readable format. A program known as feed reader or feed aggregator

⁸ Ron Castle Webs www.roncastle.com

will go and collect the updates on behalf of the user and present the content in a user-friendly layout. Google Alerts is a very easy way to subscribe to what the world is saying about you or about any topic of your choice. Set up as many Google Alerts based on your keywords and any new webpage mentioning them will land in your inbox.

Since each blog post is made of short, judicious and topical content, a blog can be your best ally to boost your search engine rankings. Search engine crawlers (or robots) will continuously come and visit your site for more relevant content. A site's online popularity will grow and more and more people are going to link to it. As a tourism business, you should consider blogging as part of your online strategy. It is an excellent manner to increase web content, grow your organic visitors and develop your brand.

Consider setting up an individual blog about your product and experiences you offer or work with other stakeholders in your region and set up a joint blog. Your focus should be on sharing news about your product and your region. Tell stories, discuss visitor experiences, surroundings, unique facts and other engaging content. Remember to use pictures, videos and hyperlinks. As a blog really is a website, focus on your keywords and implement search engine optimization principles to encourage search engines to visit and crawl your blog posts.

E-Marketing

E-marketing, often referred to as "online marketing" or "Internet marketing" is the suite of online activities to promote and improve a business's online visibility. Just like search engine optimization, e-marketing is crucial as it will give a website all the chances to succeed and bring in business. E-marketing activities are broad and often overlap, making it difficult to assign them to a single category.

Media Releases

A media release can be defined as a way of making an announcement, written as closely as possible to the way in which it will be reported in the media. Releases are a great way of broadcasting a message and directing people to your website. They need to be particularly relevant to time-sensitive communication announcements or response to external events or news.

In essence, if done well a media release can be a cost effective way of generating further website traffic, as it gets you more exposure to your target market for free. You should have a section on your website dedicated to your media releases. Use the heading "newsroom" or "media releases" to better your search engine optimization. This will create new content that search engines feed on (even if it is in a PDF format search engines will still be able to read it). The aim of a media release is to be published by a news channel to obtain validation from a third party.

Banner Advertising

Banner advertising is a form of e-marketing that allows operators to display a clickable advertisement on websites with high traffic. This form of advertising is an excellent manner to increase brand awareness. However, it may not provide a return on investment high enough to justify the expense for the majority of small and medium tourism operators. With an average click through rate of 0.2 % (only 0.2% of all the people who saw the banner click on it), banner advertising is less effective than other forms of e-marketing.

Email Marketing

Email remains the most used tool of the Internet. It is therefore a very powerful medium to start or continue to develop a relationship with your target market and existing clients and to keep your brand top

of mind. Since it is so cost efficient and accessible, it is not unusual for office workers to receive from 40 to 60 emails a day. Your newsletter will therefore need to stand out in their inboxes by being perceived as an unrivalled piece of information.

Who to email: As people who contact you by phone if they would like to be added to your email list. Set up cluster email marketing campaigns with the region's tourism partners.

What to write: Send only relevant information that gives your newsletter personality and a unique voice, provide educational content and testimonials, use colors and brands. HTML format with photos and embedded hyperlinks is generally preferred to plain, email-like, text format. However, your target market might be more responsive to plain-text email. Newsletter design should convey professionalism and be consistent. Include unsubscribe link.

Send them regularly and consistently. Seasonal newsletters are popular. Mondays and Tuesday get the highest opening rate. Use a dedicated email marketing program. Aim for an opening rate of 30%. Segment your database based on your target markets (biking enthusiasts, bird watching, etc).

Do not forget to include a call-to-action or two in the newsletter. A link to a special offers page on your website or a discount code for your product when you book within 48 hours often goes a long way and encourages conversions.

Google Tools

Google is the most widely used search engine, however it evolved to offer many more services than its search engine rivals. Over the years, Google has developed a

series of free tools to increase exposure on the Internet.

Google Places

Search engines have been improving for numerous years now to provide results that take into consideration location attributes such as city, area, and even where the searcher is located. This practice is known as "local search" and goes hand in hand with how tourists research – by location. Google integrates maps into its search results, based on the information provided by the business in the Google Places tool. These results show first in the search engine rankings.

To achieve the best results, ensure that you utilize all the fields in your Google Places listing to your advantage. This includes categories, photos, videos, getting your customer to write reviews, opening hours, and type of payment. The more information you provide the more attention Google and your readers will pay to your listing. You need to ensure your website is search engine friendly.

Furthermore, you should:

- Ensure your business address and phone number is visible on every page (header or footer) and on the contact page.
- Try and increase the number of quality links to your website which come from local businesses or resources. These are called citations.

Google Maps

Maps are one of the most searched items on the Internet. Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com>) allows you to:

- Place your Google Places listing on the map (automatic).
- Create a personalized map especially designed for your target market.

- Place any Google map (the standard or the personalized one) on your website.

Online maps are interactive. This signifies that you can go to <http://maps.google.com> and key in your destination, or a type of business in the search field and the website will return your results on a map therefore allowing you and your customers to make your own itinerary and print it. Maps are such a successful tool that people now use them as a search engines for locations. A wealth of information – apart from directions – is available on maps. The user will see photos, videos, customer reviews, contact details, and even other places of interests that other users have added on the map.

Webmaster tools

Activating the Google Webmaster Tools will give your online visibility a boost. These tools are not only available to webmasters and you can set them up yourself.

Alerts

Google Alerts is a very easy way to subscribe to what the world is saying about you or about any topic of your choice. Set up as many Google Alerts based on your keywords and any new webpage mentioning them will land in your inbox.

Pay Per Click

Pay per click (PPC) is a form of e-marketing that involves setting up an online advertising campaign which will be displayed on search engine results pages and advertising networks such as websites and blogs. Once you have selected the search engine you would like your ads to be displayed on, you will need to:

- Set up an account
- Do your keywords research
- Create your campaigns (groups of ads, keywords, bid price)
- Go live
- Let the campaign run its course
- Track and fine tune on a weekly basis

The main difference and benefit between search engine pay per click and other forms of online or offline advertising is that PPC targets an audience that is ready to buy and actively searching for your product. The ads will only be displayed when people enter the keywords you specified.

- PPC is cost effective: you will only pay a predefined amount when someone clicks on your ad. Your ads will therefore be displayed for free. In PPC jargon, the number of times your ads are displayed is called the number of impressions.
- Immediate - There is no need to work with a third-party such as an agency or pay per click consultant: you can set up your campaign yourself and it will be live as soon as you press “ok”. You can also make all the changes you like to your campaign.
- Flexibility - Pay per click is a form of advertising that can be set up, left running for as long as you want, paused, re-started, altered, cancelled, etc. The campaign can be accessed and changed at any time using any Internet-enabled computer as the majority of PPC services are online-based and fully automated.
- Tracking - Because everything is based online, you will be able to know exactly which ads were clicked, which ads converted, and which keywords your target market is using to search. Basically you will gain market intelligence on what works, what doesn't and will be able to use the keyword information within the content of your website to naturally increase its search engine rankings.

Use pay per click for seasonal events, to research what your target market searches, what keywords they use in order to optimize your website for search engines. Google Adwords is the largest PPC service.

Social Media

Wikipedia defines social media as “the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio”. Social media is more than a new way to communicate; it refers to an entire online environment built on people’s contributions and interactions. The communication in social media is done using “social networking”. These sites connect groups of people together. Leveraging of social media to market tourism products has proven to be an excellent strategy.

- Join different social media networks and become active for a few months.
- Identify your target market and how they behave online and which social networking tools they use. The majority of travelers use YouTube, TripAdvisor, and Google Maps. However, there are many more networks you could be leveraging off. Start by asking your customers which online social networks they belong to and seek advice from professionals such as your local tourism association.
- Create content in these social media platforms to offer your target market your product in a shape and form that they are likely to respond to.
- Entice your target market to visit your website or contact you so that they book your product. This step is very important, as it is the one that will turn leads into bookings.

YouTube

www.youtube.com is a video-sharing site with over 100 million users. Every minute, more than twenty hours of video are uploaded to YouTube. You need to create quality short videos about your property or tour, preferably showcasing guests experiencing your product.

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com> is a social networking site with over 500 million active

users worldwide, half of which log in every day. Facebook’s fastest growing demographic are those 35 years old and older.

Flickr and Picasa Web Albums

Flickr www.flickr.com and Picasa Web Albums <http://picasaweb.google.com> are online photo management sites on which anyone can upload their photos and share them with the world. Displaying your property or tour’s photos on online photo management sites will increase the exposure of your product and allow you to capture a different market. These photos can also be easily integrated into your website.

Podcasting

A podcast is a media file (generally audio) that is distributed over the Internet. The advantage of podcasts is that they can be subscribed to just like you would subscribe to a website or blog via RSS feed. People can download podcasts and listen to them wherever and whenever they like. Podcasting is a very good medium to increase your brand awareness by providing informative and educational content.

Blogging

Blogging, discussed above, is one of the most common social media marketing strategies.

Twitter

Twitter was begun in 2006 and is now one of the most popular social networking and interactive micro-blogging services. Twitter enables people to send short 140 character messages to Twitter using a web or phone interface. If people are interested in a users’ messages (called tweets) they may decide to “follow” this user and therefore be informed every time they send a new tweet.

Tourism businesses can use Twitter to:

- Keep with industry news and influential people by setting up searches in <http://search.twitter.com> or Twitter programs
- Build industry contacts
- Gain brand exposure in a casual, social, personable environment
- Monitor your online reputation and engage with your fans and/or prospects
- Share quirky facts about what happened on tour today

Search Engines

Search engines such as Google, Yahoo! MSN and Bing are the Internet stakeholders. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of designing and improving a website so it ranks high in search engine results when someone who doesn't know your business searches for the services or products you offer.

If your website is not optimized for search engines there is little chance that it will appear high in the search engine results list. Since more than 95% of people start their search on search engines your website needs to meet key search engine requirements. One of the objectives of search engines is to rank the most trusted, usable, functional and informative sites first. They want to provide the user with the most relevant information.

Search engines operate by sending their robots to crawl a website in order to understand what a website and business is about, index all its pages in their database, list the website's pages on the first pages of results when a potential visitor enters keywords that describe an offer, and increase targeted visitation to a website.

Having an optimized website means that it is growing its online visibility. Accompanied with quality content, the online visitor will be enticed to contact you and book your product. With an optimized website,

relevant inbound links and a sustainable strategy you can expect to:

- Rank on the first pages of search engines for the keywords your target market uses to search for you.
- Be visible on other sites that are often used by your target market to research and share vacation experiences.

On-Site Optimization

On-Site means activities that need to be performed on your site's content and structure. Sites that use a lot of Flash technology will not be as successful as well-coded HTML sites. Sites that use HTML "Frames" technology are not search engine friendly.

Run your site through www.seo-browser.com and assess if all your text content is visible to search engines. Can you see all your text in a structured manner and the Alt tags of your images? If not, contact a web professional who is proficient at search engine optimization.

Ensure a good hyperlink structure. The navigation bar of a website is its main suite of hyperlinks. Users and search engines should be able to access every single page of your website using your navigation and sub navigation menus. Is this the case on your site? If not, search engines will not be able to crawl all your pages and index them.

It is important, especially on the homepage, to have a reasonable number of hyperlinks within the content of your site. This will inform your readers and search engines that such and such pages are more relevant than others. The text of the hyperlink should indicate what the page you are linking to is about.

Title Tags

The page title is a one-line description of each page of a website. It is displayed at the

very top of the Internet browser window. In web jargon, this title is known as title tag. Search engines give immense importance to the title tag of each page as it identifies the content of a web document. Title tags are not only important to search engines but also to humans as they attract their attention in search engine results.

It is important that the title tag of each page holds the main keywords for that page. Experts also recommend placing important keywords at the beginning of the title. Aim for meaningful page titles and avoid making title tags that are simply a long list of keywords. Search engines will only display the first 65 characters of the title tag. If you require more characters because of your keywords you may go over 65 characters. However, be aware that only the initial 65 will display in search engine results.

Headings

Just like chapters in a book, headings are used to structure content in a reader-friendly and hierarchical manner. They describe the section of information that they introduce. It comes as no surprise that search engines rely on headings to understand the weight and relevancy of each section of your page. Research has shown in the past year that search engines do not seem to place as much value as they used to on the keywords held within the headings. However, it is still important to use them appropriately as they provide paragraph summary to the users.

Meta Description

The description is the snippet of text displayed below a listing in the search engine results page. Search engines do not use it to rank your page but it is a chance for you to stand out from your competitors on the search engine results page.

Use it as a teaser for your webpage content. It will encourage the visitor to click on your listing. Ensure it also holds your page's keywords as the keywords used by the user in the search field (travel advice lonely planet) will be bolded in the description, thus drawing the user's eye. The description tag, just like the title tag, is also part of the page header. It is referred to as the Meta description tag. It is generally located in the same area as the title tag within your website's content management system.

Image Alt Attribute

Alt tags are for images. Since search engines cannot see images as such they rely on the Alt tag to understand what the image is about.

Structure of the Page Address

Each web document or page has a unique address that can be typed in a browser to access it directly called a URL (Uniform Resource Locator). Make the URL readable, simple structure, short, and use hyphens to separate words.

Keywords

Keywords, by definition, are words used as reference points for finding other relevant information. In the online space, they become the link between users and search engines. Combinations of keywords are often referred to as keyphrases. For your business, they are the password to online marketing success. Search engines determine how relevant webpages are to user queries by looking at how keywords are organized on each webpage. It is vital to ensure that you use keywords in appropriate places throughout your webpage, as this is fundamental to how search engines rank your site.

Getting into the mindsets of your customers by researching what words, terms, or jargon your everyday customers use is first and foremost. Google reported in 2007 that

25% of searches conducted every day are unique searches that they had never seen before. “The Long Tail” theory, when applied to search, highlights that the majority of the world’s demand for information through search engines originate on rare, unique keyword combinations. Successful online businesses use these Long Tail keyword combinations to their advantage by researching their target market and using the information to create content-rich websites that cater to specific consumers needs (source: UntangleMyWeb.com).

Example:

Popular Keywords: Accommodation Harrisville

Long tail keywords: Weekend escape in Harrisville

1. Pinpoint what is being offered and have no more than 3 or 4 keyword combinations for each offering
2. Can use the Google Adwords keyword tool to extract the keywords held in competing websites.

Quintura.com is a visual search engine that allows you to see what words are related to your search query: www.quintura.com.

Where to use keywords

Once an optimal list of keywords and keyphrases to use in the content throughout a website is developed, then you must decide on the focus of each individual page of your site and then attribute the relevant keywords or keyphrases to its content.

- Title tag - Use your keyphrase in the title tag and complement it with related keywords.
- Headings - Use your keyphrase or its related keywords heading
- Image Alt attribute - Aim to use an image that is related to the page’s theme and use your keyphrase or its related keywords in the text of the image alt attribute.

- URL - Use the keyphrase or the main keyword in the page address (the URL).
- Page copy (content) - Use your keyphrase and its related keywords at least 2-3 times in the page’s content itself. Try and bold the keyphrase or appropriate keywords once at least.
- Meta description - Even though it has been established that the Meta description doesn’t primarily affect search engine rankings, you should still include your keywords in it, as this will gain your customers’ attention because it usually reinstates what they have searched for originally.
- Hyperlinks - Keywords should also be used in hyperlinks. However, the keywords used in links to a page should be the keywords identifying the linked page and not the theme of the page the link originates from.

Once you have optimized your site for your most profitable keywords it is important to continuously assess how they are ranking on search engines.

Inbound Links

Search engines also use inbound links to a website to gauge its popularity and importance. Since links are an important factor to search engines, it comes as no surprise that growing the quality and number of links to your website is critical to increase your online popularity and thus improve your search engine rankings.

This discipline is referred to as “link building” or “off-site search engine optimization” and is one of the most important tasks required to succeed in the online space. Links are the online version of word-of-mouth. There are two main categories of links: editorial links and acquired links.

Editorial links

Editorial links express the opinion of the editor. In this instance, it is the opinion person linking to you from their website.

Editorial links take time to get because they are earned as a reward for providing good, citation-worthy content. They are the links that search engines will favor and therefore have the biggest link value.

Acquired links

In this category fall all the other links (paid or unpaid). Getting these links necessitates making contact with another organization to entice them to link to you. Participating in online discussion forums or by leaving comments on Blogs can create links as well.

Acquired links have less search engine value than editorial links because they bypass the feeling of trust that editorial links have. For instance, not all acquired links (especially those acquired by leaving comments on blogs) will be followed by search engines.

Online Directories

There are a number of powerful directories which can positively influence your search engine positions. However, there are also many dubious online directories. The purpose of directories is to group information in categories that a user can browse when searching for something specific. People have realized that having their website listed in a directory creates an inbound link to their site, thus possibly providing a positive “vote” for their website and improving their search engine rankings. This has given ideas to many web-savvy entrepreneurs and directories started to flourish. There are now millions of directories on the web and it is difficult to sort the good directories from the ones whose priority is not to help humans find relevant websites but to make money by selling links that may improve search engine rankings.

Other things that influence the value of an inbound link:

- Popularity - If a website is popular, in search engine terms, it means that it already has relevant and high quality links pointing to it. This infers that links from popular website will provide your site with a better link value than least popular sites.
- Relevancy - Sites that are related to your industry or sector provide greater link value than non-related sites.
- Trust - Trust refers to trusted domain names and extensions. Obtaining a link from a trusted domain generally positively increases your page’s placement amongst search engine results.
- Number of links on the page - The value of the link will be diminished if the page linking to you has many other links. This demonstrates that the link value from a directory is demised as directories, by definition, list many businesses on each page.
- Hyperlinks - When possible, ensure that the site linking to you uses your keywords in the hyperlink to your page.

Sourcing inbound links

Check who is already linking to your website and check competitors’ links. Go through the same process as above but use your competitors’ website instead of yours. You can also use the address of sites that rank well in search engines for your keywords. Yahoo! and OpenSiteExplorer will show you which sites link to you. However, there are many other people or businesses that might have mentioned your business name online but who haven’t linked to you using a hyperlink. Google your business name to find these webpages. Contact them and ask if they could kindly put a hyperlink on the article in order to allow the reader to access your site for further reference.

Assessing Success

Google Analytics is a website statistics package which will provide you with a dashboard view of your website success. You can compare dates, analyze visitor

trends, traffic sources (direct, search engines, referring sites), content overview, pageviews, bounce rate, average time on sites, percent new visits, absolutely unique visitors, visitor loyalty, keyword overview, and top exit pages. This will allow you to take advantage of opportunities, identify and fix problems associated with the website and maximize the return on investment. Content analysis allows you to know who your visitors are and where they come from as well as what they are doing on your site.

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Contributors

Denise Cline, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments
Richard Deuell, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments
Brandon Schroeder, Michigan Sea Grant
Sarah Waters, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary
Jim Muratzki, Land Information Access Association (website and online database design)
Laura Johnson, Prescott College Master's Student
US 23 Heritage Route Management Council
US 23 Heritage Route County Team Members in Alcona, Alpena & Presque Isle Counties
Thunder Bay Audubon Society
Au Sable Audubon Society