Policy Theme Areas and Potential Actions

The primary objective of the Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment (NEMIA) is to use the analyses conducted by the assessment teams to develop policy options, or potential actions, related to sustainable tourism and economic development that can be implemented by the appropriate decision-makers in the region. In preparation for generating effective potential actions, the NEMIA working group used work group meeting summaries, the ecological, socio-economic, cultural and land-use status and trends assessments, as well as the American Institute of Architects’ Sustainable Design Assessment Team (AIA SDAT) evaluation to define key terms in the guiding question. The following terms were defined and reviewed by all members of the work group: coastal access, regional context, sustainable tourism, economic development, integrity of natural and cultural resources, and quality of life.

Subsequently, a Sea Grant team developed a methodology to qualitatively prioritize and classify these definitions into policy theme areas. Students used the workgroup meeting summaries and related documents, produced through other Northeast Michigan area initiatives that have influenced the NEMIA process, to record the number of times policy theme areas appeared. The following documents were used:

- NEMIA Meeting Summaries from September 23, 2005, February 9, 2006, June 8, 2006, and August 24, 2006;
- Huron Greenways: A System of Land and Water Trails;
- AIA SDAT Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis October 5, 2006, and

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

1) Government Coordination and Communication,
2) Growing an Entrepreneurial Community and Attracting Business Interests,
3) Incorporation of Modern Technologies,
4) Natural, Cultural, and Maritime Heritage Resources Tourism, and
5) Preserving Sense of Place and Community Character.

Potential actions that could be undertaken by various regional entities to achieve the vision of sustainable tourism and economic development were then developed for each policy theme area. These actions reflect working group comments and concerns expressed at NEMIA meetings.

The following pages list the five themes and related potential actions. This document is intended for review and further development by the working group.
**Theme 1: Government Coordination and Communication**

Improved coordination efforts among various units of government are needed to efficiently and effectively carry out regional and local initiatives. Such coordination brings together the best resources, prevents duplication of efforts, and provides buy-in from various levels of government.

Potential Actions:

1. Enhance vertical governmental partnerships (e.g., township to county to state to federal) regionally by coordinating local advisory councils in order to share resources
2. Enhance horizontal governmental partnerships regionally by developing a regional Master Plan
3. Enhance horizontal governmental partnerships regionally by coordinating existing and future economic development and tourism initiatives across counties (e.g., Sunrise Side Tourism, US 23 Heritage Route, NEMCOG)
4. Fully implement community Master Plans and coordinate ordinances with neighboring jurisdictions
5. Develop a regionally coordinated strategy to identify governmental, corporate, and foundation funding opportunities

**Theme 2: Growing an Entrepreneurial Community and Attracting Business Interests**

Fostering both homegrown and external businesses that are loyal to local communities is needed to develop a sustainable regional economy. Pursuing economic diversity by utilizing all local resources will ensure a balanced economy.

Potential Actions:

1. Enhance cooperation between the public and private sectors to promote business location in NE MI (i.e., the Chamber of Commerce draws new businesses)
2. Educate local government officials about how their actions can encourage or inhibit growth and opportunities
3. Recruit coastal businesses such as diving outfitters, marinas, restaurants, and equipment rental and guide services by providing education on how to launch and/or expand a business
4. Partner with Alpena Community College to develop marketing strategies
5. Support service industry needs by assisting with business management plans for coastal businesses
6. Develop restaurants and shops around the commercial fishery
7. Develop entrepreneurial lessons in middle school curriculums
8. Establish a regional inventor and entrepreneur club for networking and educational purposes
9. Establish funding and resources to carry out additional research for future economic decision-making including a study on where users are coming from, regional transportation trends, and a continued cultural assessment
**Theme 3: Incorporation of Modern Technologies**
Increased use of modern technologies is needed in order to effectively promote the region to non-residents. The use of modern technologies decreases marketing costs over time, ensures that the correct audiences are targeted, and ensures that the most current information is available in a timely manner.

Potential Actions:
1. Increase visibility of the area’s resources to non-residents by marketing regional tourism opportunities via the web, providing itineraries for various types of tourism (drive-thru, vacation destination, second or retirement home)
2. Market entrepreneurial opportunities via the web
3. Utilize GIS technology to visualize economic and tourism-related trends

**Theme 4: Natural, Cultural, and Maritime Heritage Resources Tourism**
Establishing diverse tourism opportunities is needed in order to sustain the tourism segment of the economy. Sustainable tourism opportunities that are appropriate to the landscape will protect and enhance resources.

Potential Actions:
1. Diversify the tourism portfolio by increasing non-traditional tourism opportunities with viable options for tourism throughout the year
2. Balance the tourism portfolio by maintaining traditional tourism opportunities and connecting natural resources, cultural resources, and maritime heritage
3. Develop coastal access points such as camping, boating, and picnicking facilities in order to increase harbor usage
4. Enhance marina access by working with the State Waterways Commission to change seasonal and transient boat slip policies
5. Provide interpretive opportunities for greenways and blueways including increased signage and self-guided tours
6. Offer guided educational access on the coast
7. Coordinate cross-marketing partnerships between natural, cultural, and maritime heritage sites (e.g., TBNMS interprets cultural and maritime heritage resources at state park lands)
8. Market NE MI as a maritime heritage and nature-based tourism destination
9. Capitalize on the presence of the Marine Sanctuary to build complimentary enterprises
10. Utilize TBNMS as a gateway visitor center for regional opportunities
11. Develop advisory groups for state and federal planning processes that affect local natural, cultural, and maritime heritage resources (e.g., an advisory council for state parks on the model of the Marine Sanctuary advisory council)
12. Network state lands through the state parks planning process
Theme 5: Preserving Sense of Place and Community Character

Protecting and enhancing the distinguished physical and social quality of the region reinforces a sense of place and community character. Such qualities are attractive to residents and non-residents alike.

Potential Actions:
1. Increase public awareness of regional resources through education and outreach campaigns
2. Develop place-based education curriculums for K-12 students
3. Provide view-sheds along coastal highways
4. Protect and enhance the unique and diverse character of regional city and village centers through distinct shops, restaurants, and festivals
5. Protect quality of life by balancing local resources with economic development needs
6. Protect historic architectural resources through local ordinances
7. Enhance community and regional recreational and social opportunities by providing spaces for community interaction
8. Preserve working landscapes through tools such as conservation easements and purchase of development rights