

A Sustainable Future for Northeast Michigan: Economic Impacts and Benefits of the Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment Project



Known as the “Sunrise Side,” Michigan’s northeast coastal region is rich in natural resources and home to many significant historic and cultural sites. However, the last few decades have been economically challenging for the region. Michigan Sea Grant, in partnership with Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, organized the Northeast Michigan Integrated Assessment funded, in part, by Michigan Sea Grant and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. The primary objective of the Integrated Assessment project was to foster a regional planning process focused on economic development and coastal resource management.

ASSESSING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Michigan Sea Grant facilitated seven workshops for community, government and business leaders to develop a shared vision of the region’s future and to identify information needed to guide regional planning. Sea Grant assembled five technical assessment teams to focus on socioeconomic, ecological resources, cultural assets, planning and zoning and sustainability in the region. Together, the assessment teams and representatives from Alcona, Presque Isle and Alpena counties developed a suite of potential actions designed to maintain the current quality of life but improve economic development and tourism opportunities through coastal access in the northeast region.

Leaders identified a need to establish a strong tourism base to stimulate the regional economy, while maintaining natural and cultural resources. The technical teams supported the process by assessing current conditions and available resources in the region and providing technical guidance for selecting and implementing potential actions.

GUIDING DECISION MAKING

This project helped guide regional planning and decision making by:

- Providing an inventory of cultural and ecological resources in the area
- Facilitating stakeholders in developing regional goals for the coast
- Prioritizing potential actions for achieving goals
- Evaluating planning and zoning tools
- Developing new partnerships among government agencies, towns and businesses
- Inspiring new ideas for sustainable economic development
- Helping secure over \$400,000 in grants and funding to implement new ideas

“The project brought the three counties together to help take a look at the needs, to broaden our focus and realize that what we have in common is greater than what separates us.”

— Bethany Styer, Alcona Economic Development Corporation.



BENEFITS TO PARTNERS

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Representatives from Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson's Harbor state parks, were engaged in workshops that initiated a new effort to develop a coordinated management plan. In addition, the project has helped the parks develop a citizen advisory committee, enhancing communication between state and local partners.

NOAA-Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary

This project provided technical and community support for a Maritime Heritage Trail proposal that the Sanctuary will construct in collaboration with surrounding towns. The process allowed the federal agency to form partnerships with adjacent counties and to explore opportunities to expand the Sanctuary.

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Coastal Management Program

This assessment helped prioritize regional needs and opportunities, and in turn, helped the Coastal Management Program evaluate and fund projects, such as the Huron Blueways Trail.

Northeast Michigan Council of Governments

The project helped foster a variety of regional partnerships among federal, state and local agencies, enhancing Northeast Michigan Council of Governments' (NEMCOG) mission. The assessment also helped NEMCOG focus attention and secure funding for projects that address the region's long-term goals.

IMPLEMENTING REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Regional Coastal Tourism Survey

Based on the needs identified by the assessment, Marine Sanctuary staff and NEMCOG conducted a visitor expenditure study to gather tourism data that are current, specific and relevant to northeast Michigan.

Coastal Tourism Business Support Website

Michigan Sea Grant is developing a web-based "toolbox" designed to provide targeted support to emerging entrepreneurs interested in eco- or cultural-coastal tourism in the northeast region.

Huron Blueways Project

In order to enhance recreational opportunities for paddlers along northern Lake Huron, NEMCOG began a project to identify coastal access points, water routes and other amenities from Mackinac City to Harrisville.

Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative: Engaging Youth Through Place-based Education

School and youth groups are addressing several coastal resource issues through new education projects that focus on community engagement. For example, a group from Alcona schools is developing 12 interpretive signs for Negwegon State Park. The Integrated Assessment helped in developing collaborative partners and in identifying specific community needs, allowing Michigan Sea Grant to secure \$32,000 in grants to support stewardship projects. As a result

"The project brought more recognition to this large coastal area to try to build upon but not spoil what's there. Anytime we can bring communities together to interact and discuss a common resource is always a plus."

— Richard Deull, NEMCOG

of the assessment project, regional leaders were awarded an additional \$200,000 in educational support from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust in 2009.

Creating Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative

The project helped position a team from northeast Michigan to be selected for an economic development training program supported by Michigan State University. Four people were chosen to represent the three-county region in intensive training sessions focused on energizing entrepreneurs.

Revitalizing Fishing-Related Tourism

Based on an opportunity identified by the assessment, Michigan Sea Grant is now working with fishery-dependent businesses in the region to identify new products and marketing strategies necessary to thrive within a changing ecosystem and economy.



Fostering economic growth and protecting Michigan's coastal/Great Lakes resources. Supported by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Michigan State University and the University of Michigan.

CONTACT

Brandon Schroeder
Michigan Sea Grant Extension Educator,
Northeast District, Tawas City

Phone: (989) 984-1056
E-mail: schroe45@msu.edu