Northeast Michigan offers vast stretches of diverse and undisturbed Great Lakes coastlines, including coastal wetlands, marshes and limestone cobble shorelines. The Lake Huron Biodiversity Conservation project prioritizes this region’s valuable coastal habitats for protection, as local communities envision opportunities to leverage these assets for ecotourism — with both perspectives at the heart of sustainable coastal tourism efforts in this region.

These dynamic Lake Huron wetland ecosystems are home to a variety of plant and animal life. In a 2009 research report, coastal wetland researchers Dr. Donald Uzarski (Central Michigan University) and the late Dr. Thomas Burton (Michigan State University), estimated that more than 1400 species of plants and animals exist among Lake Huron’s wetlands spanning Michigan’s shoreline. Protecting these habitats is important for conservation of the broader Lake Huron ecosystem.

Many resource management agencies, conservation organizations and citizen volunteers (including youth) contribute as partners in stewardship and in promoting coastal tourism opportunities in connection with these natural resources. In protecting these coastal habitats, communities are not only protecting Lake Huron ecosystems and local natural resources. They are also protecting invaluable coastal community and tourism development opportunities, improving community quality of life, and attracting visitors who may value a more natural resource-based, sustainable coastal tourism experience.

A visit to the Lake Huron coastline offers opportunities to hike, explore, and enjoy spectacular scenery and wildlife among these coastal habitats. How many Lake Huron wetlands can you discover?

- Saginaw Bay is known for its extensive network of coastal wetlands. The DNR Saginaw Bay Visitor Center offers an

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opportunity to learn more about the wetlands and the abundant waterfowl. Located within the Bay City State Recreation Area, visitors can stop at Tobico Marsh and enjoy one of the largest coastal wetlands on the Great Lakes. If you are interested in wildlife watching in these wetlands, then check out the Saginaw Bay Birding Trail.

- **Negwegon State Park** is one of the larger undisturbed wooded dune and swale complexes in the Great Lakes with sandy beach, cobble shores, and coastal marsh. Alcona School students bring these coastal resources to life through interpretive signs they designed and installed at the park.

- **Rockport State Recreation Area** offers miles of limestone cobble shorelines. It is home to an abandoned limestone quarry — Rockport is known for rocks! The shoreline and quarry offer opportunities to find plenty of ancient Devonian sea life fossils.

- **Besser Natural Area** offers a one-mile woodland hike through a small, virgin white pine stand. This diverse shoreline also offers a coastal lagoon, where you will see parts of the 1877 shipwreck of the Portland — or kayak or snorkel Lake Huron to visit the rest of this wreck, which is marked by buoy.

- **Thompson’s Harbor State Park** is known for biodiversity and its diversity of coastal wetland communities. Grab a GPS and visit an Earth Cache site developed by youth as part of their 4-H Great Lakes and Natural Resources Camp science experience. If all goes well, you will land at your first coastal wetland featuring carnivorous plants! This embayment of Thompson's Harbor offers fantastic examples of coastal fens and Great Lakes marshes. Thompson’s Harbor Park trails will lead you to Grand Lake Outlet where you can explore limestone cobble shores and sandy dunes, or follow the outlet upstream into the wetland marsh — a great bird watching stop! Northern cedar swamps are found throughout the park, which also offers a northern Michigan bog.

- **Cheboygan County** abounds with wetland exploration opportunities, including a boardwalk lookout over cattails and a coastal marsh in town at Gordon Turner Park, Grass Bay Preserve and Cheboygan State Park, where you can camp while exploring a range of Great Lakes coastal habitats including marshes, cobble shores, sand dunes and inter-dunal wetlands.

To explore more about diversity, ecological function, and issues facing coastal wetlands, be sure to read *Between Land and Lake: Michigan’s Great Lakes Coastal Wetlands* by Dennis A. Albert, published by Michigan State University Extension and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory.

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