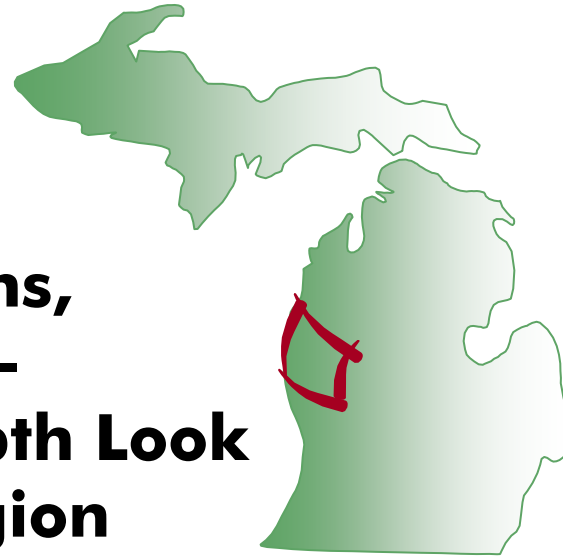




# **A Central West Michigan Tourism Assistance Program**

## **Perceptions, Attitudes – An In-Depth Look at the Region**



Presented by:

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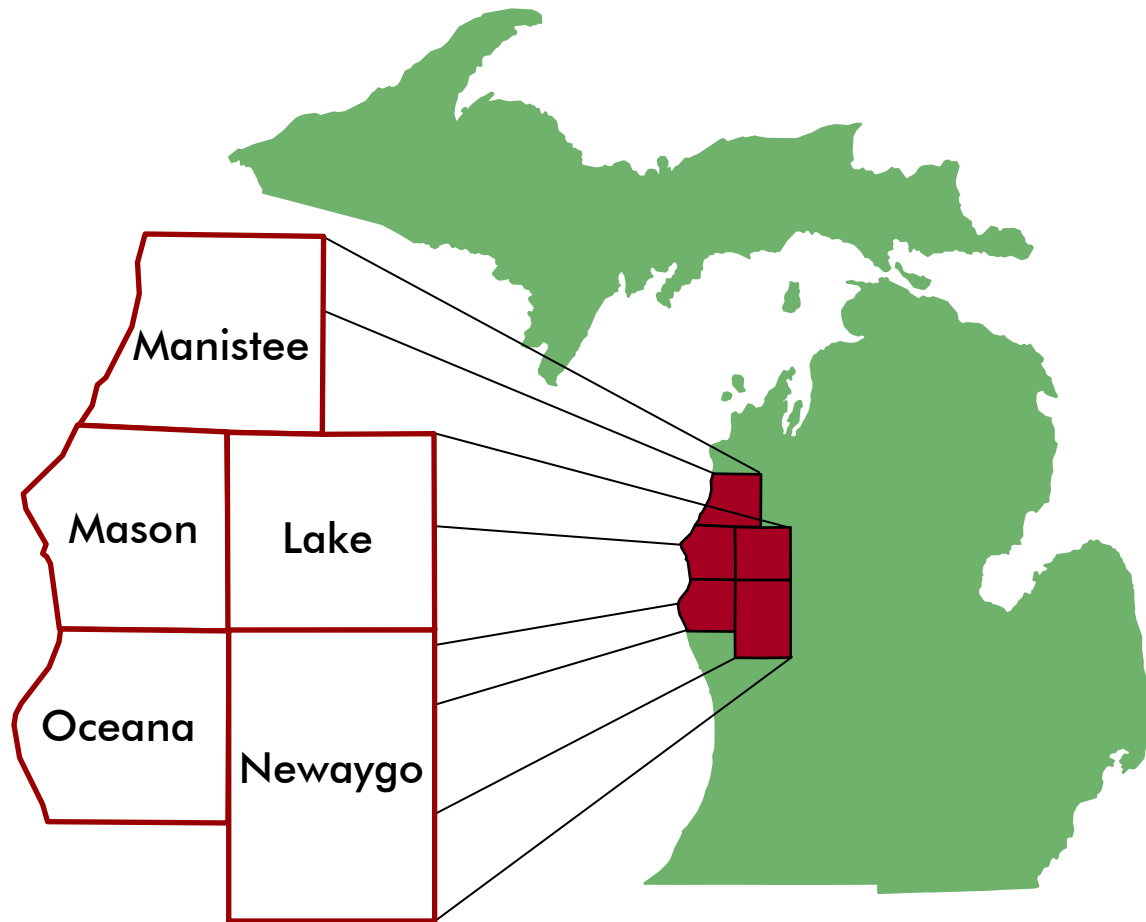
Web: [www.tourism.msu.edu/tap/](http://www.tourism.msu.edu/tap/)

Five-County Regional  
Tourism Business Marketing Forum

Ludington, Michigan  
November 13, 2006

# Central West Michigan TAP Area

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# Tourism Assistance Program

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- The TAP is a long-term research/extension project designed to develop, expand, and strengthen an area's tourism network. The objective of such a program is to enhance skills and develop a comprehensive strategic plan that will prepare local tourism leaders for the ongoing work that must continue after the TAP is completed.
- TAPs since 1997:
  - Straits of Mackinac (Cheboygan and Mackinac counties)
  - Thumb area (Lapeer, Sanilac and Tuscola counties)
  - M-66 (Barry, Ionia and Montcalm counties)

# Funding Sources

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- University Outreach and Engagement
- Local tourism businesses
- Economic development corporations
- Convention and visitors bureaus
- Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) county offices
- MSUE Tourism Area of Expertise
- Tourism Resource Center at the Dept. of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies (CARRS)

# Project Goals and Components

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## Goals:

- Increase visitation to the study area, especially during the slower time of the year
- Establish a regional destination marketing partnership with a strategic long-term marketing plan
- Focus on enhancing and developing the region's agri-tourism and nature-based tourism industries

## Components:

- Supply assessment:
  - resource inventory
- Demand assessment:
  - transient visitor survey
  - overnight visitor survey
  - potential market survey
- Needs and preferences assessment:
  - business survey
  - resident survey
- Formation of a regional partnership
- Creation of a strategic marketing plan

# Demand Assessment

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- Transient visitor (intercept) survey – summer 2004 – 532 respondents
  - to capture those visitors who do not spend a night in a local commercial lodging establishment, e.g., day-trippers, pass-thru traffic, and owners of cottages and second homes
- Overnight visitor survey – fall 2004 – 268 respondents
  - to gain insight into visitors' overall impression of the study area as a tourism destination, trip profile, and general marketing and demographic information
- Potential visitor survey – fall 2005 – 302 respondents
  - to explore region's potential market and its general preferences

# Needs and Preferences Assessment

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- Resident survey – fall 2005 – 518 respondents
  - to gauge residents' attitudes toward tourism development and promotion in their county.
- Business/supplier survey – fall 2005 – 87 respondents
  - to uncover issues facing travel and tourism businesses in the study region;
  - to assess what aspects of the region contribute to or detract from the vitality of these businesses; and
  - to develop proactive plans for the continued and balanced growth of tourism-related businesses in the five counties.

# Visitor Origin

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- 67% - 80% - Michigan residents
- Implications:
  - Single market
  - Economic situation in state
  - Working together outside the market



# About Visitors

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- 78% - 95% – visited the region in the past
- 63% of pass-through traffic is destination traffic to the region
- Potential market – propensity to travel throughout the year
- 70% - weekend trips to / within Michigan
  
- Implications:
  - Capturing traveling markets
    - Good news and bad news about current travel market
    - First-time visitors

# Activities on a Trip

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- Interest in activities (“intercept” survey“):

- Camping
- Boating
- Kayaking / canoeing
- Sightseeing
- Dining out



- General participation on any trip anywhere (potential market survey):

- Dining out
- Sightseeing
- Visiting historic sites
- Shopping
- Attending festivals or events



# Strengths and Weaknesses

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- Strengths of the region:
  - Lakes / rivers / water
  - Scenery / nature
  - Outdoor recreation
  - Fishing
  - Serenity / small-town atmosphere
- Weaknesses of the region:
  - Road congestion / condition; crowded places / facilities
  - Lack of variety of attractions / events / entertainment
  - Lack of shopping choices (quantity and quality)
  - Lack of restaurant choices (quantity and quality)
  - Lack of lodging choices (quantity and quality)



# Things Missing or Needing Improvement

- Better information / promotion
- More variety of attractions / activities
- More variety and quality of restaurant
- Better roads / signs / access
- More variety of lodging establishments
- Implications:
  - Current visitors and their needs
  - Potential visitors and their needs
  - Technology versus outdoors:
    - Market niches
    - New products



# Planning Horizon

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- Advanced planning for trips is getting shorter and shorter:
  - All trips – within 30 days (53% - 61%)
  - Vacation trip – within 60 days (52%)
  - Weekend trip – within 15 days (59%)
- Implications:
  - Promotion year round
  - Accurate / updated information
  - Easy to find information
  - Pooling resources



# Information and promotion

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- The power of:
  - recommendations from family and friends (36% - 74%)
  - word of mouth (24% - 67%)
- Internet (34% - 65%)
- Implications:
  - Hospitality training:
    - Employees
    - Access to information
    - On-site marketing: “come again”, “bring family / friends”
  - Regional information portal on the Internet



# Visitor Sentiment

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- Great outdoor recreation opportunities
- Much scenic appeal
- 83% likely to visit the region within next three years
- 97% would recommend the region to their family and friends
- Implications:
  - Visitors as ambassadors for the region

# Tourism Businesses (I)

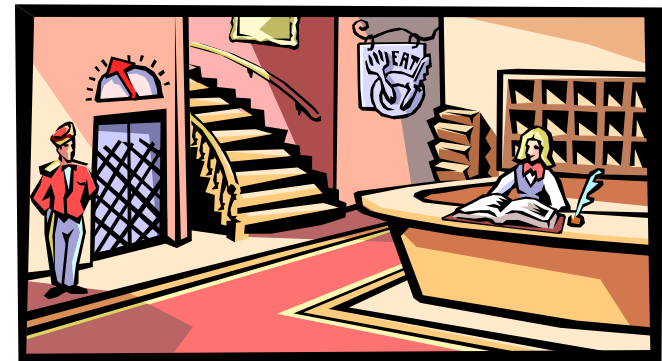
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- 60% of business sales come from tourists
- 67% of tourists served are from Michigan
- 42% believe number of tourists increased over the recent years
- 22% increased number of employees over the recent years
- 41% indicate business sales increased over the recent years
  
- Summer operating hours:
  - Monday – Friday:
    - 8 a.m. - 6p.m. – 74%
    - after 6 p.m. – 46%
  - Saturday – Sunday:
    - 8 a.m. - 6p.m. – 51%
    - after 6 p.m. – 43%

# Tourism Businesses (II)

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- Implications:
  - Lack of fit between business hours of operation and tourist traffic flow
  - Adjustments in operating hours
  - Effective, “tourist- friendly” partnerships:
    - Information / referrals
    - Coordinated business hours



# Business Sentiment

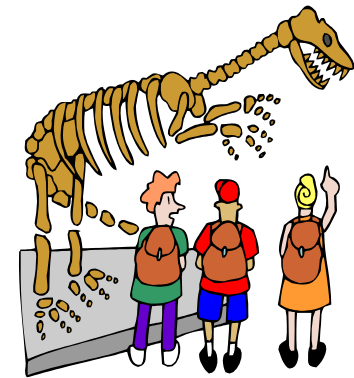
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- 31% consider their business very successful
- 67% consider their business OK
  
- 86% consider partnerships important
- 48% interested in new / more partnerships
- 51% support a more formalized regional tourism cooperation

# Resident Sentiment toward Tourism (I)

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- 71% enjoy meeting and interacting with tourists
- 81% believe in tourism to be an economic stabilizer / engine in the region:
  - More jobs
  - Additional revenue to businesses / county
- 80%+ - support additional level of development of county attractions:
  - agri-tourism,
  - festivals,
  - hiking / biking trails,
  - camping,
  - museums / cultural sites,
  - restaurants,
  - historic sites, etc.



## Resident Sentiment toward Tourism (II)

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- 46% believe tourists pay their fair share for the services they use
- 63% believe most tourism jobs pay low wages
- 56% believe tourism jobs offer career advancement opportunities
- 16% take their guests only to places outside the county they live in
- 94% believe residents should be involved in decisions about tourism in the county

# Residents and Tourism

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- Implications:
  - Resident support - competitive advantage
  - Involvement in planning / decision-making process
  - Ambassadors for the region:
    - Effective strategies
      - Familiarity with attractions / events
      - Commonly known web site



# Summary

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- Current visitors love the area's natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities
- More variety of shopping, lodging, restaurant and attraction opportunities would add to the appeal of the region
- Better coordination of business hours to tourist flow within the area should be considered
- Businesses see importance of and are in support of regional partnerships, but there is no effective mechanisms for growing partnerships
- Residents love their region
- Residents have very positive attitude towards tourism and favor its additional development in their region

# MSU Contact Info

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TAP Web site: [www.tourism.msu.edu/tap/](http://www.tourism.msu.edu/tap/)

Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan: [www.tourismplan.msu.edu/](http://www.tourismplan.msu.edu/)

Web: [www.tourismcenter.msu.edu](http://www.tourismcenter.msu.edu)

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