

The Michigan Tourism Task Force

TASK FORCE REPORT ON TOURISM

April 2008

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MESSAGE FROM STATE REPRESENTATIVE KEN HORN, CHAIRMAN – MICHIGAN TOURISM TASK FORCE

As a brief bit of background, tourism has been a passion of mine, as well as an integral part of my career for more than 25 years. Here is a quick history as it relates to tourism:

- White House Conference on Travel & Tourism - Clinton Administration
- Appointed to the Michigan Travel Commission - Governor Engler
- Business owner in the hospitality industry
- Frankenmuth Convention & Visitors Bureau – Board of Directors
- Saginaw Valley Convention & Visitors Bureau – Board of Directors
- Michigan House Tourism, Outdoor Recreation & Natural Resources Committee – Rep. Joel Sheltroun, Chairman
- Special Subcommittee on Tourism, and the Tourism Caucus

I was honored to be selected as the Chairman of the Michigan Tourism Task Force in this, my first term in office. It was a privilege to participate in a process that can lead to a better understanding of both the problems and opportunities presented an industry that holds so much potential to contribute to a more vibrant state economy.

It is important to thank the members of this task force who all believe in the importance of tourism to our state's economic future, and who traveled to take testimony from citizens from across this great state. The dedication of State Representatives **Tom Casperson, Goeff Hansen, Arlan Meekhof, David Palsrok** and **Tonya Schuitmaker** made all of this possible.

It is our conclusion that tourism is far more diverse and broader in scope than most people realize. Tourism is more than vacation travel, it's outings to visit the world's largest Christmas store, tee times at a golf resort in Northern Michigan, and a trip to the water park only a couple of hours away. It's also the trip to the bait shop on your way to your favorite fishing hole, to a meal at a family restaurant over in the next town, to a performance by the local symphony orchestra. In all its diversity, travel & tourism combine to create jobs, generate tax revenues and make Michigan's economy stronger.

Business owners, visitor bureau presidents and Michigan's travelers have a great story to tell. And, we listened very carefully. I am proud to say that the Michigan Tourism Task Force conducted hearings in six different locations across this state, and offered eighty-seven individuals the opportunity to provide compelling personal testimony that helped produce the summary report and recommendations that follow.

All who participated in this process share a common goal; to improve the image of this state, and to strengthen and expand untapped potential to make Michigan a year-round tourism destination for travelers - not just from every state in America - but from nations around the world.



Kenneth B. Horn
State Representative, Michigan's 94th District

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is more an experience than a product. Combined with the broad range of available tourist activities, it is likely that no two individuals will suggest the same definition. In fact, how tourism is defined is largely dependent on an individual's age, preferences, and the multiple recreational opportunities that are available in any given area. As such, it's no surprise that there are a variety of definitions and categories captured by the activity we call "tourism."

- **Agri-tourism**: Examples include riding a hay wagon at a pumpkin farm, tours at a local winery, picking cherries or apple in a farmer's orchard or trekking through a corn maze.
- **Cultural tourism**: ... visiting The Henry Ford in Dearborn, a driving tour of scenic lighthouses, visiting the Grand Rapids Art Museum or participating in a folk festival in a nearby city.
- **Destination tourism**: ... traveling to enjoy the Bavarian experience of Frankenmuth, vacationing on historic Mackinac Island, touring Lake Michigan's shoreline or a visit to the DIA or Greektown in Detroit.
- **Event tourism**: ... the North American International Auto Show which draws visitors from around the globe, attending a Tigers baseball game, or a NASCAR event at MIS or watching the Port Huron to Mackinac sailboat race.
- **Recreational tourism**: ... staying in a lodge on a fishing trip up north, going on a family excursion to a theme park, golfing or skiing at a resort, snowmobiling in our winter wonderland or spending an afternoon in one of Michigan's many state parks and forests.
- **Scenic tourism**: ... taking a slow-paced hike during a fall color tour, or beholding natural wonders such as Tahquamenon Falls, the Straits of Mackinac and Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes.

Tourism is a vital, but often overlooked component of the Michigan economy. It is an industry that presents families multiple opportunities for leisure activities and vacation memories. This same industry encompasses conventions and business meeting that increase the strength and vitality of commerce.

In order to best grasp the potential of this segment of our economy, public hearings were convened in the Michigan communities of Frankenmuth, Marquette, Spring Lake, South Haven, Dearborn and Thompsonville. Geographic locations were selected to reflect the full array of tourism opportunities and to allow tourism industry leaders to easily participate in those hearings. Participation was strong and thoughtful testimony was provided.

The Michigan Tourism Task Force was created to focus attention on the challenges that face tourism in the 21st century, and will issue recommendations for specific state actions to sustain and grow tourism in the coming years.

1992 TASK FORCE REPORT

In 1991, State Representative Frank Fitzgerald led a House Task Force on Tourism to assess the current state of one of Michigan's most important and growing industries. Public hearings were held in Alpena, Bad Axe, Copper Harbor, Detroit, Frankenmuth, Mackinac Island, St. Joseph/Benton Harbor and Traverse City.

Michigan was one of the first states to aggressively promote itself in the early 1980s and it was determined that a review should be conducted to determine the impact of that campaign and identify challenges that lay ahead. The task force issued a report in 1992 and made a number of recommendations. Some of these policy recommendations were put into practice, some were not and some contemporary issues were not foreseen at the time the report was compiled.

The 1992 report made no mention of invasive species or Great Lakes water levels. The events of 9-11 with their devastating impact on air travel and the tourism industry in general were nine years in the future. A faltering auto manufacturing base, numerous plant closings, high unemployment levels, and record gasoline prices were unforeseen in 1992. Michigan's tourism industry faces a much different set of challenges now than it did then.

The Fitzgerald report made twenty-eight different policy recommendations to improve the industry. Below, some of the more noteworthy are highlighted.

Accomplishments

The 1992 task force encouraged the development of a tourism master plan. This was accomplished in 2007 by the Michigan Tourism Industry Planning Council through the support of Michigan State University's Travel, Tourism and Recreation Resource Center and Travel Michigan.

The 1992 task force recommended that all public schools begin their academic year after Labor Day to extend the summer vacation season. Legislation was passed into law in 2005.

The 1992 task force encouraged the Secretary of State to develop new license plate designs as a way to advertise Michigan's natural beauty. The Great Lakes Splendor license plate was introduced in 1996 followed by the Spectacular Peninsulas license plate unveiled in 2006. By the end of 2007, the traditional license plate known as 'Old Blue' was retired from service.

The 1992 task force encouraged the Michigan Travel Bureau to facilitate and coordinate cultural and heritage tourism. Federal legislation authorized the creation of National Heritage Areas and Michigan is now home to the Automotive National Heritage Area.

The 1992 task force recommended the development of scenic highways and heritage routes which have been created in the intervening fifteen years.

The 1992 task force was forward-thinking in suggesting the placement of business logo signs on highways to alert motorists of amenities available at the next exit. These useful and efficient resources have served to increase the ease and enjoyment of business and leisure travelers, just as they have strengthened local economies throughout Michigan.

The 1992 task force suggested the establishment of a tourism caucus within Michigan's House of Representatives. This was accomplished in 2007 by Representative Kate Ebli of Monroe.

Continuing Efforts

The Fitzgerald report recommended that state funds and industry investments be used to coordinate advertising and promotion in regions. While some progress has been made through one-time funding sources, based on the testimony offered to this taskforce, it appears this is an ongoing concern that still needs to be addressed.

The 1992 task force recommended that site development be carefully balanced with minimal environmental impact to preserve scenery. Michigan residents are still concerned about this balance.

The 1992 task force recommended that fish stocks needed to be replenished and safeguards put in place to protect the water quality of the Great Lakes. These are worthy and ongoing goals of today's policymakers.

The 1992 task force recognized the importance of motor coach travel as a tourism industry niche. A recommendation was made to target the motor coach industry and lure them to Michigan as a travel destination. With the price of gasoline continuing to climb, it would appear that motor coach travel could become an increasingly attractive option for travelers.

The 1992 task force encouraged the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to work with the aviation industry to promote Michigan destinations.

The 1992 task force encouraged the Michigan Travel Bureau (now Travel Michigan) to promote Michigan as a year-round destination. Seizing such an opportunity would bring more hunters, sportsmen, skiers, snowmobilers, and winter sports enthusiasts to Michigan. Year-round promotion would create more year-round jobs, tax revenues, and a more stable Michigan economy. The most recent report indicates that the lack of a consistent state investment in promotion funding leaves this important objective, with all its potential, unfulfilled.

2007 MICHIGAN TOURISM TASK FORCE REPORT

"MICHIGAN TOURISM IN THE 21st CENTURY"

Industry leaders stressed that for every \$1 invested to attract visitors, the state of Michigan receives \$3 in revenue in the same fiscal year the investment is made.

Other states are keenly aware of the value of tourism to their state economies and are vigorously promoting their regions. The state of Florida commits \$35 million to tourism promotion. The state of Pennsylvania recently increased their investment from \$33 million to \$65 million. Michigan's competitors are recognizing the value that the tourism industry has to offer, and through greater state investment, are leveraging the assets of their private sector to expand market share in an ever-growing global travel marketplace.

Tourism means jobs. The Michigan Tourism Task Force determined that the Michigan tourism industry is capable of producing a wide range of employment opportunities. These jobs consist of front line, first-time employment for young people and those just entering into the work force. Such positions provide training in basic job skills which serve that individual for the rest of his or her life. However, there are many high paying, tourism jobs available for college educated, career-minded professionals. In fact, there are 10 Michigan colleges and universities that offer degree programs in Hospitality Management, Tourism & Recreation, and Hotel & Resort Management and related tourism majors.

Tourism provides jobs that can never be outsourced. Because tourism is geographically based, consumers travel to the product. Golf courses, campgrounds, hotels, and other tourist attractions and the jobs they provide will never be relocated to another state. These jobs stay in Michigan, employing Michigan workers at Michigan attractions. In 2007, it is estimated that tourism generated \$18.7 billion in total economic activity in Michigan. Like other economic drivers, tourism generates a strong ripple effect by contributing to increased retail sales in clothing and grocery stores, higher sales in gas stations, restaurants, and all of the retail outlets that serve the needs of golfers, campers, bikers and the like. As tourism grows, gasoline tax and sales tax revenues to the state also increase. Growth in tourism has a positive multiplier effect on the state's economy, thereby increasing governmental revenues and improving the quality of life for all of Michigan's citizens.

The following recommendations are designed to harness the full potential of Michigan's tourism industry. Tourism will play an increasingly significant role in the state's current and future economy. The goal of this report is to create a policy plan of action complimenting the Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan which was developed and approved in 2007 by the Michigan Travel Industry. The plan, now under the authority of the Michigan Travel Commission, outlines strategic initiatives deemed critical by the industry.

The end goal is to do what we can legislatively to position Michigan as a world leader in tourism.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force collectively recommends the following policy goals that will achieve the mission of preparing the Michigan tourism industry for the 21st century.

Tourism Promotion

Challenge

Positioning Michigan to be competitive

“Imagine how your business would be run if all of your inventory was in the back and not on display?” Brad Van Dommelen - Traverse City Convention & Visitors Bureau

The award-winning “Pure Michigan” advertising campaign, launched in 2007, is not reaching significantly into target markets outside of Michigan. Waging an effective advertising campaign requires a richer, sustained state commitment to successfully market Michigan’s tourism assets.

Pure Michigan was named as the 2007 best state travel advertising campaign by the Travel Industry Association of America. A common theme of testimony from tourism industry leaders is that Michigan is failing to capitalize on a truly brilliant promotional opportunity. For instance, with the declining strength of the U.S. dollar, the exchange rate in Canada is particularly favorable to attract our northern neighbors. There appears to be some anxiety among industry leaders that Michigan is not prepared to “strike while the iron is hot.”

Plan of Action

Make Michigan competitive with neighboring states in terms of tourism funding

“We don’t have a product problem in the state of Michigan, we have a promotional problem.” Steve Yencich - Michigan Hotel, Motel & Resort Association

Providing encouragement to the industry, the governor set promotion funding for tourism as a priority in her 2008 State of the State address. One possibility for facilitating this investment is legislation proposed by State Senator Jason Allen that (after mandatory disbursements have been made to the school aid fund and revenue sharing program) would invest approximately \$30 million of sales tax revenues into tourism promotion. Since the return on investment for every one dollar of state spending is between two and three dollars in state tax revenue, this is a sound policy proposal and economic development tool. Importantly, that sales tax revenue is generated in the same fiscal year creating an almost immediate return in jobs and tax revenues for the state.

Additional Plan of Action

Dedicate, as a percentage, “undedicated” sales tax income from tourism related businesses only.

While current efforts are focused on dedicating an exact percentage of (unrestricted) sales tax to tourism, an interesting concept raised during testimony is the ability to identify and dedicate (unrestricted) sales tax generated by the tourism industry back to supporting the industry. The Michigan Department of Treasury is able to determine the amount of sales tax revenue generated by different sectors of the economy. By applying SIC (Standard Industrial Classification) codes, the department can easily identify how revenues are generated by specific sectors of the tourism and travel industry. Coding undedicated sales tax revenue would protect education and other restricted funds. Using tourism dollars to cultivate and promote the tourism industry is a practical solution that would leverage and strengthen private industry marketing investments which are currently in place.

“We are poised on the threshold of making tourism the greatest and #1 industry in the State of Michigan that will not lose jobs but will create jobs.” Barbara Barden - Livingston County Convention & Visitors Bureau

Challenge

Utilize promotional dollars for maximum value and impact

“Can we do some collaborative efforts that will get more miles out of these dollars?” Dr. Don Holecek - Professor Emeritus, Michigan State University

The state can more efficiently utilize its limited tourism promotion dollars. While Travel Michigan has an established partnership program for advertising purposes, some smaller tourism industry members do not consider the program sufficiently economical or flexible. In order to participate in the matching dollar advertising program, certain criteria must be achieved. First, Travel Michigan restricts advertising to major metropolitan cities, i.e. Chicago, Toledo, Ontario. Second, entities wishing to partner with the state must invest a minimum level of advertising dollars in a given market, i.e. \$30,000 in Toledo. Third, all ads must be produced by Travel Michigan’s designated advertising agency.

Smaller entities have difficulty achieving the minimum dollar criteria, feel that the identified markets do not reach their target audience, and that the advertising campaigns are not sufficiently customized.

Plan of Action

Examine avenues to broaden partnership program opportunities

The state should review its partnering program and examine ways to achieve broader participation in the matching funds program. We should be proficient in delivering a desired product to a target audience. For instance, Escanaba and Marquette have very distinct geographic audiences in Illinois and Wisconsin as well as the Lower Peninsula. Marketing strategies should take into account both in- and out-of-state markets, and large and small cities. Travel Michigan should also communicate with other state agencies to ensure that all of Michigan’s natural resource assets are properly identified and effectively marketed.

LIFT Program (Local Incentive for Tourism)

Michigan’s partnership program for advertising should allow individual businesses and attractions to pool their limited advertising dollars to highlight specific regions of the state rather than their individual operations. As one example, the Saginaw Valley Convention & Visitors Bureau has a partnership model that can be effortlessly replicated by the Michigan Travel Commission. The LIFT program is a hybrid grant-based/partnership program that will allow the state to assist local businesses and convention & visitors bureaus reap greater economic rewards through collaborations.

Michigan economic development and tourism promotions should compliment each other.

“According to a research study conducted by Brogan & Partners...the likelihood that a business person will consider moving or expanding to an area dramatically increases if they visit the area - particularly within the industries of information technology, engineering & sciences.” Annette Rummel – President and CEO, Saginaw Valley CVB

There is a disconnection between Michigan’s economic development campaign (Upper Hand) and the state’s tourism promotion (Pure Michigan). It is recognized that the two marketing programs are kept separate intentionally to avoid a blurring of industry lines between manufacturing and tourism. A concern exists precisely in the “silo” effect that keeps the ideas of economic success and quality of life conspicuously divided.

Dovetail Upper Hand and Pure Michigan campaigns to create maximum exposure.

Michigan devotes a relatively small amount of dollars to tourism promotion in relation to other states. Better coordination between the Upper Hand and Pure Michigan campaigns could produce a greater positive result for both tourism and manufacturing. Businesses looking to locate in Michigan will respond favorably to Michigan's recreation and cultural opportunities for their employees. Also, visitors deciding where to spend their discretionary income may be more attracted to regions that are promoted as vibrant centers of economic growth. Where appropriate, Pure Michigan and Upper Hand media buys should be placed in the same markets to augment and compliment each other.

Additional Plan of Action

Quick response to new opportunities

Michigan recognizes the benefit of aggressive promotion for all of its industries including manufacturing, agriculture and tourism, and this report notes the drive for proper funding levels to reach deeply into target markets.

In addition to numerous requests for additional promotion funding, one of the more interesting ideas revealed during task force hearings was the concept of “quick strikes” and “nimble campaigns.” For instance, when other states are in the midst of a particularly long heat wave, Michigan marketers should act swiftly and assertively.

A Pure Michigan ad promoting our swimming and water sports can offer a refreshing alternative to a heat wave in another state. An Upper Hand ad designed to attract businesses to Michigan's freshwater resources will lobby businesses in perpetually drought-stricken states, appeal to both industry leaders, and appeal to environmental organizations that remain anxious over water diversion from the Great Lakes. These promotions could invite guests and job-providers alike, while demonstrating our commitment to Michigan's precious water resources.

Challenge

Leverage technology as the foundation of Michigan promotion

Michigan's silhouette is one of the rare geographic wonders that can be seen clearly from space. Yet, from the ground, it can be an elusive place to display accurately for travelers. Our diversity, from urban offerings to our multitude of outdoor activities cannot be clearly defined with simple snapshots.

While Detroit and other urban areas enjoy a well deserved resurgence, the world also needs to be aware of the vast sections of natural beauty that are easily accessible to outdoor enthusiasts. Michigan needs to be a leader in incorporating cutting edge technology to better promote the state.

Utilize interactive website using satellite imagery

"Sometimes it seems we want to keep it a secret so that Michigan is only available for us to enjoy." Gary and Sue Ann Schnitker - Cartier Mansion Bed & Breakfast

Michigan.org was named as the nation's #1 state tourism website by "Hitwise United States" over the summer season when it registered over 30,000 daily visits. It is important to build on the success of this site to allow visitors to fully appreciate all of Michigan's travel venues. Using Michigan-based Internet companies, the state should launch interactive satellite imagery services to give visitors close up looks at our scenic wonders in addition to viewing the streets and neighborhoods around the hotels and motels they choose.

For travelers interested in customizing their get-away, technology exists to create ala carte itineraries. An example of this is available at the Saginaw Valley CVB in their golf get-away package. A visitor to the site can click buttons for tee times at their favorite golf course, choice of hotel room, and dinner reservation. To retain a leadership position, Travel Michigan should incorporate state of the art technology in day to day promotional activities.

Reach year-round tourism segments

Recent emphasis on marketing Michigan has focused on the more heavily traveled summer months. Some leading travel destinations feel that this de-emphasis on other seasons has been detrimental to their business. Understanding that this focus on summer activity is due to limited resources and peak travel times, the potential to attract year-round visitors remains a challenge.

Greater emphasis on marketing Michigan as a four-season destination

"Michigan is a winter wonderland, yet we are incapable of marketing that." Mickey MacWilliams - Michigan Snowsports Industries Association

Michigan should advertise amenities and recreation opportunities available in all its seasons, not just the warm weather functions. Promising warm, sunny beaches for our guests is important, but equal focus should be placed on the benefits of each season. The michigan.org homepage features a variety of interesting year-round activities. Travel Michigan should continue this effective use of the website, but seek ways to increase awareness of other seasonal activities in all forms of advertising. Adequate funding for Travel Michigan will ensure greater equity in seasonal promotions, and in doing so, generate year-round jobs and state tax revenues.

Michigan's unique geography

It's a geographic reality that Michigan is a destination state. Unlike Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, Michigan does not benefit from causal pass-through travelers. Visitors and meeting and convention planners must carefully choose to make Michigan a destination. Michigan has to work harder and smarter in light of our northern position.

Greater emphasis on marketing Michigan as a sports, meeting and convention destination

"If you effectively promote tourism in Michigan, you will promote business in Michigan." George Moroz - TICOM (Tourism Industry Coalition of Michigan)

Michigan boasts a wide array of venues and attractions that make a perfect fit for national and regional events. Sporting events, national association forums, and large scale conventions are very lucrative and should be targeted for our destination state. This type of sales effort goes far beyond the production, smart placement of ads and choice of advertising mediums.

Working closely with the private sector, Michigan can yield countless major events. The Super Bowl, Ryder Cup, MLB's All Star Game, this year's NCAA Basketball Quarterfinals, and the International 500 snowmobile race are recent examples of events bringing national attention and tourism dollars to Michigan. In turn, gas stations, restaurants, hotels, convenience stores, and other attractions all benefit tremendously with the when major events come to our state. Travel Michigan should work with convention and visitors bureaus to market and attract more events such as these.

Michigan.org on state license plates

"This state is one of the country's best kept secrets!" is a statement I often hear from out-of-state tourists." Patricia Mooradian - The Henry Ford

Michigan.org is the "call to action" site used in all Travel Michigan marketing. Michigan drivers may be one of the best assets the state has to promote Michigan tourism. Policymakers have an opportunity to generate tourism networking by using the website address 'www.michigan.org' in place of the current 'www.michigan.gov' on license plates.

Regulatory Reform

Challenge

MEDC emphasis on manufacturing

State officials at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) are eager to assist in business relocation to this state, and expansion of current domestic operations. Their actions are focused on large industries and manufacturing. Tourism ventures produce jobs, many at high salaries. Tourism businesses also provide measurable effects on neighboring businesses and create additional opportunities for communities. The challenge for the MEDC is to create economic incentive packages to lure more tourism development to Michigan.

Plan of Action

Incentives for tourism ventures

"[A company] built a new indoor water park a few years ago. If they had been a manufacturing company, not only would infrastructure funding been available, but they would have been able to apply for a host of other economic incentives restricted to manufacturers." JoAnn Crary - President and CEO, Saginaw Future, Inc.

Michigan should investigate tourism incentive packages successfully utilized in other states and develop a similar incentive plan for Michigan. Kentucky has a policy for tourism growth that could be modeled by Michigan. For instance, investments of \$10 million or more, with 30% of customer base coming from outside of Michigan could provide hundreds of good paying jobs, and act as a starting point for MEDC incentives and equitable grant programs.

Challenge

Regulatory concerns suppress fresh tourism concepts

Regulatory concerns conflict with potentially beneficial attractions due to lack of innovation and flexibility. This issue was brought to the attention of the task force by a group of underwater recreation enthusiasts concerned that outdated state regulations and bureaucracies suppress fresh tourism concepts.

In this case, facilitate intentional sinking of environmentally sanitized vessels to promote underwater scuba diving tourism

State government regulators could partner with underwater recreation enthusiasts to facilitate the proper intentional sinking of vessels. Other states have undertaken these ventures in a safe and environmentally-friendly way. Michigan regulators should emulate their counterparts and promote such opportunities. This particular concern may be very specialized and limited in scope, but shouldn't be overlooked as we seek every avenue to expand our tourism industry.

Transient tourist populations increase infrastructure demands

Many tourism destination communities in Michigan must make sizeable investments in municipal infrastructure to accommodate seasonal or transient population. New water plants and improved sewer systems must be designed to meet the demands of residents and visitors. However, revenue sharing payments and state and federal grants are allocated solely on a community's year round residential population. Some local governments encounter particular hardship in providing infrastructures for populations that are elevated for just a few months out of a year.

Develop revenue sharing formula or grants that take into account tourist population

"Tourism destinations statewide are unique in that revenue sharing punishes us for our low average annual population." Dorothy Appleyard - Mayor of South Haven

Because the current revenue sharing program does not adequately account for visitor-related shifts in population, some communities struggle to provide sufficient infrastructure. Transient tourist populations should be taken into account as state dollars are disbursed to local units of government. Funding should be allocated to support residents and tourists alike. With a proper formula, special revenue sharing or "enhanced population" grants should be made available to accommodate tourism destination communities as they experience substantial spikes in peak travel months.

Challenge

Regulations: Barriers to natural resource maintenance

Michigan's rivers and harbors are vitally important for tourism opportunities, as well as for general watercraft navigation. Yet, regular maintenance of these waterways through systematic dredging is often bogged down with red-tape. Scrutiny by state and federal regulating agencies is literally choking off normal boat traffic.

Plan of Action

Simultaneous review of dredging applications or pre-approved maintenance programs

Dredging applications are reviewed by Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Simultaneous review by both agencies would expedite this process and ensure timely dredging can occur.

Ideally, coastal or river-based communities performing routine maintenance could be granted a pre-approved dredging schedule to facilitate the dredging process. Maintaining the navigability of these waterways is essential to tourism and the local economy.

Challenge

Facilitate international tourism

Michigan's close proximity to Canada provides an easy opportunity to import foreign visitors. Our challenge is to expedite traffic flow across the border while protecting national security.

Plan of Action

Laws should continually be examined for content and effect on tourism

In a post 9-11 world, greater security at our borders is essential to the protection of U.S. citizens. Unfortunately, federal attempts to improve border security have slowed the free flow of people and goods across the bridges linking Michigan to Canada. In some cases, delays at the border have prompted visitors to seek alternate destinations. In worst-case scenarios, drivers from Canada and the east coast of the U.S. are bypassing Michigan altogether in their travels.

Michigan policymakers should encourage federal rules that speed up border congestion. The state should step up efforts to minimize the negative impact on travelers crossing the U.S.-Canadian border. The Michigan congressional delegation should seek input from state legislators when issues of revised security protocols are discussed and implemented.

Challenge

Public transportation obstacles should be assessed

Michigan needs to maintain flexibility in all transportation venues to accommodate all types of visitors and their travel needs. Rising gas prices and strain on our current infrastructure make continual reassessment of public transportation opportunities a must.

Plan of Action

Transportation, in all of its configurations, should be a focus

Testimony focused repeatedly on Michigan's missed opportunities when it comes to passenger rail service. Many rail lines are sold out and adding additional cars to these trains could increase traffic into our state from places such as Canada and Chicago. Linking these rail stops to available motor coach lines could also extend, enhance and expand our tourism visitors to places such as South Haven or Grand Haven, where Chicago residents enjoy visiting.

The task force recommends that the MDOT refocus on transportation in totality. Roads and bridges are an extraordinarily important focus, and good roads will benefit the travel industry, but providing incentives to transportation businesses to better coordinate air, rail, bus, and auto traffic could ease congestion and simplify travel packaging.

Challenge

Challenges of gaming industry to traditional tourism

The growth in Indian casino gaming in recent years has presented unique challenges and competition to the Michigan tourism industry. Some private business owners expressed concern over the impact of disparate tax treatment between non-gaming ventures located on casino property and those located nearby. For instance, testimony provided in the Upper Peninsula pointed out the difficulty competing with \$39 rooms that come with \$30 in free gaming chips. Further testimony reminded us that hotels on private property must collect sales tax and hotel accommodation taxes, and pay property taxes, personal property taxes and the Michigan Business Tax.

Review state gaming policy and Indian casino compacts to improve tourism business competitiveness

The governor and the legislature should continually monitor the effectiveness of Tribal Compacts that provide a Class III Gaming License. It is within our means to equalize the playing field for all Michigan businesses through tax policy reform and economic development incentives. Measures such as these, and methods to facilitate unique marketing partnerships between private business and casinos, should be pursued by the legislature and tourism industry representatives.

Seek balance between harnessing nature's beauty and preserving resources for future generations

Michigan residents continue to be concerned with a proper balance between access to our state's resources and preservation of our natural beauty and scenic wonder. An appropriate balance must be achieved that allows for appropriate growth in local economies, especially when public access is planned. Some communities feel stymied by the project approval process.

Streamline development and approval process

"The need to preserve and improve our parks, trails and wildlife should be a priority that transcends partisan interest." Lisa Shanley - South Haven Convention & Visitors Bureau

There will always be give-and-take between preserving open spaces and providing means to access our natural wonders when servicing Michigan's population and our visitors. Travelers appreciate our scenic beauty, and the ability to access it in a meaningful way.

There are hundreds of miles of scenic coastline on Michigan's shores. Development projects, such as boardwalks and hospitality businesses, often improve access to appreciate and enjoy limited portions of Michigan's coastline.

State government should not shy away from the occasional development project at the water's edge. For instance, a brick loading dock which now sits empty in a Marquette harbor is currently precluded from development. The footprint of the structure is already in the water, and no significant change to water quality would be observable. This is just one case where red-tape can interfere with gentle, environmentally-friendly tourism growth.

Additional Plan of Action

Legislative oversight could improve efficiency and balance in forestry programs

Properly overseeing forestry programs in Michigan could generate significant revenue for state programs. Developing forest trails could also enhance widespread interest from a variety of tourism sectors.

The Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan are particularly interested in building a 21st century infrastructure to accommodate tourists. Infrastructure development is necessary in order for tourists to reach Michigan's splendid attractions in the more rural parts of our state.

Challenge

State regulatory agencies do not always view business and local government as partners

Business owners and local units of government often need to make common-sense adjustments on their private property or municipal land to better accommodate their patrons. There is an understanding that government agencies are in place to preserve and protect our natural environment. When evaluating these requests, government should begin with the assumption that these property owners intend to improve, not damage, the natural environment - often for the general public to enjoy. It is difficult to fault a private individual for improving his or her property when many acres of state land are often in far worse states of disrepair and neglect.

Plan of Action

Government should seek out mutual solutions with private business

"My business has almost been put out of business a dozen times by local zoning, state regulations or the DEQ." Mike DeVoe - Portage Point Inn

State government should always have an attitude of partnering with local government and small-business owners in preserving our precious environment. A common-sense litmus test can and should be applied to non-conforming use of land prior to any fines being levied on property owners and local units of government. The task force suggests a simple 'tie goes to the runner' approach, which assumes the good intentions of the community to enhance its economic condition, while protecting its natural assets.

Bureaucracy can frustrate small business

Michigan businesses experience roadblocks to growth when working through regulatory agencies. Small-business owners, many operating on small profit margins, are often impeded by delays in processing applications and permits required by the state.

Often when a business changes ownership, it faces overly strict scrutiny, even when the nature of the business activity has not significantly changed. For example, with modern resources and technology, the act of transferring a liquor license from one owner to another can and should be simpler.

We heard testimony that delays in this process by the Liquor Control Commission often cause local businesses and job providers to think twice when contemplating new business ventures. Michigan government must streamline its regulatory processes and make doing business in Michigan less complicated.

Clearing up 'red-tape' hassles on job providers

“Imagine if you needed a legislator to get involved every time you wanted to transfer a motor vehicle registration to a family member?” Bill Zehnder – Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn

Small businesses described frustration with delays in the state licensing process. Testimony often focused on delays within Michigan Liquor Control Commission. Liquor laws should be written and regulatory processes followed to ensure that the state is providing the quickest possible response time to local entrepreneurs. Legislation to provide for "conditional" or "temporary" licensing is suggested to allow business owners to continue to operate during a more-detailed review process.

Another suggestion presented to the task force that we offer for investigation, rather than recommendation, is one to permit taste-testing of beer and wine in retail and festival settings. An example may be Representative Geoff Hansen's bill to permit supervised tasting at local farmer's markets. While taste-testing is available in some small venues such as wineries and specialty brewers, some in the industry would like to see enhanced opportunities for the public to sample their product.

Protecting our Natural Resources

Challenge

Ensuring Michigan's wetland policies are effective and applied strategically

“We need to ensure there is preservation of our natural resources in conjunction with the Pure Michigan campaign.” Rachel Vochaska - Greater South Haven Chamber of Commerce

Frequent concerns were expressed to the task force over Michigan's rigid wetland policy that at times prohibits even modest construction projects. Very small tracts of private land are prevented from use by definition as a wetland. Both residential and commercial tourism ventures are often prevented from sensible growth and expansion that would have minimal impact on the environment.

Plan of Action

Investigate broader approach to wetland preservation that allows for reasonable economic growth

The MDEQ and the DNR should be a partner, not an obstacle, to efforts to grow our state economy. Reasonable limitations to growth are necessary, but agency rules and regulations should never be so rigid as to offer no alternatives for private industry to flourish. Tourism business owners have a vested interest in the maintenance of sound environmental standards, but to many in the industry, regulatory agencies often appear to be working outside of their mission and at odds with private enterprise.

Strict oversight of state agencies would go far in addressing these concerns. While most other states follow federal wetland policy, Michigan and New Jersey administer this program at the state level. Operational audits and stricter interpretation of existing law would allow Michigan to protect its natural resources while finding reasonable solutions to economic stimulus and job growth.

Challenge

Threats from invasive species

Cormorants are birds that, by all accounts, are creating an ecological disaster in northern Michigan. These birds consume large quantities of fish and pose a clear threat to our state's fisheries and island vegetation. The cormorant threatens the environment, and in doing so poses a significant threat to outdoor recreation enthusiasts and the tourism industry segments that seek to serve their needs.

In addition, the growth of the global economy brings more and more ships from exotic locations to the Great Lakes. Some of these ships have carried invasive species from foreign ecosystems into our waterways that can pose a threat to native habitats, existing food chains and the wildlife that depends on them.

Plan of Action

Combat overpopulation of the double crested cormorant

While this is primarily a federal issue, Michigan should join other Great Lakes states in a coordinated effort to lobby Washington, D.C. to overturn the cormorant's protection as an endangered species. Until such a change is made, the state should continue to work with federal authorities in attempts to gain some control of populations. The end goal is not to eradicate the cormorant, but to limit their negative impact. A controlled cormorant population should do little harm to the surrounding environment.

Additional Plan of Action

Increase efforts to protect the Great Lakes from invasive species

The Great Lakes are Michigan's greatest natural resource. Our lush forests, clear streaming rivers and scenic shorelines are all dependent on the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem. While we welcome commerce and sightseeing vessels to visit one of the largest repositories of fresh water on the planet, the state must prioritize protection from invasive species such as zebra mussels that can destroy the abundant aquatic life in our inland seas.

Ineffective beach closures harm short-term and long-term tourism revenues

When environmental contamination such as an E. coli outbreak is detected in a river system, beaches at the mouth of the waterway are closed in response to this potential hazard to human health. Most of the monitors are up-river. However, it takes time for those contaminants to travel downstream, sometimes causing beaches to be closed prematurely. Following that, an additional problem of delayed testing at the beach site often causes a beach to remain closed well after the beach may be safe once again. Visitors are disappointed and often angry after spending hours of drive time only to find beaches shut down.

Real-time environmental monitoring of beaches

The state needs to ensure that Michigan's beaches are open when they are safe and closed when they are not. With instruction and certification from the Michigan Department of Community Health, local units of government should be allowed to monitor their beaches with accurate monitoring equipment to facilitate real-time water quality information.

With this tool available to local units of government, beaches can be monitored on a consistent basis to ensure that our beaches are closed at the right time and reopened as soon as they are safe for the public.

Administrative Issues

Challenge

Intergovernmental cooperation

Agency administrative decisions can affect annual festivals, events and peak tourism seasons in the state. Two examples, infrastructure repair and waterway dredging, have at times interfered with traffic flow and other types of access to and from major local events.

Plan of Action

State agency/local coordination on large scale tourism events

Agencies such as MDOT have already taken big steps by moving aside orange barrels to accommodate traffic during summer holidays such as Labor Day and July 4th. We can do more by coordinating with local communities on every large scale project. Agencies should routinely work with communities through local units of government and business organizations to ensure minimal negative impact on local attractions or festival events. Prime examples are annual events such as the Dream Cruise on Woodward Avenue, NASCAR races at the Michigan International Speedway, the Coast Guard Festival in Grand Haven, and special events such as the Superbowl and the Ryder Cup.

Challenge

Greater representation for leading industry

Tourism is a significant sector of the state's economy, but does not have proportional influence on state policy. Other major industries in the state are represented and overseen by cabinet level departments in state government. While Travel Michigan manages the direct marketing and advertising of the state, they are not responsible to seek out tourism industry problem resolution. No single state agency is mandated to work on behalf of the many small and medium size businesses comprising the tourism industry, contrary to other major industries in the state. For example, agriculture is a major industry in Michigan that has its own cabinet level department to serve its constituency and look out for their overall interests within state government, including a component of industry promotion.

Elevate tourism to cabinet level status as a full department

As indicated earlier in this report, every dollar the state invests in tourism promotion results in an estimated three dollars in state revenue. Once tourism funding is stabilized, and national promotional campaigns are successful in returning revenue to the state, the task force recommends the creation of a cabinet level tourism department. With the governor's executive order folding the former Department of Civil Service into the Department of Management and Budget, the new Department of Tourism is within reach. An additional opportunity may be available by renaming and refocusing the Department of History, Arts and Libraries to the Department of Tourism and Cultural History.

Having a seat at the policy-making table will ensure that tourism concerns are included in all executive and legislative discussions. This would demonstrate to the industry that the state is sincere in its effort to promote tourism.

*“Tourism in Michigan is like Rodney Dangerfield. We just can’t get the respect we’ve earned.”
Bob Spletzer - Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland*

Intelligent information yields smart growth

Intelligent, judicious and sustainable tourism information is lacking. Michigan economic development and promotional efforts require accurate and timely statistical data as an underpinning of a successful program. We have identified tourism as a leading industry, worthy of resource investments for economic growth. These investments include research and collection of data to better identify future needs and opportunities.

Until 2007, the Travel, Tourism and Recreation Resource Center (TTRRC), housed at Michigan State University was funded to maintain Michigan’s Tourism Industry statistical data. The center closed in 2007 due to lack of funding. Without clear statistical data on tourism, Michigan is at an enormous disadvantage in economic development and promotion efforts.

Renew partnership for statistical information

Ensure, as part of tourism economic development and promotional efforts, that the state allocate permanent, sustainable funding to reestablish and maintain statistical information pertaining to tourism. Further, the state should prioritize partnerships with in-state higher education research facilities to accomplish this goal. It is vitally important to seek out and preserve existing expertise in systematic data collection to ensure proper advocacy for tourism.

Challenge

Promote greater cross-section of industry leaders on Travel Commission

The travel industry expressed interest in greater diversity and broader industry representation on the Michigan Travel Commission. The body has at times lacked true geographic diversity and cross-sectional representation of the travel industry. While industry representatives acknowledge that they can do better in communicating suggestions for representation to the governor's office, clearer statutory guidelines for commission membership would assist in meeting this goal.

Plan of Action

Review provisions for Travel Commission membership

The Legislature should review statutory requirements of the Michigan Travel Commission and consider revisions to enhance membership diversity and participation. Every effort should be taken to ensure the commission is truly representative of the industry, and that geographic diversity is achieved. In the end, our intent should be to find talented industry leaders to give voice to even the smallest family business, and who will work diligently to promote tourism as a vibrant part of Michigan's economy.

FACTS ABOUT MICHIGAN

Michigan has more public golf courses than any other state in the country. (**Kiplinger.com**)

Michigan has more downhill ski areas than any other state except New York.

Michigan has more miles of freshwater coastline than any other state and is second only to Alaska in total coastal shoreline. Over 3,000 miles of coastline adjoin the Great Lakes. (**worldatlas.com**)

Michigan has more than 11,000 inland lakes and 36,000 miles of rivers and streams. (**Michigan.gov**)

Michigan has 1,300 designated mountain bike and bicycle trails. (**Michigan.org**)

Michigan has more watercraft registrations than any other state. (**Kiplinger.com**)

Michigan has more snowmobile registrations than any other state. (**Kiplinger.com**)

Michigan has 75,000 acres of sand dunes. (**Michigan.gov**)

The MDNR manages more public lands than any agency east of the Mississippi River. (**Michigan.gov**)

Michigan.org is the most popular state tourism website in the country recording 1.7 million hits in July 2007 which accounted for over 13 percent of the traffic to all 50 states tourism websites. (**www.mirsnews.com**)

In 2002, Detroit was the 21st most popular destination for international visitors to the United States boasting a quarter of a million travelers. (**U.S. Department of Commerce**)

Michigan has 11 underwater preserves encompassing 2,450 square miles of Great Lakes bottomlands. (**Michigan.gov**)

A Michigan resident is never more than six miles from a river or stream and never more than 85 miles from one of the Great Lakes. (**Michigan.gov**)

Michigan manages 6,100 miles of groomed snowmobile trails. (**Michigan.gov**)

Michigan has the largest dedicated state forest system in the nation spanning 3.9 million acres with three forests in the Upper Peninsula and three forests in the Lower Peninsula. (**Michigan.gov**)

Michigan is home to the U.S. Ski Hall of Fame as well as the nation's only Olympic Education Center.

A 1997 study revealed that visitors to state parks and recreation areas spent an estimated \$464 million, about half of that within 20 miles of their destination. Owners of registered boats spend about \$700 million on trips in 1998. (**Michigan.gov**)

70 percent of Michigan's hotel occupancy comes from in-state residents. (**Michiganhotels.org**)

Michigan ranks dead last in hotel occupancy rate. (**Michiganhotels.org**)

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS TASK FORCE

The task force members wish to thank the following persons for their invaluable testimony that contributed to the findings in this report:

Task Force Meeting, July 23, 2007 at the Bavarian Inn Lodge in Frankenmuth

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Task Force Meeting, August 16, 2007 at Presque Isle Park in Marquette

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Task Force Meeting, October 15, 2007 at The Henry Ford in Dearborn

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Task Force Meeting, November 30, 2007 at Crystal Mountain Resort in Thompsonville

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