

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Resource Team (NRT) applauds the Idlewild community for simply holding on to the land known as Idlewild. At approximately 3,000 acres, it is the largest land based historically African American resort ever assembled in the United States. Idlewild is one of the six most complete African American resorts remaining in America. It is a rare and valuable national resource with physical and cultural significance.

Idlewild is located along U.S. Highway 10 in south central Lake County, Yates Township (see page A-5 location maps). It is approximately thirty five miles east of Lake Michigan, and two hundred forty miles northwest of Detroit. Baldwin, the county seat, is located four miles west. The physical Idlewild community is concentrated on approximately three thousand acres within the Manistee National Forest ($\pm 180,000$ acres in Lake County). Seven hundred and fifteen persons reside in Yates Township year round. The population increases to approximately three thousand between June 1 and August 31 due to the presence of summer residents and vacationers. Public records indicate that more than one half of the year round population is above 45 years of age.

Neighboring communities, such as Baldwin, have partnered with Yates Township and local organizations, such as FiveCAP, to improve basic utilities and public transportation. These are strategic steps. The State of Michigan must be recognized for its wisdom and foresight in acknowledging Idlewild as a state and national resource. The State has been creative in its "State Partners" approach. The assemblage and commitment of the essential departments and agencies has been economical in time and expertise, while being productive. Momentum has been produced at all of the critical levels as a result of this initiative. The NRT acknowledges the significant scale and complexity of the proposal to revitalize Idlewild, but urges the local community, northwestern Michigan neighbors, and State government to proceed as quickly as possible.

The NRT was charged with developing an initial body of thought, interpretation, process, structure, resources, networks and vision which would serve as the strategic framework for economic development through cultural tourism in Idlewild. The process began with extensive

discussions regarding goals, objectives, resources and expectations between the Team Leader and Director of the Michigan Office of Cultural Economic Development. The Team Leader made a reconnaissance trip to Lansing to meet with State Department Heads, and to Idlewild to meet directly with community representatives. A delegation from Idlewild traveled to Eatonville, Florida, America's oldest incorporated African American town. The trip took place during the production in Eatonville of the 17th Annual Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts and Humanities ZORA Festival) in January 2006. Members of the Idlewild delegation were given numerous opportunities to follow staff and volunteers of Preserve the Eatonville Community, Inc. (P.E.C.), the 501(c)(3), historic preservation and arts organization which conceived of and organizes the annual event, as they made final arrangements for the ZORA Festival.

The Team made a visit to Idlewild to meet community representatives and tour the Baldwin area on June 1, 2006. The NRT also met with State agency representatives to be briefed on the status of departmental efforts and partnering opportunities toward the Idlewild initiative. Additional cultural and historic documentation was gathered from the Michigan State Archives. The NRT began to synthesize its observations and recommendations, and develop a proposal for strategic planning to assist the State of Michigan and the Idlewild community.

CONCLUSION: Idlewild is a national treasure, and possesses the physical resources, history, authenticity, and broad culture to achieve great success with economic development via cultural tourism.

The NRT addressed the strategic issues which must become permanent components of any programs or plans proposed for Idlewild with the following recommendations in Part I:

1. All efforts should be made to preserve Idlewild as an inhabited functioning community. Great care will be required to enhance the quality of life of the residents, preserve the dignity of the residents and authentic physical character while advancing economic growth.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Idlewild community and State of Michigan must approach this project in a strategic manner. The strategic framework must include regional collaboration and partnerships. The process must be straightforward and objective, managed with discipline and public accountability. Initiation of piecemeal phases and stop-gap programs before completing a strategic master plan will not generate significant long-term results, and will not attract a tourist audience.
3. Invest in a community building process concurrent with major program and physical master planning. Local trust, organizational development, networking relationships, technical knowledge, conceptual mastery and problem solving capability require strengthening beyond current levels.
4. Preservation of land, and landscape, must become as high a priority as preservation of structures. A detailed and comprehensive “land genealogy” should be created for each property in Idlewild. A local historic land resource plan should be prepared, and used to coordinate State and Federal management and disposal of “tax reverted properties”. A land trust should be created in Idlewild to manage “tax reverted properties”.
5. Place greater local emphasis on environmental stewardship and historic preservation as integral with all quality of life issues in Idlewild. Protection and quality enhancement of natural resources must become the top community action item. The authenticity, integrity and documentation of the existing National Register District must be greatly reinforced. Physical representation of footprints of all structures built on Williams Island between 1920 and 1940 should be one of the first historic preservation projects. The community must make every effort to build a credible track record in historic preservation programming and education.
6. A legal self-governing structure must be developed to allow Idlewild to plan and manage in its own behalf. Waiver of population requirements for charter township status or creation of a “special” governing district should be considered.
7. Creative business formats, such as a small business incubator and locally owned food co-op, must be encouraged and evolve with traditional mature commercial scenarios and formats.
8. Develop a “special projects” structure to produce more effective State interdepartmental collaboration on Idlewild, and similar, projects. Full-time staffing, with assignment of some executive authority, will be essential.
9. Commit strategic State funding/budget for a major long-term involvement.
10. Ensure that all cultural, historic and physical planning will be facilitated by competent professionals experienced in African American historic cultural and community planning.

The National Resource Team is composed of six interdisciplinary professionals with extensive experience and credentials in cultural tourism, tourism economics, community organization, community planning, public humanities and arts programming, physical planning, historic preservation, landscape architecture, and architecture. Each team member left Idlewild with strong impressions and insights. Part III/Individual Voices is included to enlighten the State and community to these uniquely sincere and striking thoughts.

Idlewild Cultural Economic Development Initiative National Resource Team (NRT)

Mr. Everett L. Fly, Team Leader
Landscape Architect, FASLA
Architect, NCARB Certified
Mr. Stephen L. Carter,
Landscape Architect, ASLA
Dr. Lydia C. Charles
Cultural Historian
Dr. Gloria House
Humanities Scholar
Mr. Perry Howard
Landscape Architect, FASLA
Mrs. N.Y. Nathiri
Community Preservationist

August, 2006