

Working Waterfront Challenges in the Great Lakes: Some Examples from Diverse Communities in the State of Michigan

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Michigan the Great Lakes State with shoreline on four Great Lakes possesses the largest freshwater shoreline in the world. It's history, culture and economy is intertwined with water resources. Michigan's 3,288 miles of coast is home to over 44% of the states population. The diversity of communities ranges from large metropolitan areas like Detroit to isolated hamlets in the Upper Peninsula. But all these communities have something in common relating to their essential association with the Great Lakes. This presentation is designed to articulate through case studies the diverse planning approaches Michigan communities have initiated to utilize, maintain, redevelop and preserve working waterfronts and associated natural resources for community benefit and quality of life. The authors suggest that these Michigan experiences can serve as examples for other coastal communities endeavoring to do the same.

Leland, Michigan: A Nonprofit Community-Led Effort To Preserve Historic Fishtown Including Purchase Of Commercial Fishing Boats And Licenses.

A non-profit community led effort has preserved a unique working waterfront in Northwest Lower Michigan. Leland is a quaint historic unincorporated village which contains "Fishtown," one of few extant examples in the Great Lakes region of a traditional cultural landscape developed by commercial and sports fishing and other water-transportation and recreation related activities. It is a landscape that has evolved from its centuries old use as a fishery site. As well, Leland's Fishtown is a unique portal to Lake Michigan including nearby access to islands which are owned and managed by the U.S. National Park Service. It has an existing high profile for both local and regional residents and ranks high as one of the State and region's cultural tourism attractions.

The Fishtown Preservation Society (<http://www.preservingfishtown.org/>) a non profit-organization is concerned with the sustainability of historic Fishtown and as a local newspaper editorial stated to "assure that the area remains open to the public and that commercial fishing—in some form—continues along its ageless docks". About 70% of what is called Fishtown was owned by Carlson family whose ancestors first settled on nearby North Manitou Island in the 1870's. In the 1970's Bill Carlson a 4th generation fisherman and his brother acquired fishing shanties from fishing families no longer in business. They led the effort to create the Leland Historic District which includes Fishtown and in 1975 was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Carlson's vision was to preserve Fishtown's commercial fishing essence and enhance its tourism attraction by converting the fishing shanties to gift shops and leasing docks to charterfishermen. The Carlson family managed the property until 2001, with retirement beckoning, sought to find another entity to carry on their vision and sustain the fishery.

The Fishtown Preservation Society began work in earnest in 2005 and began a concerted effort to perform diligence, fundraise, and purchase and maintain Fishtown, thus staving off probable demolition of the fishing village and redevelopment into condominiums. In

an outstanding dedicated six month fund-raising effort in 2006, the Fishtown Preservation Society raised over \$2.5 million from over 3,000 donors and on February 7, 2007 officially received title to the land properties along with two commercial fishing vessels (a trap net boat and a gill net tug) and the state fishing licenses and fishing gear from the Carlson family. The Carlson's heritage will continue in Fishtown as they will have a 70 year lease on their former fishery building where they sell Great Lakes fishery products.

The Fishtown Preservation Society also formed an Education and Interpretation Advisory Committee which has members from the Natural Resources Department of Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians, the Inland Seas Education Association, the Leelanau Historical Society and Michigan Sea Grant Extension actively participating. The Fishtown Preservation Society has initiated efforts to raise an additional \$2 million to move forward with plans to maintain and preserve Fishtown's historical structures, while also offering historical interpretation and educational programs to reflect the rich history of commercial fishing on the Great Lakes.

Newspaper writer Bill O'Brien summed up Fishtown well when he wrote: "Fishtown's connection to 19th- and early 20th Century Leland tightly weaves it to the community fabric. The buildings recall days when residents cobbled together a living from Lake Michigan's natural resources. Its timeless appearance creates a tourism appeal, and it's a magnet for locals and visitors who stroll wooden docks surrounded by water, boats, shops and the unmistakable aroma of fish." Thanks to the efforts of the Fishtown Preservation Society, this unique working waterfront is now preserved for the next generations to enjoy and experience an authentic part of our Great Lakes history and culture.

Grand Haven, Michigan: Reestablishing a Working Waterfront through Development Of Centralized Charterboat Dockage

Grand Haven a coastal community located on the central eastern shore of Lake Michigan has always been a maritime community. From the time it was first settled to the present day its proximity to the Great Lakes has resulted in a close association with industries and commercial sectors that depend on water. Even before European settlement Native Americans inhabited the area in part because of its abundant fishery resources. Later the area became a flourishing commercial waterfront and harbor that hosted water dependent uses including commercial fisheries, shipping, passenger transport and sawmills. Because of many factors common to most Great Lakes coastal communities the commercial fishery and other working waterfront activities waned by the late 1950's. Waterfronts deteriorated and communities developed away from these water resources. When Pacific salmon were introduced in the Great Lakes in the late 1960's a multibillion dollar sportfishery developed and a commercial charterboat fleet emerged to provide access to this sportfishery. More importantly the fishery and thousands of participants it attracted acted as an impetus for waterfront revitalization.

In 2005 almost 600 charterboats were licensed by the State of Michigan. These vessels took more than 16,000 excursions on the Great Lakes resulting in significant economic impact to the State of Michigan and coastal communities. Charterboats in the Grand

Haven area directly generate \$857K annually. Charterboat customers and their families spent an additional \$168.44/person/day or a total of \$1.3 million. The City of Grand Haven recognized this economic potential as early as 1983. Local officials and community leaders decided to develop centralized charterboat dockage that could capitalize on this market segment and serve as an anchor project for the redevelopment of Grand Haven's working waterfront.

Major elements of the project included 16 charterboat slips linked physically and thematically to the downtown area. Centralized charterboat dockage provided a functional fishing dock and created tourism attraction in its own right. Inherent in the project plan was the understanding that sportfishing and charterboats were of interest to nonanglers. Part of the facility included a stainless steel fish cleaning station with fish disposal unit and encircled with a viewing area for the public to observe the days catch.

Officials utilized a combination of granting sources and local funding to develop the project and other waterfront infrastructure. A waterfront tax incremental financing district (TIFA) was enacted. TIFA's generally function to capture an increment of tax revenues generated from development of a specified district. In this circumstance the waterfront. The results were impressive for a community of Grand Haven's size. In the seven years of TIFA existence 1.1 million in tax revenues were generated. 15 public improvement projects resulted and were leveraged by over 5.6 million in grants. Public and private investment within the district amounted to over \$27 million. Major developments included retail and commercial space, upland residential condominiums, a bed and breakfast inn, and adaptive reuse project of old factory space, a multipurpose Coast Guard station and a marina expansion.

From Rust Belt to Green Belt: Public-Private Partnerships Working to Transform Southeast Michigan

Waterfronts along the Detroit River have evolved greatly since the City of Detroit was founded over 300 years ago. Approximately 97% of the coastal wetlands along the U.S. portion of the Detroit River have vanished. Today the Detroit River is both a dividing line and a gathering point. It stretches nearly 48 miles and serves as a flowing boundary between Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario. Along the Detroit River shoreline are over 20 islands, many coastal wetlands, marshes and shoals, national wildlife refuges, public parks, coal-fired power plants, auto assembly plants, chemical refineries, steel manufacturing facilities, marinas, and more. Two major North American flyways intersect in the region. Businesses, non-profit organizations, private citizens and federal, state and local officials are coming together to try to repair some of the damaged habitat, restore public access to the waterfront and develop ecotourism opportunities. These waterfront transforming partnerships are demonstrated by examining softshore engineering and eco-tourism examples.

Softshore Engineering

The Detroit River continues to be an important international shipping channel, with 80 million tons of cargo passing through on an annual basis. Industrial facilities up and

down the river depend on importing and exporting shipments of ore, coal, steel, etc. to run their operations. As a result, much of the shoreline has been hardened to prevent erosion. Softshore engineering takes hardened, rip rapped shorelines and reestablishes native coastal wetland vegetation. In many cases, the restoration not only benefits wildlife species, but also has a positive impact on human populations. Since 1995, over 25 softshore engineering projects have been completed up on the Detroit River.

The City of River Rouge home to nearly 10,000 residents has nearly 5 miles of waterfront along the Rouge and Detroit Rivers, only 550 feet of that are available for public access. Waterfront access is restricted to Belanger Park, a 9.5 acre park on the Detroit River. Recent restoration efforts have made the park an attractive, waterfront retreat offering access to the Detroit River for boating, fishing, and picnicking. The city initiated a two-phase, \$1 million restoration of the park in 1997. Belanger Park is now used extensively year-round for fishing, and on summer weekends the boardwalk is crowded with spectators and anglers. From the boardwalk, park patrons enjoy spectacular views of the Detroit skyline and freighter traffic.

U.S. Steel Corporation, located downstream of Belanger Park in the cities of Ecorse and River Rouge, is Michigan's largest producer of steel. It sits on 1,100 acres and has approximately seven miles of shoreline. In 2004 approximately 1,000 linear feet of their shoreline in River Rouge was converted from a hardened, poured concrete to a more natural shoreline using soft-shore engineering techniques with native plants. The project was funded by U.S. Steel as part of a supplemental environmental plan developed due to clean air act violations. Michigan Sea Grant was involved in negotiating the plan and provided technical assistance throughout the project.

Until recently, concrete banks and metal guardrails bordered the Detroit River shoreline in front of DTE Energy's River Rouge Power Plant. Today the 200-foot section of industrial shoreline is a thriving natural area, alive with cardinal flower, dogwood and native grasses. The more than \$50,000 DTE Energy project was funded in part by a US EPA Five-Star Grant, which requires at least five partner organizations. In addition to DTE Energy, support came from the City of River Rouge, Friends of the Detroit River, Metropolitan Affairs Coalition, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Michigan Sea Grant, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and Wildlife Habitat Council. Numerous in-kind contributions, including many volunteer hours preparing soil and planting, helped the project toward completion.

While the reasons for undertaking softshore engineering projects vary, the results are the same; improved wildlife habitat, increased public access to waterfronts and an appreciation for the natural resources that remain.

Eco-Tourism:

As businesses, residents and community leaders learned to appreciate Southeast Michigan's natural resources, they also realized that the area could be promoted for its richness in water, wildlife and recreational opportunities. As a result, eco-tourism based activities such as greenways, blueways and birding were initiated. Greenways are open

spaces, including habitats and trails that link parks, nature reserves, cultural features or historic sites with each other. In Greater Detroit, greenways are beginning to punctuate a nearly continuous stretch of commercial development. Greenways allow access to the waterways, improve the aesthetic appearance of the shoreline and have recreational, ecological and economic benefits.

The Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative began in 2000 as a result of concerns raised at the 1998 Downriver Summit hosted by Congressman John D. Dingell. Citizens, business leaders, local officials and others came together to discuss ways to improve the quality of life in the region. The Initiative is a regional non-motorized pathway vision for the Downriver region of Southeast Michigan that will connect the 21 Downriver communities and Wayne County through a network of trails and greenways. Michigan Sea Grant has played a role in the project since its inception.

In September 2006, the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition released plans for the Detroit Heritage River Water Trail, a river version of a greenway trail (or “blueway”) and will provide opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, and small boat paddling. The water trail will increase water recreation, education, and entertainment opportunities – allowing for different kinds of experiences and trips. The water trail offers paddlers the opportunity to learn about the rivers’ distinctive wildlife, habitat, and heritage while reconnecting people to the very resource that has drawn settlers to the region for centuries.

The region’s abundant water resources also attract a wide variety of wildlife setting the stage for world renowned birding locations. Over 350 species of birds have been recorded in this region. Over 300,000 diving ducks stop each year to rest and feed on water celery in the lower Detroit River and western Lake Erie during their fall migration from Canada to the east and south. As raptors migrate south from their eastern Canadian breeding grounds, they are blocked by the north shore of Lake Erie and cross over the lower Detroit River on thermal updrafts. Because of this phenomenon and geography the lower river is one of the three best spots to watch hawks in North America. Annual hawk festivals attract thousands of birders that observe over 100,000 hawks crossing the Detroit River.

These tremendous birding resources are the focus of a new effort to promote eco-tourism through the development of a bird watching driving tour map and educational brochure for Southeast Michigan and Southwest Ontario.

Visioning a Sustainable Future for NE Michigan: Connecting Great Lakes Coastal Access, Tourism, and Economic Development through an Integrated Assessment

A rural example of Michigan Sea Grant’s coastal community development programming is reflected in an applied research initiative engaging the communities of northeast Michigan and the northern Lake Huron coastline, specifically a three-county area that includes Presque Isle, Alpena and Alcona counties. Michigan Sea Grant, through a collaborative partnership, is funding and facilitating a research-based process, called an integrated assessment (www.miseagrant.umich.edu/ia), designed to the development of

potential policy actions that address the following policy question: “How can coastal [Lake Huron] access be designed, in a regional context, for sustainable tourism that stimulates economic development while maintaining the integrity of natural and cultural resources, and quality of life?”

Regionally, the rural northeast Michigan communities are rich in both coastal cultural and natural resources; boasting a recently designated NOAA National Marine Sanctuary focused exclusively on the cultural maritime resources found in and along Lake Huron, and significant tracts of publicly-owned and geologically, ecologically significant coastal properties. However, the past few decades for this region have been economically challenging. To this end, developing and marketing a diversified and sustainable Great Lakes coastal tourism portfolio, including both cultural and natural resources related tourism, has been identified as a significant economic development opportunity for this region, and is a central focus of this particular integrated assessment process.

Through 2004 and 2005, the Michigan Sea Grant research program identified and selected northeast Michigan as a pilot community to conduct an integrated assessment. The appropriate research and community partners were identified, establishing a core working group reflecting the appropriate local, state and federal decision-making partners. This regional working group verified the potential value that this assessment could add to their current work and initiatives related to the coastline, and collaboratively defined the working policy question. Starting in 2006 and continuing through 2007, several working group meetings took place to collaborate with and engage technical experts in data interpretation, and policy identification and prioritization.

This assessment involves the following qualitative and quantitative work: an ecological assessment, a cultural assets inventory, a zoning and planning assessment, a socio-economic study, and a sustainable design assessment. These various assessments will then be combined as necessary to better understand current conditions, provide tools for forecasting potential future conditions, and support in developing potential policy options. The final, completed integrated assessment report is anticipated by June 2007, following a scientific peer review and public information and comment period.

This particular integrated assessment provides a model for successfully applying research to regionally inform policy decisions related to Lake Huron coastal resource management, and generating economic development opportunities through sustainable use of these resources. To date, the process has demonstrated value in enhancing regional relationships and has catalyzed the development of several side projects and grants achieved in support of this regional process. Preliminarily, officials representing federal, state, and local agencies and organizations have also indicated and agree that this process has enhanced their regional relationships, added value to their existing projects and work, and will guide and influence their intended coastal access-related work within the region.

Additional background and information related to this project are available online at: www.miseagrant.umich.edu/nemia

