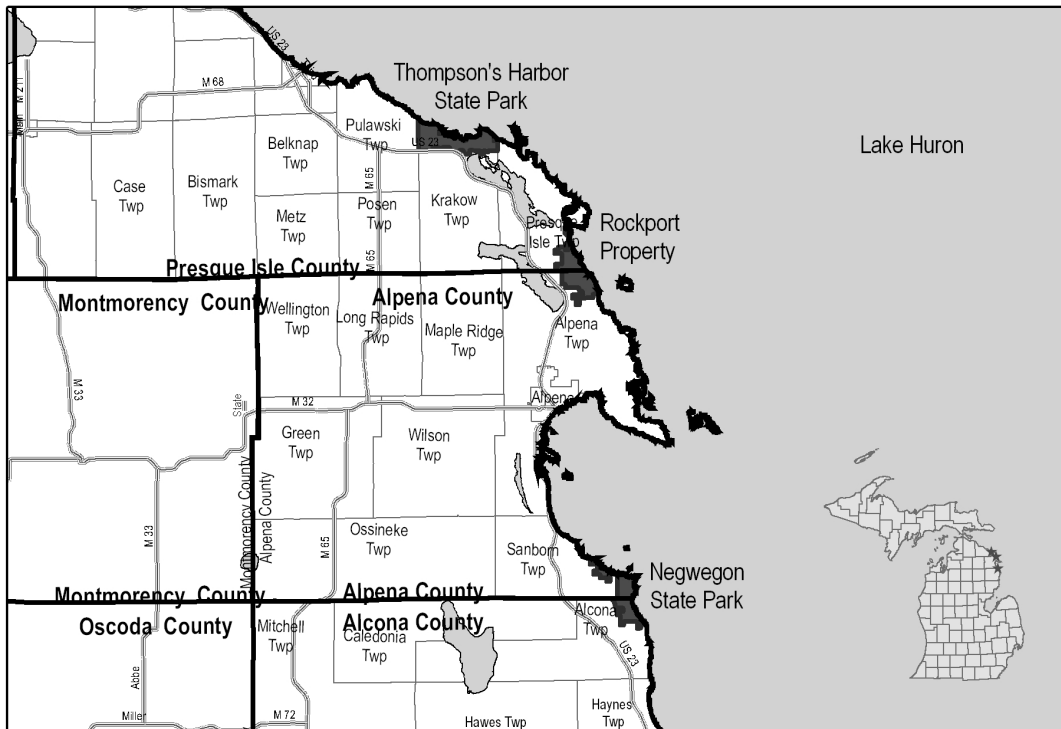


## Regional Assessment

Negwegon State Park, The Rockport Property  
Thompson's Harbor State Park



Prepared for

Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Parks and Recreation Division

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**September 2008**

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Negwegon – Rockport – Thompson’s Harbor

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## Regional Assessment Negwegon – Rockport – Thompson’s Harbor

### 1.0 Introduction

In 2007, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Division (PRD) embarked on a planning process for three sites in northeast Michigan. The PRD’s strategy was to develop Phase I General Management Plans for Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property and Thompson’s Harbor State Park. In addition, the PRD intended for a Regional Assessment to be performed after the Phase I GMPs were completed. The Regional Assessment would determine the potential for marketing and managing the three sites as a unit. The direction of the Assessment was to be predicated on the outcome of the concerted Phase I GMP processes.

The Phase I GMP planning process resulted in a unified concept for Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson’s Harbor. Rockport becomes the central gathering place for visitors, allowing the other two sites to remain in a primarily undisturbed, natural state. A central hub of activity at Rockport orients visitors as to the opportunities available at all three sites. The center directs visitors on the location of individual resources and activities and how to get there, as well as special educational attributes of each site. Rockport was selected as the hub because of its central location between the two other sites, and the fact that it already has a fairly large area of development (gravel parking area for the boat launch and deep water port, as well as the area disturbed by the quarry). There is potential for an interpretive center, or a similar structure, at Rockport to give it significance as the hub, or gateway to all three properties. It may also be appropriate to permit ecotourism businesses to be based at this location. Another key outcome of the GMP strategy was to transfer management of the Rockport Property from Forest Minerals and Fire Management Division (FMFMD) to PRD.

The Regional Assessment applies the Phase I GMP outcome to an evaluation of the merits of managing and/or marketing Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson’s Harbor as a unit. The Assessment presents the significance of each property, and the opportunities and challenges related to a regional management approach in a structured and concise manner that will aid further evaluation during subsequent planning phases and possible approaches to permitting limited commercial use at the sites. We come into the Assessment with a clear understanding that there is virtually no dispute over the natural resource significance of the three sites, nor the need to preserve and protect these valuable pieces of land. This document seeks to identify how the sites might become more open to public use [bring more people to the area thereby assisting the local economy], without compromising the integrity of the natural resources. The latter cannot be overemphasized. Potential solutions include a coordinated management strategy, partnerships for advertising the northeast region, and promoting businesses that further true ecotourism principles (see Section 5.0 sidebar).

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**2.0 Background**

The Phase I General Management Plans (GMPs) developed for Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property and Thompson’s Harbor State Park provide an in-depth account of the general features and unique characteristics of each site. This Section consolidates this information. A catalogue of attributes classified should be of great value as a reference or database by those implementing unified management and marketing strategies. The attributes are classified according to the following (Note: the attributes are detailed in Appendix A of each GMP):

- ✦ Core Value Significance
- ✦ Common Elements
- ✦ Unique Characteristics
- ✦ Significance to Local Area

**2.1 Core Value Significance**

The core significance of each site was evaluated with regard to Natural Resource Values, Historic and Cultural Resource Values, Recreational Opportunities and Outdoor Education Opportunities.

2.1.1 Natural Resource Values

Each property exhibits a number of unique natural resource values, while some natural resources are evident at two or all three of the parks. The chart below attempts to quantify the many individual natural features and natural resources and identify which properties are host to significant examples.

Natural Resource Values	Negwegon	Rockport	Thompson’s Harbor
Undeveloped, sandy beach	●	●	●
Undeveloped, cobbled beach	●	●	●
Unique fens and bogs		●	●
Great Lakes marsh	●		●
Cedar swamp	●	●	●
Oak ridge		●	●
Virgin red/white pine		●	
Designated Natural Area		●	●
Alvar glade communities		●	●
Dunes and/or dune/swale complex	●	●	●
Sand boils		●	
Great Lakes fishery spawning grounds	●	●	●
Threatened or endangered plants	●	●	●
Threatened or endangered animals	●	●	●
Karst topography with sink holes		●	
Exposed geological strata		●	

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Natural Resource Values	Negwegon	Rockport	Thompson’s Harbor
Hines Emerald Dragonfly			●
Piping Plover Critical Habitat			●
Bald Eagle	●	●	●
Blanding’s Turtle	●		
Pitcher’s Thistle	●	●	
Dwarf Lake Iris		●	●

2.1.2 Historic and Cultural Resources

The history of human occupation and settlement causes each property to exhibit a number of unique historic and cultural resource values, while some resources are evident at two or all three of the sites. The chart below attempts to quantify the many individual historic and cultural resources and identify which properties are host to significant examples.

Historic and Cultural Resources	Negwegon	Rockport	Thompson’s Harbor
Native American stone walls and pits	●		
Native American history	●	●	●
Archeological artifacts and history	●	●	●
Limestone quarry workers settlement		●	
European settlement history	●	●	●
Limestone quarry history		●	●
Great Lakes shipping history		●	●
Great Lakes shipwrecks and history	●	●	●
Historic harbors		●	●
Stage coach trail	●		
Historic railroad grade		●	
Lighthouse and lighthouse history		●	
Fossils and fossil history		●	

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2.1.3 Recreation Opportunities

All three properties have a long history of recreational use, even before they were purchased by the State of Michigan and continuing today. Many of the recreational opportunities of these properties are available at all three. Each also has unique characteristics, however, that result in certain opportunities being specific to only one. The following chart lists the many distinct resources and opportunities that can be enjoyed in the parks, and then identifies which among them afford these experiences (or could be improved to provide them).

Recreation Opportunities	Negwegon	Rockport	Thompson’s Harbor
Walk pristine, undeveloped shoreline	●	●	●
Swimming	●	●	●
Hiking	●	●	●
Mountain biking	●*	●	●*
Camping	●	●	●
Canoeing and kayaking	●	●	●
Snowmobiling		●	●
Hunting	●	●	●
Fishing	●	●	●
Equestrian Use	●*	●*	●*
Diving at shipwrecks off-shore	●	●	●
Diving in sink holes		●	
Small boat launch		●	
Deep water port		●	
Bird watching	●	●	●
Wildflower viewing	●	●	●
Fossil hunting		●	
Lighthouse tour		●	
Long-range shooting		●	

\* Where appropriate.



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2.1.4 Outdoor Education Opportunities

All three properties have the potential to become “outdoor classrooms” for nature study, ecology, archeology, geology, Native American history, settlement history, species protection and diversity, hunting and fishing, Great Lakes shipping and ship-building history, and potential many others. These educational opportunities tend to be more specific to the three properties. The chart which follows attempts to quantify the many individual educational resources and opportunities, then identify which properties might host significant examples.

<b>Outdoor Education Opportunities</b>	<b>Negwegon</b>	<b>Rockport</b>	<b>Thompson’s Harbor</b>
Surface geology	●	●	●
Bedrock geology		●	
Fossil record and examples		●	
Native American history	●		
European settlement history	●	●	●
Great Lakes shipping history		●	●
Great Lakes shipwreck history	●	●	●
Transportation history	●	●	
Endangered species study	●	●	●
Understanding critical habitat	●	●	●
Great Lakes fishery	●	●	
Hunter Safety education	●	●	●
Great Lakes lighthouse history		●	

## 2.2 Common Elements

As the above charts illustrate, there are many natural resources, historical and cultural resources, recreation and educational opportunities that are common to Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property, and Thompson’s Harbor State Park. These key elements of commonality would lend support to consideration of managing, or at least marketing, all three properties as a “unit”. The key elements shared by all three properties include:

- ✦ ***Pristine, Undeveloped Lake Huron Beaches.*** Similar to only a few other major shoreline resources, for example the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property, and Thompson’s Harbor State Park taken as a unit include over 22 miles of unspoiled Lake Huron shoreline. There are many points along these three properties where no human modifications are visible in any direction. The fact that these properties remain primarily undeveloped is worth protecting. Both unit-managing and unit-marketing may support this goal.
- ✦ ***Hunting and Fishing.*** All three properties have a long, primarily regional history of providing significant opportunities for hunting and fishing. Trapping may also be a related activity that is common to all three. With the possible need for increases in support and enforcement personnel related to specific seasons, unit-managing and unit-marketing may permit better coordination of departmental personnel.
- ✦ ***Threatened or Endangered Plants and Animals.*** There are several known plants and animals with State and National significance, that are either threatened or endangered, and are found on one or more of these three properties. Education about the importance of these plants and animals, as well as efforts to ensure their long-term survival, may best be undertaken by a single management and marketing unit.
- ✦ ***Great Lakes Shipping History.*** Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property, and Thompson’s Harbor State Park have all played some role in the history of Great Lakes shipping, ship-building, and or shipwrecks. The area has so many high quality shipwreck sites that NOAA chose to locate its Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary Museum in Alpena, centrally located to all three properties. The cultural, educational and recreational opportunities associated with the history of the Great Lakes shipping industry and evidence of that industry at all three properties provides a sound argument in favor of management and marketing as a unit. There is opportunity for cross education and interpretation with the Sanctuary at these three locations. The Sanctuary could serve a reciprocal function by providing information about all three sites.
- ✦ ***Sustainable Recreation Opportunities.*** There are many low impact, sustainable recreation opportunities at Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property, and Thompson’s Harbor State Park. All three properties have potential for canoe-in or kayak-in, rustic camping as an example. All three are well-known for migratory bird

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watching opportunities. All have significant back country hiking resources. Perhaps most important, all three are well off the beaten path and require an elevated level of commitment from the user. They are attractive to many outdoor enthusiasts who typically wish to partner with the Department through personal stewardship of the resource for the enjoyment of future generations. Protection of and education about these resources may be more easily accomplished in the long-run via management and marketing as a unit.

- ✦ **Access to Lake Huron.** These three properties constitute the bulk of public access to Lake Huron. Nearly 22 miles of shoreline access are provided, and the land is simply gorgeous. The shoreline environment invites use of Lake Huron for recreation, bird watching, bird counts, shipwreck exploration, sport and Native American commercial fishing, educational programs, and many other opportunities.
- ✦ **Common Identity among State and Regional Resources.** Northeast Michigan is very different from northwest Michigan in terms of the way in which it has developed. The northwest is a very attractive location for summer vacationers. Resort towns pepper the coastline and certain areas, like Traverse City, have become national destinations. The parks and campgrounds are heavily trafficked as a result.

The northeast side of the state stands in stark contrast. Northeast Michigan does not attract the same level of tourism dollars that the west side does. Businesses, tourists and year-round residents are fewer. This has allowed the land, specifically that of the three sites, to remain largely undeveloped. Based upon comments received during the GMP public participation process, the majority of site users consist of local residents, some of whom have enjoyed the property for generations. A reduced amount of visitors may also be attributed to the difficulty in finding the three sites (i.e. access roads are difficult to find, or as is the case for Negwegon, difficult to traverse).

The three sites also stand apart from other regional resources. These are among the only sites that offer Lake Huron access and that offer passive, day-use recreation. Other resources in the region provide camping facilities. Hoefft State Park, Harrisville State Park and Ossineke State Forest are regional resources that offers rustic and modern facilities. These nearby opportunities permit Negwegon, Thompson’s Harbor, and much of Rockport to remain *undeveloped* in terms of pavement and other more intensive recreational uses.

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### 2.3 Local Use of and Demand for Park Features

Each of the three properties - Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property, and Thompson’s Harbor State Park – satisfies local demands for recreation space and activities and meets certain local needs for such space and facilities. Because of the physical distance between each, it seems appropriate to identify these uses/needs separately for each property and its local environs.

Local Recreation and Use Opportunities	Negwegon	Rockport	Thompson’s Harbor
Public access to Lake Huron beach	●	●	●
Swimming at Great Lake beach	●	●	●
Canoe or kayak along untouched shore	●	●	●
Undeveloped landscape in natural state	●	●	●
Hiking in a pristine environment	●	●	●
Hunting animal and seasonal variety	●	●	●
Fishing animal and seasonal variety	●	●	●
Mountain biking opportunities	●*	●	●*
Snowmobiling opportunities		●	●
Migratory bird viewing	●	●	●
Native American history	●	●	●
Endangered species in natural setting	●	●	●
Lake Huron carry-down boat access	●	●	●
Lake Huron boat launch ramp		●	
Karst sinkhole diving opportunities		●	
Lake Huron shipwreck diving	●	●	●
Fossil hunting		●	
Geology education		●	
Long-range shooting		●	

\* Where appropriate.

### 2.4 Unique Characteristics of Each Property

As is evident from the charts in Section 2.1 and the Regional Assessment Matrix at the end of this Section, Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property, and Thompson’s Harbor State Park each have their own unique characteristics that can only be found at that property. The key elements of each is listed briefly, as follows:

#### ***Negwegon State Park.***

- Native American stone walls and pits
- Stage coach trail
- Bald Eagles
- Blanding’s Turtles
- Dune/swale complex

#### ***Rockport Property.***

- Karst topography sink holes
- Virgin red and white pine

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- Pitcher’s Thistle
- Sand boils
- Exposed bedrock and fossils
- Dedicated Natural Area

**Thompson’s Harbor State Park.**

- Great Lakes marsh
- European settlement artifacts
- Hines Emerald Dragonfly Critical Habitat
- Dwarf Lake Iris Critical Habitat
- Piping Plover Critical Habitat
- Dedicated Natural Area

**Regional Assessment Matrix**

	Resources and Opportunities			Significance		
	Negwegon State Park	Rockport Property	Thompson's Harbor State Park	Regional	State-wide	National
<b>Natural Features</b>						
Sink holes (karst features)		✓		✓	✓	✓
Cobble beaches	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Sandy beaches	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Fens, bogs, Great Lakes marsh, cedar swamp	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Oak ridge		✓	✓	✓		
Virgin red and white pine		✓		✓	✓	
Pitcher’s thistle		✓			✓	✓
Sensitive Natural Features	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Designated Natural Areas		✓	✓		✓	✓
Alvar glade communities		✓	✓		✓	✓
Dunes and dune-swale complex	✓		✓		✓	✓
Sand boils		✓			✓	
Wetland variety	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Great Lakes fishery	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Threatened and endangered species	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Wildflower variety	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
<b>Historic / Cultural Resources</b>						
Fossils		✓			✓	
Shipwrecks	✓	✓	✓			✓
Middle Island Lighthouse / Lighthouse tour		✓			✓	
Native American stone wall/pits	✓				✓	
Quarry (Mackinac bridge caissons)		✓			✓	
Historic harbors		✓	✓		✓	
European settlements	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Stage coach trail	✓			✓	✓	
Railroad		✓		✓		

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	Resources and Opportunities			Significance		
	Negwegon State Park	Rockport Property	Thompson's Harbor State Park	Regional	State-wide	National
Quarry history		✓	✓		✓	
Lumbering history		✓		✓		
European settlement history	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Shipping history		✓	✓	✓		
Shipwreck history	✓	✓	✓			✓
<b>Education Opportunities</b>						
Rock quarry		✓			✓	
Dune swale formations	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Archeological artifacts	✓	✓			✓	
Unique geological features		✓			✓	✓
Whitefish spawning	✓	✓			✓	
<b>Recreation Opportunities</b>						
Pristine, undeveloped shoreline	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Deep harbor		✓			✓	
Railroad grade		✓		✓		
Rustic camping	✓			✓		
Hunting and fishing	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Duck hunting	✓			✓		
Fossil hunting		✓			✓	
Diving at shipwrecks and sinkholes		✓				✓
Hiking	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Mountain biking		✓		✓		
Snowmobiles		✓	✓	✓		
Wildflower viewing	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Birding	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Swimming	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Plant and animal species</b>						
Hines emerald dragonfly			✓		✓	✓
Bald eagles	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Blanding’s turtles	✓				✓	
Pitcher's thistle	✓	✓			✓	✓
Dwarf lake Iris		✓	✓		✓	✓
Piping plover			✓		✓	✓
<b>Partnerships (State and Regional Networks) [Also see Section 4.2]</b>						
Lighthouse Tour		✓			✓	
Sunrise Coastal Tour	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary	✓	✓	✓			✓

### **3.0 Management**

Currently Negwegon State Park, the Rockport Property and Thompson’s Harbor State Park are managed independently. Negwegon State Park is managed out of the Parks and Recreation Division (PRD) Harrisville State Park office. Thompson’s Harbor is managed by the PRD Cheboygan Field Office. The Rockport Property is managed under the Forest, Minerals and Fire Management Division.

An outcome of the General Management Plan process was a recommendation for Rockport to be managed by the PRD. Rockport is a pivotal component of the GMP Planning strategy. As such, transfer of management to the PRD seems appropriate and this Assessment concurs with that recommendation.

Even with the three ‘parks’ falling under the management of the PRD, there are challenges to overseeing daily operations, programming and maintenance. Those identified as a result of the GMP plan process include:

- ✘ Access to individual properties can be difficult and is not always under Department control. Negwegon State Park is the best example. The access road was improved years ago to a much higher standard than Sand Hill Road, the county road leading to it. Sand Hill Road can be very difficult to travel during certain seasons of the year. Improvements to access roads will most likely involve road base and surface upgrades or signage, or both.
- ✘ The physical distance (miles) between the sites can present a challenge for day-to-day management. A management structure that requires one individual staff position to cover more than one park could make daily visits impractical. During the GMP process enforcement staff, in particular, shared their difficulty in responding quickly to incident complaints as a result of the size of the territories for which they are responsible.
- ✘ Physical distance of PRD staff to their sites of responsibility. Thompson’s Harbor and Negwegon management teams are already a fair distance from their respective sites of responsibility. It is not unreasonable to expect that introducing a second site to either team without adding personnel would place additional stress on that field office.
- ✘ Some properties may contain more or less sensitive resources. This could cause personnel to be assigned disproportionately, based upon a breeding or flowering season, or how fragile a given resource might be to undue human contact.

This Assessment recognizes that reduced staffing at parks state-wide may strain the ability to assemble a new or expanded team. Park management staff already assume a greater responsibility for larger territories or multiple properties in response to staff cut-backs and State budget shortfalls. In light of those constraints, the following are offered for consideration of a shared management approach: 1) Establishment of a field office

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that is more centrally located to the three sites; and 2) Adding PRD staff to manage and maintain the northeast parks. The number of additional staff, full/part-time and other logistics will need to be assessed.

The current level of park usage may not demonstrate an immediate need for either of these considerations. However, the vision for the three sites is to increase visitors. The importance of these recommendations will be reinforced as the GMPs concepts, and marketing and ecotourism business recruitment efforts are implemented (see Sections 4.0 and 5.0).

## 4.0 Marketing

Northeast Michigan is a checkerboard of human settlements, unique natural areas, recreation resources, forests, preserves, lighthouses, and similar destinations connected by a network of waterways, hiking and biking trails, streets and roads, Lake Huron shoreline and the like. There are many opportunities to create linkages and coordination among this array of attractions that could improve local access to the resources, bolster the regional tourism economy, and expand the stewardship network that cares for the individual gems.

### 4.1 Strategy

There is no doubt that the three sites would benefit from a united marketing strategy. Collectively, the sites provide multiple reasons for visitors to make a trip to northeast Michigan. Individually, the sites offer their own unique characteristics, enough to draw visitors once they are in the area. With the completion of the General Management Plans, the DNR has a vision for the direction of the sites. ‘Now’ is an opportune time to get the word out regarding Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson’s Harbor. This would also allow the DNR to present Rockport as the gateway to the three sites, thereby forwarding the concept of the General Management Plans.

When developing a marketing strategy, consider the following:

- ✦ Research successful regional marketing initiatives (e.g. Les Chenaux, Point Pelee National Park, Ohio).
- ✦ Identify target populations and visitor groups. Who are the people that the area is trying to attract: in-state families, out-of-state families, out-door enthusiasts of all ages, educational institutions, wildlife organizations, patrons of outfitter stores, etc.?
- ✦ Develop modes of communicating with these groups. How will the DNR best reach its target visitor groups? Brochures, websites, TV, radio, newspaper advertisements, are all vehicles for reaching specific audiences.



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- ✦ Capitalize on partnerships. Who else is promoting tourism in the northeast and how can we cross-promote one another? Working with others interested in the same outcome allows each to maximize effort by pooling their scarce resources.
- ✦ Work with local government and relevant agencies and organizations to ensure that they are prepared for the results of a successful marketing campaign. Increased visits will impact road volumes, accident frequency, first response times, businesses cycles, and potentially new development. Before rolling-out the market approach, make sure there is coordination among all relevant local agencies and organizations.

#### **4.2 Potential Partnerships**

An unforeseen outcome of the General Management Plan process was the breadth of potential partners available for marketing the resources in northeast Michigan. This section of the assessment looks generally at the partnerships that might be formed between the Michigan parks and nearby population centers, other public lands, friends groups and organizations at all levels, and recreational resources throughout the region. The following is not meant to be an inclusive list, and other partnership opportunities may arise in the future.

##### Lake Huron Access

- ✓ Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary

##### Overnight Camping

- ✓ Harrisville State Park
- ✓ Hoelt State Park
- ✓ Ossineke State Forest Campground
- ✓ Thunder Bay River State Forest Campground

##### Critical Habitat Preservation

- ✓ The Nature Conservancy
- ✓ US Fish and Wildlife Service
- ✓ Karst Conservancy
- ✓ Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

The Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail is an excellent example of a successful collaborative effort. The Trail is a Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary initiative carried out in partnership with the Michigan Historical Center and other agencies, local governments, and businesses, designed to physically connect people with Lake Huron and associated waterways. The Trail invites users to explore the maritime heritage and the waterways of the region through highlighted shoreside venues.

The heart of the trail surrounds the sanctuary’s headquarters, the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center, located on the Thunder Bay River in Alpena, Michigan. Opening in 2007 and funded by a \$3.4 million grant from the Michigan DOT, the trail features a boardwalk and pedestrian bridge, new landscaping, historically themed lighting, and dockage for visiting tall ships. As part of the trail, twenty full-color historic markers are being developed to interpret shipwrecks, lumber mills, dock remnants, historic waterfront buildings, and Great Lakes shipping to create a broader maritime heritage context for sanctuary shipwrecks.

This, however, is only the beginning of the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trails initiative. The Trail is envisioned to encompass the entire region, tying together state parks, recreation lands, city waterfronts and marinas, historic lighthouses, and other sanctuary lakefront access areas and waterways. Key partnerships with state parks and recreational areas have been pinpointed for development as Trail sites. The sanctuary and the state are seeking out funding opportunities as well as partner sites to develop infrastructure such as shipwreck mooring buoys, signage, exhibits, displays, and kiosks, as well as developing online and print materials to lead visitors along the region-wide Trail. (Contributed by the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary.)

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Migratory Bird Watching

- ✓ The Nature Conservancy
- ✓ The Audubon Society

Lighthouse Touring

- ✓ Lighthouse Festival
- ✓ Old Presque Isle Lighthouse Park
- ✓ New Presque Isle Lighthouse Park
- ✓ Middle Island Lighthouse Tours
- ✓ Forty Mile Point Lighthouse Park
- ✓ Sturgeon Point Lighthouse (Managed by Harrisville State Park)

Overland Trails Networks

- ✓ Alpena to Mackinac Trail
- ✓ Alpena to Hillman Trail
- ✓ Great Lakes Circle Tour
- ✓ Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Trail
- ✓ Huron Greenways
- ✓ Lights of Northern Lake Huron
- ✓ Maritime Heritage Trail
- ✓ Huron Sunrise Trail (Rogers City to Hoeft Bike Trail)
- ✓ Sunrise Side Coastal Highway
- ✓ Sweetwater Trail

Waterway Trails Networks

- ✓ Blueway trail. *A water trail may be developed by NEMCOG, grant pending.*
- ✓ Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve

Historic Preservation

- ✓ Alcona County Historical Society
- ✓ Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority
- ✓ Lighthouse Trail
- ✓ Northeast Michigan Genealogical and Historical Society
- ✓ Presque Isle County Historical Museum
- ✓ Thunderbay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve

Outdoor Education

- ✓ Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve
- ✓ Michigan State University Extension Offices
- ✓ Michigan Karst Conservancy
- ✓ Area Schools Adventure Ranger Stations
- ✓ American Institute of Professional Geologists, Michigan Section
- ✓ Friends of the Museum of Paleontology

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Land Conservation Organizations

- ✓ Besser Foundation
- ✓ Headwaters Land Conservancy
- ✓ The Nature Conservancy
- ✓ Trust for Public Lands

Diving

- ✓ Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve
- ✓ Great Lakes Divers

Friends Groups

- ✓ NRTH Advisory Committee
- ✓ Establishment of a ‘Friends of Negwegon’ group is in the early stages of development. Other Friends Groups may be forming.

Government

- ✓ Alcona, Alpena and Presque Isle County Governments
- ✓ Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority
- ✓ City of Alpena, Rogers City and Harrisville (other nearby cities may also be considered partners)
- ✓ Townships of Alpena, Alcona, Krakow and Sanborn (other adjacent Townships may also be considered partners)

Businesses and Non-Profit Organizations

- ✓ Chambers of Commerce
- ✓ Charter Services
- ✓ Commercial Fisheries (Rocheport Fisheries)
- ✓ Lions Clubs
- ✓ Northeast Michigan Council of Governments
- ✓ Michigan Outdoor News
- ✓ Registered League of Women Voters
- ✓ Presque Isle County Tourism Council

## 5.0 Ecotourism Potential

Ecotourism is a concept that promotes responsible, sustainable stewardship of a resource. Also known as ecological tourism, it has been defined as ‘encompassing a spectrum of nature-based activities that foster visitor appreciation and understanding of natural and cultural heritage, which are managed to be ecologically, economically and socially sustainable’ (Queensland Ecotourism Plan, 2003-2008). This type of tourism typically appeals to ecologically and socially conscious individuals. Ecotourism may involve volunteering, personal growth, and learning new ways to live on the planet; typically involving travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions.

Responsible, sustainable ecotourism includes programs that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. In addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is in the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and creation of economic opportunities for local communities. (Randall, A. (1987). Resource economics, Second Edition. New York, USA: John Wiley and Sons.)

The Phase I General Management Plans for Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson’s Harbor depict their significance in terms of natural resource, cultural and historic value. The Core Values sections portray the wealth they bring to the region, the State, and in some instances, the world. While recreation and education opportunities are planned for the properties, the GMPs emphasize that creating opportunities for public enjoyment shall not occur at the expense of the land’s value. An ecotourism approach to broader recreation and education opportunities aligns well with the outcome of the GMPs.

**Principles of Ecotourism.** The International Ecotourism Society espouses six principles of ecotourism, and recommends them to those responsible for implementing and participating in tourism activities:

1. Minimize impact
2. Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
3. Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
4. Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
5. Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
6. Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate

**Components of Ecotourism.**

Similar to principles, the United Nations Publication Ecotourism: Principles Practices and Policies for Sustainability by Megan Epler Wood, produced in conjunction with The International Ecotourism Society, provides components of ecotourism:

- ✦ Contributes to conservation of biodiversity
- ✦ Sustains the well-being of local people
- ✦ Includes an interpretation / learning experience
- ✦ Involves responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry
- ✦ Is delivered primarily to small groups by small-scale businesses
- ✦ Requires lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources
- ✦ Stresses local participation, ownership, and business opportunities, particularly for rural people

## Regional Assessment Negwegon – Rockport – Thompson’s Harbor

The principle concept of ecotourism is to afford visitors opportunities to experience a resource - by hiking, camping, fishing, birding, wildflower viewing, biking, kayaking, and the like - and simultaneously learn how to do that activity without leaving a negative impact. When the visitor’s stay is over, the goal is for them to leave with a new appreciation for the natural and cultural environment. The DNR, local businesses and other local and state organizations can all play a part in a successful, sustainable, ecotourism agenda in northeast Michigan.

The strategy of Ecotourism is itself a marketing tool for drawing people to the area, and may make northeast Michigan a national example.

Potential Ecotourism Opportunities associated with Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson’s Harbor:

- Interpretive and educational signs within the parks, designed to promote ecotourism principles.
- Guided hiking and diving tours of the sinkholes at Rockport
- Guided diving tours of shipwrecks in the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve from the deep water port at Rockport
- Guided geology hikes and fossil-hunting tours of the quarry at Rockport
- Kayak tours of the shoreline and kayak-in, rustic camping trips at Negwegon
- Bicycle touring that would visit all three properties over a period of a few days or a week
- Professionally-guided or self-guided bird watching and bird census treks
- Native American history tours at Negwegon
- Spring wildflower tours – hiking for the able-bodied and using tour vehicles on public roads for those not able to access the more difficult areas. (Thompson’s Harbor is currently completing several kilometers of barrier-free trails that allow individuals to see Dwarf Lake Iris in season).
- Private-enterprise tours, lessons, supply stands, snack shops, and other businesses to link people with the environment

Properly implemented, ecotourism has the potential to provide direct economic benefit to local individuals and businesses, while protecting and enhancing the resources for future generations. Local employment opportunities would develop for guides and their support personnel, retail specialists at outfitters and outdoor gear stores, naturalists, historians and similar specialists. The spin-off benefits of ecotour operations would likely have a positive economic impact on food, lodging, equipment outfitters, and similar businesses throughout the region. It should be noted that as an economic development tool for the region, ecotourism should be but one element of a coordinated strategy. It is an economic development tool, however, that appears to be consistent with the concept of protecting the State’s sensitive resources at these three properties, subject to proper implementation.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

Northeast Michigan is a relatively undiscovered place in our State. This reduced visibility and visitation has allowed the Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson’s Harbor properties to remain as largely intact, wild environments, which are now rare elsewhere in the state and therefore valuable in providing a unique visitor experience in unspoiled landscapes. Ensuring that their resources are preserved and protected in the future is an underlying principle of any action proposed for the sites.

The purpose of the Regional Assessment was to evaluate the potential for managing and marketing the three sites as a unit. Certainly, there is great value in doing both. The Phase I General Management Plans prepared for Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson’s Harbor present a coordinated concept for improving the sites. It follows that a coordinated management strategy should also be implemented. Given the staffing challenges associated with managing three sites that are miles apart, the PRD should consider establishing a field office in proximity to the properties and/or adding staff. Ensuring adequate access to each site is also necessary in terms of facilitating proper management.

During the Phase I GMP process, there was an expressed preference by some workshop participants that Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson’s Harbor should remain less visible in the interest of preserving and protecting the unique natural resources found there. However, these are public lands and their public benefit potential is real. One application is assisting the local economy. A marketing effort, in conjunction with a plan to draw ecotourism-based businesses to the area, could put the three properties on the vacation-radar of many diverse user groups. The marketing effort would be enhanced if implemented in partnership with other regional groups interested in the same end. Working together allows for resources to be used more efficiently, and therefore more target visitor groups may be reached. The list in Section 4.0 provides only a beginning of the potential partnerships the PRD may explore.

Michigan is a State that is blessed with many valuable resources. There is no question that Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson’s Harbor are among them. A recent study by Michigan State University found that Michigan ranks last in investment in its natural resources (Source: *State Conservation Spending in the US, A Political Economy Analysis, Report 1* by Hannah Research Policy, Land Use Institute, Michigan State University and Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy, LPI Report 2007-08, November 2007). By investing more now, we can protect the resource and improve the State’s economy. Together, PRD, local governments, organizations, educational institutions, friends groups, and residents and businesses have the unique opportunity to enhance a very special place in Michigan.