



RURAL TOURISM ASSESSMENT

ST. HELEN COMMUNITY DATA REPORT

Prepared By the MSU Extension RTA Team:
Andy Northrop, Will Cronin, and Garrett Ziegler

Michigan State University Extension Rural Tourism Assessment

Phase 1: Planning and Asset Identification Workshop

Phase 1 serves as the foundational stage of the Rural Tourism Assessment (RTA) process. During this initial phase, held in workshop format facilitated by Michigan State University Extension, stakeholders identify assets and key metrics central to their tourism economy. Identified assets are prioritized by stakeholders which serve to support subsequent Phases. Additional steps are taken to generate specific questions stakeholders would like answered from First Impressions Tourism (FIT) assessment(s) conducted during and central to Phase 2.

Phase 2: (Data Collection and Analysis)

Phase 2 centers on gathering data generated through surveys and site visits using MSU Extensions FIT program. FIT provides valuable insights into the tourism experience from both first-time visitors and community perspectives generated in Phase 1. The collected data is then thoroughly analyzed to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities related to rural tourism development in participating communities. Presentations are then generated for the purpose of sharing with community stakeholders offered a community forum setting as part of Phase 3.

Phase 3: Results Dissemination and Community Engagement

Approximately six months after completing Phase 2, Phase 3 commences. Results obtained from Phases 1 and 2 are merged and shared with stakeholders participating in the Rural Tourism Assessment. This phase also provides an opportunity for residents and community members to engage in discussions and provide feedback on the first-time visitor perspective, findings, fostering collaboration and shared decision-making.

Phase 4: Implementation Strategy Development and Visioning (Optional)

Although optional, Phase 4 consists of facilitated discussions with stakeholders around next steps and implementation strategies for communities participating in the entire Rural Tourism Assessment process. These discussions heavily focus on insights gathered directly from FIT assessments conducted during Phase 2 and shared during Phase 3. Tourism development models are applied, where and when necessary, to help guide discussions. Tailored strategies are developed to enhance the tourism experience based on visitor feedback and community priorities.

Rural Tourism Assessment – Roscommon County Summary

The [Roscommon County Economic Development Corporation](#) and [Michigan State University Extension](#) (MSUE) established a partnership in early 2023 to strengthen rural tourism across the county and three communities by capitalizing on stakeholder knowledge, input, and first-time visitor perspectives to the area.

- Following MSUE's Rural Tourism Assessment format, Roscommon County along with Prudenville/Houghton Lake, St. Helen, and Village of Roscommon participated in the multi-phase effort.
- Phase 1 was conducted April 2023.
- Phase 2 was conducted September – October 2023.
- Phase 3 was completed May 2024.
- At the time of drafting this summary, Phase 4 is being planned for Fall 2024.

As part of RTA, Phase 2 consists of a comprehensive FIT assessment in and with participating partners. In this effort, Roscommon County and the three identified communities received five first-time visitors at separate times between September and October 2023.

All five visitors spent three nights, four days visiting various stakeholder identified tourism assets from Phase 1, as well as a wide range of self-identified tourism assets while on site. A total of 15 nights were spent in the county: eight nights in hotels, four nights in motels, two nights camping, and one night in a bed & breakfast.

Visitor Profiles:

- 1 Female from Generation X visited with her spouse between Friday–Monday.
- 1 Male from Generation X visited alone between Tues–Friday.
- 3 Males from Millennial Generation visited alone between Thurs–Sunday.
- All visitors are married residents of either Upper or Lower Peninsula, MI, and are employees of Michigan State University Extension with various expertise.

Visitor Diverse Personal Interests:

- Artists, (Mountain) Bike Rider(s), Birder(s), Camper(s), Foodie, Hiker(s), Paddler(s), Nature and Outdoor Enthusiast(s), Trail Enthusiast(s), Water Lover, Trip Planners, and Avid/World Travelers.

Introduction to First Impression Tourism Assessments (FIT)

The First Impressions (FI) program was developed in 1991 by the University of Wisconsin Extension to help communities learn about their existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of first-time visitors. The FI program has been used to help communities across the U.S. and Canada inform economic initiatives or further develop community goals and has been modified over the years by various Extension services based on different needs. Michigan State University (MSU) Extension adapted this program via a multi-state grant provided by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development in 2014. MSU Extension's First Impressions Tourism Assessments (FIT) is a unique version of FI for our state and, since inception in 2016,

What is FIT?

FIT is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community. FIT involves developing leaders, assessing the host community, sharing results in forum open to all, and providing suggestions to advance community-driven tourism. Overall, FIT helps participating communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors. Since inception, FIT has empowered leaders and stakeholders to develop action plans to improve their communities based on new perspectives and suggestions from first-time visitors. These action plans are proven to be the catalysts needed to launch and expand small town tourism development across Michigan. For more information on FIT, please visit - https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism_first_impressions/index

Additional FIT Resources

Please visit the FIT Resources Below to learn more about the program

- FIT - [How it Works](#)
- FIT - [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- FIT - [Building a Community Leadership Team for FIT](#)
- A Summary of Community Actions and Success from FIT - [Downloadable Report](#)



Summary of MSU Extension tourism development programs

The following programs are available statewide to guide decision making around tourism development and implementation.

Understanding Tourism for Michigan Communities (UTMC)

This interactive workshop highlights tourism industry statistics and exposes communities to trends and travelers' interests, as well as a number of niche tourism markets. UTMC is specifically designed to promote regional synergies, leadership, and tourism product development. <https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/programs/understanding-tourism-for-michigan-communities>

Planning for Tourism-Preventing Destination Decline

This workshop walks communities through a planning process and uses life-cycle models to explore where communities may be in establishing themselves as tourism destinations. Additional tools will be employed to determine their readiness, identify next steps for action and explore engagement strategies for coalition building within the community. <https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/programs/planning-for-tourism>

First Impressions Tourism (FIT) Assessments

FIT is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community positioned to lead development based on the program results. FIT involves developing community leadership, assessing the host community, sharing the results in a community forum open to all, and providing suggestions to drive community action. Overall, FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first time visitors.

https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism_first_impressions/index

Custom Tourism Programs

MSU Extension tourism educators are equipped to meet the diverse needs and interests of Michigan communities. Specialized programs are available to communities with a specific interest in agri-tourism, ecotourism and/or cultural/heritage tourism. Learn more


Learn more about MSU Extension tourism programs by visiting:

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/>

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First Impressions Tourism Assessment
St. Helen, MI
June 2024



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First Impressions: Assessing Your Community for Tourism

How It Works | History | Community Reports | Apply | Resources | Frequently Asked Questions

A comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community Overall, FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors.

[How It Works](#) [Apply](#)

Results from this assessment were shared with the St. Helen community on May 15th, 2024. Their FIT assessment was one of four assessments part of the MSU Extension's Rural Tourism Assessment program for Roscommon County.



This report was compiled by-

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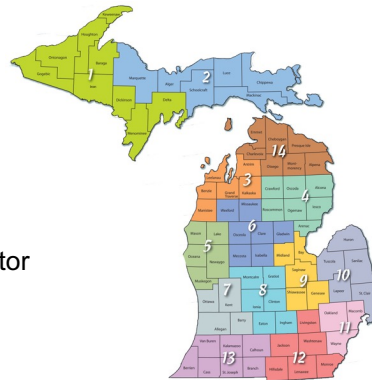
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MSU Extension's Mission

Helping people to improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities.

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To file a program discrimination complaint, a complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, which can be obtained online at www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-program-discrimination-complaint-form.pdf, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

mail:
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
fax:
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442;
email:
program.intake@usda.gov.

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correo postal:
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
fax:
(833) 256-1665 o (202) 690-7442;
correo electrónico:
program.intake@usda.gov.

Esta institución ofrece igualdad de oportunidades.

Rural Tourism Assessment

- **Phase 1 Q2-2023**
 - Tourism Asset ID Workshop / April 12, 2023
- **Phase 2 Q3-Q4 2023**
 - FIT Assessment
 - Roscommon County,
 - Prudenville/Houghton, St. Helen, and Village of Roscommon
 - Aggregating results and reports
- **Phase 3 – Q1-Q2 2024**
 - Roscommon County Forum – May 1st
 - Prudenville/Houghton, St Helen, and Village of Roscommon



Phase 1: Roscommon County & Community Tourism Asset Identification Workshop



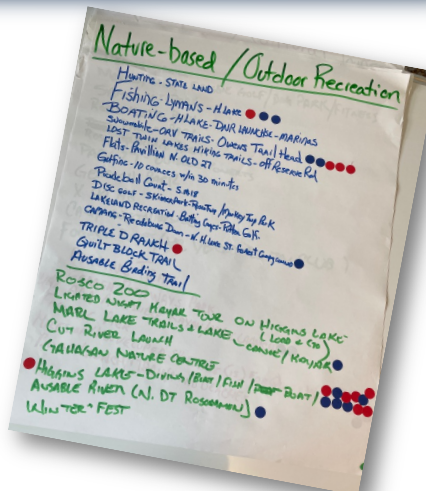
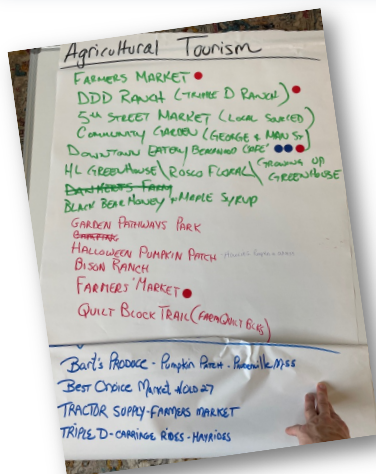
Phase 1: Tourism Asset Identification Workshop

Phase 1 Objectives:

- Bring stakeholders across county/communities into a collective asset identification process
- To provide leaders/stakeholders the opportunity to pre-select and prioritize their tourism assets
- To collect additional stakeholder input for the purpose of generating county visioning questions for First Impressions Tourism (FIT) assessment



RTA Phase 1 – Prioritizing Tourism Assets



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RTA Phase 1 – Collective Visioning Exercise

What is something you would like to know about your County from a (first-time) visitor perspective?

Reasons to visit?
Why?
Reflections

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Phase 2:

- First Impressions Tourism (FIT) Assessments

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First Impressions: Assessing Your Community for Tourism

How It Works | History | Community Reports | Apply | Resources | Frequently Asked Questions

A comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community. Overall, FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors.

How It Works | Apply


First Impressions: Assessing your community for tourism (FIT), Michigan State University Extension
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FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

Assessing your community for tourism (FIT)



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PURPOSE

FIT is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community positioned to lead development based on the program results. FIT involves developing community leadership, assessing the host community, sharing the results in a community forum open to all, and providing suggestions to drive community action. Overall, FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors.




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FIT communities will:

- Learn about their assets and opportunities from first-time visitors.
- Strengthen an existing cohort of leaders and residents by providing them an opportunity to organize on the basis of valuable feedback about their community.
- Develop a list of action items for community improvement.

- Integrate action items into community plans.
- Take action on community improvements and strengthen their image.
- Improve community well-being and quality of life for residents and visitors.




First Impressions:
Assessing your community for tourism (FIT)

The results of FIT can:

- Spawn **local leadership**.
- Strengthen **community vitality**.
- Form the basis for **future development**.

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Things to know...



- Every community gets visitors
- We don't rank or compare communities
- Balance of positives & negatives
- Information from new perspectives
- Not meant to shame
- Repeated data emphasize importance

First Impressions: Assessing your community for tourism (FIT), Michigan State University Extension
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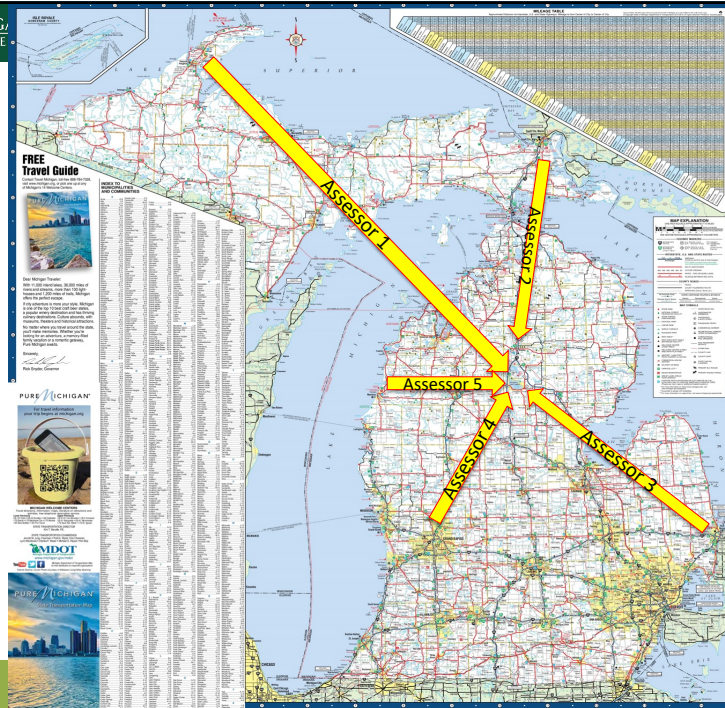
First Impressions Tourism!
Who visited our community?
When did they visit?

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• **5 Visitor Profiles:**

- 1 Female
- 4 Male
- Generations:
 - 3 Millennials
 - 2 Gen X
- Visited alone - 4
- Visited with spouse – 1
- All long-term residents of MI
 - Life
 - 10+ years




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- **Assessors also identified as-**
 - Non-parents, Parents
 - Artists, Bike riders, Birder, Campers,
 - Foodies, Local Food Fan,
 - Hikers, Paddlers
 - Nature & Outdoor Enthusiasts,
 - All Trails Enthusiasts
 - Water Lovers
- Map readers, Trip planners, Avid travelers
- Planners, Arts Executive, Tourism Faculty, Community Development Faculty



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The Visit / Assessments

- Pre-research 2-4+ Hours
- 3 nights / 4 days in September
 - 1 Tues - Friday
 - 3 Thurs - Sunday
 - 1 Friday - Monday

Accommodation – 15 nights

- 8 nights - Hotels
- 4 nights - Motels
- 2 nights - Camping
- 1 night - B&B

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FIT - Results 3 Sections


- Pre-Visit
 - Web Presence & Marketing / Initial Impressions
- The Visit
 - Our Experiences / First Impressions & Data Sets
- Post-Visit
 - Reflections
 - **Strengths**, **Challenges**, and **Opportunities**

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Most helpful website and why?



- Sainthelenchamber.net
 - *One of the few places with info devoted to SH.*
 - *Seems to have most info, but not much for visitors.*
 - *What they have now is extremely out of date*
- Visithoughtonlake.com (x2, previously mentioned)

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What additional info would be beneficial?

- Needs an overhaul to become more modern
- Focus on food, lodging, and shopping

The screenshot shows the St. Helen Chamber of Commerce website. The 'Area Lodging' section lists several options with phone numbers: St. Helen Campground (989-389-4452), Powers Lodge (989-389-7909), Trails End Motel (989-389-7929), Ardash Beach Campground & Marina (989-709-1138), and Bluejays Campground (989-432-3179). The 'Community Events' section features photos of people fishing and a group of people on a boat. A footer note states: 'Listing on this page requires a St. Helen Chamber of Commerce membership. For more information "Click Here"'

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Most helpful website statistics -

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The information was well presented.	0	2	2	1
Web pages were visually appealing.	2	0	2	1
I noticed typographical errors.	1	4	0	0
It was easy to find information on the website	0	2	3	0
The information was useful.	0	2	3	0
More information is needed on this site.	0	0	2	3

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First 5-minute impressions

- *When I first arrived in St. Helen, I thought that it was a small up-north community. There seemed to be some appealing places to stop as I drove through but also wasn't a place that I was feeling like I would have needed to spend a lot of time in. Seemed like a place a lot of people might just pass through on their way to ORV trails or other activities. I noticed the number of side by sides and ORV in the area and it seemed that was the primary audience the community is catering to.*

- *Wow, this is a town devoted to Off-roading, hunting, fishing, and nature-based activities! Sure, it isn't the most pristine of places, but it has everything for a good old-fashioned week in the woods.*



First 5-minute impressions –



- *It seems that unless I have a boat to fish on Lake St. Helens or a quad to get on the trails, there is little to do here. Downtown is not walkable and so I am not inclined to stop here. Signs directing to the waterfront were hard to spot the first time through town. Had to consult with Google maps to find my way to waterfront parks.*
- *Not good. Confederate flag and many other flags that indicated certain people may not be welcome in the area....Not much in the way of retail or restaurants that would entice somebody to stop. Not really a downtown at all. It's like an intersection.*



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First 5-minute impressions –

- Seems SH is healthier in the warmer months than I recall seeing as I drove through in April 2023. Although a small town, clearly, they tried presenting the community in a positive manner with flowers and banners and benches. There also seems to be an influx of development/restaurants in town and at the north end, too. Overall, for as little as it is, I was pleasantly surprised, but still, it caters to a very specific audience.



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Top 4 reasons visitors come to St. Helen

Outdoor recreation	4
Visit friends and family	4
Be in nature	3
Specific activity – ORV/ATV Trails	3
In transit to somewhere else	2
Engage in sports activities	2
Get away from people	1
Visit historical sites	0
Experience a unique culture	0
Get entertained/for entertainment	0
Engage in business/professional activities	0
Engage in religious activities	0
Relax	0
Other Reason	0
Agritourism opportunities	0
Shop	0
Total	19





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Community Attributes

• Customer service	11
• Hospitality and friendliness	10
• Safety and security	8
• Cleanliness	7
• Other – <i>Waterfront Park Fac</i>	6
• Variety of restaurants	5
• Variety of things to do	5
• Directional signage	4
• Variety of shopping options	3
• Variety of accommodations	1






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Community Attributes –

- The outdoor recreation is excellent here. Beaches, kayaking, awesome nature preserves, a nice community park, off-roading events, and tons of places to go off-roading with rental company in town so you don't have to have your own things.
- I thought for as small of a town that it is the variety/quantity of restaurants was pretty good... The accommodation was next to nil there or so I could not find anything. If I didn't have an ORV or fishing gear, there really is not much for one to do there on the surface.


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Community Attributes –

- Signage to the waterfront parks/boat access could be improved. Signage from when leaving the parks, directing people back to St. Helen could also be improved. The two accommodations I found seemed to both be related to trail networks, and their Facebook/websites were not inviting. Shopping options were limited, so I didn't shop, although the dollar store was one of the more inviting with attractive landscaping.

- I was going to stay in St. Helen for the assessment, but I could not find lodging. There are a couple of places, but they seem hyper-targeted at the ATV crowd and do not have websites or even good Facebook pages.





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Community Infrastructure

• Parking	11
• Cell phone service	10
• Waste receptacles	5
• Sidewalks/Walkways	3
• Benches/Seating options	2
• Public restrooms	2
• Wi-Fi	2
• Water fountains	1
• Pedestrian travel infrastructure	1
• Recycling receptacles	0
• Bicycle travel infrastructure	0


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Community Infrastructure-

- I didn't notice much pedestrian or bike infrastructure in the community and where there were sidewalks they weren't well maintained or established. This was not a community that I really wanted to walk around in.
- Not a lot of great walking infrastructure, but roads are wide with wide shoulders and are best suited to allow ATVs and other off-road vehicles to get around town easily without disrupting traffic.
- It does not appear that bike/pedestrian infrastructure (including benches or seating) is a priority.



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Downtown Business Area

• Parking charges are reasonable	14
• Parking is secure	12
• Customers are greeted warmly when they walk through the door	11
• There are areas of green space	9
• Parking is centrally located	8
• Flags/banners are displayed on the exterior of businesses	7
• There is a gateway point to enter/leave town (piece of art, mural, sign, etc.)	7
• This is a welcoming place	6
• The grounds have been landscaped with flowers, trees, shrubs, and bushes	5
• The downtown business area is handicapped accessible	5
• There is a mix of ages	5
• Walking sidewalks are well maintained	4
• The main downtown business area is a major tourist draw for the area	4
• Hanging baskets are displayed on the exterior of businesses	3
• The main downtown business area feels distinct or special	3
• Vehicle traffic is managed to encourage pedestrian movement, via foot or bike	2
• There is pedestrian traffic (foot and bike)	2
• There are walker/biker friendly signs	1
• Bike lanes exist on roadways	1
• There is a mix of ethnic groups	1


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- The downtown is auto-centric.
- Paved shoulders provide little security and are not inviting for pedestrians as they can feel the “woosh” of the cars going by.
- On the right side, there are items displayed within the road right of way, crowding the road and making it impossible for pedestrians to walk on that side of the road.
- **Solution** – An inviting sidewalk system would require intentional changes to the zoning ordinance and master plan.

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I enjoyed visiting the Cove Park—it seems that way-finding signs at this intersection (leaving the park) would be helpful to navigate back to St. Helen downtown.




If there are ever new bike racks installed or there is a need to move these racks within the park, I would suggest moving them closer to the play area.

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Reflections



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- What did you do?
- Where did you go?



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Assets Visited – St. Helen

<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Jen's Hen House✓ Richfield Township Park✓ Roscommon Red Pine Natural Area✓ Public access, Lake St. Helen✓ Beef a Roo✓ St. Helen Community Garden Park✓ The Market✓ Forkin Around BBQ✓ Rite Aid✓ St Helen Power Sports✓ Dollar Tree✓ The Howling Pumpkin✓ Veterans Memorial Park✓ Cove Marina	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Kirtland Community College Disc Golf Course✓ The Angry Oven✓ Roscommon State Forest (near Cedar Creek)✓ Maple Valley Bison Ranch✓ Roscommon County Quilt Block Trail✓ Artesia Beach area and Campground✓ Camp Kirby
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Assets Visited – St. Helen

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jen's Hen House• Richfield Township Park• Roscommon Red Pine Natural Area• Public access, Lake St. Helen• Beef a Roo• St. Helen Community Garden Park• The Market• Forkin Around BBQ• Rite Aid• St Helen Power Sports• Dollar Tree• The Howling Pumpkin• Veterans Memorial Park• Cove Marina	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kirtland Community College Disc Golf Course• The Angry Oven• Roscommon State Forest (near Cedar Creek)• Maple Valley Bison Ranch• Roscommon County Quilt Block Trail• Artesia Beach area and Campground• Camp Kirby
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Assets highlighted orange were identified by community stakeholders as "points of interest" before FIT assessments began.

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LOOK

AT WHAT ST. HELEN HAS TO OFFER: NOT JUST OUR BEAUTIFUL LAKE

FOOD/RESTAURANTS: FROM TAKE OUT, BAR, TO FINE DINING	DOCTORS/DENTIST
ICE CREAM PARLOR	SENIOR ASSISTED LIVING
LIQUOR STORE	AMERICAN LEGION PFPW LOCATIONS
DRUG STORE	ST. HELEN COMMUNITY CENTER—ACTIVITIES & DAILY LUNCHEES
MARKET	LIBRARY
GENERAL STORE	LANDSCAPE, TOWNSHIP PARKS WITH PAVILLION
CONVENIENCE STORE	CEMETERY
TOBACCO SHOP	POST OFFICE
GIFT SHOP/FLOWERS/LANDSCAPING MATERIAL	PUBLIC SAFETY
UPHOLSTERY & FLOORING STORE	VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK
FREE COMMUNITY ESSENTIAL STORE	BINGO
BAKERYWARE	FENCE COMPANY
LUMBER YARD/BUILDING SUPPLY	STORAGE UNITS
CHURCHES—MOST DENOMINATIONS	PET GROOMING
BANKS	PET BOARDING
CHARTER SCHOOL—PRE-K TO 11 TH GRADE	ARK—ASSOCIATION TO RESCUE KNITTERS
BUFFALO RANCH	
SMALL ENGINE REPAIR	
WELL DRILLING	
	SENIOR LOW INCOME HOUSING
	COMMUNITY REHABILITATION/PHYSICAL THERAPY SERVICE
	MONUMENT SERVICE
	AIRPORT
	GOLF COURSE
	MARINAS
	FREE BOAT LAUNCH/ADA 887V ACCESSIBLE FISHING PIER & WINTER/SUMMER SPORTS SHOP & REPAIR
	FISHING & ARCHERY SUPPLIES
	SNOWMOBILE AND GUY GLIMS
	MOYER/CANNING/JUDICE/CAMPGROUND
	TAX SERVICE
	SEAMSTRESS, GIFT SHOP
BEAUTY PARLOR/BARBER SHOP	
TANNING	
INSURANCE	
TITLE COMPANY	
WALKERS	

Although weathered, this caught my eye at the lake and something I've not seen before in this county or other FIT communities. It is clearly a list of assets that make SH what it is.

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AT WHAT ST. HELEN HAS TO OFFER: NOT JUST OUR BEAUTIFUL LAKE

FOOD/RESTAURANTS FROM TAKE OUT, BAR, TO FINE DINING
ICE CREAM PARLOR
LIQUOR STORE
DRIK STORE
MARKET
GENERAL STORE
CONVENIENCE STORE
TOBACCO SHOP
GIFT SHOP/PLANTERS/LANDSCAPING MATERIAL
HOLIDAY & FLOORING STORE
FREE COMMUNITY ESSENTIAL STORE
HARDWARE
LUMBER YARD/BUILDING SUPPLY
CHURCHES-MOST DENOMINATIONS
BANKS
CHARTER SCHOOLS—PRES-K TO 11TH GRADE
BUFFALO VENUE
SMALL ENGINE REPAIR
WELL DRILLING
GAS STATION
AUTO REPAIR
AUTO PARTS STORE
FUNERAL HOME
HOME TRUCK & TRAILER REPAIR
LAWN SERVICES & SNOW PLOWING
INDOOR DRINKING CONTRACTOR
LAUNDRY/MAT
KAYAK/CANOE LAUNCH YACHTS CONTRACT
BEAUTY PARLOR/BARBER SHOP
TANNING
INSURANCE
TITLE COMPANY
WEDDING

DOCTORS/DENTIST
SENIOR ASSISTED LIVING
AMERICAN LEGION/FFW LOCATIONS
ST. HELEN COMMUNITY CENTER—ACTIVITIES & DAILY GUNCHES
LIBRARY
PLANSCAPE/TOWNSHIP PARKS WITH PAVILLION
CEMETERY
POST OFFICE
PEOPLE SAFETY
VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK
BINGO
FENCE COMPANY
STORAGE UNITS
PERFORMING
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A.R.K.—ASSOCIATION TO RESCUE KNITTERS
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MARINAS
FREE BAIT LAUNCH/ALL OWN ACCESSIBLE FISHING TIER & WATERS/SUMMER SUPPLY SHOP & REPAIR
FISHING & ARCHERY SUPPLIES
SNOWMOBILE AND TEE SHOPS
HOTEL/CABINS/LODGE/CAMPGROUND
TAX SERVICE
SEAMSTRESS/GIFT SHOP

- Who created and posted this list, and what is their intention?
- Are St. Helen leaders promoting these assets?
- I wonder how this list can be replicated on (their) websites, throughout SH using larger signages, and replicated in other communities?

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Feeling of being welcomed – 80% said Yes!

- *I felt welcome in local businesses...*
- *People talked to me and didn't stare like I was an intruder.*
- *I appreciated the interaction I got at Forkin' Around.*

- *This was a highlight of my visit in St. Helen. The staff was friendly, and the food was good. I sat outside here on a sunny day and enjoyed chicken BBQ and slaw. The business had an inviting flag out front that caught my attention and I appreciated the humor in the name.*

- *The presence of the Confederate Flag on one resident's porch is to blame for lack of feeling welcomed!*

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What will you remember most six months from now?

- Friendly people
- Beautiful trails
- The Confederate flag
- Community Garden Park
- That I need a boat or ORV to experience St. Helen
- The healthy appearance of the town despite its size
- 3- or 4-dollar stores within a couple miles of each other



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Are there specialty shops, attractions or assets that would bring you back to visit?

1. It would be fun to visit and rent a side-by-side to explore ORV trails in the area
2. ORV Trails
3. In general, I might pass through here from time to time to see how things progress. It was a fascinating little town, but not much to draw me back unless they expand their offerings

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If you could change one or two reasonable things about this community, what would it be?

- A Brewery
- A (visible) community space
- More/better signs at/to Cove Park
- Better/more sidewalk infrastructure
- A new website highlighting SH assets
- A trail system going N/S to Village of Rosco
- Working with residents to not to display certain flags



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What additional activities/facilities/services would you suggest to be offered in this community?

- Connect SH to a Rosco County "Loop"
- Signage to next community
- More public access
- More food variety
- Better sidewalks (x2)
- Connection between businesses
- Cleaned up downtown
- Designated/marked ORV trails throughout town
 - separate from sidewalks
- More info available Chamber
 - outside and website
- Designated area to get maps, directions of the area
 - very disorientating
- Better lodging options
- Mountain Biking trails
- Kayak/SUP/Canoe/Boat rental
- Guided trips of the area
 - Glamping and BBQ with...
- Learn-to-clinics
 - fish, drive a quad, shoot



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30,000 Foot Suggestions

- Elevate “The Loop” concept as advertised on 75N
- Get communities to buy into it as a regional county effort
- Use concept to develop 1-, 2-, and 3-day+ itineraries
- Use itineraries to develop new ideas, themes, cuisines
- Link communities together visually by story, trails, history, distances, activities, etc.




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Recreation

- Increase mountain bike and non-motorized trail infrastructure
- Mountain bike trails would add another layer of outdoor rec.
- More lake access wherever possible.
- Consider adding recreational opportunities, like SUP, disc golf, to suite of possibilities-- increase YouTube presence for those sports
- Enhance MTB users/bikers



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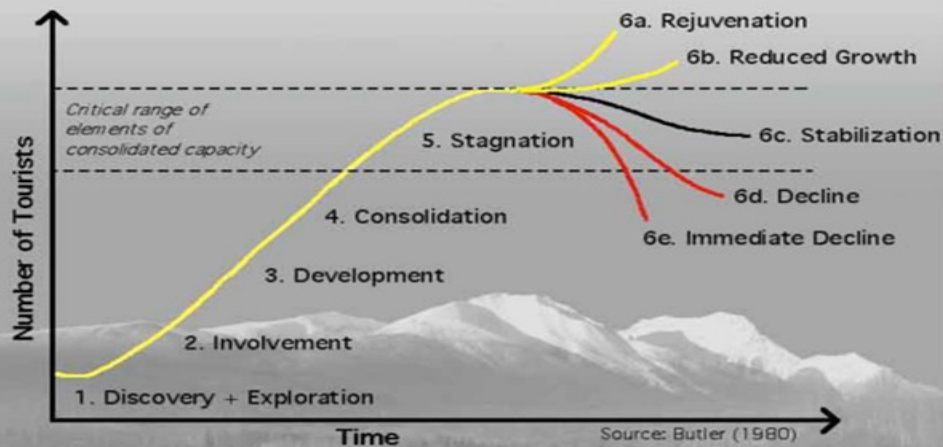
Additional thoughts...

- Decide now what you want to be/become and plan
- Huge opportunities here to reach new diverse groups & trail users
- A lot of potential for diverse tourism development if planned for properly
- Pursue a sustainable path to contain/manage growth in a strategic manner that maintains character, limits congestion, and achieves community goals




Bridge Community Vision with Tourism Life Cycle Model

Hypothetical Evolution of a Tourist Area



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- Communities are using FIT to -
 - Build capacity
 - Strengthen their image, assets, and tourism/recreation opportunities
 - Update master and/or recreation plans
 - Spawn new ideas and leadership
 - Increase grant applications to -
 - DNR, Community Foundations, USDA Rural Development
 - Organize for state agency programs, such as
 - Redevelopment Ready Certification (RRC)
 - Main Street Programs



First Impressions: Assessing your community for tourism (FIT), Michigan State University Extension
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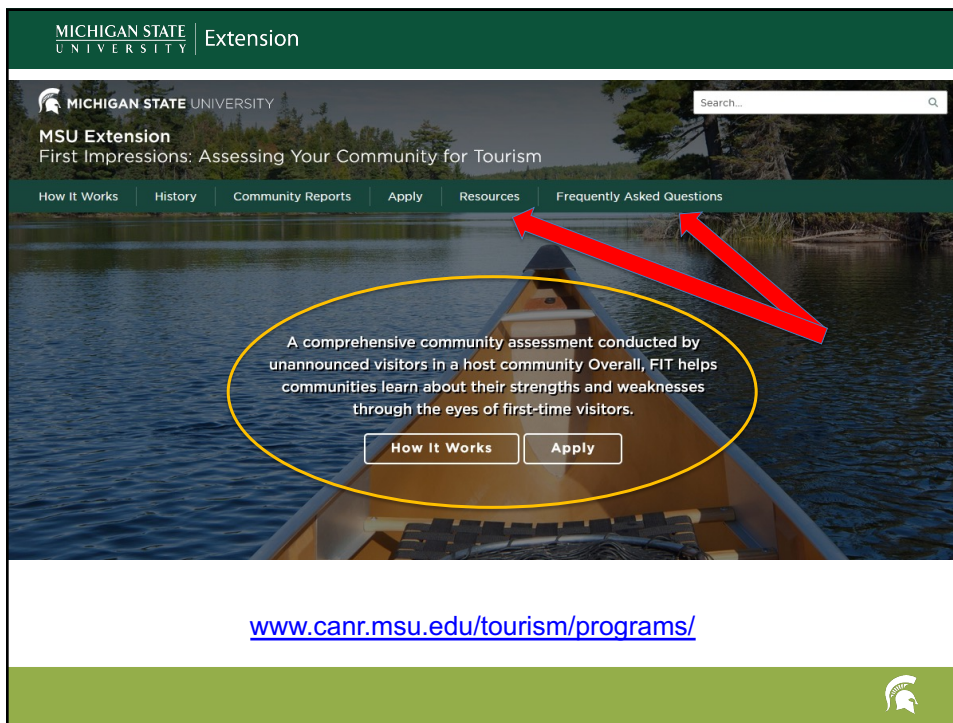
MSU Extension
First Impressions: Assessing Your Community for Tourism

How It Works | History | Community Reports | Apply | Resources | Frequently Asked Questions

A comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community Overall, FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors.

How It Works | Apply

www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/programs/



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Community, Food, and Environment Institute



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Next Steps for FIT Communities

- Consult the FIT Community Next Steps manual provided to your Community Leadership Team (CLT).
- Learn from other FIT communities as to what is achievable by reviewing “FIT Successes Report–April 2021 Edition” – <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/fit-successes-report-april-2021-edition>
- Consider exploring the raw data further and identifying parts of the results to act.
- Facilitate discussions with private sector assets visited during the assessment and share asset reviews with each stakeholder and/or department.
- Schedule a public discussion meeting between the CLT, local leaders, and active citizens of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.
- Review your community’s result and discuss strategies to work together.
- Search out low-hanging tourism-related projects from list of results, picking one or two items that can be accomplished immediately and ensure their completion.
- Schedule a follow-up discussion with MSU Extension Government and Community Vitality/Tourism educators to facilitate your next steps if you need assistance. ○ Contact MSU Extension Statewide Tourism Educator, Andy Northrop – northro5@msu.edu

Available Funding and Grants

- MI Economic Development Corporation – Public Spaces Community Places – <https://www.miplace.org/programs/public-spaces-community-places/>
- Match on Main – <https://www.miplace.org/small-business/match-on-main/>
- United States Department of Agriculture–Rural Development Grants <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs>
- Michigan Arts and Humanities, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA)
- Arts Midwest (Touring Gig Fund), National Endowment for the Arts
- Community Foundations and/or individual Foundation funds (example: Dow in Midland)
- Business/Corporate sponsorships (example: MI Sugar Trails – <http://www.sblc-mi.org/michigan-sugartrails.html>)
- Crowd Funding, Individual donations / sponsorships (Lions Club, Rotary Club, etc.)