



RURAL TOURISM ASSESSMENT

ROSCOMMON COUNTY DATA REPORT

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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](#)



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First Impressions Tourism Assessment
Roscommon County, MI
May 2024



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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](#)

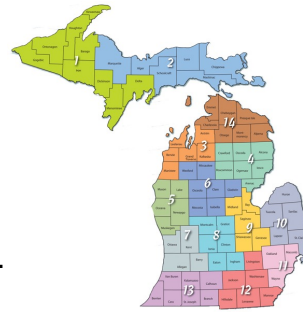
Results from this assessment were shared with a community of Roscommon County stakeholders May 1st, 2024. The Roscommon County FIT assessment was one of four assessments part of the MSU Extension's Rural Tourism Assessment program for Roscommon County.



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mail:
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
(202) 296-1665 or (202) 690-7442;
email:
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correo postal:
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1400 Independence Avenue, SW
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correo electrónico:
program.intake@usda.gov.
Esta institución ofrece igualdad de oportunidades.

Agenda / Objectives:


- To understand the Rural Tourism Assessment three-phase program
- Share the *Roscommon County FIT* results
- Facilitate a Next Steps process for participants
- Ensure attendees are aware of individual community results and when they are being offered



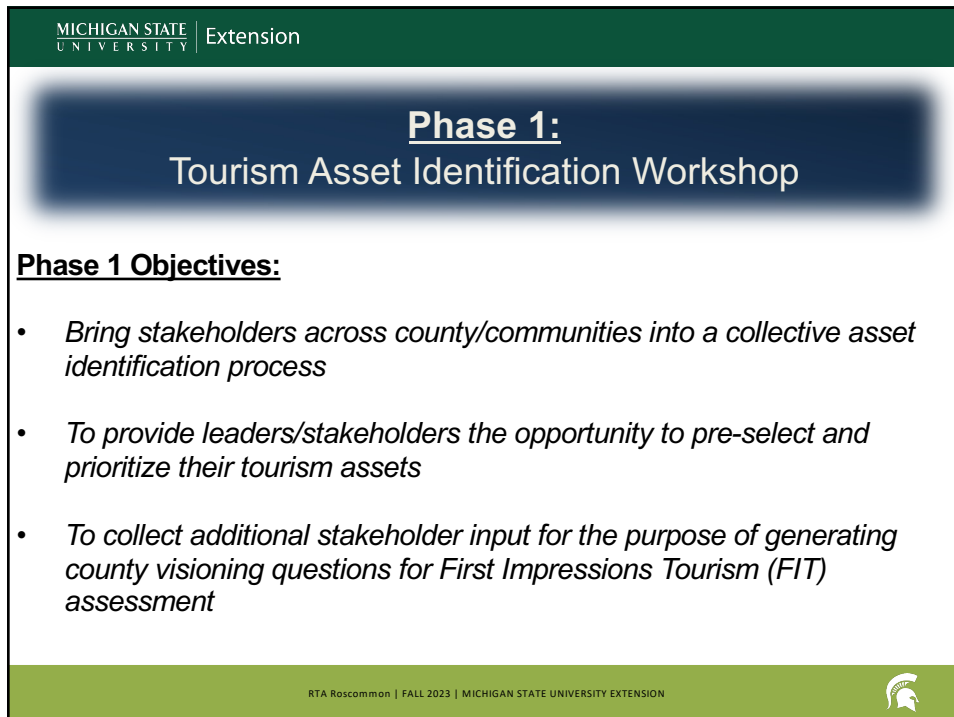
Rural Tourism Assessment

- **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 – Tonight
 - Phase 3 will continue into May for individual communities





The screenshot shows the MSU Extension website. At the top, it says "MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension". Below that is the MSU logo and "MSU Extension" with the subtitle "First Impressions: Assessing Your Community for Tourism". A navigation menu includes "How It Works", "History", "Community Reports", "Apply", "Resources", and "Frequently Asked Questions". The main content area features a background image of a lake with a person in a canoe. The text reads "Roscommon County & Community Rural Tourism Asset ID Workshop Phase 1". Below this, a date is listed: "• April 12th, 2023". At the bottom, there is a URL: www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/programs/ and the MSU logo.



The screenshot shows the MSU Extension website. At the top, it says "MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension". The main content area has a dark blue background with the text "Phase 1: Tourism Asset Identification Workshop". Below this, the text reads "Phase 1 Objectives:". A list of three objectives is provided:

- *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*

At the bottom, there is a footer: "RTA Roscommon | FALL 2023 | MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION" and the MSU logo.



Phase 1: Identifying Tourism Assets

What are attractions, events, business examples from your community?

- Nature-based/Outdoor Recreation
- Historical/Cultural tourism
- Agritourism
- Random Assets



RTA Phase 1 – Prioritizing Tourism Assets

- 2 Sticky Dots = 2 Votes Per Person
- Best asset in your community 
- Best asset in your county 



Historical / Cultural Tourism

Deerfield Historical and Logging and Graveling Trail

MEMORIAL PARK (VETERANS)

HISTORICAL STATUS FOR SEVERAL OLD BLDGS.

73RD YEAR FOR BLUEVELL FESTIVAL ●

LONGEST RUNNING FESTIVAL IN MICHIGAN

LONGEST

TUT (TIPUP TOWN) Winter Festival 74TH YR

TRUSTEE PARK - History, scenic views ●●●

Pinetown - Architecture - movies ●●●

● Hilar Historical Village in Pinetown

IMMERSED - BUD BASH

Popcorn Race Car Show - Antiques

Antique Home - Murky Topography Snow Fields

ANNUAL CRAFT SHOW @ school area

Blues Festival - July



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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?

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Incorporating Phase 1 into RTA

- Shared list of assets with the 5 assessors
 - Ensured at least one assessor visited as many of the assets as possible
- Helped us better understand what current residents view as key community highlights/assets



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Prudenville – Houghton Lake Assets

Nature-based/Outdoor Rec

Priority Assets
Snowmobile - ORV Trails, Owens Trail Head
Fishing - Lymans, Houghton Lake
Camping - Reedsburg Dam, N Houghton Lake State Forest Campground
Higgins Lake Bike Trail
Iron-Belle Bike Trail
Triple D Ranch
Remaining Assets
State Land for Hunting
Boating - Houghton Lake, DNR Launches, Marinas
Lost Twin Lakes Hiking Trails - off Reserve Rd.
Flats - Pavillion N. Old 27
Golfing - 10 Courses within 30 Minutes
Pickleball Court - S.M. 18
Disc Golf - Skinner Park (Rosco Twp), Markey Twp Park
Lakeland Recreation - Batting Cages, Putt-Putt Golf
Quilt Block Trail
Ausable Birding Trail
Paddle Brave/Campbell's Canoe Livery
KOA Campground
Great Circle Campground

Other (Lodging, retail, etc.)

Priority Assets (None)
Frog Tiki Bar
Bucilli's Pizza
Morning Glory - Retail Antique/Home Decor
Remaining Assets
Lakeside Resort - Waterpark, Hotel, Restaurant
Arnies - Retail, Gifts, Crafts
Rocking Chair Gift Shop
Mystical Awakening
Anchor Inn - Paranormal Tours/Events
Becky's Best Sewing - Sales, Classes, Repairs
Camping World RV Center
Lyman's - Fish, Bait Shop, Rentals
N. Michigan Event Center - Restaurant, Sports, Exercise Class
Back Door Saloon
Limberlost Restaurant and Bar
MJ's Restaurant



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Prudenville – Houghton Lake Assets

Historical - Cultural

Priority Assets
Pine Theatre - Architecture, Movies
Trestle Park - History, music concerts
Houghton Lake Historical Village and Playhouse
Remaining Assets
TUT (Tip Up Town) Longest Winter Festival - 74th year
Limberlost - Bud Bash
Pipkin Run Car Show - Antiques
Antique Flea Market - Markey Park/Denton Soccer Fields
Annual Craft Shows @ School Area
Blues Festival - July

Agri-Food Tourism

Priority Assets (None)
Remaining Assets
Bart's Produce - Pumpkin Patch - Prudenville M-55
Best Choice Market - N Old 27
Tractor Supply Farmers Market
Triple D Carriage Rides - Hay Rides

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Roscommon – Higgins Lake Assets

Nature-based/Outdoor Rec

Priority Assets
Higgins Lake - Diving, Boating, Fishing
Marl Lake Trails + Lake (Canoe/Kayak)
Ausable River South Branch (N. DT Roscommon)
Remaining Assets
Roscommon Zoo
Lighted Night Kayak Tour on Hig Lake
Cut River Launch
Gahagan Nature Centre
Winter-Fest
Tisdale Trail
Markey Park - Disc Golf, Dog Park, Fitness
Sam-O-Set Park
Roscommon Metro Park
Pheonix Park
Roscommon Wallace Park
Park 27 - Outdoor Concerts
Gerrish Park
Cross-Country Ski Headquarters
Camp Westminster
Forest Dunes/Ye Old Country Club
Kirtland Warbler Festival

Other (Lodging, retail, etc.)

Priority Assets (None)
Remaining Assets
CRAF Center - Gym/Fitness Center
Fireman's Memorial
The Barn at Higgins Lake/Event Center
Freds of Roscommon
The Loom Room
Weekends - Retail
B&B Marina & Gift Shop
Silver Dollar
Roscommon Canoe Classic - Event
Cut River Grille
Polar Parlor
Country Corners Pizza
Higgins Lake Bike Trail
Iron-Belle Bike Trail
Paddle Brave/Campbell's Canoe Livery
KOA Campground

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Roscommon – Higgins Lake Assets

Historical - Cultural

Priority Assets
Fireman's Memorial Festival/Monument
Remaining Assets
RAM Center
CCC Museum
Roscommon Area Historical Society
Gazebo Concerts
Ausable River Center
Craft Shows Markey/Denton
Ros-tober Fest
Roscommon Art Festival
Summerfest - Car Show
Mason Tract & Chapel
Roscommon District Library
Christmas in the Village
4th July Parade + Fireworks
Greens Bar
Train Museum

Agri-Food Tourism

Priority Assets
Downtown Eatery Beachwood Cafe
Roscommon Farmers Market
Triple D Ranch
Remaining Assets
5th St. Market (Local Sourced)
Community Garden (George & Main St.)
HL Greenhouse
Roscommon Floral
Growing UP Greenhouse
Black Bear Honey and Maple Syrup

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St. Helen Assets

Nature-based/Outdoor Rec

Priority Assets
Lake St Helen Miles of Undeveloped Shoreline (Quiet water trail)
Universal ADA Accessible Kayak/Canoe Launch
100's of miles of accessible trails
Remaining Assets
Birding Trail
Garden Pathways Park
Lake St. Helen Fishing Pier
Boat Launch, Marina and Beaches (Lake St. Helen)
Area Parks - Richfield Twp. Park, Public Access Park, Cove Park, Garden Pathway
Motor Sport Area - Rock Pile
ORV and ATV Events
Second Largest Trailhead in MI

Other (Lodging, retail, etc.)


Priority Assets (None)
Lake Superior State University - Charlton Heston Academy
Remaining Assets
Woody's Hot Dogs on the Lake
Hen House - Top 10 Best Chicken in MI (MLIVE)
Family Events - Egg Hunt, Summer Kick-off, Blue-Gill, Fireworks, Trunk or Treat
The Game Refuge
Multiple ORV Events
Multiple Car Shows
Evergreen Barn - Wedding Venue, 100 year old barn

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St. Helen Assets


Historical - Cultural	Agri-Food Tourism
Priority Assets 73rd year for Blue Gill Festival - Longest Running Festival in MI	Priority Assets St. Helen Farmers Market
Remaining Assets Develop Historical Info - Logging and Original Town Memorial Park (Veterans) Historical Status for Several old buildings	Remaining Assets Garden Pathways Park Halloween Pumpkin Patch Bison Ranch Quilt Block Trail - Farm/Barn Quilts

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Rural Tourism Assessment

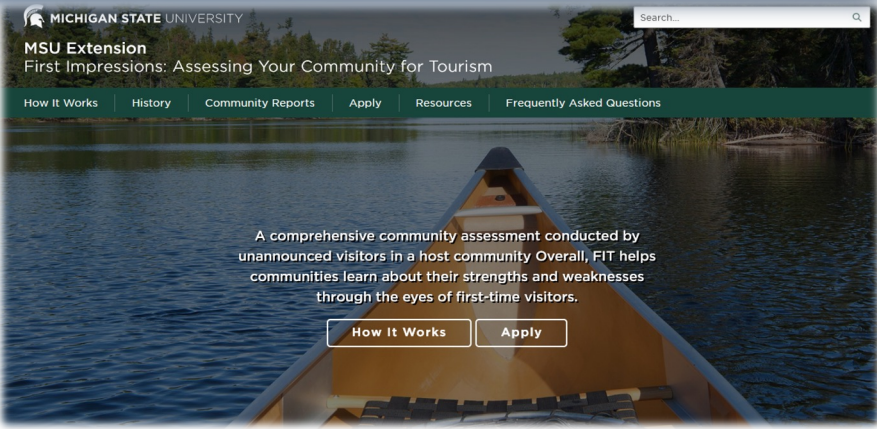
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Phase 2:

- First Impressions Tourism (FIT) Assessments
 - Q2-Q3 Late Summer/early Fall



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](#)



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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.



First Impressions:
Assessing your community for tourism (FIT)

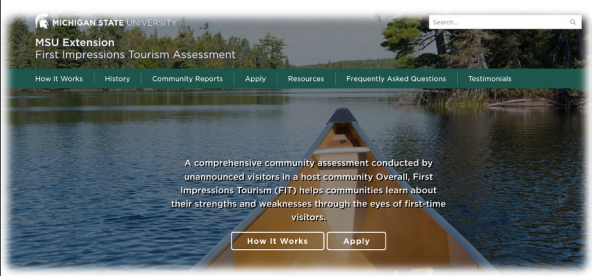
The results of FIT can:

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

First Impressions: Assessing your community for tourism (FIT), Michigan State University Extension
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Things to know...



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

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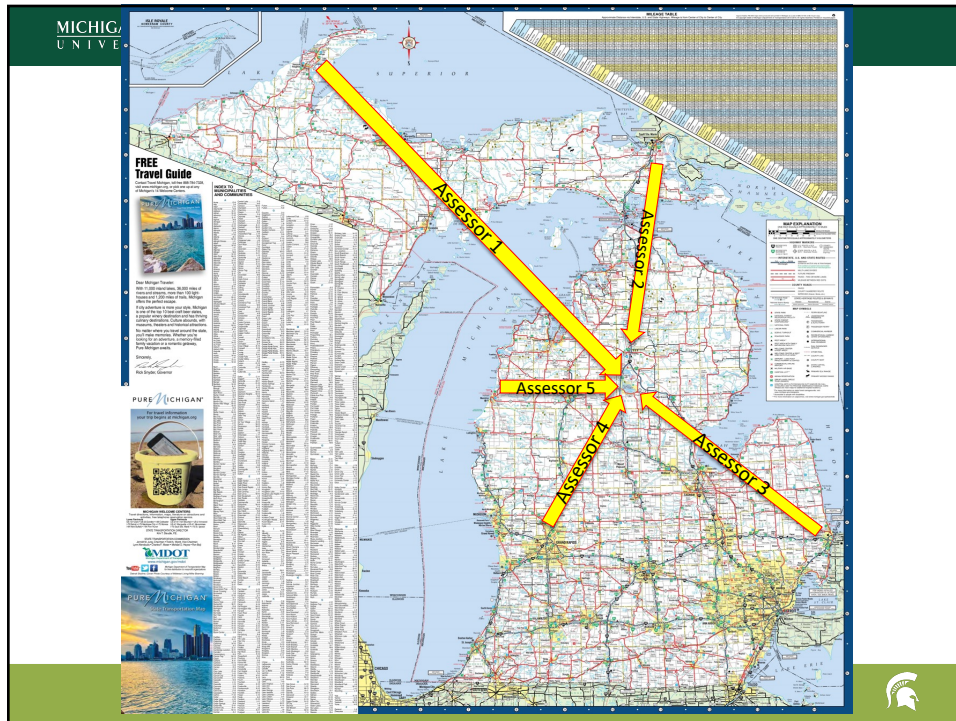
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- **5 Visitor Profiles:**
 - 1 Female
 - 4 Male
 - Generations:
 - 3 Millennials
 - 2 Gen X
 - Visited alone - 4
 - Visited with spouse – 1
 - All long-term residents of MI
 - Life
 - 10+ years



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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 (aka 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 – visithoughtonlake.com

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
The information was well presented.	0	0	3	2	5
Web pages were visually appealing.	0	0	3	2	5
I noticed typographical errors.	1	4	0	0	5
It was easy to find information on the website	0	1	3	1	5
The information was useful.	0	1	3	1	5
More information is needed on this site.	0	2	2	1	5

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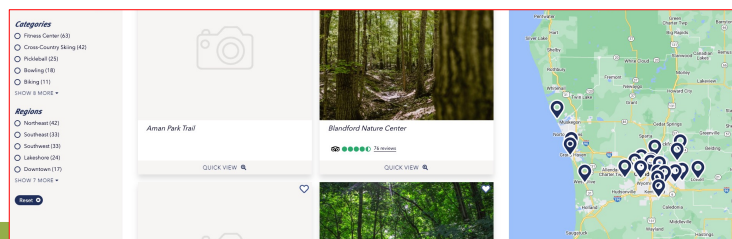
Why the most helpful?

1. Website listed things to do, attractions from the surrounding region.
2. It was the *most professional* with the easiest to navigate. The topics for sub pages are specifically relevant to tourists.
3. Fairly robust website covering the county and region with events and such.
4. Most comprehensive list of activities, lodging, and videos
5. Seemed to be the most front and center resource



What additional info would be beneficial?

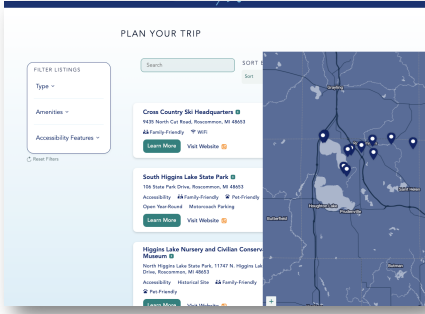
1. An interactive map of the area that allows you to see where things are located and select for different categories of attractions/lodging/restaurants
2. Make things searchable by community in addition to category, so e.g.
3. I would move the *RC Visitors Guide* to the top as well as the App available via QR code. Putting all that at the bottom seems to discourage its use.
 1. Note - I only found out about both resources navigating around the community and noticing the app in my hotel lobby, not by using the “most helpful” website



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2nd website worth mentioning?







- Google maps (x3)
 - Utilized for wayfinding and asset identification and information
- <https://www.michigan.org/city/roscommon> - Pure Michigan
 - had a good listing of things to do, but not much additional information outside of the business directory, included interactive map feature
- Roscommon County



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Which social media did you use?

 3	 2	 4	 0	 2
 3				

Why was it used?

- TA – Look at some top local attractions,
 - didn't have much useful info...
- YT – Visited the HL channel and enjoyed seeing videos of activities in the area
 - Watched fishing videos, learned of frisbee golf near state park

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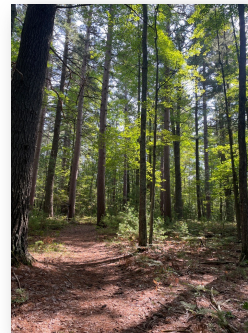
Based on your research, how did you visualize the county before visiting?

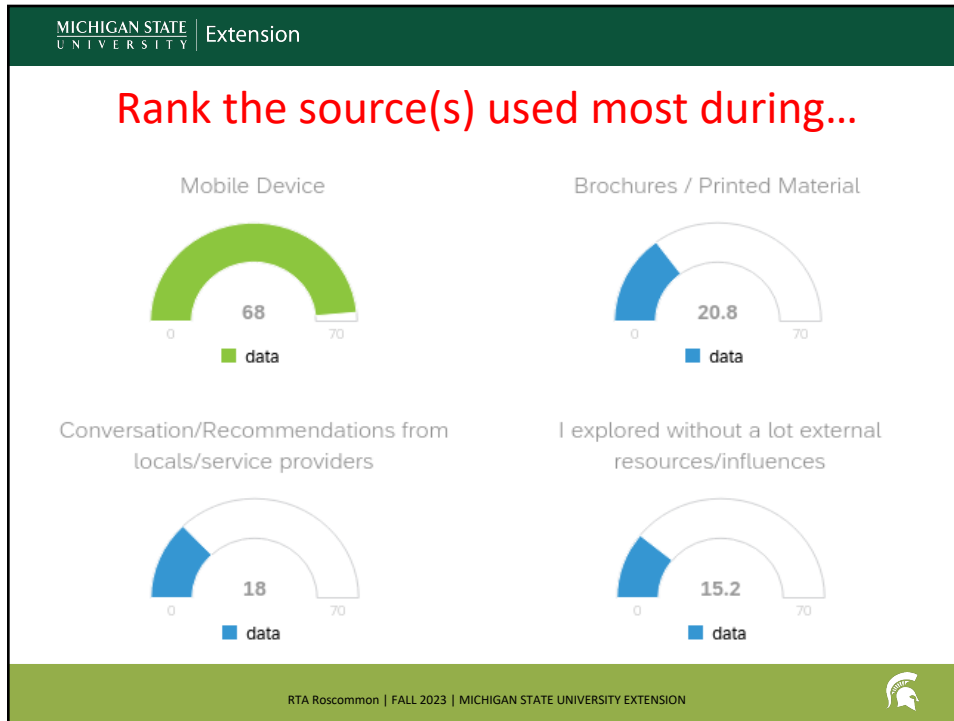
- I expected to find a region dominated by the two large lakes that are within the county borders and to have some maybe dated tourism infrastructure that exists along those lakes. The area between the lakes I was expecting to be forested and fairly wild in terms of services and people.
- Spread out, rustic, outdoor recreation focused, high expectations for outdoor recreation, low expectations for food and accommodations.



Based on your research, how did you visualize the county before visiting?

- Visualized two main population centers around the lakes and mostly forested elsewhere. I worried about not having a motorboat, quad, ORV, or a set of clubs for my visit!
- I did expect easier understanding of how to participate in activities and enjoy the area. I guess I expected to have a better understanding of where to go, what to do from my research, but when I got there, I couldn't really grasp the distances between each community nor all that clear how to access the lakes and trails...





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Community Information

Question	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
• It was easy to find a visitor center	0	1	2	2
• Visitor center hours were conducive to visitors	0	2	2	1
• Visitor center staff were helpful	0	1	2	2
• It was easy to find a regional tourist brochure	0	0	2	3
• It was easy to find a map of the region	0	2	0	3
• The local/regional newspaper was informative	1	0	2	1
• Information booths/kiosks exist to help tourists locate attractions and services	0	0	5	0

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Top 4 reasons

• Outdoor recreation	5
• Be in nature	3
• Visit friends and family	3
• Relax	3
• Specific activity this county has	2 
• Other Reason	2 
• Engage in sports activities	1
• Engage in business/professional activities	1
• Visit historical sites	0
• Get away from people	0
• Experience a unique culture	0
• Get entertained/for entertainment	0
• In transit to somewhere else	0
• Engage in religious activities	0
• Agritourism opportunities	0
• Shop	0




ORVs, Trails
Fish, Family Tradition




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Nature-based attractions	14
Outdoor recreation	13
Hospitality and friendliness	12
Safety and security	10
Destination's marketing	9
Customer service	9
Cultural attractions	8
Cleanliness	7
Variety of shopping options	7
Variety of accommodations	6
Agricultural attractions	6
Directional signage	5
Well marked assets	5
Variety of restaurants	4



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County Attributes –

There are several nice hiking trails, state parks and recreation opportunities that make Roscommon County an outdoor lovers paradise

The natural beauty of the lakes, rivers and trails in the area are something that should draw visitors during all four seasons to Roscommon County



Overall, this area exceeded my expectations. I was not expecting such great customer service and friendly people at nearly every business I went into. Clearly this area has been in tourism for a while and appreciates tourists (at least at businesses).



One of the main areas that I thought the county was lacking was in variety and innovation within the restaurant industry. Many of the eateries in the county were serving very similar types of food, and by the third day staying there I was looking for something with more variety or types of cuisine

It did seem like, outside of the state parks, public access to the two main lakes was lacking

It might also be difficult for a wheelchair bound person to access some of the area's assets

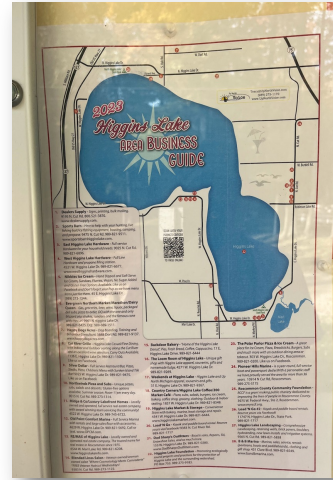
In terms of safety and connectivity it's EXTREMELY car-centric everywhere and poorly signed, so I drove past a lot of things before I had any idea I was looking at something interesting



County Geographic specific

I found the southern portion of the county to lack directional signage or signage that was visible to the eye that was already being bombarded with signage along the main corridor of Prudenville. That area is just overwhelmingly obnoxious with marketing and if you don't have a co-pilot, you can easily create an accident or get into one.

North of the county though I thought the signage was much better, but even there it lacked between communities. The communities could be connected visually so much better and encouraging visitors to "loop".



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



Description for Assets Visited – Next 3 slides

- Assets highlighted orange on the following three slides were identified during Phase 1 by stakeholders as important to Roscommon County’s tourism industry.
- The list themselves were assets visited by assessors



Assets Visited – Prudenville/Houghton Lake

- Lake House Meat and Deli and the takeout only Side Shack
- Bookworm
- Beachfront Hotel
- Detroit Rustic
- Joe’s Coney Island
- Knitty Gritty Treasures
- M55 Pour House
- RV Camping World
- Lost Twin Lakes Hiking Trail
- Kiss Me Coffee
- Walmart
- Lakeview Waterfront Park
- Beachfront hotel
- Morning Glory
- Spicer’s Boat City
- Frog Tiki Bar
- Home Depot
- Sully’s on the Lake BBQ
- Lakeside Resort
- Houghton Lake Flats (Birding trail)
- HL Fitness Center
- Bart’s Fruit Market
- Trestle Park
- Pawn Shop
- Limberlost
- Chamber Farmers Market
- Sullivan Beach Park
- Houghton Lake Provisioning Center
- Navajo Trading Post
- Skinner Park / Roscommon Township Disc Golf
- TJ Loopies Sips and Sweets
- Backus Township Park
- Lakeside Bar and Grille




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Assets Visited – Village of Roscommon

- Cut River Grille
- Michigan State Firemen’s Memorial
- North Winds Lodge at Higgins Lake
- N Higgins Lake SP (Crawford County)
- Roscommon Area District Library
- Marl Lake Trails
- Michigan Firemen’s Memorial Festival
- CCC Museum (Crawford County)
- The Bird and The Bear Bakery
- Beechwood Cafe
- Made Up North
- The Butcher’s Wife Market
- Roscommon Historic Model Train Museum
- S. Higgins Lake State Park
- Northern Candles and Soap
- Roscommon Village Market
- Au Sable River Center
- Art-Y-Facts
- Village Outfitters
- Wallace Park
- Addie Beth's Clothing
- Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve
- Tisdale Triangle Pathway
- Uncommonly Goods
- Cross Country Ski Headquarters
- St. Vincent DePaul
- Markey Memorial Park & Disc Golf
- Gerrish Township Park

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Assets Visited – St. Helen

- 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
- 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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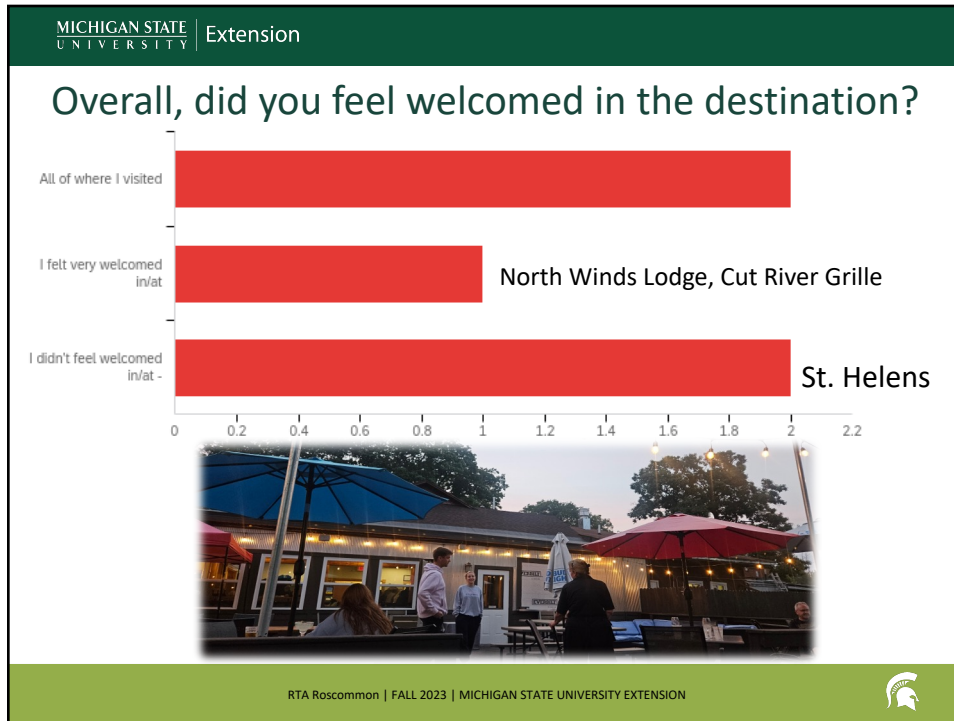
Public and Private Assets Visited

- All assets listed were experienced between 1 and 5 times
- All have one or more reviews
- Some assets may be misnamed
- Some assets may technically be part of other communities, but were experienced as listed
- Assets identified as high attractions in individual community Zooms.



Reflections





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How often can you see yourself visiting again?

Once a year	0
A couple times a year	1
Every couple years or so	1
Not really for another few years	3
I cannot envision returning	0


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What will you remember most six months from now?

- The lakes and hiking
- Feeling of remoteness
- Ability to get away from people in nature
- Beachwood Café
- Old growth trees
- Gahagan Preserve
- South Higgins Lake
- Scenic drives between Rosco and St. Helen
- Cross-country Headquarters
- Village of Roscommon

- Lack of lake access
- “The Loop” marketed on 75N, but no loop
- Lack of Mountain Biking options
- Overwhelming feeling in Prudenville



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As the destination is now, I would recommend this to friends/family? **100% Said Yes!**

- A place that I would visit again and plan to bring family to camp at either N or S Higgins Lake State Parks, hike or play disc golf
- Great outdoor recreation opportunities.
- If I had a friend who was looking to rent a cabin and spend some time on a lake, I would say go for it.
- I would recommend the S. Higgins Lake State Park and Roscommon area generally.
- For the State Parks



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Strengths

- Natural resources
- State park infrastructure
- Remote / open space areas
- Feeling of solitude
- Known tourism destination
- Kirtland Warbler Birding Trail
- Great customer service
- Some nice lodging and food
- Convenient Geo location
- Diversity of (state/federal) landscapes
- Some cultural sites
- A place to go, relax, and explore (w/ boat or ORV)
- Outdoor recreation, trails
- A CVB
- Multiple Chambers
- Rosco County EDC




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Challenges

- Aging tourism infrastructure
- Difficult pedestrian/non-motorized travel
- Reliance on cars
- Everyone knows the lakes, but seems not much else
- Difficult public access to lakes
- Lack of food variety options
- Minimal city planning/zoning
- Lack of natural community gathering places
- Needed update of zoning ordinances
- Lack of walkability south side of county
- Lack of connectivity between communities
- Poor signage (overshadowed)
- Weak community websites
- No mention/signage of the "Loop"



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Opportunities = Suggestions

- Increase public access to lakes
- Foster more unique food options
- Farm to table/Local food
- Brew pub and/or distillery
- Increase county marketing
- Better maps to help navigate
- Split RC into 4 specific hubs
- Increase outdoor recreation options
- Engage MTB trail and other users
- Expand Trestle Park into multi-use community node
- Create more continuity via planning and zoning
 - Ordinance for Pedestrian Center in Prudenville
 - Decreasing parking lot sizes and yard setbacks (redevelopment)
- Create welcoming campaigns in less visited areas (St. Helen)
- Connect 3 communities better



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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Suggestions

- Art
- Business
- Community
- Recreation



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Art

- Public art installations (permanent or not) that celebrate the uniqueness/history of the community and region
- Arts center for plays/shows
- Perhaps engage local artists and artisans. Expand art presence at farmers markets.
- Continue to support local art through Farm Markets and coffee shop/gift co-op models.
- Could art themes/murals be used across RC for the “The Loop”?

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Business

- More local food options and variety, maybe a local restaurant pop-up to provide access to kitchen space and clientele for restaurant start-ups and to attract entrepreneurs
- Construct a more coherent county wide chamber
- More dining variety.
- Encourage more hotels to get onto major travel websites (Bookings, Expedia) because it looks like there are very few hotels in the area on those websites. There are many, many short-term rentals on those websites so it is enticing to do the STR route rather than a hotel/motel.
- Explore different dining options/Farm to Table



Community


- Install better sidewalks on the South of Houghton Lake (that area is dangerous to walk around!)
- Try to develop multi-use public spaces.
- Increase way finding between communities and pointing to community assets
- The Loop!




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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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- 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



msue.anr.msu.edu

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

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

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Sea Grant Educator / MSU Extension
District 2

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.)

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/>