



# Using *Rural Tourism Assessment* to Strengthen Outdoor Recreation in Roscommon County and Communities

Garrett Ziegler and Andy Northrop



# Who We Are



**Garrett Ziegler**

Food Systems and Sustainable Tourism  
Educator



**Andy Northrop**

Sustainable Tourism and Community  
Development Educator



**The Rural Tourism Assessment**



## MSU Extension's Mission

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



Michigan State University  
Extension programs and  
materials are open to all without  
regard to race, color, national  
origin, sex, gender, gender  
identity, religion, age, height,  
weight, disability, political  
beliefs, sexual orientation,  
marital status, family status or  
veteran status.



In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, and American Sign Language) should contact the responsible State or local Agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

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](http://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; or

**fax:**  
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442;

**email:**  
[program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Conforme a la ley federal y las políticas y regulaciones de derechos civiles del Departamento de Agricultura de los Estados Unidos (USDA), esta institución tiene prohibido discriminar por motivos de raza, color, origen nacional, sexo, edad, discapacidad, venganza o represalia por actividades realizadas en el pasado relacionadas con los derechos civiles (no todos los principios de prohibición aplican a todos los programas).

La información del programa puede estar disponible en otros idiomas además del inglés. Las personas con discapacidades que requieran medios de comunicación alternativos para obtener información sobre el programa (por ejemplo, Braille, letra agrandada, grabación de audio y lenguaje de señas americano) deben comunicarse con la agencia estatal o local responsable que administra el programa o con el TARGET Center del USDA al (202) 720-2600 (voz y TTY) o comunicarse con el USDA a través del Servicio Federal de Transmisión de Información al (800) 877-8339.

Para presentar una queja por discriminación en el programa, el reclamante debe completar un formulario AD-3027, Formulario de queja por discriminación del programa del USDA, que se puede obtener en línea, en [www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-program-discrimination-complaint-form.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-program-discrimination-complaint-form.pdf), en cualquier oficina del USDA, llamando al (866) 632-9992, o escribiendo una carta dirigida al USDA. La carta debe contener el nombre, la dirección y el número de teléfono del reclamante, y una descripción escrita de la supuesta acción discriminatoria con suficiente detalle para informar al Subsecretario de Derechos Civiles (ASCR, por sus siglas en inglés) sobre la naturaleza y la fecha de la presunta violación de los derechos civiles. La carta o el formulario AD-3027 completado debe enviarse al USDA por medio de:

**correo postal:**  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; o'

**fax:**  
(833) 256-1665 o' (202) 690-7442;

**correo electrónico:**  
[program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

Esta institución ofrece igualdad de oportunidades.

## Outdoor Recreation Communities...

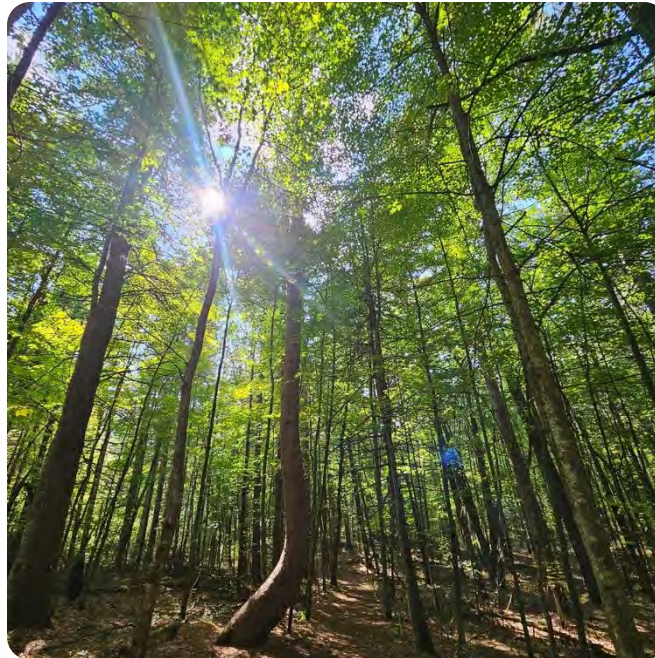
What do you appreciate  
most?

What is most important to  
have?

**The Rural Tourism Assessment**



# The Rural Tourism Assessment Model



The Rural Tourism Assessment



# Our Partner



**Brenda Bachelder**

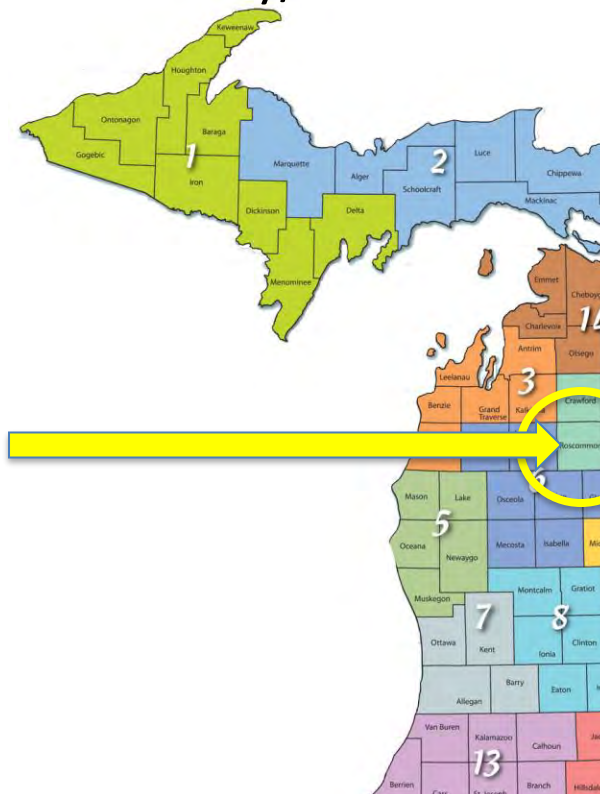
**Director of Business and Economic Development**



**The Rural Tourism Assessment**



# Background on RTA

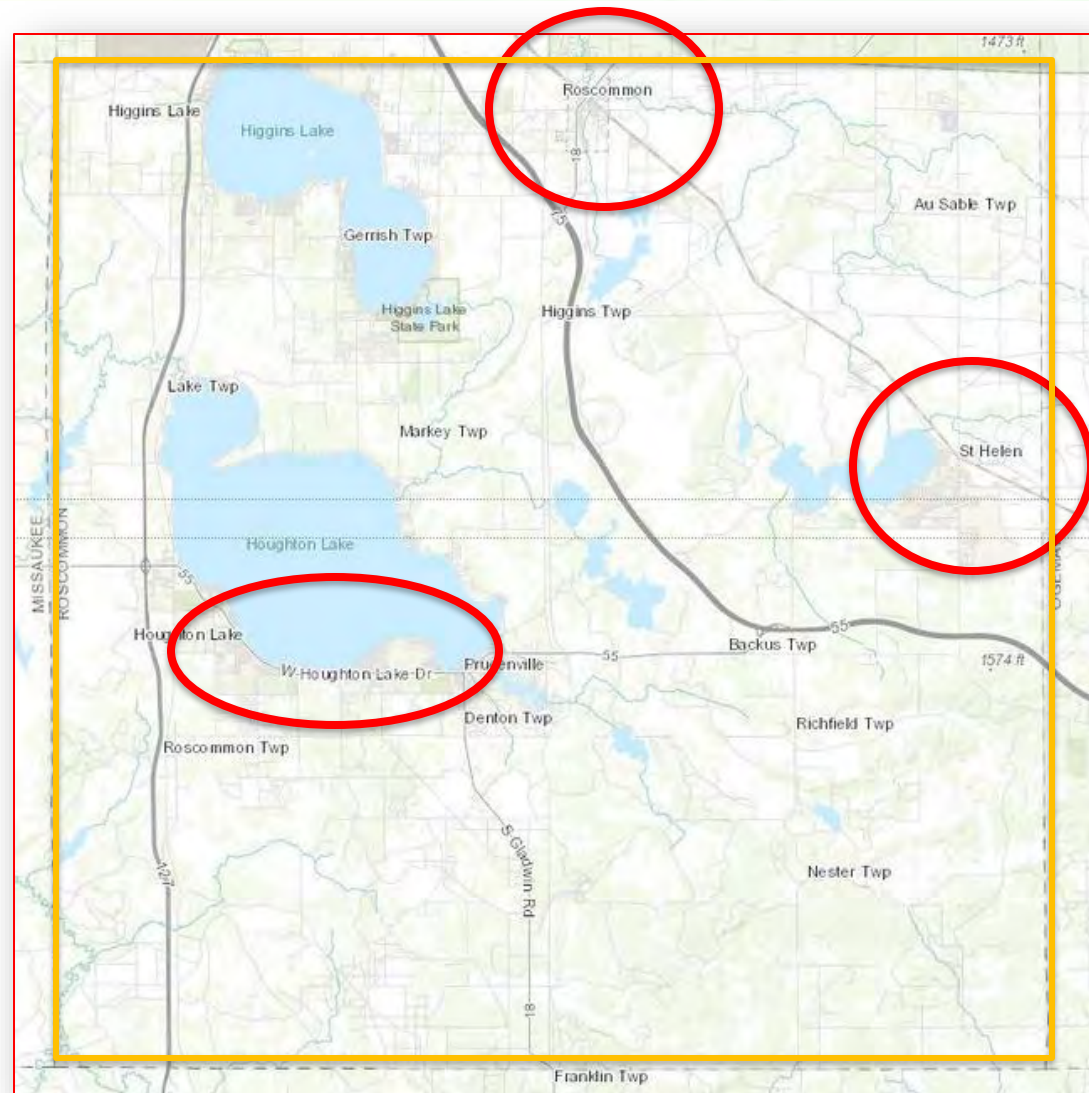
- Partnership with Roscommon County Economic Development Corp.
  - Need to foster collaboration & innovation with county/communities
  - Approximately 2 years process
  - = Lead to a new MSUE tourism program
- 
- Roscommon County
    - 580 sq miles w/ 24,000 residents
    - 2023 Tourism Stats
      - \$152.3m Visitor Spending
      - 15.7% - Share of the region
      - .5% - Share of the State
- 
- A map of Michigan's counties, color-coded and numbered 1 through 13. A large yellow arrow points from the left towards Roscommon County, which is highlighted in orange and labeled with the number 3. The counties shown include Keweenaw, Houghton, Ontonagon, Benzie, Iron, Delta, Dickinson, Mackinac, Chippewa, Lapeer, Emmet, Cheboygan, Charlevoix, Ogemaw, Antrim, Oscoda, Crawford, Roscommon, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalamazoo, Mason, Lake, Oshtemo, Van Buren, Allegan, Barry, Eaton, Hillsdale, Branch, Calhoun, Jackson, Kent, Ottawa, Montcalm, Gratiot, Ionia, Clinton, and Van Buren.



## RURAL TOURISM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM



- Targeted
  - Roscommon County
  - 3 Communities
    - Houghton Lake
    - St. Helen
    - Village of Roscommon



## RURAL TOURISM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM



Find your way with RTA!



## OUR PROCESS



### 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 MSU 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 Extension's FIT program. FIT provides valuable insights into the tourism experience from both first-time visitors and community perspectives generated during Phase 1.

### Phase 2: Contd.



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 during a community forum setting as part of Phase 3.

### Phase 3: Results dissemination and community engagement



Approx. 6 months after completing Phase 2, Phase 3 commences. Results obtained from the first two Phases 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 perspectives, fostering collaboration and shared decision-making.

### Phase 4: Implementation strategy development



Phase 4 consists of facilitated discussions with stakeholders around next steps and implementation strategies for communities participating in the entire RTA 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.





The Rural Tourism Assessment



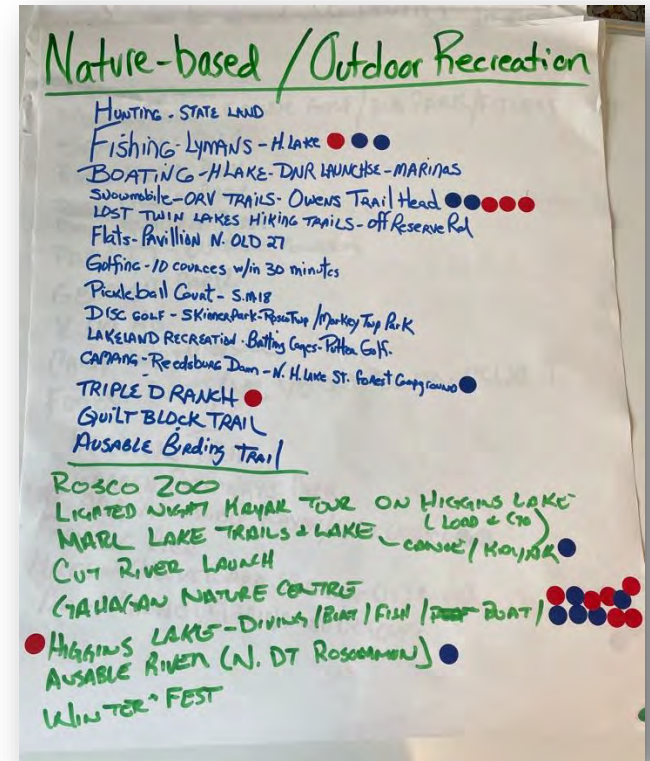
## Phase 1: Tourism Asset Identification Workshop April 2023

### Objectives:

- *To bring leaders/stakeholders across county & communities into a collective asset identification process to prioritize their tourism assets.*
- *To collect additional leaders/stakeholder input for the purpose of generating county visioning questions for first-time visitors during Phase 2.*



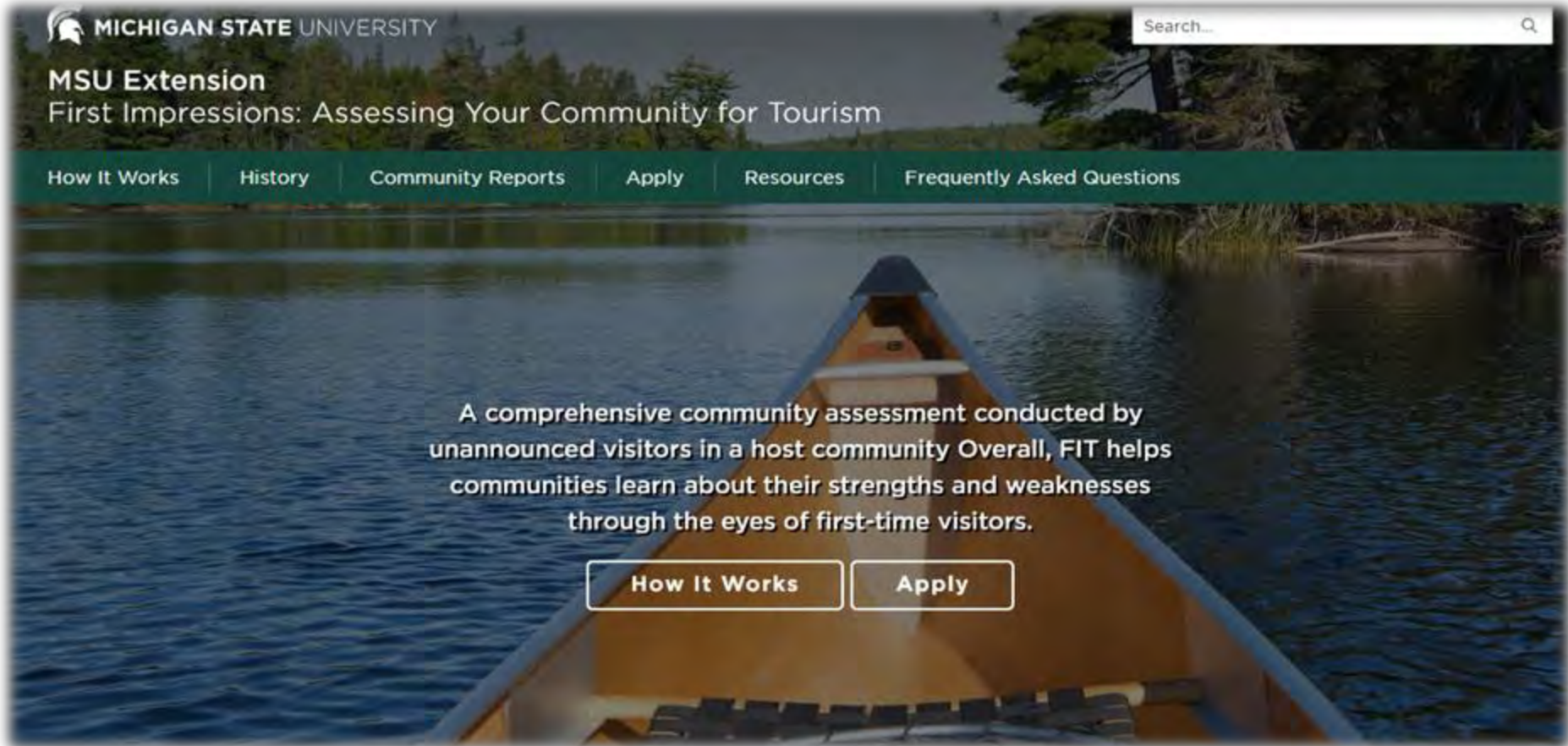
## Phase 1: Asset Identification Workshop



### Other Assets ID

- -Agricultural/Agritourism
- -Cultural/Historical

## Phase 2: Data Collection and Analysis



The screenshot shows the MSU Extension website. At the top left is the Michigan State University logo and name. To the right is a search bar. Below the header, the main title 'MSU Extension First Impressions: Assessing Your Community for Tourism' is displayed. A green navigation bar contains links: 'How It Works', 'History', 'Community Reports', 'Apply', 'Resources', and 'Frequently Asked Questions'. The main content area features a background image of a canoe on a lake. Overlaid on this image is the text: '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.' Below this text are two buttons: 'How It Works' and 'Apply'.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Search...

**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](#)

## 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.

## Phase 3: Result Dissemination and Community Engagement May 2024

- Phase 1 and 2 results are merged and shared
- Phase 3 - Community Report Forums
  - 1 County Forum – (In-person, 2.5 hours)
    - 70 participants
  - 3 Community Forums (Zoom, 90 minutes)
    - Houghton Lake, 35 participants
    - St. Helen, 25 participants
    - Village of Roscommon, 35 participants

## Phase 4: Implementation Strategy and Development October 2024

**ROSCOMMON COUNTY  
RURAL TOURISM ASSESSMENT**

**PHASE FOUR: PROGRAM WRAP-UP  
AND NEXT STEPS**

Please join MSU Extension and Roscommon County Economic Development as we host a final gathering to wrap up the Rural Tourism Assessment and plan next steps.



Registration: <https://events.anr.msu.edu/RTAPhase4/>

**10/23/2024**  
**5:00 PM – 7:30 PM**  
**Markey Township Hall**  
7400 E Houghton Lake Dr, Houghton Lake, MI 48629

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY | Extension

ROSCOMMON COUNTY  
Economic Development Corporation

- 70 attendees
- Included -
  - Recapped RTA to that point
  - Focused on insights from Phase 3 Forums
    - *Quick Wins, Assets, Needs, A-has*
  - Facilitated – Community Activities
  - Planning *Next Steps*

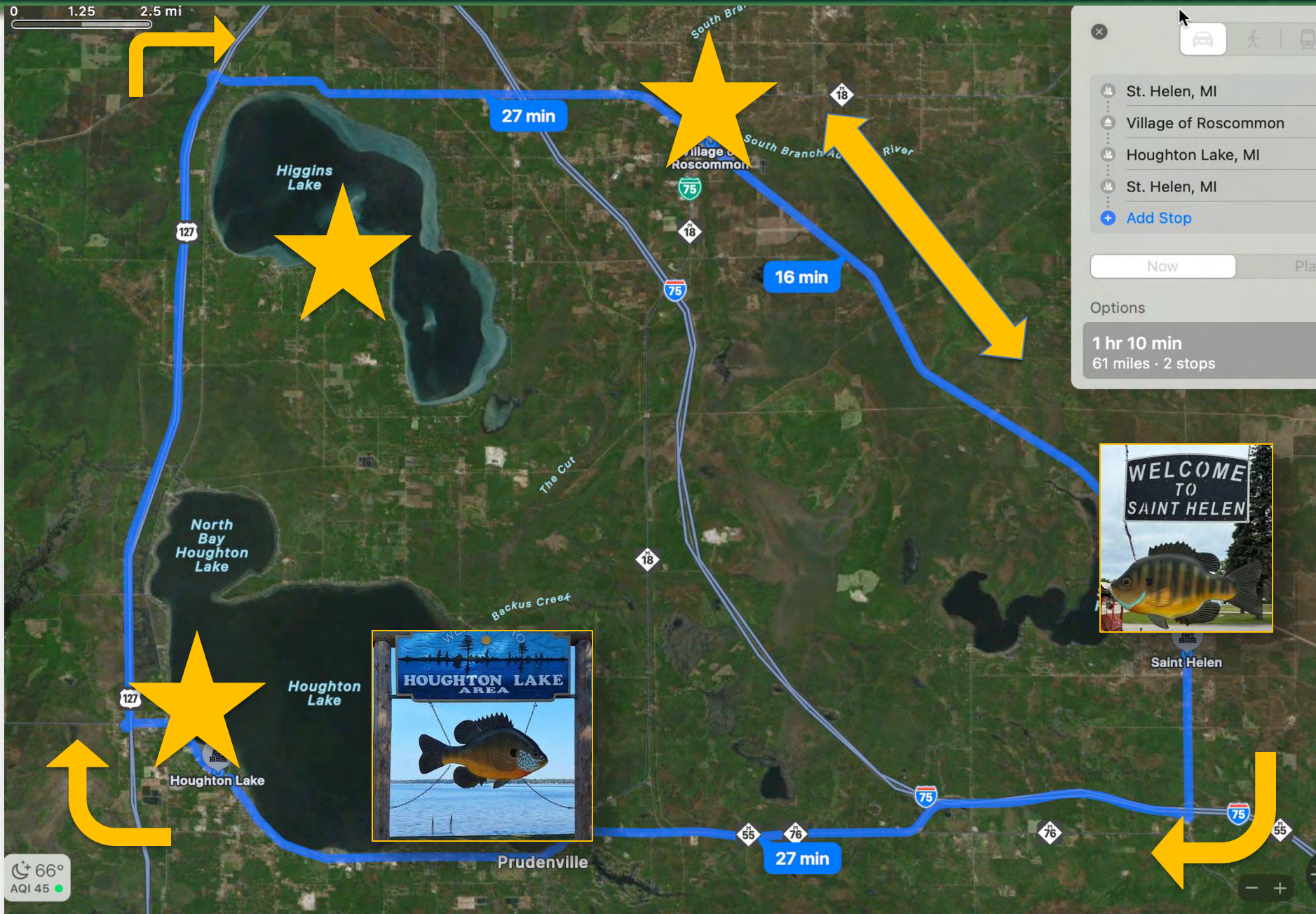
| Quick Wins                                           | Assets                                                  | Needs                                          | “Ah-ha moments”                               |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Chamber and County website improvements              | Public Libraries                                        | Completion of Iron Belle                       | The Loop                                      |
| Better signs for lake access                         | Local food, not chains                                  | Funding                                        | Lack of online marketing information          |
| Public Art                                           | Short driving distance to Metro Detroit, highway access | Improve web presence and tech support to do it | Expand Trestle District                       |
| Develop “The Loop”                                   | Lakes                                                   | Slow traffic down                              | Expand food options, especially farm-to-table |
| Expand use of social media                           | Community Organizations                                 | Grow agritourism                               | Surprising most would return                  |
| Update Google Maps, TripAdvisor, Yelp, etc.          | Trail system                                            | Invest in lodging                              | Expand bike paths                             |
| Printed and web maps of all public parks and beaches | Natural areas and gathering spaces                      | Develop food truck areas and hire coordinator  |                                               |

## "The Loop" - Roscommon County

- Opportunity identified during Phase 2
- Gained traction after Phase 3
- Implementation began before Phase 4
- Tying communities together
  - Each community promoting the next
  - Community identified themes -
    - Sports, Cuisine, History
    - First starting with fish



# "The Loop" - Roscommon County



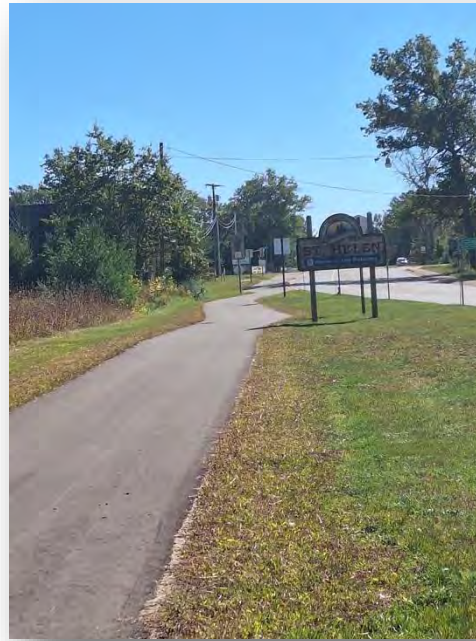
## Partner Perspectives –

- Capacity and Buy-in from Rosco Communities?
- Funding?
- Expectations of the RTA effort?
- Surprises during or after the effort?
- Impacts and actions across the three participating communities and/or county?



## Community – Actions and Impacts

- St Helen secured \$200K state funding for sidewalks
  - USDA Funding for Farmers Market
- Village of Rosco – Secured Irish Kilt Brewing Co.



## Strengthening Communities Further via Your Expertise...

- What question(s) would be best for a community to consider when strengthening (or developing) outdoor recreation?
- What are characteristics of thriving outdoor recreation communities?



## RURAL TOURISM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM



**Find your way with RTA!**



### WHY COMPLETE A RURAL TOURISM ASSESSMENT?

- ✓ Engaging stakeholders in the process of identifying assets within your geography is a valuable way to strengthen collaboration and foster sustainability.
- ✓ Capturing first-time visitor perspectives of your assets will help highlight strengths, weakness, and opportunities.
- ✓ Helping to ensure rural tourism has a solid place in future community economic development is a key component of the RTA approach.

### WHO IS A GOOD FIT FOR RTA?

- RTA is available to communities and counties. More importantly, it is ideal for stakeholders that see the value and synergy tourism provides to rural economies.



### LEARN MORE ABOUT RTA

The first RTA was conducted in partnership with Roscommon County Economic Development Corporation, including Roscommon County and the communities of Prudenville/Houghton Lake, St. Helen, and the Village of Roscommon.

Learn more about the inaugural assessment by scanning the QR code below.



### FOR MORE INFO CONTACT:

- **Andy Northrop,**  
[northro5@msu.edu](mailto:northro5@msu.edu)
- **Garrett Ziegler,**  
[zieglerg@msu.edu](mailto:zieglerg@msu.edu)



# Questions?

**Contact:**

**Garrett Ziegler**  
**MSU Extension**  
**[zieglerg@msu.edu](mailto:zieglerg@msu.edu)**

**Contact:**

**Andy Northrop**  
**MSU Extension**  
**[northro5@msu.edu](mailto:northro5@msu.edu)**

**Contact:**

**Brenda Bacheldar**  
**Roscommon EDC**  
**[bbacheldar@michworks4u.org](mailto:bbacheldar@michworks4u.org)**



**Rural Tourism Assessment**



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

**RURAL TOURISM  
ASSESSMENT  
PROGRAM**



**Find your  
way with  
RTA!**



Andy Northrop, MA  
Community Vitality and Tourism Educator  
Statewide Service, [northro5@msu.edu](mailto:northro5@msu.edu)

Garrett Ziegler, MS  
Community Food Systems and Tourism Educator  
West MI Service, [zieglerg@msu.edu](mailto:zieglerg@msu.edu)

Will Cronin, MPA  
Community Vitality and Tourism Educator  
Upper Peninsula Service, [croninw@msu.edu](mailto:croninw@msu.edu)

## RURAL TOURISM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM



Find your  
way with  
RTA!

