



# Assessing the Potential for Sustainable Ecotourism in Munising, Michigan

David Kronk  
Scott Jordan

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Michigan State University  
EDA University Center for  
Regional Economic Innovation

**MICHIGAN STATE** Center for Community and  
UNIVERSITY Economic Development  
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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Co-Learning Plan is to assess the development of an ecotourism economy in the Munising, Michigan area using the Ecotourism Evaluation Framework. Munising is located in Michigan's North Central Upper Peninsula on the south shore of Lake Superior, directly adjacent to Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore and Hiawatha National Forest. The Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore is perceived to be the primary attraction for tourists and has become the prominent industry in the area.

Munising's economic history has been largely dependent on timber industry, trade and commercial fishing. Until recently, Munising had made little effort to develop or update its infrastructure to support a tourism economy and the local desire was to remain a sleepy Upper Michigan town. However, in 1966, the United States declared over 114 square miles of land along the south shore of Lake Superior, the nation's first National Lakeshore to be managed by the National Park Service (NPS). The establishment of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore was intended to preserve the shoreline and bring tourists to the area in order to boost the local economy. In 1990, Grand Island, a harbor located in the center of Munising Bay, was converted into a National Recreation Area and managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS). Owing to both these endeavors, Munising area has experienced a significant increase in nature-based tourism in the recent times. Summer visitation has increased 30% since 2014 and 97% since 2011 (USFS, 2015).



Picture 1: Enjoy Munising Display Board for the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Hiawatha National Forest and the Alger Underwater Preserve

However, this growth in tourism has encountered some resistance from the local community. As the community of Munising attempts to keep up with the influx of tourists, little attempt has been made to assess the interests or concerns of the visitors, the local community members, or local business owners. Recent discussions with Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore and Hiawatha National Forest staff have indicated there is a need to control harmful impacts on the local environment and the demand for more local service providers (lodging and food). Neglecting these factors in Munising could make it difficult to sustain an ecotourism economy in the region in the future.

"The administrative history of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore is the story of tension between the conception of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore as a recreation area and an economic development initiative, and the conception of the National Park Service as an environmental guardian. The tension was present in Public Law 89-668 and it became even more pronounced in the years since 1966."

- Theodore J. Karamanski (1995)

Therefore, this study aims to assess the development of an ecotourism economy in the Munising area using the Ecotourism Evaluation Framework (developed in Costa Rica). Ecotourism, in this context, is defined as sustainable business practices that utilize local resources, hire local employees, purchase local food, educate tourists about protecting the area's resources and investing in sustainable alternative energies. The model is based on the balance of three variables: economy, local community, and the environment. A recent study by Jordan (2015), indicated that the development of an ecotourism economy could be successful when organized through a centralized noncompeting organization. Therefore, this Co-Learning Plan will examine the implementation of the Sustainable Ecotourism Alliance Organization (SEAO) in Munising, Michigan.

## BACKGROUND FOR THIS STUDY

### HISTORY OF MUNISING AND THE PICTURED ROCKS NATIONAL LAKESHORE

The national lakeshore is perceived to be the primary attraction for tourists in the area. Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore is currently managed by the NPS, whose mission is to preserve lands for future generations and for educational purposes.

In the early 20th Century, many parks were thriving but because of the remoteness of the Upper Peninsula, the Pictured Rocks area did not receive much attention. It was first considered for park development in 1923 when a group of Munising area sportsmen contacted the Superintendent of State Parks for Michigan and proposed that the State Conservation Commission consider the establishment of a combined state park-wildlife preserve in the Pictured Rocks area. The principal emphasis of Munising's request was to protect white-tailed deer habitat. At the time, the Munising community embraced the change and promoted the park with special events.

For the next 20 years, the state did not act upon the resolution to make the Pictured Rocks a state park. However, in the 1950s, when the Upper Peninsula began to experience a boom in tourism, it brought about the entrance of the state in Pictured Rocks. At this time, the Conservation Department resolved Pictured Rocks as an area with all the attributes of an outstanding state park; natural beauty that should be preserved for the lasting enjoyment of the people and which would add to the economic benefit of the region. Despite this resolution, the state did not have the capacity to develop the park.

There was much insistence for the development of a federal park, but little action was taken until the early 1960's. In 1960, a bill was proposed not to make the area a federal park but to place it under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. At this time, the Munising Chamber of Commerce developed strong support for the park and began to pursue a tourism economy more aggressively. However, the major businesses in the region were opposed to park development. This opposition

delayed the bill and continued to fuel a conflict over park development in the area, which still remains apparent in the Munising area decision making.

Despite the opposition, Pictured Rocks was declared the first National Lakeshore to be managed by the NPS in 1966. This designation along with a commitment to pave Highway 58 was the beginning of a nature-based tourism economy in the Munising area, even though the conflicts between land preservation and commercial land use continue to exist.

## ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism conjures up images of wealthy people in pith helmets on safaris in Africa, but the reality is that over 40% of the U.S. population participates in some form of ecotourism (Che, 2004). It is the fastest growing segment in the travel and tourism industry. However, there are misconceptions of what this relatively new industry is and how it works best. Ecotourism is more than nature-based tourism. The World Conservation Union's Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas defined it as "environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to appreciate nature that promotes conservation, has a low negative impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations" (Ross & Wall, 1999). This definition involves the integration of several factors including tourists, residents, commercial interests and land managers. Ecotourism also suggests that local populations are incorporated into a symbiotic relationship with natural areas through tourism (Ross & Wall, 1999).

Conversations about sustainability are often limited to our relationships with the natural environment and the ability to sustain our earth in its natural state. Although environmental sustainability is important, ecotourism follows a more holistic perspective including economic and cultural sustainability (Tsaur, 2006). In order for a natural resource to sustain, it must be viewed by its community as having economic value. For example, if a business is developed on community property (city, state, or federally owned), that use must be seen by a community as adding to its economic interests including sustainable tourism, or that area may be developed for other capital interests such as housing or business. Figure 1 notes the ecotourism perspective of economic, social and environmental engagement.

All of the sustainable ecotourism programs worldwide focus on three pillars of sustainability. These are economic, social and environmental protection.

- **ECONOMIC:** Sustainable Ecotourism supports innovative economic development strategies that could yield entrepreneurship, job creation and economic innovation.
- **SOCIAL:** Sustainable Ecotourism looks at ways of improving the well-being of the local residents and maintaining the sense of place of the community.
- **ENVIRONMENT:** Sustainable Ecotourism supports efforts to educate tourists about protection of local resources and encourages local businesses involved in food service, lodging and outdoor recreation to take an active role in doing the same.

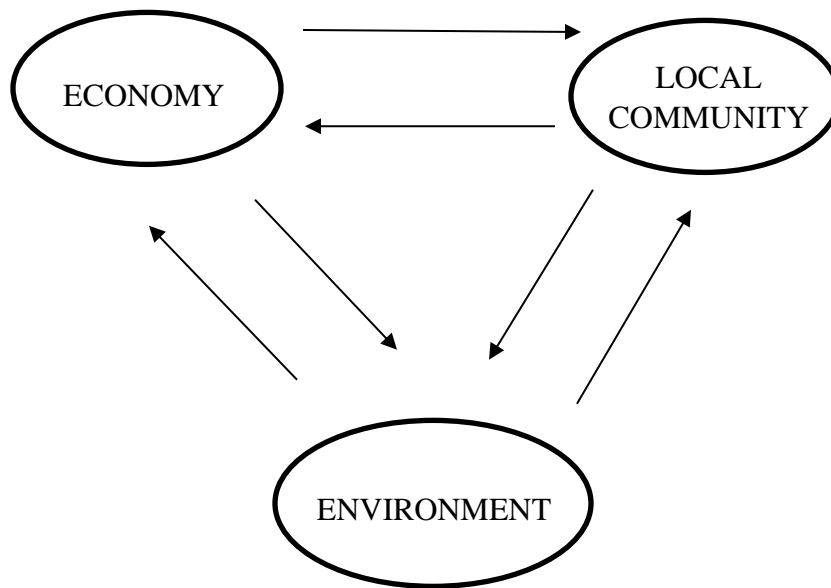


Figure 1: Ecotourism Evaluation Framework (Mowforth, Munt 2016)

As the definition of ecotourism combines visitations, conservation and local participation, it has the potential to generate local cultural, social and economic benefits in a community. These local benefits are critical for long-term sustainability. Ecotourism has the potential to contribute to the economic wellbeing of a locality or a region and diversify local economies by providing alternative employment and entrepreneurial opportunities (Che, 2006). Entrepreneurial development using ecotourism often replaces traditional economies that are no longer productive or that have been dependent on natural resources which have become depleted, such as the Michigan’s Upper Peninsula where mining and timber industries continue to decline in production.

For example, communities surrounding the Allegheny National Forest in Northwestern Pennsylvania are examples of ecotourism economies that were once based on lumber production (Che, 2006). The Allegheny hardwood forests were abundant with desirable species for furniture making and large-scale lumber production. Therefore, the local economies developed a dependence on this industry. However, due to extensive deforestation using the clear-cut harvesting process, many of these tree species were not able to recover. Understanding that they were dependent on an unsustainable resource, the local communities wanted to use the Allegheny hardwood forests without causing harm to the environment. They recognized that the hardwood forests are quite unique in the country with similar stands existing in the Smoky Mountains and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula (Che, 2006). The Center for Rural Pennsylvania highlighted places in the world that had similar forests, such as in New Zealand and countries in Europe, which were able to establish ecotourism economies by attracting tourists to the forests to participate in outdoor recreation activities. A Forest County Action Team (FCAT) was developed by the U.S. Forest Service to include local stakeholders in the economic development process, and it implemented an ecotourism plan with the mission of developing the economy utilizing the Allegheny hardwoods while also preserving them. “As a result, tourism generated \$24.26 million in traveler expenditures, 4.74 million in payroll expenditures, 3.2 million in state and local tax revenues, and 280 jobs in 1996” (Che, 2006).



Some key components leading to the success of ecotourism in Pennsylvania were the organization of local stakeholders, efforts to develop businesses, preservation of natural resources and conducting business in the interest of the local culture. In order for ecotourism ventures to be considered successful, local communities must have some measure of control and share equity in the benefits (Schevyns, 1999).



Picture 2: Tourists at the Munising Falls in the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

The history of Munising's economic development program has been similar in many ways to that of the communities surrounding the Allegheny National Forest. Both communities depended on a timber industry and eventually experienced economic difficulties. Not organizing efforts around an ecotourism model may result in the loss of any one of the three variables noted in Figure 1.

## ECONOMICS

Ecotourism is a sector of the leisure economy. Leisure activities yield over \$2 trillion a year into the United States economy, which represents 97% of service industry spending (Kelly, 2013). Tourism is the largest growing area in leisure spending and ecotourism is the fastest growing area in the tourism industry. In the summer of 2016, several businesses grew in response to the increase in summer visitors over the years. Pictured Rock Boat Cruises, a company that tours the Lakeshore on large motor boats, has increased their fleet of boats and purchased larger boats. Uncle Ducky's Kayak tours dramatically increased the number of tours they offer and added a restaurant, office and campground in the nearby town of Christmas.



Picture 3: Pictured Rocks Cruise Boat Tours

Munising has made some efforts to organize their efforts towards tourism development, but they have been focused more on the economic aspect of tourism. In 2001, Munising hired HyettPalma to develop an economic enhancement strategy for the Munising area. The consultants identified a potential for nature-based tourism, made recommendations for its development and suggested infrastructure changes that could benefit visitors' experiences. Munising has taken steps to make the downtown more attractive for visitors. Examples include placing benches, trash receptacles, bicycle racks, decorative flower boxes and street post flags with pictures of the nearby cliffs and forest.



Picture 4: Kayak Tours at the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

Tourism is viewed as solely an economic force in the area. Although there has been a positive impact in the Munising economy with nature-based tourism, it only lasts for four months, and efforts to protect the natural environment or the local community are not the primary focus for vendors. A sustainable community aspires to maintain a year round economy that supports the growth of families living in the

community. Reflecting on Figure 1, reforms that promote only economic growth could potentially overlook other important aspects of ecotourism like the local community and environment. If all aspects of the model are not equally respected, there is a chance that economic benefits from the area will not be sustained. Therefore, it is important to include the local community and environment into the discussion, and reconcile them with the economy, to make the Munising area a sustainable community.

## LOCAL COMMUNITY

The communities surrounding nature-based tourism sites are an important consideration in the Ecotourism Evaluation Framework (Mowforth and Munt, 2016). Research indicates that communities differ in their perceptions of the impacts of tourism. Different perceptions of community members have been noted between those who receive an economic gain from tourism and those who do not. Citizens who do not directly gain from the tourism economy in Munising expressed concerns about commercialization of culture and harm to the environment. In the town of Telluride, Colorado, a former mining town, now a pricey resort for movie stars and other wealthy out-of-towners, nearly 70 percent of the town's 500 housing units are second homes that are vacant most of the year. Most of the town's residents from the 1960's and 1970's have left - they could no longer afford a house in the community where the average price of a home is \$300,000 and others left because they did not care to remain in glitzy Telluride (Howe 1997).

In Costa Rican communities, the local or state government advises, educates, and plans along with citizens to develop a positive perception of tourism development (Campbell, 1999). Community members generally report positive views of tourism when a formalized planning process has been implemented. Community members also have positive perceptions of tourism development when they were made aware of investment or employment opportunities associated with the industry. Therefore, community participation is central to the ecotourism concept, with proponents arguing that participation in planning is necessary to ensure the benefits reach all residents in ecotourism areas (Simmons 1994). Wild (1994) suggests that ecotourism encourages local employment and small business development, and that a community approach to decision-making helps ensure traditional lifestyles and community values are respected. Kutay (1992) notes, a close working relationship between the local community and the industry will provide supportive conservation efforts.

## ENVIRONMENT

Sustaining the natural environment is the third aspect of the Ecotourism Evaluation Framework and is the most commonly identified aspect of ecotourism. Protection of a destinations' natural resources is key to sustaining an ecotourism economy. The ecotourism economy must lengthen the viability of resources used in tourism. Tourism could cause the introduction of invasive species, over exploitation of resources, and pollution, all of which affect natural resources. Government agencies can mediate these issues through planning, regulating, permitting, and licensure.

Sustainable ecotourism however, is much more complicated than simply protecting local natural resources, particularly in the case of pollution. For example, human tourism is dependent on fossil fuels. Both visitors and businesses need to use fossil fuel based energies to accomplish their goals related to tourism. Fossil fuel use emits carbon dioxide and methane into the air, resulting in warming of the earth's surface. Long-term use of fossil fuels has an adverse effect on ecotourism destinations.

North Central Costa Rica has been successful in encouraging the use of alternative energy sources by making locals aware of this need and by making it a variable on their ecotourism rating for business. However, encouraging businesses to operate using alternative energy sources will have only a small effect on the emission of carbon and methane into the atmosphere because 70% of fossil fuel emissions are from transportation (Pickens, 2016). The introduction of alternative transportation sources is important in lowering the long-term impacts of pollution on ecotourism destinations.

## METHODOLOGY

Munising has experienced extraordinary growth in nature-based tourism in the past three years. However, a basic awareness of ecotourism in the community is low. So a qualitative assessment of the potential for ecotourism development was conducted. In addition, the Co-Learning Plan authors provided several hours of education to businesses and community members on the ecotourism model.

The focus on data collection for this Co-Learning Plan was to identify and interview stakeholders involved in nature-based tourism, such as representatives from the Munising city government, tribal representatives, officers from the National Park Service (NPS) and the United States Forest Service (USFS), outdoor recreation and business owners, the local supportive service industry and community members. Participants for the interviews were specifically targeted because of their role in the tourism industry. Interviews often added inspiration, which resulted in ad hoc selection of participants. The latter could be considered a quasi-snowball method of participant selection. Following is a list of the organizations interviewed to gather data:

Munising Chamber of Commerce

Downtown Development Association

The Eastern Upper Peninsula Nature Tourism Alliance

Mayor of Munising

Munising City Manager

Superintendent of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

Munising District Ranger for Hiawatha National Forest

The largest outdoor recreation provider in the area: Uncle Ducky's Kayak Tours

The largest coffee shop in the area: The Falling Rock Cafe

The Munising Quality of Life Group

The Great Waters Project of the Eastern Upper Peninsula

The Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission (CUPPAD)

Individual interviews took place in the stakeholders' businesses, homes, or offices. Questioning was free-flowing and casual with five basic questions guiding each conversation. The five questions were based on the sub-scales from the Costa Rican Ecotourism Evaluation Framework (Appendix A).

1. Do you use local labor resources?
2. Do you use or recommend the use of locally grown/produced foods?

3. Do you practice sustainability in its daily operation using conservation practices, recycling or use of sustainable alternative energies?
4. Do you contribute in some way to the protection of local resources?
5. Do you educate customers about sustainable practices they can perform while in the area to help protect local resources?

A visitor's survey was also created based on the five subscales stated earlier. Three hundred questionnaires were placed in the USFS welcome center in Munising. However, due to a low response rate at this time, this data was not used in the results of this Co-Learning Plan.

Educational sessions were also held in order to help stakeholders understand the variables of ecotourism. Stakeholders were invited to attend a meeting on solar energy. An educational coffee house was held at the Munising Library where the Co-Learning Plan authors educated stakeholders on ecotourism and gained a better understanding of the point of view of local community members.

A finding from our interviews with nature-based tourism businesses is that the term "ecotourism" is not well received by local companies. It was difficult for the authors to arrange meetings with representatives because of the use of this term. Potentially because of this, we were unable to interview anyone from the Pictured Rocks Cruise Company. It was reported that ecotourism generally leads to criticism from the interviewees as it adds costs to their bottom line.

## FINDINGS

### NATURE-BASED TOURISM BUSINESSES

Interviewees reported that the economic growth in Munising may be due to the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore receiving an increased level of national press coverage, the Pure Michigan campaign, and pavement of Highway 58. Pictured Rocks Cruises and Uncle Ducky's Kayak Tours appear to be leading the community in tourism development. According to the Munising Chamber of Commerce, these two companies grossed over six million dollars during the 2015 season.

To understand how nature-based tourism has effected local economics, community perceptions, and the natural environment, Uncle Ducky's sea kayak tours is a clear case study to review. Uncle Ducky's has an actively engaged owner who lives in the nearby town of Marquette. He began his company renting canoes, which led to bicycle rentals. Neither business was reportedly successful. After the company obtained NPS permits to operate sea kayak tours in the National Lakeshore, the company began to quickly grow. According to one of the company's guides, the company provided tours for over 450 customers on June 11 2016, making Uncle Ducky's the largest sea kayaking tour business in the United States. However, this development has not been without problems. The following is a customer response from Yelp posted on August 16, 2015:

"My wife and I took the half day paddle (4 hours, which turned out to about 2 on the actual water). It was fun and it was beautiful and inarguably a great way to see the Rocks. However, for \$99 a head, and with little care given to training/instruction, the whole operation seemed sort of like a big cash grab. There were probably 100+ tandem kayaks out on Miners Beach, constantly rotating out into the water



and then back in. It seemed like we spent about half our time paddling and the other half waiting for the people in front of us to finish what they were doing (all the while rushing through the various "attractions", when it was our turn, as we were mindful that there were many others waiting their turn behind us as well).”



Picture 5: Kayaking Business Expansion at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

At the time, the Lakeshore did not have the infrastructure to support the increase in visitors to the park. Parking and restroom facilities had reached their capacity. Local community members did not enjoy large crowds at Miners Beach and were unhappy with the situation. A social media campaign was started to encourage people to notify the National Lakeshore to complain specifically about Uncle Ducky’s operations.

Uncle Ducky’s reports that they have relatively few complaints and most of their customers are happy with their service. The staff members have been known to pick up trash on the beach and it is common for them to assist others carrying kayaks to the beach. Uncle Ducky’s also has worked with Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore to decrease their impact in the area. Previously, on some days, up to 100 kayaks were placed at the shoreline waiting for customers. This season, they limited the number of kayaks placed on the beach to only the ones that are needed at the time. They also created customer parking outside of the Lakeshore’s boundary and bus customers to the Miners Beach parking lot. Previously, customers had to pay for the tour in the Munising office and meet Uncle Ducky’s staff at Miners Beach in the National Lakeshore. Uncle Ducky’s also carries human waste created by their customers out of the park. They have also increased their guide-to-customer ratio to address customer concerns and enhance water safety.

Uncle Ducky’s continues to receive criticism from the local community. Yet, they are the “poster child” for tourism development in the Munising area. This company however, fits the Ecotourism Evaluation Model more closely than other nature-based tourism businesses in the area. Uncle Ducky’s primary mode of transportation (kayaks) is not fossil fuel dependent; they have introduced low impact lodging

yurts for customers; they have introduced composting toilets in the commercial campground for their customers'; and they are actively working with the NPS to accommodate needs from the Lakeshore.

Uncle Ducky's also employs over 80 employees and attempts to hire from the local area. These positions are seasonal and a majority of employees are students studying at Northern Michigan University in nearby Marquette. According to the owner of Uncle Ducky's, it is difficult to find employees from Munising. The available workforce in the area is not, in the company owner's opinion, properly trained to work in the service industry.

## SERVICE INDUSTRY BUSINESSES RELATED TO TOURISM

Local businesses associated with the service industry surrounding tourism development in the Munising area were interviewed. Local government officials, restaurant owners, and professionals in the local lodging industry were interviewed to form this aspect of the data. Participants for these interviews were selected because of their indirect association with nature-based tourism in the area. The five questions associated with the Costa Rican Evaluation scale were used to guide questions, but because representatives of businesses were not familiar with ecotourism models, meetings were semi-structured.

Similar to the nature-based tourism industry in Munising, the service industry in the area is experiencing growth as well. According to one restaurant owner, in August 2015 season, the Munising Subway Sandwich business achieved the company's number one sales for the nation. A new restaurant opened that same season and closed after one day of business, reportedly overwhelmed by the number of customers. In the summer of 2016, twelve new businesses opened including a pet daycare, encouraged by a Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore policy, which does not allow pets outside of the owners' vehicle.

While Munising's Mayor and City Manager are supportive of the service industry in their town, they emphasize that the city is stressed and in need of more services such as recycling, to deal with tourism related development. The Mayor reports that trashcans in popular city parks are emptied several times daily and that the city is in need of more restaurants, lodging accommodations, and businesses that will entertain the visitors during the evenings.

Besides infrastructure needs in Munising, there is a shortage of trained seasonal workers leading to controversy over where businesses should find workers. With a declining high school student demographic in the Upper Peninsula, access to entry-level service workers is challenging (EUP-Planning.org, 2009). During the winter of 2016, Munising business owners explored the possibility of bringing guest workers from Jamaica to the area to fill the need for seasonal workers. Community members expressed concerns about the guest worker program. There was a feeling that these workers would not represent the culture of Munising. These workers were not brought in because of these concerns and due to the expense of purchasing return tickets for each worker.

Interviews also revealed business owners' concerns for a lack of organization between vendors. For example, in Munising, the Falling Rock Café coffee shop and the Bay Furnace Bagel Works are located a few blocks from each other. However, the coffee shop purchases bagels from out of town. Rather than purchasing bagels from Bay Furnace, if these companies were to supply each other's needs, they both would have larger sales and this revenue would remain in the local economy longer. Using locally grown foods is another way local businesses could support the local economy. Alger County hosts many

small farms that sell to the Marquette Food Co-op program to distribute food to businesses. However, the co-op does not yet possess the ability to transport the locally grown food to Munising. It was also reported that vegetables purchased out of the area are easier for kitchen workers to process, which saves time and adds to a higher return. For these reasons, communication between restaurants and local farmers has not yet taken place.

Local services' choosing not to support one another has contributed to sustaining a seasonal economy rather than a year-round one. The tourism season in Munising begins in late May and ends in September after Labor Day. There are a few events in the off-season but they do not make a substantial contribution to the economy. Nature-based tourism businesses close for the season and a majority of other services close as well. The owner of the Falling Rock Café reported that he remains open year-round, but it costs him money to remain open during the off-season. It is difficult to support a family in a seasonal economy and Munising's family households are dwindling. There is a potential that Munising will not be able to support a community for families and year-round residents in the future.

## ANALYSIS

Based on the evidence discovered during this qualitative analysis, Munising does not fit the ecotourism model. The Ecotourism Evaluation model is based on the balance of the three variables; economic, local community, and environment. This Co-Learning Plan revealed that Munising possesses local strengths for each variable. Yet, there are short falls in each variable as well. There appears to be a low level of awareness about ecotourism and how it could benefit the community or the economy. Throughout this study, there was initial reluctance by many of our participants because they thought of ecotourism as a threat to their businesses. In one interview, a business owner sat up on the front of his chair, pointed his finger and implied that the authors were not to degrade his business' environmental practices. Others expressed concerns for costs of adopting ecotourism principles. A stronger understanding of the return on investment of ecotourism could change this perspective.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Munising has a history of a strong timber and a fishing industry. Each of these were not able to sustain the area's economy since the 1960s. These industries also had high environmental impacts. Nature-based tourism development has had a much lower impact on the natural environment. As stewards of the natural environment, the NPS and the USFS have worked directly with the community to promote a tourism economy while sustaining the natural beauty of the area. When issues of impact have been noted, these agencies have effectively worked with businesses to decrease impacts. As visits to the Munising area increase, these parties will be challenged to maintain their success. Investment in sustainable infrastructure in the National Lakeshore and in Munising will be needed in the near future.

Global and long-term environmental stewardship has not been strongly addressed by nature-based tourism development in the Munising area. Businesses have expressed interest in this concept, but are slow in taking action. Providing a better understanding to business owners about the return on investment in using alternative energy sources would be effective. Businesses need education on how the use of these energy sources can decrease long-term expenses and attract customers. For example, in order to resolve a mechanical problem in a boat operated by the Glass Bottom Boat Tours in Munising, they began to use biodiesel, which is a sustainable resource. The use of this fuel could be marketed and would potentially bring in more local customers. As a majority of fossil fuel use is from transportation



(Pickens, 2016), long-term environmental impacts could be drastically reduced by the use of alternative fuels for the boat fleets. Therefore, further exploration on alternative energies for boats would be impactful.

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

In general, there is a positive perception for tourism in the Munising area. However, there is evidence of two distinctly different views of this development. A majority of people do support tourism, yet there is a population that does not. According to the Mayor of Munising, those opposed to tourism development prefer things as they used to be. This group does not enjoy traffic in their town, the increasing diversity in the community, waiting in lines and crowded beaches.

Campbell (1999) suggests the inclusion of community members in the planning process of tourism development and educating members on tourism and ecotourism would develop a positive attitude towards the tourism industry. In Munising, the Mayor and others who are participating in planning are aware of community members' perceptions. He also suggested the formation of an advisory committee including citizens with a negative perspective might be helpful. The biggest challenge, however, is that there is not an accurate perception of what ecotourism is and how it may benefit the community.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

The tourism economy is a strength for the Munising area. Because of the Pure Michigan campaign, media coverage of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, and the paving of Highway 58 that connects both ends of the National Lakeshore, tourism is flourishing in the area. Great Waters, an organization that made efforts in the past, to promote nature-based tourism in the eastern portion of the Upper Peninsula, aided the promotion of ecotourism in the region.

It is likely that Munising will be a destination for a significant time in the future. However, there are many drastic issues associated with the seasonal economy in Munising. Primarily, the inability of Munising residents to support a household throughout the year is a cause of concern. This has a decreasing effect on year-round consumption of local products and may leave the city vacant during the off-season. If this were to happen, out-of-town investors could move in and revenue from the tourism economy would leave the area.

Due to its seasonal nature, continued growth in its current manner may have a negative effect on community development and can create long-term environmental problems. Adopting ecotourism practices would benefit the Munising area and sustain the natural environment, enhance the local economy, and most importantly build the local community and its culture.

## SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM ALLIANCE ORGANIZATION

The tourism economy is booming in the Munising area, but assistance is still needed in developing a year round economy that will sustain family households and in maintaining the sense of place for community members. Although the business owners, community members and government officials were not familiar with the sustainable ecotourism model during the course of our study, all were receptive of it - an indication that it would bring value to them. In this context, we conclude that there is a need for a Sustainable Ecotourism Alliance Organization (SEAO) in the Munising area that would

coordinate and promote the development of ecotourism in the area. The SEAO could be a consultant organization aimed to improve ecotourism awareness and develop Munising's economy by promoting collaboration among Munising residents, businesses and city officials.

Currently, plans are coming together to develop the Sustainable Ecotourism Alliance Organization for Alger County into an institute at Northern Michigan University. The institute would be made up of several university departments including the outdoor recreation department, the business department and the communications department. This institute will serve as an ecotourism development consultant to businesses in the Munising and Alger County area involved in outdoor recreation, food service and lodging. It will offer workshops in the coming year on sustainable alternative energy development and expected return on investment to business. Other workshops on gateway cities and solar energy are being planned too. In addition, the SEAO will attempt to understand what might be the sense of place that Munising residents would like to see as the tourism industry grows. We plan to develop a Community/City Government Advisory Committee to better coordinate the ecotourism economy of Munising and provide representation for local opinion at the administrative level. To improve the service industry in Munising, its workforce must be developed and therefore, the SEAO plans to educate and create a well-trained and skilled service industry workforce in the Upper Peninsula. Finally, an ecotourism criteria system for businesses will be developed. In this, outdoor recreation, food service and lodging businesses will be assessed for their ecotourism efforts, if they choose to participate in the program. Their ratings will be posted on an area ecotourism website (under development) and linked to other sites such as the Munising Chamber of Commerce and Pure Michigan.

## ADDENDUM

### THE NMU SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM ORGANIZATION FOR ALGER COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Sustainable Ecotourism is an environmentally-focused business model that is growing rapidly in popularity worldwide.

The Upper Peninsula of Michigan stands to create an ecotourism haven that offers hands-on student engagement opportunities, community economic development, extended learning opportunities and holistically improved well-being of regional residents. The proposed Sustainable Ecotourism Organization for Alger County has the potential to bring these benefits to Munising, and develop a replicable model for Marquette and other UP destination locations.

In March 2016, the Outdoor Recreation Leadership/Management Department of the Northern Michigan University School of Health and Human Performance was awarded a grant of \$8,000 from the Michigan State University EDA Center for Regional Economic Innovation. This grant supports innovative economic development strategies that could yield entrepreneurship, job creation and economic innovation in distressed regions of Michigan.

Professor Scott Jordan and Contingent Instructor David Kronk have been examining the existing nature-based tourism in Munising, Michigan, determining current and projected sustainability issues, problems and possible solutions. They have been researching how the creation of a Sustainable Ecotourism Organization (SEO) for Alger County, Michigan, could provide economic benefits to the county.

Directing ecotourism toward local needs, interests and resource limits can greatly enhance tourism's value to a community and help create a sustainable industry. Creating a truly sustainable local tourism industry is not a daunting task, but making tourism really fit the community requires work. Creating a successful and sustainable ecotourism industry is like creating any successful and sustainable economic activity—it takes vision, planning and effort.

To date, SEO has held four community meetings: two to introduce/educate Alger County citizens about SEO and two about sustainable solar energy for their homes and businesses. We have received a lot of positive feedback from the community. On April 7, 2017 we will hold a one-day workshop (co-presented by the MSU Extension Service, SEO and the Alger County Chamber of Commerce) to define Munising's "Sense of Place" and define the strategies that should be pursued to maintain this unique area. We will target key community leaders, business owners and citizens as participants.

Beginning in late April, SEO will hold additional meetings in the community and will seek continued community involvement in developing action strategies to address the following four important objectives:

1. Using and enhancing local food sources.
2. Hiring and helping local employees and investigating the development of cottage industries in Munising to create work during the off-season.
3. Investing in alternative energies and sustainable products and practices (like recycling).

4. Educating the public about protecting natural resources and ways the lodging, food and outdoor recreation providers can protect local natural resources.

We are currently talking with four Northern Michigan University departments about involving student representatives from these departments in linking University research and information to community development.

Hopefully the departments represented will be:

1. Outdoor Recreation Leadership/Management
2. Environmental Studies and Sustainability
3. Accounting and Entrepreneurship and
4. Graphic Communications.

Other Project Collaborators:

1. The Roam Inn of Munising has offered to hold community meetings in their conference room free of charge.
2. Pictured Rocks Cruises of Munising has offered to work with Northern Michigan University to develop two ecotourism displays for their soon-to-open visitor center and pay for their construction. The displays would inform tourists about the components of ecotourism and explain ways visitors can help protect the area's natural resources. One display would also mention the fact that some NMU Degree Programs promote sustainable ecotourism and will have an NMU Logo on the display.

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The MSU EDA University Center for Regional Economic Innovation (REI) seeks to identify and develop new economic development tools, models, policies and practices to support innovative economic development high-growth enterprises and job creation in distressed regions across the state. REI has established a new economic development ecosystem to cope with the ever-changing global and regional dynamic(s). Through this ecosystem, we engage innovative and creative minds which result in new economic development practices.

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