

## MANISTEE COUNTY USES WATER TO BE A GLOBAL DESTINATION

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**NOTE TO MEDIA:** The Explore the Shores Leadership Team will be available to discuss the program following their Team meeting at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, December 16, 2009 at Manistee-Blacker Airport located on US-31, just north of the City of Manistee.

**For Immediate Release:** December 15, 2009

**Manistee, Michigan** - Manistee County's history has been influenced by its natural resources. Now, the County is teaming up with an array of partners to continue that legacy through its bounty of rivers, streams, inland lakes and Lake Michigan. "Explore the Shores" is a series of places throughout Manistee County that provide exciting hands-on opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to learn about water stewardship and explore nature while recreating, including access to world-class sport fishing.

The vision of "Explore the Shores" is to make this rural Michigan county the world's premier destination for people of all needs and abilities to use and explore its Lake Michigan shore, 276 miles of rivers and streams and 49 inland lakes. The program will help people with special needs to access and use the county's waters as well as generate significant added visitation supporting the County's important tourism economy.

The goal is bold: to develop 50 places in Manistee County by 2020 that will provide universal access to rivers, streams, Lake Michigan, wetlands and other waters and attract 1 million new visitors and residents of all ages, gender and ethnic heritage and those who have special needs encompassing their sensory, physical or cognitive capacities.

A shot-in-the-arm was just provided by three grants from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust that provide over \$329,000 for three new sites to support universal access for people to fish for salmon and trout on the mighty Manistee River and the outlet of Bar Lake on Lake Michigan.

"Our Board was so impressed," said Shivaugn Rayl, Assistant Manager for the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, managed by the Lansing firm Public Sector Consultants. "Explore the Shores represents a systematic approach to connect everyone, including people with disabilities, with the water and fishery resources that make Michigan a global destination. The development of three new sites will provide angling and other recreational benefits to thousands, while significantly advancing the County's vision."

The three new "Explore the Shores" sites are:

**Big Manistee River (Near confluence with Bear Creek):** Located just off River Road on property owned by the U. S. Forest Service, this site is on the Big Manistee River at an existing boat launch facility near the confluence of Bear Creek with the Big Manistee River. Bear Creek is one of the most valued streams in Michigan because its habitat is ideally suited to natural reproduction of trout and salmon species. Developments along the Big Manistee River at this site will include universally accessible walkways and platforms for fishing, upgrading restrooms and parking facilities. The new World Record brown trout was landed in 2009 on the Big Manistee near this location.

**Rainbow Bend:** Located off River Road on U. S. Forest Service property, this is a heavily used site for shore and boater angling for Salmon and Trout. This is also the site of a lake sturgeon rearing and rehabilitation program managed by the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians where fingerling lake sturgeon are annually released with a goal of building sustainable populations. Explore the Shores developments will include several universally accessible boardwalks and platforms to support shore bound angling for Chinook salmon, coho salmon, steelhead and brown trout, as well as parking improvements.

**Bar Lake:** Located on Lake Shore Road where the outlet for Bar Lake enters Lake Michigan, this is a heavily used site for shore bound angling for Salmon and Trout, particularly Steelhead and brown trout. Explore the Shores improvements will include a flexible boardwalk system to the beach for shore anglers, decking and an observation and staging area. This site is managed by Manistee Township in partnership with the Manistee County Road Commission.

All facilities will be constructed of durable, low maintenance materials and positioned to reduce or prevent erosion caused by foot traffic. Educational signage and materials, along with a web site, will also be provided to promote stewardship and visitor education. All "Explore the Shores" sites will be based upon universal access design standards and comply with Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines. The advice of individuals with disabilities, sport fishing experts and organizations concerned with water stewardship will be sought in facility designs. The contractor chosen by the Explore the Shores Leadership Team for the three new locations is Abonmarche, Inc. Assuming timely action by federal, state and local agencies on required permits and other approvals, all three facilities should be completed in 2010. Explore the Shores was developed in part as a result of the Manistee County Recreation Plan that was completed with the support of a steering committee consisting of diverse interests and approved by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in 2008.

"Each of these locations will offer exceptional opportunities for angling from the shore for Great Lakes migratory fish like Chinook salmon, coho salmon, steelhead, brown trout and others," said Michigan Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Biologist Mark Tonello. "For example, the Big Manistee River hosts about 600,000 angler hours each year, but much of the angling activity on the lower river is confined to boat anglers because the river is too deep to wade. The improvements to the Bear Creek and Rainbow Bend sites will provide opportunities for people of all needs and abilities to enjoy this fishery, which is one of the most productive in the Great Lakes basin. The Bar Lake outlet has deep water close to shore, making it a perfect location for anglers to readily reach migrating salmon, steelhead and brown trout from the beach, particularly during spring, fall and early winter."

The Great Lakes Fishery Trust was created in 1996 to compensate residents of Michigan for the lost use and enjoyment of fishery resources of Lake Michigan caused by operation of the Ludington Pumped Storage Plant. The Trust makes grants to support fishery research; lake trout, lake sturgeon and other fish population rehabilitation; fish habitat enhancement; public education about fisheries; and access to Great Lakes fisheries. The Trust has awarded over \$40 million in grants since 1998.

"The economic impact of people using water for all forms of recreation is of immense importance to Manistee County," said Judy Ball, Executive Director of the Manistee County Convention and Visitors Bureau that co-sponsors a number of Manistee County fishing tournaments. "Explore the Shores" will serve to bring more and more visitors to our waters, our communities and our businesses. For anglers, it will provide more opportunities to land another world record from Manistee County like the 41 pound Brown Trout landed on the Big Manistee River in 2009."

Other Explore the Shores sites include:

- **Stronach Fishing Pier** in Stronach, Michigan on Manistee Lake at an access site managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and near the mouth of the Little Manistee River. This universally accessible fishing pier was also funded under a Great Lakes Fishery Trust Grant.
- **Arthur Street Boat Launch** in the City of Manistee on Manistee Lake near the mouth of the Big Manistee River. This site, also funded by the Fishery Trust, will be completed in early 2010 and will include a universally accessible fishing pier, renovated restroom facilities, a new, two-car launch facility and expanded parking. The launch and other site improvements are made possible through a State of Michigan Waterways grant to the City.

- **Manistee Municipal Marina** in the City of Manistee on the Manistee River channel to Lake Michigan. A new lift station has been installed by the City to lift people and wheelchairs in and out of boats. The lift facility was funded under an Access to Recreation grant program created by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation that is administered by the Michigan Recreation and Parks Association Foundation.
- **First and Fifth Street Beaches.** Both beaches now feature flexible platforms that enable people with mobility challenges to reach the beach. The platforms are removed during winter.

Richard Knechtges, a member of the Explore the Shores Leadership Team, says this is only the start.

“Everybody wins,” says Knechtges who was stricken with Polio at age 9 and uses a wheelchair. “We have local, state and federal governments, nonprofits and fishing organizations pulling together to make this program happen. Explore the Shores is the reason why the National Association of the Physically Handicapped will be holding their national conference next summer in Manistee. For me, it’s a lifelong dream come true.”

As with the nation, about 19% of the population in Manistee County has some form of disability. By 2020, it is estimated that 51% of the County’s population will be 65 or older and 52% of the population over that age typically have some form of disability, with about 37% having a severe disability.

The program is coordinated by the Manistee County Community Foundation in partnership with the County’s economic development organization, the Alliance for Economic Success. Nominations for new Explore the Shores sites will be sought soon for 2010. Nominated sites are ranked by the Leadership Team. The Alliance for Economic Success will prepare grant requests to public and private funders based on the ranking.

The program has its roots in Manistee County’s first visioning initiative, Envision Manistee County. Following that effort the National and Michigan Easter Seals organizations worked with the County under a U. S. Department of Agriculture grant to develop “Envision Accessible Manistee,” a strategy for integrating universal access. The Michigan Easter Seals organization made a \$20,000 grant to the Manistee Community Foundation to jump-start Explore the Shores along with a \$10,000 grant from the Fishery Trust to identify Explore the Shores locations.

The Leadership Team includes representation from: Alliance for Economic Success, Manistee County Community Foundation, The National Association of the Physically Handicapped, Manistee County Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Great Lakes Fishery Trust, Michigan Easter Seals, City of Manistee, Manistee County, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, Manistee Charter Boat Association, Manistee County Sport Fishing Association and Manistee Area Public Schools and Consumers Energy, with liaison to the Team provided by the U. S. Forest Service. The offices of U. S. Senator Carl Levin, U. S. Senator Debbie Stabenow and Congressman Pete Hoekstra are included among the active supporters of the Leadership Team.