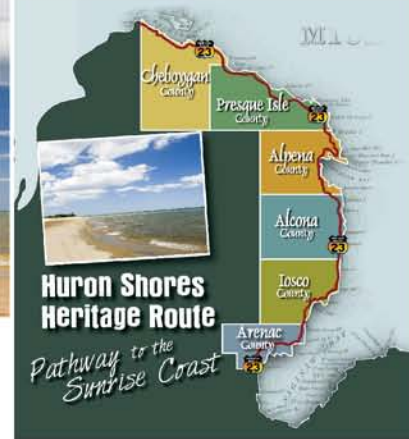




Heritage Route 23

Your Pathway to the Sunrise Coast



Welcome to the US 23 Heritage Route Program!

The US 23 Heritage Route program has been busy in the last few years working to promote our beautiful Sunrise Coast. We would like to introduce you to the program and give you a little background on what we've been up to. Read on....

Structure of the Heritage Route Program...

Management Council

NEMCOG provides coordination and technical assistance to an overall Management Council which consists of representatives of each of the six counties as well as from DNR, MDOT, NOAA, the US Forest Service, Michigan Sea Grant, Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, and the tourism industry. The purpose of the Management Council is to provide overall organizational direction and structure; to inform, coordinate and unite the efforts of existing organizations, businesses, and municipalities engaged in economic and community development, natural resource management, preservation, travel and tourism, education, marketing, and promotional efforts along the Lake Huron coast. The Council recognizes the importance and impact that tourism has on the region and focuses on its enhancement and the delivery of a strong voice in the marketplace.

County Teams

Each of the six counties along the route has its own county team which implements projects in its county. Each team is a collaborative effort involving representatives from local governments along US 23, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the Michigan Department of Transportation, the US Forest Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, local chambers of commerce, DDA's, local tourism bureaus, historical societies, lighthouse organizations, bicycling advocates, and interested citizens. NEMCOG provides technical assistance to each of these teams.

Working Together in Collaboration

The volunteers on the county teams and the Management Council have made a concerted effort to work together as a region rather than as individual counties to achieve the major goals of the program. Working together, we have achieved a great deal in a very short period of time. Our major focus has been on tourism development and marketing the coast as a destination. Our goal is to coordinate with as many groups as possible so that we are not duplicating efforts along the coast. The US 23 Heritage Route program involves coordination between NEMCOG, MDOT, MDNRE, NOAA, US Forest Service and River Road National Scenic Byway, Sunrise Coastal Coalition, Saginaw-Chippewa Indian Tribe, Pure Michigan, and numerous local tourism bureaus, road commissions, and local units of governments.

Coordination with Other Michigan Heritage Routes

The US 23 Heritage Route coordinates its efforts with other Heritage Routes in the State to ensure consistent identity and recognition of the routes. For example, US 23 had representation on the state-wide Heritage Route Signage Committee to provide input on the draft signage plan for submission to MDOT.

Designation

In 2004, the 200-mile stretch of US 23 from Standish to Mackinaw City was designated a recreational Heritage Route by MDOT.

Management Plan

The US 23 Route has developed a Management Plan which identifies goals, objectives, and priority projects for each county along the route as well as the route as a whole.

Technical Assistance

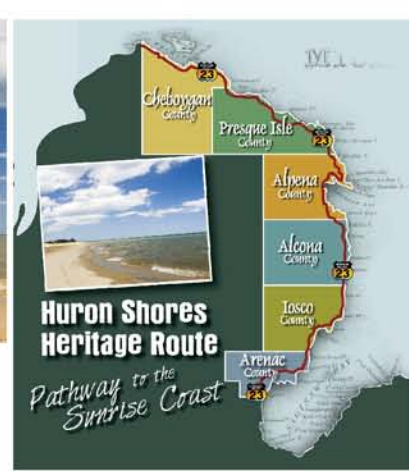
NEMCOG (Northeast Michigan Council of Governments) receives funding from MDOT to coordinate activities and provide technical assistance to the US 23 Heritage Route program, a 6-county collaborative effort intended to initiate and promote activities and projects along US 23. NEMCOG staffing represents both the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments and the East Michigan Council of Governments.





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Recent Activities on the Heritage Route

Brochures

In 2010, brochures were created for each county highlighting the recreational attractions along the route. The brochures are coordinated in design and have the look of a **unified tourist destination**. NEMCOG designed the brochures and worked with each county to put together funding for a joint printing. 15,000 brochures were printed per county and are available at Michigan Welcome Centers, online at www.us23heritageroute.org, and at local tourism information locations. The brochures were so popular that tourism information centers couldn't keep enough in stock and still receive calls requesting the brochures. A re-print is in progress.

US 23 Logo

In 2010, a new US 23 logo was adopted by the Management Council. There is currently an application on file with the US Patent and Trademark Office for exclusive use of the logo.

Sunrise Coastal Coalition & Pure Michigan

The Management Council has welcomed members of the "Sunrise Coastal Coalition" to be part of the council and has incorporated the Coastal Coalition as a marketing partner of the Heritage Route. The route and coast is on its way to being successfully branded through partnership with the Pure Michigan campaign and the diligent efforts of local communities to raise money to participate in this highly successful ad campaign. Our new website calls the Huron Shores Heritage Route "Your Pathway to the Sunrise Coast". Two "Sunrise Coast" radio ads were produced in collaboration with the Pure Michigan campaign. The ads featured actor Tim Allen narrating over the signature Pure Michigan music. Local businesses are already seeing an increase in revenue as a direct result of the radio ads.

Individual County Projects

In addition to the coordinated route-long effort to promote northeast Michigan, the individual County Heritage Route teams work on their own individual projects. The following highlight some of the more recent accomplishments:

Presque Isle County: Designed a new Huron Sunrise Trail Brochure.

Alpena County: Created plans for a future Welcome Center. Created downtown Alpena map to be used in downtown brochure.

Alcona County: Created new walking/biking trail route through Harrisville connecting to new Heritage Trail at Harrisville State Park. Installed signage and create coordinated brochure. Created Alcona County Quilt Trail Map. Now in the process of creating bike route maps.

Arenac County: Renovated historic train depot – now a Welcome Center.





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Discover US 23 at www.heritage23.org

Funding was received from MDOT to develop a website which we have done in partnership with the Land Information Access Association (LIAA). This website provides a regional resource to the potential visitor to access information on over 1,000 attractions along the coast.

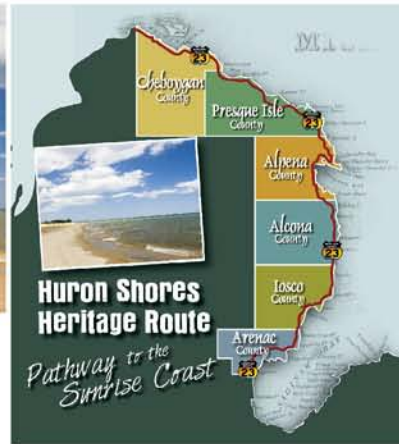
Visitors are able to search the site based on either their local destination or by area of interest which we call "Active Adventures", "Outdoor & Farm Fun", "Arts, Culture, & History", and "Eat, Shop, & Sleep".

Users can view maps of all attractions within each category or choose subcategories to view maps of only one type of attraction. In addition, users can view attractions in specific geographic regions. Once they click on an attraction on the map, they are directed to a page for that attraction which will give them detailed information and photos (including icons showing seasonality and fees).

There is also a "plan your itinerary" feature where users can make multiple selections relating to what they want to do along the route and the site will search through the database to come up with all places that fill those needs. For example, if a person is interested in bird watching, kayaking, and staying at Bed and Breakfasts, the site will return all attractions which have any of those activities listed. The user can also choose geographic constraints if they wish. The visitor can then add those sites to a "shopping list" and print out their own itinerary. Maps are also part of this site to give the visitor a geographic perspective of where the attractions are. A coastal events calendar is another popular feature.

The website features both publicly-owned and privately-owned attractions. All attractions on the site are tourism-related, and there is no charge to private businesses for appearing on the site. The website was completed after a monumental volunteer effort, which was coordinated by NEMCOG. Heritage Route program volunteers from the 200-mile stretch of coastline put in hundreds of hours collecting data on attractions to include on the site as well as uploading data and photos onto the website. In addition, NEMCOG staff also participated in uploading data, writing site descriptions, and reviewed and edited over 1,200 entries. In addition, NEMCOG staff also collected, edited, and uploaded all photos which are used for the main page, interest area pages, and county pages. NEMCOG staff and volunteers from the coastal communities work together to keep the site updated and the events calendar current. The website is a truly unique and trailblazing method of presenting information for the tourist in a comprehensive, user-friendly, and detailed manner. The ability that it gives the tourists to design their own tours and itinerary maps is groundbreaking because of the scale in which it is accomplished.

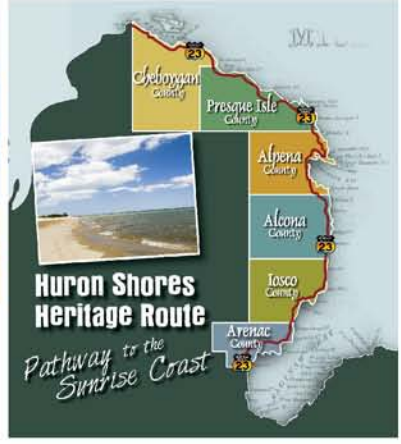
Visit www.heritage23.org to get lost on the Sunrise Coast! The website was launched on Labor Day Weekend of 2010 and has already had over 10,000 unique visitors from 85 different countries and 2,200 cities. The website continues to grow in popularity as more and more people "Discover US 23".



Attractions on the US 23 Website:

- Trails
- Tours
- Fishing
- Boating/public accesses
- Golf
- Hunting
- Sledding
- Swimming
- Laser tag/paint ball
- Lighthouses
- Art and demonstrations
- Educational sites
- Historic sites
- Museums
- Maritime history sites
- Shipwrecks
- Industrial tourism sites
- Quilt trails
- Cultural sites
- Music and theater
- Craft shows
- Beaches
- Land formations
- Migration waypoints
- Natural springs
- Parks
- Waterfalls
- Wildlife viewing
- Bird viewing
- Campsites
- Scenic viewing
- U-Pick & farm markets
- Petting zoos
- Hayrides, sleigh rides
- Fossil collecting sites
- Amusement Parks
- Place to stay
- Places to eat
- Transportation
- Tourism information
- Places to shop
- Health care
- Outdoor goods
- Outdoor guides
- Visitor information





Telling the Story of the Sunrise Coast

The Heritage Route Teams are currently working on a project to tell the stories of the Sunrise Coast. The final product will be a mile by mile web travel guide for the traveler of US 23 which will detail the historical/cultural stories along US 23 as well as the natural features that abound in coastal northeastern Michigan. In addition, travelers will be provided with a mile by mile account of nearby amenities. In order to enhance the stories being told, photos and mini-documentaries will be utilized. The proposed video documentary project includes the creation of mini-documentary stories which will be scripted depicting interesting history, cultural features, natural features, and legends/lore.

Documentary Production

NEMCOG will coordinate with the six individual county Heritage Route teams and professional filmmakers (who have long been part of the US 23 Program) to create mini-documentaries of selected stories along the US 23 Huron Shores Heritage Route. These professional filmmakers will be responsible for all aspects of pre-production, production, and post-production of the mini-documentaries. These videos will build on the stage that has been set by the Pure Michigan campaign and will present unique and engaging stories that draw visitors to the US 23 Heritage Route. These proposed mini-documentaries, written, filmed and produced by these Emmy award-winning filmmakers, will be a unique promotional feature for the Huron Shores Heritage Route and can be used as a model for the entire Michigan Heritage Route program which would allow Michigan Heritage Routes to compete with other states in the national tourism market by communicating a unique sense of place to draw visitors to Michigan. In addition, these films will serve to promote filmmaking in Michigan.

Telling the Stories on the Web and in the Field...

After the mile by mile stories are written and selected videos are produced, "Telling the Story of US 23" will be presented on the US 23 website and in the field. Travelers will be able to click on a segment of US 23 and read the written stories available for that segment, view photos, or watch a video (videos available for selected segments). Travelers will be able to develop and print out their own itinerary which will include the stories and selected nearby points of interest and amenities. GPS coordinates of each mile segment will also be available for download in order to assist the traveler in locating the actual site of the stories, photos, and videos. In addition, on the website travelers will be given an opportunity to post their own stories of their adventures on US 23. The stories will also be available to the traveler in route through the use of QR Codes (QR Code is a barcode that is readable by QR scanners, mobile phones with a camera, and smartphones). Physically placing a QR Code at each point of interest that has an associated story (using small logo signs with a site number which corresponds to the site number on the website) will allow those travelers with a cell phone camera or a smartphone to scan the barcode and read the story or watch the video on their phone while they are traveling US 23. The group plans to place the QR code on print materials as well. In addition, the groups are working on a US 23 app for mobile devices.

Huron Blueways & Greenways...adding even more to US 23

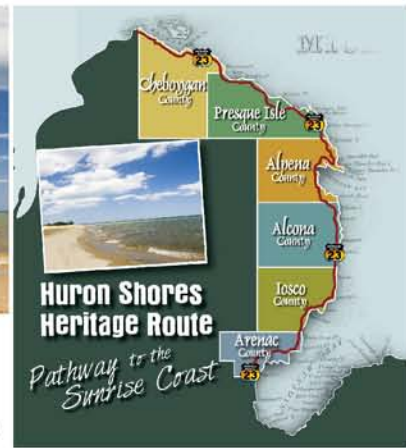
In the late 1990's, the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, in partnership with coastal communities and the Michigan Coastal Management Program established the Huron Greenways. The Huron Greenways encompasses the Lake Huron coastal zone from Mackinaw City to south of Harrisville. NEMCOG received funding in 2010 from Coastal Management to develop a coastal water trail and update the Huron Greenways (and expand into Iosco County). The "Huron Blueways & Greenways" will be incorporated into the US 23 website to provide visitors with even more detailed information on land and water trails in addition to detailed information on natural resources and landforms along the Sunrise Coast in order to encourage natural resource-based tourism in northeast Michigan.





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National Scenic Byways

US 23 was recently awarded over \$147,000 in grant funding from National Scenic Byways to create an interpretive program which includes the following:

Interpretive Information Development

The grant funds the identification and compilation of information on the key assets along the route including the collection of historical stories and photos. Interpretive information will be developed including criteria for selection and data gathering. Interpretive information will cover arts, culture, and history; natural resources; and active recreation.

Interpretive Map Development & Route Atlas

Using the interpretive information, several types of large format tourism maps will be developed. A map displaying interpretive information of the entire Heritage Route will be developed in addition to maps displaying more detailed interpretive information of each county area. Also, themed tourism maps will be developed which will each focus on a subject area including a route-long eco-tourism map, a biking and hiking tour map, a cultural tour map, and a historic tour map. A US 23 "route atlas" will be developed in book format which will provide all of the interpretive information in one document on a mile by mile basis.

Website Enhancements

With this grant funding, the already successful tourism website www.us23heritageroute.org will be even further enhanced. The new enhancements will include an interactive component where visitors can read the stories of the coastal area, watch videos, leave their own stories, and also download pre-set tours to their GPS units.

Future Plans...

The US 23 Heritage Route program is not slowing down in the promotion of the Sunrise Coast. Other activities which are planned include....

Billboard advertising on I-75: The Management Council plans to either purchase billboard space or establish partnerships with local businesses that have existing billboards to associate the US 23 brand with those businesses.

Logo Signage: US 23 logo signs are planned to be placed along 23 as well as at selected sites in each county. A unique number will also appear on the sign which will correspond to the sites number on the website and on print media. In addition, the QR codes can be placed on the logo signs.

Brand Merchandise: The Management Council would like to establish partnerships with local businesses in order to produce brand merchandise which will be sold on the website and at local businesses in order to sustain the Heritage Route program.

Recently, US 23 and River Road National Scenic Byway submitted a joint grant application to National Scenic Byways to fund the video documentaries, logo signage, Smartphone app, billboard advertising, out-of-state ads through Pure Michigan, and the creation of brand merchandise.

Get Involved!

If you would like to get involved in the US 23 Heritage Route program in your county, please contact Denise Cline at dmcline@nemcog.org or 231-421-5384. Thank you!

Eco-Tourism Marketing Plan

NEMCOG is currently investigating the feasibility of ecotourism development along Northeast Michigan's Lake Huron Shoreline. The overall goal of the project is to increase the viability for small businesses to emerge and be sustainable by building upon the rich asset of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Maritime Heritage Trail. Existing assets along the coast have been inventoried and are currently being analyzed in regards to new ecotourism opportunities, local attractions, potential product development, and visitor experience enhancement. The result of this project will be a marketing plan for coastal ecotourism business development centered around increased state, national and global awareness and visitor attraction of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Maritime Heritage Trail.

