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Eco-tourism comes to Beaver Island

Eric and Carrie Myers, both graduates of CMU's master's program, came to the Island in the middle of August to take the first step towards enacting a plan that came to them when they were on their honeymoon in Australia. On their journey through the Down Under rain forest, many hotels in which they stayed offered tours of the local mysterious places every day—giving their patrons a reason to extend their stay. Both Carrie and Eric had the same idea: "Why can't we do that, on Beaver Island?"

Both astute observers of nature (Eric just received his PhD in Forestry from MSU), they intend to offer two tours of the Island's unique ecology starting next summer: one of two hours, the other of almost four, guided trips to bogs, woodlands, and sand dunes. In addition they might offer trips to other islands in conjunction with Dan Higdon's *Island Hopper Charters*. So they were here to do what anyone starting a business on the Island must do: hire someone to install a driveway and create a clearing on their land off the West Side Road, make arrangements for utilities, and choose a contractor who can get them in a new structure by the end of next May.

In addition, they were charting the driving times between different places of interest in order to create options for

their tour. "It will change, week by week, because nature changes," they explained. "Different flowers come into bloom, and animals modify their foraging patterns." Not that they know everything about the Island's ecology. "We saw something that amazed us camping on our land last night. One of the five most intriguing sights I've ever seen in my life: a fluorescent fungus that glowed in the dark."

Last spring the Leadership Retreat focused on the question of how we

could manage the inevitable growth of tourism in a way that would protect our fragile environment. Encouraging eco-tourism business by responsible operators was one of the recommendations. "We realize we're walking a thin line," they said. "There are some things we've found that are just too delicate to be shown to anyone. And there's another danger. A man was just caught trying to smuggle a hundred orchids back to Germany, where he planned to sell them. Beaver Island has its share of valuable species as well. Maybe to show some of them, we'll have to blindfold our guests and spin them around three times before taking them to the site."

Since some of nature's spectacles occur in the off-season, this enterprise also supports a direction the Chamber is pushing with its year-around draw.



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