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## Tourism industry to map 5-year plan; economic development an added focus

By Amy Lane

When hundreds of tourism industry representatives gather at a March conference in Grand Rapids, they'll do more than network.

They'll have a chance to help chart the next five-year strategy for Michigan's tourism industry -- a strategic plan set to be completed by the end of the year that will envision what the industry should be by 2017 and how that will differ from today.

"This is not the plan for **Travel Michigan** or the **Michigan Economic Development Corp.**, this is an industry plan," said George Zimmermann, vice president of Travel Michigan, the state's tourism-marketing arm. "We have the most active people in the tourism industry in the state gathered at the conference. So why wouldn't we take advantage of that time to do some plan work?"

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After the strategic planning session at the conference, there will be additional meetings held around the state as well as online opportunities for tourism industry members "to provide input into the development of goals, objectives and strategies," said Sarah Nicholls, associate professor in the MSU department of geography and department of community, agriculture, recreation and resource studies, in an email.

Nicholls said there will be a website that will contain information, explain the planning process and ways to get involved.

The Michigan Travel Commission oversaw implementation of the first strategic plan and is now facilitating development of the new plan.

Patricia Mooradian, president of **The Henry Ford** in Dearborn and chairman of the travel commission, said holding the first major industry-wide planning session at the conference provides an important chance to voice input on the future shape of Michigan's tourism industry.

Overall, she said, the conference is an opportunity "to integrate and work together, and to share" as well as hear "the big picture" and vision for the state and tourism.

For the full story, see: <http://www.crainsdetroit.com/article/20120205/SUB01/302059995> (subscription required).