

# Exploring Water Trails: Outdoor Recreation Accessible to all

GVSU SCIENCE OF AGING CONFERENCE

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BY MICHAEL SCANTLEBURY, PHD AND MARK GLEASON, PHD



# Public Hearings: Support & Involvement in Michigan Water Trails

PROJECT SPONSORED BY  
MICHIGAN'S DEQ & NOAA, WMEAC AND GRAND VALLEY STATE  
UNIVERSITY

# Presentation

- ▶ Background:
  - ▶ What is a water trail
  - ▶ What activities are done on water Trails
  - ▶ Project Partners
  - ▶ Project Location
  - ▶ Water Trails in Michigan and Non-motorized Activities
- ▶ Purpose of Project:
  - ▶ Public Input, involvement, Education, and Acceptance
  - ▶ Project Researcher Concerns
  - ▶ Weather and Open Water
  - ▶ “Impact to my activity”
  - ▶ Public Hearings
  - ▶ Results
  - ▶ Problems and Issues
  - ▶ Future plans
  - ▶ Reflection on the experience



# What is A Water Trail?

- ▶ "a stretch of water along a river or shoreline that has been mapped out with the intent of creating an educational, scenic, and enjoyable experience for recreational canoers and kayakers." For the purpose of this project activities include kayaks and canoes as well as other non-motorized activities such as paddle boards, tubing, rowboats and sailboats.





- ▶ West Michigan Water Trail(s) encompass not only the access points and direct amenities.
- ▶ But dynamic features of the lakeshore (weather-related components) and connections to underwater and off-shore components such as cultural, historical, and ecological landmarks, in addition to lodging and other related businesses.
- ▶ Additional features include a direct relationship to local tourism activities and services.





# Water Trail Activities include but are not limited to:





# Activities for all ages and seasons.





Really all ages.





# Project Partners to create new trail in West Michigan.

- ▶ Michigan's DEQ & NOAA—Provided funding to:
  - ▶ West Michigan Environmental Action Council-WMEAC. A west Michigan non-profit environmental advocacy and education organization. Most members and offices are located in west Michigan.
  - ▶ Grand Valley State University-GVSU Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management. GVSU has about 25,000 students and HTM has around 500 majors.
    - ▶ Scott Rood, Robert Robins, Michael Scantlebury, Mark Gleason

A map of the Great Lakes region in North America. The five Great Lakes are shown in dark blue: Lake Superior (top left), Lake Michigan (bottom left), Lake Huron (center), Lake Erie (bottom right), and Lake Ontario (top right). The surrounding land is depicted in shades of brown and tan, representing different terrain types. The labels for the lakes are in yellow capital letters.

LAKE  
SUPERIOR

LAKE  
ONTARIO

LAKE  
HURON

LAKE  
MICHIGAN

LAKE  
ERIE



Approximately 150  
miles of shoreline

A map of the Lake Michigan shoreline in Michigan, showing the coastline from Ludington in the north to Benton Harbor in the south. The map includes major roads like I-196, I-94, and I-75, and labels for several state parks including Silver Lake, Duck Lake, and Pigeon Lake. It also shows the city of Muskegon and the surrounding area.

- St. Joseph / Benton Harbor area north to Ludington area
- Approximately 150 miles of coastline
- Primary focus – one mile inland of Lake Michigan coastline

- Berrien
- Van Buren
- Allegan
- Ottawa
- Muskegon
- Oceana
- Mason

- Benton Harbor / St. Joseph
- South Haven
- Saugatuck / Douglas
- Holland
- Grand Haven
- Muskegon Area
- White Lake Area
- Ludington

# Grand River Water Shed



Location of Study Area

1:1,500,000

Spatial Reference: NAD 1983 Michigan GeoRef Meters



# Great Lakes Water Trails:

<http://www.michiganwatertrails.org>

- ▶ Isle Royale National Park
- ▶ Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore
- ▶ Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore
- ▶ Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore
- ▶ Apostle Islands National Lakeshore



# Over 3,000 miles of Water Trails in Michigan Great Lakes, inland Lakes, streams and rivers.

- ▶ Project To encourage and provide for activities on the water and to promote tourism activities that include local sites and underwater sources of interest.
- ▶ Michigan's Great Lakes have cultural resources underwater in the form of hundreds of shipwrecks. Many shipwrecks are located in West Michigan.





# Water Trails Activities: Education and Tourism

150 miles long, 1 mile inland





Project Included providing opportunities for the public to have input on the development of the trail. Then to learn about the recommendations

- A wide ranging project with many stakeholders and organizations sharing the lake's tourism resources and nearby waters.
- Project Area bordered by two National Lakeshores and has numerous City, County and State Parks within the trail's length





# Purpose of Project: Public Input, Education, Acceptance and Involvement with development of water trail.

## Stakeholders

- ▶ Property Owners
- ▶ Government Organizations
- ▶ Non-motorized participants
- ▶ Motorized participants
- ▶ Tourism Groups
- ▶ Concerned Local populations
- ▶ Non-locals
- ▶ Diving community
- ▶ Sport Fishing community
- ▶ Many others....

All have concerns or will have concerns. If those concerns are not addressed then the stakeholders can delay or derail the project.

# Project Concerns in addition to involving the Public.

- ▶ Weather and Open Water
  - ▶ Most summer storms come from SW, W, and NW.
  - ▶ Open Lake with little protection
- ▶ “Impact to my activity”





# Seven Public Input or hearing sites included:

- ▶ Benton Harbor/St Joseph
- ▶ Muskegon
- ▶ South Haven
- ▶ White Hall/Montague
- ▶ Holland/Saugatuck
- ▶ Pentwater/Ludington
- ▶ Grand Haven

# Meeting One: Introduction and Asking for input/feedback.

- ▶ Water Trail Education
- ▶ Request for Input and Feedback
- ▶ Website
- ▶ Project explanation
- ▶ Issues included
  - ▶ Low turn out of non-connected citizens
  - ▶ Weather-Winter
  - ▶ Times and locations?



# Meeting Two and Three: Project Update

## ▶ Meeting Two

### ▶ Project Update

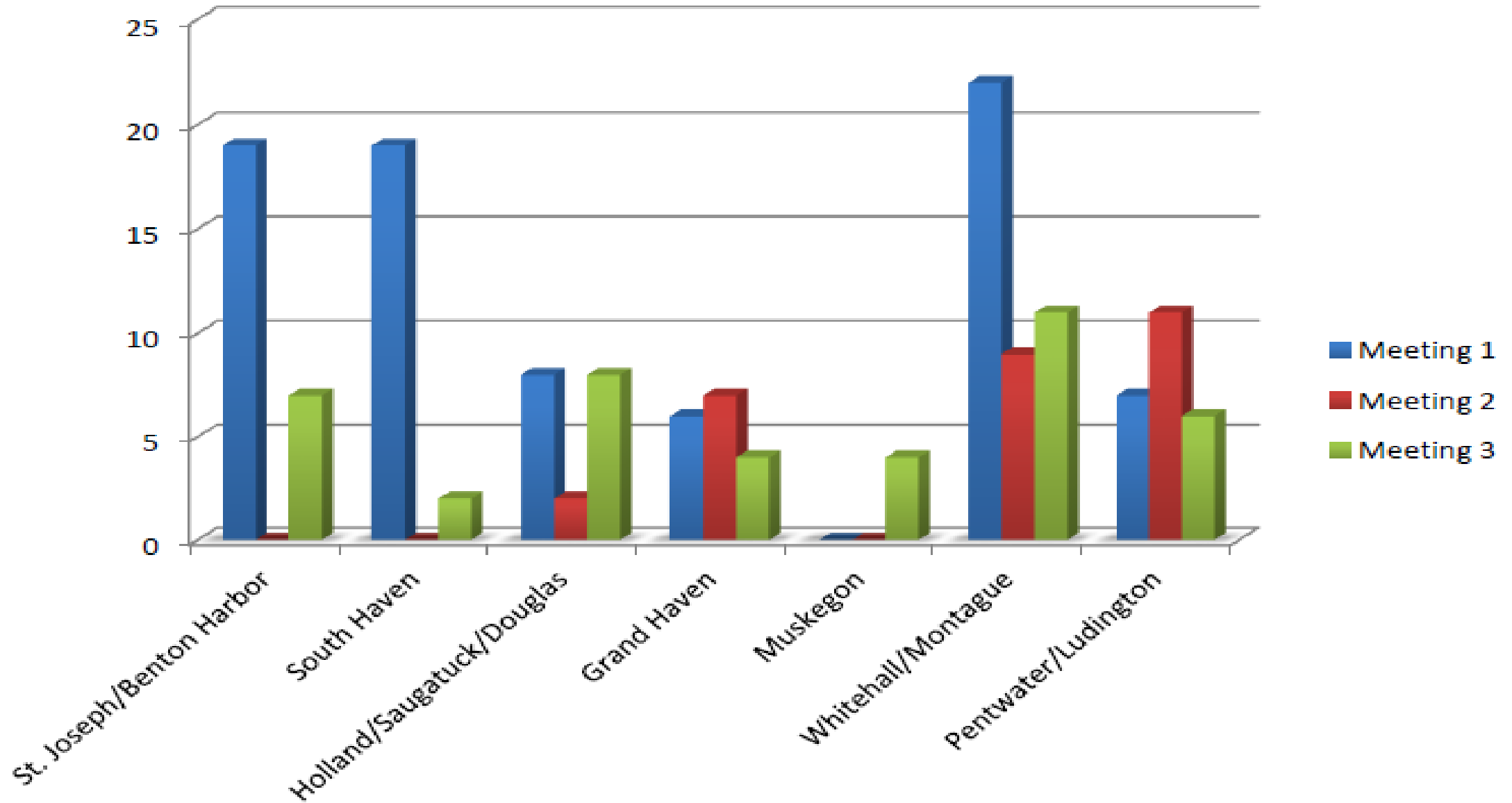
### ▶ Encourage comments and Questions

## ▶ Meeting Three

### ▶ Draft Final Report

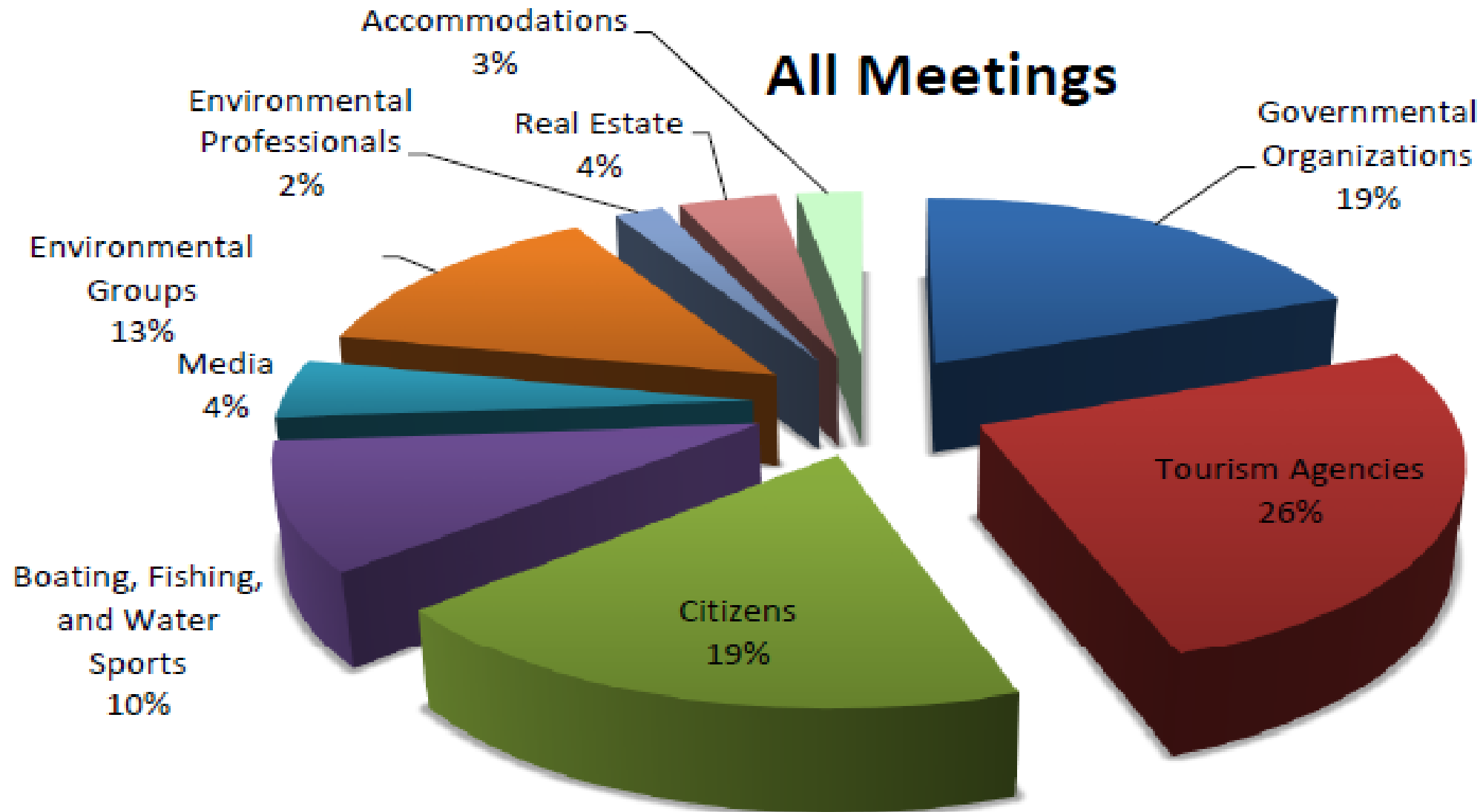
### ▶ Encourage comments and Questions

## Public Meeting Attendance

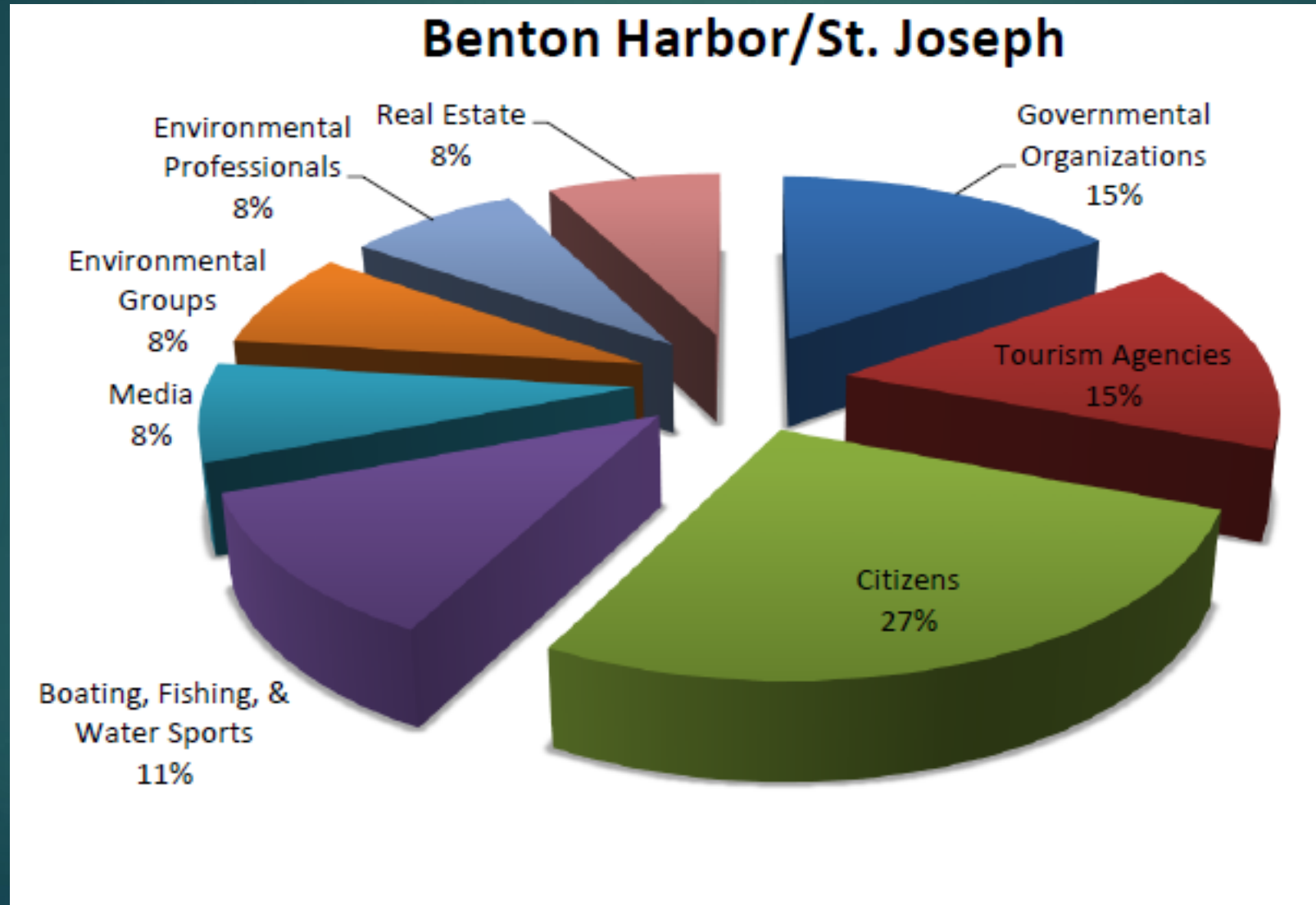




# All Meetings Participant Breakdown



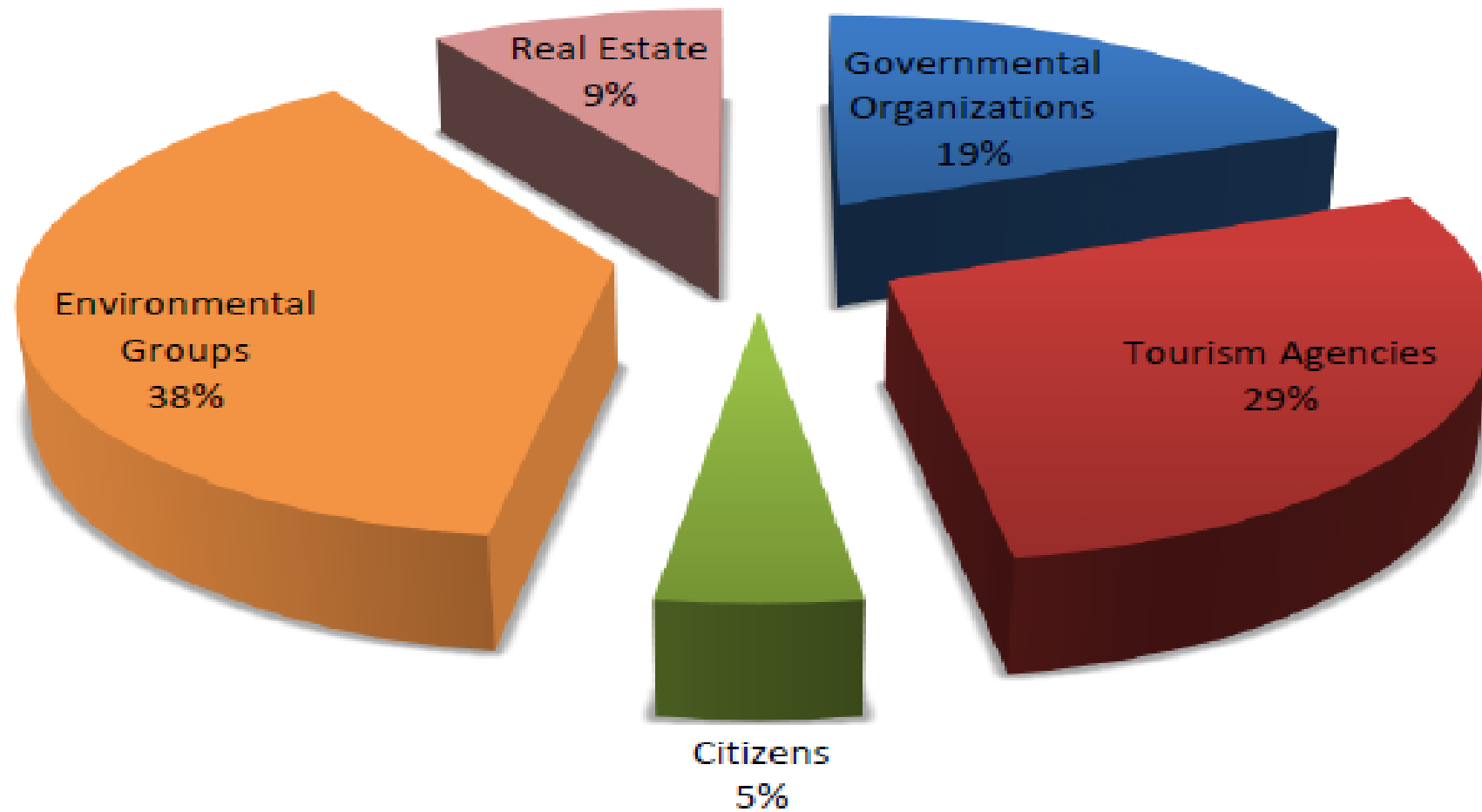
# Benton Harbor/St Joseph 26 People





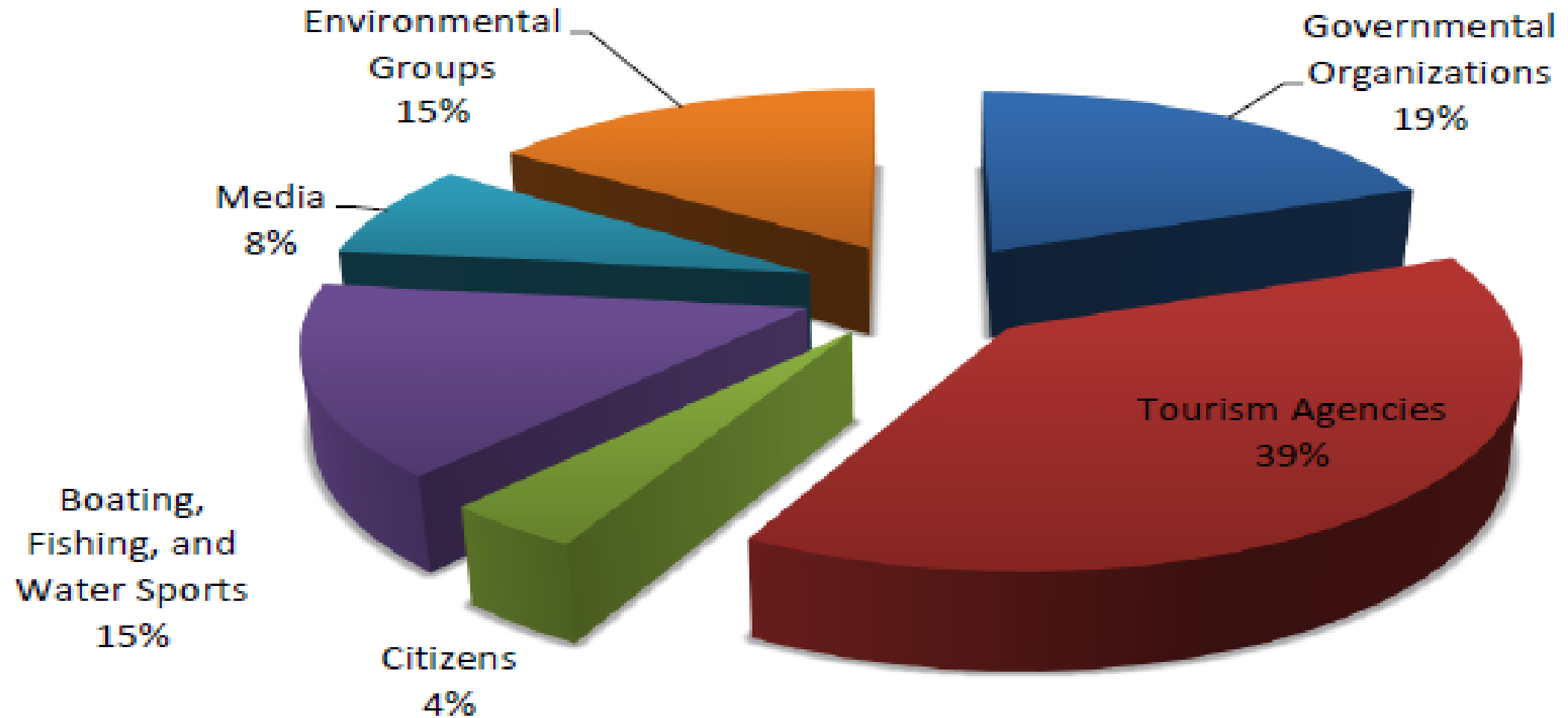
# South Haven 21 People

## South Haven



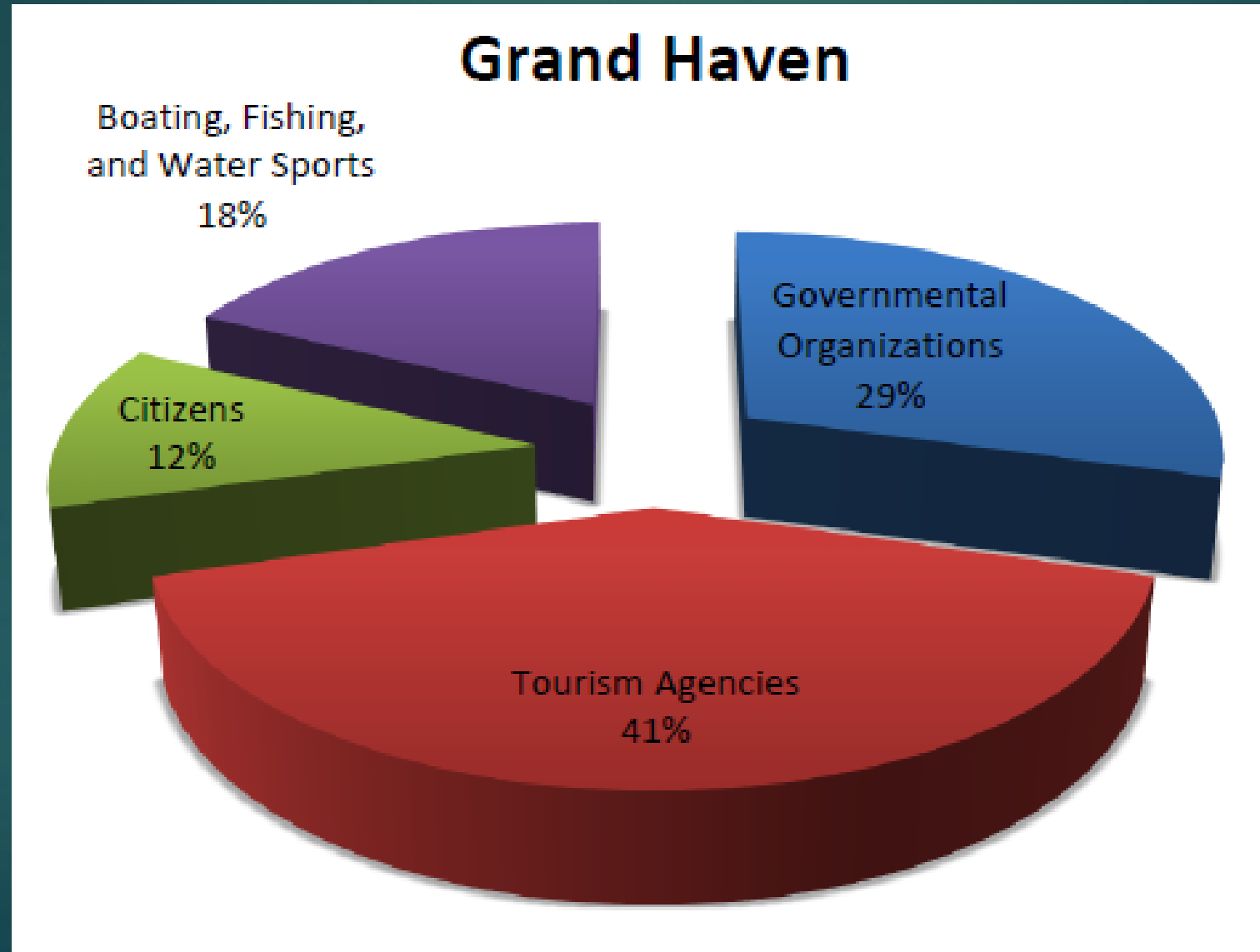
# Holland/Saugatuck 18 People

## Holland/Saugatuck/Douglas

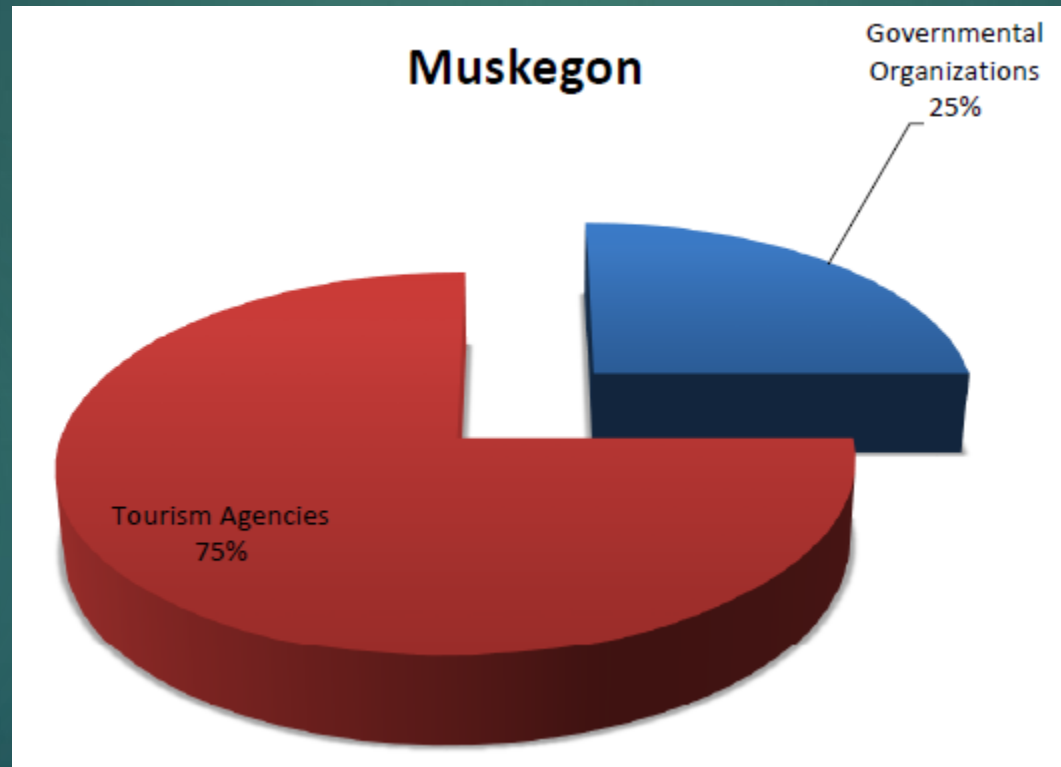




# Grand Haven, 17 People

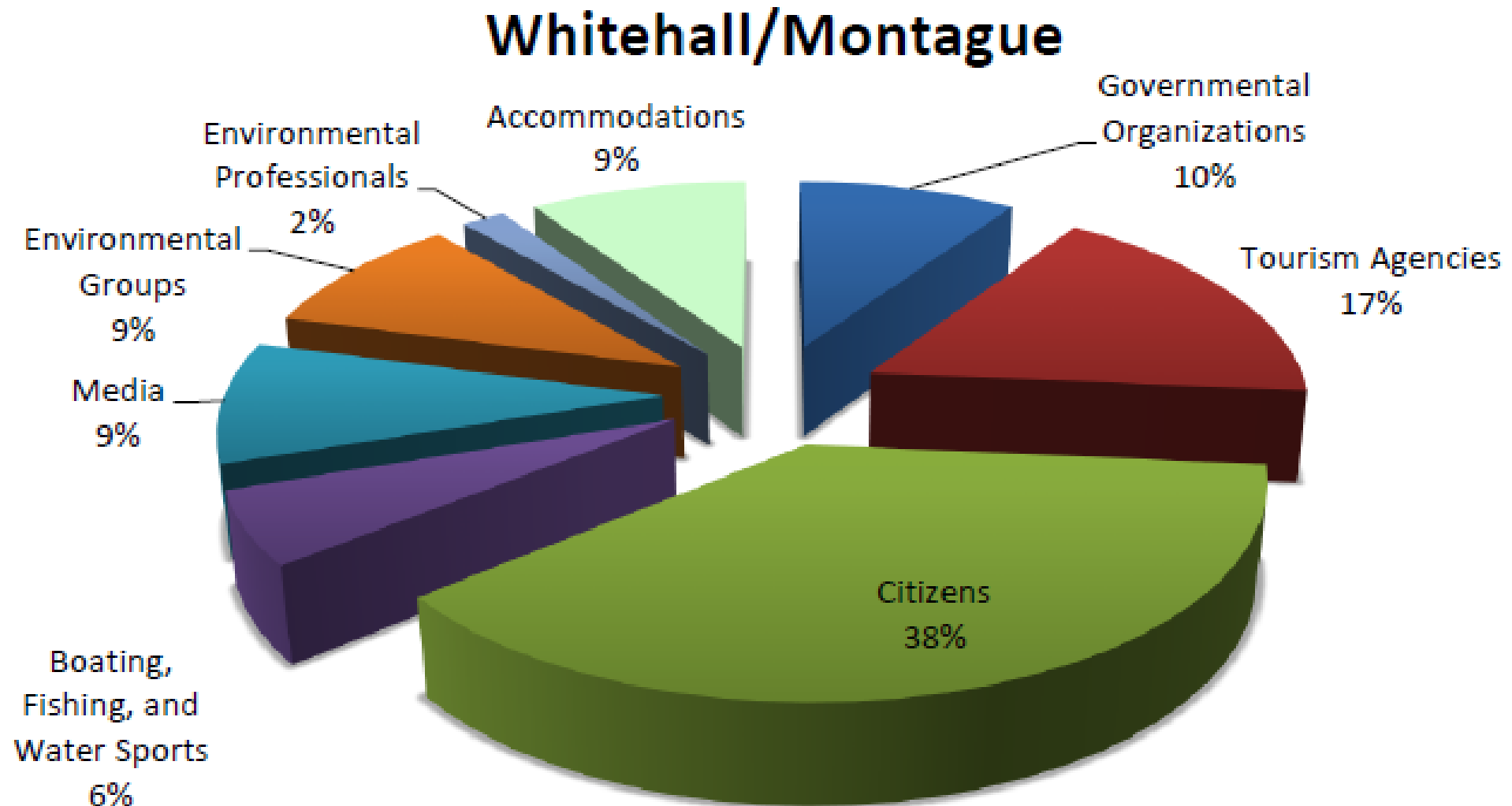


# Muskegon 4 People

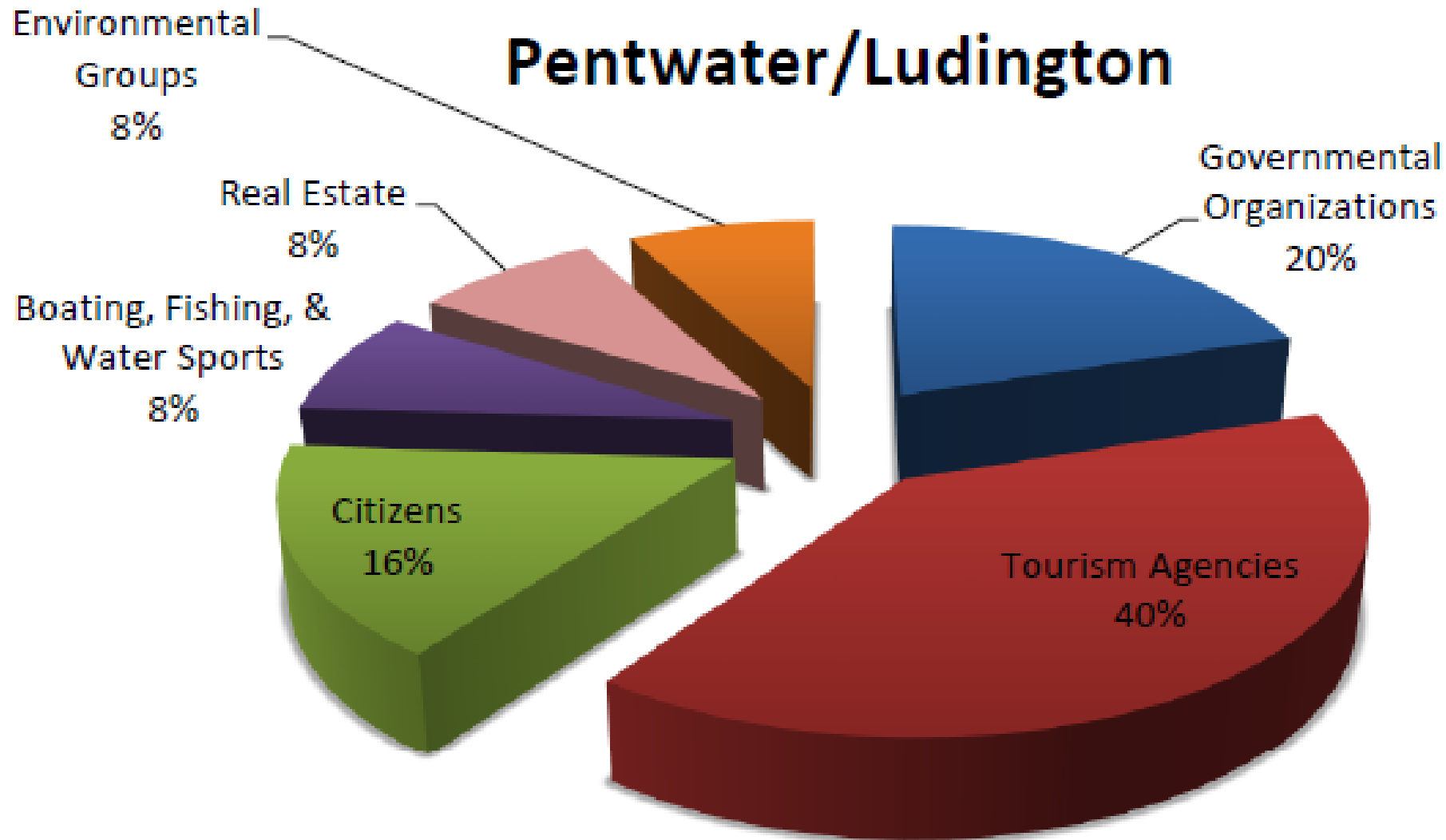




# Whitehall/Montague 42 People



# Pentwater/Ludington 24 People





# Results



# Results

- ▶ Finding One – Multiple Benefits Would Accrue from Developing a West Michigan Water Trail
- ▶ Finding Two – All Counties are “Market-Ready” or “Near Market-Ready”
- ▶ Finding Three – Follow Leading and Best Management Practices
- ▶ Finding Four – There is a Wide Spectrum of Water-Related Activities in the Near-Shoreline
- ▶ Finding Five – There are Important Ecological Threats and Planning Considerations
- ▶ Finding Six – Incorporate Public Input and Comment in the Implementation Stage



# What about flooding?



# Issues—not in report?

- ▶ The Number of private citizens at public hearings was small. Or was it?
- ▶ Water trails have a fair amount of public acceptance.
- ▶ The public understands what water trails are. Or do they not care?
- ▶ Illness caused significant issues in research team.







# Future

- ▶ Based on Support of Final report, creation of water trail along this coast line seems to be moving forward.
- ▶ Local communities and organization will be main drivers of efforts.
- ▶ Safety will remain a concern as well property rights.

# Personal reflection:





# Marketing & Awareness





# Balance, Balance, Balance!





# Water conditions & quality



# Treacherous exits!



## Safety Concerns!

- Signage, and
- Smart 911



Concluding thought

Thank you