

Nature-based Tourism in Maine: The State's Role in Promoting a Strong Tourism Industry

by Elizabeth Munding

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Tourism is the state's largest industry and, perhaps also, one of the least well understood and appreciated by Maine citizens. Conventional wisdom suggests that tourism yields unwanted crowds and low-paying jobs. Yet closer analysis suggests that tourism does and has a yet-to-be-realized potential to enhance the well-being and sustainability of communities, particularly through high-quality, nature-based experiences that leverage Maine's extraordinary landscapes, wilderness, and rural culture. To this end, Elizabeth Munding and John Daigle summarize what was learned as a result of Munding's interviews with close to 50 tourism stakeholders throughout Maine. Although this study covered four major aspects of Maine's tourism industry, here the authors focus on the state's role and responsibilities in strengthening, promoting, and sustaining a nature-based tourism industry in Maine. 🐾

In 1895, Cornelia T. Crosby hosted a rustic exhibit booth stuffed full of moose antlers, bear skins and live salmon in posh New York City. She had been hired by Maine Central Railroad to represent the state in the premiere Sportsmen's Exposition. Becoming the first paid person to promote Maine tourism, this outdoors journalist, a.k.a. Fly Rod Crosby, wrote extensively about recreation in Maine. As word spread regarding the state's scenic landscape, Maine's natural resources attracted visitors.

More than 100 years later, tourism has become Maine's largest industry. Providing some 87,000 direct jobs, tourism employs 10 percent of the state's workforce exceeding even the collective employment of the state's other four natural resource industries—forestry, agriculture, fishing, and aquaculture. According to state figures, tourism accounts for roughly seven percent of gross state product or \$2.5 billion annually. In 2003 alone, 44 million visitors spent \$6 billion and contributed \$340 million in sales tax (Longwoods International 2004).

An important and growing segment of Maine's overall tourism industry is nature-based tourism. Although annual statistics show stagnant growth and even losses in some segments of Maine's tourism industry, revenues from outdoor recreation trips to Maine—a component of nature-based tourism—grew by close to 40 percent from 2001 to 2003. Comprised of businesses, outdoor and recreation associations, and government bodies, nature-based tourism depends on the health of Maine's natural resources and the cooperation of related players, such as landowners who allow public access. The quandary comes in determining which actions will transform Maine's nature-based tourism sector into a truly sustainable industry that simultaneously nurtures the natural and cultural resources upon which it depends and leads to new economic opportunities.

This article summarizes a series of interviews with tourism stakeholders throughout Maine. The interviews were conducted by the lead author as partial fulfillment of a master of science degree in the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Program at the University of Maine.¹ In all, 43 interviews were conducted with tourism stakeholders representing three distinct groups: (1) *direct* stakeholders—those who sell tourism prod-

ucts or experiences; (2) *indirect* stakeholders—those who are ancillary to the industry, such as private and non-profit landowners; and, (3) *related* stakeholders—those who work in government, academia or the consulting sector.

The purpose of this study was to identify threats to the industry as perceived by those in and close to the industry and to assess the potential for a unified, sustainable nature-based tourism vision in Maine. Initial results were incorporated into a 2004 legislative report prepared by the Maine Tourism Commission's Natural Resources Committee (NRC 2004) and submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Business, Research and Economic Development.

SETTING THE STAGE: THE BLAINE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED INDUSTRIES

On November 17, 2003, close to 700 stakeholders from across Maine's five natural resource industries participated in the Blaine House Conference on Natural Resource-based Industries. The conference marked a turning point in its recognition of tourism as one of the state's natural-resource industries. Four broad recommendations pertaining to tourism arose out of the conference, including

1. Make higher education, research, and extension support priorities;
2. Clarify state agency roles and responsibilities;
3. Implement sustainable tourism economic development planning; and
4. Create a comprehensive branding campaign (Blaine House Conference Planning Committee 2004).

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DID YOU KNOW...

- Anecdotally, L.L. Bean is believed to be Maine's top tourist attraction, with Acadia National Park as second.
- A record 671,000 vehicles traveled the Maine Turnpike on Memorial Day weekend in 2007, a 1.5 percent increase over last year, according to the Maine Turnpike Authority.
- Maine's tourism budget is comparable to or exceeds that of other states: Maine at \$7.2 million, Nebraska at approximately \$3 million and Minnesota at \$8 million in 2004.
- Based on tourism revenues, Maine's national ranking as an overnight U.S. travel destination has been 38th or 39th from 2000 to 2003. As context, the entire New England travel market could do better. In 2003, Massachusetts ranked 28th in overnight travel, with Connecticut at 35th, New Hampshire at 39th, Vermont at 47th and Rhode Island dead last at 50th (Longwoods International 2004).
- Maine ranks 37th nationally in its percentage of public land (5.4%), with Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas in the last positions, respectively (NRCM n.d.).
- Tourism economically is one of the world's largest industries, and employs approximately one in nine workers, for 231 million jobs, generating 10.4 percent of the world gross domestic product (WTTC 2007). Tourism became the third largest U.S. retail industry, behind food and auto sales, in the mid-1980s.

The articulation of these recommendations and associated action steps marked an important step in developing a cogent nature-based tourism strategy for Maine. Former assistant director of the Office of Tourism, Nat Bowditch, remarked at the time, "if you take a look at the Blaine House Conference recommendations and implement those, then you'll get a lot of things taken care of."

The 43 stakeholders interviewed independently of the conference addressed many of the outcomes of the Blaine House Conference. In fact, their comments helped to clarify many of the specific issues underlying

the consensus-derived recommendations emerging from the conference. This article, however, reports only on what interviewees said in relation to the *state's role and responsibilities* in strengthening, promoting, and sustaining a nature-based tourism industry in Maine. Clarifying the state's role and responsibilities was repeatedly identified as necessary (but not sufficient) to achieving all of the recommendations arising out of the conference.

From the Blaine House Conference (2004), three specific actions were suggested to Governor John Baldacci:

1. Broaden the mandate of the Office of Tourism;
2. Improve tourism and recreation economic development incentive offerings; and
3. Coordinate recreational land management, use, and promotion.

The findings presented in the next section reinforce these suggestions. Moreover, within the context of personal interviews, study participants were able to offer more detailed insights and suggestions for enhancing the state's role and responsibilities in the tourism industry. For the sake of organization, results and recommendations arising from the study are clustered under three broad headers: (1) governance issues; (2) the quality of Maine's overall tourism effort; and (3) recreation planning and land management.

STUDY FINDINGS

Governance Issues

Broaden the Mandate of the Office of Tourism

At present, the Office of Tourism's legislative mandate restricts its role to marketing out of state. The office has employed creative means to work within this mandate, primarily through the establishment of eight tourism regions within Maine to which a small portion of funds are allocated annually (these funds are earmarked for marketing efforts). In addition, the office has initiated informal dialogue and coordination

among other agencies. Still, the state lacks mechanisms for developing new destinations; improving the quality of existing destinations through interpretive materials or infrastructure; assuring environmental protection of high-traffic destinations; or creating comprehensive tourism management and planning in the state.

Interviewees identified four categories where the state's role could be expanded: serving tourists; serving communities; serving entrepreneurs and the industry; and marketing. Several interviewees mentioned the need to assist communities and to help them to strategize around tourism efforts. "I'd welcome the state to shift some of its tourism money to an inland focus," said John Simko, town manager of Greenville. "Maybe it's not enough to just promote us. We need government officials to come here to spend time to do a state strategic plan to have people come in the off season."

The Office of Tourism is said to concern itself with sustaining numbers, instead of focusing on the quality of the experiences. While marketing can remain a central role for the office, its marketing messages could shift from a series of pretty pictures to images emphasizing stewardship and include in-state as well as out-of-state campaigns. Several interviewees wanted the state to explore new ways of marketing that would include more diverse geographic locales and entities, including local governments and tourism entrepreneurs. Although the office is currently restricted to marketing out of state, statistics show the importance to the tourism industry of Mainers who recreate in their own state. (See, for example, the recent article in *Maine Policy Review* by Roper et al. [2006].) A new in-state marketing effort could educate Mainers on the positive economic impact of tourism that goes well beyond tourism businesses. This, in turn, could help to develop and nurture a positive image of the industry. By broadening its expanding duties, the office would better serve the entrepreneurs, the tourists, the communities, and the industry.

Create an Interagency Tourism Board

Maine's tourism industry suffers from a lack of coordinated state-level leadership. According to Natalie Springuel, marine extension associate for the Maine Sea Grant Program, "a problem for the tourism industry is

that there are so many different initiatives in the state and no direct way that these agencies are talking to each other." In some instances this lack of coordination has led to conflict. For example, Dave Bell, executive director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine in Orono stated, "The so-called successful reintroduction of the turkey, which involves a major hunt, is a huge problem for our [blueberry] growers. So, this is an example of how success can be a negative." A coordinated effort is also important for protecting resources essential for tourism. Lee Sochasky, executive director of the St. Croix International Waterway, stated, "Stewarding the extent, character and diversity of the natural resources that support the state's economy—particularly tourism—can't be the job of land trusts, resource agencies and conservation groups. There must be a stronger partnership between these and tourism operators...we need to make this 'the right thing to do.'"

Confusion and a sense of mistrust among tourism industry stakeholders are often the byproducts of multiple agencies working parallel but independently of one another. The people interviewed for this project voiced their frustration about this. In their view agencies unknowingly pursue duplicative or even counterproductive efforts far too frequently. By reorganizing tourism's state-level structure to strengthen interagency communication, tourism initiatives can be enacted more efficiently. Stakeholders suggested a tourism board should be made up of representatives of the Office of Tourism, along with other state agencies, and outside groups like the inland-focused Maine Mountain Heritage Network and the coastal-focused Vacationland Resources Committee of the Down East Resource Conservation and Development Council. The board should address topics that cut across agencies, such as transportation, wildlife, and conservation. This new board could curb conflicting agency policies, combine funding, and look beyond the day-to-day marketing responsibilities to broader goals such as measuring tourist satisfaction.

Establish a Joint Standing Committee on Tourism

Several stakeholders indicated that the Maine Legislature could make tourism a priority by adding a tourism committee. Most proposed tourism-related bills

are heard as an add-on to the Business, Research and Economic Development (BRED) committee. Directing tourism-related bills to multiple committees results in multiple Maine entities working simultaneously on tourism goals. This happened with an ecotourism initiative, LD 946, in 2003. At the bill's hearings before the BRED committee, it became clear that the legislature was not aware of what the Maine Office of Tourism had been doing and vice versa. During the hearing, the Maine Office of Tourism indicated the mission of the newly formed Maine Tourism Commission's Natural Resources Committee included objectives outlined in LD 946.

Avoid State Agency Actions Unfair to One Industry

Some in the tourism industry are concerned about the issue of fairness of state agency actions. One agency enforces regulations that do not apply to constituents of another agency. Windjammer captains said state rules are tighter on them than on lobster boat operators, who do not have to pass driving tests. "In the lobster industry, you don't have to take a rules-of-the-road test or anything. Lobstermen have to buy a license to fish but not to drive their boat," said Kip Files, former owner of the three-masted schooner Victory Chimes out of Rockland. "It's frightening." State agencies, other than the Office of Tourism, are accused of turning a deaf ear to tourism stakeholders. The Department of Marine Resources (DMR), for example, regulates ocean waters up to three miles off the coast, but has not assisted windjammer captains in navigating around aquaculture pens. Other tourism entrepreneurs have felt dismissed by the DMR. Penobscot Bay residents, for example, felt the DMR ignored them in 2003 when the DMR considered an application for establishment of a finfish farm in the bay. These residents, who rely on tourism as the economic base of the community, did not want a finfish operation in their backyard because of concerns about pollution and industrialization. "The islands are where we have been taking our guests for years," said Sally M. Littlefield, co-owner of the Oakland House Seaside Resort in Brooksville and member of the East Penobscot Bay Environmental Alliance. "I do see [finfish farming]

as incompatible with our business offering. The way DMR rules are written doesn't give us a say at all. It doesn't look at any land-based businesses as having merit or value." Government—at the town and state levels—may act in a way that perpetuates conflict.

The Quality of Maine's Overall Tourism Effort

Increase the Amount and Scope of the State's Tourism Budget

The Office of Tourism can offer limited economic incentives because all but a small proportion of tourism-related tax revenues go to the state's General Fund rather than to the industry. Ninety-five percent of the seven percent meals and lodging tax, which was increased from five percent in 2004 in part to assist the tourism industry, feeds the General Fund, adding only approximately \$300,000 to the annual Office of Tourism budget. As evidence, the Maine Office of Tourism's \$6.9 million budget in 2003 increased only slightly to \$7.2 million in 2004. Stakeholders would like to see revenues benefit the industry that collects those dollars. Furthermore, state park admission fees also go to the General Fund instead of back to the state parks. (Even if all state park fees were returned to the Bureau of Parks and Lands [BPL], most say these funds alone would not sustain an under-funded BPL unless drastic changes in fee structures took place.) The state's snowmobile strategy, however, allows money garnered in that industry to stay in that industry; tax revenues gathered by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IF&W) remain in the sector through Department of Conservation (DOC) grants to the approximately 300 state-registered clubs to build trails.

To increase the scope of the tourism budget, the Office of Tourism, which recognizes eight tourism regions, should be challenged to add sub-regions to recognize smaller communities and to better distribute economic development funds. Distribution of the office's money within a region appears unfair when some communities longing for tourism dollars receive nothing. One stakeholder lamented that Bar Harbor, which is located in Hancock County, garners most of the marketing dollars for a large

region that covers both Hancock and Washington counties. Stakeholders also recommended that the state invest more in other organizations that help to build important recreation infrastructure. “The Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) has been the primary source for rehabilitating trails as well as assisting with many other recreation projects,” said Ken Spalding, former director of the MCC and current project coordinator for Restore: The North Woods. “The state reduced funding to the MCC to fund only the director’s position.” Also, several stakeholders referred to the need for more support for the state park system. “Faced with smaller budgets and aging facilities,” Sochasky said, “we need to explore new ways to preserve these vital resource-linked tourism assets.”

Involve Tourism Professionals

Tourism businesspeople explained their voices currently go unheard because they cannot afford to be away from their businesses to meet with each other and/or to testify at lengthy legislative hearings. The 24-member Maine Tourism Commission, which assists the Office of Tourism with marketing and natural resource issues, is restricted by a lack of funding to its participants. These tourism leaders are expected to give of their own time to study the industry. “They are a ‘volunteer’ committee, and they are not paid,” Bowditch said. “So, what is the capacity to be out there in a big way? It is somewhat limited.” If the state is serious about tourism, tourism’s primary think-tank, the MTC, should not be treated as a volunteer effort. Beyond Augusta’s efforts, additional convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) are needed besides those in Portland and Bangor. Without CVBs focusing exclusively on tourism, chambers of commerce must oversee the industry. Chambers do a lot for tourism, but they oversee all types of business and community needs and are, therefore, spread very thinly.

Build More Tourism Information Centers

Tourism relies on information centers as contact points with visitors that relay important things-to-do information. Government should reassess the locations of existing and future state-run information centers and add interpretation materials with messages on how

to interact with the resource. Video cameras could be installed at centers to display live images of puffins on Eastern Egg Island or a windjammer setting sail in Camden or views from atop Mount Katahdin in Baxter State Park. Interpretation can include interagency information such as IF&W fishing licenses, DOC state park maps, and Office of Tourism lodging lists.

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Tourists, especially in inland Maine, encounter infrequently used rest areas, some without basic facilities. Working rest stops are needed to serve tourists’ basic needs. The responsibility for centers, according to stakeholders, extends beyond any one government agency in order to support all parts of the state. “This is especially important to rural Maine,” said Bucky Owen, the former commissioner of IF&W and a retired University of Maine wildlife ecology professor. “I pushed [for information centers] when I was in IF&W, but there were no dollars at the time [in the mid-1990s] to support it.” Multiple agencies could work together more closely to provide diverse information on activities like camping, wildlife viewing, and fishing to serve the nature-based tourist.

Improve the Climate within Maine for Tourism

The tourism industry is not treated by the public as a valid Maine industry. General thinking is that increased tourism simply leads to busier roads and increased taxes. “In a mill town, you’re taught that tourists are bad,” said Matt Polstein, owner of the New England Outdoor Center in Millinocket, “and to

make them go away because they will make us legally change with new regulations.” Some communities support the stereotype that tourism jobs consist of flipping burgers and cleaning motel rooms. Tourism, carrying low-end jobs as does every industry, brings high-quality jobs, too, measured by salary and job satisfaction. “The mill jobs are going down, and there is nothing we can do about that,” said Jeff McEvoy, owner of Weatherby’s Inn in Grand Lake Stream. “We can build a tourism-based economy that is strong and has a quality of life. Not everyone will have year-round jobs with benefits because neither do I. All my guides don’t make a lot of money, but they have the quality of life that they want.”

The tourism industry needs to identify priority areas that have either existing or potential recreational value and be proactive about addressing threats to access and natural resource health.

The tourism industry, however, has done a poor job of labeling itself as a Maine attribute, and residents need to be educated on the positives. “The idea has been that if a tourist drives to Kittery and throws open his wallet, then that is the best tourist,” Polstein added. It is likely that most people who are anti-tourism have not thought through why they are against tourism. A few years ago some Greenville residents wanted to shut down tourism discussions, but the Greenville town manager has embraced tourism as a way to diversify the town’s economy. “I maintain that we are strongest when the most diverse,” said Simko, who reflected on the calamity of the mills shutting down in the 1980s. “There was a lot of talk on: Do we want to see tourism as a new way to create money? ... The end product is that it isn’t ‘either/or’ but both with an ‘and.’” It is important to recall that Maine depends on all types of tourism jobs, as the industry employs 10 percent of

the job base, and that nature-based tourism is economically significant. “I’d love to say in 10 years that birders bring in \$X dollars a year,” said Judy Walker, former Maine Audubon naturalist in Falmouth. “I don’t think the rest of the world will buy into eco-tourism in Maine until we do.”

If the state recognized tourism for its economic value and more vigorously countered the negative stereotype, people’s perception of the industry would improve. “The state might do more work in kind of dispelling that reputation that it is just minimum-wage jobs,” said Dianne Tilton, former executive director of the Sunrise County Economic Council of Maine. Furthermore, all levels of government need to enhance the public’s perception of nature-based tourism. “We need the whole legislation at the municipal, county and state level to focus on conservation recreation,” said Ken Olson, former president of Friends of Acadia in Bar Harbor. “This will give the public the sense of why it’s important.” Stakeholders clearly believe more needs to be done to support tourism’s potential and to educate people that non-tourism businesses profit from tourists, too.

Recreation Planning and Land Management

Outline a Land-management Directive that Recognizes Tourism

To ensure a strong foundation for Maine tourism, tourists must have access to quality places to recreate. The state’s land-management plan should emphasize how conserved lands allow for recreational access by the public. The tourism industry needs to identify priority areas that have either existing or potential recreational value and be proactive about addressing threats to access and natural resource health. When purchasing new lands, the state should include long-range recreation plans because few conserved lands—especially easements—encourage visits by the public. Since conservation easements usually only limit the ability of the owner to develop the land, the state might be better off purchasing the land outright. “I don’t see a strong link between tourism and conservation easements,” Owen said. “Facilities are not available, and many conservation easements preclude infrastruc-

ture.” In the Land for Maine’s Future (LMF) program, the purchase of easements compared with that of fee-based lands has tripled. Until the year 2000, less than 10 percent of LMF conservation projects were protected by easements. By 2004, 30 percent of LMF lands were conservation easements. An emphasis on easements leads to problems with access by the public. Several stakeholders recommended additional research that would examine the short- and long-term implications of easements.

Increase Land Management

Some stakeholders believe governing entities, whether the state or regional non-profits, do not provide sufficiently for land management. The current level of management makes some uneasy about the ability to monitor regulations responsibly. According to the *Land for Maine’s Future Program: Increasing the Return on a Sound Public Investment* report (LMF 2004) people in Maine think that the responsible agencies do not have the resources to monitor the land, let alone to enforce rules and regulations on the land. Those in government recognize the buying-without-managing pattern that has ensued. When the LMF program started in the mid-1980s, money could only be used to acquire land, not to manage it, but times have changed. “We have spent a lot of money buying land and not any managing it,” said former head of the Department of Conservation Richard Anderson, referring to the initial \$50 million bond issue. “The Land for Maine’s Future should be more focused on recreation opportunities. We are more concerned about rare plants than recreation. I think this is ridiculous.” As the state increases the proportion of public land and easement-protected private lands bought with public funds, it should make recreation management part of the foundation. Recreation management is particularly complex on private land because the burden is on the landowners. “Landowners don’t want more public use because then the pressure is on the landowners to provide the resource,” said Steve Schley, president of Pingree Associates, Inc., who spoke through his employee Sarah Medina of Seven Islands Land Co. in Bangor. “We are torn over the desire and the appropriateness of more

promotion of the use of inland Maine, but there’s a lack of opportunity to profit from it, and there’s the potential to destroy characteristics that are currently attractive, including forest management.” One stakeholder suggested the state should not market lands it doesn’t manage or own because management might not be at a sufficient level to handle visitation. “The state appears to be publicizing and pushing certain activities and resources more than they have in the past,” said Jane Arbuckle, director of stewardship at the Maine Coast Heritage Trust in Brunswick. “That pushing is inappropriate because the state is not in touch with the resource owners and managers.”

Increase the Amount of Accessible Land

Because only a very small percentage of Maine’s total acreage is publicly owned, the state should increase its public holdings and promote the locations of its lesser-known lands. Most people cannot quickly locate Maine’s 47 state parks and historic sites on a map, much less the state’s more recent easement purchases. Many government officials claim the LMF program purchases are the best way to increase the percentage of publicly owned land. The state, however, needs to do a better job to make people aware of these new lands and to create recreational management plans for them. Some stakeholders also claim that LMF-purchased lands are an alternative to a national park proposed for northern Maine by Restore: The North Woods and other preservation groups. Again, if this is the case, then the state should map out and promote these lands as recreation-rich destination spots for a mainstream audience. “I think the state is in a hard way when trying to encourage recreation on private land when we haven’t done much on lands we own,” Anderson said. “In the north, one of the great opportunities is the public lands we already own.”

If the industry wants more tourists, especially in the interior of the state, then it needs to provide the land, facilities, and interpretive materials to welcome visitors, including readily available brochures that describe and provide maps of these lands. The state also needs to raise awareness about the different traditional users of this land to prevent conflicts between competing uses. “My biggest worry is that with all the

REDUCING THE IMPACTS OF MAINE TOURISM

- Add land managers or extension specialists to manage land receiving increased recreation use.
- Do not overpromote wilderness or natural environments that are susceptible to being damaged by high use, such as roads and trails during the early spring.
- Establish desired conditions among various stakeholders to determine carrying capacities.
- Do not promote underdeveloped areas until management is in place.
- Use interpretive materials to spread visitors out to less-visited areas.
- Include messages on interpretive hand-outs regarding ways to interact with the resource in a low-impact manner.
- Use adequate and strategically placed signs to help focus types of visitation at particular sites and to reduce visitor conflict.

and privies. Agreements need to consider the costs of increased visitation and enhanced natural resources. Up to this point, a non-profit called the North Maine Woods has worked since 1971 to alleviate landowner burdens by caring and investing in infrastructure. “The North Maine Woods charges enough money to provide for the campsites,” said Sarah Medina, land-use director at Seven Islands Land Co. in Bangor, “which is good for us because our foresters don’t have to be out making sure that there is enough toilet paper at

green people coming up here that someone might decide that he or she doesn’t want snowmobilers on the trails,” said Paul Fichtner, former owner of Big Lake Equipment in Greenville, “and we’ve just lost the continuity of the communities.”

Offer Incentives to Private Landowners

With Maine’s tradition of public recreation on private lands threatened by increased “No Trespassing” postings (Acheson 2006), the state should consider establishing formal access agreements for landowners. The forestry firm International Paper reports that it pays thousands of dollars annually to maintain recreational infrastructure. The state could provide incentives to landowners who repair ecological damage and maintain roads and facilities like trailheads, parking lots, campsites,

campsites.” Overall, stakeholders from all facets of the tourism industry believe landowners should be somehow compensated by the state or by individual recreationists for some of the costs of allowing access to their land.

This compensation could come from either state or private sources. For example, state funds could be given to outside organizations and forest and coastal landowners that enhance the public landscape, in the same way that the state currently gives funds to snowmobile and ATV clubs to develop and maintain trails. These funds could be used by those groups to maintain facilities on private land. Alternatively, recreationists could pay a per-person fee to visit the site. In either case, the state needs to continue its discussion with landowners, such as its 2004 Task Force on Traditional Uses and Public Access to Land in Maine. In response to the changes in land ownership patterns over the past decade, this task force, which included small and large landowners, analyzed the best ways for ensuring access to land for traditional uses. If Maine institutes fees for access to private land, it will not be the first state to do this. Oregon timber landowners already have operated experimental per person fee programs for recreationists.

Curb Tensions Between Conflicting Recreationists

To avoid user conflict, recreation areas can be created for specific uses. Not every land parcel needs to accommodate multiple recreational uses, as motorized and non-motorized recreationists overlap in often-unfriendly ways. Minnesota has proven that motorized and non-motorized designations are possible and appropriate. Known for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness with its 1.3 million acres containing hundreds of lakes and rivers and 1,200 miles of non-motorized canoe routes, Minnesota also has the Superior National Forest, however, which allows multiple recreational uses. Maine can also choose to designate that particular areas are open only to particular uses. “The state is unwilling to separate user groups because then you’d get an income from both,” said Garrett Conover, owner of North Woods Ways canoe guiding business in Willimantic, in a tongue-in-cheek comment referring to motorized and non-motorized

uses. “By favoring one, you don’t get an income from both.” Maine tourism stakeholders also see a benefit in separate recreation areas that serve different recreational skill levels. Beginners might appreciate areas with easy access, while harder outdoor enthusiasts want to visit remote locations, especially without roads.

Recognize the Role of Volunteer Groups

Many of the stakeholders mentioned the vital role of volunteer groups that help to promote, protect, and maintain recreation assets, and they realized that these people, who build and maintain much of the infrastructure, need to be recognized. “The amount of volunteer staff is big. This is the time I should be here at my business,” said Fichtner, who has helped as Greenville’s snowmobile trail maintenance organizer. “With as much money as snowmobiles bring in, we shouldn’t have to be volunteering our time.” The state could coordinate groups by town or project and organize more “Friends” groups, since only a few state parks, such as Eagle Island and Fort Knox, have these crucial groups. “We need more volunteer organizations, especially for each state park,” said Anderson, who suggested this coordination when he was the head of the DOC. Many of the stakeholders feel the state needs to recognize the importance of volunteers to the success of its number-one industry and find ways to encourage more people to join in.

CONCLUSION

Residents, businesses, and government must realize that the tourism industry is more than extending an invitation to people to come use the state’s natural resources. “How do you promote the natural resources as a way that promotes revenue?” Tilton asked. “If you just promote the natural resources and say, ‘Oh, come see,’ you are just sharing, and it’s not really an industry.” Tourism, due to a lack of specific goals and little research on which to base decisions, is a difficult topic for policymakers. Little is known about which locations successfully draw visitors to Maine. Furthermore, if tourism is too concentrated, it can upset the landscape, causing some communities to no longer want it in their backyard. “The social fabric of resident communities can be disrupted by conflict and dissention with visitors

and by congestion and overtaxing of the infrastructure and basic services” (Pigram 2000).

Taking certain actions, however, will enhance all four Blaine House conference proposals: higher education, research and extension; state government roles and responsibilities; economic development planning; and branding. The industry can benefit by examining tourism programs in other states and identifying inter-related problems. The University of Maine System and Maine Community College System can act as key education players to teach industry members the principles of sustainability and to instruct communities to use a matrix for mapping out their own tourism strategies. Communities can be given a voice on whether to include tourism, how to do so, and can determine what elements reflect authenticity by approving only the projects they find acceptable in type, location, design and operation. Tourism products need to be measured by the quality of the experience instead of the quantity of visitors, especially in rural areas where new signage or attractions need time to draw interest to the area. A new federal designation, such as a national park, could create a profitable destination attraction in inland Maine and garner federal funds for regions struggling to put themselves on the map.

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Stakeholders believe that several challenges still exist for the state. They believe that communities would be better served if the Office of Tourism stood as its own department rather than under the authority of the Department of Community and Economic Development. Also according to stakeholders, the Office of Tourism’s mandate needs to be changed so it can approach natural resource management agencies and other state agencies, such as the Department of

Transportation, with development ideas as a way to pool the state's limited dollars. There also needs to be a new interagency tourism body so that no one agency faces all the burden of researching, planning, or funding within the industry. Additionally, several stakeholders believe the state needs to invest more resources in its tourism industry, including efforts to make landowners and the general public more aware of the direct and indirect economic benefits of tourism. The state needs to improve its recreation planning and develop land management plans that support tourism initiatives and are compatible with landowners' goals and objectives. Finally stakeholders believe that the state needs to recognize the role of volunteers, who provide vital services that enhance the state's recreational opportunities.

If the state takes these actions, we believe critical outcomes will result. In this time of change for Maine's manufacturing industry, tourism can be a part of a community's economic solution. Towns can celebrate the forces that shaped their communities and put their heritage on display. Tourism's progress depends on the successful adoption of new statewide policies. The industry needs to measure success by the quality of the experience, which will ensure return visitation and attract new visitors with economic, ecological, and cultural benefits. 🐟

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Wilbur LaPage, Dr. John Daigle and Kathryn Olmstead, all of the University of Maine, contributed to this tourism study as part of the primary author's academic graduate committee. The Maine Office of Tourism deserves credit for funding this research in order to have a better understanding of the industry's future.



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ENDNOTE

- I. Funding to cover the costs associated with the interviews was provided by the Maine Office of Tourism, and direct assistance in identifying potential interviewees was provided by the Natural Resources Committee, which, at the time of the study, existed under the auspices of the Maine Tourism Commission. Full results of the study may be viewed at: <http://www.library.umaine.edu/theses/pdf/MundingEA2006.pdf>

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