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Executive Summary : Strategic Plan for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative, September 2005

FERMATA, Inc.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategic Plan for Implementing

THE MAINE NATURE TOURISM INITIATIVE - SEPTEMBER 2005





Prepared by

FERMATA, Inc.

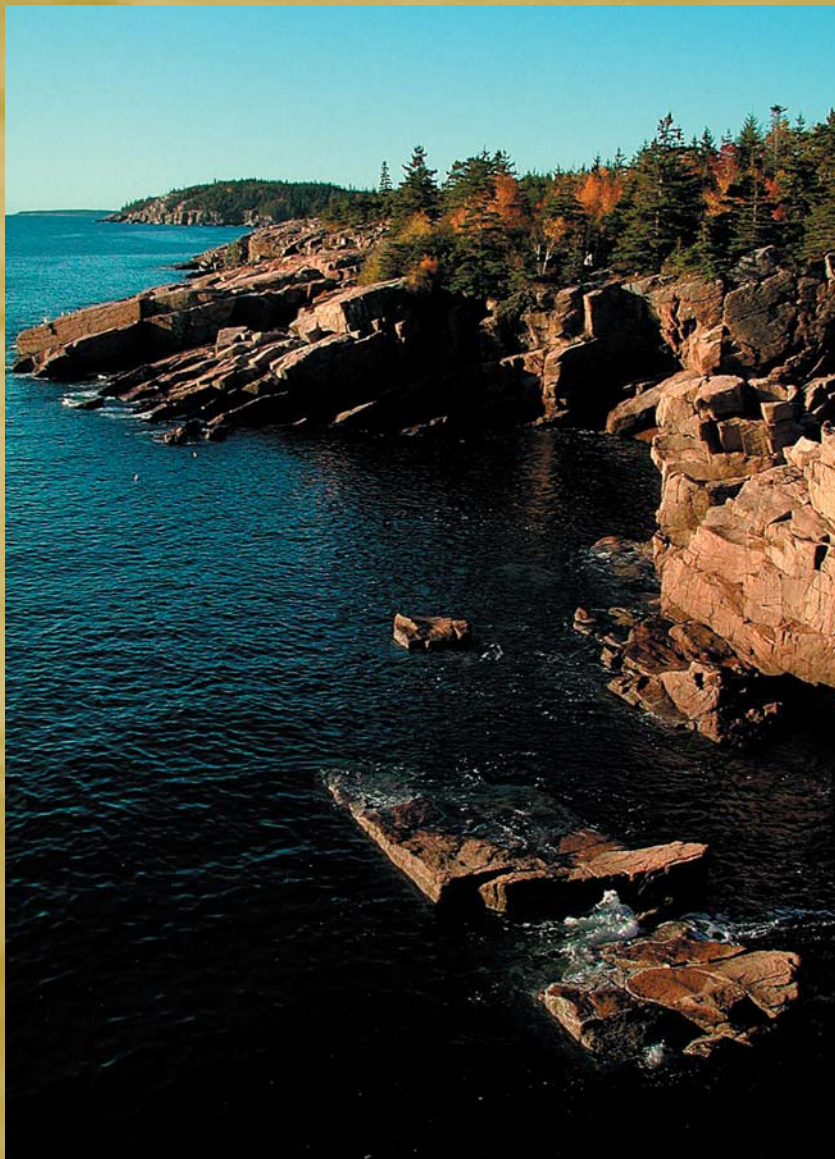
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Prepared for:

The State of Maine



FERMATA, Inc.
Executive Summary
Strategic Plan for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative
September 2005

Background

The nature-based tourism discussion in the state of Maine was prompted by issues raised at the November 2003 Blaine House Conference on Maine's Natural Resource-based Industries. In September 2004, the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) retained FERMATA, Inc., a nationally-known experiential tourism development consulting firm, to assess Maine's opportunities in nature-based tourism; one of the fastest growing niches in the travel industry. Governor John Baldacci has provided leadership for the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative throughout the entire project.

FERMATA, Inc. worked with state agency representatives, members of various state level organizations with interests in tourism and natural resources, and stakeholders in three rural pilot project areas: the Western Mountains, the Highlands, and Downeast. In addition to DECD and the Maine Office of Tourism, several other state agencies are supporting this project including DOT, Department of Agriculture, Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, and DOC - making this a key administration initiative. Project guidance is provided by the Natural Resources Committee (NRC) of the Maine Tourism Commission, Donna Fichtner Chair. Regional project support is by Roger Merchant (Highlands), Bruce Hazard (Western Mountains), and Judy East (Downeast).

Project Goals

1. Demonstrate how nature-based tourism development can be planned and implemented across the entire state.
2. Establish the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative as one of the administration's key strategies for rural economic development through job creation and tax revenue generation.
3. Provide a framework to support and compliment local and regional experiential tourism development efforts.
4. Furnish Maine visitors with accurate and comprehensive information on opportunities to experience the state's unique natural, historical, and cultural resources.

Vision

Experiential tourism enables rural communities to take advantage of their region's heritage, culture, and natural resources in new ways while also supporting traditional resource-based activities. It also enhances and diversifies traditional natural resource-based industries. Given the array of marketable travel and recreational experiences available throughout the Maine Woods, efforts to support experiential tourism service providers should result in net new dollars coming in to support rural, local economies. Coordination and implementation of the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative actions is expected to be led largely by local coalitions of tourism promotion agencies and other stakeholders with support and local capacity development assistance from appropriate state agencies and others as needed.

Guiding Principles for Experiential Tourism Development in Maine

(August 2005 NRC Draft)

"These Principles have been identified as those key considerations that should guide discussion at the state, regional, and local level concerning the opportunities and challenges that come with experiential tourism development. In developing these Principles, the NRC hopes to enhance the thoroughness of the deliberations that invariably accompany development discussions by identifying in advance the considerations that should be factored equally into the policy-making processes at all levels.

State Support of Experiential Tourism Businesses

Community Commitment to Planning

Statewide Tourism Planning and Development

The Role of the Office of Tourism - Marketing

The Role of the Office of Tourism - Ecotourism Quality Labeling

The Role of the Office of Tourism - Product Development

Cross-sector cooperation (networking) and coordinated strategic planning

Public/Private Financial support

Public/Private Access Opportunities and Partnerships:

Developing an Understanding of Carrying Capacity

Education: Business Outreach and Frontline Worker Training

Overall strategy for the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative

It is important to recognize that the three initial pilot regions were a way of getting started looking at opportunities for nature-based tourism in the state of Maine. However, implementation efforts need to focus on state-wide initiatives to the extent possible (for example, training on hospitality for Maine nature tourism visitors and on *The Maine Woods Experience* messages can be offered to all appropriate businesses, not just those located in one of the three pilot regions). Where implementation does take place in one or more of the three pilot regions, then implementation projects need to be designed so that they can serve as models for eventual implementation in other regions (for example, the format and style for the guidebook for the Moosehead - Katahdin area itinerary will be utilized for subsequent guides in the other pilot regions and in the other regions of the state).

FERMATA's Approach

FERMATA conducted a detailed inventory and assessment of the natural resource-based tourism offerings in the three regions. FERMATA also assessed cultural and historical offerings that are connected to natural resources that enrich visitor experiences by framing the experience within the natural world. FERMATA analyzed "gaps" in tourism product offerings in the three regions and assessed the feasibility of creating additional products that reflect the regional identity and community appropriateness. FERMATA inventoried lodging, dining, outfitting, and guiding services in the three regions

Findings

- The nature resources that have been identified are substantial enough to serve as a foundation for a successful strategy. Culture and history should be used for enrichment to the natural resource based experiences. The nature-based and related cultural and historic offerings in the pilot regions do not function as any sort of thematic group and are largely just a disconnected collection of sites.

- The opportunity for developing highway-based thematic itineraries exists and is well supported by the state's transportation agency and others through the current identification of several state and national scenic byways and other route identifiers (Moosehead Trail, Katahdin Trail, etc.). Multi-modal corridors such as rail trails and water-based trails can also be connected. A good number of sites, offering a fair variety of visitor experience levels, exist along these routes. A number of different partners are interested in cooperating in these efforts and are willing to work toward connecting these sites and itineraries through unifying marketing and educational materials and interpretative signage.
- There are a number of visitor centers (existing and planned across the region). Depending upon location and local leadership direction, these centers could function as gateways and portals to the regions' visitor experiences. Presently there is no network between the centers, but if such a framework were established, it would enable the centers to function as a seamless system for visitor information and education delivery. Good local support exists in the two western regions for this concept and planning is underway; and there is an excellent, but under-utilized resource, being developed at the new Down East Heritage Center. Managers of existing and planned nature centers, cultural heritage centers, and welcome centers are interested and willing to work toward the design of a uniform system for visitor service delivery within each region and across the Maine Woods as a whole. This may take the form of near real time information sharing between the various facilities.
- Appropriate lodging opportunities appear to be in ample supply through most of the three pilot areas. Not all lodging will meet the quality requirements of many experiential tourists. There is also a need for strengthening marketing and promotion efforts of members of the Maine Sporting Camps Association and others to reach into the experiential tourism market.
- Unique in the eastern US is the cache of the Maine Guides. The marketing potential of this highly recognizable brand is tremendous and Guides help to meet the very real need for visitors to the Maine Woods for customized guided trips led by knowledge local experts. Not only do guides serve to enhance visitor experiences, but they also enable resource managers and land owners to control access and convey important conservation stewardship messages through the Guides. Local economies are strengthened through employment opportunities related to guiding, however guides need technical assistance and training on messaging, marketing and outreach, and small business management.
- There is considerable recreation use taking place on private industrial timber lands. Implementation of Maine Nature Tourism Initiative pilot project recommendations could increase demands for recreation access to these lands by additional visitors by raising their awareness of the many opportunities. At this point, it appears that these landowners are generally willing to develop some infrastructure to support these increased demands and to manage use so that forestry practices can continue simultaneously. A system for fair compensation to the landowners needs to be developed along with a way of reaching visitors with messages regarding sustainable forest management's benefits.
- Authentic locally manufactured products and foods exist but are often poorly branded and marketed; and in many parts of the study regions are hard to find. This could be addressed through renewed efforts of existing producer organizations and relevant state agencies that currently exist and are interested in increasing promotions.

Recommended Priorities for Action

The following are FERMATA's recommendations for how the nature, history, and culture-based products and related interpretive programming can be developed and utilized to move key markets to the pilot regions and their assets; and to communicate messages that project partners seek to advance. In addition to product development, there is also a need for human resource development. FERMATA recommends technical assistance for site managers, service providers, and others on key interpretive messages and how to serve the needs of nature tourists; and also new state level staffing and task force creation to support the implementation of the initiative.

"Basically, what we need to do is develop and follow wise policies that protect and enhance the natural qualities that have always drawn people to this state. We should work at continuing to be as most visitors basically see us: a safe, family-friendly destination with great outdoor activities (plus a lot of other delights that may or may not show up in guidebooks or surveys). Sure, we want to woo more tourists, but we need to be smart about the kind of visitors we set out deliberately to attract. We want to be loved for what we are, but we must also continue to be what we are loved for" - Jim Brunelle, commentary *Portland Press Herald*

ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATION

Action 1: Establish a Governor's Task Force for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative.

The purpose of the Governor's Task Force for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative would be to:

- help promote the growth of nature tourism and associated enterprises in the state of Maine;
- guide implementation and assure the coordinated and accelerated implementation of the priority recommendations for developing nature tourism in the state of Maine in general and in the three pilot regions;
- encourage development of additional private sector services, products, and lodging;
- guide efforts to cross market to traditional user and naturalist markets so that both will have ample opportunity to utilize resources for their preferred activities.

The Governor would name Task Force members and would include cabinet level representatives of the participating state agencies, members of the nature-based tourism industry including members of the Maine Tourism Commission's Natural Resources Committee and a representative of U Maine's Center for Tourism Research and Outreach (CentRO), and two-three representatives from each of the three pilot regions. Consideration should be given to appointing at least one member of the Traveler Information Advisory Committee (TIAC) to this Task Force. This is a legislatively created committee and they have legislative jurisdiction over traveler related services of many types.(23 MRSA § 1901-1925).

Administrative support to the Governor's Task Force would be furnished by DECD and the Office of Tourism using current staff, a new dedicated staff person with a focus on the MNTI (see following action), and contracted services.

Timeframe: Task Force members to be named and first meeting schedule in October 2005. It is expected that the Task Force would have monthly meetings and use an email listserv for information sharing between meetings.

Action 2: Create two new dedicated staff positions in DECD Office of Tourism to Support regional tourism development efforts with a focus on the MNTI.

One of these two people would focus on the Downeast pilot region. The other person would assist the other two pilot regions and work with current DECD and Office of Tourism staff and their contractors to support the new Governor's Task Force. Presently the Maine Natural Resource-based Industries initiative has a dedicated staff person in the State Planning Office; and that staff presence is one of the largest factors in the success of that initiative.

In addition to supporting the pilot regions' locally-led implementation efforts with technical assistance, it is recommended that these staff people would also be responsible for working in partnership with the regions on fund development efforts to support the long-term implementation of the MNTI on the ground.

It is expected that the new staff person in the Downeast region would help to develop capacity and leadership in local organizations across Washington and Hancock Counties; and build

cooperation among numerous groups now working independently. The FERMATA study area was limited to the Washington County portion of the Downeast region. However, it is FERMATA's recommendation that this region be expanded to include both Washington County and Hancock County, allowing tourism assets such as Acadia National Park in Hancock County to help drive traffic to the rest of the region; and also to improve collaborative opportunities for regional tourism development efforts. The new staff person would assist the Downeast Acadia Regional Tourism organization in their efforts to represent and coordinate all Downeast communities' and service providers' tourism activities. This action is consistent with Goal 4 of the Down East Sustainable Tourism Initiative Year 2010 (DESTINY 2010) of the Down East RC&D Council (Nov. 2004).

Ideally, each of the three regions would have at least an addition ½ time staff person based in the region (perhaps at regional economic development agency offices) to supplement the work of volunteers in the regions who are currently leading and accomplishing implementation actions. It is recommended that one of the first topics undertaken by the new Governor's Task Force is to recommend the most effective way of creating and funding these regional positions; and also to establish how these positions would work in concert with the state-level positions and the local implementation groups.

Timeframe: Staff people would be recruited and hired by December 31, 2005. Task Force would develop recommendations for establishing regional support positions by April 2006.

ADDITIONAL INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

Action 3: Complete resource inventory and assessments in the rest of the state

There is a need to complete assessments and documentation of natural, and related historical and cultural, resources in the other regions of the state that were not included in the initial pilot areas work. It is expected that the best method for completing this work will be identified by the Task Force. Work could involve contracting with a planning and assessment firm to complete the assessment phase or to provide assessment training to volunteer assessors or assessors from state agencies or non-profit organizations' current staff.

MaineDOT has a GIS database of historic and cultural resources associated with transportation projects that have been undertaken. MHPC has numerous files that also inventory and assess additional resources currently not in the DOT database.

Timeframe: Hold for action until implementation of high priority action items is underway in the pilot regions.

ITINERARIES

Action 4: Finalize the itinerary and publish an itinerary guide for the Maine Highlands Region

The itinerary would connect recommended priority sites in the Katahdin Moosehead area as identified in the FERMATA assessment report. See map. Portions of the current (or proposed extended) DOT-designated Moosehead Trail and Katahdin Trail highway corridors make up the highway routes that would link the priority sites of this itinerary.

Members of the Piscataquis Tourism Task Force (PTTF) and others should continue their work of obtaining written agreements that are signed by all site managers or landowners demonstrating their permission for the inclusion of their site in the itinerary and guidebook. It is important that private landowners understand the potential impacts and benefits of designating their site as a destination in the itinerary. PTTF and others need to confirm driving directions and site descriptions as presented by FERMATA assessors. In addition, DOC representatives and others should be involved in assuring that those attractions and public or conserved lands identified in the report *Procedures for Evaluating the Potential Regional Economic Impacts of Conservation Lands in the 100-Mile Wilderness Region* (Anderson, Boyle, Bell, and Holden; Aug. 2005) are included in the itinerary as appropriate.

Some of the sites recommended for inclusion in the itinerary could benefit from infrastructure improvement and interpretation. See following Actions. In some cases, sites with excellent resources were not included in the itinerary recommendations due to the extent of infrastructure improvement necessary to either support visitation or to protect resources. An on-going task of the PTTF, the Millinocket Area Growth and Investment Council (MAGIC), the Piscataquis County EDC, and others in the region will be to work with landowners, state agency partners, and others to coordinate this development and eventual inclusion of additional sites in the itinerary.

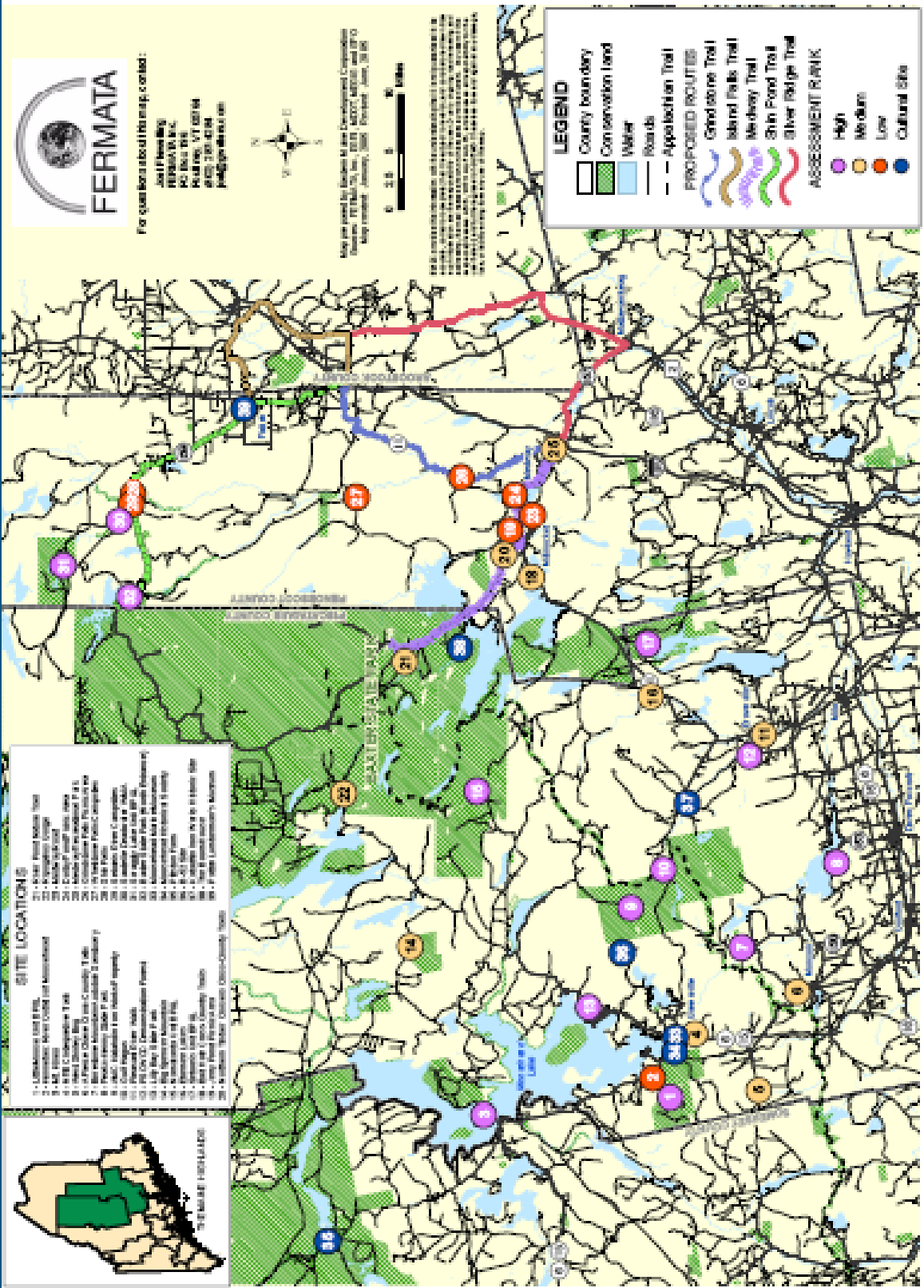
The PTTF, the Culture Heritage and Eco-tourism (CHet) Committee of the PCEDC, the AMC, the Maine Highlands Corp., and others are presently assembling a map, site descriptions, and user guidelines for use in this guide. The Office of Tourism and the state's ad agency should work with these partners to provide design assistance and matching funding for printing this publication.

Southern Piscataquis County Regional Recreation Map and Guide Project Goals and Objectives

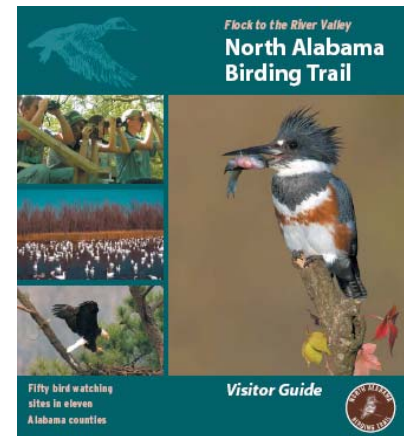
CHet, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and other partners in the Southern Piscataquis region will work cooperatively to develop and produce a regional recreation and stewardship Map and Guide that will:

- strengthen the appeal of the local region as a recreational destination with a rich cultural and natural history,
- engage residents and visitors alike in active and healthy lifestyles within natural settings, and
- reach out to recreational users to increase their appreciation of the resources, promote safety and ethical behavior, and instill a stewardship ethic.

FERMATA Highlands Assessment



The style of the guide for this itinerary is expected to become the template for other itinerary guidebooks to be developed in the other pilot regions in the state as part of implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative. FERMATA recommends that a booklet style rather than a large format map would be the most effective type of publication. See sample of the North Alabama Birding Trail visitors guide.



Distribution of the publication will be both in-region at participating sites and visitor centers; and upon request at all state visitor centers and through the Office of Tourism website and trade show presence.

Timeframe: Site managers' or landowners' permissions by fall 2005. Guide design and publication May 2006.

Action 5: Complete feasibility studies or Corridor Management Plans for possible new scenic byways in the Moosehead Katahdin area

DOT was contacted by PCEDC regarding the possibility of preparing a feasibility study or corridor management plan for a proposed new scenic byway between Greenville, Rockwood, and Jackman (now currently part of the Moosehead Trail DOT-designated highway corridor).

In addition DOT, proposes to study the feasibility of the creation of a scenic byway between Medway and Sherman (along what DOT now calls the Medway Trail).

Local government officials and economic development leaders in Brownville and Dover-Foxcroft recognize the current value of the DOT-designated highway corridor, The Katahdin Trail, in their region; and are also interested in seeing a DOT-led study of scenic byway potential along at least portions of that Trail corridor (in particular that area that would showcase the heritage resources of the Katahdin Iron Works site).

FERMATA recommends that DOT proceed with these studies and preparation of plans as appropriate in partnership with regional planning organizations and local community involvement. Scenic Byway designation would help to increase visitor awareness of the region's resources, reinforce the value of the itineraries as routes that connect key resources, and help to generate additional revenues for infrastructure enhancements and interpretation.

Timeframe: Study areas defined, local advisory committees named, consultants or others who would complete the studies/plans selected, and studies/plans begun – June 2006. Recommendations finalized and studies/plans completed – June 2007.

Action 6: Finalize the itinerary and publish an itinerary guide for the Western Maine Mountains region

The Maine Mountains Heritage Network and scenic byways organizations in the Western Maine Mountains region have completed a significant amount of preliminary work for itinerary development in the region. In addition, FERMATA's assessment report recommended priority sites for inclusion in this itinerary. See map.

FERMATA Western Mountains Region Assessment



Members of the Network and others should continue their work of obtaining written agreements that are signed by all site managers or landowners demonstrating their permission for the inclusion of their site in the itinerary and guidebook. It is important that private landowners understand the potential impacts and benefits of designating their site as a destination in the itinerary.

Some of the sites recommended for inclusion in the itinerary could benefit from infrastructure improvement and interpretation. See following Actions. In some cases, sites with excellent resources were not included in the itinerary recommendations due to the extent of infrastructure improvement necessary to either support visitation or to protect resources. An on-going task of the Network, the byways organizations, and others in the region will be to work with landowners, state agency partners, and others to coordinate this development and eventual inclusion of additional sites in the itinerary.

"In June, 2005, the Maine Mountain Heritage Network and the National Trust for Historic Preservation sponsored a *Share Your Heritage Workshop* that brought together teams from nine local areas across the mountain region for the purpose of creating new heritage tourism "products," in this case themed itineraries. Teams from Norway/South Paris, Bethel, Rangeley, Farmington, Skowhegan, Jackman, Greenville, Dover Foxcroft, and Millinocket identified local sites and activities associated with themes ranging from "creativity and invention" to "the history of paper making" to "the healing effects of the mountain landscape." Teams then used these thematically linked sites and activities to design three day visitor experiences. Since the workshop, the Share Your Heritage itineraries have been used in a variety of ways, from designing an event to setting up a fam tour for travel writers to building a local network linking farmers and visitor service providers. Over the coming months, local teams will further develop their itineraries, building working relationships among partners, testing designed experiences, and putting simple mechanisms in place to track results. MMHN is now applying to the Maine Office of Tourism for funding to support local promotion of the Share Your Heritage itineraries in the spring of 2006." From Bruce Hazard, Maine Mountain Heritage Network

Fishing is a popular activity in this region and in streams and rivers adjoining the region. Presently single resource guides to fishing opportunities exist. Content from these publications should be included as sidebar information in the itinerary guidebook for this region.

The guidebook for the itinerary in this region should follow the style developed for the Moosehead Katahdin area described above. Local groups in the western Maine mountains should coordinate design with the Office of Tourism and take advantage of the availability of matching funds through the Office of Tourism.

Timeframe: Site managers' or landowners' permissions by winter 2005. Guide design and publication fall 2006.

Action 7: Create the Downeast Wildlife and Heritage Trail.

A new thematic itinerary should be developed in the Downeast area that utilizes the many resources available on public lands and private sites (with landowners' permissions). See FERMATA resource assessments and map.

Note: FERMATA's assessments were limited to Washington County. However, FERMATA recommends that this itinerary be extended through local input and utilizing local inventories to include the entire Downeast Acadia Regional Tourism region (Washington and Hancock Counties).

Called Maine's Big Sur by National Geographic's *Guide to Scenic Highways and Byways* (second edition), US 1 from Ellsworth to Calais is "truly a road less traveled. Most tourists never get past Bar Harbor and miss the crashing surf at Acadia National Park's Schoodic Point, the tiny fishing villages that dot the coast, and the small cities a stone's throw from the Canadian border."

Partners such as those who came together to develop the Down East Sustainable Tourism Initiative Year 2010 (DESTINY 2010) under the leadership of the Down East RC&D Council and state and federal agency representatives should be involved in this site identification process. Through the on-going involvement at the local level of partners such as the St. Croix International Waterway Commission, City of Calais, and DOC, additional sites can be added to the itinerary similar to and including the newly acquired Devil's Head Conservation Area, the state's highest coastal headland of the St. Croix International Waterway.

This new Downeast Wildlife and Heritage Trail will serve to link other existing and planned thematic itineraries and trail systems (including the local sections of the new statewide birding trail, the existing state scenic byway, the proposed DOT Calais Branch Rail Trail, those trails described in the Cobscook Trails booklet published by the Quoddy Regional Land Trust, and the planned DOC Ice Age Trail) to unify and connect visitors' experiences.

The guidebook will function to clearly show linkages among the numerous itineraries that exist in the Downeast Region presently; and thereby address concerns of visitor confusion related to the presence of multiple routes. In addition, the trail and guidebook will provide a direct connection with the current and recommended future exhibits and storylines at the Downeast Heritage Center (DHC). See Action below describing recommendations for other interpretative programming support at DHC.

The guidebook will consistently describe (using the same style of writing, level of detail for site description and driving directions, use of imagery, etc.) the sites that make up the new itinerary/trail. The guidebook for the itinerary in this region should follow the style developed for the Moosehead Katahdin area described above. Local groups should coordinate design with the Office of Tourism.

FERMATA DownEast Region Assessment



For questions about this map, contact:
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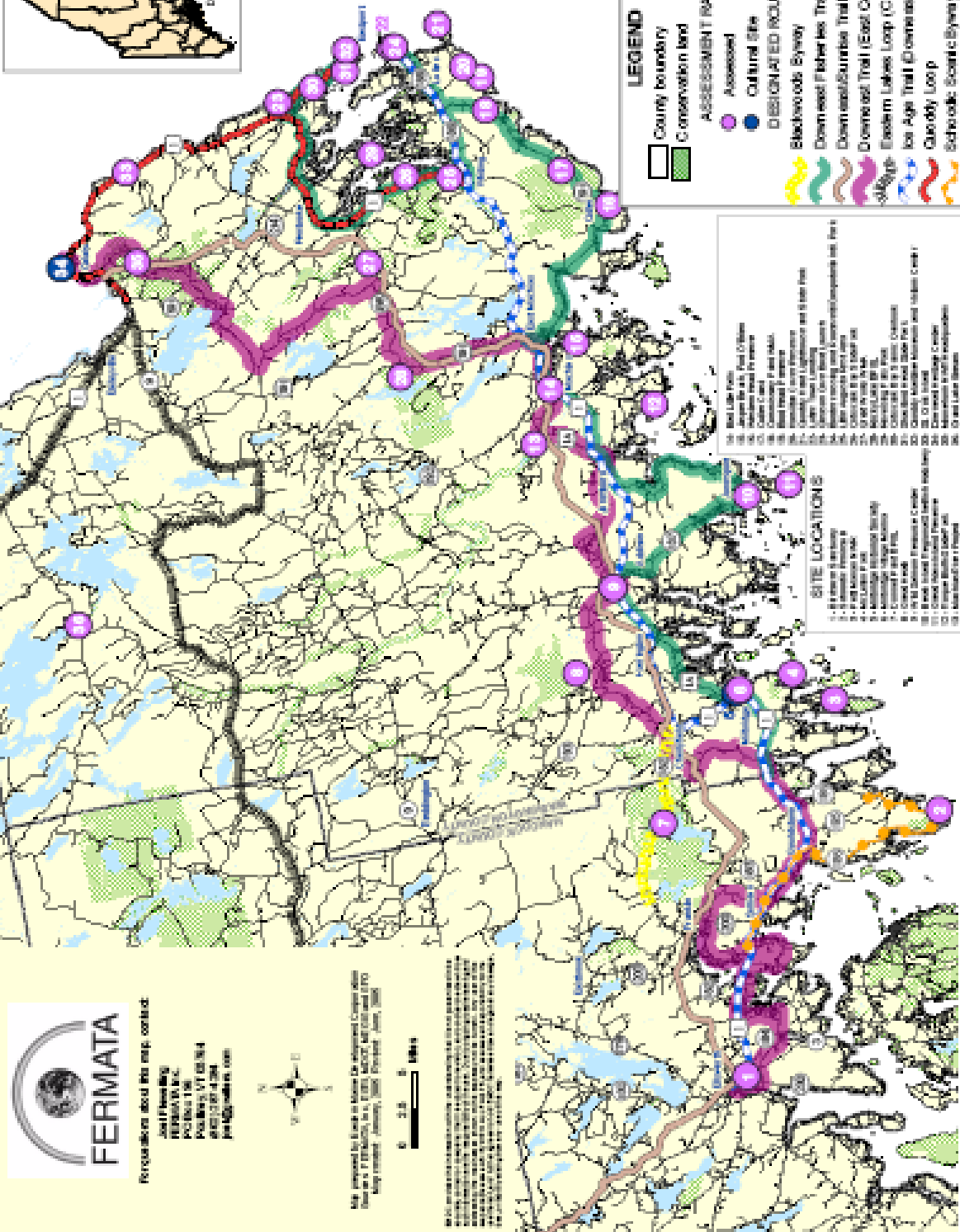
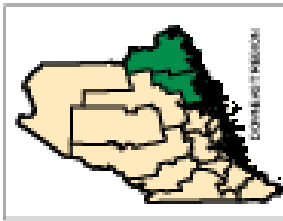


Map prepared for FERMATA, Inc. in Maine Developmental Capital plan
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 Map created January, 2005. Printed June, 2005.

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Map of DownEast Region Assessment, showing the location of the FERMATA project area in the DownEast region of Maine. The map includes the following information:

- County boundaries
- Conservation land
- Roads
- Water
- Assessment Rank
- Assessed
- Cultural Site
- Designated Routes
- Blackwoods Byway
- Downeast Fisheries Trail (Proposed)
- Downeast Sunrise Trail (Proposed)
- Downeast Trail (East Coast Greenway)
- Eastern Lakes Loop (Conceptual)
- Ice Age Trail (Conceptual)
- Quebec Loop
- Schoodic Byway



LEGEND

County boundary
 Conservation land
 Roads
 Water

ASSESSMENT RANK

Assessed

Cultural Site

DESIGNATED ROUTES

Blackwoods Byway

Downeast Fisheries Trail (Proposed)

Downeast Sunrise Trail (Proposed)

Downeast Trail (East Coast Greenway)

Eastern Lakes Loop (Conceptual)

Ice Age Trail (Conceptual)

Quebec Loop

Schoodic Byway

SITE LOCATIONS

1. FERMATA Project Area
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During several public meetings in the Downeast region, FERMATA planners learned that many lodging facilities and guides questioned the need for another thematic itinerary and the utility of a guidebook. Their sense is that the best way for visitors to explore the region is based at a camp and under the guidance of a local guide or at the direction of the camp owner. FERMATA concurs that first person interpretation is always a good approach to assuring quality visitor experiences. However, not all visitors are interested in guided trips or staying in camps. The recommended guidebook is not intended to hurt existing entrepreneurial businesses; and it is expected that as a result of the book, new visitors will discover the area and may at some time return and take advantage of professional guiding services or stay in a camp.

Timeframe: Identify local partners to guide project and assist with matching funds – ASAP. Site managers’ or landowners’ permissions by winter 2005. Guide design and publication fall 2006.

Action 8: Develop supplementary itinerary interpretation and guides.

This recommendation involves a number of actions that will supplement the initial guidebook production for the three pilot regions. Some of these actions include:

- Placing all of the above pilot region itinerary guidebooks and interpretative signs (described in following Actions) in a searchable on-line database with clickable image map on the Maine Tourism website. This will allow for updates by site managers or others.
- Development and production of audio cassettes or CDs for each route by the Office of Tourism or others for use by visitors once in the regions.
- As a first priority, FERMATA recommends utilizing much of the work of the existing Maine Birding Trail initiative as the initial subject-specific guide.

In addition to serving as a bird finding tool, the Maine Birding Trail publication would function to educate visitors as to responsible bird watching ethics and the importance of respecting the rights of private landowners. Not all content in the current on-line trail guide is “asserted to be accurate, official, or sanctioned by the individual landowners or stewardship authorities”. As such, the Task Force and others will need to gather landowner and site manager permissions and assess sites (not previously assessed for the three pilot regions’ general itineraries) for suitability for supporting visitation prior to publishing the Birding Trail guide.

The Office of Tourism should support the efforts of statewide non-profit groups and others to design and publish hardcopy and on-line versions of plant identification guides, bird checklists, and other materials to be identified by Task Force and site managers. DOC’s Maine Natural Areas Program, Maine Geological Survey and Bureau of Parks and Lands have important information to contribute to this effort.

An example of a current effort that the Office of Tourism or others could help to support is a new initiative of the Kennebec-Chaudière Heritage Corridor group in the western Maine mountains region to develop a CD for use by whitewater guides with their clients during the off-river portion of their experience. The content of this CD could used as-is or with few modifications by general visitors to the Corridor.

Timeframe: Birding Trail guide and Kennebec-Chaudière Heritage CD – summer 2006. Other publications as partner interest and funding availability permit.

HIGHWAY SIGNAGE TO SUPPORT ITINERARIES

Action 9: Highway directional signs

DOT working with the other Governor's Task Force members should design, fabricate, and install uniform highway directional signs for the various pilot region itineraries. The Office of Tourism should play an advising role on design elements to assure consistency with publications as should the DOT's committee on tourism and signage. Other local groups such as Moosehead Trail Corridor Committee, PTTF, and scenic byway committees also need to be consulted. It is important the new signage system be developed in such a way that it complements existing signage but at the same time provides visually consistent and recognizable symbols to guide visitors through the regions from site to site.

Local organizations and site managers need to be involved in finalizing the sign plans; and in helping to furnish matching funds or in-kind support for installation and sign maintenance. Nearly all organization representatives encountered by FERMATA planners during community meetings identified this as the type of project in which they would be willing and able to contribute resources and leadership.

For example, the Piscataquis Soil and Water Conservation District has earmarked funds to support efforts for coordinated signage for natural resource tourism in Piscataquis County. In this County as well, there is interest on the part of county officials in placing welcome signs at the major County borders. Official are also talking about simple informational kiosks and have a couple of new roads that the County may be getting assistance to re-gravel and re-open to facilitate public traffic to important resource-based tourism attractors such as Moxie Falls.

The highway directional signage recently designed and installed in the western part of the state for the Androscoggin Canoe Trail is a good example of the type of signage recommended for the three pilot regions' itinerary waypoints.

Sign design needs to be consistent with efforts underway for various state and national scenic byway signage. All other sign designs should be developed to be consistent with existing special route designation signage previously developed and installed by DOT.



DOT has worked with representatives from the various tourism regions to outline designs and regional symbols. The Downeast/Acadia system was the prototype. DOT could secure funding to address these types of signage. A sign policy initiated by DOT in collaboration with DECD/OT and Maine Tourism Association and TIAC is about 90% complete. Maine Turnpike Authority is not explicitly mentioned but may be affected. The Task Force should assist with completing this policy. The policy specifically was intended to create a branding image for sign design; and to limit the signage to publicly owned and managed destinations as an issue of fiscal limitations.

The Task Force needs to address several questions - Who pays for replacements due to aging or damage? What are the long term maintenance implications of this recommendation?

Timeframe: Signs designed and installed by summer 2007

Action 10: Design, fabricate, and install uniform wayfinding signs

At least some of the sites along the pilot regions' itineraries do not presently have any site identification (wayfinding) signage. DOT and site managers need to work together to design and install signs to be consistent with imagery developed for highway directional signs. Wayfinding signage is important to reassure visitors following an itinerary that they have arrived at sites shown in their guidebooks and maps. MaineDOT currently has a project which funds this type of signage for the Schoodic Peninsula Scenic Byway.

Timeframe: Signs designed and installed by summer 2007

INTERPRETATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Action 11: Write, design, fabricate, and install uniform interpretative signs for sites along itineraries that do not presently have any interpretative signage. Site specific stories should tie to overall thematic framework as recommended by FERMATA for Maine Nature Tourism initiative. Mounting to be on low profile pedestals at most sites and on three-sided kiosks to be fabricated and installed at gateway sites such as visitor centers.

The Office of Tourism and DOT are logical partners for obtaining funding and providing overall project direction including fabrication and installation assistance. DOC and IF&W staff have excellent skills in planning, writing, and design for interpretative signs; and should be involved in all aspects of planning and design. Members in the Western Maine Mountains Heritage Network have invested considerable time and effort in discussing interpretative themes and deployment actions. FERMATA's recommended thematic framework (see below) draws upon this good work. Representatives from the Network interpretative planning effort should also be involved in the overall MNTI interpretative sign planning and design.

Bordering on Canada and the Atlantic Ocean, dotted with communities that are immediately adjacent to immense tracts of forests or the rugged seacoast, subject to extreme variations in weather and unrelenting winters, in more ways than one Maine and its residents live on the edge. These conditions make for sturdy character, inventive practices and a rich heritage. At the same time, these very same conditions have long made Maine attractive and exciting to a wide array of visitors. The challenge of engaging life without the easy comforts and amenities of modern civilization has for many years proven to be a magnet for people in search of adventure and immediate experience. Ecologically, "an edge" has additional meanings. It is a place pulsating with life. Where meadow and woods meet, where land touches water, where one climatic zone intersects with another—all of which can be found in Maine--wildlife is diverse, abundant and active. Similarly, in cultural life there is parallel to this natural phenomenon. Where two cultures intersect—as in Maine where French-Canadian and Anglo-American cultures overlap—unexpected and unusual phenomena appear. Today, as in past generations, the diverse ways in which life on the edge can be explored and experienced in Maine offers a gamut of meanings and attractions. Living on the Edge is an abiding characteristic of the state in light of its rich nature, history and culture. *FERMATA, Interpretative Plan for the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative*

Design and materials for the signs need to be consistent with signage already in-place and designed by DOC; or planned and designed by scenic byways organizations in the Western Maine Mountains Region. See proposed sample prepared by FERMATA designers to illustrate use of thematic framework and to tie with design elements utilized in the Kennebec-Chaudière Heritage Corridor interpretative signage.



The interpretative team may find it useful to develop a style guide for interpretation for distribution and use by all interpretative plan implementation partners (public and private). See example developed for Lake Champlain in VT, NY, and Quebec (http://www.lcbp.org/wayside/Manual/Lo_Res_Manual.pdf)

The Task Force or interpretative planning team (made up of agency representatives and others) needs to plan for and develop interpretation for specific sites along the itineraries such as state parks and for trails that will be incorporated into itineraries such as Ice Age Trail or Calais Branch Rail Trail. This site specific interpretation needs to match the style developed for waypoints; and utilize themes and stories that are consistent with the thematic framework for the entire project.

Timeframe: planning for signage for one itinerary completed by October 2006 and signage designed and installed by June 2007; other planning completed and signs installed by June 2008.

Action 12: Support efforts to create a network of interpreted visitor centers

Presently the numerous centers in the region and elsewhere serving the region (along the Interstate and other major highways) are not linked thematically. These facilities should function as a seamless system for visitor information and education delivery. It may be necessary to develop a state-funded incentives program for getting centers to cooperate. The need for this action should be explored further by the Task Force and center managers or others.

Good local support exists in the two western regions for this concept and planning is underway. The Heritage Network is doing good work in promoting cooperation and communication among center projects across the mountain area. That group is discussing financing approaches, new information/communication technologies, and a proposed traveling exhibit designed to put forward regional themes and to demonstrate cooperation among the centers.

There is an excellent, but under-utilized resource and somewhat disjointed interpretative effort, at the new Downeast Heritage Center (DEHC). The DEHC could benefit from focused effort to develop effective interpretative programming and program support. It is expected that this center would function as the portal site for the new Downeast Wildlife and Heritage Trail itinerary.

Therefore, there is a need to plan for this use and to redesign exhibits as appropriate to reflect key subthemes and storylines conveyed by the sites along the trail. The DEHC should be used to add meaning to visitors' experiences and encourage them to explore the region.

Specific actions to be undertaken include:

- study need for incentives program to stimulate cooperative messaging;
- staff training on the overall *Maine Woods Experience* thematic framework messages and pilot region itineraries;
- creation and installation of consistent exhibitry to match site interpretation signage to encourage visitors to explore the Maine Woods via one or more of the itineraries;
- development and population of database system for near real time information sharing;
- detailed interpretative planning and redevelopment at the DEHC;
- consider the existing and proposed Maine Turnpike and Interstate system visitor information centers' roles.

The Office of Tourism should take the lead on these efforts with support from Task Force or agency interpretative staff. Others to involve include the Maine Tourism Association, the Western Maine Mountains Heritage Network, scenic byways' staff, and DEHC leadership and other visitor center managers/operators.

Timeframe: General: training on messaging begun in 2006 and completed by May 31, 2007; exhibit design plan by Dec. 31, 2006 and fabrication and installation complete by June 2008; database design by Dec. 2006 and fully operational by June 2007. DEHC: Plan for exhibit modifications and additions – spring 2006; exhibit fabrication and installation – Dec. 2006

Action 13: Build one or more new multi-facet visitor and interpretative centers to serve as a gateway to *The Maine Woods Experience*.

A new center should be developed in partnership with local non-profits, members of the state's forest products industry, and state agencies. Presently there are many proposals for developing new interpretative centers in all of the pilot regions including several that would be intended to function as the gateway to the entire Maine Woods Experience. Because no one center currently functions in this manner, it would be desirable from the visitor experience standpoint to have one center with this dedicated focus.

There is a need to establish a method by which rational decisions about where this investment should best be placed. The Task Force (and in particular DECD and DOT) needs to take the lead on creating on addressing the location decision question as well as consider what is best approach to linkage, what are minimum requirements for top quality visitor experience, how the center will be maintained and operated (most likely using a variety of local and state resources).

Of those centers under consideration, several include:

- Natural Resources Education Center (NREC) near Greenville where a private non-profit group is working with Piscataquis County EDC and the Town of Greenville. The mission of NREC is to "educate and inform people about the Moosehead region's natural resources of the past, present, and future. NREC is the primary source that people rely on to understand the culture, natural history, and uses of the North Woods." The NREC

steering committee is currently developing an operations plan and seeking construction funding for an environmental education center on land south of Greenville. It is recommended that if this facility were developed as the new gateway to the Maine Woods, it would need to serve a broader function than its current leadership envisions; and have more inclusive governance. Involve IF&W and DOC as possible building tenants; and to provide information to visitors on public lands facilities and recreational opportunities.

- The Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway is developing a plan to construct and operate an interpretative center in the Western Maine Mountains area. The exact location is still being discussed by the committee and others.
- Katahdin Discovery Center. “Working with the Maine Community Foundation, the Millinocket Area Growth and Investment Council (MAGIC) set up a community fund called the Katahdin Fund (KF). The KF partners envision a destination learning and visitor center within a few miles of I-95. The Katahdin Discovery Center would welcome the broadest cross-section of tourists, recreationists, school groups, and other with exhibition and screening areas highlighting the area’s rich natural and cultural history and attractions. Exhibits would serve to educate and inspire, as well as direct visitors to the many attractions that the greater Katahdin region offers. At the center of Maine’s North Woods and as the logical gateway to an area of stunning natural beauty, the center would provide information and assistance to those traveling in any direction.”
- Visitor gateway center near Ellsworth. It is expected that this interpretative center would function to move visitors Downeast; and to DEW&HT and DHC portal site. This would allow visitors the opportunity to find the authentic experiences they are seeking but may not find at Acadia NP. Consider relocating proposed DOT/NPS visitor center now proposed for Trenton to serve this function

Timeframe: Study best location and make site recommendation – spring 2006. Prepare concept plans for building design and function – June 2006. Construction – spring 2007

Action 14: Design and construct highway-based enhancements along itinerary routes

FERMATA’s assessment of itinerary sites made a number of recommendations for infrastructure development needs. This work includes road paving, road widening for biking, new pull-outs at observation areas, parking area development or expansion, observation area viewing platforms and trail construction, canoe and boating access sites development, and other activities.

DOT should take the lead in making these enhancements either as stand alone projects accomplished through enhancements funding or in the capital work plan or in conjunction with adjacent planned highway work. An example of how this could work is the Hurricane Deck project in the Highlands region. DOC and IF&W should provide input to DOT along with local community representatives.

Timeframe: June 2008

Action 15: Calais Branch Rail Trail

In July, Governor Baldacci announced that he charged DOT with putting together a management and maintenance plan for removing the tracks on the Calais Branch Railroad between Ellsworth and Ayers Junction (87 miles) and allowing construction of an interim multi-use trail. DOT has assembled a committee of stakeholders to work with the agency to develop the plan by the end of November. It will be presented to the Transportation Committee of the Maine Legislature in early 2006.

If well-supported, DOT will move ahead with track removal and trail construction as it secures funding. It will also prioritize sections for construction. Necessary developments will include trailhead parking, trail signage, interpretative signs, trail map publication, and other actions.

Timeframe: Rail trail management plan – Nov. 2005; Track removal and rail trail construction – as funds are available; Rail trail development – June 2007

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Action 16: Devise and begin implementation of an integrated, multi-agency/multi-partner integrated marketing communications campaign to raise awareness of *The Maine Woods Experience*.

The Task Force, led by the Office of Tourism should utilize:

- messages recommended by FERMATA's thematic framework.
- Acadia National Park, Appalachian Trail terminus (in cooperation with the NPS and the Appalachian Trail Conference on appropriate messaging), and Baxter State Park (in cooperation with the Park's managers) as unique attractors
- consider using H.D. Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, connections and messages.
- Native American product and experience opportunities including work currently underway by Penobscot Nation on experiential tourism product development and multi-tribe basket center in Old Town;

"Following the stress and strain which have prevailed, more than ever before does the call of the Maine woods find a responsive note among the men and women who have had a share in the hardships of war and reconstruction. The vacation program offered by the Maine woods, widely and properly known as 'the nations playground', presents a variety which means that practically throughout the year are attractions of unfailing appeal. The world over, the vast expanse of forest wonderland is famous for its fishing and hunting, for the many canoe trips through waterways of surpassing charm, for mountain climbing opportunities, and for the general delights of scenery and picturesque surroundings which make it the supreme vacation region" - *In the Maine Woods* (1921) by George Houghton (publisher Bangor and Aroostook Railroad).

Focus campaign in priority markets as identified in FERMATA's assessment. Work will include:

- Write, design, and print a new dedicated publication for The Maine Woods Experience highlighting itineraries, visitor centers, and key messages
- Distribute publication at visitor centers, trade shows, and in response to inquiries;
- targeted advertising using messages and images developed for publication
- update existing state of Maine and other tourism promotion groups' standard publications and websites regarding The Maine Woods Experience using key messages and images developed for publications
- create of one or more literary and art pieces,
- participate in adventure travel and outdoor recreation shows;

Timeframe: Phased over three years. Year one – complete new targeted publication and distribute

Action 17: Devise and begin implementation of public relations efforts.

The Task Force led by the Office of Tourism should focus on travel writers and editors with special interest media, but also look at mass media in recommended markets. Develop a photo library for use by media and regional marketing organizations. Messages and stories need to differentiate Maine and Maine's nature-based offerings from those of other northeastern states that are competing directly with the state of the same visitors.

Develop or strengthen partnerships with:

- well-known, Maine-based corporations that are emblematic of the authenticity associated with the Nature Tourism Initiative such as Toms of Maine and LL Bean.
- international cooperative ventures such as Gulf of Maine initiatives with Gulf of Maine Council, National Geographic, and others; and Discover New England organization;

Timeframe: This effort could begin immediately with the announcement of the opportunities and continue as new events, itineraries, attractors, etc. are developed and ready for visitors.

Action 18: Develop new events or support existing events

Events and festivals are an excellent way of introducing uninitiated experiential tourists to the natural and cultural heritage of a region. Local organizations, supported by the Task Force and others, should develop new events and expand promotional efforts for existing events. Excellent resources on “How to” plan events and festivals including nature tourism event planners and a booklet published by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, *Providing Positive Viewing Experiences*.

The Down East Spring Birding Festival, sponsored by the Cobscook Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, the Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge, and other organizations takes place over the four-day Memorial Day Weekend in late May. In 2004, 77 birders from 9 U.S. States and New Brunswick attended. They stayed in at least 16 local accommodations, found 151 birds, and contributed \$33,187 to the area in estimated direct economic impact. These figures increased the second year. In May 2005, 84 birders attended from 15 U.S. States and New Brunswick. They stayed in at least 18 accommodations, found 176 birds, and contributed \$39,816 to the area. Planning already has begun for the 2006 birding festival, which will take place May 26-29, 2006.

Timeframe: On-going, beginning in spring and fall 2006.

Action 19: Coordinate efforts and share information among all who are involved in Maine Nature Tourism initiative and Maine’s Natural Resource-based Industries effort.

Recommended tactics include:

- Convene marketing roundtable to coordinate efforts and share information
- Include state agencies such as IF&W and DOC, tribal governments, members of Sporting Camps Assoc. (and other lodging providers), members of the Maine Guide Assoc. (and other guides), other non-profits (such as AMC, ATC, and Audubon), North Maine Woods and other interested landowners, and the marketing entities for the three pilot regions (and other regional marketing organizations from the rest of the state interested in co-branding/promoting under *The Maine Woods Experience*).
- Develop and implement one or more multi-agency demonstration projects to reach into key experiential tourism markets through advertising, public relations, and a visible presence at appropriate outdoors and travel shows.

Priority 4: Maine's image - inseparably linked with its natural resources and its sense of place – is a potent tool for marketing. Maine's clean, green, worry-free appeal is universal. At the same time, small producers and businesses could benefit from a coordinated marketing effort. Increased collaboration may be able to boost Maine's presence in the marketplace. The Steering Committee's goal is to (1) explore market issues including branding, marketing, marketing structure, and cooperation between marketing organizations; and (2) develop approaches to strengthen links among marketing organizations, enhance distribution systems, and create a common and compelling message. Lead agency: DECD, with Dept. of Ag., DOC, IF&W, Marine Resources, and DOT. From *Governor's Steering Committee on Natural Resources-based Industries Top Five Priorities*.

There is a proposal to the agencies presently for creating an Outdoor Maine program (based on the Outdoor Alabama model) that could be modified to reflect FERMATA's recommendations on markets and messages; and could be developed as the first effort to address the needs identified through the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative and Maine Natural Resource-based Industries efforts.

Timeframe: Year one – convene roundtable and hold quarterly meetings; and complete planning for demonstration project. Year two – begin demonstration project

VISITOR SUPPORT SERVICES ASSISTANCE

Action 20: Provide technical assistance and incentives to owners of new or existing authentic Maine lodging properties.

The funds and assistance should be used to plan for new markets and obtain funding to make improvements or new developments as needed to support the new Maine nature tourist market. This recommendation is not for enhancement of traditional facilities for traditional markets, but rather a new action for a new, upscale market. DECD should take the lead in implementing this recommendation.

It is important to note FERMATA's finding that for all of its natural assets, the three pilot regions generally lack the type of lodging facilities that are necessary to take full advantage of the experiential tourism market. This is a high end market, with many of these tourists seeking lodging that includes upscale amenities. Additionally, they want that lodging experience to have the ring of authenticity to it: construction with local materials, serving local food, selling local products, etc.

In the western part of the state and between the Western Mountains and Highlands pilot regions, there appears to be suitable lodging that has been developed in connection with the ski resorts in those areas. There is a need to develop strategic marketing relationships between these facilities and nature-based attractors in the adjacent regions.

Timeframe: Year one – develop assistance program components and obtain funding. Year two – begin funding and offering technical assistance

Action 21: Support efforts of members of Maine Guide Association and others by designing and offering training and technical assistance.

Actions to implement this recommendation include:

- Development and promotion of customized guided trips in the Maine Woods in order to enhance visitor experiences;
- Expanded partnerships with Maine Sporting Camps and other lodging properties to develop packages;
- Need to develop and offer training to guides on itinerary development, messaging, and marketing to experiential tourists;
- Expand existing guide training and certification to support new directions.

DECD should take the lead in this effort with IF&W, Maine Outdoors, and others cooperating as appropriate. Maine Outdoors has developed a course that will combine many business basics with a specific knowledge developed over time of what does and does not work to make one of these special businesses successful.

DOC staff have been instrumental in working with many organizations to develop a *Leave No Trace* ethic and practice. DOC staff would be willing and able to provide training on this topic as well as some of the geologic, natural plant community, historic and other natural and cultural features as part of a systematic portrayal of Maine's assets.

“Registered Maine Guides are well respected throughout the country for their knowledge of Maine’s woods and waters. This high level of outdoor knowledge does not necessarily make someone qualified to run a small business, develop customers or handle bookkeeping. Most small business courses are aimed at business sectors other than outdoor recreation services.”
Don Kleiner, Maine Outdoors

Timeframe: Begin winter 2005 and continue to support

Action 22: Develop and provide hospitality training to front-line lodging staff and other service-related businesses’ personnel.

This training is needed to insure consistent communication of messages and values of the Maine Woods to visitors. Use some of the training developed for visitor center personnel (see Action 12). Also start by refining and expanding current training offerings of Maine Tourism and Hospitality Institute. Funding for the MTHI, a non-profit organization is needed for start-up and then it is expected to be a self supporting initiative through tuition of participants and grant funds.

Trainees could either come to a central location for classes by the MTHI or others, or classes could be brought into individual businesses and employees trained on-site. This latter model was piloted earlier in 2005 successfully at a property in the Maine Highlands region.

“Built to meet the needs of industry professionals in all positions, the [MTHI] training series integrates classroom instruction and hands-on training by industry experts to provide a comprehensive experience. Customer service skills, local and regional destination information, and line-level skills training are all included in the series” - MTHI brochure.

Other adult education providers such as University of Maine Extension and Penquis Higher Ed Center in Dover Foxcroft could also play an important role in providing hospitality training to front-line lodging staff and other service-related businesses’ personnel.

Timeframe: First classes offered by December 31, 2005 and continue to support

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Action 23: Branding and marketing natural resource-based products and services.

Authentic locally manufactured products and foods are often poorly branded (with regard to Maine as a place of origin) and marketed; and in many parts of the three pilot regions are hard to find.

This can be addressed through renewed efforts of existing producer organizations and relevant state agencies. DECD; Maine Natural Resource-based Industries Steering Committee members, and others should continue to address this issue. Consideration should be given to adding a craft producer to the Governor's Task Force for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative.

The authenticity and high quality of the products, and how that information is conveyed in the retail setting, are the keys to consumer enthusiasm and strong sales. Retail environments will be successful only if they offer products that meet consumer expectations for design, quality, and functionality. Authentic, utilitarian products that are exotic, functional and beautifully made with top-quality materials are the most marketable. V. Lederman, *The International Ecotourism Society Newsletter*, 2001

An example of successful branding and marketing of authentic local products is the work of the Maine Highlands Guild. The Guild "is a non-profit organization located in rural Maine whose mission is to educate the public about the culture, artistic traditions, and opportunities in The Maine Highlands. The Guild works with local artisans to help them sell and promote their locally made products." The Guild should expand services to the entire Maine Woods region or be used as a model of a successful marketing and promotion network that could be established in the other regions.

Marketing messages should be tied to the place-based and attitudes-based themes of the proposed interpretative framework.

Timeframe: On-going

ADDITIONAL STUDIES

Action 24: Maine Woods National Heritage Area Feasibility Study

The Task Force and others should evaluate the feasibility of positioning *The Maine Woods* as a heritage landscape (“Special places created by human interaction with the natural environment”). In November of 2004, the Maine Mountain Heritage Network put forward “a regional development plan that places experiential tourism development at the center of a suite of proposed heritage-based development strategies. The goal of the Network and its plan is to bring new revenues into the Maine’s mountain region (Oxford, Franklin, Somerset, and Piscataquis Counties) through creative use of the region’s heritage assets. Early in its planning process, the Network adopted a “heritage area” model as a platform for organizing its proposed marketing and development activities.”

In July, 2005, with pilot projects underway in each of four program areas (Knowledge Power, Woods and Waters, Village Works, and Mountain Made), the Network’s coordinating team decided to request an opinion from the National Park Service as to whether the region could qualify for national designation as a heritage area. Should the NPS preliminary assessment be positive, the Network would then determine whether it would be advisable to proceed with a full feasibility study, a prerequisite for national designation. National designation would bring significant new technical assistance and funding to the Maine mountain region from the federal level to support locally created and managed heritage development projects.

A nationally designated heritage area is different from a national park in several important ways. National designation of a heritage area does not in and of itself result in federal ownership of property or any increase in regulatory control by government at any level. A “national heritage area” is a place recognized by the United States Congress for its unique contribution to the American experience. In a national heritage area, natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. These patterns make national heritage areas representative of the national experience through the physical features that remain and the traditions that have evolved in the areas. Continued use of the national heritage areas by people whose traditions helped to shape the landscapes enhances their significance.

According to a 2004 University of Michigan study, over 100,000 people visited Louisiana’s Cane River National Heritage Area in 2003. Average spending was \$171/party/day with total visitor spending that year of \$8.7 million. The direct employment effect of visitor spending was 207 jobs.

The National Park Service has outlined four critical steps that need to be taken prior to congressional designation of a national heritage area. These steps are:

1. Completion of a suitability/feasibility study;
2. Public involvement in the suitability/feasibility study;
3. Demonstration of widespread public support among heritage area residents for the proposed designation; and
4. Commitment to the proposal from key constituents, which may include governments, industry, and private, non-profit organizations, in addition to area residents.

If the national heritage area approach is adopted, FERMATA recommends a governance structure be established similar to that of the Cane River National Heritage Area in Louisiana:

“The Cane River National Heritage Area Commission is the management entity that guides heritage area activities. The nineteen-member commission represents the wide variety of institutions, organizations, and interests that intersect in the national heritage area. As a government agency, the commission has authority to hire people, administer grant programs, develop loan programs, and set priorities, but it has no zoning or land-use powers and no power of eminent domain. The commission members were appointed by the secretary of the interior and are therefore, representatives of the secretary and the federal government. All of the commissioners volunteer their time. Officially, their appointments last three years, after which they can be reappointed or replaced.”

“Like National Parks, the National Heritage Areas give the public opportunities to experience natural, cultural, and historic resources and scenic landscapes of outstanding national significance. The fundamental difference between the two is that National Parks are set aside as places to visit - not to live - while National Heritage Areas are populated with local residents whose cultural, historic, and economic traditions are a critical part of the mix. In essence, the program provides opportunities to preserve a region’s natural, historic, and cultural resources by harnessing them to promote rural economic development. Designation as a National Heritage Area gives a region access to the positive marketing benefits of the National Park “brand.” The market for nature-based and heritage-based tourism is growing steadily, and the National Park identity can give a region a tremendous competitive advantage. The official definition states that a National Heritage Area is “a place designated by Congress where natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography.” There are now 23 federally designated Heritage Areas and Heritage Corridors in the U.S., with many more under consideration.” From *The Proposed Cumberland Plateau National Heritage Corridor: The Case for Federal Designation and Step One: The Feasibility/Suitability Study* by Edwin Gardner, Heritage Strategy Group

Timeframe: Continue current efforts

Action 25: Study the need for compensation for private landowners for use of their lands for outdoor recreation

A preliminary study was undertaken by Leadership Maine recently and found that as important as compensation is the need of landowners for visitor education and recognition of importance of their managed forests to recreation and economic development.

Timeframe: 2006

Action 26: Study the carrying capacity of resources and communities for increased visitation

Consider the limits of acceptable change both to the residents of an area and to the type of experiences sought by visitors related to the number of people at one time that they will encounter during a trip. This may vary by location, remoteness, experience type, and other factors. The University of Maine CenTRO is presently in the process of designing this type of research and is assigning personnel.

Limits to Acceptable Change is quite simple in concept. We have resources, which include visitor experiences, to protect to some degree. Since every visitor has an impact, no matter how lightly tread, we need to decide in what condition we want to maintain the resource-experience. Thus we choose the desired conditions of the resource-experience, then the variables to measure them, and subsequently the maximum amount of alteration or change we are willing to accept (hence, "limits to acceptable change"). Finally we decide which mitigation tactics we will use if the conditions approach, reach, or exceed those limits. To do that requires very special attention to the communities' wants, needs, and desires, and to assure the product packs a satisfying experiential punch. Ultimately, of course, the number of visitors does matter. There's always a maximum, but that maximum depends on the kind of management being applied and on the limit of acceptable change. Since both always change, so does the number of people. Thus a region that cares about its visitors focuses on the resource-experiences, not just the number of people standing on the thin ice of dubious assumptions. They will fall through. Jon Kohl, *The International Interpreter*.

It is important that this study also include an assessment of emergency services providers' capabilities and capacity for growth; and the anticipated demands for additional services that will result from increased visitation.

Timeframe: 2006

Action 27: Possibility and feasibility for certification of nature tourism operators

The Task Force should continue discussion on this topic; and evaluate several possible approaches put forward by researchers and others such as the Leave No Trace Program in the region and world-wide. If the need for further study is agreed upon by the Task Force, then researchers should be commissioned to study the feasibility and recommend methodology. One possible approach to certification could be through guide licensing as coordinated by IF&W.

"Ecotourism advocates are convinced that rigorously accredited, attractively labeled, and effectively marketed outdoor recreation has "win-win" potential. It helps sustain healthy ecosystems. It also increases demand and raises profitability for participating tour businesses and strengthens the economy of host communities." David Vail, Department of Economics, Bowdoin College

Timeframe: 2007

Action 28: Identify land acquisition opportunities needed to support expanded nature tourism offerings

The Task force, working with local groups in the three pilot regions, Land for Maine's Future, and others should identify the land acquisition opportunities and needs that would protect and enhance the quality of experiences including improving access to existing waypoints on the itineraries and also making the addition of other waypoints to the itineraries possible.

Public meetings and agency input have led FERMATA assessors to understand that there is ongoing development pressure challenging the qualities of many of the assets proposed for inclusion in the pilot regions' itineraries. The Task Force should consider the recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on Traditional Uses and Public Access to Lands in Maine (due fall 2005) to sustain and enhance the opportunities for public access to private lands for traditional recreation.

Timeframe: By June 2006





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