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Report on Maine's Nature-based Tourism Initiative

**An Initiative of
Governor John Elias Baldacci**

November 1, 2010

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Executive Summary

Governor John Elias Baldacci organized the Blaine House Conference on Natural Resources in November 2003. All participants were challenged to find innovative ways to grow the Maine economy drawing upon the abundance of natural resources. The tourism industry had previously laid a foundation of industry research through the Tourism Commission's Natural Resource Committee and prepared to respond. The Governor facilitated a state contract with Fermata, Inc., a Texas-based nature tourism development company, to work with three pilot regions in Maine.

Downeast (Washington County), Franklin County (Western Mountains) and Piscataquis County (The Maine Highlands) were selected as the pilot regions for the initiative. Fermata studied these regions, assessed key resources, and delivered a report recommending twenty-two action steps. Each region's plans were unique and engaged product development consistent with existing "grassroots" nature tourism work already in place within each area. By design, the process of nature tourism product developed in the pilot regions would inform similar activities for the entire state. This report details the actions taken since the Fermata report was delivered in September 2005, toward reaching the Fermata goals both in the pilot regions and statewide.

The initial goals were directed at identification and development of new tourism products, specifically nature-based itineraries with power to attract experiential visitors to the rural areas of Maine. Experiential tourism is an emerging market comprised of visitors who seek participation in nature recreation, within the context of the culture and heritage of areas visited. Preference for remote and untouched locations is coupled with a desire to develop a deeper understanding of an area visited. This market includes many active outdoor pursuits, for example land-based activity including camping, hiking, biking, and skiing and water-based activities of paddling and rafting. Non-consumptive wildlife and scenic viewing are also popular.

Tourism development requires a long-term commitment that engages networks and partnerships at the local level. Financial resources must be identified and necessary infrastructure fabricated to ensure reasonable health and safety of visitors. All three pilot regions addressed the necessity of localized organizational structure to work with and oversee tourism development work. An inventory of key sites was conducted, a master list created, and sites were assessed for further infrastructural work. Directional signage was inventoried and a list of priorities was created for future action. In every region, new partnerships developed to propel the work forward. In addition, simultaneous nature tourism related projects developed in every region as the result of the statewide focus brought about by the Governor's initiative.

Regional leaders agree the Governor's Task Force has been the catalyst that helped to keep the regions focused on the ultimate goals that, at times, seemed difficult to achieve. The Task Force brought regional people together with state resource agency representatives to discuss progress, share concerns and barriers, and to offer recommendations and resources. The Maine Office of Tourism, Department of Conservation, Department of Transportation, Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, and Department of Agriculture have all been included in the oversight conversation and have lent specific expertise and recommendations to each individual locale. Various state departments have made investments in state-owned regional infrastructure based upon the local prioritization work. Thus, ongoing shared information has enabled state departments to be more efficient and effective by focusing on localized needs and, in collaboration with regional partners, to achieve goals that otherwise would not have been accomplished. In addition, the ongoing conversation around nature-based tourism development has fostered a new understanding of the importance of tourism development as a critical component of economic development.

Through the Governor's Task Force, the state of Maine and pilot regions have become partners in regional tourism development and created a new model for the development of critical regional infrastructure. Countless volunteer hours and localized effort have achieved positive results with limited resources, through passion and commitment. Piscataquis County used the Fermata recommendations to create a template for development of a nature tourism trail. The template has been shared with the other regions and is included in this report (Section 2). The template will enable any region in Maine to use the guide to assist them in developing their own nature tourism product highlighting their unique natural assets.

This regional effort, with the support of the Governor's Task Force, has helped to move tourism development in rural counties of Maine to greater heights, but the goals of the Fermata Study are not yet fully accomplished. Nature Tourism Task Force members are in agreement about the importance of an oversight body to guide efforts going forward in order not to lose the significant ground gained over the last eight years. The impact of the Governor's office elevates the effort and ensures appropriate state resources are available to the regions. Since there is Legislative history with this initiative, it is equally important to continue communications with the Maine Legislature. This long-term economic development effort must be fully supported and continued for the entire state of Maine to take full advantage of the lessons learned if Maine is to grow, maintain and expand in the very competitive tourism economy.

2010 Report on Maine's Nature-based Tourism Initiative: An Initiative of Governor John Elias Baldacci

Introduction

Realizing rural Maine tourism's sustainable growth potential demands bold, creative, tenacious, state, regional and local leadership and effective coordination of public, private and philanthropic initiatives. Traditionally, the state has emphasized tourism marketing. The potential game changer now is state investment in tourism destinations and products. The state's funding capacity is limited in these tight fiscal times, but the stakes are high for rural Maine. Backing tourism and other promising growth sectors is crucial for revitalizing regions whose "mature" manufacturing and natural resource-based industries no longer sustain rural employment and thriving communities (Vail, 2010, p. 1-2).

Maine tourism officials, Tourism Commission members, economic developers and community development specialists have long recognized there is far more Maine could be doing to utilize the tremendous natural resource assets to attract increased income and employment to our state, particularly to our more natural, remote, rural areas. This realization accompanies the keen awareness that such an effort requires a long-term commitment to serious preparation and development work before many assets can be marketed for visitation. Equally important, thoughtful careful preliminary assessment work will insure development is balanced with conservation, sound management techniques, and protection to insure sensitive areas and Maine citizenry do not suffer degradation in the quest for more equitable statewide economic development.

History and Background

Governor John Elias Baldacci organized the Blaine House Conference on Natural Resources in November 2003 with over 700 participants. At the conference, business leaders were challenged to think innovatively about new ways to utilize the plentiful natural resources of Maine as a basis for renewed economic growth in Maine.

The tourism industry had previously laid a foundation of industry research through the Tourism Commission's Natural Resource Committee (NRC) and prepared to respond to the Blaine House Conference challenge. Foundational research was rooted in response to the 2002 Maine Tourism Commission mandate to recommend actions for nature-based tourism in Maine. The NRC was requested to examine major resource issues related to tourism, identify state departmental opportunities, foster communication among state agencies, and examine potential policy issues. The task proved to be vastly more complex than originally envisioned. However, an impressive body of work formed the foundation for initial policy development, program restructuring and public understanding, including the current pilot region accomplishments (Rowe, 2008).

The committee undertook the initial task of gathering input from a broad array of sources. An interview guide was designed and adopted as the basis for recorded interviews of over 40 tourism industry leaders, chosen from a field of more than 80. Businesses of interest included non-governmental and non-profit organizations along with government agencies closely tied to the tourism industry. The interview guide was also used for 12 public forums held across Maine, strategically located to limit travel distance for attendees to less than 40 miles. Over 150 attendees participated as the result of media and trade association publicity. The information gathered formed a clear picture of the state of resource based tourism in 2003 and provided a vast store of ideas and recommendations for improvements (Rowe, 2008).

A significant part of the early discussion surrounded the need and necessity for new tourism product development prior to engaging in significant marketing efforts for rural regions. The focus of the Office of Tourism has legitimately been in response to its official marketing mandate. Product development is a long-term, labor intensive and expensive effort. The rich natural, historic and cultural resource base available in many rural regions has not had sufficient analysis, attention and guidance to develop tourism to full potential. The NRC worked hard to differentiate the full scope of tourism product development versus the highly visible task of marketing existing tourism products. The group became fully aware that tourism *product* development was ultimately the heart of economic development.

A database of existing resources, programs and research was compiled to help avoid overlap or duplication while attempting to identify critical areas for further research. The resource

materials, combined with the results of the interviews and forums, offered the Commission solid direction for developing meaningful recommendations. A document released by the NRC in August 2005, *Guiding Principles for Experiential Tourism Development in Maine*, offered basic policy recommendations compiled from the “grassroots” research (Appendix A)

Experiential tourism is an emerging market comprised of visitors who seek participation in nature recreation, within the context of the culture and heritage of areas visited. Preference for remote and untouched locations is coupled with a desire to develop a deeper understanding of an area visited. This market includes many active outdoor pursuits, for example land-based activity including camping, hiking, biking, and skiing and water-based activities of paddling and rafting. Non-consumptive wildlife and scenic viewing are also popular. These visitors are looking for authentic experiences while learning new things about the world around them. While the reasons for travel may differ, “Experiential tourists are bound together by the shared goal of engaging in activities from which they can develop a deeper understanding of a region, its unique attributes, and its local history and culture” (Fermata, 2005, p. 4).

According to US Travel Association research (2002), 48% of US travelers want to visit an area that is “remote and untouched”, 58% wish to study an area’s culture, while another 76% want to go to a place never visited before. The experiential market covers a broad spectrum of market niches, “many of which are among those most rapidly expanding . . . For example, wildlife-associated recreation . . . now involves millions of Americans in . . . a variety of non-consumptive activities” (Fermata, 2005).

The NRC saw a significant opportunity for Maine in this emerging market and embraced the following definition of experiential tourism in the *Guiding Principles* document (Rowe, 2005):

Experiential tourism includes activities that draw people outdoors such as hunting, fishing, birding, and other wildlife viewing, hiking, camping, learning about history of a region, and nature photography, in addition to other cultural, historical, or nature-based activities (p. 2),

Following are the key principles identified in the *Guiding Principles* document in order to, “guide tourism development at the state, regional and local level concerning the opportunities and challenges that come with experiential tourism” (p. 2).

1. **State:**
 - a. Support in terms of incentives and assistance, is required for rural job creation, diversity and economic development.
 - b. Efforts to engender and maintain a regulatory environment that both supports carefully planned development and ensure comprehensive protection of the myriad natural and cultural heritage resources will support experiential tourism activities (p. 2-3).

2. **Statewide Strategic Planning:**
 - a. Community leaders must commit to a realistic assessment of assets including: niche markets, organizational and individual leadership capacity, financial resources available for the development of effective tourism destinations, and the complexity and inter-relatedness of nearby tourism systems.
 - b. The state should lead an effort to form a statewide strategic plan for nature-based tourism development. Marketing alone has been shown to be ineffective without simultaneous, comprehensive development work (p. 2).
3. **Maine Office of Tourism:**
 - a. Include in-state marketing and tourism development planning under MOT's guidance.
 - b. Facilitate a multi-stakeholder discussion on developing a voluntary ecotourism certification program (Ecotourism Quality Labeling).
 - c. Proactive work with DECD and other state, regional and local entities to promote tourism product development: support, link and market an array of destinations that will attract experiential tourism consumers (p. 4-5).
4. **Partnerships and Networks:**
 - a. Cross-sector cooperation and coordinated strategic planning requires networking, organizational infrastructure, state resource coordination, state-regional collaboration, and identifying best practices for state lands shared and showcased.
 - b. Identify public and private financial support at all levels: local, regional and state.
 - c. Maintain public and private access opportunities that respect unique traditions, flexibility and creativity (p. 5-7).
5. The state should constantly explore all paths to retain public access to large-scale landscapes and educate the public regarding the privilege of private land use (p. 7).
6. Develop an understanding of carrying capacity by researching prime tourism host communities and ecosystems under potential stress (p. 7-8).
7. Insure a high quality visitor experience through education, business outreach and frontline worker training at every level by engaging policy makers and the general public.

At the initial hearing on proposed legislation LD 946, *Resolve to Establish the Commission to Promote Jobs and Economic Development through Ecotourism* (May 2003), it became clear the NRC was already addressing many of the objectives outlined by the proposed bill. The NRC was charged to continue its work and to report back to the Business, Research and Development Committee (BRED) of the Legislature in a year. A sub-committee of the NRC issued a report on *Watchable Wildlife* in March 2004 (Appendices B and C).

Two recommendations accompanied the report made to the BRED committee: 1) Maine should hire a consultant with experience in watchable wildlife and nature-based tourism to assist in

“visioning” for nature-based tourism, and 2) Maine should establish geographically and seasonally dispersed “pilot regions” where nature tourism projects could build from existing efforts. Local government interests could lead the evolving process with oversight and support from the Maine Office of Tourism (MOT), the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IF&W), Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Department of Conservation (DOC).

It is important to note while all of this comprehensive work was being done at the state level, several regions were also moving ahead with organizing, visioning, and regional planning in the area of resource utilization for tourism related purposes.

Fermata: Purpose, Process, Synopsis

Fermata, Inc., a Texas-based nature-tourism development company, was identified as a leader in tourism product development, particularly in the area of birding and wildlife trails. State-level projects were conducted by Fermata in Texas, Virginia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Alabama and Connecticut (Rowe, 2008). Early in 2004, Ted Eubanks, CEO of Fermata, Inc. came to Maine at the invitation of the DECD Office of Tourism and presented to the NRC, the Tourism Commission, and key natural resource agency staff members. During the visit, a meeting with was arranged with Governor Baldacci that led to an invitation for a second presentation by Ted Eubanks and Mary Jeanne Packer, also from Fermata, Inc. A state contract was established with Fermata in 2004 to assess and make action recommendations regarding three rural “pilot regions” in Maine, with the understanding those regions would share results with the other tourism regions of Maine in order that the nature-based tourism initiatives could ultimately be implemented statewide.

The NRC of the Tourism Commission previously identified and adopted (July 13, 2004) critical readiness factors helped to determine which areas of Maine were prime locations for consideration as pilot regions. Adopted by the NRC, the following qualities of a community were considered essential:

1. Commitment and “buy-in” to tourism development to insure follow through on recommendations resulting from the Fermata study,
2. Capacity for and determination to pursue marketing of tourism products,
3. Qualified local leadership in place to move individual projects forward,
4. Tourism organizational capacity exists to continue work on product development and community consensus building,
5. Rich natural resource product potential, but limited on capacity to develop products around the resource,
6. Low income, less developed geographic regions should be given priority,
7. Demonstrated interest and willingness to seek partnerships with relevant state-conservation and planning officials to plan for resource protection and sustainability, and
8. Regional location with demonstrated commitment to a planned and balanced approach to tourism development with goals and objectives toward that end.

Highly desirable potential for success would include evidence of solid foundational work in place, such as, prior inventory assessment, marketing studies, market research, local governments and widespread regional support, and previous efforts to develop new tourism products and markets. Without foundation work in place, a region would be required to initiate

basic research for sustainable tourism development work before proceeding. Evidence these critical factors have been considered or met, while not a guarantee, goes a long way toward creating confidence a pilot region will reach the established goals.

The Fermata, Inc. Report

A Strategic Plan for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative:

After a year of meetings, site visits, and planning within the three pilot regions, the final Fermata report was released September 11, 2005, to the Governor, state departmental officials, and members of the tourism business community. The stated goals of the project were to:

1. Demonstrate how nature-based tourism development could 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 of support to complement 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 (p. 2).

Envisioned in the Fermata plan (2005), Maine communities, in partnership with local tourism related agencies and other stakeholders, would be empowered to blend elements of heritage, culture and natural resources into innovative, creative, development of new tourism experiences or "products." These products would have the power to entice "experiential tourism" markets and introduce new dollars into the economy of Maine's rural regions (p. 2).

Fermata's Twelve-Step Strategy for Itinerary Development:

Fermata's twelve steps include:

1. Identify and define a zone of influence,
2. Identify the resources,
3. Identify the products and services that reflect natural resources and local culture,
4. Shape travel itineraries within the region using trails,
5. Develop marketing strategies to move specific markets to destinations,
6. Use trails as a marketing platform for guided tours of destinations and services,
7. Study regional messages questioning if correct messages are being delivered to visitors,
8. Form a strategy to enhance and develop a broader array of destinations,
9. Form a strategy to enhance the development of guided services,
10. Use an experiential trail to build brand identity,

11. Use brand to expand products and services beyond the region, and
12. Use the expanded amenity base to attract businesses and jobs (Eubanks, 2004).

Three pilot regions were established to initiate opportunities for nature-based tourism in specific geographic locales in Maine. The implementation recommendations were focused on the entire state with the understanding that the pilot projects would create models for implementation in other regions throughout the state.

The Fermata report listed an initial assessment of natural resource assets for itinerary inclusion based on recommendations by each pilot area. An assessment of regional capacity to accomplish the report's proposed tasks was also included. Fermata recommended a thematic framework for itinerary development inclusive of the three pilot regions with possible relevance to the state as a whole.

Finally, Fermata made a practical list of action steps to be taken to move the Nature Tourism Initiative forward statewide, as well as within each pilot region. Fermata's recommended action steps were:

Administration & Coordination

1. Establish a Governor's Task Force for implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative.

Inventory & Assessment

2. Complete assessments of nature-based and related historical and cultural resources in non-pilot regions of the state.

Itineraries

3. Develop an itinerary in the Maine Highlands Region to connect recommended priority sites.
4. Support efforts of the Maine Mountains Heritage Network and Maine Scenic Byways for itinerary development in the Western Maine Region.
5. Write, design, and print a guidebook and map for the Greenville itinerary as a template for other guidebooks.
6. Develop marketing and educational materials, and a map, that show in one place the location and connection of numerous itineraries currently existing in the Downeast Region.
7. Write, design and print a guidebook and map for the Western Mountain Region itinerary.
8. Develop supplementary itinerary interpretation and guides and place all guides on a searchable on-line database with clickable image maps, audio downloads, plant identifications guides, etc. accessible on the Maine tourism website.

Highway Signage to Support Itineraries

9. Design, fabricate, and install uniform highway directional signs for the Downeast Region, Greenville, and Western Maine Mountains Region itineraries.
10. Design, fabricate and install uniform highway wayfinding signs for sites along itineraries without site identification signage.

***Interpretation & Infrastructure Development to Support Itineraries
& the Maine Woods Experience***

11. Write, design, fabricate and install uniform highway interpretive signs for sites along itineraries without interpretive signage. Interpretive signage should tie together the overall thematic framework as recommended by Fermata.
12. Support efforts to create a network of interpretive visitor centers, in the three pilot regions, and also on interstate and major highways of Maine. These interpretive centers would function as a seamless system for visitor information and education delivery.
13. Build a multi-faceted interpretive visitor center near Greenville to serve as a gateway to *The Maine Woods Experience*.
14. Design and construct highway-based enhancements along itinerary routes based on Fermata's recommendations. Include road paving, roadway widening for biking, new pull-outs at observation areas, parking area development or expansion, observation area viewing platforms, trail construction and other amenities as needed.

Integrated Marketing Communications for the Maine Woods Experience

15. Devise and begin implementation of an integrated, multi-agency/multi-partner marketing communications campaign to raise awareness of The Maine Woods Experience. Use thematic messages that highlight Acadia National Park, the terminus of Appalachian Trail and Baxter State Park as world class attractors. Utilize Henry David Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* messages and connections. Market Native American products and experience opportunities.
16. Devise and begin implementation of coordinated public relations efforts. Focus on travel writers and editors, develop a photo library, and form partnerships with authentic Maine-based businesses associated with nature tourism such as LL Bean and Tom's of Maine.
17. Coordinate efforts and share information among everyone involved in *The Maine Nature Tourism Initiative* and Maine's natural resource-based industries. Convene roundtable events to coordinate efforts. Include state agencies, tribal governments, The Maine Sporting Camp Association, The Maine Professional Guides Association, and other appropriate stakeholders with tourism and natural resource interests. Develop one or more demonstration projects to reach key experiential markets through advertising and public relations.

Visitor Support Services Assistance

18. Provide technical assistance and incentives to owners of new or existing authentic Maine lodging properties to facilitate access to new markets and make capital improvements to attract a more upscale clientele.
19. Support efforts of The Maine Professional Guides Association and others by designing and offering training and technical assistance to develop and promote customized trips in the Maine Woods. Promote expanded partnerships and packaging, training on itinerary development and messages, and marketing to experiential tourists.
20. Develop and provide hospitality training for frontline service-related personnel to help insure consistent communication of the themes and values of the Maine Woods to visitors.

Local Economic Development Assistance

21. Brand and market high quality, authentic natural resource-based products and services that are often less visible.

Additional Studies

22. Complete additional studies and develop appropriate strategies in the following areas:
 - National heritage feasibility studies designating heritage landscapes in Maine Woods,
 - Compensation or benefits for private landowners for use of private land for public outdoor recreation,
 - Carrying capacity of resources and communities for increased visitation, and
 - Possibility and feasibility of certification of nature tourism operators and businesses.

Governor's Task Force Work and Achievements

The Governor's Task Force, formed in September 2005, provided a coordinating, oversight body with the support and influence of the Governor's Office, lending credibility to the Nature Tourism Initiative and access to the considerable resources and expertise of state government. This body has proved to be invaluable by providing a way to maintain momentum while facilitating communications, networking, and a forum for sharing successes, challenges and resolving difficult questions in an open, non-judgmental environment.

The Task Force held regions accountable to the larger cause. Participants were subtly reminded, simply by attendance at the meetings, that projects were intended to ultimately offer guidance to all regions in a statewide effort. Without the Task Force reporting in place, it would have been very easy to lose focus, both locally and on the larger scale.

Key Task Force Successes and Responses to Fermata's Recommended Actions

There have been many actions taken over the last five years in direct response to Fermata recommendations. Actions accomplished at the Task Force level are listed below in response to specific Action Recommendations. Noteworthy progress has been made and important lessons have been learned by utilizing the specific pilot regions as test cases. Actions accomplished on the regional level impacting Fermata's recommendations are listed with a regional notation, unless there were broader state responses.

Administration & Coordination

Response to Action 1: Formation of the Governor's Task Force

- The Governor's Nature-based Tourism Task Force was established by the Governor's Office and announced on September, 2005, with the roll-out of the final Fermata report. The first meeting was held in October 2005.
- Washington County (Downeast), Franklin County (Western Mountains) and Piscataquis County (The Maine Highlands) were selected as the pilot regions for the initiative using previously established criteria (Appendix E). The public announcement was made September 2005 (Section 3 A, B, and C: Pilot region reports).
- Official representatives were appointed from each region to serve on the Governor's Task Force.

Inventory & Assessment

Response to Action 2: Statewide nature asset assessments

- Nature-based site assessment tools were adopted as state policy for statewide consistency. This allowed regional independence to be blended into a cohesive whole as itineraries were developed.
- Maine Department of Transportation (DOT) plans to hold a training session in 2011 for Scenic Byway organizations to integrate assessments into corridor management plans using the template developed by Fermata and refined by Piscataquis County for ongoing assessment work. Cooperating state agency staff and regional people will be invited. This training will insure consistency in the use of assessment tools statewide (Section 2: Template).
- Based upon the work of the pilot regions, the state is now positioned to help regional tourism organizations move forward in a unified, cohesive manner.

Itineraries

- Cross-regional partnerships facilitated information sharing related to tasks accomplished in each pilot region. Independent work plans based on the decisions of a regional working group produced unique approaches for each pilot region. The cross-regional exchange of information and ideas allowed state agency staff and business people to offer recommendations and assistance so all parties benefited from shared knowledge.
- The Task Force accountability oversight helped the pilot regions focus, unveil opportunities, and facilitate forward momentum.

Response to Action 3: Itinerary for the **Maine Highland Region** (Piscataquis)

- Map and specific site information for *The Great Maine Woods and Water Tour* is available by clicking the chickadee at www.themainehighlands.com. The step by step template developed by Piscataquis County in the Maine Highlands Region for site assessment, signage inventory and planning, and itinerary development is available for any region interested (Section 2: Template).
- Two new Maine Scenic Byways have been designated Seboomook Scenic Byway, Route 15, connects Greenville to Jackman in the Moosehead Lake region, and 2) Grindstone Scenic Byway, Routes 11 and 157, from the southern Baxter State Park boundary near Togue Pond to Medway, Sherman, Patten and Mt. Chase to the northern Baxter State Park boundary at Mattagamon. Corridor Management Plans will be developed in FY 2011.

Response to Action 4: Itinerary development in the **Western Mountain Region**

- Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG) performed initial assessments and has reformed as the Franklin County Tourism Network. They released an updated map and guide of the Franklin Heritage Loop in October 2010 as a new promotional piece to entice tourists to experience the Franklin County region.

- Updated Corridor Management Plans are being developed for FY 2011 for Grafton Notch Scenic Byway (Route 26, Oxford), State Route 27 Byway (Carrabassett River Valley, Franklin), Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway (Routes 4 and 17, Franklin), and the Old Canada National Scenic Byway (Route 201, Somerset).
- An independent effort by the Maine Trail Finder (www.mainetrailfinder.com) offers a free online resource serving both visitors and residents in finding “people-powered” trails in Franklin County. Users search a growing database of non-motorized, four-season trails to find the right trail for their next adventure. They can browse interactive trail maps, trail descriptions, pictures, and trip reports.

Response to Action 5: Template guidebook and map for **Piscataquis County**

- A style guide for printed materials was adopted by the MOT (Appendix F). The new style guide/template was used for the Maine Birding Trail brochure as a prototype for other guides to follow while itineraries are still in development. The template, also used for DOC’s 75th Anniversary *State Park Passport*, is ready for regional use.
- The *Piscataquis County Cultural and Recreational Map* was developed through a partnership of Piscataquis County Economic Development Council, Appalachian Mountain Club, and University of Maine Cooperative Extension.
- *The Great Maine Woods and Waters Tour* map, site descriptions and link (Action 3: www.themainehighlands.com).
- Piscataquis Tourism Development Authority is working on a 2011 map and guide for Piscataquis County using established style protocols.
- DOT contracted with Eastern Maine Development Corporation to prepare a corridor management plan for Seboomook Scenic Byway in FY 2011 on Routes 6 and 15 connecting Jackman to Greenville in the Moosehead Lake Region. Expansion of the byway from Greenville to Kokadjo is being explored.

Response to Action 6: Marketing materials and map connecting existing **Downeast** itineraries

- The newly completed *Discover Downeast & Acadia* map includes GIS coordinates for all sites laying the groundwork for inclusion on a website.
- Downeast utilized an intern to create five sample itineraries.
- Informal assessments were accomplished by members of Downeast’s RC&D’s Vacationland Resources Committee, an advisory organization for nature tourism initiatives. Formal assessments were completed through a MOT contract with Sunrise County Economic Council.
- Maine Trail Finder will add Washington County trails to an online database in the next phase of development (Action 8).
- Maine DOT has provided funding to the Washington County Council of Governments WCCoG) for an assessment of the intrinsic qualities of the coastal highways from Cherryfield to Calais as a prelude to having select routes designated as the Bold Coast Scenic Byway.

Response to Action 7: Guidebook and map for **Western Mountain Region**

- Franklin County Tourism Network produced a map and guide of the Franklin Heritage Loop (Action 4).

Response to Action 8: Itineraries, supplemental interpretation and guide materials, searchable database

- The Maine Birding Trail brochure was published in 2009 using the new style guide to serve as a template for other similar guides. Over 90,000 copies were distributed and reprinted within the first year (Appendix F). *Maine Birding Trail: The Official Guide to More Than 260 Accessible Birding Sites* is now in print.
- The style guide template was used for the DOC's 75th Anniversary *Maine State Park Passport* (Appendix F).
- Maine DOT has applied for a marketing grant for Scenic Byways statewide. If funded, Maine DOT will integrate the Scenic Byways marketing effort into MOT media efforts.
- All regional sites and businesses may list packages on MOT's searchable website (www.visitmaine.com) and on regional tourism websites.
- An independent effort by the Villages of Piscataquis County has produced a downloadable brochure and audio tour (MP3 player or CD format) from their website (www.villagestour.org) and linked with the chamber of commerce website.
- *A Waterfall Guide to Southern Piscataquis County*, CD-ROM and guide, was created by entrepreneur E. Stumpfel and made available through the Piscataquis Chamber of Commerce.
- Maine Trail Finder (www.mainetrailfinder.com) provides a free online resource for both visitors and residents (Action 4). Interactive trail maps, trail descriptions, pictures, and trip reports are provided. Washington County trails will be added to the database in the next phase of development (Action 6).

Highway Signs to Support Itineraries

Response to Action 9: Design and develop uniform highway directional signs for itinerary sites.

- Chickadee logo adopted as the statewide nature tourism icon September 2007 (Appendix G).
- Maine DOT and MOT developed protocols for use of the chickadee logo (Appendix H).
- The Piscataquis pilot region was the first to erect and unveil chickadee signs in a press conference in June 2008. In subsequent press conferences, nine interpretive signs on an itinerary of fourteen sites were unveiled.
- Downeast state parks are chickadee signed and directional signs are currently being developed.
- Scenic Byway signage is being reviewed to assure byway routes are clearly defined. Interpretive signs are planned for all newly designated Scenic Byways.

Response to Action 10: Wayfinding signs for itineraries without site identification

- Wayfinding signage has been erected for previously unsigned areas: Mt. Kineo, Appalachian Trail Route 15 north of Monson, Big Moose Mountain Trailhead, Borestone Mountain Sanctuary, Guilford River Walk, Pleasant River Walk, Gulf Hugas, and the view of Mt. Katahdin on Route 11.

Interpretive & Infrastructural Development to Support Itineraries & the Maine Woods Experience

In each pilot region and statewide larger initiatives are having an impact on interpretive and infrastructural development, itineraries, and the Maine Woods Experience. Although these initiatives were not necessarily tied to pilot region efforts, it is important to include them because they create context that will ultimately connect with other pilot projects.

- **Keeping Maine’s Forest (KMF) and Keeping Maine’s Forest Economy (KMFE):** In 2007, the KMF committee comprised of an unusually wide variety of groups, institutions and businesses passionate about the future of Maine’s forests formed and began two years of regular meetings and sustained discussions. The October 2009 report from the KMF committee concluded there existed an unusual and timely opportunity for a bold, landscape-scale conservation effort to maintain a stable or increasing flow of wood fiber, protect key natural resources, maintain air and water quality, preserve key wildlife habitat, provide abundant recreational opportunities, and sustain local economies. The KMFE Committee met in 2010 and released a report of recommendations in conjunction with KMF's report. One recommendation was an increase in the USDA allocation to Rural Business Enterprise and Rural Business Opportunity Grant funding programs (RBEG and RBOG) which have been very supportive of nature-based tourism-related efforts. The work of both committees serve as a backdrop and sets the stage for future discussions regarding the *Maine Woods*
- **Downeast Lakes Land Trust** has advanced a bold vision to protect the region’s fisheries, wildlife and economy with a strong reliance on guides, sporting camp owners and employees, and forestry industry workers. The Land Trust has protected 350,000 acres and helped to create an international landscape of nearly 1.4 million acres of conservation lands stretching from Maine into New Brunswick. Most of the land is managed for sustainable forestry, wildlife habitat and public recreation with a central focus on the preservation of the area’s heritage and culture – the essence of the *Maine Woods Experience*.
- **Maine Huts and Trails Initiative’s** ultimate vision is to complete 180 miles of trail connecting 12 huts from the New Hampshire border to Moosehead Lake for year round, “people powered” recreation, including hiking, groomed cross country skiing, snowshoeing, canoeing, kayaking, and biking. The completion of phase one of this initiative includes thirty miles of trails and three huts: one on Poplar Stream near Carrabassett

Valley, the second on Flagstaff Lake, and the third hut near Grand Falls on the Dead River near The Forks (www.mainehuts.org).

- **100-Mile Wilderness Region** identifies a section of the Appalachian Trail that does not cross any paved road for 100 miles. The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) strives to conserve 70,000 acres of forest land, develop enhanced trails for outdoor recreation, and preserve traditional sporting camps to facilitate an extended back-country experience through the AMC Maine Woods Initiative.

Response to Action 11: Themed interpretive signs for uninterpreted sites

- A standard interpretive panel design was adopted following Scenic Byways guidelines at a joint meeting with transportation, tourism and regional representatives in November 2006. New interpretive signage has been installed on many of Maine's state and national byways.
- A joint tourism/transportation signage policy was drafted and adopted to create a systematic process for new tourism signage requests in 2009 (Appendix H).
- Work is ongoing in all regions until completed.

Response to Action 11: (Regional - Piscataquis)

- Interpretive signs have been installed at nine areas not previously interpreted: Mt. Kineo, Big Moose Mountain Trailhead, Moosehead Marine Museum, Lily Bay State Park, Appalachian Trailhead, Peaks Kenny State Park, Gulf Hagas, Katahdin Iron Works, and the view of Mt. Katahdin on Route 11.
- All new sites tied to the theme "Rich natural resources forged this region's heritage and its self-reliant people" from "Living on the Edge" recommended by Fermata with "Innovative by Nature," "State of Connectedness," and "Maine in the World" as sub-themes.

Response to Action 12: Create Network of interpretive visitors' centers in pilot regions

- Downeast Heritage Museum in Calais, near the Canada border crossing has been closed in its original format. The visitor information center continues to operate. Maine Indian Education purchased the facility and is researching new uses.
- National Park Service Saint Croix Island International Historic Site opened a new ranger station for visitor education and park administration includes an information desk, sales area, educational exhibits, staff and public restrooms, water fountain, offices, staff break room, library, meeting space, storage and mechanical rooms, as well as expanding parking for vehicles and busses (www.nps.gov/sacr).
- Old Canada Road National Scenic Byway worked with University of Maine School of Forest Resources to conduct an onsite visitor survey to measure interest in an interpretive center and desirable attributes (2006). Robbins Hill rest area site has been established at the site chosen for the interpretive center and funding obtained for interpretive signage along a walking trail to be complete in 2011. No funding source has been identified for the center.

- Groundwork has begun for a Maine DOT funded intermodal facility and visitors' center in Trenton, gateway to Acadia National Park. Ellsworth is exploring a visitor's center that can guide visitors to the entire Downeast-Acadia region. No funding source has been identified for either facility.
- Multiple small chamber of commerce visitor centers exist throughout all three pilot regions, but do not currently serve the interpretive role as intended by Fermata recommendations.
- Response to Action 13 below, NREC.

Response to Action 13: Interpretive visitor center near Greenville

- Natural Resource Education Center (NREC) in Greenville has obtained land at the DOT turn-out at the entrance to the Maine Woods region on Route 15 and a federal grant obtained to construct an interpretive visitor's center scheduled to open in spring 2011.
- Sessions in Greenville, Brownville and Dover-Foxcroft trained frontline staff in customer service skills and new nature itineraries (Action 20).

Response to Action 14: Highway enhancements along itinerary routes

- Maine DOT has made significant road improvements in Piscataquis County along the Route 6 and 15 nature itinerary corridor. No requests have been made by Piscataquis Tourism Development Authority to install scenic turn-outs, viewing areas/platforms, or bike lanes.
- WCCoG and Hancock County Planning Commission conducted a study entitled *Downeast Coastal Scenic Inventory of Hancock and Washington Counties* in summer 2010. Funding was provided by the Maine State Planning Office.
- WCCoG conducted an analysis of feasible locations for scenic turn-outs, passing lanes, high traffic turn-out lanes along Route 1 from Steuben to Calais.
- Many enhancements have been completed through the Scenic Byways program funding and Transportation Enhancement Program. A good example of this is an overlook reconstruction project at the Height of Land on the Rangeley Lakes National Scenic Byway will create a new visitor turnout and pedestrian area overlooking Mooselookmeguntic Lake when completed in 2011-12. One of its key purposes in the federal authorization is, "to facilitate the creation of the traveler itineraries recommended by Fermata. Inc., and to boost tourism revenue and related employment opportunities" (Snowe, 2009).
- Downeast Sunrise Trail, a multi-use recreational trail funded by Maine DOT, was completed and opened in fall 2010.
- Statewide recommendations have been difficult to implement due to limited funding for enhancements. Ongoing work depends upon statewide priorities and selection processes.
- Maine DOT and MOT developed protocols for use of the chickadee logo.
- Downeast has inventoried highway signage leading to and within the region.

Response to Action 15: Multi-partner marketing communications campaign to raise awareness of the Maine Woods Experience

- The Native American Community held the first annual Tribes of the Dawnland Festival to showcase heritage, customs and art in August 2010.
- The Schoodic Sculpture Festival draws artists from around the world every two years to gain inspiration from the natural environment of the Schoodic Peninsula.
- Vacation Resources Committee publishes and distributes a quarterly newsletter to over 1200 people interested in nature-based, experiential tourism.
- MOT recommended marketing and branding campaigns phased in over three years. The first year goal is a targeted publication for distribution to appropriate markets.
- All regions attended trade shows for marketing coordinated through MOT in 2010.

Response to Action 16: Coordinated public relations efforts focused on the Maine Woods Experience for travel writers and editors

- The Maine Highlands photo library was updated for marketing purposes through Maine Tourism Marketing Partnership Grant Program (MTMPP).
- Downeast-Acadia photo library and film footage is planned for 2010 using MTMPP funding.
- All regions participate in promoting new tourism products through Nancy Marshall Communications, contractor for MOT public relations efforts.
- Focus on travel writers and editors have been ongoing since fall 2005 through MOT public relations contractor, Nancy Marshall Communications.
- Birding Trail Guide is distributed in MOT public relations packets.

Response to Action 17: Coordinated efforts across *The Maine Nature Tourism Initiative*

- Action regarding the marketing roundtable should be coordinated with the reformed Governor's Task Force on Nature Tourism in 2011 and accomplished as a two year project. Year one: convene the roundtable with all appropriate players and hold quarterly meetings to complete planning for a demonstration project. Year two: Begin, implement and monitor the demonstration project.
- MOT has coordinated many marketing efforts through the tourism sub-cabinet created by MOT Director. Far more coordination and efficiency exists now than ever before across state agencies with regard to nature-based tourism marketing efforts.

Visitor Support Services Assistance

Response to Action 18: Support for capital improvements in authentic Maine lodging for upscale markets

- In response to initial Fermata recommendations, the Eastern Maine Development Corporation accomplished a survey of Maine Sporting Camp owners in June 2005 regarding openness to capital upgrades for the purpose of attracting new markets (Appendix I).

- Workforce training for quality service by Maine Woods Tourism Training Initiative (MWTTI) begun in 2010 (Action 20).
- AMC will open the recently renovated 1867 Chairback Sporting Camp in January 2011 as the Gorman Chairback Lodge and Cabins as part of the AMC Maine Woods Initiative. The renovated “green” facility located in the 100-mile Wilderness will offer a year round destination connected by trails to three other facilities: West Branch Pond, Medawisla, and Little Lyford Sporting Camps.

Response to Action 19: Support development of customized trips, packaging and marketing in the Maine Woods

- **Rural Destination Tourism - Maine Woods Discovery**
A regional prototype including large and small scale businesses and service providers has teamed up to offer high quality opportunities to experience the region’s natural destinations, authentic cultural traditions, and distinctive local products (www.mainewoodsdiscovery.com).
- **The Maine Highlands and Western Mountains** tourism regions both held multiple packaging seminars with Joe Venuto, “The Opportunity Guy,” to help all business owners understand the confusing details of packaging. As a result, some business owners have developed unique packages by partnering with other businesses within a region.
- **AMC**, both solely and in partnership with another business, has developed several Maine Woods guided, experiential packages and community outreach programs as well as their own in-house frontline training program.
- **Downeast** sponsored training for a certified interpretive trainer who is now training others in natural and cultural history interpretation through Washington County Community College.
- **VRC** sponsored training for four participants in packaging opportunities and developed interest in hiring a packaging specialist to work with the region in 2011.

Response to Action 20: Development of frontline training programs

- Piscataquis County held training in spring 2008 in three communities for frontline staff in customer service, new themed itinerary, waterfalls, and the *Villages of Piscataquis* tour.
- The Maine Woods Consortium received grant funding from USDA to develop sustainable hospitality, destination and marketing training for Franklin, Piscataquis, and Washington Counties under the MWTTI label. A second year of funding will add Aroostook, Oxford and Penobscot counties to the Initiative (Appendix J).

Local Economic Development Assistance

Response to Action 21: Branding and marketing of authentic Maine products

- Packages developed in all pilot regions have included high quality, resource-based Maine products.
- New Gardiner information Center for Maine Craft focuses on rare, indigenous Maine products. The Center opened in November 2008 at the juncture of Interstate 295 and 95

with the assistance and support of MOT. The Maine Tourism Association operates the visitor information center portion of the facility.

- The chickadee logo and publication style guide have been adopted by *The Maine Nature Tourism Initiative* and are being used for early branding efforts. Much more discussion, research, and work is needed in the area of branding.
- Downeast has branded itself, highlighting nature, and connected local Maine artisans to the public via the DART website. Blue Hill Peninsula potters hold an event every year and the Grand Lake Stream Folk Art Festival features local artists in a beautiful unspoiled setting.

Additional Studies

Since its inception (1987), the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) Program has depended on willing partnerships with Maine's landowners. The program's key goal has been to ensure public recreational access to Maine's great outdoors. Using conservation easements, LMF has been successful in achieving this goal on hundreds of thousands of acres in Maine's working forest while these lands remain productive, privately managed contributors to the forest products industry. Easements provide landowners with financial compensation without which they would be forced to seek other channels of financial return including development, timber liquidation and recreational leasing. LMF's conservation easements have been an invaluable tool for maintaining the centuries-old relationship between private landowners and Maine's sportsmen and women seeking all forms of outdoor recreation.

Response to Action 22: National Heritage area, landowner compensation, carrying capacity and certification of nature tourism operators

- **Maine Mountain National Heritage Area** was the focus of a highly publicized forum conducted in Farmington by the Maine Mountain Heritage Network in May 2006. Over 100 stakeholders attended from all regions. The result of a straw poll taken at the conclusion of the rally demonstrated that Maine private landowners, and to a large degree business owners, were not in favor of pursuing the creation of a National Heritage Area in the Maine Mountains at that time.
- **Landowner compensation and partnership:** The recent *Keeping Maine's Forest* and *Keeping Maine's Forest Economy* discussions are touching landowner compensation issues. Discussions engage a partnership of landowners, conservation, business and tourism interests working to find common ground and solutions for long-term challenges of the working Maine forest.
- **Certification Research:** David Vail, Director of the Maine Center for Economic Policy's *Spreading Prosperity to All of Maine* project and professor of economics and environmental studies at Bowdoin College, has studied various aspects of tourism and tourism development with a focus of tourism as a key economic driver to ensure a livable wage and prosperity to rural Mainers. Dr. Vail's research on certification and branding,

summarized in, *An Ecotourism Brand for Rural Maine – The Time is Right* (2009) proposes using Sweden's *Nature's Best* quality label as a beginning point for designing accreditation criteria and process for Maine businesses. Vail advocates quality labeling/branding as a means to energize economic potential in rural Maine while simultaneously insuring a quality product.

- **Education Summit:**

In April 2007 the University of Maine System Center for Tourism Research and Outreach (CentTRO) convened a meeting of faculty from University of Maine and Community College campuses across the state involved in programs related to tourism and recreation to explore ways in which higher education in Maine can improve education for the tourism and recreation workforce in Maine.

- **Workforce Development:**

A half-day conference on workforce development in Maine's tourism industry was held in May 2009 by CentTRO. The keynote speaker was Kenneth Bartlett, a nationally recognized expert on workforce development and training.

State Agency Support and Alignment

All departments in state government are very lean with regard to financial and human resources in these challenging economic times. The task force and the process surrounding implementation of the Fermata goals have enabled improved and enhanced information sharing to achieve greater governmental efficiency and effectiveness.

- Governor John E. Baldacci was briefed after each meeting of the Nature Tourism Task Force resulting in his ability to facilitate greater agency interaction and identification of resources useful to each pilot project. This enhanced level of communication has helped achieve the Governor's goal to gain greater agency alignment within state government, resulting in a reduction of redundancies and waste.
- The Task Force has been a tool to assist participating state agencies to be more strategic in identifying local needs and committing limited state resources based upon recognized needs.
- State investments and upgrades have been made in parks and public lands by the DOC in support of the conservation and tourism focus of nature tourism projects. Greater investments have been made in areas where the local groups have been working to support and promote state owned lands, thus creating true public-private partnerships.
- The Task Force provided an opportunity for communication, networking and increased awareness among all partners regarding the status of each project and potential areas of overlap and shared learning experiences.

Successful Results from a State Perspective

- Regions have accomplished itineraries with very limited resources. Passion and commitment to the projects have moved the regions forward to accomplish their own regionally established goals.
- MOT, DOC, DOT, IF&W, Department of Agriculture and others have become active partners in the tourism marketing and development conversation.
- The DOC has made significant investments in the pilot regions directly related to the inventory work and prioritization which has been accomplished. DOC has become a valued and active partner in tourism planning with the pilot regions.
- IF&W has expressed the desire to work with businesses to form partnerships and wants to gain traction with tourism businesses. Those connections need to be encouraged and facilitated.
- IF&W has exemplified geographic diversity in improvements made in access and parking for some of Maine's more popular fishing sites: East and West Outlets of the Kennebec River, Schoodic Lake, Androscoggin River, Lambert Lake, Upper Cold Stream Pond, and the St. John River in Frenchville.
- IF&W has collaborated with MOT and DOT to obtain the first chickadee designation for Swan Island on the Kennebec River in Richmond.
- IF&W has collaborated with MOT on a fishing section of the visitmaine.com website. An outstanding video with detailed information on fishing rules and regulations along with information about a wide variety of species is now available in an appealing format easily available for visitors.
- A step-by-step itinerary template with samples has been developed for used by any region in the state to help them develop nature-based tourism itineraries (Section 2, Template).
- Maine DOT and MOT developed a policy as part of the chickadee sign program to ensure directional signs placed on state highways for Gulf Hagas, or other locations not directly accessible from a public way, were complemented by similar signs erected on private lands with private funds guiding visitors safely to and from the Gulf Hagas national landmark.
- The State Planning Office, through KMFE, has become engaged in planning and finding resources for tourism workforce training.
- MOT and DOC collaborated on the publication of a park pass in honor of the 75th Anniversary of Maine State Parks. The pass has increased visitation to the parks by an average of 13% statewide in summer 2010.
- The collaboration of several state agencies, with shared input and perspective from a variety of departmental players, has made tourism development much easier to

accomplish. Collaboration at both the local and state levels is changing the model for tourism development work.

- Statutes have been changed twice with respect to tourism driven by the nature-based policy focus. The first change recognized tourism as an important component of the state's economic development strategies. The second change allows nature-based tourism use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) investment packages. TIFs have been used for tourism investments ranging from trails to sporting camps in rural Washington County, rural Franklin County, Bucksport, Millinocket, and Kingfield. Actual wording of statute can be found in LD 539 (2009).

Barriers Recognized by Nature Tourism Task Force

The many accomplishments of the Nature Tourism Task Force and specific successes have been outlined. From the perspective of committee members, some challenges remain.

- The nature tourism development process is too important to risk losing momentum and the successes gained.
- It is sometimes difficult for regions to determine which efforts can provide workable models or templates for other regions.
- More business involvement is needed in the Task Force to gain the critical entrepreneurial perspective.
- An important oversight and serious vacuum is the lack of a large landowner's presence on the Task Force.
- Engage other impacted non-government organizations through a compelling case for long-term shared interests.
- It is difficult to identify resources and economic impact for collateral program not under the pilot projects but inspired by the Governor's focus on nature tourism.
- Continuity and keeping track of current standings have been a challenge due to the length of time between Task Force meetings.
- Finding financial and staff resources to travel to meetings are challenging for regional representatives.

Creating a Nature-based Tourism Itinerary: Concepts for Pilot Projects

Tourism product, unlike manufacturing product, consists of a combination of real “products” (like a bed and meals) and services (like a Maine guide or a massage) combined to form an overall “experience” that is tangible and can be evaluated. Experiential visitors seek unique experiences that offer authenticity and allow educational experiences in the context of an enjoyable natural setting. Spectacular natural settings establish a background of peace, serenity, authenticity and set the stage for experiences tied together thematically, in this case, through interpreted trails.

The process of tourism product development across large landscapes and multiple jurisdictional boundaries is complicated and requires a long-term commitment. In the pilot itinerary projects, this level of tourism product development was created for the first time in Maine by dedicated volunteers and local tourism organizations. Accomplishment of an itinerary and all of the supplementary components has required an investment of the last five years. Even now, many details remain to be resolved from these initial pilot efforts.

The timeline may possibly be truncated to a degree in the application to other regions, yet there are elements in the creation of anything new that require time to research, refine, fabricate and deliver. Product development, though critical to remaining competitive in the tourism arena, is not a short-term, quick fix to solve an immediate issue. New nature-based tourism product development should be an ongoing and continual part of Maine’s overall economic development strategy if the state is to remain viable and competitive as a tourism destination.

Very simplistically, the steps for developing a Nature Tourism Itinerary are (Fichtner, 2010):

1. Delineate the boundaries of the study area.
2. Conduct an inventory of regional assets.
3. Conduct a site assessments using Fermata’s Applied Site Assessment Protocol’s (ASAP) numeric scale of assessment values.
4. Make a detailed assessment with evaluation notations.
5. Using the Template Questionnaire, conduct phone interviews with site managers/owners.
6. Use all information gathered to select final itinerary sites.
7. Inventory existing signage.
8. Map general configuration of sites and existing signs.
9. Prepare an initial signage request proposal for changes/additions.
10. Prepare initial site descriptions.
11. Obtain written permissions using the template.
12. Prepare an informed budget.

13. Build a basic website or link to an existing site(s) as common sense dictates.
14. Prepare a thematic framework for interpretive work.
15. Plan for public relations and regional education.
16. Connect cultural, historic and local services as appropriate.
17. Research, design and develop interpretive signage (work with contractor).
18. Prepare brochure copy.
19. Develop a marketing and distribution plan.
20. Establish a maintenance plan.
21. Evaluate every aspect of the preceding process.
22. Engage in continuous cycle process to add sites.

Section 2 provides a more complete step-by-step template, with expanded explanations. This template is available for statewide use in regions that desire to begin unique itinerary work. The staff of the MOT will assist and arrange for consulting with regions seeking guidance to use the template for product development purposes.

Pilot Project Results: Downeast, Western Mountains, Piscataquis and Maine Birding Trail

Each pilot region's approach to Fermata recommendations focused on the "grass-roots" level in an attempt to make practical sense from the perspective of the local working group within the context of existing initiatives. It is critically important to review each complete pilot report for enlightening details of work specific to each geographic region. This document highlights the work accomplished by dedicated local working groups. Complete reports from each pilot region are included in Section 3 of this report for greater detail.

Downeast Pilot Region

The Downeast Region placed nature-based tourism under the purview of the VRC and focused on implementing the Downeast Sustainable Tourism Initiative for Year 2010 (Destiny 2010). Destiny 2010 has five goals: economic development, ecological conservation, cultural preservation, local coordination and education (VRC, 2010). The updated document suggests 130 sub-goals for sustainable tourism. Sunrise County Development Council was contracted to manage the nature-based tourism initiative using sub-contractors for inventory work. The VRC functions as the advisory board to oversee the project by offering critical feedback and suggestions. Accomplishments have included: 1) a complete list of master sites, 2) a survey, 3) a signage inventory, 4) informal site assessments utilizing secondary sources, 5) formal on-site assessments, 6) chickadee sign installation at two top priority sites, 7) a list of "Gems of the Gems" poised for promotion as part of the new itineraries, and 8) a list of thirteen priorities for actively working with sites (Section 3, A).

Major Successes

- Completed master list of sites
- Site surveys
- Signage inventory
- Site assessments completed
- Installation of chickadee signs
- List of major “Gems” prepared for itinerary inclusion
- List of priorities for actions on each site
- Focused and augmented existing nature-based tourism projects
- Spurred new investments from the DOC and others
- Formed new working partnerships and collaborations

Major Challenges

- Perception of “top down” governmental mandate
- Negative local perceptions regarding tourism’s unchecked power to deteriorate local values and the environment, as well as increase property taxes
- Process: Communication with site managers and changing personnel
- Communication and outreach to tourism and connected business community
- Lack of centralized entity to pull various efforts into a cohesive whole
- Lack of funding
- Lack of staffing

Other Regional Nature-based Tourism Initiatives

Refer to the complete Downeast Region report for details about important parallel initiatives.

Important working collaborations:

- Downeast Acadia Regional Tourism funded four new nature-based projects
- Expansion of Downeast Fisheries Trail
- Discover Downeast & Acadia Map
- Washington County Unorganized Territories Tax Incremental Financing program providing access to grant and loan fund for nature-based tourism projects
- Downeast Coastal Scenic Inventory of Hancock and Washington Counties completed in February 2010
- Initial steps toward a Downeast Coastal Scenic Byway between Steuben and Calais
- Published *Resource Guide for Sustainable Tourism in Downeast Maine and Southwest New Brunswick*

Key partnerships

- University of Maine Sea Grant: Investment in nature-based tourism through staffing
- Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands: Private funding for staff capacity Downeast - full-time position second year
- Maine Woods Tourism Training Initiative
- Access Atlantica Leadership Council, Northeast Trade Corridor, tourism sub-committee
- Sunrise County Economic Council's investment in nature-based tourism through staffing
- Workshops, outreach and educational programs implemented through partnerships with more planned

Results

- Nature-based tourism resource assets in the Downeast Region are substantial enough to be a strong foundation for a successful nature tourism strategy.
- Related cultural and heritage offerings are not functioning as a thematic group and need to be drawn together with the resource assets into a cohesive whole.
- Increase understanding and learning gained about tourism packaging, branding, maintaining connections with businesses, site managers and residents.
- Create, maintain and nurture strong linkages between sites, tourism destinations, and partnering organizations in order to realize significant results in making the region more tourism and resident friendly.

Western Mountains Pilot Region

The Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments (AVCOG) was contracted to work with the Western Mountains on the Fermata initiatives. Since there was no county-wide tourism network in place, AVCOG convened a representative group of local stakeholders to review the recommendations and engage in developing nature tourism plans.

The ad hoc working group, 1) reviewed all site recommendations, 2) updated site and contact information, 3) contacted sites for itinerary inclusion permissions, 4) selected the most itinerary ready sites, 5) accomplished a signage inventory through a contractor, and 6) discussed themes within a seminar context. The AVCOG contract reached its limit at this point. The group was required to examine potential resources and a working structure for continuation of the project.

Another network of people interested in establishing a functioning and informed tourism production network was formed called the Franklin County Tourism Network (FCTN). This network's mission was dedicated to tourism development under the umbrella of the Greater Franklin County Development Corporation, similar in structure to the Piscataquis County group.

With restructuring, tourism work was relegated to a secondary position for a time as the new network realized the importance of locating financial resources. The group recognized funding was easier to find for projects than organizational planning. Projects supported by grant funding have included the MWTTI and the reworking of the Franklin County Heritage Loop Map to create a tourism-focused map and guide for Franklin County (Section 3, B).

Major Successes

- Site reviews and permissions accomplished
- Listing of itinerary ready sites
- Signage inventory and recommendations for new and replacement signs
- Theme determination
- A re-formed network dedicated to tourism development
- Franklin County Tourism Loop Map and Guide completed and unveiled
- A celebration and roll-out event in October 2010 for FCTN and the loop map
- Franklin County Unorganized Territories Tax Increment Financing District to dedicate funds for nature-based tourism projects

Major Challenges

- Organizing for sustainability: Sustainability of leadership, funding and industry “buy-in”
- The long-term working process required for itinerary completion
- Feeling pressured from state government to complete work without adequate resources
- Sustainability of the itinerary initiatives
- Desire to see concrete results

Other Regional Nature-based Tourism Initiatives

Refer to the complete Franklin County report for details about important parallel initiatives.

- High Peaks Alliance
- Wild Brook Trout Initiative
- Farmington Downtown Walking Tour
- Rural Destination Tourism Initiative
- State Park investments by DOC in response to local prioritization
- Western Mountains Foundation Hut to Hut Initiative and new Appalachian Trail connection
- Outreach and training for Maine Guides from Don Kleiner and others
- Sustainable frontline training work through the MWTTI
- Networking and sharing across all pilot regions through the Governor’s Nature Tourism Task Force

Results

- Leadership has learned to listen to the will of the local network to engage people in long-term tourism development planning.
- A sustainable tourism network committed to the sustainable development of the tourism industry in Franklin County has grown out of the nature-based tourism initiative.

Piscataquis County Pilot Region

Piscataquis County began nature-based tourism work within an ad hoc committee of the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council (PCEDC). The group recognized early the need to find funding for signage and contracted for services focused on the detailed and significant work of the committee, sites assessments, and support for the creation of an itinerary. Initial insight was critical to the successful results seen by the region.

The detailed Piscataquis report traces the evolution of the early committee into a recognized Piscataquis Tourism Development Authority under the umbrella of the broader PCEDC. Working with a contractor enabled the group to establish an initial nature tourism itinerary with interpretive signage at nine of fourteen sanctioned sites. Although the group seized upon the opportunity to make many hidden natural resource assets visible through a marketable itinerary, the road to results were long and arduous and required carving out a new road in heretofore uncharted territory. The results were well worth the effort and pave the way for others to follow with similar itineraries in other locations around the state (Section 3, C).

Major Successes

Structure and leadership

- Establishment of PTDA sanctioned under PCEDC unifying tourism economic development work
- Strong committee leadership through working partnerships with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and AMC
- Committed volunteers and staff participation

Process refined

- A step-by-step working template with samples available to share and assist other regions

Funding partnerships

- Legislator, BRED Committee and MOT funding support
- County Commissioners committed funding for three years
- State investments followed the assessment and prioritization work
- Grant funding secured for Appalachian Trail trailhead upgrade work

- Plum Creek funded signage on private land
- MTMPP grant funding for website tour development and training programs

Public relations

- Effective outreach to municipal officials and leadership
- Raised awareness and visibility of nature-based tourism and natural assets county-wide
- Enhanced trust levels across broad spectrum of interests, including large land owners

Signage

- Chickadee signage at currently sanctioned sites and on directional signage
- Nine interpretive signs researched, designed, fabricated, and installed at eight sites; 9th awaiting completion of the Kineo dock renovation
- Maine DOT and MOT worked on a sign policy that would provide signs on public ways directing traffic to notable locations on private ways provided similar directional signs were placed on private ways directing visitors to and from Gulf Hagas.
- Partnership and agreement of five private landowners to allow uniform directional signage on private land to Gulf Hagas, a nationally recognized scenic landmark
- Construction and placement of two informational kiosks at the northern and southern entrances to Gulf Hagas

Marketing

- Development of *Great Maine Woods and Waters Tour* on The Maine Highlands website

Training

- Initiated PTDA customer service and regional destination training for businesses in 2008
- Partnership with MWTTI and two other pilot regions in 2010
- Site assessment training for volunteer nature tourism committee members
- Business participation in The Maine Highlands sponsored packaging seminars in 2010

Major Challenges

- Difficult to sustain long-term momentum and committee involvement
- Local people originally viewed project negatively as government directed
- Lack of funding from beginning of the project
- Lack of funding to interpret all sites
- Working through various state departments, rules, policies and regulations
- Necessity to develop long-term maintenance and sustainability plan for itinerary and signage

- Need of a cohesive vision for long-term coordinated rural community and tourism development statewide
- Need guidance on most effective marketing mechanisms to reach the target audience

Other Regional Nature-based Tourism Initiatives

Refer to the complete Piscataquis County report for details about important parallel initiatives.

- Southern Piscataquis Cultural and Recreation Map and Guide
- The Villages of Piscataquis County
- The Piscataquis Waterfalls project
- Initial Maine Birding Trail research and packaging
- GIS mapping of recreational assets
- Natural Resource Education Center
- AMC Roach Land acquisition
- Seboomook Scenic Highway
- Grindstone Scenic Byway
- MWTTI
- Southern Piscataquis County Tourism Development
- Plum Creek Timberland Project
- Northern Forest Canoe Trail

Results

- Piscataquis County has a new nature-based tourism itinerary product comprised of fourteen chickadee signed sites with nine identified with new interpretive signs.
- In partnership with the independent waterfall project, PTDA is currently adding waterfall sites to expand this tour.
- The template created for this project is now helping others within the pilot regions and in other locations around Maine.

The Maine Birding Trail Pilot Project

The Maine Birding Trail was initiated as an independent project in 2003 at the same time as the Governor's Blaine House Conference. The project was spearheaded by Bob Duchesne, a Maine Audubon trustee and member of the Maine Legislature. After four years of site research and two years of itinerary refinement, the trail launched in May 2009 comprised of 82 sites statewide publically accessible and excellent for bird-watching. Although the project was designed to cover the entire state, particular emphasis was placed on the three pilot project regions outlined in the Fermata report. This trail is the first state-wide nature-based itinerary.

Major Successes

- Itinerary guide books funded by the MOT and Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund now in the third printing
- Guides sent by MOT in response to all birding inquiries
- A companion guide book has been published by Down East Books
- A supporting website can be found at www.mainebirdingtrail.com
- As site evaluations neared completion, a supervisory stewardship group was assembled to oversee the layout and launch, chaired by the MDOC, staffed by the MOT, including representatives of the Maine IF&W, Maine Audubon, and Bob Duchesne
- Current focus on working with innkeepers to maximize economic development potential of the trail

Major Challenges

- Several false starts
- Originally conceived, under Maine Audubon, the Birding Trail project competed with Audubon's other funding priorities
- Maine Audubon's limited financial resources could not support the Maine Birding Trail project
- Maine Audubon's regional chapters enthusiastic, but assistance was limited
- The site-evaluation phase was a self-funded, solo initiative

Results

- Coordination through the Maine Nature-based Tourism Initiative enabled the project to stay thematically consistent with other initiatives.
- Mapping of the itinerary was reorganized to coincide with Maine's tourism regions.
- All print and web materials adopted the chickadee logo to be consistent with coordinated branding.
- Studied trails in other states to develop a set of best practices in brochure layout and design.
- Successful initiatives require a champion. Grants are useful for starting a project, but not for sustaining them. Initiatives intended to be economic development tools need to identify and involve the beneficiaries early in the process.
- Initiatives are resource-dependent. Inadequate resources produce inadequate results.
- Goals of multiple stakeholders may differ, leading to delays while disagreements are resolved. A loss of momentum can threaten completion of projects as participants change or lose interest. Projects require a strong task master to keep momentum positive.

Shared Regional Lessons

Structure: Solid, committed organizations and structure must be in place to house and guide the important process of regional nature-based tourism product development.

Leadership: Tourism development projects can only be effectively achieved with strong, committed leadership, willing to engage in long-term and sometimes discouraging economic development activity. Leaders must be visionary, but concrete, and have the ability to focus on the ultimate goal in order to help volunteers remain engaged.

Volunteers: Tourism development projects can only be effectively achieved with the dedication of working volunteers at the local level or a large budget. The volunteer work leverages the limited resources available at every level and is more effective in terms of local pride and buy-in.

Respect for Local Input: Leadership cannot force projects upon local citizens which they are not prepared to embrace. Wise leadership listens, engages in effective dialog, and guides local groups at the pace they are willing to move. In some areas, readiness to engage comes slower than in other areas.

Visioning: In order to accomplish effective results, a compelling vision and “big picture” thinking is more important than focus on small projects. Small projects can be effective tools for laying groundwork and ratcheting enthusiasm leading to a larger level of thinking, especially in the face of resistance. An effectively articulated vision has the power to inspire people to engage in larger thinking.

Dedicated Funding: To insure completion of new product developed and established, the funding conversation must begin at the beginning of a project until sufficient funds are secured to accomplish the work. Without an assurance of funding at the onset, partnerships provide shared resources to accomplish projects and provide smaller components of a larger envisioned whole.

Visitor Centric: Creation of successful visitor products requires a focus outside the localized role into the role of visitors who know little or nothing about the region. Viewing the region through the eyes of a newcomer helps to identify shortcomings and challenges that must be overcome during the tourism product development process.

Outreach and Public Relations: Public relations and outreach to local and regional leadership, legislators, municipal leaders, business people, and site managers is a requirement to help the process of development run smoothly. Despite outreach efforts, delays permit people to forget

the work in progress. Continued outreach is necessary to keep all players engaged and supportive.

Dedicated Paid Staff: Dedicated staff is needed to work with volunteer groups to oversee, direct and guide projects, and ensure ultimate success. Working through layers of policy and regulations from municipalities and the state entities involves complex logistics.

Collaboration and Partnerships: During difficult economic times, or in any environment where resources are limited, the most effective way to accomplish lasting tourism development is through working partnerships and collaborations on every level. Operating strictly on a local or regional level often falls short of success, but working those levels in concert with state leadership can leverage resources, change policies, identify funding mechanisms, and guide a project to greater success at every level.

Independent Nature Tourism Initiatives Since 2005

Achievements are frequently a reflection of focus. A number of projects have developed within the same timeframe as the Nature-based Tourism Initiative in Maine. Some projects were the result of the increased awareness resulting from the state focus on nature tourism and itinerary creation. Other efforts have evolved through completely independent initiatives. Mentioned below are some examples of known independent initiatives developed simultaneous to the tourism initiative.

- **The Androscoggin River Watershed Council** established the Androscoggin River Trail Plan – a vision of interconnected land and water trails along the length of the Androscoggin River from Lake Umbagog to Merrymeeting Bay (www.androscogginwatershed.org).

Ultimate goals are twofold:

1. To create interconnected water and land trails and to provide interconnections to other publicly accessible trail systems, and
 2. To create a deeper appreciation for and understanding of the natural and cultural resources in the Watershed through improved access and provision of informational kiosks and interpretative panels at river and trail access sites.
- **The Gems of 26**, a driving tour of eight unique organizations, offers onsite tours highlighting cultural, historic and recreational experiences along Route 26 from Gray to South Paris. The “Gems” include Maine Wildlife Park, Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, Poland Spring Resort, Poland Spring Preservations Society and Preservation Park, Poland Historical School House, McLaughlin Garden, and Harvest Hill Farms. ”Gems” are targeting motorcoach and other tour groups with website guidance on food options and lodging (www.gemsof26.com).
 - **High Peaks Alliance (HPA)**, a group of local citizens with a vision for the High Peaks region, connects communities through a backcountry trail system from Weld to the Bigelows. Planned residential and commercial development in the ring of existing communities (Rangeley, Phillips, Carrabasset Valley, and Eustis) surrounding the High Peaks unites conservation efforts securing the area for timber harvesting and four-season backcountry recreation. HPA provides a forum encouraging local people to consider different perspectives (motorized vs. non-motorized recreation groups) and share ideas about multiple-use and improved landowner relations.

In collaboration with Sandy River Land Trust, an AmeriCorps Volunteer with the Maine Conservation Corps has been hired for 2010-11 to help create the *Cornelia “Fly Rod” Crosby Trail*. This walking trail will run from Strong, through Phillips and Oquossoc, ending at Rangeley Outdoor Sporting Heritage Museum following the old Narrow Gauge Sandy River Rail line where possible (www.highpeakalliance.wordpress.com).

- **Keeping Maine's Forests (KMF) and Keeping Maine's Forest Economy (KMFE)** are efforts to maintain Maine's forest land base *as forest*—both for its high environmental values and its importance to the wood products industry, community and tribal aspirations, sportsmen, recreationists, and rural economies. The largest unfragmented forest in the East, Maine's traditional working forest is a national treasure predominantly maintained by private landowners. This initiative seeks to take advantage of a unique opportunity offered by US Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack and US Secretary of Interior Salazar to find ways to maintain forest landscapes through coordinated action and make federal programs more responsive to the needs of Maine's forest landowners. Conservation efforts include supporting a diverse, robust forest-based economy with markets for a wide variety of forest-based products, including tourism, while strengthening the rural economies dependant on them.

Five of the seven recommendations in the KMFE proposal submitted in September 2010 to the Secretaries have implications for nature-based tourism businesses by addressing landowner relations, workforce development, trail infrastructure, broadband access, and energy efficiency. One recommendation in particular asks for increased funding for the USDA Rural Development Agency's Rural Business Enterprise Grant Program (RBEG) and suggests rule changes that would make this already valuable program even more accessible and effective for Maine's rural tourism businesses (www.keepingmainesforests.org/proposal).

- **Kennebec River Initiative's (KRI)** broad objectives are to secure the future of the River as one of the state's most important scenic, ecological, fisheries, wildlife, recreational, cultural and economic assets, while fostering revitalization efforts of the municipalities along the river. More than a strategy, the KRI is an effort to organize and coordinate the efforts of organizations, public and private, and the people who are working together to preserve the essential values of the Kennebec. It is a call to all interested parties to support and engage in a comprehensive, coordinated, and strategic approach to protecting the numerous values of the River under the guidance of a common vision for the future of the River (www.krrt.org/kennebec.asp).

Participants include the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments, the Maine DOC, Sportsmen's Alliance of Maine, Maine Rivers, Soil & Water Conservation Districts, the Natural Resources Council of Maine, Trout Unlimited, along with municipal officials, individuals, regional and municipal land trusts, and business interests.

Projects are organized into six program areas:

1. KRI Coordination, Phase Two
 2. River Access Improvement
 3. Kennebec Trails
 4. Corridor Protection & Restoration (includes fisheries)
 5. Community-Based Waterfront Development
- **The Mahoosuc Loop** is a 100-mile adventure trail of waterfalls, wildlife, woods, hiking and water trails in the Mahoosuc Mountains of Maine and New Hampshire encompassing both border regions and the Appalachian Trail through some of its most rugged terrain.

A detailed map guide was unveiled to the public in spring 2008 by the Mahoosuc Initiative, a collaborative of Umbagog Area, Androscoggin Valley, and Bethel Area Chambers of Commerce. The Mahoosuc Initiative helps Mahoosuc Region communities build vibrant local economies, conserve and encourage sound management of the region's natural resources, and promote healthy communities connected to the land.

Members of the Mahoosuc Initiative are: Androscoggin River Watershed Council, AMC, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Biomass Energy Resource Center, The Conservation Fund, Forest Guild, Forest Society of Maine, Mahoosuc Land Trust, The Wilderness Society, Tri-County Community Action Programs, Trust for Public Land (www.mahoosucinfo.org).

- **Maine Huts and Trails Initiative's** plan is to eventually complete a 200 mile hut and trail system from the New Hampshire border to Moosehead Lake for year round, "people powered" recreation, including hiking, groomed cross country skiing, snowshoeing, canoeing, kayaking, and biking. Twenty-five miles of trail are completed two lodges built, one on Poplar Stream near Carrabassett Valley and the second on Flagstaff Lake. The current program is focused on completion of a third hut near Grand Falls on the Dead River near Route 201 in The Forks (www.mainehuts.org).
- **Maine Quality Label Initiative** represents the efforts of the Maine Betterment Funds, the Maine Woods Consortium in support of David Vail and a four-five member action team to produce a case statement and related outreach and survey

materials to assess views among a wide range of stakeholders on design and implementation questions related to a possible quality label for sustainable Maine Woods tourism. Issue to be evaluated include: types of eligible businesses; certification criteria; rigor of standards (silver, gold, platinum levels); financing accreditation, brand development, and promotion; time frame for developing and launching the label. Assuming responses warrant, the work will include organizing a stakeholder retreat to gauge commitments and consider implementation strategies.

- **Maine’s Quality Places Initiative** is rooted in 2010 by Public Law 2009, Chapter 483 established to garner economic benefits from our quality of place. The 2010 legislation established a new approach to making investments, an approach that relies on local expertise and knowledge built on a region’s indigenous strengths. The goal of the initiative is to help Maine keep and attract skilled workers and entrepreneurs and to refill the declining workforce population by taking advantage of Maine’s advantage in global economic competition. Our principal quality of place assets are majestic mountains, unbroken forests, open fields, wild rivers, pristine lakes, widely-celebrated coastlines, picturesque downtowns, lively arts and culture, authentic historic buildings, and exceptional outdoor recreational opportunities.

This Initiative empowers six economic development districts to identify distinct and marketable assets and to craft strategies for developing those assets into economic opportunity for their regions through regional quality of place investment strategies. The Maine Council on Quality of Place was created to facilitate coordination of state and regional activities to support and implement the regional quality of place investment strategies (www.maine.gov/spo/specialprojects/qualityofplace/index.htm).

- **The Maine Sporting Camp Heritage Foundation (MSCHF)** was founded to preserve Maine’s traditional sporting camps and the natural resources supporting them. The foundation’s core mission is preservation of Maine’s sporting camp heritage for the ongoing enjoyment of the public. The new Foundation will work with local economies that rely on the sporting camp tradition to prevent further unemployment and to enhance economic development by preventing further deterioration of the infrastructure. Commercial sporting camps have dwindled from over 300 at the turn of the last century to fewer than 40 today. The MSCHF plans to work with owners on inventory and analysis, acquiring conservation easements, land acquisition and leasing issues, and business and marketing assistance (www.SportingCampFoundation.org).
- **Maine Trail Finder** is a free online resource serving both visitors and residents in locating “people-powered” trails in the state. Users can search a growing database of

non-motorized, four-season trails to find the right trail for their next adventure using interactive trail maps, trail descriptions, pictures, and trip reports. Ultimately, all human powered trails in Maine will be searchable on this database. The prototype in Franklin County was developed by the Stephen Engle of the Center for Community GIS in Farmington. Current goals are to double the number of trails available in Franklin County, work with the DOC to incorporate trails in state parks and on public land, and identify trails in Washington County.

Maine Trail Finder is a collaborative effort between organizations and funders committed to promoting active recreation in the state of Maine, including the Center for Community GIS, Healthy Community Coalition of Franklin County, Environmental Funders Network, Maine DOC, and the Maine Office of Tourism (www.mainetrailfinder.com).

- **Maine Woods Tourism Training Initiative (MWTTI)** is a long-term initiative intended to organize networks of tourism training providers to deliver a comprehensive, multi-modal training program for tourism businesses and frontline service employees in the Maine Woods. Economic development organizations in Franklin, Piscataquis, and Washington Counties organized local networks comprised of businesses, chambers of commerce, training providers, and other stakeholders. Local networks conducted assessments to determine trainings needs and delivery specifications then formulated training approaches to meet highest priority needs. Extensive feedback sought for all plans was incorporated to create finalized training approaches. The Betterment Fund and USDA Rural Development provided funding for this initiative.

This program directly coincided with the original pilot regions and supports the educational initiatives recommended by Fermata, Inc. The first round of funding is in the reporting and evaluation stages with a second round of funding approved to support the next phase of Maine Woods training programs. Additional regions being added to the training program in the next phase are Penobscot, Oxford and Aroostook counties (Appendix J) (www.mainewoodsonsortium.org/mmh/programs/content/tourism-training).

- **Northern Forest Canoe Trail (NFCT)** is a long-distance paddling trail connecting the major watersheds across the Adirondacks and Northern New England links communities and wild places, and offers canoeists and kayakers a lifetime of paddling destinations and adventures. The NFCT Trip offers 347 miles of paddling in Maine, ending in the St. John River valley by means of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway.

The NFCT has regional significance as a multi-state initiative, building recreational infrastructure and focus on catalyzing rural economic results along the trail. The completed project will include nine kiosks, 28 register boxes in key locations along the trail, complete GIS mapping of the route and upgrade the organization's website planner. This project meets several of the urgent action recommendations of the Northern Forest Sustainable Economy Initiative report (www.northernforestcanoetrail.org).

- **Rural Destination Tourism (RDT)** is a new approach to rural tourism development that combines authentic and intimate place-based tourism experiences with high quality customer service standards and seamless integration of local providers organized around thematic visitor experiences that customers can access through a variety of coordinated planning and booking tools (www.mainewoodsdiscovery.com).

Two prototypes for RDT in the Maine Woods Region are:

1. *Franklin County Tourism Network* (FCTN) is county level prototype intended to create opportunities for business growth and product development, focusing on Franklin County's four season destination offerings. FCTN is currently focused on updating of the Franklin Heritage Loop Map.
2. *Maine Woods Discovery*, a regional prototype, includes large scale businesses and small scale service providers teamed up to offer visitors high quality opportunities to experience the region's natural destinations, authentic cultural traditions, and distinctive local products. This group is currently working on developing winter packages.

- **The Southern Piscataquis Waterfall Project** grew from the efforts of one entrepreneurial individual, Eric Stumpf, who located, researched, described and photographed over 50 waterfalls in southern Piscataquis County. Working with the PCEDC and consistent with the awareness of the nature tourism focus on itinerary development, permission was given to use this body of work to prioritize the most accessible waterfall sites for placement on a public tour.

The waterfalls work is an ongoing project of the Piscataquis Tourism Development Authority with the goal of creating a trail of some of the best waterfalls of Piscataquis County. This trail is slated for completion in 2011. The tour will include a printed map and guide, a website, and possibly a "passport" system whereby visitors could check off waterfalls visited and achieve recognition for completing the list (www.piscataquischamber.com/waterfall_guide.asp).

- **The Villages of Piscataquis County** audio driving tour highlights the history and cultural heritage that make this rural region unique. The Tour, with two loops that cover about 134 miles, is the result of the Penquis Leadership Institute (PLI) Class of 2006 project. The group of dedicated volunteer PLI students created a downloadable audio tour that provides travelers with guidance to “Villages” signage while entertaining with stories and songs from local musicians. A website and supporting print materials are also the result of the PLI 2006 class project (www.villagestour.org).
- **Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)** is a five year plan required to comply with federal regulations to receive Land and Water Conservation Funds. Priorities that form the basis for an implementation strategy are: 1) to connect Mainers of all ages with outdoor recreation, 2) to connect lands and communities to nurture quality of place, 3) to connect outdoor recreation stakeholder collaboration, 4) to connect trails to establish or improve regional trail systems. The SCORP report is the result of examining trends, the markets, activities engaged in by visitors and implementation strategies for achieving the priorities. The current plan with an emphasis on trails will be in place until 2014 (www.maine.gov/doc/parks/programs/.../index.html).

Although not a comprehensive list, these initiatives developed simultaneous to the Nature-based Tourism Initiative are examples of high profile, broad-based efforts, many of which are statewide in scope.

Goals and Recommendations for the Governor's Task Force:

2011 and Beyond

Continue Asset Assessments

Natural resource asset assessments are not an end to themselves, but a mechanism to discover the natural resources that exist, identify what is missing, determine which resources compel new visitors to experience a region, and decide which assets should or should not be shared. The assessment process identifies infrastructural needs, systemic gaps and allows for translating needs into a plan to bring the resource into a positive state of repair that can support increased visitor capacity.

Critical and honest assessment of real regional needs enables state agencies to become true partners, rather than just a resource to be tapped when convenient. Park managers and state planners become more aligned in thinking with regional leaders creating a true “team” approach to local and regional infrastructure upgrades. Hard, thoughtful assessment leads to informed planning which leads to investments, on both the private and state levels. Ultimately, resource asset are put in proper condition and context for marketing to the visiting public.

Future Goals of the Nature Tourism Task Force

1. The Task Force respectfully requests the Governor to share this report with the incoming administration and to advocate for continuation of the Governor's Nature Tourism Task Force to complete the implementation of the Fermata recommendations and goals that have not yet been fully realized.
2. Though great strides have been taken toward the recommendations, the Task Force oversight is necessary to encourage and support the regional organizations, to be a platform for open communication and idea generation, and to help hold the local groups accountable to complete the nature-based tourism development work.
3. The Task Force prefers to remain under the Governor's Office, but DECD is the appropriate home if the first option is not available. DECD would require commitment from the administration and other state agencies, funding and dedicated staffing in order to be fully effective.
4. With the Legislative history of this initiative, the Task Force sees the importance of continued Legislative communication to encourage continued funding support through the Maine Legislature.
5. The entire Task Force should meet in 2011 for quarterly half-day updates and sharing of information with the entire group. Task specific working groups should meet as necessary.

6. MOT commenced holding tourism sub-cabinet meetings four years ago to discuss the many areas where resource departmental interests and tourism projects overlap. Those meetings should continue on a regular basis to discuss mutually beneficial ventures and coordinate tourism projects across departmental boundaries.
7. The Task Force should coalesce around a few strong resolutions in the resource policy area, such as the recent Question 3 Bond Issue requesting \$9,750,000 to invest in land conservation, working waterfront preservation and to preserve State Parks.
8. The Governor should name the co-chairs of the Nature Tourism Task Force. The model of a key state employee teamed with a tourism business person has worked well. The make-up of the task force should continue to be a mix of state partners and private business representatives. Local regions should name representative leaders to the Task Force.
9. Some state and private interests need to be specifically invited to participate and be awakened to the importance and benefits of participation.
10. The Task Force must find compelling ways to engage more business people and convince appropriate NGO interests to enter the nature tourism conversation.
11. Appoint one or two large landowners to the new Task Force to gain insight from the ownership perspective.
12. Initiate a system of interim communications to help keep everyone informed and up-to-date between Task Force meetings.
13. Ongoing studies should be coordinated and guided by the Governor's Task Force. Some studies have been initiated without the participation of the Task Force and coordination of all interested parties has not always been possible. The timeline for studies is often set by funders and the entities that execute the studies.
14. Establish standard criteria and a uniform process for historic and cultural non-profit organizations to be recognized with the chickadee logo signage.
15. Eliminate potential for visitor confusion regarding the chickadee logo with the Maine Birding Trail.
16. Determine criteria for exportable regional models to the state-wide level.
17. Seek synergies and share resources with MDOT connecting Scenic Byway projects with nature tourism projects.
18. Examine IF&W's *Maine Wildlife Action Plan* to understand conservation strategies for wildlife species of greatest need, to work toward ensuring compatibility, and to connect existing itineraries as appropriate.
19. Ask Department of Agriculture to discuss connections to appropriate regional farm to farm tours and ways to tie agricultural assets to nature itineraries.
20. Invite at least two additional pilot regions to join the work on nature-based itineraries taking full advantage of accomplishments from initial pilot regions.

Goals for Regional Nature Tourism Organizations

Each region has to bring passion and resources to the table in these projects. In the previous pilot work, Downeast, through the Bureau of Parks and Lands, hired staff to assist with inventory and assessment work. Franklin County worked with AVCOG for staffing. Piscataquis County gained support from the County Commissioners, Appalachian Mountain Club, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Plum Creek and others to accomplish goals.

Short-term Task Force Goals for 1 Nature-based Tourism Organizations

1. Ensure broad cross sections of interests are engaged on each regional nature-based group to build and maintain support.
2. Find credible ways to track economic impact.
3. Clarify trail intersections - scenic byways, hiking, biking, snowmobiling, ATV riding - as they relate to nature tourism itineraries.

Itinerary Goals

1. Assist and support the existing pilot regions to finish and excel in the work begun.
2. Connect historic and cultural resources more effectively with existing itineraries.
3. Request specific state support that could assist in focusing local itineraries.
4. Discuss and find mechanisms for long-term maintenance and funding for signage replacement.

Visitor Center Goals

1. Examine the best visitor centers and document best practices.
2. Work with one or two visitor centers to achieve consistency and connectivity and then begin to duplicate success using that model.

Training Goal

1. Expand hospitality training to include park service staff, North Maine Woods gate staff, and other appropriate service staff within each region.

Long-term Task Force Goals

1. The Fermata recommendations offer a pathway connecting regional natural resource assessment to full state resource assessment and large-scale branding. Overtime, the Task Force can help facilitate the process throughout Maine using the lessons learned through the individual regions.
2. Tie all visitor centers statewide together electronically for “real time” information.
3. Discuss the proposed “The Maine Woods” branding campaign to determine if regions agree with the strategy. Consider using a consultant to examine recommendations with sporting camps and guides to make further suggestions before proceeding with branding.

Conclusion: The Future of Nature-based Tourism Work

“Success isn’t magic or hocus-pocus, it’s simply learning how to focus” (Canfield, 2000).

Governor John Elias Baldacci enabled the state of Maine to shine a spotlight on the possibilities inherent in utilizing our resource base in creative new ways. The Governor followed up by focusing the tourism industry with the assistance of one of the most highly respected Nature Tourism companies in the country, Fermata, Inc. Fermata laid out a general process to follow and made specific recommendations tailored for rural regions of the state to assist in using their natural resources to create new tourism itineraries/products.

The work accomplished in this effort by each pilot region is significant, but this is just the beginning of what all task force members agree must be a long-term commitment to continuing tourism product development as a key strategy of economic development in order for Maine to be competitive in the domestic and international tourism marketplace. Tourism product development is solid economic development; this message should be gaining wide acceptance throughout the state.

To leave tourism product development on an ad hoc basis, allows it to be vulnerable to constantly changing political winds. Positive efforts can be instantly negated in one administrative change leaving businesses and local organizations feeling disenfranchised regarding the governmental institution. The long-term commitment and investment of local and regional people over the last eight years is on the brink of regional pay-off, but success is uncertain through no fault of the many citizen volunteers invested in the effort. **Tourism development, as a critical component of economic development, needs a consistent and sustained effort if Maine is to grow, maintain and expand the tourism economy.**

How can this be accomplished? Perhaps the tourism regions or individual counties should be encouraged and assisted in the creation of a regional tourism development plan, which could feed into a larger overall state coordinated tourism development strategy. Regional or county plans might be housed long-term under local regional economic development entities, with an organized leadership structure solidly established to sustain continuity of efforts in each instance. Perhaps the hard work of dedicated regional people would be somewhat less subject to the political landscape under such a scenario.

Geographically, regional boundaries must make practical sense from a tourism working perspective and leadership must be localized. Plans must be grassroots driven, and long-term, but also a part of the larger scope of economic development planning. The Piscataquis Tourism Development Authority, the Franklin County Tourism Network and Downeast-Acadia Regional

Tourism organizations may provide framework models for structural stabilization of tourism development oversight groups.

It is clear the Governor's Task Force has provided the impetus and cohesion to help the regional entities accomplish concrete and positive results. The two-tiered approach has helped local volunteers to cut through the sometimes difficult and confusing governmental departments and regulations. Without both levels of collaborative local labor and governmental support services, the nature-based tourism effort in Maine would not be where it is at this point. The Task Force collaborative model has opened the door to a new, more effective way to accomplish tourism development through a working public-private partnership.

The end result, based on the work accomplished in the pilot regions, is that Maine is now in a strong position to share tested and refined templates, lessons learned and a pre-navigated process with the rest of the state. Maine is in a position to become the leader in nature tourism development in New England by continuing a commitment to established nature tourism efforts statewide, while spreading out region by region. Without the continued support and oversight of the state Task Force, the fruit of all this labor has the potential to be lost.

The goal of this effort has been to create new tourism product with compelling power to draw experiential tourists into areas of Maine where they might not otherwise visit. By accomplishing this goal, the pilot regions and the Governor's Task Force have achieved true success. The following excerpt from a letter to the Ellsworth American says it all (Shaw, 2010).

The three people from Massachusetts rode their bikes up to their truck and were grinning from ear to ear! My friends and I had just finished our ride and were loading our bikes and also grinning. Different versions of "Wow, what a great trail", were flying through the air. They were photographers. . . the kind who earn their living at it. . . and they had come up from Boston to take photos of and to ride on the Downeast Sunrise Trail. We were locals who have enjoyed the trail all summer. We all agreed. . . it had been a perfect day! But then . . . the Downeast Sunrise trail **MAKES** perfect days! Perhaps the most repeated phrase shared by folks on the trail no matter what they were doing is, "How wonderful that a few people had the vision to dream of this and then the determination to make it happen!". . . Kudos – many, many kudos to them . . . what a gift they have given to Downeast Maine!

This is the ultimate success; both visitors and locals are enabled to fully enjoy Maine's beautiful natural resources, participate in supporting local economies, and appreciate the long-term effort that allowed them to do just that!

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