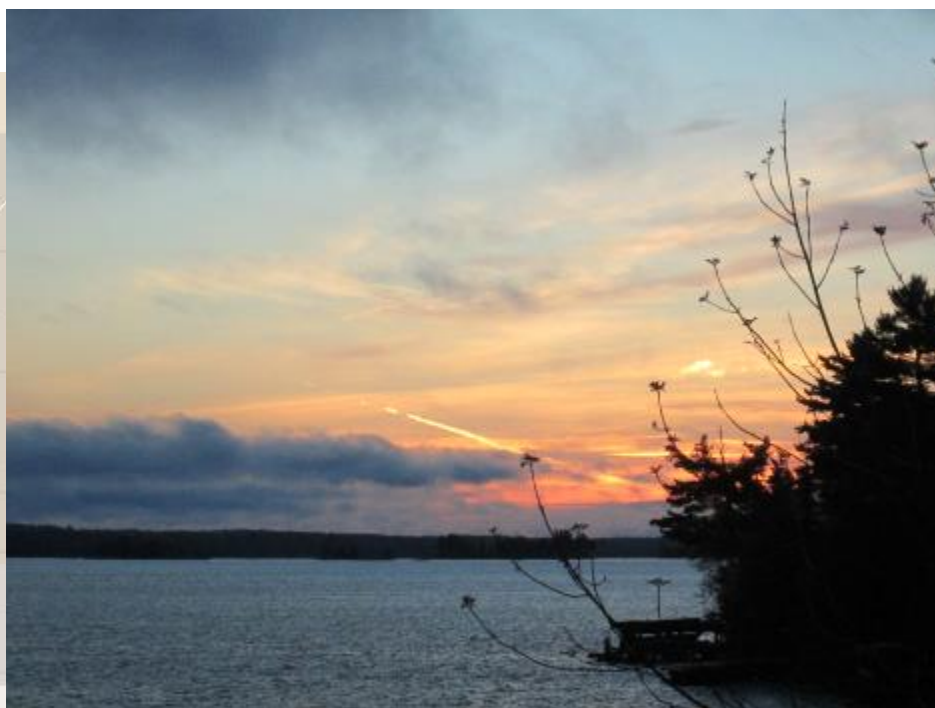




UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION

TOURISM CENTER

Sustainable Tourism Development in Destination Voyageurs National Park Communities



MINNESOTA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ASSESSMENT FOR SMALL COMMUNITIES PROJECT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH: UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION REGIONAL
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Sustainable Tourism Development in Destination Voyageurs National Park Communities

April 2014

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2013, the Minnesota communities of Orr/Pelican Lake, Crane Lake, Ash River, Kabetogama Lake and Ranier represented collectively as Destination Voyageurs National Park (DVNP), collaboratively applied for and were selected to be part of the Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities project conducted by the University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and University of Minnesota Tourism Center. The project was created to assist small non-metro communities as they identify, assess and develop local assets as part of a sustainable tourism development effort.

Tourism in Minnesota is a \$12.5 billion dollar industry that generates 17 percent of state sales tax revenue and more than 245,000 jobs from entry level to executive level positions. This happens in virtually every county of the state. Destination Voyageurs National Park is located within both St. Louis County and Koochiching County. Tourism in Koochiching County generates \$28.7 million in sales and employs 519 people. St. Louis County, which includes the Duluth metropolitan area, generates just under \$474 million in tourism-related sales and employs over 10,350 people (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2014).

Experience shows that expanding regional assets helps attract more visitors or keeps visitors longer in an area. Sustainable tourism and recreation efforts integrate the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainability by satisfying community tourism needs, protecting natural and cultural resource attractions, and preserving development capabilities for future generations.

To support tourism development or expansion efforts, broad community understanding of tourism is needed. Many leaders in the DVNP communities recognize tourism as an economic driver in the region, but overall awareness and understanding of tourism within the communities is limited. Creating a shared understanding of tourism and building awareness of its benefits will encourage residents to get involved.

The tourism assessment process involved gathering information and understanding the communities' tourism situation, and the process provided a basis for the core recommendations listed below. For example, a DVNP Community Team representing each of the communities spearheaded completion of local tourism resource inventories and analysis; and a First Impressions Team from another community conducted a "secret shopper" visit to the DVNP region to carry out a broad assessment of the local tourism strengths and weaknesses. In October, an Expert Team spent a day in the DVNP communities, exploring the area and visiting with community residents.

The Destination Voyageurs National Park region provides both existing and potential new opportunities for tourism development using natural and cultural environments. To successfully harness and sustain these opportunities, community involvement, collaboration and planning will be necessary. This report shares the data collected during this project and provides recommendations for action the communities might consider to harness or expand tourism opportunities.

General recommendations include:

- Create, maintain and enhance authentic tourism experiences.
- Build on existing natural and cultural capital.
- Create and maintain quality products and services.
- Identify ways to measure success and impact.
- Maintain awareness that tourism is just one important element of the region's economy.

- Encourage sustainable tourism practices across private and public sectors.
- Build local awareness, provide information and increase support for tourism from city governments, civic organizations, user groups and faith-based communities.
- Engage partners in discussions, tourism development planning and action.
- Commit organizational support to development opportunities for additional lodging, food and other tourism-related businesses to meet the needs of tourism now and as it grows.
- Provide organizational leadership in creating a regional tourism plan that aligns with the shared values of the region. Once this plan is created, recruit, involve and work with individuals and organizations to implement strategies that increase tourism and recreation in the area in accordance with that plan.
- Ask: “How does each possibility reflect DVNP as a region and our shared values?”
- Build on existing social and human capital.
- Engage residents to build local awareness of, and increase support for, tourism.
- Enhance the availability of information about the region on the Internet and in each DVNP community.
- Use research to better understand and address the needs of identified tourism markets.

Specific recommendations for the Destination Voyageurs National Park communities draw on the insights and observations of community members, First Impression visitors and Expert Team members. The recommendations are structured around several key themes:

To create stronger collaborations and community bonds	
<p>Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore ways to partner with regional community and economic development efforts that are being planned or implemented, such as the economic response teams in International Falls. • Review past studies for recommendations and actions taken or needed. • Engage community residents and regional organizations in DVNP planning. • Encourage businesses to cross-promote other businesses in the region. 	<p>Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider funding strategies for DVNP to build organizational sustainability, such as creating a three year funding scheme in which each member destination marketing organization commits a percentage of its annual lodging tax receipts to DVNP. This will give DVNP a sustained budget to promote the area. • Continue to recruit, involve and work with individuals and organizations in development and implementation of strategies that will benefit tourism and recreation business in the area. • Continue to leverage matching grant funds from Explore Minnesota Tourism, Iron Range Resources, and other funding sources. Include National Park staff in grant applications as feasible.

To maintain and enhance attractions and amenities

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Work with regional businesses to address visitor expectations for such features as expanded businesses hours, diverse dining options, and improved facility appearance.
- Host regular customer service workshops to refresh and maintain consistent quality service.
- Work with staff of the University of Minnesota NOvA neutrino physics research program to expand and market tours at the Ash River site.
- Increase visibility and information about the availability of ATM machines, auto repair services, and emergency medical care.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Work with key regional and state partners to address the need for infrastructure improvements and correct “way-finding” signage.
- Encourage new tourism amenities or businesses by identifying opportunities and facilitating stakeholder conversations.
- As new markets are considered, identify and enhance amenities to support visitor experiences. For example, cyclists (and other visitors) need bike racks, public toilets and drinking fountains.
- Collaborate with regional or state organizations on an initiative or plan to help upgrade and maintain rundown facilities.

To bolster community support

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Host a regional “spruce-up” day.
- Write a “start-of-season” article about benefits of tourism for local media outlets.
- Include younger and diverse residents in the planning process.
- Explore online sources such as Facebook and other social media outlets to reach residents and groups such as the Facebook group “Building Borderlands.”
- Consider an online calendar on the DVNP website and invite regional organizations to post information about local activities.
- Invite visitors to share favorite regional experiences on the DVNP website.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Work with National Park Service staff to review marketing, visitor data and education for gap opportunities.
- Maintain a database list of regional groups and organizations that may be potential partners or simply interested in learning about tourism happenings.
- Regularly provide short news items about regional tourism activities or events to regional media, civic organizations and faith organizations.
- Hold public meetings to discuss and plan for current and future tourism activities. Include opportunities for people to come together and celebrate the unique history, arts, cultural background, and natural resources of the area.
- Use consistent messages about regulations as a means of resource protection.

To expand marketing of the Destination Voyageurs National Park region

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- The greatest short-term opportunity for DVNP is to enhance online visibility. For example, many of the resorts listed in the Lake Kabetogama area did not show up when searching for “hotels” or “resort” on Google Maps (via Android phones) or Yelp (via iPhones).
- Consider hosting workshops to teach small business owners about e-marketing. Examples of topics include how to put themselves on the digital maps on third party websites like Google Maps, or responding to online reviews. One source for e-marketing workshops is University of Minnesota Extension at www.extension.umn.edu/community/retail/e-marketing/
- Enhance online information about existing amenities and options for tourists who are not visiting DVNP to fish. For example, what weather-resistant options are available for families with children?
- Place key attractions and landmarks on Google Maps, Yelp, Trip Advisor and other popular online mapping sites.
- Add information to the DVNP website and consider billboards or leaflets telling tourists what to do if their cell phone picks up a Canadian signal.
- Review current birding lists, maps and brochures. Update them for smartphones and tablets.
- Implement a campaign to increase community business presence on popular online travel sites such as TripAdvisor.com.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Use the unique differences between Voyageurs National Park and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness as a marketing strength.
- Consider a visitor profile study to better understand current visitors and their needs and expectations. One resource is the University of Minnesota Tourism Center. www.tourism.umn.edu/ResearchServices/
- Consider marketing eco-oriented vacation experiences.
- Explore including area volunteer opportunities in tourism packages that allow visitors to participate in eco-protection projects.
- Explore targeted marketing efforts to niche markets, such as outdoor enthusiasts, birders or young adult travelers.
- Develop and publicize possible regional itineraries for visitors so they will travel throughout the region. Itineraries could last more than one day.
- Explore the possibility of offering hosteling opportunities and market them via online booking sites such as “Hostel World” and “Hostel Bookers.”
- Continue promoting the variety of activities and attractions in the region rather than in individual communities to differentiate the DVNP marketing mission from community marketing organizations.
- Consider promoting DVNP as a “dark sky” tourism destination. See www.darksky.org or www.observingsites.com/ds_mn.htm for further information.
- Periodically assess the progress of initiatives against DVNP goals and measure for success and impact.

Recommendations for next steps include consideration of projects to explore the opportunities discovered in this project. Projects might encompass evaluating, developing new tourism assets, and maintaining existing ones. Other projects might include developing greater collaboration and bonding among communities in the region, and building community support for tourism; or enhancing current marketing strategies to focus on additionally identified target markets. Ideas and strategies for next steps are listed below and presented at greater length in the report. The report also includes the various teams’ findings.

MINNESOTA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ASSESSMENT FOR SMALL COMMUNITIES: REPORT FOR DESTINATION VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK COMMUNITIES

Introduction

The Minnesota communities of Orr/Pelican Lake, Crane Lake, Ash River, Kabetogama Lake and Ranier, represented collectively as Destination Voyageurs National Park (DVNP), were selected to be part of the Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities project in 2013. The University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and the University of Minnesota Tourism Center sought communities ready to identify, assess and develop local assets as part of a sustainable tourism development initiative. This effort, led locally by a DVNP leadership team consisting of community members and facilitated by Extension educators in Community Economics and Tourism Center faculty, had four goals:

1. To inventory regional tourism assets;
2. To assess tourism assets from local, visitor and expert perspectives;
3. To help the DVNP region uncover opportunities for tourism development; and
4. To help the region identify action steps for sustainable tourism development.

This report organizes project discoveries around four key ingredients of sustainable community tourism development: evaluating, maintaining and growing attractions and services; providing tourism leadership; developing community support; and marketing tourism.

Defining Tourism

Tourism has many definitions. This project centers on “person-trips” as defined by the U.S. Travel Association: “one person on a trip away from home overnight in paid accommodations or on a day or overnight trip to places 50 miles or more (one-way) away from home.” This definition includes specific criteria of distance, time and paid accommodations, which allows measurement.

However, this definition does not describe the purpose of travel. Tourists are not just vacation travelers. Business travelers, pass-through travelers and visiting friends and relatives (VFR) are also “tourists.” For smaller communities, pass-through travelers or day-trip visitors are important tourists to consider. Getting pass-through travelers to stop, stay a while and spend money is the goal. Day visitors generate income even if they don’t stay longer, but if the community offers sufficient tourism opportunities they may return for overnight stays at local accommodations – which increases revenue.

Identifying and differentiating current and potential types of visitors is important. For example, the VFR market is a significant segment of the tourism market in rural areas. Marketing to reach the VFR market is done primarily through community residents. This means regularly informing residents about attractions, events and happenings available in the community and region. The hope is that residents then share this information with their friends and family. Information dissemination can have further positive benefits in educating residents about tourism, increasing community involvement and generating community pride.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism considers the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of sustainable development in both the planning and operation of tourism. Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of community members and stakeholders, strong political leadership and organization, and continuous effort to create a high level of tourist satisfaction.

For more information about sustainable tourism development for destinations, see Appendix A: Sustainable Tourism.

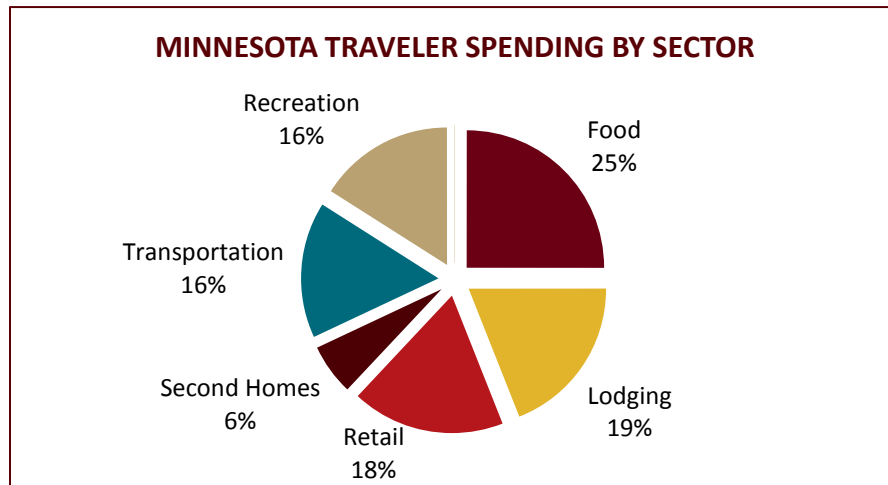
Minnesota Tourism

Tourism in Minnesota is a \$12.5 billion dollar industry that generates 17 percent of state sales tax revenue and more than 245,000 jobs from entry level to executive level positions. Spending during Minnesota's 71 million annual person-trips (overnight and day trips) is distributed throughout the economy (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2014).

For more information see Appendix B: Explore Minnesota Tourism and Economy Fact Sheet, 2014.

The United Nations' Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization say sustainable tourism should:

- Make use of environmental resources in a way that maintains essential ecological processes and helps to conserve the natural heritage and biodiversity.
- Respect the authenticity of host communities, conserve the cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing benefits across the community—including employment and income-earning opportunities.



Source: Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2014 based on 2012 revenue data.

Regional Tourism

The travel and tourism sector in Northeast Minnesota clearly is an important part of the regional economy. In the Arrowhead counties of Northeast Minnesota, tourism accounts for over \$764 million dollars in gross sales and provides over \$50 million in sales tax. In addition, the tourism sector employs 32,000 people in the seven-county region. Destination Voyageurs National Park is located within both St. Louis County and Koochiching County. Koochiching County generates \$28.7 million in sales and employs 519 people. St. Louis County, which includes the Duluth metropolitan

area, generates just under \$474 million and employs over 10,350 people (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2014).

Developing Tourism Opportunities

In his book, *Marketing for Entrepreneurs*, Frederick Crane (2013) says that opportunities can be “recognized, discovered or created.” This is particularly true of tourism opportunities because tourism is about experiences.

Recognizing opportunities requires a community to match existing assets—supply—with current or potential tourist markets—demand. For example, DVNP maintains birding inventories and is home to regional birding experts. How can DVNP better target the birding market to take advantage of these assets?

Discovering opportunities means supply or demand exists, and the other must be found, or “discovered.” For example, tourists around the world are becoming more interested in local foods. What supply can be found in the region? Supply could include cafes and restaurants offering local dishes, but also things like wineries, farmers’ markets, or the experience of fixing a shore lunch from visitors’ own catch or learning about forest edibles.

Creating opportunities is necessary when neither demand nor supply exist in an obvious manner. Thus, the community could create new opportunities. For example, are there opportunities to promote DVNP as a dark-sky destination?

Characteristics of a Good Tourism Opportunity

- Creates significant value for visitors by fulfilling an unmet need
- Offers profit potential
- Fits the capabilities of the community (values, skills and expertise)
- Offers sustainability over time
- Includes capability for financing (as needed)
- Produces measurable change in the community

Adapted from Crane, F. G. (2013). *Marketing for entrepreneurs* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications (pp. 22-23)

Harnessing Assets via the Community Capitals Framework

As part of the data collection in this project, communities were asked to identify and evaluate their assets. Assets can be physical resources such as rivers or buildings, or less tangible resources, such as volunteer networks, cultural heritage, or individuals' skills.

The Community Capitals Framework (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004) helps describe and categorize assets as a starting point for community and economic development—including tourism development. The creators of the framework name seven categories of resources that they call capitals: built, cultural, human, natural, political, social, and financial.

Assets become capitals when they are leveraged to improve communities (Emery, et al., 2006). The tourism assets inventory forms used in this project drew upon the Community Capitals Framework to help communities harness their assets for sustainable tourism development.



Flora, et al. (2004) define the capitals as:

Built capital: These are man-made, tangible assets, such as factories, schools, roads, restored habitat, and community centers. Built capital contributes to the building of other community capitals.

Cultural capital: Includes both values and approaches. Cultural capital can be thought of as the filter through which people live their lives, the daily or seasonal rituals they observe, and the way they regard the world around them.

Financial capital: Consists of money used for investment, rather than consumption. Financial capital is important for communities and residents because it can be transformed into built capital—which in turn supports other kinds of capital.

Human capital: Refers to the skills and abilities of each individual in a community. Human capital includes potential abilities and acquired skills; both formal and informal education contribute to human capital. A person's health and leadership skills are also part of human capital.

Natural capital: Includes landscape, air, water, soil, and biodiversity of plants and animals. Natural capital can be consumed or extracted for immediate profit or maintained as a continuing resource for communities.

Political capital: This kind of capital involves the ability of a group to influence the distribution of resources within a social unit, including helping set the agenda for what resources are available and who is eligible to receive them. Political capital includes organizations, connections, voice and power. Note that "political" does not mean "partisan" or "party politics" in this context.

Social capital: This consists of the networks, trust and engagement of people that exist among and within groups and communities. Social capital contributes to a sense of common identity and shared future. A community's social capital facilitates groups' ability to work together.

Project Description

The Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities project was launched to help small, non-metro communities identify and develop local assets that will attract and retain tourists. Assets include natural and built attractions, services, facilities, people, organizations and more.

Five communities or clusters of communities with populations under 1,500 were selected in a competitive application process to participate in the project. Single communities, which are located throughout the state, are Akeley, Warroad, and Houston. The community clusters are Clinton, Graceville, Beardsley, and Orr-Pelican Lake, Crane Lake, Ash River, Kabetogama Lake, Rainier—working collectively as Destination Voyageurs National Park.

Each community or cluster has a unique set of assets that can be used to develop tourism opportunities. Identifying and evaluating these assets through inventories and assessments are the first steps. The process engaged each community in examining its tourism assets.

The tourism assessment process included three information collection phases that involved community members, University of Minnesota Extension faculty and educators, Explore Minnesota Tourism staff, and regional volunteers.

In Phase 1, community residents identified local tourism assets by completing inventory and assessment forms. This was the DVNP Community Team.

In Phase 2, a resident team from one project community visited another community to conduct a mystery shopper-style visit and provide visitors' "first impressions" of tourism in the community. This was the First Impressions Team.

In Phase 3, a team of tourism experts assembled by University of Minnesota Extension visited each community to conduct an assessment and on-site consultation. The visit also included a community meeting to solicit ideas and insights from residents on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) for local tourism. This was the Expert Team.

This report reflects the aggregated data, observations, and suggestions from all three phases.

For more information about the project and process, see Appendix C: Project Application.

Project Limitations

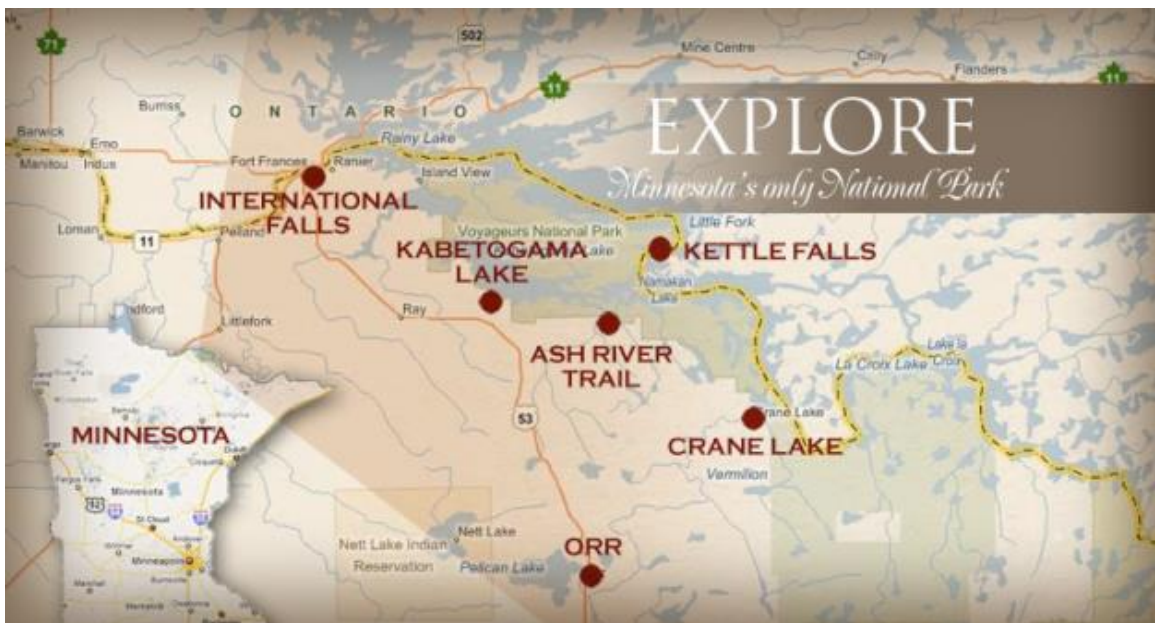
As DVNP leadership and residents of DVNP communities consider this report and strategies to move forward, they should note the limitations of this project. Information collected in each phase of the project represents a collective qualitative snapshot of regional assets by a small group of individuals, and thus may not fully represent community or visitor viewpoints. Inventories and assessment forms submitted by the community team were limited in number (only six were received) and assessment data was incomplete. The geographic size of the region and time constraints of site visits also limited information collection both for the DVNP Community Team and for the visiting teams (the First Impressions and Expert Teams).

Report authors recommend more in-depth inventory and assessment of regional assets. This may offer an opportunity to engage additional community members and gain additional local perspective. The authors also recommend obtaining additional visitor perspectives.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN DVNP COMMUNITIES: PROJECT FINDINGS, IDEAS AND STRATEGIES

To build tourism in a sustainable manner, it will be critical to consider each idea and strategy in a holistic and participatory approach. Part of the process is determining key values, and then weighing whether opportunities fit with those values. DVNP communities need to ask questions such as: What should be protected and what can be developed? How will developing or enhancing assets leverage others? Who in the region can and should be part of the decision? This report reflects findings and suggestions in areas important to building tourism in a sustainable manner. Those areas are:

- Maintaining and enhancing attractions and amenities
- Creating stronger regional collaboration and community bonds
- Bolstering community support
- Marketing tourism.



Map of DVNP region and communities. Source: <http://www.destinationvoyageursnationalpark.com/>

ABOUT VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK AND DVNP COMMUNITIES

Voyageurs National Park (VNP), from which the DVNP community partnership takes its name, is located in Northeast Minnesota, with much of the park bordering Canada. Voyageurs was designated a national park in 1975 after years of public debate, thus becoming Minnesota's only national park. The French word "voyageurs" refers to French-Canadian fur traders who were the first Europeans to travel—mostly by canoe—through the region's many lakes and rivers (National Park Service, n. d.)). The park's many lakes are accessible by both motorized and non-motorized watercraft through launch ramps at the three National Park Visitor Centers or at entry points in the surrounding gateway communities.

The Destination Voyageurs National Park gateway communities include International Falls/Ranier/Rainy Lake, Kabetogama Lake, Orr/Pelican Lake, Ash River Trail/Kettle Falls, and Crane Lake. These gateway communities are spread over a large area, from Orr, near the southern tip of the park, to International Falls, which is just over 50 miles to the north on the Canadian border. International Falls, the largest gateway community, is 300 miles north of the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

The DVNP community partnership is a non-profit 501c 3 destination marketing organization with a mission to develop and implement marketing strategies to increase awareness of the park and the vacation opportunities in the region's communities (Mason, 2007). The DVNP partnership brings leaders together from local, state, federal, and non-profit organizations, as well as park administration, local businesses, and gateway communities (Mason, 2007).

Background

Local residents often say the economies of communities in Northeast Minnesota depend on the “three T’s” of taconite, timber, and tourism. Although the mining and timber industries are still economic drivers in the area, changes in the global economy and technological advances have moved community and economic development professionals to make strategic decisions about diversifying the economy and increasing tourism in the area.

For example, in fall 2013, Boise Incorporated, an International Falls paper mill that is the largest contributor to the economy in Koochiching County, announced a major layoff of about 300 positions that will significantly affect the regional economy. In the wake of this announcement, International Falls, as well as other towns surrounding Voyageurs National Park, are making an effort to develop the tourism industry into an even bigger player in the local economy.

Although most of the communities that surround the park have been involved in tourism for many years, community leaders saw potential in making a bigger marketing impact if they combined time and resources to boost tourism sales in the entire region. In 2008, the DVNP organization was created to address marketing needs and issues from a larger regional perspective (Mason, 2007).

Past Studies

Tourism’s role as an important economic engine in Northeast Minnesota has driven numerous studies and assessments of tourism over the years primarily to identify gaps or address specific opportunities. These reports provided background and insight for this project. Two organizations that have completed notable tourism projects in the region are the University of Minnesota Extension Northeast Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (NMRSDP) and the Arrowhead Regional Development Corporation (ARDC). Their work is further complemented by the commitment to tourism and projects funded by the Iron Range Resources Board and other regional tourism marketing groups.

These previous studies include some of the same opportunities and challenges raised in this report such as the development of bird watching and address infrastructure issues. This past work demonstrates the success of regional leaders in leveraging external resources to address regional issues. All past reports and outcomes should be reviewed in conjunction with recommendations in this report as DVNP considers future tourism initiatives.

PROJECT FINDINGS, IDEAS AND STRATEGIES

Tourism Assets Identified by Communities

Local volunteers in the DVNP communities conducted inventories of available resources, amenities, cultural attractions, and recreational opportunities for visitors in fall 2013. A total of six inventory and assessments were completed. Many of the assets documented and ranked with high importance to tourism describe natural, scenic, and cultural attractions within Voyageurs National Park and the gateway communities. Therefore, finding new ways to package and promote the variety of activities and attractions available in the park and regionally rather than as individual communities would fulfill the DVNP mission and differentiate the DVNP marketing role from community marketing organizations.

Inventory Type	Key Asset Examples and Observations
Attractions—Natural and Scenic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beaches—Ranier Beach • Bird watching sites—Orr Park, Orr Bog, Oberholtzer Trail, Tilsen Bay Trails, Rainy River Management Area • Cliffs—Anderson Bay • Fall foliage—Koochiching County and Rainy Lake Area • Fishing lakes— Kabetogama and Rainy lakes, Rainy River, Ash River • Forests—Voyageurs National Park forest areas and Koochiching County forests • Geologic formations—Voyageurs National Park • Hiking trails—Oberholtzer Trail, Tilsen Bay Trail, Rainy Lake Recreation Trail • Islands—Rainy Lake and Lake Kabetogama • Parks—Voyageurs National Park, Franz Jevne State Park, City Beach • Picnic areas—Rainy Lake Visitor Center, Voyageurs National Park day-use sites • Rivers—Rainy, Echo, and Ash rivers • Waterfalls—Vermillion Falls, Whitewater on Vermillion River • Wilderness and wildlife—throughout the region
Attractions—Cultural and Historic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antique and craft shops throughout communities • Archaeological sites—Mckinstry Mounds, Grand Mound, Voyageurs National Park • Ceremonial dances—Nett Lake Pow Wow • Many churches throughout communities • Ethnic celebrations—St. Urho’s Day • Ethnic restaurants—Mexican and Asian throughout the area • Exhibits—Rainy Lake Visitor Center park history exhibit and Koochiching County Historical Museum • Historic buildings—St. Thomas Aquinas, Kettle Falls Hotel, Backus Community Center

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landmarks—Canadian border crossing, Little American Mine site, Bushyhead Mine, Brule Narrows, Kettle Falls Hotel • Lumber camps • Memorials—e.g. a Veterans memorial • Museums—Bronko Nagurski Museum • Performing arts —Icebox Radio Theatre, Rainy River Community College Theatre • Early railroad beds throughout the area • Landmarks—Boise Paper Mill
Attractions—Recreational Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bird watching • Water activities in Voyageurs National Park and on lakes and rivers in Koochiching and St. Louis counties; activities include canoeing, houseboating, kayaking, sailing, and water skiing • Bowling • Camping • Golfing • Hiking • Hunting • Skating • Nordic skiing
Special Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft shows— • Fishing Tournaments—Sturgeon Championship Fishing Derby, International Falls Bass Championship • Music Festivals—Hooked On Talent • Festivals—4th of July Festival, Ladyslipper Festival, Icebox Days
Other Attractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bronko Nagurski Arena and Kerry Park • Rizzo Field Ball Park • Children’s parks throughout the area • International Falls Dam • Kettle Falls Dam • Rainy Lake Visitor Center • Boise Paper Mill Industrial Tours • Bridges at Vermillion Falls • Pine Ridge Gift Shop Bakery • Wooden Frog Campground • Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary

Findings from First Impressions Visitors

DVNP was visited and assessed by community representatives from one of communities participating in the statewide but outside the region in the fall of 2013. These visitors were asked to look at the community objectively and provide constructive feedback using a set of questions provided by the University of Minnesota Tourism Center.

Before the Visit

None of the First Impression visitors had ever visited the Voyageurs National Park gateway communities prior to this visit. All of the First Impressions visitors to DVNP were female, between ages 45-54. Their expectation was that the region was fairly remote and rural, and did not have many businesses that cater to potential tourists.

Before going to the DVNP region, First Impressions visitors reviewed DVNP's website (www.dvnpmn.com) for its usefulness. First Impressions visitors were asked to rate the website on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being "poor" and 6 "excellent." They rated the overall appearance of the website and links to other sites as fair. While First Impressions visitors gave ease of finding a map on the website a 6 (excellent), they gave availability of tourism information a 3 (fair) and ease in finding specific information a 2 (poor). Their overall rating for the website, including links to other sites, was 3—fair. First Impressions visitors said they would like to see interactive maps and online reservation capability on the website.

Initial Impressions

Following their trip to the DVNP communities, First Impressions visitors reported that people were "nice and helpful." Visitors said the DVNP region appears to have "a little bit of everything" and would make a suitable retirement area. The First Impressions visitors agreed that the overall ambiance of the DVNP communities was fair, citing visitor centers, good street lighting, well maintained public spaces, and public artwork.



First Impressions visitors also noted areas for improvement, including the need to better maintain building facades, improve business signage, and install additional informational signs and banners in the communities. These are things that can be easily addressed but have a significant impact on visitor impressions.

Finally, First Impressions visitors rated community entrance signs as good—4 for clarity and 4.5 for location.

Community Information

First Impressions visitors reported that printed community information, such as brochures, trailhead maps, lake maps, and bulletin boards, were easy to find in DVNP communities. One visitor noted "Love the maps up on walls everywhere we went." However, visitors noted that it was extremely difficult, and sometimes impossible, to find information about stores, restaurants, and resorts using a mobile phone or tablet.

Access to Internet and WiFi

First Impressions visitors rated access to Internet and WiFi as good in DVNP communities, but visitors were confused when their phones began to pick up a Canadian signal, thus incurring roaming charges.

Tourism Assets

Visitors strongly agreed (rating of 6) that the DVNP area has an abundance of natural resources available for tourists' enjoyment. Visitors gave the level of cultural and heritage resources a 4.5 and the availability of lodging options a 4, putting those below "fair" on the scale.

Visitors collectively agreed that there is a lack of various activities and entertainment, festivals and events, retail opportunities, and dining options in the DVNP region. All these options were rated at 1 to 1.5—poor to slightly above poor. This suggests an opportunity to enhance marketing of existing options and possibly to increase options to meet visitors' needs and expectations.

When asked about the overall availability of recreational activities in the area, First Impressions visitors rated public access to waterways, walking trails, beaches, community centers and playgrounds as the highest in terms of availability. Some amenities visitors said were not readily available were golf courses, skateboard parks, art centers, public pools, and tennis courts.

Basic Services

When looking for basic services in DVNP communities, visitors said they easily found benches and other public seating, waste receptacles, recycling receptacles and RV dump stations. All were rated 5 to 6 - good to excellent. Visitors also found DVNP communities accommodating to persons with physical disabilities.

On the negative side, visitors said it was difficult to find drinking fountains, ATM machines, auto repair services, and emergency medical care in DVNP communities. They also noted a lack of bike racks in the region and inaccurate GPS directions; these are issues each community can address. Visitors also cited a lack of public transportation in the region; this is an issue that will take a longer-term effort to address.

Hospitality

First Impressions visitors gave positive reviews to the overall quality of hospitality and customer service in the DVNP communities. Visitors said they felt safe, were treated with respect by residents, and that frontline staff in local businesses and service organizations appeared to have been trained in good customer service. Visitors praised friendly local residents who seemed happy that tourists were in town.

First Impressions visitors also named two areas for improvement: expanding business hours to meet tourist needs. The First Impression reviewers also wished that they were encouraged to provide feedback about their experience on websites with online reviews.

Lasting Impressions

First Impressions visitors said their lasting impression of the DVNP region was one of a "gorgeous, peaceful area" with clean, fresh air and friendly people. Visitors believed the target tourist audience for this destination includes families (with children), fishing enthusiasts and outdoor enthusiasts in general.

First Impressions visitors also cited opportunities for improving the look of storefronts, landscaping and downtowns in general. Visitors identified the need to expand the DVNP web presence, as well as increase visibility on mapping and tourism websites such as Google Maps, Trip Advisor, and Yelp. Finally, visitors cited the need for more diverse options for dining and shopping, as well as museums, art studios, and cultural attractions.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS—SWOT ANALYSIS

On October 3, 2013, a community meeting was held during the Expert Team visit. The meeting was held to identify and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of tourism development in the region. About 25 residents and other community representatives attended the community meeting, in which residents broke into small groups of 4-5 people to conduct a SWOT analysis of the tourism potential for the DVNP region.

Each small group selected its top answers in each SWOT category and identified potential actions to take to use regional strengths to address opportunities or threats and weaknesses. The list below compiles the top answers of each group. See Appendix D: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats from October, 2013 Community Meeting for the complete list created by participants during the meeting.

Note that few younger residents attended the community meeting. As a result, the Expert Team suggests reaching out to younger residents via Facebook and other social media, as well as holding meetings, in order to obtain additional perspectives.

Strengths

Three areas stood out as exceptional strengths of the region.

Unique natural resource base

- Multitude of four-season activities
- Wildlife viewing and nature activities
- Variety of lodging and camping options
- Beautiful settings of lake, wilderness and solitude

Strong leadership

- Dedicated staff and administrators at Voyageurs National Park
- Willing community leaders with a can-do attitude
- Strong resort and community collaboration
- Organized local governments
- Businesses and residents embrace tourists

Solid infrastructure

- Roads and aesthetic issues being addressed
- Variety of lodging, shopping, and rental opportunities
- Visitor centers
- Transportation access

Weaknesses

Participants noted the following as being weaknesses and deficits in the area.

Marketing and funding

- Lack of regional identity
- Voyageurs National Park and gateway communities are not well-known around the region or the United States.
- Lack of funds to expand marketing—asking the same businesses to contribute most of the funding
- Confusion among tourists about the difference between Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park

Lack of a diversified economy

- Loss of a multi-faceted economy—need to think beyond the “Three T’s” of taconite, timber and tourism
- Fewer workers
- Lack of seasonal employment
- Long distance from major population centers

Missing infrastructure

- No ATV or bike trail infrastructure
- Infrastructure is aging
- Not much private land to develop
- Shopping opportunities inconsistent among communities

Opportunities

The community participants identified the following as opportunities for the region.

Technology advances

- More cell phone coverage
- New fiber-optic line

Greater use of the natural resource base

- Voyageurs National Park and communities could be a geo-tourism destination
- Connect the trail systems
- Opportunities for guiding businesses

- Improve the water and air quality

Positive media coverage

- Improve the regional, statewide, and national media coverage of Voyageurs National Park and surrounding communities

Threats

The following were identified as threats to the region and tourism sector.

Government regulations and taxes

- Federal, state, and local regulations could be a barrier
- Cost-of-living increases
- Negative government intervention and possibility of shutdowns (note: the tourism assessment was conducted during the federal government shutdown which included Voyageurs National Park)

Worsening of the local and national economy

- The Boise paper mill layoffs and Potlatch closing are concerns
- Lack of available jobs
- Getting more expensive to travel by car with increasing fuel prices
- Environmental degradation
- Concerns about effects of climate change on tourism industry
- Need to plan for natural disasters and extreme weather
- Polluted waters and invasive species are a threat

EXPERT TEAM OBSERVATIONS

The Expert Team visited DVNP communities on October 2 - 4, 2013. The team consisted of faculty from the University of Minnesota Tourism Center, Extension Center for Community Vitality; the executive director of the Northeast Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnership; the regional manager from Explore Minnesota Tourism, and a University student assisting with the project. The team met with DVNP Community Team members, spent time touring the DVNP communities to make independent observations, and met with community residents in a facilitated discussion of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of tourism in the Destination Voyageurs National Park area (see previous section). The Expert Team's observations and analysis of input collected from the Community and First Impression teams are summarized below under five areas of need:

- To create stronger collaborations among the DVNP and other regional tourism efforts.



- To create stronger bonds among DVNP communities in order to establish a regional identity.
- To maintain and enhance tourism attractions and amenities in the region.
- To bolster community support for and understanding of tourism development.
- To expand marketing efforts to attract new audiences.

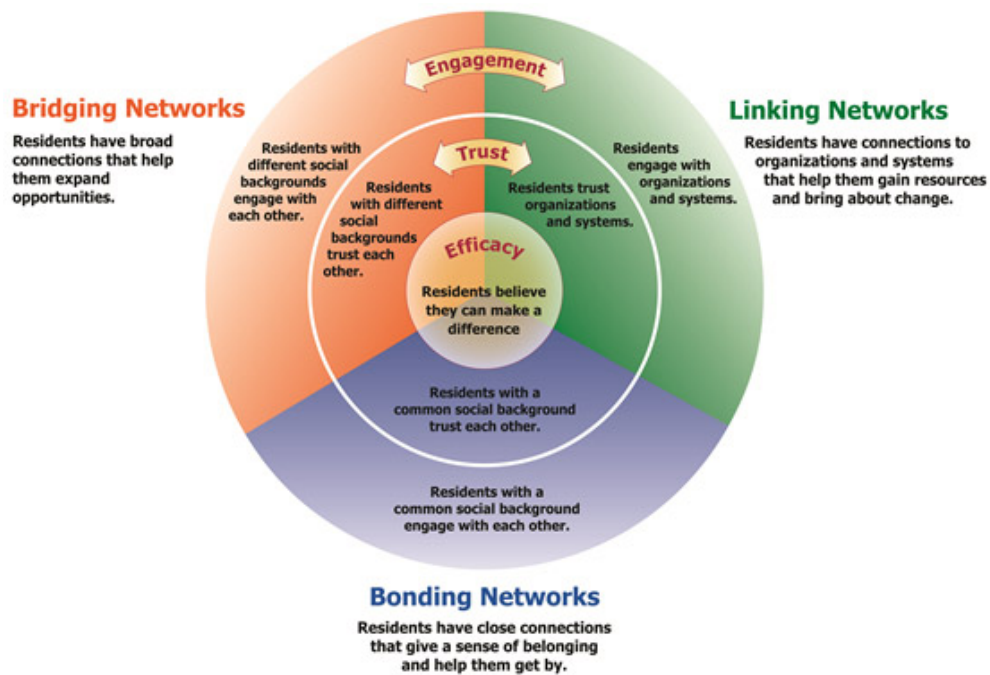
Creating Stronger Collaborations and Community Bonds

DVNP’s mission is to “connect people to Voyageurs National Park via implementation of an ongoing, comprehensive marketing and public relations campaign.” This mission statement is clear – DVNP is a regional marketing organization. Marketing is critical to building and maintaining tourism and economic growth in the region. However, marketing alone does not create sustainable tourism development. To strengthen tourism and support DVNP marketing efforts, robust leadership and community development are also needed.

The organization’s collaborative model and membership fosters networking in the region, but there is an opportunity to build on this. During the SWOT analysis, a strength and opportunity noted by participants is the ability to qualify for more grants because of regional collaboration. Participants also identified the need to hold more regular activities that bond communities within the region together.

Experienced leaders in DVNP have worked together for many years and have established trust. This social capital – the networks among people – can be leveraged to create even more bridges to others. For example, DVNP leaders can share their collective knowledge, passion and skills to foster tourism entrepreneurship and develop future leaders.

DVNP is an all-volunteer organization. It is unclear how formal the structure of the organization is; how decisions are made and the organization’s funding strategy. This model could be assessed for sustainability going forward. Strengthening the organization with staff and sustained funding will support DVNP leaders, encourage new leaders to step up, and can generate broader engagement across the region.



Community Social Capital Model ©2014, University of Minnesota Regents

While DVNP's mission is marketing, supporting community development and building social capital strengthens local community support for tourism in the region. Stronger community support in turn expands potential for developing tourism assets and expanding the marketing efforts of DVNP. For more information on community social capital and consultation or community training see <http://www.extension.umn.edu/community/civic-engagement/social-capital/>

Two examples of regional network relationships were shared by local leaders. According to regional sources, the current National Park manager's engagement with communities and tourism leaders is building new relationships and trust after years of strained relationships between the park and locals. These new relationships benefit sustainable tourism in the region and should be nurtured.

DVNP also participates in the Heart of the Continent Partnership (HOCP). This Canadian-American coalition working on cross-border projects includes a broad array of public and private organizations. The HOCP seeks to develop a common identity and sense of belonging. (<http://www.heartofthecontinent.org/>) This coalition provides opportunities to extend regional collaborations and participate in opportunities to reach new international audiences. While this partnership offers a new approach to strengthening regional relationships, some Expert Team members expressed concern that the expanded marketing efforts could strain or divert limited human and financial resources from DVNP.

Maintain and Enhance Attractions and Amenities

Creating and maintaining quality products and services benefits both residents and visitors. Expert Team members agreed with community members and First Impressions visitors who mentioned that there are opportunities to enhance tourism by refining existing amenities, sprucing up building facades, and encouraging entrepreneurship to develop business opportunities.



DVNP has a well-established resort network. Nearly all resorts have been operating for many years. The quality of lodging varies. One expert noted, "Rustic sells but deteriorating facilities does not." Collaborating with regional or state organizations on an initiative or other plan that helps resorts maintain and upgrade facilities that are run down could benefit both the businesses and regional tourism.

Voyageurs National Park is a key player both as an attraction and in managing the area's major natural resource. The value of working closely with the National Park Service is clearly understood by DVNP, and a review of the national park's marketing, visitor use data and visitor education can increase synergy and identify gaps that DVNP can fill.



The University of Minnesota's NOvA neutrino physics research facility is a surprise gem attraction in the region. Facility tours offer a unique experience for visitors of all ages. Working with University of Minnesota NOvA staff to expand and market tours engages the University as a partner and creates a valuable tourism attraction. Tourism professionals can help NOvA staff standardize the tour length and content, create a marketing brochure, and set a scheduling or reservation system.

The DVNP Community Team also identified a number

of cultural resources for possible development. For example, the region could do a better job of highlighting Native American cultures in tourist attractions. Such attractions could appeal to new markets or provide additional activities for visitors. Reaching out to local tribal leaders is another opportunity to strengthen regional collaboration and expand tourism.

The ARDC is another regional resource in the planning, development, and implementation stages for many local projects in the region. One example is the International Falls Area Gateway Corridor Improvement Project. This project makes aesthetic improvements and much-needed amenities to roadways throughout the International Falls area. The project involves numerous partners, including county and local governments and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT).

The ARDC collaboration may open the door for additional infrastructure improvements to support tourism. The DVNP area includes creative community signs and information aimed at visitors, but signs to help tourists find their way are problematic across the DVNP region. For example, highway signs list an incorrect distance from Orr to Crane Lake. Community residents know this, but this can be a big problem for visitors unfamiliar with the area. Other work in the region with MNDOT and county officials can be leveraged to address these and other signage issues.



Some questions arose about the quality of customer service in the region based on Expert Team member experiences, who reported varying levels of quality. This contradicts with reports from First Impressions visitors, who generally said they experienced good customer service in the region. Maintaining consistent quality customer service is always an issue and worthy of ongoing investment to create positive visitor experiences.

Today's experienced consumers also seek variety and quality in dining experiences. Encouraging restaurants to embrace new food trends and to provide consistent high quality food addresses the expectations of visitors used to quality and more variety in food choices.

Expert Team members also observed that while tourism development is best left to private operators and local associations and communities, DVNP can and should continue to play a critical and enabling role in developing new tourism amenities or businesses. DVNP is in a good position to facilitate and lead a coalition of stakeholders, including businesses, residents, and government entities to foster further sustainable tourism development in the DVNP area.

Bolster Community Support

Community development in the DVNP region is not part of the mission of DVNP, yet it is an opportunity to enhance tourism in the local communities which are a part of DVNP. Supporting community development efforts will bolster local support for tourism, encourage new business entrepreneurs and foster community pride.

The local tourism industry has an excellent grasp of what DVNP has to offer visitors. However, while people involved in the tourism industry “get-it,” there are still some residents and seasonal homeowners who do not support promoting the area for further tourism. A tourism awareness campaign can elevate residents' understanding of tourism and its importance to their communities, as well as build a sense of pride in their communities. Similarly, education on sustainable tourism resources would help mitigate social, environmental and economic stress.

Awareness building and networking happens across communities. Local leaders should be deliberate about broad engagement across the region. In this context, “community” is more than place-based and includes communities of interest and shared characteristics. To reach residents new communication strategies may be needed. As noted, younger residents (under 35) were not well represented at the SWOT meeting. Facebook and other forms of social media offer one way to connect with younger people. For example, in Northeast Minnesota the Facebook group “Building Borderlands” includes many younger residents who are discussing the future of the region among their peers through thoughtful dialogue and conversation. Connecting with this group provides an opportunity to hear new perspectives and encourage their support for tourism efforts.

Involving community residents as much as possible in achieving DVNP’s mission will encourage general public buy-in, which – in turn – will encourage more positive attitudes toward tourism.

In summary, the Expert Team recommends the following actions to bolster community support:

- Continue to recruit, involve and work with individuals and organizations in developing and implementing strategies that will benefit tourism and recreation business in the area.
- Explore partnering with selected organizations to educate both locals and tourists about sustainable use of the natural, cultural, and social resources in the area. This includes identification of social capacity for tourism among residents.
- Hold public meetings and use other strategies like social media to discuss and plan for current and future tourism activities.
- Provide opportunities for people to come together and celebrate the unique history, arts, cultural background, and natural resources of the area.

Expand Marketing of the DVNP region

Improving the online presence of businesses and communities across the DVNP region will enhance tourism, foster stronger networks and extend the marketing efforts of DVNP. Visitors and residents alike will benefit from increased access to information about regional businesses, attractions, and activities. Improving online presence also will provide an opportunity to assess what is known regionally about current visitors and potential new markets for tourism.

The DVNP website <http://www.destinationvoyageursnationalpark.com/> is a key marketing tool for the region and first point of information about the attractions and facilities in DVNP. Enhancing the DVNP website is a first step. The Expert Team offers the following observations about the DVNP website.

- The home page photo is visually appealing. Simple headers clearly guide users to information.
- The website heavily relies on links to other web pages to provide information about the region. While providing links may be the simplest way to provide information about local resources, this method is time consuming for website visitors who want to get good information fast. In addition, many of the links are broken, which annoys website visitors and may discourage them from exploring a trip to the DVNP region altogether. For these reasons, the Expert Team recommends including brief descriptions of local resources with the links. And fix broken links promptly.

- The website would benefit from an interactive map with “hotspots” that would respond to mouse rollovers or clicks to reveal additional information about regional attractions and services. The map also could include links to other pages on the website.
- Finally, the Expert Team recommends adapting the website (including the map) for easy viewing on smartphones and tablets.

The popularity of bird watching provides another marketing opportunity for DVNP. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), in 2011 there were 47 million birdwatchers (age 16+) in the United States, with 18 million of those taking trips to participate in bird watching. At 24 percent, the Midwest has the second highest birdwatching participation rate in the United States (USFWS, 2011).

Birding inventories and brochures developed with assistance from NMRSDP provide an existing base of information for use in a targeted marketing effort. Downloadable birding lists, maps and brochures are already posted on the DVNP website and can be adapted for smartphones and tablets. In addition, consider asking local experts to schedule talks or lead bird watching hikes.

Well-designed eco-vacations offer another marketing opportunity and can develop a new generation of DVNP travelers. An ongoing eco-orientation and water protection theme (and actual actions to back it) would both protect DVNP’s most vital natural assets, as well as attract tourists. Attractions like interpretive sites also educate travelers on the importance of protecting wildlife and the natural environment in general. A research study by Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Switzerland suggests that sustainable tourism marketing evokes positive emotions and responses in environmentally-minded American travelers (Wehrli, et al., 2013).



There may also be a marketing opportunity in packaging eco-protection volunteer activities to tourists. So-called “voluntourism” has seen increased attention and growth over the years. A Google search of “volunteer tourism” in 2014 shows over 58 million results, including opportunities, travel sites, popular media articles and research. Research also finds the presence of visiting volunteers can result in increased participation in the volunteer programs by residents and affects financial, human, the built and bonding social capital within the community (Zahra and McGehee, 2013).

Recreation opportunities in the region are plentiful; these include fishing, birding, hunting, camping, and snowmobiling. A long-term plan to enhance recreational attractions and amenities is needed. For example, residents cited the need for a biking and ATV trail infrastructure. Expanded recreational opportunities could address national trends related to bike tourism, outdoor recreation and healthy lifestyles. Research and feasibility studies are needed to explore this idea.

Many visitor markets fit the tourism offerings of the DVNP region and present opportunities to be “recognized, discovered or created.” According to a 2011 Outdoor Recreation Foundation report at <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/research.participation.2011.html>, the five outdoor activities with participation in excess of 100 million in the United States were all seeing growth; those activities include walking outdoors; visiting nature centers/cultural sites; viewing and photographing wildlife

and birds; picnicking, beach visits or other passive recreation; and bicycling on and off road. These are markets the DVNP can serve.

Younger travelers represent a new generation of potential DVNP tourists. A survey of 34,000 young people (aged up to 35) carried out by the World Youth, Student and Educational Travel Confederation (WYSEC) suggests that today's youth - Millennials - represent 20 percent of the total global travel market, including 5 percent who travel for volunteer projects. The UNWTO predicts that the number of international trips by young people might increase from 200 million trips a year at present to 300 million by 2020. The WYSEC study also found that young people tend to stay in locally-owned accommodations, so their money tends to stay *in* the destination (IPK International, 2013). DVNP might benefit from this trend with a marketing effort targeting younger travelers.

Consider implementing a campaign to **increase DVNP's tourism-related business presence on popular online travel sites**, such as TripAdvisor at www.tripadvisor.com, VirtualTourist, and IgoUGo. Sites like these are increasingly popular with travelers researching trips (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). According to Funsherpa (2012), 87 percent of travelers used the Internet for a bulk of their trip planning. Business owners may want to encourage travelers to leave online reviews about their experiences, but they should also be prepared to respond to online comments promptly and positively as a way of building potential customers. One resource for more information about responding to online reviews is <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/vitality/emarketing-guides/>.

Hosteling is also a popular travel style worldwide that may draw tourists, especially young people, to DVNP. Hosteling is the practice of staying at low cost, supervised lodging facilities. These often include dormitory style accommodations. Research whether any of the region's lodging facilities are willing to offer hosteling, and if so, explore marketing them via online hostel booking sites such as Hostel World or Hostel Bookers.

In conclusion, there are many opportunities to tap new or expanded markets for DVNP. The experienced marketing professionals in DVNP communities are best qualified to assess these possibilities. Each initiative should be gauged against DVNP goals and then measured for success and impact.

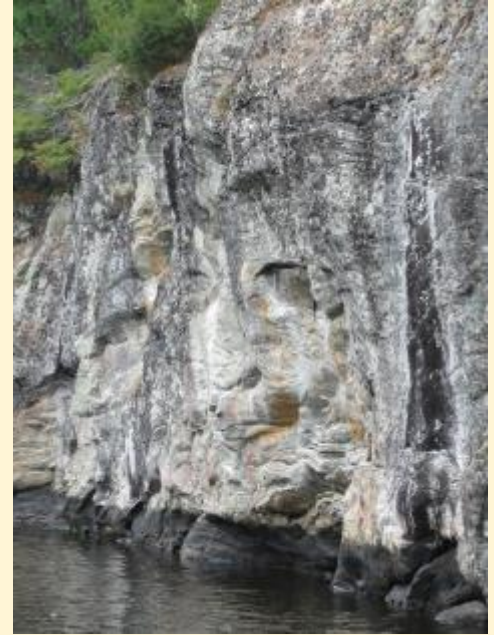
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations draw on the observations and suggestions from the DVNP Community Team, residents attending the SWOT meeting, the First Impressions Team, and the Expert Team.

General Recommendations

Following are general recommendations for sustainable tourism development initiatives in the DVNP region:

- Create, maintain and enhance authentic tourism experiences.
- Build on existing natural and cultural capital.
- Create and maintain quality products and services.
- Identify ways to measure success and impact.
- Maintain awareness that tourism is just one important element of the community's economy.
- Encourage sustainable tourism practices across private and public sectors.
- Build local awareness, provide information and increase support for tourism from city governments, civic organizations, user groups and faith-based communities.
- Engage partners in discussions, tourism development planning and action.
- Commit organizational support to the development of opportunities for additional lodging, food, and other tourism-related businesses to meet the needs of tourism now and as it grows.
- Provide organizational leadership in creating a regional tourism plan that aligns with the shared values of the region. Once this plan is created, recruit, involve and work with individuals and organizations to implement strategies that increase tourism and recreation in the area in accordance with that plan.
- Ask: "How does each possibility reflect DVNP as a region and our shared values?"
- Build on existing social and human capital.
- Engage residents to build local awareness and increase support for tourism.
- Enhance the availability of information about the region on the Internet and in each DVNP community.
- Use research to better understand and address the needs of identified tourism markets.



To Create Stronger Collaborations and Community bonds

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies (Can be Done Within 12 Months)

- Explore ways to partner with regional community and economic development efforts being planned or implemented, such as the economic response teams in International Falls.
- Review past studies for recommendations and actions taken or needed.
- Engage community residents and regional organizations in DVNP planning.
- Encourage businesses to cross-promote other businesses in the region.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Consider funding strategies for DVNP to build organizational sustainability, such as creating a three year funding scheme in which each member destination marketing organization commits a percentage of its annual lodging tax receipts to DVNP. This will give DVNP a sustained budget to promote the area.
- Continue to recruit, involve and work with individuals and organizations in development and implementation of strategies that will benefit tourism and recreation business in the area.
- Continue to leverage matching grant funds from Explore Minnesota Tourism, Iron Range Resources and other funding sources. Include the Voyageurs National Park staff in grant applications as feasible.

To Maintain and Enhance Attractions and Amenities

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies (Can be Done Within 12 Months)

- Work with regional businesses to address visitor expectations for such features as expanded businesses hours, diverse dining options, and improved facility appearance.
- Host regular customer service workshops to refresh and maintain consistent quality service.
- Work with staff of the University of Minnesota NOvA neutrino physics research program to expand and market tours at the Ash River site.
- Increase visibility and information about the availability of ATM machines, auto repair services, and emergency medical care.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Work with key regional and state partners to address the need for infrastructure improvements and correct “way-finding” signage.
- Encourage new tourism amenities or businesses by identifying opportunities and facilitating stakeholder conversations.
- As new markets are considered, identify and enhance amenities to support visitor experiences. For example, cyclists (and other visitors) need bike racks, public toilets and drinking fountains.

- Collaborate with regional or state organizations on an initiative or plan that helps resorts upgrade and maintain rundown facilities.

To Bolster Community Support

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies (Can be Done Within 12 Months)

- Host a regional “spruce-up” day.
- Write a “start-of-season” article about benefits of tourism for local media outlets.
- Include younger and diverse residents in the planning process.
- Explore blogs, Facebook and other social media outlets to reach residents and groups such as the Facebook group “Building Borderlands.”
- Consider an online calendar on the DVNP website and invite regional organizations to post information about local activities.
- Invite visitors to share favorite regional experiences on the DVNP website.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Work with Voyageurs National Park Service staff to review marketing, visitor data and education and other information for gap opportunities.
- Maintain a database of groups and organizations in the region that may be potential partners or simply want to learn about tourism activities.
- Regularly provide short news items about regional tourism activities or events to regional media, civic organizations and faith organizations.
- Hold public meetings to discuss and plan existing and future tourism activities. Include opportunities for people to come together and celebrate the unique history, arts, cultural background, and natural resources of the area.
- Use consistent messaging about regulations as a means of resource protection.

To Expand Marketing of the DVNP Region

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies (Can be Done Within 12 Months)

- The greatest short-term opportunity for DVNP is to enhance online visibility. For example, many of the resorts listed in the Kabetogama Lake area did not show up when searching for “hotels” or “resort” on Google Maps (used by Android phones) or Yelp (used by iPhones).
- Consider hosting workshops to teach small business owners about e-marketing. Topics might include how to put their businesses on digital maps via third-party websites like Google Maps, or how to respond to online reviews. One source for e-marketing workshops is University of Minnesota Extension at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/community/retail/e-marketing/>

- Enhance online information about existing amenities and options for tourists who are not visiting DVNP to fish. For example, what weather-resistant options are available for families with children?
- Place key attractions and landmarks on Google Maps, Yelp, Trip Advisor and other popular online mapping sites.
- Add information to the DVNP website and consider billboards or leaflets telling tourists what to do if their cell phone picks up a Canadian signal.
- Review current birding lists, maps and brochures. Update them for smartphones and tablets.
- Implement a campaign to increase community business presence on popular online travel sites such as TripAdvisor at www.tripadvisor.com.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Use the unique differences of Voyageurs National Park versus Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness as a marketing strength.
- Consider a visitor profile study to better understand current visitors and their needs and expectations. One resource is the University of Minnesota Tourism Center at <http://www.tourism.umn.edu/ResearchServices/index.htm>.
- Consider marketing eco-oriented vacation experiences.
- Explore including area volunteer opportunities in tourism packages that allow visitors to participate in eco-protection projects.
- Explore targeted marketing efforts to niche markets, such as outdoor enthusiasts, birders or young adult travelers.
- Develop and publicize possible regional itineraries for visitors so they will travel throughout the region. Itineraries could last more than one day.
- Explore the possibility of offering hosteling opportunities and market them via online booking sites such as “Hostel World” and “Hostel Bookers.”
- Continue promoting the variety of activities and attractions in the region rather than in individual communities to differentiate the DVNP marketing mission from individual community marketing organizations.
- Consider promoting DVNP as a dark-sky tourism destination. See www.darksky.org or http://www.observingsites.com/ds_mn.htm for further information.
- Periodically assess the progress of initiatives against DVNP goals and measure for success and impact.

CONCLUSION

Thank you to the DVNP leadership team, community residents, and First Impressions visitors. This project required the effort and resources of many people and organizations.

Tourism is an established part of the regional economy in Northeast Minnesota. Opportunities exist to make changes so that visitors will stay longer and return to the region. DVNP is an established marketing organization with a core of dedicated leaders and a strong base of regional tourism assets with which to work. DVNP is poised to strengthen existing tourism and embrace new opportunities.

The inventory assessments, site visits and SWOT analysis together and independently reveal a variety of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for DVNP communities and tourism businesses. While not all issues can or should be a matter for DVNP collective action, there are some that are clearly best addressed collectively to assure cost effectiveness and better chances of achieving desired results.

Community collaboration and planning will be necessary to sustain any efforts and make them successful. Further, it is important to consider efforts in a holistic manner to address economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Toward that end, DVNP leaders and stakeholders will be asked to identify strategies to move forward, collectively develop a detailed action plan with SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time-bound) objectives, and work together to implement the plan.

A tourism plan is needed to sustain tourism regionally now and into the future. Involving residents and businesses in the planning process, and communicating strategies throughout the region will share the vision and build support. Maintaining DVNP as a strong marketing organization provides leadership to guide successful implementation of the plan. Measuring and communicating the value of tourism to residents will increase support for tourism initiatives to keep tourism a vibrant industry across the region.



RESOURCES

Community Assistantship Program provides applied research assistance to community-based groups outside the Twin Cities metro area: <http://www.cura.umn.edu/CAP>.

Explore Minnesota Tourism: <http://www.exploreminnesota.com/industry-minnesota/index.aspx>

Minnesota Main Street program provides training, tools, information, and networking to revitalize downtown commercial districts: <http://www.mnpreservation.org/programs/main-street/>

Technical Preservation Services: This program provides information about tax incentives for historic preservation; <http://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm>

University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management Ventures Enterprise. This program supports businesses through student-managed projects to explore models, solve business problems and evaluate opportunities: <http://www.carlsonschool.umn.edu/ventures/>

University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality offers e-marketing education both in person and online: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/community/retail/e-marketing/>.

University of Minnesota Tourism Center: <http://www.tourism.umn.edu/>.

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APPENDICES

A: Sustainable Tourism

B: Explore Minnesota: Tourism and Minnesota's Economy Fact Sheet, 2014

C: Project Application

D: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (full lists)

APPENDIX A: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) and the related performance indicators have been created by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (www.gstccouncil.org). This is a worldwide effort led by a coalition of more than 30 diverse organizations, businesses and experts to come to a common understanding of sustainable tourism. Based on recognized criteria, certification standards, and best practices from around the world, the GSTC-D suggests minimum guidelines and indicators to aid communities and businesses in establishing locally appropriate measures around four main themes:

- Effective sustainability planning
- Maximize social and economic benefits for the local community
- Enhance cultural heritage
- Reduce negative impacts to the environment.

The GSTC-D is a tool gaining momentum globally, and the website provides links to several community case studies demonstrating how communities of different sizes are applying sustainability. Reviewing these criteria and the community case examples may assist your community in applying sustainability in your own tourism development initiatives.

Sustainable Development

The NE Regional Sustainable Development Partnership has a rich history of assisting communities and organizations in the region with sustainable efforts. Reviewing their website and past reports can provide additional ideas. <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/rsdp/northeast/>

**APPENDIX B:
EXPLORE MINNESOTA: TOURISM AND MINNESOTA'S ECONOMY FACT SHEET,
2014**



Tourism and Minnesota's Economy

Economic Impact: Sales and Jobs

Travel/tourism in Minnesota generates:

SALES

- \$12.5 billion in gross sales
- More than \$34 million a day

JOBS

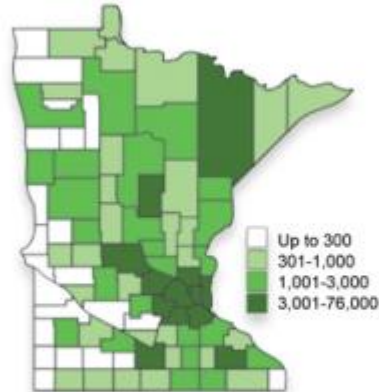
- More than 245,000 full- and part-time jobs
- 11% of total private sector employment
- \$4.3 billion in wages

REVENUE

- \$811 million in state sales tax
- 17% of state sales tax revenues

Note: Data for leisure & hospitality sector, 2012

LEISURE & HOSPITALITY JOBS BY COUNTY, 2012



- Travel & tourism creates jobs and generates sales in virtually every county of Minnesota.
- Tourism jobs represent all levels of employment, from important entry level service jobs to high-paying executive positions.
- Traveler spending indirectly supports jobs in many other industries, as well, from financial services to printing.

GROWTH IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Sales at leisure and hospitality businesses grew 54% from 2000 to 2012, including 5% annual growth for 2012.



RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Every \$1 invested in state tourism marketing returns an estimated:

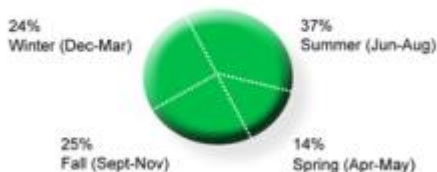
- \$8 in state and local taxes
- \$84 in spending by travelers

MINNESOTA RANKING AMONG STATES

The economic impact of travel & tourism in Minnesota ranks significantly higher compared to other states in:

Traveler Spending	22nd
Travel-Generated Employment	18th
Travel-Generated Payroll	14th
Travel-Generated Tax Receipts	9th

TRAVELER EXPENDITURES BY SEASON



Find more Information at: industry.exploreminnesota.com

CHANGE IN MINNESOTA LODGING OCCUPANCY

Source: STR (Smith Travel Research, Inc.)



After a decline in occupancy in 2009 due to the recession, lodging properties have seen annual increases in occupancy.

TRAVELER SPENDING BY SECTOR

Spending during Minnesota's 71 million annual person-trips (including overnight and day trips) is distributed throughout the economy:

- Food 25%
- Lodging 19%
- Retail 18%
- Recreation 16%
- Transportation 16%
- Second homes 6%

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2014

The FY2014 budget for Explore Minnesota Tourism is \$13.9 million, a significant, 66% increase in funding. With this additional investment, a new and expanded Explore Minnesota marketing campaign will debut in 2014.

Sources: Minnesota 2013 Tourism Advertising Evaluation and Image Study, Longwoods International; The Economic Impact of 2011 Travel in Minnesota, Tourism Economics; The Economic Impact of Expenditures by Travelers on Minnesota, June 2007-May 2008, Davidson-Peterson Associates; Minnesota Department of Revenue, 2012; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2012; Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Travel Association.

ECONOMIC IMPACT BY COUNTY

Minnesota's Leisure and Hospitality Industry, 2012

	Gross Sales	Sales Tax	Private Sector Employment		Gross Sales	Sales Tax	Private Sector Employment
Minneapolis - Saint Paul Area				Southern Minnesota			
Anoka	\$477,316,997	\$32,335,750	11,946	Big Stone	\$3,981,552	\$288,713	128
Carver	\$147,757,574	\$9,670,067	3,558	Blue Earth	\$163,413,193	\$10,761,636	3,812
Chisago	\$51,750,970	\$3,349,041	1,444	Brown	\$35,978,422	\$2,415,266	1,171
Dakota	\$756,875,628	\$50,422,799	16,657	Chippewa	\$16,097,127	\$1,116,951	382
Hennepin	\$4,240,067,280	\$280,741,109	75,525	Cottonwood	\$9,783,595	\$668,610	282
Isanti	\$32,486,466	\$2,263,043	871	Dodge	\$10,603,708	\$748,724	402
Ramsey	\$1,769,335,116	\$114,778,186	25,789	Faribault	\$11,001,957	\$720,257	305
Scott	\$309,920,392	\$17,654,986	6,168	Fillmore	\$20,503,063	\$1,444,022	578
Washington	\$437,255,748	\$29,667,435	10,378	Freeborn	\$42,175,002	\$2,830,232	1,092
Wright	\$181,130,118	\$10,836,093	4,406	Goodhue	\$69,132,826	\$4,750,638	1,733
Region Total	\$8,403,896,289	\$551,718,509	156,742	Houston	\$9,754,403	\$694,858	275
Central Minnesota				Jackson	\$10,890,094	\$671,491	313
Aitkin	\$20,692,436	\$1,425,354	497	Lac Qui Parle	\$4,071,170	\$291,795	88
Benton	\$54,858,985	\$3,625,581	1,286	Le Sueur	\$24,367,527	\$1,550,019	613
Crow Wing	\$201,073,526	\$12,686,611	3,892	Lincoln	\$3,565,954	\$263,732	103
Douglas	\$101,302,136	\$6,646,968	2,168	Lyon	\$66,993,915	\$3,048,196	1,381
Grant	\$3,031,590	\$193,803	47	Martin	\$31,101,613	\$2,085,872	840
Kandiyohi	\$77,016,965	\$4,829,598	1,582	Mower	\$56,191,224	\$3,363,419	1,306
McLeod	\$41,173,719	\$2,757,112	1,242	Murray	\$8,091,619	\$548,364	181
Meeker	\$16,657,239	\$1,122,629	431	Nicollet	\$34,746,412	\$2,416,047	923
Mille Lacs	\$50,259,624	\$2,704,777	905	Nobles	\$27,045,875	\$1,869,919	797
Morrison	\$37,953,902	\$2,650,027	1,069	Olmsted	\$396,425,482	\$26,354,806	7,982
Otter Tail	\$79,659,018	\$5,335,051	2,092	Pipestone	\$10,549,728	\$711,950	277
Pope	\$12,958,581	\$881,963	301	Redwood	\$27,583,097	\$1,953,300	399
Sherburne	\$78,969,255	\$4,882,658	1,990	Renville	\$9,121,424	\$647,690	274
Stearns	\$289,798,902	\$18,933,475	7,608	Rice	\$139,958,353	\$6,025,710	2,333
Stevens	\$16,022,664	\$944,069	463	Rock	\$9,424,079	\$651,954	215
Todd	\$20,289,225	\$1,411,145	406	Sibley	\$7,537,573	\$544,233	162
Wadena	\$14,577,092	\$983,273	371	Steele	\$61,538,609	\$4,121,598	1,401
Region Total	\$1,116,294,859	\$72,014,094	26,350	Swift	\$8,651,992	\$617,172	239
Northwest Minnesota				Traverse	\$2,187,294	\$164,983	NA
Becker	\$68,776,424	\$4,399,765	1,459	Wabasha	\$25,620,714	\$1,718,486	777
Beltrami	\$82,096,909	\$5,249,317	1,872	Waseca	\$14,349,281	\$907,047	388
Cass	\$102,411,781	\$6,196,420	1,736	Watsonwan	\$7,821,691	\$535,815	213
Clay	\$73,111,131	\$4,653,784	1,872	Winona	\$93,844,551	\$6,407,935	2,448
Clearwater	\$4,562,173	\$328,117	138	Yellow Medicine	\$13,838,318	\$554,384	211
Hubbard	\$29,955,194	\$2,018,357	741	Region Total	\$1,487,942,437	\$94,465,824	34,024
Kittson	\$3,056,600	\$220,142	70	Northeast Minnesota			
Lake of the Woods	\$31,860,767	\$1,810,876	479	Carlton	\$59,989,204	\$3,928,136	1,018
Mahnomen	\$16,465,104	\$970,379	122	Cook	\$55,099,915	\$3,509,141	880
Marshall	\$4,864,753	\$375,197	144	Itasca	\$69,252,200	\$4,458,591	1,501
Norman	\$3,020,579	\$215,947	67	Kanabec	\$14,045,543	\$924,158	308
Pennington	\$24,035,703	\$1,637,725	536	Koochiching	\$28,709,105	\$1,898,868	519
Polk	\$43,504,674	\$2,711,711	1,099	Lake	\$29,804,253	\$2,053,201	881
Red Lake	\$1,927,256	\$137,787	66	Pine	\$63,658,221	\$3,423,625	1,022
Roseau	\$19,603,999	\$1,313,260	344	St Louis	\$473,912,454	\$32,100,727	10,354
Wilkin	\$4,021,685	\$299,055	159	Region Total	\$794,470,895	\$52,296,447	16,483
Region Total	\$513,274,732	\$32,537,839	10,904	Minnesota Total	\$12,467,603,066	\$810,615,926	245,411

Notes: State total does not equal the sum of counties or regions because some data is withheld to avoid disclosure of individual businesses; and some state level data is for businesses located outside of Minnesota. The Leisure and Hospitality industry consists of Accommodations; Food Services and Drinking Places; and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation.

Sources: Minnesota Department of Revenue; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Produced by Explore Minnesota Tourism, an office of the State of Minnesota. 1/14

APPENDIX C: PROJECT APPLICATION

Community Application Form

Applications are due by noon on **May 15, 2013** and communities will be notified by **May 31, 2013**.

Please submit this application to your Regional Sustainable Development Partnership office listed on the last page.

Community Criteria:

Non-metro townships or communities in Minnesota with a population under 1500 or a group of 2-3 small communities (each under 1500) may apply. Groups of communities must be in geographic proximity and be willing to or have experience working together. Potential team members to consider:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chamber/CVB Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Resort/Hotel/Motel/B&B, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Resources Specialist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parks & Recreation Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Attraction manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> City planning or economic development staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Retailer | <input type="checkbox"/> Historical Society staff / volunteers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Township supervisor or clerk | <input type="checkbox"/> Restaurateur | <input type="checkbox"/> Arts / theater Organization |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth representative | <input type="checkbox"/> Others as appropriate |

Contact Information:

Community: Destination Voyageurs National Park (DVNP)	County: St. Louis and Koochiching
Partner Communities Names: (if applicable): Orr/Pelican Lake, Crane Lake, Kabetogama Lake, Ash River, Ranier	
Local Coordinator: Mary Somnis (providing administrative support to DVNP, which has no staff.)	Email: mary.somnis@state.mn.us
Street Address: c/o IRRRB 4261 Hwy 53 S	
City: Eveleth MN	Zip Code: 55734
Telephone: 218-735-3040	Community website: www.dvnpmn.com
Additional Team members & emails (minimum of two people in addition to Local Coordinator required and multi-community applications must include team members from each community) Orr/Pelican Lake: Roni Carr Crane Lake: Butch Eggen Kabetogama Lake: Jennifer Gelo Ash River: Deb Weiber Ranier: Tony Cole (Emails are included in attached commitments.)	

Continued on next page

Please answer in one short paragraph: How ready do you feel your community is to engage in this project? How will you use the findings from this program to benefit your community?

DVNP is an all-volunteer organization whose mission is "to connect people to Voyageurs National Park via an ongoing, comprehensive marketing and public relations campaign that will effectively encourage awareness and result in increased visitation, economic growth and sustainable communities." Members of DVNP represent all gateway communities surrounding the park, working together in an innovative partnership that has never been experienced in this area before. Accomplishments include:

- Creation of a portal website, bringing all communities together for the purpose of joint marketing.
- Hosted a "Marketing Think Tank" community meeting and collected input from 75 attendees.
- Attended the Heart of the Continent's International Community Congress and, as a result, created a strategic marketing plan for the organization. DVNP is committed and follows through on plans.
- In the process of local fundraising, in preparation to pursue larger sponsorship opportunities.

The members of DVNP appreciate and understand the benefits of collaboration among the gateway communities. This program provides an opportunity to engage many people in the area, participating in the assessment, providing input, and creating ownership of the resultant recommendations. The findings from this program will be incorporated into the strategic plans of DVNP and will be shared with all gateway communities for future implementation.

Applicant Terms of Agreement:

- Our community already has at least 3 people who have agreed to serve on the Community Leadership Team. This team will be responsible during the next 1-2 years for facilitating program logistics in the community and helping guide implementation of the program locally. One person will chair the Leadership Team and be the primary contact person.
- Our community realizes that implementing this tourism assessment program takes a commitment of time and requires financial resources to support meetings, the community visit and implementation of recommendations.
- Our community will host the visiting tourism experts for a 1-2 day visit by providing complimentary commercial lodging and meals, and arrange for interviews and meetings with community stakeholders. These may be in-kind contributions.
- Our community will send representatives to the statewide celebration of communities in this project.
- Our community is prepared to create action steps to develop tourism assets.

Sign & Date: Mary Somnis 5/14/13

Partner community signatures as applicable:

Please see attached emails of commitment from community team members.

Questions, please contact:

Cynthia Messer, Extension Professor
University of Minnesota Tourism Center
cmesser@umn.edu or call 612.624.6236



Somnis, Mary (IRR)

From: Orr Pelican Lake Info <info@OrrPelicanLake.com>
Sent: Friday, May 03, 2013 2:47 PM
To: Somnis, Mary (IRR)
Subject: Community Leadership Team

Mary,

Yes, I will be on the Community Leadership Team and help in any way I can for the Orr-Pelican Lake area.

roni carr- Secretary Orr Pelican Lake Resort Association
Email: info@orripelicanlake.com
Phone: 800/777-4690

Somnis, Mary (IRR)

From: Somnis, Mary (IRR)
Sent: Tuesday, May 14, 2013 11:45 AM
To: 'Butch Eggen'
Subject: RE: MN Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities

Thank you!

Mary Somnis
mary.somnis@state.mn.us
218-735-3040
800-765-5043 ext 3040
IRRRB
PO BOX 441
Eveleth MN 55734

-----Original Message-----

From: Butch Eggen [<mailto:beggen@citlink.net>]
Sent: Tuesday, May 14, 2013 11:40 AM
To: Somnis, Mary (IRR)
Subject: RE: MN Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities

Dear Mary,

I agree to serve on the Community Leadership Team for the MN. Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities as it pertains to DVNP.

Butch Eggen

Somnis, Mary (IRR)

From: Jennifer Gelo <jrsgatkab@icloud.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 14, 2013 12:32 PM
To: Somnis, Mary (IRR)
Subject: Re: MN Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities

Hi Mary

Thank you again for spearheading the application for the Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities. This would be a wonderful opportunity for our area and I look forward to hearing regarding its approval. In the meantime, I would like to be the Kabetogama representative on the Community Leadership Team which is a part of this application. Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Gelo, Owner
Sandy Point Resort
10606 Gamma Road
Kabetogama, MN 56669
218.875.2615

Somnis, Mary (IRR)

To: Deb Wieber
Subject: RE: MN Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities

-----Original Message-----

From: Deb Wieber [mailto:deb@ashtrailodge.com]
Sent: Friday, May 03, 2013 12:32 PM
To: Somnis, Mary (IRR)
Subject: Re: MN Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities

I would be honored to!
Deb

On 5/3/2013 12:31 PM, Somnis, Mary (IRR) wrote:

> Are you willing to serve on the Community Leadership Team? Please respond - thank you!
>

> Mary Somnis
> mary.somnis@state.mn.us
> 218-735-3040
> 800-765-5043 ext 3040
> IRRRB
> PO BOX 441
> Eveleth MN 55734
>

> -----Original Message-----

> **From:** Deb Wieber [mailto:deb@ashtrailodge.com]
> **Sent:** Friday, May 03, 2013 12:30 PM
> **To:** Somnis, Mary (IRR)
> **Cc:** Orr Pelican Lake Info; Butch Eggen; jrsgatkab@icloud.com; Betsey Warrington; joe@soundnorth.net; eric@internationaldentalsarts.com; Shawn Mason; Michael_Ward (Michael_Ward@nps.gov)
> **Subject:** Re: MN Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities
>

> thank you Mary for spearheading this wonderful opportunity! I am sorry I missed the meeting Wednesday; had a commitment I couldn't get away from.

APPENDIX D: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS FROM OCTOBER, 2013 COMMUNITY MEETING (FULL LISTS)

INTERNAL		EXTERNAL	
INTERNAL		EXTERNAL	
INTERNAL		EXTERNAL	
<p>Community: DVNP</p> <p>These are elements within the community that may affect your ability to reach your goals --- leadership, lack of vision, funding, communication, physical resources, human resources etc.</p> <p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multitude of 4 season activities • Unique natural resources base • Wildlife viewing/ Nature • Infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Roads ○ Structure ○ Schools ○ Etc. • Good leadership • VNP • VNP superintendent • Starting of businesses • Compassionate businesses • Willing leaders and good vision • Airports • Can-do attitude • People work together • Beautiful settings , lake, wilderness • Strong resort communities • Appeal to ecofriendly element and fitness • Variety of lodging, shopping, boat rental, etc to offer • Great camping (tent, RV) • Voyager NP w/ emphasis on national 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short season • Loss of multifaceted economy • Funding • Lack of funds • Don't have regional identity • UNP is not well known • NO ATV or bike trail infrastructure • Aging infrastructure • Fewer workers • Availability of land • CAVE people • Aging population and infrastructure • Asking some business to do most of the funding • Aging facilities • Doesn't work well with others • Lack of diversified industries • Lack of funds • Lack of age related activities • Signage • Nimby's nimble's • Selfishness • Lack of seasonal opportunities • Lack of ATV trails • Lack of resorts and lodging • Lack of off season employment 	<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underutilized natural resources • EMT • Interconnected trail systems • Park offerings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Land, water, critters, boat tours, etc. • Geotourism dest. HOCIP • Technology advances in communities • Positive media coverage • Grants funding • Gateway sewer projects • Sharing of ideas from other states • New fiber – optic line • Underutilized wood basket • Reach out to other ethnic groups to be tourists here • Park offerings • People shopping local (locals) • Big trail systems – comprehensive, connected • Water park (manmade) • Improving economy • More cell coverage • More day sites in park • Family amusement • Guiding • Positive media coverage 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging population • Gov. regulations/ taxes • Current/Future State/Fed regulations • Envired degradation • Polluted waters/ invasives • Natural disasters/weather • National economy • Gas prices • Aging everything • Increasing taxes • Invasive specials • Deteriorating roads • Boise layoffs • Potlatch closing • Cost of living • Most amenities are accessible only by water • Job cuts (Boise) Nova (construction ends) • Terrorism • Too many governing bodies • Job availability • Army worse • Fed government shut down • State shutdown • Weather • Highway construction • Limited availability for billboards • Economy

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Community: DVNP

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairly good commo w/ national park Hunting and fishing Locals appreciate tourism. Esp. for social life Quiet peaceful, solitude Visitor centers Retreat areas Natural resources Cooperation amongst communities Variety of exposures for guest Local businesses DNVP leadership National park 4 seasons Variety of recreation Great VNP superintendent Residents are welcoming to tourism EMT Plethora of resorts and lodging Hard working citizens Water resources (lakes, rivers) Opp to indrroduce/educate visitor about park Organized DMOs Existing infrastructure – park, falls, roads, lodging, desire of residents its do something Groups that will work well together Organized local gov't 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Money and volunteers Lack of campsites outside VNP VNP is not well known Bike trails, lack there of Not enough short stay places Communication among businesses Confusing between VNP and BWCA – no motors Not much private land to develop Heavy competition between communities for tourist base Complicated NP systems – EG Tour boats Difficult being tour guide w/in park Distance from major population No consistent branded signage w/in community Shopping availability inconsistent among communities Don't have big signage to clearly tell visitors "you are here" park Employment – finding local employees Negative attitude towards visitors Local stigma against Fed and State agencies Only access by water to get to park Short season 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proximity to Canada Regional marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geotourism Market to No Dakota (booming population) Family oriented travel Low interest rates CO fires and floods – market them and their clients Grand Opening of park Over-use of other resorts Politicians live here Technology advances in communication Bear sanctuary (intl audience) Canadian mining Water/air quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government shut downs More regs imposed on VNP Canadian mining Limited funding sources Any disaster Negative government intervention Government shutdown
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Community: DVNP

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of events across region • Transportation access (access to TC – 4 lane highways, airport) • Uniqueness of Nat'l resources • Fish • Traditional; and historic base of tourism biz (longest industry survived) • Strong k-12 school system • Arts community • Good websites for tourism promotion • Adv. and signage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived cold climate • Lack of cross community communication • Enough staff @ info center for 7 days/week • Bugs • Distance from large pop. Centers • Loss of multifaceted economy • Visitors wanting Fed stamp and visitor center • Falls dependence on wood products industry • Old school/traditional thinking 		
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Community: DVNP

Community:

	STRENGTHS		WEAKNESSES	
	1.		1.	
	2.		2.	
OPPORTUNITIES	Opportunity-Strength (OS) Strategies Use strengths to take advantage of opportunities		Opportunity-Weakness (OW) Strategies Overcome weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities	
1.	1.		1.	
2.	2.		2.	
THREATS	Threat-Strength (TS) Strategies Use strengths to avoid threats		Threat-Weakness (TW) Strategies Minimize weaknesses and avoid threats	
1.	1.		1.	
2.	2.		2.	

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Community: DVNP

S/O

- Improve on 3T's
- More grants avail. b/c working together
- Media x2

W/O

- Stronger DMO marketing drive National and international market by building awareness
 - By focusing on MIDWEST market
- Get more funding
- Reg. FAM tour
 - Experience regular community
- Promote tourism, Div. timber industry, improve miner

S/T

- Tailor gov't regulations to environment conditions
- Land of fewer NO's → BWCA
- Fewer restrictions. work w/ government regulations/property
- Build awareness/educate locals and visitors about environment

W/T

- More reg. activities to BOND community
- WORK TOGETHER
- Use joint power agreement to work through environmental regulations
- Think of regulations as protections
- DMO's and BUSN work more close with park service

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