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TOURISM AND RECREATION: A SUBSTANTIAL INCOME POTENTIAL FOR THE
MEMORIAL HARDWOOD FOREST AREA OF SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA

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MEMORIAL HARDWOOD FOREST AREA OF SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA*

by

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THE FUTURE FOR MY COMMUNITY?

The reader is asked to view their community in perspective. How would you answer the question, "What would I like the future of my community to be?"

It is suggested that a major wish for every community would be living quality for residents. Living quality includes jobs and income opportunities. It includes pride in the community - the place which one calls home. It also includes amenities - things which lift living above the humdrum; among these are aesthetic qualities and opportunities for recreational activities.

The following discussion is primarily directed at potential for job and income opportunities through the development of the recreational and tourism industry of Southeastern Minnesota. But it is recognized that the opportunities for area residents' personal enjoyment at fishing, viewing the beauty of the woods, the wild flowers, and the wildlife, plus the many other possible recreational activities has first claim upon area amenities. It is suggested that a balanced approach to community resource use is essential in reaching the goal of residents' living quality. This calls for optimum development of all resource and industry potential including particularly agriculture and manufacturing. It also means that the development of the recreation/tourism market and resource potential offers much to this part of southeast Minnesota.

TOURISM INDUSTRY POTENTIAL FOR SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA

Present projections are for relatively limited population and economic growth in the counties of the Memorial Hardwood Forest area. If we except the two metropolitan counties of Dakota and Olmsted, only one of the remaining six has a projection for appreciable population growth within the next 15 years.^{1/} The other five have either a projection for a stable or a declining population. Even with the stable population, this usually means in today's society that the service base will be eroded. Stable or declining populations mean that many of the young people growing up in the community will seek employment elsewhere.

Part of this population stagnation arises from the large dependence for employment upon agricultural production. Agriculture is an excellent use for many of the area's resources. Its market location fits it well for dairy agriculture. However, as new technology in agriculture has developed, fewer workers are required to produce more and handle larger acreages. This release of workers from primary production such as agriculture has gone on over time. In ages past it freed man to paint caves,

^{1/} Hoyt, J.S., Jr., and Nelson, D. "Population Projections 1975-2000", Minn. Economic Data, Counties and Regions, Dept. of Agri. Econ., U. of MN, 1973.

to construct the calendar, and to write and perform music. In the present day it has allowed freedom to develop the computer and build automobiles and roads. But it still works a temporary hardship on the communities that are primarily rural.

Other industries, particularly manufacturing, processing and medicine, have been developed. These now contribute importantly to the economy of Southeast Minnesota. Fortunately this part of Southeast Minnesota has yet another employment and income base which the course of our overall economy makes available. This is in the further development of its commercial tourism and recreation industry.

The overall demand upon which tourism can build is almost staggeringly large. At the present time over 20 percent of personal family spending goes for optional types of expenditures of a recreational and tourism nature. This amounts in the United States to between 3 and 4 hundred billion dollars annually. In Minnesota alone the U.S. Travel Data Center estimates that there are over 140,000 jobs directly related to travel.^{2/} This represents 9.2 percent of Minnesota's non-farm employment, and because of it, we rank seventh among all the states in the United States.

The potential among the six counties - Dodge, Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Wabasha and Winona, to which I have just referred - is large. In the fifteen years immediately ahead the possibility is that they could expand their sales for tourism and travel from the present approximately \$25,000,000^{3/} to approximately \$100,000,000. This means that employment possibilities from tourism/recreation could grow by as much as 3 to 4 thousand jobs in this fifteen year period.

I must hasten to add that this is a statement of realistic potential. It is not a forecast of what will happen. There is nothing automatic about it. Tourism and recreation, like any other industry, must be systematically planned for and developed. However, the potential is here in great abundance.

Why hasn't it happened up until this time? Part of the answer lies in the fact that its major potential market areas, such as the Twin Cities and Chicago, have "gone to northern Minnesota" to the lakes area. They have not seen this part of Minnesota as having a substantial destination appeal. They have viewed lakes as offering recreational possibilities while rivers - among the major features of S.E. Minnesota - have had little appeal.

^{2/} 1976 National Travel Expenditure Study: Summary Report. U.S. Travel Data Center, Washington, D.C., 1978.

^{3/} The Economic Distribution of Tourist Expenditures in Minnesota, Research Bulletin #06, Minnesota Department of Economic Development, 1976.

Coupled with a weak destination image on the part of their best market areas, there has been a local problem - businesses and investors have seen little potential for tourism. They have, indeed, failed to view it as a legitimate industry. This failure is not unique to Southeastern Minnesota, in one form or another it may be encountered in most communities. It is compounded of at least two factors:

1. Tourism is an incredibly complex phenomenon, crosscutting a very large part of the society and economy. For this reason its full impact is seldom recognized or understood. Most people are tourists many times throughout the year. Most retail businesses profit from tourists since travelers need, while away from home, nearly everything that they would need at home; but in very different proportions. Thus tourism income is received by many businesses but for only a few is it the main income source. Finally, today's economy requires travel as a condition of the operation of most firms - for sales, supply, technology, and administration.
2. Our work ethic philosophy served us well in the 19th century. It decreed that production of physical things was the essential goal and that idleness was evil. Carried into the present day it causes problems; because of advanced production technology and division of labor most workers cannot be engaged in physical production. Services are seen as producing "nothing" and possibly even being sinful, even though they are as important currently as activity involving a physical product. Further, the idea of tangeable products becomes prostituted into a consumerism where "gadgets" tend to rule our lives. Many of these "gadgets" and physical items deliver much more than utility. A shiny chrome-trimmed automobile is more than transportation. We could get the transportation with a bicycle or motorcycle. In addition it delivers status, comfort and convenience. These are also important items provided by the growing service sector of our economy, of which recreation and tourism is a part. When the hospitality* businesses are recognized by a region as an important part of the modern setting it is possible to go about the task of systematically building them into the structure of the local economy.

RESOURCE AND MARKET BASES FOR TOURISM

Tourism potential of the Memorial Hardwood Forest Area bases solidly upon its resource endowment and market setting.

Resources. The recreational resource endowment is considerable. Vistas from the towering hills overlooking the mighty Mississippi compare favorably

* Those businesses serving people away from home - including food, lodging, transportation, and entertainment.

with some of the top attractions in the North American Continent. Their nature differs from that of the Grand Canyon, or Niagara Falls but they are of a near-comparable magnitude.

Natural recreational resources may be viewed as those relating to:

- Forests
- Rivers
- Topographic - the hills

We may thus look upon Southeastern Minnesota as the woods-rivers-hills recreational region. It stands in contrast to the northern woods and lakes of the northern half of the state with potential for offering a viable alternative. Along with the natural features, essential man-made features are noted later in the discussion. These include:

- The communities and their service centers.
- History, culture and the current economic activities.
- Hospitality services.

What, specifically, do the forests contribute? Together with the rivers of the area the forests give Southeast Minnesota its recreational trademark - the special visual appeal of rugged wooded hills and freely-running water, harboring a wealth of nature. Every tourism area has a distinctive image and that of the Memorial Hardwood Forest area can be thus clearly defined. The rugged terrain is suited to the production of trees rather than tilled crops. Trees and recreation are complementary over a wide range. The general vista is one of expansive vastness and relative wilderness even though there is a relatively dense human settlement.

The forests provide habitat for many forms of wildlife. These include the whitetail deer, and newly-reintroduced wild turkey. There is clean runoff water and cool streams for trout. And there are delicate wild flowers.

Overall the forests add color. There is the stark white of birch trunks in winter; the delicate blush of emerging buds in the spring; a refreshing deep green canopy in summer; and the brilliant burst of autumn color.

Publically owned forest land can guarantee that there will always be access to enjoyment of some of these areas by local residents, as well as by visitors. This is important, as private ownership of land for amenity prepose is proceeding at a much more rapid pace in Minnesota than most of us realize. Without public ownership of some tracts of land even many area residents would be restricted within a relatively short time. This is not to purpose that all of the land, or even a high percentage of it should be in public ownership. It is assumed that most of the land area, even that which grows trees, will be privately owned. But publicly owned land can be a factor in management and in the provision of recreational facilities and forest area access.

Needed is a common vision of the future potential and social means for engineering it into reality.

Market Access. The market access of this part of Minnesota for tourism purposes is the best of any part of non-metropolitan Minnesota. First, there is the Twin Cities lying less than an hour's drive from many parts of this area, with its relatively affluent and outdoor-area-oriented population of 2 million.

Second, there is Rochester and the Mayo clinic area. Rochester in many ways is the most concentrated tourist destination in Minnesota. Many of those who come there because of the Mayo clinic are able to travel about and often must spend weekends and other periods when their time is unoccupied. They would profit from knowing of the fascinating things to see and to that are within an hour's drive. Mutual advantages can result to Rochester, to medical clients and their families and to other area communities. Properly executed, the destination image of both Rochester and other Southeast Minnesota communities can be enhanced.

Finally, only half a day's drive away is the Chicago area with its 8 to 10 million population. The completion of interstate 90 has improved access to southeast Minnesota from the Chicago area. It represents a new market access not available except in the very recent past.

BUILDING TOURISM APPEALS

Tourism Opportunities: Mississippi River Based. The Mississippi River dominates among the features of this area. Lake Pepin, as one of the major lakes in Minnesota and also part of the Mississippi River, represents a major attraction of the area. Its use includes sailboats as well as power boats. A number of large marinas serve this unusual water feature.

At many points throughout its length, the Mississippi expands to form marshes, bayous and other areas in which wildlife abounds. These serve for fishing, for hunting, and for nature observation. The labyrinth of water passages almost boggles the imagination. Along the main river channel some communities have exercised ingenuity in the provision of recreational facilities. Houston county, and its development of Wildcat park on a Corps of Engineers' spoil bank, provides an excellent example. These features allow people using power boats, houseboats as well as land access to enjoy the river and the river area.

There are ample opportunities for both duck and goose hunting along the Mississippi River flyway. Local citizens have enjoyed this sport for years. With proper management there is room for others to take advantage of this fall sport along the Mississippi River.

Tourism Opportunities: Family Sightseeing. One of the rapidly growing types of vacationing is that of family sightseeing: to enjoy both the visual sights of our nation and to experience at first hand areas that

that are away from home. The sightseeing potential is great in southeast Minnesota. There are the overlooks that provide outstanding visual access. Most of these are at points along the Mississippi River or in the nearby forested hills. Among these are Highway 60 overlooking Wabasha and Garvin Heights above Winona. In this area one can see and interpret the major transportation means of rail, river and road which are concentrated within the river corridor. These shaped much of the course of our city and industrial development in the United States. Locks and dams serve as highlights of special interest.

Many communities of this area, particularly those in the hill area, have an almost Swiss-like quality. Among these are Lanesborough, and Wahlen. These communities have the opportunity to share their visual aspects while hosting visitors and providing services, to the economic advantage of residents.

There are bits of history, as in powerhouses along the Root river, the steamer Wilkie at Winona, and old water powered mills that are to be enjoyed. Current economic activity - agriculture, forestry, manufacturing - are also of interest to visitors.

Shopping, history museums and hospitality services of local cities are an essential part of the sightseeing experience. Downtown Winona's new mall offers a special visual aspect, as does Red Wing. Every community - Springgrove, Caledonia, Preston, Zumbro, to name only a few - has features which may be shared with pride.

Southeast Minnesota is the orchard area of Minnesota. Orchards provide not only pleasing landscape vistas, but also the commercial sales of orchard products to visitors represents a further opportunity for attracting, servicing and gaining from these tourists.

Tourism Potential: Upland Hunting and Stream Fishing. The woods area provides habitat for many types of upland game. Ruff grouse are among them. Especially to be mentioned is the wild turkey which has just been reintroduced into Minnesota and where a successful open season was held in 1978. There is also a good whitetail deer herd.

How can area land owners reduce problems of hunters wanting access to their lands? It is proposed that landowners consider forming a landowners cooperative for the purpose of providing controlled hunting access at an appropriate fee. The precedent for this is well established in many areas and for many types of hunting. It would be to the advantage of residents in yielding an income while gaining additional control. It would also be to the advantage of the out-of-the-area hunter since he will then have specific points where he can enter and where he will know that he is welcome.

Recreational discussion of this area would not be complete without note of the trout fishing. It is a unique feature of Southeast Minnesota. There are an almost countless number of trout fishing streams in this area.

It might be noted that the better the forest cover, the better the quality of water, the better the likelihood of fishing to be enjoyed by residents and by controlled access to visitors.

Tourism-Recreation Potential: Other Outdoor Recreation Activity. Just as there is opportunity for trout fishing in many of the streams, a number of the streams entering the Mississippi River offer good canoeing experiences. Along with canoeing, innertubing has become popular. Both are growing in participation.

It is understood that there are now about 50 miles of multi-purpose trails in the Hardwood Forest Area. The potential is for many more. The type of trail uses include backpacking, horseback riding and, in selected places, biking, and in the winter snowmobiling and cross country skiing. Trails that access high bluffs along the Mississippi would serve as a special attraction for many visitors. Observation of trails that have been developed, such as the Douglas Trail from Pine Island to Rochester, is that local residents living in the adjacent communities use the trails in greater numbers than all visitors. Snowmobile trails in substantial number have been developed in the area at the initiative of user groups and residents. There is need for maps for all forms of trails in order to provide proper access and use.

While trail use is rapidly gaining popularity, trails represent difficulties because of the fact that they are linear and extend along land having many different ownerships and uses. The privilege of trail use is subject to abuse. For this reason, it may be that many of our trails will need to be confined to publicly owned areas such as state land in the Memorial Forest and parks. At the same time, if trails in areas such as along abandoned right-of-ways can be developed, these will represent facilities that can serve all people with healthful activity into the future. It is important, that those people who live in the area participate in the trail development decisions positively as to where and what kinds of trails, how they are used, and the means of policing them adequately. One suggestion for policing: develop a user responsibility code.

Not to be overlooked are the winter sports areas. Some of the greatest topographic relief in Minnesota occurs in Southeastern Minnesota. There are excellent sites for down-hill skiing. The Coffey Mill winter sports area at Wabasha is the most recently-developed of these sites.

AN ADEQUATE SALES PACKAGE - NEEDED FOR ECONOMIC IMPACT

In order that tourism have economic impact in the host community it is essential that there be services and facilities which the visitor can pay for. Most are provided by private businesses. It should be apparent, that unless something is sold to the visitor economic advantage to the host community can not result.

What are the items that can be sold? These include first, the standard items that travelers need in order to live and travel away from home:

Food, shelter and means of transportation such as automotive and other travel services. In addition, however, they can include rentals for guide services, for canoes, and horseback riding, fees for hunting, and recreational activities such as attendance at special events, visiting historical centers, and taking part in art and cultural experiences. Finally, shopping opportunities, extending to the entire range of retail sales of businesses, should be viewed as a major opportunity for sales to visitors. These include sales of art and craft objects, unique items that are indigenous to the area as well as more everyday sales of items of clothing, hardware and various other merchandise. It should be recognized that travelers need almost everything while they are away from home that they need at home, but they buy it in very different proportions.

Of prime requirement for realizing income from tourists - high quality lodging and food services. At the present time Rochester has 60 percent of the lodging capacity of the entire Region Ten. This means that there is a relatively low capacity to house people overnight in most other cities. Lodging availability is a necessity if people are to come to visit and to access the opportunities for recreation. There appear to be opportunities not only for expansion of motels and hotels but also for good quality resort operations both along the Mississippi River and inland.

A facility closely related to resorting is camping. Camping is not necessarily a low budget item. It is not uncommon for campground operators to realize \$15 or more per site rented each day. Some investments in campgrounds that are of high quality are of significant size. For example, there is in Minnesota at least one campground capitalized at over 3 million dollars.

Food represents a special item. There is a need for a full range of these good quality services from the fast food type operation to those that offer a sit-down dining and entertaining experience in this part of Minnesota. Especially to be commended is the restoration of historic inns in communities which include Wabasha, Red Wing, and Mantorville. One added note about food - our studies have found that grocery stores, often not considered a part of the tourist business, make substantial sales to visitors in areas where there is active tourist traffic.^{4/} Finally, the reader should be sensitive to the fact that when a full parking lot of a food service business is observed, these people are spending money in the community. This represents income to the area which translates into employment, profits and tax base in the same way as would the full parking lot of workers' autos around a factory building.

^{4/} Blank, U., "Tourism in the Lake of the Woods-Rainy Lake Area", Minnesota Agri. Economist, Dept. of Agri. & Applied Economics, University of Minnesota, No. 543, November 1, 1971.

POTENTIAL DEMONSTRATED BY COMMUNITY SUCCESSES

A number of communities have "got it together". Their success demonstrates how cooperative effort toward common goals can have meaning in terms of community pride and tourism income.

One outstanding community success story is the pageant "The Song of Hiwatha" which is done by Pipestone in southwestern Minnesota. In this community they provide an experience for approximately 40,000 visitors every year. Can such an artistic-cultural experience be produced in Southeastern Minnesota? Certainly there is no lack of sites, including the water front in Red Wing, the band shell in Winona, or the picturesque hills setting of Lanesborough. History and historical interpretation represent possibilities. This might be developed about the mill at Pickwick, historical interpretation of the Mississippi River at Winona, or an ethnic or migrant experience.

Lying within the Memorial Hardwood Forest Area is the small community of Berne, Dodge County. It provides another success story. The Berne Swissfest draws annually as many as 10,000 visitors. It is a home grown production put on by the congregation of the Zwingli church, which is at Berne. Most who come are, in a large measure, people from around the area but also many from Rochester and from the Twin Cities - Many of the latter coming on chartered buses. It provides a genuine cultural experience that is gaining not only a national but even an international reputation. This was not developed overnight. The highly successful 1978 Swissfest was the 25th such event that has been staged.

Another community that has done an outstanding job of "getting it all together" is New Glarus, Wisconsin. New Glarus is 40 miles south of Madison. It is at the head of a bicycle trail in the beautiful rolling, semi-wooded hills, of that part of Wisconsin. Much of the downtown of New Glarus has been remodeled to fit an Alpine theme. Visitors enjoy the Swiss experience in architecture and services in this community with its Swiss ethnic background. New Glarus has a special shopping attraction; there is a major fabric sales store that draws people planning wedding attire, tapestries or just plain looking for an outstanding fabric selection. In addition the New Glarus historical society put their unique background on display in a reconstructed Swiss village. This facility serves as an on-going source of pride to the local community. They can look backward to their heritage with pride, and they share this experience with others who visit them to the mutual profit and advantage of both host and visitor.