

# Downeast Nature Based Tourism Initiative

## Project Overview

Maine's Nature-Based Tourism Initiative (NBTI) grew out of a 2003 Blaine House Conference on Maine Nature-Based Industries. FERMATA, Inc., a Texas-based consulting firm was retained by the State soon after the conference to inventory Maine's nature-based tourism opportunities and make recommendations for advancement in this largely overlooked sector. Based on recommendations from the Natural Resources Committee of the Maine Tourism Commission, FERMATA's study focused on the Western Mountains, Highlands, and Down East regions - selected because each region is relatively less developed, rich in natural resources, has a high level of commitment, and tend to be lower-income. The final report is available online at [www.fermatainc.com/maine/documents/0926finalreport.pdf](http://www.fermatainc.com/maine/documents/0926finalreport.pdf). This report complements the Vacationland Resources Committee (VRC) Destiny 2010 plan, available online at <http://www.downeastrcd.com/DESTINY%202010%20Final.pdf> and the Resource Guide for Sustainable Tourism, available at <http://www.seagrant.umaine.edu/extension/coastcom/sustour.htm>

In 2007, the Maine Office of Tourism (MOT) awarded the Sunrise County Economic Council (SCEC) funds to launch a nature-based tourism initiative in Down East Maine within Washington and Hancock Counties. This project intends to expand our region's tourism market by raising the public's awareness of the Down East region's natural resources, heritage, and culture. Stakeholders have been engaged in a process to inventory our unique assets and winnow them down to the most suitable destinations. Ultimately we plan to develop several "themed" itineraries for aggressive promotion. SCEC manages the initiative in Washington County, working in collaboration with Savory Bay Environmental Planning and Project Management in Hancock County.

Project tasks include (but are not limited to):

- Broadening the public's awareness of Downeast Maine's nature-based tourism assets;
- Encouraging cooperation and coordination in product development and marketing efforts between traditional travel industry sectors and the arts, heritage and cultural tourism community;
- Facilitating tourism-related technical assistance to nature-based, heritage and cultural tourism community in the Washington/Hancock County Region;
- Serving as primary liaison between Maine Office of Tourism (MOT) and the Vacationland Resources Committee (VRC) in implementing a sustainable, nature-based tourism plan;
- Conducting an infrastructure/facilities inventory for the region and make recommendations for improvements utilizing the criteria outlined by the FERMATA Inc. study for the Governor's Nature-Based Tourism Initiative; and
- Planning and facilitating public meetings and personal interviews related to tourism product development.

## **Partnerships**

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Project leaders work closely with the MOT, the VRC of the Down East Resource Conservation and Development Council (DERCD), and Down East and Acadia Regional Tourism (DART). Other partners include (but are not limited to):

- Local Chambers of Commerce and business leaders;
- Municipalities throughout the Downeast region;
- Hancock County Planning Commission;
- Washington County Council of Governments;
- Downeast Acadia Region of Tourism;
- Eastern Maine Development Council;
- Maine Coast Heritage Trust and local land trusts;
- Maine Sea Grant;
- Sunrise Trail Coalition;
- Acadia National Park; and
- Local watershed coalitions
- Maine Forest Consortium.

## **Significant Activities to Date**

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- Conducted an inventory of significant sites and developed a “Matrix” showing sites from the two-county region;
- Geographic Positioning System (GPS) and photo identification of existing signage for sites; and
- Preliminary survey of property owner/managers primarily to evaluate infrastructure needs and overall interest in project..

## **Next Steps**

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- Identify Down East sites that are “ready” for chickadee sign installation identifying significant nature-based tourism sites throughout the pilot project areas;
- Continue to build community partnerships and identify nature-based tourism resources throughout the Down East region, engaging neighbors in New Brunswick, Penobscot and Waldo Counties; and
- Locate funding opportunities to enable the continuation of current work and new projects.