



VRC Outlook

A Voice for Sustainable Tourism Down East

#4, October 2010

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From the Cockpit

(Notes from our Chair)

Welcome to Fall! By the looks of the contents of this newsletter, this is the season for regional projects, research results, funding opportunities, trainings, and marketing plans for next year. Happy Halloween!

[Natalie Springuel](#)
[Maine Sea Grant](#) and [VRC](#) Chair

Conversion Study Underscores Importance of Nature Based Tourism to our Area

Last fall, DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism sent out an email survey to 795 contacts who had requested information from DART for the 2009 season. DART conducted this conversion study to touch base with its customers and renew its information on who they are, why they come here and whether they are happy with their experiences here.

Not surprisingly, the results among those who visited our region showed that our region's nature and scenery were what most people (87%) liked best about the area. Similarly Acadia National Park (57.2%) and coastal scenery, lighthouses, fishing villages (31%) were what brought them here in the first place. Our demographic is the older traveler, with over 67% percent of visitors at age 55 or over and August and September are the most popular months.

Tourism businesses in the area can use the information in the study in a variety of ways. For instance they can market themselves by helping potential customers make the connection between their business and the natural attractions that are nearby. Businesses might also want to develop packages geared to older travelers for the months that are slower such as May and June. To see the full study and report, click [here](#).

Nature-Based Tourism Initiative

In the last newsletter, it was reported that the planners behind the Downeast Nature-based tourism initiative had identified about 20 sites as meeting state-wide criteria for nature-based tourism, including things like adequate parking and facilities. Once a variety of these types of standards have been met, nature-based tourism sites can be identified with Maine's Chickadee logo. This is the logo that all three of Maine's nature-based tourism pilot regions (Downeast, Maine Highlands and Western Mountains) are using in signage and marketing, for a unified message that Maine is the place for quality nature-based experiences. In our region, travelers can now find the chickadee marking three destinations - Shackford Head State Park, Quoddy Head State Park and Cutler Coast Public Lands. Keep your eyes peeled for more chickadees over the coming months.



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Update on the Downeast Fisheries Trail

Last spring, Downeast Fisheries Trail planners met with more than 50 people throughout our region to explore what fisheries heritage sites should be highlighted along the new and improved Downeast Fisheries Trail. The short answer: the entire coast, from Penobscot to Passamaquoddy Bays! The process helped us realize that there is great local interest in our fisheries heritage, and that signage should only be one part of this effort. People wanted to see oral histories and school projects, lecture series and festivals, website and apps, all to celebrate our fisheries heritage. Many talked about groundfish and other species as being central to our sense of place and history, about lobster being king today, and about remaining open to emerging fish species and opportunities for the future. You can find a summary and a full report at [Maine Sea Grant](#). Stay tuned in the coming months as we start tackling some of these ideas! Clearly, signage and a map are only the first step! To get involved, contact [Natalie Springuel](#), Maine Sea Grant.



Hospitality Training: What can it do for my business?

Good customer service creates visitors to your business or community who want to stay longer, spend more, have a higher "intent to return" and provide you with positive word of mouth advertising. Good customer service is all about bringing customers back and sending them away happy. If customers are happy, they will pass their positive experience along to others who may then try your product or service for themselves and in turn become repeat customers.

What: Customer Service -- What is it all about?

Where: WHCA (Corner of Rte 1 & Maple St. Milbridge)

When: November 10, 2010, 9:00 AM-noon

Who: Anyone who deals with customers or potential customers

Cost: \$15

Sponsored by Sunrise County Economic Council, Washington Hancock Community Agency, and the Milbridge Area Merchants Association. To register, call Sarah Joy, 546-7544 x4460 or sjchaples@whcacap.org

This training series is part of the [Maine Woods Tourism Training Initiative](#) - a project supported by the Maine Woods Consortium with funding from the Betterment Fund and USDA Rural Development.

HUD Funding comes Downeast!

Washington and Aroostook counties learned last week that they will receive \$800,000 from the [US Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) over the next 3 years to prepare a Washington-Aroostook Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. The Northern Maine Development Commission will administer the funds and collaborate with organizations, businesses and individuals throughout both counties including the [Washington County Council of Governments](#), [Sunrise County Economic Council](#), Washington-Aroostook Workforce Investment Board and many others.

The initiative is intended to build economic competitiveness by connecting housing with jobs, schools and transportation. One of the initiatives includes state-of-the-art geographic information system, or GIS, modeling in cooperation with area universities to assist with "visioning and scenario planning" to allow both planners and the public to discuss alternative futures, according to the grant [abstract](#) (PDF).

Consistent with the proposed realignment of Maine's Economic Development Districts that will align Washington and Aroostook counties (to take effect July, 2011) consortium members see enormous opportunity offered by such regional collaboration in this large and diverse region.

TIF District Provides Grants and Loans for Businesses & Nonprofits

The Washington County TIF Program for the Unorganized Territories (UT) offers grants and loans for economic development in any of the county's 34 UTs. To date, grants totaling about \$200,000 have been awarded, leveraging \$2.1 million in economic development in the county. Grants so far have encompassed purchase of a hunting lodge, a plan for resource development, equipment for an energy auditing business, a plan for development of a tidal turbine, improved public access to conservation lands, and a capital campaign for development of an educational facility. Sunrise County Economic Council (SCEC), a VRC partner, is administering the grant and loan program for the county.

The TIF (Tax Increment Financing) UT District was developed to assist First Wind in creating the Stetson I and Stetson II wind farms in the UTs near Danforth. Forty percent of First Wind's property taxes on the wind farms go to Washington County for economic development; the remaining 60 percent is returned to First Wind. The amount to be deposited in the county's TIF account for this coming year is about \$550,000. With these funds, the unused portion of which will accumulate from year to year, the county commissioners have an opportunity to spur major economic development and nature-based tourism in Washington County. For more information and applications, please call TIF Administrator Diane Smith-Halkett at SCEC, 207-255-0983, email tifadmin@sunrisecounty.org, or go to the county website at www.washingtoncountymaine.com.

Tourism Business Marketing Opportunity

[DownEast and Acadia Regional Tourism](#) (DART) will soon be hiring a Marketing Outreach Contractor to help reach out to businesses, help them get onto the DART website and make them aware of marketing opportunities that are available. DART received many qualified applications and hopes to announce who it is at DART's Quarterly meeting in November, so he or she can start to work as quickly as possible. If you know a tourism related business that is not on the site, [please let us know](#). The goal is to reach as many tourism businesses as possible throughout the region.

Incubator Without Walls Wins National Award

Washington Hancock Community Agency has won the national Community Action Partnership's Entrepreneurship Encouragement Award for its Incubator Without Walls small business training program. The IWW program is administered by Down East Business Alliance, a division of WHCA, which is a nonprofit community action organization. Competition for the award was open to 1,000 community action programs around the country. Many tourism businesses in our region have benefited from the IWW program. For more info, click [here](#).

Partner Profile: Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands

[The Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands](#) (BPL) protects and manages the natural and cultural resources under its care in order to offer a wide range of recreational and educational opportunities and provide environmental and economic benefits for present and future

generations.

BPL's conservation lands Downeast consist of two major recreational river corridors (Machias and St. Croix); six state parks (Holbrook Island, Lamoine, Roque Bluffs, Cobscook Bay, Quoddy Head, and Shackford Head); historic sites including the birthplace of the American Navy (Machiasport); tens of thousands of acres of major Public Lands holdings (Donnell Pond, Amherst Mountains, Cutler Coast, Duck Lake, Rocky Lake, and Great Heath); a new 85 mile all-season multi-use trail (Down East Sunrise Trail); vast conservation easements (Downeast Lakes, especially); and more.

Because of the importance of many of these sites to the Downeast tourism economy, BPL is active on the Vacationland Resources Committee (VRC). As part of the VRC's Nature-Based Tourism Initiative, BPL is able to plan and implement recreation and access improvements that are aligned with local economic development priorities. To learn more about Downeast Parks and Lands and BPL's nature-based tourism efforts contact Misha Mytar at 460-4818 or misha.mytar@maine.gov.

Green Tips from the Field

This issue's green ideas come from:

[Ardea EcoExpeditions](#), Gouldsboro

Green Idea: 1. Local food (seafood and farm products) from neighbors for sea kayaking day and overnight trips. 2. Bar Harbor Ferry/Sea Kayaking Packages - pick up at dock in Winter Harbor to avoid drive from Bar Harbor then clients can use the Island Explorer for more Schoodic exploration.

How much have you saved with this idea? 1. Priceless - more expensive food offset by delivering a higher quality product/experience with less driving to large grocery stores while supporting a vibrant local economy. 2. \$2000+ Bar Harbor marketing exposure and opportunities combined with increasing customer base.

How have you used this idea to market your business? 1. Organic Local Food- niche differentiation and grabbing the green customer. 2. Ferry/Sea Kayak makes it easier for Bar Harbor market to get to me in Schoodic without driving and exposure to area has resulted in several return visits to the "Maine they were looking for."

What have your customers said about your green idea? 1. Local food, "One of the reasons to go on a trip, proven "green" credentials and emphasis on quality." 2. Unique experience - "boat ride and sea kayak tour in one while reducing carbon footprint"

Do you have a green idea to share? [Let us know!](#)

The mission of the VRC is to promote sustainable tourism practices in Down East, Maine.

The VRC is a committee of [Down East Resource Conservation and Development Council](#). Meetings and membership are always open. For more information or to join the VRC, please [contact us!](#)

The VRC logo was designed locally by Deborah Bailey at [Barnstormer Design Group](#), 207-497-5446.