



**Northern Forest Destination Summit
October 27, 2022 – Whitefield NH
Summary Report**

Tourism and Recreation in Service of Rural Northern Forest Communities



The Northern Forest Destination Summit convened 85 local, state, and regional leaders for a day of sharing and learning about sustainable tourism in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The event built on regional and local work by the Northern Forest Center to help communities engage sustainably with the tourism sector through its Rural Tourism Academy and Community Destination Academy program. The agenda enabled stakeholders to explore the opportunities and risks presented by tourism and recreation development, and strategies to secure positive net benefits for rural communities.

The following report provides a brief summary of event proceedings, key strategic takeaways, and next steps. Please also related materials from the Summit:

- Keynote presentation slides
- Compilation of table discussion notes
- Analysis of participant survey responses

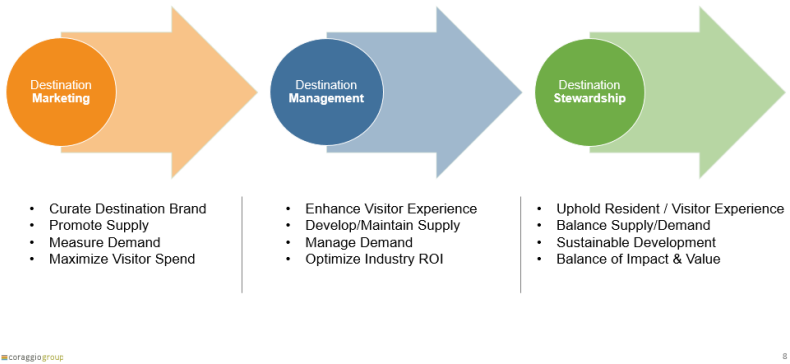
SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Keynote Presentation – Sara Meaney, Corragio Group

The opening Summit session featured a keynote presentation focused on the growing movement by tourism destination away from traditional marketing toward Destination Management and ultimately Destination Stewardship.

The focus on national trends, rationale, and strategies for building destination stewardship aligned directly with emerging local- and state-level discussions across the Northern Forest as communities respond to growing visitation pressure on local infrastructure, natural resources, and culture.

Evolution of the Destination Organization



Panel/Table Discussion 1:

Visitor Education – Avoiding Conflict and Engaging Visitors as Contributors to Sustainability

Panelists:

- Colleen Dalton, [Visit Truckee-Tahoe, California – Sustainable Truckee](#)
- Maura Adams, Northern Forest Center, [Ride with Gratitude](#)
- David Miller, [Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust](#), Visitor Ambassadors

Discussion Themes and Highlights – from panelists and table discussion notes

- **Community Engagement and Buy-In:** Understand and communicate the community benefits of sustainable tourism and recreation – business and job creation, tax base, subsidized community amenities like trails, restaurants, cultural assets, etc. – and work to shift language and attitudes from “locals versus visitors” to “residents hosting guests”.
- **Communication and Education:** Provide clear education and materials about expected guest etiquette and behavior through pledges or codes of conduct and try to make community and natural resource stewardship cool, attractive, and pervasive. Invest in local ambassadors and hospitality service training and look for ways to capitalize on guests’ connection to place and interest in caring for it.
- **Infrastructure:** Create spaces for guests and residents to connect both formally and informally, and provide infrastructure to encourage/enable stewardship (parking, restrooms, navigation support, etc.).

Educate, Engineer, Enforce - enforcement can be organic IF you engineer and educate effectively and have solutions in place (i.e., can't enforce parking issues if you don't have parking options available)

Panel/Table Discussion 2:

Who Pays: Generating Revenue for Destination Management

Panelists:

- Marcus Hinz, [Oregon Coast Visitors Association](#)
- Abby Long, [Kingdom Trails Association](#)
- Denise Vallee, [Town of Gorham, NH](#)

Discussion Themes and Highlights – from panelists and table discussion notes

- **Municipal Support and Engagement:** Build municipal/local political understanding and support for the value derived from tourism and recreation in the form of local amenities, business and job creation, and tax base. Municipalities can be supportive partners by contributing town staff and public works capacity to infrastructure projects, pursuing state and federal grants, and supporting local guest education programs.
- **Pooling Resources:** Create systems for multi-sector stakeholders to coordinate and pool resources around shared interests. This includes traditional business, municipal, and non-profit groups as well as community health, education, and others. Consider appropriate balance between local and regional-level collaboration and look for opportunities beyond direct funding to include shared educational resources, management strategies, and infrastructure.
- **State Funding & Resources:** Work with state tourism and recreation office to balance investment between marketing and management, and engage other state agencies (parks, transportation, education, housing, etc.) to identify and align existing financial and technical assistance programs with destination stewardship needs and opportunities.

More conversation is needed to bring municipalities into the conversation to make outdoor recreation a priority.

Plenary – Sustaining Sustainable Tourism

Discussion Themes and Highlights – from presentation and table discussion notes. See participant survey analysis below for additional detail.

- **Community:** For local communities to be relevant and supportive, they need data and better understanding of the industry's importance and what it contributes to their economy and quality of life – that it isn't replacing local culture but adding to it. Municipal leadership can contribute to sustainable tourism through direct funding, in-kind support, education, planning and zoning (to address housing and other growth issues), and infrastructure.
- **Regional:** Opportunities exist to create shared messaging and guest education resources that can be applied regionally and/or at sub-regional levels with associated place-branding. Regional learning and problem-solving can help generate new organizational models to align traditional and existing resources (tax revenue, business contributions) with evolving industry and community needs. Regional advocacy can help align, generate, and secure state and federal resources to support sustainable tourism as an economic and community development priority.

We need new mechanisms for collaboration across business, local state, federal NGOs. Who leads? What scale makes sense? Full region feels too big. Sub-regional collaboratives perhaps linked together when issues and opportunities dictate.

Next Steps

The Northern Forest Center recognizes sustainable tourism and recreation as critical contributors to long term community and economic development across the Northern Forest region. With the Summit and ongoing Rural Tourism Academy and Community Destination Academy work as a foundation, the Center is committed to working with local, state, and regional leaders to advance pro-active strategies that enable Northern Forest communities to secure needed benefits and avoid potential negative impacts of a growing recreation tourism sector. Next steps for the Center include:

- **Rural Tourism Academy:** Support local capacity, planning and project implementation through ongoing Rural Tourism Academy and Community Destination Academy programming and replication in other destination communities.
- **Regional Network Communication:** Create information exchange and network development opportunities through regional communication tools including a regular Sustainable Tourism e-newsletter and potential webinar series.
- **Regional Convening:** Partner with the Northern Border Regional Commission to host a 2023 Northern Forest Outdoor Economy symposium with leaders from across northern Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York and beyond.
- **Housing:** Seek opportunities to invest in new middle-income housing in targeted communities.
- **Policy & Funding:** Seek opportunities to influence policy and secure state, federal, and philanthropic funding to support sustainable tourism practices across the Northern Forest region.

Thanks to those who were able to join us for the Northern Forest Destination Summit, and special thanks to the Northern Border Regional Commission for its generous support of this work.