

DRAFT

**Coös County, NH
Tourism Technical Review Committee
Tourism Action Plan**

**Committee Meetings:
January 11, 2008
January 24, 2008
February 11, 2008**

1. Introduction and History

Introduction:

Tourism, one of Coös county's key economic sectors, has been beset with poor weather and other economic hardships such as spiking energy costs, lack of a consistent brand and piecemeal marketing in the past half-decade. To provide this sector the boost it needs to capitalize on an eager visitor population and unify tourism property and attractions owners as well as the rest of the hospitality sectors, better marketing, promotion, collaboration approach, and branding are all seen as necessary.

Currently the county sees \$250.5 million in visitor spending annually (2005 data) represented by 4,051 jobs (16.5% of the county's labor pool with payroll valued at \$88.9 million). Overall, this sector paid \$70.03 million into the State's rooms and meals tax fund. Coös represents the largest single day expenditure for tourists of any of the state's 7 regions with the obvious reason being that many visitors require an overnight stay.

This baseline data will assist us in measuring the impact of this action plan efforts, combined with those of Roger Brooks' Destination Development consultation in the county. His work, funded in part by a generous Tillotson Fund grant and State assistance, could help in reestablishing a county-wide, regional association.

Thanks to the EDA Sudden and Severe grant which funded this Coös Economic Action plan, North Country Council and Coös Economic Development Corporation engaged this process to look into future economic potential beyond the closure of the Groveton mills. The intention is to develop an economic development plan that's actionable.

Three other Technical Review Committees (Timber, Alternative Energy and Creative Economy), comprised of "content experts" are meeting to find a path to: "Abundant, quality jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities that sustain and enhance the well being of families and communities in the region." These plans are intended to become consensus documents moving the county's business forward to greater capacity, job creation and retention and profitability.

This document offers a summary of present and potential tourism markets, assets, concerns, goals & objectives and actions to be taken.

History of tourism in Coös County.

Tourism in Coös County can probably trace its roots back about 200 years with farmers opening their homes to travelers heading across the northern states. Trails that were first used by Native Americans became the routes early settlers used to get farm and forest goods to the seaports in Maine. These same routes eventually became roads, then better roads – which were in turn used for touring the countryside as families began traveling by automobile.

The arrival of railroads in the mid 1800's helped increase tourism throughout the White Mountains. Railroad companies provided access to the northern region for those living in the cities along the East Coast. Boarding houses became hotels, and then became grand hotels, and eventually grand hotels were built specifically to accommodate the influx of tourists.

Visitors came from the cities for the region's clean air and outdoor experiences. Famous visitors, including writers, politicians and painters, came to the area and others quickly followed. The media of the day promoted the region as a "must see" for visitors, now touring in cars and staying at little cabins and motels which sprang up along the routes. Family attractions, like Santa's Village and Six Gun City grew up along the road to attract or keep visitors for the area.

The great rivers also helped in the development of tourism, as they spawned the timber industry and the area's cultural diversity. At one point, Berlin was the 4th largest city in the State. With population came visitors. Some lumber camps became sporting camps and visitors came to experience the traditional northern way of life. Visitors came to the North Country for many of the same reasons they continue to visit today: Escape, explore and appreciate the North Country's beauty and traditions.

2. Importance of Tourism to Coös County

The Tourism economy is responsible for the livelihood of more than 20 percent of area residents, and brought in more than \$250 million in 2005. The high percentage of overnight stays and use of restaurants contributed more than \$73 million into the State's coffers through the Rooms & Meals Tax. Closer to home, tourism is considered a benefit to the area as a clean industry, with diverse jobs, which foster entrepreneurs and sparks community pride.

A well-maintained tourism economy will keep our present tourist-oriented businesses, can attract more business and employ more creative residents in the area. It will help to retain young people and spawn educational opportunities through internships in disciplines such as wildlife, culinary arts, recreation, and preserving natural resources. This type of tourism economy at the same time helps to further tourism expansion.

This region benefits from tourism's promotion of land stewardship, infrastructure, amenities and services, which are available to both tourists and residents. Tourism is also considered a flexible, enduring sector of the region's overall economy.

New Hampshire Tourism Data for the Great North Woods region.
Compiled by the Institute for New Hampshire Studies, Dr. Mark Okrant, Director:

Estimated Traveler Spending by season in the Great North Woods:
\$126.8 million (Sum '05 – spring -06)

Estimated Traveler Spending on Rooms and Meals:
\$37.8 million (Sum '05 – spring -06)

Estimated Number of Visitor Days
1.28 million (Sum '05 – spring -06)

Estimated Traveler Spending by Visitor Day:
\$ 99.06

Tourism Resources for Coös County:

Resources for Tourism in Coös County include its five Chambers of Commerce, representing the more than 40 towns and unincorporated areas. These Chambers include: the North Country Chamber, Umbagog Area Chamber, Northern Gateway Chamber, Androscoggin Valley Chamber, and the Twin Mountain Chamber.

Regional, State and National resources are in place to aid in the development or maintenance of the tourism economy. These include:

Local/Regional:

- a. Androscoggin Valley Economic Recovery (AVER)
- b. Downtown Organizations (Berlin and Colebrook)
- c. Groveton Regional Economic Action Team (GREAT)
- d. Main Street organizations
- e. Northern Community Investment Corporation
- f. The Joint Rivers Commission
- g. The Mahoosuc Initiative
- h. The Tillotson Fund
- i. White Mountains Attractions Association
- j. Northern Forest Canoe Trail Association

Statewide:

- k. Dept. of Resources & Econ. Devel.
- l. New Hampshire Travel Council
- m. NH Campground Owners Association
- n. NH Division of Travel & Tourism
- o. NH Lodging & Restaurant Association
- p. Ski NH Association
- q. The Granite State Ambassadors
- r. The Institute for New Hampshire Studies
- s. The Joint Promotional Program (DRED)
- t. The NH Snowmobile Association

Multi-State/Federal:

- u. Appalachian Mountain Club
- v. National Scenic Byways organization (Connecticut River NSB)
- w. Preserve America organization
- x. The Gateway Communities Organization
- y. The Northern Forest Center
- z. White Mountain National Forest
- aa. Northern Forest Center

3. Strategy: Opportunities and Challenges

Current Options/Opportunities for tourism in Coös County

Categories: Opportunities may be listed in more than one category.

c. Tourism Attractions

1	Mt Washington and Presidential Range	38	Moose watching (96% success rate)
2	Cultural heritage	39	Moose festival
3	Rivers and lakes	37	Historic Trails
4	Boreal forest	38	Moose watching (96% success rate)
5	Trails, motorized, ski, hiking,	39	Moose festival
6	WMNF and State Forests – Public lands	40	Annual Snodeo
7	Views and open fields	41	Covered bridges
8	Variety of sports opportunities	42	Nat'l Forest History at Weeks State Park
9	Historic attractions	43	Lake Umbagog NWR Wildlife Festival
10	45th Parallel	44	Riverfire Festival
11	Scenic drives (Scenic & Cultural Byways)	45	State Heritage Trail
12	Wildlife viewing	46	Our Lady of Grace Shrine
13	Fall foliage	47	Donald Ross Golf Courses
14	Proximity to international boundary	48	Youth events like Football League
15	Lancaster Fair, agricultural fairs	49	Town Commons
16	Farmers markets	50	Old Home Days
17	Family attractions	51	Culinary finds
18	Fire towers, covered bridges	52	Classic car event
19	Ski areas	53	Berlin's Hockey Rink
20	Hunting and fishing	54	Blessing of the Bikes
21	Changing seasons	55	Wine & Beer Tastings
22	Fish hatchery	56	Historic ATV events
23	Pondicherry, Silvio Conte Wildlife Refuge	57	Open Barns program
24	Golf courses	58	Historic Barns and Granges
25	Genealogy	59	Ski Areas – Wilderness, Wildcat (also history), Bretton Woods
26	NH Forest Heritage Canoe Trail	60	LL Cotes
27	Rogers Rangers Historic Sites	61	Lake Umbagog Nat'l Wildlife Refuge
28	Northern Forest Heritage Park	62	World Monetary Conference
29	Connecticut, Andro and Magalloway Rivers	63	Stark Prison Camp history
30	Nansen Ski Jump & Ski Club History	64	Carnegie Libraries
31	Native American & Prehistoric Sites	65	Historic cemeteries
32	Indian Stream Republic	66	Log drives and boom piers
33	Forest Rally	67	Russion Orthodox Church
34	CCC trails, like on Wildcat	68	Villages in Berlin: Danish, Swedish, Finish, Russian, etc.
35	Auto Rd, Cog RR, Santa's, Six Gun City	69	Appalachian Mountain Club huts & lodging
36	Car Racing at Riverside	70	Cohos Trail
37	Historic Trails		

b. Tourism promotion

- 1 Kiosks, rest areas
- 2 Weekly newspapers
- 3 Social networking (internet)
- 4 Word of mouth advertising
- 5 Granite State Ambassador
- 6 Statewide tourism magazines (i.e.; NH To Do)
- 7 Boston Globe Travel Show
- 8 Big E
- 9 DTTD Promotion
- 10 Exhibit at Snowmobile Expo
Governor's Tourism Conference
Regional/National Media

c. Tourism infrastructure

- 1 Kiosks, CofCs, rest areas, info centers
- 2 Non-chain lodging
- 3 Proximity to international boundary
- 4 Farmers markets
- 5 NH Forest Heritage Canoe Trail
- 6 Family attractions
- 7 Ski areas
- 8 Fish hatchery
- 9 Pondicherry, Silvio Conte, Lake Umbagog Wildlife Refuges
- 10 Golf courses
- 11 Genealogy
- 12 Forest Service Offices and Information Centers
- 13 Locally owned lodging and dining
- 14 Camping
- 15 Event venue at the Community College
- 16 Town Commons
- 17 Berlin's Hockey Rink
- 18 Local color and character
AMC visitor and program centers (Pinkham & Highland)

d. Tourism hospitality

- 1 Grand Hotels, lodging diversity
- 2 Perceived safe environment
- 3 Cultural heritage
- 4 Historic attractions
- 5 Culinary finds
- 6 Authenticity (genuineness)

e. Tourism services

- 1 Shopping diversity
- 2 Guides available
- 3 Maple Sugar operations and stands
- 4 Artist and antique co-ops
- 5 Outfitters available
- 6 Creative Natives
- 7 Handmade in the Northern Forest

Current Concerns/Challenges to Tourism in Coös County

Goals and Objectives
Should follow
The SMART
Rule:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Rewarding
Time-bound

	Concerns/Challenges
	<p>To Tourism Attractions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of a coordinated effort to protect & maintain Natural & Cultural Resources 2. Tourism is weather-dependant
	<p>To Tourism Promotion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of promotion materials and methods 2. Lack of funding for promotion 3. Lack of developed Itineraries for Visitors 4. Lack of cooperative regional marketing for chambers and businesses 5. Perceived distance from tourism markets 6. Negative perception of tourists and tourism
	<p>Tourism Infrastructure</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No widespread broadband 2. Transportation is a challenge 3. Lack of proper signage 4. No mature land-use plan 5. Industrial downtown, in economic transition
	<p>Tourism Hospitality</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of customer service 2. Negative perception of tourism jobs 3. Lack of customer service training
	<p>Tourism Services</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of proper signage 2. Lack of/declining services 3. Lack of air service to region 4. Lack of public restrooms 5. No snowmobile reciprocity with neighboring States

4. Goals and Action Steps

The committee was asked to identify just the top actionable challenge(s) from the previous page, and address it/them with Action Steps.

Summary of Recommendations

Ranked #1 Develop and Fund More Promotion

Justification: The Tourism Market is dependant on promotion. Increased tourism translates to improved economy in the area. Tourism is considered a flexible, stable, enduring economy. And can help create or establish community and regional pride.

Time Frame: Promotion plans should be completed over the first two years of the Action Plan. Then ongoing.

Leadership: The five Chambers of Commerce in the Region should take on the role through unified action or organization.

Action Steps:

- a. Develop marketing cooperation for region-wide web sites, print materials and other promotion. Any website developed must have the equipment to sell, and “close the deal” through reservations, etc.
 - The Website must both sell, and be a one-stop shop for reservations, itineraries, etc.
 - The promotion/website must be all-inclusive for Chambers in the area
- b. Encourage partnerships – collaborations to search for funding sources
- c. Encourage change in Rooms & Meals tax distribution at both local level and in Concord to get more money into promoting the region.
- d. Seek Joint Promotional Program funds and other pools of available money
- e. Seek money from businesses in the area for sponsorships and advertisements
- f. Train Chamber of Commerce staff and volunteers in fundraising and grant writing

- g. Develop a “toolbox” for Chambers to use for promotion
- h. Coordinate print and web presence with a common brand for the area
- i. Train area staff to cross-sell the area and its businesses

Notes: It is anticipated that the Roger Brooks program being developed in the region will assist in developing focused promotional material and branding. The committee discussed the need to work with those involved in this initiative to move regional promotion forward.

Ranked #2 Protect the Region’s Resources

Justification: This includes the natural and cultural resources; the “golden goose” of tourism in the County – the reason visitors come to the region.

Time Frame: Planning process should be started as soon as the Action Plan is put into place and is expected to take three years to get fully into place. Updates as needed in future years.

Leadership: Natural resources-North Country Council. Cultural resources-Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire. Can also utilize the Mahoosuc Initiative as a model.

Action Steps:

1. Identify the Cultural and Natural Resources
2. Work with the Energy, Timber and Creative economies to encourage protection and related economic/product development.
3. Develop a land use “toolbox” for communities to use.
4. Educate the public of the value of Cultural & Natural Resources and the need to maintain them.
5. Market the Cultural and Natural Resources as assets to visitors AND residents (i.e.; signage).
6. Institute Open Space initiatives and current use.

Ranked #3 Increase, improve and retain services and attractions used by visitors and residents

Justification: Meet basic needs. Increase business. Help retain employees and attain repeat visitors. Increase visitor perception that the region is safe, secure, vibrant and active.

Time Frame: Three years from implementation of the Action Plan, then ongoing.

Leadership: Town, businesses, CEDC, North Country Council, Chambers of Commerce DOT, DTTD, North Country Superintendents.

Action Steps:

1. Improve signage to existing services
2. Advocate for cell and broadband service
3. Encourage or develop non weather-dependent Attractions
 - Promote and encourage artists/craft co-ops.
 - Seek affinity groups gatherings that match the region and culture
 - Develop itineraries for visitors
 - Educate and advocate weather forecasters
4. Build volunteerism into local high school curriculum
5. Seek funding for public facilities and visitor amenities (benches, restrooms, parking) as well as funds to maintain them.
6. Encourage a “shop locally” initiative to keep local business viable.
7. Seek funding sources to benefit existing businesses, in addition to new businesses

Note: It is felt that bad weather (or a forecast for bad weather) affects the winter more than the summer season, and needs to be addressed. Some potential markets were identified as being less weather-dependant, such as fishing and birdwatching.

Ranked #4 Increase Customer Service

Justification: Improves hospitality atmosphere of the area, increases repeat customers, fosters community pride and ownership. All these work towards long term success.

Time Frame: Planning process should be started as soon as the Action Plan is put into place and initial steps can be completed in one year. Some projects already started (Granite State Ambassador Training). Ongoing training will be needed in future years.

Leadership: Downtown associations, Chambers of Commerce, White Mountains Community Technical College, Granite State Ambassadors, businesses.

Action Steps:

1. Institute Granite State Ambassador training in the area (first session planned for this year)
2. Customer Service Trainings – seasonal frontliner sessions highlighting resources, must-dos, common questions, “best kept secrets.”
3. Educate businesses on the monetary benefit of good customer service.
4. Work with colleges in the area to do community outreach programs about customer service.
5. Create and distribute publications that educate residents about the area so they can help visitors.
6. Institute awards or incentive programs for good customer service

5. Community Input

The following members of the Tourism Technical Review Committee had input in this Action Plan:

Gloria	Bunnell	North Country Chamber of Commerce
Gene	Ehlert	Mountain View Grand Resort
Don	Kerr	Umbagog Chamber of Commerce
Matt	Massei	Mt. Washington Resort
Mark	Okrant	Institute for NH Studies
Rebecca	Oreskes	White Mtn. National Forest
Peter	Riviere	Coös County Economic Development
Kevin	Shyne	White Mountain Community College
Chris	Thayer	Appalachian Mountain Club
Alice	DeSouza	Division of Travel & Tourism, State of NH
Howie	Wemyss	Mount Washington Auto Road, Chair
Jayne	O'Connor	White Mountains Attractions, Facilitator

The Action Plan will be reviewed for soundness and potential implementation by the Economic Action Steering Committee:

Gary	Armitage	The Balsams	Racheal	Stuart	NH Charitable Foundation
Dave	Atkinson	Wausau Paper	Jim	Tibbets	The First Colebrook Bank
Dave	Auger	SAU 58 School Board	Rick	Tillotson	
Steve	Barba	Plymouth State University	Tom	Wagner	Forest Service
Mark	Belanger	Dept of Employment Security	Howie	Wemyss	Mount Washington Auto Road
Paul	Casey	Umbagog Chamber of Commerce	Don	Wharton	SPNHF
Pat	Corso	Mount Washington Hotel	Jeff	Woodburn	
Scott	Coulombe	Steel Elements, Inc.	Brad	Wyman	
Mitch	Couture	School Board Committee			
Tom	Deans	Tillotson Fund			
Chris	Diego	Mountain View Grand Resort			
Brian	Emerson	Emerson Outdoor Outfitters			
Kathy	Eneguess	White Mt. Comm College			
John	Falconer				
Dave	Govatski	Cherry Pond Wildlife Center			
Steve	Griffin	Isaacson Steel			
Bing	Judd				
Russ	Keene	AVHNNH			
Katie	Kelley	White Mountain Lumber			
Barry	Kelly	White Mountain Lumber			
Scott	Labnon	Town and Country Motor Inn			
Beno	Lamontagne				
Cathy	McDowell	Family Res. Ctr @ Berlin-Gorham			
Louise	McLeery	UVCH			
Robbie	Munce	Munce's Superior Inc.			
Barry	Normandeau	Normandeau Trucking			
Peter	Powell	Peter W. Powell Real Estate			
Peter	Riviere	Coös Economic Dev Cor			

6. Outside Expertise

Tourism facts and figures for this project were provided by Professor Mark Okrant of the Institute for New Hampshire Studies and the Coös County Economic Development Commission.

The reference to the Roger Brooks initiative refers to a Visitor/Tourism Assessment being performed by Roger Brooks, president of Destination Development, Inc, which specializes in tourism and resort development and marketing. Further work has been contracted through NCIC for a Branding, Economic Development and Marketing Action Plan to be started April 1, 2008 and completed in September, 2008.

7. Addendum

Forms, options and directions used during this process come from the following resources:

Developing a Tourism Action Plan, Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada

Tourism Action Plan: Devon County England

Tourism Action Plan: South Carolina

Tourism Action Plan: Nova Scotia

Tourism Action Plan: British Columbia

Tourism Action Plan: Las Vegas

Tourism Action Plan: Jacksonville, AR