

**Outline of: Southern Piscataquis County Marketing Strategy
Completed and Delivered July 1997**

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Section I: Goals & Objectives (p.1)

Goal: Provide visitors with a memorable experience by providing information & guidance through effective communications, marketing tools, networking, local and regional collaborations.

1. Inventory of natural & cultural resources
2. Link assets with a marketing plan to welcome & guide visitors into the natural resources and cultural opportunities.

Section II. Research Report (p. 2)

1. Strategic Inventory:

SWOT Analysis (copy pp. - for meeting)

2. Resource Inventory: * Indicates areas of strength (Section IV)

- *Natural Sites
- *Cemeteries
- *Camping areas & campgrounds
- Churches, Clubs & Organizations
- Man-made sites
- Restaurants
- Lodging
- *Other Businesses
- *Events

3. Existing Marketing Efforts: (p.3)

- A. Map published by Chamber – meets general needs, not specific
- b. Information center on one of six entry point to Dover-Foxcroft
- c. Chamber has done little to pursue tourism in or out-of-state
- d. In 1997, Chamber participated in two trade shows for the first time.

4. Competitive Analysis: (p.3-4)

- a. Not currently (1997) competitive in Maine tourism.
- b. Few tourism products developed.
- c. Relying on pass-through visitors intrigued by charm of the village.
- d. Not a destination, but a service stop for visitor's enroute to Bangor, Millinocket or Moosehead.

5. Image Positioning: (p. 4)

a. Quintessence of rural Maine agrarian lifestyle, reflective of inland Maine, the way life used to be. People represent the essence of the Maine and New England work ethic, a simpler lifestyle, appreciative of the natural landscape from which they sustain life and to which they give back.

b. Vestiges of the former manufacturing economy that were based upon natural resources still dot the local landscape.

Section III. Marketing Plan for initial direction:

A. Key Research Findings: (p.5-6)

1. Southern Piscataquis has strong potential for tourism development because of the natural resources, i.e. waterways, forest, mountains, and plentiful trails.
2. The location in the center of the region offers positive positioning for tourism access and development.
3. The varied rolling terrain south of Atkinson and the Piscataquis River lends itself well to biking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, snowmobiling and many other popular outdoor recreational pursuits.
4. This region offers the possibility of an exceptional number of backcountry experiences which are increasingly appealing to a growing number of Americans. Those experiences are not necessarily for novices without guidance and specific education.
5. Southern Piscataquis has visitor access from many directions and only one location for visitor information distribution. Visitor entry into this region needs management for better information access.
6. Tourism infrastructure is weak and needs development to support increased visitations. There is a weak foundation upon which to build.
7. Many Maine residents are seeking affordable experience away from the coastal crowds. This is a significant potential market for the region.
8. There is no signage identifying the region as a tourism area. No significant regional identity.
9. Chamber historically has engaged in minimal tourism activities. Tourism has been more reactive rather than the result of proactive marketing.
10. The region can support some carefully planned and slow tourism growth that will not place undue pressure on existing tourism infrastructure.

B. Critical Challenges: (pp. 7-8)

1. Need local determination on whether or not they want tourism development. Community discussions offered mixed feelings on tourism among small numbers of residents present. Tourism development efforts will be unsuccessful if they are not supported by the local communities.

2. Finding creative strategies to bring together a large geographic area with a wide diversity of terrain and a small population base is a challenge to local leadership.

3. One of the most significant challenges facing the region is finding committed leadership, with the skills, time and energy, to implement tourism development strategies. Tourism development requires sustained commitment over the long term for success.

4. The final serious challenge that faces all regions in Maine is the lack of financial resources from the state. Therefore implementation money must be raised from the private sector on the local and regional levels. Marketing efforts are expensive; therefore we must seek creative strategies that do not require large amounts of money in the short term.

C. Tourism Marketing Strategy: (pp. 8-28)

A. Work on Essentials

1. Create a Vision for Tourism Development: By carefully managing tourist traffic through the region, by dispersing visitors throughout the region, by planning around events in the tourist destination areas, the region can encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more money.

2. Develop and build upon an Image: This region is representative of agrarian and rural life, the way it used to be. Dover-Foxcroft is the “quintessential Maine village of yesteryear”. The area can build positively on the nostalgia for the slower paced, more relaxed way of life that people remember in their past.

3. Develop an organizational framework for Long Term Tourism Development: The region needs a Tourism Development Committee to oversee long term tourism development. Key stakeholders need to be represented. This committee requires strong, capable and determined leadership to manage individual interests for the common good.

4. Create a Regional Information system: Kiosks, Brochures, signs and Guides: Need a system of information delivery that is easily accessible to visitors no matter what their point of entry. Contracts with visible local businesses which are identified by logo signing are mentioned as one way inexpensive way to accomplish this goal in the short-term. A visitor’s guide is required to fully respond to visitor’s needs; but ultimately a regional network of electronic kiosks that offer “real-time” visitor information assistance would be ideal.

5. Launch a Regional Tourism Public Relations Program: The Chamber of Commerce needs to launch a campaign to build consensus for tourism as one economic tool to be used in the overall economic development mix.

6. Collect tourism data through a consistent, on-going survey process: Consistent data collection through surveys should be used to determine if the region is progressing toward the goals established.

7. Create an evaluation process to act as foundation for future tourism development efforts: The committee will evaluate on a regular basis and make adjustments to the tourism development plan as necessary.

B. Promote Unique Characteristics: Develop unique and special characteristics to develop a legitimate “sense of place”.

1. Theme & logo: Suggestion of a nostalgic theme as a possibility that would be appealing to “Baby Boomers” traveling in their retirement with money to spend. “The region time passed by” was one suggestion from a local resident. A brainstorming session could yield the right words and concept.

2. Develop Nostalgia to enhance the Image & Theme. Build business clusters around a theme. Some ideas offered are:

1) Promote a real country store, for example Webber Hardware in Dover-Foxcroft.

2) Create a regular “Cruisin nite” with antique autos converging at a local restaurant. This becomes a real attraction for visitors and residents alike.

3) Soda Fountain: encourage a traditional drug store to open an old-fashioned soda fountain that serves popular dishes and flavors of years gone by.

C. As much as possible, develop tourism experiences around unique, natural and man-made linkages that tie the region together; i.e., rivers, roads, agriculture, forests, railroad, shared experiences, history, etc.

1. Piscataquis and Pleasant Rivers: expanded river walks with connections between communities open up new non-motorized travel opportunities year round.

2. The railroad: Work to develop a passenger train trip to celebrate the history of the railroad in the development of the north woods. Such a trip opens up spectacular scenery

otherwise unseen and could be entertaining and educational in nature. At the same time, the people are managed through the beautiful backcountry. Connect Jackman, Greenville Jct. and Brownville Jct. via rail and allow them each to tell their unique historic stories. Railroad communities should consider restoration of their historically significant buildings.

3. The Agriculture: There is an opportunity for a large, consistent farmer's market highlighting locally grown products. Quality crafts and products should also be highlighted. A different farms tour could be highlighted each week. Visitors would be directed to that farm through the farmer's market.

4. Self-guided Tours: Tours focusing on areas of special interest should be developed on maps for easy distribution to visitors. Some interest areas are: historic sites, historic architecture, cultural diversity, hiking trails, biking trails, farm tours, cross-country ski tours, etc.

5. Guided Backcountry Experiences: Guided backcountry tours should be readily available and encouraged for visitors who want an in depth wilderness experience. A guide helps to insure the quality of the experience, competent interpretation of the history, culture and natural resources, in addition to providing for a high level of comfort and safety for the visitors. Examples: portions of the Appalachian Trail; combination adventures, i.e., hiking, biking, canoeing; woodland tours interpreting forest practices and lumbering history; waterfall tours, etc.

6. The Roads: The network of primary and secondary roads can offer auto touring routes and mountain biking opportunities, but need to be outlined for the ease of the visitors. Packages can be developed utilizing the YMCA pool as a part of the amenities offered for biking packages.

7. Seasonal Events:

Fall: This is the perfect time for an Oktoberfest or Harvest Festival to celebrate the conclusion of the fall harvest and close of the aforementioned Farmer's Market.

Winter: Celebrate and promote the regional Christmas tree farms with an old-fashioned, nostalgic Currier & Ives Christmas Celebration theme.

Spring: Animal babies, sheep shearing, flower marketplace and children's activities should be part of a Spring Fling celebration that officially opens the annual Farmers Market.

Summer: Recommendation to develop an inventory of artists and musicians to serve as a basis for a summer Arts & Cultural Festival. Such an event might include a sidewalk art festival, performing musicians throughout the community, Arcady performance, and well known performers.

D. Remain a secondary tourism community, but build a calendar of regular events around the scheduled events of the tourism destination communities in close proximity. In this way, capture visitors passing through to or from other destinations.

1. "Moosemaine" 's grand finale is mid-June a perfect time to open the Farmer's Market to encourage the same visitors to come to both events.

2. Piscataquis County Canoe Race & the Kenduskeag Canoe Race: Cross sell the Piscataquis event at the Kenduskeag race which opens the season.

3. Biking: Piggy-back on the Tour de Moose: After the hilly terrain in the Moosehead mountain, bikers would welcome a more relaxing day biking along one of the river valleys. Coordinate the marketing to assist both events.

E. Target current Pass-through visitors & Maine Residents: About 75-80% of visitors to Southern Piscataquis region are from within Maine. In the short term, continue to market to Maine residents until the region is clear about its tourism goals. In the long term, cross marketing

to other similar regions along the Maine coast would be a strategy to bring more visitors to a similar inland experience. Recommends looking at adventure and nature travelers as particularly strong markets for this region. A list of specialized recreation markets includes: birding, wildlife viewing, fishing, mountain biking, canoeing, hiking, photography, among others. The study recommends a baseline visitor survey to quantify the existing market so that acceptable growth goals may be established and monitored.

F. Work with similar coastal regions to cross promote to sell similar compatible experiences.

1. Waldo County
2. Camden-Rockport-Lincolntonville

E. Miscellaneous Ideas for Information Dissemination: These ideas should wait for implementation until the region has a solid and increasing base of visitors for most effective use of marketing money.

1. A placemat sized map and directory for use in local restaurants.
2. A fisherman's placemat, a general, humorous and quaint guide to fishing waters.

D. Action Steps:

1. The So. Piscataquis Chamber should establish a Tourism development Committee to carry out tourism development strategies for the region.

Strong leadership must be found for this committee, since the process requires a long term commitment.

2. The Chamber should hold regional meetings (or series of meetings) to discuss the local commitment to tourism development.

3. The proposed strategies should be discussed at the meetings to gain feedback, reactions and buy-in from the local region.

4. The proposed theme concept should be discussed in a brainstorming session with a good cross-section of residents, business people, marketing and artistic talent to develop a theme and logo.

5. The committee should prioritize the ideas according to those most easily implemented in the short-term and long-term strategies.

6. Sub-committees should be formed to begin work on the chosen priorities.

5. Conclusions:

The Southern Piscataquis Chamber has a significant opportunity to make some initial efforts to develop tourism in carefully planned and well managed ways. Effectiveness will require commitment, hard work, and organization for the long term. The kind of development that this region is seeking can be totally compatible with their long term vision, if sufficient planning is done before marketing and implementation efforts begin.