



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION

TOURISM CENTER

Sustainable Tourism Development in Akeley, Minnesota



MINNESOTA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ASSESSMENT FOR SMALL COMMUNITIES PROJECT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH: UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION REGIONAL
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Sustainable Tourism Development in Akeley, Minnesota

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MINNESOTA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ASSESSMENT FOR SMALL COMMUNITIES PROJECT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In spring of 2013, the community of Akeley, Minnesota applied for and was selected to be part of the Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities project conducted by the University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and University of Minnesota Tourism Center. This 18-month project was created to assist small non-metro communities to identify, assess and develop local assets as part of a sustainable tourism development initiative.

Tourism in Minnesota is a \$12.5 billion dollar industry that generates 17 percent of state sales tax revenue and more than 245,000 jobs from entry level to executive level positions. This happens in virtually every county of the state. In Houston County, tourism generates approximately \$9.8 million in sales and about 300 jobs (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2014). Expanding regional assets attracts more visitors and keeps visitors longer in the region. Sustainable tourism and recreation efforts integrate the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainability by satisfying community tourism needs, protecting natural and cultural resource attractions, and preserving development capabilities for future generations.

Akeley and the surrounding area provide both existing and potential opportunities for tourism development utilizing natural and cultural environments. This report shares information gathered during this project and provides recommendations for action the community might consider harnessing or expanding tourism opportunities. To successfully harness and sustain these opportunities, community involvement, collaboration and planning will be necessary.

One of the key pre-development needs is to clearly understand what tourism includes. Several leaders in the community recognize tourism as a potential in the region, but the overall awareness and understanding of tourism within the community is limited. Creating a shared understanding of tourism will help prepare residents and build interest to get involved.

The Tourism Assessment process involved components designed to gather and understand the City's tourism situation, and provide a basis for the core recommendations listed below. For example, the Akeley Community Team spearheaded local tourism resource inventories and analysis, a First Impressions Team from another community quietly visited Akeley to carry out a broad assessment of the city's tourism strengths and weaknesses, and, in late-September, an Expert Team spent a day in Akeley, exploring the area and visiting with community members.

This report presents the findings and provides both general recommendations fundamental to community tourism and more specific suggested strategies to consider in developing sustainable tourism initiatives in Akeley.

General recommendations for any sustainable community tourism initiative include:

- Maintain awareness that tourism is just one important element of the community's economy.
- Key tourism markets for Akeley need to be better understood.
- Build on Akeley's existing natural and cultural capital.
- Create and maintain quality products and services.
- Encourage sustainable practices across private and public sectors.
- Identify ways to measure success and impact.

- Build local awareness, provide information and increase support for tourism and tourism development from city government, civic organizations, residents, user groups and faith-based communities.
- Engage partners in discussions, tourism development planning and action.
- Commit organizational supports to the development of opportunities for additional lodging, food and tourism-related businesses to meet the needs of tourism now and as it grows.
- Identify a formal task force or organization to provide leadership beyond this project.
- Host a “Spring Clean-Up Day” to bolster local pride.
- Build on Akeley’s existing social and human capital.
- Create and enhance authentic tourism experiences.
- Ask “*how does this reflect Akeley and our values?*”
- Pay attention to the usability of information about Akeley on the internet and in the community.
- Promote stop, play and dine opportunities.

As a next step, Akeley should consider short- and long-term projects that address opportunities discovered in this project. Options for ideas and strategies are listed below. These are presented at more length in the report, as well as the findings to support these ideas.

To evaluate, build and maintain assets and attractions...	
<p>Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What day trips travelers could make to Akeley? • In addition to the Paul Bunyan statue what additional resources could slow the traffic down and invite visitors to stop and do something fun in Akeley? • Plan, design and install a trail or path connecting the Heartland Trail with the city. • Start enhancing the appearance of the community from the viewpoint of visiting bikers and hikers. Small, simple projects that improve signage and the appearance of buildings, etc. • Painting & finishing repairs to Paul Bunyan statue should be a priority. • Add interpretation. The photos at the statue need explanation and more should be added about Paul’s story. If this is 	<p>Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build Akeley’s Paul Bunyan brand. Look for ways to highlight the Paul Bunyan theme throughout the community. • The Akeley area is rich in high quality, authentic assets and attractions, offering a mix of natural, scenic, cultural, historical and recreational assets. What can local tourism partners do to increase the <i>drawing power</i> of these amenities? • What existing local resources serve as a potential experiences or destinations for international visitors? • Work with local and county partners to explore opportunities for extending the tourism season. • Develop, adopt and implement a plan to improve the physical appearance of the Downtown, tourist information resources, and selected local

<p>“the birthplace of Paul Bunyan” this needs to be explained. Not everyone knows the Paul Bunyan story and may ask “Who is Babe?” Tap into local and state museum resources to assist.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve signage to the public toilets --- make them more visible from the road. • Clarify the name of the museum to be consistent across the community and on the website. • Even if storefronts are empty fill the windows with something to look at.... Perhaps host an art contest similar to the banners for window treatments. • Encourage a current or new business to sell ice cream or treats in the summer --- bike visitors interviewed said they came looking for ice cream but when only packaged ice cream was available at the gas station, they opted out saying, “We’ll wait until we get to Nevis.” 	<p>landscaping.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop, adopt and implement a plan to improve and promote “The Crossroads” featuring Horizon’s Memorial Corner. How can this tourism hub for the city? • Become a destination, especially for recreational bikers. All methods of analysis used in the tourism assessment process identify recreation opportunities, particularly biking, and natural resource assets as core strengths for Akeley. The Heartland Trail and nearby connection with Paul Bunyan State Trail are key assets. • Develop a plan for maximizing the city’s location along the Lake Country Scenic Byway. • How might the Woodtick Theater expand its role in local tourism development? • Develop consistent quality signs to public areas. Wayfinding and signage are an issue throughout the community. Local artisans could be invited to help design these to fit the Paul Bunyan theme. • Compile a list of other local or regional artisans who might be interested in displaying their work or offering demonstrations/classes. • Work with the city to understand goals for the campground related to tourism. • Leverage the Municipal Liquor store, which also serves food, as a visitor resource.
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To develop leadership for tourism initiatives	
<p>Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to existing local organizations and institutions to share what you’ve learned from the Tourism Assessment process. How might these groups play a role in building the city’s tourism potential? • The Akeley Chamber of Commerce could inspire and encourage local businesses to build on the Paul Bunyan theme. 	<p>Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create, adopt and implement an Akeley Tourism Development Plan.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to seasonal residents in the area to tap their interest, skills, knowledge and leadership resources for Akeley’s tourism development initiatives. Some will eventually become year-round residents. 	
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To build community support for tourism...	
<p>Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the release of this report as a springboard for engagement with key stakeholders: local organizations, community leaders, the City of Akeley, resort owners, etc. • Continue building active Chamber membership. • Develop student internship opportunities to create win-win outcomes. • Develop and deploy a Tourism Communications Plan to reach and teach year-round and seasonal residents about the benefits of a local sustainable tourism program - economic effects, preservation and promotion of local history and culture, additional opportunities for “home-made,” volunteer-driven resources like the Paul Bunyan statue, etc. Chamber leads with other organizations involved. • Track volunteer hours for tourism events and work and use this information to communicate with residents and in seeking grants. • Use findings of soon-to-be-released study of seasonal residents as a foundation for developing and deploying an Outreach Plan to 2nd Homeowners in the area. • Identify ways to strengthen tourism cooperation and development with Nevis, Park Rapids and Hubbard County. 	<p>Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create, adopt and implement an Akeley Tourism Development Plan. • Develop, adopt and implement a plan to become a destination for Bike Tours. • Create or strengthen the connection between the Akeley Regional Community Center and area tourism activities. How might this attractive, recycled school building become more central to tourism projects?

To market Akeley to tourists...

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Explore new working partnerships with area resorts. Connect city visitors with overnight opportunities. Connect resort guests with Akeley events and amenities.
- Update and maintain current information on the Chamber website. Make the website mobile friendly.
- Use available secondary data about current and potential visitor markets from local resorts, businesses and public agencies like the DNR.
- Take advantage of the marketing expertise and resources of Explore Minnesota Tourism.
- Meet with Explore Minnesota Tourism regional manager Carol Alterpeter.
- Work with the owners of the Woodtick Theater to find out from tour companies what services and amenities would keep the people in the community for one more hour.
- Work with the owners of the gas station, and businesses like it, to more actively promote Akeley tourism opportunities and even to find a way to engage them in tourism.
- Explore the feasibility of attracting visitors who love *geocaching*, an outdoor recreation activity in which participants tap global positioning (GPS) technology to find hidden “caches” of items or information.
- Identify ways to measure tourism success and impact.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Become a Northwoods Hub for Healthy Recreation. Build on trails, natural and scenic resources, existing healthy and natural living initiatives, etc.
- The Heartland Trail provides opportunities to market Akeley to specific niche market groups and to collaborate with other trail communities to do this.
- Trail user groups can also be differentiated and focused marketing opportunities created to reach these groups. For example, biking is a growing recreational activity nationally and even globally. The market for cycling includes both adults and families, and Minnesota is recognized as one of the top states in the U.S. for bicycling.

Akeley has good potential to develop a strong sustainable tourism initiative, given its many assets and a small core group of enthusiastic supporters. Akeley can build on this momentum by leveraging its assets, developing its leadership potential, strengthening community involvement, and marketing effectively. Thank you to the community leadership team and to the residents of Akeley for their hard work in assessing this potential.

MINNESOTA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ASSESSMENT FOR SMALL COMMUNITIES: REPORT FOR AKELEY, MINNESOTA

Introduction

The community of Akeley, Minnesota was selected to be part of the Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities project in 2013. The University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and the University of Minnesota Tourism Center were looking for communities who were ready to identify, assess and develop local assets as part of a sustainable tourism development initiative. This effort, led locally by a community leadership team in Akeley and facilitated by Extension educators in Community Economics and Tourism Center faculty, had four goals:

1. To inventory local tourism assets;
2. To assess tourism assets from local, visitor and expert perspectives;
3. To help the community uncover opportunities for tourism development; and,
4. To help the community identify action steps for sustainable tourism development.

As the city of Akeley continues to work with Extension, it is hoped they will use this report to consider their options and to align their efforts with community values, concerns, and hopes for the future. Extension looks forward to continuing to be a resource to Akeley.

To provide some strategic direction, this report is structured about project discoveries around four key ingredients of sustainable community tourism development - evaluating, maintaining and growing attractions and services, providing tourism leadership; developing community support; and marketing tourism. To begin, a brief overview is provided of definitions and core elements important to sustainable community tourism development.

Defining Tourism

One of the overarching findings in each of the project communities is an opportunity to learn more about tourism. Tourism has many definitions. This project centers on “person-trips” as defined by the U.S. Travel Association: “one person on a trip away from home overnight in paid accommodations or on a day or overnight trip to places 50 miles or more (one-way) away from home.” This definition includes specific criteria of distance, time and paid accommodations, which allows measurement.

However, this definition does not describe the purpose of travel. Tourists are not just vacation travelers. Business travelers, pass-through travelers and travelers visiting friends and relatives (VFR) are also “tourists.” For smaller communities, pass-through travelers or day-trip visitors are important tourists to consider—even if they do not stay in paid accommodations. Getting them to stop, stay a while and spend money is the goal. Day visitors can generate income and if the community offers sufficient tourism opportunities they may return and stay longer and use overnight accommodations.

Identifying and differentiating current and potential types of visitors is important. For example, the VFR market is a significant segment of the tourism market in rural areas. Marketing to reach the VFR market is done primarily through community residents. VFR marketing is strengthened by informing community members on a regular basis about attractions, events and happenings

available in the community and region. Building awareness of local tourism activities and happenings gives residents information to share with their friends and family. It holds other positive benefits such as increasing involvement and generating community pride.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism considers the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of sustainable development in both the planning and operation of tourism. It requires the informed participation of community members and stakeholders, strong political leadership and organization, and continuous effort to create a high level of tourist satisfaction.

For more information about sustainable tourism development for destinations see Appendix A.

Minnesota Tourism

Tourism in Minnesota is a \$12.5 billion dollar industry that generates 17 percent of state sales tax revenue and more than 245,000 jobs from entry level to executive level positions. Spending during Minnesota’s 71 million annual person-trips (overnight and day trips) is distributed throughout the economy (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2014).

For more information see Appendix B: Explore Minnesota Tourism and Economy Fact Sheet, 2014.

The United Nations’ Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization say sustainable tourism should:

- Make use of environmental resources in a way that maintains essential ecological processes and helps to conserve the natural heritage and biodiversity.
- Respect the authenticity of host communities, conserve the cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing benefits across the community—including employment and income-earning opportunities.

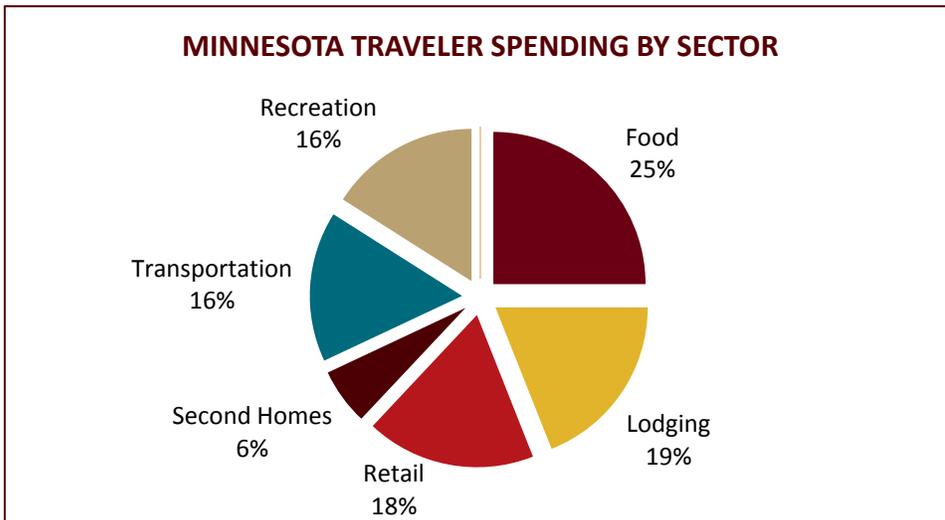


Chart 1: Source: Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2014 based on 2012 revenue data.

Local/Regional Tourism

Tourism happens in virtually every county of the state. In Hubbard County, tourism generates \$29,024,394 in gross sales, just under \$2 million in state sales tax revenue, and over 700 jobs (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2013). Statewide traveler spending patterns seen in the above chart provide an insight to likely similar patterns in Hubbard County, although with larger than average proportion of seasonal housing units to total housing units Second Homes spending would probably account for a larger piece of the spending pie.

Clearly, tourism already plays an important economic role in Hubbard County. Sustainably developing this sector offers an opportunity for the county's businesses and communities.

TABLE 1: TOURISM-RELATED SALES, TAXES & NUMBER OF ESTABLISHMENTS, HUBBARD COUNTY, 2011

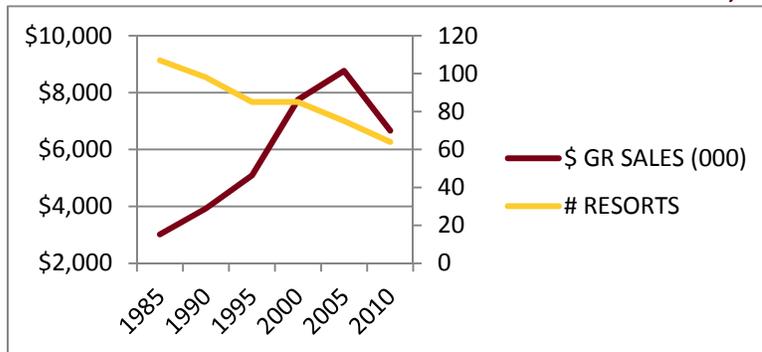
LEISURE/HOSP ESTABLISHMENT TYPES	# of Estabs	Gross Sales	Taxable Sales	Sales Tax	Total Tax
Performing Arts, Spectator Sports	9	\$428,102	\$410,985	\$28,256	\$28,332
Amusement, Gambling & Recreation	13	\$2,294,403	\$1,919,371	\$134,625	\$137,526
Accommodation	80	\$8,649,426	\$7,809,225	\$536,876	\$537,005
Food & Drink	53	\$17,652,463	\$17,228,495	\$1,260,920	\$1,261,368
Leisure & Hospitality Total	155	\$29,024,394	\$27,368,076	\$1,960,677	\$1,964,231
All Other Industries	616	\$413,713,684	\$108,671,279	\$7,673,252	\$8,025,677
Total, All Industries	771	\$442,738,078	\$136,039,355	\$9,633,929	\$9,989,908

Source: Annual MN Sales Tax Statistics, Leisure & Hospitality Industry, Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2011.

In 2011, Table 1 (above) shows the importance of tourism with leisure and hospitality firms accounting for 155 businesses or 20 percent of all establishments in Hubbard County generating over \$29 million in gross sales and just under \$2 million in taxes.

The chart below, based on state Department of Revenue data, shows an interesting trend with the number of resorts in the county decreasing markedly since the mid-1980s – dropping from 107 to 63 – while total dollar proceeds have doubled. A more detailed, year-to-year analysis of this data shows resort gross sales peaking even higher in 2008 and then steadily declining in the wake of the recent recession. A local resort owner indicates that most of the resorts that have gone out of business in Hubbard County during this time period were smaller, “Mom and Pop” firms.

CHART 2: TRENDS IN RESORT GROSS SALES & # OF RESORTS, HUBBARD COUNTY, 1985-2010



Source: Sales Tax Statistics, Tax Research Division, MN Department of Revenue, 2013.

With seasonal, recreational and occasional use homes accounting for 35 percent of all county housing units (2010 U.S. Census), tourism impacts and opportunities in the area relate to seasonal residents as well as visitors passing through, vacationers at local resorts, and day trippers using the trails and amenities of the region.

Developing Tourism Opportunities

In his book, *Marketing for Entrepreneurs*, Frederick Crane (2013) says that opportunities can be “recognized, discovered or created.” This is particularly true of tourism opportunities because tourism is about experiences.

Recognizing opportunities requires a community to match existing assets—supply—with current or potential tourist markets—demand. For example, Akeley has a nice regional park with bike trail access. Akeley can enhance the amenities available and promote the community as a starting point for using the trail to address the growing trend in bike tourism in Minnesota.

Discovering opportunities means supply or demand exists, and the other must be found, or “discovered.” For example, globally there is growing interest in local foods (culinary tourism demand). What “supply” is found in Akeley and the region? This includes everything from cafes, wineries, and farmers markets to farm visits -- experiences that can be marketed to attract tourists interested in local foods.

Creating opportunities is necessary when neither demand nor supply exist in an obvious manner. Thus, the community could create new opportunities. For example, as part of the interest in developing local food experiences, perhaps the tourism group learns that the chef at the local café and the owner of the nearby winery both have the interest and ability to teach. Can they create classes in something like or cooking wild game with wine to use their skills and to promote a local experience?

Characteristics of a Good Tourism Opportunity

- 1) Creates significant value for the visitor by fulfilling and unmet need.
- 2) Offers profit potential
- 3) Fits the capabilities of the community (values, skills and expertise)
- 4) Sustainable over time
- 5) Can obtain financing (as needed)
- 6) Produces measurable change in the community

Adapted from Crane, 2013, p 22/23

Harnessing Assets via the Community Capitals Framework

A phase of data collection in the project asked communities to identify and evaluate their assets. Assets can be physical resources, such as rivers or buildings, or less tangible resources, such as volunteer networks, cultural heritage, or individuals’ skills.

The Community Capitals Framework (Flora, Flora & Fey, 2004) helps describe and categorize unique assets as a starting point for community and economic development—including tourism development. The creators of this framework name seven categories of resources which they call capitals: built, cultural, human, natural, political, social, and financial.

Assets become capitals when they are leveraged to improve communities. (Emery, et al, 2006) The inventory forms used in this project draw upon the Community Capitals Framework to help communities harness their assets for sustainable tourism development.



Flora et al define the capitals as:

Built capital: These are man-made, tangible assets, such as factories, schools, roads, restored habitat, and community centers. Built capital contributes to the building of other community capitals.

Cultural capital: Includes both values and approaches. Cultural capital can be thought of as the filter through which people live their lives, the daily or seasonal rituals they observe, and the way they regard the world around them.

Financial capital: Consists of money used for investment, rather than consumption. Financial capital is important for communities and residents because it can be transformed into built capital—which in turn supports other kinds of capital.

Human capital: Refers to the skills and abilities of each individual in a community. Human capital includes potential abilities and acquired skills; both formal and informal education contributes to human capital. A person’s health and leadership skills are also part of human capital.

Natural capital: includes landscape, air, water, soil, and biodiversity of plants and animals. Natural capital can be consumed or extracted for immediate profit or maintained as a continuing resource for communities.

Political capital: This kind of capital involves the ability of a group to influence the distribution of resources within a social unit, including helping set the agenda for what resources are available and who is eligible to receive them. Political capital includes organizations, connections, voice and power. Note that “political” does not mean “partisan” or “party politics” in this context.

Social capital: This consists of the networks, trust and engagement of people that exist among and within groups and communities. Social capital contributes to a sense of common identity and shared future. A community's social capital facilitates groups' working together.

Project Description

The Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities project was launched to help small, non-metro communities identify and develop local assets that will attract tourists. Assets include natural and built attractions, services, facilities, people, organizations and more.

Five communities or clusters of communities, with populations under 1,500 were selected to participate in the project through a competitive application process. Located throughout the state, the communities are Akeley, Warroad, and Houston. The community clusters are Clinton, Graceville, Beardsley, and Orr-Pelican Lake, Crane Lake, Ash River, Kabetogama Lake, Rainier—working collectively as Destination Voyageurs National Park.

Each community has a unique set of assets that can be used to develop tourism opportunities. The process engaged each community in identifying and evaluating their tourism assets. The Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities process included three data collection phases that involved community members, University of Minnesota Extension faculty and educators, Explore Minnesota Tourism staff, and regional volunteers.

In Phase 1, community residents identified local tourism assets by completing inventory and assessment forms.

In Phase 2, a resident team from one project community visited another community to conduct a mystery shopper-style visit and provide visitors' "first impressions" of the tourism in the community.

In Phase 3, a team of tourism experts assembled by University of Minnesota Extension visited each community to conduct an assessment and on-site consultation. The visit also included a community meeting to solicit ideas and insights from residents on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) for local tourism.

This report represents the aggregated data, observations, and suggestions from all three phases.

For more information about the project and process, see Appendix C, Project Application.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN AKELEY: PROJECT FINDINGS, IDEAS AND STRATEGIES

To focus Akeley's future community tourism development efforts, we have organized our findings and the suggestions from each of the teams around four areas important to create and sustain tourism:

1. evaluating, maintaining and enhancing attractions and services;
2. developing tourism leadership;
3. building community support; and
4. marketing tourism.

To build tourism in a sustainable manner it will be critical to consider each idea and strategy in a holistic and participatory approach. What are the key values of Akeley and how does each opportunity fit with those values? What should be protected and what can be developed? How will developing or enhancing assets leverage others? Who in the community can and should be part of the decision? These and other questions should be asked throughout the process.



Source: <http://www.zeemaps.com/>

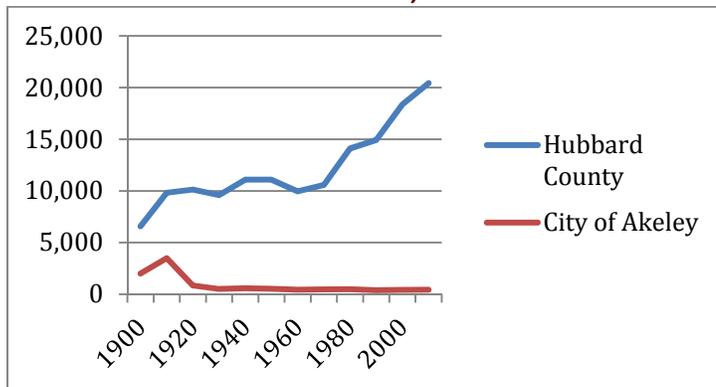
Evaluating, Maintaining and Enhancing Attractions and Services: Findings, Ideas and Strategies to Consider

ABOUT AKELEY

Akeley is located on the Lake Country Scenic Byway at the junction of State Highways 34 and 64. The city is 2 hours east of Fargo, North Dakota, by car, 2 and one half hours west of Duluth, MN and about 3 and one half hours north of Minnesota's Twin Cities. The city's Community Leadership Team for this tourism assessment project recognizes that they can best control tourism improvements and development initiatives within their own city limits. None-the-less, they also realize that Akeley is one small hub within a larger region of resources, amenities, destinations, activities and events. The map below shows the city's location and the 20-mile radius they believe the average visiting or seasonal family mostly operates within when they come to Akeley.

The City of Akeley was literally put on the map when, in 1899, the railroad connected the area with markets in the Upper Midwest coinciding with the local construction of Minnesota's largest lumber mill. As timber and lumber production soared local population boomed to an estimated 3,500 by 1910 but fell dramatically when the mill burned to the ground in 1915. (See chart below.) With an economy based on resource extraction, as local industry declined, small local businesses have relied more heavily on tourism and seasonal demand for services and amenities.

CHART 3: POPULATION CHANGES, AKELEY & HUBBARD COUNTY, 1900-2010



Source: U.S.Census, 1900 to 2010, U.S. Census Bureau

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS (SWOT ANALYSIS)

Akeley's SWOT analysis invited local participants to look at internal (local) and external (outside) factors affecting the community's ability to pursue more effective tourism development. Internal/Local factors are ones that the community can, to some extent, control. External/Outside factors affect the city's tourism initiatives, but are less easily managed from Akeley, requiring outside partnerships and resources. Below are some of the highlights of a September 24, 2013 SWOT session held at Akeley's Senior Center. Readers will be seeing some overlap between the SWOT data, First Impression output, and other elements of this Tourism Assessment project. This is a positive result as different elements of the information, analysis and recommendations reinforce potential tourism development paths for Akeley.



Internal/Local Strengths

Photo: C. Messer

- All things Paul Bunyan – statue, museum and event, and their pro Akeley currently has a brand, it is Paul Bunyan
- Natural resources and features – lakes, forests, etc – and related amenities – such as boat ramps, bike and ATV trails
- Organizations and volunteers that help make the community a better place – the Chamber, city government, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Fire Department, civic groups
- Akeley is a friendly community
- Special places like the Public Library and the Akeley Regional Community Center
- Local businesses
- Public lands
- The city has “room to grow”

Internal/Local Weaknesses

- Need for improvements to “The Corner” where State Routes 34 and 64 connect within the city.
- Appearance of wayside rest stops, general appearance of community

- Lack of key businesses -i.e. lodging, a laundromat, a grocery store, manufacturing - and related jobs. Struggles of existing businesses to stay open. Lack of year-round demand for goods and services
- Business situation and low property tax values limits tax dollars available for city services and development
- Loss of local school in 1989
- Lack of community vision and pride
- Need for more mid- and higher-market housing
- Akeley is a seasonal community
- Empty store fronts
- Lack of project funding
- Low income population
- Local drug problem
- Lack of bridge
- Need for more community involvement, more collaboration, especially with young people

External/Outside Opportunities

- Make Akeley a destination including for out-state audiences
- Build on Paul Bunyan theme creating, for example, a Tree House
- Promote Akeley more
- Take advantage of lake(s) proximity via new restaurant and campground expansion, for area promotion
- Support new business development
- Address mainstream residential and assisted living housing development; promote awareness of available vacant properties
- Weather/Sports
- What can we do to promote the “crossroads?”
- What can we do to get more tourists to stop?
- Consider developing new events, activities
- Keep museum open more hours

External/Outside Threats

- Aquatic invasive species
- Outside economic factors including the general state of the economy, high taxes and rising gas prices
- Outside supplies of local drugs
- Weather including lack of snow
- Government laws and regulations

FINDINGS

Key Findings

Assets identified, inventoried and evaluated by community volunteers include an array of resources, facilities, amenities and events. The inventories paint a portrait of an asset-rich area. Some key examples are offered in the table below. At least four insights can be drawn from the local analysis of *area attractions*:

1. Based on local evaluations, attractions generally rank high in terms of quality and authenticity, but mostly receive lower scores for “drawing power.”
2. Some area attractions receiving high quality rankings are associated with low activity levels. These include ethnic restaurants, vineyards, golf and mountain biking.
3. The market appeal across practically all of the evaluated assets is assumed to be local and regional vs. national or international.
4. The Akeley area has many assets that have attraction potential for more than one season of the year.

Findings from Observations of Community Members

INVENTORY TYPE	KEY ASSET EXAMPLES & OBSERVATIONS
Attractions – Natural & Scenic	Beaches, Paul Bunyan State Forest, Chippewa State Park, North Country Trail, Other Trails, River Headwaters, City Parks, Area Streams & Lakes, Area Forests & Parks. Nature-Based Activities, e.g., swimming, canoeing, river, mountain biking, tubing, sailing, cross-country skiing
Attractions – Cultural & Historic	Antique, Craft & Art Establishments, Many Churches, Proximity of Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe & Related Activities and Sites, Ethnic Fest, Uff Da Days in Nevis, Veterans Memorial, Local Museums, Local Theaters
Attractions – Recreational Activities (Numerous)	Built Environment-Based Activities, e.g., bowling, gambling, spas, locally-prepared foods, shopping, video arcades
Special Events	Paul Bunyan Days & many other events.

Other Attractions	Paul Bunyan Statue, Public Library, Fish Hatcheries
Private Services	Many Lodging, Food & Drink, Shopping services identified.
Public Services - Physical Environment & Infrastructure	Akeley has most of the public services expected within a municipality. Downtown Appearance, Landscaping & Tourist Information were identified as needing upgrading.

Findings from Observations of First Impressions Visitors

Community representatives from one of the other project communities visited the City of Akeley to assess the community’s tourism prospects and provide an outsider’s perspective. These visitors were asked to look at the community objectively and offer constructive feedback using a set of questions provided by the University of Minnesota Tourism Center. Key First Impressions findings are listed below.

Initial impressions. The First Impressions team, in this case, was a family with children. They loved the Paul Bunyan statue citing the “car stopping statue’s” unique photo opportunity aspect. They could see that Akeley residents take pride in their community. The city was generally described as “aesthetically pleasing.”

Community entrances. Clearly a key first impression for Akeley visitors. The family noted that three of Akeley’s entrances were highlighted with “nice signs.” They liked the “great entrance feel” of the streetlights and unique banners as they headed north into town on Route 64. More and newer banners were suggested for other entrances.

Availability of attractions and recreation opportunities. Other than trails, public lake, Community Center and State Park access, the availability of many amenities such as a river with public access, movie theatre, bowling alley, disk golf, skateboard park, art center, or a farmers market was scored fairly low. The lack of availability of some potential attractions such as a river with public access is understandable because there are no rivers in or near Akeley. However, this list can be reviewed for potential opportunities that can complement existing attractions and recreation. For example, is a bowling alley, disk golf or a skateboard park a potential addition? This impressions category also relates to those attractions and recreation opportunities that the Akeley residents associate with that 20-mile radius of resources available to visitors; for example, there are arts centers in Walker and Park Rapids. This represents an opportunity to collaborate regionally.

Quality of access to different resources. These resources ranged from bike racks to pedestrian crossings to cell phone reception. The visiting family mostly scored these resources average.

Potential Opportunities. Based on their visit, the First Impression folks were asked a series of questions about perceived opportunities and challenges for Akeley. Key answers include:

- o Big positive aspects experienced by this family include connections with local resorts and the music theater, bike trails and the potential to become a "destination" community for state trails, good food, antique shops, Paul Bunyan & Babe statue and related photo op, nice art work, and lake access.

- o Big challenges identified include a need for more services, dealing with a locally depressed economy and related blight, decaying infrastructure, creating a more positive cycle of upward development. Addressing these can help bringing more tourism business into the community, grow a sustainable "niche" that will attract people, and find funding for planned priorities.
- o What additional activities, services or facilities should Akeley consider developing? Capitalize on resorts and bike and ATV trails with more marketing and links. Encourage development of more family restaurants. Make public restrooms more visible. Create amenities for hikers and bikers.

Findings from Observations of Expert Team Visitors

A team of five tourism experts visited Akeley on September 24 & 25 2013. The team included faculty from the University of Minnesota Tourism Center, the executive director of the Central Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, the regional manager from Explore Minnesota Tourism, and a professor of travel and tourism from St Cloud State University.

During the visit team members had the chance to observe various community assets and talk with residents and businesses. It is evident that Akeley has many tourism assets and that there are visitors already coming to Akeley including users of the Heartland State Trail, the campground, and the Woodtick Theater. They are already here but they need reasons to stay longer. Enhance the secondary attractions and create those reasons.

For most visitors, Akeley is not a destination community, but rather a community located along primary transportation routes used by tourists traveling to their primary destination, or for sightseeing and day trips by those staying in the greater region. With this in mind, efforts to enhance tourism in Akeley should look at ways to entice travelers to slow down, park their cars, or take a break from riding the bike trail to visit the shops, museum, parks or café.

Akeley has successfully created a “sense of place” having already completed a few fundamental community projects; and the community has some excellent projects underway to further secure its place on the “tourism map.” It appears that most tourism planning has been done without much outside help. Over the years a few motivated community ‘leaders’ picked a project and did it, then others have looked at what’s been done, and at what they could do. As they have done this they have laid a good foundation for “homegrown” authentic tourism. The tourism activities in Akeley represent a wholesome, organic quality of the product not a commercial, generic product that has been repeated in other small communities. These reflect a *“we take pride in who we are, what we do, and the skills and talents of our people”* attitude which has strong appeal for tourists.

The primary tourism products in Akeley are the Heartland State Trail, the Lake Country Scenic Byway, the Paul Bunyan story, and the Woodtick Theater as well as the proximity to regional recreational opportunities like the city campground, the lakes and the Paul Bunyan State Forest.

The Heartland State Trail. This multi-use state trail with a link to the Paul Bunyan State Trail is a key attraction to bring visitors into Akeley as a year-round tourism asset. The 27-mile segment between Park Rapids and Walker offers a variety of uses with paved surface, grassy treadway for horseback riding and



Photo: C. Messer

mountain biking, and grooming in the winter for snowmobiling. The trail goes through the community and a significant potential is connecting the trail to the town to bring bikers and other users off the trail and into the town. Trail users spend money, and the key is to capture a share of their expenditures.

However, from the trail, the view of Akeley is the back of buildings with only a glimpse of town. There is not much of anything inviting the user into town, i.e., signs, inviting-looking buildings, kiosks, trail heads, information about restaurants/food, or restrooms. Signage is poor both for trail users and for those seeking to access the trail. What does exist is in need of repair or refreshing. Access from the trail to the downtown area is limited to one of two short gravel roads. For bikers this presents a potential barrier or hazard. Once in town, there is a need for bike racks, drinking fountains and toilets that are clearly signed. If someone needs a tire or bike repair, there appears to be no assistance in town.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) trail map (online PDF version) shows that Akeley has parking spaces and rest area but does not show that it has restrooms. This may sound trivial, but details are important. Work with the DNR to ensure that information is updated and included in future versions of their materials.

Akeley is also located on the **Lake Country Scenic Byway**. However, other than the community entrance signs, there is no recognition in the community of this asset. The Lake Country Scenic Byway is marketed regionally, statewide and nationally by local participating communities, Explore Minnesota Tourism and the Minnesota Department of Transportation. Participating in joint marketing and other collaborations provides an opportunity to put Akeley in front of key audiences in a relatively low-cost way and can foster good community relationships with other communities along the byway. The Paul Bunyan Byway and Lake Country Scenic Byway are promoted on the federal website:

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/byways/states/MN> Consider how Akeley can take advantage of this with the community's connection to Paul Bunyan.

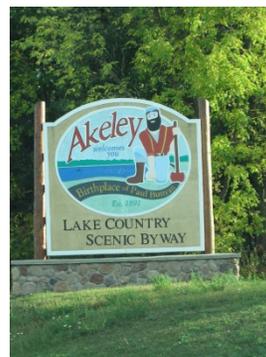


Photo: C. Messer

The **Paul Bunyan theme** is evident across the community – from the statue to banners, murals to community businesses. It is clear that this is part of the community's culture and a source of pride. The community embraces being the birthplace of Paul Bunyan including the statue and a museum.

The street light banners, each with the Paul Bunyan theme and made by young artists (school children) are an excellent “welcome” device, and create a clear sense of place. Using the works of local school children celebrates two important community values: children and pride in the quality of local resources. The murals and banners also exude a sense of humor.

The **Paul Bunyan statue** is a significant attraction on Highway 34. Many cars were observed stopping and people getting out snapping photos by it. We also observed bikers from the trail resting nearby. However, the statue is in need of repair. It is evident that the touristic value is appreciated by locals, as the statue has been repaired and patched. However, Paul is looking his age: the patches need sanding and repainting, his famous open hand in which thousands of visitors have sat and had their pictures taken, looks as if it is full of dirty pond water (or worse), his beard needs a trim (or should be lightened) and there is something about those eyes that can be a bit scary. Restoring Paul to a friendly, inviting condition will coax even more visitors to pull over for a photo.

The Paul Bunyan statue sits in a small, well located park with great potential. There is a billboard with historical images that present a history of the area, but the visitor is left to figure out the significance of the images to the community. Clearly, the historical value of the images is important and has meaning to the community, but it needs more interpretation to assist the visitor in capturing the meaning and significance.

The park also seems to be a catchall for the community with various memorials, a pavilion, a museum, Paul Bunyan, and the billboard. They are all packed in together with the community map, an interpretation billboard, a flagpole and Paul. Could a better plan be developed to spread assets out within the park or to another location?



Photo: C. Messer

Right behind the Paul Bunyan statue, there is a museum.

This is great, but the name of the museum is confusing. The sign on the museum reads Akeley Paul Bunyan Museum. On the City Council website, the title is “Paul Bunyan Historical Museum”, but the brief introduction calls it “Akeley Paul Bunyan Museum.” The name needs to be sorted out and used consistently. Who owns/operates the museum and what is its purpose? Is it for celebrating Paul Bunyan, or is it for celebrating the history of the community including being the birthplace of Paul Bunyan? The museum is maintained by volunteers and is open only when volunteers are available. A small handmade sign on the museum entrance states “*Open 12-4 daily when help is here.*” The museum was closed while the expert team was visiting so we were unable to explore it. The unpredictable hours of operation puts visitors off and makes it less appealing for a potential return visit.

Although the team was told that Akeley is the birthplace of Paul Bunyan, there is no interpretation telling his story or explaining the history of Paul Bunyan. Not everyone is familiar with the Paul Bunyan story. There is an opportunity to work with local and state museum resources to interpret the full Paul Bunyan story in a compelling way that enhances this theme.

Local residents identified Akeley being the birthplace of Paul Bunyan as a primary tourism product. However, being the birthplace of Paul Bunyan is not necessarily the primary reason for visitors to come visit Akeley. Primary tourism products draw or pull visitors to a destination region or community. It is a significant tourism asset deemed important within the community however and the theme can be enhanced to help retain visitors or offer a reason for them to come to Akeley while in the region.

Interpretive signing could bring more interest in the community. Where are other “Paul Bunyan” interest sites in the area that could be highlighted? Right now for many, the brief photo opportunity at the statue is their only stop in Akeley. Local information in the park could be provided to encourage them to think about using services or visiting retail shops in Akeley.

The **Woodtick Theater** is a classic seasonal attraction that draws families and bus groups into the community. The building itself is really quaint and charming – good for pictures, video footage and other promos. The theater seats 167 guests. Open in the summer months of June to September it presents evening shows on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights and matinees on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

This is so unique and a real treasure. One team member suggested that some large media might be interested in covering it, i.e., KSTP's On the Road with Jason Davis. It may present an opportunity to promote the uniqueness of Akeley --- Paul Bunyan and the Woodtick.

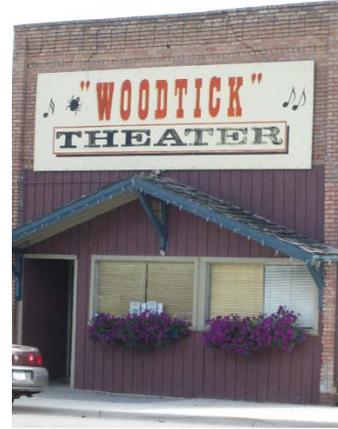


Photo: C. Messer

According to Peg Davies, Community Leadership Team member, the Woodtick Theater draws audiences who explore the community before a show and dine at a regional German restaurant after the show. The location of the theater is convenient, and the exterior of the building has character. Across the street from the theater, there are two antique shops that sell different types of goods. This is healthy, since focusing on different kinds of antique reduces competition and complements each other. Can or do these shops tie their window displays to the performances or the Paul Bunyan theme?

Cross-marketing opportunities with the businesses and theater to get visitors to experience "more" of Akeley should be explored. Work with the owners of the theater who are coordinating with the bus tour companies. Ask them to find out from tour companies what would help keep the people in the community for one more hour. Identify what services may be needed. Can Akeley deliver them?

"Akeley is this little diamond-in-the-rough where we can do it," according to Mike Chase, owner of the Woodtick Theater as quoted on the theater's website. The theater also highlights the scenic byway on the map on their webpage. (<http://woodticktheater.net/map.html>)

Regional artisans like Paul Albright, nationally known wood sculptor who lives near Akeley could be a tourism draw. He's already been donating some of his work to community causes. How can the community work with him to bring attention to his work and to the community for both of their benefit, i.e., feature sculptures on the bike trail or in the pocket park on Main Street. Perhaps create a wood-carving demonstration, class or competition in the pocket park, and pitch media coverage of this national artist.

The **recreational opportunities** of the 10th and 11th Crow Wing Lakes bordering town are a real asset including the City Park and Campground on the lake. These are draws for anglers, swimmers, boaters and campers.

The city owned campground is an under-leveraged tourism gem. It would be interesting to know what the goals are for the campground, as the camping fees are below the market rate, particularly for the amenities provided. This is an amazing resource for the community and is the one real destination resource of the community. Depending upon community goals for the campground - high revenue generation, community/public access, community gathering place, summer residences, etc. - more could be done to generate direct and indirect economic benefits for Akeley.

The unique quality of the facilities, the proximity of each of the 26 campsites to the lake and the fact that each campsite shares a dock with only one other campsite make this a great facility.

Signage for the park and public access needs to be improved. The campground is not easily linked to town via, for example, a walking path or bike trail spur. Simple, easy connections to the commercial areas, either by foot, bike or vehicle, are needed.

The **Paul Bunyan State Forest** offers excellent recreational opportunities with cross-country skiing, hiking and mountain biking opportunities, as well as 37 miles of ATV trails, 87 miles for Off-Highway Motorcycling and 60 miles of Snowmobiling trails. (DNR, 2013) The name of the park provides a natural link to Akeley's theme. How might local tourism development partners capitalize on this to bring visitors to the forest into Akeley?

NEXT STEPS FOR CONSIDERATION

The following list of recommendations is drawn from the community SWOT, expert team and First Impression visits. The key will be for the community to identify short-term action goals within these recommendations that will help demonstrate the opportunities tourism affords Akeley. These will in turn generate interest in moving forward with a more comprehensive tourism development plan that creates a sustainable and realistic tourism offering.

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies (Can be Done Within 12 Months)

- Painting & finishing repairs to Paul Bunyan statue should be a priority
- Add interpretation. The photos at the statue need explanation and more should be added about Paul's story. If this is "the birthplace of Paul Bunyan" this needs to be explained. Not everyone knows the Paul Bunyan story and may ask "Who is Babe?" Tap into local and state museum resources to assist.
- Improve signage to the public toilets --- make them more visible from the road
- Clarify the name of the museum to be consistent across the community and on the website.
- Even if storefronts are empty fill the windows with something to look at.... Perhaps host an art contest similar to the banners for window treatments.
- Bring trail users off the trail --- improve signage both at the trail parking areas and on the two streets bringing visitors into downtown and provide bike racks.
- Encourage a current or new business to sell ice cream or treats in the summer --- bike visitors interviewed said they came looking for ice cream but when only packaged ice cream was available at the gas station, they opted out saying, "I'll wait until we get to Nevis."

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- The community already has the Paul Bunyan theme started --- look for additional ways to build on that. For example, the Bunyan Burger, "Babe's Blueberry Pie," etc.
- Build on the current theme using simple "homegrown" efforts to indirectly embrace the theme, similar to the street light banners. For example, red plaid curtains could be placed in storefront windows, and empty storefronts and lots might be filled with carefully chosen visual images. Installing wooden bike racks is another suggestion. These will complement existing efforts, could involve local skilled craftspersons, and build local pride.
- Develop consistent quality signs to public areas. Wayfinding and signage are an issue throughout the community. Local artisans could be invited to help design these to fit the Paul Bunyan theme.
- Compile a list of other local or regional artisans who might be interested in displaying their work or offering demonstrations/classes. These could be make-and-take classes on an afternoon, or a weekend of art-in-the-park. If there are enough regional artisans, is there indoor space to set up a small gallery or store?
- Work with the city to understand goals for the campground related to tourism. The bar/liquor store that backs up to the Trail is a Municipal Liquor store. They have a newly remodeled bar area that serves food. Can the facility invite trail users to stop for

lunch and refreshments by creating a fun menu targeted to them and promoting it? The location might make it possible to build outdoor patio seating on the back creating a visual cue for trail-users.

- **Horizon's Memorial Corner** (the northwest corner of MN-64 and MN-34). This is a very nice project on the most prominent corner in the community. Given the importance of the corner, the community may want to consider how this corner can be used to enhance tourism for visitors passing through.

The site could potentially serve as the location for a trailhead for cyclists, or wayside rest for auto travelers. It is highly visible and clearly attracts the gaze of travelers, and is located right in the heart of the community. The bike trail passes directly behind the park and could be easily connected with a short trail spur. Amenities, such as food, water, air pumps, and shopping are in close proximity.



Photo: C. Messer

Examples of actions to make this corner a tourism hub include:

- Moving the interpretation board at the Paul Bunyan Park to this point.
- A tourist “trail” from the corner to the Paul Bunyan statue could be developed with existing resources.
- The city acquire nearby lots to expand the park and increase its utility as a tourist hub.

Developing Leadership for Akeley: Findings and Strategies to Consider

ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONS IN AKELEY

Akeley has a long history of people stepping up to make things happen in the community. Previous tourism initiatives include activities and events driven by chamber, local government, churches, nonprofit and volunteer partnerships. Examples include advertising and outreach, website development, several community events - including the popular Paul Bunyan Days, visitor-oriented facility construction, local educational workshops, and local leadership development (supported by the Blandin Foundation and the Minnesota Horizons program).

FINDINGS

Key Findings

Leadership and organizational development can be particularly difficult for small communities without the resources or critical mass of activities to commit public or non-profit organizations exclusively to lead tourism development. The Chamber of Commerce values tourism and there is a small but dedicated and passionate core team interested in enhancing tourism in Akeley. These strengths can be leveraged to maintain and grow tourism. According to the local leadership team, the Chamber is working to strengthen its active membership which will in turn benefit tourism initiatives.

There seem to be a large number of community/civic organizations for such a small community. This can be a real asset if they work in concert for community goals, but there might also be potential for some challenges if they're not working collectively. It might be helpful to bring the organizations together for some collective brainstorming specifically on how they can best work together.

The development of a Tourism Development Plan for Akeley can serve as a great opportunity to share it with their neighboring communities - and to begin some discussion on more shared goals/efforts.

Findings from Observations of Community Members

The Chamber can encourage businesses to tie into the Paul Bunyan theme. This might even be a friendly competition that the Chamber could sponsor as a fun, annual event to help area businesses refresh their Paul Bunyan theme effort. It might be something that could happen during spring/early summer as a lead up to Paul Bunyan Days where there could be a “crowning” or “plaid-shirt” ceremony for the winning business.

The community identified a number of associations, institutional and individual assets that could benefit tourism initiatives. Seeking ways to engage these assets and continuing to build local leadership capacity will enhance sustainability.

Associations Assets	Assets identified include: Chamber of Commerce, Lions, Yes You Can, Timberland Dirt Devils, Paul Bunyan Days Committee, Audrey’s Purple Dream, HRA. These represent a strong mix of business, civic, issues-based and other organizations. One concern might be that a relative handful of local volunteers are the “go to” folks for local associations. The MN Horizons program laid the groundwork for some community leaders now active in local tourism development. <u>What additional Horizons resources might be available locally?</u>
Institutional Assets	City Council, Hubbard County, ARCC, EHCDF, local faith-based organizations
Individual Assets	Historians, specialty crops, artist, theater, craftsmen, builders/construction, motivational speaker, community organizers, photographer, holistic services

Findings from Observations of Expert Team Members

The Chamber of Commerce values tourism and there is a small but dedicated and passionate core team interested in enhancing tourism in Akeley. There also seem to be a large number of community/civic organizations for such a small community. Both of these can be real assets if they work in concert for community goals. It is important to also build political support for local tourism efforts. Building in ways to measure success and impact of tourism initiatives, and communicating these to local and regional leaders will build support.

Stronger regional relationships could strengthen Akeley’s presence within regional marketing and resource development. The development of a Tourism Development Plan for Akeley can serve as a great opportunity to share it with their neighboring communities – and to begin some discussion on more shared goals/efforts.

NEXT STEPS FOR CONSIDERATION

General Recommendations

- Engage partners in discussions, tourism development planning and action.
- Commit organizational supports to the development of opportunities for additional lodging, food and tourism-related businesses to meet the needs of tourism now and as it grows.
- Identify ways to measure success and impact.
- Identify a formal task force or organization to provide leadership beyond this project.

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies (Can be Done Within 12 Months)

- Continue to build active membership in the Chamber of Commerce.
- Reach out to existing local organizations and institutions to share what you've learned from the Tourism Assessment process. How might these groups play a role in building the city's tourism potential?
- The Akeley Chamber of Commerce could inspire and encourage local businesses to build on the Paul Bunyan theme.
- Reach out to seasonal residents in the area to tap their interest, skills, knowledge and leadership resources for Akeley's tourism development initiatives. Some will eventually become year-round residents and leaders.
- Explore how regional High School students can be involved either with volunteer projects or in some type of mentorship/internship opportunity.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Create, adopt and implement an Akeley Tourism Development Plan.
- Explore stronger Nevis and Park Rapids connections for tourism. The communities already collaborate on marketing the trail and byway. What are other opportunities?

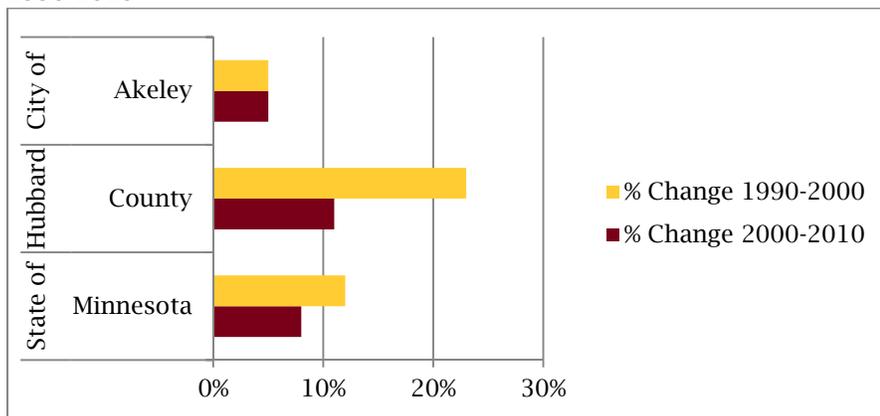
Building Community Support for Tourism in Akeley: Findings and Strategies to Consider

ABOUT THE AKELEY COMMUNITY

The City of Akeley has a population of 432 (2010 US Census). In the wake of the boom and bust of early-20th century timber and lumber activities, the community’s year-round population has ranged from 393 in 1990 to a high of 566 in 1940 (Historical US Census data). The loss of the city’s school due to the consolidation of the larger area’s school system may have contributed to the 1990 low. In recent years this same pattern continues with the Akeley population growing by 5 percent in each of the last 2 decades – in contrast to larger percentage and numeric increases for Hubbard County and the State of Minnesota, especially during the 1990s. (See table below.)

Building community support for tourism leverages the community’s human, social and political capitals to support and maintain tourism.

TABLE 2: POPULATION GROWTH COMPARISON AKELEY, HUBBARD COUNTY & THE STATE OF MN 1990-2010



SOURCE: US Decennial Census, 1990-2010, Bureau of Census, US Department of Commerce

Fully 80 percent of working residents travel outside the city to reach their place of employment (American Community Survey, 2008 & 2012). Although local businesses provide a variety of opportunities for shopping, dining, entertainment, and services, the current local business mix requires Akeley residents to travel to other cities for groceries and a number of other basic goods and services. Community leaders understand that tourism is just one important component of the local economy. That said, given the present business and employment environment, the area’s rich mix of natural resources and scenic beauty, and the abundant recreation opportunities available, it may be that tourism development is a strong option for the City of Akeley.

The table below profiling age cohorts for Akeley, Hubbard County and the state shows a city and county with slightly smaller proportions of younger residents than the state as a whole, and significantly less of a presence for residents in their middle years as compared with all of Minnesota. In the older cohorts, this middle-aged pattern is reversed with 52 percent of the county’s population 45 years of age and older, 46 percent of Akeley residents in this category, while statewide this age grouping captures only 40 percent of the population. This last pattern resonates with another statistic; the median age for all of Minnesota in 2010 was 37.4 years. Akeley’s media age is 41 and the county’s even higher at 46. The comparison becomes more pronounced if one looks at the 65

and older category. A Northwoods economic developer speculates that one population dynamic affecting smaller, aging cities like Akeley – communities with proportionally large older populations, but perhaps without the resources to develop significant senior housing capacity, geriatric healthcare, etc. to meet the needs of this group – is that as the older folks age, they head for larger cities where this infrastructure is available. While we do not fully understand the implications of this theory – perhaps it is offset by retirees moving from, e.g., The Cities, to places like Akeley – it does suggest strategies for strengthening the local resources that support older community members, who provide experienced volunteer energy for so many local tourism initiatives.

TABLE 3: AGE COHORT COMPARISON, AKELEY, HUBBARD COUNTY & STATE OF MN, 2010

	Akeley, MN	Hubbard County	State of Minnesota	Akeley, MN	Hubbard County	State of Minnesota
	Counts			Percentages		
Under 5 years	33	1,260	355,504	8%	6%	7%
5 to 19 years	79	3,624	1,075,707	18%	18%	20%
20 to 24 years	23	814	355,651	5%	4%	7%
25 to 44 years	99	4,076	1,396,680	23%	20%	26%
45 to 64 years	125	6,409	1,437,262	29%	31%	27%
65 years & over	73	4,245	683,121	17%	21%	13%
Totals	432	20,428	5,303,925			
Median Age	41.0	46.4	37.4			

SOURCE: Census 2010, US Census Bureau, Department of Commerce

Comparing, at different points in time, the proportions of jobs in different industries as elements of all jobs in Hubbard County can give one a sense of trends in the structure of the county economy. With the number of establishments and employees remaining fairly constant from the late-1990s up till 2011, trends in employment by industry – showing employment by *place of work* of people working in Hubbard County vs. by *place of residence*, suggest modest shifts in employment across different sectors. We can see in the table below slight changes downward in the percentage of workers employed in manufacturing, wholesale trade, and finance and insurance, along with a sharp decrease in employment in arts, entertainment and recreation. Small increases are seen in utility, construction, transportation and warehousing, information technologies, professional services, health care and social assistance, and accommodation and food services. Although we know from Explore MN data (See above.) that tourism is still a vital component of the county economy, the drop in Arts, Entertainment & Recreation employment is significant. This may reflect the long-term trend in the number of Mom & Pop resorts and/or may be linked to shorter term issues related to the recent economic downturn. Accommodation and food services employment, linked with tourism, maintain a solid presence in 2011 employment.

TABLE 4: TRENDS IN EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY IN HUBBARD COUNTY, 1998 & 2011

HUBBARD COUNTY MINNESOTA	1998	2011
	% of Total Employment	% of Total Employment
Major Industry		
Forestry, fishing, hunting & ag support	1%	1%
Utilities	0%	1%
Construction	4%	5%
Manufacturing	22%	21%
Wholesale trade	2%	1%
Retail trade	22%	22%
Transportation & warehousing	1%	3%
Information	1%	2%
Finance & insurance	3%	2%
Real estate & rental & leasing	0%	0%
Professional, scientific & technical services	1%	2%
Management of companies & enterprises	0%	1%
Admin. support, waste management, remediation services	1%	1%
Educational services	0%	0%
Health care and social assistance	18%	20%
Arts, entertainment & recreation	6%	1%
Accommodation & food services	10%	11%
Other services (except public administration)	7%	7%

SOURCE: Reconstructed NAICS-basis Employment Data, Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, 1990 - 2011

PREVIOUS STUDIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Hubbard County Housing Study* included a chapter about Akeley’s challenges and opportunities. Recommendations included encouraging public involvement, protecting the city’s existing housing stock, identifying local housing needs, and developing and adopting a city housing plan.

ESRI <http://www.esri.com/> produced a set of online *Akeley Profiles* for the Hubbard County Regional Economic Development Commission. The profiles provide a municipal overview, demographic reports, a business climate assessment, and a set of reports about liveability, labor and workforce, and assets and infrastructure.

Akeley's Paul Bunyan Days event has been featured on a number of media outlets, including Minnesota Public Radio in 2013:

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2013/06/28/arts/weekend-festivals>

In 2011 The Chamber of Commerce hosted community meetings to identify Akeley's resources and assets. The list was shared with this project team for review prior to the team visit.

This list and the other prior studies provide a good background for this project and demonstrate that the community already recognizes key assets in the community in addition to those specific to tourism opportunities. Akeley's past work has prepared the community to embrace these opportunities.

FINDINGS

Key Findings

While the Chamber of Commerce and a core group of volunteers are passionate about tourism, there still appears to be apathy and even negativity towards tourism amongst some residents. This provides an opportunity to reach out to residents with regular, consistent communication about the benefits of tourism to the local economy. The authentic, organic quality of the current tourism product suggests a *"we take pride in who we are, what we do, and the skills and talents of our people"* attitude. This attitude can be and should be celebrated and further encouraged.

Findings from Observations of Community Members

During the community meeting, local residents identified complacency as a concern. The fact that the expert team was brought into the community is positive news, and clearly shows an interest in enhancing Akeley's tourism experiences. Furthermore, the goals identified in Akeley's application to complete a tourism assessment were to use the project's findings to create a tourism development plan and market the community in a more organized, more cohesive way.

It was further noted by community members that this should be an important part of the Chamber's messaging to community members-- that tourism is and can be an important part of the local economy.

Findings from Observations of First Impressions Visitors

Citing friendly, respectful locals, a feeling of safety and security, and other factors the first Impression visitors scored city residents high for hospitality. The few lower scores targeted availability of information about local attractions and events, local attitudes about tourism, and local encouragement of visitors to provide feedback about their experience.

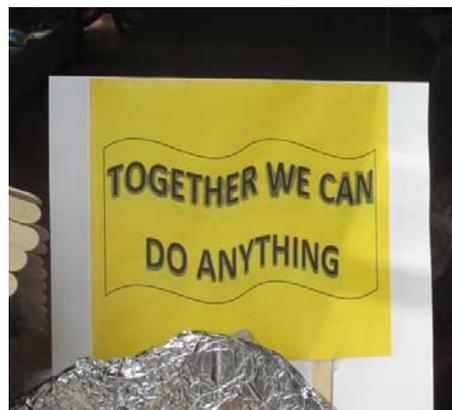
The visitors were also asked to suggest opportunities for Akeley to better serve visitors. One opening is for the city to become a destination bike tour provider. Create more visitor stops for pictures. Another potential is to use the trails to attract more bikers and healthy recreationists. Highlight the area's quintessential Minnesota Resorts. Improve local signage; "make people feel welcome and feed their curiosity."

Findings from Observations of Expert Team Visitors

Ideally, as community members recognize Akeley as a tourist destination they might take more pride in their services, amenities, customer service, unique assets, and community beautification.

Build human and social capital by seeking opportunities to help community members develop a self-identity that they can take pride in.

One area of concern is the aging and seasonal populations of Akeley. A concerted effort can be made to engage seasonal, senior residents and youth in local and regional tourism development initiatives. Many students seek internships to build their skills and knowledge. Tapping into this potential by creating quality internship opportunities in your tourism development initiatives can build their skills and knowledge while benefiting the community. Understanding and engaging the needs and interests of the area's seasonal residents - fully 35 percent of Hubbard County's housing units are owned by folks who consider this area to be their Second Home - provides a key opportunity for expanding volunteer numbers and energy. A study of the perceptions, opinions, attitudes and interests of 2nd homeowners in 8 northern-tier MN counties, including Hubbard County, is being completed as this report is being written; the results will be shared with Akeley community leaders to support this important opening.



Sign in storefront window
Photo: C. Messer

There seems to be a strong natural connection between the three communities of Akeley, Nevis and Park Rapids in addition to the Bike Trail. While each has their own unique assets and visitor opportunities, there could be a real benefit to strengthening collective marketing or promotions as some visitors seek to visit a region or towns near other quaint towns for day trips. Each community has a slightly different theme and feel --- take advantage of that. Some northwoods communities in other states have coordinated event planning and execution so that visitors and seasonal residents can always find something to do on the weekends.

The Akeley Regional Community Center is a great re-use for the old school and it also is a nice looking building. How does this fit into current tourism and what additional opportunities are there to integrate the center into tourism initiatives?

NEXT STEPS FOR CONSIDERATION

General Recommendations

- Maintain awareness that tourism is just one important element of the community's economy.
- Host a "Spring Clean-Up Day" to bolster local pride.
- Build local awareness, provide information and increase support for tourism and tourism development from city government, civic organizations, residents, user groups and faith-based communities.
- Build on Akeley's existing social and human capital.

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies (Can be Done Within 12 Months)

- Use the release of this report as a springboard for engagement with key stakeholders: local organizations, community leaders, the City of Akeley, resort owners, etc.
- Continue building active Chamber membership.
- Develop student internship opportunities to create win-win outcomes.
- Develop and deploy a Tourism Communications Plan to reach and teach year-round and seasonal residents about the benefits of a local sustainable tourism program - economic effects, preservation and promotion of local history and culture, additional opportunities for "home-made," volunteer-driven resources like the Paul Bunyan statue, etc. Chamber leads with other organizations involved.
- Track volunteer hours for tourism events and work and use this information to communicate with residents and in seeking grants. As of 2011, the value of volunteer time in Minnesota is considered \$21.91 per hour:
https://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time
- Use findings of soon-to-be-released study of seasonal residents as a foundation for developing and deploying an Outreach Plan to 2nd Homeowners in the area.
- Identify ways to strengthen tourism cooperation and development with Nevis, Park Rapids and Hubbard County.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- Create, adopt and implement an Akeley Tourism Development Plan.
- Develop, adopt and implement a plan to become a destination for Bike Tours.
- Create or strengthen the connection between the Akeley Regional Community Center and area tourism activities. How might this attractive, recycled school building become more central to tourism projects?

Marketing Tourism in Akeley: Findings and Strategies to Consider

ABOUT CURRENT MARKETING EFFORTS IN AKELEY

Akeley has made a good effort to promote the community tourism assets with limited resources, but there are opportunities to enhance and improve visibility both on the Internet and with print literature. Awareness of the free resources available through Explore Minnesota Tourism was limited. Data on tourism marketing impact and market research is needed to inform decisions.

FINDINGS

Key Findings

The community seems to be eager about developing tourism. However, there is not a good understanding of who is currently coming to Akeley. The community has yet to discuss the specific markets that it wants to attract. Good starting points to learn about current and potential markets include gathering information on resort customers, campground users, and gas station users. DNR does its own studies of parks and trail users, which is publicly available data.

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/pat/index.html>

When the expert team members sat in the rest area by the Paul Bunyan statue, couples in their 50s (biking) and 70s (driving) as well as families with younger children and teens (all driving) were observed stopping. At the meeting with a community leader, she talked about putting an ad in a biking magazine. Having a clear sense of who is coming, their demographics and interests/motivations will help the community focus development and marketing efforts.

Findings from Observations of Community Members

There is a Cenex gas station, along with a store, in the community. Comments by locals suggest that the Cenex station seems to be integrated into and well received by the community. Expert team members also found the staff person on duty to be very welcoming and knowledgeable about the community and area. This is a good first contact for many visitors to Akeley and an opportunity to encourage them to stop for more than just gas.

As identified by the community itself, Akeley needs something to make it a destination, not just where MN-64 and MN-34 intersect, more than just a portion of the Heartland State Trail. If being the birthplace of Paul Bunyan is not the draw that attracts visitors to the community, then what is the drawing factor? Consider how to strengthen this as a draw, and identify ways to align with target markets. Use the inventories to consider what else is a drawing factor, and then align with the target market(s), which, as mentioned earlier on, needs to be more fully explored.

Findings from Observations of First Impressions Visitors

First Impression visitors were asked to look at the community websites prior to arrival--a primary source of first information for many tourists.

Website. The Chamber website is easy to use and linked well to other sites, but could use an upgrade including a downloadable brochure and local contact information. The website is not kept up-to-date.

Community Information. In addition to checking out the website, the First Impression visitors were asked to evaluate other information sources and access issues. They cite the presence of local brochures, regional maps, local and regional newspapers, a community bulletin board, and local people as resources. Smart phone access, which is becoming more

and more of resource for travelers as mobile use eclipses desktop use, was limited to the iPhone (vs. Android). The Information Center with its “great public restrooms” and proximity to the Paul Bunyan statue and museum was also noted.

Based on their visit, the First Impression folks suggested that people passing through, trail users and resort visitors were possible target audiences.

Findings from Observations of Expert Team Visitors

The community of Akeley appreciates its identity and independence. Akeley is included in the Park Rapids guidebook. This is understandable, because a community the size of Akeley may not be able to produce an independent guidebook because of the cost. It is common practice that a regional guide includes several neighboring communities. Akeley can highlight the part of the guide that is dedicated to Akeley by not only making the guide available around town, but by making copies of those pages available for display in businesses.

Good starting points to learn about their market include gathering information on resort customers, campground users, and gas station users. DNR does its own study of trail users, which should be publicly available data that the community can have access to.

A focus on sustainable tourism opens doors to more grant and fundraising opportunities as it couples natural resource protection, energy-conservation, and community development. The unique crossover of these focus areas provides some unique grant opportunities

This also opens doors to some unique marketing and/or media coverage through efforts like Renewing the Countryside (<http://renewingthecountryside.org/>) and Green Routes (<http://www.greenroutes.org/index.php>)

Here are few examples of how some other communities are highlighting/marketing these low-impact, outdoor activities. (These are bigger municipalities with big website budgets, but they might offer some ideas for ways to feature and/or group recreation and event opportunities)

- http://grandmarais.com/what_to_do/
- <http://www.lanesboro.com/what-to-do/#1>
- <http://www.visitingnorthfield.com/recreation.html>

NEXT STEPS FOR CONSIDERATION

General Recommendations

- Key tourism markets for Akeley need to be better understood.
- Strengthen regional collaborations to take advantage of marketing opportunities and grants.
- Promote stop, play and shop opportunities.
- Identify ways to measure marketing efforts and impact.

Short-Term Project Ideas and Strategies (Can be Done Within 12 Months)

- Update and maintain current information on the Chamber website. Make the website mobile friendly.
- Use available secondary data about current and potential visitor markets from local resorts, businesses and public agencies like the DNR.
- Take advantage of the marketing expertise and resources of Explore Minnesota Tourism. www.exploreminnesota.com
- Meet with Explore Minnesota Tourism regional manager Carol Alterpeter.
- Work with the owners of the Woodtick Theater who are coordinating with the bus tour companies to find out from tour companies what services and amenities would keep the people in the community for one more hour.
- Work with the owners of the gas station, and businesses like it, to more actively promote Akeley tourism opportunities and even to find a way to engage them in tourism, e.g., getting travelers to stop, purchase gas or other products).
- Geocaching is a popular activity that ties technology with the great outdoors. It involves hiding a “cache” for others to find by using latitude and longitude coordinates and a GPS system to find the hidden cache location. There are currently hundreds of caches hidden along the Heartland Trail and in or around Akeley that are bringing in Geocachers. An opportunity may exist to connect with this large market of recreationalists in Minnesota and beyond. Websites such as www.geocaching.com allow people to both find coordinates for hidden treasures as well as post their own and organizations like the Minnesota Geocaching Association promote geocaching as a family oriented outdoor activity. <http://mngca.org/>
- Identify ways to measure marketing success and impact.

Long-Term Project Ideas and Strategies

- The Heartland Trail provides opportunities to market Akeley to specific niche market groups and to collaborate with other trail communities to do this. For example, the Brainerd, Nisswa, Pequot Lakes communities market the Paul Bunyan Trail together, which inspires a lot of users to plan destination bike trips to and from these communities. These users include many local community members, helping to keep their “tourism dollars” in the local region.
- Trail user groups can also be differentiated and focused marketing opportunities created to reach these groups. For example, biking is a growing recreational activity nationally and even globally. The market for cycling includes both adults and families, and Minnesota is recognized as one of the top states in the U.S. for bicycling. The state and other private company partners are investing funds to market the trails in Minnesota. Information and resources from the 2013 Pedal MN Summit is available on the Explore Minnesota Tourism website at (<http://www.exploreminnesota.com/industry-minnesota/tools-training/index.aspx>)

CONCLUSION

Akeley has good potential to enhance or develop tourism opportunities to serve current and new target audiences. The inventory assessments, site visits and SWOT analysis together and independently reveal a variety of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the Akeley community and tourism businesses, and industry. It will be tempting to grab all the excellent potential opportunities available for this community to develop a broader tourism experience. While not all can be addressed by the community, there are some that can be addressed collectively by community residents, organizations and elected leaders to assure effectiveness, including cost effectiveness, and enhanced chances of achieving the desired result. Akeley leaders and stakeholders can identify a few of these (focus on three or less to start), and develop a detailed action plan with useful objectives, and work together to implement the plan.

To sustain momentum from these tourism initiatives, it will be critical that the community think long term by creating a long term tourism development plan based on community values and realistic goals given the human and financial resources available. Involving residents and businesses will help share the vision and build support. Set realistic goals, and recognize that expanding tourism takes time and consistent effort. There are many potential partners and resources able to assist.

Thank you to the Akeley leadership team, community residents, and First Impression visitors.

RESOURCES

There are many available resources to help move a tourism plan forward. Explore additional resources and programs to help enhance Akeley's downtown, the connection to biking or other opportunities. A few ideas include:

- Consider Minnesota Main Street program <http://www.mnpreservation.org/programs/main-street/> and look at consultants who can help you plan and act.
- PedalMN has just announced a partnership with Bike Fixtation to offer communities and businesses products to improve local biking infrastructure. For more information see: <http://www.exploreminnesota.com/industry-minnesota/featured-programs/pedalmn-products-available-to-help-build-biking/index.aspx>
- A University of Minnesota CAP student could develop a specific design project <http://www.cura.umn.edu/CAP>
- Explore Minnesota Tourism: www.industry.exploreminnesota.com
- Northwest Minnesota Foundation: <http://www.nwmf.org/>
- Central Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnership: <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/rsdp/central/>
- University of Minnesota Extension Community Economics Programs: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/community/about/community-economics/#central>
- Minnesota Green Step Cities: <http://greenstep.pca.state.mn.us/>



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APPENDICES

A: Sustainable Tourism

B: Explore Minnesota: Tourism and Minnesota's Economy Fact Sheet, 2014

C: Project Application

APPENDIX A: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) and the related performance indicators have been created by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (www.gstccouncil.org). This is a worldwide effort led by a coalition of more than 30 diverse organizations, businesses and experts to come to a common understanding of sustainable tourism. Based on currently recognized criteria, certification standards, and best practices from around the world, the GSTC-D suggests minimum guidelines and a set of indicators to aid communities and businesses in establishing locally appropriate measures around four main themes:

- Effective sustainability planning
- Maximize social and economic benefits for the local community
- Enhance cultural heritage
- Reduce negative impacts to the environment.

The criteria are basic guidelines for communities seeking to be more sustainable in their tourism initiatives. In smaller communities, limited resources may prevent comprehensive application of all criteria. Smaller communities are encouraged to review the criteria and select those that are actionable locally. Using these criteria to monitor the effects of local actions will help the community identify improvement toward sustainability.

The GSTC-D is a tool gaining momentum globally, and the website mentioned above provides links to several community case studies demonstrating how communities of different sizes are applying sustainable practices. Reviewing these criteria and the community case examples may assist your community in applying sustainability in your own tourism development initiatives.

APPENDIX B: EXPLORE MINNESOTA: TOURISM AND MINNESOTA'S ECONOMY FACT SHEET, 2014

EXPLORE Minnesota **Tourism and Minnesota's Economy**

Economic Impact: Sales and Jobs

Travel/tourism in Minnesota generates:

SALES

- \$12.5 billion in gross sales
- More than \$34 million a day

JOBS

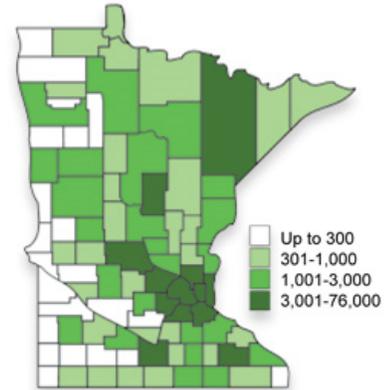
- More than 245,000 full- and part-time jobs
- 11% of total private sector employment
- \$4.3 billion in wages

REVENUE

- \$811 million in state sales tax
- 17% of state sales tax revenues

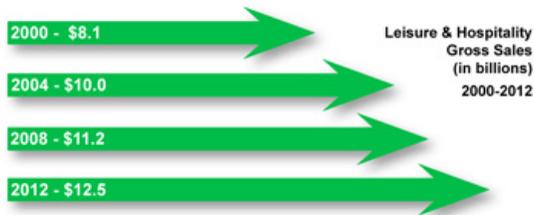
Note: Data for leisure & hospitality sector, 2012

LEISURE & HOSPITALITY JOBS BY COUNTY, 2012



GROWTH IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Sales at leisure and hospitality businesses grew 54% from 2000 to 2012, including 5% annual growth for 2012.



- Travel & tourism creates jobs and generates sales in virtually every county of Minnesota.
- Tourism jobs represent all levels of employment, from important entry level service jobs to high-paying executive positions.
- Traveler spending indirectly supports jobs in many other industries, as well, from financial services to printing.

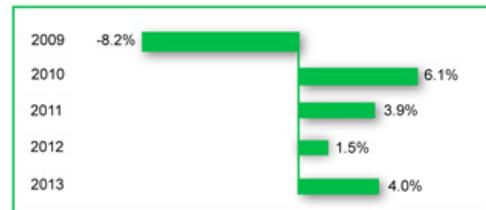
RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Every \$1 invested in state tourism marketing returns an estimated:

- \$8 in state and local taxes
- \$84 in spending by travelers

CHANGE IN MINNESOTA LODGING OCCUPANCY

Source: STR (Smith Travel Research, Inc.)



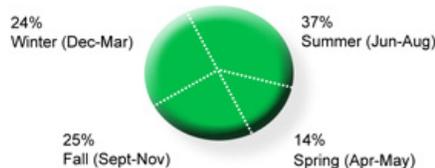
MINNESOTA RANKING AMONG STATES

The economic impact of travel & tourism in Minnesota ranks significantly higher compared to other states in:

Traveler Spending	22nd
Travel-Generated Employment	18th
Travel-Generated Payroll	14th
Travel-Generated Tax Receipts	9th

After a decline in occupancy in 2009 due to the recession, lodging properties have seen annual increases in occupancy.

TRAVELER EXPENDITURES BY SEASON



TRAVELER SPENDING BY SECTOR

Spending during Minnesota's 71 million annual person-trips (including overnight and day trips) is distributed throughout the economy:

- Food 25%
- Retail 18%
- Recreation 16%
- Transportation 16%
- Lodging 19%
- Second homes 6%

Find more Information at: industry.exploreminnesota.com

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2014

The FY2014 budget for Explore Minnesota Tourism is \$13.9 million, a significant, 66% increase in funding. With this additional investment, a new and expanded Explore Minnesota marketing campaign will debut in 2014.

Sources: Minnesota 2013 Tourism Advertising Evaluation and Image Study, Longwoods International; The Economic Impact of 2011 Travel in Minnesota, Tourism Economics; The Economic Impact of Expenditures by Travelers on Minnesota, June 2007-May 2008, Davidson-Peterson Associates; Minnesota Department of Revenue, 2012; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2012; Bureau of Labor Statistics; U.S. Travel Association.

ECONOMIC IMPACT BY COUNTY

Minnesota's Leisure and Hospitality Industry, 2012

	Gross Sales	Sales Tax	Private Sector Employment		Gross Sales	Sales Tax	Private Sector Employment
Minneapolis - Saint Paul Area				Southern Minnesota			
Anoka	\$477,316,997	\$32,335,750	11,946	Big Stone	\$3,981,552	\$288,713	128
Carver	\$147,757,574	\$9,670,067	3,558	Blue Earth	\$163,413,193	\$10,761,636	3,812
Chisago	\$51,750,970	\$3,349,041	1,444	Brown	\$35,978,422	\$2,415,266	1,171
Dakota	\$756,875,628	\$50,422,799	16,657	Chippewa	\$16,097,127	\$1,116,951	382
Hennepin	\$4,240,067,280	\$280,741,109	75,525	Cottonwood	\$9,783,595	\$668,610	282
Isanti	\$32,486,466	\$2,263,043	871	Dodge	\$10,603,708	\$748,724	402
Ramsey	\$1,769,335,116	\$114,778,186	25,789	Faribault	\$11,001,957	\$720,257	305
Scott	\$309,920,392	\$17,654,986	6,168	Fillmore	\$20,503,063	\$1,444,022	578
Washington	\$437,255,748	\$29,667,435	10,378	Freeborn	\$42,175,002	\$2,830,232	1,092
Wright	\$181,130,118	\$10,836,093	4,406	Goodhue	\$69,132,826	\$4,750,638	1,733
Region Total	\$8,403,896,289	\$551,718,509	156,742	Houston	\$9,754,403	\$694,858	275
				Jackson	\$10,890,094	\$671,491	313
				Lac Qui Parle	\$4,071,170	\$291,795	88
				Le Sueur	\$24,367,527	\$1,550,019	613
Central Minnesota				Lincoln	\$3,565,954	\$263,732	103
Aitkin	\$20,692,436	\$1,425,354	497	Lyon	\$66,993,915	\$3,048,196	1,381
Benton	\$54,858,985	\$3,625,581	1,286	Martin	\$31,101,613	\$2,085,872	840
Crow Wing	\$201,073,526	\$12,686,611	3,892	Mower	\$56,191,224	\$3,363,419	1,306
Douglas	\$101,302,136	\$6,646,968	2,168	Murray	\$8,091,619	\$548,364	181
Grant	\$3,031,590	\$193,803	47	Nicollet	\$34,746,412	\$2,416,047	923
Kandiyohi	\$77,016,965	\$4,829,598	1,582	Nobles	\$27,045,875	\$1,869,919	797
McLeod	\$41,173,719	\$2,757,112	1,242	Olmsted	\$396,425,482	\$26,354,806	7,982
Meeker	\$16,657,239	\$1,122,629	431	Pipestone	\$10,549,728	\$711,950	277
Mille Lacs	\$50,259,624	\$2,704,777	905	Redwood	\$27,583,097	\$1,953,300	399
Morrison	\$37,953,902	\$2,650,027	1,069	Renville	\$9,121,424	\$647,690	274
Otter Tail	\$79,659,018	\$5,335,051	2,092	Rice	\$139,958,353	\$6,025,710	2,333
Pope	\$12,958,581	\$881,963	301	Rock	\$9,424,079	\$651,954	215
Sherburne	\$78,969,255	\$4,882,658	1,990	Sibley	\$7,537,573	\$544,233	162
Stearns	\$289,798,902	\$18,933,475	7,608	Steele	\$61,538,609	\$4,121,598	1,401
Stevens	\$16,022,664	\$944,069	463	Swift	\$8,651,992	\$617,172	239
Todd	\$20,289,225	\$1,411,145	406	Traverse	\$2,187,294	\$164,983	NA
Wadena	\$14,577,092	\$983,273	371	Wabasha	\$25,620,714	\$1,718,486	777
Region Total	\$1,116,294,859	\$72,014,094	26,350	Waseca	\$14,349,281	\$907,047	388
				Watonwan	\$7,821,691	\$535,815	213
				Winona	\$93,844,551	\$6,407,935	2,448
				Yellow Medicine	\$13,838,318	\$554,384	211
				Region Total	\$1,487,942,437	\$94,465,824	34,024
Northwest Minnesota				Northeast Minnesota			
Becker	\$68,776,424	\$4,399,765	1,459	Carlton	\$59,989,204	\$3,928,136	1,018
Beltrami	\$82,096,909	\$5,249,317	1,872	Cook	\$55,099,915	\$3,509,141	880
Cass	\$102,411,781	\$6,196,420	1,736	Itasca	\$69,252,200	\$4,458,591	1,501
Clay	\$73,111,131	\$4,653,784	1,872	Kanabec	\$14,045,543	\$924,158	308
Clearwater	\$4,562,173	\$328,117	138	Koochiching	\$28,709,105	\$1,898,868	519
Hubbard	\$29,955,194	\$2,018,357	741	Lake	\$29,804,253	\$2,053,201	881
Kittson	\$3,056,600	\$220,142	70	Pine	\$63,658,221	\$3,423,625	1,022
Lake of the Woods	\$31,860,767	\$1,810,876	479	St Louis	\$473,912,454	\$32,100,727	10,354
Mahnomen	\$16,465,104	\$970,379	122	Region Total	\$794,470,895	\$52,296,447	16,483
Marshall	\$4,864,753	\$375,197	144	Minnesota Total	\$12,467,603,066	\$810,615,926	245,411
Norman	\$3,020,579	\$215,947	67				
Pennington	\$24,035,703	\$1,637,725	536				
Polk	\$43,504,674	\$2,711,711	1,099				
Red Lake	\$1,927,256	\$137,787	66				
Roseau	\$19,603,999	\$1,313,260	344				
Wilkin	\$4,021,685	\$299,055	159				
Region Total	\$513,274,732	\$32,537,839	10,904				

Notes: State total does not equal the sum of counties or regions because some data is withheld to avoid disclosure of individual businesses; and some state level data is for businesses located outside of Minnesota. The Leisure and Hospitality industry consists of Accommodations; Food Services and Drinking Places; and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation.

Sources: Minnesota Department of Revenue; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

Produced by Explore Minnesota Tourism, an office of the State of Minnesota. 1/14

APPENDIX C: PROJECT APPLICATION

Is this program right for us? A quick self-assessment

Tourism development is a comprehensive effort involving many aspects of your community. To help you and your applicant team think about aspects of community life that can potentially impact the quality of tourism products and services; and to better gauge if undertaking a tourism assessment program would be of benefit to your community, please mark where on the spectrum you feel your tourism development team is in achieving these aspects of community-oriented tourism development. Communities just starting tourism development may not have achieved or even be working on these, but reviewing them can help you and your team consider ways of strengthening existing tourism and recreation products, services and assets.

a.	Planning : Tourism fits our community's shared vision for development and use of our resources	1	2	3	4	5
		We have no vision			We have a shared vision within our community	
b.	Building Community Support : Our community understands the value of involving people in the decisions that impact them	1	2	3	4	5
		Residents don't get involved in community efforts			We have at least 50% of our residents involved in community efforts	
c.	Organizing for Tourism Development : Our Community's boards and civic groups are assets in our tourism development strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
		We have boards and committees			Our groups provide effective leadership and management	
d.	Assessing your Tourism Potential : Our Community wants to understand its tourism strengths and opportunities compared to other neighboring destinations.	1	2	3	4	5
		We've never thought about it before			We have surveyed local businesses and know what our niche is	
e.	Assessing your Market(s) : Our community wants to understand who our visitors are and can convey specialized messaging tailored to the unique interests, needs and wants of each.	1	2	3	4	5
		We've never thought about it before			We have surveyed visitors and know what their needs are	
f.	Marketing/Communication : Our community has a plan to communicate the availability of our tourism products and services to potential customers.	1	2	3	4	5
		We don't have a plan			We have a plan that includes the use of social media	
g.	Local Business Development : Our community values and encourages small business development.	1	2	3	4	5
		We haven't considered this			We have surveyed local businesses and work with their interests	
h.	Infrastructure and Appearance : Our community has made an effort to assess and upgrade its infrastructure and attractiveness to visitors and residents.	1	2	3	4	5
		We haven't made any effort			We have specific routes developed that guide visitors through town	
i.	Human Resources : Our community welcomes diversity and is meeting the customer service expectations of a diverse mix of customers.	1	2	3	4	5
		We haven't thought about this			We have trained our workforce and serve a diverse mix of visitors	
j.	Funding : Our community is aware of the financial resources that are available to us to implement our tourism development strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
		We have resources			We use our resources and external ones to effectively accomplish our development projects	
k.	Maintaining Tourism Vitality : Our community has a development plan in place that is used to periodically update business information, and assess if any changes are needed in the experiences, services or products that we offer.	1	2	3	4	5
		We don't have a plan			Our plan is in use and updated periodically based on the needs of our community and visitors	

Community Application Form

Applications are due by noon on **May 15, 2013** and communities will be notified by **May 31, 2013**.
 Please submit this application to your Regional Sustainable Development Partnership office listed on the last page.

Community Criteria:

Non-metro townships or communities in Minnesota with a population under 1500 or a group of 2-3 small communities (each under 1500) may apply. Groups of communities must be in geographic proximity and be willing to or have experience working together. Potential team members to consider:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chamber/CVB Director | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resort/Hotel/Motel/B&B, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Resources Specialist |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parks & Recreation Director | <input type="checkbox"/> Attraction manager | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> City planning or economic development staff | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Retailer | <input type="checkbox"/> Historical Society staff / volunteers |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Township supervisor or clerk | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restaurateur | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Arts / theater Organization |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth representative | <input type="checkbox"/> Others as appropriate |

Contact Information:

Community: <i>Akeley</i>	County: <i>Hubbard</i>
Partner Communities Names: (if applicable): 	
Local Coordinator: <i>Peg Davies</i>	Email: <i>pld@arvig.net</i>
Street Address: <i>25476 Horseshoe Rd</i>	
City: <i>Akeley</i>	Zip Code: <i>56433</i>
Telephone: <i>218-252-1541</i>	Community website: <i>www.akeleychamber.com</i>
Additional Team members & emails (minimum of two people in addition to Local Coordinator required and multi-community applications must include team members from each community) <i>Kristin fake kfake@justastage.biz</i> <i>Sandra Fynboh Andress safynboh@arvig.net</i>	

Continued on next page

Please answer in one short paragraph: How ready do you feel your community is to engage in this project? How will you use the findings from this program to benefit your community?

Our Community has a core group of dedicated people working together to bring our community into the future. We've grown the chamber x ten, developed an internet presence. We've been working on upgrading our facilities and improving the appearance of our town. We would use our findings to develop a plan and market our community in a more organized, cohesive way.

Applicant Terms of Agreement:

- Our community already has at least 3 people who have agreed to serve on the Community Leadership Team. This team will be responsible during the next 1-2 years for facilitating program logistics in the community and helping guide implementation of the program locally. One person will chair the Leadership Team and be the primary contact person.
- Our community realizes that implementing this tourism assessment program takes a commitment of time and requires financial resources to support meetings, the community visit and implementation of recommendations.
- Our community will host the visiting tourism experts for a 1-2 day visit by providing complimentary commercial lodging and meals, and arrange for interviews and meetings with community stakeholders. These may be in-kind contributions.
- Our community will send representatives to the statewide celebration of communities in this project.
- Our community is prepared to create action steps to develop tourism assets.

Sign & Date:

Peggy Hawes 4-23-13

Partner community signatures as applicable:

Sandra Lybch Andres
AKO Mathis

Questions, please contact:

Cynthia Messer, Extension Professor
University of Minnesota Tourism Center
cmesser@umn.edu or call 612.624.6236



The University of Minnesota Tourism Center is a collaboration of the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences and University of Minnesota Extension.