Destination Stewardship & the Geotourism Approach: Collaborating for a Sustainable Future in the Beaver Valley

Presented by Jonathan Tourtellot
in collaboration with Samantha Bray | April 23, 2023

PART 1 – BACKGROUND

How tourism interacts with places

The Two Faces of Tourism

• Crass over-development
• Crowding
• Cultural degradation
• Pollution
• Ecological damage
• Ugliness
• Social problems
• Nuisances
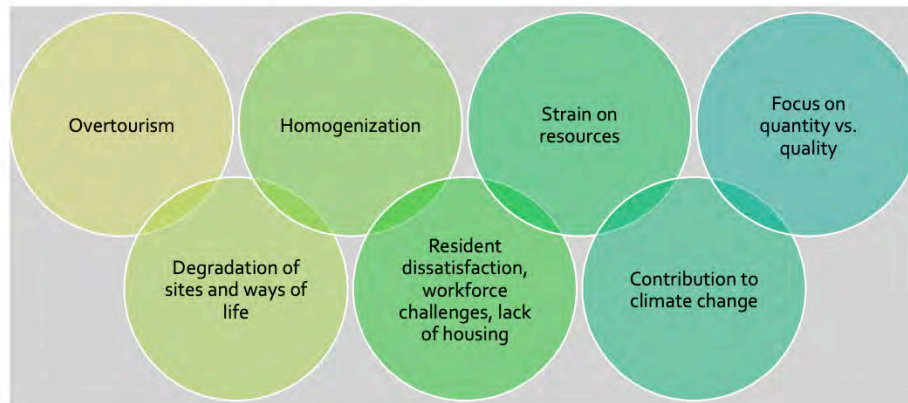
• Economic benefit
• Cultural pride
• Conservation of historic and natural assets
• Public education
• International understanding
• Philanthropy

Economic benefits can spin off many other benefits as well.

"Tourism is the fire
that can cook your food
or burn your house down."

The Messy Problem(s) of Tourism

Overtourism

Homogenization

Strain on resources

Focus on quantity vs. quality

Degradation of sites and ways of life

Resident dissatisfaction, workforce challenges, lack of housing
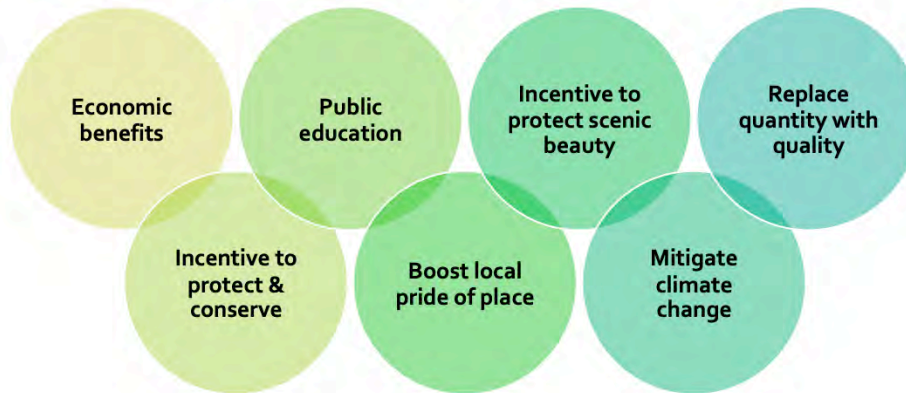
Contribution to climate change

Destinations are also facing pressures from climate change, overtourism, degradation, strains on resources, low wages and housing crises for tourism workers, pandemics, resident dissatisfaction, etc. This has led to resident discontent with tourism in many destinations.

How it burns your house down: Overtourism resulted in a political revolution in Barcelona. Now the city seeks a mutually beneficial relationship between visitors and locals.

The Opportunities of Tourism

- Economic benefits
- Public education
- Incentive to protect scenic beauty
- Replace quantity with quality
- Incentive to protect & conserve
- Boost local pride of place
- Mitigate climate change

Climate action is an intimating topic that DMOs, with a primary mandate to market a destination, often feel ill-equipped to manage.

A destination stewardship council can help shape a tourism plan in keeping with the principles of the **"geotourism approach"** – defined via National Geographic as:

"Tourism that sustains or enhances the **geographical character** of a place—
- its environment,
- geology
- culture,
- aesthetics,
- heritage, and
- the well-being of its residents."

This definition, which we introduced in 2002 when I worked at National Geographic, sums up the intent of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Destination Criteria. "Geographical character" – sense of place – drives tourism and relies on numerous destination characteristics.

From eco- to geo-

Manage tourism so that it *pays* to protect the place, not destroy it.

Sightseeing

Cultural tourism

Geological tourism

GEOTOURISM APPROACH

ECOTOURISM: nature

Local cuisine

Historical tourism

Agri-tourism

Indigenous tourism

All place-based types of tourism = the ENTIRE destination

Geotourism is more than ecotourism, which is traditionally nature-based; more than sustainable tourism because it speaks to the possibility of enhancing unique aspects of a place.

How do Destination Stewardship & Geotourism work together? Think of it this way…

In this analogy, refrigeration stands for sustaining the place. No cool, no ice cream.

Two sides of the same coin

WISE
TOURISM

DESTINATION
STEWARDSHIP
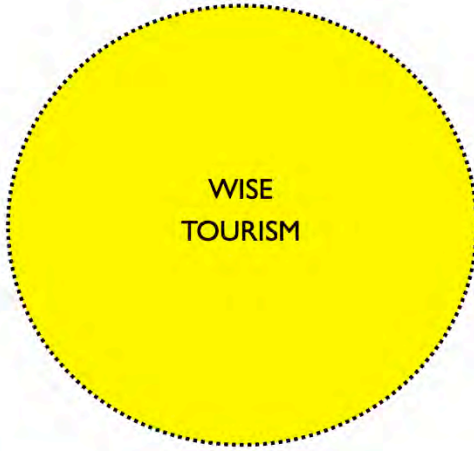
Wisely managed tourism and good stewardship are two sides of the same coin.

What is geographical character?
The identity of your special place.

A totem pole says "north-west Pacific coast."

A heritage mural enhances an ugly tank in Newfoundland

Cultural geographical character—enlivening an ugly storage tank in one case and brightening southeast Alaska in the other.

This does not enhance geographical character.

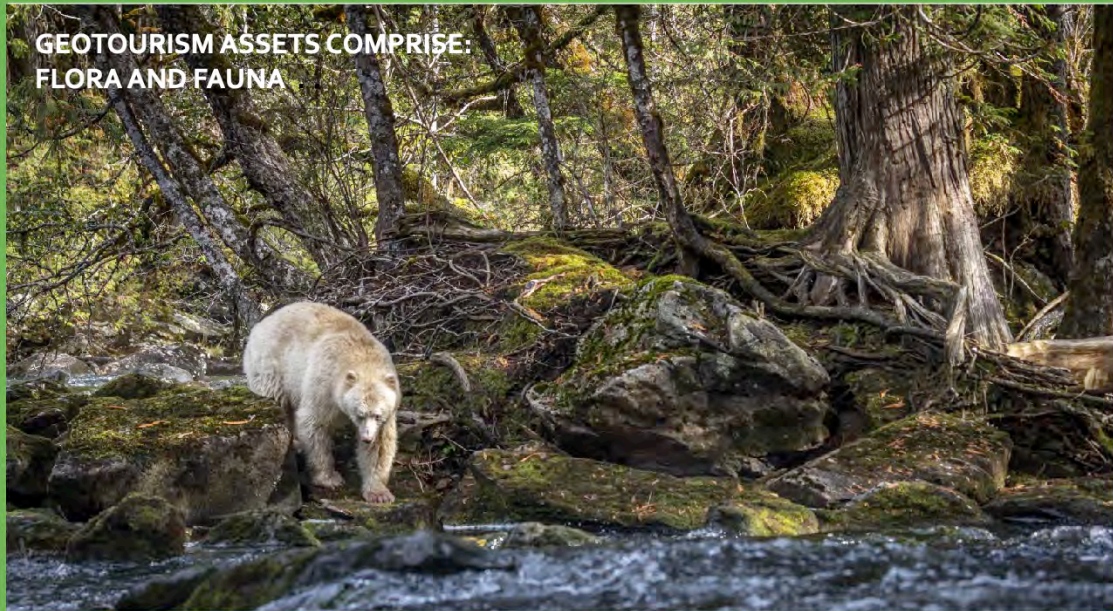Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Québec, Canada

Chain enterprises in general offer no sense of place, but on the basis of pure tourism transactions, they look great on paper.

What IS geographical character?

All these things …

GEOTOURISM ASSETS COMPRISE:
FLORA AND FAUNA

Located in the heart of The Great Bear Rainforest, Spirit Bear Lodge offers access to transformative wilderness and authentic Cultural experiences that create emotional connections between people, nature and wildlife.

HISTORY

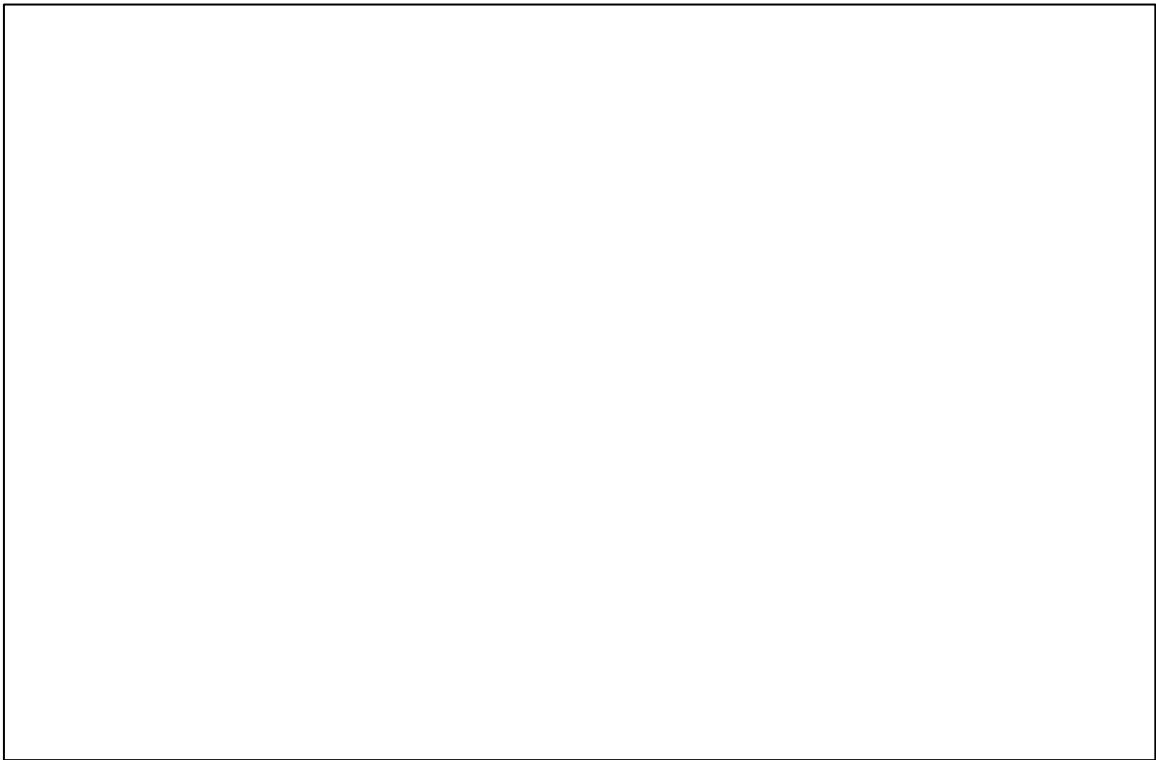**Bar U Ranch National Historic Site, commemorate the history and importance of ranching in Canada.**
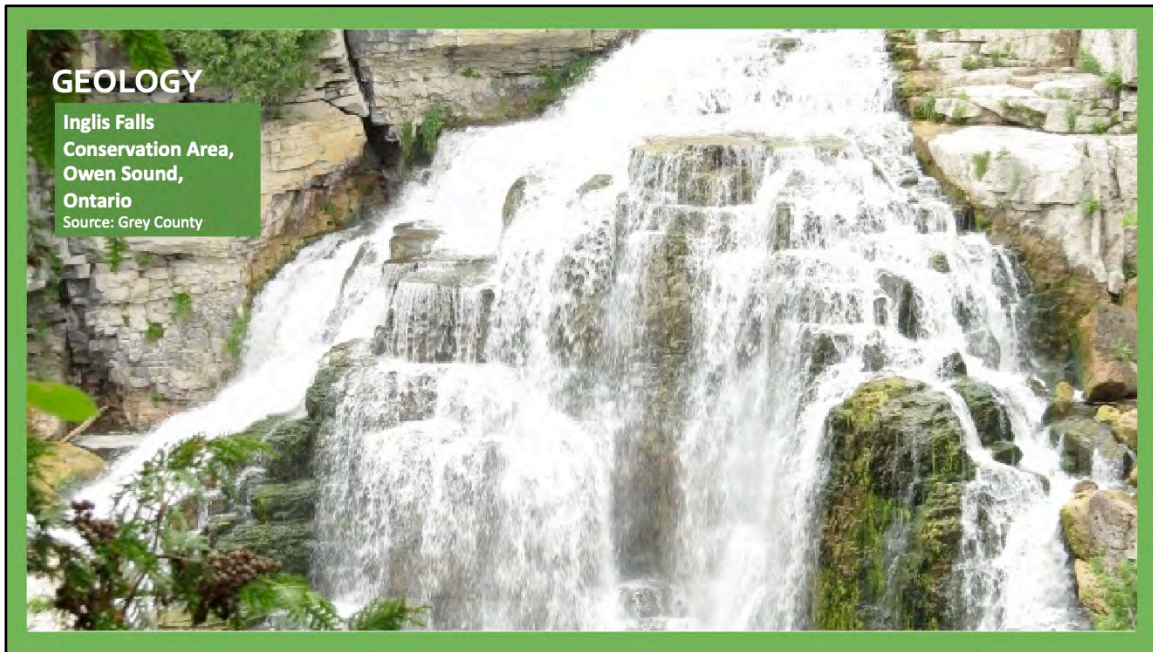Source: Parks Canada via Crown of the Continent Geotourism Program

SCENIC PLACES

Old Baldy Scenic Lookout, Grey Highlands, Ontario
Source: Grey County

GEOLOGY

Inglis Falls
Conservation Area,
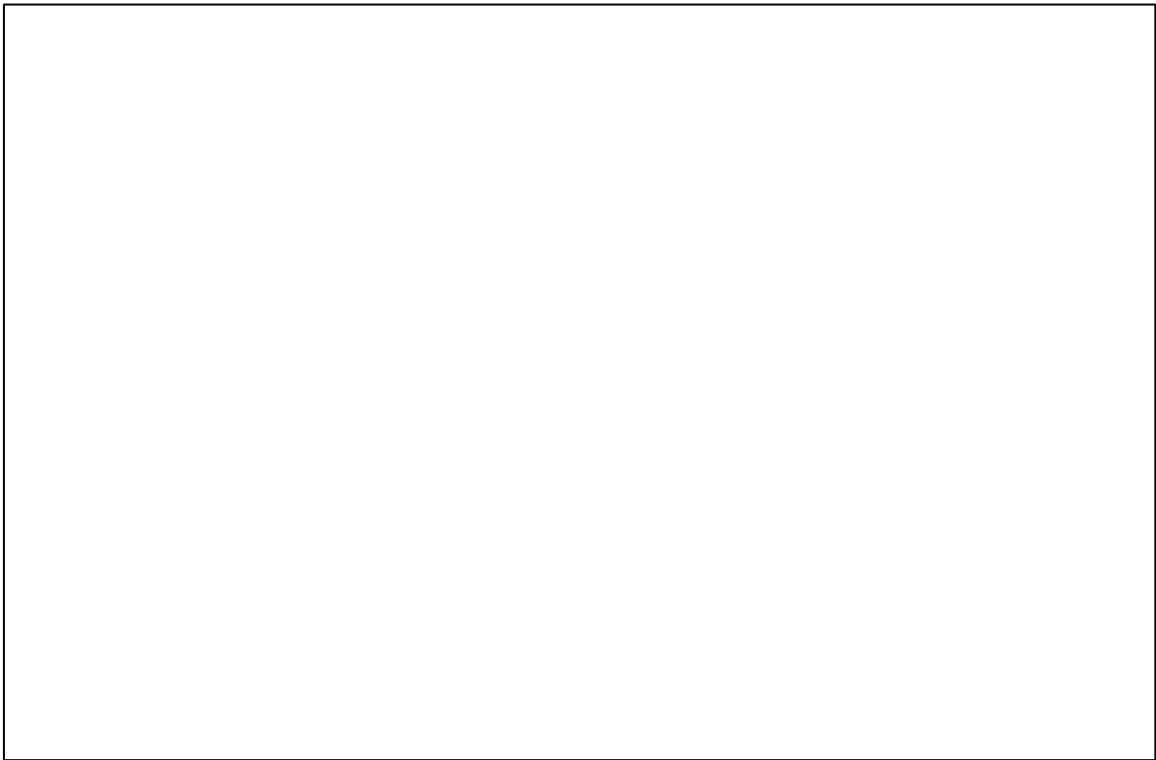Owen Sound,
Ontario
Source: Grey County

You will hear "geotourism" also used to mean "geological tourism"—a narrower niche—but one that certainly falls within the broader, geographical definition of the "geotourism approach." That relationship has been endorsed by the Arouca Decaraltion of 2011 and by UNESCO.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump archaeological site in Alberta, a UNESCO World Heritage site.
Source: Crown of the Continent Geotourism Program

SPIRITUAL PLACES

Chief Mountain looms between prairie and Rockies. Hikers should not climb it without proper cultural guidance from Blackfeet leaders.
Source: Glacier National Park via Crown of the Continent Geotourism Program

CUISINE

In B.C. the Thompson Okanagan is known for its abundance of farm to table restaurants and bistros.
Source: Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, British Columbia

LOCAL MUSIC

West Brooklyn SpeakEasy Saturday Nights,
Bay of Fundy & Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia
Source: Tourism Nova Scotia

DANCES

The annual celebration of Cape Breton-based Gaelic music gives locals and visitors alike insight into this distinct and vibrant living culture, bringing the kitchen-ceilidh feel to the forefront.
Source: Tourism Nova Scotia

TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE …

Fogo Island: Traditional Newfoundland fishing "stages" inspire the design for visiting artist studios.

creativity

… AND LOCAL CRAFTS

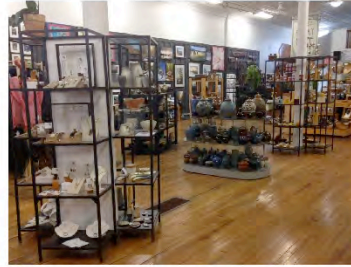**From boat-building skills**

To modern furniture!

ARTS

Many micro/small/medium businesses, such as...

< Blue Mountain Makers, Clarksburg

^ Cobble Beach Spring Artisan Market, Kemble

Owen Sound Artists' Co-op, ON ^

< Wildwood Art Adventures, Flesherton
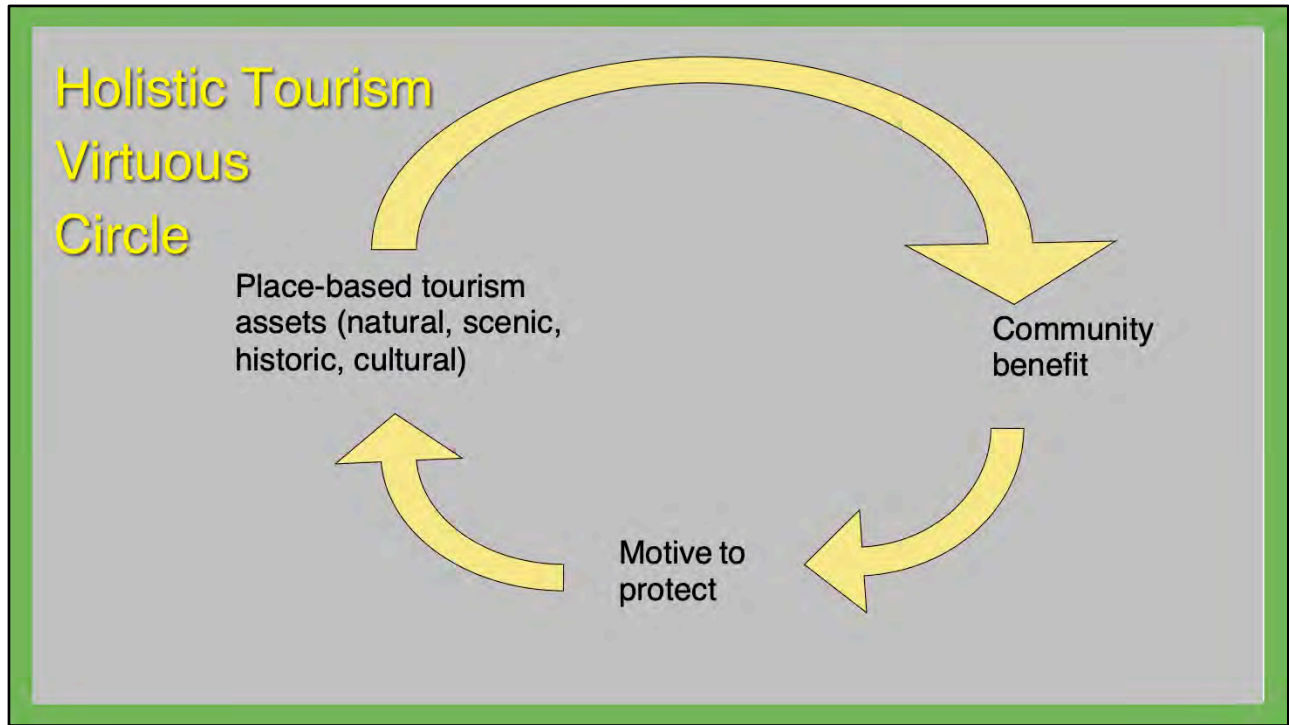
Beaver Valley Gold Honey, Clarksburg >

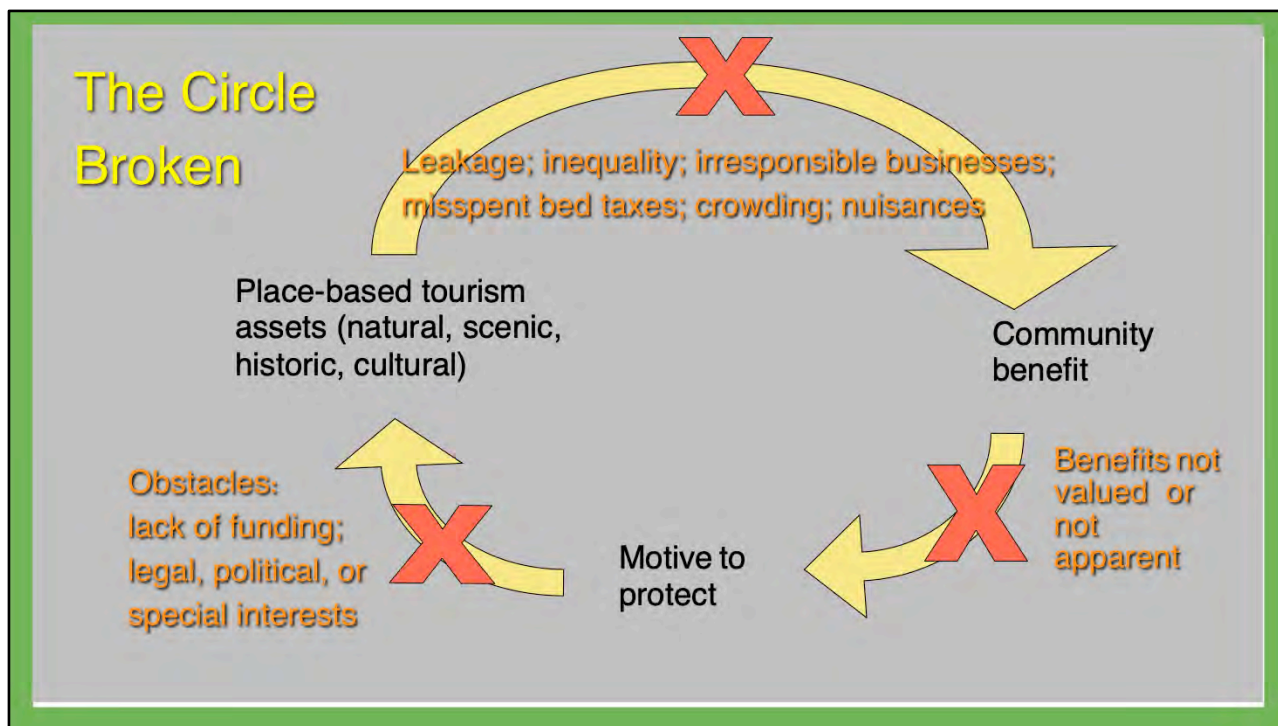Creative entrepreneurs can add texture to the travel experience. Their enterprises add to sense of place – what most people travel for. Recovery from the 2020 pandemic should emphasize support for restarting distinctive small businesses and creating new ones to replace the many that are being lost.

SEEING THE WHOLE PICTURE

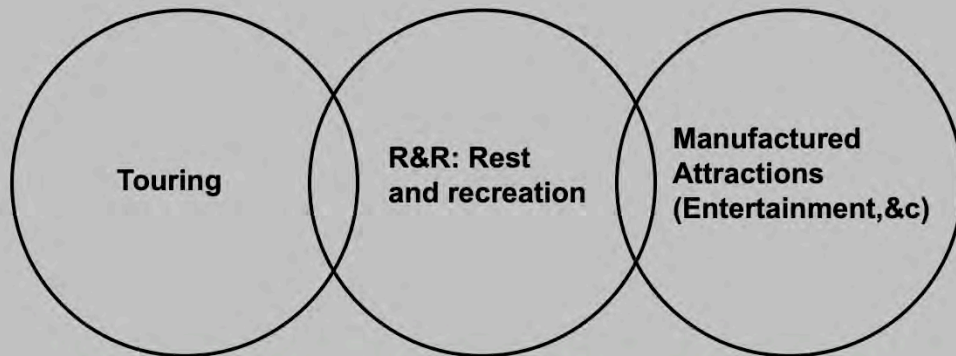Recognize how tourism interacts with places

and the people who live there.

Holistic Tourism Virtuous Circle

Place-based tourism assets (natural, scenic, historic, cultural)

Community benefit

Motive to protect

This is how things should work, but …

The Circle Broken

Leakage; inequality; irresponsible businesses; misspent bed taxes; crowding; nuisances

Place-based tourism assets (natural, scenic, historic, cultural)

Community benefit

Obstacles: lack of funding; legal, political, or special interests

Motive to protect

Benefits not valued or not apparent

The circle may failk if conditions interfere with any one of the beneficial impacts. ("Leakage" means the revenue doesn't stay in the locale.) Destination stewardship councils can help make the circle unbroken.

Let's look at how tourism interacts with destinations. Of these three overlapping styles of tourism, each has a different relationship to the place where it occurs.

Touring-style tourism

Relies on human *and* physical character of place.

ACTIVITIES
- sightseeing
- history
- nature
- scenery
- hiking / Nordic skiing
- local shopping
- typical cuisine
- photography
- culture & festivals
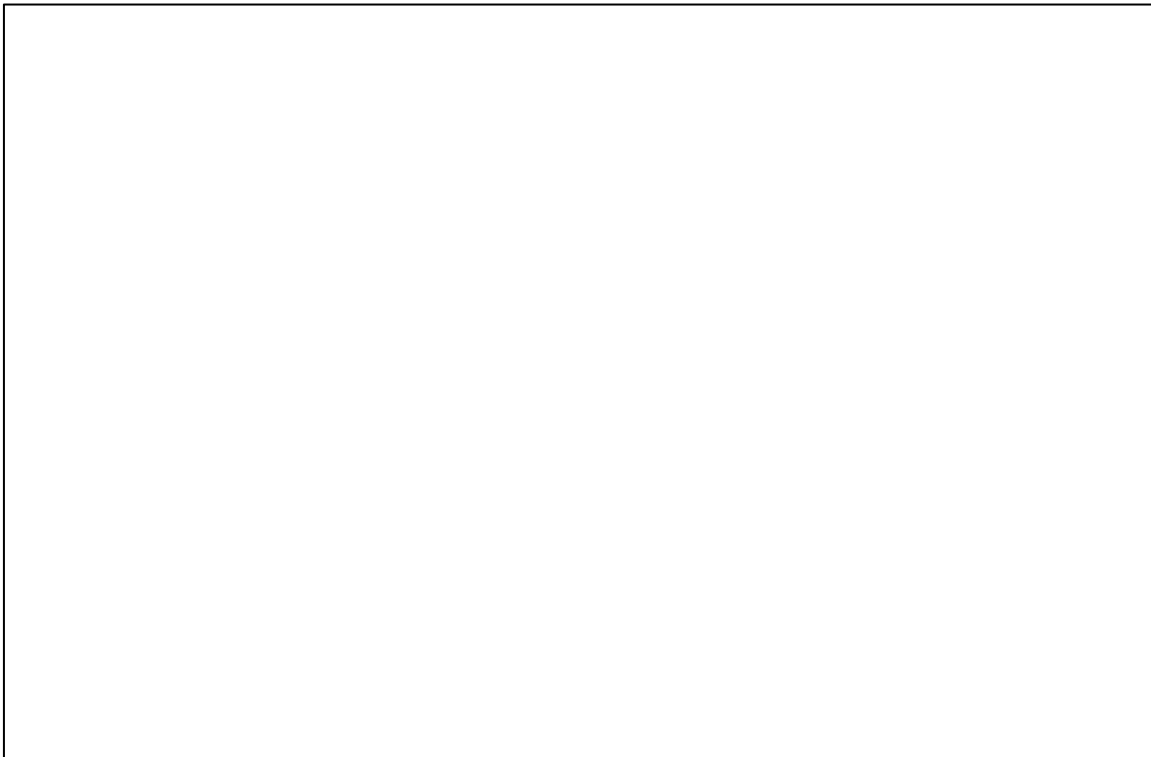
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CHARACTERISTICS
- Diffuse impact
- Supports small businesses
- Requires protecting nature and heritage
- Needs architecture, landscapes, culture unique to the locale.

"Touring" style tourism tends to have fewer negative impacts on the locale while providing more benefit for local businesses and residents; it is about ALL the qualities that make up character of place.

R & R tourism
Depends only on physical character of place.

ACTIVITIES
- lakeshore resorts
- golf
- downhill skiing
- water sports
- vacation homes

R and R tourism encourages resort sprawl and can change the face of the earth, particularly as resorts and vacation homes spread along seacoasts and eat up the physical beauty. You can see it in satellite photos. This is a major development issue. However, it is still possible to introduce sense of place, through tours, architecture, art, even restaurant menus.

R & R tourism
Depends only on physical character of place.

ACTIVITIES
- coastal resorts
- golf
- downhill skiing
- water sports
- vacation homes

CHARACTERISTICS
- Risk of sprawl
- Environmental impacts
- Opportunity for architecture, day tours, landscaping, cuisine, that do suit the locale.

R and R tourism encourages resort sprawl and can change the face of the earth, particularly as resorts and vacation homes spread along seacoasts and eat up the physical beauty. You can see it in satellite photos. This is a major development issue. However, it is still possible to introduce sense of place, through tours, architecture, art, even restaurant menus.

Entertainment-style tourism
Manufactured attractions that do not depend on character of place.

ACTIVITIES
- theme parks
- built recreation
- outlet malls
- amusement parks
- convention centers
- sports arenas
- casinos

These pedal-trikes are fun, but you could be anywhere.

Entertainment-style tourism
Manufactured attractions that do not depend on character of place.

ACTIVITIES
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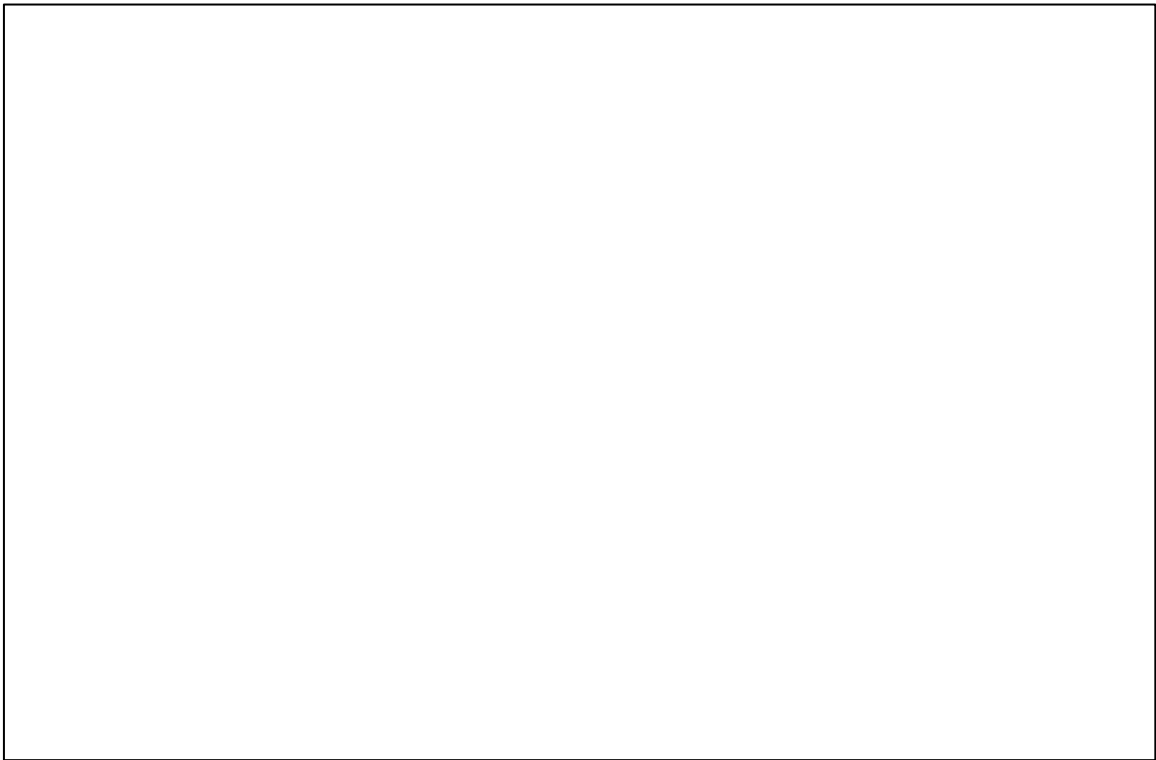- amusement parks
- convention centers
- sports arenas
- casinos

CHARACTERISTICS
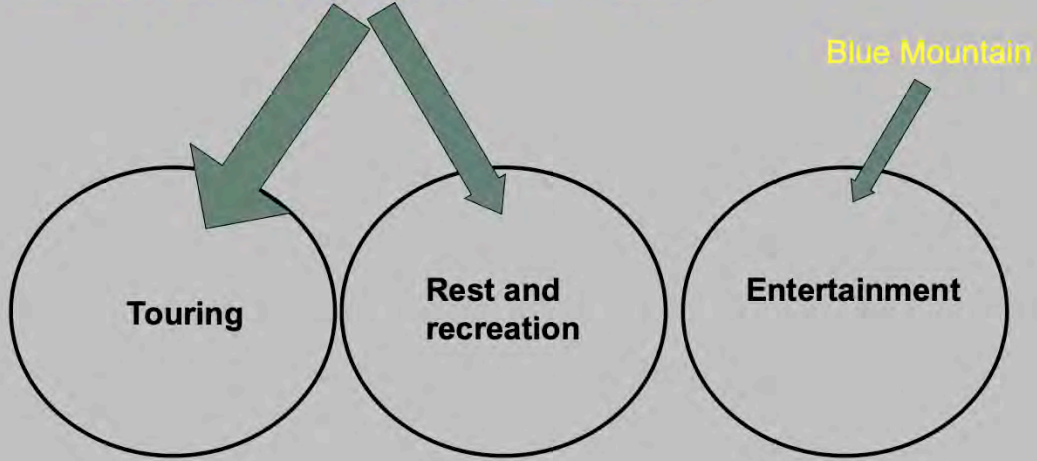- Changes nature of locale; high impact.
- High employment generator.
- Mass tourism; high traffic.

Las Vegas, the ultimate manufactured attraction, is in some ways, well-sited; out in a desert is a pretty good place for this kind of tourism. But it too tends to sprawl, as Las Vegas does, unless contained. Sprawl consumes other endemic assets—water, natural habitats, scenery, traditional communities.

BEAVER VALLEY STYLE?

Blue Mountain

Touring

Rest and recreation

Entertainment

DESTINATION STYLE DRIFT . . .
if development unchecked, unguided

Touring → R & R → Entertain-ment

Unspoiled destination
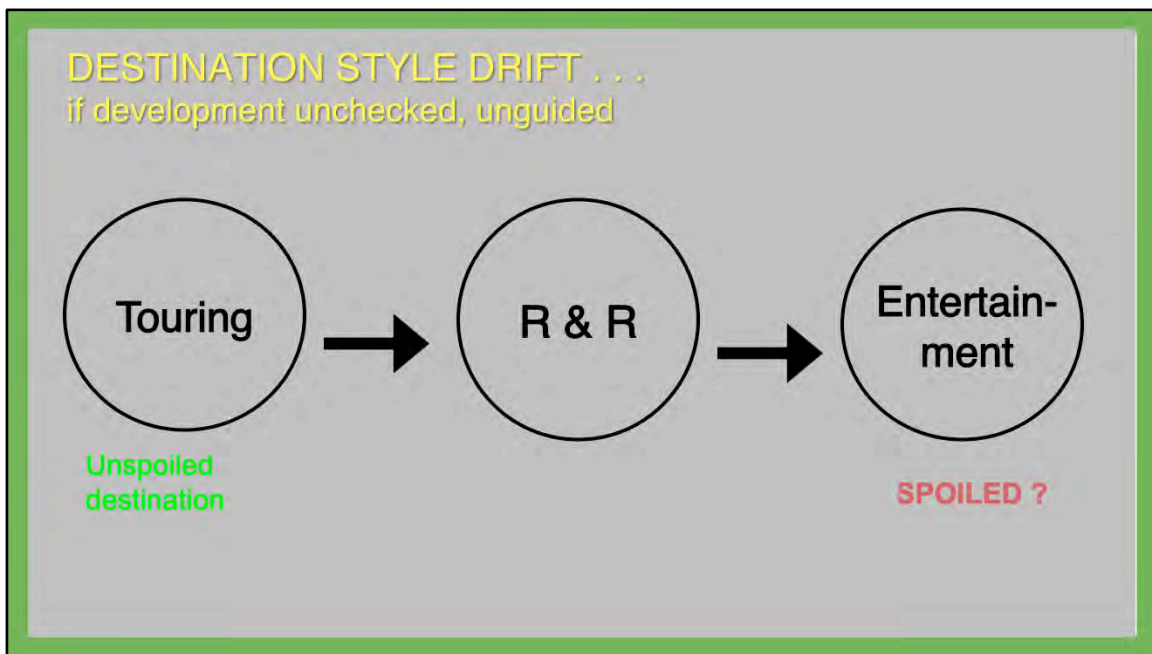
SPOILED ?

When tourism development is unmanaged, unguided, market supply forces often begin to change the character of the place. Eventually the destination loses many of the qualities that attracted people in the first place. The "unspoiled" place becomes spoiled. Economists call it "supply-side market failure" – activity that creates untallied costs. This is a special danger for limited ecosystems and places of natural beauty.

Plog's psychographic continuum of tourist types
After Stanley C. Plog, PhD
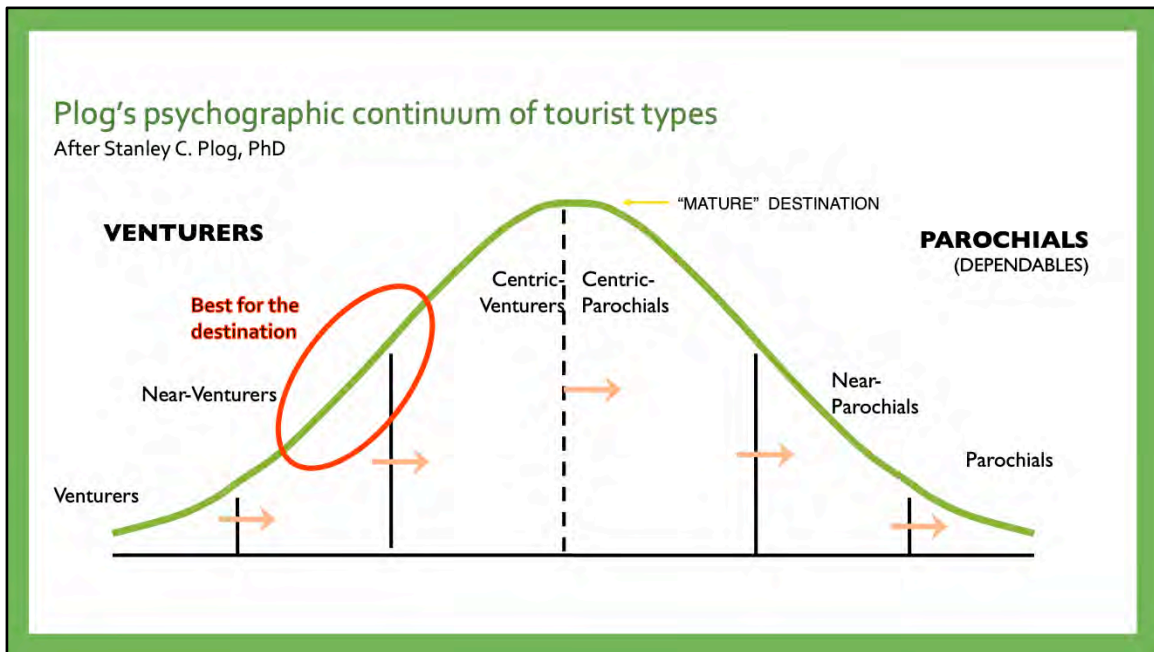
Several decades ago Stanley Plog showed how the demand side drives the same tendency to drift away from authentic character of place. He proposed this pschographic distribution. The "venturers" are the first tourists to discover a place. The parochials don't begin to appear until the facilities feel a lot like home. Plog's brilliant point was this: word-of-mouth about the destination moves only one way-- from the adventurous to the conservative. No venturer is attracted to a place by hearing "It has a McDonald's just like home!"

Plog suggests there is a golden spot on this curve that is best for the destination: (yellow oval), where tourism services are developed enough for a healthy tourism economy, but still relatively authentic and the character of the place well protected. Here at the top of the curve it is already too late--too crowded, too many inappropriate businesses moving in."Mature" is also the term used for fruit right before it begins to rot. Destinations catering mainly to what I call Parochials have in effect sold their souls to mass tourism.

THE NUMBERS PROBLEM

After Covid, overtourism is returning.

Without management, it will get worse.

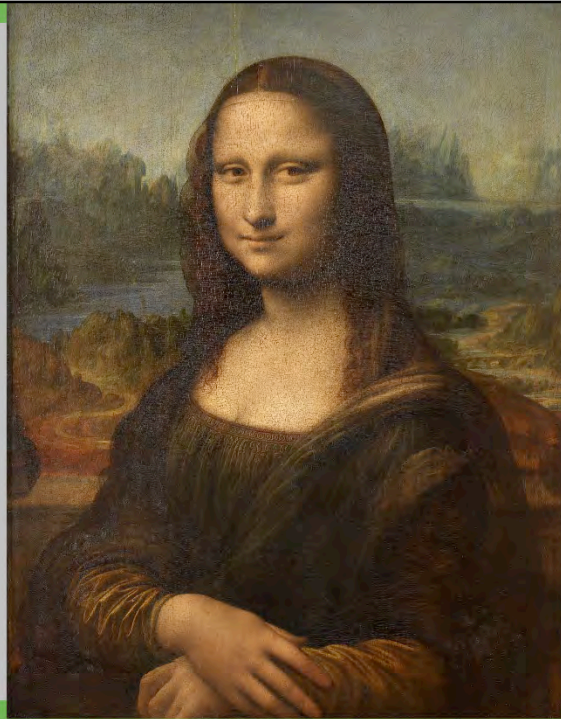Before the Covid-19 pandemic the travel industry had been discussing an old problem with a new name: "overtourism"—"too many tourists". Overtourism shows every sign of returning as the pandemic recedes. World tourism is outgrowing its home.

An iconic indicator:

Mona Lisa

Size:
77 cm x 53 cm

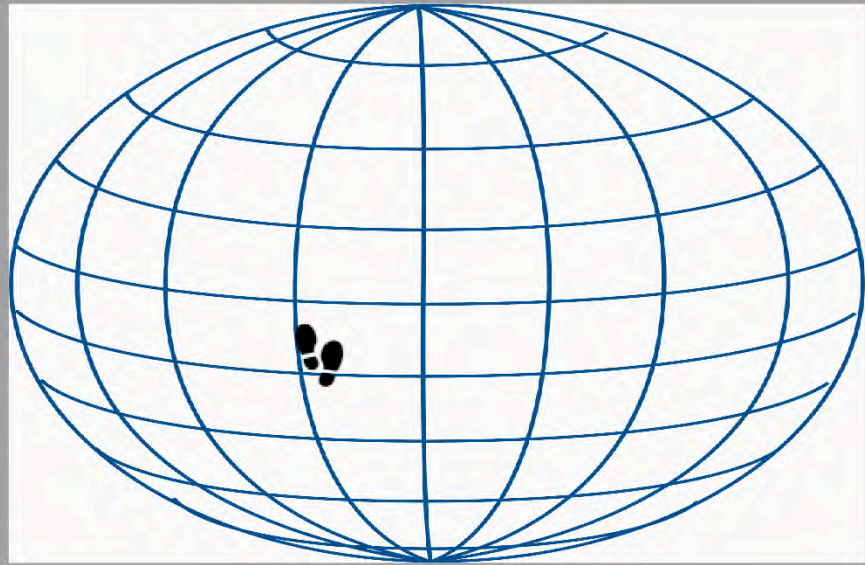I'll use one of the world's most famous tourist attractions to illustrate the arrival of overtourism.

Tourism Footprint circa 1950

25 million international arrivals

In the 1950s, when post-war travel was just beginning, there were about 25 million international arrivals, worldwide. Imagine that 1 centimeter on a tape measure represents 5 million of those tourists. In 1950, that means 5 cms.

Tourism Footprint 2019

International arrivals reach 1.5 billion
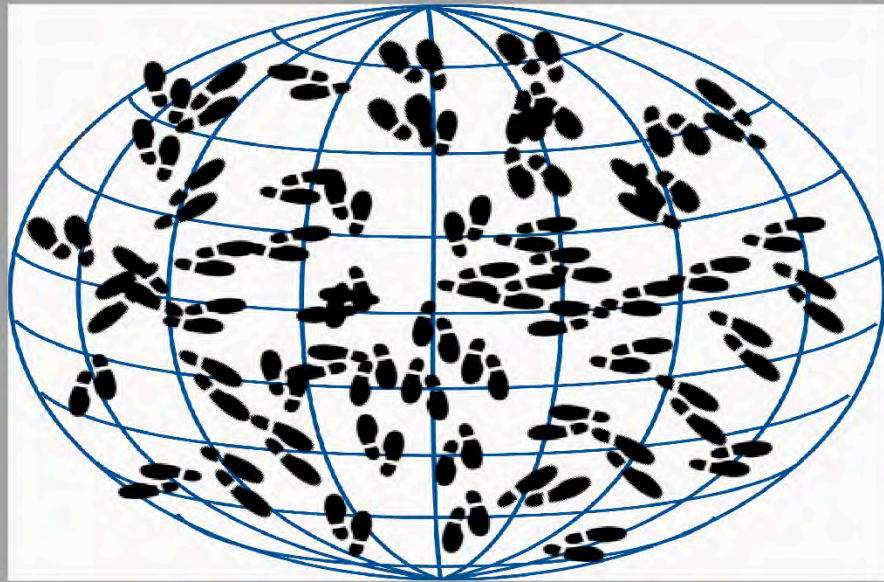
Now, even Mt Everest has an overtourism issue. Just think: if only 1 in a million of every international trip is to climb Mt Everest, that would still put at least 1,300 climbers on the mountain. Plus their teams. Pretty close to the actual counts in recent years.

5 people in 1950 > 300 people in 2019? Really?

The Mona Lisa is still 53 cm wide. Heritage tourism spaces can't grow to absorb demand.

Policymakers tend to act as if tourism can grown indefinitely, even when space for it does not.

International tourist arrivals to reach 1.8 billion by 2030
—Forecast by UNWTO in 2011

International tourism, World

1,500,000,000 arrivals in 2019, a 7% annual increase since 1990

Tourist Arrivals, million

source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) ©
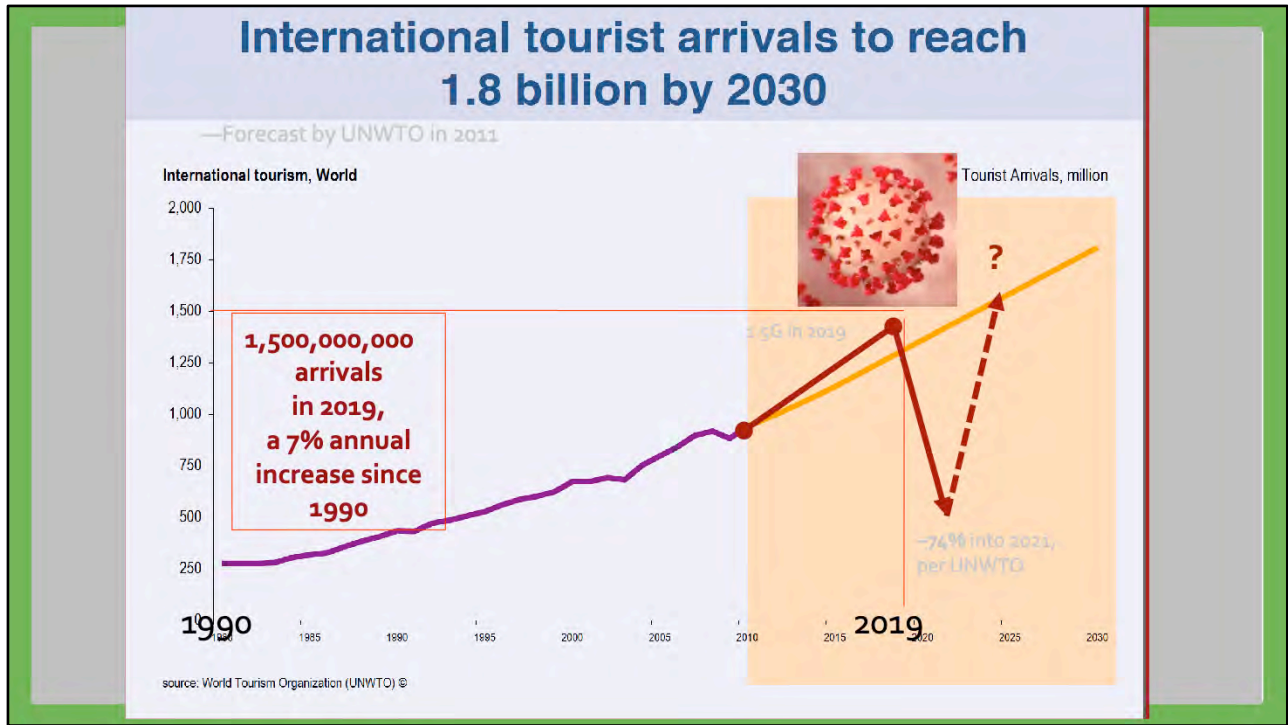
After Covid international arrivals plunged, but rural domestic tourism soared. Now, in 2023, a pandemic that lasted longer than anticipated has fueled the public's resurgent desire to travel.

2021: Domestic rural tourism surged

Under trans-border Covid restrictions in 2020 and 2021, tourist crowds merely shifted to domestic rural and protected-area destinations, where outdoors offered relative safety.
Beaver Valley experienced this as well.

Questions and comments on Part 1:
Background –
How tourism interacts with places

**Part 2 will look at how to proceed and take charge
of destination stewardship in the Beaver Valley**

PART 2 – FOREGROUND

Taking charge of how tourism interacts with Beaver Valley:

Better destination stewardship

People of the Tourism System

- Complex
- Fragmented
- Competing interests
- Does not have policy attention tourism deserves
- Increasing pressures

Source: Spilanis and Tellier, 2012
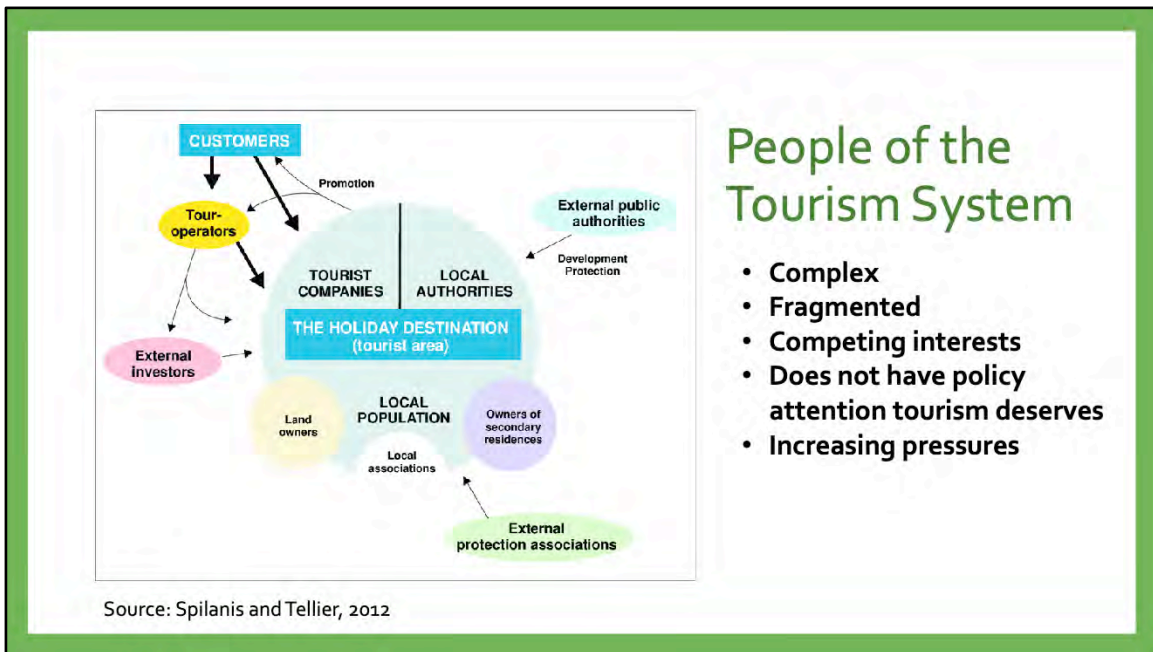
Tourism is complicated, in part because the "product" is the destination, but the destination is made up of many moving parts. The industry is fragmented and complex, with many competing interests. It's easy to see how tourism development can spin out of control if not planned and managed thoughtfully with inputs from stakeholders.

Georgian Bay, an Aspiring Geopark

• Geopark = a UNESCO designation featuring the Niagara Escarpment and much more.

Geopark tourism? There's more to it than this

"UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a *holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development.*" —UNESCO

An encouraging new development, adding to the Niagara Escarpment designation.

Geoparks – More Than Rocks

What UNESCO describes: [A] *bottom-up approach of combining conservation with sustainable development while involving local communities.... While a Geopark must demonstrate geological heritage, the purpose ... is to explore, develop and celebrate the links between that*

• ... resembles the NatGeo "geotourism approach"

geological heritage and all other aspects of the area's natural, cultural and intangible heritages. —UNESCO

• A chance for Beaver Valley to offer a model for the entire Georgian Bay.

• An opportunity for international recognition to enhance the importance of protecting Beaver Valley.

Reinventing tourism first requires perceiving tourism as it really is.

The true tourism product is the PLACE.

Tourism businesses facilitate and add value, but they depend on the place.

So managing tourism and managing the place are the same job.

It requires collaboration among destination marketers, industry, government, researchers and scientists, residents, and travelers themselves.

Big Bay, Michigan
Source: Travel Marquette

Global Sustainable Tourism Council's Criterion A1:
"Destination management responsibility"

The destination has an effective **organization, department, group, or committee** responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, **with involvement by the private sector, public sector and civil society.** This group has defined responsibilities, oversight, and implementation capability for the management of **socio-economic, cultural and environmental issues.** The group … follows principles of sustainability and transparency in its operations and transactions.

In short, a "destination stewardship council"

Destination Stewardship is catching on

Hawaii Tourism Authority to focus on destination stewardship

Overhaul of Glasgow's Golden Z Will Target 'Poor Stewardship'

Big Sur Destination Stewardship Project

Myrtle Beach Chamber collaborates on 10-year destination stewardship plan, seeks community input

Tourism Tofino shifting focus to stewardship

LAKE TAHOE DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP PLAN INTRODUCED TO ADDRESS TOURISM

Colorado Tourism Office Launches Destination Stewardship Strategic Planning Initiative

Ottawa Destination Stewardship Plan

Ideally, destination stewardship councils should involve people representing these different features of a place:

- historic sites
- nature & ecotourism
- farm/restaurant programs
- beautification; arts community
- traditional performing arts, crafts
- indigenous and minority groups
- urban renewal
- local government
- tourism and local business expertise
- tourism marketing
- spiritual sites
- other characteristics of the place

The Rhode Island Geotourism Collaborative

At National Geographic, we encouraged geotourism stewardship councils, committees, or an equivalent that include people who understand each different aspect of their locale.
To start a holistic tourism program, they might design a marketing project with lots of local community participation.

Significantly, this particular council failed, for a common reason: It depended on just one inspired leader. When he retired, the council collapsed. Councils controlled by governments face a similar problem, often terminated when the government changes. Councils must plan to sustain themselves.

Steps to building a sustainable destination stewardship council

1 Convene a steering group of destination stakeholders to begin recruiting a Destination Stewardship Council or Committee –UNDERWAY

2 Hold meetings with stakeholders and an initial workshop about geotourism and good destination stewardship – SECOND MEETING HELD 5 SEPT.

3 Adapt the Geotourism Charter or similar guiding principles, such as the Future of Tourism Coalition Guiding Principles – FIRST DRAFT NOW UNDER REVIEW

4 Propose a vision/mission statement for stakeholders to discuss and adopt. – NEXT
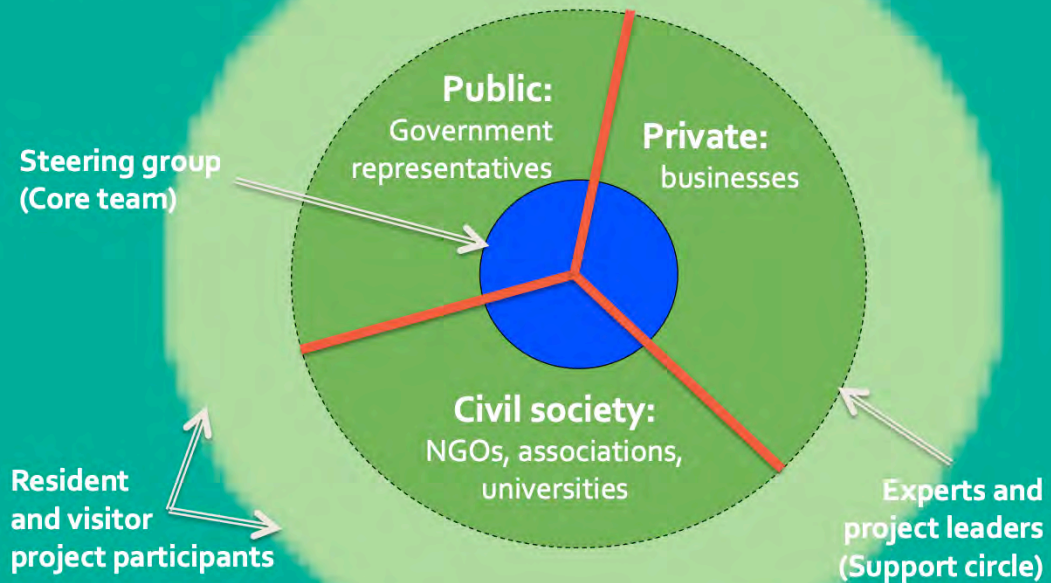
5 Adopt an initial project – with a deadline! A timetable keeps the council energized and focused. Develop a funding strategy and timeline for the project.

6 Launch a formal Stewardship Council dedicated achieving the mission in keeping with Charter principles. Develop a long-term, self-sustaining plan for the Council to continue to the next projects.

Destination Stewardship Council: A structural approach

Public: Government representatives

Private: businesses

Civil society: NGOs, associations, universities

Steering group (Core team)

Resident and visitor project participants

Experts and project leaders (Support circle)

The core group does most of the planning, coordination, and policy-making. A much larger pool of affiliate members can help with specific projects or expertise as needed. Projects and events can engage both residents and tourists as appropriate.
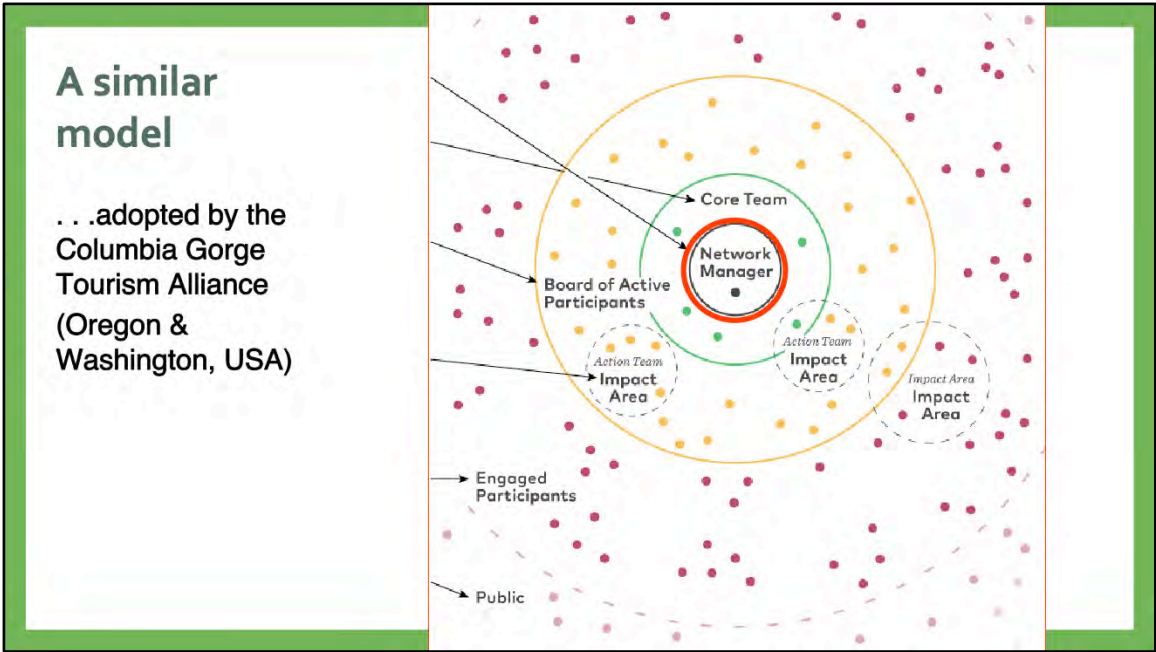
Eventually, successful councils must develop funding to hire a manager.

Launch a Collaborative Catalytic Project

- Festival
- Community survey
- Contest (photo etc.)
- Collaborative web site & apps
- Participatory geotourism map or booklet
- Tourist education projects
- Placemaking projects

. . . something with a deadline!
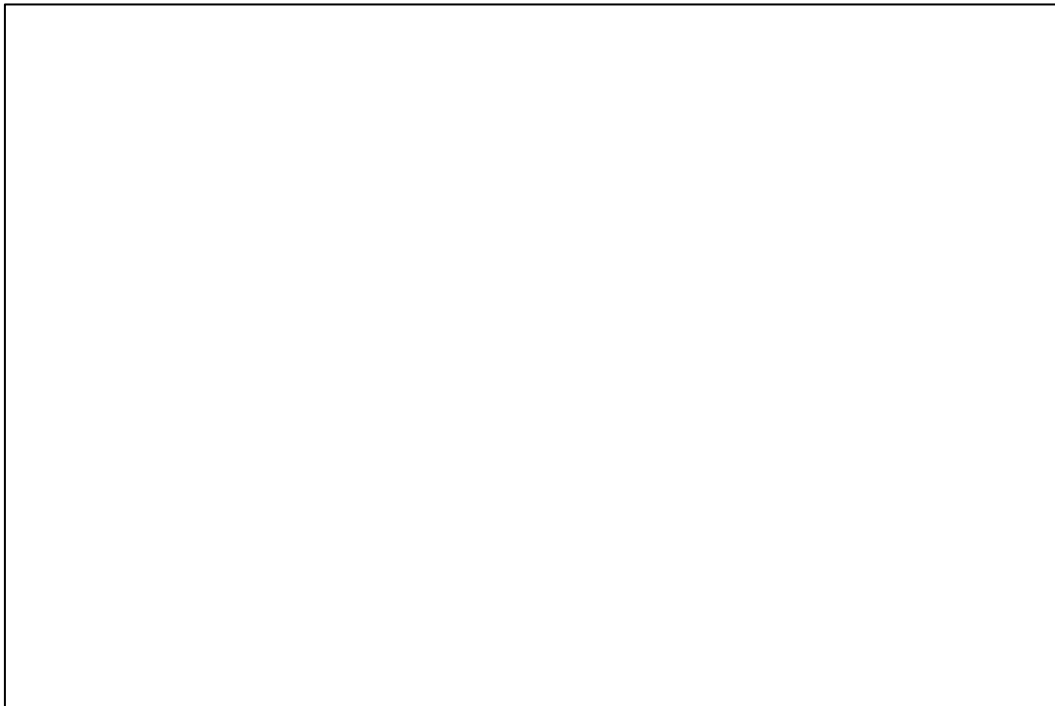
Block Island kid's assignment: Shoot what you like most about the island. The fresh eye of a child resembles that of a first[t]-time tourist. This became a tourist-office calendar for the island.

Crown of the Continent Geotourism Map Guide

The Crown of the Continent Geotourism Council is a regional network of communities, tourism bureaus, conservation and business groups, educators, First Nations, government agencies, and others working together in the region that includes and surrounds Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park in southwestern Alberta, southeastern British Columbia, and northwestern Montana.

Map
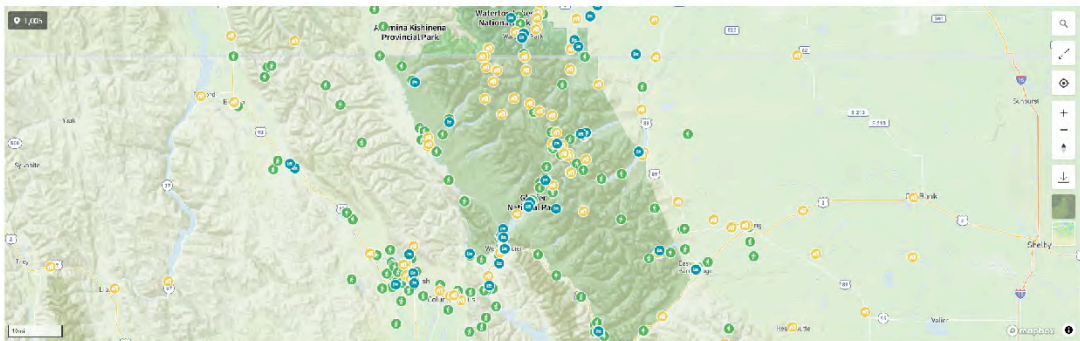
This council has successfully crossed many borders, unifying a sense of place for "The Crown"

Big Bay, Michigan Stewardship Council project:

BBSC Mission Statement:
"To facilitate the protection of the unique nature of the greater Big Bay area and promote community improvements ... through responsible, properly scaled economic development and stewardship of natural resources and cultural enrichment."

A good example of a mission statement. Like a compass, it keeps the ship of destination stewardship on course.

A destination stewardship council will need volunteer skills & expertise!

Social media	Legal	Responsible tourism development	Regional planning
Suitable architecture	Farming & Gastronomy	Website development	Fundraising
Teaching and interpretation	Accounting	Writing & Editing	ETC!

Beaver Valley has great human resources!

An advantage many other destinations lack.

The best resource: Beaver Valley people.

What are measures of success? Some might include...

Quality of tourism, not quantity of tourists	Length of stay	Small business development	Added employment	Spending benefits— How much? To whom?
Natural resources protected and available for local use	Proportion of waste diverted from landfills	Percentage of structures operating on renewable energy	Enhancement of sustainable local supply chains	Social, educational benefits
Enhanced community assets	Sustainable transportation options offered	Nonprofits or volunteer projects supported through tourism funds	Public projects supported through tourism taxes	Return on long-term investment
	Quality of the destination	Quality of life for the residents		

Measure deeper than just counting tourists and their transactions.

Barcelona changes its ways

The Strategic Plan for Tourism 2020 'aims to break the dichotomy that has traditionally separated "tourism" from the "rest of the city". Tourism … is an inherent and integral part of the current urban phenomenon.'

—Barcelona City and Tourism Council, 'an open, diverse, and participatory civic body set up to discuss what kind of city we want and, therefore, what kind of tourism suits the city best.

A city that learned by painful overtourism experience changed. Substitute "Beaver Valley" for "Barcelona" and this could be an excellent model. A perfect expression of how to bridge the gap between "tourism industry" and the place where tourism occurs.

Next, review your Guiding Principles

And revise accordingly, only as much as necessary:

1. Take the Whole Picture into Account
2. Protect Distinctive Destination Character
3. Benefit Local Communities
4. Choose Quality over Quantity
5. Collaborate for Holistic Destination Management
6. Redefine Economic Success

7. Reduce Tourism's Burden
8. Use Land Wisely
9. Operate Business Responsibly
10. Address Global Issues
11. Educate Interactively
12. Evaluate Progress

The mission statement sets your course; the guiding principles are the stars to steer by. Once agreed to, circulate these in charter form, inviting as many signatories as possible.
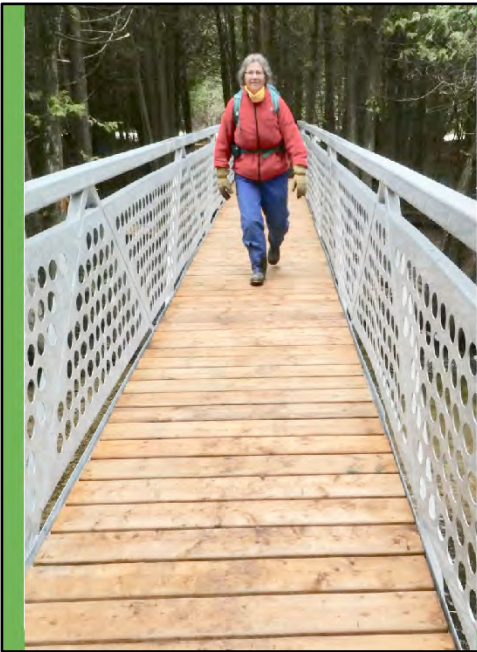
Thank You!

Questions and comments?

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