

## **What exactly is destination stewardship?**

Put most simply, it is the process of caring for places where tourism occurs.

A world of issues and opportunities lie within those last three words.

Tourism involves more than tourism businesses, but rather the entire character of the destination and the welfare of its residents. Such a holistic phenomenon requires holistic management, hence this more formal definition of destination stewardship:

*“An ongoing process by which local communities, governmental agencies, civic organizations, and tourism-related businesses work jointly to maintain and enhance the cultural, environmental, economic, and aesthetic integrity of their country, region, or town – and thereby care for the distinctive attributes that appeal to both residents and beneficial tourists.”*

In recent years the concept has been catching on. Colorado has established a statewide Destination Stewardship Department; Lake Tahoe is using the approach to cope with its numerous tourism and heritage issues; a November 2023 symposium in Quebec was devoted to the topic; the World Travel and Tourism Council has issued a full report on the concept, “Towards Destination Stewardship.”

What, then, is the message for western Loudoun? Communities that fail to engage in tourism policy yield control of it to others. What’s more, they may miss the benefits that wise tourism can bestow. The solution is to establish a collaborative destination stewardship council or network.

For rural Loudoun at least dangers and opportunities both come to mind. The dangers are well known:

- Invasive subdivisions that destroy the character (and tourism appeal) of our beautiful countryside.
- Inappropriately scaled, located, or otherwise troublesome tourism venues.
- Temporarily deflected powerline plans for data centers, et al.

Among the opportunities:

- Improve the economic case – Increase tourism spending keyed to rural character for local economic and political benefit.
- Deepen public understanding – Increase local and neighborhood educational tourism to raise the perceived value of rural areas. People don’t care about what they don’t know. They vote accordingly.

These dangers and opportunities could define the agenda of a destination stewardship collaboratuive for rural Loudoun.

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