

For endorsement:

Commitment to Guiding Principles for Destination Stewardship in Western Loudoun

Preamble

“Destination stewardship” is 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.

“Western Loudoun” is generally defined as those portions of Loudoun County lying west of U.S. 15 and including the region north of Leesburg between 15 and the Potomac River. It is a unique resource, a beautiful and authentic historic countryside that supports a thriving rural economy and attracts tens of thousands of visitors yearly. Yet it is in danger. We propose coordinated action to preserve its value for tourism and to increase its value to local residents, as set forth below.

The following principles, based on an international provenance¹, work toward adopting the geotourism approach, defined in 2002 [via National Geographic](#) and the U.S. Travel Industry Association² 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.”

Guided by the elements proposed herein, we seek to monitor and improve the interaction between tourism and care for this place that we love – its flora and fauna, historic features, farms, scenic and spiritual places, geological assets, archaeology, cuisine, music, culture, traditional architecture, local arts and crafts, and community heritage.

We seek to do this by collaborative action coordinated by a destination stewardship council or equivalent, and thereby heighten the power of constructive tourism, minimize tourism burdens, encourage changes in public and private policy, maintain residents’ quality of life, and sustain rural tourism businesses whose profitability is enhanced by the appeal of the surrounding landscapes.

¹ The proposed principals, tailored for rural Loudoun, are derived from the Guiding Principles of the multinational Future of Tourism Coalition, the internationally endorsed destination stewardship criteria of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, and the Geotourism Principles originally put forth by National Geographic.

² Formerly the Travel Industry Association of America.

Rural Loudoun Destination Stewardship Charter

WHEREAS tourism done well can benefit Rural Loudoun communities, engage the traveling public, including the voters of eastern Loudoun, generate tax revenue, and incentivize protection of our nature, history, culture, and landscapes;

WHEREAS tourism done poorly can quickly and easily degrade the value of Rural Loudoun, risking loss of its appeal for both residents and visitors;

WHEREAS tourism revenues provide a counterweight to burgeoning inappropriate development in Rural Loudoun;

WHEREAS the scenic character and wise stewardship of Rural Loudoun is essential for maintaining those revenues;

WHEREAS a large pool of valuable tourists do appreciate the character of Rural Loudoun;

WHEREAS the complexities of any destination call for a holistic, collaborative approach;

WHEREAS the need for managing tourism is urgent, given beneficial tourism opportunities, unevenly mandated visitor marketing, and negative visitor impacts, all in the face of unrelenting housing development pressure and inadequate coordination;

WE THE UNDERSIGNED endorse these Guiding Principles for the destination stewardship of western Loudoun:

1. Take the Whole Picture into Account

Plan with recognition that most tourism by its nature interacts with Rural Loudoun as a whole, not only tourism businesses and related real estate, but also ecosystems, aesthetics, history, natural resources, built infrastructure, supply chains, cultural assets and traditions, and communities of diverse perspectives.

2. Protect Distinctive Destination Character

Retain and enhance Rural Loudoun's appeal and distinctiveness – “integrity of place.” Encourage tourism policies and business practices that protect and benefit natural, historic, scenic, and cultural assets. Offer design guidelines for buildings and exteriors that suit their settings. Protect local economies, enterprises, and business districts from generic commercialization. Shield bright lighting to allow dark-sky marketing. Prohibit eyesores such as intrusive commercial signage.

3. Benefit Local Communities

Encourage benefits such as public land protection, ecosystem diversity, small business development, fair distribution of incomes, and robust, sustainable local supply chains. Favor public access to natural attractions. Mitigate tourism nuisances and disruptions for local residents.

4. Choose Quality over Quantity

Manage tourism development based on value of visitation rather than volume of tourists. Market for visitors likely to appreciate Rural Loudoun's character, respect it, and stay longer, thus bringing greater benefit per visitor. For resilience and diversity, seek such visitors from across the demographic spectrum.

5. Collaborate for Holistic Destination Management

Establish permanent collaboration mechanisms with government, tourism organizations, businesses, civic organizations, researchers and scientists, and citizens groups – essential for an effective buy-in to good destination stewardship attuned to the whole picture. Coordinate policy with areas bordering Rural Loudoun.

6. Educate Interactively

Engage visitors, residents, and government officials in learning about Rural Loudoun. Encourage residents of all ages to discover and interpret their natural and cultural heritage for visitors, so that guests and hosts alike gain a richer appreciation for the stories our area has to tell, thereby fostering a caring attitude and a supportive political mentality.

7. Redefine Economic Success

Favor tourism metrics that demonstrate wide local benefit, retention of tourism revenue within Rural Loudoun, and protection for natural, cultural, and scenic heritage. Encourage business models that can operate profitably within those limits. Favor tourism investment in rural and village enterprises useful to locals and visitors alike. Aim for a resilient economy, diversified beyond tourism.

8. Reduce Tourism’s Public Burden

Account for tourism costs in terms of environmental expenses for such factors as water usage, sewerage and runoff, traffic and parking, waste disposal, and other unstated burdens.

9. Use Land Wisely

Plan land-use to attract visitors by protecting and enhancing the cultural landscape, scenic appeal, and natural assets of Rural Loudoun. Discourage sprawl, data centers, subdivisions, overbuilt highways, and high-intensity uses unsuited to the rural ambiance. Preserve farmland through all legal means possible, with full compensation for giving up development rights. Restrict short-term rentals and tourism developments to a scale appropriate for adjacent neighborhoods.³

10. Be a Responsible Global Citizen

Recognizing that global-scale problems affect Rural Loudoun itself, call for tourism policies and activities that mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, disposable plastics pollution, watershed pollution, and similar problems. Use these measures to attract the growing, environmentally aware tourism market.

11. Operate Businesses Responsibly

Encourage micro- to medium-size enterprises and tourism business strategies that emphasize economic and social benefits to local communities, favoring use of local labor and sustainable supply chains. Reward enterprises that support these destination-stewardship principles through their actions.

12. Evaluate Progress

Establish an evaluation process to be conducted on a regular basis by a qualified independent panel representing the interests of all stakeholders; publicize the results and respond accordingly.

Signatories

Name	Organization & Role (optional)	E-mail (nonpublic)
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For individual residents: Status in western Loudoun:

Fulltime resident

Weekend or intermittent resident

Frequent visitor

From Eastern Loudoun From beyond Loudoun