

# Tourism and Rural Loudoun

## Taking Charge

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## Our Mission, Our Goal, Our Invitation

**SAVE THE PLACES YOU LOVE**

**Our mission:** To help protect the world's distinctive places by supporting wisely managed tourism and enlightened destination stewardship.

**Our goal:** Help people find the resources they need to achieve that mission.



Welcome to the  
**Destination Stewardship Center**  
 continuing the work of National Geographic's former  
 Center for Sustainable Destinations.

This website is all about the intersection between stewardship of places and one of the world's most impactful industries: tourism. **We gather and provide information** on the

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I've spent the past 25 years or so working around the world on the interactions between tourism and places, first as a travel journalist and editor at National Geographic Traveler, then as the founder of the NG Center for Sustainable Destination. After events leading to the Disney takeover terminated our program there, I took it independent as the DSC ([www.DestinationCenter.org](http://www.DestinationCenter.org)), a collaborative global community nonprofit website for practitioners in destination stewardship, cultural and natural heritage, and the geotourism approach.

## W. Loudoun Starting Assumptions

1. Tourism revenues earned by the rural west make a political case for preserving the rural west.
2. Tourism revenues help support the rural west.
3. **Visit Loudoun** knows well the value of our region but is mandated to market it, not manage it.
4. In fact, no one is really in charge of how tourism interacts with the rural west, including the BOS.



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If you don't take charge of how tourism is managed in your locale, other people will.



I spend much of my time on the left-hand side of this diagram, but for Loudoun, I can concentrate on the positive side of tourism. Economic benefits can spin off many other benefits as well.

Tourism that promotes public education is a proactive opportunity for raising the perceived value of our attractive, heritage-rich countryside. That counts, especially on Election Day.



From my 10,000-foot point of view, tourism in Loudoun is not broken; it's pretty healthy, with only some minor friction points. What's broken? The declining, continually threatened character of the rural west.

“destination stewardship” –  
Taking care of a place where tourism occurs.

**We have (at least) 8 challenges.**



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## Challenge # 1



The rural character on which much of that tourism depends is leaching away. Too often our pastures turn into fields of meadow-muffin mansions. Call this Challenge #1.

I believe that thriving, responsible, thoughtfully managed rural tourism is one of the best hopes for countering the development interests, powerline threats, etc. that would destroy the quality of western Loudoun.

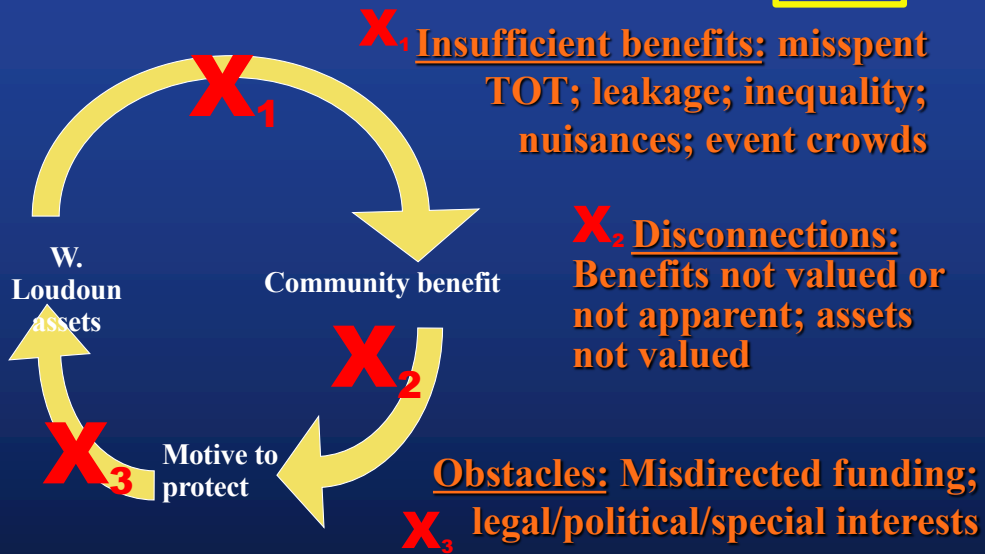


The idea is that well-informed tourism that benefits local communities creates an incentive to protect what tourists are coming to see. The tough part is to make sure each one of these cause-and-effect arrows actually works.



# The Circle Broken

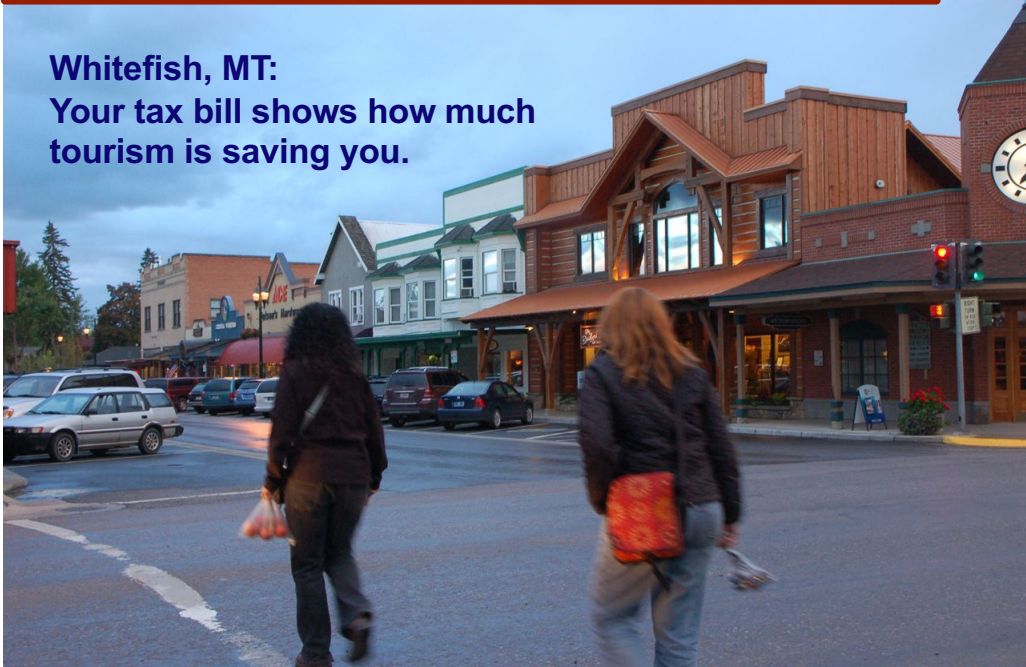
# 2



Repairing the virtuous circle is challenge number 2.

**Increase resident awareness of tourism benefits**

**Whitefish, MT:  
Your tax bill shows how much  
tourism is saving you.**



One way to make benefits apparent.

**Engage local people in showing off their place**



Volunteers in New Hampshire's "Granite State Ambassadors" program. Nothing raises local awareness better than showing off the locale to visitors.

## Zoning & Codes

# 3

Tourism-enabled land use ...

- Outdoor recreation
- Farming incremental income
- Entertainment venues – appropriate scale, not major
- Restaurants, wineries, breweries, etc.
- STRs (Airbnb, VRBO, etc)
- Retail

Subdivisions,  
over-scale  
development,  
light & noise  
pollution,  
etc.



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Challenge #3: Zoning for tourism uses, scaled appropriately, with supporting code enforcement.

## DESTINATION STYLE DRIFT . . .

#4

if development unchecked, unguided



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When tourism development is unmanaged, unguided, forces of market-supply often begin to change the character of the place. Eventually it loses many of the qualities that attracted people in the first place. The “unspoiled” place becomes spoiled. This is a special danger for limited ecosystems, cultural landscapes like western Loudoun, and places of natural beauty. Currently, overscale R&R proposals represent a threat in the rural west.

Checking and guiding tourism development is Challenge #4.

## ABOUT DMOs, e.g. VISIT LOUDOUN

**D**estination  
**M**arketing >>>> **D**estination  
**O**rganization **M**anagement  
**O**rganization



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The slowly emerging new trend is to change the “M” in “DMO” from Marketing to Management. VL isn’t there yet, for a good reason.

## Loudoun's 8% Bed Tax and the VL Mandate

TOT: Of the 8% per dollar collected:

2% is allocated to the county's General Fund.

3%, per state law, "shall be designated and spent **solely** for tourism and travel, marketing of tourism or **initiatives** that, as determined after consultation with the local tourism industry organizations, including representatives of lodging properties located in the county, **attract travelers to the locality**, increase occupancy at lodging properties, and generate tourism revenues in the locality. "

3% is remitted to the state to fund NVTD transportation (Metro et al).



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VL's government mandate commands it to market, market, market. Initiatives that protect destination attractiveness may be a loophole that can be taken advantage of.

## Destinations International:

# 5

*“We [DMOs] can no longer rely on visitation numbers to be the measure of our success.... We must realize that our local residents are our ultimate customers and make our efforts a shared value in our community and our teams a community asset.”*

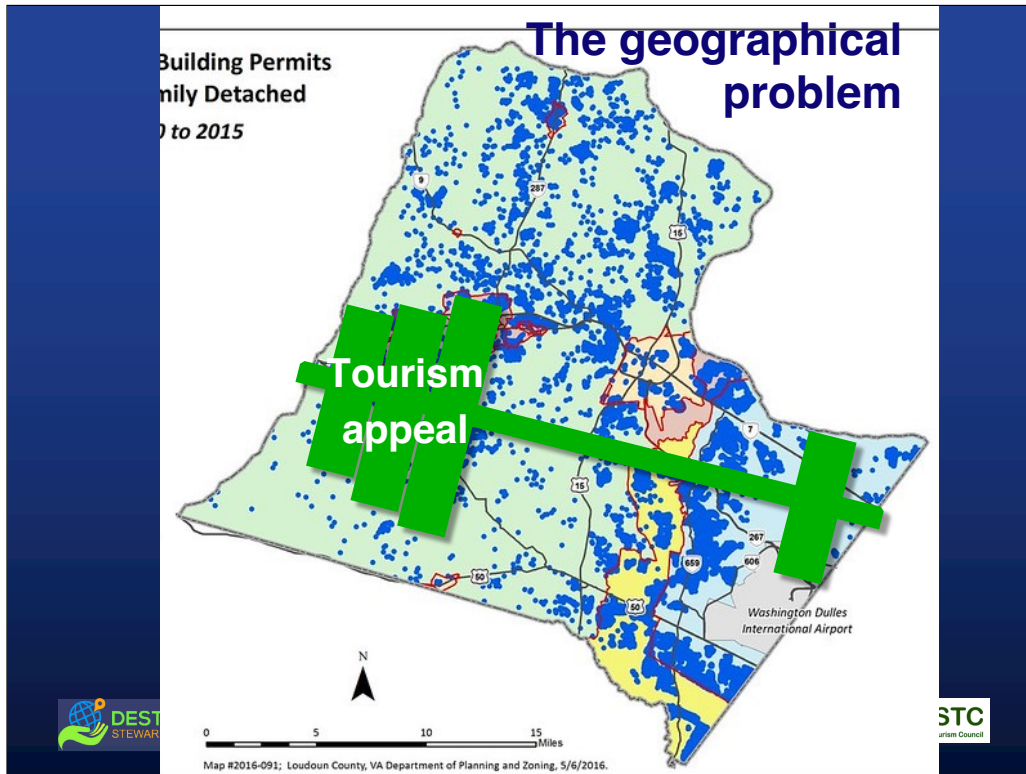


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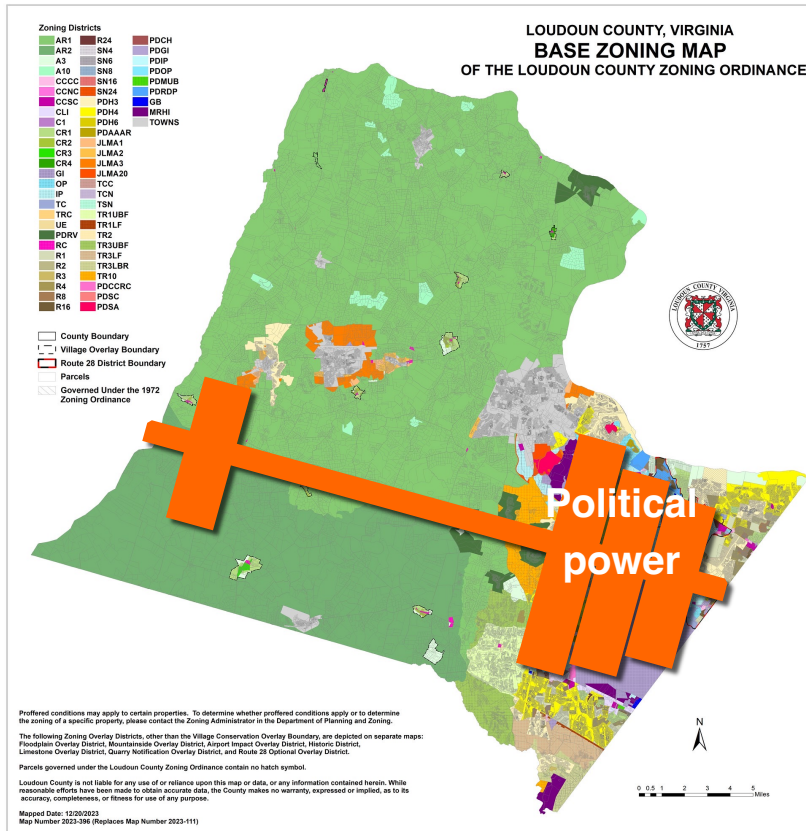


Shifting the DMO paradigm is Challenge #5.





Picture an uneven barbell. Most of Loudoun's tourism appeal is in the west.



Politically, the barbell is reversed, with decisions about the west determined by the much denser, more populous constituencies in the east.

## Loudouners, visit Loudoun!

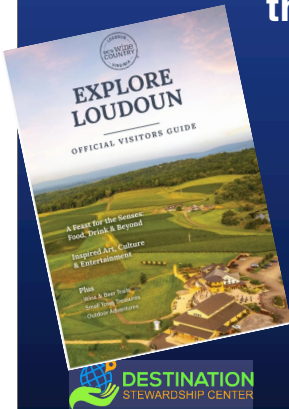
# 6

People don't care about what they don't know.

For rural preservation therefore, it is politic  
that eastern Loudouners and  
*new western residents*  
value the character of  
rural Loudoun.

By getting to know it.

And voting accordingly.



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Thus, Loudouners must be more aggressively engaged in the natural and cultural heritage of their place. Call this Challenge #6.

## VALUING CHARACTER OF PLACE

**Heed Simon Kuznets:  
The tourism “industry”  
is more than the sum of  
its transactions**



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Simon Kuznets won the Nobel for devising the idea of GDP, based on numbers of transactions, but he was appalled at how governments seized on his metric as the be-all of gauging a healthy economy and society.



Guided by revenue metrics alone, government policy often leans toward the "industry" side, with little regard to the stewardship side. Civic engagement, enlightened business, and a collaborative approach can change that and bridge the "Kuznets Gap".

## Note *Visit Loudoun's* MOU with BOS: QUANTITY, NOT QUALITY

Visit Loudoun activity and tracked results:

1. Visitation Figures for Visitors Center and area attractions.
2. Number of Meeting and Event Leads and Confirmed Bookings.
3. Number of Group Tour Leads and Confirmed Bookings.
4. Number of Trade Shows, Familiarization Tours, Site Visits, and Sales Missions.
5. Annual Visitation Figures with a report of the current visitor profile.
6. Complete web site visitation, usage and inquiry analysis, including social media and digital impressions.
7. Editorial Coverage received and advertising equivalency.



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# 7<sup>th</sup> of the 13 Guiding Principles put forth by the Future of Tourism Coalition

# 7



**7. Redefine economic success**  
Rather than raw contribution to growth in GDP, favor metrics that specify destination benefits such as small business development, distribution of incomes, and enhancement of sustainable local supply chains.  
[Learn more.](#)

... and by proposed Rural Loudoun Guiding Principles:  
**“7. Redefine Economic Success**  
Favor tourism metrics that demonstrate wide local benefit, ...”



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**1. See the whole picture**  
Recognize that most tourism by its nature involves the destination as a whole, not only industry businesses, but also its environment, natural resources, cultural assets and traditions, communities, aesthetics, and built infrastructure.  
[Learn more.](#)



**4. Choose quality over quantity**  
Manage tourism development based on quality of visitation, not quantity of visitors, so as to enhance the travel experience while sustaining the character of the destination and benefiting local communities.  
[Learn more.](#)



**7. Redefine economic success**  
Rather than raw contribution to growth in GDP favor metrics that specify destination benefits such as small business development, distribution of incomes, and enhancement of sustainable local supply chains.  
[Learn more.](#)



**10. Contain tourism's land use**  
Limit high-occupancy resort tourism to concentrated areas. Discourage resort sprawl from taking over coasts, islands, and mountain areas so as to retain geographical character, diverse economy, local access, and critical ecosystems.  
[Learn more.](#)

A more nuanced approach to measuring economic benefit than the conventional method will also help. Challenge #7.

To bridge the perception gap—

**Managing tourism and managing the place should be seen as an intertwined job.**

It requires collaboration of the DMO, industry, supply chains, governments, researchers and scientists, residents, and visitors.



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## PRESERVING AND ENHANCING RURAL LOUDOUN IDENTITY

Economic metrics are just one ingredient in a successful tourism recipe.

Place-based tourism is a holistic product. That requires holistic management to deal with threats and opportunities.



A nice cake isn't made only of sugar!

#8



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Establishing holistic management is Challenge #8, a big one – the one that can begin to tackle all the other challenges.



Winery in the Douro Valley, Portugal.

## Proactive: Seize opportunities

Tourism – intramural  
and extramural – can  
increase perceived  
value of rural Loudoun.



## Meet the 8 Challenges

1. Discourage the growth of subdivisions
2. Maintain the virtuous circle (deal with TOT usage, leakage, pride of place, legal & political obstacles)
3. Achieve responsible zoning for rural tourism appeal as well as responsible tourism products
4. Manage tourism to help keep rural Loudoun “unspoiled”
5. Revise the Visit Loudoun mandate; modify TOT (bed taxes)
6. Help all Loudouners discover and value rural Loudoun
7. Adopt new metrics: Redefine economic success
8. ORGANIZE FOR HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT



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## HOW TO PROCEED

Begin with #8:

# STRUCTURING HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT



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## STRUCTURING HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT



To coordinate all the aspects of destination stewardship, GSTC **Sustainable Destination Criterion A1** calls for a coordinated, collaborative response.



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GSTC is the international group that has built a global consensus on what sustainable tourism should look like.

## 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 effect, a “destination stewardship council”



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## Who is going to do that?

**A destination-stewardship council, network, or collaborative could do that, if bolstered by the weight of signatories who have endorsed the Guiding Principles.**



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## Barcelona changes its ways

... with a Strategic Plan for Tourism that ‘aims to break the dichotomy that has traditionally separated “tourism” from the “rest of the city”. Tourism is not an outside phenomenon, something unconnected with the city; rather, 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.’*



The perfect expression of how to bridge the gap between “tourism industry” and the place where tourism occurs – from a city that learned by painful overtourism experience. Substitute “countryside” for “city” and their “city and tourism council” would resemble the tourism-stewardship collaborative that Loudoun’s rural west needs.

## What would a western Loudoun destination stewardship collaborative do?

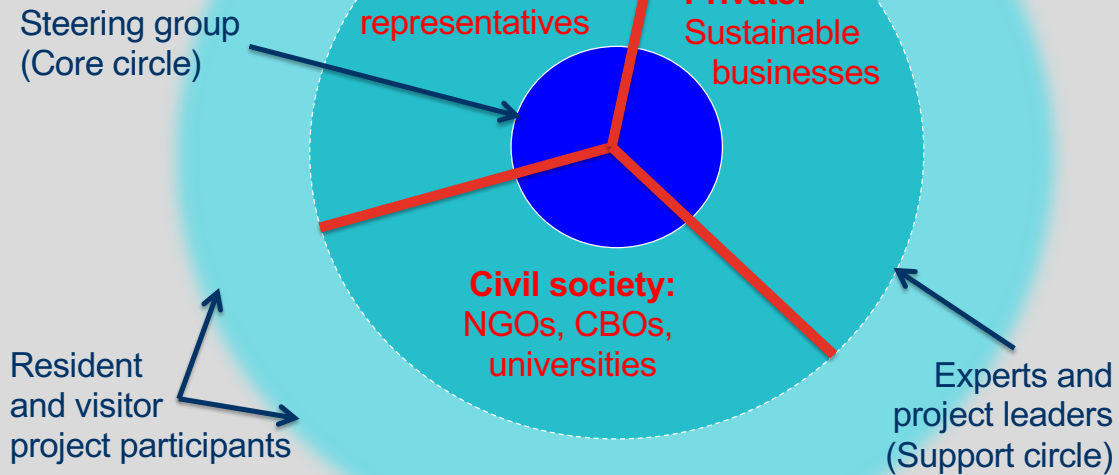
- Adopt and help launch **proactive forms of educational tourism** (e.g. early JTHG ), with VL
- Broaden and promote a **Rural Loudoun brand** for experiences as well as products, with VL
- Help mitigate points of **tourism friction** (noisy entertainment, bright lights, intrusive events)
- Help mitigate points of **bureaucratic friction** (signage, grading requirements)
- Collaborate to combat **over-scale proposals** (too-big sports venues, too-tall power lines, and on)
- Lobby for a **TOT that supports stewardship actions**



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## Destination Stewardship Council: A tripod approach whereby no sector controls.

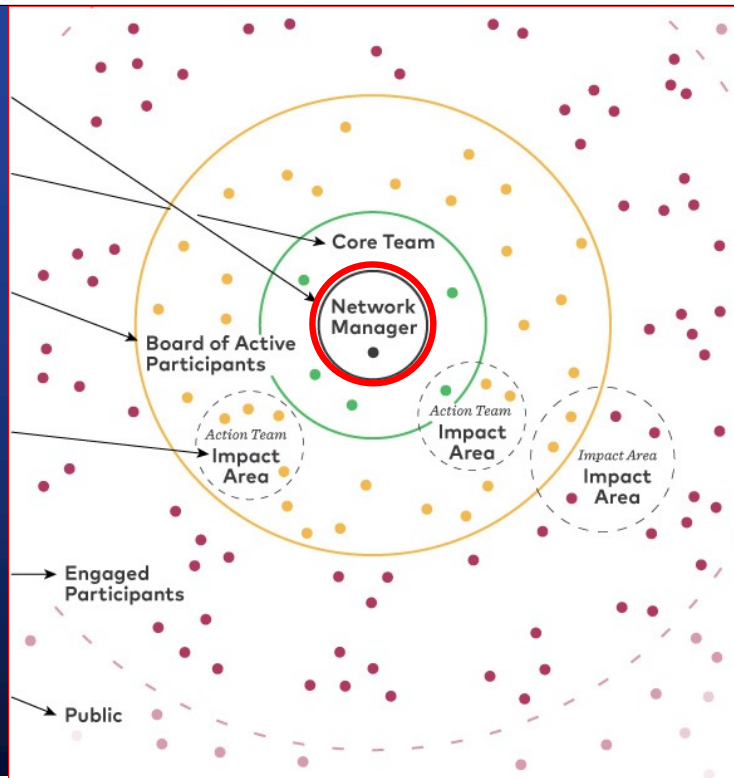


In this resilient model, the core group does most of the planning, coordination, and policy-making. A much larger pool of affiliate members can help with specific projects or expertise as needed. Projects and events can engage both residents and tourists as appropriate.

The tripartite structure keeps any one segment from dominating (especially government ) and ensures continuity if one segment falters.

## A similar model

... adopted by the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance (OR/WA)



A real-life example from the bi-state Columbia River Valley. At least one staffer is almost essential. CGTA is profiled on the Destination Stewardship Center website.

## Steps to building a sustainable destination stewardship council

- 1** Convene a steering group to begin recruiting a destination stewardship council or committee – UNDERWAY
- 2** Adopt a set of Guiding Principles – DONE. READY FOR ENDORSING SIGNATURES
- 3** Propose a mission/vision statement for stakeholders to discuss and adopt – NOT YET
- 4** Hold community meetings with stakeholders – NONE YET.
- 5** Adopt an initial project – with a deadline, funding strategy and timeline. – IN DISCUSSION
- 6** FINAL STEP – Launch a formal Stewardship Council and with a long-term self-sustaining strategy.



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## **A closing thought: Promote “backyard tourism”**

The county’s political realities and geographical imbalance suggest that the initial catalytic project might be most effective if focused on Challenge #6:

- Help all Loudouners discover what’s special about their rural countryside. There are many ways to do this. It could be fun.

To be discussed?



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