

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGERS: THEIR ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Arthur W. Magill

Principal Resource Analyst, USDA Forest Service, Pacific
Southwest Research Station, 4955 Canyon Crest Drive,
Riverside, CA 92507-6099

Though our wildlands are important destinations for international visitors, little is known about their activities or influence on local economies. This paper encourages resource managers to assume leadership for developing an international tourism strategy for our wildlands by packaging lesser known wildland attractions as regional complexes to attract tourists.

Introduction

The United States had a merchandise trade deficit (imports of televisions, cars, etc.) of \$101 billion in 1990 (Eckhouse 1991). This is not surprising, because the deficit has persisted since 1975. Nevertheless, a surplus in service trade exports has persisted since 1969, tripled since 1986, and amounted to \$31.7 billion in 1990 (Eckhouse 1991). Furthermore, this amount is considered conservative by 50 percent, because many services, such as fees for technical advice or computer software, are difficult to track.

A service export has been defined as the transfer of foreign funds to the United States for a service rendered (Eckhouse 1991). Thus, a foreign tourist purchasing a ticket on a U.S. airline, or a foreign ship paying a docking fee at a U.S. port are examples of service exports. The ticket price or the docking fee represents foreign currency coming into the United States. Trade imports are just the opposite--a transfer of U.S. dollars to other countries for their products and services. When trade imports exceed exports, a trade deficit occurs, but a trade surplus accrues when exports exceed imports.

What do service trade exports have to do with the management of natural resources? Tourism is the largest category of U.S. service exports. Foreign tourism and travel on U.S. carriers accounted for nearly \$53 billion in 1990, and the surplus attributed to tourism amounted to nearly \$2 billion--the first tourism surplus ever (Eckhouse 1991). The service export surplus contributed to a reduction in the total trade deficit.

Over 50 percent of the 40 million foreign arrivals in the United States in 1990 were on vacation, and another 30 percent combined vacation with business (O'Leary 1991). Many foreign visitors are attracted by the likes of the Golden Gate Bridge, Disneyland, Las Vegas, and Washington D.C. (Eckhouse 1991), and much of their expenditures result from such visits. In addition, National Parks, National Forests, and other wildlands are important destinations for international visitors (Uysal and others 1990). Very little is known, however, about foreign use of wildlands and their importance has been generally overlooked (Andereck and others 1988; O'Leary 1989; Uysal and others 1990).

Visitor logs and field observations suggest that use of wildland recreation areas by foreign visitors is substantial (Simcox and Pfister 1990; Machlis and Wenderoth 1984). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect National Parks, National Forests, and similar areas to contribute to the service export surplus associated with tourism, and to the reduction of our overall trade deficit. The contributions could be greater if resource agencies were to encourage international visitation to our wildland areas.

This paper describes how wildland areas can be packaged for international tourists as a benefit to local communities and our national economy, and it offers an example from a wildland area in California. In addition, it directs resource managers to take the initiative for bolstering community endeavors to increase international tourism.

Increase International Tourism

The USDA Forest Service and, possibly, other resource agencies have a policy for "working with rural people and communities on developing natural resource-based opportunities and enterprises that contribute to the economic and social vitality of rural communities" (USDA Forest Service 1990, p. 5). Increasing tourism, especially international tourism, in rural America fits the policy. Because all tourists spend money for lodging, food, transportation, guided tours, entry fees, and souvenirs, tourism contributes to local economies and may surpass traditional industries in its contribution. For example, agriculture is the leading industry in Riverside County, California, but tourism is the fastest growing industry -- contributing three times as much money as agriculture in the Coachella Valley (Scully 1991). If tourism can bolster the economy of this agricultural community that is surrounded by desert, think what it could do for rural communities adjacent to attractive natural resource areas--particularly communities with a slow rate of growth and high unemployment.

The Canadian Park Service, Tourism Canada, and Statistics Canada have worked to obtain information about international travel, but U.S. natural resource agencies have made little if any effort to explore foreign markets (O'Leary 1991). Our "marketing" is aimed at domestic tourist dollars. While attracting U.S. tourists brings new money to rural communities, it fails to bring new money to the country or to help fight the trade deficit.

Resource agencies should join forces with organizations concerned with tourism and market lesser known areas (O'Leary 1989). Obviously, National Parks, such as Grand Canyon and Yellowstone; Lake Tahoe, on the border of California and Nevada; and ski areas like those at Aspen, Colorado, are well known to international visitors. Many other high quality, but "lesser known" areas, however, are capable of attracting foreign tourists, provided they are marketed effectively. From a Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management perspective, lesser known areas may mean nearly all of the lands they manage.

A majority of international visitors regard our National Parks and National Forests as the "key advantage" the United States has in the tourism market (O'Leary 1989). Therefore, why have not natural resource managers developed an international perspective about recreation and tourism? Resource agencies are not known for their innovation, have little visitor management, and have employees who would "like to see visitors stay home" (O'Leary 1991). These conditions reflect known attitudes and behavior of resource professionals that should be changed (Magill 1988), particularly if marketing of foreign visitors is to succeed.

Clustering Resources for Foreign Tourists

Taken individually, many natural resources and related cultural and historical attractions have relatively common appeal, that is, they may attract local people, possibly a regional clientele, and even some visitors from across the nation. The numbers of visitors can be expected to decline, however, with increasing distance from the attraction; and the number of international visitors is likely to be small to nonexistent. As a specific example, the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, located in the White Mountains on the Inyo National Forest at the eastern edge of California, is accessible by motor vehicle over a route designated as a National Forest Scenic Byway. The forest contains specimens of the earth's oldest living trees growing above 10,000 feet of elevation. The area has spectacular views of the eastern escarpment of the Sierra Nevada and the Owens River Valley 6,000 feet below -- a photographer's dream! It also holds wonders for those interested in ecology, geology, and wildlife. Nevertheless, it is remote, and visitation is low. In fact, foreign

visits to the Inyo National Forest are nearly nonexistent (0.2 pct) with the majority of tourists coming from California (Lee and Brown 1991). The frequency of foreign visits may be a little larger, because people staying at motels and resorts were not counted.

The ability of the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest to draw from a greater pool of tourists, including international tourists, may be

enhanced by grouping or "clustering" it with other local attractions on the Inyo and Toiyabe National Forests and surrounding areas (Figure 1). Such a regional complex would offer a comprehensive vacation experience competitive with other tourist attractions (Murphy and Keller 1990, Wall 1989). The "Inyo Complex" may be attractive to international tourists through effective marketing.

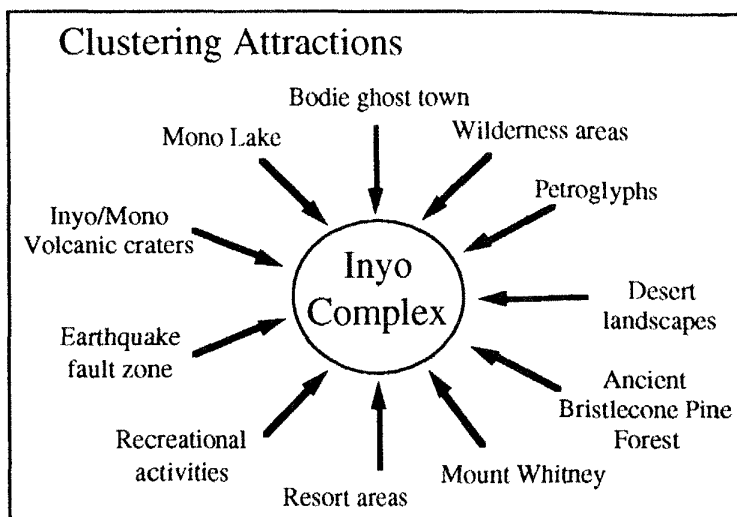


Figure 1. The Inyo Complex. Individually, many wildland attractions have relatively common appeal, but their attractiveness can be significantly enhanced by clustering them to offer a comprehensive vacation experience.

A tour of the Inyo Complex might start from airports at Reno or Las Vegas, in Nevada, or Ontario, Fresno, or South Lake Tahoe, in California (Figure 2). Buses could carry tourists north from Ontario or Las Vegas with options to visit Death Valley National Monument, the Inyo Complex, and Yosemite National Park, Lake Tahoe, or Reno, and naturally the order could be reversed. Regardless of the arrival or departure points of the tours, several days could be spent at the heart of the Inyo Complex -- in the

towns of Bishop or Mammoth Lakes -- from whence satellite tours could originate. One might think that tourists would be unwilling to ride a bus to Mammoth Lakes from Ontario or Las Vegas. Yet, according to a bus tour director, her group had traveled from Palm Springs through Mammoth Lakes to the Mono Lake Visitor and was departing for Yosemite. Palm Springs is more distant than Las Vegas by about 30 miles.

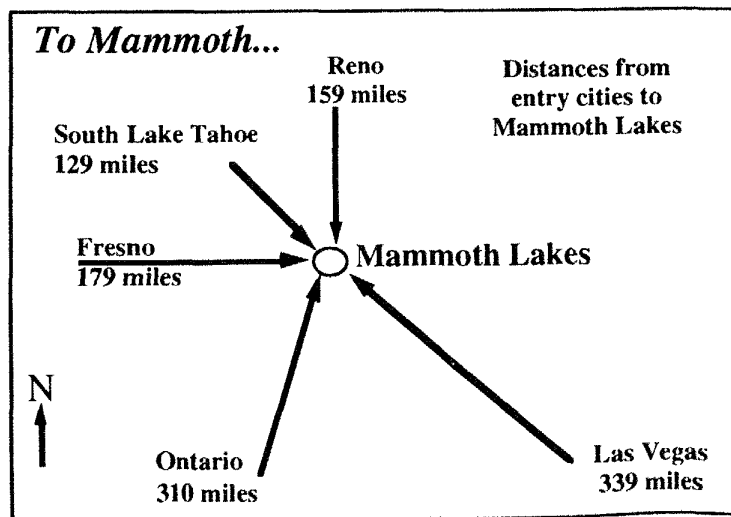


Figure 2. Mileage from entry/departure airports to Mammoth Lakes, California.

Marketing Our Wildlands

On the surface, increasing international tourism by marketing clustered natural resources may seem implausible. The skiing industry, however, found international visitors to be "inquisitive and curious once they get to the United States" (O'Connell 1992). They like the "Have-a-nice-day" attitude of businesses, the quality of our "average" hotel room, and the perception that "everything works." Now, the skiing industry is promoting tourism by marketing "the history, culture and the uniqueness of each part of the United States" to international visitors, and is suggesting that international tourism can be increased only if its members join forces. This approach seems plausible for other tourism-based businesses and communities. In this light, "The Inyo Complex" may be a feasible tour package, but it may not be easy to establish.

Recently, an informal group called CURES, the Coalition for Unified Recreation in the Eastern Sierra, was formed by representatives of local businesses; special interest groups; chambers of commerce; Federal, State, and local government agencies; and a visitor bureau. Its purpose is to improve tourism and recreation services in the eastern Sierra region of California. Even though CURES provides the kind of organization needed to make an Inyo Complex feasible, its marketing and other information is being focused only at domestic tourism. Considerably more effort will be necessary if the program is to entice international visitors.

Some Marketing Concerns

Marketing is a process aimed at identifying what people want and providing it for a fee. In essence, the skiing industry has shown that foreign tourists do aspire to vacations in the United States, especially after an initial visit (O'Connell 1992). Previously unrecognized interests of foreign visitors include forests, beaches, natural wonders, ruins, and cultural diversity, along with opportunities for gambling and shopping (Edgell 1990).

Some will question the marketing of our outdoor recreation resources. Yet, fragile and scarce resources may be protected through sound marketing that leads tourists away from easily damaged locations and offers experiences more attuned to their expectations for resource visitation and support service (Knopf 1990). Providing tourists with opportunities and services in keeping with their social orientations and dependence on facilities, may make tourism more acceptable to environmental groups that seek protection of fragile resources. In addition, marketing scarce resources for tourism has the benefit of promoting wise use by informing visitors of the need to "protect the integrity of our most threatened and vulnerable environments," and giving them some opportunity to experience something new (Knopf 1990, p. 61). In this manner, tourism may serve as an interpretive tool to foster international environmental conservation.

Local people may object to the increased crowding, traffic, and competition for resource use. Thus, for tourism to be successful, support of local residents is essential (Keogh 1990). On the other hand, locals see the obvious benefits of tourism (jobs and income), and also may regard improvements in infrastructure and services as benefits to themselves as well as to tourists (Keogh 1990). Establishing and marketing tourism complexes may not only increase service exports and help reduce the nation's trade deficit, but offer hope to "bolster sagging rural economies" (Knopf 1990). Clearly, local people must be involved in planning and development for tourism.

Attitudes and Resistance to Tourism

People with a variety of interests--businesses, chambers of commerce, environmental groups, local citizens, and governmental agencies including natural resource managers--must interact and establish commonalities for a tourism complex to be established, marketed, and serviced. Therein may lie the most difficult problem--communication, especially between natural resource managers, the professionals in tourism with whom they must work, and the publics both serve. Furthermore,

the communication problem may not rest entirely with resource professionals; people in tourism businesses may contribute as much to barriers to effective interaction as do resource managers.

Travel agents, brochures, and pamphlets are important sources of information for international travelers (O'Leary 1989), yet travel agents tend not to contact resource managers to obtain or verify information (Pfister 1992). Consequently, tourists may appear without warning, and managers may not be prepared to provide services expected by the tourists. This situation suggests that travel agents, who one would expect to have a strong social orientation, may be as reluctant as resource managers to initiate interactions necessary to verify itineraries. Of course, travel agents simply may not know where to obtain some of the information they need.

Whose Job is It?

"Managing for recreation is complicated" (O'Leary 1989, p. 13). Managing for tourism, however, may be more "complicated" as a consequence of the complex interactions needed to plan, market, and service tourists. The complexity associated with the interactions of many different people and groups may present abstract problems with no correct formulation, no evidence to indicate when solutions are found, and no test for objectivity--problems termed "wicked" by Allen and Gould (1986). Also, considering that resource managers do not deal well with abstract problems, are predisposed to autonomous action, and are disinclined to initiate social interaction (Magill 1991), the outlook for developing international tourism on our public lands seems bleak.

"Wicked problems" may grow as interactions become more frequent among people who provide travel services. Any of them may feel a reluctance to interact with others even though working with people is an integral part of their business. Resource managers, on the other hand, are more inclined to perceive their job as managing and protecting resources (Magill 1988), thus they are less likely to start the interactions necessary to increase tourism on the lands they manage. Obviously, somebody must assume leadership if efforts to increase resource-based tourism are to commence, let alone succeed.

Assuming leadership of the diverse assemblage of people needed to increase international visits to wildlands seems an unlikely role for resource managers who are known for their affinity to deal with "things" rather than people. Nevertheless, it is because of their unique knowledge of natural resources and familiarity with specific areas, that they may be ideal champions for the effort. Thus, to gain the "edge" needed to assume leadership of a resource-based tourism program, resource professionals are advised to develop greater sensitivity to public opinion, obtain more training in the social sciences, avoid using technical jargon in public speaking and writing, use language appropriate for the public, and seek improved career guidance for prospective students (Gallagher 1988; Gallagher and Patrick-Riley 1989; Magill 1991). In addition, they should obtain knowledge of the cultures of prospective international visitors and offer them some familiar situations thereby avoiding unfavorable interactions and making themselves better hosts.

Over the past decade, a change has occurred among the professional disciplines of some natural resource agencies. The ranks of the biological and engineering professionals have been infiltrated by persons from socially oriented disciplines--sociology, archaeology, anthropology, social psychology, and political science. These people are contributing new viewpoints to the traditional scientific perspectives of natural resource professionals. These "new ways of thinking" may contribute substantially to the awakening of resource professionals to abstract approaches for solving problems, and for serving people--be they U.S. citizens or foreign tourists.

Conclusions

Responsibility for establishing the relationships needed for effective communication among people in the tourism industry and natural resource management may rest with natural resource managers. They already have a specific responsibility to support government programs that encourage the economic and social development of rural communities. Though less obvious to managers, they also should contribute to efforts to reduce the nation's trade deficit. Both goals may be served through increased visits by international tourists to our public lands.

The tourism industry is unlikely to feel any responsibility to foster either rural areas development or trade deficit reduction without external encouragement. They are, after all, in business to earn a profit. Therefore, natural resource managers may need to set aside their reluctance to public interactions and take leadership in garnering support for a tourism strategy for our wildlands.

Literature Cited

- Allen, Gerald M. and Ernest M. Gould, Jr. 1986. Complexity, wickedness, and public forests. *Journal of Forestry* 84(4):20-24.
- Andereck, Kathleen L.; Muzaffer Uysal; Lawrence A. Hartmann and Marsha A. Iyomasa. 1988. International tourism on public lands in the United States. In: Watson, Alan H., compiler. *Outdoor Recreation Benchmark 1988: Proceedings of the National Outdoor Recreation Forum*, Tampa, Florida, January 13-14, 1988; 290-298.
- Eckhouse, John. 1991. Tourists narrow U.S. trade gap. *Business Extra*. San Francisco Chronicle, September 30, 1991:B1, B4.
- Edgell, David L. 1990. Trends in international tourism through the year 2000. *Trends*, 27(3):32-35.
- Gallagher, Thomas J. 1988. Native participation in land management planning in Alaska. *Arctic* 41(2):91-98.
- Gallagher, Thomas J. and Kent. Patrick-Riley 1989. The readability of federal land management plans. *Environmental Management* 13(1):85-90.
- Keogh, Brian. 1990. resident recreationists' perceptions and attitudes with respect to tourism development. *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, 15(2):71-83.
- Knopf, Richard C. 1990. Marketing public lands. Is it the right thing to do? *Parks and Recreation*, 25(3):57-66.
- Lee, Martha E. and Perry J. Brown. 1991. An analysis, interpretation, and report of recreational user data collected on the Inyo N.F. during summer 1989. Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University; 87 p.
- Machlis, Gary E. and Ellen L. Wenderoth. 1984. Cultural variation in the use of leisure time: foreign tourists at the Grand Canyon. *Leisure Science*, 6(2):187-204.
- Magill, Arthur W. 1988. Natural resource professionals: the reluctant public servants. *Environmental Professional*, 10(4):295-303.
- Magill, Arthur W. 1991. Barriers to effective public interaction. *Journal of Forestry*, 89(10):16-18.
- Murphy, Peter E. and C. Peter Keller. 1990. Destination travel patterns: an examination and modeling of tourist patterns on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. *Leisure Sciences*, 12(1):49-66.
- O'Connell, Bill. 1992. Globalization of American skiing. *Ski Area Management*, 31(1):38, 40.

O'Leary, Joseph T. 1989. International tourists and the resource management agency. Paper presented at the Workshop of the National Forest Service Leadership and the National Recreation Research Leaders, Washington, DC; 29 p.

O'Leary, Joseph T. 1991. International travelers: bridging the gap. Paper presented at the F2-Recreation working group technical session, Society of American Foresters 1991 National Convention, San Francisco, CA, August 3-7, 1991.

Pfister, Robert. 1992. Personal conversation. California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA.

Scally, Robert. 1991. Tourism tops agriculture in Coachella Valley study. *The Press-Enterprise* (Riverside, CA), November 11, Business Section.

Simcox, David E. and Robert Pfister. 1990. Hispanic values and behaviors related to outdoor recreation and the forest environment. Technical Research Report. California State University, Chico, and California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA; 116 p.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 1990. A strategic plan for the 90's: working together for rural America. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service; 22 p.

Uysal, Muzaffer; Cary D. McDonald and Laurel J. Reid. 1990. Sources of information used by international visitors to U.S. parks and natural areas. *Journal of Parks and Recreation Administration*, 8(1):51-59.

Wall, Geoffrey. 1989. An international perspective on historic sites, recreation, and tourism. *Recreation Research Review*, 14(4):10-14.