

RESOURCE ASSESSMENT PRESENTATION WATCHABLE WILDLIFE CONFERENCE

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I. RESOURCE ASSESSMENT: AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE WILDLIFE TOURISM PROCESS.

A. FIVE STEPS OF RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

Step1. Identify the potential area in which tourism opportunities exist.

- a. On a map, draw a circle around the focal point (town) representing a 60 to 90 minute driving radius.
- b. Then, identify all areas of public natural resource land and potentially accessible private land within that circle.

Step 2. Identify the people, clubs, and local, state, and federal officials who may have special knowledge of the wildlife of the areas previously identified. Contact them and get their input-and data/ lists/ publications.

Step 3. Identify the primary featured species or natural features around which wildlife tourism efforts can be based (ARE THEY IN THESE TOP TEN?)

- a. **Bald eagles.** The first rule of wildlife tourism is that people can't get enough of bald eagles.
- b. **Large conspicuous mammals**, like bison, deer, elk, mountain sheep, mountain goats, moose and pronghorns.
- c. **Wildlife breeding grounds or display (lek) sites.** Bison in rut, elk bugling, prairie chickens booming, sharptailed grouse displaying.
- d. **Migratory concentration sites or wintering areas.** The spectacle of migration is a natural attraction for people. This can include shorebirds, Canada or snow geese, sandhill cranes, bald eagles, caribou, anadromous fish like salmon, monarch butterflies, migrating raptors, or songbird concentration sites along migratory routes. (Observation needs to be done in a controlled manner that does not disrupt natural feeding or resting patterns.)
- e. **Good examples of native biomes** (native plant communities). For example, Minnesota's four major biomes are tallgrass prairie, eastern hardwood forest, aspen parkland, and boreal forest. People appreciate seeing panoramic views of large expanses of relatively undisturbed natural environments. Learn the special features and major plants of your local biome. Capitalize on areas that feature several biomes in close proximity to each other.

f. **Lakes, swamps, wetlands and rivers.** The edges of lakes, wetlands, and rivers with natural habitats on the adjacent upland are a natural concentration site for many wildlife species. Interpretive opportunities are excellent along shoreland trails, on boardwalks, viewing blinds and platforms, and from boats and pontoons along the water's edge.

g. **Wildflower concentrations, including associated butterflies, moths and other insects.** There is special interest in locations that feature spring ephemeral woodland flowers, prairie wildflowers, orchids, and carnivorous bog plants. These can be in natural settings or on landscaped grounds. Butterfly gardens can be a big attraction at resorts, B & Bs, and interpretive centers at parks. As a supplemental idea, night lights and adjacent sheets can be set up at interpretive centers or lodges to attract moths and other insects at night.

h. **Rare, unusual or endemic species** –that can be viewed without endangering or disturbing the natural behavior of those species. Some rare or endangered species are too sensitive to human presence or disturbance that tourism attention should not be directed to them. However, some species are rare that are also very tolerant of the presence of humans. E.g. wildlife of the Galapagos Islands, peregrine falcons or bald eagles in wintering areas.

This category includes rare birds that may draw national or international attention from globetrotting birders. Proper guidelines are necessary for this to be a success without impinging on the wildlife. For example, no touching of animals, no feeding allowed, and viewing only from viewing platforms, vehicles, or observation blinds.

i. **Places where families or individuals with children or walking disabilities can view COMMON wildlife easily.** Never underestimate the importance of providing the opportunity to see common wildlife like deer, ducks, foxes, butterflies, turtles, pond life, frogs, lizards, harmless snakes and songbirds. Most wildlife watchers are not looking for rare birds. There are some people whose lifetime career in wildlife conservation began with the sighting of a red fox. These sites can include city parks and urban settings, landscaped grounds of parks and B & Bs, state parks or resorts with a whole array of bird feeders, and large natural areas with protected wildlife populations that ignore the presence of people. Stroller accessible and wheelchair accessible trails fill a special need for this category of wildlife watchers.

l. **Nocturnal wildlife viewing** in natural areas and habitats where night viewing/ listening for wildlife (and star watching) are possible. This includes places where it is possible to howl for wolves, bat watch with the use of bat detectors, frog surveys, “owling” with taped calls (within ethical limits), observation of nesting sea turtles—with a trained guide, and use of spotlights to see nocturnal wildlife from walking paths or from vehicles—if it is legal in your area.

Step 4. Send out planning teams for field trips to the sites of interest, including the local experts who can explain what is unique about the sites involved. Get familiar with those sites and what times of year are best for viewing. Learn about the means of public access, parking facilities, ease of viewing offered, when to go during the day, and any special equipment that may be necessary.

Step 5. Create a phenology chart of the special features of your area and plot the months of the year that these special features are most available for viewing. Then when you pick your target season (Shoulder season), for promotion of wildlife tourism, you know what features are the focal point of your marketing efforts.

KNOW YOUR MARKET: GENERAL NATURE LOVERS

Who are they?

What kind of experience are they seeking?

How are they different from avid birders/ photographers?

How do you reach them?

Howard Hill bowhunting story.

Families with children

Travelers looking for “something to do”

Single mothers and children

Adults with walking disabilities

Teachers with youth; even preschool

Casual Experiences:

1. Birds/deer in landscaped backyards, at feeders, shrubs
2. Easy experiences. Roadside accessible, easy parking
3. Bald eagles
4. Common animal viewing: deer
5. Novelty experiences: nesting turtles; bats at sunset.
6. Nature Center/ Conservation center interpreted
7. Guided day trips
8. Park visitors
9. Golf/fishing widows/kids
10. Self-guided driving tour routes

Goal: Stay longer; spend some money; provide a memorable experience;
generate positive interest in wildlife

Capitalizing on the opportunity

1. Spotting scope in the lounge, focused on feeders
2. Binoculars to check out
3. Bird list for site
4. Info on local wildlife sites on web site
5. Countertop signs of guided services
 - Orchid walks
 - Birding walks
 - Boat/pontoon tours
 - Night walks

6. Directional signs
7. Reference copies of Traveler's Guide at Checkin Desk.
8. Blinds available
9. Bird feeders on site
10. Butterfly gardens
11. Viewing platforms and parking areas
12. Kiosks and informational signs
13. Bird books; magazines on the coffee tables;
in the rooms.

Generic wildlife:

- Deer
- Rabbits
- Songbirds
- Wildlife at educational centers
- Bats
- Herps
- Butterflies
- Bald eagles

How do yo reach them:

- General radio
- Newspaper articles
- Outdoor sections
- Info at outdoor stores
- Web pages for cities; towns and resorts