



Tourism Assessment and Strategic Plan

Burnett County

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UW
Extension

Acknowledgements



Tourism Assessment and Strategic Plan Burnett County

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Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	2
<i>Table of Contents</i>	3
<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>Economic Impact and Trends</i>	5
• Expenditure in Northwest Wisconsin	
• County Trends in Expenditure	
• County Sales Tax Trends	
• Property Tax by Tourism Businesses	
• Jobs	
• Secondary Homeowners	
• Traffic Counts	
• Summer Population	
<i>Strategic Planning Process</i>	8
• Session One: Review 1993 Assessment	
• Session Two: SWOT Analysis	
• Session Three: Roundtable Discussion with elected officials: Senator Sheila Harsdorf, Rep. Mark Pettis, Secretary of Tourism Kevin Shibiliski	
• Session Four: Marketing Opportunities	
• Session Five: Strategies	
• Session Six: Implementation	
<i>Appendix</i>	12
• Summer Population Calculation	13
• 1994 Tourism Assessment Summary	14
• Burnett County Profile	16
• Northwoods Profile	17

Introduction

Tourism has been a significant part of Burnett County's economy for decades. It is no surprise that over time tourism has also changed in many ways. From the number of people visiting to the ways people visit, the only real constant in tourism has been change.

The purpose of this report is to assess resource needs of the tourism sector and plan for the future. This was done by bringing a diverse group of tourism related businesses and organizations together to review the economic impacts of tourism and to identify ways to improve the tourism industry in the county.

Six sessions were planned to help determine resource needs. The sessions were as follows:

- Session One—Review the 1994 Tourism Assessment and implementation of strategies
- Session Two—Self assessment questionnaire and SWOT analysis
- Session Three—Roundtable Discussion with state tourism elected officials
- Session Four—Co-op advertising opportunities; guest speaker Ruth Goetz-Dept. of Tourism
- Session Five—Issues and Strategies
- Session Six—Implementation

The six sessions brought 14 tourism stakeholders together to talk about and develop a direction for the tourism industry in Burnett County. Much work is still needed to implement the strategies and action plans identified in this plan. Further discussions and planning will be needed by an even broader base of tourism stakeholders.

It is hoped that this document will serve to inform elected officials and organizations about the benefits and impact of tourism and help to provide a strategic direction for tourism planning, promotion, and infrastructure development.

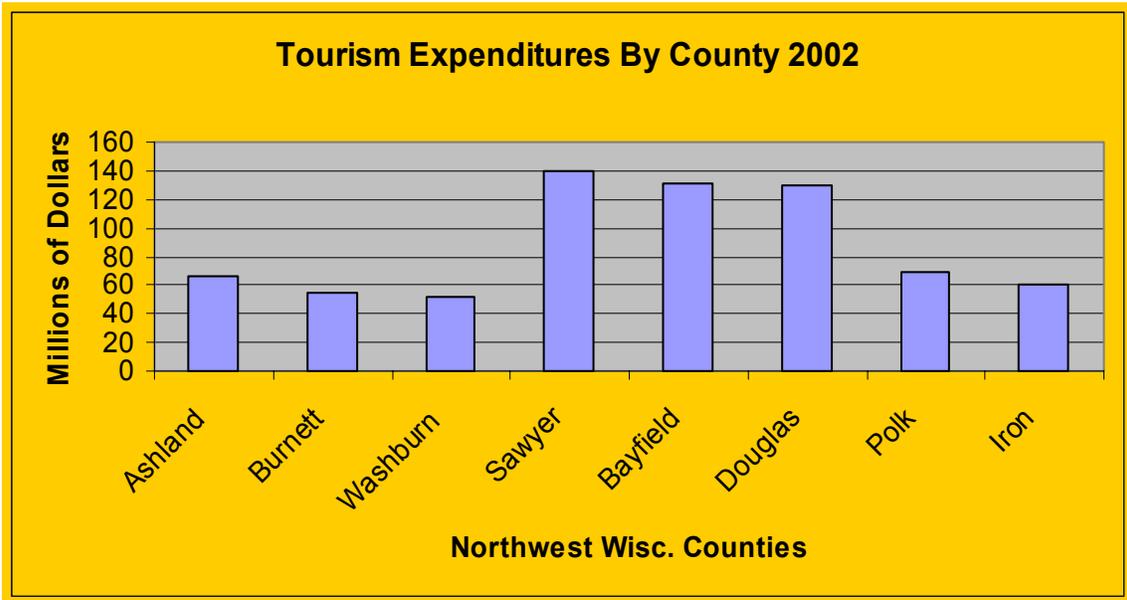


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Economic Impacts and Trends

Tourism Expenditures and Jobs. In 2002 Burnett County had 55 millions dollars spent in the tourism sector. In 1993 expenditures totaled \$19 million. Tourism spending is linked to approximately 30% of the jobs in the county. It also accounts for approximately 1/3 of the sales of all products and services. Regionally, Burnett is second from the bottom, ahead of only Washburn County. Over the last decade expenditures have

Secondary Homeowners. Currently, a large part of tourism in Burnett County is its secondary homeowners. Although the percent of housing units as secondary homes has decreased by 5% since 1990, the over 5,000 homes still have a significant impact on tourism in the county. The reason for the reduced percentage of secondary homes is that retirees are turning their seasonal homes into year round homes. Burnett County's year round population has increased by over 3,000 people partly due to this trend.

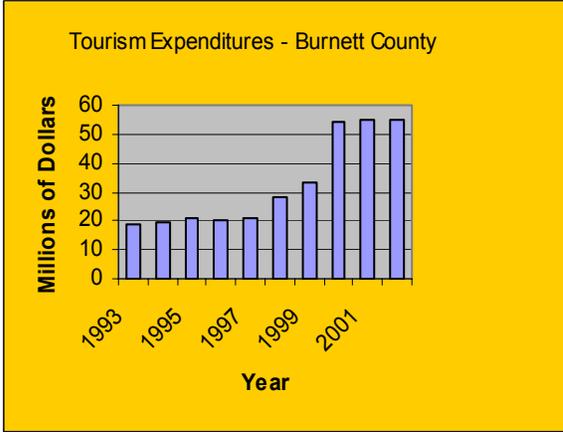


increased every year except for 2002. The half of a percent decline was lowest of the four counties that saw a decrease. Four other counties still had increases in their tourism expenditures. The downturn in the economy, no snow winters, and the events of 911 are noted as the primary cause of the decline.

Seasonal Housing Units

1990: 5,870 50% of housing units

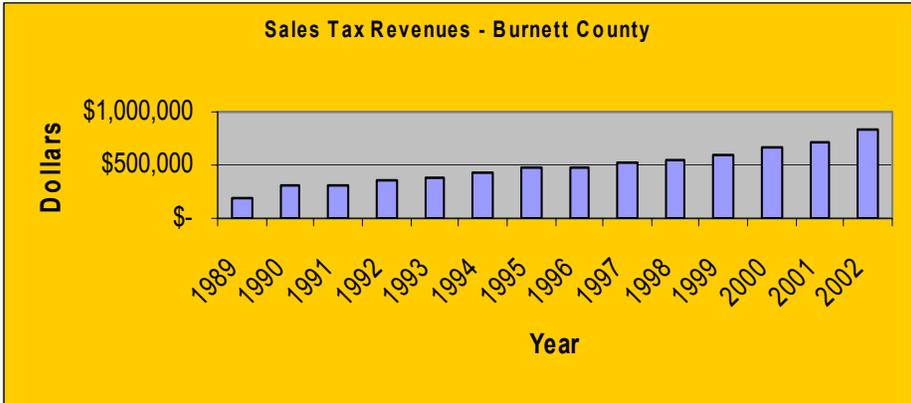
2000: 5,664 45% of housing units



Summer Population. Large increases in summer population occur in Burnett County. A recent calculation based on 2003 lodging units and secondary homes came up with a total of almost 42,000 people. This is almost three times the year round population and plays a tremendous role in the local economy. In 1994 the summer population was similar in size. This is despite a reduction in resort facilities. There is some shifting of lodging to hotel/motel facilities.

Sales Tax. Retail has been a strong component of tourism throughout the state and that sector is continuing to see increasing sales. Generally, shopping is usually around 28% of the travelers expenditures. The 0.5 % sales tax totals has shown an upward trend since its inception in 1993. Sales tax revenues now total over \$800,000. Tourism has added many stores that year round residents use that may not be viable without tourism.

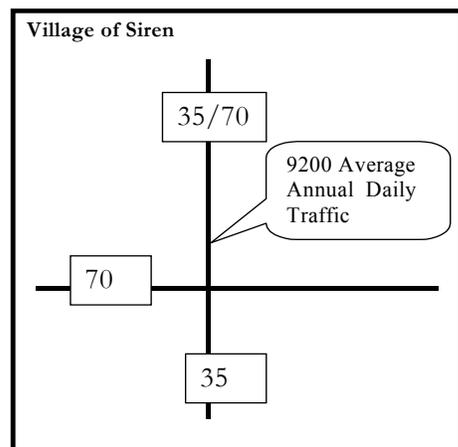
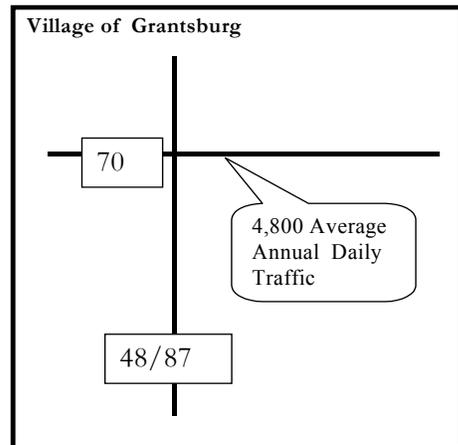
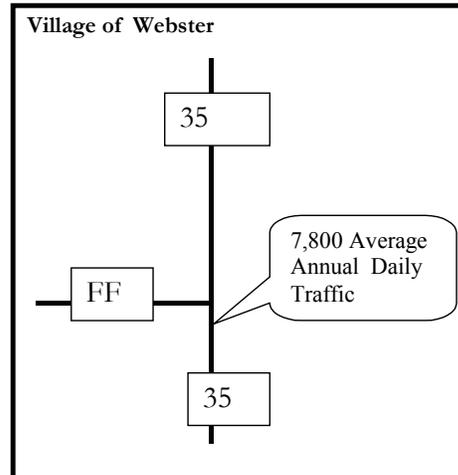
The calculation process is broken down in a table in the Appendix. Numbers also include many of the summer camps in the county. The summer population total is to be used as an approximation and may even be higher depending on varying lodging occupancy levels. Continuing trends and developing of new events and promotions may also affect shoulder season population totals.





Expenditures By Category. Traditionally tourism has focused on lodging numbers and variety. However tourism encompasses other category of expenditures. State of Wisconsin Department of Tourism data shows that 28% of expenditures are in retail, 27% in food, 25% in recreation, 13% in lodging, and 7 % in transportation. Although lodging is fourth in a travelers expenditures, it is still an important part of the tourism sector. Often times a travelers experience at a lodging establishment sets the image for the rest of the trip. More importantly this data shows the integration of the economic sectors and the need to work cooperatively on marketing strategies.

Traffic Counts. Traffic has increased significantly over the previous decades. On this page are average annual daily traffic counts for the villages of Siren, Grantsburg, and Webster. The counts were taken in 1999 and are approximations of traffic year round (including the peak summer traffic and low spring levels.). Since 1993 traffic counts have increased by 43% in Grantsburg, 61% in Siren, and 188% in Webster. The trend coincides with the fast growing economy of the 1990's and a jump in seasonal home development.





Strategic Planning Process

Session One: Review 1993 Assessment.

During the first session of the strategic planning process the group reviewed the 1993 Tourism Assessment. The document stated economic statistics for that time and included strategies for improving that sector. The major strategies/action plans implemented were:

- Developed a multi-page marketing brochure that highlighted all the activities available in the county.
- Funded half of the visitor center
- Created a new marketing slogan: “Burnett County: All trails lead to adventure”
- Two full service hotels developed in Siren.

Session Two: SWOT Analysis. After taking a tourism sector survey the group worked on developing a list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths and weaknesses are internal to tourism in Burnett County. Opportunities and threats are external forces out of the control of the tourism sector in Burnett County.

Strengths

- Special events
- Natural Resources including 500 lakes, over 14 rivers, St. Croix Scenic River Way, 8 wildlife areas, state and county forest lands, trails
- Crex Meadows
- Fort Folle Avoine Historical Park
- Restaurants
- Shops
- Resorts

- Casino/Tribal operations
- Volunteers
- Forts Folle Avoine Historical Park
- Grantsburg Historical Museum
- Crex Visitor Center
- Auditoriums – Webster
- Convention space
- Arenas
- Golf courses (7 courses and good variety)
- Variety of foods served
- Relaxed attitude/experience – not the Dells
- Web presence
- Airports (3)
- Birds – variety of species and numbers

Weaknesses

- Lack of cohesive organization – “no one in charge”
- Motor versus silent sports conflict
- Lack of evaluation of events and promotions
- Local government reluctant to change
- Lack of funding
- Need beds, lodging
- Little focus on shoulder season – “feast or famine”
- Tourism attitude toward secondary home owners – currently negative
- Web presence
- County wide marketing
- State/local regulations towards development/redevelopment
- Tourism referrals, cooperation, teamwork, networking
- Weather dependency



Opportunities

- Proximity to Twin Cities
- State tourism department/ITBEC
- Grant writing
- Southern Wisconsin market
- ATV's
- Chicago
- Midwest
- Germany/international
- Birding Trail
- High Gas Prices
- Fear of terrorism
- Bus tours

Threats

- Stock market and general economy
- Gas prices
- Weather
- Terrorism
- Competitive marketing from other markets
- No county wide room tax enabling legislation
- State/federal regulations on hunting and fishing bag limits

Session Three: Roundtable with elected officials. Burnett County is lucky to have two state legislators that represent each of the respective tourism committees as chairpersons. Senator Sheila Harsdorf chairs the tourism committee in the Senate and Mark Pettis chairs the tourism committee in the assembly. Along with Secretary of Tourism Kevin Shibiliski, the legislators addressed the tourism assessment team. They also answered questions regarding tourism activities at the state level and

listened to comments from tourism stakeholders in Burnett County. The panel answered questions regarding JEM grant funding during the fiscal crisis, addressed ATV's, pending county-wide room tax legislation, and strategies for promoting their community.

Session Four: Marketing Trends and Cooperative Advertising

Opportunities. Ruth Goetz, regional tourism coordinator for the Department of Tourism spoke to the group about tourism trends and the many cooperative advertising opportunities available through the Department of Tourism. She discussed the trends towards "relaxation", birding, and internet use for planning trips. Also, with the events of 9-11, traveling trends indicate more trips via the automobile.

The largest amount of her time was spent on describing the many cooperative advertising opportunities and grants available through the Department of Tourism. Grants available include:

- First time event
- Destination Marketing
- Sales Promotion
- One of a kind event
- Existing Event

The cooperative ad program will give businesses reduced rates for advertising in major newspapers and magazines. The only requirement for the ads is to include that slogan "stay a little bit



Session Five: Issues and Strategies.

The last session focused on pulling the ideas from the previous sessions together. The participants reviewed the SWOT analysis and then identified issues. For each issue, the participants identified strategies and action plans for addressing the main issues. The four major issues and actions plans follow:

Issue: Lack of Organization

Strategy: Create a forum for tourism organizations and businesses to meet, plan and implement tourism activities

Action:

- Create a new county-wide organization with representatives from a variety of businesses and all geographic areas. Organization should include lodging, retail, food and beverage, chambers, recreation and trail groups, heritage organizations, and government

Issue: Marketing and Promotion

Strategy: Increase promotional activities by marketing tourism county-wide and to local businesses.

Action:

- Develop a marketing plan
- Coordinate a tourism day/fair to educate businesses and employees about county tourism assets
- Expand website marketing
- Focus marketing towards Twin Cities, Chicago, Eau Claire, Southern Wisconsin, International markets
- Utilize co-op advertising using private funds
- Direct email marketing
- Develop concise guide book on county tourism assets

Issue: Funding

Strategy: Identify and obtain new funding.

Action:

- Retain and increase county tourism funds
- Utilize Joint Effort Marketing grants
- Implement user fees where appropriate
- Membership dues
- Pursue partnerships including ITBEC, business to business, other counties, organization to organization
- Fund raisers
- Explore implementing a county-wide room tax if enabling legislation allows it

Issue: Government perception towards tourism

Strategy: Increase visibility and communication

Action:

- More Business involvement with county board, villages, and towns
- Attend more meetings including PRT, county board, finance committees, town and village boards
- Communicate plan and vision



IMPLEMENTATION

The four issues and action plans were a result of a diverse group of tourism stakeholders strategically planning for their industry. Of the four major issues “organization” was the highest priority. The other major issues of promotion, funding and government perception, are also important. However, the participants believe that the other issues can not be adequately addressed until improved organization is created.

Strategic planning is important for organizations and businesses. It is one of the first steps in creating a successful industry. However a strategic plan is of little use if it is not implemented. Ultimately the effectiveness of this plan is up to the tourism industry stakeholders and their willingness to implement it.





APPENDIX



Summer Population Calculation

Summer Population 2003	
Year Round Population	16,000
Second Homes (5664 homes x 4 people)	22,656
Lodging Units (412 units x 2 people x .60 occupancy)	494
Campsites (683 x 2 people x .75 occupancy)	1,024
Summer Camp Sites (1,120 x 2 people x .75)	1,680
	<hr/>
Total Calculated Summer Population	41,854



1994 Burnett County Tourism Assessment Summary

Short Term Goals

- Improve signage to county tourism office;
A number of red "visitor information" signs were erected at information sites throughout the county.
- Develop new recreational guide lure piece designed to highlight all the activities available in the county.
A multi-page guide was developed and many thousands printed. A large amount of this guide is still available today.
- Ensure a minimal budget adequate enough to operate a tourism office in 1995 (includes raising approximately \$12,000 to combine with county budgeted \$13,000);
Until 2003, the county budgeted \$12,000 to help fund the visitors center. The Siren Tourism Commission funded the other half- also \$12,000. In 2003 the county funded the center at \$11,000.
- Develop a list of services that the tourism office provides or could provide in benefit of the individual villages, communities and the tribe. Highlighting these services will help these groups recognize the value of the tourism office and may lead to funding assistance;
Incomplete.
- Develop a motor coach tour (eco-tourism effort);
A proposal for a joint effort marketing grant was completed however it was rejected by the state of Wisconsin.
- Begin to develop new theme and logo based on "Year Round Playground for all Ages" and/or "Come To Burnett County For The Fun of It."
The theme "Burnett County: Where all trails lead to adventure!" was created and used throughout its marketing efforts.

Long Term Goals

- Develop a list of services that the tourism office provides or could provide in benefit of the individual villages, communities and the tribe. Highlighting these services will help these groups recognize the value of the tourism office and may lead to funding assistance;
Incomplete.
- Develop weekend packages for outdoor activities, particularly during shoulder seasons;
A golf package was promoted in the early 2000 with very limited success.
- Have a destination resort or full service motel constructed in the county;
Two full service hotels were constructed in approximately 1996.
- Increase the county share of the tourism budget back up to sufficient levels to ensure operations can continue (recommended at \$40,000);
The 2003 Tourism budget totals \$ 26,000. Previous budgets were higher but never approached the \$40,000 level.
- Explore new markets, particularly targeting the non-Twin Cities markets within a two hour radius;
Incomplete.
- Promote the expansion of motor coach tours and RV travelers;
Incomplete.
- Develop hospitality training programs for managers and employees;
A limited number of hospitality programs have been offered with little participation. Reasons for low turnout included limited advertising to lack of interest by tourism businesses.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of marketing efforts through a conversion study.
Incomplete.