



MAHOOSUC REGION SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN

MAINE, USA

April 2020



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This report summarizes the Community Destination Academy (CDA) outcomes and the Mahoosuc Region Sustainable Tourism Plan. This document is based on the extensive stakeholder and community deliberations across three modules of the CDA.

Report Prepared by

David Beurle, CEO, Future iQ



Future iQ specializes in applying innovative tools and approaches to assist municipalities, organizations, regions and industries shape their economic and community futures. With nearly two decades of experience, the company has a global clientele spanning three continents.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Maine Woods Consortium has worked in partnership with the Maine Office of Tourism and Northern Forest Center to pilot a new approach to training and capacity building in high potential Rural Destination Areas. The Community Destination Academy (CDA) approach is flexible to allow a tailored approach to communities based upon their previous destination development work. The CDA consists of professionally led workshops and training sessions combined with a package of direct financial and technical assistance to support destination development projects in high potential Rural Destination Areas across the Maine Woods region.

The CDA program is built on a recognition that successful destinations require a unique level of cooperation among business, non-profit, and municipal stakeholders and a common set of skills and knowledge to enable effective team-based project implementation.

In preparing their application for the Community Destination Academy, the Mahoosuc Region applicants were asked to define what made region a high potential destination. They indicated the region is a compelling travel or vacation destination, based on:

- The mountains, lakes, rivers and villages.
- In the winter, visitors (mostly) travel for alpine skiing and snowboarding and, to a lesser degree, Nordic skiing, fat-tire biking, snowshoeing and snowmobiling.
- In the Spring, depending on the snowpack, visitors come to do late season skiing and also to fish in the rivers and streams.
- Summer and Fall provide myriad activities – hiking, biking (road, mountain and fat-tire) water sports of all types, scenic driving to waterfalls, Grafton Notch State Park and White Mountain National Forest, camping, picnicking, golfing on two eighteen-hole courses, bird watching, wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing.
- For those visitors seeking more “passive” past-times, Bethel is home to the Broad Street National Historic District, the Maine Mineral and Gem Museum, the Gem Theater, the Museum of the Bethel Historical Society, two gem sluices, chair lift rides at Sunday River Resort (summer and fall weekends), and foliage viewing.
- The area businesses and nonprofits organize and host events all year round, and this region is host to more than 100 weddings annually!

All of the above assets are important in creating a diverse and memorable destination for visitors, and they are all available to the 5,000 individuals who call this area home.





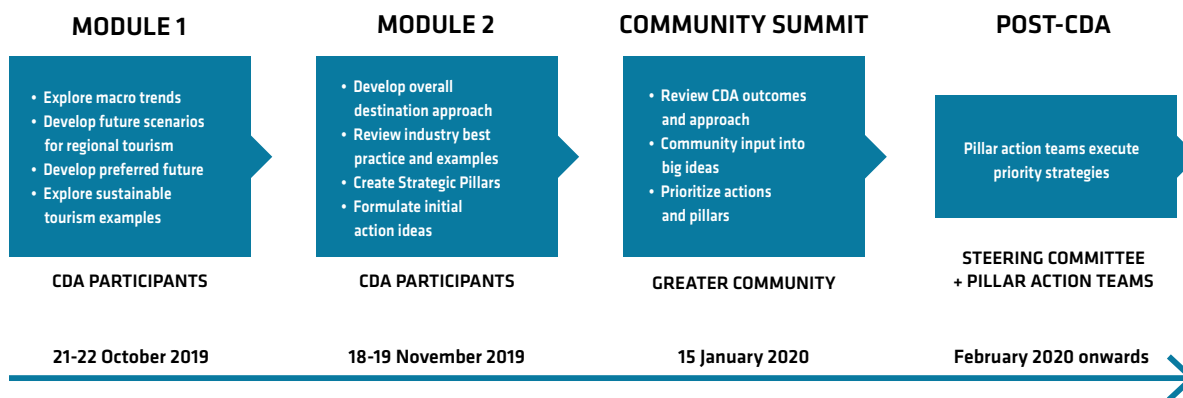
The CDA process allowed significant input from over 100 local stakeholders, ensuring a robust and thoughtful strategic plan.

2.0 MAHOOSUC REGION - COMMUNITY DESTINATION ACADEMY TIMELINE

The formal part of the Community Destination Academy (CDA) ran over a four-month period, with additional pre-planning and Steering Committee sessions before and after. The module content was a mixture of expert and peer presentations, planning exercises, surveys and community presentations. Approximately 50 people participated in Module 1 and Module 2, and nearly 100 people attended the community tourism summit on 15 January 2020.

This represents a significant time investment from a core group of local stakeholders. Each module was 1.5 days, and the community summit was an evening event. The design of the modules aimed to allow synthesis of ideas and collaborative planning with the participants. The Community Summit was added to the CDA program, as there was a desire for high levels of community buy-in to the process and the outcomes. This event allowed additional input and prioritization work.

Mahoosuc Region – Community Destination Academy Timeline



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DATA INSIGHTS:

- Creating successful community-based strategic tourism plans requires solid stakeholder engagement. The CDA was successful in attracting well respected local leaders and stakeholders to the table. This adds credibility and validity to the resulting plan.
- The presenters at the CDA drew from extensive practical and industry experience and discussed best practice examples. This helped ensure the plan is high quality and ambitious, while fully reflecting the desires of local stakeholders.





3.0 FORCES SHAPING THE FUTURE – MACRO TRENDS

Participants at the CDA workshop explored relevant areas of emerging macro trends and forces of change. These trends presentations covered macro trends, tourism industry trends and peer presentations. Presenters included data from Maine Office of Tourism, Adventure Travel Trade Association, and Future iQ. In particular the trend analysis explored the impact of technology, the emergence of adventure travel and the concept of sustainable tourism.

Local Economy Benefits

CONSIDER THE FOOTPRINT OF ADVENTURE TRAVELERS

200 cruise tourists, 10 all-inclusive package tourists, or 4 adventure travelers = \$10,000 for the local economy

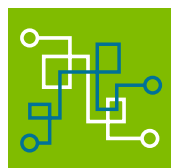


*Based on World Bank (2015) Strengthening Tourism Competitiveness in the OECS countries: Market Analysis

Slide courtesy of Russell Walters, Regional Director, North America, Adventure Travel Trade Association



Of particular relevance to the discussion on trends is the speed and scale of change occurring. This was explored to better understand how the Mahoosuc Region can anticipate emerging trends and opportunities. More information can be found in The Maine Woods Future of Tourism reports, which can be accessed at www.future-iq.com/project/maine-woods-usa-2018/



FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The emerging macro trends represent both 'headwinds' and 'tailwinds' for the future of tourism in the Mahoosuc Region. As the world becomes more urbanized, destinations that offer rich outdoor recreation experiences are likely to be sought after locations.
- The nature of travel and travelers is evolving, with clear differences in generational cohorts. The Mahoosuc Region will need to figure out how to appeal to emerging generations of travelers, who may be seeking different types of destinations experiences than more traditional travelers.

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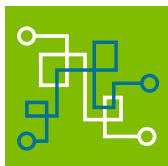
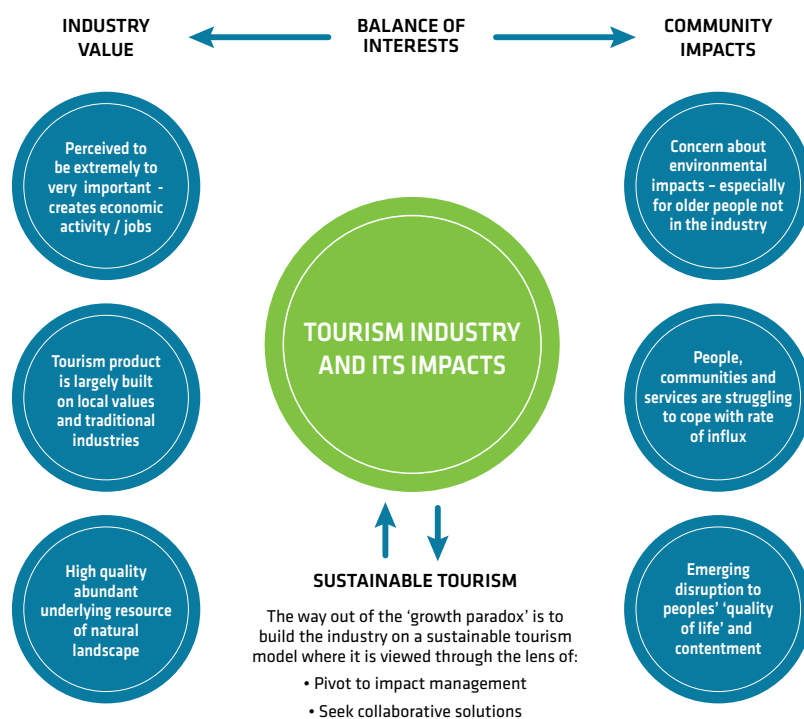


In response to a survey question about the 'importance of tourism to the future of the region', 97% of CDA participants said it was 'very' to 'extremely' important. There is no doubt it is a key future economic driver for the region.

4.0 POTENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

An outstanding feature of the CDA discussions was the perceived importance of taking a sustainable tourism approach. This is a relatively new concept in tourism strategic planning and is well suited to the Mahoosuc Region. The value of this approach is that it helps balance the value created by the industry, with the potential negative impacts of tourism and visitation on small regional communities. The dangers of over-tourism are that it leads to resident alienation, and subsequent push-back on the tourism economy by locals. Throughout the CDA, it was clear there is not much appetite to significantly grow visitation, but there is interest in finding the right balance that suits the communities in the region.

Growing a Tourism Industry - A Careful Balancing Act



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FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- Sustainable tourism offers a framework to manage the sometimes competing interests of industry growth and community impact. While it is relatively new in concept, it has gained traction, especially in nature-based destinations in the Rockies and parts of Europe.
- The concept of sustainability is well understood and was noted as an underlying principle and value within the CDA discussions. The region has the potential to position itself as a leader in the application of these concepts within the local tourism industry.



The five sustainability dimensions were all considered very important to the region, scoring between 9.2 and 9.8, out of 10 (scale 1 = Not important; 10 = Critically important).

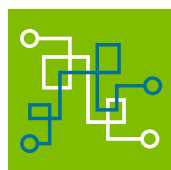
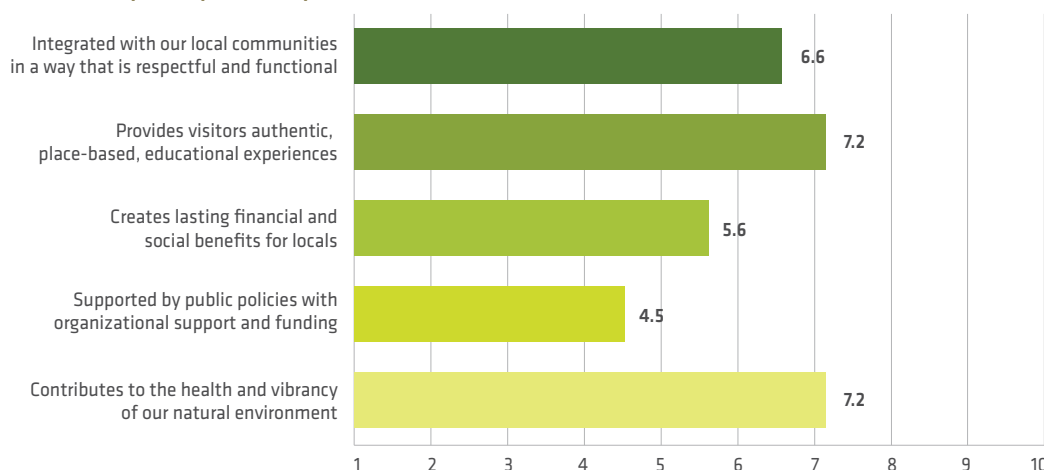
4.1 CURRENT PERFORMANCE AGAINST SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSIONS

During the CDA, participants explored a working definition of sustainable tourism with five key dimensions. The dimensions were:

- Integrated with our local communities in a way that is respectful and functional
- Provides visitors authentic, place-based, educational experiences
- Creates lasting financial and social benefits for locals
- Supported by public policies with organizational support and funding
- Contributes to the health and vibrancy of our natural environment

Survey responses were collected to understand the perception of how well the region is currently performing against the sustainability dimensions. Overall, the results were generally okay, but show significant room for improvement. This points to the potential of adopting a Sustainable Tourism approach, that would work across these five key dimensions.

'How well do you think the region is CURRENTLY performing against each of these dimensions of Sustainable Tourism? (Scale: 1= Very Poorly; 10 = Very Well)



FUTURE INSIGHTS

- The dimensions most connected to the quality of the natural resources score higher (visitor experiences and natural environment). However, the dimensions about local impact and value score lower.
- There is an obvious need to frame better local policy to guide and manage the impacts of tourism, and help ensure that lasting value accrues to the communities in the region.

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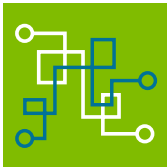
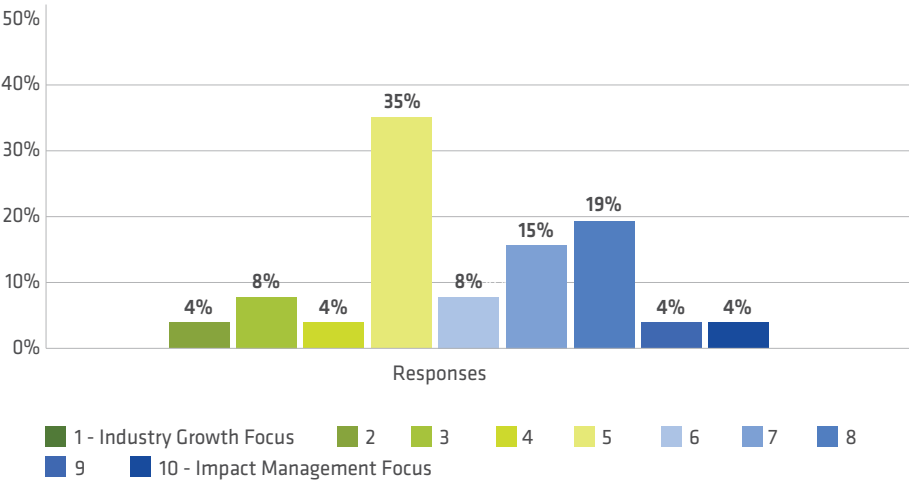


The CDA participants clearly seek an even balanced approach to tourism, with a thoughtful focus on gently growing the industry while carefully managing local impacts.

4.2 ACHIEVING THE RIGHT BALANCE

The main focus of a sustainable tourism approach is for a destination community to find the right balance between economic impact and community impact. This ‘sweet spot’ will vary from community to community and will reflect local desires and values. The Mahoosuc Region is already a successful tourism destination and has supported a tourism economy for over 150 years. The future trajectory of the tourism economy will have significant impacts on the community feel and fabric. During the CDA, the group explored the balance between growing visitation and managing impact, looking out over the next 10 years.

Where should the region aim its focus on a continuum from an ‘Industry Growth Focus’ (growing the number of visitors) to an ‘Impact Management Focus’ (managing the local impacts of tourism and tourists)?

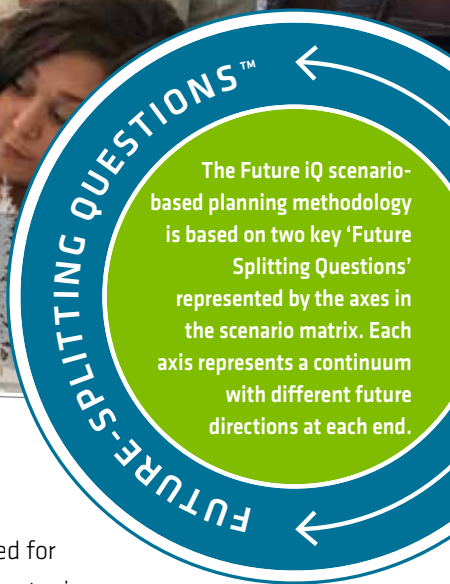


FutureInsight

FUTURE INSIGHTS

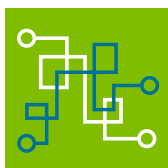
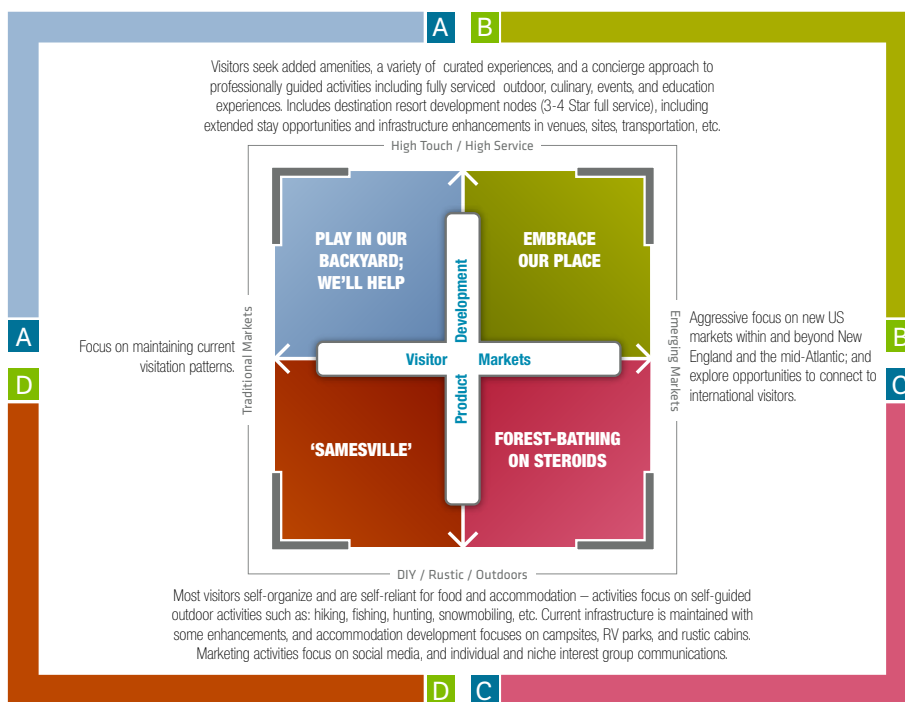
- While there is a consensus that a carefully balanced approach is important, there are some outlier views, which are on the ends of the continuum. Maintaining open community discussion will be important to reconciling views in the future.
- Focusing on Sustainable Tourism will help find the right balance. Small communities, like those found in the Mahoosuc region, could become rapidly overwhelmed by over-tourism, especially in peak periods.





5.0 CREATING THE SCENARIO FRAMEWORK

Summit participants were presented with the scenario matrix which had been previously developed for the Future of Tourism work in the Maine Woods region. This matrix is defined by the two key macro topics, presented as continuums in each axis. The axes were defined as 'Product Development' and 'Visitor Markets' (see diagram). Brief descriptions were also attached to the end points of each axis. Participants were randomly divided into four groups to develop a narrative for each scenario, and specifically how that scenario would play out in the Mahoosuc region. Each group was asked to describe the characteristics of region in 2030 under the conditions of the scenario quadrant that they had been given. After the characteristics were established, Summit participants were asked to devise major events or headlines of how the scenario occurred using the years 2020, 2025, 2030, and to give their scenario a descriptive name. Narratives and descriptions of each scenario as developed by the workshop participants are included in the following sections.



FUTURE INSIGHTS

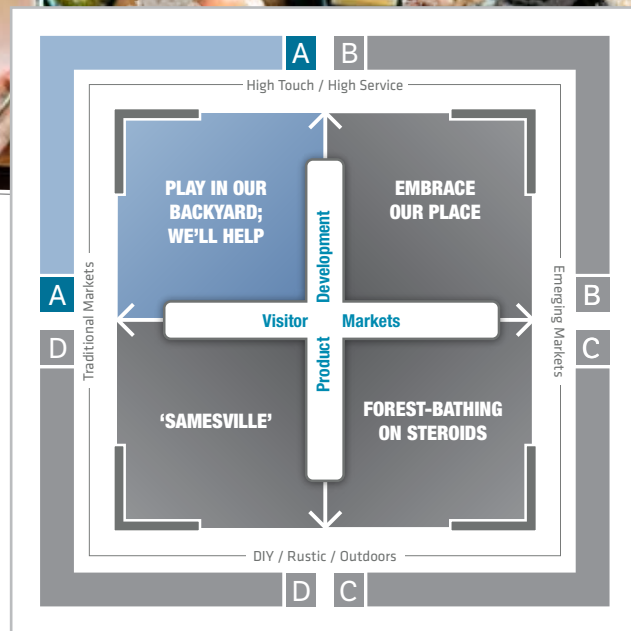
- The scenarios represent very plausible futures for the Mahoosuc Region. The scenario framework has been developed and tested extensively in the Maine Woods region, and offers an interactive way to explore local implications.
- Each of the four plausible scenarios represent different implication and consequences for the region, its industries and communities. This approach helps identify preferred futures.

Future**Insight**



5.1 SCENARIO A – PLAY IN OUR BACKYARD; WE’LL HELP

This future is created by a focus on traditional markets (mostly northeast and Atlantic USA) coupled with a higher touch / higher service approach to product development. This future would be appealing to nostalgic travelers seeking some of the luxury indulgence of previous eras, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts.



Community and Societal

Strong focus on local authentic experiences that celebrate heritage and history.

- Local communities collaborate to help create seamless travel experiences for aging demographics.
- Some over-gentrification occurs.
- There is some disconnect between the working natural resource economy, and the quaint tourism appeal sought by some.



Economic and Tourism Industry

Local communities serve the luxury traveler who is seeking indulgence and nostalgic experiences.

- Quality premium local food has become a key part of the destination experience.
- Guides are in high demand to create personalized and curated nature-based experiences.
- More local businesses operate on a seasonal basis, with the region being more dependent on key recreation seasons.



Environmental and Landscape

Environmental preservation is a priority, with 'viewsapes' being protected.

- There is a strong investment in renewable energy and sustainability principles.
- There is a focus on curated outdoor experiences, with extensive trail networks developed.
- Downtown streetscapes are protected, and towns become more walkable.

2020 HEADLINE NEWS:

Old Time General Store opens, featuring local Maine made products.



2025 HEADLINE NEWS:

Multiuse new trail system opens, connecting Sunday River to Mt. Abram.



2030 HEADLINE NEWS:

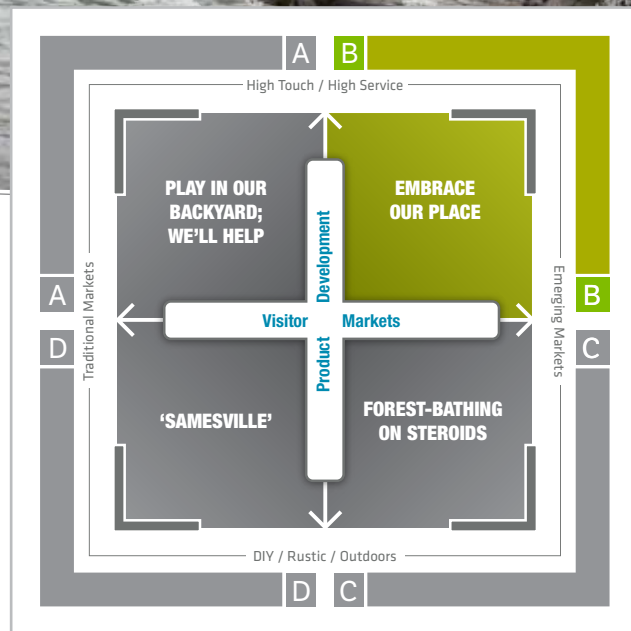
Passenger rail service reinstated to Bethel, offering luxury travel from Boston.





5.2 SCENARIO B – EMBRACE OUR PLACE

This scenario is shaped by a focus on emerging markets and developing a high touch / high service approach to product development. The overall outcome is an increase in visitor spend, helping boost the economic impact of tourism. This future also sees a high emphasis on sustainable tourism approaches, appealing to more discerning and empathetic visitors.



Community and Societal

The community embraces tourism as the region attracts more affluent travelers who are interested in the underlying sustainability values.

- There is increased buy-in for the tourism industry from state/municipal and leadership
- The region has adapted and implemented a sustainable tourism plan, which builds local collaboration.
- The region has become a destination location for a new wave of professional and technical specialists, who are drawn by the community values and recreational opportunities.



Economic and Tourism Industry

The tourism industry has evolved to apply more sophisticated use of technology and is strongly focused on a sustainability model.

- Transportation becomes seamless with on-demand shuttles and car services with tracking.
- The industry has focused on building year-round recreation, with bigger cultural events, conferences and festivals
- Technology assists in finding new customers in new markets, and the local wayfinding has been revamped.



Environmental and Landscape

Sustainability has become a key defining value, and the towns and landscapes reflect a commitment to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- Shoulders on Route 26 have been enhanced with sidewalks, walkability initiatives and cycling trails.
- Major transportation links include trains from major metro areas of Boston, and transit from Portland.
- The region is a leader in sustainable practices such as renewable energy, regenerative agriculture and environmental management.

2020 HEADLINE NEWS:

Mountain bike guide service launches to create and cater for high-end recreation experiences.



2025 HEADLINE NEWS:

Choose your own adventure – individualized experiences abound in the outdoor, and the Mountain explorer shuttle runs year-round.



2030 HEADLINE NEWS:

Region voted best place to live and work, and investment is made in higher end hotels and restaurants.





5.3 SCENARIO C – FOREST BATHING ON STEROIDS

This scenario paints a future where there is a focus on emerging markets, coupled with a more traditional DIY rustic adventure experience. While the destination activities remain familiar, the new waves of travelers seeking these authentic outdoor experiences begins to place stress on the local infrastructure and it struggles with over-tourism at peak times.



Community and Societal

The community invests in skills training for people to support the needs of new travelers, but residents begin to feel alienated.

- Local community resources begin to become strained, especially in emergency services, who deal with poorly prepared adventure travelers.
- The use patterns change, and more visitors begin to use local areas, and the gap closes between the hiking, skiing and mountain bike culture; and the hunting and ATV culture.
- Local efforts are focused on improved infrastructure to help manage visitation numbers.



Economic and Tourism Industry

Overtourism begins to emerge as a problem, as poorly prepared new travelers 'discover' the regions un-spoilt appeal.

- Overtourism begins to degrade the experience people are coming to the region to find.
- More guides, coaches, and instructors are needed to support a range of traditional and different activities, but there is a lack of a coordinated approach.
- Many visitors feel like they've had an epic outdoor experience (even if a local would consider it pretty average) and promote the region on social media.



Environmental and Landscape

Environmental degradation begins to occur in some areas of overuse, especially iconic recreation areas and sensitive areas.

- There is more public land and entry level trails cater to the waves of new visitors.
- The region becomes more widely known for its quality and unique outdoor experiences. This places pressure on sensitive areas.
- Conflicts begin to emerge between traditional nature-based industries, such as forestry and agriculture, and the new visitors who don't understand the local values or ethics.

2020 HEADLINE NEWS:

4-H camp graduates first class of early college class, focused on outdoor leadership and skills.



2025 HEADLINE NEWS:

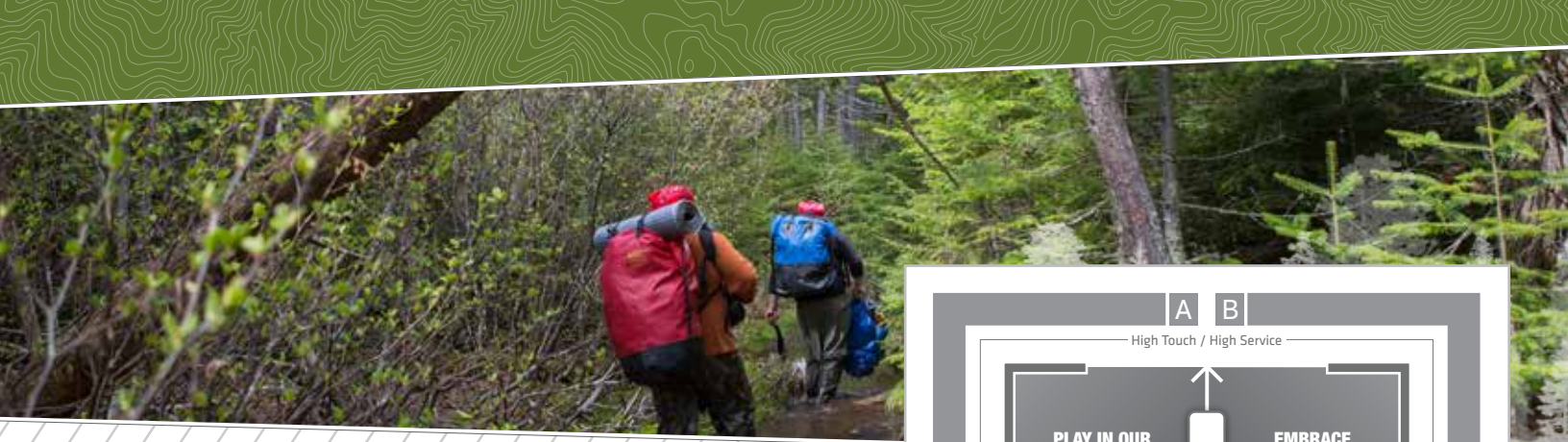
First multi-use, multi-day trail connects Maine and Vermont and if focused on self-organized travelers.



2030 HEADLINE NEWS:

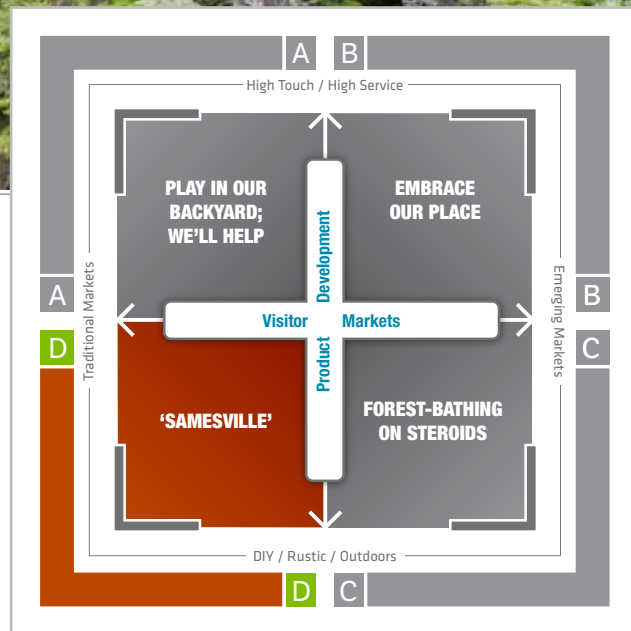
Community forced to develop mitigation plan for managing unintended impacts of uncontrolled tourism growth.





5.4 SCENARIO D – ‘SAMESVILLE’

This future is where the focus remains on traditional markets, and the product remains the DIY rustic type approach. While this feels comfortable and familiar, the region suffers as the focus is on ‘baby-boomers’ designing destination experiences for ‘baby-boomers’. The emerging more youthful travelers go to other destinations, and the resorts look inwards and cater for their own pool of visitors.



Community and Societal

The regional population remains static or even declines. The population ages and youth leave.

- The regional population declines, and visitation plateaus then declines.
- Bethel becomes more like a retirement community; Woodstock – retirees & independent workers; Greenwood – retirement community; and Newry – resort community.
- Youth population declines and there are smaller numbers of kindergarteners.



Economic and Tourism Industry

The tourism industry becomes increasingly focused around resorts and low-cost adventure travel.

- Mountain bikers start visiting more, especially those that are self-organized and take multiday trips.
- There is a reliance on the same ski industry, but a narrowing appeal of destination.
- Slow to little economic growth, and many potential visitors still not reached.



Environmental and Landscape

The forested landscape remains relatively intact, and environmental conditions remain much the same.

- The environment improves in some areas, as tourism pressures reduce.
- Towns have not embraced environmental practices, so energy and waste management remain much the same.
- Impacts of climate change begin to materialize, and some negative impacts on ski fields are being observed.

2020 HEADLINE NEWS:

The region is the premier outdoor mountain destination for domestic travelers.



2025 HEADLINE NEWS:

The tourism industry flatlines, and recreation hotspots move to New Hampshire and Vermont.



2030 HEADLINE NEWS:

More older people and retirees move to the region from cities; but the local youth population plummets.



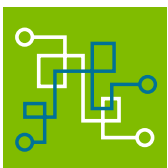
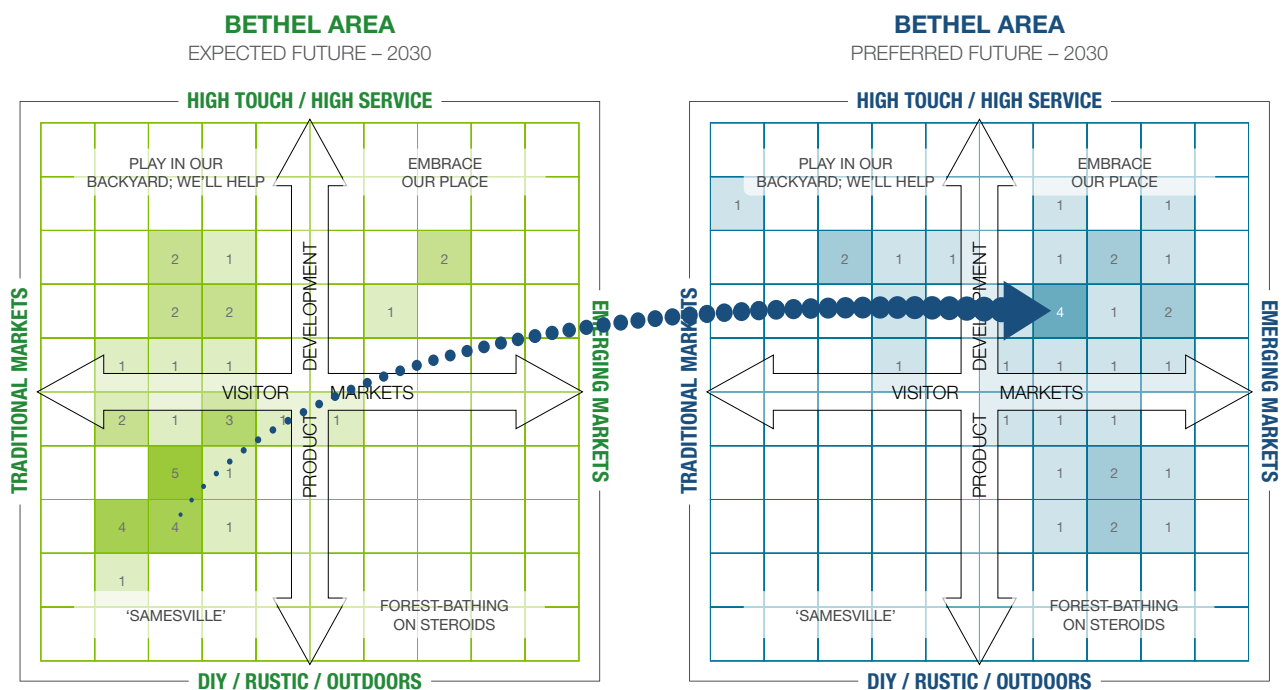


6.0 PLAUSIBILITY MAPPING – EXPECTED AND PREFERRED FUTURES

To explore the notion of expected and preferred futures, a 10 x 10 grid was laid over the scenario matrix, creating 100 different possible versions of the future. As the axes are continuums, this allows a more nuanced view of possible futures.

6.1 EXPECTED AND PREFERRED FUTURES

The expected future is one deemed most likely to happen if there is no change in the current trajectory of the region. Workshop participants mostly believed the region was heading on a trajectory towards the ‘Samesville’ future, making it the expected future. However, when responding to the question about the preferred future, most respondents were in the ‘Embrace Our Place’ scenario. These heat maps help understand the aspirations for the future.



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FUTURE INSIGHTS:

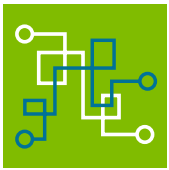
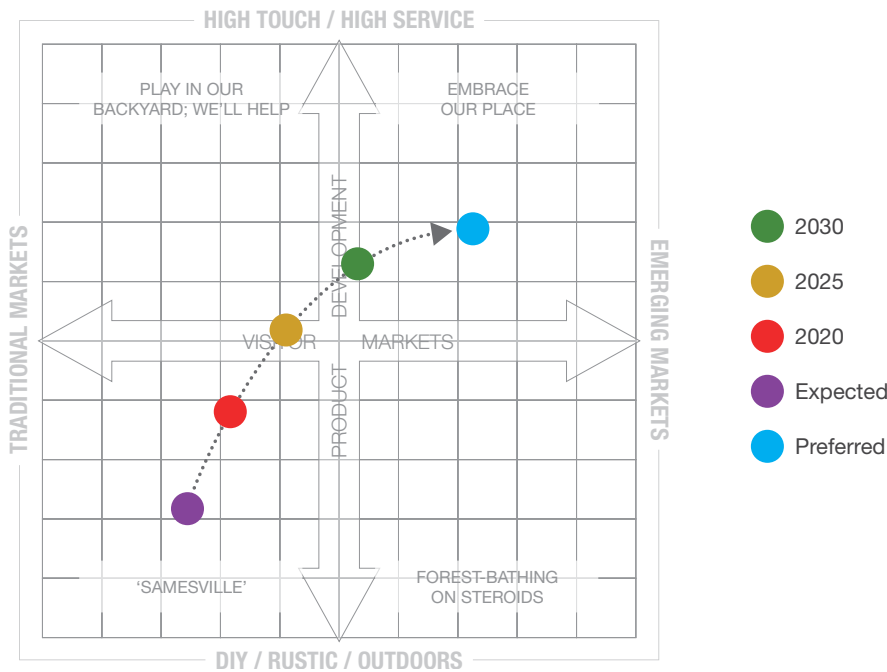
- The concentration of responses around the expected and preferred futures shows a relatively high level of alignment between the stakeholders.
- There is a clear pivot in direction required to achieve the preferred future. This understanding lays the foundation for the discussion about the strategic action plan.



CDA participants saw value in working simultaneously on product development and marketing initiatives. This begins to change the trajectory, and the new products help build appeal for the emerging markets.

6.2 CLOSING THE GAP – GETTING FROM EXPECTED TO PREFERRED FUTURE

Following the exploration of the expected and preferred future, the CDA participants discussed the best trajectory to move from the epicenter of the expected responses to the preferred future response. Working in table groups, the participants mapped out what they believed was a realistic trajectory, and how fast they could make progress. The notion of looking at trajectory and velocity, helps build a realistic sustainable tourism strategic action plan. The table groups were asked where they think the region should aim to be in 2020, 2025 and 2030. The following chart represents the consensus results.



Future**Insight**

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The move towards the 'Embrace Our Place' scenario includes positioning the region as attractive for more affluent emerging markets. In the context of the Mahoosuc region, this especially includes those travelers who have an appreciation of sustainability principles.
- The move towards a high touch / high service type product aims to deliver a greater spend per visitor, adding to the economic impact of tourism in the region.





The Mahoosuc Region has fantastic natural assets, and a range of tourism products packed in a relatively small area. This makes it an ideal destination 'base-camp' and also the potential to create an unforgettable visitor experience.

6.2.1 CREATING HIGH-TOUCH, HIGH SERVICE PRODUCTS

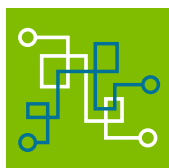
Key to achieving the preferred future and extracting greater economic impact from tourism, is to enhance the spend per visitor. The scenario planning has identified that creating higher touch / higher service products is a key strategic step. This was also considered to be consistent with macro emerging trends and the evolving concept of concierge type packages. The CDA participants brainstormed answers to two questions in this area, and a summary of their thoughts is below.

What type of products does Mahoosuc Region need, or can deliver on?

- Remote working – expand visitors to weekdays
- 3-day weekends
- Delivers the Maine experience
- 'Go green' – eco-tourism / eco-living
- More local product – food, farmers, art
- Outdoor and small-town experience and fun
- Adventure at any level
- Packaged itineraries

What would make the Mahoosuc Region product unique and appealing to emerging markets?

- Living like a local
- Authentic, with space yet close to attractions
- Easy packages
- Well-rounded holistic experience with nature, art, food
- Need stronger main street experience
- Provide role model as a community – healthy living; green; lifestyle
- Community has unified vision and sustainable collaboration
- Need a village mentality
- Cultural mixed with recreational opportunity
- Sense of adventure
- Leverage Minerals and Gem museum



FutureInsight

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The CDA identified that the region offers the potential of a living example of applied sustainable tourism principles. The scale of the region is ideal, as the key stakeholders can readily collaborate and affect real change.
- The potential for the area to offer remote working is intriguing. This could be very appealing to the recreation oriented professional who could work remotely.





Figuring out strategies for how to reach emerging markets is likely to be more challenging than product development. This is because it will require different skills and knowledge of how to reach new types of travelers.

6.2.2 REACHING HIGHER VALUE EMERGING MARKETS

The CDA participants also explored how to reach the higher value emerging market segments. Their responses to key questions is summarized below.

Which higher-value emerging market segment(s) have most potential?

- Balanced Achievers
- Adventure Travel
- Genuine originals
- Hudson valley – Asian; Eastern Europe; UK
- Attract 1st time – they will be back
- Feel-good movement
- Next gen balanced achievers
- Mid-stream – mix of adventure, cultures, food

How do we best reach the higher value emerging markets?

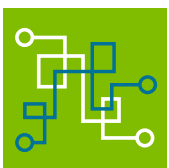
- Local and regional collaboration
- Strategic partnership with businesses
- Collaboration – across the board
- Packaged experiences
- Extract more from existing visitors
- Partnership and relationships
- Product managers – targeted adventure travel companies
- Concierge style companies

What makes Mahoosuc Region most appealing to the potential emerging markets?

- Great outdoors with less crowds
- Good infrastructure
- 4 Season activities; rocks; minerals and meteorites
- Authenticity
- Intersect of landscape / scenery/ outdoor recreation / high quality amenities / lodging
- Easy access to major markets
- Commitment to healthy lifestyles in a mountain town

What is the compelling marketing narrative about the Mahoosuc Region destination?

- Everything in one place
- 4 season destination that's down to earth and out of this world
- Small town, unpretentious – perfect place to be temporary local
- Thriving small town
- Sustainability
- We're the place you want to be; even if you haven't found us yet



FutureInsight

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The biggest challenge for the region will be to reach and engage with emerging generations. The ski resorts offer an excellent collaborative partnership to broaden the understanding of what the region offers.
- Understanding the potential appeal of the region, from a traveler perspective, will be critical. A pitfall would be to look at it just from the 'locals' perspective.





The strategic pillars help organize future actions into key focus areas. These are intended to be the foundational building blocks that support actions aimed at achieving the preferred future call 'Embrace Our Place.'

7.0 STRATEGIC PILLAR DEVELOPMENT

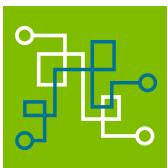
The development of plausible scenarios, and then identifying the preferred future, allows the formulation of the strategic action plan. The CDA participants explored what were the key priority areas for action that would evolve the region. These included:

- Focus on collaboration across region, and especially between the townships.
- Create a strong sustainability focus and explore unique eco-based approaches.
- Build an outdoor recreation focus at a regional scale.
- Create a coherent regional message and support it with better wayfinding.
- Examine new strategic partnerships and co-ordination, especially between public and private entities.

The workshop synthesized the discussions to create five main strategic pillars. These are the foundation focus areas that will allow the preferred future to be realized.



* Working title for preferred future developed during CDA process.



FutureInsight

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The pillars identified for the Mahoosuc Region Sustainable Tourism Plan mirror the dimensions of sustainable tourism, seeking to deliver value and benefit to the local community, as well as enhances visitor experiences.
- A key organizing principle in these pillars is collaboration at a regional scale. It is recognized that a regional approach will deliver greater shared value and benefit.



The CDA participants highlighted that the region has a 'sense of something special'. The clear challenge is to preserve that quality sense of place, and simultaneously support a strong tourism economy.

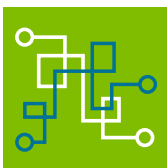
7.1 UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF THE PREFERRED FUTURE – ‘EMBRACE OUR PLACE’

The ‘Embrace Our Place’ scenario was identified as the preferred future. It brings together the concept of a ‘High Touch / High Service’ approach to destination product, and a focus on attracting more visitation from the emerging new markets in the New England and mid-Atlantic regions, and beyond. A key outcome in this scenario is an increase in the spend per visitor and enhancing the economic impact of tourism.

However, throughout the CDA workshops, participants reinforced the important regional commitment to community and environmental sustainability. There is clear concern that the region could be vulnerable to over-visitation, which would ultimately degrade the local community experience and appeal. In articulating the preferred scenario ‘Embrace Our Place’, there is an overarching approach of focusing on sustainability and visitor management. This ensures the region continues to offer high-value visitor experiences, while enhancing local quality of life. This means higher value, more empathetic visitation, with a focus on quality over quantity. The underlying principles include:

- Striving for a balanced year-round economy
- Protecting the authentic character and lifestyle of the region
- Pursuing the development of a dynamic destination that is underpinned by a strong sustainability ethos

The ‘Embrace Our Place’ future has a particular focus on attracting visitors who can build and retain a connection with the region, and who will become partners in ensuring it is a model of sustainable destination management. This visitor profile matches the research done by Maine Office of Tourism, which also identifies the potential appeal of the broader Maine Woods area to the higher spending conscious traveler. These travelers are seeking higher quality outdoor recreation, and unique cultural and community experiences. In this way, the region can leverage the region’s unique confluence of high-quality tourism assets, which are embedded in the vast tracts of natural landscapes.



Future**Insight**

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The Mahoosuc Region Sustainable Tourism Plan targets the concept of sustainable tourism and ‘sustainable travelers’. This approach positions the region well to take advantage of emerging trends and evolution in tourism.
- The focus on emerging new markets in the Mid-Atlantic will help reduce the dependence on the ‘baby boomer’ generation of travelers. There is clear potential to position the region as a preferred destination for emerging generations who are increasingly seeking outdoor recreation adventures.

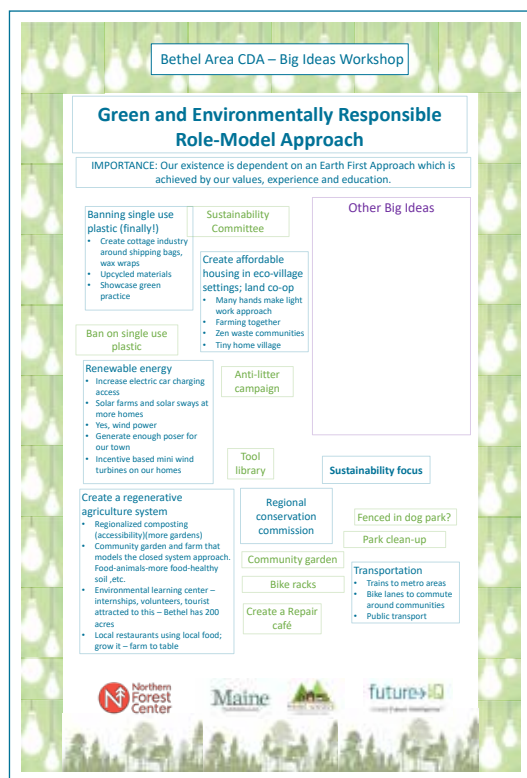




The priority action ideas identified at the Summit helped shape the actions in the Mahoosuc Region Sustainable Tourism Plan. Over 100 local residents participated in the idea generation and prioritization.

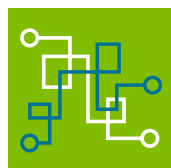
7.2 COMMUNITY TOURISM SUMMIT – STAKEHOLDER INPUT AND PRIORITIZATION

As part of the CDA process, a community tourism summit was held in January 2020. The purpose was to gain community input into ideas and prioritization of the strategic actions. As part of this process, ideas created throughout the CDA were bundled under the draft Strategic Pillars. Ideas that were created during the 'Heart and Soul' project were also included to help integrate community input from different planning efforts.



The agenda for the Community Tourism Summit covered:

- Review of Bethel Area Tourism Destination Academy work
- Global data and tourism trends
- Mahoosuc Region planning and vision for future
- Introduce Strategic Tourism Pillars
- Pillar Discussion
 - Review purpose and desired outcome
 - Review Big Ideas for action and add any additional ideas
 - Prioritization – add your dots on high priority projects to build a sustainable tourism industry
- Report Outs – by Pillar teams and complete survey
- Next Steps – Local Leadership Team



FutureInsight

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The Community Summit generated a number of excellent new ideas and gave a clear sense of priority for actions. In each pillar, 2-3 key action ideas were identified as the top priorities.
- This prioritization exercise helped link the Heart and Soul work with the CDA planning efforts. As such it offers a coordinated set of priorities that address the most important community needs.



The Sustainable Tourism Plan Framework is the outcome of substantial community and stakeholder input, incorporating the views of over 100 local people.

7.3 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Pillars, developed as part of the Mahoosuc Region Sustainable Tourism Plan, create an organizing framework for implementation. The pillars were developed with the CDA participants, and the key initial actions were prioritized at the Community Tourism Summit on 15 January 2020. These actions were subsequently refined in discussions with the Steering Committee in February and March.

Many tourism destination economies often struggle to find a balance between the positive economic contribution of tourism, and the collateral impacts of high visitation, such as congestion and overuse. The Sustainable Tourism Plan Framework does an admirable job of identifying the actions needed to achieve a harmonious balance between resident and visitor quality of experience; and achieve the preferred future 'Embrace Our Place'. This framework represents the collective wisdom and insights of many dedicated and committed stakeholders, who have enough 'street-smarts' to know what will work locally.

MAHOOSUC REGION SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN

Creating a harmonious balance between resident and visitor quality of experience

PILLAR	REGIONAL COLLABORATION	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	WORKFORCE AND HOUSING	ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP	VISITOR EXPERIENCE
PURPOSE	<i>Build a culture of collaboration and inclusion, creating shared leadership and regional solutions</i>	<i>Develop mutually respectful linkages between residents and tourism industry</i>	<i>Create unique tourism workforce and housing solutions that enhance local liveability</i>	<i>Implement and demonstrate environmentally responsible approaches</i>	<i>Curate unique visitor experiences based on sustainable tourism principles</i>
KEY INITIAL ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Townships collaborate to find shared solutions for infrastructure, waste management and resource management. Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive community. Key stakeholders work together to develop regional approach to implementing sustainable tourism plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and educate visitors and residents about the broad range of economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism in the Mahoosuc Region. Develop creative ways that visitors can contribute to the viability and sustainability of the local economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create affordable housing options for local tourism related workforce, that includes options for rentals and pathways to ownership. Create liveable wage jobs and enhanced community liveability with concepts like multimodal transit, walkable communities and recreation for youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and implement innovative environmentally responsible approaches, such as local regenerative agriculture and food systems connected to tourism. Embrace and focus on renewable energy and waste systems to lead on sustainable environmental solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement wayfinding that creates a 'sense of arrival' and reflects the rugged sense of individualism and subtle sophistication. Pivot destination marketing to connect with the emerging 'sustainable travellers', and communicate shared responsibilities between visitors and residents.



7.3.1 REGIONAL COLLABORATION

During the CDA, there was considerable discussion about the importance of a regional approach, building a local culture of collaboration and focusing on shared solutions. At a strategic level, this can help tackle the big issues, and coordinate efforts on complex shared challenges. At a tactical level, it was identified that regional collaboration could help deliver quick outcomes such as:

- Improved access to capital
- Eliminating or reducing costs of duplicated efforts
- Help fund shared priorities
- More accessible information across the region

PURPOSE:

Build a culture of collaboration and inclusion, creating shared leadership and regional solutions.

A very promising outcome from the CDA process was the Town Managers convening to explore areas of possible fruitful collaboration. This was followed by a joint meeting of Township Selectmen, where they explored practical collaboration steps such as shared waste management. These steps lay the foundation for potentially larger collaborative steps.

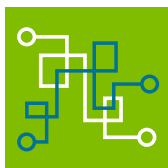
Immediate Key Strategic Actions:

The CDA workshops and the Community Tourism Summit identified priority immediate strategic actions, including:

- Townships collaborate to find suitable shared solutions for infrastructure, waste management and resource management.
- Cultivate a welcoming and inclusive community.
- Key stakeholders convene and work together to develop a regional approach to implementing a sustainable tourism plan.

Other community ideas on collaboration included:

- Identifying what networks and relationships already exist.
- Four towns consciously develop 5 to 10-year plans, including a comprehensive economic plan officially adopted by each town. Plans to focus on necessary infrastructure – sewer, waste, broadband, parking and transportation.
- Create a clearinghouse of information, which could build transparency across the region and help educate the regional community on the benefits of new tourism initiatives.



FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The Mahoosuc Region, and its communities are not large or affluent enough to waste resources. Finding ways to collaborate and create efficiencies is good common sense. Initial steps by the Selectmen and Town Managers is to be applauded.
- Future collaboration will be required to tackle the bigger issue and regional approaches. This will be required to make real headway on implementing sustainable tourism and regional messaging and branding.

Future**Insight**



7.3.2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Like all destination communities, the Mahoosuc Region has a symbiotic relationship with tourism visitation, as they mutually benefit from each other. Visitors get to experience the natural amenities; and the local communities derive economic stimulus. However, at the human level, there can be friction between visitors and locals in such destinations. This is particularly pronounced in situations where there is over-tourism which leads to 'resident alienation' and push back against the tourism sector.

While the Mahoosuc Region is not yet at a point of over-tourism, it is important to build a mutually respectful relationship between the local communities and the visitation industry. This is a particularly important aspect of sustainable tourism principles, where residents' needs are respected, and they appreciate the benefits they derive in the long term. However, in many rural destinations, the true economic impact of tourism is not well appreciated and is often underestimated. Closing this gap in understanding and appreciation will be important to create a healthy destination and community.

Immediate Key Strategic Actions:

The CDA workshops and the Community Tourism Summit identified priority immediate strategic actions, including:

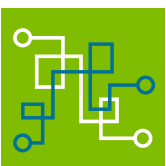
- Document and educate visitors and residents about the broad range of economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism in the Mahoosuc Region.
- Develop creative ways that visitors can contribute to the viability and sustainability of the local economy.

Other community ideas on community engagement included:

- Undertake a destination-based economy impact survey and promote findings to help build community support and understanding.
- Engage the younger generations and enlist articulate young people (less than 20 years old) who are involved in the tourism industry as local spokespeople.
- Create the connection to build respect for the producers in the region. Local food systems and understanding the positive impact of natural resource industries can help in this ambition.
- Demonstrate and return direct benefit to the community amenities, such as recreation space for young people and collaboration with schools.

PURPOSE:

Develop mutually respectful linkages between residents and tourism industry.



FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- Building linkages between traditional community leaders and the tourism industry will be critical for long term support. The Community Tourism Summit in January 2020 was an excellent initiative to bring local leaders together and allow their direct input into the planning process.
- Showcasing the region's industries and their history is an important part of building understanding and respect.

Future**Insight**



7.3.3 WORKFORCE AND HOUSING

Workforce and housing challenges are endemic in seasonal tourism economies. There is almost nothing simple or easy in solving these systemic issues. However, the need is real in the Mahoosuc Region and has to be tackled. There are a series of cascading impacts that include issues of young families looking for housing and schools; competition for accommodation between workers and visitors; and the impact of the seasonal ebbs and flows of work and workers.

Destinations that are interested in sustainability focus on trying to create year-round living jobs and are looking at creative solutions to housing and accommodation needs. During the CDA, stakeholders also expressed the desire and potential for tourism industry workers to become long-term members of the community, especially if there were viable pathways to house or accommodation ownership. The CDA stakeholders took this a step further and explored how the community infrastructure could transform to enhance liveability.

Immediate Key Strategic Actions:

The CDA workshops and the Community Tourism Summit identified priority immediate strategic actions, including:

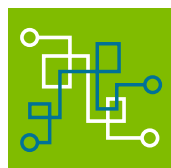
- Create affordable housing options for local tourism related workforce that include options for rentals and pathways to ownership.
- Create living-wage year-round jobs and enhance community liveability with concepts like multimodal transit, walkable communities and recreation for youth.

Other community ideas on workforce and housing included:

- Use existing buildings for housing and update to environmentally sustainable workforce housing.
- Look at outlying regions as bedroom communities for multiple units and offer a broader choice of housing.
- Explore the integration of tourism vocational training into the local educational system.
- Support affordable daycare to help recruit and retain a local tourism industry workforce.

PURPOSE:

Create unique tourism workforce and housing solutions that enhance local liveability.



Future**Insight**

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- See-sawing of workforce in seasonal tourism destinations places significant stress on businesses and communities. Finding creative ways to level this pattern helps build community sustainability over time.
- Creative solutions to workforce housing and building pathways to ownership is challenging. However, it is an issue well suited to innovative public – private – philanthropic solutions. Placed under the banner of sustainable community development, this could be appealing to some funders seeking novel approaches.





7.3.4 ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP

A feature of the CDA discussions was the deep commitment local stakeholders had to environmental leadership and the application of sustainable practices. While this might not look like a tourism priority at first glance, it becomes very relevant when factoring in sustainable tourism principles. This creates an intriguing intersect between the emerging global sustainable tourism conversation, and the Mahoosuc Region.

There appears to be very real potential to position this region as a leader in the exploration and implementation of Sustainable Tourism principles. This would potentially create a whole new dimension to the destination experience. This is made possible and underpinned by the genuine local desire to see environmentally sustainable practices applied at scale in the region.

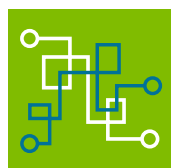
Immediate Key Strategic Actions:

The CDA workshops and the Community Tourism Summit identified immediate priority strategic actions, including:

- Identify and implement innovative environmentally responsible approaches, such as local regenerative agriculture and food systems connected to tourism.
- Embrace and focus on renewable energy and waste systems to lead on sustainable environmental solutions.

Other community ideas on environmental leadership included:

- Community gardens and farms that model the closed system approach and create local food systems connected to local restaurants.
- Environmental learning center – where internships, volunteers and tourist can work together on environmental projects.
- Lead on initiatives such as banning single use plastic and focus on upcycled materials. Build local efforts to reduce, recycle and reuse.
- Explore sustainable transportation models and new housing concepts, including electric vehicles and sustainable building practices.



Future**Insight**

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- Embracing environmental leadership could prove to be a game-changer for the sustainable tourism proposition in the Mahoosuc Region. Many regions are adapting environmentally friendly practices, but less are willing to display true leadership. This could be a unique proposition for the region.
- As the impacts of climate change deepen in the world, counties will begin to tackle impacts and mitigation with more urgency. Those destinations that have embraced environmental leadership will resonate more with astute travelers, and proactively take care of their own location.

PURPOSE:

Implement and demonstrate environmentally responsible approaches.





7.3.5 VISITOR EXPERIENCE

One of the underlying principles in the Strategic Tourism Plan is expanding tourism to year-round visitation. In addition, there is a focus on curating visitor experiences based on sustainable tourism principles. This places an important lens on the notion of overall visitor experience. This experience is multi-dimensional, and includes everything from travel booking, first impressions on arrival, interactions during visit, and follow-up connection.

Authenticity is critical, as the destination 'promise' needs to match the experience. At a product level, the region has an extraordinary recreation base, comprised of world class ski resorts, golf courses, and a range of recreation and walking trails. To make the total picture, the quality needs to extend to the 'main street experience', wayfinding and interactions with locals.

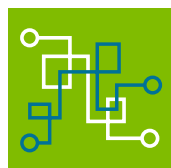
Immediate Key Strategic Actions:

The CDA workshops and the Community Tourism Summit identified priority immediate strategic actions, including:

- Implement wayfinding that creates a 'sense of arrival' and reflects the region's innate rugged sense of individualism and subtle sophistication.
- Pivot destination marketing to connect with the emerging 'sustainable travellers' and communicate shared responsibilities between visitors and residents.

Other community ideas on visitor experience included:

- Focused product identification and development; getting inventory ready for sustainable tourism. Include recreation focus on regional scale and events like music gatherings and festivals.
- Identify an experienced curator who can help aggregate product and create unique itineraries.
- Implement a guest and visitor follow up system, for data collection in order to identify visitor interests, amplify offerings, develop new experiences and expand existing experiences.
- Analyze the destination experience from a first-time visitor perspective.



FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The Mahoosuc Region has a truly remarkable constellation of recreation assets. This provides a fantastic base for the destination package, but it also needs to be reflected in the total visitor experience.
- There is an immediate potential to pivot destination marketing to position the region as a leader in sustainable tourism. This offers the potential to add new vigor and value to destination messaging.

Future**Insight**



PURPOSE:

Curate unique visitor experiences based on sustainable tourism principles.





The prioritization of the Strategic Pillars at the Community Tourism Summit validates the work done by CDA participants and suggests well-crafted priority areas.

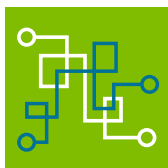
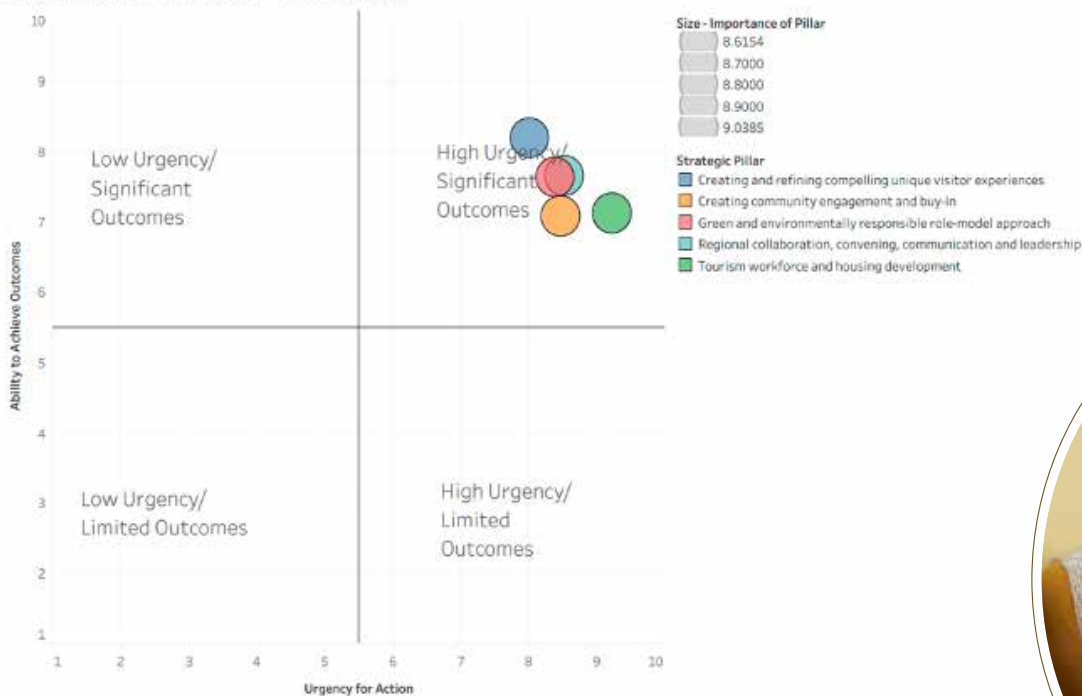
7.4 INITIAL PRIORITIZATION OF STRATEGIC PILLARS

At the Community Tourism Summit, participants were asked at the end of the input session to rate each pillar. The questions asked included:

- Urgency of action
- Ability to achieve outcomes.

The rating was done to prioritize actions. All the pillars were rated 'highly to critically urgent', and it was viewed there was a significant ability to achieve meaningful and significant outcomes. This supports the outcomes of the CDA and gives a mandate to the local Steering Committee to act on implementation steps.

Scenario Matrix Validation - Average Data



FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The pillars were all rated at a similar level of urgency and ability to achieve significant outcomes. The underlying data suggests that people not involved in the tourism industry see the urgency as even greater.
- All the pillars were seen as similarly important, and all were seen as significantly important.

FutureInsight

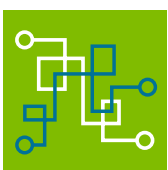


The work started at the CDA will be carried forward by the local Steering Committee. A key focus will be continuing to build collaboration and community buy-in.

8.0 NEXT STEPS – FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Following the Community Tourism Summit, the local Steering Committee has met several times and established a series of next step actions. These include:

- **Focus on Sustainable Tourism** – the overarching focus of the Steering Committee is to implement the Mahoosuc Region Sustainable Tourism Plan. The judgement of the CDA stakeholders, the Community Tourism Summit participants and Steering Committee, is that a sustainable tourism approach offers great potential, and the region is uniquely poised to capitalize of this concept.
- **Create a Sustainability Pledge** – a priority will be to develop a Mahoosuc Region Sustainability Pledge that can encapsulate the concept and opportunity of sustainable tourism for the region; and share that pledge with visitors and residents. This provides a vehicle for alignment of values and aspirations for the destination.
- **Establish Pillar Teams** – teams are being formed for each Pillar topic, to assess and implement actions that have been identified.



FutureInsight

FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- The concept of creating a sustainability pledge has great merit, and is a potential defining 'point of difference' for the Mahoosuc Region.
- The focus on sustainable tourism is an exciting priority. This is an emerging trend in outdoor recreation destinations, and could be a new model to help guide tourism dependent economies.



Outdoor recreation in locations like the Mahoosuc Region might actually see an increase in domestic visitation after regional and local travel restrictions are lifted.

9.0 POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19

The global pandemic associated with the Coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged at the very end of this CDA planning process.

While the trajectory and ultimate impact is still playing out, it is clear the global tourism industry and economy will face significant disruption and challenges. The direct and immediate impact on the Mahoosuc Region will be similar to other heavily tourism dependent economies, which will include steep declines in visitor numbers, loss of revenue, temporary business closure and increased unemployment. This will create disruption and hardship for significant sections of the community and local industry. Business support programs are still being developed and made available, and appear to offer immediate support, well suited to tourism businesses.

In the medium term, as restrictions on movement are lifted, this may see a return to moderate to heavy visitation, especially this summer. People are likely to seek outdoor relief from stay-at-home policies and confinement in urban settings. The likely reduction of air travel will drive the recreation-oriented urban populations to nearby regional vacation locations. The Mahoosuc Region is in immediate proximity to such significant urban populations.

In the longer term, the underlying trends are likely to emerge, and the challenges of over visitation will return. The region is well placed to use this 'pause' moment to prepare for implementation of some of the 2020 projects and initiatives that have been planned.





10.0 FOR MORE INFORMATION

For information about the Community Destination Academy process please contact:

Mike Wilson

Northern Forest Center

Email: mwilson@northernforest.org

Donna Moreland

Maine Office of Tourism

Email: donna.moreland@maine.gov

For more information about the Mahoosuc Region Sustainable Tourism Plan, please contact:

Jessie Perkins, Executive Director

Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce

Email: jessie@bethelmaine.com

Robin Zinchuk, Outreach Director

Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce

Email: robin@bethelmaine.com

Other useful resources:

To access background reports on The Future of Tourism in the Maine Woods, please visit:

<https://future-iq.com/project/maine-woods-usa-2018/>



FUTURE OF TOURISM –
THE MAINE WOODS
Executive Summary



FUTURE OF TOURISM –
THE MAINE WOODS
Part 1: Emerging Trends

November 2018



FUTURE OF TOURISM –
THE MAINE WOODS
Part 2: Potential Scenarios

December 2018



