

NORTHERN FOREST RURAL TOURISM ACADEMY

VERMONT • NEW HAMPSHIRE • 2021-22

Across the Northern Forest region, pent up demand for travel and outdoor recreation is creating a sudden boost in visitation. This is triggering new perspectives about tourism and its future impact across the region. While there is opportunity for vital business innovation and growth, this new level of visitation puts pressure on the region's natural resources and community infrastructure.

The Rural Tourism Academy is designed to help communities plan how to best engage with tourism and recreation economies, and how to manage and shape local impact.

ABOUT THE RURAL TOURISM ACADEMY (RTA)

The Northern Forest Center has created the Rural Tourism Academy (RTA), as a fast-track planning-to-implementation process to provide direct technical and financial assistance to help rural communities which have a strong tourism potential or exposure. In particular, the RTA is being offered to rural destination areas that are wrestling with the challenges of growing and managing tourism; and are keen to embrace a destination management focus by building local collaborative approaches. The RTA program is built on a recognition that simultaneously growing the tourism sector, while managing it for sustainability, requires cooperation among multiple stakeholder groups such as businesses, non-profit groups, and municipal entities.



PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The RTA offers communities a hands-on practical planning process to collectively identify and implement actions. It brings local stakeholders together to explore shared vision; explore and apply best practice destination impact management models; and develop unique local solutions that will embed tourism in ways that sustain local businesses, natural resources, and culture. The program also has dedicated funds to help communities implement their priority projects.

PROVEN TRACK RECORD

The RTA has been built on the 'tried and tested' rural destination development program developed by the Northern Forest Center and Maine Office of Tourism. This program has delivered practical and strategic outcomes in Maine rural destination communities, including:

- **Rangeley Lakes** – created new regional way-finding initiative and brand positioning
- **Moosehead Lake** – rebuilt a lakeside boardwalk and instituted cooperative planning and marketing of community events
- **Bethel Area** – created the 'Mahoosuc Way' sustainable tourism initiative built on pillars of regional collaboration, community engagement, experience development, environmental leadership, and workforce and housing development



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Joe Short Vice President, Northern Forest Center
jshort@northernforest.org • www.northernforest.org



RURAL TOURISM ACADEMY PROCESS

The Northern Forest Rural Tourism Academy was launched in March 2021. The initial workshop phase was held in May 2021, bringing together (virtually) regional stakeholders to explore future possible trajectories for tourism management across the region.

Communities across northern New Hampshire and Vermont's Northeast Kingdom are now being offered the opportunity to join Phase 2 – Local Community Planning. This is a unique opportunity to bring local stakeholders together in a proven planning approach, to develop local vision and action plans for sustainable tourism and destination impact management.

PHASE 1 Exploring Future Trajectory

*Regional Stakeholder
Virtual Workshops
May 2021*



EXPLORE FUTURE TRENDS & SCENARIOS

- Exploring emerging trends shaping the tourism industry
- Learning from sustainable tourism case studies across the globe
- Investigating potential futures and implications
- Create preferred regional future scenario for managing tourism impact

LOCAL COMMUNITY -BASED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLANNING WORKSHOPS

- Explore local implications of global and national trends
- Create local shared vision and aspiration for future of tourism and recreation
- Craft local strategic action plans targeted toward building sustainable outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism
- Develop local implementation plans, priorities and catalyst projects

The RTA also includes dedicated funds that will be applied to directly help communities implement their key priority projects. This funding aims to accelerate implementation and action.

PHASE 2 Local Community Planning

*Local In-person Community
Planning Workshops
Nov 2021 and Feb / Mar 2022*

PHASE 3 Regional Learning Laboratory

*Regional Convening and
Learning Laboratory
Spring 2022*

REGIONAL COMMUNITIES CONVENING AND SHARED LEARNING LABORATORY

- Communities convene to share their plans and projects
- Exploration of best-practice for implementation
- The Learning Laboratory will connect communities to additional resources to implement their projects



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Joe Short *Vice President*, Northern Forest Center
jshort@northernforest.org • www.northernforest.org

