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Report for the Foothills Model Forest

Ecotourism in the Foothills Models Forest

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the biggest global economic activities. In 1997, the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) estimated approximately 595 million international travelers (The Ecotourism Society, 1998). Spending by these tourists was estimated at more than US\$425 billion. Tourist arrivals are predicted to grow by an average 4.3% a year over the next two decades, while receipts from international tourism will climb by 6.7% a year (The Ecotourism Society 1998). In Alberta, annual revenue generated by tourism activities was estimated at \$3 billion in 1997 and projected to be \$3.5 billion in 1998 (Berezowski, 1998).

Accompanying this growth is the different types of tourism. There are many different forms of tourism such as adventure tourism, mass tourism, nature tourism, and ecotourism. Ecotourism (which has also been characterised as “alternative tourism”) is a growing phenomenon and has recently become the forefront of many tour operators, aid agencies and government officials. Such tourism development differentiates itself from mass tourism in several ways. Unlike mass tourism, ecotourism is small in scale, locally controlled and undisruptive to the local community (Weaver *et al*, 1995).

Ecotourism is an amalgam of interests arising out of environmental, economic and social concerns. It incorporates both a strong commitment to nature and a sense of social responsibility. That responsibility also extends to the sensitivity of the travellers (Western 1998). However, a precise definition of the term or concept remains to be clarified. Such a definition is needed if planners want to separate ecotourism experiences from other tourism experiences, thereby “permitting the significance of the sector to be assessed in terms of positive and negative cultural, environmental and economic impacts” (Blamey, 1997; p.109). Operators promoting ecotourism products also need to know their target markets. Consumer profiles enable products to be targeted at those segments likely to bring greatest returns. In short, understanding the concept and the issues surrounding ecotourism is essential for successful ecotourism planning, development, marketing and management.

Ecotourism development has been well established in the developing countries (de Groot 1983;

Dearden 1989; Boo 1990; Fennell and Eagles 1990). Destinations such as Costa Rica, Indonesia and the Galapagos Islands have become synonymous with ecotourism. However, it is now being applied in small communities in developed countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Canada. Much of this growing interest in ecotourism in developed countries can be attributed to its economic potential and at the same time to its links with the sustainable development banner.

Why is Ecotourism attractive?

There are several reasons why ecotourism has attracted local and national governments, commercial operators, and conservationists in Canada. First, ecotourism provides an incentive to expand protected areas and for private landowners to conserve their lands. It provides an alternative source of income for local communities who might otherwise use the land in a manner that is not ecologically sustainable. This appeals to both conservationists as well as community leaders. Second, ecotourism's emphasis on local resources, employment, and tendency to operate in peripheral regions make it attractive to small rural communities where economic conditions are often depressed and high rates of underemployment and outmigration are chronic (Weaver *et al.*, 1995). Furthermore, its stress on local ownership implies fewer leakages from the economy¹. It also requires less development, less investment and involves less cultural and environmental disruptions than other forms of tourism. However, it does require services and infrastructure to make it economically beneficial (Boo 1990). It can also promote beneficial linkages within a diverse, integrated economy. Finally, ecotourists tend to stay longer, spend more per day than the average tourist and seek out local goods and services for consumption (Ecotourism Society 1998). In short, ecotourism is about exploiting tourism's potential for conservation and development and about averting its negative impact on ecology, culture and aesthetics making it appealing to different groups.

1.2 *Problems of Ecotourism Development*

Despite ecotourism's social, economic and environmental advantages, it can nonetheless create many problems. The downside of ecotourism activities is that they take place in natural areas, many of which are easily damaged. Therefore, if capacity is exceeded or management of the resource is inadequate,

¹ Though in reality, big national or international companies set up in the communities and hence take away much of the income generated.

then ecotourism can become a problem and can cause more harm than good. If managed and planned carefully it is considered to be a more environmentally friendly type of tourism development. Bowermaster (1994) cites several negative impacts of ecotourism such as fragile coral reefs being threatened by too many divers, cultural and archaeological ruins crumbling due to excessive number of visitors. Furthermore, this damage can occur in situations where tour operators put their own short term interests ahead of those of the natural environment and local communities. Additionally, some tourism operators misuse the term ecotourism in order to cash in on current consumer interest in this area.

Another potential problem of ecotourism is that expectations of ecotourists may conflict with the reality of local lifestyles and priorities which could include hunting of wildlife or other consumptive activities not held by the ecotourist philosophy (Weaver *et al* 1995). For example, the great flocks of snow geese and other migratory fowl which attract ecotourists to the prairies are perceived as pests by some farmers. Furthermore, what ecotourists may view as unspoilt and “authentic” may be seen by locals to be underdevelopment.

1.3 *Objective of Report and Outline*

Many researchers agree that ecotourism has been interchangeably used for other types of tourism and that it is increasingly being used without clear understanding of the concepts and the criteria that distinguish it from any other kind of tourism and development (Scace 1995; Bottrill and Pearce 1995; Thomlinson and Getz 1996). The aim of this report is to briefly explore and examine the concept of ecotourism and attempt to clarify what it means. To do so we have divided this report into two major parts. In the first part the expert or academic concept and definition of ecotourism is explored. A history of ecotourism is briefly presented. Then a survey of the various definitions that have arisen in the literature is undertaken. This will illustrate the different perspectives that can be taken. Difficulties in formulating a concise and precise ecotourism definition are then examined. This is then followed by an examination of ecotourism as a product and segment. This involves a review of the ecotourism market and profile. Criteria for successful ecotourism based on the definitions surveyed are put forward. Finally, applications and practices of ecotourism are examined with emphasis on Canadian ecotourism studies. The second part of this report explores the concept of ecotourism at the local level. To do so we investigated the different perceptions of ecotourism from affected stakeholders in the

Foothills Model Forest. We interviewed 17 people in Hinton and Jasper who represented a variety of different interests. These included town planners, tourism operators, forest industry planners, coal industry reclamation officers, environmentalists, and local business people. First, we asked them for their definition of ecotourism. Then we ascertained potential conflicts and benefits associated with ecotourism in the FMF.

2.0 Literature Review and Defining Ecotourism

2.1 History of Ecotourism

Historically, one has been led to believe that the ecotourism term was coined in 1983 by Ceballos-Lascurain (Canadian Environmental Advisory Council 1992). However, some have contended that it first appeared as early as 1978 (Ashton and Ashton 1993). According to Ashton and Ashton (1993), Higgins (1996) and Fennell (1997), the term was first mentioned in the literature by Kenton Miller in 1978. Other early references to ecotourism include the book by Mathieson and Wall (1982) on tourism impacts and Romeril (1985). According to Fennell (1997), Hetzer (1965) was likely to first coin the phrase ecotourism. Fennell (1997) goes on to say that Ceballos-Lascurain (1983) should be mentioned as first coining the term "under the guise of industry connotation, which represents the goods and services and infrastructure required to support the ecotourism industry" (Fennell 1997, p. 234). Card and Vogelsong (1994) say that ecotourism originated within the responsible tourism movement of the 1970s and was a reaction to cultural spoliation, economic incongruities and the destruction of natural resources. Environmental tourism in the 1980s then led to ecotourism (Boo, 1990). Boo (1990) cites two global trends that furthered interest in ecotourism. First, increasing demand for touring ecologically protected areas and second, growing awareness of the need to integrate natural resource conservation with economic needs of rural populations who rely on these resources.

2.2 *Literature Review*

The ecotourism literature is currently so dense that several attempts have been made to disentangle the multitudes of issues and debates into distinct viewpoints. Botrill and Pearce (1997) classify the literature into perspectives which they feel represent the three major ecotourism players: 1) Participant, 2) Operator (supplier), and 3) resource manager (planning and protection - conservation) perspectives.

Literature on the participant perspective views ecotourism to be a product or market segment. Consequently, this would examine the motives, education and behaviour and participation of ecotourists while operator and manager perspectives would focus more on guidelines with emphasis on environmental impacts for the resource manager perspective. By contrast, Blamey (1997) classifies the literature into normative, descriptive and supplier orientated perspectives. Thomilson and Getz (1994) discusses two general perspectives: ecotourism as a resource management philosophy (based on the principles of sustainable development) and viewing ecotourism as a destination development marketing strategy. Similarly Wight (1994) finds these two prevailing views to exist in the ecotourism literature: one uses the public interest in the environment to market it as a product and the second uses the same interest to conserve the resources upon which this product is based. These two perspectives are also supported by Ziffer (1989) who argues that the marketing language of travel needs to be disentangled from the conservation and development concepts of ecotourism. Finally, in their attempt to make the literature clearer and more manageable, Fennell and Eagles (1997) put forward a conceptual framework. They divided the literature into issues or concepts dealing with visitors (demand) and service industry (supplier). The former deals with marketing, visitor management and visitor attitudes while the supply side deals with tour operation, resource management and community development. These perspectives are not necessarily exclusive and in many cases overlap but they do provide a way of separating the abundance of literature on ecotourism.

The ecotourism literature can be said to have evolved. As the potential economic benefits of ecotourism are being realised, tour operators and marketing officials are increasingly using the concept to market destinations. Consequently, it can be said that ecotourism has evolved from a set of principles focusing on ethics and conservation to becoming a product and market segment. Literature related to the latter are thus more focused on the demand characteristics of ecotourism, with empirical modelling and ecotourist profiles gaining increasing popularity among researchers (Palacio and McCool 1997; The Ecotourism Society 1998).

In conclusion, the ecotourism phenomenon has attracted many parties: environmentalists, tour operators, small community planners, aid agencies and tourists. This has resulted in literature focusing on issues important to these different players. Hence, ecotourism definitions will invariably vary depending on the perspective being taken. This implies that a precise and consistent definition of ecotourism is most likely to be unattainable.

2.3 *The Definition*

There is currently a wide range of ecotourism definitions in the literature and depending on which perspective is being taken, different issues and concerns will be emphasised. As a result, definitions will differ accordingly. For example, in the “product” perspective, sustainability aspects of ecotourism are not usually addressed. More specifically, the characteristics of ecological, socio-cultural integrity, responsibility and sustainability may not be attached to the product (Cater 1994). Literature using this perspective is often written with profit as a goal and not protection and conservation. Furthermore, it exploits the natural environment and can lead to higher volume and development and increase economic benefits. Such definition differs greatly from the environmental and resource management points of view where the issues of scale and carrying capacity are often emphasised. However, even within the same perspective, definitions will differ. For example, according to Lindberg and Hawkins (1993), scale does not matter but rather impact. Thus, for these authors, it is impact which should be addressed in the definition and characteristic of the ecotourism concept. However, Boo (1990) feels that ecotourism is about both small scale tourism development and low impact.

Table 3 presents some of the most commonly used definitions in the ecotourism literature. The definitions vary in restrictiveness, depth and perspective being taken. For example, Boo (1990) uses a simple definition which equates ecotourism with nature tourism. This has also been used in similar fashion by other authors (Stewart and Sekarjagrarim 1997; Fennel and Eagles 1990). Narrower definitions include those by the Australian National Ecotourism Strategy (Commonwealth Department of Tourism, 1994) which requires ecotourism to be nature-based, environmentally-educated and sustainably-managed and Buckley (1994) which adds an additional dimension or component of conservation supporting. Less restrictive definitions normally ignore one of Buckley’s four or the Australian National Ecotourism Strategy’s three dimensions.

However, the two most commonly cited definitions used to describe the ecotourism concept are those by The Ecotourism Society² (1993) which emphasises natural and cultural sustainability and Ceballos-Lascurain’s (1987) definition which emphasises the tourist’s learning experience and resulting development of a conservation ethic that should follow from ecotourism. However, the original descriptive definition of Ceballos-Lascurain (1987) appears to have evolved into largely a normative concept (Blamey 1997). Ceballos-Lascurain (1989) also defines ecotourism to be a subset of nature tourism. He distinguishes ecotourism from other types of nature tourism by its sustainable use of natural resources and the social and host elements. This is reinforced by Ziffer (1989; p.6) who says

²TES’s definition was later shorted to “responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people”

“nature tourism is not necessarily ecologically sound... Ecotourism will always refer to the goal of well-managed and constructive nature-tourism”. Ziffer (1989) also believes that successful ecotourism can only take place in protected areas. Similarly, Tisdell (1996) distinguishes between “environmentally sensitive tourism” and “environmentally dependent tourism” where the former refers to ecotourism and the latter might come under the umbrella of “nature based tourism”. Debates are still ongoing as to whether all tourism that is environmentally friendly can be considered ecotourism or only those which makes a positive contribution to the cultural or natural environment. Recently, the Canadian Environmental Advisory Council (Scace *et al*, 1992) proposed a consensus-orientated Canadian definition which incorporates environmental and conservation ethics. It is this definition that appears to be cited in many Canadian based ecotourism studies and is being implemented by local governments.

Table 3: Definitions of Ecotourism found in the Literature

Kutay (1989)	<i>Ecotourism is now seen as a model of development in which natural areas are planned as part of the tourism base and biological resources are clearly linked to social economic sectors. This focuses on the vital role of the host country or community.</i>
Ceballos-Lascurain (1989)*	<i>Travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural manifestations found in these areas</i>
Fennel and Eagles (1990)	The authors suggest that the local community, resource management and tour operators are necessary components of an ecotourism development model. This perspective is most explicit about the merger between conservation and tourism
Ziffer (1990)	<i>Goal of ecotourism development would be to attract visitors to natural areas and use the revenue to fund local conservation and economic development</i>
Boo (1991)*	<i>Ecotourism is synonymous with nature tourism. It is nonconsumptive recreation (bird watching, whale watching, wildflower photography.</i>
Boeger (1991)	<i>...environmentally sound tourism which respects the dignity and diversity of other cultures as well as the earth's renewable resources</i>
The Ecotourism Association of Australia (1992)	<i>Ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding , appreciation and conservation</i>

Norris (1992)	The author argues that tourism is not “eco” unless it “clearly integrates both protection of resources with provision of local economic benefits”.
Scace et al (1992) (Canadian Environmental Advisory Council)	<i>Ecotourism is an enlightening nature travel experience that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem while respecting the integrity of host communities.</i>
The Ecotourism Society (TES) (1993) *	<i>.. purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people</i>
Australian National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) (1994)	<i>Ecotourism is nature based tourism that involves education, interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable</i>
Buckley (1994)	For Buckley, ecotourism has four components. It is nature-based, educated, sustainable managed and conservation-supporting”
Eagles (1994)	Says that ecotourism is a niche market of sustainable tourism. It is one of four nonconsumptive form of sustainable tourism. It involves travel for the discovery of and learning about wild natural environments. It has a strong focus on learning and discovering nature.
Tickell (1994)	<i>Travel to enjoy the world’s amazing diversity of natural life and human culture without causing damage to either...</i>
Blamey (1997)	<i>An ecotourism experience is one in which an individual travels to what he/she considers to be relatively undisturbed natural area and is more than 40km from home, the primary intention being to study, admire or appreciate the scenery and wild plants and animals as well as existing cultural manifestations found in the area</i>

* Most commonly cited definitions in the literature.

2.4 Problems in Defining Ecotourism

There are a number of factors that make defining of ecotourism difficult in research. Difficulties primarily arise due to the multidimensional nature of the definitions and the fact that each dimension (eg. sustainability or education) represents a continuum of possibilities (Blamey 1997). For example, for the nature component, questions arise as to what constitutes a nature experience. Would a drive through a forested area or tours on reclaimed mine sites constitute as a nature experience? For bus tours, must the bus driver pull over? Does walking through a regenerated forest qualify as a nature experience? With respect to the educational component, difficulty arises in establishing whether a particular nature-based activity involves significant “education”. Is education defined by a trained guide or can one educate themselves on their own? Does education have to be intended? Finally, with

the ecological sustainability component, how does one define low environmental impact? Secondly, the literature is dense with a multitude of definitions as illustrated by a few examples in Table 3. Difficulty in finding a precise definition of ecotourism has been further exacerbated by the fact that it has been linked to many other terms. Scace (1992) cites 37 terms from the literature that have been linked to ecotourism adding to the confusion. These have ranged from adventure tourism to green tourism.

Further definitional difficulties can be attributed to the sustainability criteria (environmental, education, cultural) that characterise ecotourism. The very concept of sustainability remains unclear among researchers and planners. Environmental sustainability within the context of ecotourism refers to carrying capacity and scale issues. Carrying capacity can be defined as “a way to conceptualise the relationship between intensity of use and the management objectives for a resource area” (Farrell and Runyan 1991, p.31).

Hawkins (1994) and Thomlinson and Getz (1996) believe that ecotourism involves minimum visitor density and low impact activities although precise definition or measurement of low impact is ambiguous and unclarified. In the World Tourism Organisation publication, Sustainable Development: Guide for Local Planners (1993), ecotourism activities are described as “small scale and do not require high capital investment but must be carefully controlled and fit well into the environment”. For ecotourism purists, only environmentally conscious tourism at low volume is pure tourism. Therefore, purists do not believe that the Amboseli National Park in Kenya which receives approximately ¼ million tourists per year is ecotourism. According to the TES (1994), ecotourism accepted in terms of management rather than rigid small scale is shifting from a definition of small-scale nature tourism to a set of principles applicable to any nature-related tourism. The current philosophy then is to look at the environmental and cultural impact rather than scale.

In short, there appears no quick fix to the problem of identifying an operational definition of ecotourism. Different definitions will be suited to different circumstances. Compromises will have to be made. The choice of definition is hence inherently subjective. (Blamey 1997). In an attempt to define ecotourism, the following criteria and characteristics of ecotourism were identified as well as associated activities. These are presented in Box 1 and Table 4. The characteristics were based upon existing definitions in the literature while activities presented in Table 4 were based on three categories:

(1) a form of ecotourism or very closely associated therewith; (2) not normally associated with ecotourism; and (3) neutral association, that is, could be associated with a variety of tourism types (Weaver *et al* 1995).

BOX 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF ECOTOURISM (Ceballos-Lascurain 1989)

It requires a unique, accessible natural environment (protected or non-protected)

It promotes positive environmental ethics and fosters "preferred" behaviour in its participants

It does not degrade the resource. It does not involve consumptive erosion of the natural environment. Under this definition, hunting and fishing would be classified under adventure tourism and not ecotourism. Long term security of the land base

It concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic. Facilities and services may facilitate the encounter with the intrinsic resource but never become attractions in their own right and do not detract from the resource.

It is orientated around the environment in question and not around man.

It must benefit the wildlife and the environment.

It provides first hand encounter with natural environment and with any cultural elements found in the undeveloped areas.

It actively involves the local communities in the tourism process

Its level of gratification is measured in terms of education and /or appreciation rather than thrill seeking or physical achievement

It involves considerable preparation and demands in-depth knowledge on the part of both leaders and participants.

It requires training of tour operators, field guides etc.

It provides employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local people

Table 4: Defining ecotourism-related activities

Ecotourism-related	Not related to ecotourism	Neutral Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildlife viewing • Canoeing • Hiking • Cross-country skiing • Cultural (Aboriginal) • Study/research (whale watching) • Northern Lights • Covered wagon tours • Historic tours • Photography • Botanical study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing • Hunting • Snowmobiling • Ice fishing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touring • Boating • Camping • Horseback riding • Cycling • Vacation farm • Rafting • Dog Sledding • Swimming • Fossil hunting • Catch and release fishing •

Ecotourism activities in the literature are normally characterised by their non consumptive nature while activities which are consumptive then to be classified as unrelated to ecotourism (hunting, fishing etc). However this has fuelled much debate. For example, it is not clear whether catch-and-release fishing should be classified as ecotourism. Snowmobiling is normally classified as non ecotourism because the activity involves motorised vehicle which disturbs the environment. MacIntosh *et al* (1995) cite the following as examples of ecotourism: (1) adventure travel that uses the body; and (2) environmental or ecological travel that focuses on environmental awareness, protection and recovery such as trail cleanup, rainforest tours etc. These activities have been debated because the criteria or characteristics of the ecotourism often overlap. Classification of activities largely depends on what definition is being used and how narrow or broad the definition. Moreover, depending on the weight or emphasis one criterion carries over the other. For example, from a conservation or protection perspective, the impact criterion may be more important than the learning component. This implies that even though an activity may be appropriate and may have a high educational component, if the activity is deemed to generate an unacceptable level of environmental impact, then that activity may be disqualified as an ecotourism activity. This clearly illustrates the difficulties with defining ecotourism as mentioned earlier and raises the question as what defines unacceptable. What may be acceptable impact in one definition or one interest group may be deemed unacceptable for another. Defining ecotourism and associated activities then becomes *highly subjective*.

2.2? Ecotourism as a Product and Market Segment

A market segment consists of consumers who respond in a similar way to a given set of marketing stimuli (Kotler et al 1994). It has been claimed that ecotourism can be considered a segment of nature-based tourism market, offering high growth and being more environmentally responsible than nature-based tourism. The current consensus is that ecotourism has now become a market segment or a product. This can be attributed to the demand for vacationing in unspoilt areas and an increase in the desire to learn more about different cultures and environments. Ecotourism as a market segment and product discusses ecotourism with profit as a goal while in the past, ecotourism literature has focused more on protection goals. This section briefly examines the market for ecotourism and the profile of the ecotourist.

4.1 The Ecotourism Market

Estimating the size of the ecotourism market is not easy because as discussed above, a precise definition of this type of tourism remains unclear. Furthermore, few countries collect adequate data or statistics to determine the size of the ecotourism industry. There are no reliable statistics for the magnitude or growth of the global ecotourism industry. This can be attributed to the lack universally accepted definition of the term and because of its frequent inclusion under more comprehensive labels such as “nature tourism” or “adventure tourism” (Weaver, Glen and Rounds 1995). According to the Ecotourism Society (1998), ecotourism should be considered to be a speciality segment of the larger nature tourism market. As a result, ecotourism statistics are often based on nature tourism. Following in this fashion, Ceballos-Lascurain (1993) reports a WTO estimate that nature tourism generates 7% of all international travel expenditure (Lindberg 1997). Applying this to the US\$3.4 trillion reported in 1994 gross output sales by the WTO will yield US\$238 billion in “nature tourism” (Lindberg 1994).

The World Resources Institute (1990) cites nature travel as increasing at an annual rate between 10% -30% (Reingold 1993) and The Ecotourism Society (TES) estimates that nature travel is estimated to increase annually by 20-25 percent between 1990 and 1995. The proportion of the nature tourism amount accounted for by ecotourism will largely depend on how strictly the concept is defined. Attempts such as Filion (1994) have been made to estimate the size of the ecotourism market through the use of general tourism statistics. For his study, Filion defined ecotourism to be “travel to enjoy and appreciate nature”. Using this definition, Filion then used nature tourists and wildlife related tourists to estimate the size of the ecotourism market. TES argues that this represents nature tourism more than

ecotourism. However, these statistics can provide a rough indication as to the size of this speciality market even though they may not be completely accurate. According to Filion (1994), 40-46% of all international tourists are nature tourists and 20%-40% are wildlife-related tourists. These figures were based on an analysis of inbound tourist motivations to different world-wide destinations. Different multipliers were used for the figures.

• *Table 1: International tourist Estimates*

• <i>Total International Tourism Arrivals</i>	<i>Nature tourists</i> ³	<i>Wildlife related Tourists</i> ⁴
1988 - 393 million	157-236 million	79-157 million
1994 - 528.4 million	211 - 317 million	106-211 million

• *Table 2 : Economic Impact of International tourists*

<i>Total International Direct Economic Impact</i> ⁵	<i>Nature tourists</i>	<i>Wildlife related Tourists</i>
1988 - US\$388 billion	US\$93 - 223 billion	US\$47 - 155 billion
1994 - US\$416 billion	US166 - 250 billion	US\$83 - 166 billion

Using a very conservative definition, the World Heritage Travel Group estimates a 1990 ecotourism value for European and North American travellers of US\$3 billion. This is triple the 1985 value (Hilderman Witty Crosby Hanna & Associates, 1992a; p.181). Ziffer (1989; p.9-10) supports a 20% annual growth rate for the late 1980s, but estimates that Americans spend at least US12 billion per year on international travel alone. This implies a more liberal definition may have been used.

HLA Consultants and ARA Consulting Group⁶ (1995) conducted a tourism market demand study looking at selected Canadian and US markets. The study found an ecotourism market of 13, 200, 000 travellers in only 7 major cities. British Columbia and Alberta could see from 1.6 million to 3.2 million potential visitors from these markets. The report also stated that if only 5% of the potential market were to come to British Columbia and Alberta over the next 5 years, the estimated additional potential revenue would be in the order of \$176 million - \$352 million for the two destinations combined.

³ Nature tourists were identified as "tourists visiting a destination to experience and enjoy nature" (Filion, 1994 ; Pg. 1).

⁴Wildlife tourists were defined as tourists visiting a destination to observe wildlife (eg. bird -watchers)

⁵Total international direct economic impact = money spent on travel by tourists travelling abroad

⁶ In this study, ecotourism was defined as "vacations where the traveller would experience nature, adventure or cultural experiences in the countryside"

According to Weaver *et al* (1995), anecdotal statistics are more reliable though less comprehensive indication in the growth in ecotourism sector. Hvenegaard *et al*'s (1989) study at Point Pelee National Park in Ontario is a worthy example. The authors say that birdwatching (a nonconsumptive ecotourist activity) presently involves between 20 and 30 million active participants, generating more than US\$20 billion in annual expenditures.

4.2 Ecotourist Market Profile

Laarman (1987) distinguishes between two types of ecotourists: dedicated and casual ecotourist - The dedicated ecotourist who is typically a scientist or professional specialist primarily interested in nature and the casual ecotourist who combines the nature experience with other attractions not related to the enjoyment and educational benefits of natural areas. Other studies distinguishing ecotourists from other types of tourists focus on the demographic profile (gender, age, income) of the ecotourist as well as their spending and accommodation patterns (Saleh and Karwacki's 1996; Ballantine and Eagles 1994; Eagles and Cascagnette 1995; Fennell and Smale 1992; Hvenegaard *et al* 1989; Tourism Research Group 1988; Wiliacy and Eagles 1990). Box 2 below summarises the emerging profile of ecotourists as indicated by various studies. This profile was based on data collected by a survey completed by HLA and ARA consulting firms of North American travel consumers (1994) and is supported by Hvenegaardener's (1989) study at Point Peele National Park in Ontario and the Social Change Media (1995).

BOX 2: Profile of the Ecotourist

- *Middle Aged :34-45 years old*
- *Gender: Evenly split but historically they have been mainly male*
- *Highly educated*
- *High income level*
- *Longer trip duration*
- *Willing to spend more on local goods*
- *Tolerant of primary facilities*
- *Important elements: wilderness setting, wildlife viewing*
- *Motivations for taking the trip: to enjoy the scenery and nature and new experiences*

Several studies have found that ecotourists tend to have a higher income level than the average Canadian. Average annual income earnings for an ecotourist was found to be between \$52,000 to \$70,000 (Ballantine and Eagles 1994; Eagles and Cascagnette 1995; Fennell and Smale 1992; Hvenegaard et al 1989; Tourism Research Group 1988; Wiliacy and Eagles 1990). The average Canadian in 1990 earned \$24,000 (Statistics Canada, 1993b). Hvenegaard *et al* (1989) found that birdwatchers at Point Pelee National Park reported an average gross household income of CAN \$57,000. In her study of 62 ecotourists in Ecuador, Wilson (1987) found that 27% earned a family income of approximately CAN \$37,500-\$75,000 or a median of CAN \$56,250. The overall income of individuals in these two studies is quite similar and is well above average.

There is a general consensus that the ecotourist is older than average traveller. In 1994, Statistics Canada (1994) placed the average Canadian traveller to be between 25 and 44 years old. Most studies have placed the ecotourist as being between the ages of 35 -55 with the majority being between the ages of 45-55 years (Ballantine and Eagles, 1994; Boo 1990; Canadian Heritage et al; 1995; Eagles and Cascagnette, 1995; Fennell and Small, 1992; Hvenegaard et al 1989; Kretchman and Eagles, 1990; Tourism Research Group 1988; Williacy and Eagles 1990). However, recent studies are showing that ecotourism is starting to appeal to younger people. This is probably due to more affordable eco-destinations being made more available (Crossley and Lee, 1994). Seniors are also starting to get interested in this type of tourism (Canadian Heritage , 1995).

Reported findings as to the male-female ration of ecotourists are somewhat mixed. Some studies have found more male than female ecotourists (Fennell and Smale, 1992). Others have reported females as outnumbering males (Ballantine and Eagles, 1994; Eagles and Cascagnette, 1995; Williacy and Eagles, 1990). Others such as Boo (1990) and Canadian Heritage (1995) found the ratio to be even.

In general, ecotourists also tend to be a well -educated group. Most studies have reported that at least 60% or more of respondents as having at least a bachelors education (Ballantine and Eagles 1994; Eagles and Cascagnette 1995; Fennell and Smale 1992; Hvenegaard et al 1989; Tourism Research Group 1988; Wiliacy and Eagles 1990). By comparison, in 1991 only 7.4% of the Canadian population held a bachelors degree and only 2.2% held a post graduate degree (statistics Canada, 1993a). In her study, Wilson (1987) found that more than 40% of Ecuadorian tourists had university degrees and more than 10% of the sample had doctoral degrees.

According to Blamey (1995, pg.117), “although interpretation was identified as an important element in a satisfying ecotour, [formal] education was not itself seen as a major motivation in the decision to take an ecotour”. This finding can be contrasted to Eagles (1992) which suggests that “ learning about nature is an important ecotourism motive, but that minimising negative impacts may not be so.” Ecotourists were also found to have a common preference for small groups and a desire to experience something different (Social Media Change 1995). The sustainability component of ecotourism was also found not to be the primary motivator for ecotourists. However, that does not necessarily mean that sustainability issues are not important. For a more detailed research pertaining to ecotourist motivations and purchasing patterns, refer to Blamey (1995).

Blamey (1997) goes further suggesting that there may be different segments within the loosely defined ecotourism market and hence need to provide profiles for these different segments. These ecotourism segments would differ depending on the definitions and dimensions used. Blamey and Braithwaite (1997) use social values in segmenting the potential ecotourism market. Results from this study of the potential Australian market indicate that the majority of potential ecotourists do not have particularly green values and those with greener values tend to be least in favour of use of park entrance fees. This has been partly attributed the tourists’ sense of equality and shared responsibility through income taxes.

2.? Applications of Ecotourism

Ecotourism means different things to different people. It fits a range of definitions and agendas. The variations have yielded widely different results in the experiences of consumers, in the effects of operators’ practices on host environments and communities, and in the consequences for heritage conservation (Scace *et al* 1992, pg. 9). This section illustrates some of the ways ecotourism is being applied in internationally and in greater detail in Canada.

5.1 International Ecotourism Practices

Ecotourism can be applied to almost any natural setting: coastal, marine, rain forests and farmland. Ecotourism has mostly been associated with developing countries. Notable examples include Costa Rica with its rain forests, Belize and Koh Phi Phi National Park of Phuket, Thailand with its coral reef

ecotourism, Galapagos Islands with its unique animals, Kenya for wildlife watching. Furthermore, in the LDCs, ecotourism have mostly been applied in protected areas such as national parks. Literature focusing on LDCs as ecotourism destinations are plentiful (Singh et al 1989; Boo 1990; Dixon and Sherman 1990; Goriup 1991; Scace 1993; Mendelson and Maille 1994; Mercer *et al* 1997; Weaver *et al* 1991).

Costa Rica is perhaps one of the most well known ecotourism destinations in the world providing about 10 ecotourism sites. Its ecotourism development projects are based on its rain forests which are all in protected national parks. All its sites make use of the country's unique fauna and flora. One of the most successful privately owned nature sites is the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve of Costa Rica (Boo 1990; Steele, 1995) which is owned by the Tropical Science Centre. Ecotourism in Costa Rica is a prime example of illustrating the benefits of this type of development. First, it has provided local employment in terms of guides, food production, lodging and crafts for souvenirs and transportation. It also shows the private sector working with the government where by the state provides the resource base with the nature parks and the private sector provides the visitor needs. In 1986, Costa Rica attracted more than 261, 552 foreign tourists generating much needed income for this country. Donations to help protect the are have accounted for more than \$500, 000. Rain forests are being protected while at the same time they are generating income. Few tour operators are allowed to operate in order minimise the affect on the social carrying capacity. Temporal restrictions are also conducted to minimise impact with wildlife. Informative guides and knowledgeable guides are important.

Ecotourism today can also be seen being practised by Governments in Australia and New Zealand (Richardson 1993; Hall 1994) while small scale rural tourism strategies are being implemented in the UK and other parts of Europe (Lane 1988, 1991).

5.2 Ecotourism and Canada

According to a 1991 survey, 19% of Canadians took trips to engage in non-consumptive wildlife related pursuits such as wildlife viewing, photo and study of wildlife (Weaver *et al* 1995). According to Filion (1993), participants who are better educated and wealthier than the average Canadian carried out a total of 84.3 million activity days with expenditures of \$2.4 billion a year. Filion also says that mirroring the American trend, birdwatching and pleasure walking are expected to experience the most rapid growth between 1986-2001. Canada's undisturbed natural environments make them conducive to

ecotourism. As a result, regionally, it has become an important economic activity, although at a national level it is relatively small. This section of the report briefly reviews how Canada is contributing to the ecotourism phenomenon.

For example, bird watchers in Point Pelee national Park generate \$6 million annually (Hevengard *et al*, 1989). Whale watchers from Vancouver Island generated expenditures estimated at \$4.2 million in 1988 (Duffus and Dearden 1990). Current revenues in British Columbia for outdoor adventure tourism of which nature tourism is a significant part are in the order of \$133.7 million and over a million visitor days of service were provided in 1986. According to Duffus and Dearden (1990), about 22% of Canadians undertake trips with wildlife viewing as the main goal. Furthermore, 45.5% take part in non-hunting wildlife-orientated activities during trips taken for other reasons. The economic value of this activity is significant, generating about \$.1 billion in expenditures from recreational use in 1987. Another report estimates a total of \$10.7 million visitor days per year (both resident and non resident) are currently spent viewing wildlife (Ethos Consulting, 1988). Ecotourism in Churchill, Manitoba is based on polar bears and seal pup observation in the Gulf of St. Lawrence (McArthur, 1992; Lenton 1993). It is estimated that \$1-1.5 million were generated from the 700 or so tourists who viewed the pups in 1991/92. With cut backs and out-migration in the 1960s, ecotourism has helped bring back a thriving community. In fact, ecotourism in Churchill is year round with visitors arriving in three seasons: June to early July for bird watching, July to August for photo safaris and October to November for polar bears (Allen *et al* 1990; Weaver *et al* 1995). More recently, Churchill has started to attract tourists with the northern lights (*aurora borealis*) viewing.

Canadian examples of community based ecotourism initiatives include Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands of British Columbia (Williams 1992), the Inuit community in Baker Lake in the Northwest Territories (Woodley 1993) and the non-profit Redberry Lake Pelican Project at Hafford, Saskatchewan (Hawkes and Williams 1993). The latter was conceived in 1989. Since then, the project has gained an international reputation as a successful ecotourism prototype which includes an interpretative centre, a network of hiking trails, research activity, ecosystem restoration and an innovative television monitoring system appropriate for remote colonial nesting bird sites (Weaver *et al*, 1995; Hawkes and Williams 1993). Other significant ecotourism enterprises include the guided "buffalo creeps" in Wood Buffalo National Park and the Bathurst Inlet Lodge (Northwest territories) which since the early 1970s has provided opportunities to experience Inuit culture and Arctic natural history (Scace, 1993).

Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan is also a well know ecotourist destination in Canada (Saleh and Karwacki 1996). This park contains the most extensive prairie vegetation association in western Canada. It acts as a sanctuary for numerous vulnerable, threatened and endangered species. It also contains important archaeological resources such as dinosaur fossils. The infrastructure in the park consists of only visitor facilities and an interpretative centre. Other examples of ecotourism practices in Canada include the Quebec City to Edmundston ecotour and the Rideau Canal in Ontario. In these cases, travellers are provided with a description of the geological composition of the eco-region along with examples of birdlife (Fennell, 1997). Rural areas such as farmland are also being applied to ecotourism development (Kretchman and Eagles 1990).

The prairie region provinces are starting to gain a reputation as a region offering significant ecotourism opportunities. For example, potential exists since they provide excellent venues for viewing migratory waterfowl. Ecotourism in Alberta has been associated for many decades with Banff and Jasper National Parks and with the mountain region in general. Recently, the private sector has been taking advantage of ecotourism opportunities. This has come in the form of farm and ranch ecotourism. This is an entirely new form of ecotourism and has only emerged in the last five years. The latter have become significant particularly in the foothills region. This type of tourism seems to offer some aspects of the ecotourism philosophy. Farms and ranches are diversifying their operations to include ecotourism-related activities such as wildlife viewing. The owners of these types of operations are real farmers who have decided to supplement their income with money from visitors who or interested in experiencing life on a working farm or ranch, observing wildlife, hunting and fishing on private lands (Bryan 1991).

Furthermore, under the initiative of the Foothills Model Forest, potential ecotourism sites were identified in the Foothills Model Forest region (Ellen 1994). **Mention Yellowhead iniative**

In addition, many private tourist operations in the Foothills Model Forest area are now devoting their operations to ecotourism. Examples include the Black Cat Ranch which provides horseback guided rides and interpretational hikes and the Fox Creek Development Association which plans to offer a native based ecotourism experience.

2.0 Conclusion

In this part of the report we provide a brief overview of ecotourism, its definition and the issues surrounding this phenomenon. As world-wide interest in conservation and the protection of natural values has grown, so too has the research into ecotourism. A set of criteria for ecotourism development was outlined. We also presented the difficulties in identifying a precise definition for ecotourism. At the expert and academic level much of the ecotourism debate occurs at the conceptual and semantic level. In conclusion, a ecotourism definition will differ according to the *perspective* being taken. The appeal of ecotourism to planners and governments was also outlined. Furthermore, it has also shown that ecotourism is not restricted to lesser developed countries. It is a thriving industry in Canada with much economic and conservation potential. This potential is now being assessed for the Foothills Model Forest region. In the next stage of this report, we examine the differing perspectives from a local stakeholder level.

MOVE THIS

Recommendations

The Foothills Model Forest's first step is to identify which perspective it will be using since that will determine the direction of ecotourism planning. Second, the definition used should be compatible with existing and future plans. As the first part of the section reports, no definite ecotourism definition exists. Therefore, the first stage of planning requires the FMF to identify the definition by which it will be guided. One possibility is to adhere by Canada's environmental council definition. Third, it should adopt a strategy for tourism development.

3.0 Introduction

In the second part of this report we examine the interviews conducted in the Foothills Model Forest (FMF) region between August and November of 1998. The aim of the interviews was to identify the concept of ecotourism as defined by key stakeholders in the FMF region. Interviews for this report were conducted in two communities in the FMF area – Hinton and Jasper. Four groups were identified as having a vested interest in potential ecotourism development in the region. They were environmentalists, town planners, tourism operators (private camp ground and ecotourism operators, park rangers) and industry (mining, forestry, oil and gas). An attempt was made to interview at least one representative from each stakeholder group. A total of 17 interviews were conducted: seven in Jasper and ten in Hinton.

Location	Stakeholder	# of Interviews
Hinton	Environmentalist	2
	Town Planner	1
	Tourism Operator ⁷	4
	Industry ⁸	3
Jasper	Environmentalist	1
	Town Planner	1
	Ecotourism Guide	3 ⁹
	Parks Canada Business Liason	1
	Jasper Town Muncipal Service	1
Total Interviews		17

The interview questions were designed to collect information in two areas. First, the individual's definition of ecotourism in terms of associated ecotourism activities, the difference if any from other forms of tourism and where it can take place. The second section of the interview focused on assessing

⁷ Consisted of private camp ground operator, ecotourism operator, potential ecotourism operator using the FMA and public tourism operator

⁸ Consisted of representatives from the Mines and Weldwood. Does not include oil and Gas.

⁹ One of the guides was also an active member of the Jasper Environmental Association

the individual's perspective on whether ecotourism can be compatible with other resource users in the area. More specifically, with resource extractive industries such as forestry and mining. The following section puts forward the findings of the interviews.

2.0 Interview Results

Results put forth of the interviews serve to answer the following questions:

What activities are associated with ecotourism?

What distinguishes ecotourism from other forms of tourism?

Are protected areas required for successful ecotourism?

Can ecotourism be practised in a forest management area (FMA)?

What are the benefits and negatives of ecotourism?

Is ecotourism part of sustainable natural resource management?

What are the conflicts between stakeholders in the FMF?

Can ecotourism replace mining and forestry industries in Hinton?

Can ecotourism coexist with mining and forestry industries in Hinton?

Can ecotourism in the FMF meet the requirements put forth by traditional definitions?

Activities associated with Ecotourism

In general, interviewees stated that appropriate ecotourism activities were those that are performed in a natural setting, provided a learning or nature appreciation and had little environmental impact. More specifically, those who equated ecotourism with nature tourism found all the activities on the list (Appendix 2a) to qualify since they were all performed in the outdoors. Furthermore, they argued that ecotourism was just a "buzzword" and no different from nature or adventure tourism. Some argued that the definition of ecotourism was a perceptual phenomena relative to the individual. However, these same people also mentioned that the environmental impact had to be low and that participants had to come out of the experience having learnt something about the environment.

For those who felt there was a distinction between ecotourism and other forms of tourism, some activities tended to be easier to classify as ecotourism activities relative to others. First, motorised activities such as snowmobiling or powerboats were all deemed to be anti-ecotourism due to the noise and impact on the environment. However, most agreed that snowmobiles could be used as a means of

transportation to an ecotourism venue. The ecotourism experience would then start afterwards. For individuals following a more stringent definition, bus tours and motorised boat rides (even with a guide) such as that offered on Maligne Lake were also considered to be anti-ecotourism

¹⁰. In these cases, the educational component was deemed to be not sufficient enough to bypass the intrusiveness of the boat rides. In addition, it was felt that tourists on the bus were not experiencing a real first hand encounter with nature. However, if they got out and used the bus as a means of transportation, then such an activity would qualify.

Another criterion which interviewees used to determine whether the activity conformed to their idea of ecotourism was on the extractive and consumptive nature of the activity. Interviewees with a narrow definition only classified those activities which were non-consumptive and non-extractive in nature. For this reason, fishing, hunting and fossil hunting were immediately classified as being non-ecotourism. When asked about catch and release fishing, all environmentalists and park rangers interviewed felt that this would still not qualify as ecotourism because of mounting evidence of mortality among catch and release fish. In addition, hunting as part of a cultural experience or a farming lifestyle was also felt to be outside the realm of ecotourism. If hunting was to be part of the experience, then it was felt that it should be talked about and learnt but “true” ecotourists would not participate. However, with a more flexible definition, hunting and fishing were considered by some interviewees to be ecotourism if a learning component was added and the species was not endangered.

Certain activities were immediately associated with ecotourism. These included hiking, canoeing, kayaking, wildlife viewing, dog sledding and cross country skiing. Horseback riding was also mentioned but recent controversy in both Jasper and Hinton concerning the impact they have on the environment meant that all interviewees felt that horseback riding could only be considered ecotourism if the number of riders were limited and the impact minimal. In all these activities, while they were identified to be appropriate ecotouism activities, all interviewees using a narrow definition believed that ultimately it was the manner in which the activities were marketed and practised that determined whether the activity was truly ecotourism. Hence, this implied having a learning or environmental educational component and making sure the environmental impact was minimal.

Camping had a range of views when classifying it as an ecotourism activity. First, all interviewees felt

¹⁰ By the same token, many respondents also gave the Maligne Lake boat tours as an example of an ecotourism experience

that motor home camping was not ecotourism but cheap accommodation. As for tenting, this had a wide range of views. Camping at a camp site by some environmentalists were considered to be ecotourism only if impact was minimal while those adopting a more strict definition felt that it could be ecotourism if the camping occurred in the outback away from any signs of development. In other words, camping at a campsite near a road would not qualify. With respect to intensity of camping infrastructure and facilities, this was not considered to be an important factor. However, camping using a tent and then going out during the day to learn and appreciate nature would qualify as an ecotourism experience. A survey of the responses also revealed that camping by itself was not considered to be ecotourism activity.

In summary, activities were deemed appropriate for ecotourism varied depending on how broad or narrow the definition being used. In the narrow sense, appropriate ecotourism activities were those that did not use a motorised vehicle, was out in natural environment, had low environmental impact, be non-extractive in nature and most importantly had a learning or appreciation of nature. By contrast, the broad definition that has emerged from these interviews is that any activity in the outdoor can be classified as ecotourism including wildlife viewing on reclaimed mine sites and activities in reforested areas of the FMA. All interviewees struggled with determining what activities would be appropriate. Problems with classifying activities as ecotourism arose when some of them met some of their criteria and violated others. In these cases, interviewees would struggle in assessing which criterion was more important relative to the other. In other words, the multi-dimensional aspect of ecotourism and the continuum of possibilities for certain criteria created some problems for some interviewees. For example, all felt that environmental education was an important element for ecotourism. However, the degree or level of learning required to associate the activity with ecotourism was found to be debatable.

What distinguishes ecotourism from other forms of tourism?

Results show that all interest groups found the educational or learning component to be the main criterion that differentiates ecotourism from other forms of tourism. Low environmental impact was also stated often as a defining characteristic. Narrower definitions further include an ethical and environmental attitude as well as a more intimate contact with nature. Carrying capacity was also cited by two interviewees to be a vital characteristic of ecotourism.

The importance of protected areas for the success of Ecotourism

All those interviewed thought that some degree of protection was required for successful ecotourism. In comparison to other interest groups, environmentalists felt a need for higher level of protection and for larger areas. With respect to tourism operators, protection was thought to be necessary in that it provided long-term security of the land base and hence security for their livelihood. In general, areas designated in the FMA for recreation purposes were deemed to have sufficient level of protection. However, some of the Hinton area interviewees thought that industry should designate more of their land for recreation purposes. Furthermore, interviewees were aware that most of the forests outside of the Park had already been allocated. Therefore, realistically speaking, they could not ask for high level of protection.

The responses indicated that protected areas were not a prerequisite for ecotourism. Ecotourism activities could be practised successfully in non-protected areas at the same level as protected areas. However, environmentalists and tourism operators thought that protection of an area or some sort of designation in the Hinton area allows for long term ecotourism possibilities. Although most of the Jasper interviewees had a limited knowledge of issues and ecotourism in the Hinton area they stated that ecotourism was a feasible albeit a more difficult undertaking.

Can Ecotourism be practised in an FMA?

Responses by all stakeholder groups including environmentalists in both Hinton and Jasper indicate that ecotourism can be practised in an FMA. Most Hinton area tourism operators said they were already operating in a FMA and that most forested land is in the FMA. Therefore, if Hinton were to have any ecotourism, it would have to be in the FMA. Environmentalists believed that ecotourism can be practised in areas of the FMA that have not been clear cut and also in reforested areas. They also acknowledged that ecotourism can also be defined in terms of using the FMA to educate people about “pure natural” areas and comparing them to “reforested” areas. This idea was supported by other representatives of the interest groups.

The benefits and negatives of ecotourism.

Economic benefits generated by increased visitors to the region and spin off businesses were the most commonly stated potential benefits of ecotourism. Employment for locals and the First Nation’s population were also mentioned. These benefits were stated for both Jasper and Hinton. Environmentalists also included increased conservation and environmental education. For industry,

given that ecotourism be defined in terms of visiting reclaimed mine sites and reforested areas in the FMA, cited increased knowledge of the workings of the forestry and mining sectors and minimisation of environmental impacts by extractive industries. In addition, increased recreational opportunities derived from increased protection or designated areas as well as the ecotourism's ability to push industry into using more environmentally friendly practices were mentioned.

Negative impacts on the extractive industries in the region were acknowledged by all stakeholders. In particular, both forestry and mine industries felt that ecotourism (if narrowly defined) had the potential to adversely affect Hinton's and thus the Province's economy, thereby decreasing the standard of living in the community. In the same manner, environmentalists admitted that ecotourism would not be able to generate the same amount of revenue as the extractive industries, lowering the standard of living in the region. Furthermore, they recognised that following a strict definition of ecotourism would take away areas from the and hence have a negative impact on the forestry industry. Other negative impacts mentioned included environmental impacts arising from large groups of tourists. Interviewees living in Jasper also spoke of negative social impacts such as accommodation problems to support the increase in seasonal workers.

Is ecotourism part of sustainable natural resource management?

All those interviewed believed ecotourism to be part of sustainable natural resource management. The majority responded that it had to be that there was no choice, otherwise there would not be ecotourism in the area. In addition, interviewees also said the non-consumptive, low impact; non-intrusive and educational characteristics make ecotourism sustainable. With respect to the industry, they also agreed but based on different reasons. They felt that ecotourism was part of sustainable natural resource management because according to their definition, ecotourism is about integrating all aspects of the land, multiple use of landscape and educating people about how industry reclaims the land or reforests the land. All groups seemed to cite the environmental education component of ecotourism as contributing to sustainable natural resource management.

Conflicts arising between stakeholders.

All of the Hinton area stakeholders admitted to conflicts between interest groups. When asked to state an example, most cited conflicts arising between the Black Cat Ranch and Weldwood or the Cheviot Mine Project. When asked about consultation process to solve these conflicts, industry felt they were

doing a good job but admitted that they could be doing better. As for tourism operators, they felt that more consultation and open channels were necessary.

Can ecotourism replace mining and forestry industries in Hinton?

A survey of the responses clearly distinguishes two main responses. Interviewees living in Hinton (including the environmentalists) stated that ecotourism would not be able to drive out the extractive industries because they felt that tourism would not be able to sustain the economic base of the community and the standard of living in the community. While they agreed that ecotourism would generate jobs, all felt that the tourism industry would not be able to match the wages that employees in the extractive industries were currently receiving. Furthermore, they felt that the tourism sector also carried somewhat of a stigma in that it was associated with low paying jobs. All agreed that ecotourism is not economically viable to support the current lifestyle of Hinton and surrounding areas who work in the extractive resource industries. By contrast, those interviewed in Jasper felt that tourism had a strong potential to replace those industries.

Can ecotourism coexist with mining and forestry industries in Hinton?

In general, all stakeholders believed there was a potential for all resource users to coexist. Some operators and environmentalists asserted that under current industry practices all groups would be in conflict while industry and some operators felt that stringent environmental views meant that currently ecotourism would not be able to coexist with industry. However, the latter could coexist and complement ecotourism through environmental education of the natural processes including those of industry, increased consultation and openness of industry with tourism operators, acknowledging the carrying capacity of the area, decrease in environmental impact, assurances and most importantly through compromise. The mines felt that if environmentalists broadened their definition to include reclaim mine site visits, then in their view they could coexist with ecotourism.

Is ecotourism as defined in the FMF consistent with the traditional literature definition?

At the end of the interview, respondents were given a table citing Ceballos-Lasucrain's definition (Appendix 2b) of ecotourism. This definition is the traditionally cited one of ecotourism in the literature. The aim of this exercise was to evaluate how respondents felt their definition matched that

of Ceballos-Lascurain and whether they felt those ecotourism characteristics were realistic for their community. The prevailing view arising from the interviews appear that the traditional definition is too stringent and unrealistic for the communities in the FMF. However, this view is not shared by the environmentalists who felt that they conformed to their personal definitions with minor changes. All respondents believed that ecotourism could also take place in a non-unique natural environment. Moreover, all agreed that protection of an area was not required for ecotourism and that ecotourism would benefit the local community in terms of employment. Some felt that the “non –degradation” of the environment was too stringent. Industry felt that if such a definition were taken, then industry would not be able to coexist with ecotourism. Others also believed that ecotourism is not restricted to “undeveloped areas”. For example, they felt this characteristic would exclude ecotourism in reforested areas of the FMA and on reclaimed mine sites. While all agreed that their definitions of ecotourism revolved around an educational and nature appreciation component, some felt that it was too restrictive to exclude the “thrill” factor of the activity. Finally, everyone believed that tourism operators have to understand ecotourism and try to minimise their environmental impact. Furthermore, industry and some tour operators suggested that tourism operators should provide more information to their clients in terms of industry’s role in minimising environmental impacts and their contribution to restoring the natural environment in the area.

3.0 Summary

Analysis of the interviews revealed that, as predicted, definitions of ecotourism in the FMF region varied according to different interest groups and their perspectives. In general, it was found that the definitions ranged from one that was narrow and specific and closely matched traditional literature definitions to a more broad and flexible definition which incorporated more developed areas.

The emerging pattern appeared to be the environmentalists (with conservation and protection perspective) as having the narrowest definitions while industry groups (mining and forestry) tended to accept and define ecotourism more broadly. This is consistent with their perspective a resource extractor and developer. Definitions from the tourism operators, park rangers and town planners were found to be in between these two extremes. Furthermore, even among the tourism operators

interviewed, definitions varied according to where they operated. For example, those operating in outside the FMA tended to give a more stringent definition compared to those operating in the FMA. Another pattern that emerged from these interviews concerns important characteristics that define ecotourism. All interviewees felt that a learning or appreciation of nature and low environmental impact were highly associated with the ecotourism concept. Furthermore, all interviewees felt that some degree of protection was required for successful tourism. However, the level of protection varied from environmentalists to industry as expected. With respect to activities, most interviewees felt that ecotourism could not be distinguished between one activity to another but rather in the manner in which they are offered and practised.

Diagram 1 : Range of Ecotourism Definitions

The table below summarises the main findings of the interviews and presents the ecotourism concept

as viewed by local stakeholder groups in the Foothills Model Forest.

BOX 2: Defining Ecotourism in the FMF –Summary of Interviews

Ecotourism in the FMF

Is primarily non extractive, environmentally educational and low impact

Is part of sustainable natural resource management

Can be practised successfully in protected and non protected areas

Can be practised in an FMA

Can be practised on reclaimed mine sites and reforested areas given a broad definition

Can be any outdoor activity that is not motorised, provided it has little environmental impact and has a learning or appreciation for nature

Can use a motorised vehicle (such as snowmobile) as a means of transportation only and also has to have minimal environmental impact

Requires some degree of protection in terms of designated trails, areas or zoning

Can complement and coexist with forestry and mining industries provided there is increased public consultation and openness, integrity, security of land base, increase in environmental practices and compromises on all sides

Can only coexist with hunting and OTVs if designated trails are allocated and some form of education is provided to OTV users on their environmental impacts

Cannot replace extractive sectors due to wage differentials between the two sectors

Can succeed if education on industry practices and natural processes are combined and presented to ecotourism clients

Defining Ecotourism for the Foothills Model Forest Region

It appears from the interviews that Hinton and Jasper communities define and see ecotourism differently. This can be attributed to the different lifestyles and economic realities facing these

communities. Jasper's economy is based on nature tourism while Hinton's is based primarily on extractive resource industries with tourism still developing. As such, it is likely that two different definitions of ecotourism will have to be adopted for these two different communities. As stated in the literature, identifying an operationalised definition of ecotourism largely depends on the host community, the circumstances surrounding the community and above all a willingness and involvement on the part of the community. With respect to Jasper, it appears that a more narrow definition, perhaps one that is closer to the traditional definition as proposed by Ceballos-Lascurain (1989), might be more in line with the community. By contrast, it is unlikely that such a narrow definition would work or be accepted in the Hinton community. If compromises are to be made, then a broader and more flexible definition which incorporates some of the industries' "natural" attractions should be considered for Hinton. One approach is to perhaps adopt the Canadian Environmental Advisory Council's (1992) ecotourism definition

¹¹ and interpret it according to the needs and circumstances of each community. With this definition, a more strict interpretation can be embraced for Jasper while a more liberal interpretation can be used for Hinton. However, while adopting two definitions for the FMF region may serve as a compromise and be more practical, they must nonetheless be approached with extreme caution and the goal of ecotourism should always be kept in mind. That is, the broad definition should keep the main tenets of ecotourism (environmental education, low environmental impact, protection and security) intact and adjust them ever so slightly so as to incorporate some of the elements found in the industries' definition. Ecotourism thrives on three main components: The attraction of tourists to an accessible natural area. The use of tourism as a tool in nature conservation through the generation of education, profits, changing attitudes, community development and political priorities. The provision of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local people. Therefore, using these as goals of ecotourism, the FMF can then proceed to attain a more precise definition for Hinton and Jasper. The difficulty however, lies in finding the balance between industries' definition and environmentalist's' definitions, or perhaps just using the tour operators' definition. Ultimately however, the success of ecotourism in the Foothills Model Forest will depend on the willingness of all stakeholders to comprise and political will.

Limitations of the report and Recommendations

As mentioned, this report is based on responses from 12 stakeholder interviews. While every attempt was made to interview as many representatives from each group, limited time and peak tourism season

¹¹ The Canadian Environmental Advisory Council (1992) defines ecotouism as " Ecotourism is an enlightening nature travel experience that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem while respecting the integrity of host communities."

restricted the number of possible interviews. Therefore, it is highly recommended that more interviews be conducted from each interest group. In particular, the gas and oil industry was not represented in any of the interviews. More interviews should also be conducted among tourism operators. These interviews focused on operators offering ecotourism experiences. Future interviews should also encompass some non-ecotourism operators such as those offering scenic helicopter rides, outfitters offering horseback riding adventures and those operating in the FMA. Furthermore, the interviews obtained ecotourism definitions from a supply side perspective. No attempt was made to examine the demand side perspective. Namely, visitors or tourists.

Another future study should also examine the role of perceptions or image of the areas offering ecotourism. While suppliers may meet the requirements of ecotourism, tourist perceptions of the area may still inhibit the success of ecotourism in the FMF area. Concerns over the perception and image of Hinton were often raised by tour operators when asked about factors affecting the success of ecotourism in the area.

Finally, potential studies exist in the realm of choice experiments. That is, after a variety of ecotourism definitions for the FMF stakeholders have been compiled, a choice experiment may be developed to examine the preferences of stakeholders and tourists among alternative ecotourism definitions or scenarios. In other words, alternative definitions could be assessed in terms of ranges of identified ecotourism components such as environmental education, environmental impacts, activities, levels of protection, levels of consultation, employment impact and so on. This would also illustrate the relative importance of one characteristic over the other for different stakeholders. For example, how much environmental education would one individual be prepared to give up for lower environmental impact etc. After all, these were some of the trade-offs with which interviewees were having difficulties when assessing the appropriateness of an activity to be ecotourism.

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