

## **VI. IMPLEMENTING THE FIRST WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE**

### Building Administrative Capacity

In order to gain maximum benefit from the creation of the First Wilderness experience, the way in which tourist attractions are developed and promoted should begin to link them so that tourists begin to think of them as part of a single vacation experience. While strict uniformity is not desired, there does need to be a unifying consistency in promotions, promotional material, and built environment. The primary tasks will involve coordinating activities/organizations into a coherent experience for the traveler and promoting the resulting experience in the tourism market. This suggests that implementation of such an effort has to occur at the corridor level. Such an effort should build upon the intermunicipal agreement that has made this initial study possible.

The organization or organizations charged with creating the First Wilderness experience need to interact with a variety of corridor-related enterprises, oversee a coordinated program of public and private investments while spearheading a marketing and promotion effort. Given the fact that the current effort involves local jurisdictions from two counties, it is not reasonable to expect this could be done by existing county agency. For example, even County TPO, a logical candidate for this role, has much broader responsibilities than just the corridor, and does not embrace all corridor municipalities within its geographic jurisdiction. This suggests that a new intermunicipal organization be created to manage the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor. The choices for such a stand alone agency include the creation of a public authority or the designation of a local development corporation (LDC). In many ways, a public authority seems the best choice given the tasks at hand. Such an authority can be created with a separate administrative structure and even given the authority to issue bonds to finance improvement projects related to the Corridor.

On the other hand, while it may ultimately be the best solution for Corridor management, the creation of an authority presents some significant problems. Foremost, its creation would require a special act of the State legislature. The fate of such legislation becomes subject to statewide political forces, and could result in substantial delays before it is enacted. In contrast, while a Local Development Corporation may not have the full range of powers of a public authority, its creation is completely within the jurisdiction of local governments. As described below, an LDC can be created with all of the powers required to initiate and sustain the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor in its first years of existence.

Local Development Corporations (LDCs) as authorized under New York State Law possess very broad powers to implement and effect economic development. An LDC can provide continuity, and long-term solutions to economic development needs. It would be relatively easy to develop an LDC to further the tourism development goals of a First Wilderness Heritage Corridor.

A Local Development Corporation can be formed by the participating municipalities through the following process:

1. Draft a Certificate of Incorporation - this spells out the name, purpose, and lists the initial directors.
2. Develop By-Laws for the LDC – this details membership, meetings of members, election of Directors, terms of office, actions of the Board of Directors, officers, and operations.
3. File Certificate of Incorporation with the New York State Department of State (\$100 fee).
4. Hold Organizational Meeting and first Annual Meeting of the members.
5. Elect Members to the Board of Directors
6. File sales tax exemption with the New York State Office of Taxation and Finance
7. Pursue tax-exempt status with the Internal Revenue Service.

The First Wilderness Development Corporation would be charged with encouraging the growth and success of new and existing tourism related business in the First Wilderness Corridor by creating and promoting a coordinated and consistent tourism experience for visitors to the First Wilderness Corridor. The Corporation would accomplish this by serving as the locus of a coordinated marketing and promotional effort and by serving as a vehicle to secure, lease, acquire, develop and sell real estate necessary to implement the action plan for the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor.

In its initial year of operation, the LDC would focus on two initiatives:

The LDC will work with the County, local governments, and tourism-related enterprises to develop the Nodes included in the Action Plan. For the participating communities, the nodes will serve as focal points of the marketing and promotion efforts involved with the First Wilderness Experience. Implementing the Action Plan will involve the following activities:

- Assisting in the development of tourist interpretive themes for sites along First Wilderness Corridor
- Inventorying and contacting local tourism attractions to explore cross-promotional potential
- Promote entrepreneurship among local tourism operators
- Coordinate activities with other tourism promotion groups
- Increase communications within the region
- Develop the tourism infrastructure associated with the nodes (platforms, stations, signage, kiosks, etc.)
- develop the tourism infrastructure (train stops, signage, kiosks, etc.) to improve the ability of tourists to experience the Corridor.

#### Creating a Marketing and Promotional Campaign

The LDC would coordinate the effort to market and promote the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor. One of the first steps in this process would be to secure the services needed to design a logo for the corridor, and develop a brochure describing it. The brochure would serve to inform both tourists and participating tourist-related enterprises about the major themes that will be included in the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor. The logo would be used in signage and promotional materials to orient tourists to the various component attractions in the Corridor. It is recommended that, to the greatest extent possible, the tourism operators consult in the development of the logo so that, as opportunities arise, they will be willing to include the logo as part of their own promotional materials.

In addition to developing the logo and brochure, the LDC will work with existing tourism-related enterprises to promote the First Wilderness Experience. This effort will combine three promotional strategies:

- Brochure exchange* mutual agreements to display each other's brochures at each attraction's admissions area or gift shop.
- Cross promotion* mutual agreements to promote each other's attractions in specific promotional efforts. This can range from a simple reference to the other attraction in advertisements, brochures, etc., to providing admissions discounts to patrons of other attractions. The Corridor should seek to develop cross-promotional relationships with existing major attractions like the Adirondack Museum, Gore Mountain, and Great Escape.
- Cooperative Marketing* pooling marketing resources to create ad campaigns that promote all participating attractions simultaneously. The use of the "First Wilderness" experience could become the theme for a series of cooperative marketing efforts.

Table 8-1 provides a list of potential marketing relationships to be developed by the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor.

| <b>Table 6-1<br/>Potential Partners for Marketing/Promotion Partnerships</b>  |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Brochure Exchange   | Brochure Exchange & Cooperative Advertising  | Brochure Exchange, Cooperative Advertising, & Cross-Promotion  |
| <u>Chambers of Commerce</u><br>Adirondack Regional Chamber,<br>Glens Falls<br>Bolton Landing<br>Glens Falls<br>Gore Mountain Region<br>Hague/Silver Bay<br>Lake George<br>Lake Luzerne<br>Johnsbury<br>North Warren<br>Queensbury<br>Stony Creek<br>Thurman/Athol<br>Warrensburg<br><br><u>Historical/Cultural Tourism</u><br>Adirondack Mountain Club<br>Information Center<br>Chapman Historical Museum | <u>Nature Tourism</u><br>Garnet Mine Tours<br>Natural Stone Bridge and Caves<br><br><u>Adventure Tourism:</u><br>Adirondack Rafting Co.<br>Adirondack River Outfitters<br>Adventure Sports Rafting<br>Beaver Brook Outfitters<br>Hudson River Rafting Company<br>Hudson Whitewater World | <u>Historical/Cultural Tourism</u><br>Adirondack Museum<br>Fort Ticonderoga<br>Fort William Henry Museum<br><br><u>Nature Tourism</u><br>Adirondack Park Agency<br>Adirondack Park Visitor's<br>Interpretive Center<br>Ausable Chasm<br><br><u>Adventure Tourism:</u><br>Adirondack North Country<br>Association<br><br><u>Other Excursion Trains:</u><br>Adirondack Scenic Railroad<br>Battenkill Rambler |

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| Brochure Exchange  | Brochure Exchange & Cooperative Advertising | Brochure Exchange, Cooperative Advertising, & Cross-Promotion  |
| Chester Museum of Local History<br>Lake George Historical Museum<br>Mill Museum<br>Schoolhouse Museum<br>Stony Creek Historical Museum<br>Warrensburg Museum of Local History<br><br><u>Adventure Tourism</u><br>Glens Falls Feeder Canal Trail<br>Warren County Bikeway |   | <u>Other Attractions:</u><br>Frontier Town/Great Escape<br>Lake George Action Park<br>Santa's Workshop |

Building the Railroad into the First Wilderness experience: Achieving the Maximum Sustainable Scale of Operations

A key component of the First Wilderness experience is the tourism railroad. In order to fulfill its role in the corridor on a sustainable basis, railroad operations must generate sufficient revenue to cover the costs of operating the railroad and, most important, maintaining the rail bed. This presents several key challenges.

First, the existing tourism railroad is a seasonal operation. Even when fully developed as part of the First Wilderness experience, ridership will fluctuate with the peaks and valleys of visitation to the Adirondacks. This will make it difficult for the railroad to generate a steady cash flow required to fully cover costs.

Second, this particular tourism railroad is located in a rural market. In such a setting, one could expect the railroad to generate \$50,000 to \$75,000 as part of this integrated tourism experience. However, the Adirondack region features fairly stiff competition for ridership, including the Battenkill Rambler and the Adirondack Scenic Railroad. This competitive pressure, coupled with the inherent seasonality of tourism in the Adirondacks may make it difficult for tourism life to consistently cover operating costs. (Note that Table 8-1 calls for the creation of an integrated cross-promotional relationship among the region's tourism railroads, as a means of ensuring that each will be capable of generating sustainable levels of ridership).

In order to overcome the obstacles described here, it is imperative that the railroad develop strong connections into Saratoga County. This will help the railroad's revenue picture in two ways. Most importantly, it increases the likelihood of expanding freight operations along the corridor. For many tourism railroads, freight operations provide the steady revenue sources that cover the costs of rail bed maintenance. A longer corridor with access to more industrial sites will better position the railroad to develop this revenue source.

In addition, by expanding operations into Saratoga County, the tourism side of the railroad will be better positioned to serve more market segments of riders. The link would make a Saratoga-to-North Creek “ski train” a possibility, expanding ridership and extending the operating season of the tourism line. It also would enable the railroad to establish cross promotional relationships with a greater variety of establishments. For example, the railroad could draw patrons from “dark days” (e.g., nonracing days).

It could also tap into convention business based in Saratoga, and have a stronger proximity to Lake George-based attractions. Finally, extending the service to Saratoga Springs will also strengthen the direct connection to the New York City metropolitan marketplace. The train will have a direct link, via Amtrak to New York City. It will also extend its service to Saratoga Springs, a major destination for travelers from the New York metropolitan area. This will strengthen the connection between the tourism railroad and what the marketing analysis has identified as the single most attractive market segment identified for the First Wilderness Corridor.

In conclusion, it is very important to continue to explore potential approaches for extending the rail operations into Saratoga County. This extension would greatly strengthen the ability of the railroad to sustain its operations on an ongoing basis, and become a central contributor to, and beneficiary of, the First Wilderness experience.