

Appendix D

Tourism and Marketing

The Kennebec River corridor is positioned well to attract much more tourism than currently comes to the area. The central and lower sections of the river corridor can draw from the crowds of coastal tourists that come to Maine each year. Further to the north, the corridor offers an entirely different kind of experience with some outstanding services offered in select locations.

While the Kennebec Corridor offers lots of attractions and activities for people to see and do, there are several obstacles standing in the way of the Kennebec Corridor becoming a more popular destination for tourists.

1. Lack of a coordinated marketing effort
2. Lack of services offered
3. Lack of information on the Kennebec Corridor

There are many kinds of tourists that enjoy the State of Maine. A Maine tourist can be defined in many ways ranging from overnight guests to day trippers to visits by family and friends. Tourists may further be defined as in-state or out of state. At present, the Kennebec River Initiative will define tourists as people traveling (in-state or out of state) to any of the corridor towns and spending money in that community. Examples can range from using overnight accommodations, dining, purchasing fuel, hiring guides, or paying to participate in any recreational activity.

Any marketing plan for the Kennebec River corridor should be based on the uses and activities currently available in the region. In many cases, the sites and activities that people want to visit and take part in are available but tourists do not yet know they exist. Marketing the activities that are currently available and working to improve them by making the experience better for tourists is an approach that works here in Maine. Successful examples include Maine's white water rafting industry and the work of the Upper Andro Anglers Alliance in successfully promoting and enhancing an existing fishery. Both of these examples utilize existing resources combined with wise marketing and some investment of time and or money to offer and promote a product people want.

The Kennebec Corridor falls into two State-recognized tourism regions. The Corridor from the mouth of the Kennebec inland through Richmond falls to the Midcoast Council of Chambers while the region from Gardiner north through Jackman is under the jurisdiction of the Kennebec Valley Tourism Council. Both of these organizations receive some funding from the Maine Tourism Marketing Partnership Program to promote their regional tourism businesses.

Whole River Activities/Common Themes with Examples: The character of the Kennebec corridor from Moosehead to the sea is extremely diverse however there are common themes that occur up and down the entire corridor. The **history** of the Kennebec Corridor is interesting from top to bottom. **Fishing** is also an activity that is common throughout the entire Kennebec. The diversity of the Kennebec fishery can only be described as amazing. **Boating** is also an activity that is found throughout the river. While this activity looks very different depending upon what section of the Kennebec you are looking at, boating has been a constant for hundreds of years.

History: The Kennebec Corridor has a very rich history that includes many wonderful historic sites and locations for tourists to visit. What needs to be developed is coordination between these sites so tourists can enjoy a full days learning about the Historic Kennebec. A Fort to fort tour in the lower Kennebec, combined with a visit to the Maine State Museum would be one example. Tours could be either self guided or more elaborate if there was interest and investment by the partners.

Fishery: Anglers coming to Maine to fish need to be directed toward the Kennebec. The Kennebec River fishery boasts many traits that make it unique but two of these traits rise to the forefront when considering tourism. First, the diversity of the fish species available in the Kennebec allows an angler to fish one (or more) stretch of the river and catch multiple species of quality sized fish during an outing. Species from brook trout and land locked salmon on a dry fly in the north to 40 lb stripers in the Lower Kennebec and everything in between, from a diversity standpoint, the Kennebec has it all. The second aspect that makes the Kennebec so unique is the quality of the angling experience. Once on the river and angler will notice relatively little development when compared to many destination fisheries found around the country. While much of the open space along the Kennebec Corridor is at risk from

development pressures, currently, there is a feeling from many that the Kennebec has a “wild” feel to it.

Boating: Recreational boating of various kinds has been a part of Kennebec River culture for generations. Today, boating tourism including whitewater rafting, kayaking, power boating, and sailing and sight-seeing tours in the lower Kennebec. Since the river has become cleaner over the past 30 years boating activity has increased dramatically. As coastal tourism in Maine has shown, people coming to our state for a vacation want to be on the water. The Kennebec can provide that opportunity but with a different experience than the Maine coast offers.

What is lacking is a linking and packaging of these activities so tourists know they exist. The Kennebec Corridor has great places to visit and activities that can be destinations for many but until recently, Mainers had their back turned to the river. This notion is rapidly changing as people begin to realize what an asset the Kennebec can be for communities along the corridor.

Historically, many businesses in Maine that cater to tourists have promoted the image of a Maine vacation as a “rustic experience”. The expectations of tourists are different than before. Not the rustic experience Maine has marketed to them in the past. While rustic charm may appeal to some, the word “rustic” is a red flag for many meaning a lack of services are provided. Services like internet access and cell phone coverage have become offerings that businesses must provide to increase their customer base. Tourists to Maine do very much want a woods, river or ocean experience but at the end of the day they must be able to have comfort, great food and access to the internet.

To provide the kind of vacation and amenities that tourists coming to Maine are currently seeking will create significantly higher quality job opportunities for the work force in the state. Amenities that support our great resources will require a better trained workforce with hospitality/service instruction and knowledge of the region. Investment by business owners on higher wages and employee development will also attract and lead to the kind of service that today’s tourists are demanding.

Recommendations:

Project ideas:

Linking partners to create “activity packages” that partner and promote several different or like activities with good lodging and great food would give potential tourists a reason to come to the area. Without promotion of these important linkages, you are left with many great activities and no coordination between them. Potential tourists are left to fend for themselves when planning a trip to the Kennebec region.

Product development of activities: Conduct some promotional events to bring press and tourists to the Kennebec. An example would be an outdoor writers press event around the Kennebec fishery.

Creation of a Kennebec Corridor visitor center to act as a clearinghouse of information: Using activity specific printed materials and brochures to promote and market the corridor is seen as the best approach to promote the Kennebec Corridor. In the meantime, creating a comprehensive KRI website that answers the questions of potential tourists (and provides other services) is a good first step.

The idea of product partnership where the public can be better served by businesses promoting each other: Lodge to lodge or activity to activity tours by cooperating competitors will help both businesses if services can be improved by working together. This model is working very well in places right here in Maine. A small but critical mass of town planners and private investors is needed to get a tour package together that includes lodging, recreation, cultural amenities and transportation if needed. Any tours will likely be specific to one reach but not limited by geography. The projects are defined by the players.

Expansion of services and hospitality training: Amenities that support our great resources will require a better trained workforce with hospitality/service instruction and knowledge of the region.