

Report

to the

North American
Commission for Environmental Cooperation

on the

North American Guide Exchange Project

*--Strengthening Communities
Through Sustainable Tourism*



Prepared by:

Saskatchewan Wetland
Conservation Corporation

February 2001

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About the cover photo: Adriana Guzmán, commercial and operations director of Expediciones Sierra Norte, with children in Lachatao, Oaxaca.

North American Guide Exchange Project

– *Strengthening Communities Through Sustainable Tourism*

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(L-R) Jim Searson, Clem Millar, Brian MacDonald, Faustino Velázquez Ruiz, Gordon Lerat, Pablo Ruiz Lavalle, Adriana Guzmán Salinas, Adán López Pérez, Lisa Carter, Gord Demoskoff, Kerry Holderness, Sharon Rodenbush, Mark Stackhouse, Julio Gallardo Del Ángel

Overview

The goal of the *North American Guide Exchange Project (NAGE)* was, “to enhance the delivery of sustainable tourism in North America through the development of an ecotour guide network, an effort to help ensure long-term conservation of ecologically-sensitive areas in North America.”

The project involved ecotour guides from Mexico, the United States and Canada in a forum for sharing site information, delivery techniques, problem-solving and resource information. The project was structured with activities that facilitated collaborative, meaningful discussions among guides about their industry. Two workshops, six months apart, provided the guides the time for reflection, research, testing and contributions to the project as a tool to enhance their industry. The workshops were designed to: 1) discuss the basic strengths, threats and opportunities of each area, 2) consider the obstacles faced by the guides when developing their tours/sites, and 3) explore ways and means to overcome the obstacles they identified and ensure long-term conservation of their areas. Guides received hands-on experience and expanded their knowledge of sustainable ecotourism. The project was coordinated in partnership with community-based tourism and conservation groups, and received support from local communities and governments. The NAGE project was administered by the Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation (SWCC).

The project strengthened communities through sustainable tourism development by involving guides from the three countries in sharing information and discussing the challenges, opportunities, needs and processes required to further develop this industry. Communities in these areas gained an international perspective about ecotour delivery, and have become more acutely aware of the value of sustainable tourism, which extends beyond local employment to provide economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being.



En route to Hierve el Agua, guides toured a textile factory at Teotitlán del Valle, learning of the cochinitilla bug that provides the red dye in naturally-coloured fabrics.

All project activities were with the guides and the communities, and not about them. The participants were highly familiar with the challenges and opportunities they face, and could discuss the realities of overcoming obstacles and developing their industry. They indicated that even though they accomplished a great deal through discussions and the development of recommendations, their group has merely begun the process that will lead to effective, enhanced delivery of sustainable tourism in North America. This success will extend through the development of their network and their industry. Continued support of the NAGE project would enable them to continue this process and help develop the industry, benefiting many more guides, their communities, and all of society.

Obstacles

A preliminary list of obstacles to enhance delivery of sustainable tourism in ecologically-sensitive areas was developed at the Saskatchewan workshop and amended by the group while in Oaxaca. Care was taken to recognize the causes and not the symptoms of obstacles identified by the guides. Based on a list of ten obstacles and discussions about them, the guides developed their recommendations to the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (NACEC), contained in this report. The guides also articulated a definition for “ecotourism” as a basis for the recommendations to enhance sustainable ecotour delivery in North America.

Participants identified the following obstacles.

1. **Lack of a shared understanding of ecotourism.** The guides soon learned their opinions differed when discussing the activities that may be considered ecotourism. The guides from northern Saskatchewan noted that hunting and fishing could be consumptive ecotour activities if done in a sustainable manner. In contrast, an American participant initially excluded consumptive use of resources from this concept. Guides then compared hunting activities in Saskatchewan with mountain biking in Mexico, analyzing the similarities and differences of each. As discussions developed, the guides unanimously accepted these activities as potential “ecotourism” activities as defined by the guides in this report.



Faustino Velázquez of Michoacán explains land tenure in Mexico

2. **Lack of regional understanding among participants.** To more fully understand the circumstances of guides in different regions, participants needed to learn of the cultural differences, land tenure systems, government strategies and regulations, and the local needs of individual communities. Indigenous people from Saskatchewan were very interested in land tenure in the communities visited in Oaxaca and commented on the structure and similarities of the areas. Language difference was not an obstacle.
3. **Community receptiveness to ecotourism.** Considerable time and energy was needed, at least in some areas, to garner community support and for the community to experience the benefits and values of sustainable tourism. Receptiveness was directly related to the length of time the communities were involved in ecotourism. Similarities among Nuevo San Juan in Michoacán, Sierra Norte's Pueblos Mancomunados in Oaxaca, and the Chaplin and Quill Lakes areas of Saskatchewan illustrated this point. The guides considered, "How do we move from communities' indifference to communities making a difference?"



Ecotourism enhances community pride. Photo at a textile factory in Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca.

Guides firmly believe that without the understanding and cooperation of their communities, their industry would fail. Tantamount is the provision of benefits—social, economic, cultural, environmental—that accrue to the community that supports ecotourism. Comments included various techniques to promote community involvement, and how, “outsiders who visit and praise the area and its amenities” are the quickest catalysts to changing local attitudes, behaviour and a community’s acceptance of ecotourism. The “balance in delivery” is delicate; it weighs the benefits to the community with low impact to the environment. An additional caution was noted as one guide stated, “We must be careful not to place so much burden on local people—perhaps we place too much already—as not all communities have expertise and experience on their own to develop in sustainable fashion.”

4. **Lack of financial resources.** This obstacle resulted from the expressed need to develop and maintain the established network of ecotour guides. Discussions ranged from network recognition, terms of reference for an ecotour guide network, marketing the network, rules and guidelines for sites/clients/guides, and increased publics' awareness and education about conservation, biodiversity and how people can respect and enjoy nature in a sustainable fashion.



Clem Millar of Chaplin, Saskatchewan leads a tour of the salt flats around Chaplin Lake in southwestern Saskatchewan during the August 2000 workshop.

5. **Government regulations limit development.** “The authority, or control, lies outside the communities, but the responsibility rests within” was the consensus of participants. Generally participants felt governments exhibit an indifference to local people and cultures, especially with recent issues like ecotourism development. In Utah, however, government control and intervention was deemed an asset by helping control or mitigate urban sprawl and protect vital bird habitat. Guides agreed the best method of protecting the environment is through development led by local people who care about and understand the fragility of their land, and not through the influence of outsiders who, “... by virtue of money or control, can move in and develop” ecologically-sensitive areas. It was felt big business and hands-on control by remote governments not only causes friction between locals and outsiders, but in most cases is detrimental to the environment and benefits very few people in the long-run. “If you are going to operate an ecotour business you have to feel something for the environment, and if you are going to do it for money only, you will fail!” stated the manager of Cabañas del Monte in Sierra Norte, Oaxaca.



Waldemar Perez Chavez, manager of Cabañas del Monte in Sierra Norte, explains the delicate balance of community-based sustainable ecotourism.

6. **Educational needs.** This discussion addressed the need for community awareness and education about the value of biodiversity and long-term conservation. Comments about guides who advertise “sustainable tour activities” but do not practice sustainable tourism exacerbated the need for a clear understanding of sustainable ecotourism and local community support. Those groups identified as potentially benefiting from educational initiatives include tour operators (current, future), governments, tourists and communities. Education would mitigate the fear of developing a new industry among community residents, clearly define ecotourism, and promote “best practices” for the industry and for all guides. Overall, increased awareness would help communities maintain their environment and their culture.
7. **Isolation.** This obstacle was mitigated by the realization—especially among indigenous people from Canada and from Mexico—they are not alone in their efforts to protect their culture and their natural environment. Participants felt the presence of an ecotour guide network would provide the support to continue their work, despite remote locations and influence from other sectors to develop their areas. All guides strongly supported development of a permanent guide network as a basis for their work and their industry.
8. **The need to market.** There was considerable discussion about educating people and marketing the concept of sustainable ecotourism. It was felt the best marketing is by word-of-mouth, although a website and promotional information for the network was also discussed. One guide explained how he gains new clients based on his reputation. “In Mexico, and maybe other places as well,” he stated, “if you give good service, one person will be told (about the good service), but if you give bad service, ten people hear about it.

9. **Attracting, training and retaining expert guides.** An American participant indicated there is a great need for expert birding guides to meet the needs of clients in his area, and was pleased to learn of this expertise within the group, and through this network, that could partially alleviate this obstacle. As he saw it, “We must continually strive to be better than our paying customers ...”.
10. **Environmental degradation and global warming.** One guide stated, “It may not matter how much we work towards protecting and conserving biodiversity and various species of flora and fauna, as we may not succeed because of the phenomena of global warming and the issues surrounding this. However, this issue does not mean we should not do the best we can to conserve what we have (now).”



A late afternoon hike in the Sierra Norte mountains.

Evaluation

Project evaluation includes validation of:

1. Participants' understanding about the opportunities and challenges of the industry and how it is helping sustain and strengthen environmental integrity in ecologically-sensitive areas of North America.
2. Participants' conceptual understanding about sustainable tourism, realizing the short- and longer-term values of participation in the exchange, for guides, communities, adjacent regions and continentally. Guides realized they can each make a difference in their areas through communication, education and application of new techniques.

3. The extent to which participants made plans and will implement new techniques that were demonstrated or discussed during the workshops.
4. The extent to which participants share the techniques and ideas from the workshops with ecotour operators in their respective areas will be determined later this year. Several guides indicated they would report on the project by speaking at community functions and with other individuals. One participant indicated he would devote considerable volunteer time to speak with school children about sustainable environmental management that includes ecotourism as a tool for long-term conservation.
5. Immediate and longer-term value of establishing an ecotour guide exchange network in North America was identified through project delivery. Considerable, repeated value about the project was expressed by participants, and evinced by the list of *Bonus* Outcomes noted by the guides. A Saskatchewan guide stated, “This project benefits humankind—it is the bringing together of countries and people in a common understanding toward a common goal.”
6. NACEC’s perceived value in the recommendations from the guides about sustainable tourism delivery in North America will be determined as it helps in the development of sustainable tourism in North America. Longer-term impact of project delivery, including changes in local community attitudes and behaviour, will be informally monitored through the guides. Enhanced public understanding about biodiversity and the needs and value of migratory species through media coverage will also be noted.



Vicente Cruz Aguayo, an 81-year-old resident of Lachatao, shares wisdom about ecotourism and conservation.

The fundamental ingredient contributing to the success of this project was participation by guides, and this success will extend through the development of their network and their industry. The guides indicated that even though they accomplished a great deal through discussions and the development of recommendations, their group has merely begun the process that will lead to effective, enhanced delivery of sustainable tourism in North America. Continued support of the NAGE project would enable them to continue this process and help develop the industry, benefiting many more guides, their communities, and all of society.

Outcomes

Defining “ecotourism”

Capturing the concept and application of ecotourism in words was the single most difficult task of workshop participants. It took considerable time to understand and to discuss the many obstacles that at first precluded a common understanding of ecotourism. These discussions extended well beyond the “formal” workshop setting, continuing through meals, hikes, while travelling, and long into the evenings.

One issue that initially created an impasse was that of consumptive versus non-consumptive use of resources during an ecotourism experience. Mountain biking in Mexico and hunting in northern Saskatchewan were the examples that quantified these discussions. Eventually participants agreed both activities could be within or outside their definition of ecotourism. It was determined activities such as mountain biking or hunting must be sustainable and educational to be included. If one of these criterion is missing, the activity is not ecotourism. If these criteria were met, along with other criteria within the definition, then these activities could be accepted as ecotourism. Key words in the definition are “sustainable”, “educational” and “nature-based”.



Kerry Holderness of Quill Lake, Saskatchewan explains his understanding of sustainable ecotourism to the guides while at Cabañas del Monte.

Although everyone may not agree with the definition developed by workshop participants, these guides—from vastly different regions of North America, with different languages, cultures and customs—were able to achieve unanimous agreement on the definition. This accomplishment was possible because of the common traits among participants, especially their love and appreciation of nature, and a respect for each other’s cultures and customs. The group defined ecotourism as ...

“A sustainable method of nature-based educational tourism that reflects and respects the unique environment, community and culture of each individual ecosystem while minimizing impacts to those ecosystems.”

Recommendations

The recommendations from the guides to the NACEC to enhance ecotourism are:-

- 1. That a permanent North American Guide Exchange Network be established. SWCC or another reputable agency could be charged with the responsibility for coordinating this network.**

Rationale: A network of ecotour guides will provide a foundation of guidance and support for guides involved in the delivery of ecotourism in North America.

- 2. That a code of ethics be developed by and for North American guides involved in ecotourism. Development of this code of ethics must include representatives from Mexico, Canada and the United States.**

Rationale: A code of ethics will be a list of accepted practices, values and guidelines for guides involved in ecotour delivery.

- 3. That the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation encourage governments to empower local communities. This can be done by governments providing technical support and recognizing community decisions on activities in their areas.**

Rationale: Participants believe the communities have the best interests of their residents in mind, and should be able to directly influence and oversee activities in their areas.

- 4. That an appropriate system to market ecotourism, and for providing marketing support for qualified ecotour operators be established. The present NAGE group is willing and able to facilitate this task.**

Rationale: It was felt there is considerable benefit in developing a marketing strategy for the guide network, taking advantage of opportunities to link and package diverse geographic ecotour experiences.

5. **That an internet webpage be established which represents the NAGE network, displays its code of ethics, and links all sites represented by the network.**

Rationale: Profile about the North American Guide Exchange that allows public access through the internet was seen as vital for continuation of this initiative.

6. **That funding assistance be provided by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation for three years to enable the NAGE network to enhance the delivery of ecotourism and public awareness about sustainable tourism in North America. It is proposed the network would become self-sufficient through membership fees and sponsorship after three years. Other sources of funding will also be sought to assist in delivery of the recommendations in this report.**

Rationale: Delivery of the recommendations developed by guides during the NAGE workshops is required. This would include funding to develop terms of reference, a code of ethics and a basic marketing strategy for the network. Critical to the network is the ability of guides to access the network as a window that enables their reporting to the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, as this entity helps to shape delivery of sustainable ecotourism in North America.

Bonus Outcomes

Additional outcomes resulting from these participants coming together include the following examples.

1. Deepened cultural interest and broadened respect for and acceptance of differences.
2. Assistance from a Mexican guide in the development of ecotour infrastructure in northern Saskatchewan.
3. Recognition of the potential for birding tours in the La Ronge area of Saskatchewan.
4. Bird guide expertise that will be shared among guides in Oaxaca, Veracruz and Saskatchewan.
5. Recognition and support from local governments for sustainable tourism development (Saskatchewan, Oaxaca).
6. Increased community interest about ecotourism (all areas, especially Oaxaca and Saskatchewan where workshops were conducted).
7. Many personal and professional contacts established.
8. Language skills development – for community people and participants.
9. Increased stimuli to learn about other countries, new experiences.
10. Sharing among sites of ecotour product development.
11. Increased awareness about NACEC and international sustainable tourism development by communities and participants.

12. Heightened community and government awareness about the ecological importance of their areas, and the community benefits of sustainable tourism (through speaking engagements, school visits, student exchanges, other).
13. Recognition of the need for inventory of local flora and fauna in several areas.
14. Provision of economic and social benefits to communities visited (Oaxaca, Saskatchewan).
15. Linkage of university students from Nayarit and Utah in business ventures that may include ecotourism.
16. Recognition of a growing interest in ecotourism development, by countries, governments, communities, individuals.
17. Establishment of pen-pal relationships that link children of communities in Mexico with participants' children in Canada.
18. Potential participation by guides from Quintana Roo with ecotourism birding tours in Utah.
19. Potential professional development opportunity for Veracruz participant in Saskatchewan.



Guides toured the Quill Lakes area while in Saskatchewan last August.

Analysis

The success of the project is attributed directly to the guides through their discussions and ideas to enhance the ecotourism industry in North America. The guides were keenly interested in developing their industry and firmly committed to sustainable tourism that benefits their communities—economically, socially, culturally and environmentally. The dedication of these participants, and their ability to candidly share experiences, ideas and concerns, was critical to the success of this project. Guides were able to come to unanimous agreement on the definition of ecotourism, develop recommendations for NACEC's consideration and begin the process of developing a North American guide exchange network.

The key challenge of the project was for participants to devise ways to overcome obstacles, which they identified, to the development of sustainable tourism in North America. Ways and means of overcoming these obstacles were determined by guides through their recommendations to NACEC. These recommendations included developing a code of ethics for guides and a permanent ecotour guide network. Guides also recognized the need for a broad public awareness and marketing strategy for their industry that includes an internet website, with funding to support these activities for a three year term. Guides also recommended that NACEC encourage governments to empower local communities by giving the communities technical support and by recognizing community decisions on activities in their areas. The current challenge, borne of the project, is to secure funding to develop the network and help ensure ecotourism develops in a sustainable manner throughout North America.

A most valuable lesson from the project is the recognition that ecotour guides have an outstanding knowledge of ecotourism delivery and management. The guides are the key to successful development of this relatively new industry, as they are able to succinctly discuss the obstacles within their industry and develop solutions that will assist this rapidly growing industry. Guides are also the talent and the catalyst behind long-term conservation of ecologically-sensitive areas in North America.

On behalf of participants in the North American Guide Exchange project, the SWCC will invite potential funding agencies and entities to support further development of the NAGE. With financial support, a permanent guide network will be established, recommendations will be addressed, and the network will be expanded, initially with indigenous representatives from Mexico's Monarch butterfly reserves and the coastal area of Quintana Roo. Implementation of the guides' recommendations will enhance the delivery of sustainable tourism in North America.

Acknowledgements

The North American Guide Exchange participants and the Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation gratefully acknowledge the sponsors and partners for their vision and support of the *North American Guide Exchange Project*.

North American Fund for Environmental Cooperation
 TransCanada PipeLines
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 Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations
 Saskatchewan Northern Affairs
 Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management
 SaskTel
 University of Regina
 Participating communities in
 Mexico, the United States and Canada.

Participants

- Mexico:* Adán López Pérez, Marismas Nacionales, Nayarit
 Faustino Velázquez Ruiz, Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro, Michoacán
 Francisco Gerardo Arvayo Alvarez, Rio San Pedro, Sonora
 Julio C. Gallardo Del Ángel, ProNatura Veracruz, Veracruz
 Adriana Guzmán Salinas, Expediciones Sierra Norte, Oaxaca
 Pablo Ruiz Lavalle, Pueblos Mancomunados, Oaxaca
 Alma Zuri Aguirre Ojeda (translator), Tepic, Nayarit
 Lisa Carter (translator), Oaxaca, Oaxaca
- United States:* Mark Stackhouse, Great Salt Lake, Utah
 Kevin Bixby, Las Cruces, New Mexico
- Canada:* Clem Millar, Chaplin Tourism Association, Chaplin, Saskatchewan
 Kerry Holderness, Quill Lakes Nature Tours, Quill Lake, Saskatchewan
 Gordon Lerat, Sacred Ground Tipi Camps, Crooked Lake, Saskatchewan
 Jim Searson, Sundance Marina, LaRonge, Saskatchewan
 Brian MacDonald, Lone Wolf Camps, Carswell Lake, Saskatchewan
 Dr. Ralph Nilson, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan
 Mihaela Vulpescu, NAFEC, Montreal, Quebec
 Sharon Rodenbush, SWCC, Regina, Saskatchewan
 Gord Demoskoff, SWCC, Regina, Saskatchewan

Project Testimonials

Subject: Intercambio de Guías

Date: Wed, 28 Feb 2001 13:47:41 -0600

From: "Jose Gpe. Chavez" <ecoturismo@comunidadindigena.com>

To: gdemoskoff@wetland.sk.ca

INTERCAMBIO DE GUIAS DE NORTEAMERICA

Este tipo de proyectos de experiencias es muy positivo para las comunidades o grupos indígenas que estan organizadas o en proceso de organización.

Para la Comunidad Indígena de Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro, fue de gran ayuda este proyecto ya que nos permitio conocer personas, conocer trabajos de otras Comunidades y sobre todo nos ayudó a concretar más la idea de seguir desarrollando nuestro proyecto de ecoturismo.

También aprendimos a valorar nuestros recursos naturales, saber que en muchos lugares ya no existe el bosque y los animales que todavía tenemos. Además, pensar que hay mucha gente que pagaría por visitar lo que para nosotros es cotidiano.

algo importante fue el aprender que los recorridos se deben de hacer bien planeados para, tener éxito y aceptación de los visitantes y que esto se logra con trabajo y mucho esmero.

Lo mas importante fue la vinculación con otras experiencias o grupos de trabajo con los que pudimos compartir conocimientos, experiencias y expectativas. por lo tanto creemos que este tipo de proyectos se sigan financiando para el desarrollo de los grupos indígenas de México, Estados Unidos y Canada.

Saludos:

Faustino Velazquez
 Comunidad Indígena de Nuevo San Juan Parangaricutiro, Mich.

February 13, 2001

G. D. Lerat
Sacred Ground Tipi Camps
P.O. Box 466
Broadview, Saskatchewan SOG OKO

Sharon Rodenbush
Coordinator, International Programs
Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation
101 – 2022 Cornwall Street
Regina, Saskatchewan Canada S4P 2K5

Dear Sharon Rodenbush,

I wish to thank you for the opportunity to participate in the NAGE project. My involvement in the tours of Saskatchewan and Mexico, and the networking with the other guides and Saskatchewan Wetland co-ordinators has helped me considerably. Not only has this been of great value for me in the expansion of my own tipi camp/ecotourism project, but has also assisted me in getting a more clear picture of tourism as a whole for the province of Saskatchewan and also North America. The experience will help me in my work as a member of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Task force on tourism development.

From my First Nations perspective and Elders teachings, my primary concern is of course the protection of our environment and culture. I believe that through this process that we collectively worked through our tasks with these considerations in mind. It was enjoyable to be part of these discussions because of the consistency with what I have been personally taught by our Elders.

I sincerely hope that the recommendations and outcomes of these workshops will be very seriously and carefully considered. I think we have to maintain the established network and process in order to ensure the continued sustainable developments that we have begun.

I look forward to being involved in the further development and advancement of ecotourism in First Nations country and in Saskatchewan.

Thank you,



Gordon D. Lerat

Dear Sharon

It was a pleasure to meet and get to know both you and Gord. You are both very kind and caring people.

It was an honor to be a participant in this very important workshop. It was a great benefit to myself. It gave me a better understanding of the challenges we face. I enjoyed working with an international group of guides and operators to better understand and respect each others differences, but to unite in common goals. Common goals in areas of protection for communities, culture and ecological environment. I believe our debates and discussions proved to be very successful toward better understanding these very important issues.

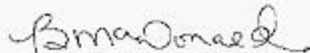
I would like to thank all organizations who were responsible for funding this project, with a special thank you to the Sask. Wetlands Conservation Corporation and their staff for initializing this project. It was a great benefit to me in many different areas of education and opportunity. In areas of meeting people and making new friends. I salute the wetland corporation in their efforts to educate societies, protect and preserve our continental natural wetland and the global birds that are associated with these wetlands, your efforts benefit us all.

I would like to thank Jim Bogard and Northern Affairs for sponsoring me. The knowledge gained will be a benefit to assist our northern communities in ecologically sustainable tourism development.

To the NAFEC I thank you for your assistance in providing opportunity in networking internationally toward environmental protection, by protecting the environment we protect ourselves and our earth. By doing this we protect a future for our children and grand children. For that I thank you again.

We have taken the first step, and even with a very hectic schedule and limited amounts of time we achieved our goals and came up with a number of recommendations, which I hope will be accepted and provide us with a opportunity to continue networking on an international level.

To everyone involved once again thank-you.



Brian MacDonald
Lone Wolf Camps

Cc: Jim Bogard

Subject: Re: Carta para NAFEC
Date: Sat, 17 Feb 2001 21:04:04 -0600 (CST)
From: adan lopez <kapadan2000@yahoo.com.mx>
To: Sharon Rodenbush <srodenbush@wetland.sk.ca>

Estimada Sharon.

Contestando sinceramente esta carta para la inclusion al reporte de NAFEC, quiero decir que ambos talleres (Canada y Mexico) creo que han sido bastante provechosos para toso los participantes, ya que en la busqueda de un bienestar de las comunidades, un aprovechamiento de los recursos, el respeto a la naturaleza y todo lo que esto conlleva, nos deja pues bien establecido el termino o la definicion al menos aceptada por este pequeño grupo de lo que consideramos ECOTURISMO y con la esperanza de que en el futuro cercano esta propia definicion pueda ser la aceptada por la UICN (Union Internacional para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza) y por otro lado en el aspecto personal puedo agregar que ambos talleres fueron de gran ayuda ya que pude encontrar grandes amigos, pude intercambiar ideas, comentarios y pude aprovechar todos estos comentarios y experiencias para poder aplicarlos en lo que yo desarrollo en la actualidad de acuerdo a los lineamientos y recomendaciones del taller en Saskatchewan: ser difusor de la conservacion del medio ambiente aplicado para Mexico; esto me deja tranquilo ya que profesionalmente tanto compañeros guias de turistas y los mismos turistas se empiezan a dar cuenta de esta corriente de eco-guias de turistas y de ecoturistas que vienen buscando estas alternativas que creo que en un futuro cercano tendremos o manejaremos con mas fuerza y frecuencia y gracias a esta recomendacion adquirida en Oaxaca, esta red de guias de ecoturismo se vera favorecida. Gracias Sharon por todo tu esfuerzo, lo mismo que a Gord y a todos aquellos patrocinadores que sin su ayuda estos talleres no se hubieran podido llevar a cabo. Sabemos que nuestra tarea aun comienza y espero que en un futuro cercano tengamos otra vez la posibilidad de continuar y encontrarnos en otro taller.

Mil gracias a todos por su apoyo.

Adan Lopez Perez

Guia de turistas del Estado de Nayarit, Mexico.

Jim Searson
Sundance Sports & Marina
Box 311
La Ronge, Saskatchewan, Canada
S0J 1L0

February 27, 2001

Sharon Rodenbush
Coordinator, International Programs
101-2022 Cornwall Street
Regina, Saskatchewan Canada S4P 2K5

Dear Sharon,

I am writing you this letter to thank you for organizing and developing the North American Guide Exchange workshops, that I was most fortunate to have taken part in. Every part of the workshops both in the Regina area, and in Oaxaca exceeded my expectations. I definitely benefited personally, as well I am very excited about how my business will further develop with the knowledge I am bringing home.

I really enjoyed meeting and working with all my new friends from the States, Mexico, and Saskatchewan. Involvement with this guide group has been a very integral step towards growth and development, of what I now understand the concept of ecotourism to be. It was exciting to work with people who love what they do, and had no problem sharing their knowledge, as we are striving for the same goals. I came to realize that many of the "topes" (bumps) on the road that we are experiencing, are the same challenges that seem quite consistent in this developing area of ecotourism.

Sharon I really appreciate the additional assistance that you have provided with gathering the information from the Canadian Embassy in regards to what is the best way to permit Adan to visit and study our operation. If all goes well, which I am sure it will, Adan will experience first hand, new and exciting adventures. I also really look forward to the knowledge that will be brought to La Ronge, and area. I personally am excited about learning more Spanish.

As a group of guides and operators we have started to create excellent recommendations. My hope is that we will see a continuation of what we have started, as it will benefit all present and future ecotourism initiatives.

Teniki,

Jim Searson

Sharon G. Rodenbush
Coordinator, International Programs.
Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation.

I am very thankful for the opportunity to have participated in the recent NAGE workshop in Oaxaca, México. This was a great opportunity to share experiences regarding ecotourism and development in different places in North America. Meetings such as this stimulate the exchange of ideas, which allows for the proper development of ecotourism, and this in turn strengthens the conservation of places and their culture through proper development.

In my opinion, this was a great opportunity to share opinions, experiences and ideas with workshop participants. In doing this we reinforce our work and commitment to environmental and cultural conservation in each of our countries, allowing us to better our work each day. Meetings where there is an exchange of ideas and experiences are very important so that each of the participants may have a better idea of the different definitions of development and ecotourism in different countries, regions, communities or as individuals.

The sharing of experiences with people from distinct parts of North America, all with different professions, ages and experiences in ecotourism, was useful for me to better myself as a person, biologist and ecotourism guide, since now I can better understand what others think. After the NAGE workshop I am better prepared to deal with people looking for ecotourism experiences, and can ensure better use of the environment and promote its conservation with the people I guide in the field.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to better my work.

Sincerely,

Julio César Gallardo Del Ángel
Cloud Forest Program
PRONATURA VERACRUZ.

Xalapa, Veracruz, México on February 19, 2001

February 28, 2001.

Sharon Rodenbush
Coordinator, International Programs
101-2022 Cornwall Street
Regina, Saskatchewan Canada S4P 2K5

Dear Sharon,

I would like to begin by thanking you infinitely for the invitation to participate in the NAGE project as an invitee to Saskatchewan, Canada, and to host the same in my state of Oaxaca.

Contact with guides from other places in North American who confront the same challenges and obstacles that we do allowed me to expand my knowledge regarding sustainable tourism, which brings economic, cultural social and, of course, environmental benefit to our communities.

Another result of these workshops has been the professional contacts, which allow us to improve and increase our ecotourism services. I am convinced that groups such as NAGE are necessary in order to directly share and exchange ideas, challenges, threats and opportunities in ecotourism and thereby establish directives which will guide our communities and operators so that this activity becomes a tool to help us to reach sustainable development worldwide. It will also allow us to offer our visitors an educational, fun and safe experience, contributing to the creation of a new ecological consciousness in the world.

Personally, being a participant in this workshop with people who share a common goal, "to take care of our people and our earth", reinforces my commitment to continue working towards this end.

I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to participate in this workshop and it is my sincere desire that this be only the start of a network that will evolve in order to contribute to global sustainable development.

Sincerely,

Adriana Guzmán
Commercial and Operations Director
Expediciones Sierra Norte De Oaxaca
Community Ecotourism Company
Pueblos Mancomunados

Dear Sharon:

I am very appreciative of the opportunity to participate in the North American Guide Exchange Workshop. I would like to congratulate the coordinators, sponsors and participants for their efforts in making this workshop so successful.

To talk and work with people from Northern Saskatchewan to Southern Mexico is a wonderful experience. I found that although many things are quite different including geography, language and climate; our goals and challenges are very similar.

I feel that by proceeding with the recommendations put forth by this workshop, all sustainable ecotourism in North America

should benefit.

Sincerely,

Clem Millar
Chairman Chaplin
Tourism Committee Inc.

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February 27, 2001

Sharon Rodenbush
Coordinator, International Programs
101-2022 Cornwall Street
Regina, Saskatchewan Canada S4P 2K5

Dear Sharon,

I am writing this letter to express my sincere gratitude for inviting me to participate in the workshops for the North American Guide Exchange. Being a part of this group has provided many benefits to me personally, and to my business. Equally, I hope that whatever small contributions that I may have made to this group will prove to be of benefit to the others in the group, and to our industry as a whole.

Through these workshops, I have learned something about the ecotourism industry which I should have known before. Ecotourism is an industry which is growing, not through the activities of governments or a few major companies, but rather through the collective efforts of many small communities and businesses like my own. We face many challenges and problems daily with making our programs work, and our businesses profitable. Through discussions in these workshops, it became clear to me, in spite of the vast cultural differences represented in the group, that we all face the same challenges.

The value of having the ability to share ideas about how to overcome these challenges cannot be overestimated. These workshops gave us this ability, and by continuing this association into the future, we can ensure that we, and others in our industry, will always be able to help one another. The contacts I made, and the personal relationships which grew from the workshops will always be valuable to me and my business. I look forward to building new relationships such as these in the future. I sincerely hope that we will be able to look back at these workshops as the beginning of an association of ecotourism operators which is indispensable to our industry.

Although ecotourism grows through the activities of individual ecotour operators, and not through the activities of governments and larger organizations, there is a role which these organizations can play to assist our industry. By facilitating the creation and continued operation of an exchange, such as that which was created here, they can ensure that this exchange of ideas will always benefit ecotour operators. For this to occur, the

recommendations which were unanimously adopted by our group should be implemented.

In many places, the potential benefits of ecotourism to communities and the environment has yet to be fully realized. I again thank you for the effort you have made towards helping each of us do our own small part towards achieving this goal.

Sincerely (and muchismas gracias!),
Mark Stackhouse, Westwings, Inc.

Sharon Rodenbush
SWCC

Thank you for inviting me to both the Saskatchewan and the Oaxaca, portions of the North American Eco-Guide Exchange.

The second portion of the experience many more times as productive than the first, as the people came together not as strangers, but almost as old friends. Thus the discussions came quicker, with less inhibitions, and thus I feel the accomplishments were coming faster than the first meeting could be...

I feel that we achieved a level of knowledge sharing, both personal, and regional, for all involved. Common and specific problems were identified, helping each individual evaluate the necessary directions needed that each operation may, or must use to achieve success.

I feel the discussions held, with the help of you and Gord as facilitators, in topics such as marketing, customer needs and expectations, inter-cultural understanding, and differences and similarities not only in scenery and climate but in specific values and wildlife and habitat management techniques, were excellent.

Excellent comparisons were made between Government and NGO support and regulations, as well as community vs. private business based operations. There was interesting options of how all could work together to achieve common goals.

Even though I feel we accomplished a great deal, I also feel that we may have, as a group, a lot more to offer the process of the development of the future of this industry. I hope we can find some way of digging deeper into the talent pool that you have pulled together.

I am very proud of the fact that this diverse group from across North America could establish a definition of Eco-Tourism that could be accepted by all present, where all other definitions from around the world could not quite fit many cultures involved. In my years of involvement with the provincial Eco-Tourism task force, we couldn't do it. Julio said the group he was involved with from a number of Latin American countries could not accomplish this either, and almost all definitions I have read, all attempts to define it have been lacking until now.

I do hope that we can find a way to continue this process, I feel in many ways we have just begun to achieve.

Kerry Holderness
Quill Lakes Nature Tours
Penny's Nature Lodge

Dear friends of the North American guide exchange:

Nearly a month has passed since we walked together the ancient zapotec paths of the Oaxaca mountains. As I recall the days we spent sharing thoughts, experiences and ideas on potential joint projects, I can only wish the results of our exchange will be as beneficial for everyone involved as they've been for our organization, and for us personally as well.

I'll begin by saying that in Oaxaca, neither official institutions nor communities have agreed upon the basic principles of sustainable ecotourism delivery. Under this circumstance, our participation as hosts of an international event such as the North American Guide Exchange, has drawn considerable attention to the community-owned and operated model of ecotourism our organization has been promoting in the Sierra Norte for the past 5 years. This attention has opened new possibilities of cooperation with different organizations and institutions. To mention just one example, during the course of the workshop an agreement was reached between the Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation, the Secretaría de Turismo of Oaxaca and Expediciones Sierra Norte, and funding was provided for printing 1 000 hiking trail maps of the Pueblos Mancomunados. More projects are under way as a direct result of the workshop. We have a long way to go before we reach our goal of a sustainable ecotourism activity under indigenous control, but as a result of the NAGE our organization has now a unique opportunity to speak, to a wider and more receptive audience, about our experience working with the Pueblos Mancomunados, and the lessons that can be drawn from it. This will hopefully help better the chances of long term conservation of the ecosystems of the mountains of Oaxaca, for there can be no better hands to take care of them than those of the people who have inhabited this land for centuries.

NAGE provided many important lessons and helped broaden our perspective. It is easy to feel isolated when you're surrounded by big mountains, so it was wonderful to learn that some of the birds nesting here came from such a distant place as Saskatchewan, via Utah... what a surprising way to realize we're not isolated at all! We knew birdwatching was a very important ecotourism activity, but we lacked the expertise to develop a program to attract birdwatchers, and more important, to increase awareness of local people on the importance this area has to migrating birds. The exchange opened the possibility of a birding map and an educational joint project, involving Mark, Julio, and schoolchildren and guides from the communities. We were happy to hear other projects among the guides from the exchange were also taking shape as a result of this meeting, and we wish them all the best and hope we can support these experiences in any way we can.

On a personal level, the exchange provided a most enriching experience. I must confess I didn't expect us to agree on a common definition of ecotourism. Coming from such different cultures, landscapes and ways of living was not the easiest circumstance 16 people can find themselves in as they try to reach common ground regarding definitions. Besides, a zapotec legend often heard in the mountains had it that once this was tried by another group, and for four months, without success. So taking into account such a gloomy perspective, I was particularly happy when Kerry was able to finally put in words the NAGE definition of ecotourism, one that can include, let's say, Brian's Wolf Camp activities up north and also Valdemar's observation tour of bromelias at del Monte cabins (along with the much needed squirrel control program he'll have to undertake one of these years). As for myself, I couldn't feel more comfortable with the definition.

As for the future of NAGE, I certainly hope we could meet again sometime in the future, but I don't know if that will be possible. So I remember the words Brian told me when we said goodbye at the airport: "I don't know if we'll see each other again, but you'll always walk with me." I feel the same way with each participant of NAGE.

I want to finish this letter by expressing my gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of this exchange, specially to the people of the Saskatchewan Wetland Conservation Corporation, Gord Demoskoff and Sharon Rodenbush, whose efforts and dedication made it all possible.

Warmest regards

Pablo Ruiz Lavalle
 Director of the Ecotourism Project
 Pueblos Mancomunados

February 16, 2001

Sharon Rodenbush,
International Coordinator,
Saskatchewan Wetlands Conservation Commission,
Saskatoon, SK Canada

Dear Sharon,

By way of this letter I would like to provide you with my thoughts on the value and benefits of NAGE Workshop #2 and the project as a whole. Let me begin by saying that my participation in the workshop, as interpreter, was marginal. However, having heard the discussions and interacted with the participants themselves, these are my impressions.

I believe the project as a whole has great benefit. As individuals, guides and ecotourism operators, the participants directly interacted with others working in the same field. This contact allowed them to talk about their individual projects, share ideas, goals, concerns and ways of overcoming obstacles. Most importantly, in learning about others and their projects, the participants came to realize that they were not alone in their endeavours. Further, as a result of these contacts, great friendships and possible partnerships were forged between many of the guides. I heard of many plans for increased professional contact and sharing of expertise.

Further, as ecotourism seems to be a relatively new field and one in which there is a great deal of uncertainty as to its definition, what it involves and who is really involved in it. This exchange provided the participants with a sense of common ground and confirmation from their peers. Most importantly, they found that they have the ability to set standards and positively influence the development of ecotourism in North America.

In terms of Workshop #2 itself, the discussions were thought provoking, much information was exchanged among the guides; opinions were asked and respected. Through these discussions, a consensus was reached on the definition of ecotourism; a major accomplishment.

Finally, the five day journey through the Sierra Madre mountain area in Oaxaca, México, gave participants the opportunity to see an ecotourism project in action. Participants were able to draw similarities, provide suggestions, and gain ideas for their own use. I believe that it was a great learning experience.

Personally, having never been involved in the ecotourism industry before, I found the workshop and exchange program to be quite inspiring. Linking three countries on one continent and guides with very connected yet disparate projects is a momentous task, but one that I believe has begun to bear great fruit.

I thank you for the opportunity to partake in this endeavour and remain at your service should you require it.

Yours truly,

Lisa Carter, Translator-Interpreter
Camino Antiguo a San Felipe del Agua 107-5
Oaxaca, Oax. México

Participating Sites



