AJES
Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies

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MISSION STATEMENT

The *Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies* (AJES) exists to foster a dialogue about the broad range of issues that concern the Adirondacks and Northern Forest.

AJES serves to bridge the gaps among academic disciplines and among researchers and practitioners devoted to understanding and promoting the development of sustainable communities, both human and wild.

The journal purposefully avoids serving as a vehicle for any single or special point of view. To the contrary, in searching for common ground AJES welcomes variety and a broad spectrum of opinion from its contributors.

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We encourage the submission of manuscripts, reviews, photographs, artwork and letters to the editor.

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PREROGATIVE

Greening Tourism

BY GARY CHILSON
Paul Smith's College

Conventional wisdom has it that tourism is good for our Northern Forest economy. Tourism, after all, is nonextractive unlike mining or some forms of forestry, it has no smokestacks, and it doesn't consume scenery. Each additional tourist we get brings in their dollars to the local economy, generating jobs to serve and support them, and they leave with all the pleasures of their experience. Supporting facilities, like restaurants, theaters, cultural events, roads, hospitals, and the like also benefit local inhabitants who get to live where others only visit. Thus the more tourism our region can draw the better off we are. It seems so obvious. Yet I wonder. . .

I was fortunate to have been raised in a small coastal town on the island of Oahu in the Territory of Hawaii. Nearly everybody who visits the island today leaves with pleasurable memories and dreams of returning to live in a tropical island paradise. So when people discover where I was born and where my family still lives they're very surprised to learn that I choose to live in the mountains of the Adirondacks. There are lots of reasons, of course, but it is partly because the last time I returned to the islands twenty years ago I realized that I could never be happy there.

It's said you can never go home again and it's true, especially if home's become a tourist's Mecca. With the coming of tourism there also came an end to a special "way of life" and a dramatic change in the landscape itself.

When I was born there were a half million people on the island, mostly in Honolulu and around Pearl Harbor where they belonged, and almost no tourists. Since becoming a state in 1959, shortly after ocean-hopping jets began to replace the old, slow, prop-powered constellations, Hawaii's popularity as a tourist destination has grown rapidly. I remember a time when it seemed that only the Royal Hawaiian Hotel was on the shores of Waikiki. Now you can't see the water for all the hotels. Five million tourists visit each year. On any given day there might be a couple hundred thousand tourists using the facilities, clogging the sewage system, and competing with the locals for limited beach space. There's also another 300 thousand residents squeezed in between the mountain ranges and along the coast of the tiny island.

Lots of roads, spread-out subdivisions, high-rise apartment buildings, shopping centers, hotels, and golf courses are everywhere causing erosion, air and water pollution, and the extinction of indigenous species. Traffic is intolerable. Exhaust fumes have replaced the smell of flowers. What little remains of the culture of old Hawaii is only found at tourist traps and it's been made smutty. The poor have been stripped of their land and driven into the growing slums to make room for more hotels and golf courses. Racial strife and hate crimes against white people make hiking and camping scary. You certainly have to lock your doors now.

Uncontrolled tourism made Hawaii a paradise lost — yet each individual tourist still treasures their experience there. Tourists are blind to their destructive impacts.

Those of us who don't think much of tourism, one way or another, might be surprised to learn of the large and growing body of academic literature on this industry. Much of the research has centered upon Third World countries that explicitly used tourism as a development tool because it was seen as a "clean" way to propel economic growth, more jobs and infrastructure development.

What has been discovered, however, is that Hawaii is not an isolated example of tourism gone mad. Research reveals the dark side of tourism: only modest economic benefits accrue to the host region and these meager advantages are coupled to very significant social and environmental costs.

The vast majority of tourism's monetary benefits leave the community immediately because food and fuel are usually not produced locally and tourist company profits and loan payments are usually serviced by banks outside the region. The remaining dollars captured locally are thought to magnify their beneficial impact in the community through the multiplier-effect. Money from beyond the region spent on goods and services purchased locally, after deducting their import costs, becomes income generated locally. This local income is then spent locally on goods and services becoming income for the next round and the next around the circular economy.

What is found when actually following the money around is that there are a lot of leakages that reduce the potential benefits. Even local owners of hotels, restaurants and other tourist establishments, for example, owe outside banks their loan payments. The construction jobs building the tourist facilities bought with these loans are frequently bid out to companies from outside the region. Almost all of the materials used in construction are produced from outside the region. Likewise, management personnel are usually imported instead of hiring and training locals. Even many waiters and waitresses, bussers, dishwashers and housemaids are imported from outside the community.

It's hard to imagine tourism in the Northern Forest ever reaching such ugly proportions as found on a tropical island. However, those villages and towns here that make tourism their primary economic hope should reconsider their focus. We need to be highly skeptical and very cautious about putting our economic and cultural eggs into a tourist's shopping bag. Tourism's main benefit, its multiplier-effect, brings only slim pickings after all the leakages are taken into account. Moreover, the industry is highly sensitive to the price of fuel, consumer whims, and seasonal variations. Most important, there are real costs involved — though many are hidden from view or won't be seen for a few more years and some of the most significant costs cannot be measured in mere dollars.

The development of sustainable communities in the Adirondacks and Northern Forest could and should, however, include tourism if we're careful to make it a sensible and sustainable contribution to our economy. One straightforward method of greening tourism is by establishing a "Bed Tax" on overnight accommodations, including campgrounds. Revenues collected should not go to further promote tourism as is the case now but, rather, should go to promote the conservation of the region tourists visit. Perhaps some of the revenues could be used to afford nontoxic and noncorrosive de-icers for our winter roads we keep clear and dry for the tourists (think how that would add to the quality of our lives and the lifespan of our vehicles).

Another method of making tourism worthwhile is to eliminate the various tax and loan subsidies our local governments pay to support and encourage tourism. Tourism is hardly an infant industry needing local taxpayers' help, it is the largest legitimate industry in the world. Let tourists and the businesses that serve them pay their full way plus a little extra.

To help reduce leakages and increase the local multiplier effect, our development agencies should shun national chains and mega-retailers of all kinds, including hotels and restaurants, and focus instead on assisting local residents to upgrade and expand their own faculties and facilities. There should also be a deliberate policy and campaign to bank with locally owned banks and to utilize locally produced food and materials.

Greening tourism in this way is a form of ecotourism. Unlike tourism generally, ecotourism explicitly seeks to raise the quality of life for local residents, both human and wild. Ecotourism is a new and evolving concept that is frequently misunderstood and used incorrectly. For example, most people associate ecotourism only with underdeveloped countries where much of the research into greening tourism has occurred. According to Martha Honey, in *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development* (1999), ecotourism is travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and small scale. As a process, ecotourism helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for human rights and different cultures. That sounds exactly like what we need in the underdeveloped region of the Adirondacks and Northern Forest.

With apologies to those concerned, AJES 8(1) 2001 contained a significant error of omission. The article, "Local Governments and Watershed Management: Lessons for the Adirondacks," was coauthored by Timothy D. Schaeffer and Valerie A. Luzadis and not by Dr. Schaeffer alone as indicated. Valerie Luzadis is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Forestry at SUNY-ESF and may be contacted via email at vluzadis@esf.edu. In the same issue, Jack Elliot's "Adirondack Rustic Furniture Industry: Survey and Prospect," shows the figure of a birch bench on page 16 incorrectly captioned. The caption should read: "Figure 1: George Jaques, Birch Bench, produced by George Jaques, 1985. Photo by Karen Halverson."

Archived issues of AJES, including the corrected title page and figure caption noted above, are expected to be available on-line in May 2002. Current issues of AJES will be added to the website's archives approximately 12 months after their initial release to promote both access and subscriptions.

Comments?

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