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A Perspective on Rural Tourism Development

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1. Introduction

It is not unusual to hear that rural America is undergoing transformation. This is not new news but something that has been going on since Europeans arrived on this land. However the type of transformation taking place today is based on a relatively new paradigm. Whereas in the past rural economies were supplemented by increasing levels of economic activity today's rural economy is buffeted by economic changes that are diminishing the viability of many rural communities. To fully understand the forces affecting rural America and their root causes requires a short journey back into the formative days of rural economies in this country.

The history of the United States relationship with its rural land base is one of consumption. Many of the first colonists were sent as an economic unit to make money for their sponsors. Their pursuit of fur, fish and feathers often determined whether the colony survived. As the country's population spread westward the same formula for success (i.e. harvesting natural resources) was practiced. Early voyageurs to the northern areas of the United States, and extending deep into Canada, were driven by the search for fur. Remnants of trading posts have become historical attractions for modern voyageurs who do not arrive in canoes but instead pull up in SUV's.

Settlement practices of the western states resembled a free for all during the homestead era. The term Manifest Destiny became the rallying cry for western expansion of settlements. Even though one of the most prominent early explorers and cartographers of the American West, John Wesley Powell, argued against settlement practices utilized in eastern states (Powell, 1879) his informed opinion was ignored by policy makers who were only interested in establishing a human presence on the vast western land base. Stegner (1992) recounts the fallacy of this policy in terms of fairness for those early homesteaders but the end result was exactly what was intended. Vast prairies and plains were brought under the plow, fenced, or otherwise exploited for the natural resource riches they contained.

The first attempts to assert some federal control over western areas of the country were met with strong resistance. When Presidents Harrison and Cleveland set aside large tracts of land in Federal Reserves western congressmen were openly hostile to the policy arguing that this was nothing short of a federal lock up of resources that instead should be exploited for economic gain. Their concerns were eventually addressed by Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service. Pinchot was a student and adherent to policies governing use of European forests so it was not surprising that he would come out in favor of "economic use" of the nations forests. The sentiments and policies expressed and implemented by Pinchot were evident over seventy years later when the United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service (USDA-FS) Framework for the Future (USDA-FS, 1970) was published. This policy document, steeped in resource utilization language, was especially noted for the statement that the USFS would "seek opportunities for development of forest based enterprises which will contribute to rural growth rates at least equal to the national average" (pg 8). Any student of economic growth theory is aware of the cyclic nature of resource based extraction enterprises. A policy that explicitly states that public forests will be utilized for economic growth *at least equal to the national average* is establishing the legal framework for resource exploitation. The

[1] This paper was presented as part of the Presidential Symposium at the 2004 Annual Meetings of the Mid-continent Regional Science Association.

evidence is apparent in the countless lawsuits and eventual victories won by some environmental groups over the practice of below cost timber sales.

Resource consumption was also the catalyst for the creation of the National Park Service. It was the fight over the building of the Hetch Hetchy dam in Yosemite that galvanized the pro park movement leading to its creation in the early 1900's (Everhart, 1983). Even though Yosemite was not the first park, that distinction is held by Yellowstone, the roots of the park movement originated in Yosemite.

Through the years resource consumption and exploitation has been evident not only in public policy but in individual actions. The demise of the American Bison in a few short years, the extinction of the passenger pigeon, the filling and draining of wetlands for agriculture, the collection and eventual resettlement of American Indians on reservations (usually on lands of no inherent resource consumption value), the nominal cost for mining claims (still in force today) are all examples of how Americans viewed the natural resources they controlled. These actions were not undertaken without the assistance of federal, state and local authorities who encouraged and assisted, through the legislative process, actions intended to accelerate resource consumption. Today in the county where I live in Minnesota gopher feet still qualify for a cash bounty.

While the policies we have used to develop and utilize the riches of this land were non-controversial at the time of implementation they are very controversial today. Lawsuits over minimum water levels in California streams have been brought and won by anglers against the wishes of agricultural and residential interests. Environmental groups in Hawaii have sued over the state's plan to increase its budget for tourism marketing because no environmental impact statement was ever produced that addressed the expected impacts on the environment should the marketing plan be successful and result in additional tourists coming to the state. Numerous other examples of lawsuits and legislation blocking development and exploitation of natural resources can be found at the state and federal level with most of those occurring during the last 30 years. Today rural America finds itself dealing with issues it never had to face before. Rural population decline in the plains and prairie states is real and attempts to stem the exodus have been largely unsuccessful. In areas where population has remained stable or even grown the rate of growth, apart from recreation and near urban communities, has been slow. Johnson and Beale (2002) reveal that the top three types of counties that are growing in the U.S. can be categorized as retirement, federal lands or recreation dominated. For the first time in its history the United States is dealing with a situation where instead of adding additional economic opportunity to the rural base it is dealing with the loss of opportunity. The next section will delve into this argument a bit deeper.

2. Rural Economies

Rural economies, as argued above, have been first and foremost about natural resource consumption and exploitation. Numerous government policies supported the settlement of rural America and were later repealed, such as the Homestead Act. Others have remained and continue to support the economies of rural settlements. A review of rural economies based on sectoral analysis will serve to shed light on the economic forces in play in rural America today.

Rural America has lost jobs, as a percentage of the total, over the last 30 years. Although the total number of jobs in the U.S. has increased the percentage of those jobs located in rural areas has declined from 19.4% of the total in 1969 to 17.1% of the total in 2001 (ERS-USDA, 2004). The shift of jobs from rural to urban America is only part of the story. When individual sectors are examined it becomes clear where the shift in jobs has taken place.

Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and related economic activities are all major resource intensive activities requiring large acreage. It would not be unexpected to find that these sectors are primary labor users. The number of jobs, in rural America, associated with these sectors was 165,000 plus in 1969. By 2001 that number had increased to 552,000 plus. Even though almost 400,000 new jobs had been added in these sectors in rural America since 1969 job growth in urban America for this same time period and in the same sectors enjoyed an increase of over 1.2 million jobs or three times as many as were created in rural America (ERS-USDA, 2004). Many of these urban jobs reflect processing, supply and support positions that do not require as much acreage as the economic activities that provide the raw product.

Mining, although on a smaller scale than the agriculture, forestry or fisheries sectors, employed almost 361,000 people in 1969 in rural America but by 2001, after peaking in the mid 1980's, total employment stood at approximately 321,000 jobs. Again the contrast between rural and urban America is quite revealing. Urban America actually gained employment in the mining sector, again reflecting downstream processing, and accounted for approximately 462,000 jobs in 2000 up from 374,000 in 1969 (ERS-USDA, 2004).

Manufacturing is another sector of importance to rural America. Although not one of the early resource

consumption activities it has become an important sector for rural employment and earnings. When examining this sector we find that employment in rural America has actually fared better than manufacturing employment in urban America. In 1969 there were a total of 3.6 million manufacturing jobs in rural America. That number had increased to approximately 4.3 million in 2000. By contrast in urban America jobs directly tied to manufacturing numbered 17 million in 1969 but only 14.8 million in 2000. In total the U.S. lost over 1 million manufacturing jobs from 1969 –2000 but the brunt of that loss was borne by urban residents (ERS-USDA, 2004). One other change that is not reflected in these job figures is the decline in real wages by those still employed in the manufacturing sector. In Minnesota the average meatpackers wage is approximately $12/hour. This is down from the high of $17/hour in 1982 (Hughlett, 2004). Minnesota is not the only place where the decline in real wages occurs. With the influx of Mexican labor, both legal and illegal, U.S. manufacturing is trying to remain competitive with the rest of the world by cost savings in the labor sector.

There is no absolute way to examine the impact of tourism employment in rural America. Often we hear references to the "tourism industry". As Smith (2004) points out there is no official tourism sector. Tourism sales span many sectors and the only way to accurately examine employment and revenue related to tourism is to create a separate input/output table that allocates shares of affected sectors, based on percentage of sales to these sectors from non-residents, to a tourism account often referred to as a tourism satellite account. To date the United States has not developed a tourism satellite account. Therefore to gauge the importance of tourism proxy sectors are used. The two that come closest to resembling tourism are services and retail although they are not inclusive of all types of employment directly related to tourism.

Service employment has grown substantially over the last 30+ years. In 1969 a total of 16.7 million jobs were directly related to service in the U.S. with approximately 16 percent or 2.7 million of those jobs located in rural America. By 2000 over 53 million service related jobs were found in the U.S. economy with slightly over 7 million of those found in rural America (ERS-USDA, 2004). This amounts to a 260 percent increase in service jobs in rural America. It should be noted that although the number of service jobs in urban America increased by 320 percent over the same time period many of these jobs are also related to tourism. Tourism is not confined to rural America as consumption cities (Gartner and Lime, 2000) such as Las Vegas, Orlando, and Branson, MO have emerged as major tourism attractions and large industrial cities (e.g. Chicago, New York) have evolved to include tourism as an important part of their economic base.

Another sector, retail, although not as tied to tourism as the service sector also provides an indication of tourism's growing importance in rural America. Retail includes many different types of stores from the rural gift shop to the big box retailer (e.g. Walmart, Home Depot). It is not possible to separate the two and discuss only tourism related retail jobs therefore total retail jobs is used as a proxy for tourism dependent retail positions. As mentioned above the connection between retail and tourism is not as direct as between services and tourism however it is more direct than the other sectors reviewed in this section.

Since 1969 the U.S. has added over 2.3 million retail jobs in rural America almost doubling from 2.5 million in 1969 to 4.8 million in 2000. Urban America started with 10.9 million retail jobs in 1969 and more than doubled to 22.5 million in 2000 (ERS-USDA, 2004)

When jobs from all the sectors discussed above are taken into consideration the total number created from the non-tourism sectors (i.e. ag, forestry, fisheries, manufacturing, mining) in rural America between 1969 and 2000 amounts to 1,097, 859. By contrast service sector jobs in rural America increased by over 4.3 million during that same time period and retail sector positions added another 2.3 million in rural America. The ratio of service/retail job increase versus non-tourism dependent jobs in rural America from 1969 – 2000 was 6.1:1. The dominance of service and retail sector jobs in rural America indirectly tells us how much tourism means to the continued vitality of rural living versus traditional occupations that have historically supported the rural population base. Traditional occupations now need support from the government to keep employment levels where they are at the moment. Acts like the General Mining Law of 1872 which sets land acquisition fees at $5 acre for public land or the Farm Bill, which is renewed every seven years, are examples of federal law intended to help rural based special interests maintain economic viability in the face of declining primary product prices.

A logical extension of the argument that tourism is now a dominant economic force in rural America is to suggest that old economic development models are no longer viable. The resource consumption mentality that fueled over 300 years of rural development in this country should be replaced with new paradigms that recognize the value of renewable consumption activities or, in other words, sustainable tourism development. However, if one accepts that new models for rural development are needed what should they look

like? The second half of this paper addresses that issue.

3. Rural Tourism

Rural tourism development is a rather new phenomenon when compared to traditional rural economic activities. According to Siehl (2000) much of the legislation that set aside, or created new categories of use for, federal lands occurred during the 1958-1968 decade. Siehl calls this period "Recreation's Golden Era".

Demand for additional resources for recreation and tourism purposes has its roots in post World War II America. Siehl points out that the development of ski resorts and the advent of commercial white water rafting in the states can be directly traced to surplus equipment from the War that was no longer needed by the military. In addition economic growth led to increases in disposable income that, when coupled with new labor contracts resulting in increased paid vacation time for workers, put more people into the role of recreationist/tourist. This was an ideal situation for rural development as most traditional resource extraction and consumption industries were still economically viable, without a great deal of government support, and the recreation/tourism boom was adding on to the opportunities for economic development in rural America. This was the situation that prevailed until, as shown in the preceding section, traditional industries began to stagnate during the 1970's and non-traditional industries, many of them related to tourism, began to assume a more dominant role.

The study of tourism did not appear, in a significant way, until the 1970's. Most of the academic literature at this time was very positive promoting tourism as a "smokeless" pollution free industry (Jafari, 1988). One of the few to actually look at the structure of tourism, Gunn (1979) offered a rural tourism development model that identified communities as gateways with transportation linkages leading to attractions. This early model reinforced the commonly held view of the time that attractions were tied to the natural resource base of an area. In many ways tourism's reliance on resources was similar to that of the resource extraction and consumption industries. Without a strong natural resource base with identifiable qualities neither traditional industries nor the nascent tourism phenomenon was likely to succeed.

Since Gunn's early model many types of rural tourism development have been attempted and some have been successful. It is now clear that gateway communities may be destination communities themselves and it is not necessarily the quality of the natural resource base that matters as much for success as the development model that is used. However, one constant that still affects rural tourism development is transportation. Transportation linkages and access between market and destination as well as the quality, from a tourist perspective, of the transportation system in place near the destination are integral components of rural tourism development. Yet the role of transportation as an enhancement to the attraction base and overall tourism experience has been generally ignored. In order to understand how rural tourism development differs from other forms of rural development it is important to take a closer look at the attributes and amenities, some related to transportation, that appear to matter to those seeking rural tourism experiences.

4. Rural Attributes and Amenities

What are tourists looking for from a rural tourism experience? This question has driven numerous research studies and also a great deal of government direction. As mentioned above early rural tourism development was directly tied to high quality resources such as mountains for ski resorts and white water rivers for rafting. The model that Gunn (1979) offered was appropriate for the times as it was later that gateway communities (e.g. Jackson Hole) became destinations in their own right. However Gunn's model continued the thinking that rural tourism development is directly tied to the need for natural resources to fuel economic development. It is this same type of development model, physical attribute driven, that is behind modern day rural tourism development efforts.

As mentioned most early rural tourism destinations developed to satisfy a particular market interest. In addition to skiing and rafting, fishing resorts in the upper Midwest represented early forms of rural tourism. During the early 1980's golf appeared as another singular activity that has been heavily promoted for rural tourism development. This type of development approach (i.e. single product) has recently been extended to include heritage and cultural attractions and ag-tourism. At the one and only White House Conference on Tourism in 1995 the message that any community can develop heritage and cultural tourism was delivered. The enthusiasm for this type of focused development was based on numerous reports about an upsurge in interest for cultural and heritage tourism attractions and experiences. For example, Hollinshead (1996) reported that heritage tourism was one of the fastest growing segments of tourism. It would appear that sometime in the 1990's tourists started to discover

heritage and cultural attractions. Or did they? Richards (2000) argues that it is not so much an increasing interest in cultural/heritage tourism that is responsible for the growth in this sector but rather the constantly expanding definition of cultural. Whereas in the past (pre 1990?) cultural and heritage attractions were easily identifiable and were for the most part defined as museums, historic districts, indigenous cultures and their ways of life etc., today the definition has been expanded to include rock concerts, plays, urban landscapes and so on. Richards goes on to say that the market for cultural/heritage products may actually be saturated. This would make future rural tourism development efforts focused on cultural/heritage attributes a risky proposition.

Ag-tourism is another attribute specific type of tourism development that has received increasing attention in recent years. There were examples operating for years, primarily in Europe, that seemed to indicate ag-tourism had potential for growth (Long and Lane, 2000). In recent years many university programs have been offered that attempt to link agriculture to tourism.

A question that needs to be raised, but that is absent from the literature on rural tourism development, is whether other models of development may be better suited for rural tourism development than the attribute specific approach that has dominated from the early days of rural tourism. Although tourism is all about experiences, destinations, and their marketing efforts, have first and foremost tried to sell product attributes (i.e. fishing, national parks, white water rafting, etc.) The assumption being that attributes are what pulls (Dann, 1977) someone into an area with the experiences to be gained from visiting unique to the individual.

However other approaches may be more relevant today. For example researchers from the natural resource management agencies were some of the first to look at experiences gained from engaging in different types of recreation. They generally found that even within a single product (e.g. canoeing) numerous experiences were available. Further they were able to categorize users of these products by the types of experiences sought. Initial efforts in this area were led by Driver and Toucher (1970); Driver and Brown (1975); Potter et al. (1973) and Hendee (1974).

Tourism researchers, conversely, did not adopt an experience based approach until much later and with much less enthusiasm. The first destination image studies (Hunt, 1971; Mayo, 1973) asked survey respondents to provide their perception of a destination's activities and/or attractions. For many years after this initial work much image work followed the same line of reasoning which was to see how people perceive the physical features of what a destination had, or could, offer. A notable exception to the attribute specific approach to assessing and marketing destinations came from Plog (1974). His work on allocentrics/psychocentris now termed venturers/dependables (Plog, 2002) argues that people can be grouped by how they choose to travel and therefore the general types of experiences they seek from the overall travel experience. Still, Plog's approach is not truly benefit based as the characteristics used to define market segments are based on product specific consumption patterns. In the area of image, experience based research began to appear in 1991 when Echtner and Richie suggested images could be aligned on three continuums providing more of a holistic assessment of an individual's perceptions. Their work has spawned further efforts (Suh and Gartner, in press; Chandler and Costello, 2002) that have moved away from attribute specific image assessments to ones that encompass a more experiential view of what tourists seek from their holidays. However there is little evidence, based on a convenience assessment of rural tourism marketing literature, that any major shifts have been made in how rural areas present themselves to potential customers. It is still very much an attribute specific approach with experiences to be gained implied from how the ad copy reads or looks. Dann (1996) has reviewed how ad copy language conveys certain messages about the benefits to be gained from visiting a particular destination. Still, there is no body of evidence that suggests benefits portrayed in advertising copy are based on benefits sought by targeted, potential tourists.

5. If Not Specific Attributes Then What?

Two studies conducted in Minnesota will be used to emphasize the point that rural tourism development should be more directly tied to experiential products that emphasize experiences over specific physical attributes. The first study deals with attributes and amenities sought by highway users in the state of Minnesota (Gartner, Love and Erkkila, 2002). The second report was a visitor profile study of tourists in five Minnesota communities (Gartner, Love and Erkkila, 2001). For the sake of brevity the research design will not be fully detailed in this article. Instead the reader is referred to the website of the University of Minnesota, Tourism Center[2] for a complete description of methodology employed and results.

[2] See www.tourism.umn.edu/research for details.

One of the questions highway users of different road segments in the state of Minnesota were asked was: "Below is a list of experiences you may have had while traveling today on this road segment. Please indicate how important this experience was to you in traveling this road segment today. Then indicate how much you were able to attain that experience on this road segment." There were a number of experiences evaluated with a few relating to culture/heritage and agriculture including how important was experiencing the local culture; attending cultural events; learning about the history of the area, and viewing or engaging in agricultural related activities. Respondents were asked to answer using a seven point scale from Very Unimportant (1) to Very Important (7). For attainment of the experience the respondent was offered a four point scale ranging from "Did not attain (1)" to "Totally attained (4).

Respondents were selected from those using a variety of roads including designated scenic highways, interstate highways, and county maintained roads. The highways wound through forested land, agriculture areas, small towns and the fringes of the metro area. Road segments studied were kept relatively short (15-60 miles) in order to limit the number of different landscapes the respondent traveled through thereby reducing undesirable data "noise".

Almost without exception the highway users who indicated they were interested in cultural experiences or agricultural practices recorded the lowest levels of experience seekers in the study. Even more disturbing is those who said they selected the road to gain cultural experiences or experience local agricultural practices recorded very low scores on the attainment scale. Even cultural experience seekers on road segments that included significant cultural attractions, such as a state park with Indian burial mounds, indicated they were unable to attain their desired cultural experiences. This finding supports Richards (2000) contention that the definition of culture has become so diluted over the years that it is almost impossible to pin down. For the few travelers interested in experiencing local agricultural practices the finding that they were unable to attain it was even more interesting as the study took place during the summer months when agricultural activity was high.

Other findings were more revealing with respect to attribute specific approaches to rural tourism development. In general users told us that they preferred roadways free of business development regardless of type (e.g. bed and breakfast, gift shop etc). Instead they preferred businesses be concentrated in communities that provide a "small town" look and feel. They also told us that type of roadside vegetation and how it was managed do matter. For example the desire to view fields of wildflowers was more satisfying than any other type of landscape. The need to maintain the environmental value of the area was also listed as an important trait.

When factor analysis was conducted on the different types of user groups found along the highways a segment, given the name "Learners and Doers", was revealed. This segment's size ranged from a low of 11% to a high of 31% of the users found along a particular highway. Members of this segment were interested in learning new things from driving through rural areas and visiting small towns. They were also more likely than any of the other identified segments to stop spontaneously and do things while traveling such as bird watching or hiking (Gartner and Erkkila, in press).

A second study (Gartner, et al. 2001) of visitors to rural destinations in the state of Minnesota was even more revealing about what tourists seek. Again using Factor Analysis it was shown that certain visitors tended to cluster into specific activity segments. Activities such as fishing, golfing, and boating tended to form separate segments while activities such as hiking, visiting small towns, bird watching, driving for pleasure, and enjoying fall colors tended to cluster together. When activity usage is analyzed it appears that those that are expensive to access and time consuming form their own segments. This would help explain the success of attribute specific approaches to rural tourism development. Fishing resorts are common in the upper Midwest of the United States and were some of the early forms of resort development. On the other hand, user segments that are undifferentiated by product but tied together by the ease of which one can access or exit the activity without significant money or time costs have been generally ignored in rural tourism development.

The attribute specific approach to rural tourism development still dominates today as evidenced by a recent newsletter from the Travel Industry Association of America that announces an educational seminar dedicated to providing a "Blueprint for Heritage Tourism Development" (TIA, June 21, 2003 e newsletter). While attribute specific development approaches may be used as a base for tourism development they remain examples of the historical pattern of rural tourism development in the U.S. Some destinations have been able to capitalize on their heritage as a base for development while using an attribute specific approach to bring in tourists. For example Deadwood, South Dakota has preserved its historic downtown by allowing casinos to operate within its jurisdiction (Stowkoski, 1996). The proceeds from gaming support

historic preservation activities. In this case there were few options to gaming as tourist visitation without gaming was not enough to maintain, enhance or even preserve the historic character of the town.

The use of heritage to promote and market destinations continues the attribute specific approach to development that has been the basis for rural tourism development in North America. Kerstetter et al. (2001) argue that even though many sources claim Americans are more interested in traveling to heritage sites little is known about the people who do visit these sites. MacKay et al. (2002) looked at niche markets tied to cultural activities at U.S. and Canadian destinations. Niche markets, they argued, are not yet viewed as large or important enough to qualify as market segments. What they found with respect to activity patterns was surprisingly similar to the results reported above for the state of Minnesota. Easy entry, easy access types of activities, what the authors call passive forms of activity, tended to cluster together for select groups of travelers. Cultural activities were frequently grouped with other types of "passive" activities such as bird watching and hiking. Their findings suggest attribute specific approaches to development do not necessarily work for all travelers. They also argue that attribute specific approaches to tourism development, what MacKay et al refer to as special interest tourism, creates arbitrary distinctions between groups where no conceptual or practical differences between users exist. It may make it easy for marketers to think in terms of specific attributes to attract user segments but tourists themselves may not be thinking this way. Further support for these findings is also found in Taylor et al (1993).

6. So What?

At the beginning of this paper the statement was made that rural development is now more than ever dependent on tourism as other sectors diminish in importance over time or require taxpayer support to continue functioning. If the future has arrived and we accept that tourism is a primary economic force in rural America how do we construct new paradigms to deal with it?

First accepting that tourism is not an industry but rather a collection of related industries forces one to adopt a systems approach to tourism development. Gunn's (1979) model of rural tourism development that identifies transportation as a major component of development needs to be accepted and expanded. Transportation is not only important as a linkage between market and destination or between a gateway community and its attractions but the quality and the aesthetic nature of the transportation linkage adds value (Tyrell, 1996). When one considers the differences between production, delivery and consumption of normal goods versus experiential goods it becomes even clearer how important transportation is to a tourism system. Tourism goods are produced and consumed at the same time and utilize an inverted distribution channel from that used for tangible good producers. Since the tourist must physically come to where the product is located attention to how highway systems impact use patterns seems to be a logical approach. Yet there is very little evidence, apart from the small body of literature on scenic highways (Gartner and Erkkila, in press) that highways are even considered as part of rural tourism systems.

Second, there exist user segments that do not fit into the traditional attribute specific development approach to rural tourism development. These segments may not be drawn to an area because of its particular attributes but because of the benefits they seek from the experience. Experiential development requires more of a focus on what benefits people expect to receive from a travel experience rather than what they do while at the destination.

Third, when rural communities develop culture/heritage or ag-tourism attractions they should not be viewed as primary pull attractions but instead serve as an opportunity to provide a mix of attractions that appeals across user segments. Very few culture/heritage or ag-tourism attractions can stand on their own as reasons to draw people into an area. Spending money or time to develop them as major attractions ignores user participation patterns and may result in other attractions of higher value, in terms of benefits provided to users, to be ignored or undervalued.

Fourth, rural tourism development should be addressed nationally with respect to appropriate policy. This is not to say that government policy should follow lock step with that used for other rural industrial activity such as mining, forestry or farming. However within the policy directives for those industries there are opportunities to provide support for rural tourism development while at the same time continuing the long standing financial support for the resource consumption industries. For example the Farm Bill has provisions in it for encouraging production as well as provisions for encouraging conservation through land set aside. Broadening the Farm Bill to encourage production of certain crops along highway corridors may improve the overall appeal of a destination. Similarly managing forest product plantings and harvesting along highway corridors can help create a sense of place for rural communities dependent on tourism.

None of this will happen, however, unless a systems approach to rural tourism development is adopted.

There has been one attempt on the part of the Federal government to develop policy for rural tourism development and it has failed. The creation of the National Rural Tourism Foundation by Congress and signed into existence by George H. Bush in 1992, was an attempt to bring focus and recognition to rural tourism interests (Long, 1998). The failure of the President to support the Foundation with a budget and by Congress to authorize any funding for it has essentially made it an organization without portfolio.

Fifth, local tourism development organizations should move beyond marketing and specific product development as their modus operandi and look holistically at how their destination is evolving especially with respect to competitor destinations. Universities that support rural tourism development through their research and extension programs should also re-evaluate how and what type of assistance they provide. For the most part Universities have focused on providing expertise to guide product development, marketing support, or quality improvement. Even though benefit based research has been a staple of recreation research conducted at Universities and within public agencies (e.g. USDA Forest Service) it has not made its way, in any significant way, into the realm of rural tourism development.

Sixth, rural tourism interests must move beyond the insular and single industry approach they have adopted for rural tourism development and recognize that tourism is a multi-industry economic activity with many interrelated parts. The existence of countless Convention and Business Bureaus in rural America that have been funded by special taxes, primarily on commercial lodging establishments, should be an indication of grass roots support for rural tourism development. However most of the rural CVB's see as their mission the selling of more room nights, thus increasing their budget, and not the adoption of a systems approach that might lead to a different form of rural tourism than they presently experience.

Finally, rural tourism development should be viewed in the context of providing significant economic activity that is less about fun and games and more about the future of rural living in the United States. There is no other form of rural economic activity that has shown as much job growth in the last 35 years. It may be that success has led policy makers to conclude that no attention is needed and that market forces are best left alone. Whatever the reason there is strong evidence that tourism is subject to forces that afflict other industrial activity. Product life cycles are operational, competition is fierce, profit margins especially in mature destinations are razor thin and there is significant transformation taking place in the type of experiences available for tourists. In the upper Midwest resorts numbers have declined, seasonal home ownership has accelerated since the 1970's and recreational land is increasing in value at higher rates than land used for other economic pursuits (e.g. forest products, farming). These transformational changes will have significant impacts on how rural tourism develops and who is able to access and utilize rural resources for enjoyment.

7. Concluding Remarks

Rural tourism development is part of the transformation that has been taking place in America since the first days of rural settlement. The main thesis in this paper is that we have now reached a point where old development models, which relied on the consumptive use of natural resources, can no longer support rural economies without government assistance. Depending on what part of the nation is discussed the old resource consumption models have been the main source of rural economic activity for between 100 to over 300 years. It is not easy to change long held paradigms but the thinking that tourism is irrelevant to rural America and therefore not in need of any policy attention or new development models is outdated and counter productive to the economic health of the country.

As these words are being written reports in newspapers and evening network news are discussing Vermont's battle with a big box retailer's (i.e. Wal-Mart) desire to open stores in rural areas. Opponents of this move cite the small town and village feel of rural Vermont and worry that a big box retailer will drive smaller retailers out of business and change the look and economies of small towns. They are right. The culture and heritage of rural Vermont is central to this argument and it also underscores an earlier point made in this paper. Developing cultural and heritage attractions is not always the best way to approach product development. Understanding that culture and heritage is part of a sense of place reinforces the value of a benefit based approach to rural tourism development. A "feel" of a place may be just as, or more, important than a new museum.

There is no expectation that what is going on in rural America with respect to support for traditional economic activities is about to change. Quite the contrary. When traditional resource consumption activities find themselves in trouble government is there to help out. The Farm Bill and the resistance on the part of the federal government to change old policies that

allow natural resources to be used at minimal cost will be around for a long time. However rural communities that recognize the change happening around them have the ability to organize and work to implement new models of development that will mean more to their long term economic well being than simply letting the status quo prevail. All the tools are in place for this to happen. What is lacking is any policy direction or support for those who see the future and are working for substantial change. As Woods (2000) states "Rural areas….often have natural resources, authentic agricultural or ecological-based activities, history, scenic beauty and "small town" charm which may appeal to urbanites caught up in today's fast-paced lifestyle. However, simply possessing the attributes is not sufficient. Local leaders and business persons must engage in successful product development, marketing, management and provision of adequate infrastructure" (pg 1).

Much has been said and written about sustainable tourism development. Not much has been done to implement sustainable tourism policies. Much of rural America is not on a sustainable foundation at the moment and because of this rural transformation is proceeding along a time worn and unsustainable path. What the next generation ends up with is what we leave them both in terms of physical resources but also with respect to policies to help guide future development. There is enough evidence to suggest a new paradigm for rural economic development is needed and there is enough knowledge to implement new paradigms. What is missing is the will.

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