

Background

Travel and tourism is critically important to the Sierra Nevada Regional economy, and supports a broad range of businesses. Most of the tourism attractions and businesses in the Region are directly dependent upon the sustained health of the natural environment and are actively involved in managing and stewarding these resources. In many Sierra Nevada counties (Sierra, Plumas, Mariposa, Alpine, Mono, Inyo), travel and tourism is one of the largest economic contributors.

Recent information indicates total direct travel spending in California was \$102.3 billion in 2011, a 7.6 percent increase from 2010 spending. Travel spending in the Sierra Nevada Region (Gold Country, High Sierra, Shasta Cascade) in 2011 accounted for approximately 7 percent of the total direct travel spending in California, or \$6.93 billion. More detailed information about travel impacts to the Sierra Nevada Region can be found in the [California Travel Impacts by County, 1992-2011. Dean Runyan Associates, April 2012](#)

The Sierra Nevada Geotourism (SNGT) MapGuide Project is a multi-faceted tourism promotion effort managed through a partnership of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), National Geographic, and the Sierra Business Council (SBC).

Through the use of an interactive website, a printed MapGuide, mobile phone applications, and social media tools the project highlights and promotes California's Sierra Nevada Region as a world class tourism destination. The project supports the SNC's mandate to enhance tourism in the Sierra Nevada Region while also promoting the preservation of cultural and heritage resources.

Funding and in-kind support for the project has come from several sources including: The National Scenic Highways and Byways Administration, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Sierra Business Council, Morgan Family Foundation, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, California State Parks, Nevada Commission on Tourism, multiple Sierra counties, several Tribal organizations, Northern Sierra Partnership, and many more local businesses and service groups. The project has grown a list of more than 70 supporters that have formally endorsed the project, including all 22 Sierra Nevada counties.

Current Status:

The SNGT website continues to be the foundational element of the project. The site currently has more than 1,500 published destination pages and has more than 117,000 page views from 103 countries every month. Staff continues to assist local contributors establish new destination pages and events every month. The site can be accessed at www.sierranevadageotourism.org.

The project recently launched mobile phone applications (apps) for iPhone and Droid users providing access to the entire website content while traveling in the Region.

Users have the option of enabling GPS technology to enhance functionality of the apps for real-time updates based on their current location in the Sierra. Software developers are currently working to enable “alert” tools for the apps allowing travelers to be notified of business special alerts, travel packages, itinerary suggestions, traffic conditions, and current events. More than 1,450 people have downloaded apps, which are available for free to the public.

During the 2011 calendar year 100,000 printed MapGuides, highlighting 250 destinations in the Region, were distributed throughout the state. The MapGuides were strategically distributed by visitor centers, California Welcome Centers, corporate locations, rental car agencies, sports events, museums, and businesses to encourage more travel to the region.

Marketing of the project's services and products has been a primary focus during the last year. Significant achievements been made to build brand identity and reach target markets of travelers most inclined to visit the Region. Marketing accomplishments include earned-media attention in more than 140 printed publications, television and radio interviews, and references in online and social media. The project is also pursuing paid advertising placement in Visit California Annual Travel Planner (circulation: 500,000) and other related publications. The SNGT Project been represented at multiple travel trade shows, conferences, and events throughout the state. Recently, SBC staff traveled to National Geographic headquarters in Washington D.C. to meet with corporate executives and other Geotourism projects from across the country to strengthen cross-marketing opportunities. At their last meeting, the Western Governors Association adopted language to support the efforts of Geotourism projects throughout their 17 state membership area.

Next Steps

SNC Staff and project partners will continue to assist in the development and addition of fresh content to the website and will also be working with existing destination page-owners to strengthen their support and use of the site as a marketing tool.

We will be publishing a GeoExplorer Newsletter on a monthly basis and distributing to a growing subscriber database. The newsletter will feature aspects of the website, as well as featured businesses, destinations, and additional opportunities for involvement.

Estimates are currently being solicited for a second print run of the MapGuide, to be distributed throughout the state during the 2013 calendar year. Second run print numbers are currently estimated to be between 75,000 – 125,000 pieces, dependent upon quotes received.

A broad range of marketing efforts will continue for all aspects of the project, including distribution of regular press releases, attendance at shows, events, and conferences, and placement of paid advertising.

Project partners are also continually pursuing grant opportunities to further develop the project. An application is currently being considered by the Federal Highways Administration to expand the travel advisory capabilities of the project.

Recommendation

This is an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Boardmembers are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.