TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES
FROM GREATER COORDINATION

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I appreciate this opportunity to present testimony on the
issue of "increased tourism through coordination of public and
private parks and recreation facilities throughout the state," as

Although this is a very broad and comprehensive topic, I'd
like to focus on just three points—the rationale for
coordination, barriers that prevent coordination, and some
suggested opportunities.

RATIONALE FOR COORDINATION

To start, I am sure we all agree that recreation and tourism
depend greatly on protected resources. While some travel is
targeted toward convention centers, sports arenas, and theme
parks, a larger amount depends on natural and cultural resources.

As evidence, I turn to a Texas Parks & Wildlife study of
1983. This study shows that Texas travelers spent over $9
billion in 1983 on recreation trips within the state, largely to
areas provided and protected by public agencies. Out of the 20
activities surveyed, over half of all expenditures (55 percent)
were spent on only the top four activities.

$2,022,658,000 was spent on sightseeing and pleasure driving
1,170,933,000 was spent on fishing
1,002,636,000 was spent on golf . . . and
909,425,000 was spent on horseback riding
In other words, on only four outdoor recreation activities related to travel, Texans spent over $5 billion in 1983. This spending included transportation, lodging, restaurants, groceries, equipment rental, parking fees, entrance fees, instruction and guide fees, licenses and permits, leases, and spending in Texas on out-of-state trips.

Both outdoor recreation and tourism depend very heavily upon natural resources, such as:

--- interesting and varied vegetation for scenic appreciation and game habitat,

--- recreational waters including rivers, lakes, and the Gulf Coast,

--- an abundance and variety of wildlife, for photography and nature appreciation as well as game,

--- clean air and pleasant atmosphere,

--- and a varied topography for scenic vistas and for hiking and horseback riding.

To these must be added many cultural resources because a new segment of the travel market is showing great interest in history, archeology, and ethnic customs and roots. Texas already is developing new cultural attractions in addition to those already in place, such as the Alamo, the Alabama-Coushatta Reservation, and the San Jose Mission.

No one can argue that there are not strong relationships between resources and tourism.

BARRIERS AGAINST COORDINATION

Why is it that in spite of the logical close functional
relationship between resources owned and managed by the public and private sectors there is so much antagonism and misunderstanding? In my work, not only in Texas but other states and even abroad, this standoff continues to prevail. I have observed many reasons for this but let me highlight just four.

For one thing, there are some very strong philosophical differences. Generally, public agencies have mixed roles of conservation and recreation that they believe, and rightly so, are good for society. Therefore, they tend to ignore the private sector or look upon it as exploitive and of low social value. Many park managers deny that their visitors are tourists or that they are involved in tourism. On the other hand, businesses look upon government agencies as overly restricting their activities and in some states, such as Kentucky and Oklahoma, as actually engaging in unfair competition. State-built hotels, campgrounds and marinas offer their services at reduced prices because these government investments are exempt from mortgage payments. These images, right or wrong, tend to keep public and private sectors apart.

Another barrier is jurisdictional turf. Today is such an age of specialization that we have isolated functions into separate organizations. The many bureaus and departments of government have their own mandates and traditional roles that are narrowly prescribed. Generally all staff members must be preoccupied with internal operations and be loyal to all agency policies. This makes it difficult for an agency of wildlife, for example, to reach beyond its jurisdiction and communicate with a
highway department. This organizational isolation is even more true in the private sector of tourism. Hotel, restaurant, and airline organizations concentrate on internal matters and seldom ever communicate with each other even though all are involved in tourism. It seems that the protection of organizational turf for both public and private sectors takes precedence over communication and cooperation on tourism and conservation issues.

I am afraid that those of us in education and training tend to foster the narrow perspective to the sacrifice of understanding broader relationships. Programs of education have become overly specialized in fields such as hotel management, park management, and recreation. While I understand the need for filling a curriculum with important technical information, students are denied any understanding of how their specialization relates to many others. The shock comes when they are thrown into a real world. The park manager, trained in wildlife management, has great difficulty in managing hordes of visitors. The hotel manager has difficulty in understanding how dependent he is on the many protected resource areas that bring visitors to his hotel in the first place. Fortunately, across the country there is a trend to integrate tourism with recreation and park university programs.

Viewing this issue from the individual tourist business or park manager, there seem to be no incentives for coordination. The immediate tasks at hand take precedence: maintaining buildings and grounds, keeping the staff productive and satisfied, taking care of customers and visitors, and balancing the books. Texas has a great number of experienced and competent park,
recreation and business people catering to travelers. But, because the tasks at hand have top priority, no individual has either responsibility nor the opportunity to collaborate with others outside the organization.

And so, we have a dilemma. On the one hand, the intimate relationship between resources protection and tourism development suggests close collaboration between the many public and private organizations. On the other hand, there are many very real barriers preventing this from happening.

SOME OPPORTUNITIES

Fortunately, today, in spite of these problems we are seeing some beginnings of barrier breakdown. Here and there throughout the country and in Texas innovative steps of cooperation and collaboration for a better world of tourism are taking place.

If you'll pardon a personal reference, one of my ambitions many years ago was to try to stimulate, through teaching and writing, better coordination between public and private development of tourism—especially to emphasize the need for environmental protection. In 1970 it took over two years to find a publisher who was interested in such a revolutionary topic. In the last 2 years, I was able to revise 2 of my books on this and related tourism planning issues. In the first month alone, the second edition of VACATIONSCAPE sold 1000 copies. The climate has changed—people are seeking ways of reaching above the conflicts of the past.

I would like to identify a few opportunities that now appear
to be feasible.

1. MEETINGS AND WORKSHOPS

In many instances, I have observed antagonisms fade away merely because a meeting provided neutral ground for discussion. Several years ago, the Discover Texas Association held a seminar between public and private representatives of tourism. Within only a few hours, new and constructive ideas were emerging for greater collaboration between these sectors. In recent years, I have been increasingly called upon to present seminars on tourism and the environment. Just this summer, the government tourism agency of South Africa invited me to present seminars in five of their principal regions. Those in attendance, even with different occupations, were surprised to learn how much they had in common.

A milestone was reached this last Spring when, for the first time in the history of the United States, a conference on tourism and national parks was held. I heard many testimonials to the great value of communication between the public and private sectors—and the discovery that each one could gain in the process.

When given the opportunity to sit down together, the public and private sectors of tourism can do much to resolve their own problems of resource use and protection.

2. CATALYSTS

However, such meetings, seminars, and conferences do not take place unless someone assumes the responsibility. We are finding that it really doesn't matter who performs this catalytic
role. It could be someone from the tourist industry, a local mayor, a governmental agency, or a nonprofit organization.

An excellent case of new collaboration is taking place in the Lyndon B. Johnson area. Superintendent Harry O’Bryant of the LBJ National Historical Monument has demonstrated outstanding leadership in starting new working relationships with tourism interests in the surrounding counties and towns of Johnson City, Blanco, and Stonewall. As a result, people in the area are cooperating in reviewing their resources and setting up new plans for tourism. To do this they have formed a nonprofit organization called the LBJ Heartland Council. Those in the public and private sectors are learning how much they can gain by working together.

Another example of the function of a catalyst is the dramatic progress that has taken place in Comal county. Just two years ago, environmentalists and private recreation developers in and around New Braunfels were at each others’ throats. Now, through a new organization and many meetings of discussion and compromise, riverside litter has been eliminated, erosion of the river banks has been curtailed, new patrol rangers have greatly reduced vandalism and conflict, and several organizations and agencies are cooperating as never before. This all started when the adversarial parties appealed to the Parks and Wildlife Department for help. This department tapped the little-known arm of community service of the National Park Service. And, they appealed to Texas A&M for leadership which we supplied through our Extension service.

Somehow, we need to stimulate local and regional leadership
to perform this catalytic role.

3. PLANNING

I am convinced that public and private sectors could profitably do some joint planning. Public park and recreation areas are often planned with rather narrow objectives and usually more for residents than visitors. Seldom are they planned in concert with the private sector, which could aid greatly in providing needed visitor services.

Problems of overuse of some park areas deserves better planning. More and better interpretive visitor centers can eliminate much pressure on fragile resources. By means of lectures, videos, and exhibits, many visitors are satisfied to learn about the resources without actually walking or camping within them. By planning major services, such as lodging, food service, and retail sales at the edge of the park, resources are protected.

An example of a step toward better environmental planning was the East Texas Tourism 2000 Project, initiated by the East Texas Tourism Association. Over thirty experienced experts in important parts of tourism in Texas were asked to present their best views of trends toward the future. Nine different facets of tourism were covered: attractions, resources, transportation, markets, information/advertising, urban change, education, and research. This report has stimulated greater interaction between tourism businesses and agencies responsible for resource protection throughout East Texas.

Only recently have state tourism offices taken an interest
in developing state tourism plans. In the last two years, I have been involved with Price Waterhouse in the preparation of three state tourism development plans—New York, Oklahoma, and Washington. Without doubt the process we used was as important as the final report. In each case, area workshops were held throughout the state to obtain local input. Environmentalists and park agencies as well as tourism businesses and chambers of commerce were invited to attend. In addition, each plan included an assessment of the resource potential, identifying zones with greatest development assets. In each of these states, the several sectors responsible for conservation, parks, recreation, and tourism are now much more aware of their roles in tourism and how coordination is vital to their programs.

4. POLICY

This leads me to my final statement. I am convinced that each state needs to establish a joint public-private tourism development policy. Such a policy would be directed toward four goals: (1) better provision of visitor satisfactions throughout the state, (2) enhanced opportunity for business and economic development through tourism, (3) greater protection of the environment and (4) better integration of tourism into a community's social and economic activity. While I am not advocating stronger intervention by government, I believe government can have a more constructive role for tourism.

For example, the success of the Main Street Program may suggest a tourism opportunity. This state and federal program, because it has cultural as well as economic objectives, has not
only brought Texas communities back to life but also has actually stimulated tourism because it enhanced their attractiveness for visitors. Perhaps a new program needs to be created to provide similar expert assistance to communities to develop tourism.

Maybe a new state policy on tourism could modify the mandates of state agencies to allow better cross-communication and collaboration. In this way, the promotional side would be more aware of the environmental side of tourism. Agencies would consider tourism matters in all their policies and practices.

In Texas, the original enabling act that created the Texas Tourist Development Agency stated specifically that its main purpose was tourism promotion and development. Thus far, only the promotional objectives have been implemented—yet to come is state concern over development, especially how it interfaces with the social, economic and environmental quality of the state.

CONCLUSIONS

Texas has tremendous resource assets for even greater tourism growth but these assets are now in danger. Without better coordination between the several stakeholders, neither the public agencies or businesses can continue to reach their goals. Fortunately, Texas has the experience and the expertise to avoid further resource degradation. By setting the stage for greater networking between the sectors, by providing leadership catalysts, by following better planning principles, and by establishing new tourism policy, resources can be given even better protection at the same time new tourism horizons can be reached.