



# NORTHERN FOREST RURAL TOURISM ACADEMY

PHASE 1 – EXPLORING A PATH TO THE FUTURE

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## PHASE 1 – EXPLORING A PATH TO THE FUTURE

### SUMMARY REPORT OF PHASE 1 - AUGUST 2021

This report has been produced as part of Northern Forest Rural Tourism Academy. It represents a summary of the outcomes of future scenario discussions held in May 2021 among tourism stakeholders across northern New Hampshire and Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.

The Northern Forest Center has created the Rural Tourism Academy (RTA), as a fast-track planning process to provide direct technical and financial assistance to help rural communities which have a strong tourism potential or exposure. In particular, the RTA is being offered to rural destination areas that are wrestling with the challenges of growing and managing tourism, and are keen to embrace a destination management focus by building local collaborative approaches. The RTA program is built on a recognition that sustainable tourism management requires cooperation among multiple stakeholder groups such as businesses, non-profit groups, and municipal entities.



### Northern Forest Rural Tourism Academy (Vermont and New Hampshire Program 2021-22)

The RTA program has dedicated funds to help communities implement their priority projects.



The Rural Tourism Academy is made possible by funding from the Northern Border Regional Commission, USDA Rural Development, and the Northern Forest Center. The Northern Forest Center is a regionally based innovation and investment partner that aims to create rural vibrancy by connecting people and economy to the forested landscape. Since 1997, the Northern Forest Center has forged deep partnerships and secured resources to support jobs, conserve forestland and strengthen communities in the region.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** Joe Short *Vice President*, Northern Forest Center  
jshort@northernforest.org • [www.northernforest.org](http://www.northernforest.org)

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## INTRODUCTION

Outdoor adventure has long been a cornerstone of the Northern Forest economy. Today, recreation and tourism are central to many Northern Forest communities as a community economic development strategy for attracting both visitors and new residents. However, the nature and intensity of tourism and visitation is changing. The Northern Forest Center has a deep commitment to understand the evolving nature of this important economic sector, and to assist communities as they adapt to and manage future tourism impacts. Some of the issues that are front-of-mind for our team include:

- **Accelerating change:** Even before the coronavirus pandemic, the region was experiencing an uptick in demand for travel and outdoor recreation. The last 18 months have accelerated that trend. Being a visitor destination creates economic opportunity for residents and businesses. Yet it also creates pressure on natural resources, human capital, and community infrastructure.
- **Sustainable tourism:** At the heart of tourism destination management, especially in rural destinations, is the concept of sustainable tourism. How do communities find the right balance between the economic benefits of a growing tourism economy, and its impacts on local communities, other facets of the economy, and the environment? Many communities across the Northern Forest are grappling with these questions.
- **Potential land-use conflicts:** Recreational uses are coming into conflict with each other or with other community priorities. Traditional models for recreation on private land—a unique reality in the Northern Forest—are strained in the face of record demand.
- **Destination management:** Alongside destination marketing, visitor and destination management, or proactively managing visitor experience and impacts, is fast becoming part of the conversation. The issue of destination management prompts another key question: what does that look like in a rural, private-lands region?
- **Collaborative solutions:** The Northern Forest is not a park with controlled access. Its destination regions span multiple communities and even states. Communities can work together to manage impact and offer visitors the critical mass of amenities the market is demanding, but networks and capacity for that type of regional collaboration are limited.

Community conversations and planning around these topics are not new in the Northern Forest. The Rural Tourism Academy is designed to build upon those existing efforts with two additive elements. First, it aims to address local tourism challenges and opportunities in the context of a region and informed by national and global data, best practices, and ideas. Second, it places a central focus on sustainable tourism, engaging diverse stakeholders to collectively identify and implement actions that constructively embed tourism into their community, economy, and landscape.

As the Northern Forest Center’s Destination Development Team, we look forward to working with communities throughout the regions, as we collectively tackle these big issues, and seek new thinking and collaborative solutions.



**Joe Short**  
Vice President



**Julie Renaud Evans**  
Program Director



**Mike Wilson**  
Senior Program Director



**Amy Scott**  
Program Manager



**Maura Adams**  
Director of Community Investment





## 1.0 BACKGROUND - PHASE 1 PROGRAM

The Northern Forest Center has created the Rural Tourism Academy (RTA) as a fast-track planning process to provide direct technical and financial assistance to help rural communities which have a strong tourism potential or exposure. In particular, the RTA is being offered to rural destination areas that are wrestling with the challenges of managing a growing tourism sector and are keen to embrace a destination management focus by building local collaborative approaches. The initial program elements are designed to run from May 2021 until May 2022, followed by ongoing technical and financial support, in specific communities.

The focal geography for the Northern Forest Rural Destination Academy is Vermont's Northeast Kingdom (Caledonia, Essex, Orleans counties) and Coos County New Hampshire.

### PHASE 1 – EXPLORING FUTURE TRAJECTORY

In May 2021, Phase 1 modules explored future trends and scenarios, and this report summarizes the outcomes.

#### Module 1: Future Trends (May 4, 2021)

Module 1 was an exploration of future trends and best practices in destination development. The objective was to bring new information to the region and stimulate constructive discussion about managing tourism impact. Approximately 80 people from across the region participated in the virtual workshop. Specific presentation and discussion topics included:

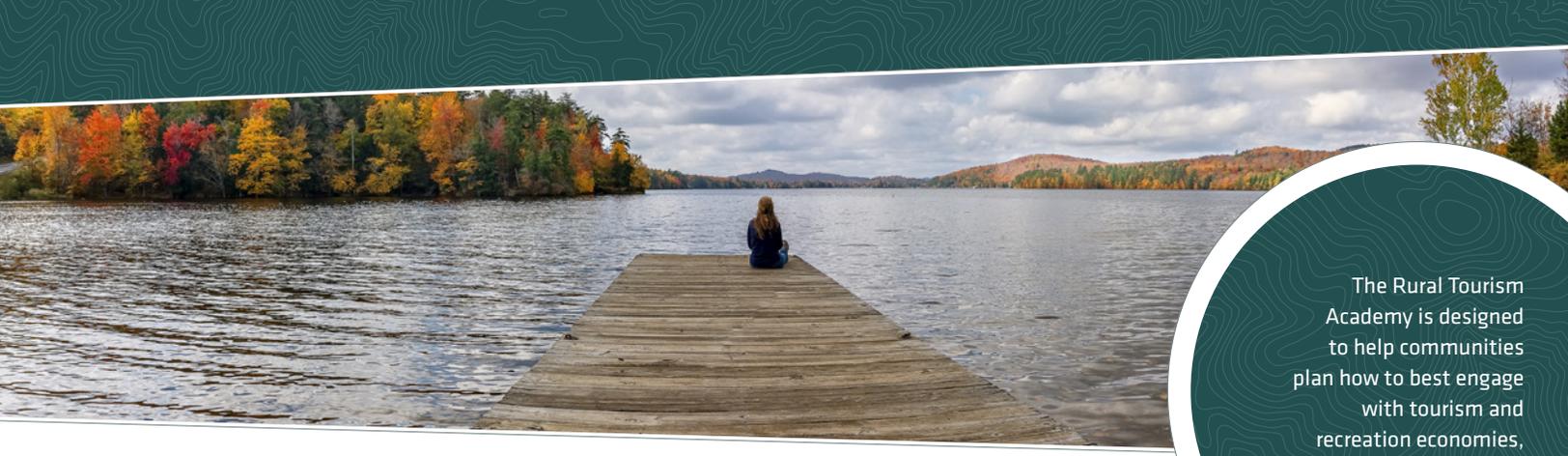
- **Emerging trends** in 'Travel, Outdoor Recreation and Rural Community Tourism' (Presenters: David Beurle, Future iQ; Russell Walters, Adventure Travel Trade Association)
- **Case studies** on how rural outdoor recreation destinations are managing destination development. (Presenters: Kristin Dahl, Crosscurrent Collective, Oregon; Olof Yrr, Iceland Tourism Development; Emily Reed, Columbia River Gorge, Oregon/Washington; Kieron Weidner, First Nature Tours, Pacific Northwest)
- **Understanding the local context** and what challenges the region faces with destination development. (Presenters: Abby Long, Kingdom Trails / VT Outdoor Rec Collaborative; Jody Fried, Catamount Arts; Philip Bryce, NH Division of Parks and Recreation, former State Forester)

#### Module 2: Future Scenarios (May 18, 2021)

Module 2 provided an opportunity for a 'deep dive' into regional tourism scenario planning, in which participants explored future possible iterations of the regional tourism economy. Approximately 35 people participated in the scenario planning workshop. The workshop included:

- Creating plausible scenarios to test implications of future directions
- Identifying and discussing expected and preferred future scenarios
- Beginning to craft high-level strategic actions





The Rural Tourism Academy is designed to help communities plan how to best engage with tourism and recreation economies, and how to manage and shape local impact.

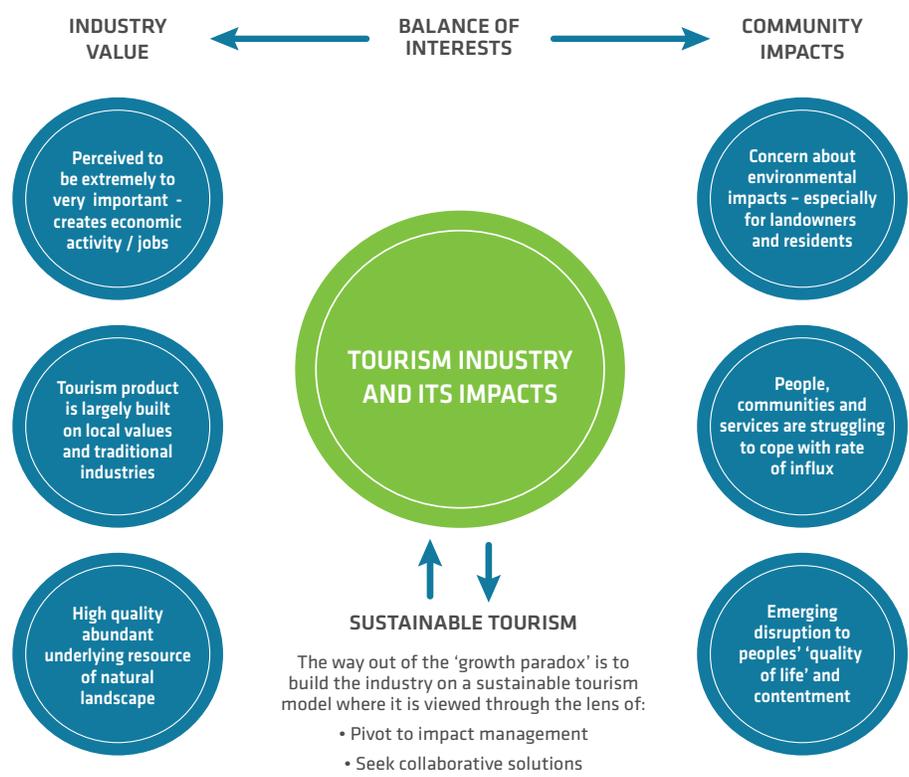
## 2.0 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM – FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

Many rural communities in the US have embraced the economic potential of tourism. Given the abundant natural and cultural assets characteristic of rural areas – fresh air, beautiful, undisturbed natural spaces, and small communities with a distinct charm and local heritage – the match between tourism and rural spaces seems ideal. However, the benefits of tourism, if operated unsustainably, can be outweighed by its potential negative impacts. Conventional tourism development has typically been driven by a destination marketing approach focused on visitor attraction. This approach focuses on visitor attraction. Increasingly, communities are turning from **destination marketing** to a **destination management** approach. This approach focuses on managing the impacts of visitation on the local destination. At the heart of tourism destination management, especially in rural destinations, is the concept of sustainable tourism. This allows a framework for communities to find the right balance between the economic benefits of a growing tourism economy, and its impacts on local communities and the environment.

**Sustainable tourism**, as defined by the *UN World Tourism Organization*, “takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.” One of the hallmarks of sustainable tourism is its emphasis on stakeholder engagement in tourism planning and decision-making.

Including the voices of *whole* communities in tourism development is important because it helps find the right balance between benefits and impacts, at a local level.

**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**  
 Finding the correct balance for local communities and destinations.  
 Now, and in the future.





The scenario planning process allows a framework to craft plausible scenarios for the future and consider potential implications and impacts.

### 3.0 KEY THEMES SHAPING THE REGIONAL FUTURE

In Module 2 of the RTA, participants imagined what the future of tourism could look like for their communities. In preparing for this scenario planning process, the project team considered macro themes seen as both potentially future-splitting and relevant for the region. This team included the project Advisory Team (see *Section 9*), Northern Forest Center staff, and Future iQ team. The process narrowed in on two highly relevant macro themes that were labeled as **Destination Management Approach** and **Collaboration focus and scale**.

These themes became the main axes on a scenario planning matrix used by RTA participants to explore the evolution of the regional tourism industry and local communities. The chart on the following page outlines the scenario matrix. Brief descriptions were attached to the end points of each axis, to create continuums along each theme. This matrix creates four distinct scenario spaces, which describe possible futures created by the combination of the conditions at the end of each axis.

During the future scenario planning workshop, the participants were randomly divided into four groups to develop a narrative for each scenario. Each group was asked to predict and describe the potential future characteristics in 2030, of the region and its tourism industry, under the conditions of their scenario quadrant. After the characteristics were established, participants were asked to project major events or headlines of how the scenario occurred using the years 2022, 2025, and 2030, and to give their scenario a descriptive name.



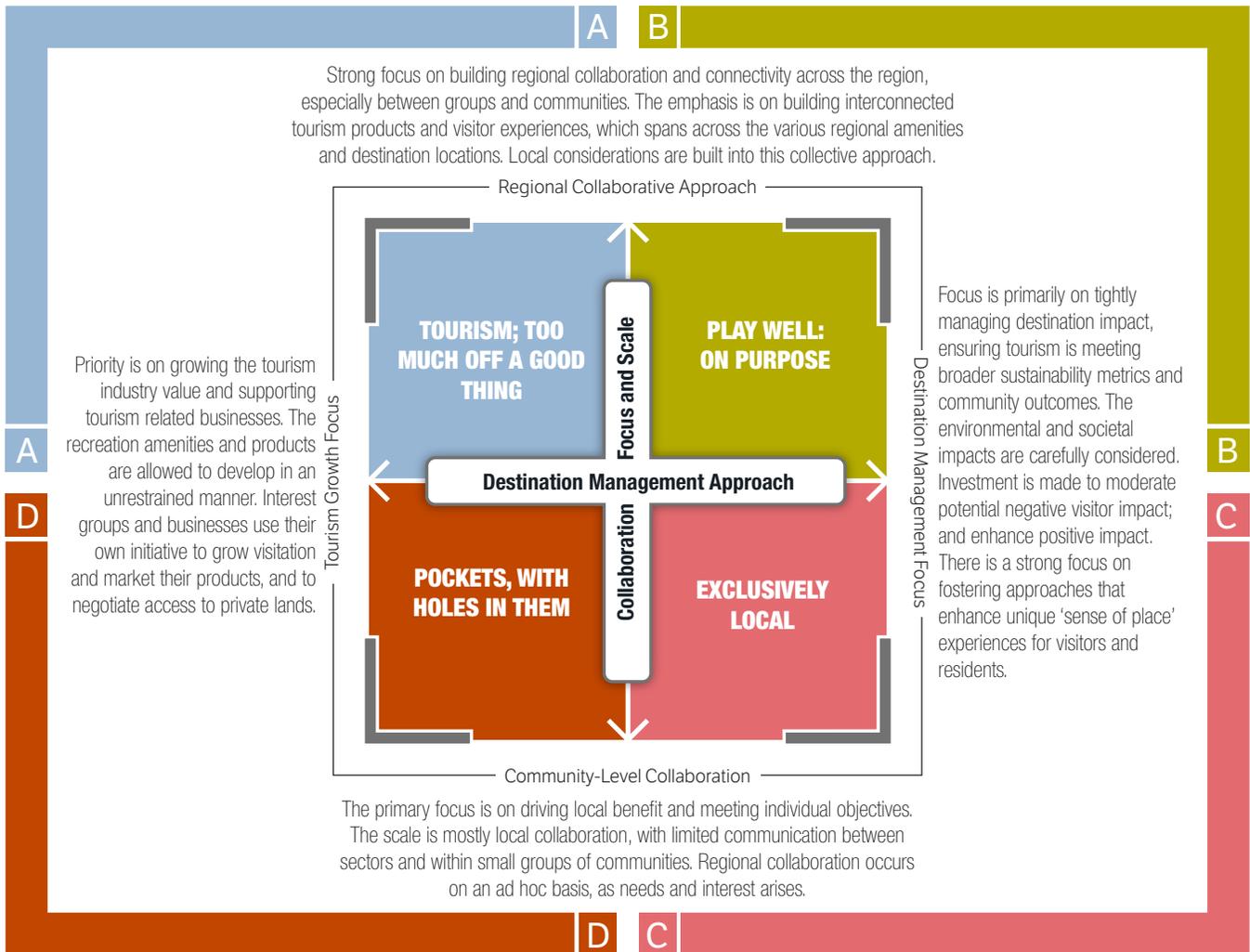


The scenarios developed during Phase 1 of the RTA create a rich narrative about different plausible futures and take a deep dive into potential future implications.

## 4.0 NORTHERN FOREST REGION – 2030 VIEWS OF THE FUTURE

Narratives and descriptions of each scenario as developed by the workshop participants are included in the following sections. The names help evoke the sense of each scenario future, and together paint a ‘future canvas’ of plausible futures.

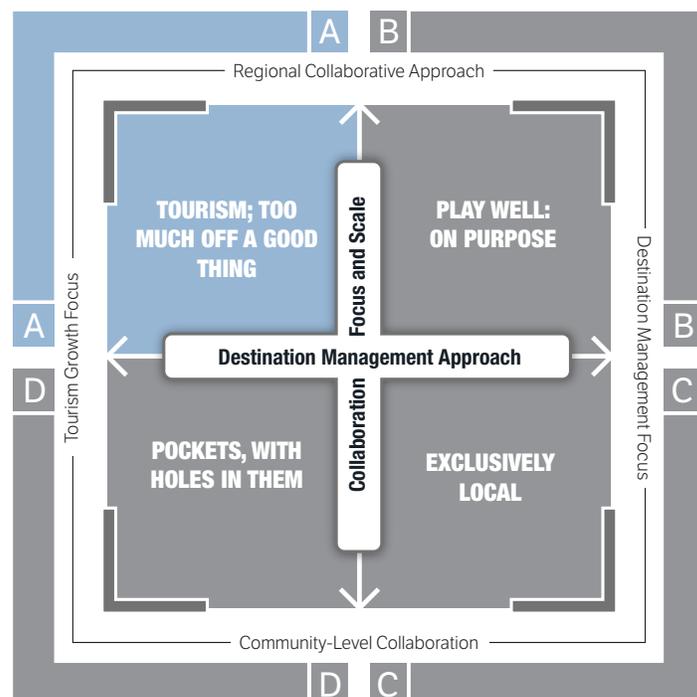
**Plausible Scenario Matrix 2030**





## 4.1 SCENARIO A: TOURISM; TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

This scenario forecasts a future where there is a strong focus on tourism growth and the region builds strong collaborations to drive this growth. This growth initially propels the region forward as it becomes a sought-after tourism destination. At first the region is viewed by visitors as an authentic outdoor recreation mecca, with intact charming communities and traditional industries. However, this growth quickly attracts people who do not understand or appreciate local values, land use, history, or culture. The surge in visitation quickly stresses the local systems and creates patterns of market distortions, overuse, and congestion. Conflicts flare over land-use and access, and the visitor experience becomes degraded. Regional collaborations become difficult to sustain, as people and communities become disenchanting.



This scenario is one that starts as promising, as it helps to build economic growth and prosperity. However, this promise fades over time as there is an increasing dynamic of public cost vs private benefit, and underlying conflicts tear at the community fabric.



In this future, the region struggles with the influx of tourists, and resulting conflicts begin to tear apart the community fabric. Divisions deepen, and the sense of resident alienation rises.

## SCENARIO A – 2030 CHARACTERISTICS: TOURISM; TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

The characteristics of this future point to a rapid shift in the local economy and focus. The strong push to build the tourism economy shifts the balance in the region, and eventually changes the underlying culture and community fabric.



### Community Impacts

**There is strong regional collaboration, initially focused on promoting tourism**

- Regional leadership is focused on employment and workforce development to support tourism
- The rapid rise in visitation places stress on land use, and local landowners and land managers become alienated
- Local communities quickly lose their character, as they are swamped by seasonal tourism visitation



### Visitor Profile & Experience

**Visitors to the region struggle to have a cohesive experience due to overuse**

- There are mixed outcomes with surging numbers – some people enjoy the group mass tourism experience; some are turned-off
- There is competition between tourism products and types of recreation, and conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation groups
- The visitor profile gradually shifts to be more metro visitors, who can tolerate the increased prices for amenities and services



### Local Economic Impacts

**Coordinated regional marketing drives increased economic activity**

- The tourism boom drives a shift in the economy to be much more seasonal, with pronounced peaks
- Regional collaboration triggers more infrastructure that helps the destination attract and absorb more visitors
- Workforce becomes a challenge, as demand for construction and service industry jobs skyrockets



### Environmental Impacts

**The tourism surge has significant negative impacts on the environment**

- There is limited focus on sustainability, and the focus is more on growth and consumption
- Due to the lack of a focus on destination management, popular areas are quickly 'loved to death'
- Environmental considerations are pushed to the background, which creates resentment and hostility within the community

**Future Headline News:** Participants were asked to characterize their imagined scenario in a series of newspaper headlines. This activity helped participants conceptualize change over time and express tangible potential impacts.

#### 2022 HEADLINE NEWS:

"Ribbon cuttings hit record highs"



#### 2025 HEADLINE NEWS:

"Trails Close – Landowner revokes access permissions, again"



#### 2030 HEADLINE NEWS:

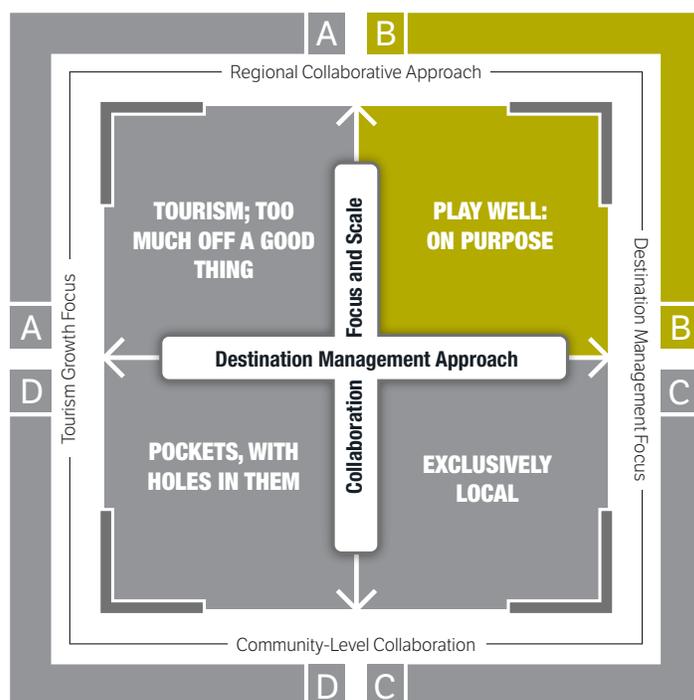
"Region continues to struggle with its own success; Tourism booms crushes communities"





## 4.2 SCENARIO B: PLAYS WELL: ON PURPOSE

This scenario forecasts a future where regional collaboration is strong, and there is a sustained focus on destination impact management. Over time, these efforts radically reshape the local tourism economy, and define a new relationship between the visitor and the region. The region has focused on building a truly sustainable tourism model that delivers enduring value to local communities and attracts empathetic visitors. This future requires an elevated investment in building long-term collaborative partnerships between multiple stakeholders such as land users, landowners, and communities. The region also invests in building capacity and capability in destination management, finding ways to mitigate and disperse impact, and preserving important habitats and sustainable land uses. The overarching theme in this future is one of sustainable management.



This future is defined by a purpose-driven approach to developing and evolving the regional tourism industry. The principles of sustainable tourism are embedded and help create a decision-making framework for the region.



In this future, the region hits the 'sweet-spot' of getting the right balance between economic benefits and local community impacts. This takes significant investment of time and resources, and it pays off in terms of creating a sustainable future.

## SCENARIO B – 2030 CHARACTERISTICS: PLAYS WELL: ON PURPOSE

The characteristics of this future point to a transformation of the local tourism economy, and a future where tourism is embraced, but tightly managed to deliver the optimal outcomes. To achieve these outcomes, the regional community has learned and committed to deep collaboration.



### Community Impacts

**The community embraces tourism and works with visitors to create mutual benefits**

- Place-based community culture, feel and vibe is maintained, and enhanced
- High levels of regional collaboration support regional planning and distribute benefits to all communities
- Visitors are educated in the local etiquette and how to interact with the environment, landowners, and communities



### Visitor Profile & Experience

**Visitors to the region become part of the solution and the region offers great experiences**

- The regional collaborative approach helps build a seamless visitor experience, where they are guided to the right places
- There is a subtle messaging that visitors need to do their part, and are expected to be responsible and co-operative
- The visitor profile gradually shifts to be more sophisticated travellers who are environmentally conscious and empathetic to local concerns



### Local Economic Impacts

**Benefits are better distributed across the region, with more locally owned enterprises**

- The sustainable tourism model has helped create more business for local guides and tourism operators
- New economic and employment opportunities are created, driven by a focus on year-round tourism products
- Resource based industries are maintained, and work in synergy with the outdoor recreation economy



### Environmental Impacts

**Tourism is being used to help drive enhancement and sustainability of the environment**

- There is a deliberate and increased focus on resource conservation, and regenerative activities
- Destination management tactics help spread out impact across the region, and avoids congestion 'hot spots'
- There is an overarching ethos of 'leave no trace' and an embracing of net-zero emissions and waste practices

**Future Headline News:** Participants were asked to characterize their imagined scenario in a series of newspaper headlines. This activity helped participants conceptualize change over time and express tangible potential impacts.

#### 2022 HEADLINE NEWS:

"The Largest Rail-Trail in New England is Completed"



#### 2025 HEADLINE NEWS:

"Coos County Visitors Understand and Respect Local Culture and Etiquette"



#### 2030 HEADLINE NEWS:

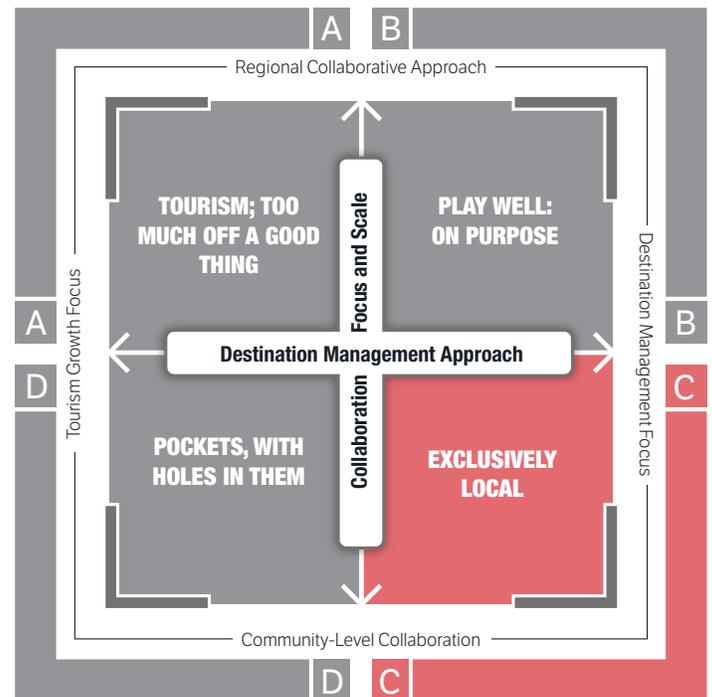
"It's a Win/Win: Open Spaces Protected and Adequate Housing is Accessible"





### 4.3 SCENARIO C: EXCLUSIVELY LOCAL

This scenario forecasts a future with a consistent embracing of destination management and diverse experiences available from community to community without an interest in regional collaboration. Overall, the region pivots away from a tourism industry growth focus; and concentrates more on stewardship of local community, cultural, and natural resources. In some places local initiatives and innovation, spurred by community-level collaboration, create well managed destinations, that offer visitors seamless and rewarding experiences. The overall environmental and economic outcomes are mixed. Some locations achieve outstanding gains in terms of local prosperity and landscape management. However, some areas, where local collaboration is not as effective or focused, have a more disjointed approach and less effective outcomes. Overall, the region struggles to reach larger markets and to gain the cohesion to tackle the bigger issues and challenges, leaving it to local communities to wrestle with solutions.



The 'Exclusively Local' scenario paints a future where there is a strong focus on destination management and strong community-level collaboration. This drives planning and implementation into an inward-looking local perspective, where communities are primarily concerned with their own issues.



In the 'Exclusively Local' scenario, there is an overall positive outcome, but we see an emerging trend towards communities being long-term 'winners' and 'losers', depending on the effectiveness of their local collaboration and planning.

## SCENARIO C - 2030 CHARACTERISTICS: EXCLUSIVELY LOCAL

The characteristics of this scenario paint a future where some communities effectively deliver on visitor experience and impact management, and others struggle.



### Community Impacts

There are 'hit and miss' outcomes in different communities, driven by effectiveness of local collaboration

- Organized destinations thrive and successfully manage impacts in a positive manner
- Local initiatives tend to be driven by local personalities and entities, rather than a larger strategy
- Areas that don't collaborate and organize locally suffer challenges in managing impacts, especially in peak periods



### Visitor Profile & Experience

Visitors gravitate to locations that are well organized and offer well managed experiences

- Some areas offer healthy visitor experience, with generally well-managed attractions in nearby proximity
- Well-managed destination communities offer a more traditional experience, and retain a strong local character
- Experience degrades in less organized areas, if visitors do stray into these destinations. This drives a more localized visitation pattern.



### Local Economic Impacts

Benefits are good, but not well distributed, and regional scale efforts struggle with funding

- Marketing and outreach efforts are smaller scale and disjointed, with some confusing messaging
- Economic impact is generally localized, and the region is unable to get traction on larger initiatives
- The local focus means the region misses out on longer-term benefits and positive impacts, and local resources become tapped-out more quickly



### Environmental Impacts

Overall, impact is well managed, but challenges emerge in areas that are not well organized

- Well organized local transportation systems disperse community-level congestion impacts
- Popular areas have a high level and intensity of sustainable management that preserves the landscape
- Visitor usage spills into less managed areas and creates localized issues, and potential seasonal environmental degradation.

**Future Headline News:** Participants were asked to characterize their imagined scenario in a series of newspaper headlines. This activity helped participants conceptualize change over time and express tangible potential impacts.

#### 2022 HEADLINE NEWS:

"Local groups enthusiastically rally around destination planning"



#### 2025 HEADLINE NEWS:

"Investment in community amenities hits record high"



#### 2030 HEADLINE NEWS:

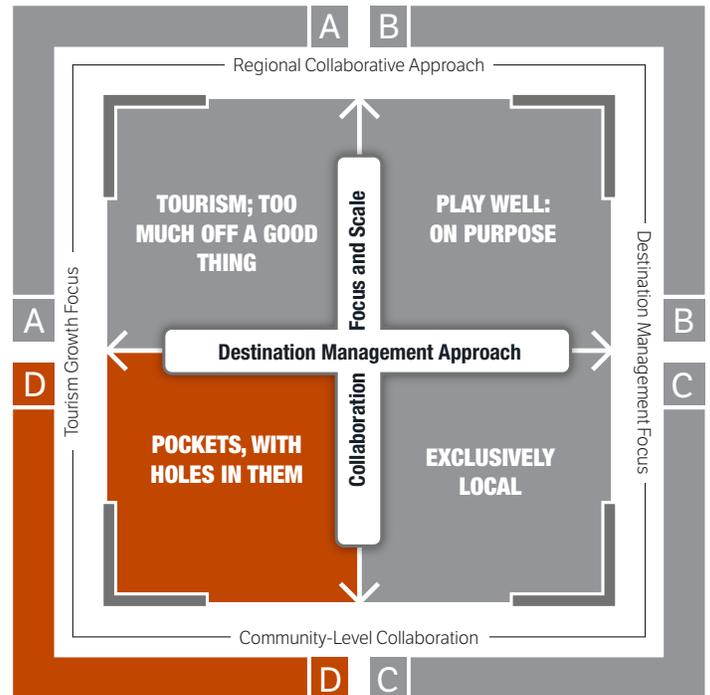
"Cracks emerge as success starts to strain resources in some areas"



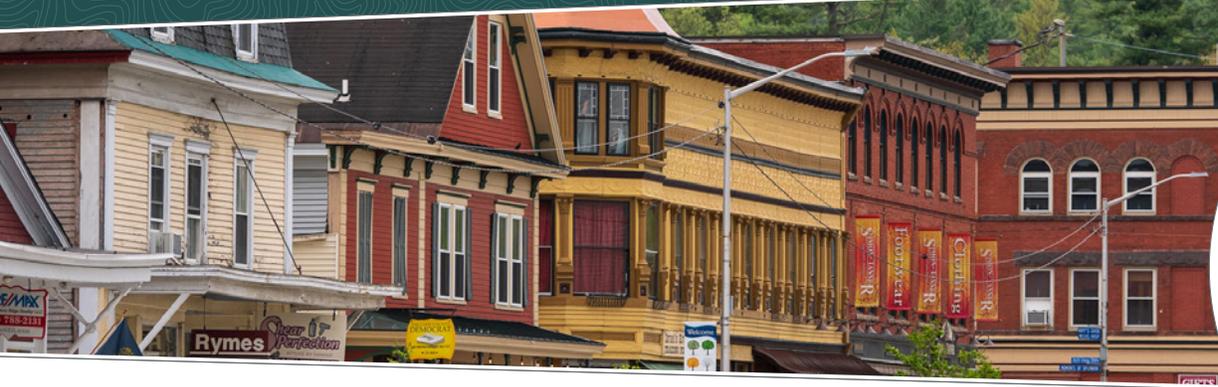


## 4.4 SCENARIO D: POCKETS, WITH HOLES IN THEM

This scenario outlines a future where there is a strong focus on tourism growth over the next decade, and collaboration mainly occurs at the local level. This future is a world of competition and segmentation between communities. The scenario name captures a phenomenon where there are pockets of communities that are the focus of strong tourism and economic growth, and then areas where communities fall through the holes. Overall, the experience of this future scenario is one of intense competition for visitors among communities. Each community is focused on its own issues and trajectory. Larger potential regional projects just don't get done, as there is insufficient collaboration to pull diverse players and user groups together. There is a lack of sustainability, and a lack of bigger picture thinking where people do not consider the consequences across different parts of the regions.



The 'Pockets, with holes in them' scenario paints a challenging picture, where the region is swamped with tourists, and there are few effective approaches to handle destination impact. Each community must work out its own issues and approach.



In this future scenario, tensions and challenges increase within the region. Tourism impacts overrun the ability for local people to manage the consequences, and land use conflicts are exacerbated.

## SCENARIO D - 2030 CHARACTERISTICS: POCKETS, WITH POCKETS IN THEM

The characteristics of this scenario paint a future where the region gradually loses control of its ability to manage tourism impacts, as visitation grows faster than the ability for local systems to cope. Key supporting infrastructure and tourism hot spots get overrun, creating damage and over-use. The economic impact of tourism jumps dramatically, which begins to distort property prices and land use decisions.



### Community Impacts

Communities take very different approaches to tourism – some embrace it and some give it a ‘stiff arm’

- Communities begin to evolve on different paths, which results in different looks and feel between communities
- There is competition and rivalry between communities and an emerging ‘them and us’ behavior
- There is an emerging ‘resident alienation’, as some people and communities feel pushed out by tourism which is bringing new money and priorities



### Visitor Profile & Experience

Visitation grows dramatically, mostly with people from urban centers looking for their quick ‘outdoor fix’

- The overall experience is very lopsided and unpredictable – it is great in some places and not in others
- Visitors tend to concentrate in well publicized locations with good amenities, which creates the ‘go-to’ places, and then spill-over impacts
- The visitors begin to have less outdoor experience, and are not equipped to deal with the challenges of remote locations, creating pressure on emergency services and land managers



### Local Economic Impacts

Benefits are strong in some areas, but the overall impact is very concentrated in well-known popular areas

- The strong economic drive creates ‘tourism boom towns’ which drives up local property prices and attracts larger business operators
- Increasingly people who work in tourism are forced out of the main locations for housing, and then must travel further to work
- The tourism economy has more pronounced seasonal spikes, which creates churn in small businesses that start and fail



### Environmental Impacts

There are increasing negative impacts as tourism overwhelms local infrastructure and systems

- There is congestion at key locations and overuse creates environmental degradation, especially in more sensitive ecological systems
- Regional land-use planning struggles to keep up with the growth, and the dynamics of rapidly growing popular locations
- Land use begins to change, as subdivision starts to break up the continuity of forest systems; land use conflicts emerge

**Future Headline News:** Participants were asked to characterize their imagined scenario in a series of newspaper headlines. This activity helped participants conceptualize change over time and express tangible potential impacts.

#### 2022 HEADLINE NEWS:

“Local trails see record-breaking levels of use”



#### 2025 HEADLINE NEWS:

“Two New ATV-only Campgrounds open in Berlin”



#### 2030 HEADLINE NEWS:

“Inter-community tensions grow over tourism impacts”





The Scenario D: 'Pockets, with holes in them' was seen as the default future, and in some ways represents the current status quo.

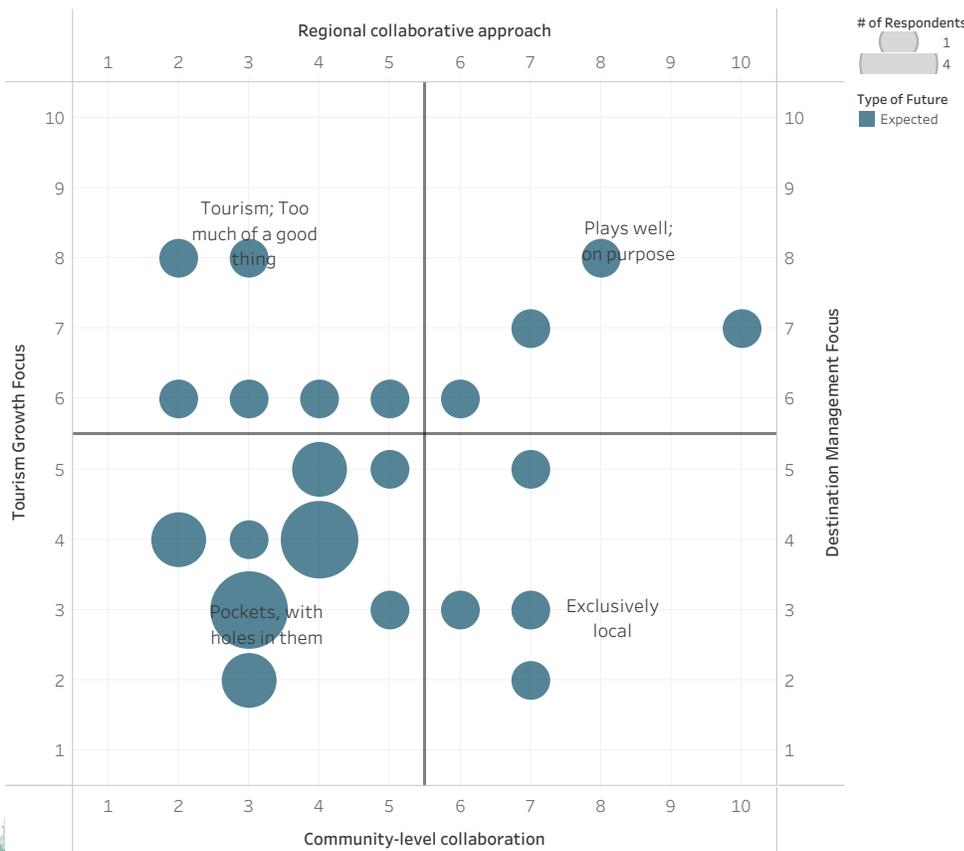
## 5.0 EXPECTED AND PREFERRED FUTURES

At the conclusion of the scenario development exercise, workshop participants were asked to consider what they believed would be the 'Expected Future' and the 'Preferred Future' for their regions in 2030. They recorded their responses in an individual survey. The Expected Future was the scenario they considered the most likely future, assuming there was no change in existing direction or trajectory. The Preferred Future was what they believed was the most optimal future scenario for the region. To indicate their choice, participants marked their Expected Future and Preferred Future on a 10 x 10 grid that overlaid the scenario framework. This provides a greater nuanced view of the future and allows people to move along the axes which represent continuums from the end points.

### 5.1 EXPECTED FUTURE - 'POCKETS - WITH HOLES IN THEM'

The results for the expected future are outlined in the following heatmap. For the Expected Future, the concentration of responses was clearly located in Scenario D: 'Pockets, with holes in them'.

**Expected Future Heatmap** (X Axis = Destination Management Approach; Y Axis = Collaboration focus and scale)





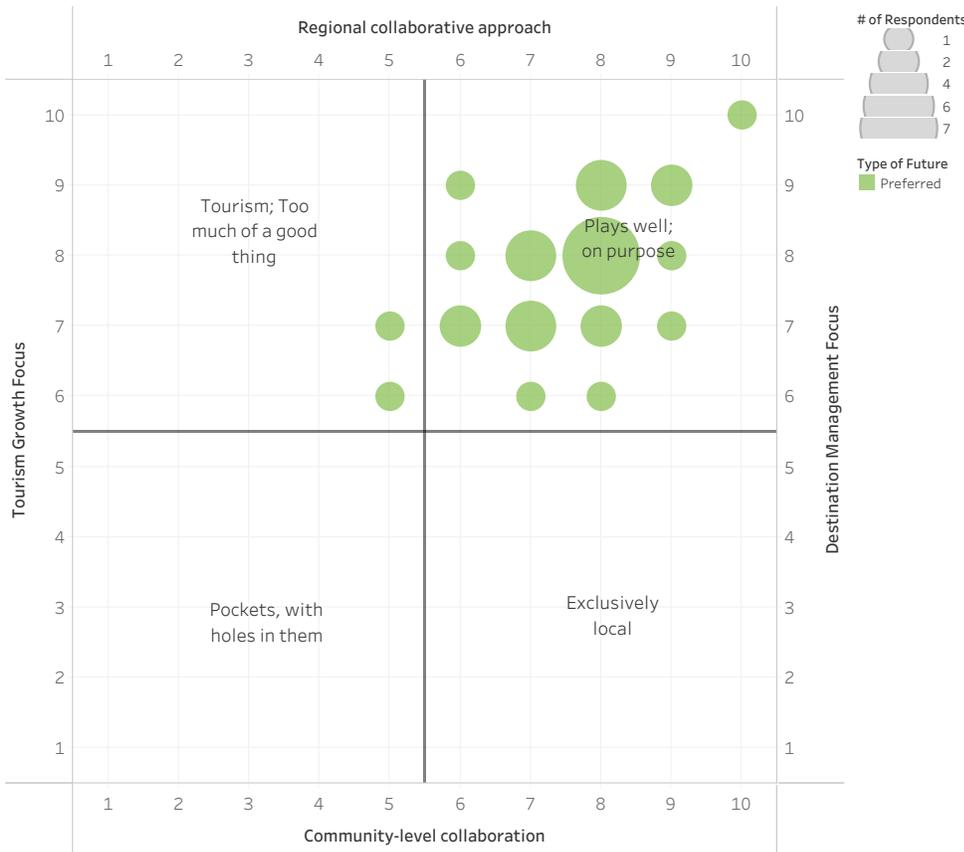
## 5.2 PREFERRED FUTURE – ‘PLAYS WELL: ON PURPOSE’

The results for the Preferred Future are outlined in the heatmap below; created by compiling the individual responses from the workshop participants. The participants were highly aligned in identifying ‘Plays well: on purpose’ as the optimal future looking out to 2030. This future represents significant change from the “Expected Future,” with a strong destination management focus, and a regional collaboration approach. The underlying view was that this future would create the right balance in the region and lay the foundation for a sustainable tourism industry.

For the Preferred Future, the concentration of responses was clearly located in the ‘Plays well; on purpose’ scenario, which represents a future where people are working very collaboratively to manage tourism impacts in a positive manner.

### Preferred Future Heatmap

(X Axis = Destination Management Approach; Y Axis = Collaboration focus and scale)



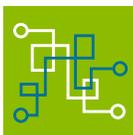
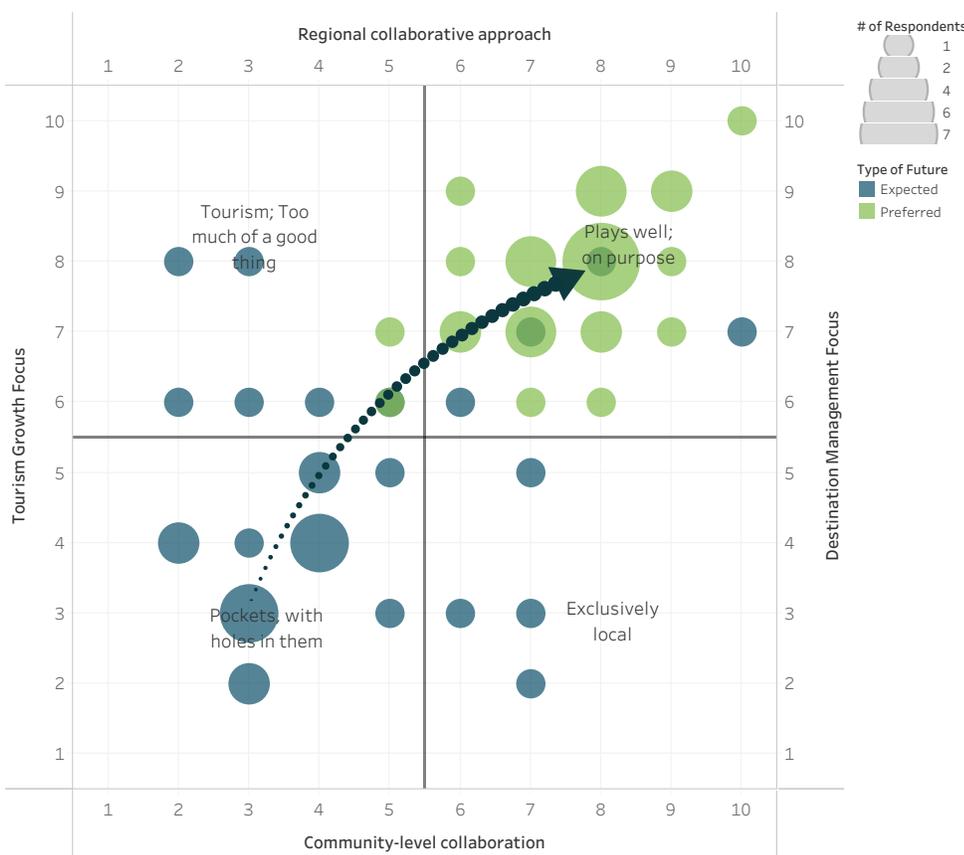


The heat maps for the Expected and Preferred futures suggest there is strong stakeholder interest in creating a destination management focus in the Northern Forest region.

### 5.3 MOVING FROM EXPECTED TO PREFERRED FUTURES

The distance between the Expected and Preferred Futures shows considerable appetite for change. The roadmap of actions and implementation to drive change from the 'Expected' to the 'Preferred' future will require careful thought, planning, and implementation. Across the Northeast Kingdom and Coos County, this may require significant new collaboration building, and investing in building a 'community of practice' that can support the technical aspects of destination management strategies and tactics.

**Expected and Preferred Future Heatmap** (X Axis = Destination Management Approach; Y Axis = Collaboration focus and scale)



#### FUTURE INSIGHTS: IDEAS TO CONSIDER

- The 'Plays well; on purpose' scenario points to a shared values-based approach, where there is proactive effort and attention on intentional destination management, while simultaneously working to build collaboration. Building a regional understanding of the shared underlying values and aspirations will be important.
- The strong collaborative approach will require capacity to bring new coalitions of stakeholders and communities together. These new partnerships, and perhaps novel collaborations, will require careful nurturing.

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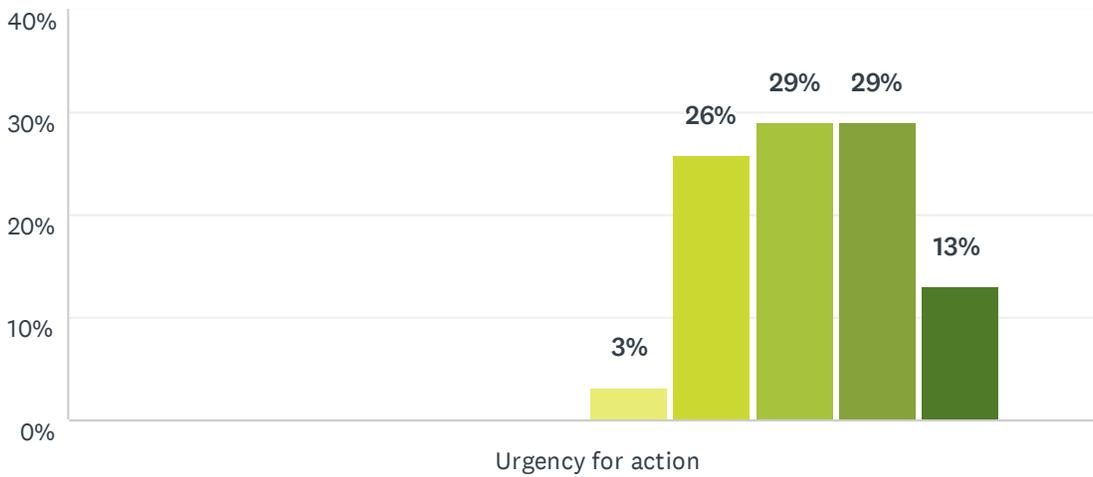
## 6.0 URGENCY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

As participants were completing the Expected and Preferred future survey, were also asked about the perceived sense of urgency to implement the preferred future. The results indicate a strong desire to move with urgency.

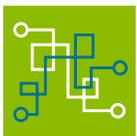
### Sense of Urgency

Question: *How quickly do you think the region needs to adopt and pursue strategies to achieve the preferred future?* Scale: 1 = Not urgent right now; 10 = Critically urgent right now

Workshop participants felt a strong sense of urgency to institute change quickly as the community seeks to achieve their preferred future.



1. Not urgent right now
  2.
  3.
  4.
  5.
  6.
  7.
  8.
  9.
  10. Critically urgent right now



FutureInsight

### FUTURE INSIGHTS:

- Workshop participants rated the urgency of adopting and pursuing strategies to achieve the preferred future in the 7-10 scoring range (Urgent to Critically Urgent). This reflects the sense of importance of tourism impacts to people in the region.
- This data reflects a strong desire to move quickly, and the scenario planning process has highlighted the potential consequences of not acting.



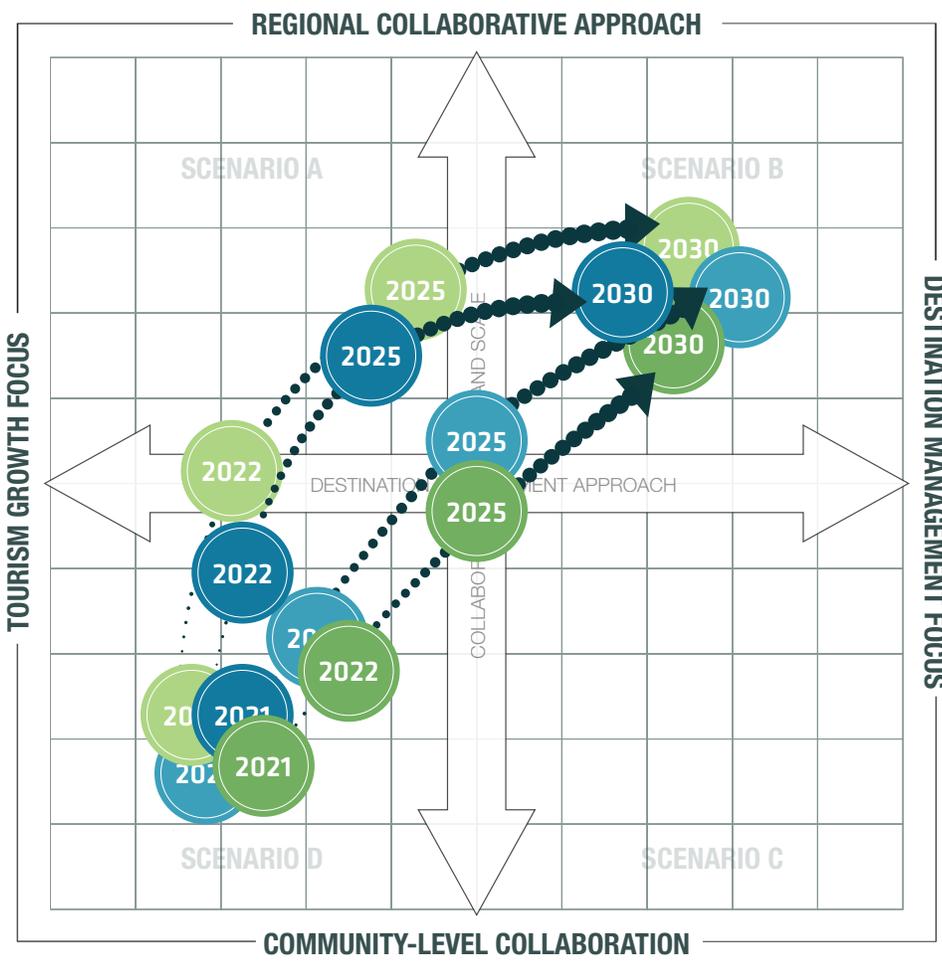


The scenario process lays out a framework to help create customized sustainable tourism development plans for different parts of the region. These plans will be developed further in Phase 2.

## 7.0 SUB-REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

### 7.1 POSSIBLE REGIONAL PATHWAYS TO PREFERRED FUTURE

After the development of the scenarios and discussion about Expected and Preferred futures, the workshop broke into sub-regional groups. These group sizes varied from 4-8 stakeholders. Each group plotted on the scenario framework where they believed they were as a starting point (Expected) and the likely progression they could make over time towards the Preferred Future. While this was a quick and simple exercise, it does provide an insight into a 'self-assessment' of key areas to initially work on and helps build a roadmap to the future.



#### NORTHERN FOREST RURAL TOURISM ACADEMY

##### MODULE 2

- St. Johnsbury, Lyndon, Burke
- Hardwick, Craftsbury, Greensboro, Barton, Glover
- Island Pond, Canaan, Colebrook
- Androscoggin Valley (Berlin, Gorham)

Where do you think your region will be / want to be in:

- 2021
- 2022
- 2025
- 2030





The brainstorming on possible regional high-level sub-regional strategies was intended to begin the process of local planning. This will be further developed with local stakeholders in Phase 2 of the Rural Tourism Academy.

## 7.2 POTENTIAL HIGH-LEVEL STRATEGIES

The Phase 1 program brought regional stakeholders together to explore emerging trends and learn from relevant case studies. It created a series of plausible future regional scenarios. This has resulted in an emerging preferred regional approach, which couples together a strategic focus on destination impact management and building collaborative alliances. The final step of the scenario planning workshop was to explore potential high-level strategies at a sub-regional level. The participants broke into four groups, and brainstormed ideas on strategy. The summary results are presented in the following table.

### Sub-regional Strategies – Summary Matrix

Sub-region	Central/Eastern Caledonia County (St. Johnsbury, Lyndon, Burke)	Essex County, Western Coos County (Island Pond, Canaan, Colebrook)	Hardwick and Southern/Central Orleans County (Hardwick, Craftsbury, Greensboro, Barton, Glover)	Androscoggin Valley (Berlin, Gorham)
Engagement	Create clear unifying message for locals and visitors, that helps build strong community buy-in and alignment around vision.	Focus on building community buy-in and support / investment to move in preferred direction – focussing on businesses, town, and community leaders.	Develop innovative ways for people to learn more about what’s happening; and help build overall awareness and buy -in across the region.	Undertake pro-active engagement and outreach, especially to local municipal and business leaders.
Collaboration	Develop mission-driven approach to destination impact management, that helps build large scale collaborations across the region.	Invest in maintaining landowner good will and support, through shared codes of conduct, standards of care, and stewardship agreements.	Identify and engage all key collaboration partners that need to be involved, from local communities to regional and statewide levels.	Focus on engaging small businesses through collaborative problem solving.
Destination Development	Focus on longer term visitation and develop a coordinated regional approach to spreading visitation in a ‘hub and spoke’ system.	Focus on destination development by identifying unique local qualities and experiences; and create clear expectations for users.	Build capacity behind building collaboration. For example, consider hiring coordinators and providing stipends for stakeholders to participate.	Create parallel tracks to simultaneously build recreation amenities and build supportive community-based infrastructure.
Best Practice	Seek best practice examples to build organizational sustainability and leadership, with a focus on longer term reliable funding streams.		Work out how to connect ‘people to people’ and ‘people to places’ through a common website (Example Columbia River Gorge).	Identify and promote sustainable tourism principles and codes of conduct (see Mahoosuc and United Nations examples).



Between Phase 1 and Phase 2, regional stakeholders are invited to participate in virtual and local discussions, to help foster new thinking and build a 'community of practice' focused on sustainable tourism.

## 8.0 NEXT STEPS – PHASE 2 - LOCAL COMMUNITY PLANNING

The Rural Tourism Academy has a strong focus on assisting local communities to implement ideas and catalytic projects. To support this, communities across northern New Hampshire and Vermont's Northeast Kingdom are now being offered the opportunity to join Phase 2 – Local Community Planning. This is a unique opportunity to bring local stakeholders together in a proven planning approach, to develop local vision and action plans for sustainable tourism and destination impact management. This support also includes access to dedicated funds for participating communities to help activate their key priority projects. This funding aims to accelerate implementation and action.

### PHASE 1 Exploring Future Trajectory

*Regional Stakeholder Virtual Workshops*

**May 2021**

#### EXPLORE FUTURE TRENDS & SCENARIOS

- Exploring emerging trends shaping the tourism industry
- Learning from sustainable tourism case studies
- Investigating potential futures and implications
- Create preferred regional future scenario for managing tourism impact



### PHASE 2 Local Community Planning

*Local In-person Community Planning Workshops*

**Nov 2021 and March 2022**

#### LOCAL COMMUNITY -BASED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLANNING WORKSHOPS

- Explore local implications of global and national trends
- Create local shared vision and aspiration for future of tourism and recreation
- Craft local strategic action plans targeted toward building sustainable outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism
- Develop local implementation plans, priorities and catalyst projects

The RTA also includes dedicated funds that will be applied to directly help communities implement their key priority projects. This funding aims to accelerate implementation and action.



### PHASE 3 Regional Learning Laboratory

*Regional Convening and Learning Laboratory*

**May 2022**

#### REGIONAL COMMUNITIES CONVENING AND SHARED LEARNING LABORATORY

- Communities convene to share their plans and projects
- Exploration of best-practice for implementation
- The Learning Laboratory will connect communities to resources resources to implement their projects



## 9.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### The Advisory Team Members:

The local Advisory Team volunteered to help guide the program development, especially the content and structure of Phase 1. They have provided invaluable local insight and context. Members of the initial Advisory Team included:

- Abby Long, Kingdom Trails and VT Outdoor Recreation Collaborative
- Carey Crozier, Northeast Kingdom Collaborative
- Jessica Savage, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
- David Snedeker, Northeastern Vermont Development Association
- Michelle Moren-Grey, North Country Council
- Philip Bryce, NH Division of Parks & Recreation
- Jody Fried, Catamount Arts
- Jackie Dagger, Vermont Office of Outdoor Recreation (VOREC)
- Denise Vallee, Town of Gorham
- Jodi Gilbert, North Country Chamber of Commerce

### Workshop Presenters:

The Phase 1 workshops were well attended by a good cross section of stakeholders. Participants engaged enthusiastically in the workshop deliberations. The Phase 1 workshop presenters included:

- Russell Walters, ATTA
- David Beurle, Future iQ
- Kristin Dahl, Crosscurrent Collective, Oregon
- Olof Yrr, Iceland Tourism Development
- Emily Reed, Columbia River Gorge, Oregon/Washington
- Kieron Weidner, First Nature Tours, Pacific Northwest
- Abby Long, Kingdom Trails and VT Outdoor Recreation Collaborative
- Jody Fried, Catamount Arts
- Philip Bryce, NH Division of Parks and Recreation, former State Forester



Special acknowledgment of the contributions by Alexandra Ramey, who has recently worked with the Northern Forest Center as a Summer Sustainability Fellow, University of New Hampshire, and is a Graduate student at the Arizona State University (Class of 2022). Her work has helped create local resources that support building a future 'community of practice' around sustainable tourism in the region.



## 10.0 FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the Northern Forest Rural Tourism Academy, please contact:



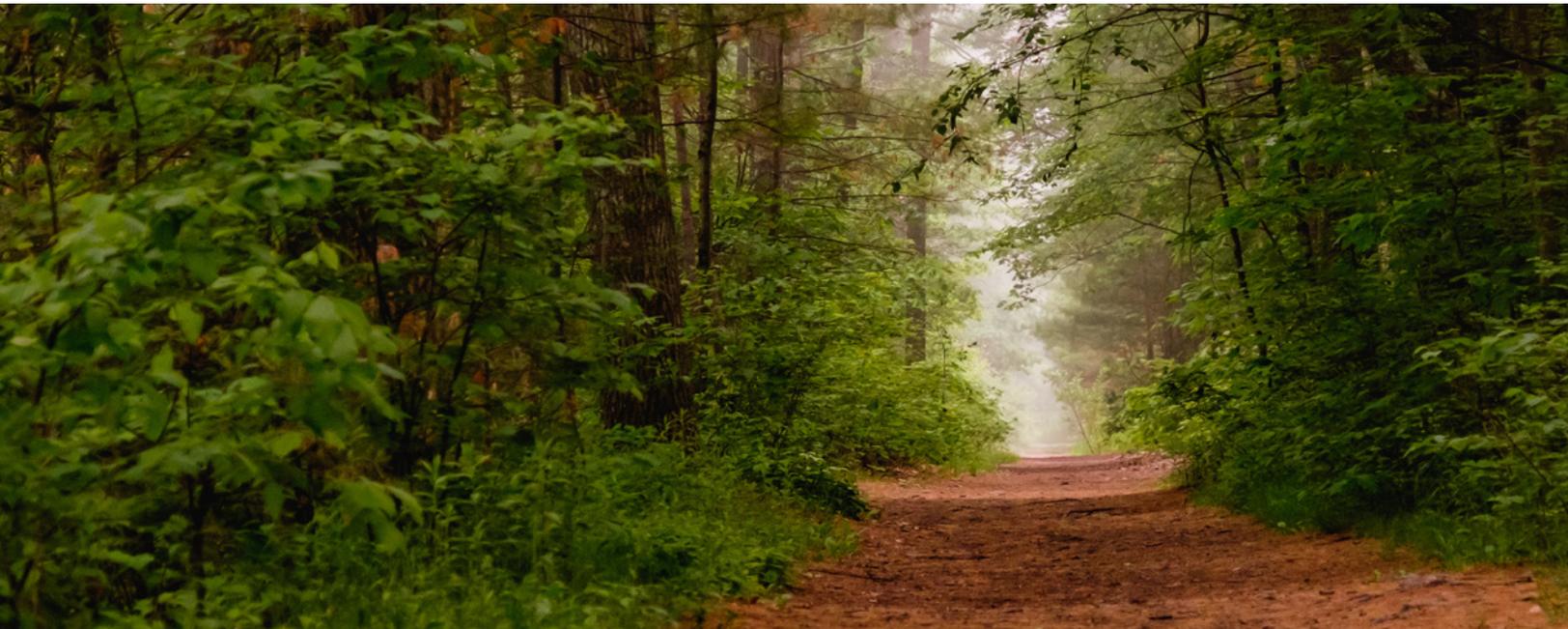
**Joe Short**, *Vice President*  
jshort@northernforest.org



**Mike Wilson**, *Senior Program Director*  
mwilson@northernforest.org

Also visit [www.northernforest.org](http://www.northernforest.org) and the RTA dedicated portal: <https://lab2.future-iq.com/northern-forest-rural-tourism-academy-portal/>

Report prepared by Future iQ, in collaboration with the Destination Development team at the Northern Forest Center.





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