

# 2021 ECOTOURISM SYMPOSIUM FOR COMMUNITIES SURROUNDING THE PETITCODIAC AND MEMRAMCOOK RIVERS

Prepared by Sentinelles Petitcodiac Riverkeeper



## 2021 ECOTOURISM SYMPOSIUM FOR COMMUNITIES SURROUNDING THE PETITCODIAC AND MEMRAMCOOK RIVERS

Sentinelles Petitcodiac Riverkeeper (SPR) and its community partners have worked together over many years to bring attention to the plight of the Petitcodiac River. The results have been historic. In 2021, the Petitcodiac causeway was removed, allowing the natural flow of the river to return along with fish and habitat. This is a significant achievement in river restoration and marks a tremendous and unique opportunity for a river to make significant contributions to the quality of life and economies of urban and rural communities.

The tidal bore is once again a major tourist attraction, attracting visitors worldwide to experience a rare and unique tidal river bore. This is part of the Fundy National Park visitor experience where visitors and locals alike flock to experience the highest tides in the world. However, despite the Fundy National Park, Hopewell Rocks Provincial Park and Petitcodiac tidal bore attracting numerous visitors from across the globe, very few tourists stop in neighbouring communities.

An integrated and collaborative restoration, eco-tourism, and economic development strategy are necessary for surrounding communities to benefit from tourism in the region while ensuring that economic development opportunities prioritize sustainability. On November 30th, 2021, SPR held a virtual Community Ecotourism Symposium to bring together tourism operators, municipalities, concerned citizens, and other stakeholders to discuss the opportunities for developing and promoting our region as a world-class tourism destination.

The Community Eco-tourism Symposium was an excellent opportunity to re-engage key stakeholders, partners, local businesses, and community groups - enabling them to play a leading role in the creation of an environmentally responsible tourism and economic development strategy to take advantage of new opportunities offered by the restoration of the Petitcodiac and Memramcook Rivers.

Ronald Babin, President of SPR, gave opening remarks for the event, focusing on the tremendous restoration journey of the Petitcodiac River since the construction of the causeway in 1967. Two guest speakers presented on eco-tourism, trails, and trail town development. This included Marc Leger from Plan 360 and Serge Dugas from the Veloroute Acadienne.

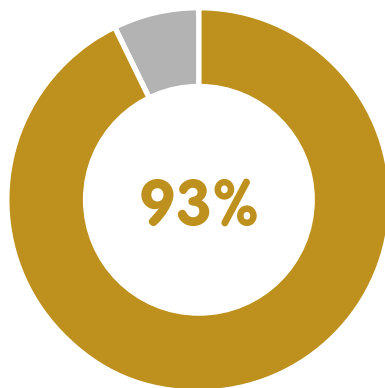
**“Someone’s success is all our success!”**

**– Marc Léger**

The virtual event had 33 participants who gave feedback and discussed ideas on a shared vision and environmentally responsible strategy to take advantage of new opportunities offered by the restoration of the Petitcodiac River, such as ecotourism, recreation, environmental and public health, economic development, and community resilience. The participants were divided into breakout rooms to discuss key topics:

- How can we turn our local communities into ecotourism destinations?
- How can we improve or expand on ecotourism in your community?
- How do we integrate our history and culture into ecotourism activities?
- How can we increase public awareness and engagement in local ecotourism opportunities?
- How can we create a support network for different ecotourism stakeholders?
- What are some collaborative opportunities between communities that could help build ecotourism?

**Eco-tourism is one of the best ways to build our local economies and protect our natural environment.**



93% of participants believe more could be done to promote regional ecotourism.

**A collaborative effort among communities in the Petitcodiac-Memramcook watershed region would help increase the opportunities to build eco-tourism**

A summary of the thoughts and discussions from this event are summarized in subsequent pages of this report. The information gathered from this event will be used to inform sustainable economic development strategies in the Community Action Plan being developed by SPR.

## **How can we turn our local communities into ecotourism destinations?**

Participants discussed how it is necessary to invest in restoration and the natural environment in communities. A dying river does not present an opportune selling point to locals or visitors. However, focusing and investing in the environmental health of the region brings many economic opportunities that are otherwise not possible.

- Ecology is extremely important and cannot be sacrificed for economic gains. Economic development opportunities, including those related to tourism must include ecological health as a priority.
- Funding is available for new trail development, which offers an environmentally sustainable way to explore regions. However, funding is lacking for maintaining trails year round after their creation. Increased support for municipalities is needed to ensure maintenance and year round access of new infrastructure.
- Provide an information package or have a website with all required information, so people can plan their trip. For example, there's no accommodation in Memramcook, so people have to stay in Dieppe.
- Visitors must "live an experience" meaning they are given the opportunity to explore and immerse themselves with the culture, ecology, social well-being, habitat and other factors that may interest them during their visit. They leave with knowledge that will stick with them because they were actively participating in gaining or experiencing this knowledge instead of passively learning about the region.

## **How can we improve or expand on ecotourism in your community?**

Participants discussed that in order to improve or expand on ecotourism in their community, the community members need to be involved in the process.

- Increased community engagement and buy-in are key.
  - Build interest and excitement in local knowledge and pathways to share that knowledge to further innovation and creation of new opportunities in ecotourism and economic development.
- One example to increase local knowledge is having information centres, panels, or QR codes that have photos of ships from the 1950s. People can put themselves back into that time period and see the difference in the landscape right in front of them.

## **How do we integrate our history and culture into ecotourism activities?**

Integrating our history and culture into ecotourism can happen in many ways. Participants came up with many ideas such as:

- Increase QR codes along trails and at other important destinations.
  - As people pass along determined points of interest, they can scan a code that provides information.
  - QR codes are less costly than interpretive panels.
  - However, one barrier is that for many rural communities there is a lack of cellular service and visitors would need to be able to use these services to scan a QR code.



- Culture is displayed through art, music and food, so integrate these aspects into environmental activities.
  - For example, visitors love experiencing regional dishes. Using locally sourced food to (indigenous culture like fish and waterfowl) to inform people about the importance of where the food comes from, while creating a lasting shared experience that people can taste.
  - An example for art was to paint or draw important environmental landscapes while learning about their cultural and environmental significance. This creates an educational opportunity and strengthens the connection to the local environment and its protection and restoration while also supporting local artists.
- Create walking tours or bike tours.
  - Pack essentials for the day to travel from community to community.
  - Partner with local businesses that create packages for the trip.
- Increasing the opportunity to hunt to learn about indigenous culture and history.
  - Create transects in trails to encourage hunting.
  - There has been a decrease in hunting, especially waterfowl.

## **How can we increase public awareness and engagement in local ecotourism opportunities?**

Participants agreed that increasing public engagement for ecotourism opportunities means having more ecotourism events, informal conversations, and working with people who are interested in cross-collaboration.

- Increasing events like Symposiums and Public Dialogues.
- Finding and empowering champions and community leaders.
- Having informal meetings and conversations with people.
- Work with people who want to work with you and work together on projects that have a similar goal. “Lead, follow or get out of the way”.
- Work on what you can where there’s buy-in and showcase success to win folks over.

## **How can we create a support network for different ecotourism stakeholders?**

In order to create a support network for ecotourism stakeholders, groups must work together to advocate for a shared goal. Everyone must see the opportunity for ecotourism and the benefits it can provide for our region.

- Petitcodiac River Discovery Centre
  - Create a platform or central touchpoint for many groups working on ecotourism, ecojustice, culture and historical preservation.
- Engage with other regional strategy groups i.e., Upper Bay of Fundy Regional Destination Development Strategy.

- Help ecotourism operators celebrate the story of the region both past and present and its culture and environmental heritage.
  - Advocate for a large trail network and other assets that all groups can use as ecotourism infrastructure.
  - Help identify funding avenues to support ecotourism opportunities.
  - Work with partners e.g., University – researchers, eNGOs, and cultural societies.

## **What are some collaborative opportunities between communities that could help build ecotourism?**

Visitors come to or pass through small rural communities, but often eat and stay in larger cities. These small rural communities are missing out on increasing their local economy by lack of ecotourism infrastructure and sometimes their voices go unheard.

- The capacity in small rural communities is a challenge.
  - Smaller rural villages and communities do not have municipal staff positions and feel their voices are lost in regional planning initiatives, in favour of larger cities with capacity to consult and engage citizens in a vision.
- Working with organizations such as Plan360, the land planning division of the Southeast Regional Service Commission.
  - It's a place where municipalities and communities meet to collaborate.
  - When more communities are involved, funding can also increase.
- Invest in rural areas.
  - People are coming to New Brunswick to see natural assets and not urban areas, so there should be an incentive to protect and restore these areas because they bring the people and the revenue.
- Encourage long-term planning over short-term successes.
  - Immediate activities can take precedent over long-term planning. For example, keeping a hockey rink and other assets can take priority over natural areas.
- Some of our small rural community members have no mayor, council, or anyone to represent them on the municipal level.
  - They rely on organizations like SPR to provide leadership.
- Encourage collaborating on funding.
  - Instead of applying for funding individually, people should be working together to apply for funding on similar projects.

Participants unanimously decided that ecotourism is important for the region, especially now with climate change, erosion, flooding, or other human-made issues. This Ecotourism Symposium took place to create a Community Action Plan. That collaborative document is a reflection of the shared vision Sentinelles Petitcodiac Riverkeeper wants to move forward with. Together, we can build ecotourism opportunities in rural communities that will increase the number of visitors and help the local economies.

## Moving Forward - Next Steps

SPR will use the discussions and results of this Community Ecotourism Symposium to inform the Community Action Plan, for Memramcook Watershed revitalization and associated opportunities for ecotourism and economic development.

The Community Action Plan outlines community objectives for the next 4 years. The community is focused on long-term planning and taking action today to help the community prosper for our future generations. Interested stakeholders, citizens and the general public are invited to reach out to SPR to participate in this project. The work outlined in the plan will encourage community collaboration and restoration efforts that protect our natural areas while providing opportunities for ecotourism. Economic development that focuses on environmental regeneration and sustainability will play a vital role in achieving the community vision.

## Stay Informed!

Communications tools to stay informed and follow Petitcodiac Riverkeeper and its projects include the following:

- **Petitcodiac Riverkeeper website:** [petitcodiac.org](http://petitcodiac.org).
- **Petitcodiac Riverkeeper Facebook Group** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4531432812>
- **Memramcook River Revitalization Facebook Group**  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/215129506488483>
- **Petitcodiac Riverkeeper email distribution list - request to be added by contacting**  
[info@petitcodiac.org](mailto:info@petitcodiac.org).