

Leaders meet to identify avenues of tourism growth

Over 70 city, county, state, business and organization representatives from Wisconsin and Minnesota, the cities of Hastings, Prescott, River Falls, and Afton, and Washington, Dakota, and Pierce Counties, and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway and the Mississippi River and Recreation Area National Parks, attended the April 7 conference, "Developing a Sustainable Community and Wildlife Nature Tourism Program." Held in the historic Hastings Courthouse, the conference was led by Jim Mallman, President of the international organization Watchable Wildlife (www.watchablewildlife.org) and hosted by the Great Rivers Confluence Project.

Mallman leads workshops throughout the world, helping communities and regions develop wildlife and nature tourism programs. Worldwide, overall tourism is estimated to be a \$9.3 trillion industry. In the United States, a 2006 survey done by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that \$45.7 billion was spent by people in wildlife viewing-related recreation expenditures, surpassing expenditures in fishing (\$42.2 billion/year) and hunting (\$22.9 billion/year). The upward trend continues for wildlife recreation expenditures.

Mallman reported travel trends are changing. He noted that travel experts contend that women tend to plan vacations and make the majority of travel decisions. This has been one of the key factors in the growth of wildlife/nature based recreation which can in-

clude walking, hiking, photography, and birding. Mallman recommended communities develop 18 month timelines for creating and implementing wildlife nature tourism programs, which include focusing on short day trips, and promote the "shoulder seasons" for their region. Mallman pointed out the importance in identifying, visiting and assessing the quality of area wildlife and nature assets.

Identification of area assets should be done by a wide group of local experts from a variety of fields--nature, business, recreational users, state, city and county representatives etc. Communities need to provide accessible relevant information, supporting materials including appropriate signage, special events, and site enhancements which attract wildlife or make wildlife viewing more accessible.

Following Mallman's presentation, Ian Muehlenhaus and Zach Bodenner of the University of WI- River Falls presented a draft interactive computer map of the confluence region of the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers with map layers including parks, historic sites, trails, information, and more. The map will be developed for further use in identifying key area assets for use in the region's wildlife and nature tourism programs of the Great Rivers Confluence Project.

The Great Rivers Confluence Project is a coalition of regional organizations, agencies, cities, counties and state groups and national parks which came together in 2009

to address conservation, recreation and economic issues arising at the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers. For more information about the Great Rivers Conflu-

ence Project, contact Margaret Smith, Executive Director of Friends of Freedom Park, 715-262-0104 or mhsmith@freedomparkwi.org



Watchable Wildlife presenter Jim Mallman gave a lively and fact-filled presentation to representatives from a wide variety of organizations, groups and representatives from two states, three counties, four cities and the region.



Over 70 attendees participated in the April 7 wildlife/nature tourism conference, including (front row) Karen Blodgett of WI DNR, River Falls Mayor Don Richards, Prescott Mayor Mike Hunter, Prescott City Council Members Marissa Holst and Mark Huber, Eau Galle Recreation Area Park Ranger (US Army Corp of Engineers) Brad Labadie, Audubon MN Policy Director Don Arnosti, and Hastings's Classic Rosewood Inn owner Dick Thorsen.

CONFERENCE GOERS



Over 70 city, county, state, business and organization representatives took part in a recent Wildlife/Nature Tourism Conference, "Developing a Sustainable Community and Wildlife Nature Tourism Program, held at the Hastings, Minn., Courthouse. The conference was led by Jim Mallman, president of Watchable Wildlife and hosted by the Great Rivers Confluence Project. River Falls Mayor Don Richards, in front, second from left, was among those who attended.

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