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TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STUDY - TOWN OF
FORT SMITH - FINAL REPORT

Sector: Tourism

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Plans/Strategies

urism Development Study

Final Report

Town of Fort Smith
Fort Smith, N.W.T.

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

The N.W.T. is experiencing significant growth in the tourism industry. The figures indicate that the volume of visitors travelling to the N.W.T. during 1987 increased by 12%, or 6,000 visitors over 1986¹. This increase is in part due to the success of the N.W.T. pavilion at Expo, as well as the result of an aggressive marketing campaign by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism and greater marketing efforts by individual operators. In addition the TIA-NWT has operated an Arctic Hotline (800 number) which has been a valuable addition to the overall marketing and awareness effort of the tourism industry.

Fort Smith has also experienced an increase in its tourism activity over the past few years. Unlike many communities further north, Fort Smith has good road access which results in a greater number of visitors to the community. However, since Fort Smith is not on the main thoroughfare to Yellowknife or part of a circle tour, travellers must make a conscious decision at the Hay River Junction to either turn and make a side trip to Fort Smith or continue driving in the same direction. In order to encourage more travellers to decide on the former, Fort Smith must develop and market attractions and activities of interest to these people.

Over the past few years a small handful of operators have been offering a selection of tourism products. Due to their individual efforts these products have been growing steadily in awareness and popularity. Consequently, interest in tourism from the town's perspective has increased as well. There are now several individuals interested in starting up new tourism ventures to attract more visitors to Fort Smith and thereby further the drive for

¹ Tourism Facts, 1986 and 1987. Division of Tourism and Parks Dept. Economic Development and Tourism, Yellowknife.

tourism development generated by the local Association, 'Spirit of the Subarctic'. The overall objective of this study, therefore, has been to analyze and identify the potential means for increased tourism activity in Fort Smith through the development of package tours.

1.2

METHODOLOGY

The study took place over the first three months in 1988. The major emphasis of the study was to identify tourism packages which were community driven. Background tourism data was obtained from existing literature and interviews with Economic Development and Tourism personnel in Fort Smith and Yellowknife. In order to identify a list of tourism opportunities the consultant conducted two visits to Fort Smith to interview residents who were interested in tourism development. Once the product opportunities were identified, the study team conducted telephone surveys with motor coach operators, travel influencers and transportation carriers to determine the viability and potential market for package tours. From these interviews four key package tours were developed.

At the end of the study the consultants conducted a tour package workshop which provided the participants with information on:

- which tourism market segments are attracted to Fort Smith;
- what a tour package means;
- how to develop a tour package; and
- how to market a tour package.

The final report presents the findings of the study in the following four sections:

- tourism resources;
- market analysis;
- proposed package tours; and
- marketing strategy.

2. TOURISM RESOURCES

2.1 NATURAL RESOURCES

Fort Smith is a picturesque N.W.T. community situated on the boundary of two ecosystems. The Slave River is the natural boundary between the Interior Plains to the West and the Precambrian Shield to the east. Within Fort Smith, the key natural attraction is the Slave River. This fast flowing river offers a variety of scenery and wildlife which can be developed into tourism products. The Slave River is currently utilized by only one operator offering river rafting tours.

The numerous islands on the east shore of the River provide excellent opportunities for picnics and hikes and the pelican nesting areas are visible to observers from the water. There are also numerous trails throughout the Fort Smith area which can be developed into half day, full day and multi-day hikes.

Outside the town of Fort Smith, the world's largest free-roaming bison herd and last nesting site of the endangered whooping crane are located in Wood Buffalo National Park. This World Heritage site attracts international visitors to the region. Although the park is relatively undeveloped, there are facilities available for visitors. The Park road goes past unique vegetation to the Pine Lake picnic and campground area and down to Carlson Landing. Although the road does continue up to Fort Fitzgerald and back to Fort Smith the loop road is presently not open during the summer. Mr. Mike Rosen at the Park office has indicated that the Park is applying for funds to open up the east extension of the road. Located along the main summer road are several well marked trails which enable visitors to view the unique vegetation and wildlife within the Park. In addition, Park staff organize an interpretative program for visitors which includes the very popular "bison creep". Over the next two years the Park staff are proposing to

increase interpretative services for visitors which will include narrative tapes (these have been very successful on the east coast). At present there is one outfitter, Jacques Van Pelt of Subarctic Wilderness Adventures, who offers multi-day trips into the back country of the Park. For 1988 the Park will be reviewing two more applications for an outfitter's permit in the Park.

Historical and Cultural Resources

The Fort Smith area is rich in history and culture. In the past, the rivers were the main link between Fort Smith and the surrounding communities. Birch bark and spruce canoes, moose hide boats, voyager canoes and steam powered sternwheelers were some of the various forms of transportation used. In addition, Fort Smith is a multi-cultural community with a combination of Cree, Chipewyan, Metis, as well as non-native cultures. These historic and cultural resources of the town and its surrounding area can be incorporated into numerous tourism opportunities.

2.2 TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

The existing infrastructure of Fort Smith is well established and prepared for tourism growth. This includes facilities for transportation, accommodation, food services, attractions and tour operators. Table 2.1 lists the facilities presently available in Fort Smith.

During the summer of 1987, Arctic College's Thebacha Campus coordinated an elder hostel program which attracted 71 (senior) visitors to Fort Smith. The program was a success and is planned to continue as an annual event. A projection of 100 participants has been made for 1988. The program is designed so that the visitors attend the scheduled programming in the morning and have the afternoon and evenings free for other activities. During the first year of operation many of the extracurricular activities

TABLE 2.1
EXISTING TOURISM FACILITIES IN FORT SMITH

ACCOMMODATION

Pelican Rapids Inn - 50 units

CAMPGROUNDS

Queen Elizabeth Campground - 19 sites

Pine Lake Campground - 36 sites

Kettle Point Group Campsite

FOOD SERVICES

Bursey's Take-Out

Cedar Hut

Pinecrest Restaurant and Dining Lounge

Purple Cow Convenience Store

Sweet Shoppe

Madame Dee's Ltd.

- preparation and tasting of
Northern Game Meats

TRANSPORTATION

Avis Car and Truck Rental

Tilden Rent-a-Car

Canadian Airlines

Northwestern Air Lease Ltd.

Loon Air

- flightseeing tours

- float plane transportation to
remote lakes/rivers

Ranger Helicopters Ltd.

- helicopter tours

OUTFITTERS

Canoe Arctic Inc.

- remote fly-in canoe trips (7-19
days)

Subarctic Wilderness

Adventures

- canoe, raft and hiking tours,
dogsled tours, cross country ski
tours

ATTRACTIONS

Northern Life Museum

Wood Buffalo National Park Interpretive Centre

North of 60 Bookstore

were arranged by the organizers of the program and provided free of charge (town tour, park tour, etc.).

The elder hostel program emphasized the strengths and weaknesses of Fort Smith's tourism infrastructure. Although there are quality facilities in place to house and feed travellers, Fort Smith does not offer sufficient activities to entertain its visitors. Presently Subarctic Wilderness Adventures provides a ground handling service for motorcoach operators by putting a local guide on board; however, there are no scheduled town or park tours for independent travellers to Fort Smith.

As indicated, only one operator, offering raft tours, has focussed on the Slave River. The thrill and excitement of a raft tour appeals to a fairly select market segment and yet the Slave River has several natural and historical resources of interest to a wide array of tourists. It appears that the river has unfulfilled potential for tourism development, primarily in the passive boat and canoe touring area.

3. MARKET ANALYSIS

3.1 VISITOR SEGMENTS

Visitors to Fort Smith can be divided into three groups; business, N.W.T. resident, and non-resident tourists.

Business travellers are an important market segment to consider. They represent the greatest proportion of travellers to the Pelican Rapids Inn, whereas the latter two tourist segments represent only 10% of the facilities clientele. In addition, business travellers tend to have the highest overall trip expenditures. Business people travel to Fort Smith year round and although business is their primary purpose for coming, they do have free time in the evenings and sometimes an afternoon. During these periods, the business traveller could very well participate in a three or four hour visitor activity.

Tourist traffic consists primarily of rubber tire travellers i.e. those who arrive in Fort Smith by automobile, recreational vehicle (R.V.) or motorcoach. These visitors either overnight in the motel or hotel, stay with a friend or relative, or camp at one of the campgrounds in the area.

Tourists who arrive by air have typically bought a package tour from Subarctic Wilderness Adventures, Canoe Arctic or one of the 6 fishing lodges in the area. Visitors who have purchased an outdoor wilderness/adventure package often start or end their trip with an overnight stay in Fort Smith, at the motel, hotel, or at a resident's home offered as a bed and breakfast facility. Those visitors travelling to a fishing lodge spend the least time in Fort Smith.

3.2 VISITOR VOLUME

Exact visitor counts for the community of Fort Smith are not available, however, an analysis of several relevant data sources provides some indication of visitation trends in the Fort Smith area.

Based on data collected by the GNWT and displayed in Table 3.1, the economic region which both Yellowknife and Fort Smith are a part of attracts the greatest proportion of (non-resident) visitors (60%) to the N.W.T. Of this, roughly 36% are rubber tire travellers, 60% are scheduled air travellers and 4% are charter air travellers. In addition, the volume of visitation for the region increased by 6% between 1986 and 1987.

TABLE 3.1
(NON-RESIDENT) VISITOR VOLUME TO THE N.W.T.

	<u>1986</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>% Increase</u>
Fort Smith Economic Region			
Road (Mackenzie and Liard Highways)			
- light vehicles	10,000	12,000	
- buses	1,000	1,000	
Scheduled Air	20,000	20,000	
Charters - lodges	1,500	1,500	
TOTAL:	32,500	34,500	6%
Inuvik Region	13,300	14,500	9%
Keewatin Region	1,500	3,000	50%
Kitikmeot Region	1,200	1,200	0%
Baffin Region	3,500	4,800	37%
TOTAL N.W.T.:	52,000	58,000	12%

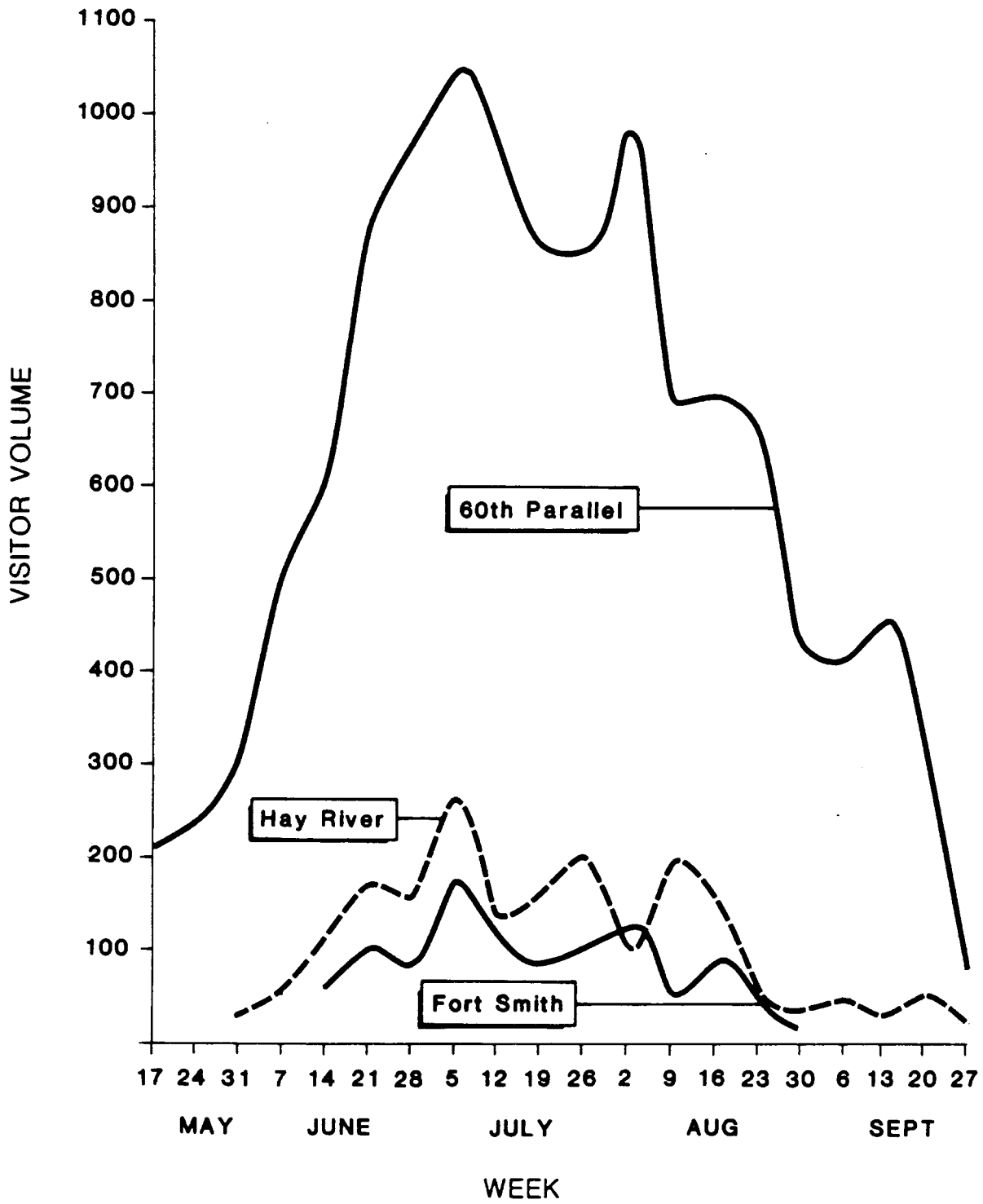
Source: Division of Tourism and Parks. Tourism Facts, A Statistical Report of Tourism/Travel and Tourism Research in the Northwest Territories, January 1987 and December 1987. GNWT.

Unfortunately, these statistics do not provide a breakdown of visitation to individual communities such as Fort Smith. However, in 1984, a non-resident survey was commissioned by the GNWT. Six percent of the respondents who visited the region stated that Fort Smith was their primary destination. Therefore, using 6% and the regional data it is possible to estimate that in 1987, 2,070 visitors selected Fort Smith as their primary destination. This figure does not include the number of visitors who travelled to Fort Smith as a secondary location.

The estimated figure of 13,000 rubber tire visitors to the region is in line with the visitor count at the 60th Parallel Visitor Information Centre which tabulated nearly 12,200 visitors from the middle of May to the end of September. This centre is located on the Mackenzie Highway, shortly after the Alberta/N.W.T. border on the latter's side. As Figure 3.1 clearly indicates, the 60th Parallel Visitor Centre is a very popular stopping and information gathering point for rubber tire travellers; more visitors were counted there than at any other visitor information centre in the N.W.T.

During 1987 a total of 1,989 people entered the Hay River Information Centre (June to the end of September) and 1,078 people entered the Fort Smith Visitor Information Centre (mid-June to the end of September).

The Wood Buffalo National Park also operates a visitor centre in Fort Smith and from April to December of 1987 a total of 2,825 visitors were recorded; 82% or 2,300 of these visitors were recorded during the summer months (June to September). Although visitor information centres are only one indication of visitor volume, as they always miss a portion of visitors, the figures seem to indicate that 3,000 to 3,500 visitors or around 10% of those to the region travelled to Fort Smith in 1987.



Source: Northwest Territories Economic Development and Tourism

Figure 2.1

Summer 1987 Visitor Information Centre Counts

Given that people who fly to Fort Smith are most likely to have their travel plans arranged (whether business, package tour or fishing lodge) the vast majority of those visitors entering the visitor information centre are rubber tire travellers, representing 30% to 35% of total visitor volume to Fort Smith.

Based on the analysis of visitor volume to the N.W.T. and the Fort Smith Economic Region in recent years, as well as discussions with local Fort Smith based tourism operators, it is also felt that the 1987 visitor volume estimation represents a greater than 15% increase over the 1986 figure.

3.3 VISITOR PROFILE

Detailed data on visitor characteristics are not available however, some origin data is available for rubber tire travellers to the Fort Smith Economic Region. Based on 1987 license plate counts at the Fort Providence Ferry, the following visitor origins were recorded:

Alberta	54.4%
British Columbia	15.9
Saskatchewan	6.8
Ontario	5.7
Rest of Canada	4.8
Total Canada:	87.6%
Minnesota	2.3%
Washington	1.6
California	1.5
Rest of United States	6.7
Total U.S.A.:	12.1%

Source: Division of Tourism and Parks. Motoring Visitors-Volumes and Origins, 1987. December 1987.

According to these counts Canadian visitors arriving by vehicle represent 88% and U.S. visitors represent 12% of the total. It should be noted that these counts are only based on license plates

and, therefore, do not take into account those visitors who arrive by air or those who rent a vehicle either in the N.W.T. or bordering provinces.

Visitor origin recorded at the Queen Elizabeth Territorial Camp-ground near Fort Smith indicates the following visitor origins for rubber tire travellers:

Alberta	23%
British Columbia	21%
Northwest Territories	5%
Rest of Canada	6%
United States	27%
Europe	18%

These percentages are based on camper registrations and include those long haul visitors who rent vehicles. Germany and Sweden were the primary European countries represented.

Interviews with two wilderness adventure operators in Fort Smith indicate that the majority of their visitors are from the United States and Europe.

4. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

The Town of Fort Smith has taken a progressive step in orienting its tourism product towards package tours. This is an important step because of the town's northern location and types of wilderness offerings, particularly those that can be associated with Wood Buffalo National Park. Package tours available from Fort Smith could be diverse in duration, transportation and activities. They could range from one-day excursions, to weekend trips, to extended vacations.

4.1 TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

As previously mentioned, Fort Smith has the required facilities to accommodate and feed visitors. Currently the town is limited in its ability to hold tourists. Activities and attractions are required to encourage visitors to stay longer. In addition, Fort Smith needs to emphasize and market its attractions and activities in order for the Mackenzie Highway traveller to make the decision to turn at Hay River and visit Fort Smith. The following proposed opportunities have been identified to meet these objectives. Winter activities have also been identified to increase the tourism industry during the shoulder season.

4.1.1 Passive River Tours

The focus of all activity in Fort Smith has been away from the river. The historic significance and wilderness setting of the river are excellent resources to develop. Since Subarctic Wilderness Adventures already offers rafting tours, it is recommended that more passive river tours be developed. These trips could be $\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 day and multi-day in length. For small more adventuresome groups canoe trips could be developed and for small or large passive groups a power boat trip could be developed. Points of interest should include the rapids, pelican nesting areas, pos-

sibly a picnic stop on the east shore or one of the many islands and visits to historic sites. The maximum size of the operation should be able to accommodate a bus load of passengers (45). This could either include one large boat or two or three smaller boats.

4.1.2 Cultural Activities

Develop opportunities which reflect the traditional lifestyle of the native cultures of Fort Smith. These could include evening barbecues with traditional country foods. Arts and Crafts workshops are becoming extremely popular and this could be developed as a ½ day package or developed into a multi-day course.

4.1.3 Town Tours

A small van tour could be organized to take visitors on a short 3 hour tour of the town. Points of interest would include cultural, historical and wilderness stops throughout the community. The key component to the success of the tour will be the guide's ability to entertain the passengers. Interesting and humorous anecdotes are essential. In addition, the tour should be set up so that it is run at a specified time every day during the peak tourism season (June-September).

4.1.4 Park Tours

Similarly to the town tours, small van tours through the park can be developed and offered on a regular basis. These tours would leave Fort Smith in the morning and provide a full day of touring and activities through the Park. The tour could include a picnic stop with traditional northern foods.

4.1.5 Bed and Breakfast Facilities

During the peak summer months of June, July and August, the accommodation facilities are often 100% booked. As a result, visitors who do not prebook and want to stay an extra night in Fort Smith may not be able to do so if the motel facilities are booked. If the town is to develop activities which will encourage visitors to stay an extra night, additional accommodation will be required only for the few peak months. Bed and breakfast facilities could be an excellent solution during this short demand period for accommodation. Several home owners already offer their facilities to Subarctic Wilderness Adventures and this service could easily be developed as a community wide service available to all visitors.

4.1.6 Back Country Outfitters

In addition to the development of activities for visitors to Fort Smith, there are opportunities for new wilderness outfitters to offer back country canoe and hiking trips. Presently there are at least two Fort Smith residents who are interested in developing new wilderness packages. The development and success of these new product opportunities will be dependent primarily on the ability of the operator to market and deliver a quality product. These proposed opportunities are new products requiring the development of new markets and will require several years of operation before a strong clientele base has been built up.

4.1.7 Horseback Riding

There is interest by one of the Fort Smith residents to develop horseback riding facilities for both local and tourism participation. Due to the expense of setting up and operating this type of facility it is recommended that during the first year the operator only offer ½ day to full day rides and develop multi-day

guided trail rides in the subsequent years of operation. The success of this operation will be dependent on the ability of the operation to attract local participation.

4.1.8 Multi-Community Tours

An opportunity which is undeveloped in the N.W.T. is multi-community package tours. Fort Smith is ideally located for the development of these tours. Possible communities could include Fort Chipewyan, Fort Smith, Fort Resolution, Hay River and Yellowknife. In addition multi-park tours could be developed where visitors spend multiple days in Wood Buffalo and Nahanni National Parks. The transportation between these communities could vary as well, for example a visitor could fly into Fort Smith spend a day or two in town, then travel by river to Fort Chipewyan, overnight and then by boat and trail to the sweetgrass area for 2-3 days and then return to Fort Smith via van through Wood Buffalo National Park. These tours will require an inbound operator who will be responsible for organizing transportation, accommodation, meals and guides.

4.1.9 Winter Activities

Presently there is a 40 km cross country ski course which follows the river and an unlimited number of unmarked trails. In order to develop cross country ski packages more extensive trails will be required. Throughout North America the participation rate for cross country skiing is increasing and the number of cross country skiing facilities is also increasing. If Fort Smith proposes to develop a cross country skiing facility it would be in strong competition with well developed facilities. On the other hand the town could develop facilities which could be marketed to northern communities in Alberta, British Columbia and the N.W.T. Special events to encourage participation are recommended.

In addition to cross country skiing, dog sled racing is a unique activity to the North which has excellent potential. Special racing events could be developed to attract attention and visitors to Fort Smith. In the south there are several dog sled racing circuits which attract racers and visitors to the 2-3 day events. This is a long term opportunity which will require support and coordination from the community.

4.2 PACKAGE TOURS

As per the terms of reference for the study the itinerary and costing of 4 packages have been prepared. These packages represent different aspects of tourism in the region. They are;

- town tours;
- river tours;
- park tours; and
- hiking tours.

These packages were selected based on the resource and market analysis, and the ability for potential operators to start up this summer. The first two packages are designed to entertain the independent traveller for 6-8 hours and to encourage the visitor to possibly stay 1-2 days more in Fort Smith. The two back country packages were selected for their ability to respond to the growing demand for adventure product in the north and for the potential to increase the number of visitors to Fort Smith.

4.2.1 Town Tour

Description:

- 3 hour town tour using a small van
- pick-up and drop off at Visitor's Centre
- pick-up and drop off at Queen Elizabeth Campground as part of tour

- scenic route could include museum, river, rapids, historic homesteads, visit to dog teams, portage etc.

Staff and Equipment Requirements:

- 1 staff for half day (possibly the community host)
- van

Scheduling:

- in order for this package to be successful it is best to be offered every day at a regularly scheduled time

Package Costs and Pricing:

- van will hold 12-14 passengers
- retail price \$13
- assume an average load of 8 passengers
- therefore daily revenues of \$104

<u>Costs</u>		<u>Revenues</u>	
Van	\$50	8 passengers	
Driver (3 hrs x \$10)	<u>30</u>	(8 x \$13)	<u>\$104</u>
	\$80		

4.2.2 River Tour

Description:

- 4 hour boat tour with dinner
- meet at the river, boat tour to rapids, islands then over to other side of river for picnic dinner
- meal to include traditional northern cooking
- possible arts and crafts demonstration

Staff and Equipment Requirements:

- boat and motor
- cooking supplies and food
- 1 staff for boat and 1 for cooking

Scheduling:

- 4 evenings a week, Thursday to Sunday

Package Costs and Pricing:

- assuming 10 people per trip, the boat(s) should be able to accommodate 16-18 people
- staff require 1 additional hour for set up and breakdown
- flat sheets, poster etc. for advertising

<u>Costs</u>		<u>Revenues</u>	
Boat	\$ 50	10 people	
Food supplies (\$15/person)	150	x \$40	\$400
Staff (\$10/hr.)	100		
Advertising	50		
Insurance, Licensing, etc.	<u>15</u>		
	\$365		

4.2.3 Park TourDescription:

- 8 hour van tour through the Park including
- lunch (boxed)
- stop off sites throughout park

Staff and Equipment Requirements:

- van
- 1 staff
- prepared lunches

Scheduling:

- every other day

Package Costs and Pricing:

- assuming 8 passengers with full load 12-14 passengers
- boxed lunch \$10

<u>Costs</u>		<u>Revenues</u>	
Van	\$ 80	8 passengers	
Driver/leader	70	(8 x \$39)	\$312
meals (\$10 x 8)	80		
Advertising	40		
Insurance, Licensing, etc.	<u>15</u>		
	\$285		

4.2.4 Canoe TourDescription:

- 5 day tour on local river where put in and pick-up sites are accessible by van
- this package requires extensive advertising, short-haul markets in first few years with long-haul markets developed over long term
- opportunity for multi-community involvement

Staff and Equipment Requirements:

- 1 guide (5 days)
- 3 canoes and camping equipment
- van and driver (2 half days)

Scheduling:

- short term (1988) two trips (July, August)
- long term 1 trip per week for an 8 week season
- trip timing should be tied in with airline schedule

Package Costs and Pricing:

- assume a maximum of canoeists, projections based on an average of 4

<u>Costs</u>		<u>Revenues</u>	
Staff (\$80/day)	\$ 400	\$600/person	\$2,400
Canoe & equipment (\$20/day)	300		
Camping equipment (\$50/night)	250		
Food (\$20/person/day)	500		
Van	300		
Advertising	200		
Insurance, Licensing, etc.	<u>15</u>		
	\$2,000		

4.3 POTENTIAL MARKETS4.3.1 Independent Travellers

This will be the major target market for the town, river and parks tours. This market includes the rubber tire and business traveler to Fort Smith. These visitors are a captive market looking for activities to do and be entertained. By capturing this large

market it will ensure the success for the operator. This market demands that the tours go on schedule as planned, on a regular basis.

4.3.2 R.V. Caravans

As discussed in the section on independent rubber tire travellers, the R.V. segment is a very important one in the N.W.T. R.V. caravans are organized groups of R.V. travellers which go on tour to various places together (i.e. forming a caravan). Six R.V. caravan organizations were contacted to determine their level of interest in the tourism activities proposed for Fort Smith.

At this point in time, the majority of R.V. caravans tend to travel to the west coast, through Washington, B.C., Yukon and Alaska because of the high level of awareness which these areas enjoy. However, these organizations are always open to new ideas and are looking for new destinations which can handle an average caravan size of 20 to 30 vehicles.

4.3.3 Group Tours

Group travel represents one of the fastest growing segments of the North American travel industry. Consequently it is also a segment of significant importance to both the N.W.T. and the community of Fort Smith.

For the purpose of the tourism product/package development analysis here, ten tour group operators were contacted. They were categorized in three ways:

- (1) those going to Fort Smith (3 operators);
- (2) those going to Yellowknife but not Fort Smith (4 operators);
and
- (3) those not presently going to Fort Smith or Yellowknife but with the potential to do so in the future (3 operators).

The first two groups were queried with regard to their satisfaction and perception of Fort Smith and its existing tourism product offerings. Operators in the second group were also asked why they were not including Fort Smith in their tour and what would entice them to do so. The third group of operators were provided an overview of Fort Smith's tourism product potential and asked whether the community might be of interest to them in future tour development.

The overall results of these interviews indicate that the group tour market is largely comprised of senior citizens travelling in groups of 35 to 40 by motorcoach. One operator contacted is providing air tours throughout the N.W.T. for seniors and is looking at future packaging of a land tour as well. These tourists are primarily interested in sightseeing and enjoy activities such as visiting museums and historic sites, shopping for crafts, easy nature walks, cultural entertainment and special events.

The operators who do include Fort Smith in their tour are fairly satisfied with the level of existing services and activities available to them in the community. They typically stay one to two nights and include activities such as a tour through Wood Buffalo National park, a visit to the Northern Life Museum, and a boat trip to view the Pelican Rapids. Subarctic Wilderness Adventures provides ground handling services (i.e. step on guide) for many of the groups and they very much enjoy the enthusiasm which Jacques Van Pelt displays for them. All the operators indicated that they would be pleased to see more activities available to them in Fort Smith and would surely incorporate as many as possible into their tours. The idea of a leisurely boat cruise on the Slave River, perhaps combined with a traditional meal, was very appealing. In addition, several other ideas were mentioned:

- o "Welcome to Fort Smith" hospitality program (e.g. to greet the groups when they arrive in town);
- o native arts and craft making demonstrations;
- o native entertainment; and
- o souvenir store.

Several of the tour operators who are not currently going to Fort Smith had not heard of the community, which demonstrates a general lack of awareness in terms of what the town has to offer visitors. These operators are always looking for new destinations and ways to make their tours different from the rest. In order to convince new operators to come to Fort Smith, the tourism promotion efforts of Fort Smith will have to focus on visitor activities and special events that are unique in some way and worth driving to either pre- or post-Yellowknife. To fully establish the level of satisfaction experienced by those operators who are going to Fort Smith, the same marketing principle holds true.

4.3.4 Wholesalers and Specialty Travel Markets

This market segment consists of those individuals who travel as part of an organized group to participate in special interest activities. In the north, many of these are outdoor adventure oriented and include backpacking, canoeing, nature/culture interpretation, dogsledding, etc. The group size may be from 2 to 10 travellers.

The market for these travel products has been growing significantly throughout the world in recent years as an increasingly sophisticated and quality conscious traveller has emerged. They are typically described as an older clientele comprised of physically active, well-travelled and experienced professionals including doctors and lawyers. They often work in high stress jobs and live in high density urban conditions. During vacation

time they want to "experience nature" and "do something unique that not many others have done".

At present, two well-established operators are offering a selection of these activities out of Fort Smith and both are extremely successful, claiming that they fill 80% to 100% of their package offerings. In order to determine the degree of additional potential for these tourism packages, several specialty wholesalers were contacted. The product ideas presented to them related to the wildlife within Wood Buffalo National Park, the Sweet Grass area, and the numerous waterways in the areas surrounding Fort Smith.

The wholesalers selling specialty packages stressed the fact that there are so many beautiful areas in North America that there is extreme competition for people wanting to develop new packages in new areas. Therefore, the more unique or exotic an idea is, the greater the chance it will have of succeeding in the marketplace. In terms of the Fort Smith region, the tourism product/packages of greatest interest to the wholesalers are related to the natural resources. In particular, the whooping crane would draw them to the area if they could access the nesting grounds. Birdwatching in the Sweet Grass area is also of interest, although the degree to which groups will go there depends on the rarity of the species which can be seen. Finally, buffalo viewing is of significant interest to only a select few markets.

5. MARKETING STRATEGY

The preceding analysis has identified the existing and potential visitor markets to Fort Smith, and four new product packages that could be developed to better meet the needs and expectations of these visitors.

The next step is to develop a marketing strategy in order to make the various market segments aware that Fort Smith is a vibrant community which offers a range of interesting activities to its visitors.

The marketing strategy outlined here identifies the means for achieving both short term (1988 to 1990) and long term (1991 and onwards) marketing objectives for each of the market segments and product/packages.

5.1 SHORT TERM STRATEGY

The overall objective of the short term strategy is to build increased local and regional awareness and to improve the visitor experience as soon as possible at the lowest cost. The following points summarize the means for achieving this for all the market segments identified.

- ensure that signage to Fort Smith is located at key highway junctions such as Enterprise and Hay River;
- build awareness among Fort Smith residents of the new activities and encourage local participation in these;
- ensure that information officers at visitor information centres in the region and locations south towards Edmonton are well informed about Fort Smith and its visitor activities and that they are well stocked with brochures. Three key centres include 60th Parallel, Hay River and Yellowknife;

- develop awareness with the objective to sell product utilizing the following groups
 - Travel Arctic hotline staff;
 - Tourism Industry Association (TIA) of N.W.T. and Alberta;
 - Canadian Airlines International product development and sales staff;
 - Auto club trip planning staff and canoe and hiking clubs in the N.W.T. and Alberta; and
 - R.V. associations and campground guide publishers.

In order to further improve the immediate appeal visitors have when arriving in Fort Smith, it is recommended that a "Community Host" position be created to provide a "welcome to the community" atmosphere as well as visitor services such as information, tour bookings, special attention for motor coach groups etc.

5.2 LONG TERM STRATEGY

The long term marketing strategy involves greater product development and more in-depth communication through a wider range of target media in addition to on-going awareness efforts.

The strategy is broken down here for each of the market segments identified.

Independent Rubber Tire and R.V. Caravan

- expand auto and R.V. club personal contact and direct mail marketing to include B.C., Washington, California, Ontario, etc.;
- invite travel writers who cover auto/R.V. magazines in target market areas (funding assistance can be obtained through Travel Arctic/TIA for 3 to 4 writers per year);
- advertise in R.V. guides such as Milepost, Trailer Life, Wheelers Guide and Rand McNally; and
- establish contact with R.V. caravan organizations.

Group Travel (especially motor coach)

- generate interest in tour companies not currently coming to Fort Smith by inviting product development managers to Fort Smith; and
- target tour companies who are already going to Yellowknife first.

Local Resident and Business

- continue to build awareness among local residents and businesses so that they will encourage their visitors to participate in Fort Smith tours;
- contact local community groups, schools, businesses, government agencies, etc.; and
- contact meeting/conference coordinators and educator groups in Alberta and the N.W.T.

Wholesalers and Specialty Travel Markets

- expand the number and type of canoe and hiking packages and develop a full-colour brochure for these;
- expand the canoe and hiking club mailing lists by adding those located in B.C., Washington, Saskatchewan, etc.;
- advertise in Canadian outdoor/adventure magazines such as Explorer, Outdoor Canada, Che-Mun and Real Travel and U.S. outdoor/adventure Magazines such as Outside, Backpacker, Canoe, Sunset etc. Advertisement should be placed in the February/March/April issues;
- invite travel writers who have a track record of published articles in the above magazines to participate in the Fort Smith canoe and hiking package tours;
- in conjunction with Canadian Airlines International, invite at least one travel wholesaler specializing in adventure travel per year; and
- attend one or two consumer travel shows such as the London Free Press in London, Ontario and the Anaheim Sportsmans/R.V. Show in Anaheim, California.

Table 5.1 summarizes the short and long term marketing strategies.

5.3 IMPLEMENTATION

Marketing new products can be both expensive and very competitive. The marketing strategy has been designed to work through the Fort Smith tourism association; "Spirit of the Subarctic". By developing a collective marketing body for the town of Fort Smith individual operators will be able to reach existing and new markets with a greater emphasis. In addition, collectively the tourism operators will be able to reach more distant long-term markets which they would not be able to afford on their own. The "Spirit of the Subarctic" has already formed a product development committee which could provide new operators with product and marketing assistance. The strength of Fort Smith's tourism industry is the willingness of the individual operators to work together and help build the town's awareness and popularity as a tourism destination.

It is very important for the town to develop strong links with the agencies or associations who can assist with the development of the town's tourism industry. These could include the Regional Tourism Officer, the region's Economic Development Officers, the Big River Zone Manager and staff, the manager and staff of Visitor Reception Centres from Yellowknife to Edmonton, Arctic Hotline staff and the staff of TIA-NWT plus the development staff and members of Travel Arctic's Marketing Department. Indian Affairs in Yellowknife and special ARDA/NEDP should be kept aware of proposed development plans.

The training capabilities of Arctic College should be utilized to upgrade skill levels. Airline product development people as well as their Sales Departments should be advised as new product comes on-stream.

TABLE 5.1

SUMMARY OF MARKETING STRATEGY FOR FORT SMITH TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

MARKET SEGMENT	PRODUCT/PACKAGES	SHORT TERM STRATEGY	LONG TERM STRATEGY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Independent Rubber-Tire o R.V. Caravan o Group Travel (Motor Coach) o Local Resident o Business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Town Tour o River Tour o Park Tour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Improve highway signage to Fort Smith o Improve existing visitor experience o Increase local and regional awareness of Fort Smith and its product offerings by contacting tourism agencies and auto/R.V. clubs o Build awareness among local residents and businesses so that they will encourage their visitors to participate in Fort Smith tours. o Take advantage of free local advertising on radio, T.V. and in newspapers. o Respond promptly to Arctic Hotline/Travel Arctic leads or enquiries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Continue to improve access and signage to Fort Smith. o Expand auto/R.V. club personal contact and direct mail. o Invite auto/R.V. magazine travel writers. o Advertise in auto/R.V. magazines. o Develop contact with R.V. caravan organizations. o Attract new motor coach operators to Fort Smith by inviting product development manager. o Contact meeting/conference coordinators and educator groups.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Wholesalers and Specialty Travel Markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Canoe Tour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Develop 1/2 to 2 day trips for existing visitor segments (Rubber tire and air). o Distribute simple 1 page flyers on the packages to all the visitor information centres in the region. o Develop word-of-mouth by building awareness of the area's natural resources with nearby canoe and hiking clubs in Yellowknife, Alberta and B.C. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Expand product line by offering longer package tours. o Develop a full-colour brochure with multiple product offerings. o Expand the canoe and hiking club mailing lists. o Advertise in outdoor/adventure magazines. o Invite outdoor/adventure travel writers. o Invite outdoor/adventure wholesalers. o Attend travel shows.

NWT Explorers Guide goes to press in early September each year and any new product for the following year needs to be ready by then. This is a marketing resource that new operators will not want to miss.