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MN Bicycle Tourism Summit

Report by Rich Burton

The “Summit”, held at Breezey Point in Brainerd, was well attended. I am not sure but a guess would be 150 people. Included in the attendees were representatives from the DNR including DNR Manager Cortland Nelson, Explore MN Tourism (Director, John Edmunds), the National Park Service, MNDOT, the Bicycle Alliance of America, the MN Parks and Trails Council, and the Twin Cities Bicycling Club.

The session was quite upbeat and well moderated by David Minge. The opening speech was given by Jim Sayers, who is with Adventure Cycling of Missoula, MT, an organization which publishes a magazine and offers guided bicycling trips. He presented a very positive picture with examples of the popularity and economic impact of bicycling tourism in Canada, Europe, and the U.S. He stressed the importance of linking all players to produce a win-win situation for the bicyclist and local economies. He has spoken nationally on bicycle tourism development and worked with state tourism organizations to help them develop bicycle tourism.

I attended two sessions, one titled Getting Started and another titled Wayfinding Resources for Bicyclists and Planners.

Points of significance gleaned from these sessions and networking were:

- 1) It is critical to work with all possible parties in the local community to put together a complete package of trails and available facilities. Because trails can be continuous, involvement of adjoining communities is also a key element.
- 2) Very important to bicyclists are route maps or markers, water, toilets, and food.
- 3) Various books are published of bike trips in the metro area. I have a copy of one of these books and have used it a lot. The routes recommended through Washington County in such books can be a foundation for some of the trails in and through Scandia.
- 4) People want to come to areas to bike, but additionally are drawn by all the amenities offered: Nice trails, restaurants, museums, parks, festivals, scenic wonders, and tours.
- 5) Bicyclists need to be informed about the community and its amenities.
- 6) Signage along the trail needs to provide good guidance including distance to rest stops, water, toilets, food, and local attractions.
- 7) As far as food is concerned, for a biking event, homemade anything is a huge draw.
- 8) A biking event could be totally Scandia, such as a part of Taco Daze, or it could be a ride from town-to-town in the local area. For example, Stillwater to Scandia to Chisago City with each town involved and providing rest stops. Suggestions

- for Taco Daze are a designated circuit ride, awards for the riders who rode the furthest to get to Taco Daze, a kids bike parade, and a bike corral.
- 9) The Twin Cities have many bicycle tour companies. We can promote Scandia bike trails to them and to the Twin City Bicycling Club. The tour companies and clubs like the idea of local businesses having advance notice of their scheduled tours.
 - 10) A bike touring company operator said that on week long bike tours the economic impact generated is \$535/cyclist per week. This is money spent in addition to the fee paid to the tour operator.
 - 11) The Federal Government is attempting to set up a national network of bike trails which will link to state and local trails. It would be an interstate bike trail system.
 - 12) Oregon leads the nation in bike trails but MN is near the top of the list for trail development. 75% of tourists in the U.S. say bike trails are part of their decision on choosing whether to travel to an area.
 - 13) Towns and cities need to work on becoming bike friendly. Examples of bike friendly items are: Signage for routes, facilities and recreational information; bike racks at various stops; bike lanes; printed bike route maps available at local businesses (for example): bike route maps on-line on a city website; permanent bike route maps at rest stops.
 - 14) Each city needs to work with and coordinate with other local governments, chambers of commerce, businesses, and county, state, and national agencies and officials in developing bicycle tourism. It is big and getting bigger. A marketing person I spoke with stated that some survey he had seen indicated that over 80 million people in the U.S. are bicyclists. Seems high, but you never know.
 - 15) I spoke with several people about more leads on where to purchase custom or standard signs and am awaiting their replies.

Submitted by: Rich Burton