



ECOTOURISM:  
OBSERVATIONS AND A FACILITY PLAN  
for

WASHINGTON ISLAND (Door County), WISCONSIN

from May, 1995

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## INTRODUCTION

From May 19-26, 1995, students and faculty from University of Wisconsin-Stout met on Washington Island (Door County), Wisconsin for the purpose of analyzing and planning an ecotourism program and facility. The course project included a preliminary assessment of existing ecotourism characteristics; these 32 "first impressions" set the stage for analyzing the national resource profile, cultural and social resources, strategic regional planning, an agenda for local ecotourism planning and programming, local participation, costs and benefits, financing considerations, marketing, management and protection responsibilities, and a prototype ecotourism information facility.

The twenty-four students and two faculty members field researched, discussed, planned and presented the results to an open forum in the community center at 10:00 a.m., May 26, 1995.

Again, the course participants would like to thank Doug Young, Town Chairman; Tim Brown, Community Center Manager; Bob Hastings, Executive Director of the Door County Chamber of Commerce; Jim and Kathy Findlay, owners/operators of Findlay's Holiday Inn and the citizens of Washington Island for their warm hospitality and generous efforts to make this course and presentation possible. The class participants hope the course discussion and dialogue will result in valid theoretical and applied planning considerations for future ecotourism programs and facilities on Washington Island.

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## I. Preliminary Assessment

The natural beauty of Washington Island (Door County) and the surrounding islands is special to the Great Lakes Region of the world. The township of Washington Island has developed an amenable quality of life, bound with a community strength and history.

The 623 residents of the Island have recently shifted their livelihood to tourism and seasonal residential development. It is important to note, however, that tourism is not without its problems. The township of Washington Island needs to confront the issue of planning for the seasonal demand of tourism, developing an infrastructure that will support the plans, regulating the flow of people to an optimal carrying capacity, and preserving the quality of life.

What is the present situation of the Island? Listed are some immediate and initial observations and impressions generated in an open class discussion during the evening of arrival on the island:

### General Observations/Initial Impressions

- + 1. Island is clean—water/litter/noise/lighting.
- 2. Various "dumpy" locations—lack of maintenance.  
—adopt an area (by seasons)
- + 3. Hospitality "natives."
- 4. Do they really want tourists and/or seasonal residents?
- ± 5. "Cultural tradition"—not as yet focused.  
—more information needed.
- 6. Fishing (both commercial and recreational) is down.  
—inland lake stock, state fishery
- 7. Ferry fell short—a captive audience is ready to listen and learn.  
—start advertising at the "Door" Chamber and Gill Rock; use a PA system, radio.
- 8. Signs
  - + relatively well maintained
  - + consistent
  - + there must be a good (strict) control ordinance in place

- a bit hard to read
  - less negativity, information center
- 9. Island is not "user friendly" to the uninitiated
  - visitors center, orientation needed
- 10. Island seems to be "for sale" (during off-season).
  - many real estate signs dot the landscape.
- 11. Middle of the island is relatively empty.
- 12. No "core"—very low density overall.
- 13. Road pattern does not suit tourism.
  - stick with names and don't change to numbers as other townships/counties have in Wisconsin.
  - add a few road segments to enhance perimeter circulation.
- 14. "Front door" (at the end of the ferry ride) leaves one flat—ghost town (off season)/cluttered/bit dumpy.
- 15. Facilities for elderly and handicapped—not there.
  - upgrade facilities.
- 16. What is the "native" population distribution—older?
- 17. Few "built" attractions.
- 18. Natural attractions.
  - enhance, make them bigger?
- 19. No night time "draw" at tower—can't tell what you're looking at.
  - use permanent materials, map, path lights and interpretive signage.
- 20. No major commercial attraction.
  - bike trails, harbors/marinas, brewery/winery, more golf.
- 21. Absentee land ownership (question: how prevalent?).
- 22. Training (or lack of it) for tourism personnel.
- 23. Little evidence of agri-tourism.
- 24. No A.T.M. on Island.
- 25. What is the Cherry Train?
- 26. Is the clear water alive
  - Acid rain status.
- 27. Lack of cross-country trails/hiking trails (other than roads).

28. "Keep out" signs posted by seasonal residents—too negative.
29. Low density—dispersal of (potential) attractions.
30. Permanent residents—very low density.
31. Log structures—beautiful, historic—promote.
32. 3-5 feet of soil or less before bedrock.

Overall, the class concluded that the residents of the island have much tourism potential to be expanded upon, if desired.

Based on our observations, the facility planning team has proposed and developed plans for a Tourism Information Center (TIC) for the township of Washington Island. It is suggested that the Center be located at Detroit Harbor. The Center would contain a wide variety of information relating to the natural and cultural benefits of Washington Island. The Center would also have a multipurpose meeting room that can house up to forty-five visitors. It would also have a relief map so visitors can visually see the locations of the most interesting sites of the Island. The most important feature of the Center, however, is to welcome all visitors who visit the community with their traditional spirit of hospitality.

## II. CREATE AN AGENDA FOR LOCAL PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

When preparing for local planning and programming in tourism, there are four steps that need to be identified and followed by planners. The first step in preparing for local planning and programming in tourism is to identify those uses and opportunities that most closely relate to the character of the area. For the tourism on Washington Island, this may include such categories as area geology, local plants and flowers, typical wildlife of the area, and surrounding bodies of water.

The second step in preparing for local planning and programming in tourism is to identify the types of recreational activities and attractions that best suit the area. The Island already offers a wide assortment of recreational activities and other attractions of the land, water and air. Some of these include:

- \* The Art and Nature Museum
- \* Jackson Harbor Maritime Museum
- \* The Jacobsen Museum
- \* Siever's School of <sup>Fiber</sup> Fine Arts
- \* The Washington Island Farm Museum
- \* Rock Island State Park
- \* Jackson Harbor Ridges
- \* Several public beaches and parks
- \* The Fly-in Fish Boil
- \* Scandinavian Dance Festival
- \* Music Festival.

One can see that Washington Island offers a wide variety of attractions and activities for



tourists and residents alike. Some suggestions, however, have been made as to some potential recreational activities and attractions that best suit the area. Some of these suggestions include:

- \* An outdoor flower sanctuary
- \* Well groomed biking/walking paths through the woods
- \* Harbor development (pier, boardwalk, etc.)
- \* A leisurely boat trip around the Island's perimeter
- \* A Washington Island visitors center.

The third step in preparing for local planning and programming in tourism is to identify the types of expected users and visitors of the activities and attractions. According to Davidson-Peterson Associates (1990), the profile for the average vacationer to Wisconsin consists of the following statistics:

- \* Female and male vacationers
- \* Average age: 44
- \* Some college education
- \* White collar occupations
- \* Wide range of household income

In addition to the profile of the average tourist to Wisconsin, other expected users and visitors to the area activities and attractions may include:

- \* Senior citizens on bus tours
- \* Outdoor/nature lovers
- \* Ecotourists
- \* Families with children
- \* Students

- \* Tourists wishing to see spring flowers/fall colors
- \* People seeking Scandinavian culture
- \* Door County residents
- \* Local area school field trips.

Within the past ten years, Wisconsin tourists' attitudes have changed toward travel. In the 1980s, only 21 percent Wisconsin tourists said they were interested in getting to know the people of the area visited. In the 1990s, that number jumped to 70 percent. In the 1980s, only 48 percent of the tourists to Wisconsin were interested in understanding the local culture. Now, in the 1990s, that number has jumped to 88 percent. And in the 1980s, only 40 percent wanted to gain a new perspective on life. Today, in the 1990s, that number has jumped to 72 percent.

Other changes in Wisconsin tourists have also taken place. In the 1980s, 90 percent of Wisconsin visitors felt that they could do whatever they wanted to do while on vacation in Wisconsin. This may have included such things as littering, smoking in no smoking areas, vandalizing, etc. In the 1990s, that number has dropped to only 44 percent. When it came to spending money freely in the 1980s, 81 percent of Wisconsin tourists said they did so. In the 1990s that number has dropped significantly to only 19 percent.

It is apparent that trends of Wisconsin tourists have changed dramatically in the past ten years. They have moved away from doing whatever they feel like doing and spending money freely in the 1980s, to moving toward getting to know the people, understanding the culture and obtaining a new perspective on life in the 1990s. To apply this to preparing for local planning and programming, it means that in order for the activity or attraction to be successful and meaningful for the tourist, it needs to be priced economically and provide local culture, a new perspective on life and an opportunity for the tourist to really get to know

the local people.

The fourth and final step in preparing for local planning and programming in tourism is to relate planning and programming goals to existing resources. In other words, take new ideas for new recreational activities or attractions and compare, contrast, and/or possibly combine them with existing activities, attractions or similar ideas for new recreational activities and attractions.

In conclusion, if each of the four steps to preparing for local planning and programming in tourism is followed, the creation of new recreational activities and attractions can be an exercise in tourism development or enhancement.

### III. LOCAL PARTICIPATION

As a part of the UW-Stout Ecotourism project, we encourage local participation to stimulate growth in the tourism market on the Island. Various local groups, activities, and future ideas to further promote tourism will be discussed.

#### Current Local Participation

The examples listed are ways in which the local inhabitants currently contribute and participate in the growth of tourism.

Some establishments and centers such as the Art and Nature Center, the Washington Island Farm Museum and the Red Barn offer summer programs featuring cultural activities, displays of art, music, photography, and other educational sessions are all sponsored by local talent and knowledge of the Islanders.

The current organizations, such as the Lions Club, Washington Island Women's Club, the American Legion, Sportsman's Club, groups from the Island's Bethel Evangelical Free Church and the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Flying Club all equally contribute to the improvement and growth of the Island. These are permanent and seasonal residents, some of whom are retired archaeologists, geologists, and environmentalists who have researched the Island, people with rich Icelandic and Scandinavian heritage, and others who were attracted to the Island for reasons of personal interests and cultural background. These people have vast amounts of knowledge ready to share with and educate tourists about the island they are visiting.

#### Future Local Participation

In conjunction with the permanent and seasonal residents and their knowledge of the Island, a way for them to share and contribute to the tourist experience would be via an island directory. For example, the local Islanders would collectively form a tourist directory that



would provide a clearing house connecting the tourist with these local inhabitants. They would then share information and provide answers in their own field of expertise for the more specialized tourist, e.g., the retired archaeologist could provide knowledge on various archaeological points of interest.

A much needed and requested service by the tourists and Islanders would be that of transportation within the Island. There should be more taxi service; "backyard tours," more guided tours, guided fishing excursions, carriages, and more shuttle services. These services could be provided by knowledgeable senior citizens who have much information about the Island to share, retirees, young adults, or anyone else who could provide these services and is willing to share their personal experiences and knowledge.

Another attraction to the tours and a way for the local people to participate in tourism growth would be to promote the local talent: such as the Island Players (a theatrical group), and a Scandinavian heritage festival. There are many more activities on the Island sponsored by the local people as well. The local people could also make it more accessible for outside groups to come in such as the Symphony Orchestra from the mainland.

To keep tourism healthy, it is essential for local people to volunteer their time, knowledge, and skills. The people need to coordinate and cooperate their efforts to effectively satisfy the needs of the tourists.

Another way to stimulate local participation would be to invite the locals to continue to become "authors" and create their own booklet of knowledge and memories in their own field of interest and expertise. These are edited and sold at the Washington Island Visitors Center and other establishments on the Island. Some of the profit should be reinvested in special island projects related to tourism.

In the off-season, during the winter months, the native Islanders should elect a qualified

facilitator to train them on various skills to make the attractions more marketable and the people more competent. This will enhance and better enable them as a group or team to obtain repeat business and promote future growth.

In addition to training, there ultimately needs to be an Island tourism resource coordinator. This person will facilitate and/or guide local volunteers and participants year round. This person will make sure all of the Island volunteers and participants' needs are met to effectively serve the public's needs and interests. They will make sure the tourism services and operations are running smoothly and successfully.

#### IV. EVALUATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL NATURAL RESOURCES

What natural resources are currently available that are, or could be, used as tourist attractions? To answer this question the resources have been divided into three categories; land, water and air resources. They are further divided into three sub-parts. Strategies for protection and education of these resources were then developed for the natural resources.

These natural resources are an attraction which will draw tourists, and the tourists bring money. It is important to protect these resources so they will be here for future generations. Resource protection through tourist education is one way these resources can be preserved for posterity.

##### I. Land

The first and primary area is land. Land can be divided into many separate resources such as:

- \* Animals
- \* Vegetation
- \* Parks and beaches
- \* Scenic views
- \* Soil.

The following observations will address each of these areas individually, and give strategies for protection and education in these areas.

The types of animals found on Washington Island are many and diverse. Horses (Icelandic), sheep, goats (Angora), deer, birds, fox, bear, etc. Some of these animals are more of a tourist attraction than others. The Icelandic horses are very unique, as are the Angora goats. The volume and variety of birds (130-plus species) found on the Island also

make them a potential tourist attraction. The horses and goats are domestic, and as such are available to be viewed during any season. The birds and water fowl of Washington Island are available predominantly during the summer months, although some remain year round. Bird watching is a nonconsumptive activity that can be used to draw tourists to the Island. When wild or domestic animals are tourist attractions, it is important to stress not feeding them. Feeding these animals interrupts their natural eating habits, and can lead to sickness or death. Informing tourists of the potential damage feeding animals can cause will allow the tourists to understand why they should not feed the animals, and will be more effective than posting negative and threatening signs such as "do not feed the animals."

The vegetation found on Washington Island can also be a lure to tourists. The most obvious is the large quantity of beautiful flowers which abound on the Island. The following chart shows the most common types of flowers and the specific peak times for their bloom.



FLOWERS BY THE MONTH					
FLOWER TYPE	May	June	July	August	September
Daffodils	x	x			
Trilliums	x				
Forget-me-not	x				
Lady Slippers		x			
Golden Rod			x	x	
Grey Piasond	x				
Indian Pipe			x		
Violets	x				
Strawberry	x				
Boys & Girls	x				
Lily of the Valley		x			
Indian Paint Brush			x		
Wild Roses		x			
Fruit Blossoms	x				
Fitzer Bushes	x				
Forsythia	x				
Adder Tongue		x			
Jack-in-the-Pulpit		x			
Tiger Lily			x	x	
Gentian				x	x
Queen Ann's Lace			x	x	
Canadian Thistle				x	x

The trees here are both attractive and functional. The hardwoods provide gorgeous fall colors. The maples give sap in the spring for syrup. The cedars and pines provide a wind break in both summer and winter, a very important contribution to the Island. All these trees

combine to form the forests of Washington Island. This forest is a home to the birds and animals located here. The forest also provides a recreational area for hikers, bird watchers, mountain bikers, painters, and many other persons interested in nature. The tourists of the 1990s are more environmentally conscious than tourists of the past. If they know the areas to discard their trash, they will. To protect this natural resource, tourists must be educated where the trash receptacles are located. Care must be taken to protect the vegetation on the forest floor, this is a major food source for many of the Island's animals. If a path could be established for hikers and nature buffs, the tourists could be strongly encouraged to stay on the path, and not wander into the woods. This would reduce the chance of the tourist getting lost, and would protect the vegetation of the Island.

Parks and beaches are two of the most common "natural" tourist attractions. The parks and beaches found on Washington Island are:

- \* Airport picnic grounds (is this open to the public?)
- \* Percy Johnson County Park
- \* Jackson Harbor Ridges
- \* Mountain Lookout Park
- \* Sand Dunes Public Beach
- \* Schoolhouse Public Beach.
- \* Peoples Park

These parks and beaches are being well maintained, and are currently being frequented by tourists. To increase the public awareness of the beaches, and how they differ from each other, descriptors could be used such as "best swimming beach," "best sand beach," "most romantic beach." These classifications would allow the tourists to decide where they will go first, and where they will spend the most time. The importance of maintaining the parks and beaches is without question. Adequate trash receptacles, and a group of people dedicated to

maintenance and upkeep of these areas are the most viable answers to environmental protection. On an aside, the sign at Schoolhouse Beach telling of the \$25 fine for removing stones is likely ineffective. A brief statement telling why you shouldn't remove the stones would give the tourists a moral reason not to take the stones, rather than a potential financial reason, the \$25 fine.

Scenic views/photo opportunities are another strong tourist attraction. The money the tourists are spending is primarily for intangible items or services, food, lodging, gas. When tourists return home, none of these things return with them. What they do bring back to their homes are pictures. Pictures which they eagerly show off to their friends and relatives at every opportunity. These pictures are 3x5 glossies advertising Washington Island; therefore, it is vital that there be plenty of opportunities for tourists to take pictures. Washington Island has been graced with many scenic areas, some of these are:

- \* Stone fences
- \* Sunrises over water, forests, meadows
- \* Sunsets over water, forests, meadows
- \* Stars, ten times as bright as in the city
- \* Flowers in the woods
- \* Beaches
- \* Morning dew on the meadows
- \* Birds/water fowl
- \* Leaves on the sugar maples in October
- \* Churches
- \* Islands on the water
- \* The bluffs
- \* Stavkirke

- \* The view from the tower
- \* Little Lake.

These are just a few of the many potential things tourists may take photos of on Washington Island. Care must be taken by both residents and tourists alike to keep the Island clean and picturesque. This will keep people coming to Washington Island, advertising it through their pictures.

The final area of natural resource consideration is the soil, specifically the rocks found in the soil. These rocks, long considered a nuisance to farmers, are now becoming valuable for landscaping and yard beautification. The rocks found on Washington Island lend themselves well to the building of stone fences. These fences beautify the road sides and give an old-world charm to the Island.

The second area of resources to be considered is water. Within this topic, there are two main subdivisions, internal (Little Lake), and external (Lake Michigan). Little Lake provides a variety of recreations:

- ? \* Swimming
- \* Canoeing
- \* Fishing, including ice fishing.

\* ~~Ice fishing~~

Many animals and birds make their homes on and around Little Lake. There are many opportunities to view or photograph them in their natural habitats.

Lake Michigan provides recreation such as:

- \* Charter fishing
- \* Sailing
- \* Canoeing
- \* Diving



- \* Boat tours
- \* Boating
- \* Swimming (for the experienced).

Lake Michigan is a topic of mystery, shipwrecks, legends, and lore. An entire retail shop could be devoted to memorabilia and legends of this Lake.

The Lake surrounds and isolates Washington Island from the rest of the county, and to protect the water in and around Washington Island, regulations could be established limiting the use of gas powered boats. Electric or wind powered vessels could be promoted.

The final major area of resource is air. At the May 23, 1995 meeting of the Door County Board of Supervisors, the issue of air pollution, and the depletion of the ozone was addressed. Some of the air pollution was attributed to other states which was carried here by the winds.

One recreation provided by the wind could be kite flying. Kite flying is very popular in some areas, and Washington Island, with its open meadows and frequent winds would provide a great place to fly a kite. Kite flying does not use up any natural resources, and produces no pollution. Hundreds of kites flying over a meadow could also provide tourists with great photo opportunities.

Other things brought in on the winds are airplanes. Every summer there is a festival on Washington Island which draws over 200 airplanes. This is also an excellent photo opportunity.

Finally, the Island lends itself to wind power generation. Wind generators could provide the Island with additional electrical needs and possibly enough to export to the mainland. The back-up diesel generator on the Island is old. Estimates have already been given on the price to replace it.

## IV. CULTURAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

### A. Education

#### 1. Schools

- a. Washington Island School has a unique district of grades K-12. The number of students is 100, and it is the smallest school district in the State of Wisconsin.
- b. Sievers School of Fiber Arts has received national recognition for the week-long and weekend classes it offers for adults. Its annual enrollment exceeds 450 students from all over the United States. Within the school building, a yarn and book shop stocks quality knitting and weaving yarns, fiber art books, and other miscellaneous supplies.

### B. Recreation

#### 1. Museums

- a. The Jackson Harbor Maritime Museum displays, indoors and outdoors, depict the Island's maritime history. Artifacts, photographs, and videos can be viewed on local maritime history, including commercial fishing, coast guard, and area shipwrecks.
- b. Jacobsen Museum was opened in 1931 by Jens Jacobsen. The museum holds his outstanding collection of natural and historical artifacts of the region.
- c. The Washington Island Farm Museum is a non-profit Wisconsin corporation established for the enjoyment and education of the public about the history of farming on the Island.

#### 2. Sports

- a. Baseball: Friday night summer Door County league.
- b. Biking: 75 miles of bike riding pleasure on the Island's back roads. Rentals are available.

- c. Boating and fishing: Boats are available for charter and fishing excursions.
- d. Bowling: 4-lane alley available at Karly's Bar.
- e. Golf: 9-hole course and mini-golf.
- f. Tennis: 2 public courts available through the Recreation Center.
- g. The Washington Island Recreation Center contains a 32 by 60 feet indoor swimming pool, whirlpool, exercise room, and a meeting/game room.

#### C. Historical Events and Sites

1. The Art and Nature Center has exhibits devoted to Island history, from prehistoric times through colonization by man, right up to the art and cultural activities of today's residents. The Center also provides nature hikes and classes.
2. The Washington Island Archives provides a historical record of the lives of the people of the Island community. There are stored files, pictures and prints, of town and school records from the early 1800s, and a map of 100 year old homes, diagrams of the cemetery at Schoolhouse Beach, and genealogy charts.
3. The Stavkirke is being built to the glory of God; to enhance the Island's Scandinavian heritage and traditions; and to provide a means of serving the ministry of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church.
4. Death's Door or Porte des Morts Legend refers to the narrow passage connecting Lake Michigan and Green Bay which has turbulent currents at all times. Between the autumns of 1872 and 1880, over 130 boats and vessels were stranded, damaged, or run ashore.
5. The Story of Griffin refers to the trade boat Robert LaSalle built to transport furs from Mackinac to the Island. The boat made its delivery and was, presumably, on its way home. It was never heard from again.

6. The Red Barn provides summer programs of music featuring local talent and other family events. It is also a popular spot for teens during the summer.

#### D. Education Opportunities

1. The Community Center building has an office and a meeting room that is used by senior citizens and others. The large assembly hall provides needed space for school activities, presentations, and fund-raising events.
2. The Library, also located in the Community Center has books, magazines, and tapes. It offers a children's reading program in the summer that is popular.

Recommendations for improving the Island's cultural and social awareness and status:

There are several examples of how to improve the current awareness and interest in the aspect of cultural and social resources of Washington Island.

With its modest population, the Island has been able, in an impressive manner, to preserve and offer a diverse area of culture, tradition and crafts. Ecotourism on this Island will likely only enhance the preservation and further educate the visitors to the Island. Further, this Island is one-of-a-kind with its location, nature and the population's Scandinavian background. Although the Midwest has a great number of people with Scandinavian ancestors, Washington Island is probably one of the few locations where the preservation of their heritage, culture and crafts is so well maintained. This should be very appealing to the great amount of people with ancestors from Scandinavia. The Native American craftsmanship is also a part of the history of the Island.

The first thing to do in order to increase people's awareness concerning Washington Island is to educate the tourists, promote and advertise in a creative manner that will be appealing to islanders as well as to tourists. When you have managed this and the tourists arrive, there are a few improvements that may be done:



The ferry ride should be the first positive impression of the tourist. When arriving on the Island, the tourists should be as impressed as possible. The Visitor Center should be as informative as possible concerning text, information, and display of pictures and tangible items. Tourists should have a sense of having arrived at a place where the Island and its permanent and seasonal residents emphasize hospitality and service.

The following suggestions could be considered by future planners desiring low impact tourism:

1. Outdoor cafes should be established in the marina/harbor areas that have considerable traffic during season. This would be appealing and a place for social gathering.
2. The Cherry Train needs a possible change of name which would reflect a more direct reference to the Island.
3. Water Sports need more promotion. Examples are motorless sports, canoeing, fishing, and scuba (shipwrecks).
4. Outdoor Activities encourage tourists to do hiking and biking. Trails may have to be built in order to protect the vegetation of the Island. Photo opportunities should be emphasized, e.g., scenic views, Rock Island's carvings in the stones, the tower, sunrise/sunset on the horizon. More history of the Island could be promoted. Lake Michigan, mysteries, shipwrecks, legends and lore could also be marketed to tourists.
5. The Museums should have more descriptive signs.
6. Fences that fit in with natural surroundings should be erected.
7. Negative signage such as "No Trespassing," "Keep Out," etc., should be changed to positive, less threatening language.
8. The Community Center Building houses the library and archives. The archives might be made more accessible and tied in closer to the library.

9. Stavkirken (the Stave Church)—heavy promotion should be done prior to its opening.

Its history and origin should be emphasized.

10. Death Door—A lake safari to select locations of sunken vessels could be considered as part of a tourism plan

## VI. CREATE A REGIONAL PLANNING STRATEGY

This section will attempt to answer the following questions: Is there a potential for ecotourism development on Washington Island? Does Washington Island wish to explore these opportunities? What specific type of opportunities does the Island wish to explore? Do those opportunities exist on the Island already, or do they need to be created? Can the existing opportunities be enhanced? Finally, what can be done to enhance the tourism experience on the Island?

From our week on the Island we believe that there is enormous potential for ecotourism on Washington Island; however, we believe the second question is the most important, "do the residents of Washington Island want to bring more tourists to the Island?" We must, for the purpose of the project, assume there is a positive reaction to this question. By way of creating a positive successful environment for tourists, it should be made clear that in order for this to occur it is essential that there is a collective effort by the community to work together as a team. This includes volunteering individual services, knowledge, skills, and, if possible, financial contribution as well. Once the community has decided to come together and work collectively to increase tourism, they must decide what kinds of tourism is most appropriate. Essentially, there are three kinds of tourism. First, mass commercial tourism, with which we are most familiar. An example of mass commercial tourism would be Wisconsin Dells. Mass tourism utilizes many commercial structures that focus primarily on the comfort and convenience of the tourist, i.e., gift shops, restaurants, and entertainment facilities. A second type of tourism is natural or ecotourism which focuses far less on the comfort and convenience of the tourist. Ecotourism's primary focus is on the environment and its conservation and preservation. People involved in that kind of tourism go for the purpose of experiencing and observing the natural elements of a particular area. The third

option, and what we feel is perhaps most appropriate, is a mixture of commercial tourism and ecotourism. This mixture combines attractive physical structures like gift shop, a visitor center, one or two commercialized areas and the natural aspects of and areas such as beaches, plants, museums and educational materials for these sights. In conjunction with the mixture of commercial and ecotourism, we feel that the commercial structures, for the most part, should be clustered in only one or two areas. This would ensure those visiting the Island for its natural beauty that the entire island would not be cluttered with various "traps" associated with tourism, but at the same time gives those who are interested in buying a souvenir a chance to do that.

Next we must discuss what opportunities already exist on the Island. Many people come to the Island because of the tranquility and beauty of the unspoiled land. The sand dunes/beach areas, museums, the tower, biking and walking, Rock Island State Park and various cultural events are all current draws for the Island. With the idea of growth in mind, we need to make constant improvements and find ways to enhance opportunities that are already here. The first item to consider is the ferry. Even though it is privately owned and operated, it needs to be studied carefully, in light of the total tourism potential. The ferry ride could be an even more positive experience for the visitor. People are fresh, alert and excited as they come over on the ferry, but all that enthusiasm is currently being wasted. During the ride over, a recording could be played over a loud speaker describing the Island and its history, culture and attractions. Basically, you have a captive audience that could be better informed upon arriving on the Island.

At this time, there are bike rentals available for touring the Island. Also, we believe that visitors could try to see the Island on foot. Whether on foot or bicycle, the tourist really has no guide to tour the Island. This Island has many beautiful attractions but the visitor is not



really told how to find them. At the very least, visitors should have access to a better map with more descriptions of potential points of interest. Possibly, the Island could go as far as creating a system of paths specifically for the many people who come to see the Island by themselves. Another area of importance to not only the visitors, but also the residents, is transportation. Currently, there is one taxi service that doubles as a guided tour; and the Cherry Train. Again, opportunities appear to be wasted. Convenient and reliable transportation is essential to the tourist, especially when they're on the Island. There could possibly be more point-to-point taxi service and definitely guided tours like the Cherry Train need to be accessible and reliable.

After suggesting improvements for the structures and services currently on the Island, we must consider the possibility of creating new attractions to promote future growth and development. A Washington Island Visitors Center, as has been discussed throughout this paper, has four major goals. First, and probably most important, would be the creation of a positive first impression for the Island. Currently, as tourists arrive on the Island, they are greeted with a negative image. A Visitors Center would portray an open and welcoming image. The second goal of the center is to let visitors know exactly what the Island has to offer. Within the facility there will be literature, a taste of the island culture and a directory of names and places. Also, the center will have lists of activities and events, ferry schedules, educational programs, restaurants, specialties and many other offerings to make the tourist visiting Washington Island feel welcome and comfortable. Another goal of the visitors center is being an anchor for the community of Washington Island. The facility will reflect a collective effort by the Island toward the future success of tourism. Finally, the visitors center will house the Director of the Tourism Bureau and therefore it will be the base of tourism for the whole Island.

The following is a collective list of potential ideas gained from a class brainstorming session:

- \* Wildflower sanctuary
- \* Charter fishing excursions
- \* Well defined biking and walking paths
- \* Winery
- \* Dinner cruises
- \* Develop a boardwalk
- \* Bird watching.

Finally, there are a few things that could be done to enhance the tourism experience on the Island. It is clear that there was much effort put into uniformity and clarity on the signage around the Island. There is, however, a prevailing negativeness to them. Explaining why something should not be done can be just as effective as just saying "don't do it." Service also needs to be upgraded on the Island. Everyone is extremely friendly, but, in order to handle a heavy tourism season, an emphasis needs to be put on providing the very best possible service. Key ingredients for this are training and preparation. Something else that will be further discussed in the marketing section is the creation of a main theme/logo/slogan. The idea is to create a definite image of Washington Island the visitors can remember and always associate with a good tourism experience.

## VII. GENERAL COSTS AND BENEFITS

In developing ecotourism on Washington Island, there will be both general benefits and conflicts. This section will focus on these benefits and conflicts, both existing and potential. We hope that these ideas will be useful in identifying some changes that may need to be addressed and provide some insight into problems that could be avoided.

### Benefits (Existing):

- \* Islanders are friendly and hospitable.
- \* The Island is full of natural resources and attractions.
- \* Rich history and culture of the Island.
- \* The Island has a quiet and relaxing atmosphere.
- \* The community center.
- \* An existing strong landuse plan should be constantly fine tuned.

### Benefits (potential):

- \* There is land to develop selectively.
- \* Diversification of the Island's economy.
- \* Jobs would be created.
- \* Reduction of seasonality by increasing year 'round tourism.
- \* Better transportation systems developed—less traffic.

### Conflicts (existing):

- \* Monopoly of ferry.
- \* Divided opinions of tourism/tourists by islanders.
- \* Some need for service training.
- \* Heavy summer traffic (cars, trucks, buses).
- \* Make the Island more "tourist friendly."

- \* Sewer system overloading.

Conflicts (potential):

- \* Increase of prices (gas, clothing, food, etc.).
- \* Shortage of employee housing.
- \* Development expenses.
- \* Noise and pollution.
- \* Vandalization of property/tourist attractions.
- \* Over-commercialization (become a miniature "tourist trap").
- \* Lack of clean water.
- \* Increase of land costs and taxes.
- \* Competition from the mainland tourism.
- \* Distance and water barrier (related to the ferry).
- \* Vandalization of nature (flowers and rocks).
- \* Island animals are challenged for space.
- \* Islanders are squeezed out or go into "hibernation."
- \* Loss of safety.

After reading the list, it may seem that there are many more conflicts than benefits. It must be considered, however, that most of these risks are only potential and with proper planning can be avoided. Along the same lines, the existing conflicts are not unsolvable, and they can be fixed and/or changed.

Next, four of the listed topics will be addressed: culture, island transportation, divisions among the community, and over-commercialization.

Culture

Washington Island is rich with culture. The Island already plays on some of this with



museums, Scandinavian shops, sod roofs, and fish boils; but, the culture could be enhanced by performing cultural events that tourists could watch and learn from. This education would also probably help tourists to respect the attractions around them and not to deface them.

There are probably other historical events and culture that could be played on. For example, more foods in addition to fish boils that relate to the culture of the area.

### Island Transportation

In the summer, Washington Island gets very busy. The ferry brings in load after load of people, often with their vehicles as well as tour buses. This creates an unpleasant atmosphere because the cars pollute the air with exhaust, cause heavy traffic which makes walking and biking unsafe, creates noise, and in general detracts from the natural beauty of the Island. A suggestion for change would be to eventually ban any vehicles coming from the main land, except for Island residents (may or may not include seasonal residents). This would create room for an island transportation system that would limit where the tourist goes. The following idea was brought to our attention by Larry Kahlscheuer, an islander. The idea is to have a trolley system (mainly for summer use). There would have to be an even number of trolleys and a specific schedule of times. The reason an even number of trolleys would be needed is so a person could, for example, go from their home to Mann's Grocery Store and be able to catch the trolley going the other way to get back home without having to go the whole way around (free for islanders). Next, the tourists would be able to stay on the trolley to see however many designated spots that the trolley stops at, or they could get off at a stop, spend some time there, and catch the next trolley going by to wherever else they may want to go. The difference between this and the cherry train is that the cherry train's specific purpose is a guided tour, the trolley would be specifically transportation.

The Washington Island inhabitants have many serious and potentially life changing issues

to consider in the near future. While trying to promote tourism on the Island, and still maintain the wonderful quality of life, it will be a challenge to find a balance that the Islanders can accept. Many of the Islanders rely on revenue provided by tourists to support themselves and their way of life. The challenging part of this situation will be in finding a happy medium between attracting more people and tourists (which will give the Islanders an economic boost that will allow them to continue to live there) and preserve the cultural and natural resources on the Island. Ecotourism is a solution that can solve and satisfy both needs.

#### Over Commercialization

Ecotourism could be used to create revenue for the Islanders and, at the same time, avoid over-commercialization. If ecotourism is promoted throughout the Island, then the chances of preserving the Island's natural beauty and resources will be much greater than if the Islanders try to create revenue through commercialized means. If the Island becomes commercialized and developed, then it will no longer have the same appeal and quality it currently has.

#### Divisions Among the Community

Another possible and potential conflict we have observed is the divided opinions of the people living on the Island. Some people that rely on tourism for their livelihood would like to see the number of tourists coming to the Island increase. We can sympathize and understand both points of view.

The people living here must reach a consensus as to what they want to do to increase revenue and preserve their way of life. Before any progress can be made, the people on the Island must develop a plan that the majority or ideally everyone can agree on.

The politics on the Island are, for the most part, controlled by the people who live here through various elected offices that they currently hold. The people who are involved in the Island politics can control many events which occur on the Island through various ordinances

and zoning laws. This has been beneficial so far because they have been able to keep the Island from turning into a commercialized place like Wisconsin Dells.

One important issue that the Islanders must consider is the fact that they now, for the most part, own the majority of the real estate and control the majority of events that occur on the Island. Should this all change in even the slightest way, everything would be disrupted and the people living on the Island could lose control of what happens here. What the Islanders must do now is take control of the issues concerning tourism before the tourism problems take control of them. If some large corporation or someone with a great deal of money moved here or started buying land or somehow would become involved in, or have an influence on the local politics, they could have a major impact on the Island. This would probably be negative considering what we feel most of the people want.

We do not want to give the impression of negativity, but we do feel that this is an issue that should be addressed as part of the planning process.



## VIII. FINANCING CONSIDERATIONS

To begin a discussion of financial considerations for Washington Island, we must first start with the ferry from Gills Rock. Nearly every resident we have talked to felt uncomfortable with the situation. At this point, the price seems unfair to residents and prohibitive to some visitors. The possibility of applying for a state operated ferry is an option. A state run ferry could mean less expense for visitors and residents and a possible payment to Washington Island for revenues after gross expenses to the State.

As was discussed in the strategic planning section, developing tourism destinations requires investment of human resources and financial resources. Generally, ecotourism destinations require less resources and financing but also yield less revenue from lower tourist usage volumes. Funds, however, are going to be needed for improving the Island's infrastructure, maintaining new and existing resources and building a Visitors Center. We will attempt to highlight various possible sources for these funds. One possibility is government subsidies. It's important to realize that the more government funding received, the less independence and control an entity maintains. Another possible source might be private and corporate donations. With this option, an ecotourism destination like Washington Island must be careful to avoid exploitation and over-commercialization. The next option, raising revenue through property taxes, is generally not very popular. Gaining this kind of funding would require the residents to buy into developing ecotourism on Washington Island and might be most effective for infra-structure improvements.

Many ecotourism destinations around the world incorporate a usage tax on tourists. Fees can range from \$2.00 to \$150.00 or more depending on the destination. It could be realistic to charge someone a fee just for visiting the Island or this concept could be used for certain locations on the Island. In the strategic planning section, we suggested a flower sanctuary.



Something like that could incorporate a users fee quite well. Finally, the Washington Island Tourism Board (which will be described later), under the leadership of the director, should have membership by most businesses on the Island. This creates a coordinated tourism effort for the Island by pooling together monies from two sources. First, there would be a membership fee for each business. Second, the Visitors Center will have areas available for these businesses to promote themselves. Each section will be of equal size but a charge for these areas would be on a graduated scale so all businesses could participate.

There are a good number of sources for funding the tourism effort on Washington Island. We would imagine several, if not all, could be implemented.

## IX. MARKETING

### Demographics

The total population of Washington Island is 623. The female population of 316 is slightly larger than the male population of 307. The age breakdown is as follows: 101 are age 17 and under, 71 are age 18 to 24, 201 are age 25 to 49, 68 are age 50 to 61, and 182 are age 62 and older. With a large portion of the population in the age 62 and older category, the numbers in the workforce are greatly affected. Of the 623 persons living on the Island, 143 are in the work force. Only 2.4 percent (2/143) make less than \$25,000 annually, 23.1 percent (30/143) make \$25,000 to \$49,999 annually, 60.2 percent (81/143) make \$50,000 to \$99,999 annually, and 15.4 percent (22/143) make over \$100,000.

### Visitor Background

Many of the visitors that come to Washington Island come to get away from the hassles of their everyday lives. Washington Island offers clean air, rest and relaxation, and peace and quiet. The main season starts for the people to come and enjoy the benefits of Washington Island is about June 1 to about the middle of October. The capacity of the Island is about 3,500 to 4,000, and that fills up quite fast. More people could probably come to the Island, but there are only 155 rooms and cabins on the Island to accommodate the visitors.

Many of the visitors that come to Washington Island are from Wisconsin and Illinois. Residents from other states, such as Minnesota and Iowa also visit. Generally, they are from larger cities, such as Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Chicago and surrounding areas.

### Spending Habits

Many of visitors go out and shop for souvenirs, rent bikes and boats, etc., and see many of the attractions that Washington Island has to offer. The spending habits of the visitors are spread out and not just at the lower end of the monetary scale. Most visitors (31.8 percent)

spend \$100 to \$249 on various products. The second largest spending group (21.5 percent) spend less than \$100. The rest (36.7 percent) spend more than \$250.

#### Internal Promotion

With the addition of the Washington Island Visitors Information Center, many more people will be able to learn more about the Island. Not only will the visitors, but the residents of Washington Island also will benefit. One of the best ways to highlight the new Visitors Information Center of Washington Island to residents would be through word-of-mouth promotion. Other ways to get the residents to get to know the information center would be at a town meeting, socials, the local newspaper, and a poster-type flyer posted at local eating and shopping establishments.

#### External Promotion

To promote the Washington Island Visitors Information Center externally in different states, cities, etc., many varieties of advertising could be used. Having a majority of visitors coming from Illinois—Chicago area—advertisements could be placed in newspapers of the surrounding suburbs. Radio and television ads could be put on local stations, along with mailing brochures to people in selected areas. Other areas, such as Milwaukee and Minneapolis, could also have advertisements much like the ones in the surrounding Chicago area.

#### Alternative Advertisement

Environmentally correct billboards could be erected on interstates, highways and roads of the surrounding areas of Chicago, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis. Modest and unobtrusive billboards could even be placed in different parts of Wisconsin. Also, having a few in cities in Door County might be helpful. Many people do not realize that there is more to Door County than the mainland or a few popular villages. Little do they know that they are missing a

unique opportunity. Tasteful bumper stickers and clothing articles would be something that someone sees when visitors are on their way home or to wherever. That could possibly lead to a curious person seeking more information about Washington Island. Then the curious person could call the Visitors Center or ask the person a few questions.

To get Washington Island Visitors Information Center better known, a special brochure or travel packet could be created. Not only will it have a small write-up about Door County, but also a special, unique brochure about Washington Island, or the telephone number for the Visitors Center.

The special brochure could highlight many of the Island's main attractions and touch upon what makes Washington Island an unique and worthwhile experience. Of course, the phone number and address of the Visitors Information Center would be placed on the brochure to provide more information if needed. The Door County Chamber of Commerce and other Chambers of Commerce in Wisconsin and other states could also have copies of this unique brochure. It would not be a bad idea to have copies of the brochure at travel agencies. While a traveler is booking their vacation, they can make plans for the next vacation, and the destination could be Washington Island. Once the person is on the Island, they can stop at the Visitors Center and get exact information on specific interests.

One other suggestion that can help to promote Washington Island and the Visitors Information Center would be to have an advertisement at the EEA (Experimental Aircraft Association) Fly-in in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Letting flyers know they can take an adventure to Washington Island to see a very unique part of the State. Not only will they be able to take part in the Lion's Fly-in, but they can also take a tour of the Washington Island Visitors Information Center.

In working with such a unique place, Washington Island is something everyone should see



once. Having the proper advertisement and good word-of-mouth communication, the new Washington Island Visitors Information Center will be a major asset to the residents and the visitors of Washington Island.

#### Marketing Icon:

Washington Island is known primarily for its Scandinavian culture and its natural beauty. One form of natural beauty that the residents have mentioned is the different types and vast number of wildflowers that bloom all over the Island, starting early in the season with the delicate May flower that blooms in the month that it was named after.

While visiting the Island, we kept taking in more and more of the natural beauty and we tried to think of something that is unique and would stand out in visitor's minds about Washington Island. What we came up with are the wild flowers as a marketing icon. They grow in abundance all over the Island and in the woods. While driving on the main road, it is amazing to see all of the flowers blooming in massive clumps. Our idea was to come up with some sort of icon that uses the wild flowers as a main point of concentration. The icon/symbol of the Island could then be placed on different souvenir products to sell to the visitors to take home. These souvenirs would then be a remembrance of Washington Island every time they are observed. Listed below are some ideas for a logo and souvenirs to sell to the visitors:

1. "Come to Washington Island where the wild flowers are always in bloom."
2. A shape of the Island with all of the wild flowers plotted on it.
3. A calendar with photographs of the different wild flowers for each month.
4. Postcards with different flowers of the Island.

A marketing icon will remind visitors of the Island every time they see it or hear of it. This will greatly increase the numbers of visitors who come to the Island hoping to see all of the

wild flowers and the rest of the natural beauty the Island has to offer.

#### X. MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION RESPONSIBILITIES

The Township of Washington Island needs to recognize an entity that is able to pool the communities energy into an organized and focused effort. We propose the Washington Island Visitors Bureau as this needed entity. The Bureau office will be housed in the Washington Island Visitors Center and the person who will be responsible for coordinating the Ecotourism activities on the Island will be the Director of the Visitor Center.

In conjunction with the Washington Island Visitor Bureau and the responsibilities of the Center, we ask: **what organizational structure is necessary to manage the townships interest<sup>in</sup> of quality and the protection of the Island's natural resources?**