



**National Park Service**  
U.S. Department of the Interior

October 1, 2008

## **BRIEFING STATEMENT**

**BUREAU:** NPS/PVE/TOUR  
**ISSUE:** Geotourism MOU: A Tool for Environmental Leadership

### **Background Summary**

Under the direction of the Department of the Interior, a multiagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed July 8 at the National Geographic Society headquarters. This new MOU provides an added tool for the NPS superintendents to use in promoting use of their facilities and providing leadership in the area of civic engagement as it relates to tourism and gateway communities.

Geotourism, a global phenomenon, has been practiced and promoted since 1997. The Geotourism concept was developed by National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations (NGS), a non-profit NGO and MOU signer. National Geographic Society defines Geotourism as "tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents." In many cases, the initiative has been embraced for assisting an area develop its cultural authenticity and recognized market value in cooperation with tourism providers, known collectively as destination marketing organizations (DMO's).

Because this is not a new concept, several NPS park units have already been involved in Geotourism partnerships with their gateway community partners and other tourism entities since the inception of Geotourism. The most recent example is the "Crown of the Continent" Georegion where NPS leadership was provided by a joint venture between Glacier NP and the Intermountain Region.

Each Geotourism partnership is unique to a particular, local Georegion. They stem from a community's desire to feature their unique culture and experiences in a different way, a way that enhances long term sustainability as special places. The July 8, 2008 signing of this MOU agreement by NGS and a number of Federal land management agencies was to further recognize and highlight the connection between Geotourism principles and our joint agency missions.

### **Discussion**

An expressed goal of the **NPS Centennial Initiative** is to "demonstrate environmental leadership to the nation." Such leadership is likely to be well received by community tourism partners since NPS provides considerable expertise in natural, cultural, and heritage preservation. We lend authenticity to the stories being told about the destination experience. Another centennial goal envisions providing "tools and business practices that will reinforce confidence in our stewardship capacities." The Geotourism context affords opportunities to develop both tools and sustainable business practices.

The NPS National Tourism Strategic Plan contains several strategies and actions which support connecting with our gateway communities in a Geotourism context. In fact, four of the six plan strategies tie directly to parks' proactive engagement using Geotourism principles, generically, as a common platform. This is reflected in Section III-5 of the MOU, which states, "NPS tourism strategy promotes cooperative communications programs with gateway community partners to educate the public about sustainable tourism experiences."

This MOU does not necessarily commit the Service to participation in Geotourism partnerships. Nothing in the MOU authorizes any of the parties to obligate or transfer funds.

Until recently, NPS has not been as active in Geotourism projects as the other agencies, particularly USFS and BLM. A review of NPS experience in the most current Georegion, called the "Crown of the Continent," could provide guidance field managers considering engagement with communities to develop a Geotourism project. Where the U.S. and Canadian public lands agencies supported the planning process, the state, provincial, regional and local destination marketing organizations supported the marketing communication outputs, such as a mapguide and web site. NPS participation consisted of a joint venture between the Glacier NP and the Intermountain Region, facilitated by IMR tourism coordinator John Keck. The National Tourism Council (NTC) recently considered the Crown of the Continent project as a case study for lessons learned.

Historically, when federal land managers engage with prospective Geotourism collaborations earlier in the process, they have greater impact; increasing chances for success. New regions are currently under consideration on the California coast and islands, the Cultural Coast in Massachusetts, and the Greater Yellowstone. None of these developments have been, or are expected to be, dependent on the execution of this MOU.

For park managers considering an opportunity to engage in a Geotourism partnership, the National Geographic Society website contains reference information. Consultation with experienced participants such as Glacier NP, IMR tourism coordinator, and the National Tourism Office (NTO) is also recommended.

#### Recent Actions

Subsequent to the signing of the MOU in July, the multi-agency work group met in September and developed a work plan for a newly created National Geotourism Stewardship Council. The Council's first order of business is a plenary presentation at the upcoming Western States Tourism Council's Gateway Communities Conference at Santa Ana, in Pueblo, New Mexico on December 2-4, 2008. For more information and reservation go to [www.newmexico.org/wstpc](http://www.newmexico.org/wstpc)

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[http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/about\\_geotourism.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/about_geotourism.html)