Birding Trail Development from a Tourism Planning Perspective

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis,

including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

As bird-watching gains popularity, there have been various techniques utilized by tourism planners to attract birdwatchers. One method of drawing birders to a specific region is through the development of a birding trail. Although there are many birding trails with varying levels of success, there was little research as to how birding trails should be designed, implemented and managed. Perhaps, a new and viable approach to birding trail development would be to plan them as tourism product clubs. A product club is an association of tourism service providers working together to deliver an integrated service. Product clubs have been successfully implemented in Barbados with golf tourism and in Spain with winery tourism. However, the concept of a product club has never been applied to bird-watching tourism. Therefore, this research tested the idea of utilizing the product club concept for bird-watching tourism. The methodology had three separate phases. Phase one involved interviewing officials of existing tourism trails, to see how they planned and managed their trails. These interviews illustrated how and what is involved with tourism trail planning and management. Phase two involved the choice of a case study location, the County of Essex and Chatham-Kent in Ontario. Phase three was planning the trail by forming an Advisory Committee consisting of key industry, non-government and government stakeholders. The Advisory Committee assisted with the following key decisions: trail size and scope, selection of birding sites, choosing accessory tourism service institutions, developing a product club oversight organization, marketing the product club, and the management, evaluation and monitoring of the trail. The thesis provides recommendations that can be used to implement a birding trail as a tourism product club. The research findings concluded that a birding trail can be planned and managed as tourism product clubs.

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This thesis would not be possible without the continued help of some key people who supported me and believed in me throughout the two years of this master`s degree. First of all, I must thank my supervisor Dr. Eagles, who has been an integral part in completing this thesis. His positive criticism moulded this thesis into what it has evolved to become. Dr. Eagles has also given me advice on conferences, publications, and teaching me the ways of the academic world. I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Murphy and Dr. Scott for also providing aid and advice for the direction of the thesis. The external reader, Dr. Nepal was also constructive in formulating the final version of the thesis. I could not write this acknowledgement without mentioning my program co-ordinator, Lori McConnell who has been invaluable in every aspect of my master`s degree; whether it was advice on funding, courses, the thesis, conferences, proof reading or simply moral support. I must also thank my family for being supportive of me throughout these two years. This is especially true for my mother as she had to support me financially for the majority of this thesis and had great patience with my educational pursuits. Lastly, I would like to thank my brother-in-law for always standing by me and editing my writing and providing technological support. One cannot ask for a better man to marry one`s sister.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother and grandfather. My mother has always supported my dreams and ambitions and been beside me throughout all the positive and negative experiences of my university years. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my grandfather, who always pushed me to go to school and to become as educated as possible. Sadly, he never got to see me finish this master's degree as he suddenly passed away.

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Chapter 1.0 Introduction

Prior to implementing a tourism product, it is important for a planner to know their own

industry and to understand its shortcomings, limitations and opportunities. A tourism planner

also needs to look at the overall picture and determine whether the industry is growing and

which segments present the best opportunities. This means being familiar with tourism

industry demands and supplies and knowing when is the best time and place to implement a

new product or program (Font & Cochrane, 2005). Thus, planning can be a delicate and time

consuming process, whereby much information and knowledge needs to be gathered and

organized. Consequently, the process needs to start with the examination of the overall tourism

market and its segments to identify an opportunity that can be developed.

Tourism is a concept that is not always easy to define, as it can incorporate many

sectors and is often interpreted and measured differently by professionals, organizations and

countries (Leiper, 1979, Smith, 1994 & Björk, 2000). The World Tourism Organization (2009,

para 1) described "tourism as the activities of people travelling to and staying in places outside

their usual homes or residence for not more than one consecutive year for either leisure,

business or other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within

the place visited". The importance and economic impacts of tourism are not always very

obvious, as they are often hard to measure (Yong-Chang, 2003 & Wall, 2010). Nevertheless,

tourism is one of the biggest sectors of the global economy as there were 980 international

arrivals in 2011, generating nearly a billion U.S. dollars (UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai,

WTO, 2012). It is estimated that tourism will grow at a rate of 4-5% annually, until the year

2020 (WTO, 2012). By 2020 international arrivals are estimated to surpass 1.5 billion people

(WTO, 2012). Moreover, tourism is "directly responsible for 5% of the world's GDP, 6% of total

exports and employing 1 out of every 12 people in the world" (WTO, 2012, para 3). Clearly,

tourism is a vital industry that drives the global economy and can generate valuable income for

a region or country.

An important tourism sectors is ecotourism (TIES, 2010). Ecotourism is often referred to

as a lower impact form of tourism that takes local environments and people into greater

consideration. Thus, ecotourism is described as "responsible travel to natural areas that

conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (TIES, 2010, para 1).

As people have become more educated and environmentally conscious in recent decades, the

popularity of ecotourism has also risen (Fennell, 2008 & Honey, 2008). It is important to

understand that ecotourism encompasses numerous tourism activities and subsectors.

One ecotourism activity that can be done almost anywhere, as long as there is a

presence of avian wildlife, is bird-watching. Bird-watching or birding is often conceptualized as

the activity of observing birds either by the naked eye or with the aid of vision enhancing

equipment for recreational purposes (American Birding Association, 2010). However, bird-

watching is a recreational activity, as well as being closely linked with wildlife conservation and

preservation and often conveys a strong ethical and education component (Watson, 2010).

Since birders are often highly motivated individuals, they sometimes travel and spend

considerable money on bird-watching (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2001). Thus, within the

last 20 years, tourism operators have begun to understand and plan for bird-watching, which

has evolved the activity into a tourism niche (Eagles, 2010b). This transformation occurred

when researchers began to study birding. Kellert (1985) illustrated that bird-watching had a much greater following in the United States than previously thought. Kellert (1985) also illustrated that bird-watching is a planned and organized activity much like other forms of tourism. Moreover, when Butler and Fenton (1987 and 1988) conducted a study on Point Pelee, and illustrated the positive economic impact that birding produced, the activity quickly gained recognition as a tourism niche.

According to The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2001) there were 46 million birders in the U.S. who spend $32 billion in retail sales, which accounted for $85 billion in overall economic output, contributed $13 billion in federal and state income taxes and created 863, 406 jobs.

Thus, bird-watching can generate revenues and is also a viable tool for education and conservation (McKay, 2007). Clearly, a niche market exists for such tourism, yet in most countries little is present in the form of an organized bird-watching tourism product (Glowinski, 2008 & McKay, 2007). Moreover, bird-watching has the potential to place new destinations into the global tourism market and to generate positive outcomes (Mackay, 2007).

However, the dilemma still exists as to how best to implement and manage such a specific tourism activity? Perhaps bird-watching tourism needs to follow in the footsteps of other more mature tourism niche markets and develop in accordance with its character (Chambliss, Slotkin & Vamosi, 2005). This development would include a formalized planning structure based on existing bird-watching tourism activities and products, such as birding trails, festivals and tours. Perhaps some ideas need to be borrowed from golf or winery tourism to form new bird-watching tourism products. Golf tourism is a more mature tourism niche than

bird-watching; however, the two share many demographical and motivational commonalities. As with bird-watching tourism, most people involved in golf tourism are well-educated, have adequate disposable income, are older, are males and have high motivation and commitment to the activity (Tassiopoulos & Haydam, 2008). However, where the two tourism niches differ is that golf tourism is well established in many places with well-planned and well-defined programs in place (Tassiopoulos & Haydam, 2008); meanwhile, bird-watching tourism still needs more development to reach the same level. As a result, it might be wise to take some of the experiences of golf tourism development and apply it to bird-watching tourism.

Winery tourism is another more mature tourism niche that bird-watching tourism can investigate for ideas. Much like winery tourism, bird-watching has also adopted a trail-based tourism idea; however, it has not developed trails as systematically or with as much detail or consideration as winery tourism (Fletcher, 2005 & Kaufman, 2009).

1.1 Research Gaps and Research Questions

Tourism trails are on the rise globally and have been adopted by many tourism sectors, including winery, culinary, birding and heritage tourism, as they present added economic benefits and a viable option of managing tourism resources (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007, Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004 & Jaffe & Pasternak, 2004). Such trails promote cohesion by combining resources to achieve united goals and objectives for tourism development.

In the U.S., birding trails have become popular. In fact almost all states in the U.S. have birding trails (American Birding Association, 2010). There are several well-known birding trails that exemplify what a birding trail should look like and what its functions should be (Kaufman,

2009). Some of these famous birding trails include the North Carolina Birding Trail, the Maine Birding Trail, The Great Florida Birding Trail (Glowinski, 2008). All of these trails have a wide array of bird species, fabulous sites and scenery. However, in looking at the development of birding trails, there is a lack of literature on the planning, design, function, and management of such trails. Very little research exists regarding what approaches are used by tourism planners when developing a birding trail. This lack of literature for planning birding trails needs to be addressed and the main focus of this thesis will be to develop such trail planning guidelines.

Another major gap in bird-watching tourism planning is the lack of coordination, sustainability of tourist numbers and revenues, and utilization of bird-watching as a tourism business. Perhaps, if bird-watching tourism was implemented as a product club (Eagles, 2010c), as seen in golf and winery tourism, it could be more successful. A product club is a collection of government, non-government, and private entities designed to serve as an organizing body that brings them together for a common goal (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2010). The higher standard that could be achieved through a birding trail product club would certainly raise the quality of the bird-watching experience and would likely force other birding trails and bird-watching tourism operators to follow. In the long run, if enough quality bird-watching trails or bird-watching tourism enterprises evolved, the idea of a bird-watching tourism certification program might even emerge. Finally, a successful bird-watching trail product club might prove to be a great example of what could be achieved in a carefully planned niche market.

Therefore, the thesis will address the following research questions:
1.) Who and what should be involved in the planning of a birding trail?
2.) What are the necessary components of a birding trail?
3.) Can a birding trail function as a tourism product club?
4.) If so, how should a birding trail product club be implemented, managed, and monitored to ensure success?

Chapter 2.0 Literature Review

Before guidelines can be developed in how to plan a birding trail, it is necessary to understand the concepts and principles that guide bird-watching as a tourism activity. This chapter will provide a literature review of the most relevant information pertaining to birding trail planning. The literature review will describe some of the fundamental concepts that underpin birding tourism and move into more specific topics and trends that are directly related to birding trail planning. The literature review will also outline why each subtopic is mentioned in this chapter and what its significance is to the topic.

First of all, the concepts of sustainability and sustainable utilization will be explained. These two concepts are important to understand as they are the foundation of ecotourism and consequently bird-watching. Next, nature-based tourism will be discussed and it will be compared and contrasted with ecotourism, as it is vital to understand that the two concepts are not the same. Moreover, ecotourism in itself will be defined and explored, whereby both the positives and negatives of this tourism subcategory will be illustrated in detail. Furthermore, wildlife tourism will be touched upon to demonstrate its relationship with ecotourism and bird-watching. Following this, bird-watching will be defined and discussed as an independent tourism activity, whereby some common trends, variables and misconceptions will be brought to the forefront. Moreover, bird-watching in the context of recreational specialization will also be touched upon. This will be followed by the introduction and definition of a bird-watching trails and their significance. Next, the concept of a product club will be defined and discussed. Exactly what a product club is will be explained and examples of where they have been utilized successfully before and with what variance of success will be presented. The literature review

will also touch upon the importance of selecting a geographical scope for the project. As a result, the concept of regional tourism development will be discussed because the ideas behind this concept are very important to understand, as the bird-watching trail will encompass a specific regional area. Lastly, tourism planning will be defined and why the process is important for developing a birding trail. The benefits and challenges of the planning process will be touched upon.

2.1 Sustainability and Sustainable Utilization

An important concept and a guiding principle for most environmentally conscious and responsible tourism development is the idea of sustainability. Since, birding tourism is also heavily reliant on the natural environment; sustainability is a vital concept that must be incorporated into any type of birding tourism development. Sustainability refers to the practice of using or utilizing natural recourses without compromising their future existence (Larson et al., 2011). Sustainable practices involve the use of natural recourses for human benefit, but by ensuring they are not overused or depleted, whereby they are no longer able to benefit humanity (Hunter & Rinner, 2004). Thus, sustainability is a delicate process that involves the careful balance of environmental, economic and social dimensions in order to ensure continued benefits for all involved stakeholders (Taiwo, 2011 & Honey, 2008). Thus, sustainability can be understood and implemented in different ways and applied differently to various scenarios.

However, within a tourism context, especially ecotourism, sustainability is usually predominantly focused on the environmental dimension of the definition. This means the promotion and implementation of more eco-friendly practices that would have a much lesser

impact on the natural environment, local ecosystems and wildlife of a particular area where

tourists might visit (Divino & McAleer, 2009). This type of sustainable tourism development is

considered very different from mainstream tourism. Nevertheless, as with all tourism

development, the goals and objectives of sustainable tourism development also involve the

generation of an economic income – only if, however, there is assurance that there will be no

environmental damage and that the local habitat in question can be well conserved (Hunter &

Rinner, 2004). Therefore, there is usually careful study and implementation of practices that

ensure that a particular ecosystem where tourism development might take place maintains its

biodiversity and ecological integrity (Larson et al., 2011). Thus, sustainability is an important

concept, especially in a field that is heavily reliant on the presence of wildlife and the idea of

intact nature. Therefore, it is vital to employ experts who understand and can implement

proper tourism activities in natural areas to ensure adequate access to natural sites, yet can

ensure such natural resources are not heavily impacted or destroyed, thus conserving a

destination for future tourists and generations (Hunter & Rinner, 2004). Thus, birding tourism

planners also have to be very aware and must incorporate sustainable practices into their

planning procedures.

However, absolute sustainability is never possible, as potentially even a single tourist

can have a negative impact on a habitat, especially in remote and sensitive environments

(Hvenegaard & Dearden, 1996). A single tourist entering a pristine forest will likely have a

greater impact on the natural environment than hundreds of tourists sitting on a popular beach

destination (Wall, 2009). In fact the Ecological Footprint Assessment formula can be applied to

calculate such impacts and to compare between different locales to determine which might be

more impacted by human activities (Wackernagel & Rees 1996). The Ecological Footprint of a region is calculated by estimating the per capita Ecological Footprint based on the consumption level people have of a particular item and comparing it to the land area in question (Cole & Sinclair, 2002). Thus, the idea of sustainability is a great in theory, yet it is not always achieved in practice. Bird-watching tourism planners usually highly prioritize the environmental dimension of sustainability, making it one of the most important and key concepts on which bird-watching tourism is based on (Drumm & Moore, 2005 & Watson, 2010). As a result, any bird-watching tourism planner should incorporate and try to implement their plan as environmentally sustainably as possible.

Sustainable tourism not only deals with environmental dimensions of sustainability, but must also incorporate economic and social dimensions. Thus, sustainability can also be interpreted as something that benefits local communities and sustains cultural and heritage sites, but at the same time creates a way of sustenance and drives the local economy (Richins, 2008). Thus, implementing a new ecotourism or birding product into a traditional community could pose challenges if it upsets the old economic or cultural order (Schellhorn, 2010). This does not have to only apply to third world or tribal communities, but can also be challenging for tourism planners in Western countries. For example if a new birding trail was to be developed in an area that has a strong agricultural heritage and farming culture, acceptance for a new ecotourism product might receive opposition from some individuals or the community.

Nevertheless, both the environmental dimensions of sustainability, reflected by a strong conservation ethic and economic and social dimension of sustainability derive from the greater

concept of sustainable utilization. Sustainable utilization is an idea which has been

implemented in many different economic and development spheres, including tourism. It

basically stipulates that resources can be used to generate income and economic growth, but

should also be sustained enough to ensure they can be utilized in the future (Divino & McAleer,

2009).

However, Biggs and Kiker (2007) argue that such a utilization approach to natural

resources management and tourism development magnifies the risk of an anthropocentric

approach that would exploit natural resources. An anthropocentric approach is one that is

centered on the benefit of humanity over all other aspects (Hunter, 1997). Meaning that if a

natural resource exists, it should first be utilized for human benefits and enjoyment, rather than

being preserved or conserved (Hunter, 1997). Certainly, under this approach, the idea of

sustaining and conserving such resources for future generations would exist; however, only

after the primary objective of utilizing what resources exist for human benefit (Biggs and Kiker,

2007). There are numerous risks to this approach to tourism development, as the primary

human benefit is usually money and the exploitation of natural resources. Nevertheless,

advocates of sustainable development feel that if resources exist, they should be utilized to aid

humanity, and as long as they are used carefully and sustainably, there should be no issue with

ensuring they exist for future generations (Hamandawana & Raban, 2010). This approach seems

to be wise, especially considering that humanity has throughout history utilized the resources

that were available to them. Incorporating modern surveying, mapping and imagery technology

to monitor and manage use of natural resources can only be an added bonus to ensure only

sustainable levels of natural resources are consumed each year (Hamandawana & Raban,

2010). The only risk is that such monitoring costs money and not all who desire to implement new tourism programs can afford it (Drumm & Moore, 2005), this also includes birding trails.

It is also vital to identify and discuss business sustainability. This type of sustainability mostly focuses on the economic dimension of the definition, consequently, making its importance sometimes harder to convey (Drumm & Moore, 2005). Nevertheless, sustainability in business can have numerous different meanings. People sometimes assume that when businesses talk about sustainability, they are solely referring to undertaking practices that do not harm the environment or are environmentally friendly or green ventures (Quinn, 2010). Although that might often be the case, the definition of sustainable business goes much further than just incorporating environmental concerns. Business sustainability can also be understood as sustaining the success, goals, objectives, growth and profitability of a business (Quinn, 2010). Thus, a business needs to ensure that it can attain its corporate goals and sustain its profitability. If initial goals to maintain profitability are not, met then other objectives will likely not be achieved either. For example, if a business cannot maintain its corporate obligations and generate a profit, it will not be able to invest in environmental protection, green technology or renewable resources (Quinn, 2010). This idea does not only apply to large corporate businesses where many shareholders need to be satisfied, but is often a vital precondition to ecotourism development. Every ecotourism enterprise must be profitable (Drumm & Moore, 2005). Although ecotourism can bring about many great benefits to both natural environments and local people, it needs to be fiscally viable and responsible.

For this research, sustainable tourism will predominantly be concentrating on the environmental, economic, and ecological factors. The ecological factors mostly relate to the use of natural resources, particularly birds and their use for tourism purposes. Meanwhile, economic sustainability in relation to sustaining profitability and maintaining visitor numbers will be equally important. In this case, birds are not a natural resource in the traditional sense where they will be harvested; rather their presence will be utilized as a tourism attraction. As a result, the strong conservation ethic that exists within sustainable tourism can be utilized in practice to ensure the conservation of this natural resource. However, a tourism planner should always take into account the needs and ideas of the local communities and try to bring about some benefits, as well as refrain from damaging the existing well-being of the local people. On the other hand, sustainable tourism development needs to ensure that proper strategies and planning are implemented to ensure the newly-developed tourism venture remains profitable and can provide viable benefits for the involved stakeholders.

2.2 The Nature-Based Tourism, Ecotourism and Wildlife Tourism Relationship

Before bird-watching tourism can be understood, it is important to identify some of the concepts and their relationships and how they might influence birding tourism planning. Nature-based tourism is considered leisure travel to natural and wilderness areas to take part in activities that are done for the sole purpose of enjoying nature (Fennell, 2008 & Honey, 2008). Meanwhile, ecotourism is travel and activities that are also usually done in natural settings, but must encompass a strong ethic for nature and biodiversity conservancy, should empower local communities and promote sustainable livelihoods and sustainable economic development

(Honey, 2008, Fennel, 2008 & TIES, 2010). Historically, a division between the concepts of

ecotourism and nature-based tourism was not made, causing the two terms to be used

incorrectly and sometimes interchangeably (Honey, 2008 & Wall, 2009). As the modern concept

of ecotourism developed in the late 1980s, the two concepts began to distance from each other

(Fennell, 2008).

Initially, ecotourism was referred to as ecological tourism, meaning any type of tourism

that had an ecological aspect tied to the tourism activity (Island and Resort, 2009). Such

changes led to the current conceptualizations of ecotourism, whereby it must convey a strong

environmental message and adhere to strong conservation ethics (Honey, 2008). The

International Ecotourism Society (2010) emphasizes that ecotourism is about uniting

conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and

participate in ecotourism activities should follow ecotourism guidelines. In order to capture and

convey this ethical message, the International Ecotourism Society has drawn up a set of

principles that are designed as guidelines for ecotourists and tourism planners alike (TIES,

2010). Based on these principles and guidelines, Ecotourism is designed to produce the

following outcomes:

- Minimize negative impact.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate (TIES, 2010).

Honey (2008) points out that although ecotourism principles are necessary and are very helpful in ecotourism development, they are sometimes hard to implement and not all can be achieved in every situation. Thus, it is important to understand that ecotourism in practice might not always be the same or achieve the same as outlined in theory.

Ecotourism belongs within the greater umbrella of nature-based tourism (Fennell, 2008 & Honey, 2008). Thus, ecotourism is usually considered a form of nature-based tourism; however not all nature-based tourism activities can be considered ecotourism (Honey, 2008). Often nature-based tourism is done in the natural environment, but does not necessarily have to incorporate certain rules or ethics, nor does it have to bring about specific positive outcomes or to benefit anyone (Honey, 2008 & Fennell, 2008). Meanwhile, if tourism activities are done in natural areas, with a concern for environmental sensitivity, and bring about benefits for local communities, then the activity is usually considered ecotourism (The Sustainable Tourism Gateway, 2010). For example, a nature-based tourist may go mountain biking, whereby the activity takes place in a natural mountain setting; however, the action of biking might damage the natural environment. Even though activity took place in nature, the mountain biker might not care about the consequences of his or her actions; thus, the activity cannot be considered ecotourism (Fennell, 2008). Thus, for this very reason, some tourism activities are sometimes only categorized as nature-based tourism and not ecotourism. Usually, there is an ethical or responsibility component that strongly differentiates nature-based and ecotourism (Fennell, 2008). Nature-based tourism is simply done in nature without any ethical considerations tied to its activities; meanwhile, ecotourism usually has a strong environmental ethic tied to it. However, Tourism Western Australia (2006) differentiates between the terms ecotourism and

nature-based tourism based on where the activity takes place and not just what activity is being undertaken. Nature-based tourism is one that is done in natural and wilderness settings and does not necessarily have to involve wildlife or animals, but could include even such things as heritage or cultural tourism (Tourism Western Australia, 2006). Meanwhile, ecotourism goes much deeper than nature-based tourism, as it has to include a conservation and education ethos. Thus, "Ecotourism is more than visiting national parks and travelling to unspoiled natural areas. The ecotourism industry has developed to cater for tourists with an interest in the environment - a desire to learn, to appreciate, to understand and to conserve. The focus is on the experience rather than the destination" (Tourism Western Australia, 2006, Section Ecotourism). This clearly contradicts nature-based tourism, which is concentrates more on location than on ethos.

The third important concept for bird-watching tourism is wildlife tourism. It is also a concept that is understood differently by various scholars. Wildlife tourism is often accepted as being part of ecotourism (Dowsley, 2009). There are two forms of wildlife tourism; consumptive wildlife tourism and non-consumptive wildlife tourism. One major point of continued conflict between ecotourism scholars is whether consumptive wildlife tourism is ecotourism. Yasuda (2010) and Dowsley (2009) argue that activities such as sport hunting should fall under ecotourism because, if the activity is implemented and managed properly, it can work within modern ecotourism guidelines. This means that properly managed sport hunting can be a useful tourism activity for wildlife management, sustainable livelihoods and preservation of indigenous culture and heritage (Dowsley, 2009). However, to other scholars the idea of killing an animal for the predominant purpose of pleasure seeking seems absurd and seems to

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contradict nature conservation (Yasuda, 2010 & Wall, 2009). As a result, some scholars and

ecotourism professionals do not accept sport hunting or sport fishing to be a legitimate

ecotourism activity (Dowsley, 2009 & Yasuda, 2010). This is well exemplified by Hitesh Mehta,

who pointed out "Hunting tourism and ecotourism are two different market segments of the

tourism pie and should not be confused with each other" (CanWest News, 2007, para 5).

Meanwhile, non-consumptive forms of wildlife tourism, such as bird-watching and wildlife

safaris, are unanimously accepted as part of ecotourism (Newsome, Dowling & Moore, 2005).

Consequently, much more emphasis is given to non-consumptive forms of wildlife tourism,

which is resulting in a decrease in participation in consumptive forms (Dowsley, 2009).

The relationship between nature-based, ecotourism, and wildlife tourism can also be

looked at as a ladder and a hierarchical relationship. All three of these concepts are tourism;

where the immediate subcategory of tourism is nature-based tourism, which encompasses

different subcategories of its own, including ecotourism (Fennell, 2008). Besides ecotourism,

nature-based tourism also comprises such tourism subsectors as camping, adventure tourism

and sailing (Fennell, 2008 & Honey, 2008). Meanwhile, ecotourism can have two distinctive

subcategories based on usage, which are consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife tourism

(Newsome, Dowling & Moore, 2005). From the non-consumptive side derives the tourism

activity of bird-watching (Newsome, Dowling & Moore, 2005). These relationships are

illustrated in a more detailed diagram two pages down as Figure 1, based on the author's

current understanding of the concepts, adopted from several notable scholars in the field.

Therefore, it is important for a birding tourism planner to know the differences between

the concepts of nature-based, ecotourism and wildlife tourism, in order to better conceptualize

planning strategies. It is also vital for a birding tourism planner to realize the different and

sometimes contradicting viewpoints of ecotourism, as a tourism planner might encounter

different people with varying views with whom he or she might need to work. A birding tourism

planner might also be impacted by conflict of development interest, such as if in a region there

is competition between bird-watchers and bird hunters. Lastly, an effective tourism planner

needs to be aware of project feasibility and be realistic about the goals and objectives of the

tourism planning process, as they fit within the realm of ecotourism (Drumm et al., 2004).

Regardless, the development of a new birding trail should try to adhere to become true

ecotourism and not just a form of nature-based tourism.
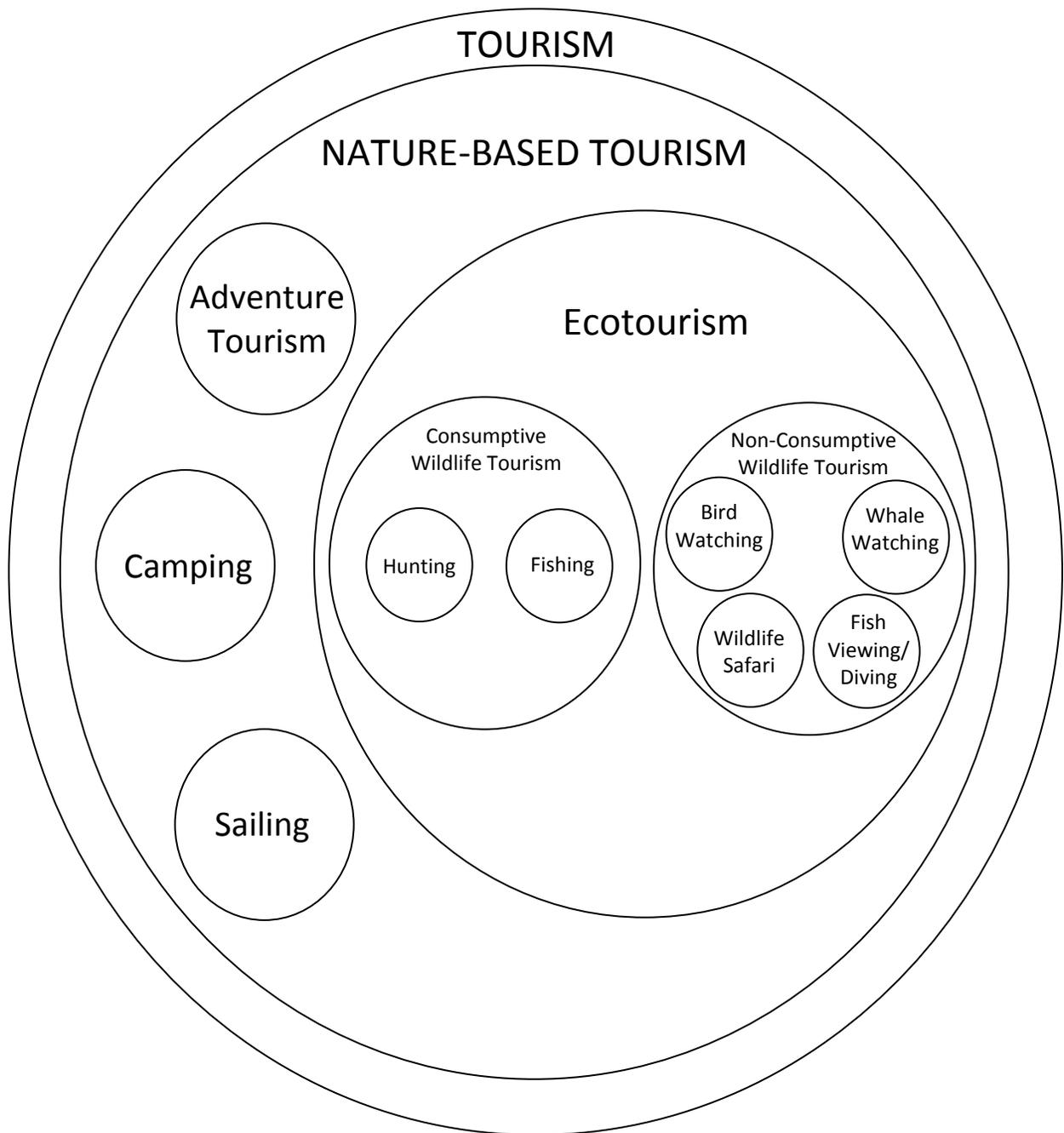
Figure 1: Tourism Relationships: Nature-Based Tourism vs. Ecotourism
Source: adopted from Fennell, 2008, Honey, 2008 & Newsome, Dowling & Moore, 2005, Dowsley, 2009

2.3 Current Ecotourism Trends

Ecotourism is growing and gaining popularity globally. According to some of the most optimistic data figures, globally, ecotourism is growing at an annual rate of 10-15% due to its international appeal, educational opportunities, and social appeal to advocate a conservation message (Lowman 2009). However, this estimate may not be supported by actual year-to-year changes in global ecotourist numbers (TIES, 2010), or national parks visitation numbers, especially in the United States (National Park Service, 2007). Ecotourism is estimated to currently hold 10-15% of the global tourism market; thus, if it were increasing by 10 to 15% annually, this overall figure would be much larger by now (TIES, 2010). Moreover, ecotourism is often linked with national parks visitation. In United States, the overall year-to-year per capita number of visitors has steadily dropped in the U.S. since 1987 (Walls, 2009). According to the National Park Service (2007) comparison reports of 2005 and 2006 park visitation data, there were 272.6 million recreational park visits in 2006, which is 0.9 million fewer visitors than in 2005, yielding an overall annual decrease of 0.3% (National Trails Training Partnership). Tom Wade of the National Park Services' Public Use Statistics Office (2007) points out that such year-to-year decreases are not new, as they have been occurring for over a decade (National Trails Training Partnership, 2007). The National Park Service (2007) would like to improve park visitation numbers. This point is well summarized by Derrick Crandall (2007, para 3) of the American Recreation Coalition as he states, "The issue is not numbers of visitors -- it is that the national park system has the potential to provide more Americans with more benefits and more memories while still being protected for future enjoyment." This clearly illustrates that ecotourism participation is not performing at its optimum, especially in relation to national park

participation, thus dismissing the concept that ecotourism is growing as much as 10-15% annually.

Nevertheless, ecotourism promotes an environmental ethic and appeals to people who enjoy nature and the natural world and have an invested interest in conserving it (Honey, 2008). Although ecotourism is often advertised as a so-called "newer" or "cooler" form of tourism, it is not new and has existed for nearly a century (Eagles, 2009b). Moreover, most ecotourists, especially the most committed ones, choose this segment of tourism because it resonates to them on a personal level and provides them with a personal level of satisfaction (Eagles, 2009b). Most birders are also involved in birding for the same personal reasons (Eagles, 2009b).

2.3.1 Certification and Accreditation

Since a birding trail could potentially serve as a form of ecotourism certification for a given region, it is important to explore ecotourism certification to date and to examine how possible certification programs could be incorporated into a birding trail. Since, certification seems to be working well in Costa Rica and is contributing to their ecotourism development; it is perceived that implementing a form of certification is an excellent idea that can be adopted by a bird-watching tourism planner. The issue of global standardization and certification for ecotourism is not a new debate, however formulating a consensus continues to present a challenge. Costa Rica has a national ecotourism certification program, the Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST, 2003). This is a nationwide evaluation tool that categorizes tourism operators into five (5) categories based on how they are perceived as working towards

sustainability. This is similar to a "star" system, which is associated with traditional hotels. Thus, the higher the category rating, the more the ecotourism destination is perceived as being sustainable (CST, 2003 & Eagles 2009a). Moreover, to achieve certain ratings an ecotourism destination must demonstrate certain criteria to the ranking body, which is the Costa Rican National Accreditation Commission (CST, 2003). However, it is important to recognize that there is no legal structure that would force ecotourism operators to attain certain levels of certification. Rather, the process of evaluation is done by the government and if an ecotourism destination chooses to only attain the lowest level of certification, they are not forced to improve (Honey, 2008). Nevertheless, most ecotourism destinations strive to improve on a constant basis as they face stiff competition in a market. Thus, if they do not strive to be better, they will likely soon go out of business (CST, 2003). However, Honey (2002) also describes that it is not always very difficult for ecotourism destinations to improve their ratings within the Costa Rican system, as the evaluating criteria mostly focuses on good intentions and well outlined plans for improvement, waste reduction and conservation. Thus, the evaluation tool is not very output oriented nor does it measure year-to-year improvement or changes (Honey, 2002). Even though the Costa Rican certification system has some flaws, it is still on the forefront of ecotourism certification. The Costa Rican system could be upgraded in some ways, but even the current accreditation system assists the country in being a leading global destination for ecotourism.

Some scholars see the lack of a standardized and global certification system as a major hurdle in assimilating what ecotourism should be in theory to what it really is in practice. Some researchers such as Kamuaro (1996) suggest that not having a global certification system can

benefit some ecotourism operators. Furthermore, Kamuaro (1996) suggests that this lack of

certification heavily aids ecotourism operators when it comes to marketing their destinations or

establishments. A primary reason ecotourism destinations are able to market themselves in

dishonest ways is because there is no single international organization or laws that oversee

ecotourism business practices (Kamuaro, 1996). Thus, if an ecotourism destination deems itself

as sustainable and working within ecotourism guidelines, there is no real way for a likely

ecotourist to really know whether the claims of an ecotourism operator are true. Certainly,

ecotourism destinations can become members of some certification body or affiliate

themselves with organizations that promote sustainable tourism, such as The International

Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2010). However, the reason for such membership must also be

examined, since it is not always done to gain knowledge or to work closer with ecotourism

principles. Rather, it is done as a marketing strategy, as being a member or an affiliate of such

organizations gives an ecotourism destination more credibility on the international market

(Drumm & Moore, 2005). Thus, if a potential ecotourist decides to choose an ecolodge

somewhere, perhaps in the Amazon, he or she is more likely to choose one that advertises as a

member of the International Ecotourism Society, rather than one which is not a member of any

accreditation group. Moreover, it is also essential to understand that very few ecotourism

certification bodies have enforcement powers, either because they might not be able to

enforce laws within certain countries or because the simple task of monitoring all members is

impossible (Kamuaro, 1996). Certainly, many ecotourism operators are aware of the limitations

of the organizations they are members of and if need be they know how to take advantage of

them to best suit their operational goals (Kamuaro, 1996). Due to such restraints and the clear

importance of ecotourism certification, some notable international organizing bodies have

begun to advocate for ecotourism certification, which include the UNEP (United Nations

Environment Programme) and The Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development.

The Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development has been most forthcoming

regarding the creation of an international system for ecotourism certification and accreditation.

In 2007 the organization published a manual called the Practical Steps for Marketing Tourism

Certification in which they outlined a very strong case for the necessity of international

certification. The manual outlined five major reasons that tourism businesses, particularly

ecotourism ventures should enter into a certification program, which are:

1.) Improve quality and performance of businesses and staff.
2.) "Do the right thing" to protect the environment and local communities.
3.) Cost cutting.
4.) Gain marketing advantage.
5.) Avoid being lumped with "greenwashed" businesses that are not sustainable, yet try to claim to be (The Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, 2007).

The UNEP also shares its viewpoint with The Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable

Development and is advocating for an international ecotourism certification program.

According to the UNEP (2005) certification can be achieved by a three step program that must

pay close attention to the following subcategories identified in each step:

1.) Analysis
   a.) Market
   b.) Resources
   c.) Competitors
   d.) Environment

2.) Strategy
   a.) Segmenting
   b.) Targeting
   c.) Positioning

3.) Marketing Mix
   a.) Product
   b.) Price
   c.) Promotion

Therefore, some certification for ecotourism exists and certain countries such as Costa Rica are

far ahead of others. Moreover, it is also very evident that there are international efforts to try

to implement a universal ecotourism certification program (UNEP, 2005). However, it is also evident that an overall international certification or monitoring body still does not exist, however it is under development (Eagles, 2009b). Bird-watching will certainly be a part of this continued ecotourism growth, thus as ecotourism certification evolves it should definitely be applied to bird-watching tourism. A birding trail in itself can be a form of accreditation for a region, especially if planned and implemented carefully. If adequate criteria are allocated so that only the best sites, accommodations, food, transportation and services are included into a birding trail product club, then the high standards demanded by the club would serve as a means of certification (Eagles, 2010c).

2.3.2 Conclusion to Ecotourism

The purpose of the aforementioned sections was to demonstrate the importance of understanding the concept of ecotourism and demonstrating how it should work in practice. This is very important for this thesis, as if these trends in ecotourism and potential challenges are not understood; planning a regional birding trail will be much more difficult. Birding tourism is a part of ecotourism and discussion of current trends cannot be ignored in a thesis that is dedicated to trying to develop guiding principles for birding trail planning.

2.4 Bird-watching Tourism

Bird-watching is the activity of viewing or watching birds either through the naked eye or by view-enhancing devices, such as binoculars and telescopes, for the purpose of recreation (American Birding Association, 2010). The activity is often challenging, as it involves searching

for elusive, rare and endemic species, but the rewards of finding such creatures is also very satisfying (Birding in British Columbia, 2009). As a result, bird-watching often associated with photography, as many birdwatchers employ high resolution cameras and video equipment to capture rare birds and moments in the field (Birding in BC, 2009). However, bird-watching is not only something people can be involved in as a solely recreational activity; rather bird-watching can also be studied as both a tourism subcategory and implemented as a business.

2.4.1 Size and Scope of the Activity

According to Blondel (2004) birdwatchers and birders are thought to comprise the largest group of wildlife viewing tourism in the world. If this is true, then bird-watching is the dominant activity in ecotourism, especially as society continues to shift away from consumptive to non-consumptive forms of wildlife tourism (Blondel, 2004). Although this could be the case, the evidence presented by Blondel is rather anecdotal and relies on secondary sources and some case study example. Thus, a critical view must be adopted when looking at Blondel's findings. Nevertheless, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2001) surveyed 15,300 people where they estimate that there were 46 million birders in the U.S., which represents about 1 in 5 Americans. This study also found that American birders spent $32 billion in retail sales, which accounted for $85 billion in overall economic output, contributed $13 billion in federal and state income taxes and created 863, 406 jobs (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2001). Moreover, "nationwide the net economic value of each non-resident birder is estimated to be $488" (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2001, p. 16). This amount per birder is significant and can undoubtedly change a region's economy.

These ideas are also well supported by an older study conducted by Scott and Callahan (no date) by the figures provided below for the United States (Figure 2).
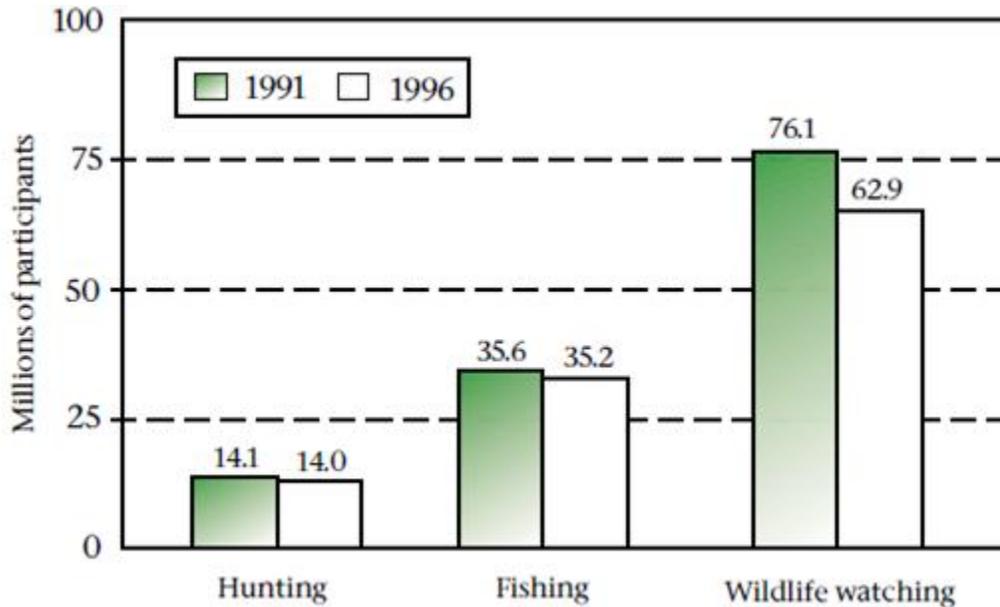
Figure 2.-Changes in Outdoor Recreation Participation: 1991-1996.
Source: (Scott & Callahan (no date) as in 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation).

Figure 2 illustrates that wildlife viewing is much more popular than hunting and fishing and also illustrates that the two consumptive forms of wildlife tourism are dropping over time, whereas wildlife viewing is increasing (Scott & Callahan, No date). This change in trends and the growth in popularity of non-consumptive forms of wildlife tourism can be further illustrated in Figure 3 on the following page.
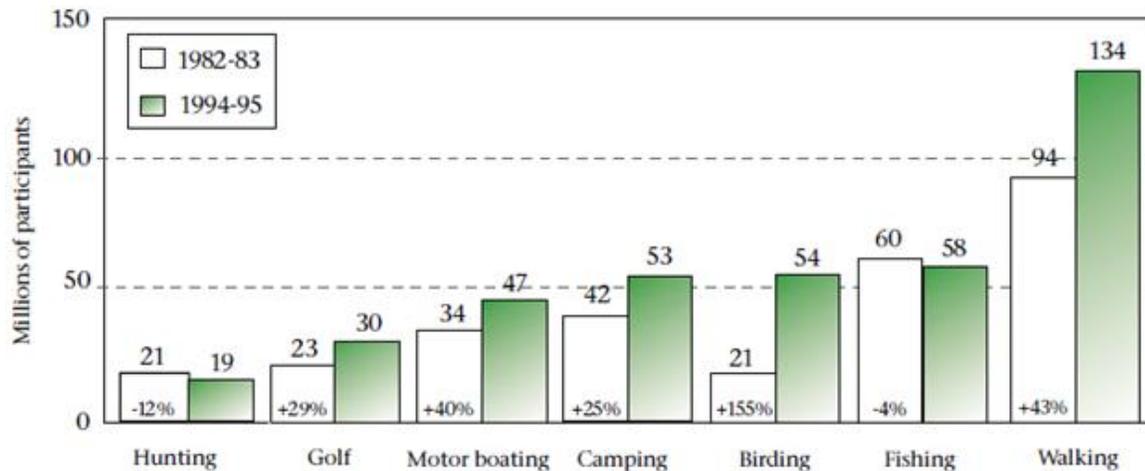
Figure 3.-Changes in Participation in Selected Outdoor Recreation Activities: 1982-1994.
Source: (Scott & Callahan (no date) as in 1994-95 National Survey of Recreation and Environment)

Figure 3 illustrates that non-consumptive forms of wildlife tourism are growing, with birding having the highest growth rate of 155%, making it the fastest growing wildlife related tourism activity in the USA (Scott & Callahan, no date). It is probable that similar trends occur for Canada. These figures and trends illustrate the growing popularity of birding in the 1980's and 1990's. As Western Society's perceptions and values of wildlife are continuing to change and shift towards non-consumption (Manfredo, Teel & Bright, 2003), birding should continue to gain popularity. Fishing and hunting are dropping in popularity in the United States with every passing year (Manfredo, Teel & Bright, 2003). As a result, Blondel's (2004) declaration that birding is and will remain the most popular wildlife tourism activity and a significant part of ecotourism development might be an accurate.

Birding is not only a significant tourism subsector in the U.S. nationally, but can also have great impacts on specific states. Even states, such as Alaska, that are further away from the rest of the U.S., are colder and are not usually the first to be associated with birding, have

significant economic contributions from birding tourism. According to Bruce Woods of the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service (2003) there are 157,290 birders who visited Alaska each year and "the

estimated economic value of nonresident birders to the state economy is a staggering

$76,757,520" (para 4). These figures were calculated based on the 2001 national survey of

birders in the U.S. that was conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Moreover,

vacationing bird-watchers pay upwards of $3,500 per person for a birding adventure in Alaska

(Woods, 2003). Bruce Woods best sums up the economic significance of birding tourism in

Alaska, by stating that "bird tourism brings in big bucks" (Woods, 2003, para 10). Clearly birding

tourism is very significant in Alaska as it contributes income to the economy of the state.

Since birding is a growing tourism activity, the economic and regional development

benefits that bird-watching can bring to an area through such enterprises as birding festivals

and birding trails can alter the economy of a given region (Colby & Smith-Incer, 2005).

Struggling communities or regions are sometimes able to put themselves on the tourism map

by adopting bird-watching tourism (Chambliss, Slotkin & Vamosi, 2005). Clearly bird-watching

has great regional economic benefits, thus perhaps it should be elevated and emphasized

nationally. Most countries have a national tourism plan with annual goals and objectives, which

usually include promoting a nation's best tourism resources (Canadian Tourism Commission,

2010). In Canada some of these notable sites, which hold national tourism significance are

Niagara Falls, Banff and Jasper National Parks, and the Rocky Mountains, amongst others (CTC,

2010). However, places like Point Pelee National Park, do not seem to play a vital role in

Canada's national tourism plan, even though Point Pelee is one of the premier bird-watching

places in North America (CTC, 2010). In the entire state of Alaska there are 493 bird species

present (Gibson et al, 2012), whereas Point Pelee National Park alone has recorded 400 species of birds in a relatively small area. The economic contribution of birding to the state of Alaska is huge, yet similar dollar figures are not evident for Point Pelee. Thus, clearly bird-watching as a tourism activity is not taken very seriously in Canada and by the CTC and is not readily promoted to foreign and domestic tourists alike, and this certainly needs to change.

Birding is also growing and gaining popularity in other parts of the world, such as Australia. According to a 2001 study conducted on behalf of the Co-operative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism Australia, there are committed birders within Australia and it is also evident that foreign birders are also coming to the nation in search of rare and endemic species (Jones & Buckley, 2001). However, the economic significance of bird-watching tourism in Australia is not really known as it has not previously been measured. Future studies are recommended and will be conducted by the CRCT Australia (Jones & Buckley, 2001). Foreign birders are known to frequent small offshore Australian islands in search of very rare species (Connell, 2009). Often times these small islands are uninhabited and have never been exposed to any type of tourism. These small islands present a new tourism opportunity for Australian tourism officials and operators, but also present challenges for sustainability and conservation (Connell, 2009). Thus, in Australia, much like in Canada, birding tourism development has not received as much attention and government support as in the United States, yet there are great opportunities and potential for this tourism segment to grow and contribute to the tourism industry.

Researchers have studied the activity of bird-watching for several decades and there are some generally accepted facts regarding bird-watching tourism, such as bird-watching being utilized for bird conservation. Sometimes general wildlife tourism knowledge can be applied to bird-watching tourism, especially for conservation efforts. This concept of using bird-watching to raise awareness about conservation has been documented in academic research (Wilcox, 1995). Revenues that are generated from birdwatchers are allocated for conservation efforts because of predominantly two reasons; first birdwatchers are really passionate about their birds and will spend money if they know it is going to a good conservation cause, and second is because of the overall economic value of bird-watching, as birders are often the only ones that can provide such funding for conservation (Kerlinger, 1992). Since many countries in the world do not have a vast number of large and unique mammals, yet possess a vast array of bird species, birds are adopted as keystone species (Verissimo et al., 2009). Birds are found in almost every corner of the world and in many different habitats. Moreover, many bird species are migratory species and although might be adaptable creatures, most still require specialized habitats that suit their needs. Consequently, individual bird species can be indicator species in almost every country as to the health of an ecosystem, the impact of pollution, the success of habitat and marshland rehabilitation and even global warming (Verissimo et al., 2009). Not only does bird-watching promote and support biodiversity conservation and the protection of species, but it can also be a useful tool in rehabilitating previously environmentally damaged areas. Schaffner (2009) describes how bird-watching and the presence of birdwatchers can turn dump sites, landfills, sewage ponds and wastewater treatment facilities back into viable bird

habitats. Sometimes, the birds are attracted to such places because they are isolated from people or because they provide ample food sources (Burger, 2004). As a result, there is added pressure to transform such sites into environmentally sound areas that are going to be even more suitable for the birds. In some cases birdwatchers are even allowed access to previously restricted areas so that they can watch the birds (Burger, 2004). Consequently, there is often a realization that rehabilitating and turning such environmentally degraded or urban sites into pleasant bird habitat will attract tourists and as a result could generate an economic benefit (Boyer & Polasky, 2004). The only risk that needs to be carefully considered by tourism planners and environmentalists is to make sure that these previously polluted sites are well restored and all toxins are cleaned up as they can pose a risk not only to the birds but also the birders (Burger, 1998). Thus, bird-watching cannot only preserve and conserve habitats but also help rehabilitate them; in such a way that not only benefits the birds (breeding, nesting etc.), but satisfies the birdwatchers as well, and the operators of such neglected lands can seek an economic reward.

Bird-watching is also a way of educating the public about wildlife conservation, biodiversity and cross-culturalism. Some researchers such as McKay (2007) believe that not only can bird-watching serve as a primary education tool to raise awareness regarding wildlife, but that it can actually go much deeper and create an overall cultural change. McKay (2007) argues that birds are declining globally as a result of human attitude towards nature, which is historically and predominantly concerned with exploiting nature for human benefit. As a result, McKay (2007) argues that if people try bird-watching and birding they might change culturally and understand and appreciate nature, rather than set out to destroy it. This is certainly a great

step towards changing people's perspectives and one that would certainly benefit bird

conservation. In fact, the idea has been adopted by schools in Uganda, as children are taught

the value of birds and nature through the practice of bird-watching (Nantongo, Nalwanga &

Alinaitwe, 2007). Foreign tourists are encouraged to come and visit this lesser-known nation in

Africa and bird-watching is seen as a key element (Nantongo, Nalwanga & Alinaitwe, 2007).

Moreover, bird-watching is often regarded as a peaceful activity and one that is at harmony

with nature. Such peaceful activities and efforts are encouraged in Uganda in order to

overcome tribal disputes (Nantongo, Nalwanga & Alinaitwe, 2007). This idea of bird-watching

encouraging peace and co-operation has not only appeared in Uganda, but also with the

ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. U.S. servicemen who are bird-watching enthusiasts

accidentally discovered one of the rarest birds on Earth, the Large-billed Reed Warbler, which

has apparently found refuge in Afghanistan's north-eastern Badakhshan Province (Fisher,

2010). This is a species of bird that was last seen in the wild in 2006 and was thought by some

as being extinct. However, the discovery of a breeding ground in Badakhshan Province has

prompted quick and strong co-operation between U.S., foreign and local Afghani scientist to

ensure the conservation of this rare species (Fisher, 2010). Moreover, committed birdwatchers

from the U.S. military continue to monitor and assist scientists with their efforts (Fisher, 2010).

This all illustrates the humbling impact that bird-watching could have even in war torn country

and perhaps the least likely bird-watching destination on Earth. However, due to a unique and

common birding culture, birdwatchers seem to have a strong cross-cultural bond that can break

down cultural and religious differences and encourage co-operation.

The economic value of birding is not a new phenomenon, as many birds have unique

features, are highly colourful or display spectacular courting rituals and behaviors, and can often be a great tourism attraction. Thus, it is also strongly evident that birds are a great tourism attraction and that this segment of ecotourism is growing, which means that there is also great economic potential that can be gained from implementing bird-watching tourism. Bird-watching certainly contributes a great deal of income in certain areas. An example is Point Peele in Ontario where bird-watching contributes over $8 million in annual revenues (Butler & Hvenegaard, 1994). Butler and Hvenegaard (1994) identified that bird-watching tourism is severely underestimated, even by local businesses near Point Peele National Park. Although, Canadian $3,200,000 was spent locally, the study found that most local businesses were underestimating the economic contribution made by this park-based tourism and that if there was much better planning for tourism quality and quantity, this number could triple (Butler & Hvenegaard, 1994). Not only do some researchers and businessmen realize the potential economic values of bird and bird-watching tourism, but some such as Sekercioglu (2003) argues that the only viable and effective way birds can be conserved is by connecting them to a direct economic value. Meaning, that birds need to be commodified in order for people to shy away from non-environmentally friendly practices, such as deforestation and adopt bird-watching tourism (Sekercioglu, 2003). Thus, much more knowledge is needed in finding out the motivations of potential bird-watching tourists and implementing formal bird-watching programs (Drumm & Moore, 2005). By gaining such information, specialized programs can be implemented, which would attract birdwatchers to certain locations and the revenues gained from such enterprises could be infused into wildlife conservation. Lastly, as birds are found almost everywhere globally, bird-watching programs can be implemented in many places and

as a result more and more wildlife could be conserved.

2.4.3 Recreational Specialization

Recreational specialization has been applied to numerous recreational activities, especially those performed outdoors (Godbey & Scott, 1994). Bryan (1977) first applied the concept to trout fishing. Bryan (1977) proposed that within any given recreational activity there are different levels of involvement, commitment, participation and specialization. Thus, recreational specialization refers to a person's skills, knowledge, equipment, commitment level, attitudes towards management practices, ethics and where they choose to participate in a given recreational activity (Bryan, 1977). Therefore, there are those individuals who are highly committed and specialized in a recreational activity and those who might be novices or more generalized in their approach (Bryan, 1977).

Since, bird-watching is often comprised of all of these aforementioned characteristics; the concept of recreational specialization can be applied to the activity. Butler and Fenton (1988) applied the concept of recreational specialization to bird-watching with their early studies of Point Pelee in the late 1980's. They concluded that there were several distinct commitment levels amongst birdwatchers that influenced their behavior patterns, site selection and equipment choices. The most committed group of birders spent a lot of time and money pursuing birds; they also had the best equipment and most skills and knowledge in identifying birds (Butler & Fenton, 1988). Meanwhile, novices were less committed and not only spent fewer hours watching birds, but also did not invest as much money into equipment (Butler & Fenton, 1988). Since these early studies, consequent studies have reaffirmed the application of

recreational specialization to study bird-watching. Studying birding and birders through a recreational specialization approach becomes most interesting at its highest commitment level, as perhaps few recreational activities have such high level of attachment and determination. Cocker (2001) describes birders in a unique way, as he refers to them as a tribe. A tribe that is not linked by a common or historical bloodline or heritage, or ancestry, rather one that is linked by fanaticism for birds and bird-watching (Cocker, 2001). Cocker (2001) describes that regardless of where a birder is from or what his or her life circumstances, once they get highly committed to birding; they become members of the same tribe. Consequently, birders are defined by their experiences and what they do and what they sometimes need to sacrifice to continue to bird. Thus, "birding is the way the human heart can be shaped by the image of a bird" (Cocker, 2001, pg. 4). Clearly, birding at its highest recreational specialization level is a serious thing to many enthusiasts and one that if forced to give up would not be taken lightly.

Recreational specialization can be applied to bird-watching in general and to specific birding activities or events, such as birding festivals (Burr & Scott, 2004). Even at birding festivals, there will be different levels of recreational specialization, based on commitment, knowledge and involvement. Burr and Scott (2004) identified that attending birding festivals has become a recreational activity. Some attend many birding festivals regularly and some are novices, just like in general bird-watching. However, Burr and Scott (2004) also identified that not all festival attendants, even those who were highly committed to birding festivals were highly committed birdwatchers and vice versa. This clearly indicated that recreational specialization can be applied to many different recreational activities and even within activities

such as bird-watching it can vary when considering sub-categories of activities as such in the case of bird-watching with birding festivals and birding trails.

Recreational specialization of birders has recently been applied to aid park managers in delivering specialized birding programs (Maple, Eagles & Rolfe, 2010). Their study identified 3 different specialization levels of birders at Point Pelee National park; beginner, intermediate and advance birders. Intermediate and advanced birders had similar birding needs, whereas beginner birders showed very different needs (Maple, Eagles, Rolfe, 2010). Since, beginner birders stayed fewer nights, had less expenditures, spent more time outside the park and were involved in a number of other activities, aside from birding, it was suggested that specialized programs be created for them (Maple, Eagles, Rolfe, 2010). This study illustrates that recreational specialization can be used for park management of birding.

2.4.4 Characteristics of the Birder

The characteristics of the birder also play an important role in trip selection criteria and preferences, which have a direct impact on trip satisfaction. Scott and Thigpen (2003) outlined four levels of birdwatchers: 1) casual birders, 2) interested birders, 3) active birders and 4) skilled birders. Expert birders were much more inclined to pursue birding individually and focused most of their trip time birding. Meanwhile, beginner birders were more likely to be involved in other activities aside from birding and had less specialized needs. Beginner birders were likely to spend less time in the field and require more activities and programs that are not directly tied to bird-watching. Another difference in motivation is the willingness of expert

birdwatchers to travel further and spend more money than novice birders (Scott &Thigpen,

2003).

Another consideration for potential birding tourism planners is whether birders are

individuals or families with young children. Research conducted by Kwan, Eagles and Gebhardt

(2008) on ecolodges in Belize, illustrated that 30% of ecolodge patrons were families with

children. Since birding is a form of ecotourism, there might be similar trends, thus birding

tourism planners should incorporate programs into their products that accommodate families.

2.4.5 Conclusion to Bird-watching

Bird-watching can have many positive benefits, such as bird conservation, wildlife

rehabilitation and a way of generating income, and also serve as a recreational activity and a

hobby, with committed and enthusiastic followers. Since most regions have some sort of avian

wildlife, birding tourism can provide many regions added economic benefits that ecotourism

planners can utilize.

2.5 Birding Trails

A bird-watching trail can illustrate how all the themes and segments of bird-watching

can come together. A bird-watching trail is a collection of chosen sites along a pre-described

route, designed to maximize the amount and variety of birds a birder can see, thus reducing

time and enhancing satisfaction (Stewart, 2006). Usually the sites along a bird-watching trail are

chosen by the planners to contribute something unique to the trail, such as the presence of an

endemic or rare species. Moreover, the birding trails typically provide a route map that includes

built facilities and visitor centers for the birdwatchers (Stewart, 2006). However, it is vital to explain that "a birding trail should not be conceptualized as a literal or physical hiking trail, such as the Bruce Trail; rather it is more like the wine routes and culinary trails that have sprung up throughout Ontario" (Carolinian Canada Coalition, Earth Tramper Consulting Inc. & Pier 8 Group, 2011, p. 4).

It is important to point out that birding trails are almost all are found in the U.S., with the exception of one functional birding trail is in Costa Rica (ABA, 2010). According to the ABA (2010) there are approximately 50 birding trail in the U.S. This means that, a successful birding destination needs to have a birding trail. The Costa Rican birding trail was also developed and is managed by Americans (Costa Rican Bird Route, 2011).

Most bird-watching trails only have limited facilities shown along the birding trail and these centers are usually designed to provide comfort for the visitors (washrooms, store, etc) (North Carolina Birding Trail, 2010 & Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, 2010 & Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island, 2010). However, some of the better planned and more thorough birding trails provide several areas with comfort facilities and usually have an on-site visitor or learning centre (Glowinski, 2008). This indicates that some of the more advanced birding trails are not solely designed to serve as an easier means of finding birds, but they also serve as learning and conservation mechanisms. Thus, the best birding trails encompass much of the same ethos that is present in ecotourism (Glowinski, 2008).

According to Glowinski (2008) there are a few thoroughly though out and well-functioning birding trails in the United States. Possibly the best planned and implemented one is the North Carolina Birding Trail, as it has short term goals, and a long term planning direction

for the trail. (NCBT, 2010) This is illustrated by the mission statement of the North Carolina

Birding Trail with the overall goal "to conserve and enhance North Carolina's bird habitat by

promoting sustainable bird-watching activities, economic opportunities and conservation

education" (NCBT, 2010, homepage). The development of the North Carolina birding trail took

from October 2003 to the summer of 2009 (NCBT, 2010). The main goal of the project was to

draw physical linkages between the best bird-watching sites in the state, bird-watchers with

communities, businesses and local historical and educational attractions within North Carolina

(NCBT, 2010). The birding trail encompasses the entire state, through three main geographical

divisions; coastal plain, piedmont and mountains. This division of areas is visually illustrated

below in Figure 4. From left to right, the three areas are shown; mountain, piedmont and

coastal.

Figure 4.- Regions of the North Carolina Birding Trail.
Source: (North Carolina Birding Trail, 2010).

The design, planning and implementation of this birding trail is co-managed by six

agencies and organizations, including the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, North

Carolina State Parks, Audubon North Carolina, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North Carolina Sea

Grant and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension (NCBT, 2010). There was a great deal of

planning and cooperation between agencies in forming the North Carolina Birding Trail. It is

also evident that the trail has had input from many different sources and certainly incorporates different viewpoints as federal, state, non-governmental and conservation agencies are all involved. The North Carolina birding trail seems to be success story and an exemplary demonstration of what a bird-watching trail should look like (Glowinski, 2008). However, it is not clear if the trail has been successful in attracting bird watchers to the area. No useful data or evaluation studies are available.

A potential flaw in the North Carolina Birding Trail is its large size, as it encompasses the entire state and hundreds of birding sites. For example, the coastal zone has 102 sites, piedmont has 103 sites, and the mountain zone has 105 sites (NCBT, 2010). No doubt that the three distinct zones have different species and habitats that needs to be differentiated. However, when there are over 100 sites in each zone, an area that is predominantly dominated by a single type of habitat, the question must be raised as to why so many sites in one zone? The answer probably lies with the cooperation involved with the trail. Often times when such large birding trails are planned most communities and businesses want to be included (Eagles, 2010c). In order to satisfy most of the stakeholders and agencies involved many sites are chosen to be represented (Eagles, 2010c). This approach to site selection can sometimes be a positive attribute, as more agencies and stakeholders mean more potential resources and multiple viewpoints (Eagles, 2010c). Moreover, this large scale system seems to be the approach used by most current birding trail planners and seems to demonstrate some success (North Carolina Birding Trail, 2010 & Great Florida Birding Trail, 2010). Perhaps going big seems to have a stronger marketing pull and easier acquisition of necessary finances in building the trail. However, on the down side, too many sites may cause overrepresentation and repetition.

For example, if a site in a zone is known to provide the best opportunity to see a certain species, there is no sense in including several other sites in the birding trail that provides the same outcomes in the same area (Eagles, 2010c). As a result, planners of birding trails have a choice between two distinct approaches. One option is to include all possible sites into a birding trail of a given area, which the North Carolina Birding Trail seems to illustrate (Eagles, 2010c). The second approach would be the selection of a finite number of excellent sites, with little to no overlap (Eagles, 2010c). Thus, some might identify this discrepancy in planning approaches as quality versus quantity. Nevertheless, this planning dilemma does not have a simple and easy answer as circumstances for the development of each birding trail might be different. Therefore, an effective tourism plan has to consider methods to decide whether any birding trail utilizes the quantity approach or the quality approach.

Since, the North Carolina birding trail is relatively new, no study has yet been conducted regarding the economic impact and benefits of the trail. Nevertheless, the trail seems to enjoy economic success as the birding trail has boosted both the number of birdwatchers and revenues from bird-watching within the state. According to Cruze`s (2006) interview with key stakeholders and developers of the trail, there has been much positive trail feedback. Simon Thompson, the owner of Ventures Birding Tours reflected on the success of the birding trail as he described "I don`t think people realize how good it is and what contribution it has had, especially for rural communities with no other economic income" (Cruze, 2006, p. 13). This is the exact reason rural counties in North Carolina insisted in being part of the statewide birding trail, for example Washington County`s Mayor Brain Roth explained "As one of the most financially stressed counties in the state, we knew we did not have a lot of money to invest in

the infrastructure that would attract industry and knew the nearby Roanoke River was popular

with birders thus we needed to promote it" (Cruze, 2006, p. 13). This clearly illustrates some of

the positive impact and attitudes local communities have towards the North Carolina Birding

Trail, even part way through its development in 2006. According to the U.S Fish and Wildlife

Service (2006) there were 2.6 million wildlife viewers in North Carolina of whom, 1.6 million

observed birds (NCBT, 2010). This massive amount of people accounted for $916 million in

expenditures within the state (U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, 2006 as mentioned by NCBT, 2010).

These are great figures that show a very positive outlook for wildlife viewing tourism in North

Carolina, however it is vital to note that these expenditures are a state wide figure and do not

necessarily illustrate the actual income generated by the North Carolina Birding Trail. Thus the

question must still be raised as to whether the birding trail had a positive contribution to the

U.S. Fish and Wildlife figures.

It is not just in areas that already have established bird-watching tourism activities that

a birding trail can be a useful tool in boosting a region's economy (Sherer, 2010 & Cruze, 2006).

A birding trail can be a very useful and practical method of placing isolated, rural or

economically declining places on a tourism map (Sherer, 2010). Moreover, places that have

been hard hit by the economic downturn of recent year are looking for new opportunities and

ideas to restart their economies and are looking for alternatives; such as a birding trail (Sherer,

2010). As a response to such a need, the North Alabama Birding Trail was established in 2005,

which incorporated many rural areas of Alabama (Sherer, 2010). Alison Stanfield who is the

assistant director for Florence-Lauderdale Tourism describes that "We have a tremendous

amount of people coming by or contacting our office for information on the birding trail, and

interest in the trail remains very high" (Sherer, 2010, para. 3). In contrast to the North Carolina

birding trail, the North Alabama trail only has 12 sites, which are spread across from the

Georgia to Mississippi state lines (Sherer, 2010). Moreover, the 12 sites were chosen by one

individual, Keith Hudson a wildlife biologist for the Alabama State Department of Conservation

and Natural Resources (Sherer, 2010). The case of the North Alabama birding trail illustrates

that a birding trail can be restricted to a few carefully chosen sites.

One problem birding trails often encounter, especially smaller ones with more limited

resources, is the issue of keeping visitation records of who and how many birders come and

participate on the trail. It is a challenge to measure the number of visitors on a trail, since there

is no need to pass though any formalized check-in or check-out process. Hudson points out this

issue regarding the North Alabama birding trail through the following statement:

> Bird-watchers are not like golfers where they sign a register at the course,
> fishermen or hunters who buy licenses or leave any other type of paper trail that
> we can use to track their movements. We do know from the amount of traffic
> that we see at the birding trail sites and from speaking to tourism bureaus across
> north Alabama that the trail does attract a large number of visitors to our state
> (Sherer, 2010, para. 6).

It is clear that a birding trail is a viable, sensible and practical tourism strategy to attract

birdwatchers and place them in contact with local communities and businesses. However, it is

also evident that there are different approaches used in designing a birding trail. Moreover, it is

also quite evident that birding trails are still in their infancy in comparison to more traditional

or mature tourism sectors, and thus present certain challenges for tourism planners.

<u>**2.6 Product Club**</u>

Perhaps a viable and practical approach to planning and managing a birding trail would be to implement it as a tourism product club. A product club is a concept that has been utilized in tourism, however it has never been applied to a birding trail.

Essentially, a product club is made up of key stakeholders whose participation and contributions are essential to the success of a given tourism product (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2010). Product clubs are a consortium of stakeholders whose primary objective is to ensure smooth operations and customer satisfaction (Product Club of Riviera Di Levante, 2010). Thus, it serves as an organizing body that brings together many segments and entities in a given area to work together and complement one another to achieve a unified goal (CTC, 2010). This means the bringing together and combination of tourism boards and officials, government agencies and personnel, small and local businesses, hotels and restaurant, transportation companies, advisory boards and any other entity that might be perceived as necessary to achieving a tourism goal (CTC, 2010). In the case of developing a bird-watching trail as a product club, some of the key stakeholders that must be included in the club would be federal, provincial and municipal representatives, regional and provincial tourism boards, national and provincial parks, conservation agencies, non-governmental bodies, wildlife advocacy groups, local hotels and accommodations, restaurants and bars, transportation providers, bird experts, guides, wildlife scientists and advertisement providers, amongst others. Although, this seems like a large number of stakeholders, most participants are necessary to ensure that the product club can provide all required services and so that it can be self-reliant (Vision Link Consulting, 2002). What this means is that a product club needs to ensure all key

stakeholder requirements are met, but being careful not to accept all possible or some unnecessary stakeholders (Vision Link Consulting, 2002). For example, a bird-watching tourism product club will certainly need available local accommodations for visitors; however it does not mean that most or all available accommodations within a given area should become members of the product club. Rather, a product club is designed to only choose and maintain those members that can provide the most positive contributions (CTC, 2010). Therefore, a product club is a consortium of stakeholders that are chosen to maintain the highest level of quality possible for any given tourism product (Product Club of Riviera Di Levante, 2010). Consequently, there is usually competition by the different stakeholder groups who desire to become part of a given product club. (Vision Link Consulting, 2002). For example, if a product club decides that it needs to employ a bus company to run bus tours, there will be competition for the position amongst different bus companies. As a result, the product club must ensure that it has chosen the best and most reliable company, thus ensuring the high standards of the product club, which in the long run will ensure added customer satisfaction. Such competition was exemplified by the 2003 proposal for a British Columbia tourism product club named Exploring the Western Canadian Wilderness. When the proposal was drawn up to develop a wilderness tourism product club in the South-eastern British Columbia, The Tourism Action Society in the Kootenays (TASK), together with the Canadian Tourism Commission put out contracts to recruit necessary stakeholders to fulfill the requirements of the product club (Western Canadian Explorers Newsletter, 2003). The choosing of appropriate members was done by the two primary fundraisers and managerial bodies of the proposed product club, which were TASK and the Canadian Tourism Commission (Western Canadian Explorers

Newsletter, 2003). Those who were chosen to represent the product club were awarded

various timeframe contracts, thus another reason there might be fierce competition between

providers of the same services (Western Canadian Explorers Newsletter, 2003). However, the

British Columbia product club stressed high quality and performance by the chosen members of

the product club and if the quality of product club diminished due to any member, they would

be replaced (Western Canadian Explorers Newsletter, 2003). Therefore, the concept of a

product club is designed to push for high quality and to highlight a given geographical area's

tourism resources and to ensure that those resources are represented, marketed and sold the

best way possible (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2010). Thus, theoretically if a product club is

planned, implemented and managed properly; it should provide the following principles:

1. Formalization of collaborative actions among stakeholders in the development of the sector, topic or niche of the tourism market.
2. Establishment of commercial synergies among participants.
3. Potential increase of the market of a topic or niche.
4. Increase efficiency in the tourism operations of a specific sector of the tourism market.
5. Creation of spaces for dialogue between the public organization and private initiative. (Del Campo Gomis et al., 2010).

When using these 5 principles, a tourism activity that is operated as a product club should

clearly outperform others that are operating independently and have less cooperation and

resources.

Besides having strong guidelines and ideas as to how a product club should function in

theory, there also needs to be consideration as to how it is created and managerial style is

adopted. Different product clubs have adopted different approaches to the creation and

management. One way a product club can function is through a hierarchical approach, whereby

decisions for both the creation and management steps of the product club are decided and

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controlled by a few key stakeholders (Canadian Tourism Commission, 2010). This is usually the case when a product club is a government initiative or decisions are largely controlled by those who provide funding for the project (Drumm et al, 2004). This approach is exemplified by the Exploring the Western Canadian Wilderness product club in British Columbia where the CTC founded most of the project and as a result the CTC controlled majority of the decision making process regarding membership, creation and management of the product club (Western Canadian Explorers Newsletter, 2003).

There are advantages and disadvantages to this sort of hierarchical approach. The major advantage of this approach is efficiency in decision making, because not much delegation is done with this approach, rather the decision comes from the top and is implemented across the different levels of the product club. This approach is perceived as less time consuming and less expensive (Drumm at al., 2004). However, this top down approach is also seen as less democratic and as a result might create added conflict, especially if local businesses and stakeholders feel they are being overly controlled or told what they can or cannot do (McLaren, 2003). Moreover, some product club members might feel that a larger overlooking body might not know or be aware of the needs of the local stakeholders, and as a result the product club might fall apart (McLaren, 2003 & Drumm et al., 2004).

The second approach to product club creation and management is setting up a stakeholder consortium that involves the local people and businesses (McLaren, 2003). Creating a separate body from key stakeholders that involves the local people ensures that no single stakeholder has overall control of decision making (Honey, 2008). This would be a new organization that needs to be developed before the actual product club could be planned and

implemented. These types of product clubs are seen in numerous places, such as the Barbados

golf tourism product club, the winery tourism product club in Spain and the seaside product

club of the Riviera Di Levante in Italy.

The advantage of such a product club is that most important stakeholders have a voice

in the decision making process of the creation and management of the product club. Moreover,

the new organization set up to perform such decisions comes from the key stakeholders and

not from the outside (Honey, 2008 & Drumm et al., 2004). As a result, this approach to

management is much favored by local businesses and peoples. The disadvantage of such an

approach is that there might be too many ideas and opinions for the direction of the product

club. Too much variance in ideas and conflicts of interest would cause the planning and decision

making process to be too time consuming and expensive (Drumm et al., 2004).

Now that some background and general ideas were provided about how a product club

should operate, it is important to examine where product clubs have been utilized in tourism

and their success. One industry where a product club enjoys success is in golf tourism in

Barbados. The Golf Product Club in Barbados contains three championship golf courses and an

executive nine-hole golf course. The golf courses are partnered with 20 selected hotels and

various transportation and equipment rental companies. Both the hotels and courses needed to

meet certain criteria to qualify as members of the product club. The idea for a golf product club

came from the Barbados Tourism Authority, in order to promote Barbados as a boutique golf

destination on the global tourism market. The initiative is funded as a 50/50 split between the

government and the private sector. As tourists visit the Caribbean most often in winter months,

the summer and fall are low tourist seasons. Consequently, something needed to be done to

draw tourists to Barbados in the off months, and golf seemed to be the answer, thus the

creation of the product club (Clarke, 2004).

The golf product club in Barbados has managed to improve quality and has been able to

market much more effectively since its formulation. In fact, some surprisingly good results and

revenues have been yielded since the implementation of the product club. Michael Davern, the

general manager of Sandy Lane properties and golf (one of the chosen courses) describes the

success of the product club as the following: "September is a very, very hard month to sell

rooms in Barbados. We have sold one-and-a-half thousand bed nights purely for golf holidays. I

see no reason why every hotel on the island can't do exactly that from May to November"

(Clarke, 2004, para. 14). However, even though the successes of the golf product club are

evident, some hotels refuse to participate in the club and desire to remain loyal to what

Barbados is most known for, which is beach tourism. Nevertheless, three more golf courses will

be added to the product club, as well as several other hotels as the club continues to expand

and enjoy success (Clarke, 2004). Thus, it is clear that the concept of a product club has been

utilized with success. Moreover, this case study example also illustrates that this product club

also emphasizes quality over quantity by maintaining a small number of world class golf

courses. The Barbadian approach may be a reasonable approach for a bird-watching trail.

The concept of a product club has been utilized with success in another niche tourism

market; wine tourism in Spain. The Wine Routes of Spain was an initiative that was established

by the Spanish government in 2001 to promote existing wine tourism products and to establish

new ones within the country (Del Campo Gomis et al., 2010). The product club brings together

the best resources that each of the wine regions of Spain have to offer the international client

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the best and most unique wine tourism experience possible. Two important guidelines were followed in the creation of the Spanish winery product club. The first was to ensure all regions of Spain were represented in order to demonstrate the rich variance and character of Spanish wine (Del Campo Gomis et al., 2010). Effort was made not to over represent any particular geographical region, thus only the best examples of each could be represented. Secondly, the Spanish winery product club was not designed to have the primary purpose as a marketing tool, rather to serve as a practical tool designed to simplify day-to-day operations and promote co-operation. The winery product club made the regional wineries tourism more efficient for two primary reasons. The product club has reduced operating costs and it increased revenues due to superior coordination and quality (Del Campos Gomis et al., 2010). In fact Del Campos Gomis et al. (2010) criticizes those tourism product clubs who develop the club for the sole reason of self promotion and advertising. The reason such product clubs are criticized is because if they only promote and market themselves, but do not ensure they provide high quality that is expected from a product club, then they might create a negative image of tourism product clubs (Del Campos Gomis et al., 2010).

The enhanced experience that The Wine Routes of Spain product club created has aided winery tourism in Spain, by both increasing visitor numbers and revenues (Del Campos Gomis et al., 2010). As a result, there are now smaller regional based winery route product clubs that are starting to emerge in Spain, such as La Mancha in Castillo in 2006 (Del Campos Gomis et al., 2010).

Within a Canadian context the majority of tourism product clubs have failed. The Canadian Tourism Commission has funded over 40 proposed tourism product clubs across

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Canada, involving over 5000 businesses (Western Canadian Explorers Newsletter, 2003).

However, today only 5 viable tourism product clubs in Canada operate successfully (Eagles,

2010c).

The question must be raised as to why and how should a bird-watching trail be designed

as a product club and would it likely be successful? Based on the literature review, there are

reasons a product club could be implemented and be successful for a birding trail. A birding trail

is already bound to incorporate different entities, such as birders, local communities and

leaders, businesses and conservationists. Thus, the introduction of a quality-oriented product

club approach would serve to improve the birding trail and birding experience. Moreover, if the

planning process is done carefully to ensure the selection of only the best quality sites then

overrepresentation would be reduced to a minimum. Since, many local businesses and people,

including birders might already be involved in local tourism, their experiences, opinions and

input should be taken seriously and incorporated into the planning process. Therefore, the

planning process would involve choosing the best qualified people and organizations from the

required stakeholder groups to form an advisory committee, whose members can delegate and

work out the direction the product club, should take. This coincides with the above mentioned

second type of approach to decision making, whereby the process is done democratically to

ensure the product club has high support and can make a regional bird-watching trail both

practical and functional.

2.7 Regional Tourism Development

Most of the important concepts and principles that are essential to developing a birding trail as a potential tourism product club were identified in the previous sections. There are several different options that can be adopted for the geographical range that a birding trail can encompass (An, Zhang & Luo, 2009). The first and the largest option would be to adopt a nationwide geographical scope, such as developing a birding trail for all of Canada. However, up to this point no such national approach has been used. Since, Canada is such a large country; to include all territories into a single birding trail would likely not be feasible. Thus, the next option is to keep the birding trail to a specific province. However, most provinces within Canada are very large and developing a single trail for large provinces would also present many challenges. Consequently, a more regional approach should be adopted, whereby the birding trail is implemented as a regional tourism development project.

Regional tourism development is tied and restricted to a specific geographical area or region, which often shares similar characteristics, such as physical landscape, climate, natural resources, culture, societal beliefs and economic needs (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006). These regions vary in size depending on circumstances, such as isolation, exposure or proximity to other areas of contrasting characteristics (Dowling, 1993). Therefore, some regions are easily identifiable by tourism developers, such as isolated islands in Fiji (Kerstetter & Bricker, 2009). However, at other times, areas that are more urbanized are harder to distinguish, especially for tourism development purposes (An, Zhang & Luo, 2009). Tourism planners often employ different strategies to draw borders between regions. One of the most effective strategies utilized by tourism planners is zoning (An, Zhang & Luo, 2009). Zoning refers to tourism

developers selecting certain characteristics in a given area that can either differentiate and separate or unify a region with another (Dowling, 1993). Common tourism assets can often be a reason in grouping certain areas into a regional tourism entity (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006). An, Zhang & Luo (2009) suggest that zoning divisions should not simply be done based on differences in tourism assets, rather zoning should also be utilized to differentiate between tourism goals and objectives. For example, even if two areas have similar natural resources or heritage sites and could be formed into one regional tourism entity, the area can be divided into two regions, one to perhaps promote cultural heritage tourism and the other ecotourism (An, Zhang & Luo, 2009). Consequently, areas can be artificially zoned into different tourism regions based on tourism development needs and demands. Whether this is the right or wrong approach is hard to determine, as different tourism planners and national or regional tourism boards have different perspectives. It seems that this sort of zoning is perhaps more useful for areas that do not have as many resources, but would still like to enhance their tourism market.

It is not only essential to develop zoning areas to differentiate between different and potentially competing tourism regions, but also to zone tourism areas away from other industry or economic development (Dowling, 1993). It is important to segregate between tourism regions and agricultural lands or heavy industry, as less environmentally sound practices might have a negative image of the tourism region (Dowling, 1993). Some buffer zones should be developed that would ensure that those areas that are most promoted as tourism attractions do not border environmentally unsound industries and as a result hamper the full potential of the undertaken regional tourism venture (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006). Regardless of exactly how big a tourism region is or what specific criteria are used in determining its zoning, it is clear that

regional tourism development has become a vital tool for today's tourism planners. Nevertheless, it is important to analyze what are some of the positives and negatives of implementing tourism based on a regional development platform. Moreover, it is important to determine if a birding trail would best work as a regional tourism development.

There are numerous positive reasons why a regional tourism development framework has been adopted by many tourism boards. When tourism is not performing to its full potential and certain regions feel neglected by a country's national tourism board, regional agencies feel the need to take action (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006). Consequently, regional tourism development initiatives are often proposed and implemented that are able to stimulate the local economy (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006). Since, regional tourism developments are usually regional or a local undertaking, income generated also stays within the given area and is re-infused into the local economy (Tapper, 2006). Therefore, regional tourism development allows additional autonomy for regions to plan and implement their own tourism development (Tapper, 2006).

However, this sort of autonomous thinking can also serve as a source of conflict, especially if regional and national tourism plans do not coincide (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006). Consequently, such conflict of interest might cause non-cooperation and might cause a local region to lose federal or provincial funding for their tourism development projects (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006). Often times much deliberation and cooperation is undertaken between federal, provincial and regional tourism agencies to ensure a common understanding of goals and objectives (CTC, 2010). Even if an agreement or compromise is reached, sometimes the

process might take a significant amount of time and money, which might delay the development of a much needed tourism project (Tapper, 2006).

From the positive side of the spectrum, regional tourism development can promote the idea of 'going local', meaning that all the vendors and providers of goods and services associated with a regional tourism product are local businesses or people (Victoria, B.C. Tourism Board, 2010). Thus, if local businesses and people are only involved in a regional tourism product, then not only can this generate local employment opportunities, but it will likely revitalize a region's economy (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006). Although a great idea that can often work in boosting the local economy of a region, it is not always feasible for a regional tourism product to only be composed of local entities. These are some of the common theoretical areas of debate regarding the positives and negatives of adopting a regional tourism development framework. It is also necessary to analyze a practical example to determine if such a regional tourism development really works in practice by examining a case study.

The North Sulawesi area of Indonesia has been a popular diving site for Western tourists for many years, as the area has some 70 genera of corals and over 2500 species of tropical fish. In 1991 a regional tourism development project eventually formed the Bunaken National Marine Park. When first developed, the park was a first of its kind as it encompasses both marine and terrestrial habitats and also has approximately 30,000 people living within the park boundary. Moreover, Bunaken adopted a unique co-management approach to the park which represented much of the local people. There are representatives from each of the 30 villages within the park boundary. The park is also overlooked by 10 NGOs and 9 Indonesian government bodies, including the Tourism and Fisheries Departments. Each of these entities

has an active voice and role in regards to the management and direction the park should be headed for in the future. (Tapper, 2006 & North Sulawesi Tourism Board, 2009) Thus, local ideas and concerns are always taken into consideration. Outside expertise and resources are also utilized to ensure the park functions efficiently. Outside help does not mean that a region needs to shift their goals and objectives to meet that of the foreigners; rather even outside help can work to complement initial goals and objectives.

Although, the area was very rich in natural resources, the local people enjoyed a very poor to modest lifestyle, as there was little development taking place in the area. As the park began to operate and received an average of 135,000 divers per year, the economic situation of the local people also began to change. At a cost of $6 U.S. for a day pass and $17 U.S. for an annual park pass, the fee was not expensive for Western standards; however it triggered growth in the local economy and has improved the living standards of the local people (Tapper, 2006). This proves that a regional tourism development project can have positive impacts if implemented properly and carefully.

Based on the theoretical review of regional tourism development and after examining a practical example, it only seems to make logical sense that the development of a birding trail should be done as a regional tourism development project. An appropriate area should be selected where the preconditions for the success exist. A region that has a rich array of avian wildlife and has a need to improve its regional tourism goals should be selected. The area should have a good knowledge of the tourism subsector that can be utilized for the development of a new product.

2.8 Tourism Planning

Since, most of the background concepts and principles essential to developing a birding

trail were identified and a geographical scope was selected, it is important to analyze what an

effective tourism planner should take into account when planning a new birding trail. Planning

is the vital process of preparing a sequence of action steps to achieve specific goals or

objectives (Dudiy, 2002). Planning often introduces efficiency to a project as it is output and

goal oriented (Ontario Professional Planners Institute, 2010). Planning is designed to reduce

project time and effort, which can often lead to more efficient allocation of resources, including

funds (Ontario Professional Planners Institute, 2010). Within a tourism context, planning is the

process of drawing up, implementing and managing specific objectives to achieve an overall

goal, such as a new tourism product (Denman, 2005). To achieve a new product or improve an

existing one, a tourism planner should consider some important influential factors, especially if

a conservation ethic is to be of high relevance (Margules & Pressey, 2000). Often planning is

done in stages, whereby one stage first needs to be completed before another stage can begin

(Inskeep, 1991). Most ecotourism planning models include numerous stages, which should be

implemented in the following order:

- Identifying Landowner Type
- Evaluating and Incorporating Ecotourism Standards
- Market Analysis
- Supply and Demand Analysis
- Land Base and Ownership Type
- Ecological Impact Assessment
- Economic Impact Assessment
- Social and Cultural Assessment
- Community Involvement
- Facility Design
- Program Planning

- Destination Standards
- Finance
- Staffing
- Evaluation
- Transportation
- Communication
- Government Regulations
- Public Relations (Inskeep, 1991 & Drumm & Moore, 2005)

This is a long and comprehensive list of ecotourism planning topics and stages. Although all can be useful, not all are relevant for developing a regional birding trail. Thus, not all of these stages will be discussed in detail. Some of these important factors that need to be considered are supply and demand, economic impact assessment, program and facility design, staffing, finances as well as management and evaluation (Denman, 2005). Although ecological impact assessment would be vital for the development of a birding trail, it will not be discussed, as in this particular case there will be no new birding sites selected. If all these factors are carefully considered and planned, the birding trail should be successful.

2.8.1 Economic Impact Assessment

Conducting an economic assessment prior to implementing a potential new tourism product is essential. However, this assessment needs to be done on two distinct levels; on the macroeconomic (large) and microeconomic (small) levels (Drumm & Moore, 2005). The macroeconomic assessment refers to the overall supply and demand aspect of a potential new tourism product. An ecotourism planner needs to assess whether specific tourism development has adequate demand in the marketplace (Drumm et al., 2004). In the case of developing a new birding trail, the overall market of bird-watching tourism needs to be assessed and it is essential

to determine how much demand this tourism segment has in the marketplace. On the other side of the economic spectrum, the supply of potential birds, natural settings and facilities also has to be strong to fulfill the supply side (Font & Cochrane, 2005). There are several techniques that tourism planners can undertake when assessing supply and demand. A comprehensive market analysis is usually a good idea for both the tourism subsector and the region where the tourism activity or product is to be implemented (Gunn & Var, 2002). Amongst some of the things that should be looked at for such an assessment would be government data and statistics, regional tourism agency documents, national and provincial parks data and the examination of academic and research papers (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006). A tourism planner may need to conduct their own initial market assessment to determine the supply and demand relationship for a given tourism product (Inskeep, 1991). This can be done through several strategies, such as surveys, questionnaires, and interviews with key individuals, amongst others (Drumm et al., 2004). Only after a thorough market analysis has been conducted and the outcomes are favorable should a tourism planner move forward and draw up their initial project goals and objectives. If the supply and demand relationship for a given tourism category or region does not seem promising then the chances of failure are magnified. Therefore, the balance between supply and demand is rather delicate and needs to be carefully considered.

It is important to conduct an economic assessment on a macro level, as well as at the micro level. Such an assessment should have two phases, a rapid assessment phase followed by an official and more thorough investigation of a given region's economic system. "A rapid assessment is a way to investigate complicated situations in which issues are not yet well defined and where there is not sufficient time or other resources for long-term, traditional

qualitative research" (Beebe, 2001 p. 12). The initial rapid assessment process is designed to

provide a quick and effective evaluation of the local economic situation. Thus, the rapid

assessment involves looking at and identifying the current economic drivers of a region and

assessing how they might be impacted by a new tourism venture, such as the creation of a

regional birding trail. Thus, it is vital to determine how such a new tourism product would fit in

with current tourism initiatives and other industries. It is also important to note and assess

whether such a new tourism product might compete with other existing economic industries

(Taylor & McGlynn, 2008). Some of these competing economic industries might be:

- Agriculture and farming
- Hunting and fishing
- Forestry (Drumm & Moore, 2004)

Thus, the potential complexities and competing agendas between different economic

drives might present a challenge to tourism planners. Sometimes this type of assessment

cannot be done by a single tourism planner and economic experts might need to be brought

onboard who are familiar with the different and potentially competing economies of a region

(Drumm et al., 2004). Therefore, it is unlikely that an ecotourism planner will be able to

perform this completely on their own. Although specialized researchers could be utilized for

such assessment, this is a field that is best left to business experts, such as consultants. Not only

are consultants able to identify potential problems related to competing economic priorities,

but they will also be able to provide advice and solutions (NIST, 2007). However, if funds are

not available to hire consultants, then expert volunteers would need to be sought out. One

option to acquiring such experts would be through forming a voluntary advisory committee

that can aid a tourism planner in conducting the economic assessment (Eagles, 2010a).

Once the proposed region has undergone the initial rapid economic assessment; a more thorough assessment will be required, which can be done in several ways. The best way to conduct an overall evaluation would be by continuing to hire outside consultants, although this process might be very expensive. An alternative would be to take the information attained from early rapid assessment findings and apply them to specific areas where a thorough assessment might not be needed (NIST, 2007). In such case, volunteer advisors, researchers, NGOs and government officials could work together with the tourism planner to delve deeper into areas that need more attention and research (Drumm et al., 2004). Regional economic experts can also be utilized who know the local tourism industry well and can contribute their experience (Drumm et al., 2004). Such regional economists might have very strong ties to the local tourism sector and other industries, making their knowledge and advice indispensable (Fennell, 2008).

Once an ecotourism planner has conducted an examination of what is important and what is not in relations to the economic assessment of a given region, it is important to identify potential benefits that might result from implementing a new ecotourism product such as a birding trail. Some of the potential specific benefits that could be achieved by implementing an ecotourism venture might be:

- The creation of added jobs and employment opportunities.
- Providing education and training opportunities for local community members.
- Building added infrastructure and transportation routes.
- Implementing a stable and practical local health care system.
- Promoting self-governance for local people.
- Community engagement and involvement (self-empowerment)
- Travel opportunities and foreign training (Drumm & Moore, 2004)

The above benefits are a theoretical overview whereby, some of these benefits would only apply if they were implemented in developing countries or tribal communities. In such cases,

these benefits may be very different than what a traditional tribal community might be accustomed to and they should be implemented carefully and in a slow sequence, otherwise their impacts might not necessarily be regarded as good (Fennel, 2008). However, some of these benefits can be achieved and deemed practical even in Western society, especially in regions that have experienced decline in their regional tourism growth (Denman, 2005).

It is important for ecotourism planners to respect traditional livelihoods (Weatherby, 2007). Thus, some of the potential negatives of implementing a new ecotourism destination within a traditional livelihoods system are:

- Losing traditional knowledge of hunting, gathering, fishing, farming
- Need to be more skilled and trained to gain employment
- Might induce and promote inequality in an otherwise equalitarian society
- People might leave local communities and move to big cities
- The cost of living might increase drastically making local communities unable to survive.
- Might develop a system of dependence on foreign aid and commodities (Weatherby, 2007 and Drumm et al., 2004).

However, it does not only have to be traditional societies in developing countries that can be negatively impacted by new ecotourism development. Even in Western countries, some people and industries might be negatively impacted by the introduction of new ecotourism products because such new ventures might hinder already established and mature economic practices (Drumm et al., 2004). For example, if new ecotourism is introduced to a traditional rural agricultural area or to an Indian reservation in North America, it would discourage both farming and hunting in those areas as those activities are not perceived as very eco-friendly. As a result, the new ecotourism venture would encroach on traditional ways of livelihood and create potential conflict (Spencer, 2010).

Therefore, it is clear that building a new ecotourism destination or site is very complicated and the economic assessment should be thought out very carefully because if it is misinterpreted there can be great impacts on local regions and communities. Certainly, many ecotourism planners and managers see their programs and sites as something that can bring about many positives to local communities, however; often times they forget to take into account other peoples perspectives. Thus, there is a need to be careful and to understand what local and regional communities might and might not need. To avoid such unpleasant conflict an ecotourism planner should always be aware of the likelihood of disagreement and plan for it. One of the most effective ways to reduce conflict is to encourage co-operation and partnership, whereby all relevant stakeholders have an input in the development of a new ecotourism product, regardless whether in Western society or in a developing nation (Drumm et al, 2004). To achieve this co-operation and partnership, developing a regional advisory committee is probably one of the wisest approaches to ecotourism planning (Eagles, 2010a).

Having identified the potential risk of conflict of ideas between different stakeholders, an ecotourism planner needs to implement a system of co-operation and shared responsibilities. Roles should be identified within the economic development sphere, whereby each party will have proper representation and have their roles and responsibilities outlined (Drumm & Moore, 2005). Some important considerations that must be taken into account are:

- Who will speak for the local communities and region regarding economic development?
- What specific roles will foreign investors play versus local community leaders?
- Who will be in charge of implementing the economic plans?
- What role will the local government and national governments play?
- What role will national or provincial/ parks play?
- What role will NGOs and conservation groups play?
- How often should stakeholders hold meetings?

- A method of assessment needs to be created to evaluate progress and identify potential problems (Drumm & Moore, 2005).

Clearly implementing an effective economic system is not easy, but the process of an economic impact assessment can help alleviate the complexity (Drum et al, 2004 & Eagles, 2009b). Without knowing what the economic climate looks like in a specific tourism sector or region it is almost impossible to implement any new tourism product. Implementing new tourism products prior to conducting an economic impact assessment can be done; however it would be foolish.

2.8.2 Facility and Program Design

It is also important to design appropriate and visually appealing facilities that tourists can use, that can make their tourism experience pleasant. There are some important things that need to be considered when planning tourism facilities and programs. Tourism facilities need to be built in accordance with the tourism activity that they are designed to complement (Gunn & Var, 2002). This means that a facility needs to be both appropriate and functional as part of a tourism product (Drumm & Moore, 2005). For example, if developing a birding trail and there are several isolated sites on the trail, there must be more than one restroom on that trail. Moreover, washrooms cannot only be located at the most visited sites, nor is it wise to simply place a single washroom at the beginning and end of the trail. Rather, there must be adequate and portable facilities on all sites or at least at most sites that birders can utilize. If adequate facilities exist that tourists can utilize, then waste and pollution will likely be reduced (Gunn & Var, 2002). It is also vital to understand that it is not only important to provide necessary facilities; they must also be designed to fit the landscape and harmoniously

complement the ecotourism activity (Drumm et al., 2004). Sometimes ecotourism planners hire

well known and talented architects to design ecotourism facilities and although they develop a

great design, their product sometimes does not fit the surrounding landscape or required

function (Eagles, 2010b). Consequently, such well-designed facilities are deemed useless from

an ecotourism planner's perspective, as they cannot be utilized effectively. Therefore, much

needs to be considered when planning ecotourism facilities, to ensure they can serve a proper

function and that they blend in with the existing landscape.

This importance to facility design also needs to transfer over to program planning, as

programs also need to be relevant to the ecotourism activity being undertaken (Drumm et al.,

2004). Programs need to be developed to suit their natural environments and existing facilities

(Gunn & Var, 2002). For example, it would be unwise to develop and adopt a loud nightly

entertainment program near breeding colonies of birds as excessive noise might disrupt some

breeding patterns. Moreover, a program needs to be designed to suit a facility; this includes

size, shape and location (Drumm & Moore, 2005). Some facilities might simply not be able to

accommodate certain program needs, thus making them impossible to achieve. It is important

to note that facility design should not come first in a planning process; rather it should be done

at the same time as program planning in order for the two to best complement one another

(Inskeep, 1991 & Drumm et al., 2004). However, due to existing or older ecotourism ventures

desiring to adopt new programs to attract added tourists cause the precondition, whereby

facilities were designed first and programs have to accommodate themselves to such initial

facility designs. Consequently, only careful and meticulous planning can avoid such conflict

between facility and program or form and function.

As with most businesses, startup costs and the planning and implementation process of a new ecotourism product might be expensive. Consequently, money and funds need to be allocated from somewhere to start such a planning and implementation process. A simple solution would be for an ecotourism developer to have their own funds that can be allocated for new ecotourism development (Drumm et al., 2004). However, this is often unlikely or impossible, especially for ecotourism businesses that are in their start up stage. As a result, funds must be raised from some other sources. A viable and logical solution to cover development costs is usually the creation of some level of partnership and cooperation with individuals, agencies and governmental bodies that can assist in such matters (Gunn & Var, 2002). Although, ecotourism planners might have an initial idea of what they might like to achieve with a new ecotourism venture, true goals and objectives will only emerge once an ecotourism planner enters into partnership and cooperation with other stakeholders (Drumm et al, 2004). Often there is no other way for ecotourism planners to raise the necessary funds for their projects, but to develop close ties with governmental and non-governmental bodies. National or provincial parks and NGOs can provide some funding for ecotourism development, but they will certainly desire something in return. In the case of a national or provincial park, they might desire to be well represented in the new ecotourism product so that they can gain more visitors. Thus, if a national or provincial park assists an ecotourism development project with funds then it would serve as an investment for them to gain added long term revenues. Meanwhile, NGOs might provide funds but with the stipulation that their doctrines or needs be incorporated into the new ecotourism development project (Drumm et al, 2004). Thus, funding

for a new ecotourism product can come from almost any stakeholder group; this is why it is vital to develop an atmosphere of co-operation so that an ecotourism planner can best benefit from all parties.

It is not only important for ecotourism planners, including developers of a birding trail to gain funding for initial startup, but also to devise strategies to meet ongoing operating costs (Drumm et al, 2004 & Eagles, 2010b). This is sometimes even harder to achieve than gaining initial investment to start up operations and if not properly though out can lead to the failure of the ecotourism business (Gunn & Var, 2002). The desired goal of any ecotourism venture should be to meet its goals and objectives and ensure long term sustainability (Drumm & Moore, 2005). The best way to achieve such long term sustainability is for ecotourism businesses to try to be as self-reliant and self-sufficient as possible (Eagles, 2010b). Thus, various strategies need to be developed to meet operational costs through self-sufficient ways.

2.8.4 Management and Evaluation

Since, the most relevant planning considerations were discussed in relation to the project implementation, it is also vital to discuss some planning strategies that can be utilized to ensure success and smooth operations. One of the most important aspects of management and evaluation is assigning roles and responsibilities to the different levels of management and employees (Drumm et al., 2004). Employees need to be well trained and made aware of their specific duties and responsibilities. As with most businesses, in ecotourism alike, staff should be assigned formalized roles, as well as non-officially assigned responsibilities to ensure effective function (Mallen & Lorne-Adams, 2008). Under the official category of duties and

responsibilities, managers and employees alike have formalized duties; however in a mostly

hierarchical system (Drumm & Moore, 2005):

- Owners and Invertors
- General manager of operations
- Consultants
- Planners
- Departmental managers (these managers are in charge of specific objectives, such as ecological assessment, or food service or wildlife tour guides).
- Guides (local)
- General employees (locals)

Such formal roles will likely produce specialized and quality staff, which is a great asset that

some ecotourism operators overlook and as a result their businesses suffer in the long run

(Denman, 2005). Well-trained and knowledgeable staff can greatly enhance an ecotourism

experience. For example when hiring a birding guide, a bird watcher expects the guide to be

knowledgeable of the regional bird population. If the guide can provide great insight and share

knowledge and expertise with a client, the bird-watcher will certainly remember that as a great

experience. Meanwhile, if a birding guide proves to be the opposite and does not possess a

great insight of the local bird population or does not address client questions well, the

birdwatcher will be left with a less desirable experience.

Under the non-formalized roles and responsibilities, employees and managers alike

have the duty to continuously be aware and to report any potential problem that they might

recognize, in an effort to reduce future operational problems (Drum et al., 2004). If an issue is

recognized in advance of it becoming a major operational problem, it will likely save much

money, resources and time (Mallen & Lorne-Adams, 2008). Thus, this non-official structure of

roles and responsibilities can override the hieratical structure and is not always favoured by

some upper level managers or those entrusted with monitoring operations. With this non-formalized system, the managerial body might be indirectly forced by their employees and members to perform better. Although, management sometimes dislikes this monitoring approach it is often favored by employees as they feel empowered and as true contributors to day-to-day-operations. This system is clearly better suited to certain situations; however it can also be applied to an ecotourism venture that is overlooked by a designated managerial body, such as one that might be found in a product club. However, this system also has a disadvantage because of the lack of pre-set rules (Mallen & Lorne-Adams, 2008). Therefore, if one lacks experience in such complex matters the best option would be to bring in an outside consulting company or to once again employ the help of a voluntary advisory committee. With outside help, the management of the ecotourism venture can learn managerial skills from a consulting company or the advisory committee (Brooks, 2009).

Another vital consideration in the monitoring and evaluation is accounting and accountability. Accounting can refer to several things, the initial definition and what most people associate with accounting is balancing books and budget to ensure a profitable business at the end of the fiscal year (Held & Koenig-Archibugi, 2005). No doubt, this is a vital aspect of a business, as an unprofitable business could not continue to operate, including an ecotourism enterprise. However, accounting and accountability can be interpreted much more widely, as it also refers to the social corporate responsibility that a business has to its employees, stakeholders, investors and to the local community in which it operates (Held & Koenig-Archibugi, 2005). Thus, businesses should strive to be as transparent as possible to illustrate to potential clients that they operate along sound ethical considerations. Moreover, the idea of

giving back to local communities and helping those that are less fortunate is often also well appreciated by potential clients (Constanza, 1999). Although, transparency and corporate social responsibility are often well appreciated by most parties, upper management needs to be careful what exact information they discloses, to whom and when (Constanza, 1999). Ecotourism operations are no exception; however they need to practice discretions wisely to ensure competitors do not compromise their ideas and operations (Drumm et al., 2004).

Besides accountability dealing with monetary and social issues, accountability can also including liability (Held & Koenig-Archibugi, 2005). An ecotourism business always needs to maintain its accountability and responsibility to its employees and clients (Drumm et al., 2004). One way to ensure liability coverage and security for an ecotourism business would be through the acquisition of insurance (Gunn & Var, 2002). Therefore, an effective ecotourism planner should always have liability insurance as a way of responsibility both towards its clients and stakeholders, as it can save a lot of grievances in the long run (Drumm & Moore, 2005).

The final phase of the monitoring and evaluation phase of planning is reporting (Drumm & Moore, 2005). It is not only important to identify that ecotourism operations need to be evaluated on a regular basis, but it is also vital to illustrate such findings through a reporting mechanism (Lindkvist & Llewellyn, 2003). In such cases the usual discretionary questions apply:

- What to report?
- Frequency of reports?
- Whether to report them publicly or only privately?

The most vital concept that needs to be understood regarding reporting is discretion. It involves presenting information to as many or perhaps all stakeholders; however not to the extent that it will have a lasting impact on the business operations of an ecotourism venture (Lindkvist &

Llewellyn, 2003). Thus, parts of all aspects of operation and involved practices of the

ecotourism business need to be identified and reported, including:

- Environmental efforts
- Waste management
- Conservation projects
- Safety and security
- Economic investment and involvement
- Aiding the local communities
- Financial matters
- Employee rights and responsibilities, amongst others (Drumm et al., 2004).

Although this list seems to portray a vast array of things that need to be monitored, not all are

equally important. Thus, an ecotourism planner needs to practice great discretion and practice

good decision making strategies to decide which aspects are most important and how often to

review each (Inskeep, 1991). The overwhelming reason that not all things can be monitored and

given the same level of priority is due to the potential high price of monitoring and

management (Inskeep, 1991). Moreover, the necessary manpower might also not exist to be

able to monitor, analyze and manage each aspect of ecotourism operations equally frequently

(Drumm & Moore, 2005). Therefore, the above list is meant to illustrate what are all the

aspects of ecotourism operation that should be monitored if possible, not to say that they are

all mandatory to monitor constantly.

However, the most important consideration is how much of each segment of

information can and should the ecotourism business report and to whom? Some operational

matters of the ecotourism business should no doubt remain confined to the upper

management. Some information can be disclosed and made available to all managers.

Meanwhile, even less critical information can be presented to all employees and even clients

(Eagles, 2009c). Certain sensitive information can only be presented to certain special interest groups who have an added interest in the matter (Eagles, 2009b). Thus, in order to know what information is appropriate to be presented to whom a delicate decision making process is required that is overlooked by a well trained and experienced managerial team (Eagles, 2009b).

Consequently, evaluation should be done as frequently as possible, but not so frequently that the reports are unable to measure change (Drum et al., 2004). Thus, the best timeline to present reports is probably quarterly (Eagles, 2009b). This time interval is often favoured by tourism planners, as it is frequent enough, but still allows time for improvement or drawbacks to be shown (Eagles, 2009b). However, there is always a risk associated with even releasing information to certain upper management or employees as whistle-blowing can always occur (Lindkvist & Llewellyn, 2003). Therefore, the question of loyalty arises, as it is never going to be 100% certain who can and cannot be trusted within any given company (Keller-Johnson, 2005). To try to evoke more employee loyalty and morale, regular employee meetings should be held at least monthly (Eagles, 2009b) whereby employees can raise their voices, make their opinions heard and suggest their own ideas. Every business should incorporate the knowledge of their subordinate employees, as they are the ones who are on the ground and in direct contact with clients and might know some things the upper management might have little or no idea about.

2.8.5 Conclusion to Planning

The aforementioned paragraphs discussed some of the most relevant and important issues that an ecotourism planner needs to consider while implementing the planning process.

Economic impacts assessment process, along with the concepts of supply and demand was illustrated, as well as potential challenges associated with staffing, finances and evaluation were identified. These are some of the general planning guidelines that an effective ecotourism planner should consider and follow to ensure success. Therefore, these principles can provide a good foundational framework from which a successful regional birding trail can be planned and implemented.

2.9 Conclusion to Literature Review

The literature review outlined most of the important background concepts and principles that a bird-watching tourism planner should understand and use as guidance throughout the process of planning and implementing a new birding trail. The ideas of sustainability and sustainable utilization were discussed as the backgrounds and guiding principles of both nature-based and ecotourism. Nature-based tourism was briefly touched upon to provide an introduction to the discussed concept of ecotourism. The ecotourism subcategories of wildlife tourism and bird-watching were also examined, which led to a discussion and analysis of current birding trails. The concept of a product club examined in different tourism spheres and placed into a birding context. Lastly, an appropriate geographical scope was selected and justified for the project, which was followed by some of the major considerations a tourism planner should consider in the planning process.

Chapter 3.0 Methodology and Case Study

Chapters 1 and 2 outlined the important concepts and principles as well as the goals and

objectives that are to be achieved by this research thesis. In order to plan and develop

implementation strategies for a birding trail as a potential product club, certain measures and

techniques need to be developed. Such techniques and ways to plan, implement and test ideas

are usually referred to as methodology (Creswell, 2009). Thus, methodology is a tool that can

guide a research process and can function as a guideline of necessary steps that need to be

achieved in order to fulfill research goals and to arrive at specific research findings (Kumar,

2005). Research methodology is usually split into two distinct categories; quantitative methods

and qualitative methods. Quantitative research is usually based on the measure of quantity or

amount, meanwhile qualitative research is concerned with quality or kind (Kothari, 2008). Thus,

quantitative research is associated with measureable outcomes that can often be represented

by statistical and numerical outcomes (Kumar, 2005). On the other hand, qualitative research

focuses on exploring qualitative phenomenon, such as why people do certain things (Kothari,

2008). As a general rule, qualitative methods are often employed to research previously

unknown or lesser known topics, whereas quantitative methods are often employed to further

delve into previously recognized research gaps (Kothari, 2008). Therefore, qualitative research

should usually be used for initial exploration, followed up by more thorough quantitative,

measureable and repeatable research (Creswell, 2009). Nonetheless, both methods are

important and are often utilized by researchers; however some research topics and

circumstances are better suited for quantitative versus qualitative and wise versa approaches,

and as a result only one research approach is utilized (Creswell, 2009).

Since, research on developing a birding trail as a product club is a relatively new approach to birding tourism development, the research had several stages, and the research methodology utilized was qualitative research methods. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized to gain information and to conduct the research. Primary source research refers to research that is new and has been conducted by a researcher on their own initiative to gather information and attain conclusions (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, unlike secondary source research, primary research does not utilize previously published or written knowledge to fulfill research goals and objectives (Kumar, 2005). For the purpose of this research project, primary research was conducted and the secondary source research mostly comes from the literature review. Throughout the research project, as potentially new and relevant concepts and ideas were discovered, there was the need to revisit secondary sources to aid in the interpretation and understanding of newly found information. Although, secondary research is important to set the context of the research thesis both before and after primary research is conducted, it is the primary research that is usually credited with discovering new results and themes.

Now that some of the guidelines of research methodology have been set forth, it is important to discuss what specific research methodologies were utilized by this research. This research project was conducted in three major phases, whereby the results of each step were incorporated into the next step of the research process. Phase one involved interviewing people involved with established tourism trails to gain insight regarding their development and operations. Phase two involved finding an appropriate case study area where the idea of a birding trail as a potential tourism product club can be tested. Phase three involved testing the idea by setting up an advisory committee composed of key stakeholders within the chosen case

study area and utilizing their help and knowledge to develop the birding trail. Each of these three main phases also had subsections added as needed in order to better test relevant ideas and evaluate their practical suitability. It is also very important to point out that all phases of the research were described and approved by the Office of Research Ethics of the University of Waterloo.

3.1 Phase 1: Interviews of Officials of Existing Tourism Trails

Stage 1 of Phase 2 involved interviewing officials of tourism trails in order to find out how the trails were planned and are managed. Ten existing tourism trails were sought out and interviewed. Since, this research is predominantly focused on birding tourism, 5 existing birding trails officials were interviewed, along with 5 other tourism trails in various tourism segments. The participants were first sought through the internet and then contacted by e-mail, whereby the goals of the research were disclosed to them and they received a copy of the interview questions in advance of the interview. This included the following 6 open ended and semi-structured interview questions:

1) What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?
2) What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?
3) What is included in the trail beyond the sites?
4) What are the accessory components of the trail, such as (below) and are they directly linked together?
   a) Accommodation providers
   b) Transportation routes and companies
   c) Restaurants and food providers
   d) Waste management
   e) Specialized stores
   f) Guides or interpreters
   g) Internet access

5) Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail operations?
6) What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A semi-structured and open ended question approach was adopted so that after the initial questions were answered by the interviewee an open dialogue could occur to in order to delve deeper into the topic (Creswell, 2009). The interviewees were provided a choice to disclose their identities or remain anonymous. The participants were asked if they consent to having the interview tape recorded. Permission was attained from the participants whether they will allow any results of the research to be published, along with referencing being credited to them and the trail they represent. The research was designed to be as transparent as possible and to consider the position and potential concerns of the trail developers or managers being interviewed. As a gesture of appreciation, all of the interview participants will receive a copy of the final outcome of the research.

3.1.1 Research Scope

Most birding trails exist in the United States; where there are approximately 50 birding trails nationwide (ABA, 2010). Since 5 birding trails officials were interviewed, the sample size represents 10% of all global birding trails. As wine, culinary and adventure tourism trails do not have a centralized oversight body that tracks the number of trails, it is hard to determine the exact sample size percentage interviewed.

Two limitations to this phase of the research was getting enough willing participants to agree to be interviewed and gaining permission to disclose or publish any information they might provide. Some trail operators did not disclose all or part of their operations and some

were altogether unwilling to participate in the interviews, probably because they wanted to protect something they worked hard to achieve (Drumm & Moore, 2005). In fact of the trail officials initially contacted by e-mail, there was a relatively low response rate and interest in participating in the interviews by the trails officials. To gain the 10 interviews, more than 50 e-mails were sent out to various trail representatives, which represents a response rate of approximately 20%.

3.2 Phase 2: Case Study: County of Essex and Chatham-Kent

Phase 2 found an appropriate area where the product club birding trail idea could be tested. Several important factors were considered, including location, suitability, current popularity and potential opportunities. One of the most important things that were considered in determining a suitable region to implement a new birding trail was a market analysis. Having carefully considered the different aforementioned factors, it was clear that an appropriate location to test the idea of a birding trail as a regional tourism product club would be the counties of Essex and Chatham-Kent within Ontario. These two counties seemed appropriate both in terms of location, size, resources, opportunities and market trends.

3.2.1 Essex County

Essex County is at the most southern corner of South-western Ontario. Essex is the furthest southern part of Ontario, and Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006). On the following page (figure 5) is an illustrated map of the location of Essex County both within Ontario and Canada.

Figure 5.- Map of Essex County.
Source: (Google Maps, 2010).

The Essex County area has a population of approximately 400,000 inhabitants, excluding the

city of Windsor, which is a separate administrative entity. The county has seven municipalities,

which include: Essex, Amherstburg, LaSalle, Kingsville, Leamington, Lakeshore and Tecumseh

(County of Essex, 2010). Peele Island is also administered as a separate municipal township,

although too small to be considered a municipality (County of Essex, 2010). Meanwhile, the City

of Windsor has a population of approximately 300,000 inhabitants (County of Essex, 2010).

Essex County and Windsor have a rich assortment of both urban and rural areas. Essex County

and the City of Windsor have experienced many job losses as a result of the 2008 recession, as

traditional automobile and other industries have shrunk in the region (Rennie, 2010) The

situation has deteriorated so much that Essex county has the highest unemployment rate

within Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010). Due to the decline of such industries, the county is

seeking to attract new green investment and has been lobbying hard for companies to develop

new eco-friendly ventures within the county. One such effort was to try to attract a multi

hundred million dollar investment by Siemens to build wind turbines for a regional wind farm (Rennie, 2010). Essex is seeking new investments and ideas to try to cope with high unemployment rates and the county is serious about adopting or attracting green or eco-friendly industry to the region. Therefore, a regional birding trail that incorporates Essex County might be a viable new business venture that the county might support, as it can lower unemployment and generate income.

3.2.2 Chatham-Kent

Chatham-Kent is also located in South-western Ontario. It is located directly east of Essex County. This is represented below by (Figure 6) and (Figure 7) on the following page, which shows the entire study area.
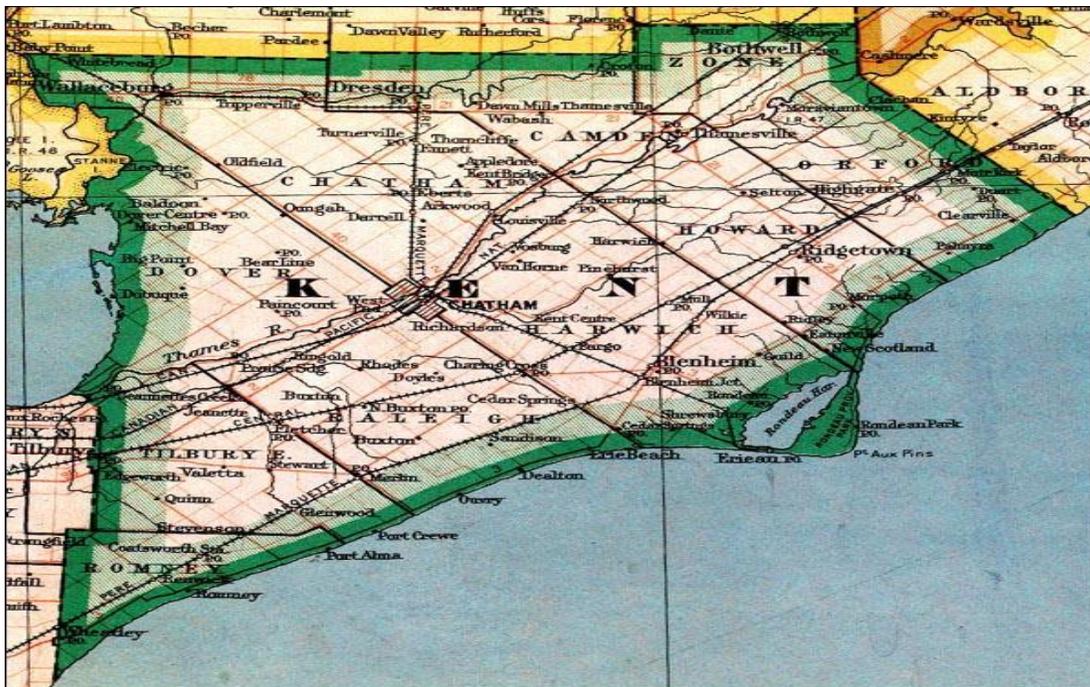
Figure 6.-Chatham-Kent
Source: (Archives of Ontario, 2009).
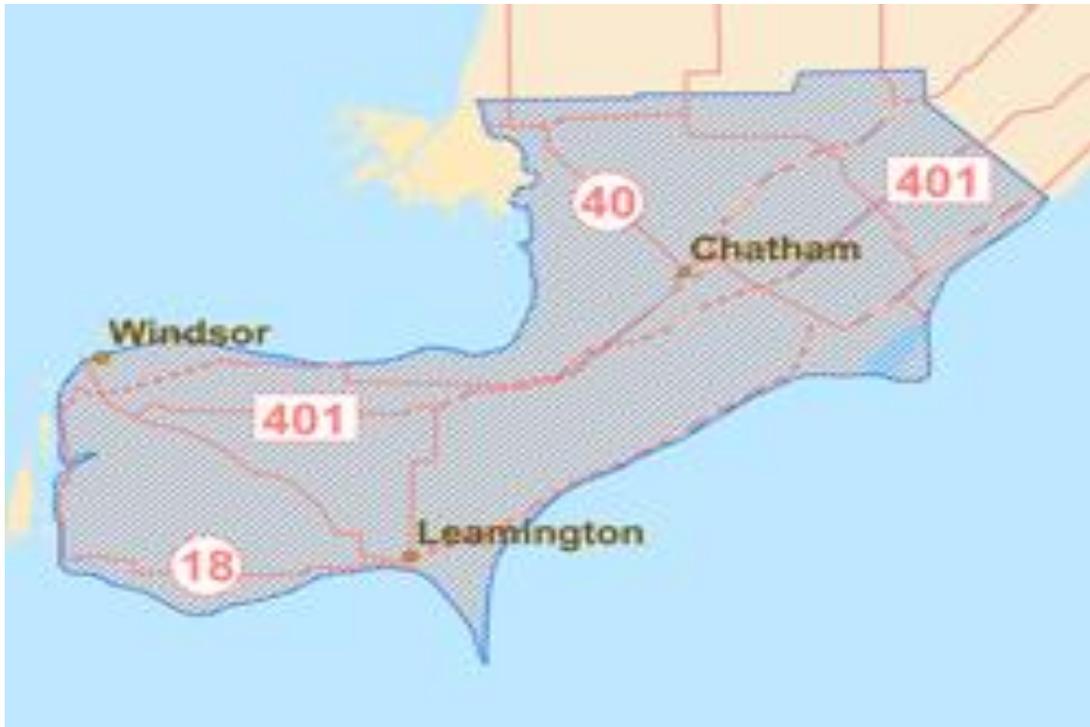
Figure 7.-Research Case Study Area.
Source: (Ontario Ministry of Environment, 2008).

In terms of population, Chatham-Kent is much smaller than Essex as it only has a

population of approximately 110,000 inhabitants (Municipality of Chatham-Kent, 2004).

However, Chatham-Kent is much larger in terms of geographical area than Essex, whereby it is

the 12th largest municipality within Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006). It is a rural area, mostly

reliant on the agricultural industry and has historically had a strong connection with the

automobile industry. It is also important to point out that Chatham was a separate

administrative body, until 1998 when it was amalgamated with Kent County (Municipality of

Chatham-Kent, 2004). This unification was forced upon the municipalities by the Province of

Ontario as an effort to save money and create better services (Kushner & Siegel, 2003).

Chatham-Kent has one of the highest unemployment rates within Canada (Statistics

Canada, 2006). As in Essex County, the struggling automotive industry caused this economic

slowdown, as the Chrysler plant in Chatham has reduced production in recent years and has even been under the threat of closing down operations (Service Canada, 2010). Consequently, much like Essex, Chatham-Kent has also sought out new investors for alternative green energy to try to revitalize its economy. Since, Chatham-Kent is mostly rural and agricultural land; it can supply large amounts of grain necessary for biofuel and ethanol production. As a result, Chatham is the home to GreenField, the largest commercial ethanol company in Canada and only one of three dry mill continuous ethanol producing plants in North America (GreenField, 2010). As a result, the company supplies ethanol fuel, beverage alcohol, pharmaceutical alcohol and commercial alcohol for over 6000 customers in North America (GreenField, 2010). This is a significant new industry for Chatham-Kent as it illustrates that much like Essex County; Chatham-Kent is also involved in and desires to attract more eco-friendly industries. Along this green industry doctrine, Chatham-Kent has also identified itself as a popular angler and birding destination (Municipality of Chatham-Kent, Department of Tourism, 2010). Since the Thames and Sydenham Rivers flow though parts of the county sport fishing and fly fishing are popular activities that are encouraged by the county to generate revenues. The presence of Rondeau Provincial Park and the shores of Lake Erie make Chatham-Kent a world class birding destination (Municipality of Chatham-Kent, Department of Tourism, 2010). The economic preconditions exist in Chatham-Kent that present an opportunity for new green industry, including tourism. Thus, it seems reasonable that a regional birding trail could incorporate Chatham-Kent County. The county itself seems to be in need of such new ecotourism ventures and has some resources that can be utilized for such an undertaking.

3.2.3 Geographical Location

Essex is "at the same latitude as northern California, Barcelona, Spain and Rome, Italy, and is blessed with a unique climate, having the mildest winters and the longest growing season in the country" (County of Essex, 2010, para. 2). The case study area contains elements of the Carolinian Forest ecosystem, which is found in Canada only in the southernmost part of Southern Ontario (Hartig et al., 2010). As a result, the study area contains bird species and other animals that are not found outside the Carolinian zone in Canada. There is probably no place in Canada with more bird species than the Point Pelee area (Butler & Hvenegaard, 1994). This region is also one of Canada's richest and most productive agricultural lands (Hartig et al., 2010). Both Canadian and American tourists frequent Essex and Chatham-Kent on a regular basis. The close proximity of Essex and Chatham-Kent to the United States means visitors from the states of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Pennsylvania are within a day's driving distance of Essex and Chatham-Kent. U.S. visitors can sometimes even come to Essex and Chatham-Kent on day trips and return the same day, making it a unique and near-by tourism attraction to Americans (County of Essex, 2010).

Traditionally Essex and Chatham-Kent have benefited from their close proximity to the U.S., as American dollars and investment would be infused into the local economy (Vingilis et al., 2006), however since the economic downturn of recent years (Vaitilingam, 2009), and since the Canadian dollar is above par or very close to the value of the U.S. the has area felt the economic impact of these international economic influences (Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island, 2010).

3.2.4 Natural Resources and Protected Areas

The case study area has good beaches, bays and shoals in their coastal areas, however perhaps no single natural heritage site is more important or popular than Point Pelee National Park (Browne & Hecnar, 2007). Point Pelee National park is one of the smallest national parks in Canada at only 16 km^2 (Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island, 2010). Point Pelee National Park was once the most visited park in Canada, when visitation peaked in 1963 and the park received 781,000 annual visitors (Parks Canada, 2009). Ever since then the park has been slowly declining in visitor numbers, whereby 2006 figures only illustrate 225,000 annual visitors (Parks Canada, 2009). Parks Canada has reported an average of 242,762 day visits over a 5 year average dating back from 2006 (Dobbie et al, 2007). Visitation at Point Pelee peaked in 1963 when the park reviewed 781,000 visitors (Dobbie et al, 2007). Point Pelee still remains a popular national park within Canada.

However, it is very important to point out that the park is still performing under its optimal capacity, as the park has 6000 available parking spots and could without compromising safety and the natural environment accommodate up to 600,000 annual visitors (Parks Canada, 2009). Moreover, year-to-year birder numbers have been declining in recent years causing the park to lose visitor numbers (Parks Canada, 2009). There are two main reasons for this decline of birders in recent years. A major obstacle that encourages American birders to stay in the U.S. is newer passport regulations that have been enforced by the U.S. government (Eagles, 2010c). As a result U.S. birders are more inclined to seek out birding sites within their own country. A second factor is the development of birding sites on the U.S. side of Lake Erie, such as Magee Marsh Wildlife Area in Ohio have also contributed to declining birder numbers in Point Pelee.

Magee Marsh can offer similar birding experiences as Point Pelee but does not require

American birders to cross the border into Canada (Friends of Magee Marsh, 2012 & Kaufman,

2011). These are challenges that birding tourism planners need to overcome to maintain birder

numbers..

Point Pelee National Park is located 50 km southeast of Windsor and Detroit, and about

400 km away from Toronto, making it in reach for day trippers (Parks Canada, 2009 & Tourism

Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island, 2010). However, there is a rich abundance of flora and fauna

found within the area (Browne & Hecnar, 2007). Particularly, the bird life of Point Pelee is very

unique not only within Canada, but in all of North America (Maple, Eagles & Rolfe, 2010). Due

to the strategic location of the park and climate, Point Pelee is a premier bird-watching

destination, featuring more than 370 recorded species of birds (Parks Canada, 2009, Tourism

Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island, 2010). "Point Pelee is an important migratory stop-over for

neo-tropical migrants, both in the autumn and fall. As well, its Carolinian Forest provides

breeding habitat for species that are rarely found elsewhere in Canada" (Parks Canada, 2009,

para 1). As a result Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island (2010) identifies the Point Pelee

National Park as a world class birding destination. Consequently, the park is visited by many

birders each year, especially within the migratory periods of May and September (Maple, Eagles

& Rolfe, 2010). As a result, the economic impact that bird-watching provides for the park and

the surrounding community is unparalleled by any other tourism activity that takes place in the

area (Kim et al., 1998). Bird-watching is an established tourism activity in Point Pelee National

Park (Maple, Eagles & Rolfe, 2010 & Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island, 2010), and could

be further developed within a regional Essex-Chatham-Kent Regional Birding Trail.

The Counties of Essex and Chatham-Kent also have other important protected and recreational areas that could be utilized and incorporated into a birding trail. Within Essex County, Windsor and Pelee Island, Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island (2010) has classified the local birding sites into a three tier configuration based on importance. Point Pelee National Park is classified as the only primary birding site, meanwhile there are four secondary birding sites, including Pelee Island, Hillman Marsh, Holiday Beach Conservation Area and the Ojibway Complex (Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island, 2010). Following these secondary sites are more than 20 tertiary sites that comprise of various recreational parks and conservation areas from Essex County. The Essex Region Conservation Authority has many natural and conservation areas that could be considered for incorporation into a regional birding trail. Some of these conservation areas offer unique habitats and as a result contain unique species (Essex Region Conservation Authority, 2010). More knowledge and discovery is needed in establishing which conservation areas might be useful as part of the birding trail. Nevertheless, the Essex Region Conservation Authority manages many areas, which are illustrated on the following page (Figure 8).

- Andrew Murray O'Neil Memorial
- Amherstburg Essex Greenway
- Big Creek
- Cedar Beach
- Cedar Creek
- Chrysler Canada Greenway
- Crystal Bay
- Devonwood
- Hillman Marsh
- Holiday Beach
- John R. Park Homestead
- Kopegaron Woods
- Maidstone

- McAuliffe Woods
- Petit Cote
- Ruscom Shores
- Stone Road Alvar
- Tremblay Beach
- White Sands (Essex Region Conservation Authority, 2010).

Figure 8.- Essex Region Conservation Authority Conservation Areas.
Source: (Essex Region Conservation Authority, 2010).

Chatham-Kent also has valuable conservation areas managed by the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority (Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority, 2010). These include:

- C.M. Wilson Conservation Area
- Colborne Street Conservation Area
- McGeachy Pond Conservation Area
- Miller Sanctuary

- Rondeau Bay Marshes
- Sinclair's Bush
- Two Creeks Conservation Area
- Walter Devereux Conservation Area (Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority, 2010).

The second most important site within the designated study area of Essex and Chatham-Kent is Rondeau Provincial Park. Rondeau is also located on the shores of Lake Erie and extends inward into the lake (Ontario Parks, 2003). It is also a significant migratory stopover point and route for neo-tropical species, including numerous species of birds and even monarch butterflies (Brower, Fink & Walford, 2006). Moreover, the Carolinian forests provide ample nesting opportunities for many rare and sometimes endangered bird species (Ontario Parks, 2003). Proof of such rare and unexpected species is evident through the records of The Friends of Rondeau. Some of these rare visitors were Kirtland's Warbler in May 2005, the Townsend's Warbler in 2008 and the Blue Grosbeak in 2010 (Friends of Rondeau, 2010). There are also many species that can be viewed in Rondeau on a regular basis, such as the annual returnee Prothonotary Warbler (Friends of Rondeau, 2010). The Friends of Rondeau has recorded over 275 species sightings (Ontario Parks, 2003). Although this is somewhat less species than those recorded by Point Pelee, it is still a very significant number of bird species. Perhaps the reason for such abundance of avian life is the location of the park, as it is isolated within Lake Erie and is away from urban centers and pollutants (Brower, Fink & Walford, 2006). Although lesser known and popular with birders than Point Pelee, especially on the international scene, Rondeau is still a unique and treasured spot for many birdwatchers and should no doubt be included into a regional birding trail. Thus, the inclusion of Rondeau would also provide provincial input and advice.

Therefore, the Counties of Essex and Chatham-Kent offer a great variance and abundance of resources for birding, are geographically well located to major markets, and yet are regions that have seen an economic slowdown in recent years. Thus, a regional birding trail could be a viable option to assist the local economy.

3.2.5 Market Analysis

In Essex and Chatham-Kent there are current tourism plans in place to attract birders. Moreover, many of the economic and market preconditions that would allow birding tourism to be successful in the region are also present within the Counties of Essex and Chatham-Kent. However, it is important to briefly analyze some of the data and figures to evaluate the true economic potential and direction of the birding industry within these two counties.

Birding has been a steady and relatively popular activity within this region of Ontario for well over a century, even though research into the activity only started in the 1980's (Butler & Fenton, 1987). Early studies illustrated the economic significance of bird-watching tourism in the region. Butler and Hvenegaard (1987) concluded that Point Pelee National Park was visited by approximately 80,000 visitors during the May birding season and that the average birder spent 4.6 days locally, while birding an average of 9.8 hours daily. Birders spending nearly five days in the region had clear economic benefits for the region with an annual expenditure of $7.9 million U.S. (Butler & Hvenegaard, 1988). This is a significant contribution to the local economy, especially in the context of the late 1980s. A subsequent study by Butler and Hvenegaard (1994) illustrated that Point Pelee's average birder stayed in the local area for 3.4 days and had a total expenditure of $5.4 million U.S., of which $3.4 million was spent locally.

This would indicate that bird-watching tourism began to decline at Point Pelee National Park, as both the number of visitors and the income generated dropped. Butler and Hvenegaard (1994) outlined the lack of coordination between the park and local businesses. They also commented that local businesses were not aware of the economic significance of birding tourism at Point Pelee.

Kim et al. (1998) looked at various birding festivals, including The Festival of Birds in Point Pelee National Park. The study concluded that the park was visited by nearly 20,000 visitors within the month of May, which contributed $3.8 million U.S. (Kim et al., 1998). A more recent study in 2006 estimated that 25,000 birders visiting the Windsor-Essex-Point Pelee region spent an annual $12.4-14.4 million (Carolinian Canada Coalition, Earth Tramper Consulting Inc. & Pier 8 Group, 2011). This study indicates the economic potential birding tourism can have for the region. However, this 2006 study also illustrates the decline in birder numbers since it estimated 25,000 annual birders in the region, whereas the Kim et al (1998) study accounted 20,000 birders in the single month of May. Bird-watching tourism is on the rise globally and this has been demonstrated though many studies and examples of successes that birding can have on biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods (Colby & Smith-Incer, 2005 & Eagles, 2010a). Blondel (2004) suggests that bird-watching tourism is the most widely practiced activity within ecotourism, whereby half of wildlife viewing tourists are birders. However, visitor numbers at Point Pelee National Park are declining and the area is not performing to its full birding tourism potential (Maple, Eagles & Rolfe, 2010). Maple, Eagles and Rolfe (2010) identified factors within the programs offered within the national park that could improve the experience for birders of all levels of experience. The study concluded that Point

Pelee National Park needs to implement different bird-watching programs and activities based on birders' recreational specialization (Maple, Eagles & Rolfe, 2010). This needs to be done because advance and intermediate birders usually have different commitment levels from beginners and desire to take part in different activities (Sali & Kuehn, 2008). Maple, Eagles and Rolfe (2010) identified that beginner birders need a more varied approach to activities that include some non-birding activities that can keep them attracted to the park. Meanwhile, advanced and intermediate birders required specialized programs on bird identification, bird biology and bird-watching (Maple, Eagles & Rolfe, 2010).

Maple, Eagles and Rolfe (2010) also identified a lack of coordination between the national park and local businesses and the community. This problem was identified nearly two decades ago (Butler and Hvenegaard, 1994), yet there still seems to be a divide between the goals and objectives of the national park and the surrounding businesses. Rondeau Provincial Park seems to be experiencing much of the same situation, since the park has many loyal birders, yet not all are connected or participate in birding in other nearby locations (Friends of Rondeau, 2010). Consequently, the development of a well-planned and implemented regional birding trail that would encompass the best birding sites within the Counties of Essex and Chatham-Kent could produce the type of coordination that can elevate the region to be one of North America's premier birding locations. Thus, the product club approach to a birding trail can exemplify positive cooperation and coordination between various stakeholders, which would ensure the quality of Southwestern Ontario birding to be amongst the best in the world.

3.3 Phase 3: Formulation of Advisory Committee

The fourth major step of the methodology outlines the practical approaches undertaken to make a birding trail feasible. Given that any such regional tourism product club must involve a range of actors, it is important that the key stakeholders involved in its planning and development be identified. Taking into consideration the geographical scope of the region, the directly involved and certain secondary desired stakeholders were the following:

- Tourism Windsor, Essex, Pelee Island
- Tourism Chatham-Kent
- Essex Region Conservation Authority
- Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority
- Point Pelee National Park
- Rondeau Provincial Park
- Ontario Field Ornithologists
- Essex County Field Naturalists' Club
- Sydenham Field Naturalists
- Point Pelee Tours (or other guide companies)
- Local Hospitality Expert
- Local Transportation and Infrastructure Expert
- Internet, GIS and Electronic Information Expert

Since this birding trail is planned as a product club, partnership was essential to establish. Initially the researcher contacted each of the stakeholders to inform them of the proposed research project and asked for their cooperation. All those who agreed to cooperate were asked to provide a key contact who was the link between the researcher and the contact's agency or organization. These contacts were then in turn asked if they wished to serve on an advisory committee. This advisory board was designed to serve in giving aid, contacts and advice in the planning and development of the birding trail (Eagles, 2010a). The advisory committee worked with the researcher in the development of a regional birding trail and an

associated product club. The advisory committee provided advice in several key areas, including:

1.) **The Size and Scope of the Activity**: In this step the advisory committee decided whether the Essex-Kent area is a viable boundary for the study area.

2.) **Choice of Birding Sites:** Key factors were discussed in determining which and how many birding sites should be included in the birding trail. Sites were evaluated for form and function and based on overall attractiveness to birders.

3.) **Choice of Accessory Institutions:** The advisory committee decided what accessory institutions were necessary to be included in the trail to make it most functional as a product club. These accessory institutions included accommodation providers, transportation routes, transportation companies, restaurant and food provision facilities, and specialist stores. Once the categories were chosen, specific sites and agencies were also chosen to represent the birding trail.

4.) **Development of a Product Club Organization**: The organization would be responsible for oversight and managing the operations of the birding trail. Key components of this organization were considered, such as its structure and funding apparatus. The possibility that a new organization might be constructed, such as the Essex-Ken Birding Trail Non-Government Organization was also discussed. Another option for organizational structure was to call upon close co-operation between the local Essex and Chatham-Kent tourism destination management organizations to work together and manage the product club. Regardless, it is important that any product club works together as a cohesive unit to deliver the best bird-watching experience to the birders.

5.) **Marketing of the Product Club:** Various strategies were discussed as to how best market and adversities the newly formed birding trail. Important tools such as trail map, a web site, a birding trail passport, and a communication hub were identified. The communication hub could involve electronic technology for communication between birders. Currently, Point Pelee National park employs a communication system, a hand written notebook and map in the visitor center. Birders record their findings into this book and other birders read them and head out to the specific site to see a specific bird. If this was done electronically using GIS technology and uploaded onto a real-time webpage, birders could access the information from their hand held devices anywhere in the field (Eagles, 2010a). This would be a very new process that could add extra boost and enjoyment for bird-watcher on the trail. So far it has not been incorporated into any existing birding trail, but the birders themselves are moving forward with efforts, such as the e-bird website.

6.) **Management, Evaluation and Monitoring**: In this step important discussion took place as to what organization will managing the birding trail. One option was to develop a new organization in the form of an NGO, which could oversee trail operations. Another

option was to entrust an existing body to manage the trail, such as Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island. A benefit of employing an NGO to manage the birding trail is that it would promote equality amongst stakeholders, whereby no one body is in charge of the birding trail (Denman, 2005). However developing a new organization is costly and time consuming. Modes and frequencies of evaluation and monitoring were also discussed.

3.4 Conclusion to Methodology

This methodology demonstrated the breakdown of the research process in three

distinct phases; whereby each step has to first be fulfilled before the next can commence. This

research has the ultimate ambition to move from a simple idea into practice. Thus, this is as

much an experiment as a learning process, and as such modifications and further reflections

will have to be made as the research evolves.

Chapter 4.0 Results and Findings

Chapter 4 will provide the results for the three phases of methodological approaches that were outlined in the aforementioned chapter, including the results of the interviews of officials associated with existing tourism trails, choosing a case study area, and the proceedings of the meeting of the advisory committee.

4.1 Phase 1: Results of Interviews of Official of Existing Tourism Trail

This section of the results will outline the findings of the interviews administered to trail planners, managers and other key contacts of the 10 existing tourism trails. This included 5 birding trails and 5 other types of tourism trails. The 10 tourism trails that were interviewed included:

- Great Florida Birding Trail
- Maine Birding Trail
- Klamath Basin Birding Trail
- Basin & Range Birding Trail
- Virginia Birding Trail
- Bend Ale Trail
- Alberta Cowboy Trail
- The Seafood and Aquaculture Trail
- Wine Road
- Anonymous Wine Trail

After interviewing people associated with 10 different tourism trails a large amount of answer material was produced. This material is too elaborate and lengthy to be presented in this chapter, but can be found after the reference of this thesis as Appendix 1. In the interviews, 7 main themes emerged regarding the planning, implementation and management of such

tourism trails. These 7 emerging themes listed below will be discussed in more detail as to their

relevance pertaining to trail planning.

1.) Site Selection Criteria
2.) Partnership and Stakeholder Collaboration
3.) Lack of Accessory Institutions
4.) Lack of Monitoring
5.) Issues of Financing
6.) Lack of Disclosure
7.) Tourism Trail Commonality

To support these findings and the seven emerged themes a two step process is used. First

quotes and data from the interviews are used to provide justification of why and how these

themes emerged. Second data is summarized from the interviews to show the strength and

breadth of the themes.These interviews served as an exploratory tool in generating ideas of

what approach or strategies should be adopted in planning a new birding trail. These results

formed a foundation to begin the planning process.

4.1.1 Theme 1 - Site Selection Criteria

All tourism trails interviewed followed some sort of criteria or methodology for site

selection. Some of the trails followed more complex criteria; meanwhile others followed a

much simpler method. These criteria are illustrated by quotes from interviewees, as follows:

> The steering committee believed that birders in Florida knew where the best birding sites were
> in the state, so we allowed public nomination of sites. Once these were received then the
> steering committee evaluated these sites based on 7 criteria….these were ecological
> significance, birding characteristics, site resiliency, physical and legal access, economic
> significance, educational significance and maintenance support (Mark Kiser, Great Florida
> Birding Trail, 2011).

> Well…for site selection…we basically wanted to tie in two main factors, which were birding
> experiences and tourism. So… we really wanted to ensure safety for the visitors and allow them
> the opportunity to see birds in Maine (Bob Duchesne, Maine Birding Trail, 2011).

Site selection for the trail was designed to work hand-in hand with the trail goals and objectives. Because we wanted a mixture of things to be part of the trail to form a true tourism product there is fairly stringent criteria for becoming part of the trail. For example if a business wants to become a site they need to be operational for a minimum of 12 months and show a positive track record….including restaurants have to serve 90% local food, seafood outlets need to sell 60% local fish, wineries 90% local wine, produce outlets 6 different kinds of local produce and tour operators must have 70% local content…Elaborate "yes"…necessary for quality though (Tamara Modra, The Seafood and Aquaculture Trail, 2011).

These quotes show the range of approaches used for site selection. However, all too often the criterion utilized by various tourism trails is either ineffective and inadequate, or overcomplicated and unachievable in practice. Some tourism trails allow for public input in site selection; which becomes a real issue when the overwhelming push factor to include sites into a trail is based on public popularity and less so on functionality. This practice is popular with some tourism trails as it is deemed the most cost effective (Deas, 2011a) to pass the responsibility of site selection over to the public. On the other hand there are tourism trails such as the Australian Seafood and Aquaculture Trail that have developed really stringent selection criteria for sites and member organizations (Modra, 2011). After reviewing all of the various criteria to join this Australian tourism trail, it is hard to imagine that any one site or member can truly achieve these pre-conditions in practice. However, there are a few tourism trails such as the Great Florida Birding Trail and the Virginia Birding Trail that seem to have a set amount of effective site selection criteria that also seem logical and achievable (Kiser, 2011, Living, 2011). The criteria outlined by these two birding trails seem to work hand-in-hand with the trail's goals and objectives.

4.1.2 Theme 2 - Partnership and Stakeholder Collaboration

All tourism trails interviewed had some sort of partnership and stakeholder

collaboration both with regards to the design, implementation and management of the trail.

Some of these partnerships and stakeholder collaborations are summed up by quotes from

interviewees, as follows:

> The Steering Committee is charge of final say over the trail, however without our partnership
> with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Parks
> Florida and our many birding partners none of our efforts could be supported in the long haul
> (Mark Kiser, Great Florida Birding Trail, 2011).

> Without our many partner organizations….umm…the U.S. Bureau of land Management,
> Audubon Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and various NGOs…Well… the bottom line is we
> would be non-existent…they are imperative in helping us direct, manage and possible expand
> the trail (Cindy Deas, Klamath Basin Birding Trail, 2011).

> We are a very long trail and it is vital for us to have partners that we can rely on to fulfill various
> tasks for the trail. Local tourism businesses and government agencies, such as Alberta Parks,
> Provincial and National History Sites, and the Alberta Economic Development Officer….all
> play a vital role in ensuring our continued success (Neil MacLaine, Alberta Cowboy Trail, 2011).

The interviews reveal that all tourism trails function as partnerships and are usually a

comprised of relevant stakeholders. These stakeholder groups are usually involved with the

initial planning, design and implementation of tourism trails and often times remain heavily

involved in their management. Sometimes one particular stakeholder, such as a state agency

takes the main control of the partnership group (Living, 2011), whereas at other times here is a

more equal role assigned to each stakeholder. Thus, there are two main management choices

for tourism trails. The first is having an existing agency or organization entrusted with the final

management responsibility of the tourism trail as witnessed with the Virginia Birding Trail or

the Australian Seafood and Aquaculture Trail. The other management choice is the formulation

of a new oversight entity in the form of Steering Committees or Advisory Boards, as occurred

with the Wine Road in California. Nevertheless, no tourism trail was designed, implemented or managed solely by a single agency or entity without the input of relevant stakeholders. Most effective tourism trails have timely meetings, such as annual or semi-annual get-togethers to discuss relevant issues, challenges and opportunities.

4.1.3 Theme 3 - Lack of Accessory Institutions

The interviewed trail officials were asked what accessory institutions are linked with their trails. Their responses are illustrated below through various quotes.

> Accessory institution?...What do you mean like hotels and restaurants and guides? Well…we can provide ideas as to where birders can stay and where they can hire a guide, but NO…at the moment we do not have direct connections with such tourism providers (Stephen Living, Virginia Birding Trail, 2011).

> Sure….we have 47 accommodation providers that are associate members of the Wine Road. But do you have restaurants and guides directly associated with the trail? (Researcher) Well…NO…at this point we do now have any restaurants that are associate members (Tracy Logan, Wine Road, 2011).

> We do not have anything like that directly tied to the trail, as we do not see the necessity. Most breweries on the trail offer an on-site restaurant and tour of their facilities…as for accommodations…visitors can just visit our tourism website (Valerie Warren, Bend Ale Trail, 2011).

It is clear that most tourism trails lack to have direct connection with relevant accessory institutions that would make their trail a complete tourism product. Few trails have direct connections with accommodation providers, restaurants, specialty stores, guiding or tour services or transportation companies. None of the trails interviewed had all these entities as part of their trail. The Australian Seafood and Aquaculture trail does a great job in selecting appropriate restaurants and seafood providers to become part of their trail; however the trail has no connection with accommodation providers. Thus, the Seafood and Aquaculture Trail is

missing a vital component in making the trail a complete tourism product (Modra, 2011).

Meanwhile, the Wine Road has 47 accommodation providers directly tied to the trail as

associate members; however there is no food or transportation provision associated with the

trail.

4.1.4 Theme 4 - Lack of Monitoring

The interviews asked for monitoring protocols. The answers are listed below.

We have conducted monitoring when we felt it was needed, such as at the start up of the trail. We know the trail is functioning well because our sites report positive visitor numbers. To answer your question…NO we do not employ a regular monitoring tool (Mark Kiser, Great Florida Birding Trail, 2011).

Well…we monitor visitor numbers through our website and how many visitors we receive to the web page…this is the only monitoring tool we use (Cindy Deas, Basin & Range Birding Trail, 2011).

We have various techniques that determine our visitor numbers…first we rely on our website which tracks how many trail maps were printed…second we receive feedback from wineries and the visitor numbers they receive and we also keep tabs on visitor numbers through the two wine festivals we organize each year….ticket sales of the wine festivals allows us to monitor visitor numbers (Tracy Logan, Wine Road, 2011).

It is also clear from the interviews that very few tourism trails have monitoring tools in

place to track visitor numbers and tourist expenditures. Most tourism trails have a website and

simply rely on website visitor numbers for the measurement of overall trail visitors. On the

other hand, some trails, such as the Wine Road rely on festival attendance and ticket sale

figures to calculate visitor numbers. Although a trail would get an overall general idea of visitor

numbers from these monitoring practices, there techniques are not very accurate and are

arbitrary in nature (MacLaine, 2011). Only one of the interviewed tourism trails had regular

monitoring, as the Australian Seafood and Aquaculture Trail, has monthly visitor monitoring.

4.1.5 Theme 5 - Issues of Financing

The interviews probed issues of finance, particularly the raising of enough revenues to maintain operating costs. The findings are listed below.

> Meeting operating costs…this is certainly been challenging and has prevented us from being able to expand the trail (Cindy Deas, Klamath Basin Birding Trail, 2011).

> Raising enough revenues to run the trail has been extremely challenging and at times almost impossible…we initially had a generous grant from the Department of Transportation (Mark Kiser, Great Florida Birding Trail, 2011).

> Maintaining financial sustainability is the hardest thing to accomplish regarding birding trail planning and management. Initial grants and funding usually run out and most trails are forced to make cuts in staff and programs. We have to be constantly vigilant to ensure grants do not run out and to jump at any opportunity that presents itself to apply for more (Bob Duchesne, Maine Birding Trail, 2011).

For every trail interviewed, finances and operating costs is a huge issue for tourism trails. Many tourism trails initially rely on government grants and funding to begin their operations. However, after being in operation for a year or two, most tourism trails run out of such government assistance and are either forced to shut down or make severe cutbacks in services and programs.

A viable option for a tourism trail is to become a true business that can raise money to various means to meet its operating costs. One of the most effective ways of accomplishing this is by establishing a quality product and charging a membership fee for those sites and entities that with to become part of the trail. This is best exemplified by the Wine Road and the Alberta Cowboy Trail. However, this system also had its challenges. Sometimes sites and tourism entities might perceive that the membership fees are too expensive or of adequate value so they might decide not to join. On the other hand there might be those who are freeloaders and take advantage of other who legitimately pay their membership fees (MacLaine, 2011).

Regardless, of what method is implemented to make a tourism trail cost effective and able to meet its operating costs, a tourism trail needs to develop itself to be financially self-sufficient (Duchesne, 2011).

4.1.6 Theme 6 - Lack of Disclosure

The tourism trails seldom published operational procedures, visitor trends or anything else that could be utilized for educational purposes. Therefore, the interviews probed the issue of trail operations. The findings are outlined by some of the quotes from the conducted interviews, of which some are listed below.

> I will only participate in this research if you can ensure that my identity and the identity of the trail I represent are kept anonymous (Anonymous Winery Trail, 2011).

> We have certain data regarding visitor numbers and trends that we do not share with the public and I am afraid I cannot disclose these to you either as it might jeopardize our operation (Tracy Logan, Wine Road, 2011).

Throughout the interview recruitment process and sometimes during the interviews as well, certain tourism planners and managers refused to participate in the study or to disclose operational facts about their trail. The North Caroline Birding Trail is one of the best known bird-watching trails in the United States, thus it would have been helpful to have their input into this research. However, after sending numerous e-mails nobody ever responded to the e-mail recruitment process. This was also case with the Nebraska Birding Trail. The most logical explanation for this lack of willingness to participate in the study is probably because these birding trails were planned by tourism consultant and they do not wish to disclose how they developed these trails. In fact the Nebraska Birding Trail was planned by a person named

Thomas Tabor who is an Ecotourism Development Consultant. Tourism is a competitive

business and sometimes some have an advantage over another and they refuse to risk giving up

that advantage. Consequently, it is understandable if such private business entrepreneurs do

not wish to participate in this study. However, even those who took part in the study did not

always disclose everything in the interview, especially financially and price related.

4.1.7 Theme 7 - Tourism Trail Commonality

The interviews probed the issue of trail planning, looking for comonanilty of purpose

and operations. Some of these quotes are listed below.

> Our trail is very unique as it encompasses the rich wine heritage of California (Tracy Logan, Wine Road, 2011).

> There is no other birding trail like the one found in Florida as we have over 2,000 miles of trails and over 500 sites (Mark Kiser, Great Florida Birding Trail, 2011).

One of the most interesting and perhaps surprising outcomes of the interviews of

officials of existing tourism trails is that all tourism trails are fundamentally the same. All of the

trails interviewed regardless whether a birding, winery, culinary or adventure trail, they were all

planned, implemented and managed similarly and they all have the same flaws and challenges.

However, they attempt to see themselves as being quite unique and different. It seems that a

birding trail which falls under ecotourism and a winery or culinary trail that has much less

emphasis on the environmental aspects of tourism have much in common and fundamentally

function the same. All were planned and managed in a partnership with other key institutions,

all faced challenges in maintaining their operating costs and all believed they were a unique

tourism product. Although numerous made the effort to emphasize their uniqueness, few were really different or stood out from the others.

4.2 Phase 2: Case Study: County of Essex and Chatham-Kent

Before such a planning process could occur a case study location needed to be secured. Since Essex and Chatham-Kent was identified in the methodology chapter as areas of high potential for developing a birding trail, representatives from the two counties and their respected tourism boards were contacted. They were provided with a brief overview of the project goals and objectives and benefits of the project were outlined. Initially the officials from Essex and Chatham-Kent were not interested in collaborating with this thesis as they were already conducting a regional assessment of birding tourism. After further correspondence, county tourism representatives agreed to collaborate on the project through membership with an Advisory Committee. Therefore, the 1st 2 phases of the methodology needed to be fulfilled in a chronological order before phase 3 begun.

4.3 Phase 3: Proceedings of Advisory Committee Meeting

On April 8th, 2011 The Point Pelee Birding Trail Advisory Committee had a meeting to discuss the idea and feasibility of developing a new birding trail for the area of Essex and Chatham-Kent. The initial meeting of the Advisory Committee had a good turnout of participants with the following attendees:

- Ed Brooker, Executive Director for Southwest Ontario Tourism Region 1

- Kris Racine, Director of Program Development-Essex, Windsor and Pelee Island Tourism
- Kevin Money, Director of Conservation Areas for Essex Regional Conservation Authority
- Paul Pratt, Coordinator for Ojibway Nature Centre
- Emily Slavic, Rondeau Provincial Park
- Laura Pennar, Rondeau Provincial Park
- Karen Linauscus, Pelee National Park
- Joy Sim, Tourism Chatham-Kent
- Sarah Rupert, Pelee National Park (not physically present, up to date with e-mail)

The creation of a first ever birding trail in Canada in the Essex-Kent Region was favored by the Advisory Committee. Ed Brooker`s reaction to the initial ideas put forth for the creation of a birding trail was that "it makes perfect sense" (Pelee Advisory Committee, 2011). Kris Racine also agreed with the creation of a birding trail for the region to be a great idea; however he emphasized that business readiness is a must if the trail and the product club is to be successful. However, some potential businesses may not be mature enough and are not birding tourism ready (Pelee Advisory Committee, 2011). As a result, education and various programs may be required to make the trail functional. The Advisory Committee members concluded that there were 11 important points needed to be resolved prior to commencement of trail planning. Thus, in Chapter 5 the author outlines answers to the 11 important planning related questions and provides detailed recommendations and strategies to begin the planning and eventual implementation of the Essex-Chatham-Kent birding trail.

Chapter 5.0 Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

Chapter 5 will analyze and discuss the results of the interviews of officials associated with existing tourism trails, choosing a case study area, and the meeting and proceedings of the Pelee Advisory Committee.

5.1 Phase 1: Interviews of Officials of Existing Tourism Trails

Within the previous chapter, 7 main themes were described based on the interviews of the 10 different tourism trails. The themes that emerged regarding the planning, implementation and management of tourism trails were described in the previous chapter by mostly bringing issues and challenges to the forefront of trail tourism planning. Chapter 4 identified and outlined the planning challenges faced by trail based tourism official. Chapter 5 will briefly discuss the implications of those findings and provide recommendations for tourism planners that can enhance the tourism trail experience for visitors. A more detailed step-by-step version of planning recommendations that are designed to address some of the themes raised in chapter 4 can be found at the end of the thesis as Appendix 2. Appendix 2 is designed as a condensed planner's manual for birding trail development that addresses some of the processes planners need to consider for birding trail development.

The interviews identified the challenge of tourism trails face in determining which sites should be included in the trail. Clearly, trails need to put consideration into their site selection criteria. Careful consideration must be taken into account to ensure the right sites are selected for the trail, as site selection can be the difference between trail success or failure. As with other tourism facilities and development, form and function must be of top priority (Drumm et

al, 2004). It is not enough for a potential site for a tourism trail to be pleasing to the eye, but also has to form a function and coincide with trail goals and objectives (Burger et al, 2008). This means that a tourism trail has to have the right amount of sites that is appropriate to its geographical scope. Meaning that a small designated area for a potential tourism trail cannot be over crowded with sites, not can a large designated area have too few sites (Burger et al, 2008). Often times to determine appropriate number of sites key variables must be considered, such as accessibility, legality, safety, potential environmental degradation and maintenance (Burger et al, 2008). The Great Florida Birding Trail exemplified seven basic criteria for selecting sites, which makes perfect logical sense, however the trail still has over 500 sites. Such a large number of sites raises the question as to how easy it is to meet any of the seven outlined criteria; as such a large number of sites would indicate that most nominated sites are appropriate to be selected for the trail because they meet the seven basic criteria. This is why it is imperative to think critically and to evaluate all sites carefully, because repetition is not favored by most trail visitors, especially those who are time constrained. Site selection is undoubtedly the most time-consuming step in tourism trail development, but must be done very carefully to ensure success (Burger et al, 2008).

All tourism planning is based on some type of partnership and stakeholder collaborations (Inskeep, 1991), as without such collective planning and management input failure is magnified (Drumm & Moore, 2005). It is very important for tourism planers to develop partnerships and to collaborate with most stakeholders who will be involved in a given project plan (Denman, 2005). This notion is perhaps nowhere more important than trail based tourism, as the entire product idea and attraction is based on linking various tourism sites into a single

destination. Thus, trail based tourism planners have to develop very strong relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders that include government, private and if possible non-governmental organizations (Burger et al, 2008). Some of this elaborate partnership and collaboration of stakeholders was evident from the trail interviewed. It was also clear that not all trails function on equal partnership levels and that often time one organization is in charge of major decision making. This is not a bad practice, as a leading organization is likely to make decisions faster and more decisively and more cost-effectively (Drumm et al, 2004). However, tourism planners always need to be careful in including some input from all participating stakeholders to avoid potential conflict in the planning process. Some additional guidelines planners can follow to achieve better stakeholder collaboration is found in Appendix 2 at the end of the thesis.

It was very evident from the interviews that none of the tourism trails that participated in the study have all necessary accessory institutions directly connected or incorporated into their trails. This a major flaw of tourism trails, especially if they are to be considered an independent tourism entity and one that is not reliant on outside support. One of the major issues is that some tourism trail officials are even resistant to the idea of incorporating restaurants or accommodations into their trails (Modra, 2011 & Logan, 2011). Some of the tourism trail officials do not see a restaurant or an accommodation provider as an attraction, thus see no need to include them into their trails (Modra, 2011 & Logan, 2011). Perhaps the idea is that these things are easy for tourists to find and they do not need to be directly connected to the trail. This flaw should be corrected as many tourists not only need accommodations and food providers while visiting a tourism trail, but many often do not know where they need to stay or how to even get there (Eagles, 2010c). Having accommodations and

food providers and other accessory institutions directly linked with the trail would also be beneficial in raising added revenues for a trail. Tourists would stay in accommodations that are associated with the trail; as a result the trail would receive some revenues from those service providers. Such funds could then be allocated to meeting operating costs or for further efforts to expand the trail. Therefore, tourism trails need to incorporate all aspects of a trip if they are to be a tourism product that can be self-efficient.

It was evident from the interviews of tourism trail officials that very few employ standardized monitoring tools to measure the performance of the trail. If there is not a system of standardized and regular timely (quarterly, semi-annual or annual) monitoring in place then how can tourism enterprises be certain it is performing well or poorly (Inskeep, 1991 & Drumm et al 2004). It is no doubt harder to monitor visitor numbers on a tourism trail than in a hotel; however trails need to do this in order to be successful. Reliance on anecdotal evidence, such as from visitor numbers of festivals associated with a trail or estimating visitor numbers sole based on judging visitors numbers at sites based on sight is inadequate. Moreover, employing different monitoring tools throughout different time intervals can also be misrepresenting and inaccurate. Consequently, tourism trails need to establish regular monitoring of visitor numbers and tourist expenditures as well as implement visitor satisfaction surveys. Perhaps the most viable and cost effective way of monitoring would be quarterly surveys and tabulations of visitor numbers.

It became evident that many tourism trails struggled to meet their operating costs. Reliance on external grants was the overwhelming way most tourism trails were developed and is how most meet their operating costs. It is not a bad idea to utilize government grants and

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external sources of funding to plan and operate a tourism trail, if they are available. The danger is becoming solely reliant on such funding to meet day-to-day operating costs and being restrained in future trail development or extension because there are not enough external funds available. Consequently, tourism trails, as other tourism enterprises need to become more financially sustainable and self-reliant (Drumm et al, 2004). There must be great effort made on the part of tourism trail planners and managers to move from reliance on external funding to programs for raising revenues internally. Trail operators need to see beyond the initial site attractions on the trail and perhaps incorporate accessory institutions or a membership system to raise necessary revenues to meet operating costs. Some more detailed strategies are outlines in Appendix 2 at the end of the thesis.

Lack of disclosure is another area where most tourism trails need more improvement. Undoubtedly no tourism enterprise wants to disclose all of their operations; especially if it jeopardizes their business (Inspeek, 1991, Drumm & Moore, 2005). This is certainly understandable considering that there might be great competitions between tourism trail operators and efforts always have to be made to maintain an advantage. However, as with monitoring a system of disclosure standards should be developed and practiced. It is important for tourism trail operators to determine what they will disclose, to whom and how often (Drumm & Moore, 2005). Transparency is vital in any business. Perhaps a well-structured semi-annual report of operational practices and proof of accountability would be a good practice for tourism trails to adopt.

Some of the tourism trails interviewed tried to illustrate that their trail product was very different or unique, however most were very similar and worked on the same basic concept.

Some of the evidence offered by tourism trail officials in support of product uniqueness did not really make the product unique. Thus, there needs to be greater effort to develop tourism trails to be more unique tourism products. Added numbers of tourism trails are emerging creating greater competition, thus making a product as unique as possible is necessary to outperform the competition. This is where proper marketing, advertising and branding are essential tools that can be utilized to achieve such uniqueness, at least in the perception of visitors (Drumm et al, 2004). A tourism trail needs to capture some sort of theme or offer something unique that a tourist cannot get anywhere else. Some ideas for such branding and marketing are discussed in more detail in Appendix 2 at the end of the thesis.

5.2 Phase 2: Case Study: County of Essex and Chatham-Kent

The field work for this thesis showed a willingness for the tourism officials in both Essex and Chatham-Kent to work together on a the Pelee Birding Trail within chapter 3 it was outlined why the case study area was sought out as a place to test the suitability of planning a birding trail as a tourism product club. Chapter 4 illustrated some of the challenges and delegation required in getting these two regional tourism bodies to consider collaborating with this thesis project. Sometimes there are other priorities and obligations that need to be fulfilled by various tourism bodies before collaboration with a new partner or project can take place, as exemplified by the case study location. In hindsight the case study area provided the perfect study area and opportunity to plan and test whether a birding trail can function as a tourism product club. The preconditions of the region in relation to birding tourism, presented a very good opportunity to plan the 1st ever birding trail in Canada. Due to the case study location

being a mature birding destination, so close to the vital U.S. market and having the need to

diversify the local economies presented Essex and Chatham-Kent as the perfect case study

location. Although it is outside of the realm of this master's thesis to actually implement the

planned and outlined birding trail, due to the very positive feedback and reception of the idea,

the Great Pelee Birding Trail will likely be built and serve as an example of collaboration and

effective and strategic tourism planning.

5.3 Phase 3: Recommendations Based on Advisory Committee Meeting

The research provides answers to the 11 questions posed by the Advisory Committee.

The answers step predominantly from the proceedings of the Advisory Committee meeting, but

also incorporate aspects of the literature review and the author's own perceptions.

1.) **Q: <u>Choice of Destinations:</u>** Should all possible destinations be included in the trail, or only those with the best combination of bird numbers, and tourism infrastructure?

A: The most important feature of any birding trail is the sites chosen for the trail. There

are two opposing approaches to site selection.

a.) One approach is to include all possible sites into the birding trail. The advantage

of this approach is the creation of a trail with a large variety of trail features and scenery,.

However, such an approach results in too much repetition, thus diminishing the quality of the

product.

b.) The second approach is selecting a small number of sites chosen based on

selection criteria. With this approach, repetition is minimized. Moreover, birders would likely

have higher satisfaction levels with this approach. Birders are often very goal oriented and

desire a feeling of accomplishment (Hvenegaard, 2002 & Eagles, 2010a). Consequently, a

shorter and more condensed trail with a finite number of high quality sites would provide

birders with such positive outcomes. Birders would likely be able to visit all or most sites along

the trail and experience a large variety of bird species and habitats in a relatively shorter

amount of time and within close proximity.

The recommendation for site selection would be to follow the second approach and to

include a finite number of high quality sites into the newly created birding trail. Since, Tourism

Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island already has a birding site designation system in place, based on

a three level system, these designated sites should be used as a basis for the trail. However, not

all of the designated sites should be included in the trail, rather only the primary site, which is

Point Pelee National Park and the 4 secondary sites. Thus, a total of 5 sites from Essex County

should be included for the initial startup of the trail. The same selection criteria and 3 level

ranking system of birding sites should be done for the Chatham-Kent. Therefore, the entire

birding trail would have approximately 10 to12 high quality birding sites included. Based on the

size of the geographical area and the various habitats that encompass the region, this number

of sites seems to make sense. Also, having a finite number of sites would be easier to manage

and maintain. Moreover, as the trail is new there is a need to see how much tourism interest is

in the trail and what feedback birders provide based on their experiences? Thus, providing

them with a smaller amount of the best quality sites within the area is the best choice to build a

positive reputation and trail loyalty. If the initial response to the trail is positive and tourism

numbers are growing then the trail can be expanded year-to-year to include more sites and

associated infrastructure. Therefore, over time some of the tertiary sites might also be included in the trail; however only if they do not diminish the quality of the trail and minimize repetition.

2.) **Q: Trail Components:** What mixture of birding destinations, accommodations, food provisions, retail stores, transportation, and information operations should be included?

A: The Great Pelee Birding Trail would be the first of its kind in Canada. The trail could be further distinguished from other North American birding trails by putting in place those components that will accompany the birding sites - accessory institutions that will make the trail successful and outperform the competition. It is recommended that those accessory institutions that will complement the trail's 10 to 12 birding sites and make the trail work as a single cohesive unit include accommodation providers, restaurants, transportation companies, retail stores and guiding services that are part of the trail. The emphasis will be on quality over quantity, using only the highest quality accessory components best suited to the trail. The breakdown should reflect the following:

a.) **Accommodation Providers:** Accommodations need to be provided within reasonable distance to each of the sites. Moreover, there should be a variety of accommodation options within different budget levels for the tourist (1 to 5 stars), including hotels, motels, inns, bed and breakfasts, trailer parks and campgrounds. There should not be more than 10-12 accommodation providers. Moreover, a mixture of rural and urban accommodations needs to be included to satisfy different preferences. There should be criteria developed for determining which accommodation provider should be included and perhaps even an open competition held to determine which accommodation provider would be selected for each accommodation type.

However, it is recommended that a few hotels be included as part of the trail, including a 5 star, such as Caesar's Windsor. Including such a hotel would satisfy those seeking a more luxurious experience within an urban setting, as it can also provide additional entertainment for adults in the form of the casino. Moreover, a lower budget hotel should also be selected within Windsor, as Detroit is the closest major airport to the Pelee region and international tourists are most likely to land there. Having at least two hotels within the city in different price levels would be highly recommended for those seeking to stay in the city or who might be in transit through the city. Moreover, a hotel and a bed and breakfast should be included near Point Pelee National Park, such as the nearby Comfort Inn. Moreover, camping sites at Rondeau Provincial Park as well as in the vicinity of Point Pelee National Park vicinity should also be included.

b.) **Food Providers:** Food provisions should follow the criteria set out for accommodation providers. There should be food provisions close to birding sites and various food options for various budget levels. Some should be rural and some should be urban and there should be at least one fine dining restaurant included on the trail. There should also be an emphasis on local produce and culinary creations, to provide tourists with a more authentic experience. Some restaurants need to be included that are licensed to serve alcohol. Moreover, there should also be some bars, pubs and fast food providers included in the trail. The emphasis could be on local and restaurants that can easier cater to birder needs by perhaps providing locally inspired packed lunches and meals. It would also be advisable to include a winery as an accessory institution that would serve as an alternative activity and food provider for those family members not as interested in birding. One person might be a very keen birder, but their

spouse might not be, in such cases a winery might fulfill other interests and serve as a food provider. Altogether, it would be recommended to have no more then 10-15 food providers within various budgets, settings and within the case study area. These accommodation providers should also be encouraged to provide some type of discount or loyalty program for trail visitors.

c.)   **Retail Stores and Shops:** The trail should include retail stores that can provide souvenir shopping, local goods and crafts as well as serve a more practical purpose. It would make logical sense to include at least 4 or 5 such retail stores. One store that should definitely be included in the birding trail would be the Wings of Pelee Nature Store where tourists have a wide choice and can buy high quality binoculars and other birding equipment. Another store that would be a good idea to include would be the Friends gift shops in Point Pelee and Rondeau.

d.)   **Transportation Providers:** A small number of transportation service providers should be selected, including a bus company, an airport shuttle service (servicing Southwestern Ontario, Toronto and Detroit), a car rental company at the trail and a taxi company. All of these transportation providers would be selected based on positive service records and what they can provide for trail visitors, including some sort of discounted rate.

e.)   **Information Operations:** it is important for tourists to obtain information regarding the birding trail, both prior to arrival as well as while on the trail. The best and primary way tourists can do this is through the birding trail website. Thus, the website needs to be developed that outlines all of the components of the trail, such as the associated hotels, restaurants, etc. The website not only needs to provide maps, brochures and route planners for

when the tourist arrives at the destination, but also information on how to get to the

destination. Thus, certain airline, bus line and train information needs to be made available.

Other sources of information would derive from a centralized information center such

as perhaps the Point Pelee visitor center. Moreover, there should be a 1-800 number set up

specifically for the birding trail that potential visitors can contact. Lastly, an iPhone or smart

phone App should be developed through which birders can receive up to date and real time

updates regarding spotted birds and other news pertaining to the trail. Such services could have

a user fee attached to them.

f.) **Guiding Services:** The trail should have at least 5 birding guides who would

provide interpretation and educational services for the trail. They need to be located in various

parts of the trail and have very good knowledge and experience with the local bird and wildlife

population. Moreover, it would be advisable if such guides spoke different languages, such as

German and French in order to better accommodate international or French-Canadian

clientele. It would be advisable to develop some sort of licensing or certification program for

guides that enables for legal guiding services within such protected areas. Perhaps guides could

take a qualifying exam and pay an annual fee to be allowed to guide within such parks. If this

was done, the parks and subsequently the birding trail can further benefit from added

revenues.

3.) **Q: Trail Organizational Structure:** How should the planning and management
body be structured?

A: There are two choices for a management body for the birding trail. One approach is

to entrust an existing organization with oversight of the trail. The second choice is the

development of a new organization to oversee trail operations. Although the development of a

new organization might be deemed as most democratic as no one stakeholder group is in charge of the entire trail, it is also much more costly and time consuming to implement. Consequently, it would be recommended that an existing entity that has experience in managing tourism and can be centrally involved with the oversight of the entire trail be entrusted with management of the trail. Since, Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island have previous experience with birding tourism, it would make most sense to have them oversee and manage the birding trail. An advisory board would have to be set up of representatives from key stakeholder groups, which would meet regularly. The time intervals recommended would be a quarterly meeting as well as any other meetings that might be necessary if the need arises. The advisory board and meetings would be overseen by Tourism Windsor, Essex, and Pelee Island with help from Chatham Kent.

4.) **Q: Long Term Success:** What structure should be put in place to ensure that the trail operates over the long term, monitors its operations, and aims for continued improvements?

A: The Advisory Board led by Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island will be responsible for compiling monitoring data and drawing conclusions regarding the operation of the trail. There should be quarterly evaluations of trail performance. This can be done two ways depending on available funding and time. One choice is for tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island to conduct quarterly surveys on their own, at each time interval. The other option is to have each service provider or site conduct their own monitoring and then send their results to Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island for tabulation and review. The latter option is more recommended as it is less time consuming and more cost effective. However, evaluation instruments would have to be designed by Tourism Windsor, Essex and Pelee Island in order for

them to all be the same and consider the same evaluation criteria. Only when such consensus has been reached can the monitoring tool be distributed to all the stakeholders. Through such quarterly monitoring, problems as well as opportunities would be recognized quickly and necessary actions would be undertaken. Moreover, quarterly monitoring would not be too frequent as to waist unnecessary funds. Besides such formal monitoring, tourists would also be able to submit opinion and feedback forms through the website pertaining to their trip experience on the trail. Such feedback would be important as some themes might arise from them that might not be recognized by the formalized monitoring system.

5.) **Q: <u>Trail Loyalty</u>:** Should a passport system be used to motivate and bring out the competitive and achievement-oriented side of birders?

A: A passport system would be very beneficial and might bring out the competitive and achievement-oriented side of birders. Birders could either pick up a passport or print one online prior to leaving home and have it rubber stamped at each birding site. Visiting food providers or staying in various accommodations could also earn a birder stamps. Consequently, passports with various stamps could be traded for prizes at the main visitor center. For example having visited and received stamps from all 10 birding sites might earn a certain price. If the person visited all sites as well as 5 food providers and stayed in 3 different accommodations, then an even bigger price can be awarded. Another idea would be to give passport collectors a choice to trade their passport for a smaller prize or give the passport up to enter a draw for a much bigger prize. To encourage even further trail loyalty, visitors could retain their stamped passports and combine them with next year`s or a previous year`s passport to attain an even bigger price or recognition. For example, if a birder filled their passport for 5 years in a row they

might receive a bigger prize and have their picture and short biography featured on the trail website.

6.) **Q: <u>Advertising</u>**: What mixture of media is most suitable for the attraction of visitors to utilize this trail compared to alternatives?

A: This new birding trail needs to develop a name that would capture the attention of potential visitors and prompt them to further inquire about visiting the trail. Thus, the trail needs to have a well-recognizable name that differentiates the trail. Probably the most viable and easily recognizable name for this trail would be to call it "The Great Pelee Birding Trail". The word great would emphasize the importance and grandeur of the trail, yet the word Pelee instantaneously describes where the trail is and the region it is associated with.

Another consideration for a newly emerging birding trail would be to capture attention on a wide scale. Since the trail is new, it would be recommended to develop a promotional video of the trail and the associated area. Perhaps nothing longer than 5 minutes that can quickly illustrate and sum up all the benefits and reasons a birder should come and visit the Great Pelee Birding Trail. Such a video could be distributed in several places, including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, as well as made available as a link on birding websites such as that of the American Birding Association.

It would also be a good idea for representatives of the trail to attend trade shows and conferences to raise awareness of the birding trail, such as ITB Berlin and the International Ecotourism Society. These are major events that are frequented by many of relevant people in the field, including tour operators, academics and potential trail visitors.

Besides these initial large scale advertising and marketing efforts, there should be ongoing and smaller scale efforts designed to continuously attract birders to the trail. This can

be done through the trail's own website, as well as having pop up or small advertisements on the sides or bottoms of the screen on popular birding websites and blogs. Internet and IT technology seems to be the most viable and often the cheapest advertising tool. Consequently, most efforts to advertise the Great Pelee Birding Trail should be focused through those efforts.

The trail should offer a printed copy of a birding trail brochure or booklet that could be placed in various tourism boards, offices and businesses, free of charge. The brochure also needs to be made available online as well as sent out by mail if requested. Such a brochure or booklet would be a condensed guide to the birding trail and feature all of the member accessory institutions and provide them with advertising exposure.

7.) **Q: Information on Site:** Can an electronic bird locator information system be developed?

A: For the Great Pelee Birding Trail to really stand out from its competition and provide a unique birding experience, it is highly recommended that an electronic bird locator information system be developed as a smart phone application. The best solution for developing such a system would be to use an existing bird locator system and modify it with various GPS and GIS technological applications so that it can work well for the Pelee region. A reputable option would be to enlist the help of Don Cowan (dcowan@uwaterloo.ca) who is the Founding Chair of Computer Sciences at the University of Waterloo and has over 50 years experience in software engineering. Dr. Cowan has already developed several web mapping, GIS and smart phone tourism applications. Such an application could be made available to birders for a fee, thus contributing to financing trail operations.

8.) **Q: International Clientele:** What are the essential components of a trail operation that would attract and keep an international clientele?

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A: In order for the trail to attract and keep international clientele, it needs to recognize

the needs of such international visitors and specifically cater to them. This means being fully

aware of the needs of international visitors not only while on the trail, but also catering to their

needs and assisting them with trip planning. Undoubtedly, the trail website will be vital in

providing information for likely visitors, regardless of origin. However, in desiring to attract and

maintain international clientele, such information needs to be made available in their native

languages. This means that the trail website and associated trip planning tips, maps, brochures

and all relevant information pertaining to the trail should be available in languages, such as

German, French, Japanese, etc. In my research, I found not a single birding trail has their

website available in any other language than English. Certainly many international clients can

speak and correspond in English; however having a website available in their native tongue

would no doubt make them feel more welcome and comfortable. Moreover, it would illustrate

to the international clientele that the trail has planned and is willing to go the extra step in

attracting and accommodating the needs of international tourists.

International tourists would not only need to be catered to before leaving, but also

during their stay on the trail. The main information center or hub should have some employees

that can correspond in the most common international languages, such as French and German.

Moreover, certain cultural aspects would need to be considered in dealing with international

clientele, such as meals and what time of day to do what activity or what services to provide

and when.

The final and perhaps most attractive feature of the Great Pelee Birding Trail would be

to have available local birding guides that can speak and interpret avian life and nature in

various international languages. This would definitely be a huge asset of the trail as international clients would not have to bring their own guides, instead can hire their own nature interpreters who speak their language but are local and likely know the local avian inhabitants better than any overseas guide.

9.)   **Q: <u>Pricing Policy and Funding:</u>** How can the operational costs of the trail be funded? Can user fees be charged to the clientele to defray the cost of trail operations? What other options or sources can be utilized to meet trail operating costs?

A: There are many ways that a tourism trail can generate funds to meet its operating costs. Much depends on the specific resources that a tourism trail has available as well as how much funding is needed to keep such a trail operational. In the case of the Great Pelee Birding Trail, it is perceived that at least $50,000 would need to be raised annually in order for the birding trail to be fully functional (Eagles, 2010c). Most of this funding would need to be allocated to hire one staff member who could overlook trail operations, and website updates. Some funding will also have to be allocated for annual maintenance of facilities and programs. Therefore, it would be preferable if even more funds were raised than the minimum perceived amount of $50,000. Thus, below are numerous ideas and strategies that could be implemented to raise revenues and funds in order for the Great Pelee Birding Trail to meet its financial operating costs.

The most viable and easiest way the trail can meet its initial startup operating costs is through attaining various financial grants. Such grants might be available from different government levels and agencies that would like to contribute to promoting tourism in the region. Another source for potential financing to meet operating costs could come from private donations or support from various special interest groups or businesses. Some businesses might

see the development of a new birding trail as a good opportunity if they perceive that it might

better aid their own business in the long run.

However, relying on external funding in the form of grants or donations is often not a

viable long term solution for a tourism trail, as initial startup funding often quickly dissipates

and the trail is then forced to make severe cuts in services (Deas, 2011a), which greatly impact

the tourist experience. In some cases tourism trails that have no available funding to meet their

operating costs were forced to close. Consequently, a tourism trail needs to find a viable

solution for long-term financial sustainability and self-sufficiency. There are several strategies

that can be utilized by tourism trails to offset their operating costs.

Another option to meet operational costs is to defray operational costs to the visiting

clientele in the form of various user and service fees. This can be done through various ways,

such as charging user fees for various services, posting entrance fees to certain facilities or

areas as well as developing a membership system. In the case of the Great Pelee Birding Trail,

there are certainly several opportunities where such strategies can be utilized to raise revenues

to meet operating costs.

One innovative idea is developing a real time electronic bird locator system that birders

can use in the field to communicate and locate birds in real time, using GPS and GIS technology.

With the development of such software, there is the possibility to charge birders for utilizing

such technological services. Birders could be charged to download the smart phone application

and to use it on their phones. Several available download options could be made available for

different prices. Current available birding applications for iPhone, iPad and Blackberry are

charging between $30 and $35, such as for the Sibley E-Guide to Birds App (AppWorld, 2011).

Thus, charging $20 for an App to get real time bird locator information on the Great Pelee

Birding Trail seems to be a reasonable option. Annual software upgrades could also be offered

in order for the software to reflect the latest trail changes and upgrades. Offering upgrades

would prompt existing App users to continue buying newer versions of the software. Perhaps

annual software upgrades could be priced at $10, which would be half of the price of a new

download. These prices would be very reasonable and there seems to be no reason why most

birders would not be willing to pay for such services, as they are not very expensive, yet offer

great benefits. Implementing such services would have immense financial benefits for the

birding trail. If only 2,500 birders were to purchase the application for their phone, at the price

of $20 each, this service alone would raise the minimum $50,000 required to meet trail

operating costs. Besides the trail gaining financial revenues, this electronic bird locator system

would eliminate the need for birders to keep returning to the Pelee National Park Visitor Centre

and to read the bird locator booklet as they would have the same information on their smart

phones. Thus, eliminating congestion in the visitor centre and also offering a service that would

make the Great Pelee Birding Trail unique among bird-watching trails.

It must also be considered what the development cost of such a smart phone

application might be. Price can vary greatly regarding smart phone applications depending on

whether the application is brand new or whether it works off an existing system and on the

desired features of the applications (Lomas, 2010). Average development cost of such smart

phone applications range between $20,000 and $150,000 (Lomas, 2010). In order to develop

such software, the birding trail could utilize and work off existing bird locator tools (pending

copyright permission, etc.) or develop a new software system. In order to offset the cost of

developing such software, the trail could utilize graduate students who specialize in GIS and

GPS related research. Thus, geography or engineering students could develop this real time bird

locator system as part of their graduate research or thesis. This way the birding trail could avoid

paying for the direct development of the new software application.

Charging additional entrance fees and having enforcement for certain trail sites could be

a viable option to raise operating funding. Even charging as low as $5 per vehicle to enter

certain areas could raise significant revenues. A good opportunity to implement entrance fees

would be for birding sites that do not charge now, such as the Blenheim Sewage Lagoons. Much

of the lagoons are fenced and are inaccessible by birders, meanwhile some parts can be

accessed for no cost. Since there is no payment system in place for the site, some can be

implemented and having a fence around the area can help with enforcement. Not only would

the fence ensure that only paid patrons enter the area, but it would also eliminate non-birders

who might disturb the birds and diminish the birding experience.

Some sites exist on the birding trail that have set entrance fees, but little enforcement

to ensure compliance. A good example of this is Hillman Marsh, which charges $5 per vehicle to

enter the conservation area; however there is no enforcement in place to ensure that all those

who enter the area pay. According to ERCA director Kevin Money, Hillman Marsh collects

approximately $5,000 worth of revenues, which at $5 per car would only account for 1,000

annual visitors (Pelee Advisory Committee, 2011). Since Hillman Marsh is a popular waterfowl

watching place and is well frequented by birders, especially during the spring, it would be very

hard to believe that only 1,000 visitors came to the site annually. Thus, it is recommended that

Hillman March and other similar conservation areas implement entrance fee enforcement.

Such enforcement can be done through two different, yet equally effective ways. One way of making sure visitors pay an entrance fee is by having personnel who can collect money at entry locations and issue a parking slip to be placed in the windshield of each entered car. Such a gate attendant could be a student from the local area who might also have knowledge of birds and current birding highlights in the conservation area. Thus, the person does not have to be paid much, but would provide an additional information service that would enrich visitors' birding experiences. Since, Hillman Marsh also has a building onsite; an additional student could be hired to serve simple snacks and beverages to the visiting birders, which can raise additional revenues. Therefore, hiring local students for gate enforcement and to manage a snack bar would ensure entry compliance and raise additional revenues that can be allocated to cover trail operating costs. Moreover, such actions would also create additional employment opportunities within the region, especially for the youth. Paying two students would create great financial benefits for the trail that would outweigh the costs of having hired staff. Moreover, students could be hired periodically, only when there is a high volume of birders to the site.

The other option for enforcement would be to implement an electronic gate system at Hillman Marsh and have on site staff. An electronic gate with a ramp could be implemented, whereby only once a patron paid for entrance either by cash or credit card would the gate open and allow them access into the conservation area. There are several options for this type of enforcement, which ranges from cheaper electronic gates which might cost as low as $1,000 to higher end gates that are solar operated and can range between $4,000-$5,000 (Elite Gates, 2011). Funds from initial grants and from other sources of funding could be allocated to a one

time investment of such enforcement tools. Afterwards there would be a need for some periodical maintenance of such gates, but it would require much less hired staff than using gate attendants.

Although there might be opposition from some parties to implement and enforce entrance fees at various birding sites, it is reasonable to make visitors pay for the service and experience they receive. Some argue that citizens already pay for such services through taxes, which might sometimes be the case; however the majority does not contribute to the county conservation area through taxes. Many visitors to Hillman Marsh come from areas of Ontario that are far outside of Essex County. Moreover, there are a large number of U.S. citizens and cars that visit Hillman Marsh and they certainly do not pay Canadian, Ontario or Essex County property taxes. Therefore, the argument that visitors to Hillman Marsh already pay municipal and county taxes that contribute to the management of the conservation area is sometimes true; however it is an overall weak argument. Moreover, for those who do contribute to the management of the conservation area through taxes, they need to be made aware as to why it is important for them to pay an entrance fee each time they enter the conservation area. Perhaps some signage or a plaque needs to be placed throughout the conservation area, especially at the entrance gate that would describe why such entrance fees are necessary. Plaques could explain the history of the marsh, its management, why there is the necessity of collect entrance fees and how such fees are used in the management of the site. Therefore, there needs to be serious effort in making people understand the necessity to collect entrance fees and showing accountability as to where their funds are going in relation to conservation efforts.

In order to make sure entrance fees are properly allocated to managing the trail, perhaps an account needs to be set up where a certain percentage of each entrance fee is directly deposited. A manager who would be in charge of operating costs and functionality of the trail could have monitored access to such an account to allocate funds to meet certain necessary operating costs.

Equipment rental could also be a viable method for the trail to raise additional revenues that can be used to meet operating costs. The visitor centers in Point Pelee National Park and Rondeau Provincial Park could offer equipment rentals to park visitors for a set fee. Equipment such as binoculars, tripods and perhaps even cameras could be rented to visitors. Equipment could be rented on an hourly, half day or daily basis. Even if only $5-15 were charged per visitors for various equipment rentals, for various lengths of time, it would be significant, as both the park and the birding trail could benefit from such revenues. In the case of both protected areas, the Friends of the Parks organizations could be entrusted with running such equipment rental programs.

In addition, birding blinds could also be offered for rent. According to Welling (2011), 17 private ranches in Texas charge from $100 to $200 a person for a daylong of use of birding blinds. It is understood that placing such blinds may not be permitted within national and provincial parks, as it is seen as something that might restrict the general park visitor from various parts of the park where birding blinds might be set up (Pelee Advisory Committee, 2011). Consequently, such blinds would have to be set up in other areas, such as perhaps the Blenheim Sewage Lagoons or Hillman Marsh. Different blinds could be offered in different areas for different price ranges. Rentals could be offered on an hourly, half day or daily basis.

Moreover, it would be really beneficial if birders could book their blinds ahead of time through the website, so they have them reserved even before leaving their homes. The other benefit of online booking would be payment or at least partial payment up front and the possibility to charge a small cancellation fee if birders do not utilize their reserved blinds. These blinds could be a major fund raiser for the birding trail if only birding trail members are allowed to use them.

Another option for raising revenues to meet trail operating costs would be to develop and run various birding courses and workshops that birders can take. Once again different birding courses could be offered for different birding levels and within different price ranges. Some courses could be offered simply as introduction to birding and perhaps entail a few hours and cost between $50-100. Meanwhile other courses could be more intense and encompass a few days or several hours over a weekend and cost several hundred dollars. Some courses could specifically focus on bird species identification or effective photography techniques or have an environmental and conservation ethos. An innovative and unique idea that could further make the Great Pelee Birding Trail very unique and raise additional revenues is offering birders such courses and workshops online. This way visitors could gain knowledge of existing bird species and the trail prior to even leaving for their trip. To run such courses and workshops the help of local birding guides or experts as well as the Friends organizations of Point Pelee and Rondeau would have to be enlisted. Therefore, certain portion of revenues would go to the management of the birding trail and some would be allocated to the conservation of the protected areas.

A further option for generating additional revenues to meet the operational costs of the birding trail would be to develop and sell birding vacation packages. Once again different

products and packages would have to be offered for different lengths of time, with different

included features and within various price ranges. Some packages might only include

transportation and lodging, where as others might operate as a nearly all-inclusive package

vacation. The benefits of offering such products would be that visitors could buy a package and

visit the birding trail for the lowest and most cost-effective way. Meanwhile, the birding trail

would be able to sell its products more widely by encouraging people to buy more at once,

through online bookings. The components of such a vacation package would only be formed

from those service providers (hotel, restaurants, transportation companies etc.) that are part of

the birding trail. Pricing for such packages would have to be careful considered and the key

objective would be to provide clients with a sense of "value for their money". Therefore, prices

could range from as low as $500 to as high as $2,000 as long as there is justification for the

price and the clients are left feeling satisfied with their trips. This is a strategy that would best

work for clientele that are coming from further away or perhaps from overseas, as it would

provide them with easy trip planning and booking options.

The most viable way the birding trail can collect funds to meet its long term operating

costs is to implement memberships. Two types of memberships can exist, those designed for

accessory institutions and those created for the clientele. Since, the Great Pelee Birding Trail is

to be designed as a tourism product club; it needs to have member accessory institutions.

Surely, such accessory institutions would go through vigorous assessment to ensure clients

receive the best possible service and birding experience. However, it is not enough for

accessory institutions to simply meet the product club's criteria for high quality. Since the

selected accessory institutions that are to become part of the product club will be provided

with unparalleled advertising, marketing and guaranteed clients, they too need to provide the

birding trail with something to meet operating costs. Consequently, it would be advisable to

charge such accessory institutions with annual membership fees that can be allocated to meet

trail operating costs. To provide flexibility, accessory institution will have a choice of

membership fees, based on the amount they are willing to pay, the advertising exposure they

desire to have as well as the voice and decision making power they feel they need on the

Advisory Board. Thus, an accessory institution could have 3 membership choices, with

membership fees ranging from $100-300 annually.

At the highest level of $300 (full member) annually, an accessory institution would be a full
member of the product club, with the following benefits:
- Full voting power at all Advisory Board meetings, including scheduled (quarterly) and
  unscheduled meetings.
- Birding Tourism workshop training.
- Receiving the most advertising and marketing exposure, including a full page advert in
  the birding trail brochure or booklet and own link page on website.
- Listing on all birding trail maps, roadside signs and website.

The $200 (associate membership) would include:
- Voting ability only on scheduled (quarterly) Advisory Board meetings, and no voting
  power for unscheduled or emergency meetings.
- Birding Tourism workshop training.
- Only receive a half page advertisement in trail brochure booklet, no individual link on
  website.
- Listing on some trail maps, road signs and website.

The $100 (partner membership) would include:
- No voting ability at any Advisory Board meeting.
- No birding tourism workshop training.
- Only listed in trail brochure booklet, no advertisement space, or individual website link.
- Only listed on some trail maps and on website, not listed on road signs.

Due to the limitations placed on non-full members in relation to advertising and Advisory Board

voting power, it is hoped that majority of accessory institutions would prompt to get full

memberships within the product club.

Another option for collecting funds from accessory institutions is by not placing specific

or set annual membership fee, rather collecting 5-10% of their annual revenues to be reverted

back to the product club to meet advertising and operating costs. Although this strategy might

generate more funds to meet operating costs than a flat annual membership fee, it is harder to

enforce and manage. Each accessory institution will have different profit margins and declare a

different profit amount, which the product club might not be able to verify. Moreover, such

returns on earned revenues could not be collected in the initial year of the product club being

operational as it cannot be collected for the previous year when no services were provided to

the accessory institutions in the form of advertising and marketing. Lastly, there is the potential

to combine both of these techniques and charge accessory institutions a flat membership fee as

well as collect on 5-10% of revenues, but only after the initial year of operations.

The other membership option is directed at the birding trail clientele, whereby visitors

to the trail can buy annual memberships to the trail. Once again different membership options

with different price levels can be offered. Members of the birding trail would receive

membership cards that would allow them access to different sites and facilities throughout the

trail. Some lower level memberships can have limitations placed on them, such as the number

of sites they can visit, whereas an unlimited membership could also be offered. This

membership would work much like an annual season pass. This approach would be most

beneficial for frequent visitors to the trail, particularly for those who live in close proximity and

can visit the trail on a regular basis. An unlimited membership could be offered for perhaps

$200 a year, which would allow access to all sites and provide discounts at member hotels,

restaurants and stores.

10.) Q: <u>New Facilities:</u> Are any new on-the-ground facilities required that could upgrade the birding service quality?

A: Since most of the sites included in the birding trail are already established bird-watching

destinations, there are few needs to build additional on-the-ground facilities. Some birding sites

might need to have additional comfort facilities built or upgrades to existing facilities.

The only other on-the-ground element that would have to be built is road signage for

the various birding sites and associated accessory institutions throughout the counties,

including signs off major highways, such as the 401.

11.) Q: <u>New Programs:</u> Are any new birding programs required that could upgrade the birding experience?

A: New birding programs in the form of courses and workshop could be offered to

birders to enhance their birding experience. Not only can they make the birding experience

more fun, but will provide birders with an added educational component.

Besides offering new programs for birders, it is necessary to implement workshops to

teach accessory institutions birding tourism related operational procedures. Such workshops

could teach hotels, restaurants, transportation companies and stores how to better cater to,

attract and satisfy birders. A good example would be teaching restaurants and bars when to

offer meals and what type of entertainment and what point in the day is most appropriate and

suitable for attracting birders. For example, it would be wise to offer birders an early breakfast

and not have loud live music in restaurants or near accommodation providers late into the evening (Eagles, 2010c).

Such workshops would have to be mandatory and should be offered free of charge for full members and associate members of the product club. Thus, all member accessory institutions will be required to send representatives to get trained and brought in line with the goals and objectives of the birding trail. Accessory institutions would be taught how to best cater to the birders and what techniques they can utilize to ensure customer satisfaction. This will be a vital tool to ensure the trail performs efficiently and provides birders with the best possible birding experience.

Product club partner organizations as well any other businesses that are not part of the birding trail, but wish to attract more birders could enlist in such workshops, for a set price. Some courses could specialize in topics such as marketing and advertising, customer satisfaction as well as program and product development.

5.3.1 Conclusion to Planning Strategies

The purpose of these questions and answers was to outline the various possibilities and planning direction that the birding trail can adopt for its different operational needs. Different choices and approaches were outlined and some recommendations were made based on the author's best interpretation stemming from the literature review, interviews of existing tourism trails and from the advisory committee meeting. These results were combined and produced a condensed Birding Trail Planner's Manual found as Appendix 2 at the end of the thesis.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Summary

Birding tourism has evolved to become a serious tourism sector, especially in the United States where it is significant contributor to the tourism industry. Birding tourism is estimated to contribute $85 billion in overall economic income in the U.S. annually (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2001). As birding tourism continues to evolve, new ideas and practices are adopted by tourism planners to attract more birders to a given area. One such outcome as a result of the growing popularity of bird-watching is birding trails. This thesis shed light on some research gaps that existed in birding trail planning, including the fact that there was very little literature regarding how birding trails are planned, implemented and managed, from a tourism planner`s perspective. The thesis also tested the suitability and appropriateness of planning and managing a birding trails as a tourism product club. Through the literature review and the adopted three-phase methodology, the pre-determined four research questions listed below were addressed and answered.

1.) Who and what should be involved in the planning of a birding trail?
2.) What are the necessary components of a birding trail?
3.) Can a birding trail function as a tourism product club?
4.) If so, how should a birding trail product club be implemented, managed, and monitored to ensure success?

Question one was first answered through interviews with official of existing tourism trails. Planners and managers of existing tourism trails were interviewed regarding the planning steps that were involved in developing their particular tourism trail. Key questions were raised, such as what organizations or individuals were most imperative in tourism trail planning and what possible challenges existed in developing such trails. Most tourism trail officials provided

very constructive answers and good insight of the necessary partnership and stakeholder

collaboration that was usually involved in planning such tourism trails. These answers were

then presented to the Pelee Advisory Committee during phase three of the research. The Pelee

Advisory Committee deliberated and discussed possible ideas and direction the potential

birding trail should take. As a result, all necessary considerations were discussed regarding the

development of the birding trail, including who and what exactly will be involved in planning

the trail. Therefore, phase one and phase three of this thesis provided the answer to the first

research questions.

The second research question was also answered through phase 1 and phase 3 of the

thesis methodology. When officials of existing tourism trails were interviewed, they provided

some great insight as to what the components of their trails were; however since it became

evident that none of the tourism trails interviewed had all necessary accessory institutions

directly linked with their trail, trail planning shortcomings became evident. The findings were

once again presented to the Pelee Advisory Committee during phase 3 of the thesis. The Pelee

Advisory Committee understood and accepted the flaws of other tourism trails and began

deliberating what exact components were necessary to be incorporated into the new birding

trail to make it a complete and self-reliant tourism product.

The third research question was addressed through phase 3 of the thesis, accompanied

by secondary source evidence drawn from the thesis literature review. The Pelee Advisory

Committee was approached and the idea of developing a new birding trail as a tourism product

club was presented to them. It had to be thoroughly explained as to what a tourism product

club really is as some of the committee members did not know. Information was drawn from

the literature review through case study examples of winery and golf tourism to illustrate the potential success the product club approach might have for birding trail planning. The Pelee Advisory Committee once again deliberated and discussed the idea and concluded that it was potentially a good idea to plan a birding trail as a tourism product club.

The fourth and last research question was answered through phase one and phase three of the thesis. By interviewing officials of existing tourism trails, information was sought out as to how they have implemented, managed and monitored their trails. This information was recorded and analyzed and notes were made as to what was successful and what was a potential failure on the part of those trail planners to addressing tourism trail implementation, management and monitoring. These findings were once again presented to the Pelee Advisory Committee who discussed the findings and added their own perspective and contributions. These specific contributions coupled with the other's own perspective and knowledge are presented in Chapter 5 as the specific recommendations for the Pelee regional birding trail.

6.1.1 Secondary Sources

The review of the existing literature related to this topic was vital in setting the background and theme of the research. Since this research is predominantly focused on ecotourism, particularly bird-watching, it was vital to evaluate existing research related to the field, including some of the key fundamental concepts of sustainability and sustainable utilization. These two concepts served as the starting point for understanding ecotourism and birding tourism. Aside from the ecologically related topics, the literature review also explored the concept of tourism product clubs and the concept of birding trails. However, very limited

academic information was found on these topics, thereby re-emphasizing the necessity of conducting primary research to better understand such tourism concepts. The literature review did assist in answering the research questions. However, the existing literature was very limited and seldom stemmed from academic sources.

6.1.2 Primary Research

Phase 1, the interviewing of officials of existing tourism trails, was vital in generating ideas and identifying further research gaps that needed to be solved in planning a potential birding trail. This phase of the research provided further insight into the research questions of the thesis.

Phase 2 of the research involved choosing an appropriate case study location to begin planning and applying ideas for the development of a new birding trail. The counties of Essex and Chatham-Kent were sought out as having the best combination of birding resources within Canada and the appropriate economic conditions that would be suitable for developing a new regional birding trail.

Phase 3 of the research is most important as it provided the final outcome and findings of the research that provide the most relevant contributions to the academic knowledge of birding trails. These outcomes also serve a practical purpose as the final recommendations can and will likely be implemented by Tourism Windsor, Essex, and Pelee Island. Through the formulation and meeting of the Pelee Advisory Committee all of the previously gained knowledge on tourism trail planning strategies were scrutinized and debated. The idea of developing a new birding trail as a tourism product club was also carefully analysed and

favoured. Therefore, through the combination of secondary sources and primary research all four of the research questions of the thesis were answered.

6.2 Key Findings

The overall outcomes of the research identified three key findings that were overlooked by previous academic research.

An important finding of the research was that no tourism trail operaties as a tourism product, as none have all the necessary components that would allow them to operate as a single self-reliant unit. This finding stemmed from the interviews of official of existing trails. The proposed solution to this problem is to develop future trails and tourism product clubs. Since tourism product clubs are designed to work as a single cohesive unit they are a viable option to overcome such a planning challenge and there seems to be no reason to indicate that such an approach would not work for tourism trail planning, implementation and management.

The second discovery of the research is the challenge that most tourism trails face in meeting their operating costs. All of the tourism trail officials interviewed expressed great concern and challenges in meeting day-to-day operating costs that can keep their trails functional. Another important discovery of the research was the lack of monitoring and evaluation that most tourism trails undergo to identify potential challenges and opportunities.

The third major finding of the research is that all tourism trails were planned similarly and all faced the same challenges and shortcomings regardless of whether they were birding trails, winery trails, culinary trails or adventure trails. Thus, the research indicated that all types of trails could be planned, implemented and managed fundamentally in the same manner. If

this is to be true then the research indicates that a new and strong tourism sector is emerging, which is the trail based tourism sector. More future studies and time needs to pass to determine this outcome.

6.3 Future Contributions and Recommendations for Research

6.3.1 Future Contribution to Tourism Planning

Based on the major findings of the research there are several vital recommendations that should be incorporated by birding tourism and tourism trail planners.

Planners must plan birding trails as a complete tourism experience and incorporate necessary accessory institutions. The application of the product club concept seems to be a viable method in promoting and developing such birding trails as cohesive units. Moreover, planners must devise strategies and programs to raise adequate revenues to keep tourism trails, including birding trails self-sufficient and financially sustainable. There also needs to be regular and standardized monitoring that can effectively compare data that will not only illustrate success, but also identify and deal with challenges.

Moreover, since all tourism is in the business of creating and selling experiences, emphasis for quality should be of the highest priority. To ensure quality from within and to reassure clientele of high quality, a certification system should be utilized. A birding trail functioning as a tourism product club could in itself be utilized as a certification body that can ensure high quality. Such an action would eliminate the necessity for third party certification and make the birding trail even more self-sufficient and cost effective. Such an example of internal quality assurance could be used and adopted in many other tourism spheres.

The research has illustrated, therefore, that the results and core ideas of this thesis have many viable, practical and academic implications for the future of a wide array of tourism planning.

6.3.2 Contributions to Research and Recommendations for Future Study

It is undoubtedly very positive if a thesis can provide practical solutions and recommendations that can be utilized to help industry personnel. However, a thesis also has to have an academic contribution upon which future studies could be conducted.

The popularity of tourism trails is growing and this research has illustrated many trends and challenges that are common to all of them; as a result, a study such as this one could lead to future studies regarding tourism trails of all types, which could elevate tourism trails to their own sector of the larger tourism industry. Thus, rather than identifying a birding trail as a part of birding tourism or a winery trail as a part of winery tourism, perhaps they can both be thought of as both being a parts of the trail tourism sector.

This thesis spent considerable time and effort in determining how a birding trail should be planned implemented and managed to ensure success. More future studies are needed regarding tourism planning in general as this part of tourism is seldom discussed in the literature. Birding has begun to appear more in academic literature within the last 20 years; however, most studies focus on birding from a conservation, education or recreational approach. Birding is without question big business and has the potential to change the economic conditions of a particular region and even country. However, there is very little academic literature on birders and the birding market needs and desires. There need to be

studies conducted as to what birders really want and desire on potential birding trips. The business practice and analysis of supply and demand need to be applied to birding tourism more thoroughly.

A viable and perhaps cost-effective way to conduct such a study would be through the examination and analysis of online birding blogs. Such blogs are posted on the internet and are available to the public, which minimizes the cost of conducting the research and ethical considerations. A larger sample size should be analyzed that can provide real input into birder needs and desires. Moreover, blogs should be analyzed from various countries and within different languages to get the most comprehensive results.

6.4 Final Thought

The three phases of this research illustrate how a planning project could be planned, collaborated and developed. The research has illustrated that a birding trail is a viable and practical way of collaborating resources and stakeholders to maximize the potential of birding tourism in a given area. In fact a parallel study conducted for Southwestern Ontario Tourism, Region 1 also identified the benefits and recommended the development of a regional birding trail (Carolinian Canada Coalition; Earth Tramper Consulting Inc.; & Peir 8 Group, 2011). However, this proposed birding trail encompasses all areas around the northern shore of Lake Erie and is not built on the tourism product club concept. This will likely have higher development costs and not have as strong an emphasis on quality as the product club approach. This thesis illustrates that the idea of a product club is well-received by tourism officials and agencies, as it seems to promote the sort of collaboration desired in building a

birding trail. If such an approach works for the implementation of a birding trail, then it could

be applied to other types of tourism trails and tourism spheres. Based on current research and

response, there seems to be no reason why such an approach to tourism trails planning would

not work.

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APPENDIX 1.0: Questions and Answers from Interviews with Tourism Trails

1.0 Great Florida Birding Trail

The Great Florida Birding Trail is one of the best known and largest birding trails in the United States. The trail spans some 2000 miles and includes 491 sites in almost every part of the state (Kiser, 2011). The key contact interviewed from the Great Florida Birding Trail was Mark Kiser who has been the Birding and Wildlife Coordinator since 2005. As a result he is the top decision maker who is directly involved in the management of the trail and is part of the steering committee.

There are ongoing efforts to expand the trail by including an additional 32 rural community sites (28 of these are designated Rural Counties of Critical Economic Concern), that are destined for new economic development (Kiser, 2011). Part of this expansion is also the changing of the name of the trail from the Great Florida Birding Trail to the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail, in hopes of promoting Florida's other wildlife viewing opportunities (Kiser, 2011). The trail has been in operation since 1997 and has gone through several key stages of development and expansion, as briefly outlined below in table 1. However, the trail is also facing hard financial challenges due to the current economic climate and loss of government support as a result of funding cutbacks (Kiser, 2011). Therefore some of the planned developments for the 2011 and 2012 year might not go ahead as scheduled (Kiser, 2011).

Table 1.-Timeline for Great Florida Birding Trail

Timeline	
Year	**Action**
1997	Initial trail planning--Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail used as a model

1998	First coordinator hired
2000	East guidebook completed
2002	West guidebook completed
2003	East road signs completed
2004	Panhandle guidebook completed
2006	South guidebook completed
2006-2007	West road signs completed
2008-2009	Panhandle road signs completed
2009	Interactive trip-planning tool on website launched
2010	Complete website overhaul
2011	Revised Panhandle Birding and Wildlife Trail guidebook completed
2011	South road signs and revised East Birding and Wildlife Trail guidebook planned for completion

Mr. Kiser answered the interview questions as follows:

1.) Q: What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: Potential sites were initially publicly nominated by interested individuals or

organizations that perceived a certain site having valuable resources for birding purposes.

Therefore, birders, conservation groups, local communities and local chambers of commerce

were all allowed to initially nominate sites that were to be reviewed and evaluated by the

steering committee. Following this public nomination process, the potential sites were

evaluated based on 7 key criteria as outlined by the steering committee, which are:

  a.) Ecological Significance-Sites needed to demonstrate ecologically important habitats
  that are inhabited by rich avian life and a need to preserve such spaces for
  conservation purposes.
  b.) Birding Characteristics-sites must be high quality, good birding habitat as well as
  contain possible rare and endemic species (i.e. Euro-Asian Dove). Sites could not
  include exotic or invasive species that would diminish the ecological integrity and
  hinder an authentic Florida birding experience.
  c.) Site Resiliency-Selected sites needed to show that if they were used on a frequent
  basis by birders that they could withstand visitor impacts without diminishing the
  birding experience or interfering with bird habitats. In this step such things as
  carrying capacity were also considered, when selecting between potential sites.

d.) <u>Physical and Legal Access</u>: public or private lands were both equally considered for potential birding sites. However, private land owners needed to give written permission for access to their land. Sometimes agreements were reached with private land owners that allowed birders to enter their land for the purpose of birding, others needed to be on official birding tours.

e.) <u>Economic Significance</u>: Sites were preferred that had a nearby economic chamber of commerce or other economic development agency that can incorporate the birding trail into their local economy. Moreover, the more tourism support that was adjacent to potential sites, the more favored they were to be selected.

f.) <u>Maintenance Support</u>: Sites were assessed if they can be maintained and kept clean on a regular basis as to not diminish the birding experience. Such considerations included the placement of garbage cans and regular collection of trash, portable washrooms and keeping trails and pathways debris free.

g.) <u>Educational Significance:</u> Sites needed to have either natural or built learning opportunities. The natural learning opportunities included things that a birder could self learn from the site visited, such as the facts about birds, the landscape, habitats and Florida. Often these learning opportunities needed to be supported by signage or by the aid of guides. Meanwhile built learning opportunities largely referred to learning or interpretation centers, which could often be supported by protected areas and their associated facilities.

2.) Q: What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?

A: The planning, development and implementation of the trail was done as a

partnership between key organizations and agencies that eventually created a steering

committee comprised of the following stakeholders:

- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Florida Parks
- Visit Florida (state tourism agency)
- Audubon of Florida
- 2 bird conservation agencies
- Local birders, especially contribution to guide books

3.) Q: What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

A: The trail has an internet website that provides useful information regarding the trail, including weather conditions for various sections for the trail, news and updates and features species. There are 4 free guidebooks provided for the trail, which can be downloaded from the website. The trail also features numerous road signs that aid birders in finding their way along the trail. The trail also has a gift store with merchandise for sale to support the trail. Lastly, one county created their own trail subsection in the hopes of further promoting their area's birding qualities.

4.) Q: What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?

A: There are currently no accessory institutions, such as hotels, restaurants, guiding services and transportation companies etc. that are linked with the trail. However, there are plans and considerations made by the steering committee to include such components into the trail in the future. Much of such development is heavily influenced by the availability of development finances. In the meantime, guides can be hired locally by birders who wish to use them.

5.) Q: Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail operations?

A: The overall management of the trail is done by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission with the aid of the same stakeholder group that makes up the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee meets every 1-2 years and assesses the trail and decides what possible improvements or expansion might be necessary for the smooth operation of the trail. The Steering Committee might also decide to remove some sites or programs from the trail if they deem them not very functional or below expected standards.

6.) **Q:** What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A: The Great Florida Birding Trail does not have an assessment tool in place that is conducted at regularly timed intervals, such as quarterly or annual surveys. However in 2004 there was a Visitor Satisfaction Survey conducted (very positive results), and there are possible plans to repeat this survey. When new signs or sites were established visitors were given a 1 page questionnaire testing their knowledge and awareness about the birding trail. The trail also accepts formal public complaints and as a result of such complaints, 3 sites were dropped in the eastern part of the trail.

7.) Extra question regarding funding for the trail:
Q: Who or what agency funded the creation of the trail?

A: The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission funded most of the creation of the trail and as a result is the most influential in the decision making process of the trail. However, the Florida Department of Transportation contributed all the funds necessary for signs, guidebooks and infrastructure to be built along the trail. Lastly, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided funds for the building of blinds, binocular loaning, the building of 10-12 sites and the development of economic workshops that taught local communities and businesses how to cater to birders. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was also responsible for the formation of the Non-profit Wildlife Agency that deals with collecting public donations in support of the trail. Currently, government agency funding is very limited and as a result the trail faces an uncertain future, especially regarding further development and expansion. In fact, some cutbacks and layoffs might also be necessary to keep the trail operational, including Mark Kiser's position.

The Maine Birding trail was started in 2003, but in a unique way. Whereas most birding

trails emerged as a way of promoting an area's tourism industry, the Maine Birding Trail began

as a hobby, of Bob Duchesne who was part of the Maine State legislature and on the Maine

Board of Trustees and an avid birder. Duchesne was also a birding guide for 15-16 years and

had a successful radio career, which all greatly contributed to his ability to promote birding in

the state. Duchesne (2011) saw the great birding resources that Maine had to offer and decided

that a birding trail would be the best way to allow others to enjoy such state resources. As a

result he approached key people and stakeholders to plan and implement the birding trail.

Thus, Bob Duchesne is the key person interviewed from the Maine Birding Trail, whereby all

relevant information related to the trail and the associated interview should be attributed to

his knowledge and participation.

1.) Q: What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: Sites were selected to incorporate and tie together two main factors; tourism and a

great birding experience. As a result three key factors were considered, which included:

   a.) Public Accessibility-All sites selected for the birding trail needed to be public lands,
       private lands could not be included as birding sites.
   b.) Safety-Sites needed to be safe both from human induced factors (i.e. crime), as well
       as natural factors (i.e. animals, extreme weather conditions, unsafe paths)
   c.) Good Birding Experience-sites needed to provide great birding experiences by
       having an abundance of birds, including rare and endemic species.

2.) Q: What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which
       stakeholders?

A: The trail was planned as a partnership of stakeholders, with Bob Duchesne serving as

the main mediator and consulting person. Amongst the other stakeholders were:

- Maine Audubon
- Maine Board of Trustees
- Maine State Government
- Maine Office of Tourism
- Birding Conservation Groups
- Various managers

3.) Q: What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

A: The trail has a website that provides important information regarding weather conditions, most commonly sighted birds in various regions on the trail, rare species alerts, trip planning resources , tour information and provides free maps and guides for the trail. The trail website also provides information on some accessory institutions, such as links to accommodation providers and guiding services.

4.) Q: What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?

A: The trail website provides a list of 30 accommodation providers that were selected to be part of the trail as well as a number of guiding services for the various regions that are part of the trail. Ten of the accommodation providers were chosen from a list of 100 inns that were part of the environmental leaders program. The other twenty were selected from The Maine Innkeepers Association. All accommodation providers were assessed for quality, location and green business values. They also had to have good business values and demonstrated previous operational success. The accommodations are asked to contribute $50 a year which would be allocated towards newsletter and to feature them in customized regional guides. Such guides are shorter (7-10 pages) and provide a basic summary of a given trail region's choice of accommodation providers. However, Mr. Duchesne described that some of the accommodation providers do not like the membership approach and some have not even provided their annual

$50 payment to be featured in the guides and on the website. Therefore, there is as lack of

enforcement associated with the accommodation providers due to lack of manpower and

funds.

5.) Q: Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail
operations?

A: The main oversight of the trail is done by Bob Duchesne himself with the aid of the

same stakeholder groups that were involved with the planning of the trail. The group has

regular meetings to discuss the direction of the trail and to identify possible areas needing

improvement. There are plans for the possible expansion of the trail and associated programs;

however finances are very limited, thus projects might not be feasible.

6.) Q: What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated
and how often?

A: There is no monitoring tool to measure visitor numbers or required improvements.

The website is used to monitor visitor numbers based on how many people click on the

website. The website can identify which month of the year has most traffic and thus conclude

which month is the most popular birding period. The website can also track how many maps

were printed off the website and monitor visitor numbers that way. The three festivals help

annually on the Maine Birding Trail and the associated attendees are another way the trail

monitors visitor numbers.

7.) Extra Question regarding funding
Q: How is the trail able to maintain itself financially?

A: According to Bob Duchesne maintaining financial sustainability is the hardest thing to

accomplish regarding birding trail planning and management. Initial grants and funding usually

run out and most trails are forced to make cuts in staff, programs and resources or must close

altogether. As a result, there are various efforts made to make the trail self-sufficient, such as incorporating accommodations and guiding services to be part of the trail. However, even those associated fees are hard to enforce and are often inadequate. As a result, the Maine Birding Trail relies on NGO's and public donations to cover part of their operational costs.

3.0 Klamath Basin Birding Trail

The Klamath Birding Trail encompasses the areas of far northern California and Southern Oregon. The Klamath Basin Birding Trail came about as a result of the Oregon Cascades Birding Trail developer refusing to extend the birding trail beyond a place called Rocky Point. As a result, there was a disagreement and a push to form new birding trails that further included some to the best birding areas of Oregon (Deas, 2011a). The Klamath Basin Birding Trail is a lesser-known trail nation-wide; however it still has 47 birding sites and encompasses various birding habitats (Deas, 2011a).

The key person interviewed from the Klamath Basin Birding Trail was Cindy Deas who is the Coordinator for the Klamath/Lake/Modoc/Siskiyou Outdoor Recreation Working Group.

1.) Q: What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: Initially there was open nomination for site selection by the public. The nominated sites were then evaluated by a Steering Committee. Sites needed to meet certain prerequisites in order to qualify, which included:

a.) <u>No ecologically sensitive sites</u>-Sites deemed too sensitive or having some species of critically endangered species or vital breeding habitats were avoided.
b.) <u>Readiness for visitation</u>-site accessibility and resilience
c.) <u>Public Land</u>-Only public lands were includes in the sites

d.) <u>Must have good birding qualities</u>-abundance of birds, presence or rare and endemic species, minimal invasive species.

e.) <u>Must be accessible</u> -even for people with disabilities, some sites allow viewing from cars.

2.) Q: What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?

A: A Steering Committee was formed of 30-35 members including:

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Commission
- California Department of Fish and Game
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Various NGOs
- Private agencies
- Audubon California
- Audubon Oregon
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management

Any person from the public could attend the Steering Committee meetings and there was allowed time provided for open questions and comments, whereby members of the public could raise certain issues or suggestions.

3.) Q: What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

A: The trail has a website, which presents relevant information to desired visitors to the trail. The trail also provided maps and guidebooks, of which 50,000 were printed of the first version. However, due to cost related issues, the second and subsequent versions of the guide are not free; rather there is a $2 charge for each 72 page guidebook. The charge was designed to offset the price of printing the guides. Moreover, the later versions of the guide provide advertising opportunities for various tourism businesses associated with the trail. However, there are no direct links with accessory institutions. One unique thing that the Klamath Basin Birding Trail provides as a result of an Oregon State initiative is free educational and classroom

materials and educational kits (DVD's, books, brochures, etc) for teachers to convey a

conservation message to children in schools.

4.) Q: What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?

A: There are no linked accessory institutions connected with the Klamath Basin Birding

Trail, nor any recommendations made on their website of suggested accommodations,

transportation providers, guides or food providers.

5.) Q: Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail operations?

A: The main oversight of the trail is done by a Working Group, which is a private

contractor in charge of managing the trail. The group has regular meetings to discuss the

direction of the trail and to identify possible areas needing improvement. They work in close co-

operation with:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Oregon Department Fish and Wildlife
- California Department of Fish and Game
- Oregon Parks
- Auburn Oregon
- bird conservation agencies
- Klamath Wingwatchers
- Local birders and expert birders.

6.) Q: What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A: The trail and sites are not regularly evaluated because there is no personnel at each

site as it is too costly and time consuming. Therefore, there is no regular monitoring or

evaluation tool in place. However, visitor numbers are monitored through website visitations.

The website can monitor the number and types of visitors and even categorize them as regular

or unique visitors. It can monitor where they are from or how long they are in the areas and even perhaps their activities. This is seen as the most cost effective monitoring tool. Visitor numbers are also tracked through a visitor center. However, in order to be recorded as a visitor, birders need to go to the visitor centre and not all of them go.

7.) Extra Question regarding funding
Q: How is the trail able to maintain itself financially?

A: Funding is a big issue and there is a constant push for more grants and government money. The trail does not receive Oregon Transportation Department funding. Therefore, the trail is not financially self-sustainable and as a result there is limited funding that can be allocated for advertising and marketing the trail, towards monitoring and evaluating the trail.

4.0 Basin & Range Birding Trail

The Basin and Range Birding Trail is another smaller birding trail that encompasses two counties, southern Oregon's Modoc County and the northern California's Lake County (Deas, 2011b). The trail was developed in 2002 as a response to the ongoing dispute between various birding tourism consultants that wanted to omit certain birding areas in Oregon, particularly in the south of the state. The entire trail has 36 designated birding sites within the two counties and states (Deas, 2011b).

The key contact interviewed from the Basin and Range Birding Trail was Cindy Deas who is the Coordinator for the Klamath/Lake/Modoc/Siskiyou Outdoor Recreation Working Group. Due to state and governmental cuts in funding and manpower, the same Working Groups is entrusted with managing the Klamath Basin Birding Trail and the Basin and Range Birding Trail.

Thus, all answers provided for the interview questions and relevant information on the Basin and Range Birding Trail can also be attributed to Cindy Deas's participation and co-operation.

1.) Q: What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: As with the Klamath Basin Birding Trail, initially there was open nomination for site selection by the public. The nominated sites were then evaluated by a Steering Committee. However, one important additional factor needed to be considered, with this trail, which is tribal rights. The overall criteria used are described below in more details, including:

a.) <u>No ecologically sensitive sites</u> - Sites deemed too sensitive or having some critically endangered species or vital breeding habitats were avoided.
b.) <u>Readiness for visitation</u>-site accessibility and resilience
c.) <u>Public Land</u>-Only public lands were includes in the sites
d.) <u>Must have good birding qualities</u>-abundance of birds, presence or rare and endemic species, minimal invasive species.
e.) <u>Must be accessible</u> -even for people with disabilities, some sites allow viewing from cars.
f.) <u>Must not interfere with tribal land values or traditions</u>-one site not included in Modoc County due to Klamath Tribe objection on Medicine Lake, also a significant geothermal location.

2.) Q: What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?

A: a Steering Committee was formed of 30-35 members including:

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Commission
- California Department of Fish and Game
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Various NGOs
- Private agencies
- Audubon California
- Audubon Oregon
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management

Any person from the public could attend the Steering Committee meetings and there

was allowed time provided for open questions and comments, whereby members of the

public could raise certain issues or suggestions.

3.) Q: What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

A: The trail includes a website, which presents relevant information to desired visitors to

the trail. The trail also provided maps and guidebooks. However, due to cost related issues, the

guidebooks are no longer free; rather there is a $2 charge for each guidebook. The charge was

designed to offset the price of printing the guides. Moreover, the later versions of the guide

provide advertising opportunities for various tourism businesses associated with the trail.

However, there are no direct links with accessory institution.

4.) Q: What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?

A: There are no directly linked accessory institutions connected with the Basin and

Range Birding Trail, nor any recommendations made on the birding trail website or the

websites of the two involved counties.

5.) Q: Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail
operations?

A: The same Working Group that oversees the Klamath Basin Birding Trail also oversees

this trail. However the group has some different partners that needed to be incorporated into

the management process. Nevertheless, regular meetings are held to discuss the direction of

the trail and to identify possible areas needing improvement.

They work in close co-operation with:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Oregon Department Fish and Wildlife

- California Department of Fish and Game
- Oregon Parks
- Auburn Oregon
- Modoc National Forrest
- Modoc County Tourism
- Lake County Tourism
- bird conservation agencies
- Klamath Wingwatchers
- Local birders and expert birders.

6.) Q: What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A: The Basin and range Birding Trail is also not regularly evaluated because there are no personnel at each site as some sites are rather isolated and do not receive many visitors. There is no regular monitoring or evaluation tool in place. Visitor numbers are monitored through website visitations. The website can monitor the number and types of visitors and even categorize them as regular or unique visitors. It can monitor where they are from or how long they are in the areas and even perhaps their activities. This is seen as the most cost effective monitoring tool. Visitor numbers are also tracked through a visitor center, however not all tourists visit the centre, thus their numbers are not recorded.

7.) Extra Question regarding funding
   Q: How is the trail able to maintain itself financially?

A: As described for the Klamath Basin Birding Trail, The Basin and Range Birding Trail also faces similar challenges, whereby it has a real hard time meeting its operating costs. This trail also does not receive Oregon Transportation Department funding. Therefore, the trail is not financially self-sustainable and as a result there is limited funding that can be allocated for

advertising and marketing the trail, towards monitoring and evaluating the trail and for further development.

5.0 Virginia Birding Trail

The Virginia Birding Trail is lesser known than some of the more prominent birding trails in the U.S. However, the trail is expanding and incorporates most of the state into the trail (Living, 2011). It is designed similarly to the North Carolina Birding Trail in having three main types of regions; coastal, mountain and piedmont. The trail is trying to emphasize the entire natural heritage of Virginia as a result the Virginia Birding Trail is also moving towards becoming the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail in order to emphasize the rich wildlife tourism assets of the state, beyond just bird-watching (Living, 2011).

The key contact person interviewed from the Virginia Birding Trail was Stephen Living a wildlife biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the coordinator in charge of the wildlife viewing programs and trails. Therefore, Mr. Living has great insight into how the Virginia Birding Trail was developed and how it is managed. As a result all relevant information related to the Virginia Birding Trail and answers provided for the interview is attributed to him.

1.) **Q:** What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: The Virginia birding trail uses several well-defined criteria that are reviewed by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries before decisions are made regarding appropriate sites for the purpose of Birding and wildlife tourism, which include:

a.) <u>Quality of Wildlife Viewing Experience</u>-Meaning that any site selected for the trail has to have a wide variety of wildlife and can provide a rich learning and tourism experience.

b.) <u>Unique and Rich Birding Resource</u>-The site has to have an abundance of birds and contain as many rare and endemic species as possible.

c.) <u>Virginia Natural Experience</u>-The site has to represent true Virginia natural heritage and experience. Meaning that sites should be carefully considered to emphasize the uniqueness of Virginia's natural beauty and assets. Moreover, sites that do not emphasize this uniqueness and could be mistaken for a site anywhere else in the U.S. should be excluded.

d.) <u>Access for Public</u>-Sites could be either public or private, however must provide legal and physical access for the tourists. In the case of private lands pre-approved and written permission needed to be granted from landowners before a site on private land could be included in the trail.

e.) <u>Visitor Support Facilities</u>-Facilities such as comfort station, washrooms, stores and other visitor necessities needed to be onsite or not further than a 30-60 minute distance from places or other sites that can provide such necessities.

f.) <u>Local Management or Partnership</u>-Sites need to be maintained and managed locally by subsidiary or partnership organizations that work closely with trail goals and objectives.

g.) <u>Local Economic Development</u>-Sites should be incorporated into the greater local economic goals and objectives of local communities.

2.) Q: What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?

A: The Virginia Birding Trail was developed as an initiative of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries; working in close partnership with the Virginia State Tourism Agency, Virginia Coastal Management Program, Virginia Department of Transportation and various birding clubs.

3.) Q: What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

A: Like most other tourism trails, The Virginia Birding Trail includes a website, which provides ample information regarding birding information and species identification descriptions. The site also provides up to date weather conditions for the various areas that it encompasses. Moreover, the website includes more detailed links for information on individual

loops of the trail. The web site also provides maps and guidebooks; however the guidebook is not available for free, rather it is an $8.50 charge. The Virginia Birding Trail also has a visitor center where more information and merchandise can be obtained.

4.) Q: What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?

A: The Virginia Birding Trail does not have any direct connections with accessory institutions such as accommodations, restaurants, guiding services, transportation services, etc. Rather it is recommended that potential tourists visit the Virginia Tourism state website and plan their trip to the Virginia Birding Trail accordingly.

5.) Q: Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail operations?

A: The ultimate responsibility of management and oversight of the Virginia Birding Trail is done by the same agency that initially planned the trail, which is the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries; however they still work in close partnership with the Virginia State Tourism Agency, Virginia Coastal Management Program, Virginia Department of Transportation and various birding clubs and local Chambers of Commerce.

6.) Q: What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A: There is no set evaluation tool in place that monitors trail performance in pre-set timely intervals, such as quarterly or annually. Instead there are periodic online surveys of visitor numbers and expenditures. The last such survey took place in 2008 and as a result some sites that were performing subpar were removed from the trail.

7.) Extra question regarding funding.
Q: Who funds the Virginia Birding Trail and how does the trail maintain itself financially?

A: Funding and operating costs for the trail are largely obtained from the Virginia State Government, especially from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. However, the state and agency also allocate revenues earned from recreational fishing and hunting for the management of the birding and wildlife trail.

6.0 Bend Ale Trail

The Bend Ale Trail is a unique tourism attraction in Bend, Oregon as it incorporates all of the microbreweries within the Bend area into one beer trail. Since, the City of Bend and the surrounding area is a popular place for microbreweries, it was seen as an opportunity to link such resources together and make them a real tourism attraction (Warren, 2011). The idea for the creation of this new tourism attraction came from the Bend Tourism Bureau and was seen as a viable way to raise tourism numbers and revenues (Warren, 2011). There are currently 8 breweries that are part of the trail, of which 7 are within the Bend area and one is outside, but was nevertheless allowed to be part of the trail.

The key person interviewed from The Bend Ale Trail was Valerie Warren who works for the Bend Tourism Bureau and is the current coordinator of the Bend Ale Trail.

1.) **Q:** What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: Three main criteria were considered for sites or breweries to be part of the Bend Ale Trail, which are:

    a.) <u>Brewery Location</u>-All microbreweries that are part of the Bent Ale Trail should be from the Bend area, however an exception has been made for one brewery and might be done again in the future.

    b.) <u>Open to Public</u>-All breweries part of the Bend Ale Trail need to be open to the public and preferably offer on-site tasting and food for the visitors.

c.) <u>Operation Time</u>-All breweries must be in operation for at least 1 year before they can be considered to become part of the trail. There are 2 emerging new breweries that would like to become part of the trail; however they have not yet been in operation long enough to be considered.

2.) **Q:** What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?

    A: The Trail was planned by Visit Bend, which is the Bend tourism Bureau, in consultation and participatory input from the brewery owners.

3.) **Q:** What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

    A: There is a website for the Bend Ale Trail that provides up-to-date information about the trail, including current events and festivals, online offers, directions and attractions. The website also has an available brochure and maps that can be printed. The trail also includes an iPhone App and an Android Phone App, whereby visitors can get real time updates about current events and offers that are going on at different sites along the trail. There is also a visitor center that functions as the central hub and a starting point for new visitors to the trail. The Bend Ale Trail has also implemented a free passport system that visitors can get involved with. The passport system works by the visitors getting a rubber stamp in their passport for each visited location on the trail. Upon visiting all locations that are part of the Bend Ale Trail, the tourists can claim a price at the visitor center.

4.) **Q:** What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?
    A: Currently there are no accessory institutions that are linked with the trail, including accommodations, food providers or transportation companies. However, most breweries do have onsite pubs and restaurants which are indirectly linked to the trail. Moreover, accommodations can be sought through the Visit Bend website. However, 2 pre-trail existing tour companies have begun offering tours of the trail and Bend, but are still not directly linked

with the trail. There are also plans to implement a 15 person peddle bar, which essentially

functions as a large bicycle, where 1 person steers, but all 15 peddle and during the time of the

ride beer is served to the patrons.

5.) **Q:** Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail operations?

A: Visit Bend (local tourism bureau) oversees the operation of the trail, including

marketing, advertising, and provides financing for the trail to meet operating costs.

6.) **Q:** What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A: There is no set monitoring or evaluation tool at scheduled time intervals. Instead

surveys are administered randomly at important times. There was a 2010 visitor survey

administered and there are plans to also administer a 2011 visitor survey. Visitor numbers are

also gathered from the tour companies providing tours and from the visitor center.

7.0 Alberta Cowboy Trail

The Alberta Cowboy Trail is a unique tourism trail that tries to provide visitors a Western

Canadian tourism experience. The trail offers a variety of cowboy and western related

programs and activities, such as horseback riding and horse tours through the wilderness, rocky

mountain sightseeing, wildlife viewing, ranching, aboriginal culture and traditions and an

overall Western Canadian cultural experience (MacLaine, 2011). The trail is designed to link

various sites and activities together, with the overall goals of emphasizing the unique natural

and cultural heritage of Alberta`s Wild West (MacLaine, 2011).

The key person interviewed from the Alberta Cowboy Trail was Neil MacLaine who is the President of the Cowboy Trail Tourism Association, which is a private entity set up to manage the trail.

1.) Q: What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: The Alberta Cowboy trail has three criteria that are considered for the purpose of site selection and for the admittance of new members. Not all members have to display all three criteria; however at least one must be present to become part of the trail. These three criteria are:

a.) <u>Western Heritage-</u>A site or potential member needs to be able to contribute to demonstrating the Western heritage and cowboy history of Alberta.
b.) <u>Aboriginal-</u>A site or member needs to be able to demonstrate aboriginal culture, traditions or heritage in order for the tourist to gain an educational tourism component and experience.
c.) <u>Adventure-</u>A site or member needs to provide an adventure tourism component that the tourist can experience hands on cowboy or western or rocky mountain tourism.

2.) Q: What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?

A: The Alberta Cowboy Trail was the initiative of local tourism providers to better emphasize their tourism assets and resources. The Provincial Government also became interested in the idea and design and implementation plans began through the partnership and involvement of various stakeholders, including:

- Travel Alberta (Provincial Tourism Board)
- Alberta Government
- Alberta Parks
- Provincial Historic Sites
- Economic Development Officer
- Local Tourism Boards
- Local Communities

- Local Tourism Businesses

3.) Q: What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

A: The Alberta Cowboy Trail also has a dedicated website that provides important information to potential visitors, including printable maps and guides. The trail also has appropriate road signage along the trail. However, the biggest difference and advantage between the Alberta Cowboy Trail and other tourism trails is the membership system that the trail has in place for sites and accessory institutions. Each site and accessory institution needs to become a member organization in order to become part of the trail. As a result, there are three different levels of membership with different amounts of associated annual fees. The Basic membership costs $225 CAD per year, an Enhanced membership costs $325 CAD annually, and an advanced membership has various price levels according to added features. The difference in membership levels is the amount of marketing and advertising exposure the different levels of membership purchases provide. A Basic membership only allows a site or accessory institution to be listed on the trail website. An enhanced membership enables a site or member to be listed on the trail website, on trail maps and on trail brochures. Meanwhile an advanced membership permits a site or member to be listed on the trail website as well as trail maps and brochures; however it also allows for added advertising and marketing in the official Alberta Cowboy Trail guidebook. Under the advanced membership umbrella, sites and members have the choice to purchase a 1/4 page, half page or full page of advertising space, all offered at different price levels. Neil MacLaine did not wish to disclose the price levels in the advanced membership category.

4.) Q: What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?

A: Since there is a membership system in place for trail sites and service providers, there are numerous accessory institutions that are directly linked to the Alberta Cowboy Trail. Many of these accessory institutions have various roles and have different levels of involvement in the trail, but they include:

- Accommodation Providers (i.e. hotels, inns and B&Bs)
- Restaurants and Other Food Providers
- Transportation Companies
- Gas Stations
- Adventure Tourism Providers (i.e. horseback riding, ranching, white water rafting)
- Aboriginal Cultural Sites
- National and Provincial Historic sites
- National and Provincial Parks
- Various Local Businesses

5.) Q: Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail operations?

A: The primary oversight of the trail is done by the Cowboy Trail Tourism association, with ultimate responsibility falling to the President, Neil MacLaine. However, there is an annual "Executive Meeting" whereby involved stakeholders (the same entities that were involved with planning the trail) are invited to attend. All members also have an annual meeting; however due to the 700 km span of the trail, usually an average between 10-15 members attend the proceedings. Nevertheless, these meetings allow for some dialogue and help identify potential challenges and opportunities as well as decide the potential future direction of the trail.

6.) Q: What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A: There is no official monitoring tool put in place by the Alberta Cowboy Trail. MacLaine explained that there is no way to figure out how to do the monitoring well, rather the trail relies on anecdotal evidence. These monitoring initiatives include tracking website

visitation numbers and the number of brochures printed as well as simple reports from sightings. Various sites or members record the tourism flow they experience throughout the year and they report their trends at annual meetings.

7.) Additional questions and comments.
Q: How are funding and operational costs met for the trail?

A: MacLaine explained that the Alberta Cowboy Trail stared out 12 years ago on government grants and funding, but once the funds ran out, the trail could not meet its operating costs and as a result was forced to shut down. Consequently, a new idea based on private industry oversight and the associated membership system was implemented. In this way the trail is able to collect the necessary funds required to meet operating costs and keep the trail functioning effectively. However, MacLaine further explained that there are numerous freeloaders part of the trail or simply using the trail for their own businesses' advantage and not really contributing to the trail's tourism goals and objectives. MacLaine estimates that there are 8 or 10 times as many members than are really needed to make the trail functional, suggesting that many could be eliminated. Some of these unproductive entities simply buy basic memberships to be listed on the trail website, but do not get involved in any further program, activities nor do they specifically cater to trail tourists. Meanwhile there are also those tourism businesses that advertise themselves for being on the Alberta Cowboy Trail due to their location, yet are not members of the trail.

8.0 The Seafood and Aquaculture Trail

The Seafood and Aquaculture Trail is a unique trail from the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. The Eyre Peninsula is often referred to as the seafood capital of Australia. with a

mature culinary tourism destination with ample natural and heritage resources that were combined into a real tourism product (Modra, 2011). The goal of creating the Australian Seafood and Aquaculture Trail was to combine great culinary experiences and restaurants, seafood, fish production (aquaculture), wineries, unique sightseeing, fishing culture and heritage into a single entity that can provide visitors with a unique Eyre Peninsula experience (Modra, 2011).

The key person contacted from the Seafood and Aquaculture trail was Tamara Modra who is the Regional Tourism Coordinator for Tourism Eyre Peninsula, South Australia.

1.) **Q:** What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: The Australian Seafood and Aquaculture Trail had developed site selection criteria based on the overall goal of the trail and which tourism entities they wanted to be involved in the trail. Therefore, the following entities were included with the following membership stipulations.

a.) <u>Time in Business</u>
- All businesses and tourism providers are required to be in business for a minimum of 12 months and need to demonstrate a positive track record.

b.) <u>Access and Signage</u>
- Suitable access for elderly, disabled & groups
- Adequate car parking facilities and spaces
- Signage clearly directing the public during their time on premises
- Accident precautionary measures.

c.) <u>Tour Operators</u>
- 70% of tour content must provide an education on seafood, aquaculture or local produce
- Tours are to be available at set times per week
- All tours must offer a point of difference – important from a visitors perspective
- Trained tour guide/s – including on the job or formal tour guide training

- Interpretation of facility, related to industry and marine species
- Feedback sheets to be distributed whenever possible and copies forwarded to Tourism Eyre Peninsula

d.) Restaurants
- 90% of seafood served at participating eateries is to be sourced from Eyre Peninsula, focus on seasonality, with no imported product used.
- Open minimum of 5 days a week – seasonal opening times with prior approval.
- A signature dish of local produce available and to be served in unique format and serving dish made out of something from the seafood industry.

e.) Seafood Outlets
- 60% of produce sold is to be sourced from Eyre Peninsula, with a total of 80% from Australia
- Point of difference between outlets required, particularly when there is more than one in a town
- Sale of seafood
- Sale of Eyre Peninsula Seafood & Produce merchandise/apparel – year 2

f.) Produce Outlets
- Minimum of 6 different brands of local products to be available for purchase
- Sale of EP Seafood & Produce merchandise/apparel – year 2

g.) Winery
- 90% of wine sold is to be produced from Eyre Peninsula fruit.
- Open minimum of 5 days a week.

Besides the specific criteria outlined for all the desired stakeholder groups, Tourism Eyre

Peninsula has also outlined a number of criteria that all businesses involved with the Seafood

and Aquaculture trail need to meet, including:

- Encouraged to participate in Accreditation programs i.e. NTAP, Eco Tourism
- Collection of visitor statistics that are provided to TEP on a monthly basis, for collation
- To be registered on Australian Tourism Data Warehouse/TXA (www.eyrepeninsula.info)
- Individual brochures to be Guide branded – when a reprint is done.

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- Attendance at least one promotional activity per year
- Attendance at least one training session per year
- Provide FOC tours, meal, seafood for visiting media and ambassador programs – maximum of 4 media/trade reps per year/business, unless otherwise agreed upon
- Provide FOC product/tour for TEP staff to familiarize your business, once a year
- $10m public liability insurance policy

2.) **Q:** What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?

A: A working group was set up 10 years ago to plan the trail, which was in place for about 4 years. Only in the past 6 months has this Working Group been re-established. This working group consists of representatives from the following tourism entities:

- Visitor Information Centre
- Food Officer
- Tourism Eyre Peninsula Committee
- Restaurant Operators
- Tour Operators

3.) **Q:** What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

A: The Australian Seafood and Aquaculture Trail also has a dedicated website that provides important information to potential visitors, including printable maps and guides. The trail also has appropriate road signage along the trail. Much like the Alberta Cowboy Trail, the Seafood and Aquaculture Trail also employs a membership system for sites and accessory institutions. Each site and accessory institution needs to become a member organization in order to become part of the trail. This trail does not have different levels of membership, rather membership fees are paid according to year-to-year commitment. A first year membership for a site or accessory institution costs $660 AUD annually, with 2nd and subsequent yearly

memberships costing $440 AUD annually. This purchased membership included the following

benefits:

- ½ page advert in the Guide brochure, includes design of advert within a standard template
- Listing on the website, updated monthly or as required
- Double page feature of Eyre Peninsula Seafood & Produce in the EP Visitor Guide
- Year 1 only – 1 x Eyre Peninsula Seafood & Produce branded sign, with business/tour name and number
- Opportunity to participate in various promotions and marketing activities – there may be additional costs associated with this – all operators to participate in a minimum of 1 event per year
- Training, undertaken by Tourism Eyre Peninsula staff or as required by participants
- Quarterly newsletter updates, prepared by Tourism Eyre Peninsula and distributed to all participants
- Storage & distribution of 40,000 guides

Involved tourism businesses can purchase additional advertising and marketing exposure for

$330 AUD per advertisement. This fee applies even if the same tourism business desires to

advertise two different tourism offerings, such as if a seafood outlet desires to advertise a

restaurant they have on sight and a tour they might offer of their facilities or operations.

4.) **Q:** What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?

A: The accessory institutions of the Seafood and Aquaculture Trail are those initially

outlined in the site selection criteria section, including restaurants, tour operators, wineries,

seafood outlets and produce outlets. However, the Australian Seafood and Aquaculture Trail is

missing two vital tourism components that are not directly linked with the trail, which are

accommodation providers and transportation companies.

5.) **Q:** Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail operations?

A: Tourism Eyre Peninsula oversees the Australian Seafood and Aquaculture Trail and has the ultimate decision making power, including future direction and planning of the trail. Tourism Eyre Peninsula is also responsible for financing the operational costs of the trail.

6.) **Q:** What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A: As part of the membership agreement each business and site associated with the trail is required to implement and collect visitor surveys which are to be compiled and sent to Tourism Eyre Peninsula on a monthly basis. Then Tourism Eyre peninsula further compiles the stats on visitor numbers and provides results monthly. Website stats are also collated on a monthly basis to further aid in determining accurate visitor numbers and associated tourism expenditures. As a result Tourism Eyre Peninsula can determine which months of the year are most popular with tourists and which months are slower. Consequently, specific programs and adjustments can be made to attract more tourists in slower months. Lastly, having compiled monthly tourism visitation figures, Tourism Eyre Peninsula is able to sum them up providing annual tourist visitor numbers as well as expenditure and revenue figures.

9.0 The Wine Road

The Wine Road is located within the Sonoma Valley of California and is one of the best known and longest operating wine trails in the United States. The Wine Road was founded over 30 years ago with 9 wineries in the Alexander, Dry Creek and Russian River Valleys, the AVA's (American Viticulture Areas) (Logan, 2011). The organization was formed to cooperatively create, print and distribute a free Wine Road Map. Wine Road has grown to over 180 wineries clustered within a 30 mile radius, accompanied by 57 accommodation providers (Logan, 2011).

The purpose of the Wine Road is to emphasize the rich wine culture of the Sonoma Valley and

to provide tourists the best possible and individualized wine tourism experience (Logan, 2011).

The key person contacted from the Wine Road is Tracy Logan who is a board member

and a guest concierge of the Wine Road. She thus has ample knowledge of how the trail was

planned and how it is currently being managed.

1.) **Q:** What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: The Wine Road employs a few important selection criteria when selecting member

wineries and lodging to become part of the trail. Some of these site selection criteria include:

- **a.)** Safety-Both wineries and lodging establishments need to be evaluated to ensure they are safe and suitable for visitors.
- **b.)** Legality-All wineries need to ensure they have the correct permits needed to serve alcohol on their premises and to visitors.
- **c.)** Proximity and Range- All wineries and lodgings need to fall within the 30 mile outlined range of the trail.
- **d.)** Facilities- Wineries need to have available meet and greet rooms and an available wine tasting facility.

2.) **Q:** What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?

A: The Wine Road was established over 30 years ago through the initiative of various

wineries in the Sonoma Valley in order for them to be linked together and provide a more

enjoyable wine tourism experience. Consequently, it is a private initiative and does not involve

government agencies and organizations like many other tourism trails.

3.) **Q:** What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

A: The Wine Road has a website and provides important information regarding their

wineries and lodgings. The website also provides information and learning steps towards wine

tasting and food and wine pairing. There are also printable maps and guides available for the

trail. The Wine Road also includes a guest concierge service provided by Tracy Logan. This

service allows guests to pre-book and personalize their trip according to their needs with the

aid of the guest concierge. The guest concierge can also meet visitors in any of the wineries or

the visitor center. The Wine Road also has available iPhone Apps and Android Phone Apps,

whereby the guests can be in direct contact with the guest concierge and have their trip plans

adjusted in real time. The apps also allow for real time updates regarding ongoing events and

news concerning the trail or any of the member wineries or lodging establishments.

However, the most beneficial asset of the Wine Road is the membership system,

whereby wineries and lodgings who desire to be part of the Wine Road need to pay annual

membership fees. There are several membership options based on exact accessory institution

circumstances and needs. A regular memberships as well as associate memberships cost $600

USD annually. Meanwhile, a co-op membership costs $1200 USD and an associate lodging

membership fee is $450 USD for a calendar year. Full membership status can only be obtained

if a winery answers YES to the following 3 questions:

1. All of our wines are from the Alexander, Dry Creek or Russian River AVAs. _____YES _____NO
2. Our winery/tasting room is located within either the Alexander, Dry Creek or Russian River area.
_____YES _____NO
3. Wine made from vitis vinifera is our primary product. _____YES _____NO

If a winery cannot answer YES to all three of the above criteria then they cannot become a full

member; however if they answer YES to question 2 and 3 and have at least one wine product

from the Alexander, Dry Creek or Russian River American Vinticultural Area (AVAs) then they

can become an associate member. However, an associate member cannot serve on various

committees or serve on the Board of Directors, nor would they have any voting rights. It is the

same case with associate lodging members, who also do not have voting rights. Meanwhile a

co-op membership is essentially a grouping of wineries that want to be represented as a single

unit. Thus, regardless of the number of wineries in the co-op they receive only 1 dot on the trail

map and are represented under one name. They usually share a common tasting room.

Becoming full members of the Wine Road allows wineries and lodging establishments' access to

an elaborate number of valuable resources, including:

- The Free Wine Road Map
- Wine Road Website
- Group, cooperative Print Advertising
- Group, cooperative Web Advertising
- Wine Road 1-800 Number
- Wine Road Three Annual Festival Events
- Wagstaff Worldwide PR firm
- Wine Road Facebook presence
- Wine Road Twitter presence with Beth (Executive Director) and Tracy (guest concierge)
- Wine Road Member & Guest Concierge- Tracy
- Wine Road Blog: Wine Time TR
- Central office for all Wine Road contacts from Press and Public
- Wine Road Apps
- Friendly "Voice" and "Presence" for the Wine Road
- Centralization of all supplies
- Seminars
- Lending Library
- Email blasts and monthly newsletter, My Wine Road, to 35,000 guests
- Wine Road Map distribution
- Concierge connections in San Francisco and also in Wine Road territory
- Tracy member of CANVAS: Concierge Alliance of Napa Valley & Sonoma
- Sandy Stoddard, Concierge Outreach to San Francisco Hotels
- Sharing of common marketing ideas and strategies
- Sharing of ABC and BATF regulations for ease in compliance
- Press Tours
- Wine Writers
- Clout with numbers of membership
- Cooperative Geographic Name Recognition
- Executive Board: Incredible shared bank of knowledge/expertise

- ED Beth (Executive Director): knowledge, experience, retail savvy, TR and lodging secret shopper

4.) **Q:** What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?

A: Beyond the sites, which are the wineries, the Wine Road has directly connected lodgings, such as hotels, inns and B&Bs. However, the Wine Road does not have other directly connected accessory institutions, such as guiding services, transportation companies or restaurants and food providers. Numerous wineries probably have on-site restaurants, thus such food provisions are indirectly incorporated into the Wine Road.

5.) **Q:** Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail operations?

A: The Wine Road Board of Directors is in charge of managing the trail and has ultimate oversight in terms of future direction of goals and objectives. The Board of Directors meets on a regular basis and is comprised of 10 wineries and 3 lodgings. The wineries have full membership and voting status, meanwhile the lodgings only serve as associate members, with no voting rights. Nevertheless, the Board of Directors is changed annually with new winery and lodging members taking turns as part of the Board of Directors. The only constant figure in place is the Executive Director who oversees the process of the Board of Directors. The current Executive Director is Beth Costa, who has served that position for the last 11 years.

Since the Wine Road is set up as a private and independent entity, it is also in charge of meeting its own financial obligations, including its operating costs. This comes from two sources; the membership fees paid by wineries and lodgings that are part of the Wine Road and from tourist tickets sold for the trail. Tickets sold for the three annual festivals are particularly important in raising revenues, which can be allocated to meet operating costs.

6.) **Q:** What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A: The Wine Road does not employ specific monitoring tools that are utilized through regular timely intervals, such as quarterly or annually. However, the Wine Road does track visitor numbers by monitoring the number of visitors to their website. Moreover, visitor numbers are recorded through ticket sales for the 3 winery festivals held each year by the Wine Road. These three events and last year's visitor numbers are presented below:

- A Wine & Food Affair (November)-5000 visitors
- Winter Wineland (January)-5000 visitors
- Barrel Tasting (March)- 19,000 visitors and this has grown to be the largest wine event in California.

These are just anecdotal figures as they do not represent the overall visitor numbers of the Wine Road; however they do demonstrate some solid visitor numbers and interest in the trail.

10.0 Anonymous Wine Trail

This is a smaller and lesser known winery trail from the United States that desired to be anonymous for unknown reasons. Moreover, the key person interviewed also asked for their name not to be disclosed. However, the person interviewed is the co-ordinator of this particular winery trail, thus has ample knowledge as to how the trail was planned and how it is currently managed. Therefore, all relevant information pertaining to this winery trail, including the interview answers are to be attributed to them.

1.) **Q:** What specific criteria or methodology was used in the selection of sites?

A: This winery trail used the following criteria:

a.) <u>Legality</u>-All wineries that desired to become part of the trail needed to demonstrate legal permits to serve alcohol on their premises. Some required, municipal, some county and some state licenses, some also needed numerous levels of licensing.

b.) <u>Geographical Scope</u>- All wineries and lodgings need to fall within the pre-designated county wide area; otherwise they could not become part of the trail.

c.) <u>Local Production</u>-Each winery needed to produce at least 50% of their wines from locally grown grapes from the designated county.

2.) Q: What and who was involved with the planning of the trail, including which stakeholders?

A: This winery trail was planned by a partnership of stakeholders that eventually evolved into a Steering Committee, which included the following participants:

- County Tourism Agency
- State Tourism Agency
- State Department of Transportation
- Local Businesses
- Local Wineries
- Winery Special Interest Groups

3.) Q: What is included in the trail beyond the sites?

A: This trail as many other has a dedicated website that provides up to date and relevant information pertaining to the trail, such as ongoing and upcoming events and festivals, weather conditions, winery tips as well as free maps, brochures and guidebooks for the trail. The trail also includes an onsite visitor center, which also provides hard copy maps and guidebooks. The visitor center also serves as an information hub for newly arrived visitors.

4.) Q: What are the accessory components and are they directly linked with the trail?

A: This particular winery trail does not have any accessory institutions that are directly tied in or part of the trail. Potential visitors to the trail are encouraged to visit the state tourism website or county tourism webpage for information and ideas regarding accommodations, restaurants and dining, transportation options and area attractions.

5.) Q: Who or what organization is involved with the management and oversight of trail operations?

A: The Steering Committee made up of representatives from each vital stakeholder group is in charge of the management and oversight of the trail. The Steering Committee members meet monthly and discuss operational matters, as well as likely challenges and opportunities. These meetings also hold an open question session when anyone with an interest in the trail or with a concern can address their idea or issue to the Steering Committee. However, the Steering Committee does not have to act on business or public concerns or recommendations, as the ultimate decision making power lies with the committee.

6.) Q: What tools are used to evaluate the trail and sites, how and what exactly is evaluated and how often?

A: This winery trail does not have specific monitoring or evaluation tools in place to follow visitor numbers or tourist expenditures. It monitors visitor numbers through website visitations to get an overall picture of tourist numbers. Tourist numbers are also followed through event and festival ticket sales; however this process is also anecdotal evidence.

APPENDIX 2.0: Birding Trail Planner's Manual

This is a condensed planning manual illustrating guidelines, strategies and recommendations that ecotourism planners can utilize for planning, implementing, and managing a birding trail. These planning principles and guidelines stem from knowledge and information gathered from the literature review of the thesis as well as the results from the primary research of interviewing existing tourism trails and developing tourism planning strategies for the Great Pelee Birding Trail. This manual is designed to be a practical outcome of the thesis, which can be further expanded in the future.

1.0 Knowing the Product

First project goals and objectives need to be set for the specific development project in question. This should be followed up by various assessment strategies that can illustrate the potential opportunities and limitations a particular development project might encounter. Thus, a tourism planner, including a birding trail planner needs to familiarize themselves very well with the area or region they are to develop or where a new trail might be implemented. This is important because if such initial assessment and considerations are skipped the trail will have no grounded guiding principles in place and the chances of failure are magnified.

1.1 Setting Goals and Objectives

The most important thing any planner needs to determine prior to commencing any planning or development is the specific goals and objectives a particular project will follow (Gunn & Var, 2002). A goal is an overall outcome that a project desires to accomplish (Drumm

et al, 2004). Goals are usually achievement oriented and capture the larger picture (Inskeep, 1991) of a planning project. Goals are also usually characterized by a single statement or sentence within a planning outline. Meanwhile, objectives are usually several more specific ideas that are developed to aid in achieving an overall goal (Gunn & Var, 2002). Consequently, a planning project can usually have 3 or 4 objectives. It is important to not only recognize such goals and principles, but to record them, as they will serve as the main guiding principles of any project. A birding trail planner also needs to be aware and develop appropriate goals and objectives that will help in the planning, development, implementation and even management of a particular trail.

First, goals and objectives need to be logical and achievable (Inskeep, 1991). Ambition plays a large part in undertaking certain development projects; however a planner needs to be reasonable and not be overzealous. Thus, planners need to know their limitations and abilities, and work with the presented situation. This means that planners need to be flexible, determined and highly motivated to maintain initial goals and objectives (Gunn & Var, 2002). Sometimes a planner will face tough challenges and conflict and there will be a need to know how to resolve such situations (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). A birding trail planner might especially face such obstacles, as a trail will encompass many areas and stakeholders, magnifying the potential need for effective conflict resolution and adaptability skills. Consequently, some objectives might need to be shifted to achieve an overall goal. However, goals should never be changed; as such action would undermine the entire planning process (Drumm & Moore, 2005).

1.2 Tourism Assets and Limitations

In order to minimize potential conflict and the need to shift objectives in the latter

stages of planning, a tourism planner needs to know the tourism assets and limitations within a

prescribed development area (Inskeep, 1991). Thus, a birding trail planner needs to have the

following considerations:

- Are there ample birds in the region that can be utilized for tourism purposes, such as rare or endemic species?
- What other tourist attractions exist that can be incorporated into the birding trail?
- Does the local community have the need and desire for new tourism development?
- Will new tourism development cause conflict of interest?
- What is the available infrastructure for new tourism development?
- Will new programs and facilities need to be built, if so which ones?
- Who and how will new development be funded?
- What is the local political or government attitude towards new tourism development?
- What other obstacles might hinder tourism development? (Gunn & Var, 2002, Drumm et al, 2004 & Inskeep, 1991).

The most important concept that a birding trail planner needs to keep in mind is not to try to

accomplish something within a given area that is either unnecessary or impossible. It is vital to

recognize and acknowledge limitations, as much as it is important to recognize and capitalize on

opportunities. One method many planners use in recognizing such assets and limitations is

through the use of a SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and

threats (Houben, Lenie & Vanhoof**,** 1999), which is exactly what a birding trail planner should

perform before commencing with planning. SWOT has the ability to perform rapid assessment

of both internal and external opportunities and threats and to act upon them (Houben, Lenie &

Vanhoof**,** 1999).

Besides knowing the obvious tourism assets that exist within a given area, a birding trail planner should also be creative and seek out new opportunities. Recognizing new opportunities and being able to mesh them into the various planning strategies makes tourism planners even more valuable in new product development (Gunn & Var, 2002). Thus, a birding trail planner needs to be vigilant and open-minded to what can be utilized and incorporated into a new birding trail. New adaptation of assets into valuable tourism products does not always have to be something completely new; rather could be something that has existed for a long time and simply needs to be evolved into a form of tourism attraction. A practical example of this would be the Bird Studies Canada Centre in Long Point, ON, which has been studying and banding various bird species for some time, but has never served as an organized tourism attraction. Thus, if a birding trail was ever built in the area, an innovative birding trail planner could utilize such assets by making the centre a site on the trail. Such a centre could be expanded and could charge fees to visitors wishing to see how birds are captured, banded and researched; making the centre a tourism product. Therefore, it is essential for a birding trail planner to know what assets can serve as practical additions to a birding trail and what limitations should be avoided. Often times knowing the difference between tourism assets and drawbacks is determining whether an asset can be commoditized as a tourism product and assessing if it can be sold? If an asset or resource can be turned into a tourism product then it must be determined where such a product could be marketed, and if so to whom (Drumm et al, 2004).

2.0 Knowing the Market

The necessity to know the market that a business operates in is vital in for any planner, including for one developing a birding trail. It is important to know the market on every level in order to ensure there is demand for a product and to see where a product fits within the market (Drumm and Moore, 2005 & Inspeek, 1991). It is also important to recognize that markets fluctuate, change and evolve due to changes in the supply and demand relationship (Houben, Lenie & Vanhoof, 1999). To adapt to changing trends a birding trail planner always needs to be well informed and aware of current market changes. In order to aid in marketing decision making and to ensure higher chances of success, a birding trail planner can utilize two important strategies; target marketing and effective advertising.

2.1 Target Market

It is unwise to market any product simply to anyone, thus the notion of target marketing has been adopted by most businesses (Smith & Cooper-Martin, 1997). Tourism has also followed other business service sectors and has adopted target marketing to better promote its products (Inskeep, 1991). Since birding tourism is often a specialized activity (McFarlane, 1994), a birding trail planner needs to be especially aware of market trends and birder motivations. Birding trail planners needs to develop their products with great consideration of who would be interested in their product and who will be target market. This means knowing birder demographics, characteristics, motivations and setting appropriate prices for offered products. Aforementioned literature mentioned within the thesis suggests that there are different levels of birders; beginner and advanced birdwatchers. Moreover, ecotourism literature (Kwan, Eagles

and Gebhardt, 2008) pointed out that 30% of ecolodge patrons in Belize were families with young children. Thus, it is recommended that a birding trail planner be aware of such trends and develop specific programs catered to specific sub-groups of birders. There should be programs specifically developed to accommodate beginner birders as well as separate programs that provide added satisfaction to advanced birders. Family birders should be provided with additional activities aside from birding, as these are usually less advanced birders and not all family members might enjoy birding. Price and affordability, is also essential in tourism planning (Drumm et al, 2004) which was identified by the Pelee Advisory Board. Consequently, different tourism products need to be developed and made part of a birding trail that cater to different affordability and tourist price levels. It is highly recommended that a tourism trail planner examine and be aware of price offering of competitors and price their product accordingly, in order to stimulate visitors to come to the trail. Correct pricing and consumer satisfaction will induce a sense of value, which was identified as a vital part of birding tourism trip planning.

2.2 Branding and Advertising

In order to reach target markets effectively, a birding trail planner needs to utilize an appropriate mixture of advertising techniques (Smith & Cooper-Martin, 1997). One of the most important considerations that must be done efficiently is branding a birding trail correctly by giving it a unique and recognizable name. Most birding trails have names that convey importance and status, such as the Great Florida Birding Trail, (Kiser, 2011) or the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. This is the same reason the Pelee Advisory Committee decided that the

newly developed trail should be called the Great Pelee Birding Trail. Pelee is a well-renowned

and mature birding destination, thus using the name in trail branding will surely aid in

promoting the trail. It is recommended that all birding trail developers adopt and brand their

trails effectively starting with proper name selection. Such actions will induce curiosity among

birders and aid in advertising the trail.

Deciding what mixture of media advertising a birding trail should utilize to promote

itself is not easy as the market can be competitive and there is a need to stand out. It is always

best to use several forms of advertising and to cross pollinate products in the marketplace

(Pelee Advisory Committee, 2011). However, it is also vital to understand the clientele that the

advertising is designed to reach. The blog analysis and interviews indicate that birders often use

technology and electronic equipment efficiently. Thus, most advertising should be focused on

electronic means, such as blogs, web pages, and even smart phone applications. This means

that trail websites would serve as the primary form of advertising. It is also vital for a birding

trail to provide accessible trail maps, brochures and booklets, as such tools would aid in proper

navigations of the trail.

3.0 Trail Design and Structure

Once a birding trail planner understands the available tourism assets that can be

developed and decides who the product should be marketed to and through which means, it is

important to decide how the product will be structured, including its development, financing

and marketing.

3.1 Trail Form and Function

The most important thing in the planning of birding trail is to decide how the trail will be structured and what form it should take. The interviews of existing tourism trails illustrated the many stakeholders that are usually involved with developing tourism trails. Consequently, careful consideration needs to be taken to ensure involvement and the satisfaction of involved stakeholders. Since the backbone of all tourism trails are the sites it offers, potential birding sites need to be carefully assessed in selecting which sites to include in the trail. Some birding trails include all possible sites in a given area; however this research thesis illustrated that this is not the wisest choice. Rather, specific criteria should be used to select a finite number of quality sites. Based on the research, it would be recommended for a birding planner to follow 7 key criteria in selecting birding sites, which include:

1) Ecological Significance
2) Birding Characteristics
3) Site Resiliency
4) Physical and Legal Access
5) Economic Significance
6) Maintenance Support
7) Educational Significance (Kiser, 2011)

These criteria seem to be most feasible and thorough in assessing birding sites and are not overly complicated as witnessed by some tourism trails, such as the Australian Seafood and Aquaculture Trail (Modra, 2011).

Aside from having a finite number of quality sites, a birding trail planner also needs to decide which accessory institutions should be made part of the birding trail. This includes deciding which and how many accessory institutions will be part of the trail, including:

- Accommodation providers
- Food providers
- Transportation companies
- Guiding services
- Maintenance companies
- Specialty and gift stores

Some birding trails have no accessory institutions as part of their trail, whereas some have only accommodations or restaurants tied to the trail. No existing trail has all necessary accessory institutions in place that would cause a trail to work as a single cohesive unit. This is a shortcoming of many tourism and birding trails as they usually encompass many areas and stakeholder groups, yet have no representation from all of them. If a birding trail does not incorporate all aspects and accessory institutions into a single tourism product, then co-operation amongst stakeholders and consumer satisfaction will likely suffers. Therefore, tourism trails need to incorporate all aspects of a trip if they are to be a true and independent tourism product that can function on its own and be self-sufficient.

3.2 Financing the Trail

Having the desire to develop a new birding trail is great, but without adequate finances, which can at least cover operating costs, no planning or development can take place. As most businesses sometimes struggle to find start up funding, a birding trail planner might also encounter financial challenges. A simple and viable option to meet operating and start up costs for a birding trail is though various government grants or private donations (Kiser, 2011 & Deas, 2011a). Although it is a great idea to utilize government funding to meet start up and operating costs, such funding is often not enough or is not available to meet long-term operating costs

(Deas, 2011a). Consequently, birding trail planners should try to develop various programs and activities associated with the birding trail that can generate additional revenues, which can be allocated to offset operating costs. Some strategies that can be utilized to achieve additional revenues are to develop new programs or services that can be sold to birders. A birding trail could develop courses or workshops to be sold to birders and birding tourism associated businesses, as an educational tool. As demonstrated by the ideas of the Pelee Advisory Committee, the availability of additional services, such as electronic real time bird locator software for smart phones could also generate additional revenues. Charging additional entrance fees to various trail sites can also aid in alleviating trail operating costs. Developing a membership system for accessory institutions is another way that a birding trail can gain additional revenues. Regardless, of what method is implemented to make a tourism trail cost effective and able to meet its operating costs, a birding trail needs to develop itself to be financially self-sufficient and sustainable (Duchesne, 2011).

3.3 Management Structure

All businesses and organizations need to have a management structure in place that can lead them, and tourism enterprises are no different (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). However, decision on managerial structure is especially important in overseeing a birding trail because of the numerous involved stakeholders. Since this thesis identified that a birding trail is best managed as a single cohesive unit, it would be strongly recommended to develop a management system for a birding trail in the form of a tourism product club. A product club can coordinate all operations to meet birding trail goals and objectives. A product club is also a viable form of cost

cutting of operational expenses and can serve as a promotional and marketing tool (Product

Club of Riviera Di Levante, 2010).

Even when a product club is entrusted with overseeing a birding trail, there is still the

need to decide who or what entity will have final decision making power over the function of

the product club. There are basically two options for selecting such an entity. The first option is

to select an existing stakeholder to oversee trail operations, as exemplified in this thesis with

the Great Pelee Birding Trail. This is often the most viable and cost-effective way to ensure

management of a birding trail, as no new organization needs to be developed. The other option

for oversight of the trail product club is to develop and add a new entity to the product club,

whose sole purpose is to oversee trail operations. Although this method is probably most

equitable and would ensure the highest level of sharing, it is also time consuming and costly to

develop and launch a new organizations for the sole purpose of overseeing the trail. Based on

evidence drawn from this thesis, it would be recommended that a birding trail select an existing

stakeholder to oversee operations of the product club. Entrusting management to an existing

stakeholder that is experienced and has mature knowledge of birding tourism is probably the

best management choice.

3.4 Evaluation and Monitoring

Evaluation, monitoring and accountability are vital in any business, including ecotourism

(Honey, 2008). However, most birding and tourism trails lack effective, accurate and regular

monitoring tools that can demonstrate the success or failure of their operations. Most tourism

trails rely on monitoring visitor numbers through website visits or through visitor registration

numbers at festivals that are associated with tourism trail. These are often inaccurate methods

that only provide anecdotal evidence of trail success or failure (MacLaine, 2011). It is also

understandable that monitoring and evaluation is sometimes brushed aside, as a birding trail

might not have the funds available to conduct regular monitoring. It is also important to

understand that smaller investment in proper and regular monitoring can often prevent much

larger problems in the future that will be much costlier to repair (Drumm et al, 2004).

Consequently, birding trails need to establish regular monitoring of visitor numbers and tourist

expenditures as well as implement visitor satisfaction surveys. Perhaps the most viable and cost

effective way of monitoring would be quarterly surveys and tabulations of visitor numbers.

4.0 Gaining a Competitive Advantage

An important factor that can ensure the success of a birding trail is for planners to

devise various strategies that can make their trail have a competitive advantage over others.

The interviews of existing tourism trails demonstrated that there is strong competition and

protection of information and planning strategies between tourism trail planners. This is no

doubt done to ensure the competition does not copy ideas and implement them as their own.

Thus, if ideas cannot be borrowed from others, then they must be developed independently. If

a birding trail planner can devise ideas and programs that offer unique products and services

then their trail will likely stand out from the rest and attract more visitors. A good example of

this innovation is the suggested development of real time electronic bird locator software

systems that birders can download and utilize on their phones out in the field. No other birding

trail offers such a service, making the Great Pelee Birding Trail unique. Utilizing the latest

electronic technology is an important advantage that a birding trail can have over its competition.

5.0 Conclusion to Birding Trail Planners' Manual

These are some of the general ideas and planning strategies that were learned from the literature review and the primary research conducted in the form of the birding blog analysis and interview of existing tourism trails. These are general recommendations that a tourism planner can consider in developing, implementing and managing a birding trail. More specific ideas and recommendations were made in the results chapters that are specifically catered to the case study location and the tourism climate of the Pelee regions.