

SUMMARY OF THUNDER BAY MEETING FRIDAY 2/27/09  
RE: SORBARA REPORT

Minister of Northern Development and Mines, Michael Gravell (?), welcomed the group and introduced Greg Sorbara. Mr. Sorbara, after his opening remarks, hit on the following.

- Difficult economic times world-wide.
- The study is relevant because tourism is a growing industry world-wide.
- The disposable income increasing in China, India and South America.
- There is world-wide competition.

He then went into a discussion of the four strategies identified in the report. There is no need to review the report here. Points stressed in the discussion included:

- Regional model is better if all work together.
- DMF is necessary for success. Called DMMO (Destination Marketing and Management Organizations)
- The industry needs one strong voice. (NOTO not mentioned at all)
- Government needs to find a way to make capital available especially to small and medium businesses.
- Government needs to invest in attractions such as Fort William and maybe a major resort on the North Shore, a “knocks the socks off” facility.

DMF took up some time in the discussion. There is uncertainty on the part of some folks at the meeting but Sorbara stressed the success for DMF across North America and in some parts of Ontario and across Canada.

- Three percent was mentioned without comment.
- Funds not to get into the hands of Queens Park.
- Should involve all accommodations.
- Transparency of spending and annual reports made available.
- No way to predict what future governments will devote to tourism.

Some other items mentioned with or without discussion included;

- Common Voice could be the strong voice for tourism.
- A major G 10 conference coming to Huntsville, Ont. in 2010.
- North of Superior wants to help partners in other regions.
- Sorbara expressed concern about the vastness of the area and region sizes.
- He also stressed that it is time to get on with discussion. The report is a starting point.
- There could be sub-regions within the three large northern regions.
- He also spoke several times about rating systems and other successes in the B.C. program.
- He compared a trip on the Inter-state highways of the U.S. to cross country travel in Canada. The quality of the travel experience and how great the non-commercial rest stops are with clean rest rooms, picnic tables and well kept grounds. These rest stops add a high measure of comfort and safety to long distance travel.

Sorbara ended his presentation with a plea that the government needs to hear from the tourism industry. We need to speak up loudly and with clarity. This report should not sit on a shelf but rather government needs to get into the implementation stage.

Recommendations for changes to the report should be made loud and clear with changes itemized and presented with solid solutions. This needs to be done now and sent to the Minister of Tourism. Sorbara's work and the work of the committee are done now since the report has been published.

He then opened the floor to questions and comments.

First comments were about DMF. Concern about the money, all or some of it, going to government was questioned. This is not the intent of the recommendation. Will government stop all tourism funding? He could not predict actions of future governments. The term DMMO was mentioned. Does this mean that DMF could be used for large staffs and program development? His response was that this would be up to the Regions to determine. Government could contribute administrative costs.

When Sorbara made reference to the vastness of the area I raised my hand. I indicated that I was there as VP of NWOTA but was representing KDCA/NWOTA Working Group. I started with a short description of NODMA and used that as a reassurance that DMF is alive, well, and being received without question by guests of our membership. I then used his comments to open the discussion of Sunset Country and it not being broke and not needing to be fixed. A few of the many strengths of the organization were mentioned and I finished with the suggestion that the Regions numbered 10 and 11 be redrawn into three Regions with Sunset Country kept intact as it is now. This would allow it to keep its "brand", and the new Regions 10 and 11 would be somewhat smaller and more manageable. One comment was made by a North of Superior members expressing concern over the Region sizes and agreement with reducing the sizes in this way. This appeared to be the consensus without further comment from anyone. I gave a copy of our paper to Sorbara and made them available. After a few more comments from the floor thanking Sorbara and the committee for the great work the meeting ended.

After the meeting Peg and I visited with Lori Paras who is the new President of North of Superior. Her thought is that lines on a map are not for division but set up ways to cooperate. She is a very positive person on working together.

Other observations: There were about 30 people attending, J.D. Corbett, Peg and I were the ONLY people from Sunset Country. We (KDCA/NWOTA) need to prepare a paper now and get it off to Minister of Tourism to support keeping Sunset Country as a Region. I suggest that the paper presented yesterday be a part of the new paper and that the ideas and facts in Tom's letter certainly need to be a part of it. Sorbara mentioned new technology (Internet) as the way of the future.....Sunset Country is there and further ahead. All these points need to be made with the quality of the "brand" being a very strong point. We may (or may not) want to offer the NODMA template for DMF as Sorbara mentioned needing a template to get a model. Not that there are none out there. Again, Sorbara said his work is finished but we, the tourism industry, need to see to any changes in the plan right away, clearly and loudly, and we need to be sure the plan does not sit on a shelf.

Bob and Peg Hunger      2/28/09