

PAME I-2013 Agenda Item 4.12
Concept Paper
Sustainable Arctic Tourism Initiative
By US

Background

At the PAME II-2012 meeting in Halifax, Canada, the United States offered to explore the possibility of developing a sustainable tourism initiative for inclusion in the PAME 2013-2015 Work Plan. As reflected in Annex I to the PAME II-2012 final RoDs, the United States noted that potential projects within such an initiative might include exchange of information on international, national and industry sustainable tourism policies, identification of Arctic tourism trends, and assessment of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental impacts (both positive and negative) of increasing Arctic tourism on communities, indigenous peoples, and marine, coastal and terrestrial ecosystems.

Objective

This concept paper elaborates upon the U.S. offer to explore the possibility of leading or co-leading the development of a sustainable tourism initiative for inclusion in the PAME 2013-2015 Work Plan and presents a preliminary outline of what such an initiative might include.

Arctic Tourism and its Impacts

According to the UN World Tourism Organization,¹ global tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification over the last six decades, becoming one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world.² According to some of the most recent information available, total Arctic visitation between 1992 and 2006 was estimated to have increased from around 4.3 million to approximately 6.5 million visitors per year.³ From 2010 to 2011, Iceland (+16%), Finland (+14%) and Norway (+9) experienced some of the fastest increases in tourist arrivals in Europe.⁴ Other data indicate that Arctic marine tourism in particular is growing.⁵ Growth in Arctic tourism is projected to continue and will likely accelerate as sea-ice cover diminishes, facilitating greater access to more remote locations.⁶

¹ The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations vested with a central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable, and universally accessible tourism. It serves as a global forum for tourism policy issues. Its membership includes 155 countries, 7 territories, 2 permanent observers and over 400 Affiliate Members. Russia and Norway are members of the UNWTO. See <http://www2.unwto.org/en/members/states>.

² UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights* (2012), at 2 (available at http://dtxqt4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/docpdf/unwtohighlights12enhr_1.pdf).

³ Fay, G., and A. Karlsdóttir, *Social Indicators for Arctic Tourism: Observing trends and assessing data*, POLAR GEOGRAPHY 34 (1-2): 63-86 (2012).

⁴ UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights* at 9.

⁵ See, e.g., Statistics Norway, *The Arctic – Increasingly Popular with Tourists* (2012), available at http://www.ssb.no/this_is_svalbard/turisme_en.pdf (noting significant increase over the last decade in tourist arrivals in Svalbard by ship and plane); Maher, P. T., *Expedition Cruise Visits to Protected Areas in the Canadian Arctic: Issues of Sustainability and Change for an Emerging Market*, TOURISM: AN INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL 60(1), at 55-56 (2012), available at http://www.unbc.ca/sites/default/files/assets/pat_maher/p_maher_tourism_2012_.pdf; *Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) Report* (2009), at 78-81, available at <http://www.pame.is/amsa-2009-report>, (“Cruise ship traffic in the Arctic region has increased significantly in the four years that have passed since the AMSA database was developed. An independent survey indicated more than 1.2 million passengers traveled in 2004 to Arctic destinations aboard cruise ships; however, by 2007 that number had more than doubled.”)

⁶ Stewart, E.J., A. Tivy, S.E.L. Howell, J. Dawson, and D. Draper, *Cruise tourism and sea ice in Canada’s Hudson Bay region*, ARCTIC, 63(1):57-66 (2010).

Increases in tourism, while often economically desirable, can have adverse impacts on natural resources and communities. Adverse impacts may include increased pollution, undesirable discharges into the sea, soil erosion, natural habitat loss, increased pressure on endangered species, loss of biodiversity, spread of invasive species, depletion of water and other critical resources, contributions to climate change, and degradation of ecosystems.⁷ It can also result in damage to cultural heritage, commercialization of local culture and conflicts with traditional land and sea uses.⁸ Some steps have been taken to control, mitigate and alleviate adverse environmental and cultural impacts of Arctic tourism, but there is no comprehensive or current repository of such information.

It should be noted that increases in tourism can also have positive impacts on natural resources and communities. Many tourism operators understand the potential adverse impacts of tourism and increasingly appreciate the role they can play in advancing environmental sustainability. Such companies also recognize that their business model is dependent upon attractive tourist destinations and, as a result, they have a vested interest in those destinations remaining attractive. Consequently, the tourism industry has at times been a driving force behind the conservation of fragile ecosystems and the protection of wildlife and marine resources.⁹ In the Arctic, a number of entities, such as the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO), have taken affirmative action to identify and mitigate potential adverse impacts that may result from the tourism activities of its members.¹⁰ Again, there is no comprehensive or current repository of such information.

Evolution of a Global Sustainable Tourism Ethos and Guiding Principles

In 1999, the General Assembly of the UN World Tourism Organization adopted a comprehensive set of principles designed to guide key players in tourism development -- the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*.¹¹ Addressed to governments, the tourism industry, communities, and tourists, this Code aims to help maximize tourism benefits while minimizing its potential negative impacts on the environment, cultural heritage and societies.

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development adopted a *Plan of Implementation* that explicitly called for nations to promote sustainable tourism to increase the benefits from tourism resources for host communities while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of those communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages.¹² In 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution recognizing

⁷ See, e.g., United Nations Environment Programme, *Resource Efficiency and Sustainable Consumption and Production: Tourism*, available at <http://www.unep.org/resourceefficiency/Home/Business/SectoralActivities/Tourism/tabid/78766/Default.aspx>. UNEP has been appointed by the Commission on Sustainable Development as the lead agency responsible for implementation of Agenda 21 issues on tourism.

⁸ See, e.g., UNEP, *Tourism in the Polar Regions: The Sustainability Challenge* (2007), at 18, available at <http://www.unep.fr/shared/publications/pdf/DTIx0938xPA-PolarTourismEN.pdf>.

⁹ World Travel & Tourism Council, *Travel & Tourism 2011* (2012), at 14, available at http://www.wttc.org/site_media/uploads/downloads/traveltourism2011.pdf.

¹⁰ Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO), *Guidelines for Visitors to the Arctic*, available at <http://www.aeco.no/documents/AECO-brosjyre-p10-engl.pdf>.

¹¹ The *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* is available at <http://ethics.unwto.org/en/content/global-code-ethics-tourism>. In 2002 and 2006, the UN General Assembly invited governments and other stakeholders in the tourism sector to consider introducing the contents of the *Global Code* into their relevant laws, regulations and professional practices. A/RES/56/212 (22 February 2002); A/RES/60/190 (17 February 2006).

¹² *Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, para. 43, UN A/CONF.199/20 (Sept. 4, 2002), available at <http://www.un-documents.net/jburgpln.htm>.

the need to promote sustainable tourism development to increase the benefits from tourism for host communities while maintaining their cultural and environmental integrity and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages.¹³ In 2012, the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development adopted an outcome document titled *The Future We Want* that reaffirms the importance of sustainable tourism activities which promote environmental awareness, conserve and protect the environment, respect wildlife, flora, biodiversity and ecosystems and cultural diversity, and improve the welfare and livelihoods of local communities.¹⁴

Potential Elements of an Arctic Sustainable Tourism Initiative

These developments reflect the emergence of a mature global sustainable tourism ethos and guiding principles. However, this ethos and its guiding principles have yet to be interpreted and applied in a coherent and comprehensive way to the Arctic. An initiative that would undertake to do so would likely need to involve several Arctic Working Groups and potentially other partners as well.¹⁵ It could involve the following elements:

- Collect and assess existing information regarding trends in Arctic tourism in terms of numbers of visitors, the geographic distribution of places visited, and changes in modes of access to these places;
- Collect and assess existing information on the adverse environmental, social, and cultural impacts of Arctic tourism;
- Collect and assess existing information on the beneficial environmental, social, and cultural impacts of Arctic tourism;
- Inventory existing laws, codes, policies, guidelines, and best practices pertaining to sustainable Arctic tourism and make them publicly available online;
- Based on an evaluation of the inventory, identify fundamental principles of sustainable Arctic tourism;
- Publicize these principles and encourage their adoption and/or implementation by key Arctic actors (e.g., states, municipalities, indigenous groups, tourism operators, industry associations, NGOs, the Arctic Council); and
- If/as appropriate, develop or encourage the development of more specific codes or best practices of sustainable Arctic tourism tailored to specific regions, communities, destinations, ecosystems, or industries.

Recommendation

The United States recommends that PAME I-2013 consider supporting the development of a sustainable Arctic tourism initiative – in conjunction with other Arctic Council Working Groups and partners as appropriate – for inclusion in PAME’s 2013-2015 Work Plan.

¹³ UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/190 (17 February 2006).

¹⁴ *The Future We Want: Outcome Document Adopted at Rio+20*, paras. 130 & 131, available at <http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20June%201230p.m.pdf>

¹⁵ Other potential partners include the University of the Arctic and its Thematic Network on Northern Tourism (<http://www.uarctic.org/compactarticles.aspx?m=595>).

Annex I – References/Select Bibliography

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