

Presentation to: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

By: Jerry Fisher President NWOTA,

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Good Morning my name is Jerry Fisher, President of the Northwestern Ontario Tourism Association

Together Kenora District Camp Owners Association or (KDCA) and the Northwestern Ontario Tourism Association or (NWOTA) represent tourism advocacy throughout North Western Ontario. As active lobby groups, we continue to address critical issues facing the tourism industry and the economy of Northwestern Ontario.

Tourism's role in the economy of NWO

The economy of Northwestern Ontario has performed poorly over the past few years. The reality of the quick decline in employment in the forestry industry has shaken communities and caused families to leave the region. We are pleased that the Government of Ontario has assisted the industry and are hopeful that forestry fortunes will turn soon.

Even in the good years – when forestry was booming there was a marked realization across the region, that a more diversification is required to create economic stability in Northwestern Ontario.

Within the Kenora and Rainy River Districts which is defined as the Travel Region of Sunset Country tourism supported directly and indirectly 12, 235 full-year jobs, 451 Million in economic activity, Wages and Salaries in excess of \$282 Million; and \$185 Million in Federal, Provincial and Municipal taxes.

There are approximately 440 tourism accommodation businesses within the region. In fact, 43% of the tourism income in Northern Ontario is generated in NW Ontario, and primarily within Sunset Country.

Tourism in Sunset Country is an export business, which is heavily reliant upon our American neighbors – American visitors to the area contribute 79% of all tourism expenditures. In economic terms, Tourism in Sunset Country is a wealth generating industry.

Improving Infrastructure Funding Opportunities for Accommodation Industry

Growth in our industry requires continuous reinvestment. Our client base is changing and we understand our important role in the stewardship of the boreal forest and its assets. To grow our businesses, we can not sell more fish or game consumption. To maintain the world class fishing experience we have in NW Ontario, our industry advocates and

supports reduced limits and catch and release fishing. Expansion dependant on the current resource is not appropriate, we must diversify the experiences we offer to grow our industry.

Largely our tourism operators are accomplishing this. In fact 7 in 10 accommodation operators re-invest figures greater than the average profit per unit within the industry back into their operations annually.

Most of the tourist operators within Northwestern Ontario are still family businesses. We are proud that our members are real folks, not corporations. We are connected to the landscape and carry with us a long range view of our individual camps and the industry as a whole.

This independence, however, can be problematic in accessing capital for reinvestment. We are pleased that the Government of Ontario included resource based tourism in the businesses eligible for Northern Ontario Heritage Fund loans. We would urge the government to continue to support our industry, and provide not only expansion dollars but assistance with “legislated and regulated” requirements such as water and sewer, gas handling etc.

Improving Infrastructure Expenditures within the Provincial Government

For decades the tourism industry in Sunset Country has been heavily dependent on the American visitor, selling experiences related to the regions undeveloped lakes, rivers and forests. I guess in that regard, the roots of the draw for tourists in Sunset Country are similar to that of the draw of Niagara Falls. A natural wonder. Miles and miles of undeveloped forests, fresh clean lakes, healthy fish and wildlife stocks.

The biggest difference between tourism in Sunset Country and Niagara Falls is not really the quality of the experience we can offer – but the investment in building on that experience and assisting our communities and businesses in extending and diversifying the stays for visitors and developing an atmosphere that promotes entrepreneurial investment.

We believe that the tourism industry provides the Province of Ontario with great opportunities for sustainable growth. We are investing and reinvesting in our industry. We are contributing to employment and tax revenues.

We would like you to join us. We would like the Province to significantly invest in the potential growth of tourism in the North West Ontario region.

I am sure you will hear today, as you have for years from across the region, that massive investment in upgrading our main highways is absolutely essential. Certainly less expensive but equally important for the traveling public is, the need for road side stops,

turn-offs, historical markers and washrooms. Our guests travel up to 18 hours to visit us, mainly by roadway. A great portion of this trip is often in the US. The US is our main competitor, and in every way, roads, historical markers, rest stops and clean attractive washrooms reinforce to every traveler that they are valued; Ontario is not communicating that same message.

Another way that the Province stimulates tourism interest is with attractions. For instance in Ontario there are 24 heritage attractions. 20 in Central and Southern Ontario, two in the North East, One in Britain and One in Northwestern Ontario. Somehow we are doubtful that within the 526,371 square kilometers there is just one item of interest to the traveling public– that is deserving of Provincial involvement. Through the various agencies the Province owns at least 40 attractions in the Province. In total the Province of Ontario owns just 2 attractions in NW Ontario.

Investing in tourism infrastructure based on either the local population of an area or the current tourism visitation will not grow new jobs in Ontario, and it will not assist our industry in expansion. Can you imagine if the US government at the turn of the century decided not to invest in attractions and transportation in Florida – because it was kind of out of the way and had a relatively small population?

All we asking for is, simply, our fair share.

Finally, we would like to thank the Province and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporations recent marketing efforts, this strategy will address both product development and marketing jointly. It will make the best use of web based marketing tools and will attempt to align with both national and local tourism marketing efforts.

We appreciate this venue to discuss with you our challenges and look forward to both the government of Ontario, and opposition parties, favorable response to our thoughtful policy requests. We look forward to working with you to ensure a prosperous future for both the Province of Ontario and Tourism through out Northwestern Ontario.