RURAL TOURISM ASSET MAP

HENRY ▪ RURAL ROCK ISLAND ▪ MERCER COUNTIES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Henry County Tourism Board

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is seen as a growth opportunity for the Henry/Rural Rock Island/Mercer County (HRRIM) region. Tourism is a source of new funds coming into the local economy, supporting not only the attractions and lodging establishments, but also contributing to the sales of retail businesses, restaurants, and service providers patronized by visitors. In turn, the taxes collected on these sales contribute to local government revenues.

Aside from its benefits to the local economy and to government revenue, tourism can have additional positive effects on communities. Attractions and the businesses they support help to create a better quality of life for residents. Improved living conditions help to attract new residents and investment by both businesses and the development community.

In 2013, Hargrove International and Young Strategies developed basic research and a strategic plan for tourism in Henry, Mercer, and rural Rock Island Counties. This study adds a level of detail to that analysis, mapping tourism assets and developing thematic relationships to link resources and foster extended visits. Additionally, it assesses the impact of tourism on the local economy and refines strategies to create a stronger tourism environment.

While it is a general goal of the study to identify means of increasing visitor traffic overall, the specific objective is to increase the number of overnight visitors at local hotels, enhancing their profitability and generating additional tax revenue that can be reinvested in tourism promotion as well as other activities. With the goal of increasing visitation overall, and with a particular emphasis on attracting more overnight travelers, approaches may include:

- Enhancing the qualities of existing attractions to increase visitation and duration of stay.
- Creating new attractions or activities that can draw visitors for longer stays.
- Bundling attractions to promote cross traffic that will increase visitors' length of stay.
- Improving the impact of marketing through better targeting and consistently messaged, well designed resources including print, web, and mobile formats.

Attractions are the core reason people will visit any location, and therefore no other factor is as important as the ability of the attraction to draw people. Simply put, is it interesting enough for people to take notice? Aside from that, there are then questions about the potential for further development of the asset itself, and the supporting services, such as lodging, dining, and shopping for essentials along with casual shopping, that create a better visitor experience, extend the length of the visit, capture more dollars locally, and make people want to return.

That visitor experience must match the promise of its marketing. Imagine booking a room at a hotel advertising luxury ocean-side rooms, only to arrive to find an economy hotel blocks from the shore, with just a glimpse of blue from the room. Not only would you never return, but you would tell friends and family about your bad experience, and in this day, post scathing reviews on the internet.

It is the same with an attraction, a community, or a region. If the actual experience falls short of the hype, bad reviews will spread quickly. It may be the case that a visitor makes a trip to a destination to find it closed, the quality falls below

expectations, or the attraction is simply not as interesting as promised in the marketing. This situation arises when organizations want to please all of their constituents by including everything, or inflating actual conditions to appear more attractive. In the long run these practices lead to failure. Marketing should be focused on those assets or activities with the broadest base, widest appeal, or highest return on investment, be realistic in its promises, and not be compelled to list the activities or attractions that do not really contribute to the visitor experience. Including these – a "throw everything at the wall and see what sticks" approach – only confuses the message and dilutes its impact.

The critical evaluation necessary for an honest assessment of tourism products can be a painful process. The potential of a tourism asset basically boils down to three questions:

- Is it unique (at least within the region)?
- Does it have broad appeal?
- Is it ready to receive visitors?

This study explores those three questions, recognizing and ranking the HRRIM area's tourism assets, considering their ability to draw visitors to the area, and identifying their needs for development. The marketing strategies proposed in the report are geared toward the region's top attractions rather than all of its sites and communities. Lastly, the project analyzes the impact of tourism on the local economy.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this study consisted of four components:

- Place Dynamics conducted a visual tour of the three counties, their respective communities, and the visitor attractions within them. During this tour and subsequent telephone conversations we interviewed approximately 30 business owners and attraction operators. In our travels we also stopped several visitors to the area to understand their perceptions.
- Attractions were rated on multiple dimensions, and the observations were discussed and confirmed in a meeting with local tourism officials. Background data was collected on tourism within the region, including visitation data and research conducted by state and local agencies. Tourism assets were mapped physically and relationally.
- An economic analysis was conducted to identify the impact of tourism on the local economy in terms of sales, tax revenues, and. The lodging market was examined to determine the potential demand for additional rooms.
- Linkages were studied to identify themes and create recommended itineraries that cross-promote attractions and extend the duration of visits. The assets themselves, along with general tourism trends, and targeted demographic or geographic markets were considered in developing these themes.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The HRRIM region has many attractions, but only a small number that can generate significant numbers of visitors from outside of the area. Most of these, as well as supporting attractions, are in need of further development. Common

Evaluating assets:

- *Is it unique?*
- *Does it have broad appeal?*
- *Is it ready to receive visitors?*

Every 1,000 new visitors results in $259,400 in spending and 3.36 new jobs.

concerns include under-developed facilities, lack of interpretation or wayfinding, and inadequate marketing. Businesses that could serve the visitor market are missing from some areas. Where they can be found, many could improve their merchandise mix or open for longer hours to capture a greater share of visitor spending.

Overall, hotels and other lodging establishments in the region are performing below the national average and below average for the Quad Cities market. This seems to be a function of a lack of demand more so than a result of conditions within the area's hotels. Most of the existing properties are economy hotels with a couple midscale hotels along Interstate 80. The Quad Cities offers stiff competition with most brands represented, and higher tier hotels. The analysis did not find sufficient demand to support a new hotel.

Tourism is vitally important to the area's economy, with the impact of visitor spending felt in nearly every community and across all sectors of the economy. Tourism is a $50 million industry supporting nearly 1,000 jobs and generating nearly $1 million in local tax revenue.

Priorities for tourism development include establishing a comprehensive system for tourism data collection, implementing wayfinding and interpretation programs, and establishing a regional program to assist in revitalizing business districts and supporting the small businesses in them. Marketing approaches include highway and onsite marketing strategies, regional collaboration and cross-promotion, and further development of print, web, and mobile marketing collateral materials.

The region needs to maintain and grow the capacity of its local resources for tourism promotion, including the Henry County Tourism Bureau and local chambers of commerce. For area tourism to reach its full potential, many of the assets need further development and a greater effort is needed to promote them. This can only be accomplished when there are local organizations able to lead the effort.

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

This section of the report documents the industry and contextual considerations upon which the asset assessment and recommendations are based. It discusses trends and preferences from the visitor perspective as well as the methods that attractions and communities are using to present their assets and appeal to tourists. It also discusses the regional setting in which the HRRIM competes for visitors.

TRAVELER TRENDS

When planning for tourism development it is important to consider the needs, desires, and habits of today's travelers, and those that are emerging over the coming years. Ideally, the region will be able to position itself to meet those future needs if they can be identified early enough. Fortunately, there are a number of organizations that track visitor interests.

General Trends

The tourism industry has been changed by the recession, the economic conditions that led to it, and by evolving generational preferences. The following is a summary of some of the trends that are emerging.

- **Growth in leisure travel over business travel.** As the economy contracted from 2007 to 2009, travel was seen as a relatively easy budget cut for both businesses and households. Still, business travel was curtailed more sharply than personal travel, and has taken longer to recover. Technology is seen as playing a role in the slower growth of business travel, as videoconferencing and other means of electronic communication mitigate the need for in-person meetings.
- **Shorter, but more frequent trips.** People are taking more trips, but they are more likely to be weekend getaways or day trips rather than extended vacations. For the HRRIM region, this could be good news. The average distance traveled was 240 miles round trip, a distance that would take in the Chicago market. But while the number of trips is up, there are fewer overnight stays.
- **Smaller travel party size.** More trips are being taken by individuals traveling solo and by couples without children. This reflects changing demographics as the population ages, couples have fewer children, and younger people are waiting longer to marry and start families.
- **Younger and older travelers.** There is growth in the number of trips made by Millennials and the Silent Generation, while fewer are made by Generation X and Boomers. The younger generation is just beginning to make trips, while older people have the greatest amount of free time as well as assets to spend on travel.
- **Friends getaways.** There is a rise in travel made by small groups of friends, such as "mancations" and "women's weekends".
- **More travel with pets.** Seventeen percent of car trips and 54 percent of RV trips include a pet. The rates are highest among younger travelers. The biggest complaint among these travelers is finding a hotel that accepts pets, either without charge or with a reasonable fee. These travelers respond positively to amenities provided for their pets, such as dog parks or areas where pets can be walked.

The Henry, rural Rock Island, and Mercer County area is an easy day trip or weekend getaway for visitors living in the Chicago area or other nearby population centers.

Changes in technology mean that tourism marketing organizations have far less control over the message.

Online reviews have a great impact on where people will visit, eat, or spend the night.

- **Someplace new.** Given the choice, many of today's travelers will choose to visit a new location instead of returning to the same place time and again. The opens the door to up and coming destinations, but it also means that reputation is more important than ever.
- **A desire for local flavor.** Perhaps it is a response to the homogenization of the landscape along with a perception of craftsmanship, but people are responding to places that offer something uniquely "local". This might be visible local culture or heritage, locally sourced foods or unique dishes, or local products on the shelves of stores.
- **Visitors want to interact.** Visitors are increasingly expressing a desire to not simply stand and watch, but to experience the attraction. They want to interact with people and take part in activities.
- **Quality and value.** Demands for quality in accommodations, food, and the visitor experience at attractions, are increasing. While peoples' expectations are increasing, so is their expectation of value.
- **Interest in outdoor recreation.** Outdoor activities remain popular and many are growing in popularity, even while others decline. The interest is year-round.

Many of these trends have the potential to benefit the HRRIM region, as it is located near large population centers and could constitute an easy day or weekend trip. It also has the potential to be an interesting alternative to better known destinations in eastern Iowa and northwestern Illinois. At the same time, the area may benefit from investments to nurture local character and offerings, enhance accessibility and interpretation of key tourism assets, and be more inclusive of pets accompanying visitors.

Group Travel

Group tour travel is anticipated to grow between seven and ten percent in 2014. While much of this is focused on international destinations along with key domestic sites, the market for backyard tours continues to expand. This typical group traveler is an older demographic, averaging 68 years. They travel with spouses and friends, usually in tours sponsored by groups in which they participate (such as senior centers, churches, garden clubs, etc.).

One in six has a mobility limitation or is traveling with someone who does. For the HRRIM region, this speaks to a need to address accessibility. Major tourist sites such as Bishop Hill are not equipped to facilitate visits by people with handicaps.

The typical person in a group tour is well educated and comes from a white collar background. They want to learn and expect to have a knowledgeable guide. They also have an interest in evening entertainment during the tour; not simply retiring to a hotel room to watch television.

Tours that link several destinations are more popular than those visiting a single site. History, heritage, gardening, and wilderness tours are among the most popular themes.

Marketing Trends

Several new approaches are important in tourism marketing, but it may be useful to first note some characteristics of how visitors plan their trips. Women outnumber men in this task, making up to 80 percent of travel arrangements. Planning for the trip is often a last minute task, especially for shorter getaways. When it comes to planning, technology is taking on an ever-increasing role. This

includes the use of the internet to plan ahead of time, or mobile technologies to look up restaurants or book a room while already on the road.

Technology opens new doors to marketing but it also presents significant challenges. Search engines like Google or sites like Expedia, Travelocity, and Yelp offer the opportunity for free or low cost marketing, helping to inform the consumer but also letting the consumer review the business or attraction. In fact, online reviews and word of mouth are among the most influential factors in decisions about which businesses to patronize and places to visit. This means that the tourism marketing organization has never been in less control of the message, and it has never before been more important to deliver on the promise.

Technology affects marketing in other ways. Location based marketing is appearing with the use of smartphones that signal the owner's location and target messages to them. While these are opt-in services, many apps track user locations and can provide a wealth of information about who visited a site, how long they stayed, and what specific businesses or locations they may have passed through. Technology is also seen as an ally in interpreting a site, presenting the opportunity for more engaging narrative and video, augmenting more simple and static signage.

Technology is changing how tourism is marketed and how visitors interact with attractions.

Integrated print, advertising, direct marketing, web and social media platforms are becoming more common, each with its own role. Online content is frequently updated through tools such as blogs and social media. The most adept programs are creating alliances with their visitors to spread the word, creating engaging strategies to get visitors to share their experiences using Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and other platforms.

Marketing is also becoming more personal. Rather than a single brochure listing everything, as has been common in the past, organizations are now developing more customized resources (again, across many platforms) to appeal to the specific interests of targeted visitor groupings.

Advertising is becoming more sophisticated with a shift to content marketing. This can help to solve the common quandary faced by many tourism organizations, of determining who is the client. Is it the visitor or is it the businesses who pay for advertising? Constrained by the need to raise funds, too many tourism organizations end up with marketing materials that are often little more than pages of advertising, failing to present the information that potential visitors want to know in order to make a decision to visit. In content marketing, the advertising message is woven into the content, minimizing or even replacing traditional advertising. For example, an article about dining might highlight a handful of restaurants, talking about their chef, history, unique features, specialties, or other characteristics, providing content, but also promoting the business.

Recreational or Vacation Activities

There are many different sources for information about Americans' participation in vacation activities. Using different surveys, these sources have some overlap, but may include or exclude any of a number of potential activities, producing different results. Fortunately, there is a general consistency among the most popular activities.

The leading outdoor recreational activities, based on annual expenditures, include the following:

1. Camping ($143 billion)
2. Water sports ($86 billion)
3. Bicycling ($81 billion)

4. Trail sports ($81 billion)
5. Off-roading ($66 billion)
6. Snow sports ($53 billion)
7. Motorcycling ($43 billion)
8. Fishing ($35 billion)
9. Wildlife viewing ($33 billion)
10. Hunting ($23 billion)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture – Forest Service has conducted a periodic survey of participation in outdoor recreational activities. The National Survey on Recreation and Environment ranks activities based on the percentage of the adult population that engage in them, with the following top results:

1. Walking (82.3%)
2. Family gathering (73.8%)
3. Viewing natural scenery (59.5%)
4. Picnicking (54.6%)
5. Driving for pleasure (50.6%)
6. Visit a historic site (45.3%)
7. Viewing wildlife (44.1%)
8. Viewing wildflowers and other natural vegetation (43.9%)
9. Swimming (41.3%)
10. Bicycling (39.4%)
11. Hiking (32.7%)
12. Visit a wilderness or primitive area (32.0%)
13. Bird-watching (31.8%)
14. Freshwater fishing (29.1%)
15. Developed camping (26.4%)
16. Motor boating (24.3%)
17. Team sports – softball, soccer, baseball, etc. (22.7%)
18. Mountain biking (21.2%)

The Henry, rural Rock Island, and Mercer County area supports many of the most popular outdoor activities.

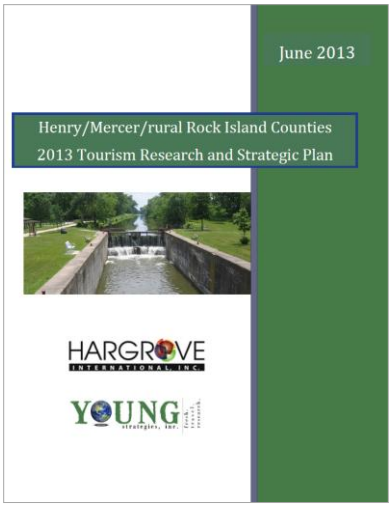
Lastly, the Outdoor Foundation conducts an annual survey of participation in a wide variety of specific recreational activities. Because the survey is conducted annually it is possible to assess whether participation is increasing, stable, or declining. Ranked by the percentage of the population taking part in the activity, the leaders include:

1. Running/jogging (18.5%)
2. Fishing (16.4%)
3. Bicycling (14.7%)
4. Camping (13.3%)
5. Hiking (12.0%)
6. Wildlife viewing (8.0%)

Some of the activities that are ranked high are also declining, at least in the short term, such as camping and fishing. Activities showing growth include bird watching, adventure racing, and kayaking. Participation in many sports, including team sports such as baseball and basketball, and individual sports including golf, horseback riding, and snowmobiling appear to be in decline.

Many of these, as well as less popular activities, can be engaged in within the HRRIM area. The challenge is that there are other sites in the broader region that may compete as locations in which people can engage in these activities. Some of those competitors will have a stronger drawing power.

2013 TOURISM RESEARCH AND STRATEGIC PLAN



This study, by Hargrove International and Young Strategies, evaluated existing tourism assets and provided recommendations to enhance their appeal, as well as to promote tourism in the region. In their evaluation, the consultant team noted the following:

- The study area offers a number of outdoor recreational assets that can lure visitors, but tend to be seasonal. Shopping and dining options are limited, and it can be difficult to find locally made items or locally sourced foods.
- "The Back Roads Beckon" is a fitting positioning statement, but there is not a consistent design approach to materials used to market attractions, and some material is out of date. A coordinated social media program is also needed. There is an opportunity to create tours or itineraries that link multiple attractions.
- Many of the region's communities, attractions, and some shops or restaurants were evaluated. While the analysis spoke of things like signage, the appearance of buildings, and hours, it made no attempt to rate the sites or talk of their potential to appeal to visitors.
- The assessment noted that shopping and dining are two very important activities, either as drivers of visitation or to support other activities. It goes on to note that the HRRIM region has few good, unique restaurants. Though specialty shopping can be found in some communities, there are few locally made products on the shelves.
- The lodging market was found to consist of seven hotels and four bed and breakfast inns with a total of 329 rooms. These were generally described as older limited service hotels. Occupancy was estimated at a low 40 percent, with an average daily rate of $56.13.

The plan recommends further actions to secure resources, develop tourist attractions, and market the area. Specific activities identified include:

- Establish more effective partnerships with communities in the HRRIM region.
- Secure 100 percent of the lodging tax receipts for the Henry County Tourism Bureau.
- Implement external marketing activities.
- Establish a system for collecting, analyzing, and reporting the economic impact of tourism.
- Seek out a grant writer to assist in applying for funds.

While tourism product development is important, the plan suggests that limited funding and staffing precludes the Henry County Tourism Bureau from pursuing this activity. Instead, it recommends that the Bureau serve in an advisory role while leaving development up to others.

The plan identifies a target market of an area within a five hour drive, which would encompass metropolitan areas such as Chicago, Indianapolis, Kansas City, and St. Louis. Three key activities to market include shopping heritage, and recreation. Multi-site itineraries can be developed to help visitors explore the region.

Wall Dog art, Aledo

Rural landscape, Mercer County

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Understanding the HRRIM area's competitive position and opportunities to expand tourism is not simply a matter of examining tourism assets within the area. They must be understood in a broader context of rival, or potential collaborators for the same visitor markets. Other destinations equally accessible to the HRRIM region's dominant markets, such as the Chicago metropolitan area, will have an impact on its drawing power.

General Characteristics

The HRRIM region is part of a broad swath of relatively flat agricultural lands stretching from the edge of the Chicago metropolitan area well into Iowa. Most of the aesthetically interesting landscape features are found along river valleys where there may be bluffs or hilly terrain, forest lands, or other natural areas. The terrain does become much hillier in the northwestern corner of Illinois, along the Mississippi River, and into Wisconsin and Minnesota. A similar hilly region runs from eastern Missouri, south of St. Louis, into southern Illinois.

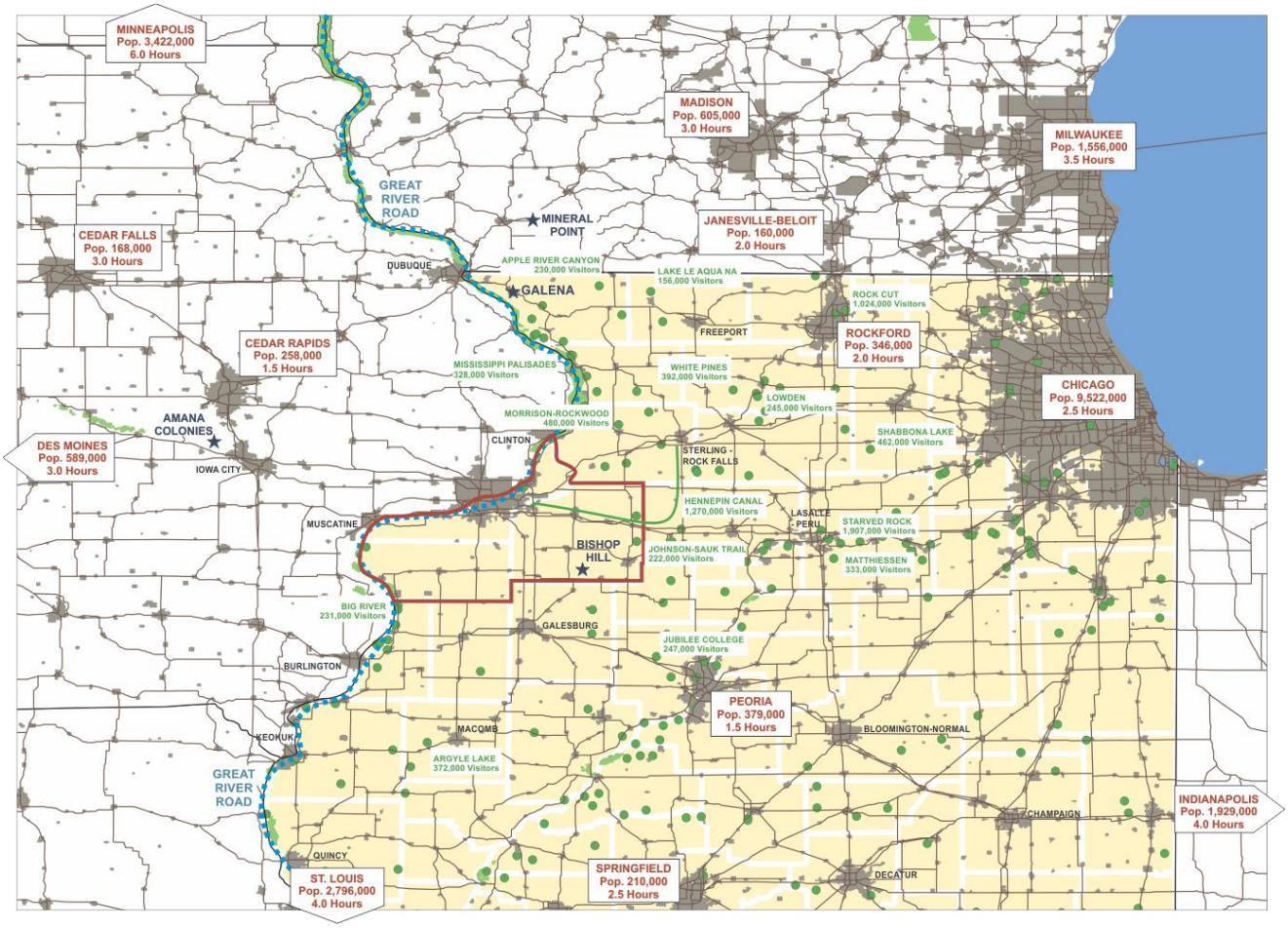
The more scenic quality of these areas has been a factor in their ability to generate tourist traffic. The areas contain many notable state parks or national forests, along with lakes, rivers, and other natural features. They support many of the same activities that visitors will engage in within the HRRIM counties – camping, bicycling, hiking, fishing, scenic driving, etc. They may also offer other activities not found in the HRRIM region, such as river-based paddling or tubing, climbing, and mountain biking.

Outdoor Recreation

Alternative sites for outdoor recreation are numerous and well distributed throughout not just Illinois, but also neighboring states. These tend to be state parks, though federal and state wildlife areas may also fill a role. The most heavily visited state parks are those ranked high in terms of scenic quality, such as Starved Rock, Morrison-Rockwood, or Mississippi Palisades State Parks in Illinois. Outside of Illinois, The HRRIM region may compete with popular parks such as Maquoketa Caves State Park in Iowa, Governor Dodge and Devil's Lake State Parks in Wisconsin, or Turkey Run and Brown County State Parks in Indiana.

Visitation at Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park is roughly half to one tenth that of the busier state parks, yet it is still above average for the statewide system. This suggests that the park does have good drawing power, and alludes to what may be one of its advantages. Visitors are more likely to experience the solitude of nature rather than view sights with a throng of other visitors. The number of visitors to Big River State Park is approximately the same.

The Hennepin Canal Parkway State Trail is one of the most-visited units in the Illinois State Park system. It is primarily used by cyclists. Illinois has several other bike trails, including one along the Illinois and Michigan Canal, and several constructed along former railroad corridors. Wisconsin also features a large number of trails built in rail corridors, the closest of which are the Sugar River Trail, Military Ridge Trail, and Glacial Drumlin Trail. Again, some of these may offer scenic landscapes or unique features such as trestles or tunnels, and can compete for visitor traffic, but bike trail riders are likely to vary their destinations to get different experiences.



Major Competitors

The Quad Cities, Galena, and the Amana Colonies are the primary competitors for travelers to the HRRIM region. It is also fair to say, though, that there may be opportunities to tie into, or redirect traffic from these more familiar destinations to alternative sites in the HHRIM market. It will be helpful to examine visitor patterns to these areas and consider local attractions or characteristics that may appeal to these visitors.

- Quad Cities

  The Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau commissioned brand research in 2013, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the origins and interests of visitors to the region. The Quad Cities draws the largest number of visitors (44 percent) from Illinois, followed by Iowa (24 percent), Wisconsin (4 percent), Indiana (3 percent) and Florida (3 percent). Nearly half of the Illinois visitors (46 percent) come from the Chicago region, followed by Peoria (11 percent). Iowa origins are more diverse, with 15 percent each coming from Cedar Rapids and Des Moines.

  Visitors were surveyed to determine their major interests or reasons for visiting. Two thirds of the persons responding were between 45 and 64 years old, suggesting some potential for children under 18 in the household. The following are the leading interests, with the percent of respondents indicating it is "very important".

Moline Center, Moline

Figge Art Museum, Davenport

Mississippi River Dam and Locks, Davenport

1. River town history (41%)
2. Theater and the arts (37%)
3. Big city options (33%)
4. Hiking and biking (32%)
5. Cool or exciting places (32%)
6. Cultural diversity (32%)
7. Boating or fishing (29%)
8. Exciting nightlife (27%)
9. Agricultural history / John Deere (22%)
10. Shopping for arts and crafts (18%)

The Mississippi River is seen as a central asset, along with events and festivals in the area's larger cities. The study noted three challenges including the need for better cooperation among cities in the area, the lack of any major attraction, and the market's lack of familiarity with the Quad Cities and what they may offer.

Potential visitors were segmented based on their affinity for particular aspects of the area, and described in terms of their interests.

VISITOR TYPE	AFFORDABLE	MIDWEST HOSPITALITY	FESTIVALS AND EVENTS	EASY TO NAVIGATE	COOL AND EXCITING
Rich culture of arts	70%	56%	57%		
Get away from the big city	73%	62%		52%	
Cool vibe	68%		65%		59%
Mississippi/outdoor getaway	75%	63%	58%	58%	

Those significantly more likely to choose the Quad Cities as a destination include 1) people wanted to get away from the big city to enjoy an easy, relaxing area with a variety of things to see and do, and 2) the family seeking affordable meals, accommodations, and activities for children and teens.

- Galena

While visitors to Galena travel from throughout the United States and even internationally, the majority are from Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and parts of adjacent states. The area is roughly bounded by Minneapolis, Omaha, St. Louis, Indianapolis, and Green Bay. The Chicago area accounts for 37.0 percent of visitors, followed by Milwaukee (6.7 percent) and Des Moines (3.7%). These three targeted markets account for fewer than half of the city's visitors. The average visitor is white, 52 years old, well educated, and has a household income in excess of $70,000. Half have children under 18 year of age.

Weekend getaways are the primary reason for traveling, followed by leisure trips. About 18 percent of visits are day trips, with 82 percent

involving an overnight stay. Overwhelmingly, these overnight stays include booked lodging (92.8 percent) as opposed to camping or staying with relatives or friends. Almost all travel to Galena (93.8 percent) is by personal car. Most (89.8 percent) are at least moderately likely to plan a return trip in the next two years. Primary reasons for visiting, in ranked order, are:

1. Unique scenic beauty
2. Shopping
3. Cultural/historic sites
4. Unique community
5. Visit wineries
6. Enjoy variety of food
7. Hiking
8. Attend special events
9. Biking
10. Enjoy live music

Characteristics people associate with the Galena area include scenic, historical, charming, relaxing, and friendly. The places that compete with Galena, identified by visitors, include Door County (Wisconsin), Lake Geneva (Wisconsin), New Buffalo (Michigan) and Michigan City (Indiana).

Downtown Galena, Illinois

Downtown Galena, Illinois

- Amana Colonies

  While the Amana Colonies has not conducted visitor research, the consultant team spoke with staff at the visitor center, examined the visitor log, spoke with business owners or employees, and conducted a visual tour of the communities.

  Like Bishop Hill, the Amana Colonies started out as a communal society in the mid 1800's, though it is much larger and continued will into the 1900's. Shopping for art, unique handcrafted items, and specialty items is central to a visit, as is food, whether for a meal or snacks, or locally produced packaged foods. The history of the colonies, architecture, and heritage also play a role. In 2007 the Convention and Visitors Bureau conducted a rebranding to position itself as "the handcrafted escape", moving away from a prior focus on history. This change has helped to boost visits, which were estimated at 800,000 in 2011, with $42 million spent at local businesses.

  As with the Quad Cities, a location along the I-80 corridor leads to a prevalence of visitors from Illinois and Iowa. Aside from these states, others appearing more frequently included Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and Texas.

Shops at the Amana Colonies, Amana, Iowa

Visitor Center, Amana, Iowa

These three competitors all share some important attributes with the HRRIM region:

- The majority of visitors are found on an east-west orientation, with the Chicago market as the primary origin.
- Visitors share a similar demographic dominated by middle-aged to older householders.
- Main interests include getting away from the big city, nature, shopping for unique items, and culture/history.

Tourism assets are rated on five qualities:

Draw

Duration

Development

Differentiation

Duplication

TOURISM ASSET MAP

The intent of the tourism map and related analysis is to document tourism assets in the HRRIM region, evaluate these assets and their tourism potential, identify development needs and opportunities, and suggest ways in which assets can be linked into itineraries that will appeal to visitors.

ASSET MAP AND RATING SYSTEM

Tourism assets were identified with the assistance of the Henry County Tourism Board and the Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau. Staff from Place Dynamics conducted visits to these locations in June and July of 2014, assessing each site and gathering insight from site staff as well as visitors.

Each site was rated on five characteristics, on a scale from one to five. For the purposes of the analysis, sites in close proximity were packaged as a single attraction. For example, a community's historic downtown, shops and restaurants, museum, and landmarks will comprise a single destination. The rating system does not rank assets against each other, but rather, along a common scale meant to demonstrate their appeal to potential visitors.

TOURISM ASSET RATING SYSTEM

DRAW – The distance that a typical visitor is likely to travel to visit the asset.

1. The attraction is of local interest only and will not draw visitors.
2. Although the attraction may not draw many visitors, it may serve as a short stop on the way to somewhere else.
3. A small number of visitors from outside of the area may be drawn to the attraction.
4. As many as a third of the visitors are from outside of the area.
5. The attraction is of great interest to visitors from outside of the area.

DURATION – The length of time a typical visitor will want to remain at the asset.

1. The typical visitor who stops will remain only a few minutes.
2. A visitor may spend an hour or two at the attraction.
3. Visits to the site can last up to a half day and often include at least one meal or snack.
4. The attraction is worth stopping for an entire day, with one or more meals.
5. Visitors will spend more than one day at the attraction, staying overnight and eating several meals.

DEVELOPMENT – Access, orientation, interpretation, facilities, customer services, and other conditions impacting visitor experience.

1. The site suffers from multiple shortcomings that may frustrate visitors.
2. One or two issues detract from the experience.
3. The site is average, meeting expectations but not exceeding them.
4. Development is above average and leads to a positive visitor experience.
5. The attraction delivers an exceptional experience on all levels.

DIFFERENTIATION – The degree to which the asset is unique or stands out from its competitors.

1. Just about every place has a similar attraction, and of comparable quality.
2. The attraction may be less common or those offered elsewhere may be of a lower quality.
3. The attraction is not very common and at least equal in quality to its competitors.

4. Few competitors exist and the attraction is in the top third as far as quality is concerned.
5. The attraction is truly unique and stands out among the best of its competitors.

DUPLICATION – The likelihood that a visitor will return for additional visits to the attraction.

1. There is no reason most visitors will want to return a second time.
2. If it is not out of the way, some visitors may consider it worth a short detour.
3. A visitor might come back every few years.
4. Visitors may consider the attraction worth a stop every year or two.
5. Visitors will definitely return time and again, even in the same year.

Only a handful of sites have the ability to draw visitors from outside of the area.

ASSET RANKINGS AND UNDERUTILIZED SITES

The 25 top rated attractions were ranked according to their composite scores. These attractions were than included on the asset map.

TOP RANKED TOURISM ASSETS

1. Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park
2. Bishop Hill
3. Hennepin Canal Parkway
4. Big River State Forest
5. Geneseo (downtown)
6. Gob Hill/Atkinson Motorsports Park
7. Cordova Dragway Park
8. Ski Snowstar
9. Great River Road
10. Great River Trail
11. Country Corner Farm Market
12. Illiniwek Forest Preserve
13. Aledo (downtown)
14. Loud Thunder Forest Preserve
15. Kewanee (downtown)
16. Hampton
17. Lavender Crest Winery / Backroad Vineyard / Creekside Vineyard
18. Stone's Apple Barn
19. Richmond Hill Park
20. Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge
21. Annawan / Howe's Park
22. Atkinson
23. Colona
24. Rock River Trail
25. Historic Route 6

UNDERUTILIZED TOURISM ASSETS

1. Bishop Hill
2. Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park
3. Mississippi River
4. Big River State Forest
5. Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge
6. Great River Road
7. Ski Snowstar
8. Cordova Dragway Park
9. Hennepin Canal Parkway
10. Gob Hill/Atkinson Motorsports Park
11. Historic Route 6
12. Colona (downtown)
13. Keithsburg
14. Rock River Trail
15. Geneseo (downtown)
16. Country Corner Farm Market
17. Lavender Crest Winery / Backroad Vineyards / Creekside Vineyards
18. Aledo (downtown)
19. Kewanee (downtown)
20. Cambridge (downtown)
21. Great River Trail
22. Mountain biking
23. Geocaching
24. Hunting
25. Horse trails and camping

The following is a discussion of each of the top attractions in the study area, indicating its rating and providing a discussion of the attraction's key features, strengths, and needs.

Ryan's Round Barn

Johnson- Sauk Trail

Bishop Hill

Gallery interior, Bishop Hill

Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park

Draw	5
Duration	5
Development	3
Differentiation	3
Duplication	4
Mean rating	4.0

Johnson-Sauk Trail is a 1,365-acre park centered on a 58-acre lake, surrounded by a forest and prairie landscape. Ryan's Round Barn was constructed in 1910 and is one of the nation's largest round barns. It houses a small museum. The park drew 222,000 visitors in 2013. Its facilities include a campground, playground, picnic areas, trails, scenic drive, café and camp store. Activities at the park include camping, hiking, bicycling, cross country skiing, boating and fishing, and hunting.

Development Needs

The park's outdoor recreational features are well developed and marked. The round barn, however, is an underutilized asset. This is a truly unique feature and its public ownership (as opposed to most others that are privately owned) should provide increased opportunities for access. Unfortunately, the barn can only be viewed from the outside except for rare occasions when it is open and staffed by volunteers. Similar structures elsewhere allow unsupervised access during normal park hours.

The barn might be considered an unique opportunity to host activities such as weddings and family or organizational events. Rental income for use of the facility could help to fund more regular staffing.

Bishop Hill

Draw	4
Duration	4
Development	4
Differentiation	4
Duplication	4
Mean rating	4.0

Bishop Hill was founded in the mid-1800's as one of many communal societies found throughout the United States. Though the colony was short-lived (1846 to 1861) many original buildings survive along with a handful of later buildings. The village is home to museums dedicated to Henry County and to Bishop Hill, along with several art galleries, unique shops, and restaurants.

Development Needs

Several potential issues may detract from visitor's experiences with the site, as well as its impact on tourism within the region.

- The museums and many of the businesses are only open seasonally, closing from December to April. Even during the peak season, many businesses have limited hours and may be closed on some days.
- There are only four places that serve food, and one of these is a bakery. One is only open for dinner. The other two are usually only open for lunch.

- The village can only be reached from less traveled county roads. While better than for many of the region's attractions, signage is still minimal and does not draw sufficient attention to the site.
- Site infrastructure is under-developed. Parking can be an issue on busy weekends. Although the site will attract an older demographic (including bus tours), accessibility is a concern both in public spaces and within buildings.
- The site's history and culture are key elements of its appeal, yet there is almost no interpretation provided. Integrated signage, cell phone (audio), and smartphone (video) tours could improve the experience. Similarly, museum displays are somewhat mundane and could be greatly enhanced by incorporating new practices, such as technology and interactive exhibits, to better engage visitors.
- State funding for Bishop Hill is being cur, resulting in additional days when museums will be closed. This will impact the visitor experience, particularly for those from greater distances, and may result in fewer visitors to the community.

Hennepin Canal State Parkway

Draw	5
Duration.....	4
Development	3
Differentiation	3
Duplication.....	4
Mean rating.....	3.8

Hennepin Canal

The Hennepin Canal was constructed between 1892 and 1907 to connect the Illinois, Rock, and Mississippi Rivers. By the 1930's it was no longer much used for commercial traffic, and in 1951 it was closed to boat traffic. Eventually the parkway was designated a state park, and gravel paths were constructed along the tow path to provide recreational opportunities.

Hennepin Canal interpretive sign

The parkway spans Rock Island, Bureau, Henry, Lee and Whiteside Counties and includes 91 miles of surfaced bike trails, 73 miles of equestrian trails, 155 miles of hiking trails, and 90 miles of snowmobile trails. Boating and fishing are also permitted. The primary visitor center and interpretive facility is located in Whiteside County, and there are several campgrounds along the route.

In 2013 the parkway attracted an estimated 1,270,000 visitors, ranking it among the most visited units in the state park system.

Development Needs

While the canal passes through Henry and Rock Island Counties, it bypasses most of the communities. It only passes through Colona, and except for a small park and trailhead, there is no attempt to capture any of the potential tourist trade associated with the canal. Elsewhere, it is difficult to locate or even access features of the canal such as its locks or aqueducts. Better wayfinding is needed to direct users from cities to the canal, and from the canal to nearby cities where users may find services. Kiosks along the canal route can be used to identify the relevant businesses and other services that trail users can find in nearby cities.

Designed for trail users, there was little thought given to others who may have an interest in canal features, but prefer to drive. Directional signage (or any signage indicating the location of significant canal features) is minimal, and

reaching a site may require a drive down gravel roads. Designating and marking a road route paralleling the canal and accessing its main features may help to improve visitation by those more interested in its history than in bicycling.

Some interpretive signage was installed in the parkway when it was first opened to the public as a recreational area. Many of these signs are aging poorly and are in need of replacement. As with Bishop Hill, more modern means of interpretation can be considered.

Fire watch tower at Big River State Forest

Big River State Forest

Draw	4
Duration	5
Development	2
Differentiation	3
Duplication	4
Mean rating	3.6

Although Big River State Forest is located outside of the study area, it lies just south of Mercer County and the nearby community of Keithsburg could serve as the gateway service provider to park users.

Big River received 231,000 visitors in 2013. Lying along the Mississippi River, the park's 2,900 acres preserve remnants of a vast prairie woodland border area that once covered much of Illinois, along with the oldest pine plantation in the state.

The park has a single 3.5 mile trail, along with 60 miles of firebreaks that are also used for hiking and horseback riding. There are 30 miles of designated snowmobile routes and 15 miles of scenic roads. Picnicking, camping, boating, fishing, and hunting are also permitted.

The park headquarters is located on the Oquawka-Keithsburg road four miles south of Keithsburg. While there are several maintenance and operational buildings, there is no visitor center or interpretive facilities. An informational kiosk provided little useful information, and no maps or other park brochures were available. The campground and picnic areas also lacked any information.

A fire watch tower is located at the park headquarters. This unique feature could have great visitor interest, but it is securely fenced off to prevent access.

<u>Development Needs</u>

Information is the foremost challenge for visitors to Big River State Forest. This begins with little to no directional signage guiding people from nearby highways to the park. Once at the park, there is a need for more visible and timely signage indicating park features. For example, the Big Pines trailhead sign can only be seen once a driver turns off into the small gravel lot. There is no signage on the road indicating the presence of the trailhead. The same is true of picnic areas. Kiosks should be provided at the campground and picnic areas, and at a minimum, contain a map of the park and its key features, park information, and details about services available nearby such as gas, groceries, medical and veterinary services, restaurants, etc. Printed maps should also be made available.

There is a need to provide greater information at the park headquarters, including exhibits to help explain features of the park. This does not need to be an indoor museum. Well designed outdoor displays (with some perhaps under a shelter to offer visitors protection from weather, and interactive exhibits can

serve just as well. These might be accompanied by a small amphitheater where programs can be offered.

The fire tower is a great missed opportunity from a tourism perspective. This historic feature is very uncommon and would solicit a great deal of interest. Many people, and perhaps especially families, would have an interest in climbing the tower for the experience of being in it and also seeing the surrounding countryside from a unique perspective.

Geneseo / Downtown Geneseo

Draw	3
Duration.....	3
Development	4
Differentiation	3
Duplication.....	3
Mean rating.....	3.2

Geneseo has an exceptionally nice downtown for a community of its size, boasting several galleries, unique shops, and good places to eat within an attractive environment. The City, Chamber of Commerce, businesses, and others have put a great deal of investment into the downtown, not only in its public spaces, but also in the privately owned buildings and businesses. A large number of events are held downtown through all seasons of the year.

Downtown Geneseo

Outside of the downtown, the city can meet most traveler needs for gas, food, and lodging. It has the most offerings of any community in the HRRIM study area.

Downtown Geneseo

<u>Development Needs</u>

With the city lying adjacent to I-80, the downtown could be a quality stop for through travelers, but it is not known and there is no highway advertising to indicate what it has to offer. In addition to maximizing tourism attraction signage through the Illinois Department of Transportation's tourism signage program, the city should utilize a billboard campaign with signs located several miles out, and then again near the Geneseo exit. Unique shopping and food should be the focus of messaging.

Gob Hill / Atkinson Motorsports Park

Draw	3
Duration.....	3
Development	3
Differentiation	3
Duplication.....	3
Mean rating.....	3.0

Saturday farmer's market, Downtown Geneseo

More public areas are being opened to meet the needs of ATV or dirt bike riders as there has been an expanding interest in the activity. This site is a 216-acre former coal mine that has been reclaimed with a combination of trails and open areas for unrestricted riding. There is a small campground on the property and an RV dealer across the street from the entrance. The park is open on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays through most of the year, although the peak season is during warmer months.

<u>Development Needs</u>

The park has plans to expand its campground by constructing cabins for rental. Ideally, it could be expanded to accommodate additional riders.

Cordova Dragway

Cordova Dragway Park

Draw	3
Duration	3
Development	2
Differentiation	3
Duplication	3
Mean rating	2.8

Cordova Dragway is open from April through October, hosting events every weekend. The attraction features a 0.25-mile asphalt drag strip and stadium capable of seating 10,000 attendees, for races in all IHRA sanctioned classes. In 2014 the IHRA Summer Nationals returned to the track after a 12-year absence.

Development Needs

This site is adequately developed for its purposes. During the racing season the track is fully booked on all weekends. As an outdoor facility there is no further opportunity to extend activities into the winter months.

The location of the track does present a challenge to building patronage for nearby businesses. Aside from a handful of gas/convenience stores and local restaurants, visitors to the track will not find many nearby services in the HRRIM region. Most of the overnight stays associated with the track are probably being captured in hotels in the Quad Cities. There is a single campground in Port Byron for RV travelers.

Ski Snowstar

Ski Snowstar

Ski Snowstar

Draw	3
Duration	3
Development	2
Differentiation	3
Duplication	3
Mean rating	2.8

Ski Snowstar is open from early December through the winter season, daily except for Christmas. The site has three lifts for skiing and a sledding hill. The facilities (rental office and café) are located at the top of the hill, adjacent to the parking. Ski Snowstar is the southernmost ski area in Illinois and has its own snowmaking equipment.

About 55 percent of its traffic is drawn from the Quad Cities region, with the remainder coming primarily from southern Illinois. Communities further north tend to head north to slopes around Galena or in Wisconsin.

Ski Snowstar has considered several opportunities to expand use of the site into the off season. Possibilities include hosting outdoor concerts and events such as scouting jamborees, car shows, lumberjack contests, craft shows, and car shows.

Development Needs

Zoning has been an impediment to hosting summer activities. The county board rejected an application to change the zoning. A second attempt might be tried with a modified proposal.

Access is one of the chief obstacles to further development of the attraction. 126th Street is the most direct route to the site, however, it is a narrow road with a steep hill, prompting local officials to advocate a more indirect route on

gravel roads. This can make it difficult to find the site. The owners have met with town, county, and other officials to look into reconstructing 126th Street to better serve the property, and to identify possible sources of funding including state grants for the project.

Great River Road

Draw	5
Duration.....	1
Development	2
Differentiation	2
Duplication.....	3
Mean rating.....	2.6

The Great River Road is one of the oldest and best known multi-state scenic byways. Each year, tens of thousands people drive all or parts of the route from the headwaters in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. The demographics of this group are varied, but many enjoy the history and natural attractions that can be found in the HRRIM region.

The Great River Road is designated on a combination of state and local roads parallel to the Mississippi River, in both Illinois and Iowa. It passes through communities including Cordova, Port Byron, Rapids City, Hampton, Andalusia, New Boston, and Keithsburg.

Development Needs

The Great River Road is easily followed in the northern part of Rock Island County, though the village centers and opportunities to view the river are poorly marked. Signage in these communities should identify the location of the downtown, public river access, and sites that will interest visitors.

South of the Quad Cities it can be difficult to follow the Great River Road where it leaves state highways to follow local roads and makes multiple turns. The route travels farther from the river in this area, and there are few opportunities to access its shores. Sites like Loud Thunder Forest Preserve, Big River State Forest, and Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge could be more significant stops along the route, but are largely unknown.

Great River Road travelers will be interested in sites or activities such as the wineries that lie nearby, and Bishop Hill. These could easily become detours from the route, but again, marketing and better signage is needed to make people aware of the attractions.

Port Byron, on the Great River Road

Museum in New Boston on the Great River Road

Great River Trail

Draw	3
Duration.....	3
Development	2
Differentiation	2
Duplication.....	3
Mean rating.....	2.6

The Great River Trail in Rock Island County is part of a grander vision for a bicycle trail system stretching along the entire Mississippi River. This segment extends from the Rock River through the Quad Cities and as far north as Albany. South of Interstate 80 the trail tends to hug the riverbank. To the north the trail is often constructed within several feet of Highway 84, where riders will have a less pleasant and less scenic experience.

Segment of the Great River Trail

Development Needs

Rock Island and Mercer Counties, along with other development partners, can consider extending the trail south along the river. The trail should make connections to Loud Thunder Forest Preserve and Big River State Forest.

Country Corner Farm Market

Country Corner Farm Market

Draw	2
Duration	2
Development	4
Differentiation	3
Duplication	2
Mean rating	2.6

Country Corner Farm Market is a seasonal attraction located on Highway 150 near Alpha. In addition to the farm market, the site has a u-pick strawberry path and pumpkin patch. There is a petting zoo, playground, and picnic area. In autumn there is a corn maze.

Country Corner Farm Market

Development Needs

Overall, the site is well developed. More merchandise might be stocked in the form store. Although the owners attempt to source locally, products that are out of season or that are processed (such as jams and jellies) are produced elsewhere. No food is sold on site for immediate consumption. This might be a missed opportunity.

Illiniwek Forest Preserve

Draw	2
Duration	2
Development	3
Differentiation	3
Duplication	2
Mean rating	2.4

Illiniwek Forest Preserve

Illiniwek Forest Preserve is located in the northern part of Rock Island County, straddling Highway 84 and including a length of Mississippi River shoreline. The park includes campgrounds, picnic areas, ball fields, a concession, a boat launch, and a short trail to a scenic overlook. The Great River Road and Great River Trail pass through the park.

The forest preserve is very close to the Elton E. Fawks Bald Eagle Refuge, which is a well known eagle roosting area. While the refuge is closed from October through April, eagles are often spotted from Illiniwek.

Development Needs

The park's facilities are adequately developed for its intended uses. As one of the few locations with river access or views on the HRRIM segment of the Great River Road, it can be better marketed to through travelers on the route.

Downtown Aledo

Aledo / Downtown Aledo

Draw	2
Duration	2
Development	3
Differentiation	3
Duplication	2
Mean rating	2.4

Downtown Aledo has a very good collection of specialty stores and restaurants in an environment where the community has made a very obvious investment in quality parks and infrastructure. Aledo is the only Main Street city in the HRRIM region. There is a weekly farmer's market and several events throughout the year, including the annual rhubarb festival.

Downtown Aledo

Development Needs

Aledo has a combination of specialty shops that will interest tourists, such as antique stores, and other shops that are largely oriented to the population living in the area. Merchandising assistance can help business identify additional products they may carry to diversify and reach a broader audience. Further efforts by the Main Street program to attract specialty businesses will help to build on a cluster that is already appearing.

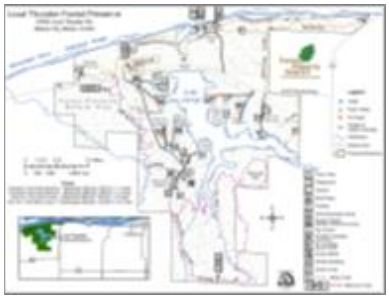
Physically, the downtown has a number of attractive buildings and a very nice public square including a band shell and covered pavilion. Less attention has been paid to the streetscape. There is little greenery to soften a hard appearance. Streets are very wide while sidewalks could be wider, providing an opportunity to place merchandise or dining outside. This will also help to liven the appearance of the district.

Downtown Aledo

As with Geneseo, Aledo is an interesting stop but is even less well known outside of the immediate area. Additional marketing, highway signage, and wayfinding can help to raise awareness of the district.

Loud Thunder Forest Preserve

Draw	2
Duration.....	3
Development	3
Differentiation	2
Duplication.....	2
Mean rating.....	2.4



Loud Thunder Forest Preserve

Loud Thunder is a forest preserve on the shores of the Mississippi River in rural Rock Island County. At 157 acres, Lake George is one of its most significant features. There are primitive and fully developed campgrounds, a horse campground and corral, picnic areas, playground, boat launches on both the river and the lake, boat rentals, three hiking trails between 1.1 and 1.5 miles in length, and a 4.6 mile multi-use trail.

Development Needs

The park is well developed for a park designed to serve the population of a county or metropolitan region. The quality of its facilities, location, and breadth of activities that can be supported at the park suggest that it does have the ability to draw from outside of the area, but it does not appear to be marketed to non-local patrons. Aside from better marketing, there is a need for wayfinding to direct visitors. This should include messaging to notify drivers on the Great River Road that the site has access to the river, facilities, and scenic views.

Downtown Kewanee

Downtown Kewanee

Kewanee / Downtown Kewanee

Draw	2
Duration	2
Development	3
Differentiation	2
Duplication	2
Mean rating	2.2

Good's is the premier attraction in downtown Kewanee, containing the furniture store, café/wine bar, and bed and breakfast inn. There are a small number of other specialty shops in the downtown, though not necessarily complimentary, and perhaps falling short of the critical mass necessary to form a destination district. Much of the downtown area is also not immediately visible from Highway 78, giving the impression that the district is smaller than it actually is.

Kewanee has a good base of businesses to meet traveler needs, including hotels, restaurants, gas stations, and shopping for basic necessities. As the community nearest to Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park, it should capture much of this traffic.

Kewanee is served by two Amtrak routes. While this is not in itself a tourist attraction, this important service can be a contributor to the area's tourism potential by enhancing accessibility. While Amtrak ridership has been on a steady increase, the Carl Sandburg and Zephyr Routes have lost a small number of riders. The current annual total passengers on these routes is 90,000. Of these, about 22,000 embark or disembark at Kewanee.

Development Needs

Kewanee could benefit from a downtown revitalization program similar to Aledo's Main Street, or the efforts made in Geneseo. Physical enhancements might include gateways, streetscaping, façade improvements, and wayfinding. An equal effort should address programmatic issues such as business recruitment and development, and promotion.

Johnson-Sauk Trail is a great source of potential sales for businesses in Kewanee. Nowhere in the park is there any information about the shops, restaurants, and services available in the city. This information should be displayed at kiosks in the park, and especially within the campground.

Hampton

Draw	2
Duration	2
Development	3
Differentiation	2
Duplication	2
Mean rating	2.2

Hampton contains a number of small attractions and assets that support visitors. These include a boat launch and marina, riverfront park, miniature golf, Mississippi River Lock and Dam 14, the Heritage Center, the 1846 Brettun & Black store, a campground, and a segment of the Great River Trail. It is also close to Illiniwek Forest Preserve.

Development Needs

Hampton has a handful of attractions, but it does not have a significant number of nearby businesses to benefit from visitors to those attractions. At the heart of this problem is the fact that the attractions are of comparatively minor importance. No one attraction, or even several combined, draw enough tourists to support businesses that must first rely on local patronage for success. Providing merchandise or services to visitors is a strategy to increase sales.

Lavender Crest Winery (Colona) / Backroad Vineyard (Orion) / Creekside Vineyards Tasting Room and Inn (Coal Valley)

Draw	2
Duration.....	2
Development	2
Differentiation	3
Duplication.....	2
Mean rating.....	2.2

There are three wineries and vineyards in close proximity south of the Quad Cities. Two (Lavender Crest and Creekside) are listed as part of the Great Rivers Winery Loop and the Northwestern Illinois Winery Loop.

Lavender Crest is located on US Highway 6 and has a wine tasting room and banquet center. The winery offers tours and has an espresso bar that serves lunch. The facility is attractive inside, but as noted in the Hargrove study, does not have a particularly appealing exterior.

Backroad Vineyard offers tours by appointment. It does not have a tasting room or other public facilities, although it can host outdoor events.

Creekside Vineyards has a tasting room located on Highway 67, and a nearby seasonal wine terrace surrounded by the vineyards and woods. Although food is not prepared onsite, visitors can request a box lunch ahead of their visit. The inn, with three bed and breakfast rooms, is also located on the farm.

Two of three area wineries have tasting rooms and offer tours to visitors.

Development Needs

Wineries are popular stops and the wines they produce are some of the few locally produced foods in the area. These assets are all to some degree still under development, but may signal the opportunity for additional similar niche agriculture or agritourism in the area. In addition to helping these businesses with their expansion needs, local tourism efforts should expand their presence in marketing for the area. As an indirect approach to building name recognition, these wineries should be making an effort to have their wines featured at local restaurants that serve alcohol.

Stone's Apple Barn

Draw	2
Duration.....	2
Development	2
Differentiation	3
Duplication.....	2
Mean rating.....	2.2

Stone's Apple Barn is a seasonal attraction near the City of Hampton and Illiniwek Forest Preserve. The orchard and farm stand is open in August and

Stone's Apple Barn (from website)

July, selling many varieties of apples and other fruit, cider, honey, and other freshly made products. Visitors can pick their own apples.

Development Needs

While farm stands, local produce, and foods are popular, the limited season of Stone's Apple Barn limits its impact on tourism in the area. Extending the season would help to generate additional traffic. This might be done by expanding into produce growth throughout the season or by adding prepared foods made with apples and other farm products, such as baked goods.

Richmond Hill Park

Draw	2
Duration	2
Development	3
Differentiation	2
Duplication	2
Mean rating	2.2

Richmond Hill Park lies north of Interstate 80 at the Geneseo interchange. The park contains several ball fields, picnic areas, and a community theater used by the Richmond Hill Players. Along with Howe's Park in Annawan, this park could serve as an alternative rest stop for travelers on the interstate. The theater may present an opportunity to provide entertainment to bus tours, especially if they are staying at the adjacent Best Western.

Development Needs

Richmond Hill is adequately developed to serve its function as a city park. If the City were to expand its role to serve as a highway rest stop, some additional improvements could be considered. These might include additional signage (including signs on the highway) and an informational kiosk. To differentiate the park from other rest stops, the city could construct an off-leash dog park, targeting the nearly one in five visitors with a pet.

Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge

Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge

Draw	2
Duration	2
Development	2
Differentiation	2
Duplication	2
Mean rating	2.0

The Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge is located on both the Illinois and Iowa sides of the Mississippi River. It is part of the Mississippi River Flyway, a network of conservation areas set aside to conserve fish and wildlife habitat and support migratory bird populations. The Keithsburg Division consist of 1,400 acres of wetlands and bottomland forests.

Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge

Hiking and fishing are allowed in the Keithsburg Division from January 1 through September 14. It is closed the remainder of the year to protect migrating birds. The Spring Slough parking lot provides access for hiking and bank fishing along an access road and levee.

The main access point is located north of Keithsburg. Signage to the site is very poor. There are no facilities at the site, which is accessed from gravel roads and appears to have been flooded. A boat ramp is located a short distance north of Keithsburg. A second access site is located south of

Keithsburg and north of Big River State Forest. Aside from a gravel lot and kiosk, there is little in the way of visitor facilities at the site.

Development Needs

This asset could play a more significant role in regional tourism promotion, for activities such as hiking, boating, bird and wildlife watching, and fishing. It is currently almost completely undeveloped with no interpretation. Restrooms, trails, and wildlife viewing stations are among the facilities that might be considered. Interpretation can include kiosks and interpretive signs, nature or interpretive trails, a printed park map, and information about the birds and wildlife that can be seen, including checklists.

Annawan / Howe's Park

Draw	1
Duration	2
Development	3
Differentiation	2
Duplication	1
Mean rating	1.8

Annawan functions as a service stop where Interstate 80, US Highway 6, and Illinois Highway 78 converge. Highway 78 connects to Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park and Kewanee. A hotel, gas stations, and restaurants are located along the highway. A few additional businesses are located on Route 6 in the downtown. Annawan is the last interchange with available services until Princeton, 24 miles to the east.

Howe's Park is found adjacent to the interstate in the northwest corner of the city. The park has a playground, shelter, and ball fields. One of the existing tourism strategies has been to attempt to attract traveling sports leagues. It has also been noted that the park could be an attractive rest stop for passing traffic on the interstate.

Development Needs

As with many of the region's smaller communities, Annawan simply functions as a service stop for travelers, although importantly, it may be the last stop for visitors to Johnson-Sauk Trail. Businesses should give thought to basic food items, camping supplies, and other merchandise catering to this market. Signage near the interchange can help to identify the businesses that are located in the city.

There is a need to quantify the impact of sporting activities on area businesses. These would include gas purchases, meals eaten in the community, and overnight stays. Gathering this data will measure the impact of the strategy, allowing it to be tailored for better impact, or perhaps expanded to other locations.

Annawan and Atkinson are located on Historic Route 6, which could be developed as a touring route.

Atkinson

Draw	1
Duration	2
Development	3
Differentiation	2
Duplication	1
Mean rating	1.8

Atkinson is located at an interchange along I-80 in Henry County. The city has a few services for visitors such as gas stations and restaurants. The downtown is located at the north end of State Street, four blocks off of Route 6. There are few businesses that would be of interest to visitors. Gob Hill/Atkinson Motorsports Park is located just east of the city.

Development Needs

Through traffic on the interstate, Historic Route 6, and the motorsports park are the primary sources of visitors to Atkinson. While they are not coming specifically to visit the city, they are stopping for its services. Marketing these should be the primary strategy for the time being. The city will want to monitor traffic to identify and promote new business opportunities as demand grows.

Park on the Hennepin Canal, Colona

Colona

Draw	1
Duration	1
Development	2
Differentiation	2
Duplication	2
Mean rating	1.6

The small of town Colona is the only community in the HRRIM area through which the Hennepin Canal actually passes. A handful of buildings make up the downtown, and there is a small park alongside the canal just north of these. The park provides parking, restrooms, and a shelter. Further from Highway 84 there is a playground, tennis courts and ball field. About two miles west of the highway the Hennepin Canal comes to an end where it joins the Rock River.

Despite the large number of cyclists and others using the Hennepin Canal, businesses in Colona appear to make no attempt to reach out to the potential market. The town park, as well as a small park at the junction of the river and canal, have no significant trailhead features. While boating might be a possibility and there is a boat launch at the confluence, the canal is routed through a culvert at 6th Street, forcing canoes or kayaks to portage and preventing larger boats from traveling upstream.

Development Needs

While the main Hennepin Canal visitor center is located near Princeton, Colona could serve as a secondary site for visitors who may prefer to start their trip at the southwest end. Exhibits and improved (unstaffed) visitor facilities could be constructed in the park or on other land along the canal.

Boating access could expand opportunities for canal users and for businesses in Colona. If it were possible to open access from the Rock River to Colona and upper reaches of the canal, Colona could serve as an important service and entertainment stop for boaters on both the canal and the Rock River. A marina could be constructed in downtown Colona to provide launch facilities, boater services, and a place to dock while boaters accessed businesses such as restaurants.

Rock River Trail

Draw	2
Duration.....	1
Development	1
Differentiation	2
Duplication.....	1
Mean rating.....	1.4

The Rock River Trail is , at this stage of development, largely a proposed corridor for motorists, trail users, and boaters following the Rock River from its headwaters in Wisconsin through Illinois to its confluence with the Mississippi River. Route travelers will be treated to natural scenery on the river, the rural landscape, and historic river towns. As with other long corridors passing through the HRRIM region, the Rock River Trail has the potential to bring in visitors from well beyond the surrounding counties.

Rock River Trail

Development Needs

The Rock River Trail should be seen as a long term opportunity that will evolve only as individual communities, counties, and even state governments invest in planning, infrastructure, amenities, and eventually marketing to bring the vision to life. Within the HRRIM area, the most significant challenges will be that the river does not pass through any cities, there are few roads that offer scenic river views, and nearly all of the shoreline is privately owned.

Rock River Trail, Quad Cities Area Map

The best strategy to address this may be to develop parks and trail corridors at strategic scenic points along the river. County governments can begin the process by identifying priority sites, and working with the state to secure funds for acquisition and development.

Historic U.S. Route 6

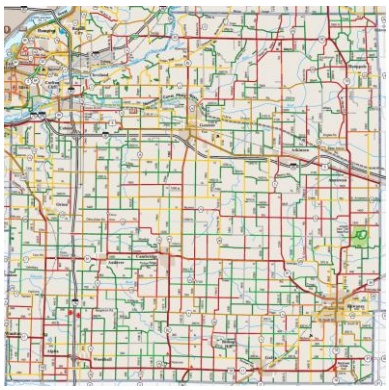
Draw	2
Duration.....	1
Development	1
Differentiation	2
Duplication.....	1
Mean rating.....	1.4

Historic US Highway 6 (commonly called Route 6), as originally designated, was the longest transcontinental highway in the United States. As with its best known counterpart, Historic Route 66, there is an interest on the part of some people to travel these historic routes that carried people though the towns and countryside prior to construction of the interstate system.

Historic Route 6

Historic route drivers are examples of the trend for people to want interaction in their travel. The trip it the purpose of the vacation, with its driving, sightseeing, and experiences of local places. Visitors want to encounter unique communities, attractions, food, and shopping. They are seeking a sense of nostalgia, too, found in old signs, historic buildings, bucolic scenes, and shops and diners that are a throwback to the golden age of auto touring.

Route 6 crosses into Henry County east of Annawan, passing through that town as well as Atkinson, Geneseo, and Colona, where it enters rural Rock Island County.



Bicycling suitability map for Henry County – Illinois Department of Transportation

Development Needs

There is no single organization promoting development of Route 6 as a historic corridor, scenic byway, or other type of tourist route. Organizations in each state are loosely coordinated, though most have not made much headway toward development. At best, most places have little more than some signage indicating the historic route designation.

For Route 6 to capture tourist traffic it should adopt an approach similar to that used in the national Scenic Byway system, in which there is careful planning for the visitor experience, addressing issues of route marking, visitor facilities and interpretation, scenic corridor preservation, historic preservation, and design guidelines for development.

Activities Supported in the HRRIM Area

Facilities within the HRRIM region support many popular outdoor activities, and some of the marketing for the area may choose to highlight these activities rather than specific locations. Supported activities and the more popular sites at which they occur are as follows:

- ATV Riding
  - Gob Hill / Atkinson Motorsports Park
- Bicycling
  - Bicycling Paths
    - Great River Trail
    - Hennepin Canal Parkway
  - On-Street Riding – The state of Illinois has mapped routes suitable for bicycling for each county in the state.
- Boating
  - Hennepin Canal Parkway
  - Johnson – Sauk Trail State Park
  - Loud Thunder Forest Preserve
  - Mississippi River (multiple sites)
  - Rock River
- Bird Watching
  - Hennepin Canal Parkway
  - Johnson – Sauk Trail State Park
  - Mineral Marsh
  - Mississippi River Flyway (multiple sites)
  - Illiniwek/Elton E. Fawks Bald Eagle Refuge
  - Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge
- Camping
  - Big River State Forest
  - Illiniwek Forest Preserve
  - Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park
  - Loud Thunder Forest Preserve
- Fishing
  - Hennepin Canal Parkway
  - Johnson – Sauk Trail State Park
  - Loud Thunder Forest Preserve

Kelly's Landing, Andalusia

Red-winged blackbird along the Hennepin Canal

- Mississippi River (multiple sites)
- Rock River

- Geocaching – There are many existing caches scattered throughout the three counties, though many of the top visitor attractions do not have geocache sites.
- Hiking / Cross Country Skiing
    - Big River State Forest
    - Hennepin Canal Parkway
    - Illiniwek Forest Preserve
    - Johnson – Sauk Trail State Park
    - Loud Thunder Forest Preserve
- Horseback Riding
    - Big River State Forest (horse rides available)
    - Loud Thunder Forest Preserve
    - Hennepin Canal Parkway
- Hunting
    - Big River State Forest
    - Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park
- Skiing
    - Ski Snowstar
- Snowmobiling
    - Big River State Forest
    - Hennepin Canal Parkway
- Team Sports (Traveling) – While most communities have parks with ball fields, a few have facilities that are designed to host traveling leagues. Some of these include:
    - Camden Park (Milan)
    - Howe's Park (Annawan)
    - Richmond Hill Park (Geneseo)
- Wildlife Watching
    - Big River State Forest
    - Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge
    - Hennepin Canal Parkway
    - Illiniwek Forest Preserve
    - Johnson – Sauk Trail State Park
    - Loud Thunder Forest Preserve

Trailhead, Big River State Forest

Big River State Forest has 30 miles of market snowmobile trails.

Festival, Downtown Geneseo

Events

Many of the area communities host events, primarily in the summer months. These range from farmer's markets to annual community festivals to county fairs. While attending these events can enhance the quality of a visitor's experience, most events are not sufficiently large enough to draw visitors from a great distance.

Events should be seen as complimentary to the main drivers of visitation. For example, a biker may want to stop at the farmer's market before hitting the trail, or a family camping in one of the parks may take a few hours to visit the county fair. With this approach, the primary role of tourism will be to ensure that visitors are

made aware of the events that are occurring during times they have already planned to travel to the area.

Underutilized Assets / Opportunities

This section of the analysis briefly highlights some of the underutilized sites or opportunities that could be better exploited in the HRRIM region. Some of these issues are further discussed as development needs later in the report. These under-performing assets are not listed in any particular order.

Poor wayfinding and limited, aging, or no interpretation are problems common to many sites.

- Bishop Hill – The seasonal and limited hours of some businesses, poor interpretation of the grounds, and need for better and interactive museum exhibits may frustrate some visitors. Decreased funding will result in fewer days on which state facilities are open.

  The site does have significant inherent appeal to many visitors passing through the area on the Great River Road or heading to similar destinations like Galena or the Amana Colonies, but marketing efforts have not reached out to them. The focus of marketing is also problematic. Rather than Swedish heritage, the emphasis should be on the unique shopping arts, dining, and lodging within the environment of an historic 19th Century religious community.
- Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park – Though the park is mostly well developed, the limited access to Ryan's Round Barn, a major feature of the site, is a severe limitation.
- Mississippi River – The Mississippi River is consistently mentioned as a prominent attraction not only in research conducted by the Quad Cities Convention and Visitor's Bureau, but also by other tourism organizations in Illinois and neighboring states. There are few places in rural Rock Island and Mercer Counties where the river can be observed. Assets touching on the river are underdeveloped and may not be well known.
- Big River State Forest – Big River State Forest has much to offer outdoor enthusiasts, however, the site is minimally developed, not easily found, and not well known. Big River may be a site where mountain bike trails could be developed.
- Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge – This site is essentially undeveloped but would hold great potential for activities like bird and wildlife viewing, hiking, boating, and fishing.
- Great River Road – Many people travel the Great River Road, but the route is poorly marked, there are few attractive sites where views or interpretation are provided, and there is no attempt to divert drivers from the route to visit nearby attractions.
- Ski Snowstar – The owners of the attraction have proposed expanding activities at the attraction into the summer season, however, have been unsuccessful in getting a necessary zoning change to develop the business.
- Cordova Dragway Park – The park is one of the oldest facilities of its type, and has for years attracted a large number of visitors to events programmed every weekend from April to October. This is a missed opportunity as few hotels or businesses that might serve visitors are located nearby.

- Hennepin Canal Parkway – The Hennepin Canal Parkway brings in the most visitors of any of the area's attractions – over 1.25 million each year. The canal only passes through Colona, which has not developed businesses catering to visitors. Boating up the canal to Colona is not possible. There is no parallel route for motorists who might have an interest in the canal, and prominent features are not easily found.
- Gob Hill/Atkinson Motorsports Park – The park has an opportunity to establish itself as a premier location for ATV riding, in a market where demand does outstrip the availability of sites where people can enjoy the activity. The park facilities are currently under developed for the potential demand. Land acquisition is necessary for expansion.
- Historic Route 6 – If communities along the route were to collaborate in creating the nostalgic environment that auto tourists want to see, this route could bring additional traffic into Annawan, Atkinson, Geneseo, and Colona. At a minimum, there should be an effort to improve the downtown areas and variety of businesses.
- Colona (downtown) – The canal is an untapped asset for the downtown, with the possibility to serve as a major trailhead and to allow boat travel to and from the Rock River.
- Keithsburg – Keithsburg should be the service center for Big River State Forest, but aside from Casey's there are no retail businesses. The downtown is vacant and decaying, despite having some of the more architecturally appealing buildings of any community in the county.
- Rock River Trail – This route is still in the development stage but has the potential to become a significant destination in a multi-state region. Henry and Rock Island Counties will need to plan ahead to capture future traffic, to ensure that it does not simply pass through without stopping.
- Geneseo (downtown) – Geneseo is not as well known as it might be. It would be a popular stop for interstate travelers, but they are unaware of what the community offers.
- Country Corner Farm Market – The one true farm market in the region, Country Corner could be incorporated into many trips to the area. The owners might consider serving simple food onsite, such as hot dogs or ice cream. Accessible public restrooms are essential to its expansion, and to routing group tours to the site.
- Lavender Crest Winery, Backroad Vineyard, Creekside Vineyards – These three wineries are clustered together and would make an easy day trip or part of a longer visit, or detour from the Great River Road.
- Aledo (downtown) – The downtown is relatively unknown but contains a solid collection of interesting shops and good eating places. Continuing to implement the Main Street Program will help to build the business base and awareness of the community.
- Kewanee (downtown) – Kewanee could benefit from downtown planning and execution to better package its offerings, develop new contributing businesses, and make them more visible. Kewanee may consider a Main Street program similar to Aledo, or to extend resources, establish a county Main Street program to share staffing and resources with other communities such as Galva, Annawan, and Atkinson.

Downtown Galva

Many communities have not tapped the market potential generated through tourism.

Downtown Keithsburg

Activities such as geocaching, horseback riding, and mountain biking are opportunities to bring new visitors into the area.

- Cambridge (downtown) – Despite being the county seat and having an attractive courthouse, there is little in the community to attract visitors.
- Great River Trail – The trail is envisioned to ultimately stretch along the length of the river, and HRRIM communities may have little influence over areas outside of their borders. Sections of the trail south of the Rock River have not yet been completed. If developed, the trail could connect directly to attractions including Loud Thunder Forest Preserve, Port Louisa NWR, Big River State Forest, and some of the communities along the river. An effort should be made to locate the trail away from highways in order to create a high quality experience that will lure cyclists.
- Mountain biking – Although mountain biking is a popular activity, there are few sites in northwestern Illinois where people can ride trails. This might be possible at a site like Big River State Forest, creating a new activity that is relatively unique.
- Geocaching – While there are existing geocaches in the three counties, they are not placed with the thought of attracting enthusiasts to attractions and businesses.
- Hunting – Hunting is a popular activity in the region, and among Chicago area residents who would spend time in the HRRIM region if public hunting sites were available. A limited number of hunting permits are issued for Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park and Big River State Forest. These always sell out. Aside from these locations there are no places where the general public can hunt.
- Horse trails and camping – The HRRIM area has a comparatively large number of recreational areas allowing horse use, and in some cases, horse camping. These include Big River State Forest, Loud Thunder Forest Preserve, the Hennepin Canal Parkway, and Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park. The need for further development is minimal, although additional resources could enhance this opportunity. Instead, targeted marketing would be the primary initiative to develop this asset.

Overall Assessment

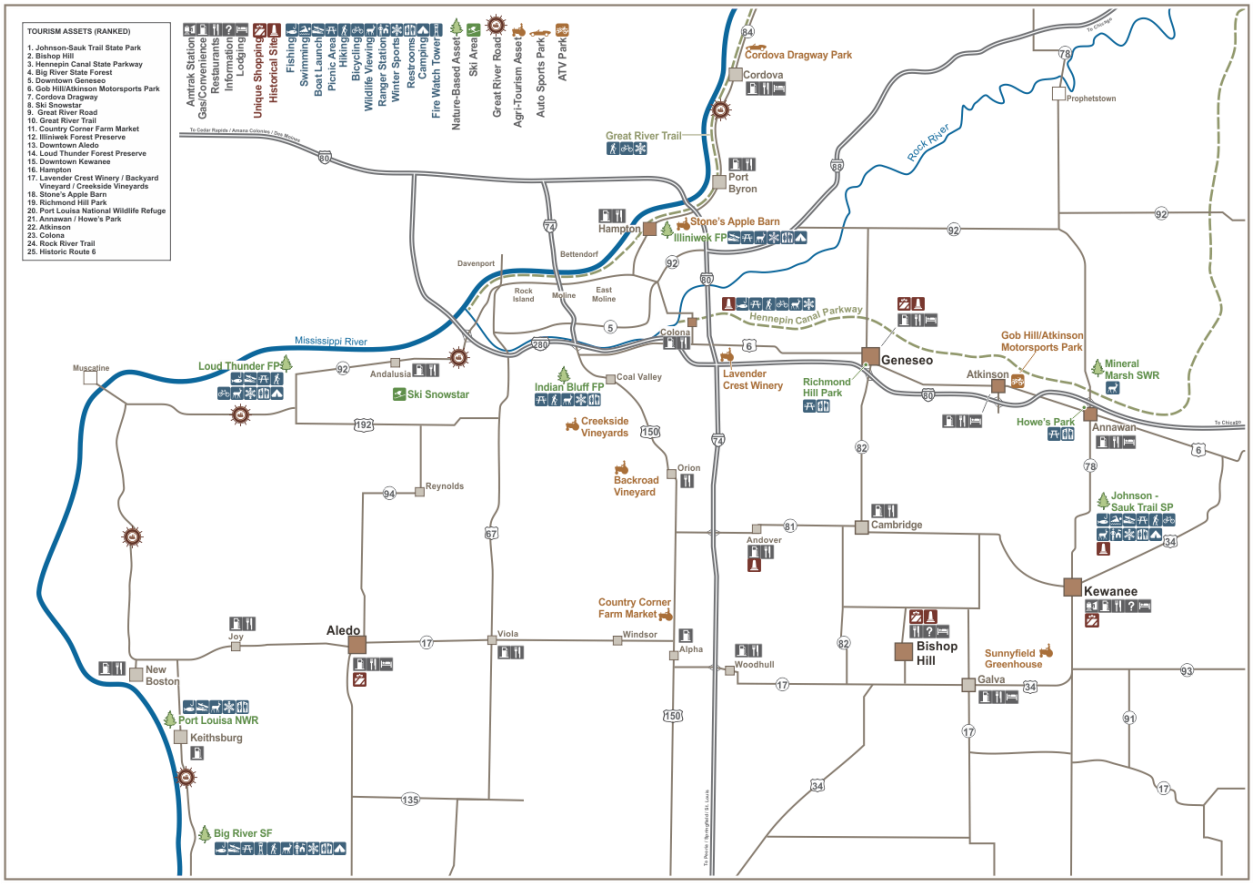
Among the area's attractions, only the first ten may have a sufficient drawing power to attract significant numbers of visitors from outside of the surrounding area (roughly defined as adjacent counties). Many of these have recognized development needs in order better serve existing patrons and to attract more visitors.

Sites with a lesser draw still figure into the tourism environment, and many of these may be easily be combined into a trip encompassing several sites. Some possible itineraries are presented later in this study.

Tourism does not benefit only the sites that attract visitors. Once these visitors are in the area they will pass through several communities, often stopping for services such as meals and gas, shopping for basic goods such as charcoal and hot dogs for a picnic, or staying at area hotels and campgrounds. By packaging, marketing, and continuing to develop area attractions, local tourism organizations and their partners can help to increase these spillover benefits to businesses and local governments.

TOURISM ASSET MAP

The tourism asset map identifies the top visitor attractions in Henry, rural Rock Island, and Mercer Counties. Icons on the map characterize activities that are accommodated at each of the attractions. They are also used to describe the availability of support services commonly sought by visitors in nearby communities. Larger versions of this map and others in the report are included in an appendix.



TOURISM ASSET MAP

HENRY - RURAL ROCK ISLAND - MERCER COUNTY TOURISM ASSET MAP

TOURISM ITINERARIES

The HRRIM area has only a few attractions that can sustain a significant number of visitors for more than a short duration of time. By combining sites into a larger set, or itinerary, it is possible to increase their collective drawing power, generate additional traffic to some of the minor locations, and increase the length of time visitors stay in the region.

The Henry County Tourism Bureau has already identified a handful of proposed itineraries:

- The *Breakfast Train* proposes hopping the Amtrak for a ride into Kewanee, having breakfast and strolling the Paint Public Art Tour before boarding the train for home.
- *Design, Décor, Dine* offers three options for shopping in Kewanee, Geneseo, or Bishop's Hill.
- The *Grand Excursion* combines a visit to Sunnyfield Gardens and/or Country Corner Farm Market with a trip to the county fair.
- The *Swedish Heritage Trail* combines Bishop Hill with a visit to Galva or the Jenny Lind Chapel in Andover.
- The *Autumn Agricultural Adventure* recommends visits to Ryan's Round Barn and Country Corner Farm Market along with the Antique Engine and Tractor Association's annual farm show.

Itineraries seek to link related activities to generate cross traffic and extend the length of time visitors spend in the area.

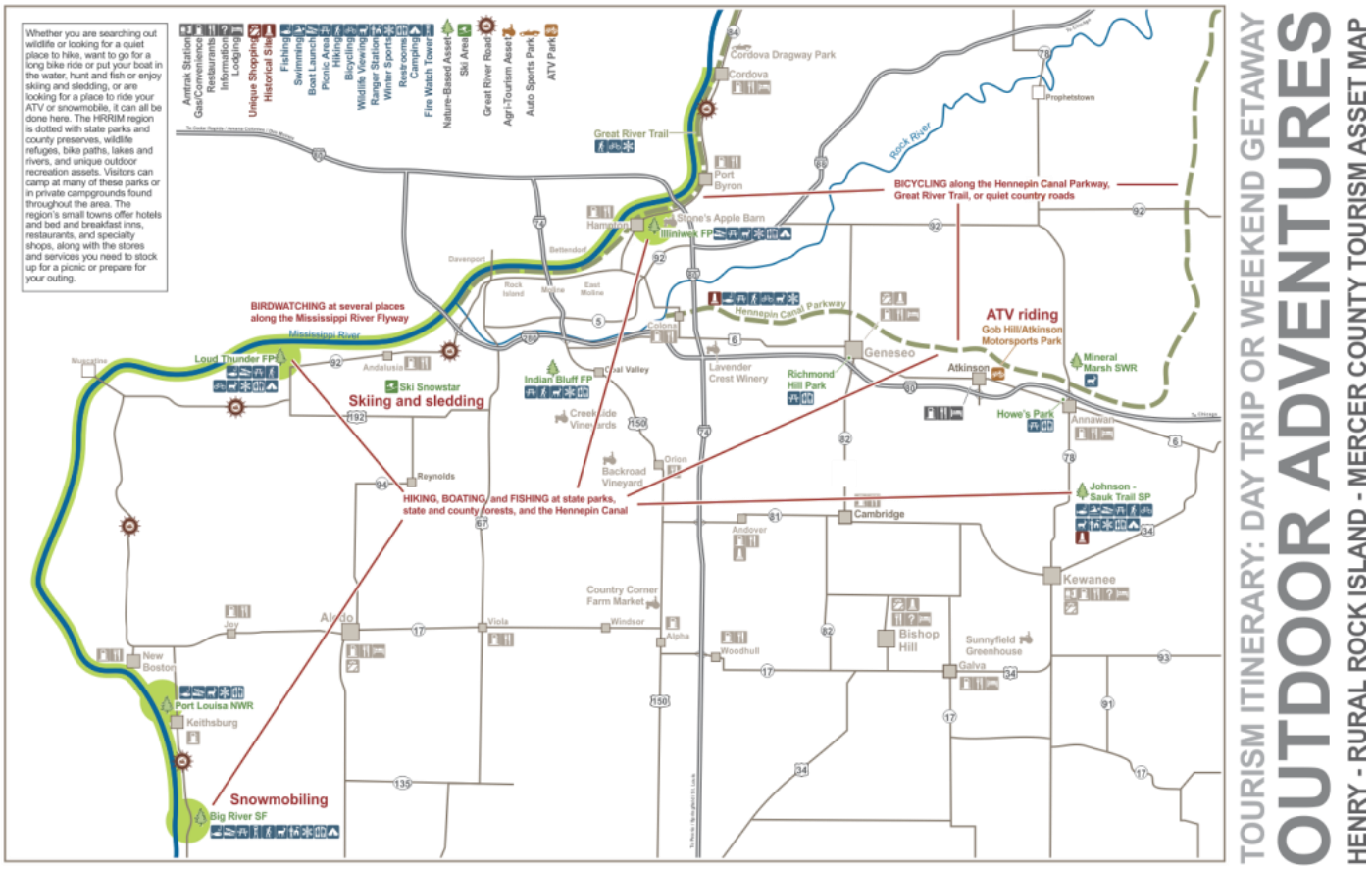
Four itineraries are proposed here. These are centered around some of the most marketable assets in the region. Each complete itinerary might take a weekend to enjoy, or can be shortened depending on the time available.

Itinerary 1: Outdoor Adventure

Large natural areas can be found nestled among the area's farm fields, where visitors can engage in a wide variety of activities.

These activities appeal to a wide demographic market, reaching from Millennials through the Baby Boom generation. Older visitors will still have an interest in some of the sites, though they may not be as able to participate in some activities. Challenging activities that are already available or may be developed, such as downhill skiing and mountain biking, will especially appeal to younger generations.

- Does bird and wildlife watching appeal to you? The Mississippi Flyway attracts millions of migrating birds in spring and autumn. Bald eagles roost on the river banks. Seen year round, in winter they hover over the open water and dive for fish. Meander through Big River State Forest, Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge, and Loud Thunder and Illiniwek Forest Preserves to see these and other birds, along with forest and wetland animals.
- Want to spend the day on the water? Put your own boat in at several public launches or marinas on the Mississippi River. If you prefer, paddle lakes in Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park or Loud Thunder Forest Preserve, where you can also rent a boat. The fishing is good wherever you choose.
- Hikers might enjoy any of the several natural areas, but we would like to suggest Johnson-Sauk Trail for its trails through upland forests, Big River State Forest for many possible routes including its stand of pine forest, and Loud Thunder Forest Preserve for a hike near the shores of the Mississippi River.



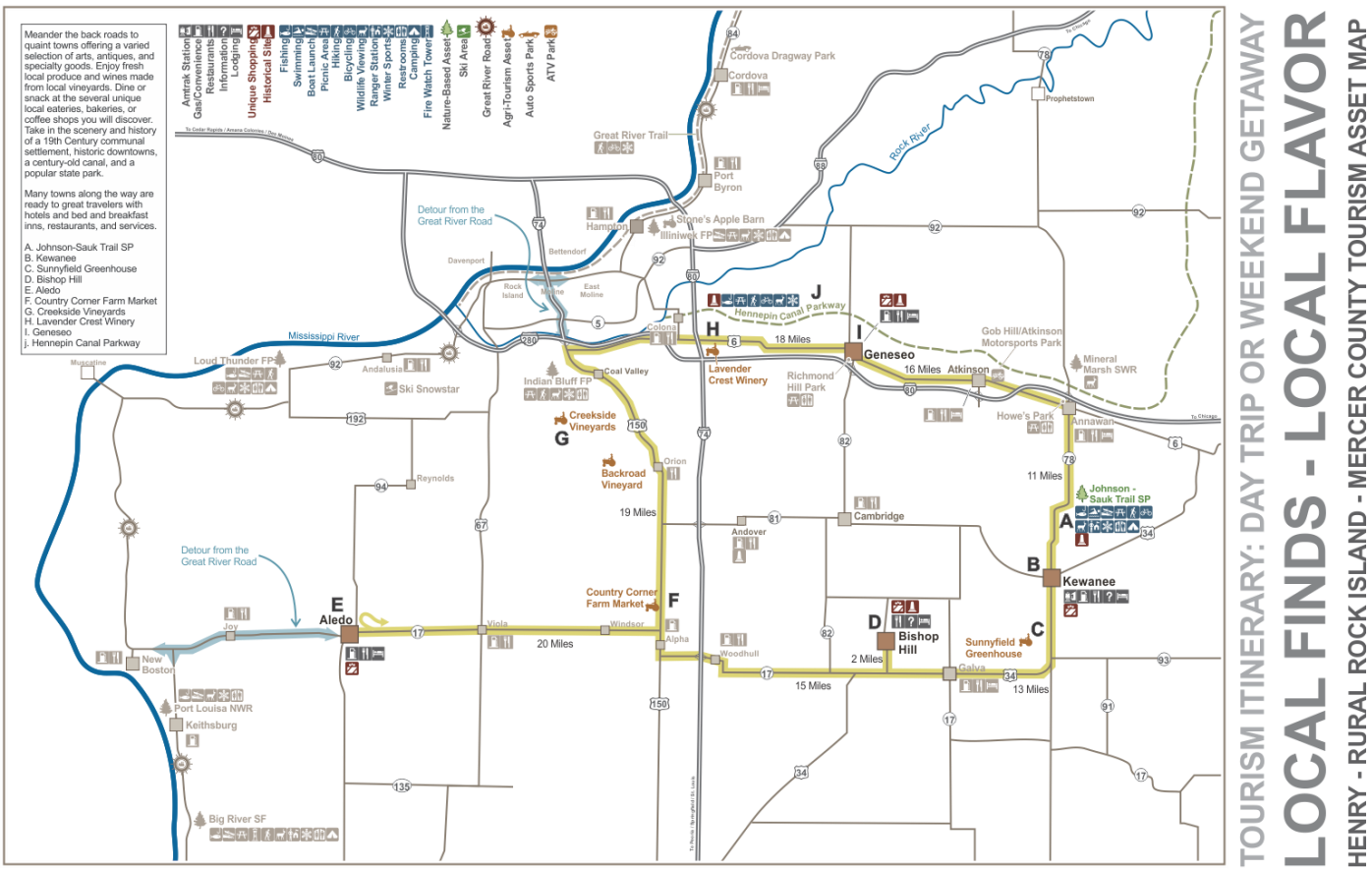
- Bicycle enthusiasts will love two paths passing through the area. The Great River Trail follows the Mississippi River north to Albany, with much of the trail built as a dedicated path. The Hennepin Canal was constructed a century ago to connect the Illinois, Rock, and Mississippi River systems. Over 100 miles of gravel paths follow the canal through the countryside and offer a close-up view of its locks, bridges, and aqueducts.
- Do you prefer the view from the back of a horse? Loud Thunder Forest Preserve has trails and a horse campground for your convenience. Big River State Forest has 60 miles of fire roads open to horseback riding, and a nearby stable where you can rent horses. The Hennepin Canal Parkway offers the longest horse trail in Illinois.
- Winter is no time to stay inside! Cross country ski on any of the area's hiking trails. Ice fish on lakes in Loud Thunder Forest Preserve or Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park. Go downhill skiing or sledding at Ski Snowstar, with the snow-making machinery to guarantee a good base of power throughout the season. Snowmobile on 30 miles of designated trails in Big River State Forest.

Itinerary 2: Local Finds – Local Flavor

Art galleries, handmade items, locally grown produce and wines, unique restaurants, and specialty shopping await back roads travelers. Set out on an adventure to tour four quaint and historic towns with a wonderful selection of shops and eateries. Side trips along the way take you to the best of the area's local growers and wineries.

Many of these activities and sites will have the greatest appeal to Generation X and older generations, although some younger people will find the sites interesting. This is particularly true of assets like Bishop Hill or Creekside Vineyards' Wine Terrace.

- Geneseo is the biggest of the four towns, with a main street brimming with shops. Here you will find art galleries and specialty stores to keep you busy for some time. Geneseo is a great place to grab a bite, whether you might want a freshly made donut and coffee for breakfast or a fine meal at dinner. Spend the night at one of two hotels and plan ahead to attend a performance of the Richmond Hill Players.
- Kewanee is well known for Good's, a furniture store that is so much more. Taking up twelve downtown buildings, the store is a showcase of interior design complete with its own wine bar and café, and bed and breakfast inn. Be sure to visit the other specialty shops downtown (Did someone say chocolate?) and take in the art that decorates several downtown buildings. You might consider taking Amtrak into Kewanee, with the station right in the heart of downtown. There are three hotels in the city if you choose to spend the night.
    - Side Trip: Heading south to Kewanee from Interstate 80, you will pass Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park. Detour into the park to see Ryan's Round Barn. Built a century ago, it is a large and rare example of a round barn. Continue on for a scenic drive on the park's loop road, or linger for a picnic and hike through its forests.



TOURISM ITINERARY: DAY TRIP OR WEEKEND GETAWAY

LOCAL FINDS - LOCAL FLAVOR

HENRY - RURAL ROCK ISLAND - MERCER COUNTY TOURISM ASSET MAP

Local foods and locally made products will appeal to visitors.

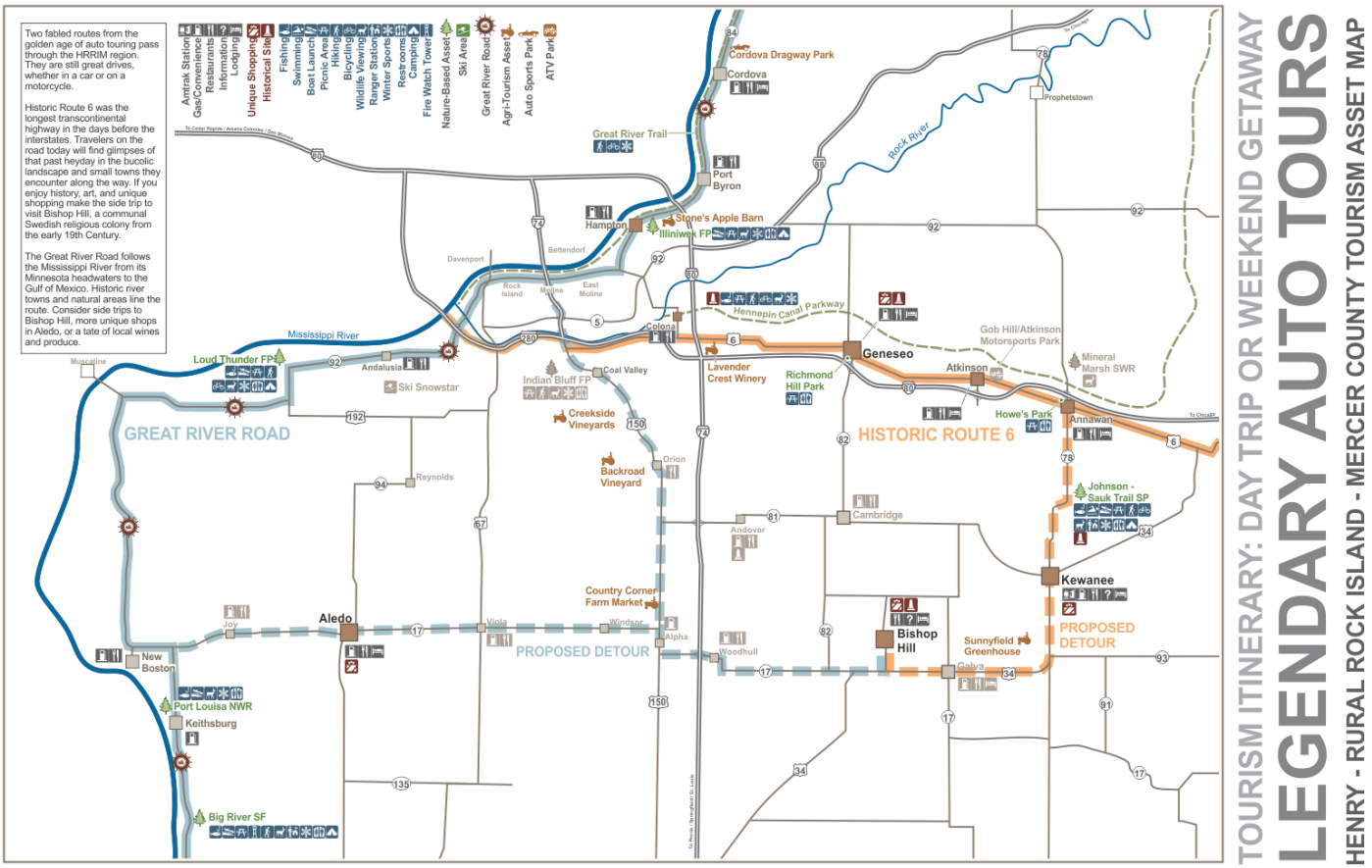
- Bishop Hill was founded by Swedish settlers in the 1840's as a communal society. Though lasting only until the outbreak of the Civil War, many of the colony's original buildings still stand around a quiet, tree lined square. In addition to two museums you will find many small shops selling art, handmade goods, and Swedish imports. Snack on a Swedish pastry from the bakery, or enjoy a meal. There are two historic bed and breakfast inns in town if you decide to spend the night, or travel to nearby Galva to stay in a hotel.
    - Side Trip: Between Kewanee and Bishop Hill you will see the signs for Sunnyfield Greenhouse. Gardeners from all over travel here to shop their wide selection of vegetable and bedding plants, shrubs, and trees. Take 200th Avenue west to 2550th Street north.
- Aledo is the county seat of Mercer County, with a downtown centered on the attractive courthouse square. Aledo is a great place to pick up a meal, or maybe you would prefer beer or coffee on an outside patio, or an ice cream cone. When you are finished head on down College Avenue and Main Street to visit the antique stores and unique shops.
- Backtrack to Highway 150 and head north to Country Corner Farm Market. Here is where you begin the "local flavor" part of the tour, and what a great place to start! Country Corner is more than just a farm stand selling local produce and specialty foods. In spring you can pick your own strawberries and in autumn you can wander through a corn maze. There are farm animals, a bee house, a playground, picnic tables, and much more to keep you busy.
- Continue north to 120th Avenue, then go west to Creekside Vineyards Wine Terrace. Open on weekends from May to October, the terrace overlooks the vineyards and Case Creek, and is a great place to enjoy award winning wines and entertainment. Order ahead and they will have a lunch waiting for you. If you prefer, or are traveling on a weekday, stop by their tasting room on Highway 67 south of 170th Avenue.
    - Side Trip: Backroad Vineyards is a short drive south and offers tours by appointment. It is located west of Orion.
- Lavender Crest Winery can be found on US Highway 6 east of Colona. The winery offers tours and has a tasting room and café for your enjoyment.

Country Corner Farm Market and the wineries can be combined for a leisurely day trip to sample local produce. Come on a Saturday and add a stop at the farmer's market in Geneseo. Combine any combination of the four towns and other stops to make the trip that is just right for you and the time you have to spend.

Itinerary 3: Legendary Auto Tours

The golden age of auto touring gave birth to scenic routes, and one of the earliest of these was the Great River Road. The era also gave birth to the U.S. Highway system. U.S. Highway 6 became one of the legendary routes as the longest of the transcontinental highways. People traveling these roads passed through farm fields and down the Main Streets of small towns where they would get a feel for the character of each place. Whether in a car or on a motorcycle you can still follow these routes through Henry, Rock Island, and Mercer Counties.

Driving one of these routes from end to end can take weeks, and although some people do it, the more common approach is to drive a segment of the road, either as a planned trip or as an alternative to driving the parallel interstate.



Older generations are most likely to find this activity appealing, however, a route that does offer unique and authentic experiences will attract other drivers, particularly when presented as a more scenic and interesting detour from the monotony of the interstate.

- From the north, the Great River Road will take you through the small towns of Cordova, Port Byron, and Hampton. Access the river in places like Port Byron, where you will also see an enormous bicycle sculpture. Hike the short trail in Illiniwek Forest preserve to an overlook where you just might see bald eagles in addition to views of the river. Hampton offers historic buildings and the Hampton Heritage Center.

  South of the Quad cities the Great River Road passes through more bucolic countryside. Loud Thunder Forest Preserve, Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge, and Big River State Forest all offer opportunities to view the native landscape of forests, prairies, and wetlands, along with the river. Hiking, boating, bird watching, fishing, camping, horseback riding, and more activities are available. You can even rent a boat or horse.

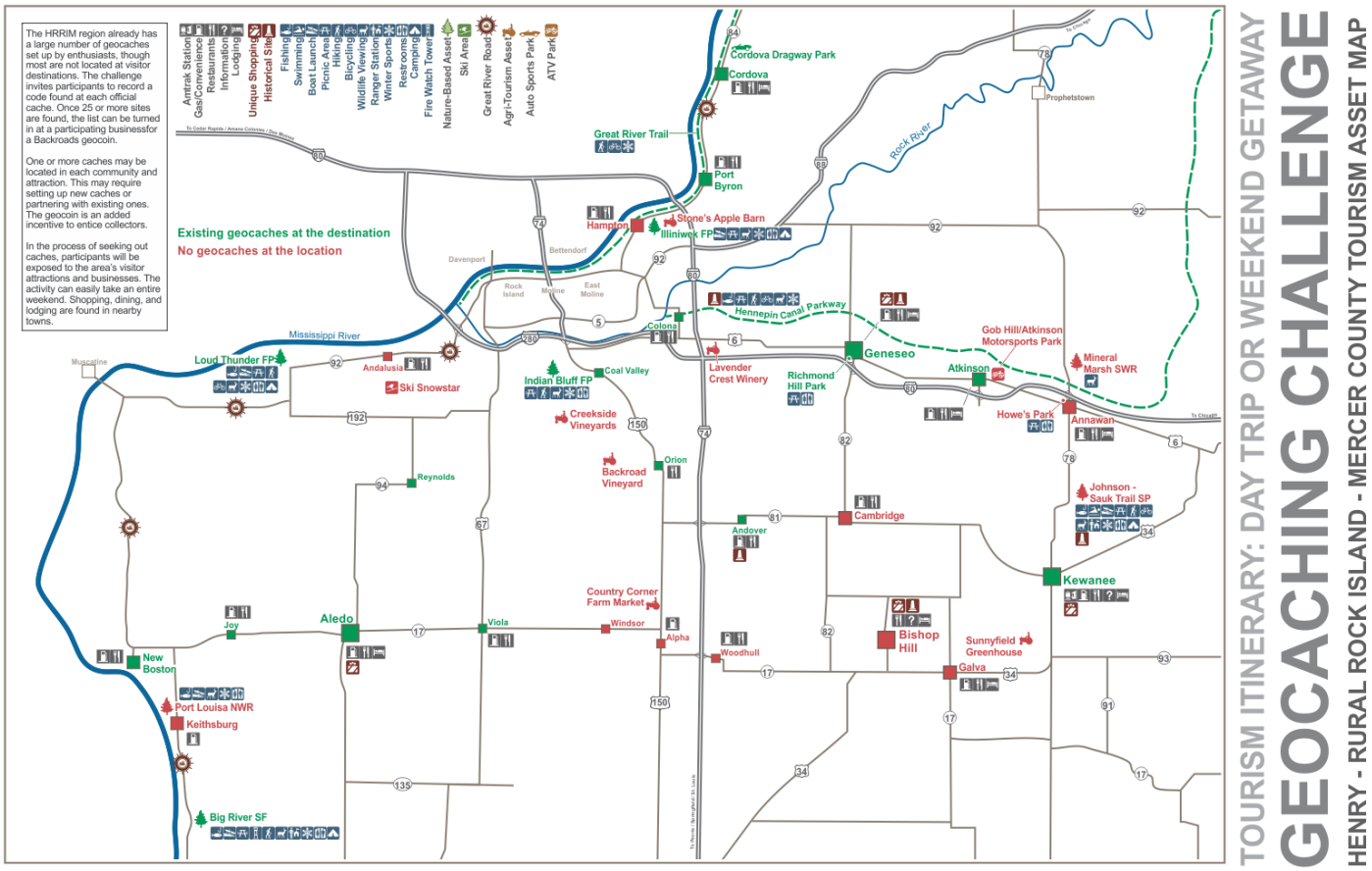
  - Side Trip: Make a detour off of the Great River Road to sample the local produce at Lavender Crest Winery, Creekside Vineyards, and Country Corner Farm market.
  - If you love the historic river towns along the Mississippi River, you will be thrilled by a visit to Bishop Hill. An early 19th Century communal religious settlement, its historic buildings now house museums, art galleries, and shops selling unique handmade goods and Swedish imports.

- US Highway 6 may be best considered a long term opportunity for development. Geneseo offers a wonderful downtown with specialty shops and eclectic, quality dining. Lavender Crest Winery also make a nice stop. Enhancements to the downtowns in Annawan, Atkinson, and Colona, as well as throughout the corridor, will make this a worthwhile detour.

Itinerary 4: Geocaching Challenge

The geocaching challenge invites participants to discover the special caches hidden throughout the three county area. A passport can be downloaded from the internet or picked up in locations such as local shops, hotels, or public offices. Participants who collect the codes hidden in a minimum number of caches can bring their passport into a designated location to collect a prize, usually a custom token or "geocoin".

Caches are hidden at attractions and in communities throughout the region. They are located with the thought of sharing the region's history, history, culture, and natural areas. Participants can find caches in communities where they may also stop to shop, eat, or spend the night.



TOURISM IMPACT ANALYSIS

Tourism is an important contributor to the economy of the HRRIM region, both directly through spending, and indirectly through the amenities that are enjoyed by local residents. This portion of the study documents some returns that local governments, residents, and businesses see as a result of their investments in tourism development. It begins with an analysis of the hotel market in Henry, Mercer, and rural Rock Island Counties, as lodging revenues are the largest contributor of funds for local tourism development.

LODGING ANALYSIS

Past research into the hotel market in the three counties has shown that occupancy, average daily rate (ADR), and revenue per available room (RevPAR) have been low when compared to normal industry standards. Several possible explanations might be considered, including the quality of existing hotels, a mismatch between available supply and guest desires, a sharply seasonal market, a recent economic downturn, or simply, weak demand.

A lack of strong demand is keeping hotel occupancy levels low.

The analysis points to this last possibility as the dominant explanation. There does not appear to be sufficient overnight travel to increase occupancy. This is even somewhat reflected in the small size of the existing hotels in the market. None were built with a large number of rooms, suggesting that the initial market was acknowledged to be relatively small. Tourism development efforts can have an impact on occupancy, helping to generate additional revenues for lodging businesses and tax revenues for local governments.

Specifically with regard to the HRRIM region, hotels in the study area must also compete with a broader selection of newer chain hotels in the Quad Cities. Guests who have a preferred hotel chain, who are searching out a higher tier hotel or specific amenities, or who prefer to have a greater selection of shopping, dining, and entertainment in closer proximity will often be willing to exchange a longer drive for their preferred lodging. This last issue is a major driver in the hotel selection of older travelers who are the dominant demographic currently traveling to the HRRIM counties.

This analysis documents the available supply, competitive environment, and market trends. It considers the potential market for a new hotel along the I-80 corridor in Henry County. Introduction of a new chain hotel would have a minimal impact on the total number of visitor nights in the region, and would most likely transfer a substantial number of stays from other hotels, perhaps making them unprofitable. It is unlikely that the market would be considered favorably for new development by any of the major hotel chains.

Study Area Lodging Establishments

There are eight hotels and six bed and breakfast inns within the study area. The seven largest hotels and four of the inns are located in Henry County. Mercer County has a single independent hotel in Aledo. The two remaining bed and breakfast inns are located in rural Rock Island County. Altogether, there are 326 hotel rooms and 24 bed and breakfast rooms, for a total of 350 rooms in the study area.

Hotels are clustered in an economy to midscale class providing little more than basic amenities. Bed and breakfast inns feature more upscale rooms. This is not atypical of most similar rural areas. Overall, the hotels get good reviews from the people who have stayed. Complaints are generally minor and could be easily

addressed by the hotels, for example, by providing a better breakfast or more closely monitoring the cleanliness of rooms.

America's Best Value Inn – Geneseo

This hotel was formerly a Super 8 and was rebranded in approximately 2012. It also appears that the 39 rooms were extensively remodeled with a contemporary appearance. Small pets are accepted. There is an indoor heated pool. Online reviews are mixed, however, the preponderance of negative reviews were prior to the second half of 2013.

AmericInn Lodge and Suites of Kewanee

There are a total of 49 rooms at the AmericInn, which features an indoor pool, fitness center, and meeting room. Pets are allowed. The exterior appearance of the hotel is average, and it is located near restaurants and shopping. Some more recent interior remodeling has occurred, however, it appears that at least some rooms have a dated appearance. Online reviews are generally positive.

AmericInn and Quality Inn, Kewanee

Best Western – Annawan Inn

The Best Western in Annawan is a 62 room hotel adjacent to Interstate 80. Hotel amenities include an indoor pool and fitness center. There is a banquet/meeting room that can accommodate up to 75 people. An adjacent conference canter is capable of hosting events with up to 400 people. Although under the same ownership as the hotel, it is not listed on the hotel website.

From the outside, the hotel does not initially make a very positive impression. Accessing the entrance requires turning off the highway into a parking lot, then turning left to drive around a vacant building into the hotel parking lot. There is no signage to direct traffic. The hotel property is itself reasonably attractive with decent landscaping.

Reviews of the hotel are generally positive, with poor reviews tending to discuss housekeeping and the pool temperature. Photos of the interior provided by guests and management suggest that the décor may be somewhat dated.

Best Western – Geneseo

The Best Western Geneseo is a 55 room hotel with amenities including an indoor pool and fitness center. The hotel was recently remodeled with contemporary furnishings and bright colors. Online reviews are consistently positive. It does not accept pets. It is adjacent to Richmond Hill Park.

Kewanee Motor Lodge

The Kewanee Motor Lodge is an older two-story motel with exterior entrances. Reviews are mixed, with positive reviews commenting on affordability, and negative reviews tending to find poor maintenance. Room photos show a somewhat dated décor, though not terribly old. The hotel is pet friendly, and while it does not offer much in the way of amenities, there is a microwave and refrigerator in each room.

Quality Inn Kewanee

The Quality Inn is a 42 room former Super 8. Pets are allowed and there is a fitness center, but no pool. From the exterior the hotel appears to be average. Photos show some dated bedding. Negative reviews of this hotel outnumber the positive ones and are consistent across the past three years, describing poor maintenance, poor housekeeping, and bad smells.

Best Western, Annawan

Super 8 – Galva

The Super 8 is a basic economy hotel with few amenities. There are 39 rooms. The exterior appearance is not particularly attractive and there is little landscaping. Online reviews are average to good. Complaints center around the poor selection of breakfast items, housekeeping, and the smoke smell. Based on photos posted online, the rooms appear slightly dated.

Blue Spruce Lodge – Aledo

The Blue Spruce Lodge is a ten-room independent motel located in Aledo. The outward appearance is typical of a hotel from approximately the 1950's, with a single floor and exterior doors. Online reviews are generally positive. It does not appear that the hotel is able to book reservations online.

Aunt Daisy's Bed and Breakfast – Kewanee

Aunt Daisy's is a four room bed and breakfast located in an 1890's home. Each room has a private bath. The inn receives excellent ratings from online reviewers.

Bishop Hill Gallery Inn – Bishop Hill

The Bishop Hill Gallery Inn offers three rooms on the second floor of the 1856 Colony Administration Building, overlooking the green. Each room has its own private bath. No breakfast is served. Online reviews are good to excellent.

Creekside Vineyards Inn – Coal Valley

The Creekside Vineyards Inn has five rooms in a country setting amid vineyards. The inn offers packages including wine and a massage, golf, or ski weekends. Guests have use of the outdoor terrace and hot tub. Online reviews are all excellent.

Good's Bed and Breakfast – Kewanee

Good's has a four room bed and breakfast located within its sprawling furniture store complex. Two of the rooms include spas. Online reviews are excellent.

Leisure Harbor Inn – Cordova

This inn is located on the banks of the Mississippi River on 3.4 acres planted with a small orchard. The original portion of the house was built in the 1840's. There are four guest bedrooms available, with private baths. It is adjacent to the Leisure Harbor Marina.

Twinflower Inn – Bishop Hill

The Twinflower Inn is located in the 1855 hospital of the Colony. It now offers four rooms with private baths and an organic breakfast. Online reviews are generally excellent.

Competitive Environment

The hotels in Aledo, Galva, and Kewanee serve the needs of travelers to the local area either for business or leisure. Their competition may include the hotels along the Interstate, which many people will pass on their way to these communities. Their somewhat better quality may make them a more appealing place to spend a night, and they are not a very great distance from cities or destinations in the southern part of Henry or Mercer Counties.

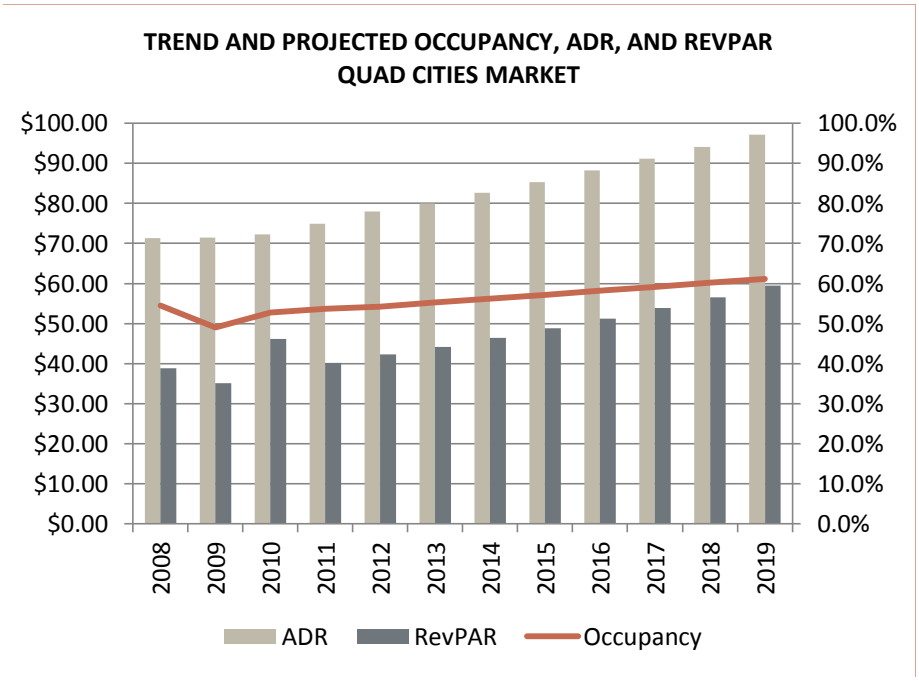
The hotels on the interstate serve through travelers as well as those making the HRRIM area their destination. Through travelers will have the option of staying in Princeton, where there are several economy scale hotels, or La Salle-Peru, where

the selection includes both economy and midscale properties. The greatest concentration of competitors, however, is found in the Quad Cities. These are found clustered on the south along I-280, or on the north in Iowa, along I-80. Downtown districts in Moline, Rock Island, and Davenport also have hotels, some of which cater to casino traffic.

Hotel selection in the Quad Cities ranges from economy to luxury tiers. Many of the national brands are found in these cities that are not found elsewhere along the interstate corridor in adjacent parts of Illinois or Iowa. This is likely to impact plans of many travelers who have preferred brand preferences. Pricing is comparable to the hotels in the HRRIM counties, while the Quad Cities area features a much greater variety of restaurants, shopping, and entertainment venues.

Market Trends and Potential for a New Hotel

The following chart provides a five year trend and projections for occupancy, average daily rate (ADR), and revenue per available room (RevPAR) in the Quad Cities market. Trend data was obtained from Smith Travel Research. Projections are based on existing inventory using forecast travel growth (1.7 percent per year) and travel price index growth (3.3 percent per year) published by the U.S. Travel Association.



The projections assume that no additional hotel rooms will be added within the market. In fact, since the peak of the recession in 2008-9, three hotels have closed, removing 350 rooms from the inventory. Closure of these hotels has contributed to the increase in occupancy at remaining properties.

The Hargrove/Young study also examined hotel occupancy and rates, estimating occupancy at 40 percent and an average daily rate (ADR) of $56.13. If accurate, this would place HRRIM performance well below average for the market. Building off of these numbers, the following table projects occupancy, room rates, and revenue per available room for the HRRIM region over the next five years, using the same growth assumptions as in the previous set of estimates.

OCCUPANCY

2008	54.5%
2009	49.1%
2010	52.7%
2011	53.7%
2012	54.2%
2013	55.3%
2014	56.2%
2015	57.2%
2016	58.2%
2017	59.2%
2018	60.2%
2019	61.2%

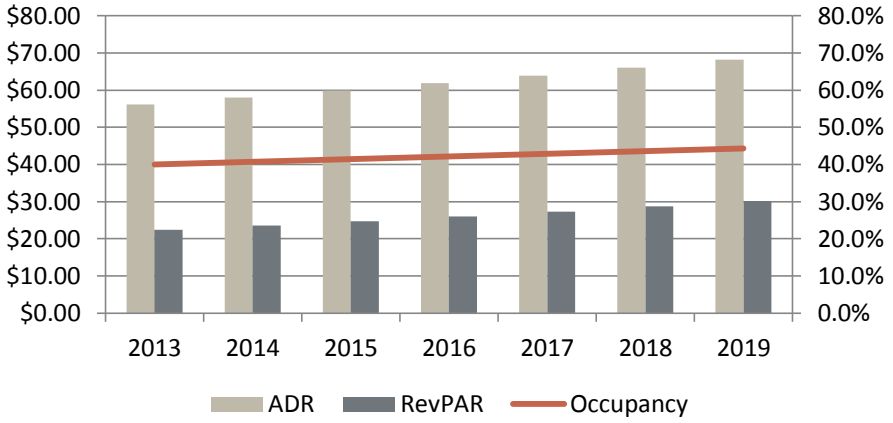
ADR

2008	$71.38
2009	$71.49
2010	$72.23
2011	$74.87
2012	$77.98
2013	$80.00
2014	$82.64
2015	$85.37
2016	$88.18
2017	$91.09
2018	$94.10
2019	$97.21

RevPAR

2008	$38.91
2009	$35.11
2010	$46.22
2011	$40.18
2012	$42.30
2013	$44.21
2014	$46.48
2015	$48.83
2016	$51.30
2017	$53.89
2018	$56.61
2019	$59.48

PROJECTED OCCUPANCY, ADR, AND REVPAR
HRRIM STUDY AREA

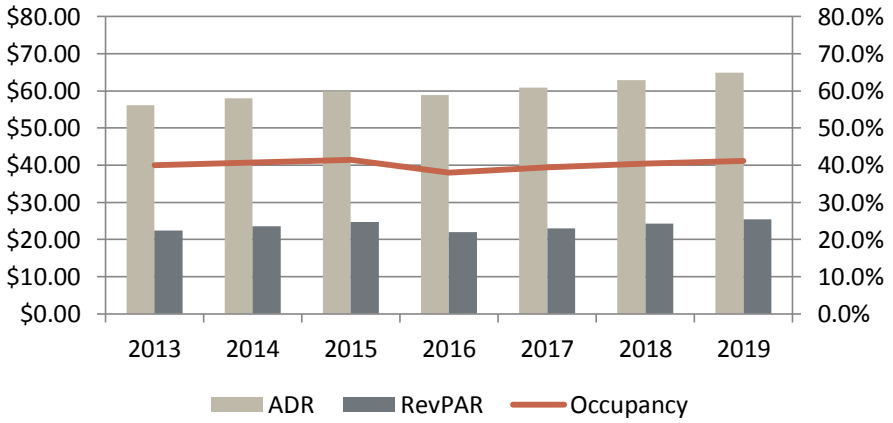


	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Occupancy	40.0%	40.7%	41.4%	42.1%	42.8%	43.5%	44.3%
ADR	$56.13	$57.98	$59.90	$61.87	$63.91	$66.02	$68.20
RevPAR	$22.45	$23.59	$24.78	$26.03	$27.35	$28.73	$30.18

If these assumptions hold true, the HRRIM will see modest gains in occupancy and revenue that will still leave the region This still leaves relatively weak numbers for the study area. By means of comparison, RevPAR is about half of the $44.21 average for the market, and a third of the national average of $63.36 for 2013.

The following chart depict a scenario in which a new 45-room hotel is constructed within the study area, opening on January 1, 2016. The new hotel will compete for existing demand and projected demand growth. It will also have the effect of inducing new demand through its presence, offering a brand not currently available within the market, and capturing unmet demand on those occasions when all other properties are fully booked.

PROJECTED OCCUPANCY, ADR, AND REVPAR WITH THE ADDITION OF A NEW HOTEL - HRRIM STUDY AREA



Additional hotel development in the HRRIM region does not appear to be a viable strategy in the foreseeable future. A new hotel would not generate significant new visitor nights, but would have the effect of lowering average daily rates, occupancy, and revenue per available room. This strain on existing properties could lead to one or more of them experiencing financial difficulty that would cause them to defer maintenance and upgrades, lower service standards, or possibly close.

TOURISM IMPACT

Tourism impact estimates generated by the State of Illinois are prepared at the county level. In 2013, the combined expenditures by visitors to Henry, Mercer, and Rock Island Counties was estimated at $276.35 million. A total of 2,001 jobs were attributed to these expenditures, which also said to generate $5.97 million in local tax revenues.

Improved data collection will provide better figures on which to base an analysis of tourism's impact.

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT ESTIMATES

	SPENDING	PAYROLL	JOBS	LOCAL TAX
Henry County	$41,990,000	$5,90,0007	210	$870,000
Mercer County	$20,930,000	$2,300,000	80	$1,090,000
Rock Island County	$214,430,000	$51,770,000	1,711	$3,830,000
Totals	$276,350,000	$60,040,000	2,001	$5,970,000

The state does not provide estimates of the number of visitors to each county, the number of trips by segment, or research into visitor expenditures. These figures are essential to modeling economic impacts in the HRRIM region. In the absence of figures from the state, the analysis relies upon an assessment of visitation data at area attractions, national averages, and data from the 2013 Hargrove/Young survey of visitors.

Unfortunately, there are some questions about bias in the Hargrove/Young survey sample and expenditures are not broken out by visitor segment or industry sector. In particular, the spending on admissions and fees is unusually high and hard to justify. This figure was reduced by half, from $84.13 to $42.00, to be more consistent with expected spending levels.

The model used in this analysis was developed by Michigan State University. Using inputs of the number of visitors and expenditures by segment (day visitor, hotel, campground, seasonal homeowner, or stays with friends and family), the model first calculates direct expenditures and their employment impacts.

TOTAL HRRIM REGION TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT ESTIMATES

SPENDING CATEGORY	SALES	JOBS
Lodging	$6.295,000	112
Camping fees	$1,780,000	32
Restaurants and bars	$11,684,000	297
Admissions and fees	$11,739,000	288
Retail trade	$32,639,000	671
Other – wholesale trade, local production	$9,412,000	47
Total direct effects	$73,548,000	1,445

ANNUAL LODGING TAX COLLECTIONS

YEAR	Henry County	Geneseo	Total
2009	$85,265	$38,518	$123,783
2010	$81,180	$36,886	$118,066
2011	$87,766	$37,516	$125,282
2012	$94,145	$35,074	$129,218
2013	$97,263	$51,761	$149,023

Total visitation by parties from outside of the area was estimated at 430,000 per year. These were divided into day trippers (44 percent), visitors staying with friends and family (35 percent), motel stays (12 percent), and campers (9 percent).

Total spending was based on the 2013 Hargrove/Young survey data, adjusted by segment. The survey average came to $282.43 per travel party, which is a sum inconsistent with lodging estimates and data for either the Quad Cities region or the HRRIM area. An alternative estimate of $122 was used, derived from the market average daily rate of about $72, and an estimated $20 per night at campgrounds. Using the new estimates, average spending per travel party, including lodging, came to $259.40. This compares to a figure of $426.54 based on the survey.

The model estimates impacts of visitors to the area, but not all expenditures will be captured in the HRRIM region. Visitors may stay elsewhere, eat elsewhere, or shop elsewhere. Based on a profile of similar communities, the share of expenditures captured locally was estimated at 70 percent. The HRRIM region was estimated to capture 50 percent of the lodging demand.

LOCAL PORTION OF HRRIM REGION TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACTS

SPENDING CATEGORY	SALES	JOBS
Lodging	$3,147,500	56
Camping fees	$1,246,000	22
Restaurants and bars	$8,178,800	208
Admissions and fees	$8,217,300	202
Retail trade	$22,847,300	470
Other – wholesale trade, local production	$6,588,400	33
Total direct effects	$50,225,300	991

The model applies multipliers to capture the secondary effects of visitor spending. This occurs when the initial income to the community is subsequently spent on products and services, either by businesses or their employees. In the case of the study area, the secondary effect adds $38,899,000 in spending, bringing the total to $112,447,000. This supports another 414 jobs, bringing that total to 1,860.

Sales tax rates are not uniform across the HRRIM territory. Henry and Mercer Counties levy a 1.0 percent school facilities tax in addition to the 6.75 percent state levy. There is no county sales tax in Rock Island County, but the cities of Moline and Rock Island both have a 1.25 percent home rule levy. Further complicating an analysis, Items such as food sold for preparation elsewhere, and some drugs, are taxed at a lower rate. Finally, of the 6.75 percent collected by the state, 80 percent of the tax collected on general merchandise is retained by the state. The remainder is returned to local governments, with 16 percent of the tax on general merchandise and all of the 1.0 percent tax on food and drugs returned to the municipality or county (if the business is in an unincorporated area), and 4 percent of the tax on general merchandise returned to the county.

For the purpose of this analysis, visitor spending on food and drugs is considered to be minimal, as most food purchases will be food prepared for immediate consumption, which is taxed at the 6.75 percent rate. Local taxes generated by

travel and tourism are generalized at 1.25 percent and the 1.0 percent school facilities levy in Henry and Mercer Counties. These are in addition to the 5.0 percent tax on lodging. As most of the area's campgrounds do not collect a lodging tax, they were not included in the analysis of taxes generated.

Tourism contributes nearly $1 million in local tax revenue.

ESTIMATE OF LOCAL TAXES GENERATED BY VISITOR SPENDING

	ESTIMATED LODGING TAX	ESTIMATED SALES TAX	ESTIMATED SCHOOL TAX
Henry County	$148,719	$367,907	$294,326
Mercer County	$4,564[1]	$49,054	$39,243
Rural Rock Island County	$4,072	$73,581	--
Total	$157,355	$490,542	$333,569

Henry County Total $810,952

Mercer County Total $92,861

Rural Rock Island County Total $77,653

Lodging tax estimates were calculated by distributing the area-wide total revenue by the portion of annual room nights located within each county. The majority of rooms are located in Henry County.

Sales taxes were calculated based on a distribution of 75 percent of visitor spending on retail, dining, and admissions in Henry County, 15 percent in the rural portions of Rock Island County, and 10 percent within Mercer County.

[1] Mercer County does not collect a lodging tax. The figure shown here is an estimate of the tax that would be generated annually on hotel rooms in the county.

TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

This section of the report offers recommendations of programs and initiatives that can have a significant impact on tourism generation and the visitor experience.

Establish a system to track visitation and report results

Enhanced traditional methods, frequent surveys, and technology can be used to gather information about visitors that can be used to improve marketing.

Information is essential to understanding visitor demographics and the opportunities to increase tourist traffic. The HRRIM region should design and execute a comprehensive approach to monitoring visits and identifying the needs or desires of its visitors. This can range from simply gathering information that is already collected, to developing new means to collect information.

- **Visitor logs.** Several sites already maintain visitor logs, such as the museums at Bishop Hill. These should collect three pieces of information; the visitor's home zip code, number of people in the party, email address. Data from the logs should be compiled on a monthly basis. While not a count of all visitors to the site, the data will help to understand levels of visitation and the origins of travelers.
- **Campground stays.** Public campgrounds including the state parks and the forest preserves, will collect data similar to the visitor logs. HRRIM tourism staff should work with the public park units to aggregate this information, helping to better understand this particular segment of the market.
- **Visitor intercept surveys.** Surveys should be conducted on a continuing basis, rather than sporadically. Several surveys might be created, specific to particular sites or ways in which they may be distributed. Some basic information should be common to all, including home zip code, age, number of adults and children in the travel party, whether it is a day trip or overnight stay, and email address.
    - **Comment cards.** The simplest form of survey asks a handful of questions and then seeks feedback about the particular site. What did they like, what would they change, and what ideas would they like to share?
    - **Intercept surveys.** These are typically carried out in person by survey recorders who stop visitors to ask a handful of questions. This might be appropriate for some of the more popular sites, and could be a good job for student interns.
    - **Email surveys.** Using its database of visitor email (from visitor logs, campgrounds, other surveys, etc.), tourism officials should conduct a survey of a sample of visitors two to four times per year. The sample should be of those people who have visited in the period since the last survey. Multiple surveys will help to identify trends and issues of seasonality, and will also allow for an averaging of results, mitigating the concerns about reliability found with the Hargrove/Young survey.

      Email surveys can be conducted electronically and can be longer than other surveys. They should ask questions not only about the visitors' experience traveling to the HRRIM region, but about their spending while on the trip. Conventional spending categories include lodging (hotel or campground), food purchased from restaurants, food purchased elsewhere, fuel purchases, other retail purchases, entrance fees and admissions, and other expenditures.

- **People counters / trail counters.** Technology can help to approximate the actual number of visitors to a site and reveal information about hourly fluctuations. People counters or trail counters sense and record the number of people passing through an area, simultaneously recording the time. Sites along the Hennepin Canal, Great River Trail, and sidewalks in the downtowns of larger cities might be considered. They might also be used to monitor visitation at events. The typical cost will vary from $500 to $1000 per installation, depending on the equipment. A budget of $5,000 to $7,000 may be adequate for an initial installation. For an example, see http://www.trafx.net.
- **Proximity sensors / iBeacons.** If the HRRIM region were to develop a mobile phone application, it could monitor where app users travel using proximity sensors. These use the phone's GPS to signal when a user enters into a defined area that could be s broad as a park or business district, or as narrowly defined as standing in front of a particular display. This technology can be used to show patterns of how people move between attractions and how long they stay in an area.

Develop a comprehensive wayfinding and interpretation program for area attractions

This topic is also discussed as a marketing tactic. One of the shortcomings of the area most-cited by visitors is poor marking of attractions. This includes both wayfinding to locate the attraction, and interpretation once on site. A comprehensive program of signage and other tactics will help to resolve these concerns.

- **Roadside panels.** Roadside panels are basically gateway features that provide general information about attractions in the area and how to get to them. The panels should be located at highway interchanges and other significant entries, such as the bridge across the Mississippi River at Muscatine, where cars can turn off the road to view the signs.
- **Tourism signage.** The State of Illinois has signage programs to advertise tourism related activities. These programs are used inconsistently by businesses and attractions. HRRIM staff should work with eligible attractions (parks, downtown districts, tourist activities, etc.) to ensure participation in the programs.
- **Wayfinding signage.** Wayfinding consists of signage and other cues that are used to guide people along a route toward particular destinations.
    - Directional signage should lead from the interstates to major attractions including Bishop Hill, Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park, Big River State Forest, the Hennepin Canal Parkway, and the larger downtown business districts. Additional signage should be provided to guide visitors to other area attractions.
    - Better marking is needed on the Great River Road and Historic Route 6. In particular, it can be easy to miss turns on the Great River Road in Mercer County. Other corridors that might be considered include the Hennepin Canal Parkway and the Rock River Trail.
    - Wayfinding may be required at the site level. Big River State Forest is especially poorly marked. There is little or no signage for trailheads, picnic areas, campgrounds, and other features.

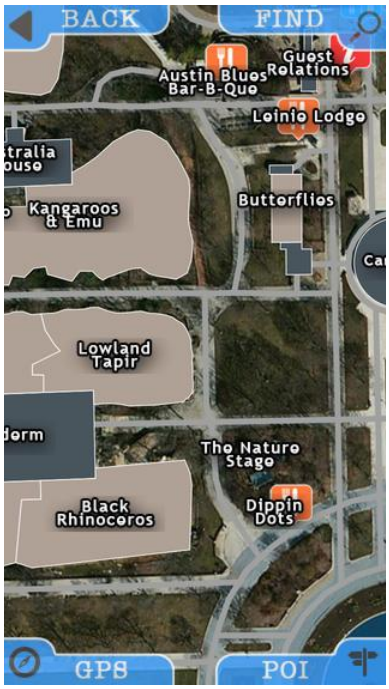
A panel provides information about the community and its businesses, Lanesboro, Minnesota

A kiosk in Tahquamenon Falls State Park (Michigan) advertises exhibits at the Maritime Museum 20 miles away.

State tourism signage programs should be fully utilized.

Cell phone based audio tours.

Mobile applications are becoming popular.



- **Informational kiosks.** Kiosks are located at visitor destinations and provide information about lodging, shopping, and services nearby, along with information about other attractions in the vicinity. Kiosks should be located in places such as the campgrounds in the state parks and forest preserves, and in the larger downtown districts.
- **Site interpretation.** Many visitors have complained about poor interpretation of visitor sites, and some existing signage is aging (such as along the Hennepin Canal). A grater effort is needed to interpret these resources in an engaging manner.
  - Interpretive signage and displays. Signs and static displays have been the standard approach to interpretation. These still are very important. Interpretation can include basic information such as maps and service guides along with information about the history, culture, environment, or other aspects of the site.
  - Cell phone strategies. As an alternative, or in accompaniment with signage, more sites are providing content using cell phones. A small sign can provide dialing information to recorded content. This may be a preferred option in some places where there may not be room for a larger sign, or there is opposition to the placement of signs.
- **Mobile applications.** The potential of mobile applications in tourism is only just beginning to be realized. A mobile application can contain a great deal of information to help users navigate the HRRIM region and interpret its attractions, as well as market businesses and collect information about where the traveler went during their stay. Apps can also be linked to web content to further enhance the experience, such as by providing video along with voice interpretations of sites.

Conduct planning to identify opportunities for access to the Rock River and Mississippi River

The area's rivers are among its most important assets, yet there is currently little access to them, and in most cases, there are not even roads that provide views of the rivers. Even the Great River Road provides very few glimpses of the river in the HRRIM region. Improving public access to these rivers will be a long term need to fully develop them as tourism assets.

In the short term, the need is to plan for locations where visitors will have access to sites, whether to view scenery, launch a boat, or participate in related activities. In the case of the Rock River Trail, it will be necessary to define the auto and bike routes through the region. This can be accomplished with the assistance of local and county governments and the Bistate Regional Commission within the next few years.

Over a longer horizon, there will be a need to pursue acquisition and to develop existing facilities to receive visitors at both new and existing sites.

Assess needs for handicapped accessibility at key attractions

The population of older persons in the United States is rapidly growing, and a number of them will experience issues with mobility. This older demographic is an important market for many HRRIM attractions, yet issues of handicapped accessibility have not been taken into account. This is even true of major sites like Bishop Hill.

An audit should be conducted of the leading visitor sites with an emphasis on those that can support group tour activities. Many common access issues can be easily

addressed without incurring substantial cost. For example, steps can be eliminated using a portable ramp.

Develop a regional business district vitality program similar to the Main Street Program

Many of the area's business districts are in need of improvement, and many of the businesses in them would benefit from technical assistance and promotion. The Main Street Program is one model of an approach to business district vitality, based on four pillars of economic restructuring, promotion, organization, and design. Aledo has adopted this model.

Often, the cost of maintaining such a program is too considerable for small communities. In recent years there have been more examples of county-wide or regional programs where a single organization coordinates services for multiple participating communities. Such an approach could have merit for Kewanee, Galva, Cambridge, Keithsburg, Colona, Hampton, and other communities in the HRRIM region.

The focus of the program should be on business recruitment and retention, business training and technical assistance, promotion, and district improvement (both public spaces and privately owned buildings. Steps that can be taken toward implementing such a program include:

- Bring in experts who can explain how a downtown revitalization program can improve the economic vitality of the district and its businesses.
- Organize trips to comparable communities that have lessons to share. Some of these might include:
  - The Amana Colonies, Iowa
  - Lanesboro, Minnesota
  - Mineral Point, Wisconsin
  - Nashville, Indiana
  - Red Wing, Minnesota
- Seek grants and raise funds from local governments, businesses, property owners, and community organizations.

Promote local arts, crafts, produce and foods

Visitors want to shop for local products such as art, crafts, and farm produce or prepared foods. The HRRIM region and nearby areas do have more of these products than is immediately apparent. Tourism officials can play a matchmaker role to help connect producers and potential outlets. For example, local food and wines can be offered in area restaurants, or regional artists can sell their works in galleries in Bishop Hill or Geneseo.

The steps involved start with identifying local area producers and the products they can offer. This should extend beyond the three counties. Again, it is an activity that may be delegated to an intern. The second part of the task is introducing potential suppliers to the retailers and restaurants that might carry their products.

Develop geocaching sites and a geocaching challenge

A geocaching challenge has ben proposed for the HRRIM area. In a geocaching challenge, participants find a minimum number of caches on a passport that can be downloaded or picked up in designated locations. After recording the codes hidden

Organized tours to successful tourism-based communities can be a strategy to learn what works and to educate community leaders.

Lanesboro, Minnesota is a small city with tourism tied to outdoor recreation and art.

The Amana Colonies (Iowa) are similar to Bishop Hill.

Nashville, Indiana, draws visitors for art and unique shopping.

Long term planning is needed to capture the full potential of the Great River Road and Historic Route 6.

at each cache, the participant can turn in the passport to receive a geocoin unique to the area.

Sites should be selected to highlight the area's more important attractions and to encourage people to visit local businesses. Some existing sites as well as new sites might be included in the challenge. The owners of existing sites need to be contacted to determine their willingness to participate. New sites have the potential to be established and maintained by the businesses that will benefit from the traffic generated by the challenge.

Sites can be established for as little as $25 each, depending on the equipment used. Additional costs will be involved in having the geocoins made.

Conduct long term planning for Great River Road and Historic Route 6

The Scenic Byways Program can serve as a model for developing tourism along the Great River Road and Historic Route 6. This program stresses the importance of planning to both ensure the quality of the corridor and to tap the full potential of visitors along the route. Counties through which these routes pass should consider similar corridor planning to preserve and enhance the quality of these routes and to generate additional traffic supporting local businesses.

Conduct research to quantify the opportunity with sports leagues

Pursuing league sporting activities has been suggested locally as a strategy to increase tourism. This suggestion deserves investigation to quantify the potential benefit. Research can include:

- Collection of data from host organizations, such as the number of activities and the origin cities of teams coming into the area.
- Conducting a survey of participants to determine how many are staying overnight and what they are spending locally on food, gas, and other goods or services.

This might be a good assignment for an intern.

Site-specific recommendations

Several potential strategies are tied directly to specific attractions. These include the following:

- **Big River State Forest.** The forest is a very underdeveloped asset, able to host a wide variety of activities, but not having adequate infrastructure. Two opportunities have been identified that may help to make the site more attractive.
  - Mountain biking is a very popular outdoor activity, but there are very few locations in northwestern Illinois or eastern Iowa where it can be pursued. With 60 miles of fire roads, there may be an opportunity to develop mountain biking trails in Big River State Forest. This asset would be unique to the area.
  - The fire tower at Big River State Forest is of interest to many potential visitors, ad would attract more traffic if it could be opened to allow people to climb to the top.
- **Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park.** This park is one of the better developed attractions in the region. Ryan's Round Barn is an unique feature of the park. Unfortunately, the barn is open only on rare occasions when volunteers are available to staff it. Ideally, the times that the interior is accessible would be extended. There are two ways this might happen:

- In many similar state parks, structures such as the barn are designed to be left open and unattended to allow visitors to enter and tour the facility, at least during daylight hours.
- Anther option may be to explore opportunities to make an income from use of the barn, such as using it as a location to host events. The income could help to provide funding for staffing, at least seasonally.

- **Great River Trail.** The Great River Trail is ultimately intended to follow the Mississippi River from its headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico. While the section north of the Rock River is completed to Albany, there is no trail south of the Rock River in Rock Island County or Mercer County.

  Constructing the trail along this stretch of the river is going to take many years. Over the next few years, Rock Island County, Mercer County, and their partners should engage in planning for the best possible route. Ideally, this will not be forced into a highway right-of-way as it is to the north. A route staying away from the road will provide a much better experience for visitors and encourage repeat traffic.

- **Ski Snowstar.** This private attraction has a strong interest in expansion, but is experiencing difficulty with zoning issues and with infrastructure to support its growth. County officials need to be educated about the importance of the business and the visitors it attracts. Assistance should also be provided to help identify funding sources for needed road upgrades.

TOURISM MARKETING

Marketing will continue to be the primary focus of most local tourism promotion activities. The recommendations here build off of those in the Hargrove/Young study, providing additional market focus and specific recommendations concerning approaches.

Over the long term it is essential that the region continue to support and expand the capacity of its local tourism promotion organizations including the Henry County Tourism Bureau and local chambers of commerce. Only these organizations, working within their communities, can provide the time, resources, and dedication to achieve local tourism goals.

MARKET FOCUS

Tourism marketing should focus primarily on an east-west corridor anchored by the Chicago market.

The Hargrove/Young study identified the HRRIM visitor market as a five-hour radius including the metropolitan areas of Chicago, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Milwaukee, along with smaller cities and rural areas in the region. While it is true that people from this entire area (or beyond) may travel to Henry, rural Rock Island, and Mercer Counties, the majority are originating in an east-west corridor from Chicago to eastern Iowa. This is the recommended geographic focus of marketing efforts, for the following reasons.

- The Henry County Tourism Bureau has limited funds for marketing. To reach an area as vast as a five hour radius would require significantly more funding. Concentrating resources in a more limited area will have greater impact.
- Households in the targeted market are likely to already have some familiarity with the HRRIM region, and if they have not already traveled to the area, are still more likely to have visited nearby attractions.
- The targeted market, and particularly Chicago, is closer than other major population centers. As the typical day trip or weekend getaway is most likely to be closer to two hours, or 120 miles in each direction, households in this market will have a greater likelihood of considering travel to the HRRIM region.

Galesburg and Peoria are also significant sources of visitors to the area. Some effort can be made to market to these communities. Their proximity raises the odds that households will consider a day trip for activities such as outdoor recreation or shopping unique stores. They may even have a tendency to visit more frequently. On the other hand, they are also less likely to make an overnight trip.

Within the target market there are three locations where it will be particularly beneficial to have printed materials available and to consider advertising opportunities. The first of these is the Quad Cities. Better known than the rural counties, they may attract visitors from a wider area, who may become familiar with, and consider excursions into the HRRIM region. Galena and the Amana Colonies are the other two locations. These sites also attract a far greater number of visitors with a similar demographic, who have an affinity for the same kinds of attractions and activities that can be found in the HRRIM region.

MARKETING APPROACHES

The proposed marketing approaches are layered to reach potential visitors at different stages of the trip planning process and as they pass through the counties.

Highway Marketing

Interstate Highways 80 and 74 carry a great many drivers from outside of the area. Most will never stop, and one reason for this is that they do not know what lies off of the highway. If they did, they might be inclined to make a brief stop for food or gas, or a longer stop to take in some of the tourist attractions that appeal to them.

Most of these people will not research attractions along a route. They are unlikely to pick up a brochure or magazine, and will most likely not visit the web page. The opportunity to reach this market is during the drive. Mobile technology will eventually provide other means, but for the near future, just as it has been for the last century, the best approach will be through roadside advertising. Some techniques include:

- Official tourism signage – The state of Illinois allows two types of official highway signage. One is the informational signs that identify specific attractions and businesses located in proximity to an interstate interchange. The second is a tourism directional signage program that can identify specialty shopping areas, historic districts, parks, and similar attractions. This second type of sign is not limited to interstate highways.

  Current use of these programs is inconsistent. Some individual businesses have applied, paid the required fees, and had signage erected to help advertise and locate their business. Others have not done so, and may not be aware that the program is available. This is an opportunity for the area's tourism organizations to educate businesses and offer technical assistance with the application process.

  Public tourism assets have also not taken part in available programs, whether for business districts or for parks. Those that are eligible should take advantage of this low cost advertising.

- Highway advertising – Billboards have been a staple of the advertising industry for well over a century. Some have become such an iconic part of the landscape that there are now efforts to preserve them (such as "ghost signs" on the sides of buildings – think of Uneeda Biscuit or Mail Pouch Tobacco) and modern efforts such as "walldog" art to recreate them.

  Sign regulations tend to put strict limits on billboard advertising and it can be expensive to lease available billboards. Several HRRIM communities have hired walldog artists to paint signs on buildings, though mostly in their downtowns. Expanding these art installations, including in nontraditional locations visible from highways, is a creative way to raise awareness about the area's attractions and events.

  The signs are also an attraction that helps to create a unique character for the region. A similar approach was used on the Enchanted Highway in North Dakota, where statues reflecting the area's culture were constructed along a 32-mile stretch of road.

- Interchange/roadside panels – Visitor centers are expensive to develop and even more expensive to staff and maintain. Well designed roadside panels can be nearly as effective at a fraction of the cost. Aside from the panels, all that is required is a place to pull off the highway, which could be just as effective in the parking lot of a business as in a public wayside.

  These panels should be considered at primary entry points to the HRRIM region, such as the I-80 interchanges in Geneseo, Atkinson, and Annawan, at the Mississippi River bridge across from Muscatine, and along the Great

Walldog art can aid in wayfinding and be used to promote attractions, as an alternative to billboards.

Wayfinding is a layered approach to guiding people to and through sites.

River Road at the southern border of Mercer County (perhaps at the Port Louisa NWR parking area) and at the northern border of Rock Island County.

Content should include a tourist map of the area and information similar to what is contained in the proposed itineraries. Along the Great River Road, the strategy should be to encourage drivers to detour to nearby sites like Aledo or Bishop Hill, by presenting information about the history, specialty shopping, and dining experiences they can offer. (The official web site and brochures for the Great River Road do include information about some attractions in Mercer and Rock Island Counties, but none in Henry County.)

- Wayfinding – Wayfinding is more than simply directional signage. An effectively designed wayfinding program contains subtle messaging that helps viewers identify and assess the services and attractions available, and easily navigate using signs and other visual cues. Information is a wayfinding scheme is layered, from broad information in outlying areas to finer detail as the target approaches the destination.
- Visitor information centers – The State of Illinois maintains several tourist information centers. For the HRRIM area, the most important of these will be along I-80 in the Quad Cities, on I-90 in South Beloit, and the Hennepin Canal visitor center. Although not an official visitor center, the Hennepin Canal Parkway's visitor center fills an informal role as one due to its location along the highway.

Onsite Marketing

Onsite marketing is an essential component of a comprehensive marketing program. This is marketing directed at persons already in the vicinity, whether it is their destination or they are simply passing through. The effort is focused on educating them about attractions and services to increase their length of stay by visiting more attractions, and to drive traffic to area businesses.

- Informational kiosks – Kiosks can provide visitor information at primary cities and attractions. The majority of information will be identical, however, some customization is warranted depending on location and the activities supported.

  At outdoor recreation assets, the kiosks should highlight related activities and nearby services such as restaurants, gas stations, shopping for staples, medical and veterinary services, and other needs of park visitors and campers. Kiosks may be considered at park headquarters locations and in campgrounds.

  Kiosks within the downtowns of key cities should provide information about that city and about the other cities with a critical mass of shopping and dining, along with other key attractions like the wineries and farm market. This is the same set of attractions included in the "Local Finds – Local Flavor" itinerary. Avoid the temptation to include everything and focus on the best quality assets.

  The places where kiosks may be considered include:

  - Downtown Geneseo
  - Downtown Aledo
  - Downtown Kewanee
  - Bishop Hill

- Hennepin Canal (Colona and other main entry points to the parkway)
- Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park
- Big River State Forest
- Loud Thunder Forest Preserve
- Illiniwek Forest Preserve

- Hotel and campground literature distribution

  Marketing materials, especially those for Mercer and Rock Island Counties, are not consistently available in hotels, campgrounds, attractions, and other locations where visitors may look for them. A list of these locations should be developed and a systematic process put in place to ensure that marketing materials are always available.

Marketing Tactics with a Broader Focus

Several potential tactics will require collaboration with other organizations that may see a benefit of working with the HHRIM region. Some of these relationships already exist, while others are new.

- Partner to market multi-county or multi-state routes such as the Great River Road, Historic Route 6, and the Rock River Trail.

  A marketing collaboration with these organizations should have the goals of increasing visitation overall and extending the length of time people spend in Henry, rural Rock Island, and Mercer Counties. Cooperative efforts should also be taken to further develop each of these assets.

  Some of this is already being done, however, the official Great River Road site only includes those counties through which the road passes. This is the best-known and most heavily traveled of the routes. Marketing should encourage drivers to consider detours to visit nearby attractions that appeal to the same demographic, such as Bishop Hill and the wineries.

  Historic Route 6 is in an uncoordinated state of development. It appears that the Illinois effort to brand and develop the route is not professionally organized, is not well funded, and does not have much participation from tourism professionals. It may be necessary to begin by building organizational capacity, then focusing on development and marketing needs.

  The Rock River Trail is even more of an emerging concept. There is still a need to designate routes and develop infrastructure to bring the idea to fruition. With this in mind, marketing is long term prospect.

- Elements of the Illinois State Park System including Big River State Forest, the Hennepin Canal Parkway, and Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park are among the most heavily visited of the area's attractions. Visitation could be higher, especially at Big River and Johnson-Sauk Trail. Two approaches might be considered.

  - In online retailing it is common to see sellers suggest similar products based on selections the buyer has made. The same concept can be applied to state parks; for example, if you enjoyed visiting White Pines State Park you might also enjoy a visit to Big River State Forest. By offering suggestions of places that are similar to those the person is visiting, the park system would help to build awareness of its other assets and drive traffic to them.

MIDWESTERN BIKE TRAILS

- Badger Trail (Wisconsin)
- C.J. Ramstead / North Shore Trail (Minnesota)
- Cedar Valley Trail (Iowa)
- Cowboy Trail (Nebraska)
- Elroy-Sparta Trail (Wisconsin)
- Glacial Drumlin Trail (Wisconsin)
- Hennepin Canal Trail (Illinois)
- I&M Canal Trail (Illinois)
- Illinois Prairie Path (Illinois)
- Iron Ore Heritage Trail (Michigan)
- Katy Trail (Missouri)
- Military Ridge Trail (Wisconsin)
- North Central Trail (Michigan)
- Paul Bunyan Trail (Minnesota)
- Pere Marquette Trail (Michigan)
- Raccoon River Valley Trail (Iowa)
- Root River Trail (Minnesota)
- Taconite Trail (Minnesota)
- Tunnel Hill State Trail (Illinois)
- Wabash Trace Trail (Iowa)
- White Pine Trail (Michigan)

Visitors may have trouble finding information about sites or activities. For example, Big River State Forest says on its website that horse rentals are available, but does not provide any web or phone contacts.

- There are several great bicycle trails in Illinois and across neighboring states. The riders of these trails will have an interest in other long trails. To encourage them to explore other routes, communities representing a handful of trails may want to collaborate in a marketing effort that can challenge riders to visit the best bike trails in the Midwest. Print and web advertising, a passport program, and targeted merchandise might be considered.

- The Henry County Tourism Bureau and the Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau already collaborate as part of Great Rivers Country, and this should be continued. Closer collaboration with Galena and the Amana Colonies might also be explored. These better-known destinations are attracting the same demographic that would be attracted to sites in the HRRIM study area, such as Bishop Hill.

Web and mobile marketing

The Henry County Tourism Bureau has a good website that is easily navigated and presents the information in a clear manner. There is a technical glitch with the site, however, that takes the user out of the site if they click on the background image. There is no single site that provides information on all of the activities and attractions in the HRRIM region.

With regard to content, two considerations may be offered. Firstly, while information is provided about places to shop, dine, or stay, they are not organized geographically. Users cannot see where there are concentrations of shops or restaurants that they might want to visit. Secondly, the list of potential activities in the area could be expanded, and greater detail is needed to help with trip planning. For instance, there is no contact information provided to check into boat and horse rentals. This information is also unavailable on respective park web sites.

Some difficulties were experienced with the mobile site. Text on the home page did not load, and the page was slow to load. Navigation (the drop-down menu) was not intuitive.

Some places are beginning to develop mobile apps to support tourism. It is not clear that these will ultimately be popular, or if the majority of people will continue to access the web for information. In the HRRIM region an application may be desirable, as there is limited data coverage in the rural areas. Applications may be expanded beyond simple tourism marketing to provide narrative and video interpretation of sites such as Bishop Hill or the Hennepin Canal, include trail maps and interpretive trail information in state parks, or assist in geocaching, among other possibilities. Using i-beacons or proximity alerts, it is possible to track when a person who has the app on their phone enters a particular area, providing valuable data for analysis of tourist behavior.

Marketing Messages

As noted in the Hargrove/Young study, the Back Roads Beckon tag line is an appropriate one. Some themes that may be reinforced to reach the target market include:

- A worthwhile detour on the way to your destination
- Visiting places less traveled
- Outdoor adventure away from the crowd
- Seeking out hidden gems in the countryside
- Local, unique, and handcrafted

As promotional materials are redesigned there should be shift away from substantial advertising and into content marketing. When these articles deal with activities such as hiking, horseback riding, or boating, they should always include information about "where" and "how". For example, provide narrative descriptions of the trails with information about how to reach the trailhead and trail length. For horseback riders, include information about nearby horse camping and where to rent a horse.

Group Tours

Lack of resources has prevented the Henry County Tourism Bureau from putting a substantial effort into developing group (bus) tours. As described earlier in the analysis, the typical tour participant is older, well educated, and seeking unusual destinations or activities where they can learn. In many cases it will be necessary to provide a well scripted itinerary and knowledgeable person to act as a docent to the tour group. Because of the amount of work involved in setting up a tour, the recommended approach is to focus on a small number of themes that can be easily replicated, rather than one-time activities. Examples might include:

- Unique Places – Combine Geneseo and Bishop Hill for a two day getaway. Start with a day at Bishop Hill. On the way, stop for a guided tour of Ryan's Round Barn. Head to Geneseo to spend the night and to enjoy a performance at the Richmond Hill Playhouse. In the morning head into downtown Geneseo.
- Great Festivals – This is a day trip to a county fair or the tractor show, but it includes more than the typical visit. Experts will meet with the tour to provide information and hands-on opportunities for people to interact with the exhibits. This can be combined with a trip to Bishop Hill to make a two-day trip.
- Agricultural Tour – Plan a day trip starting at Country Corner Farm Market. Proceed to Creekside Vineyards for a tour of the vineyards and lunch on the terrace, complete with entertainment. Finish with Lavender Crest Winery for another tasting. This can be combined with a second day that might take in a county fair or festival, or trip to Bishop Hill, or drive along the Great River Road.

COLLATERAL MATERIALS

Existing print marketing materials are good, however, some need to contain less advertising and more pictures and narrative. Content needs to be targeted to the strongest activities and locations rather than trying to include everything.

Additional collateral materials need to be developed to provide detailed information about specific sites or activities. For example:

- Biking – Use the state's biking suitability maps to put together a regional map of not just trails, but suitable routes to destinations like the state parks and Bishop Hill.
- Hiking – Assemble a brochure listing and describing the area's hiking trails.
- Bird Watching – Offer a checklist of the species that can be seen, when they can be seen, and where they tend to be seen.
- History – provide a brochure with information about historic district sites, walking tours, etc.

Information specific to activities like bird watching, hiking trails, or historic tours will help to improve the visitor experience.

A consistent theme will help to brand the region, if used throughout both official marketing material and adopted by private businesses. Several alternative templates may be created and provided for use by others. Northern Illinois University, Western Illinois University, or one of the colleges in the region might be contacted to determine if there is an interest in taking this task on as a class project.

RESOURCES

The following resources may be useful in implementing recommendations within the plan.

ADA Compliance

www.**ada**.gov/racheck.pdf

www.adachecklist.org/doc/fullchecklist/ada-checklist.pdf

Business Districts

www.christovaltx.com/pdf/20BizIdeaBooklet.pdf

http://vnrc.org/resources/smart-growth-resources/smart-growth-publications/indicators-of-downtown-health-associated-documents/

Cell Phone Tours

http://myoncell.mobi/

http://oncell.com/cell-phone-tours

http://www.spatialadventures.com/

General Resources

http://www.tourism.umn.edu/

www.albertacanada.com/files/albertacanada/1-tourism_development_guide.pdf

www.learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/g3713.pdf

www.learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/G3645.pdf

https://wrdc.usu.edu/htm/publications/file=8366

http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/

www.extension.usu.edu/htm/publications/file=14488

www.workforceplanningboard.org/en/node/333

Mobile Applications

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9FgJpuFQE8

www.bspatialllc.com

People Counters / Traffic Counters

http://www.trafx.net

Scenic Byways

http://www.pdffiller.com/27515479-sbyway-analysistoolkit-reportpdf-Report-Toolkit-for-Building-a-Scenic-Byway-Economic-Impact-Study-Various-Fillable-Forms

http://www.byways101.org/publications - Note manual on wayfinding

http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep/scenic_byways/byway_quality/analysis/