



Stroud Region Open Space & Recreation

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One in a series of educational essays on engaging the benefits of local greenways, parks and recreation systems.

Butterflies taste with their feet, *or: Attracting tourism with the pride of place*

by Rich Cramer

Butterflies, one of nature's most beautiful creatures, have some pretty unusual characteristics. They live on an all liquid diet, have transparent wings covered with scales that reflect light, cannot fly in temperatures below about 55 degrees and, they taste with their feet. After landing on a plant, the sensors in their feet tell them if its nectar is suitable to drink.

Tourists, though not always as beautiful as butterflies, have some pretty unusual traits as well. They spend thousands of dollars traveling to places with spectacular scenery, historical significance or some man-made attraction. Think Grand Canyon, Gettysburg or Disneyland. Then, strangely, in spite of their highly developed five senses, they often limit themselves and fail to taste everything an area has to offer. Our challenge, as a major tourist destination, is to encourage the guests and residents of our region to reach out and enjoy those assets that make us unique.

The northeast region of Pennsylvania relies heavily on visitors to keep our economy vibrant. A 2011 study found that tourism in the four county Pocono area generates over \$2.9 billion and over 36,000 jobs. This represents roughly 35 percent of the area's total employment and almost 50 percent of its total employment wages. With numbers this significant, we cannot ignore the millions of visitors who come here every year or why they choose to come. Just as importantly, we must not dismiss the needs of the nearly 170,000 residents of Monroe County and our many neighbors in nearby Pike, Carbon and Wayne Counties. As the saying goes, good places to live are good places to visit and vice versa. The

question we must ask is, “How do we attract visitors while protecting those things about our community that drew its residents here in the first place?”

Author, educator and community development consultant Dan Shilling offers some suggestions for blending the needs of these two groups. In his book “Civic Tourism: The Poetry and Politics of Place,” he proposes that local leaders focus on satisfying residents first. Pride of place is critical. He urges us to integrate the cultural, built and natural ingredients of our environment to create a dynamic, distinctive and prosperous community. In addition, we need to encourage corporations to lead the way in caring for the environment and protecting our shared assets. Having a healthy, natural community can only work in favor of our commercial enterprises. Our massive tourism industry can also become a tool to help the public enhance what they love about their place.

The tendency is often to separate the commercial side of tourism from the natural side. We promote our shopping centers, restaurants and hospitality businesses but short-change our many unique natural, cultural and historical attractions. To correct this imbalance our planning should be a cooperative effort. Our direction should be guided by business interests, tourism specialists, experts in recreation, environmental groups, educators and political leaders. By successfully melding these various groups, we can let our residents and guests taste the wonderful variety of parks, trails and streams provided by the Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission. We can let them taste the richness of our history and culture at sites like the Stroud Mansion or the Sherman or Pocono Community Theaters. And we can let them taste the uniqueness of local businesses like Ready, Set, Run or the Liztech Gallery.

When we look for solutions to our concerns, whether it’s encouraging visitors to enjoy our region or to make our community better for its residents, we need to see the bigger picture. Forester and author Aldo Leopold asks us to “Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it does otherwise.”

Rich Cramer is a retired school superintendent and a member of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation. The Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission provides essential public services of regional economic stimulation, environmental stewardship, and social stability through healthful recreational and cultural programming and responsible stewardship of parks and open space.

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