

Sedona 2018 Focus Groups Report

Report date: October 10, 2018

In an effort to better get input from multiple stakeholders involved in tourism, two 90-minute focus group sessions were organized with 1) public lands managers and 2) non-profit leaders. The participants for the focus groups were selected with the help of Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau. The sessions were held on one day at a hotel conference room in Sedona. Three ASU faculty conducted the sessions and using various techniques documented comments. This report is a summary of each session. The focus groups sessions were guided by two major questions: what are the major challenges of managing tourism and recreation resources sustainably in Sedona and the region? What are the possible solutions to mitigate these challenges?

Public Lands Managers

Nine participants representing local, state, tribal and federal management agencies working in Sedona and the region attended the first focus group session. The agencies included: City of Sedona, Yavapai County, Red Rock State Park, Arizona Parks and Trails, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Yavapai Apache Nation, National Park Service - River and Trails, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Coconino National Forest.

Challenges of Managing Tourism and Recreation Resources

Each participant was asked to identify and discuss three major challenges their organization are facing to manager tourism and recreation resources. These challenges are thematically presented below.

Balancing visitor use and protection of natural and cultural resources

Finding the balance between the needs of increasing number of visitors and resource protection, both natural and cultural, has been identified as one of the serious challenges. Some areas are already overused. There are too many people on limited perennial water. These issues are even greater during peak seasons as demand exceeds the capacity. To meet the demand of visitors, some of the parks have undergone more development than needed, which is not sustainable in the long-run. Agencies are also facing problems with conflicting philosophies between balancing environmental sustainability and revenue generation from tourism. One of the participants mentioned

“we want people to love public lands, but we also want the forest to be there in the future.”

User behavior

Land managers reported that it is not only the influx of visitors, but their inappropriate behaviors, that have been a major challenge in managing resources. They listed various unsustainable use of resources, such as energy and water, their impacts on wildlife, wildfire, and vandalism of artifacts. They also indicated that visitors lack of education is contributing to the impacts on natural and cultural resources.

Meeting the needs of diverse population and gaining public support

Public land managers are mandated to serve the public and their diverse needs and priorities, but these are often times conflicting each other. Remaining relevant to future generations and relevant to a diversity of user groups, including youth, minority, and other ethnic groups, is important but challenging. For example, some people want a great deal of management of public lands and others want none at all, that is until there are negative impacts. Dealing with these polar opposites perspectives is also a challenge.

Lack of resources and long-term planning

Given limited resources (human, financial), they “these public or municipal resource managers” are unable to monitor/regulate overuse, and educate and provide information to visitors and public. Because of limited resources, they lack long-term plans that are needed for sustainability. Land managers expressed the need of more resources to collect data to assess visitor impacts.

Possible Solutions

Managing visitors

Some areas are overused and others are underused. A proper distribution and management of visitors can be a solution to this issue. Managers suggested spreading summer visitors throughout nearby areas with more information and education. For example, visitors may not know about Jerome and surrounding areas to achieve a strong regional tourism economy. Sedona can distribute information about other destinations to reduce impacts on overused areas in Sedona is important.

Education and interpretation

Educating both visitor and residents about appropriate behavior in terms of fire, wildlife, forest, water, sensitive ecosystem, traffic, and parking can be a potential solution.

Collaboration

The participants emphasized the need of collaboration with communities and chambers for funding, data collection, educating residents and visitors, long-term planning, and developing consistent policies. Land management agencies want to work by drawing on an inter-agency collaboration approach to assess impacts to date and to determine acceptable impacts and activities and how to shift practices appropriately. A good example of a regional-level cross agency collaboration is String of Pearls in Colorado. Another example of interagency communication is Verde Front. Collaboration among agencies, communities and private businesses can be helpful to develop applications and disseminate information. No agency has a big advertising budget, so integrating and connecting with other agencies and their existing technological tools is important and likely to be very effective. For example, REI has developed a mountain biking app. Ebird is another app used internationally by birders. Others could be Powder Hoop app for anglers. Many agencies tend to focus on short-term planning and some focus on long-term planning, so interagency collaboration could leverage unique, as well as shared, agency assets.

Focus Group with Nonprofit Leaders

The second focus group workshop was attended by 10 participants from the following organizations: Traffic Matters, Verde Valley Cyclists Coalition, Oak Creek Watershed Council, Friends of the Verde River, Verde Valley Nature Organization, Keep Sedona Beautiful, and Sedona Red Rock Trail Fund.

Challenges of Managing Tourism and Recreation Resources

Increased visitors

New flow of tourists and their lack of awareness on the impacts on the environment is a challenge. Many users have no clue about the environment and surround areas. Because of increasing tourism, people's attitude toward tourism is changing. There a new issue caused by tourists, "them versus us attitude" (resident versus residents and owners versus nonowners) that was not there previously.

Transportation (traffic -both trail and road, parking)

The amount of traffic in Oak Creek canyon is a major problem. It cannot be widened and it should not be. Congestion is not limited to roads, but also trail heads. There are many people hiking, biking and horseback riding. The crowds make a person lose the serenity and tranquility that they are seeking in nature.

Housing affordability

Housing affordability and availability is tied to unregulated lodging. Unregulated lodging is a major issue in Sedona. For example, one participant shared that there is a house close to his house which rented out for \$750 per night. He stopped a fire there once because they did not know that it was a no burn day/area.

Environmental quality

Participants discussed the impacts of tourists on water quality, wildlife, fire, and trash. They were concerned of water quality effected by tourists (particularly swimming in Oak Creek), and also the quantity of water needed for residential and commercial development and growing population and its impacts on underground reservoir. The river is currently far below the threshold for outstanding water quality. Social trails are negatively impacting wildlife habitat; and inappropriate defecations and soil erosion are other major problems. There is a lot of trash and food matter and fecal matter introduced into the creek by visitors.

Solutions

Education and outreach

- Educate residents through festivals, events, and workshops on sustainability issues, such as water use, gardening, native plants, etc. Some organizations, such as Keep Sedona Beautiful (KSB), organize speaker series related to sustainability to educate residents, including workshops on landscaping using native plants, no insecticide, and protect bees for pollination, to make residents to be better environmental stewards.
- Most tourists are first-time visitors, so education is key. Educate tourists about fire, wildlife, trash, and Leave No Trace ethics. Similar to round-about pamphlets and website, the Chamber should expand this to educate tourists about fire. Targeting Phoenix may be a proactive approach to take given that many visitors come from Phoenix. Adding educational information to the Sedona International Film Festival may be a good approach to communicating with tourists.
- Educate businesses about dark sky, redistributing visitors, and passing information to tourist related to fire. Realtors can be a resource for to mention that one of the things that makes Sedona great is the dark skies. Hotels can also be helpful to educate tourists providing tourists information rather than just marketing of various activities.

Collaboration

Nobody can solve any issues by themselves. Collaboration with communities, other non-profits, businesses, public land management agencies and chambers for education, outreach, and funding is important. The Verde Front is an example of a regional collaboration. They work with mayors for various things, including recreation master plan, hosting bird festivals, and educating tourists about environmental health of the area. Collaborate with Arizona Department of Transportation for transit. Parking outside the city where people can use vans locally to reduce air and noise pollution, but it allows visitors to congregate in certain areas. There will be a need to look at other routes in and out of Sedona, such as neighborhood routes, and a bridge at Schnebly Road. Also, data to inform a capacity innovation approach is needed.

Involvement and fund non-profits

The Chamber and businesses can facilitate tourists to donate to nonprofits so that nonprofits can do their jobs to protect the environment. Businesses should also give back to the communities. Involve college students through voluntourism and this may help nonprofits who are short on the human resources. Involve and fund nonprofit organizations in educating public, and protecting rivers and resources through a mechanism where they get certain percentage of taxes. Also, businesses can connect to an app with the goal of information provision to users, but also give users an opportunity to donate to maintain the natural landscape. The participants provided examples of other communities like Steam Boat Springs, Colorado. They have many best practices; their hiking season is four months long. They installed a bed tax and they get \$500,000 a year that goes directly to trail management. Getting more dollars from tourists via the city government is an innovative approach. This was done through a referendum. Most places in Colorado have five different categories of taxes that go towards their environmental initiatives. Sedona can follow that example.

Submitted by ASU. Drs. Gyan Nyaupane, Christine Vogt, and Christine Buzinde

Center for Sustainable Tourism

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Nichols Tourism Group

16 Tee Place
Bellingham, WA 98229
nicholstourismgrp.com

Focus Group Invitation



May 18, 2018

Dear

Agency

Sedona is dedicated to sustainability and is working towards being a leading sustainable community in the State of Arizona and western U.S. A team of researchers from Arizona State University's Center for Sustainable Tourism and Nichols Tourism Group was awarded a contract to study and recommend further sustainability initiatives in the community and the tourism industry. The team is currently conducting visitor, resident and business surveys to garner input and a diverse advisory group is assisting in framing and examining the results of our findings. We are also conducting two focus groups with public lands managers and non-profit managers to consider all perspectives of resource and community sustainability.

You have been invited as a valuable participant to a 90-minute focus group due to your key role in managing Sedona and the surrounding areas' resources. You will be joined by approximately eight to ten other managers who represent different federal, state, tribal or local agencies. Jennifer Wesselhoff and Michelle Conway from Sedona Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau will be in attendance to listen to the focus group session.

If you are unable to attend, please let us know if someone can attend the workshop in your place and represent the agency. Light refreshments will be served. If you have any brochures or documents on sustainability planning or management for the agency, please bring to share with the group and leave behind for us to further study. Please RSVP by Wednesday May 30, 2018 to gyan@asu.edu, Ph (480) 459-8081 OR chrisv@asu.edu, Ph (810) 588-3293.

We look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,

Drs. Gyan Nyaupane and Christine Vogt

Jennifer Wesselhoff, President/CEO, Sedona Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau

Karen Osburn, Assistant City Manager, City of Sedona

Workshop

Location: Hampton Inn, Sedona, 1800 W State Route 89A in West Sedona.

Date and Time: June 11th, 2018, 9am to 10:30am.

Focus Group Invitation



NICHOLS TOURISM GROUP
Advisory services for an evolving tourism industry

ASU center for
sustainable tourism
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 18, 2018

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You have been invited as a valuable participant to a 90-minute focus group due to your involvement and key role in supporting Sedona and the surrounding areas' resources. You will be joined by approximately eight to ten other leaders who represent different non-profit organizations. Jennifer Wesselhoff and Michelle Conway from Sedona Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau will be in attendance to listen to the focus group session.

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Jennifer Wesselhoff, President/CEO, Sedona Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau

Karen Osburn, Assistant City Manager, City of Sedona

Focus Group Session

Location: Hampton Inn, Sedona, 1800 W State Route 89A in West Sedona.

Date and Time: June 11th, 2018, 1:00pm to 2:30pm.

Focus Group Methodology



Public and Nonprofit Sectors Focus Group

Public lands are an integral part of Sedona's tourism and the involvement of the agencies and stakeholders involved in managing tourism resources is critical for visioning and developing Sustainable Tourism Development Strategic Plan. Non-profits, often comprised of passionate residents, who are willing to give their time and money, increasingly comprise an important role in public lands and community assets. Based on the scope refinement meeting, two focus groups are proposed for a June date to be held with public land managers and non-profit leaders. The focus groups aim to understand:

- Current and future initiatives taken by the agencies/stakeholders
- Partnership and collaborative opportunities
- Sustainability programs and grants that might be created in Sedona
- Actions to ensure Sedona's sustainability outcomes, in general and in tourism and recreation
- Reaction to research findings to-date from the visitor study (the resident and business survey will not likely have data yet).

Focus Group 1: Public land management agencies

9 Participants confirmed

Seating- Assigned (mixed)

Table tents (color coded by type of organization). Leave the same color papers (three) for each participant.

Focus Group 2: Nonprofits

8 participants confirmed

Outline for focus group

- Overview of the project: Christine Vogt
 - Objectives of this focus group, focused and on task, IRB protocol: Christine Vogt
 - Introduction: participants and facilitators introduction. Gyan
1. What is your favorite places in Sedona? What do you enjoy doing/seeing there?



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2. What do you see as the major challenges of managing tourism and recreation resources sustainably in Sedona and the region?
 - Use one of the papers to write top three challenges.
 - Ask them to share their most important challenge first (round-robin format) using critical incident technique (CIT) - one example of the incident related to the challenge. The incident should specify the context - where, when, and who. This helps to avoid generalization, speculations, and hearsay. Discussion and thematic categorization.
 - The challenges will be group into thematic areas.
 - While compiling thematic challenges, the group will come up with solutions to the challenges they listed on their piece of paper.
 - The papers will be collected.

Challenges lead to opportunities

Present the groups priorities of challenges (themes)

3. What do you see as the major opportunities and solutions of managing tourism and recreation resources sustainably in Sedona and the region?
4. What existing policies/plans does your agency or organization have to manage public lands or community resources sustainably?

Reflections Questions:

- What do you know or think about Sedona' sustainability initiatives?

Final Questions:

- Do you have any other general or specific suggestions for Sedona's Sustainable Tourism Development Strategic Plan?

Participants from research team:

Moderators for the focus groups: Gyan, Christine V., and Christine B.

Observers: Jennifer and Michelle

Materials:

Table tents, matching color papers, Flip chart, stand, marker pens, dry erase, IRB consent forms (Gyan).