



## 2010 TOURISM & HOSPITALITY CONSORTIUM INDUSTRY SUMMIT REVIEW

Launched in the midst of a recession, Newberg's upscale and sustainable Allison Inn & Spa provided a fitting setting for a daylong conversation about the issues, challenges and opportunities facing Oregon's tourism and hospitality industry.

The 2010 Tourism & Hospitality Consortium Industry Summit drew nearly 100 leaders from across the state, who came to help shape a common vision to guide the industry. The second annual summit featured updates from policy leaders on key issues, as well as a chance to explore those issues in-depth during small-group discussion.

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-- Aubrey King, director, Western States Tourism Policy Council

Since Governor Kulongoski signed the Tourism Investment Proposal in 2003, the tourism industry has taken off, Travel Oregon CEO Todd Davidson told participants. It's grown from a \$6.5 billion business with 85,000 employees and a payroll of \$1.5 billion, to \$8 billion with 93,000 employees and more than \$2 billion in payroll.

"But equally impressive is the growth in awareness of the role the hospitality and tourism industry plays in Oregon," Davidson said, "as it contributes to our quality of life, as it contributes to our sense of environmental stewardship and as it contributes to our economy."

Aubrey King, Director of Western States Tourism Policy Council, traveled from Washington, D.C., to brief the group on issues affecting travel and tourism at the national level. King singled out two industry challenges. "We need to make the case much more persuasive nationally, that travel and tourism is an economic driver—a source of jobs," he said. "We also need to appreciate the connection between travel and tourism and the environment. They cannot thrive or exist independently of one another."

King lauded the work Oregon is already doing in these areas, particularly with policy-shaping events such as the consortium summit.

Moderator Randy Harrington noted the particularly collaborative nature of the group gathered in the room, and its optimism in the face of economic challenge. "We have something magic going on here," he told the crowd. "It's time not to back off but to double down. It's time to be bold, think big and go for it."

### THE HOT TOPICS

Nearly a dozen speakers provided participants with an overview of the latest issues affecting the tourism and hospitality industry in key sectors around the state.

#### **Here are some highlights:**

**Transportation—Patrick Cooney, Oregon Department of Transportation:** It's been a notable year for ODOT, which recorded a 60-year low for fatalities in the state; celebrated the 10-year anniversary of award-winning tripcheck.com web site; and tallied up a record number of construction projects resulting in local contractors providing jobs.

**Workforce—Bill Perry, Oregon Restaurant Association:** Unemployment is up, but state colleges are bursting at the seams. "From a state perspective, we have a tremendous opportunity to get some hospitality schools in Oregon," Perry says. On a national level, it's important to get some resolution on immigration reform. "We can't get back to where we were until we have a stabilized workforce."



**National Public Lands—Claire Lavendel, U.S. Forest Service:** Challenges include the changing demographics of visitors, the different uses of national forestlands, and an aging infrastructure. Look this year for a complete redesign on the USFS web presence, as recreation becomes the main portal by which people access info about the agency.

**State Public Lands—Kyleen Stone, Oregon State Parks:** The state park system is bigger than most residents realize. Besides operating campgrounds and day use areas, the agency makes community grants, funds an all-terrain vehicle program, and recently began operating the Oregon State Fair and Expo. Lottery funds, up for review in 2014, cover 41% of expenses, with 37% paid by users, and the rest from federal sources.

**Sustainability—Kristin Dahl, Travel Oregon:** Sustainability overlays nearly every tourism-related issue, as 78% of travelers consider themselves to be environmentally conscious. LEED-certified venues like the Allison add to the attractiveness of Oregon travel. “Pair that with recreation, then with higher ed sustainability programs, and we have all the right ingredients to become a hotbed of sustainable travel that will put us on the map.”

**Wildlife, Fishing/Hunting—Rick Hargrave, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife:** A recent ODFW/Travel Oregon study showed that activities including fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing injected \$2.4 billion into the Oregon economy. Wildlife viewing accounted for 52% of the activity. As the number of hunters and fishers decline, so does the license revenue that supports much of the agency’s programs. That forced the first fee increase in six years, making Oregon’s out-of-state licenses some of the most expensive in the country.

**Outdoor recreation—Kevin Wright, Travel Oregon:** “It’s hard not to find opportunity in this niche,” Wright said, pointing to himself as an example. “That’s what brought me to Oregon.” Travel Oregon is actively pursuing opportunities based on the recreation theme. “It’s a fantastic product that we offer.”

**Interactive marketing—Kevin Wright, Travel Oregon:** The Internet has created skeptical consumers, who now control how and where they get information. Marketing strategies must include providing the tools for Oregon’s fans to communicate. “We need to empower them to get information from each other—word of mouth still lives,” Wright says. “We are looking at where they get information and we’re meeting them there.”

**International Marketing—Teresa O’Neill, Travel Oregon:** International travel was mostly flat this year, but that’s not necessarily a bad thing. “Flat is the new up,” O’Neill said to laughter from the crowd. Bright spots are nonstop flights to Amsterdam and Tokyo through Portland International Airport, as well as increased business from Canada. “Our \$4,000 investment in a Canadian Chinese tour operator campaign, returned \$600,000 of business,” she said. “That’s a ROI we can be proud of.”

**Culinary Tourism—Holly Macfee, Travel Oregon:** There are 27 million culinary travelers in the United States. It’s a lucrative market, and what Macfee called the “quality and intimacy of the product in Oregon” holds great promise, especially through promotions such as Oregon Bounty, now in its seventh year.

**Land Use—Richard Whitman, Department of Land Conservation and Development:** The department is looking at new, nonregulatory tools in the area of timberland and agricultural use. “Agriculture is a diverse industry with a lot of different parts. We need to be working with all those parts to make sure we are doing what we can to make it sustainable over the long-term.”

## HELPING SET THE AGENDA

The last part of the day was devoted to small group discussions on the key issues of transportation, land use, public lands, and marketing. The spirited contributions of the different groups were recorded and will be used as the consortium crafts its strategy going forward.