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Clackamas County Tourism Shares Results of Water Recreation Study

West Linn, OR -- In spring 2017, Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory, the Destination Marketing and Management Agency for Clackamas County, initiated a comprehensive study to determine if the water assets in the county are being used to their greatest economic potential. A preliminary review of water-based tourism in 2016 found that there was a solid foundation for future development of new assets and expansion of current opportunities. The agency determined that water recreation has the potential to become a major tourism generator in the county.

"After evaluating the results of the 2016 review, the Tourism Development Council (TDC) made water tourism a central part of its 5-Yr (2017-22) Strategic Plan," said Danielle Cowan, executive director of Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory. "Water enthusiasts, especially those who like to fish, spend money to travel for their activities. The rivers and lakes of Clackamas County are some of the best in the country and provide outstanding opportunities for water recreation. Our county has the ability to draw visitors to enjoy our water recreation, even during the off season which is often a struggle for businesses and local communities that depend on visitors for their livelihoods."

However, converting these natural resources into sustainable tourism assets requires strategic planning to develop products, target niche user groups and still maintain the health of the area's natural resources. To conduct a further in-depth analysis of these issues, Mt. Hood Territory hired Michael Crane of Crane Associates, a leading authority in sustainable water-based recreation.

"Michael Crane is an environmental economist with more than 20 years of experience in sustainable tourism," said Samara Phelps, destination development lead. "He brought not only the technical expertise to collect and analyze the data needed for this assessment, but also a breadth of national and international experience. His perspective is an extremely valuable resource in creating our water tourism strategic plan and for local partners currently engaged in water related projects."

While performing the study, Crane Associates worked with dozens of stakeholders from the public, private and non-profit sectors to fully understand the area's water assets, analyze the market demand for water-based recreation in all its forms, identify any untapped market opportunities, and create strategies to capitalize on them. Through his research, the Willamette Falls and the Locks were identified as having huge potential for tourism, but because of the amount of work already dedicated to planning and projects within the Falls area, Crane focused the study on the other water assets in the county. The study includes more than three months of site visits to Clackamas County's water bodies and surveys from 1,700 statewide respondents. The results represent the interests of 1.6 million water recreation enthusiasts and a detailed inventory of the county's recreational assets.

Overall Study Key Findings:

- Oregon's recreational waters are visited 80 million times annually by people looking to recreate.
- Clackamas County's recreational waters attract 1.5 million visitors annually, which result in 240,000 overnight stays.
- Clackamas County's water bodies are equally good or better than the State average for recreational value.
- The public's concern for water quality, habitat quality, public access, information, safety, user conflicts and crowds are not significantly different in the county than the rest of the state.

- Water-based recreation generated about \$12 million in lodging reservations in Oregon in 2016, but Clackamas County captured only about 2% of this amount. Despite above average water assets, the county is attracting below average visitation to these waters due to a combination of physical access, water-recreation management, lack of awareness, and niche product development.

Communities throughout Clackamas County have an opportunity to create recreational assets through their connections to rivers and lakes. Consultant Crane identified numerous strategies throughout the county and in local communities that would enhance the potential for water-based recreation as an economic development tool.

"We are committed to developing and maintaining Clackamas County as a sustainable tourism destination with vibrant local communities," said Cowan. "Together with industry stakeholders, residents, local organizations, and government partners, we have the opportunity to lead the state in the improvement of water-based tourism."

Acting on the opportunities presented in the study relies on community coordination and engagement. Michael Crane will return to the area in October for discussions on water tourism with groups working on related recreation projects and interested citizens. To incentivize investment in water-based tourism, Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory is devoting a significant portion of its \$250,000 in Tourism Development Grants for 2018-19 on such projects. Grant recipients will be announced in December. The complete study, links to community specific summaries, and event details can be found at: <https://www.mthoodterritory.com/water-tourism-strategic-plan>.

Community Presentations

On October 11th and 12th, Clackamas County Tourism will host presentations and a discussion on water asset development in local communities. Michael Crane will share the methodology, key findings and recommendations from his in-depth analysis of the county's water assets. The presentations will be followed by a Question and Answer session and discussion. The presentation will be available at two separate times and locations:

October 11th
6-8 pm
Sandy Community Center
RSVP: <https://omht.us/SandyWater>

October 12th
10 am – 12 pm
Wilsonville City Hall, Willamette River Rooms 1 & 2
RSVP: <https://omht.us/WilsonvilleWater>

About Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory

Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory is the official destination marketing and management organization for Clackamas County, Oregon and is responsible for developing and promoting tourism throughout the County. We work to increase the number of new and repeat overnight visitors to strengthen the local economy. For more information on Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory visit www.mthoodterritory.com.

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