

# Tourism officials eye reopening economy in Adirondacks under regional approach

- Andy Flynn - *Adirondack Daily Enterprise* – April 22, 2020

Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism officials on Tuesday announced a plan to transform the way they market the Adirondack region as the state lifts its “New York on PAUSE” social distancing restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Getting the economy back on track is the ultimate goal. Many businesses are currently closed, or their services have been scaled back. For Adirondack communities, that means opening the region back up to tourism, which has been on hold for more than five weeks. And that will require a new tourism strategy.

“It’s going to be a very delicate dance,” Willsboro supervisor and Essex County Board of Supervisors Chairman Shaun Gilliland said Tuesday during a video conference call hosted by ROOST, based in Lake Placid.

About 200 people took part in the virtual meeting, which included a slide show presentation led by ROOST CEO Jim McKenna titled “Adirondack Tourism Strategy: Pathway Forward.” ROOST performs marketing duties for Essex and Hamilton counties and the villages of Tupper Lake and Saranac Lake.

Gilliland said he’s been in touch with state officials daily on how the economy will be reopened.

“I think when it happens,” Gilliland said, “there won’t be much prep time once the announcement is made, so everybody’s got to be ready in the various economic sectors. ... That plan has got to be ready to go.”

McKenna unveiled ROOST’s new marketing strategy shortly before Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced in Buffalo that New York will reopen the state’s economy by region, based on COVID-19 facts. Cuomo said different parts of the state have different pandemic “curves” than others. New York City has had 64% of the state’s COVID-19 cases, with 21% from Long Island, 8% from Westchester County and 7% from the rest of the state.

ROOST’s four marketing phases are called “mitigation,” “local kick-start,” “regional movement” and “reinvented travel market.” The region is currently in the mitigation phase.

“We think that, planned properly, we can get up to the final stage over the coming months,” McKenna said. “Certainly it depends a lot on our public health organizations and our county, state and federal governments.”

McKenna said he's not sure about the timeline. It all depends on when state officials begin to lift restrictions.

## **Mitigation**

After the state began its social distancing mandates in the middle of March, local and county government and tourism officials began asking travelers to stay home. ROOST suspended its paid advertising, modified its marketing message and focused on local communication.

"We started planning and positioning at that point on how we were going to reemerge in the travel market," McKenna said.

The main marketing message for mitigation is, "We'll be here": We'll be here, ready to welcome you back when the time is right. Pause now; play later. Wish you were here; glad you are staying home.

## **Local kick-start**

Once the economy starts opening up, ROOST will change its marketing message to "We are here," focusing on the local and regional residents who want to get out and explore. We are here, saving a place for you. We are here, getting ready to welcome you back.

"International travel is probably not going to happen much. Domestic flying is not going to happen much," McKenna said. "But certainly some drive-to destinations with the right mechanisms in place should be positioned to welcome some guests, we hope, over this coming summer."

Businesses will begin to reopen. Locals will want to start moving around within their communities. Travel desire will need to be built.

Recovery of the Adirondack economy will begin with local communities. There will be an emphasis on the need and value for business activity and local government engagement.

"It's a time when we can really start concentrating on our communities," McKenna said. "Let's freshen them up, make them look clean, make them look pristine."

ROOST will continue to prepare to welcome visitors back and engage communities. Appropriate events will be considered, and road trip itineraries and walking tours will be promoted.

## **Regional movement**

As the economy continues to open up, the marketing message will change to "The Adirondacks, we're open," focusing on regions within a three- to four-hour drive such as Albany, Syracuse, Rochester and the Hudson Valley.

“As things develop, we’ll see how that works, but we’re not looking at reaching out to the major metropolitan areas at this particular time,” McKenna said.

ROOST will focus on strengths of the Adirondack region: fresh air and open spaces, road trip itineraries, reconnecting with nature, affordable experiences and a return to traditional vacation experiences.

“What we mean by that is family travel,” McKenna said. “Maybe they’re in a hotel room playing Monopoly at night or certain things that maybe we haven’t experienced in the past. We have to be ready to provide those so that some travel can happen in the appropriate way.”

Businesses will have to ensure that cleanliness protocols are in place, and they’re easy for travelers to find as part of their travel planning process.

“The traveler will be different,” McKenna said. “They’ll have some new expectations. ... Most of the research says discretionary income will be lower. People will be ready for experiences, but they won’t be looking for long distances to travel. And drive-to destinations are certainly ones that will be favored.”