CHARACTERISTICS AND THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VISITORS TO HERITAGE AND CULTURAL TOURISM ATTRACTIONS IN NORTH DAKOTA

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ABSTRACT

Hodur, Nancy Marie, PhD, Program of Natural Resource Management, College of Graduate and Interdisciplinary Studies, North Dakota State University, February 2010. Characteristics and the Economic Impact of Visitors to Heritage and Cultural Tourism Attractions in North Dakota. Major Professor: Dr. F. Larry Leistritz.

In the last two decades, travel and tourism has grown into an increasingly important industry. More recently, travelers have sought out activities and attractions that focus on authenticity, heritage and uniqueness, and rural communities have begun to realize that their communities and attractions match well with what visitors are demanding. Naturally, interested parties such as policy makers, business developers, community leaders and economic development professionals have been highly motivated to substantiate claims of the economic benefits of tourism and tourist attractions. Because of interest in the economic development potential and the lack of appropriate estimates of economic impacts of heritage and cultural tourism in North Dakota, this study was undertaken to make a transparent estimate of the direct economic impacts and the economic contribution of heritage and cultural tourism in North Dakota. A survey instrument was developed to collect expenditure and other relevant data. Respondents’ motivation for visiting was used to differentiate between gross visitor expenditures (economic contribution) and net visitor expenditures (direct economic impacts). Direct economic impacts were allocated to the appropriate sectors of the North Dakota Input-Output model to estimate total (direct and secondary) economic impacts.

This study provides an assessment of North Dakota heritage and cultural tourism expenditures, direct and total economic impacts and economic contribution as well as
visitors' characteristics and attributes, motivation for visiting, visitation patterns and expenditure patterns based on motivation for visitation. Further, this study makes a defensible transparent estimate of the economic impact and the economic contribution of heritage and cultural tourism in North Dakota. A quality study is critical to make a fair assessment of the current and potential economic development opportunities associated with heritage and cultural tourism. In addition to quantifying the economic impact and economic contribution of heritage and cultural tourism, this study provides various constituent groups with an understanding of visitor characteristics, motivations for visiting and visitation and expenditure patterns. The estimate of the total economic contribution of visitors to North Dakota heritage and cultural tourism attractions demonstrates that while all expenditures are not "new dollars" to the larger state economy, they are an important part of economic activity in rural communities where heritage and cultural tourism attractions are often located.