

Steve Dobson, Board Member Aroostook County Tourism
Board Member Maine Tourism Association
Maine office of Tourism Partner
In Support of

LD1998, An Act to Transfer the Arch Hangar at the Former Loring Air Force Base to the Loring Air Museum

January 16, 2024

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business:

My name is Steve Dobson. Until recently I owned two Mom & Pop motel operations in The County. I sold them, and am presently building a small campground. I spend a great deal of my time promoting tourism in Aroostook County, by speaking to public service groups, attending trade shows, and on social media. I also promote tourism both Maine and Aroostook County through the committees I serve on.

As you may, or may not know, tourism and logging swap places as to who the largest industry is in the State of Maine for any given year.

The Maine Office of Tourism has recognized that the coast is over crowded during tourist season. They have recognized that overcrowding is not good for the communities, and does not provide a good experience for the tourist. The MOT has spent a substantial amount of money during the past year to promote inland vacations. Aroostook County has gotten a major share of that promotion. You will start seeing these promotions later this year.

Through my testimony today you will see how much Aroostook County benefits from tourism. I think the numbers will surprise you. I am also going to explain why and how Loring has a huge potential to grow tourism in Maine and Aroostook County.

Go to exhibit 1

Loring already is a tourism destination point to air force personnel that were stationed there, plus their family and friends. However Loring has a draw to tourist who has no family relationship to the former base. They are the Loring Air Museum, the Arch Hangar, North River Depot, and The Aroostook Wildlife Refuge. These places draw people from all over the USA without any coordinated publicity. The arch Hangar alone draws between 5,000 and 6,000 snowmobilers just to have their picture in front of this iconic building. There are about 4,000 tourists a year that visit the museum, and there are untold numbers of tourist that visit the North River Depot.

I would like to give you a few examples of this. A member of the MTA came up during the Crown of Maine Balloon Festival. She asked me to show her places to bring tourist in The County. I met with her in the lobby of The Northeastland Hotel. While I was in the lobby waiting for her there were four ladies who were looking the Aroostook Guide Book. They were asking questions amongst one another. I asked them what brought them to The County. They told me their parents had always spoken fondly of their time spent a Loring Air Force Base. They decided to come see where their parent served, what the people of Aroostook were about.

The MTA member and I went on tour of The County. While on Loring we went to the Arch Hangar, The National Wildlife Refuge, and then down to the North River Depot. While there were another six or eight people looking at the bunkers. These were people in their twenties. One gentleman stopped and asked me about the bunkers and was it ok for them to be there. I assured him he was fine to be there, before I got ready to leave them he asked me what the very large ache was.

I have many more stories that I could tell about tourist visiting the former Loring Air Force Base. However to save time I will move on. If you would like to hear more just contact me.

In my opinion the Former Loring Air Force Base is a diamond in the rough when it comes to the growth of tourism in Aroostook County. It is located just a mile from Spud Speedway has become a huge destination point in the last two years. This is mainly due to the Snow Bowl, and the Mud Bowl.

With a coroneted promotion for the Museum/Arch Hanger, North River Depot, and the Nation Wildlife Refuge, in my opinion Loring could draw each year as many tourists as the Houlton Fourth of July Celebration, the Crown of Maine Balloon Festival, The Potato Blossom Festival, and the Acadien Festival.

I ask for your support of LD 1998 to grow the Tourism Industry in Aroostook County.
Thank you for your time.

Respectably submitted
Steve Dobson

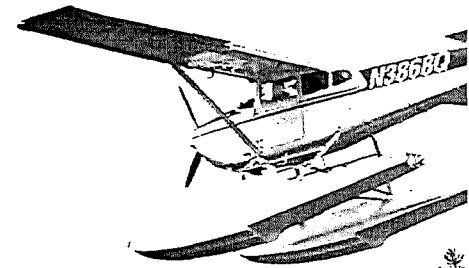
Exhibit One

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Visitor spending generated

\$246,453,400

in economic impact to Aroostook County's
economy, up 13.0% from 2021

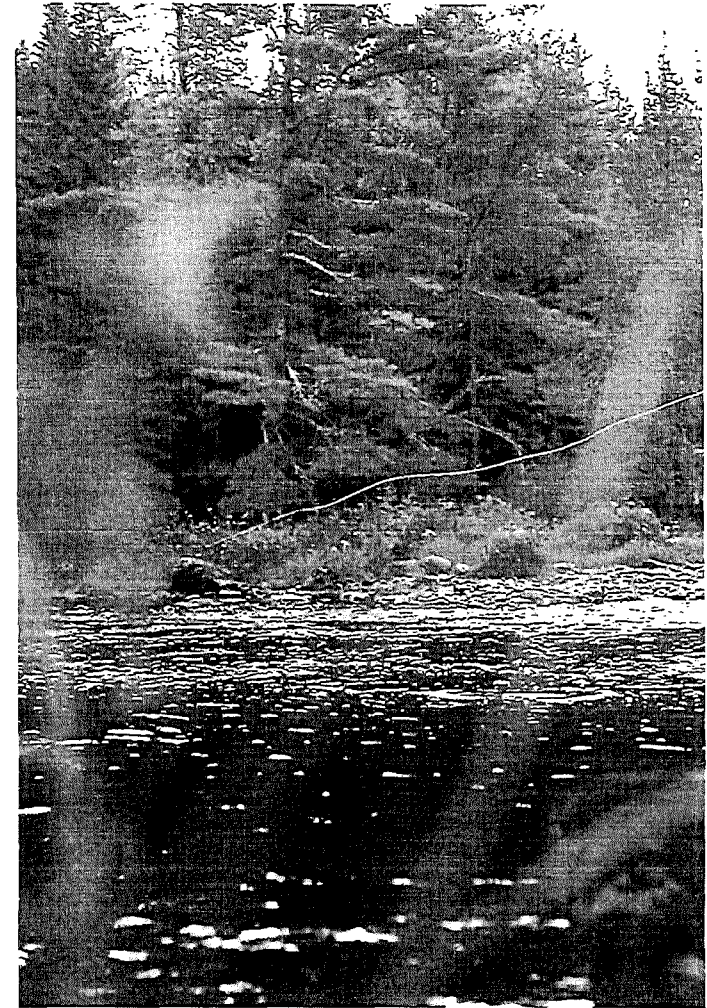


DIRECT SPENDING

Visitors to Aroostook County spent

\$160,705,800

throughout the county in 2022 on accommodations, transportation, groceries, restaurants, shopping, entertainment, and other expenses, up **13.2%** from 2021



VISITORS

Aroostook County attracted

282,900

visitors in 2022, down 1.2% from 2021

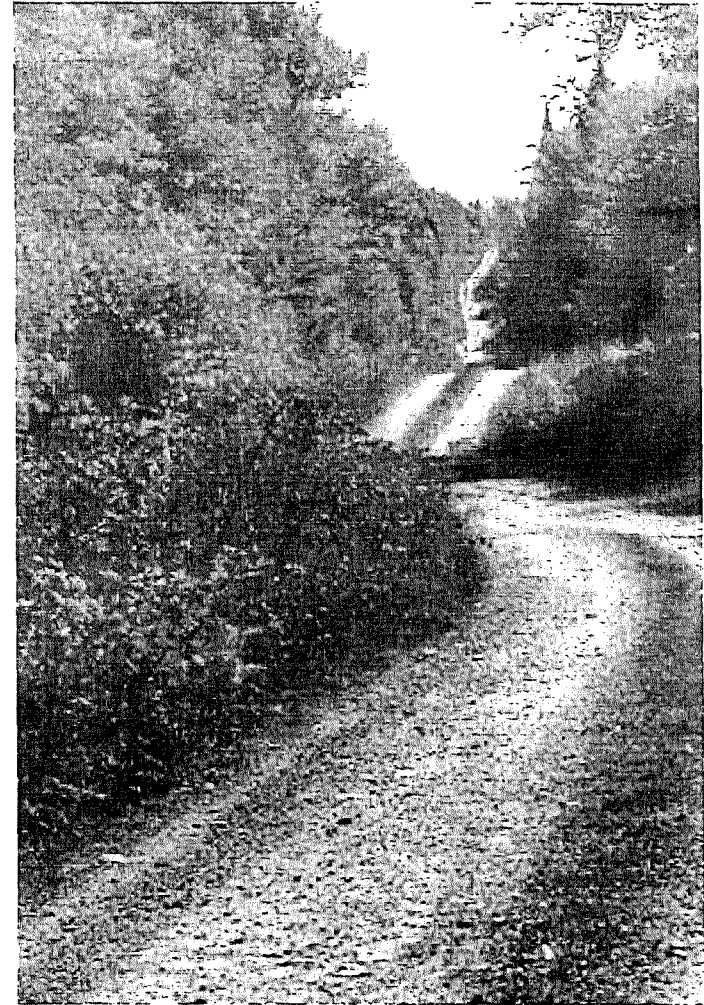


VISITOR DAYS**

All visitors to Aroostook County spent

1,105,200

days in Aroostook County throughout 2022



*Visitor days is the total number of days spent by visitors in the state of Maine. This includes

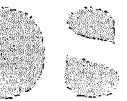
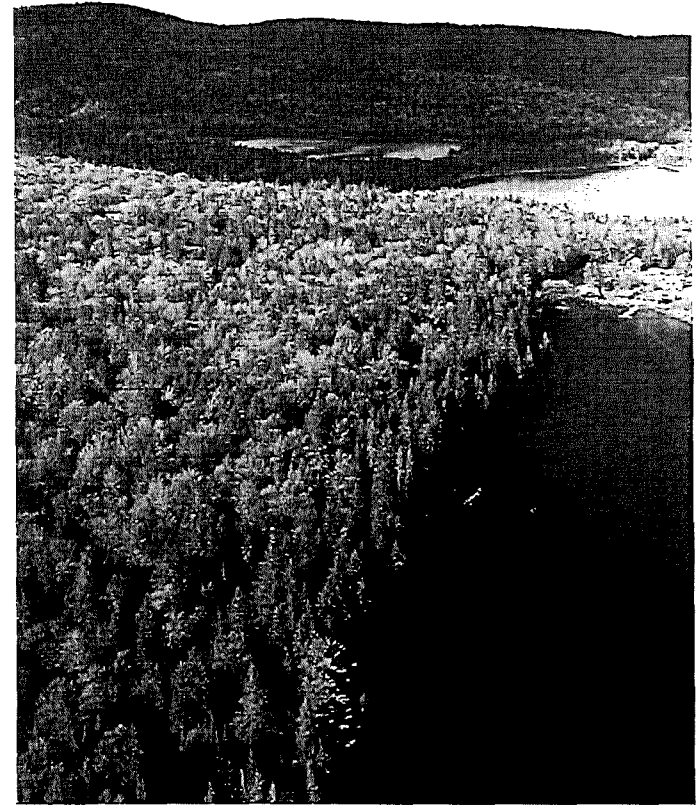


JOBS SUPPORTED

Visitors to Aroostook County supported the creation of

2,650

jobs throughout the county in 2022, up
6.0% from 2021

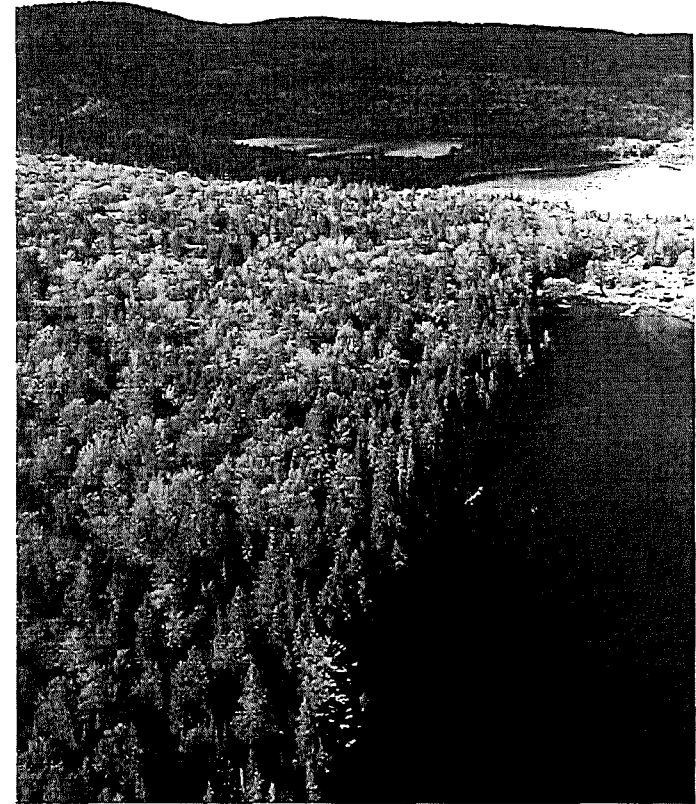


JOBS SUPPORTED

Visitors to Aroostook County supported the creation of

2,650

jobs throughout the county in 2022, up
6.0% from 2021

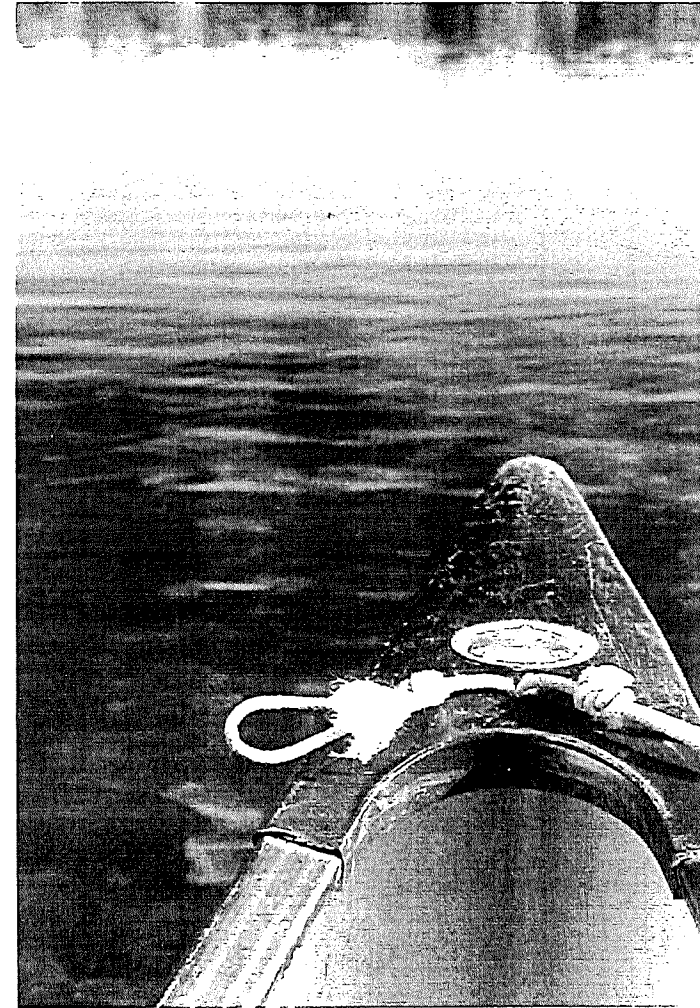


WAGES GENERATED

Visitors to Aroostook County supported

\$75,777,400

in wages paid to Aroostook County employees
in 2022, up 12.5% from 2021



VISITORS & JOBS

Every

107

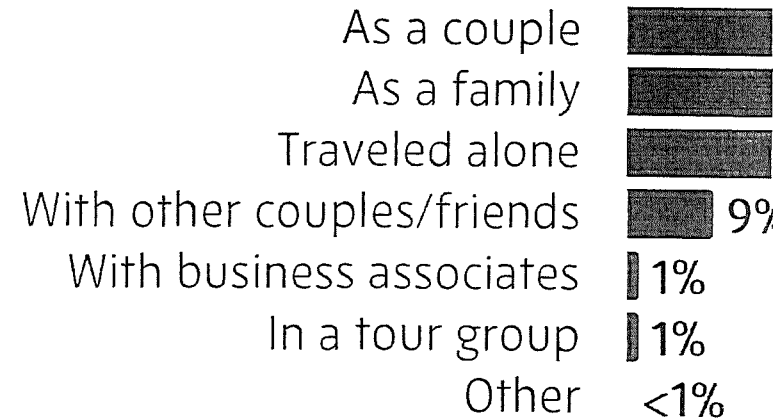
visitors supports a new job in Aroostook County



TRAVEL PARTIES

- » Typical visitors traveled to Maine in parties of 2.5 people
- » Nearly half of visitors traveled as a couple
- » 1 in 4 traveled as a family
- » 16% of visitors traveled with one or more children in their travel party

Travel Party Composition



Children in Travel Party

