

## Two-wheeled tourism

### Forum held to spur discussion on better targeting of bikers

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GLENS FALLS - Tourists who ride into town on bicycles can have a bigger economic impact than their slight transportation lets on.

The country has more bicyclists than golfers, skiers and tennis players combined, and riders can spend between \$150 and \$300 a day during overnight trips, according to statistics cited by Parks & Trails New York.

The advocacy group held a forum on bicycle tourism Wednesday night at Crandall Public Library meant to catalyze discussion about growing and promoting bicycle tourism, which members of the group said deserves more attention than it's paid.



About 50 people attended the event -- the eighth hosted by Parks & Trails across the state over the past three years -- including representatives from municipalities, bike shops, tour groups, tourism agencies, nonprofits and trail coalitions.

Robin Dropkin, executive director of Parks and Trails, said many communities have a long way to go in marketing to bicycle tourists and embracing them once they arrive.

Dropkin, a cycling tourist herself, talked about the amenities she looks for during and before a trip -- from good signs to planning materials to shuttles to cyclist-friendly hotels.

"This is not being done to the level that it really could and should be done," Dropkin said.

She encourages local officials to ride the trails and paths in their area to see first-hand how they could be made better, and said local governments can create trail and biking advisory committees as a way to stay on top of the issues.

Some improvements suggested by the audience included bike racks for the Lake George seasonal trollies, improved signs and bike lanes on the roads and better communication with business owners about how they can cater to tourists on two wheels.

The Washington County Tourism Department noted that it is producing a video for its Web site about the area's trails, while Glens Falls plans to add six bike racks downtown this summer.

Joanne Conley with the Warren County Tourism Department said the meeting drove home that cyclists -- whether a group of touring riders on a weeklong trip or a family that rides to Lake George for ice cream and mini-golf -- can have a big economic impact.

"I'm thinking it's an untapped source of income in these economic times," she said.

Conley said her office already includes information about cycling in its travel guide, but more work can be done informing local businesses about catering to the demographic.

As the two-hour forum wore on, the talk settled on a perceived local lack of marketing to cyclists and a lack of synergy among the region's trail systems.

"Clearly, there is a need for our community to start having that conversation about the importance of bicycle tourism," said Alice Grether, tourism director for Glens Falls.

But before the discussion takes place on a regional level, Grether believes it has to come together locally.

"We need to start having the discussion here, as will other communities," she said. "Then there will come a point where we'll be able to connect the dots."

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