
A-4 Opinion / Commentary

Times Observer

Tuesday
April 10, 2001

Our opinion: We have to offer more

The figures may be imprecise, but officials for the U.S. Forest Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, and Chapman State Park all seem to agree that tourism in Kinzua County is declining.

That revelation last week at a meeting of the Warren County Intergovernmental Co-Op left local officials scratching their heads looking for reasons for the decline in tourism on the Allegheny National Forest, and at Kinzua Dam and Chapman State Park, this area's premier attractions.

Actually, the decline isn't all that difficult to explain. When it comes to tourism, this area seems to go out of its way not to cater to people who want to leave their money behind when they are done with their vacations. One need look no further than similar communities in or near scenic natural resources like Allegheny

National Forest to understand the truth of that statement, communities like Old Forge, N.Y., in the Adirondacks or North Conway, N.H., on the edge of the White Mountains National Forest.

What do they have that we don't?

Start with plenty of accommodations, many located to take advantage of those area's scenic attractions. Add to that plenty of shops which cater to the activities people come to those areas to enjoy, everything from hiking and rock climbing to mountain biking and canoeing. Throw in a mix of establishments offering the type of crafts and artwork and just plain kitsch which tourists are apt to purchase in their more relaxed moments and which encourage retail browsing.

Then take a look at how those area's natural attractions are managed. Recreation gets top billing both in

the Adirondack Forest Preserve and in the White Mountains National Forest. Hiking trails run into the thousands of miles in both areas, giving dispersed recreationists that many more reasons to return. Facilities for canoeists and other water lovers, including well thought out camping areas abound. Even the Allegheny's "sister" national forest, the Monongahela offers far more, including three substantial wilderness areas and a much larger trail system.

The Allegheny isn't the Adirondacks or the White Mountains, but it has much to offer tourists of all kinds. Unfortunately, this area has done little to market itself as a destination and even less to offer tourists the ancillary attractions, accommodations, and amenities which make people want to visit and return.