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Redwood Geographic: National Geographic tourism site aims to market North Coast attractions

John Driscoll/The Times-Standard

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National Geographic has launched a guide to the Redwood Coast meant to draw tourists interested in delving into the region's history, culture and natural beauty.

The project of National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations spans the six coastal California counties from San Francisco north. The unveiling occurred officially in Scotia on Thursday, just months after explorer Mike Fay and local activist Lindsay Holm completed a trek across redwood country that was chronicled in a National Geographic magazine cover story.

The concept behind the project, which includes a geotourism Web site and MapGuide, is to create a unified regional approach to tourism. It provides a tool for small and medium-sized businesses to market their "authentic appeal," said center Associate Director James Dion.

There are already Web sites that treat tourism as a commodity, Dion said, but don't encourage sustainable travel geared to the character of the place they are marketing.

"Tourism well-managed can bring a lot of benefits to a place," Dion said. "Tourism poorly managed can do a lot of damage."

On the Web site, viewers can use the map to bring up information on trails, endangered animals, events, and places to stay and eat.

The project was developed along with the North Coast Tourism Council and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and was initially geared at showcasing the California Coastal National Monument, the scattered rocks just off the coast. Dion said it was a coincidence that Fay was on his trek in 2007-2008 while the project was being developed.

"This sustainability project has been led and driven by dozens of leaders donating time, money and expertise so we can all feel confident about our collective futures and help preserve the things that make the North Coast so extraordinary," said Tourism Council project leader Richard Strom.

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