



Les Thomas, President (TMBCI) lesthomas52@yahoo.com
Gary Snow, Vice President (MHA) gsnow@mhanation.com
Matthew Thompson, Secretary (SWO) matt.thompson.sd@gmail.com
Colette Brown, Treasurer (SLN) cbrownsln@gmail.com
Jennifer Martel At Large (SRST) jennifer.martel@sittingbull.edu
Stacey LaCompte, Executive Director (SRST) info@ndnta.com

Hihaani Waste - Good morning Chairman Schauer, Vice Chair Satrom and, members of the committee,

My name is Stacey LaCompte, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe: Executive Director North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance (NDNTA). I express my strong support for House Bill 1581, A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation to the department of commerce for tribal tourism grants.

Supporting Cultural Heritage Tourism Development in North Dakota A Path to Economic Growth and Cultural Preservation

Introduction

Cultural Heritage Tourism is a rapidly growing sector that presents a unique opportunity for North Dakota to enhance its economy while honoring and preserving the rich traditions of its Indigenous communities.

The North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance (NDNTA) leads the Nation in *coordinated statewide tribal tourism* development. The statewide alliance model – first funded by the NATIVE Act and developed by North Dakota tribes – is the most successful Native tourism development model in the U.S. today. NDNTA Board consists of 2 Tribal Members from each of the respected 5 Tribal Nations in ND.

Native tourism development builds community capacity, creates jobs, educates visitors and helps sustain a tribe's culture and environment. NDNTA has developed a strong partnership and collaboration with the ND Tourism Office to build a broad and unique Cultural Heritage Tourism in North Dakota.

Despite the potential for significant economic and cultural benefits, Tribal Nations in North Dakota face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to invest in tourism development. This document outlines the importance of integrating Indigenous Cultural Heritage Tourism into the state's budgeting process and creating dedicated funding streams to support this initiative.

The Need for State Support

Challenges Facing Tribal Nations:

- **Competing Priorities:** Tribal governments are often burdened with addressing critical issues such as healthcare, housing, and public safety. These pressing needs leave limited financial capacity to invest in tourism infrastructure and business development.
- **Limited Financial Resources:** Without external support, Tribal Nations struggle to allocate funds towards the growth of cultural tourism, which is essential for fostering economic independence and cultural sustainability.

Proposed Solutions:

1. Inclusion in State Budgeting Process:

- **Dedicated Funding Streams:** Establish a new funding mechanism within the state budget specifically earmarked for Indigenous Cultural Heritage Tourism. This could include:
 - **Start-Up Grants for Indigenous Entrepreneurs:** Provide seed funding to support the creation and growth of tourism-related small businesses in Indian Country. These grants would empower local entrepreneurs to develop authentic cultural experiences, crafts, and services that attract tourists.
 - **Tourism Infrastructure Development:** Allocate funds for the development and improvement of tourism infrastructure, such as cultural centers, museums, and parks within Tribal lands.
 - **Park Improvement Funding:** Enhance existing parks and recreational areas to make them more accessible and appealing to visitors, incorporating Indigenous cultural elements and history.

2. Economic and Cultural Benefits:

- **Job Creation and Economic Growth:** By investing in cultural tourism, North Dakota can stimulate local economies, creating jobs and new revenue streams for Indigenous communities.
- **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** Funding cultural heritage tourism ensures the protection and promotion of Indigenous traditions, languages, and histories, offering educational and enriching experiences for visitors.

Conclusion

Integrating Indigenous Cultural Heritage Tourism into North Dakota's budgeting process is not just an investment in economic development but also a commitment to preserving and celebrating the state's rich cultural diversity. By supporting Tribal Nations with dedicated funding, the state can foster a thriving tourism industry that benefits all North Dakotans while honoring its Indigenous heritage.

I urge the Government and Veterans Affairs Committee to give HB 1581 a **“Do Pass” recommendation**. By investing in tribal tourism, we are investing in the cultural, economic, and social growth of all the people of North Dakota. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Contact Information: For more information or to support this initiative, please contact Stacey LaCompte, Executive Director, NDNTA at info@ndnta.com.