

Destination Development Letter of Support

Greetings, My Name is Kelly Sorge owner/operator of Indian Hills Resort. We have a 40-year history on Lake Sakakawea offering camping and lodging. We are a unique entity as we have been partnered with the US Army Corp or Engineers, ND State Parks. MHA Nations and ND Game and Fish Dept. since 1984. On Nov 1st of 2023 we were fortunate enough to be awarded 40% of our \$500,000.00 grant application for the build of the Good Bear Bay Lodge.

I regret that I cannot be there in person, but I feel strongly about supporting this project. The Department of Commerce has worked tirelessly, and, like me, they are excited to see how extraordinary we can become with your support.

As Governor Burgum said during the one of the Destination Developments first grand openings at the Good Bear Bay Lodge, "It's about what we can be and what we can become." This sentiment perfectly captures the spirit of this initiative and the incredible potential it holds for our state.

In the winter months, I have the opportunity to travel out of state, which allows me to observe what other states are offering to attract visitors. I pay particular attention to their strategies, what draws guests, and how they compete in the tourism market. With so many destinations available, it's essential to understand what people are looking for in their travel experiences, as well as what and who are we competing with.

In our region, we identified a significant gap: the need for a larger, family-style lodge. This presented an opportunity to create a space where families, both residents and non-residents, could come together to enjoy one of the most beautiful areas of Lake Sakakawea.

However, this vision could not have become a reality without the support of the Destination Development Program. Within 12 short months, we were able to design, build, and open a facility that meets this need. Without this program, the project would have remained a dream.

Rising costs of building materials, labor, and interest rates made this project financially unfeasible for us as a business and as a family. The funding provided by the program allowed us to bring this vision to life and, importantly, keep our nightly rates affordable for our guests and traveling families.

This program not only enabled us to invest in our business but also enhanced North Dakota's tourism offerings, creating a destination that will serve visitors for years to come.

We strongly support the continuation of the Destination Development Program because we have seen its direct benefits to the local economy and the opportunities it creates for other businesses and communities. This program empowers non-government entities to overcome financial barriers, enabling the development of projects that drive tourism, create jobs, and foster economic growth.

I also want to emphasize that the grant process is rigorous. The program asks the right questions to ensure funding is directed to the most deserving projects—those with sustainable, long-term potential and a clear plan for success. This diligence ensures that funding is appropriated wisely and goes to grantees who can maximize its impact.

Continuing this program will provide critical support for similar projects across the state, ensuring that North Dakota remains a competitive and appealing destination for visitors while strengthening our communities.

Thank you all for your time and support.

Kelly and Dale Sorge.