

2011-2012

# Strategic Marketing Plan

And Program of Work



# PLUMAS

*County Visitors Bureau*

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## Mission Statement

The Plumas County Visitors Bureau (PCVB) is Plumas County's official destination marketing organization. Its primary mission is to position the county as a premier, year-round visitor destination and increase travel spending through external marketing, thereby diversifying the local economy and stimulating economic development.

PCVB's role is to be an umbrella for marketing Plumas County. PCVB serves as a communications link between numerous tourism marketing partners within the county, region and state to build consensus, unify the marketing message and avoid duplication of effort. PCVB provides assistance and information on industry issues, trends and product development, and acts as an advocate for the regional tourism industry.

The mission of PCVB is also to provide superior customer service to visitors and stakeholders, thereby encouraging repeat and extended stays, and demonstrating accountability and a return on investment.

## Plumas County's Tourism Industry

According to Dean Runyan Associates' "California Travel Impacts by County, 1992-2009," produced for the California Travel and Tourism Commission, an estimate of \$99.4 million was spent by travelers in Plumas County during 2009. This included \$22 million on accommodations, \$29.8 million on eating and beverage establishments, \$15.6 million on arts, entertainment and recreation, \$16.5 million on shopping, \$4.8 million on gas/transportation and \$9.5 million at food stores. A total of \$11.9 million in spending was generated by day travelers to Plumas County. During 2009, travel and tourism helped support 1,400 Plumas County jobs, resulted in \$35.9 million in earnings, and generated \$5.1 million in state and local taxes.

As of May 2011, the inventory of **lodging** in Plumas County includes 619 motel and B&B rooms, 405 property rentals and 333 cabins, for a total of **1,357**. The inventory of **camping** includes 2,060 private and 1,721 public campsites, for a total of **3,781**. There are 103 restaurants countywide.

## Organizational Structure and Partnerships

The Plumas County Visitors Bureau is a division of Plumas Corporation, a private, nonprofit public benefit corporation chartered in 1983 to promote economic development. The Bureau is a spin-off of the former Plumas County Chamber of Commerce, which had been in existence since 1932. In 1992, Plumas Corporation was contracted by the county to carry out the tourism promotion activities formerly provided by the chamber. Plumas County Visitors Bureau became the official name of the tourism arm of the corporation.

PCVB's offices and Visitors Center are located at 550 Crescent St., a half mile north of downtown Quincy. Currently, PCVB employs a staff of two.

The Plumas Corporation Board of Directors oversees PCVB, provides policy direction, and approves the bureau's budget. This 12 person group is made up of business people and interested parties appointed from the four area chambers of commerce (Eastern Plumas, Chester/Almanor, Indian Valley and Quincy), five members appointed by each district Plumas County Supervisor, a representative from the City of Portola, the Feather River-Coordinated Resource Management Group, and an at-large member.

### **Other Partnerships**

*Direct tourism service providers.* PCVB does not have a dues-paying membership, but it markets on behalf of a wide variety of businesses, services and agencies and event providers which serve the traveling public. These include lodging and camping providers, restaurants, attractions, parks and museums, services, retail stores and services, golf courses, recreation guides and services, health care facilities, Feather River College, real estate agencies and a host of others.

*Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association.* Plumas County is a member in this marketing organization, which represents eight counties on a membership-only basis. PCVB is the direct liaison to SCWA, and works with them on state-funded projects such as the regional visitors guide and presence at the California Welcome Center in Anderson.

*California Travel & Tourism.* PCVB maintains communication with staff from the California Travel & Tourism Commission.

*Western Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus.* PCVB is an active participant and peer resource to this regional professional association, which provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on visitor bureau management and the industry.

### **Marketing Goals and Objectives**

The situation analysis, overall goals and objectives, target markets and strategies of Plumas County Visitors Bureau's marketing program are built upon a previous document, the *Plumas County Tourism Marketing Plan*, which with yearly updates continues to guide the PCVB's program of work. The work plan also incorporates goals of the *Strategic Marketing Plan for Northern California Tourism and Outdoor Recreation* and the marketing plans of the regional marketing organization and California Tourism.

### **2011-2012 Program of Work and Strategic Initiatives**

The Plumas County Visitors Bureau's work plan is divided into the following areas:

- I. Internet Marketing/Web Site
- II. Media and Communications
- III. Publications/Photo Library
- IV. Visitor Information and Fulfillment
- V. Results and Research
- VI. Partnership Assistance/Industry Advocacy
- VII. Special Projects

## I. Internet Marketing/Web Site

*Objective: Use the latest in Internet technology and strategies to build a brand for Plumas County, and to advertise Plumas County as a vacation destination to a broader audience with the goal of converting web visits into actual visits.*

Strategy: PCVB will continue to research, implement and expand its e-travel marketing efforts and update its Web site graphics and content in order to reach new markets, drive traffic and conversion, and meet consumer demand for credible, up-to-date travel planning information. Online co-op ventures also will be considered.

- Web Site: PCVB will perform daily maintenance and updating of its countywide web site with fresh content and photos. The front page will be revamped five times a year to coincide with the change of seasons and seasonal attractions and activities, and to drive shoulder season business.

New initiatives for 2011-12 include:

- Developing a separate smaller site for mobile users.
- Adding Google maps.
- Updating Group Tour Itineraries
- Increase percentage and number of direct contacts from the Web site in calendar year 2011 as well as overall site visits. (In 2010, there were an average of 665 site visits per day as compared to 569 per day in 2009.)
- Search Engine Optimization:
  - Increase monthly SEO efforts performed by site host.
  - Key campaigns (fall foliage in northern California, Christmas tree cutting in northern California, and spring wildflowers and waterfalls in northern California) will be on page 1 or 2 of google and yahoo search engines sometime during the campaign.
- Email Marketing:
  - Send out at least four e-newsletters throughout the year through Constant Contact (or another provider.)
  - Have an open rate of 35% and above. (35% current average.)
  - Click through rate of 25% and above. (29 % current average.)
  - Keep contact list up to date removing those that are not deliverable.
  - Increase subscriptions from 3,793 (May 1) to 4,172 by May 1, 2012.

- Online Advertising:
  - Research online advertising and pay-per-click campaigns to replace traditional advertising.

- Social Media Marketing

Social Media Sites:

- Make daily to weekly relevant posts on Facebook and Twitter, with the goal of expanding fan base and interactivity with questions, links, photos and video.
- Add Plumas County videos to YouTube.com, a video-sharing site.

Blogs:

- Update Plumas Buzz at least once a week.
- Maintain birder news list with up to date emails from local birders.
- Maintain fishing report from up to date reports from local sources.
- Syndicate the fishing report through RSS feeds.
- Daily leaf peeper reports from the middle of September through the first week of November.
- Bloom Blog, weekly wildflower/waterfall reports from March – July.

Evaluation: Web site activity and links will be monitored through monthly site analysis provided by the ISP and Google Analytics. Web use also will be monitored in PCVB's direct inquiry analysis which measures customers who email or phone after viewing a Web site. Search engine position reports and key word research will be performed to determine SEO efforts. Open and click-thru rates will be tabulated to evaluate e-mail marketing. Blog strategy will be measured by consumer participation and visitation. Social media strategy analyzed through weekly reports provided by Facebook and contact forms, links and phone inquiries.

## II. Media and Communications

*Objective: Create and increase beneficial media placement opportunities and publicity for Plumas County and its travel product.*

Strategy: PCVB will continue to give top priority to assisting and developing relationships with travel and golf writers, guidebook editors, radio and television programs, photographers, freelance writers from “niche” publications, on-line editors and bloggers.

- Media Kit Development/Distribution – Sent by request or for a specific promotion, these contain countywide story ideas, fact sheets, visitor brochures, digital photos and videos.
- Press Release Distribution – New product development or all-county promotions will be highlighted in press releases sent to specific media. Visitors Guides and e-newsletters sent annually to media list. PCVB will continue relationship with California Tourism’s media relations effort by contributing press releases. Continuation of KGO radio interviews in October (and other times as invited.)
- Media List Update – PCVB’s media list (physical and online) will continue to be added to, updated and available to tourism partners.
- Press Release Assistance – PCVB will offer assistance on development of press releases or conducting media interviews to tourism partners.
- Familiarization Tours/Media Marketplace - PCVB will continue to assist Weidinger Public Relations in the group High Sierra Golf Media Tour, and will set up other tours for individual media, with the assistance of lodging providers.
- Crisis Communications – PCVB will assist the County of Plumas in developing a plan for talking with media in the event that a situation or natural disaster generates significant publicity for Plumas County.
- Image Lending – PCVB will respond to media requests for reproduction-quality images by providing photo CD’s and electronic images from its photo library. Editing and caption writing will be supplied.

Evaluation: Media tracking will be measured by total number of media placements, number of media contacts, total comparable ad value for all placements, and number of inquiries generated by each placement. PCVB will continue to maintain a clipbook of placements and distribute to partners. Further tracking could include circulation of individual media.

### III. Publications/Photo Library

*Objective: To attract and inform potential and actual visitors about Plumas County's tourism product; to provide up-to-date vacation planning information to be used by both customers and tourism providers that represents all of Plumas County in a unified manner.*

Strategy: Research, produce, print and distribute countywide collateral material; maintain photo library, acquire images and advertise ongoing photo request list. Contribute to and distribute regional and state publications.

- Official Visitors Guide – PCVB will continue partnership with Feather Publishing on publication and distribution of Plumas County Visitors Guide. Includes research, writing, proofing, photo editing. PCVB will distribute approximately 10,000 copies through fulfillment and select out-of-county distribution points.
- Plumas County Dining Guide – PCVB will continue partnership with Feather Publishing to supply information gathered from countywide restaurants to produce the “grid” within the advertiser-supported publication.
- Production/Reprints of Countywide Special Interest Brochures – Using the Brochure Reprint Policy adopted in 2000, PCVB will continue to research, produce, print and distribute a series of 15-20 additional brochures to complement the Visitors Guide. Included are Plumas County Hiking, Mountain Biking and Dining, Fall Colors and Winter Recreation guides; Backcountry Tours, Plumas County Bird List, Feather River Scenic Byway brochure, 100 Free things to Do in Plumas County and others.
- Photo Library – PCVB will continue to maintain and add to its library of digital images and video covering all of Plumas County, for the purposes of tourism promotion. This will include acquisitions, editing, hiring photographers and setting up models and itineraries. Staff will continue to themselves photograph subjects, events and locations needed for certain media, publications or website pages. Photo selection and loaning program will continue for media, publications, websites, advertising, and tourism partners. Master CDs will be created each year to keep up with new and changing tourism product, with specific requests sent to photographers.
- Partnership or Regional Publications & Web Sites – PCVB will coordinate research needed for regional and state visitors guides and supply editorial and photographs and assist in local distribution. Editorial assistance, photos and possible cost-share will be provided on partnership brochures. Web site editorial/images provided to partners.

Evaluation: Inventory/cost and distribution reports will be kept on publications to determine usage and supply needed. Quality and accuracy of publications will be determined from feedback from customers and tourism providers. Use of photo library will be monitored through email and/or CD distribution, numbers of images added, and collection of published photos.

#### **IV. Visitor Information and Fulfillment**

*Objective: To provide superior customer service that not only sells Plumas County to the visitor, but gets them to return again or extend their stays.*

Strategy: PCVB will continue to be a centralized source of visitor information for all of Plumas County, and will continue its literature fulfillment program through use of an 800-line, email and FAX. In addition, PCVB will operate a walk-in Visitors Center and a referral service aimed at making direct sales of tourism product to travelers.

- Literature Fulfillment Program – Requests for information and literature will continue to be solicited by strategically placing the 800-number and website in all ads, publicity, directories, publications, and other marketing, including a contact form on the Web site. These requests will then be “fulfilled” by mailing information packets to the prospective customer or through phone conversation. PCVB will continue to operate three phone lines plus an 800-line to service these requests, and staff also will answer inquiries by FAX, email and mail.
- Referrals from Chambers – PCVB will continue to provide mail fulfillment services to local chambers of commerce, tourism providers and others that receive visitor inquiries.
- Walk-in Service – PCVB will continue to operate a year-round Visitors Center, with Saturdays staffed all year and extended hours from May to October. The Center will provide a wealth of countywide tourist information, display space for tourism providers, a rest area for travelers, and one-on-one customer interaction with the sales potential to turn drive-thru travelers and day-trippers into overnight stays. Customers also will have access to free wireless Internet.
- Product Knowledge – Keeping up on the constantly changing tourism product will continue to be a priority for PCVB. This includes numerous phone calls, site inspections, visits with providers, staff familiarization tours, and meetings. The information is shared with chambers and other partners.
- Centralized Lodging Availability System and Online Vacancy List – This highly-valued service will continue to be operated by PCVB staff during times of high occupancy and during the summer. Lists of available rooms are tallied by contacting every lodging and camping provider in the county on a weekly basis. This list, shared with chambers, then enables customers to book reservations without having to make numerous phone calls. New this year will be an improved online vacancy list maintained by participating lodging providers that gives consumers this information online with additional links to lodging provider Web sites.
- Retail Sales – The Visitor Center will continue sales of promotional items, maps, guidebooks and other travel-oriented literature.

Evaluation: PCVB maintains a database that records information on every inquiry, and inquiry reports are issued monthly and annually. Walk-in visitors are tallied each day, and an optional guest book is used to obtain information about them. Tourism providers can attest to the value of referrals and repeat visitors from PCVB. Feedback is collected from visitors on quality of customer service. Retail sales will be monitored through inventory and bookkeeping.

## V. Results and Research

*Objective: To demonstrate accountability for PCVB's marketing program, evaluate the effectiveness of various marketing tools and to obtain information on customers in order to make educated decisions on specific marketing strategies.*

Strategy: Track all inquiries to PCVB, conduct surveys, monitor program effectiveness through reports and communicate results, keep up on industry trends and research studies, and solicit marketing data from tourism providers.

- Tracking & Inquiry Analysis – PCVB continue to create a database and track information on each inquiry, including demographics, interests, and what marketing tool generated the inquiry. Other inquiries will be tallied, and walk-in visitors will be encouraged to sign a guestbook that requests marketing data. Inquiry reports will be produced and analyzed monthly and annually, and results will be reported.
- Walk-in Guestbook Analysis – PCVB will research and prepare a report on walk-in visitors to its Visitors Center. Results will be shared with tourism partners.
- Website Metrics – A contact form on the site will be used to track information on website use beyond the tabulation of visitor user sessions, and to determine how the web user found the site. Monthly reports obtained from the Web site host will be analyzed and compiled into an annual report. Open and click-through rates will be monitored from e-newsletters. Other metrics include a Web site user demographics summary. Future plans are to develop an on-line survey and use Google analytics to obtain further information.
- Social Media Metrics – Weekly reports provided by Facebook will be analyzed and added to the monthly inquiry report. Reports from Twitter also will be reviewed during specific campaigns.
- Program Results Reports – PCVB will continue to research, prepare and disseminate reports to evaluate various programs, including advertising analysis, media clipbook and others. These reports will be available to all partners. An annual report will also be prepared and reported to the Plumas County Board of Supervisors.
- Visitor Survey – Data from the Plumas County Visitor Survey conducted by PCVB in 1998 will continue to be distributed to the public. Data from this survey will be used in making marketing decisions.
- TOT Reports and Analysis – PCVB will continue to collect data from the Plumas County Tax Collectors Office and prepare quarterly reports on transient occupancy tax collections. This report will be analyzed and distributed to tourism providers and partners.
- Industry Research – Working with California Tourism's Research Division, PCVB will continue to collect, study and disseminate research reports conducted by the state.

Evaluation: Production and distribution of the various reports, and implementation of recommended strategies based on the results. Continued public support and increased funding for tourism program based demonstration of accountability.

## VI. Partnership Assistance/Industry Advocacy

*Objective: To build consensus between and coordinate tourism marketing efforts among partners in order to increase understanding, improve communications, eliminate duplication of effort, unify the marketing message and better leverage marketing dollars.*

Strategy: On a daily basis, PCVB will continue to initiate co-operative marketing relationships, provide assistance and maintain close communication with tourism partners throughout the county, region and state. PCVB will act as an advocate for the tourism industry and undertake efforts to educate the public and local elected officials about the value of tourism and recreation.

- Partner Programs – PCVB will continue to work within the structure of partnerships identified in the *Plumas County Tourism Marketing Plan*. PCVB will continue to share information and provide staff assistance, materials, publications, cost-shares, letters of support, etc., to tourism partners as reiterated throughout this workplan.
- Liaison to Region and State – PCVB will continue to be the official liaison to Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association and the California Travel and Tourism Commission and will provide assistance to those partners. PCVB also will provide assistance to members of Western Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus through its peer resource program.
- Meetings – PCVB staff will attend board meetings, mixers, open houses, etc. as needed to network with tourism partners. Staff also will attend the Plumas Corporation Board of Directors meetings. PCVB also will maintain communication with the Plumas County Board of Supervisors to give program updates.
- Newsletter and Local Public Relations – PCVB will continue to use the “Chamber Update” column to inform local businesses about its activities. Continue to educate and provide stories and photos to local media on tourism, recreation and hospitality issues.
- Board Member/Partner Communications – PCVB will continue to disseminate annual reports, committee agendas and minutes, and other correspondence to tourism partners.
- Speakers Bureau – PCVB will seek out opportunities for sharing information about local tourism industry issues or PCVB’s marketing program at community forums and presentations. PCVB also will make presentations to other tourism professionals to share ideas and experience.
- Professional Training – PCVB staff will seek out and attend professional training and industry networking opportunities, including those offered by Western Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus, in order to broaden their knowledge and stay abreast of new tourism marketing strategies and industry trends.
- Infrastructure and Business Assistance – PCVB will continue to work with Plumas Corporation’s economic development staff to assist tourism businesses and those considering starting a tourism-related business. PCVB staff will supply any research and anecdotal information, answer questions and will refer inquiries to Plumas Corporation staff.

## VII. Special Projects

*Objective: To provide opportunities for improving or expanding tourism marketing efforts and meeting new or unanticipated demands for product, service or assistance.*

Strategy: PCVB will continue to seek out opportunities for new initiatives or special projects in the form of grants, co-ops, all-county or regional promotions. PCVB also will be available to assist with unanticipated tourism-related issues that fall under its area of responsibility. As these projects become incorporated into PCVB's general workplan, PCVB will seek to expand its funding base and level of staffing.

- Fall Colors Promotion – PCVB will continue its successful integrated marketing communications strategy designed to make fall foliage a major cross-county “event.” This will include maintaining a blog with photos and updates on fall color and soliciting volunteers for leaf-peeper reports, self-guided tours, press release distribution, e-newsletters, radio interviews, brochure publication, social media, etc.
- Spring Wildflower/Waterfalls Promotion – PCVB will continue this popular Web-based campaign, modeled after the fall foliage promotion. This will include maintaining a blog with updates and photos of wildflowers and waterfalls, soliciting volunteers for petal-peeper reports, self-guided tours and press release distribution, e-newsletters, social media, etc.
- Christmas Tree Promotion – PCVB will continue this campaign geared at bringing visitors up for Christmas tree cutting, shopping and holiday events. Campaign includes an optimized Web “microsite” and an e-newsletter article.
- Film Liaison – PCVB will continue to be the official county liaison to the California Film Commission and will respond to requests for film locations and film scout assistance. PCVB will take the lead on assisting producers should a major film or commercial select Plumas County for a location.
- Plumas County Travel Packages and Tours Development – PCVB will continue to update the 16 online itineraries which were developed for group tour and special interest travel during the off-season, from October through May. The itineraries will be integrated into all aspects of PCVB marketing, and specific promotions will be carried out as possible. Staff will assist bus tour operators with itineraries, distribute literature and arrange “on-board greetings.”

Evaluation: Seasonal promotions will be monitored by inquiry/visitor traffic, search engine rankings, and TOT. Film location requests and results will be reported. Group tour/special interest itineraries will be monitored by inquiry/website traffic and group bookings.

### The Partnership Approach

PCVB's program of work outlined above is backed by a premise outlined in the *1996 Plumas County Tourism Marketing Plan* :

*“The ‘Partners of Tourism’ partnership is a critical component of the future of the tourism industry in Plumas County. The commitment to cooperative ventures and solutions on the part of the primary partners will largely determine the success or failure of this overall effort.”*

PCVB's work plan assumes that other work falling under the roles and responsibilities of the primary partners (i.e. chambers of commerce, U.S. Forest Service, Plumas Arts, Fair Association and Museum) will continue to be funded and carried out. The PCVB work plan depends on these

partnership efforts as they are an integral part of a whole, coordinated countywide tourism marketing plan. Each agency depends on the others.

The assistance PCVB provides to its primary partners has been stated throughout the work plan, but it may be helpful to summarize **how local chambers of commerce are served by the programs carried out by PCVB:**

- Product Information Updates
- Countywide Photo Library Use
- Media List and Press Release Help
- Familiarization Tours
- Media Placements
- Cooperative Advertising
- Plumas County Visitors Guides and Dining Guides
- Specialty Countywide Publications
- Plumas County Maps
- E-mail Newsletters
- Social media promotion via blogs, Facebook and Twitter sites.
- Web Site Links
- Promotional Displays
- Mail Fulfillment Service via Web contact forms
- Centralized Lodging Vacancy Reports/Lodging Referrals/Online Vacancy List
- Tracking Software
- TOT Reports and Research
- Liaison to Region and State
- Plumas Corporation Representation
- Chamber Update Column
- Industry Advocacy
- Grant Projects
- Film Industry Liaison
- Cross-county promotions

### **Looking Ahead**

Both transient occupancy tax and tourism product have continued to grow in the past decade, despite a slowing of the growth during the past few years. TOT for 2010 totalled \$ 1,098,873, according to the Plumas County Tax Collector's Office.

This steady rise of TOT over the past decade clearly shows that tourism marketing efforts are paying off, tourism infrastructure is expanding, and there is increased demand for visitor information services.

PCVB staff expect Plumas County's tourism industry to rebound and continue to grow, given the success of the Internet and social media as a critical marketing tool for rural regions.

The Plumas County Visitors Bureau has a strong track record of accountability and proven return on investment.\* PCVB has gained recognition for its success in marketing a large, rural, and relatively unknown part of the state. PCVB looks forward to continuing this success as it enters its 80<sup>th</sup> year of service to Plumas County.

*\*A Visitor Survey conducted in 1998 proved that, for every \$1 invested in PCVB's literature fulfillment program only—there was a return of \$12. This study (available by request) was statistically valid and modeled after the California Travel and Tourism Commission's own ROI tools.*