

LOCALNEWS

Effort aims to promote region as vacation location

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

Marketing Borderland and surrounding areas as a go-to vacation destination took one step closer to a contract with National Geographic.

Representatives of Heart of the Continent Partnership met with Koochiching County commissioners Tuesday to seek funding for a contract with National Geographic. The partnership is a Canadian-American coalition working on cross-border projects that promote the economic, cultural and natural health of the lakes, forests and communities on the Minnesota-Ontario border.

The county board pledged \$2,500 in support of the effort.

“We need to embrace initiatives like this that support our second-largest industry, which is tourism,” said Eric Johnson, a Borderland resident and business owner who is a member of the HOCP design team.

Johnson, along with St. Louis County Commission-



Representatives of the Heart of the Continent Partnership are from the left, Doug Franchot, chairman of the Voyageurs National Park Association; Frank Jewell, St. Louis County commissioner; and Eric Johnson, who is on the effort’s design team, discuss partnering with the National Geographic Society Tuesday at the Koochiching County Board meeting.

er Frank Jewell and Doug Franchot, chairman of the Voyageurs National Park Association, explained that HOCP plans to partner with National Geographic Society to create a regional tourism initiative, including a map and website. Drawing input and involvement from a wide spectrum of local stakeholders, this

“geotourism” project aims to sustain and enhance the geographical character of the regions’ environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well being of its residents by highlighting resources in Heart of the Continent communities.

If \$190,000 is raised, the men said HOPC will become

a part of NGS’s network of geotourism websites, which will hopefully gain visibility and awareness of the region. Eventually, they said, \$256,000 will be needed for the effort.

“We’re delighted to have a new project that we think is going to tremendously impact the region and the community,” Franchot

said. “We’re going to build to a whole other level of collaboration and partnerships around the region.”

Franchot continued that International Falls has been a key component in HOCP and programs associated with the effort, especially since it is one of the entry points to Canada.

“And it is part of Voya-

geurs National Park,” he said.

With the support of other communities on both sides of the border, \$166,000 has been gathered towards the contract with National Geographic, but in-kind donations – including volunteers and local government input – will also be needed for complete success.

“Eric is an example of someone playing an in-kind role,” Jewell said.

Jewell said the importance of the National Geographic Society contract is threefold. First, he said, is a National Geographic map defining the area. Second, HOCP will be included on a website designed by National Geographic that is interlinked with other sites. And third, a collaboration among all the partners across the area working together to make the HOCP region a place people are interested in.

“(National Geographic) sees the border lakes region as a remarkable place that is unnoticed by many people,” he said. “It really is a site they feel should get more acknowledgment.”



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