



UPDATE: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY GEOTOURISM PROJECT  
&  
UNESCO STARLIGHT DESTINATION & RESERVE PROJECT

**Geotourism**

La Société Touristique Bon Temps d'Argyle, as the lead organization for our region's Acadian heritage-themed Geotourism Project, is pleased to say that the Municipality of the District of Argyle, the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth, the Municipality of Clare, and the Town of Yarmouth have all endorsed the National Geographic Society (NGS) Geotourism Charter. These endorsements constitute a moral commitment to pursue future tourism expansion following Geotourism principles of sustainable and appropriate development that fosters a unique sense of place.

Directors of the Bon Temps Society are also meeting with officials from Parks Canada and the Grand Pre World Heritage Site to seek their involvement.

The Director of the National Geographic Society Center for Sustainable Destinations has repeatedly provided us with a figure of U.S. \$100,000 to engage in a Geotourism Map/Guide Project. He has repeated this same figure in an interview with *Radio Canada*. National Geographic is very encouraging of local efforts and has been kept apprised as progress is made.

**Financing and Stewardship Council**

Once we are in a position to state affirmatively to National Geographic that there are funds committed to the project, we will then begin contract negotiations with the Map Department of the NGS, with the guidance and input of the Center for Sustainable Destinations.

The necessary step *prior* to any detailed negotiations is for us to form a Geotourism Stewardship Council with representatives of all stakeholders, including currently the Bon Temps Society and the municipal units that have endorsed the Charter. Seats on the Stewardship Council will be linked to a financial commitment from the municipalities.

The plan is for each of the 4 municipalities to contribute \$12,500 each, seeking the balance of funding from any future participants and/or other sources such as the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, the Province, and/or private grants. The timetable for completing the project is about 2 years from now; we believe a more hurried schedule would not allow sufficient time for community consultation and product development.

We are therefore asking for a commitment of \$12,500 from the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth for the 2013/14 fiscal year to get the process with National Geographic on the road. Based on figures provided thus far by NGS, the plan is for this to be a one-time contribution.



## **UNESCO Starlight Foundation**

The night time skies of Argyle-Yarmouth-Clare are among the darkest and clearest in the world, yet relatively accessible for tourists. The Starlight Initiative was launched in 2007 from a proposal of the IAC supported by UNESCO - MaB Programme, UNWTO, IAU, and other international conventions such as UNEP-CMS, SCBD, and Ramsar Convention, and is designed as an international action in defence of the values associated with the night sky and the general right to observe the stars. The Starlight Foundation is the body in charge of the operational management of the Starlight Initiative, providing human resources and means for its development and promotion.

The aim of this Initiative is to promote the importance of clear skies for the humankind, emphasizing and introducing the value of this endangered heritage for science, education, culture, technological development, nature conservation, and tourism. The Starlight foundation currently gives two UNESCO designations to destinations worldwide: Starlight Reserve and Starlight Tourism Destination.

Last month, representing Bon Temps, Charles Leary and Vaughan Perret travelled to the seat of the Foundation in the Canary Islands to meet with its director and other officials. They provided astronomical data and other information on the dark skies of Argyle-Yarmouth-Clare, which were very positively received. There are currently no Starlight-designated destinations in North America. Astronomical tourism is a growing niche market, and the opportunity for our local region to obtain a UNESCO designation will help to distinguish us from other destinations worldwide.

The Foundation's director, Luis Martinez, encouraged an application for both Starlight Reserve and Starlight Destination status from our area, and offered a 25% reduction in associated fees for obtaining both designations. Only one other location in the world has both titles. The process of gaining the necessary certifications can be accomplished relatively quickly through the gathering of additional data and measurements.

The Municipality of the District of Argyle has agreed to pay the 2,000 euro applications fees (1,000 euros for each designation). The Protected Areas Division of the Department of Environment is recommending that the Minister support the Reserve designation for the Tobetic Wilderness Area.

The total cost for both Starlight Reserve and Starlight Destination status is 30,000 euros (usually 40,000 euros), plus the costs of an audit. The plan is to seek grant funding for this project, and to only request funding for the certification fees from municipal units in the 2014/15 fiscal year if necessary.

Critical to maintaining Starlight status will be the creation of Starlight-themed tourism product offerings over the next couple of years. Bon Temps would like to create a Starlight Stewardship Council with representatives of each of the three municipalities.

Examples of tourism products could include a Starlight Festival, astronomically-themed hotel rooms or vacation rentals, guided star gazing, a Starlight guide training program or course, creating appropriate places where amateur astronomers could set up their equipment, and the creation of simple signage and interpretive waypoints around the area.