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**MEDIA RELEASE
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DESTINATION NORTHERN ONTARIO BRACES FOR IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON NORTHERN TOURISM INDUSTRY

(Sault Ste. Marie, ON) – As the number of new cases for the Novel Coronavirus mount in Canada, Ontario and regionally, Destination Northern Ontario (DNO) and its industry partners are bracing for the impact of the virus on the tourism economy in the north.

Destination Northern Ontario has been responding to the pandemic since March 11th, 2020 when the organization, led by Executive Director, David MacLachlan, decided to formally close its office doors and have staff work remotely in order to proactively participate in social distancing.

In an effort to measure the ongoing impact on the tourism industry, DNO created, in partnership the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries (MHSTCI), the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO) and other Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs), surveys for business owners and operators to give feedback on their individual experience through the pandemic. Acknowledging that there is a need for customized answers relating directly to northern operators, DNO responded to feedback by creating an additional survey that complements data being collected on a pan-provincial basis. The surveys are ongoing and will be distributed weekly to continue monitoring the economic impact to the Northern Ontario tourism industry. Weekly calls with Ministry staff and industry leaders are in place to ensure up-to-date information is being shared frequently

“We are very concerned with the impacts to our Northern Ontario tourism industry. We know that, for those tourism and tourism-related operations that are open now, the impacts have been swift and devastating. In addition, our seasonal operators opening in May are extremely concerned,” said Executive Director, David MacLachlan. “Our efforts to date have focused on the collecting and sharing of information. The series of surveys we have underway are critical and we are pleased to see government respond quickly and decisively with programs to assist tourism operators and organizations. Over the coming days, our efforts will move to assisting businesses access those programs. We are also planning for the recovery and will dedicate all our resources to ensuring that Northern Ontario remains a destination of choice.”

Destination Northern Ontario will continue to work with Destination Marketing Organizations, other tourism organizations and businesses at the local level to communicate current activities, gather feedback and ultimately, develop a plan for recovery. The organization is currently exploring options to support the industry and partners during social distancing such as promoting telecommuting options, creating a resource library of best practices for businesses, training on crisis communication and retooling programming to meet the ever-changing needs of tourism businesses. DNO will continue to share data and market intelligence with its partners to

Working Together to Build A Stronger Tourism Industry



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ensure that it is promoting meaningful, relevant content to its audiences. Survey results will continue to be posted on www.destinationnorthernontario.ca. DNO encourages the industry to keep up to date by signing up for its newsletters via the aforementioned website and/or through social by following the handle destinationnorthernontario on Facebook and @DestNorthernOnt on Twitter.

“In light of our current situation, the Board of Directors has decided to meet weekly to ensure that we are on top of issues as they develop,” said Marty Kalagian, President, Destination Northern Ontario. “We support the steps taken by our Executive Director and staff both externally and internally to mitigate risk while responding to COVID-19 as a Regional Tourism Organization. We are pleased to see the industry stepping up in order to give feedback and insight on economic impact. We know this is instrumental in having a collective and well-rounded approach to recovery.”

“In this unprecedented time of uncertainty, we know for one thing for certain; we are all in this together”, said MacLachlan. “Destination Northern Ontario thanks and acknowledges the collective work of all partners who are working diligently to collect feedback and relay it to decision-makers that will lead the national and provincial recovery efforts. DNO also acknowledges the instrumental feedback given by northern tourism operators and thanks each one for their time and patience through this difficult period. Continued support from the MHSTCI is a cornerstone to strengthening and building the tourism sector in Northern Ontario.”

Destination Northern Ontario is one of 13 not-for-profit regional tourism organizations funded by the Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. We are the largest tourism region in geography, the second largest in expenditure and the only region that includes sub-regions.

Northern Ontario will be a unique and distinctive tourism destination wherein high-quality products and experiences resonate with consumers, entrepreneurship is valued, and tourism provides local, regional and global connections for the entire region. Destination Northern Ontario will take a leadership role to strategically guide and champion growth in Northern Ontario’s tourism industry, through strong communication, collaboration and partnerships with industry.

For more information on Destination Northern Ontario, please visit www.destinationnorthernontario.ca. Follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/DestNorthernOnt or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/DestinationNorthernOntario for the most up to date news and information.

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