Executive Summary: Comprehensive Destination Sustainability Assessment of Sedona

The Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau (“SCC&TB”) recently underwent a comprehensive assessment of its tourism sector to inform strategic initiatives for its sustainable destination management. To conduct the assessment, the SCC&TB engaged the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (“GSTC”), the world’s leading standard-setting body for sustainability of tourism operations and destination development.

The GSTC Assessor conducted an onsite evaluation of Sedona from June 6-10, 2016. The SCC&TB coordinated the GSTC assessment with guidance from the GSTC Assessor. The SCC&TB identified stakeholders for consultation, arranged stakeholder meetings and site visits, and collected policy documents in the areas covered by the GSTC Criteria for analysis. Jennifer Wesselhoff, President/CEO, and Michelle Conway, Director of Marketing served as Destination Liaisons throughout this assessment.

The Assessment included a GSTC Destination Program Introduction Meeting with diverse public and private sector stakeholders responsible for the policy areas covered by the GSTC Criteria. This opening meeting introduced stakeholders to the GSTC, the Criteria for Destinations, and the process and goals of the assessment. The GSTC Assessor, in consultation with the Destination Liaisons, then conducted a review of the policy documents addressing the GSTC Criteria to understand the current policy landscape and identify gaps in the areas of overall governance, economic and investment climate, cultural and heritage protection, and energy and environment. The GSTC Assessor also conducted site visits to ascertain evidence of policy implementation. The GSTC then produced a report outlining the final results of the assessment and recommendations for improvements to bring Sedona tourism development into compliance with best international practice as set forth in the GSTC Criteria and Indicators.

Based on this assessment, it is evident that destination sustainability and balancing tourism growth with conservation of the natural and cultural resources is a priority for both the public and private sectors of the community of Sedona. The assessment identified the following 33 of the 41 criteria being implemented with documentation and evidence of management systems and efforts in place:

- **A2: Destination Management Organization**: The destination has an effective organization, department, group or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, with involvement by the private sector and public sector. This group is suited to the size and scale of the destination, and has defined responsibilities, oversight, and implementation capability for the management of environmental, economic, social, and cultural issues. This group’s activities are appropriately funded.
• **A3: Monitoring**: The destination has a system to monitor, publicly report, and respond to environmental, economic, social, cultural, tourism, and human rights issues. The monitoring system is reviewed and evaluated periodically.

• **A4: Tourism Seasonality Management**: The destination dedicates resources to mitigate seasonal variability of tourism where appropriate, working to balance the needs of the local economy, community, cultures and environment, to identify year-round tourism opportunities.

• **A5: Climate Change Adaptation**: The destination has a system to identify risks and opportunities associated with climate change. This system encourages climate change adaptation strategies for development, siting, design, and management of facilities. The system contributes to the sustainability and resilience of the destination and to public education on climate for both residents and tourists.

• **A6: Inventory of tourism assets and attractions**: The destination has an up-to-date, publicly available inventory and assessment of its tourism assets and attractions, including natural and cultural sites.

• **A7: Planning Regulations**: The destination has planning regulations and/or policies that require environmental, economic, and social impact assessment and integrate sustainable land use, design, construction, and demolition. The guidelines, regulations and/or policies are designed to protect natural and cultural resources, were created with local inputs from the public and a thorough review process, and are publicly communicated.

• **A8: Access for All**: Where appropriate, sites and facilities, including those of natural and cultural importance, are accessible to all, including persons with disabilities and others who have specific access requirements. Where such sites and facilities are not immediately accessible, access is afforded through the design and implementation of solutions that take into account both the integrity of the site and such reasonable accommodations for persons with access requirements as can be achieved.

• **A9: Property Acquisitions**: Laws and regulations regarding property acquisitions exist, are enforced, comply with communal and indigenous rights, ensure public consultation, and do not authorize resettlement without prior informed consent and/or reasonable compensation.

• **A10: Visitor Satisfaction**: The destination has a system to monitor and publicly report visitor satisfaction, and, if necessary, to take action to improve visitor satisfaction.

• **A12: Safety and Security**: The destination has a system to monitor, prevent, publicly report, and respond to crime, safety, and health hazards.

• **A13: Crisis and Emergency Management**: The destination has a crisis and emergency response plan that is appropriate to the destination. Key elements are communicated to residents, visitors, and enterprises. The plan establishes procedures and provides resources and training for staff, visitors, and residents, and is updated on a regular basis.

• **A14: Promotion**: Promotion is accurate with regard to the destination and its products, services, and sustainability claims. The promotional messages treat local communities and tourists authentically and respectfully.
• **B1: Economic Monitoring**: The direct and indirect economic contribution of tourism to the destination’s economy is monitored and publicly reported at least annually. To the extent feasible, this should include visitor expenditure, revenue per available room, employment and investment data.

• **B2: Local Career Opportunities**: The destination’s enterprises provide equal employment, training opportunities, occupational safety, and fair wages for all.

• **B3: Public Participation**: The destination has a system that encourages public participation in destination planning and decision making on an ongoing basis.

• **B5: Local Access**: The destination monitors, protects, and when necessary rehabilitates or restores local community access to natural and cultural sites.

• **B6: Tourism Awareness and Education**: The destination provides regular programs to affected communities to enhance their understanding of the opportunities and challenges of tourism, and the importance of sustainability.

• **B7: Preventing Exploitation**: The destination has laws and established practices to prevent commercial, sexual, or any other form of exploitation and harassment of anyone, particularly of children, adolescents, women, and minorities. The laws and established practices are publicly communicated.

• **B8: Support for Community**: The destination has a system to enable and encourage enterprises, visitors, and the public to contribute to community and sustainability initiatives.

• **B9: Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade**: The destination has a system that supports local and small- and medium-sized enterprises, and promotes and develops local sustainable products and fair trade principles that are based on the area’s nature and culture. These may include food and beverages, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.

• **C1: Attraction Protection**: The destination has a policy and system to evaluate, rehabilitate, and conserve natural and cultural sites, including built heritage (historic and archaeological) and rural and urban scenic views.

• **C2: Visitor Management**: The destination has a visitor management system for attraction sites that includes measures to preserve, protect, and enhance natural and cultural assets

• **C3: Visitor Behavior**: The destination has published and provided guidelines for proper visitor behavior at sensitive sites. Such guidelines are designed to minimize adverse impacts on sensitive sites and strengthen positive visitor behaviors.

• **C4: Cultural Heritage Protection**: The destination has laws governing the proper sale, trade, display, or gifting of historical and archaeological artifacts.

• **C5: Site Interpretation**: Accurate interpretive information is provided at natural and cultural sites. The information is culturally appropriate, developed with community collaboration, and communicated in languages pertinent to visitors.

• **C6: Intellectual Property**: The destination has a system to contribute to the protection and preservation of intellectual property rights of communities and individuals.

• **D1: Environmental Risks**: The destination has identified environmental risks and has a system in place to address them.
• **D2: Protection of Sensitive Environments**: The destination has a system to monitor the environmental impact of tourism, conserve habitats, species, and ecosystems, and prevent the introduction of invasive species.

• **D3: Wildlife Protection**: The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and standards for the harvest or capture, display, and sale of wildlife (including plants and animals).

• **D8: Water Quality**: The destination has a system to monitor drinking and recreational water quality using quality standards. The monitoring results are publicly available, and the destination has a system to respond in a timely manner to water quality issues.

• **D9: Wastewater**: The destination has clear and enforced guidelines in place for the siting, maintenance and testing of discharge from septic tanks and wastewater treatment systems, and ensures wastes are properly treated and reused or released safely with minimal adverse effects to the local population and the environment.

• **D10: Solid Waste Reduction**: The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to reduce, reuse, and recycle solid waste. Any residual solid waste that is not reused or recycled is disposed of safely and sustainably.

• **D11: Light and Noise Pollution**: The destination has guidelines and regulations to minimize light and noise pollution. The destination encourages enterprises to follow these guidelines and regulations.

8 of the 41 criteria (as listed below) scored low on the assessment because while policies or initiatives may be in place, there was little evidence of implementation.

• **A1: Sustainable destination strategy**: The destination has established and is implementing a multi-year destination strategy that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, that considers environmental, cultural, quality, health, and safety, and aesthetic issues, and was developed with public participation.

• **A11: Sustainability Standards**: The destination has a system to promote sustainability standards for enterprises consistent with the GSTC Criteria. The destination makes publicly available a list of sustainability certified or verified enterprises.

• **B4: Local Community Opinion**: Local communities’ aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with destination management are regularly monitored, recorded and publicly reported in a timely manner.

• **D4: Greenhouse Gas Emissions**: The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to measure, monitor, minimize, publicly report, and mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions from all aspects of their operation (including emissions from service providers).

• **D5: Energy Conservation**: The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to measure, monitor, reduce, and publicly report energy consumption, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

• **D6: Water Management**: The destination has a system to encourage enterprises to measure, monitor, reduce, and publicly report water usage.
• **D7: Water Security**: The destination has a system to monitor its water resources to ensure that use by enterprises is compatible with the water requirements of the destination community.

• **D12: Low-impact Transportation**: The destination has a system to increase the use of low-impact transportation, including public transportation and active transportation (e.g., walking and cycling).

An example is the low participation of the tourism enterprises in either of the two available sustainable certification programs for businesses. If the Sedona Chamber embraced one or both of these programs and promoted it to businesses, residents, and travelers more businesses would have the incentive for participation and thus increase implementation of these criteria.

The main recommendation from the GSTC assessment is for the Sedona Chamber to better coordinate the various organizations involved in destination management to work more collaboratively and ensure the sustainable development, management, and promotion of tourism in Sedona. Currently the destination is one of the world’s leaders in implementing sustainable tourism within the destination, however this is for the most part being done with minimal coordination between the various parties involved. By formalizing a partnership around the development and implementation of a sustainable destination strategy, greater coordination and impacts can be achieved with shared efforts and shared responsibilities.

Based on this assessment, it is recommended that the Sedona Chamber focus on the following four criteria in order to enhance the sustainable destination management of their tourism sector going forward:

• **A1: Sustainable Destination Strategy**—The destination has established and is implementing a multi-year destination strategy that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, that considers environmental, economic, social, cultural, quality, health, and safety, and aesthetic issues, and was developed with public participation.

• **A11. Sustainability Standards**—The destination has a system to promote sustainability standards for enterprises consistent with the GSTC Criteria. The destination makes publicly available a list of sustainability certified or verified enterprises.

• **B4: Local Community Opinion**—Local communities’ aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with destination management are regularly monitored, recorded and publicly reported in a timely manner.

• **D.12. Low Impact Transportation**—The destination has a system to increase the use of low-impact transportation, including public transportation and active transportation (e.g., walking and cycling).

For more information on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, please visit [https://www.gstcouncil.org](https://www.gstcouncil.org).