



Hasting Trails User Experience Survey Report

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Executive Summary

The Hastings Trail Destination Inc. approached the REC 480 students with the need to find the solution to their problem. That problem being knowing who uses their trails and how to create a meaningful experience that could be marketed as a Canadian Signature Experience. This paper will discuss the research found in the surrounding literature, the problem that was presented, and the recommendations.

The literature review focused on trail user experiences including carrying capacity, constraints, designing trail experiences, and proximity tourism. Many trail organizations are faced with the carrying capacity of their recreational spaces, which when exceeded will lessen the users' experiences (Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry, 2000). The users are also faced with many hurdles that they must overcome in order to become a user or be a frequent user if they so choose (Lu & Campbell, 2008). Research also concluded that there are elements of experience that must be met; these being that the organizer must provide the users with an experience that is authentic, emotional, and spiritual (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007). Lastly, the Hastings Trail has the opportunity to take advantage of the proximity tourists (Diaz-Soria, 2017).

The explanation of the problems faced is broken down into knowing the users, the Canadian Signature Experience, and social media. The main issue that Hastings Trail has is that they do not know their consumers. They do not know the ages, gender, and time of year with the most trail usage. This is a key stepping point of any marketing or experience creation. It is necessary to know the target market in order to market to them. Hastings Trail Inc has the desire to create an experience that will qualify to be a Canadian Signature Experience. The Canadian Signature Experience is an opportunity for a tourist organization to have an experience that they offer featured on the Canadian Signature Experience website and promotional material. They are defined as experiences that "engage visitors in a series of memorable travel activities, revealed over time, that are inherently personal, engage the senses, and make connections on an emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual or social level" (Canadian Signature Experiences, n.d.). Being one of these featured experiences will allow Hastings Trail to increase their user audience and tourism to their area. Lastly was the social media presence of the Hastings Trails. An increased social media presence will allow more visitors to find the trails and bring the Hastings Trail one step closer to having a Canadian Signature Experience.

The recommendation can be encapsulated by using the survey to know and understand their users, which will then be the base point of creating a meaningful experience for their users. In addition, continuing to research and work towards creating an experience that fits the guidelines and criteria of the Canadian Signature Experience.

Introduction

Understanding the user is an integral part of providing a service or experience. By understanding the user and the experience they have with the service, will allow an organization to make appropriate changes where necessary. Changes and advancements are a necessary aspect of all experiences in order to attract new and retain old users. The main focus of the user experience is for Hastings Trail. Hastings Trail's mission is to stimulate economic growth, trail development and encourage the use of the trails to promote healthy living. Like Hastings Trail, many organizations are unfamiliar with whom their users are and what they are looking for. In order to provide a meaningful and attractive experience, the users need to be understood. There are three key aspects needed to be considered when planning a program or experience. These include knowing who the users are, what they are looking for, and is the experience appealing. Through exploration of Hastings Trails, they are currently facing many issues with user experience. It is key to know the experiences, feelings, and connections the users have towards the trails. User experiences go beyond just the activity. The organization or company needs to ensure their facilities are clean, meet standards, and add to the experience rather than take away.

This paper will include preliminary research of what the surrounding literature has to say about user experience and user experience surveys in the realm of trail users. It will go in-depth about the problems Hastings Trail has encountered with user experience and the solutions to develop a better understanding of their users and the programs to create. This paper provides a key understanding of how to identify the users, the key issues, and implementation recommendations. The research explored within this paper focuses on the abilities, constraints, and challenges, and opportunities for Hastings Trail Destination Inc to utilize.

Literature and Presentation of Findings

There is a lot of research surrounding the topics of trail usage and experience surveys within the recreation and leisure community. The research talked about carrying capacity on trails, restraints of trail users, user experience, designing experiences for trails, and proximity tourists.

Carrying Capacity

From the research gathered there are a lot of reasons as to why the user experience is important for trail usage. Much of the literature talks about the carrying capacity of the trail. Carrying capacity is the ability of a specific area to withhold a certain amount of people before the area has environmental or social damage (Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry, 2000). The article by Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry (2000) explains that there are several types of carrying capacity: physical capacity, ecological capacity, social capacity, and facility capacity. Each one of these capacities is highly important in the user experience, which could leave an impression on the guest about the trail. If a trail meets or exceeds its carrying capacity, meaning that there are too many people on the trail and then starts to deteriorate thus leading to the people using the trail having a lesser experience (Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry, 2000). Facility carrying capacity is the capacity of the area, or in this case the trails, built environment that is created to support the guests (Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry, 2000). This could be the parking lots, bathrooms, trail staff, or anything else that is intended to help the guest have a better experience. Ecological carrying capacity is the natural environment's ability to hold against the recreational use on the trails (Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry, 2000). If carrying capacity exceeds the limit, vegetation will show signs of damage or sickness and

wildlife might start to disappear (Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry, 2000) Social carrying capacity is the number of visitors and distributing of visitors to allow for minimally acceptable experiences (Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry, 2000). The trail could have too many people, which would result in users bumping into each other, or having to wait behind, or pass groups of people, creating a lesser experience if the users were evenly spread throughout the trail (Symmonds, Hammitt, & Quisenberry, 2000). User experience surveys are a great way of collecting this information about the trail's user experience. Gaining the knowledge from the people who are there to enjoy the trails, and how their experience was is a great way to understand the carrying capacity of the trail.

User Restraints

Another topic that was prevalent in the research was the restraints in accordance with the trails. An article by Lu and Campbell (2008), found that constraints do not necessarily result in individuals not participating or taking part in certain activities, such as using trails for recreational use, but rather people must negotiate with themselves to overcome these constraints. One of the biggest constraints that the authors found was a lack of awareness of the trails and what the trails offer (Lu & Campbell, 2008). This meaning that the hardest barrier to entry for people is that they do not know that trails exist, and they are able to take advantage of that (Lu & Campbell, 2008). Another main constraint was the weather factor of trail usage (Lu & Campbell, 2008). In many parts of Canada, trail usage is dependent on seasonal conditions, such as winter usage (Lu & Campbell, 2008). For winter use, trails would need proper maintenance and winter activities (Lu & Campbell, 2008). The last major constraint for users of recreational trails is that there are not enough facilities along the trails (Lu & Campbell, 2008). This could be anything from parking to washrooms (Lu & Campbell, 2008). These constraints are very important to work towards minimizing as to allow as many individuals as possible to use the trails.

User Experience

There are a lot of challenges for organizations when it comes to trail user experience. One of the challenges is marketing the trails and experiences (Legault, 2013). For marketing the trails, these organizations need to know their current users which would make up their target audience (Legault, 2013). Research suggests that many trail organizations do not know the demographic information of their users (Legault, 2013). Knowing the demographic of the users to make sure that the money and resources that they are spending to advertise and market their trails are worth it and reaching the right target audience (Noe & Uysal, 1997). For example, if organizers market their experiences to people that are 65+ years old but their users are 25 - 30 years old then the money would be wasted. This is when using user experience surveys are used so organizations can get to know their users and who are using their trails. These surveys can help in the development of programs and facilities of the trails that will lead to higher levels of user satisfaction (Noe & Uysal, 1997). The user can express intent of why they participated and how they help with certain aspects of the experience (Noe & Uysal, 1997). In addition, it is also important the organizers keep their websites and promotional materials up to date as much as possible which will allow for the users to know which trails are open and what each trails has to offer which will only increase the users experiences (Legault, 2013).

Designing Experiences for Trails

Designing trail experiences can be another challenge that organizers face (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007). An article by Hayes and MacLeod (2007), suggests that trail experiences should aim to provide the visitor or tourists with the opportunity to engage with authentic, emotional, and spiritual experiences (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007). These experiences should also be entertaining, educational, esthetic, and escapist (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007). The overarching theme and story that the trail provides is an essential element of trail experience creation (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007). In addition, having opportunities for users of the experience for enrolment, engagement, and personalization (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007). These themes will allow for users to feel satisfied with their experiences and wanting to come back again (Hayes & MacLeod, 2007).

Proximity Tourists

The Hastings Trail has the opportunity to attract proximal tourists, especially in the current state of the world with the COVID-19 crisis. Proximity tourism is when a tourist visits a destination within their community or a short distance from their home (Diaz-Soria, 2017). Many people living within a community will seek out opportunities that are educational, and experiential, which trails can give them that opportunity (Diaz-Soria, 2017). These proximity tourists are an important target market when thinking of developing marketing experiences, as these people could be the first users of the experience and be potentially repeat users (Diaz-Soria, 2017).

Explanation of the Problems in the User experience

Through research and discussion with Hastings Trail Destination Inc, many gaps and challenges are being faced in the user experience. More specifically Hastings Trail is unfamiliar with its users, the Canadian Signature Experience, and lacking on social media platforms. These are key issues that can lead to problems with the user experience and program development. Through the exploration of Hastings Trail's problems, sufficient recommendations can be made in order to enhance their user knowledge.

Knowing the Users

When it comes to user experience, the most important component is understanding and knowing the users. Three main issues are being faced by Hastings Trail regarding the user; they do not know who the users are, what the users want, and there is currently no user experience information. Prior research has led to the discovery of how new the trails are. The organization has no information as they are relatively new however, they require this information in order to improve their activity and destination. The trails were established in 2019 and although this is a short time frame, the problems with user experience which currently exist could have been explored sooner.

Through discussion with Hastings Trail Destination Inc., it was made clear they do not have a good understanding of their users. The key focus of the problem is the unknown demographic of the trail users. In order for Hastings Trail to create and make adjustments to their trails, they need and want to know the demographics that are attending the trails. Due to the lack of knowledge on the users, it can create problems by not knowing what advancements need to be done to the trails. They are missing key information on who the users are such as age, gender, do they identify as someone with a disability, and if they have visited before.

Secondly, the organization is unaware of its target market. Without knowing who they are trying to attract, they cannot create experiences or programs for their users to participate in. There are current users of the trail and as previously mentioned they are unsure of the current users however they do not know who to target their experience at. Understanding their target market will enable them to focus their efforts on marketing to those specific users. When consulted, the organization had no specific demographic in mind for its target market. By understanding their current demographic, they can lessen marketing efforts towards them and enhance the marketing efforts to the users not currently attending. One aspect of Hastings Trails is they are accessible by any demographic and thus have a large potential target market. Although there is a large potential, a target market is needed for who they want to attract as programs will be created to accommodate them. For example, programs will be created to attract and accommodate families rather than individuals, and marketing efforts will be put towards those family programs.

Lastly, Hastings Trail Destination Inc. has no information on their users or their experiences on the trail. They are unfamiliar with how successful the trails are and unsure of the user traffic. Due to the fact that they have no information on their users, the organization is currently unfamiliar with what improvements are needed to increase traffic. As stated by Hastings Trail Destination Inc, their focus is "increasing the inventory and improving the quality of existing trails within Hastings County to have a direct positive impact on improving Hastings County as a tourism destination" (Hastings Trail Project Summary, 2021). One aspect that needs to be considered is the steps to creating experiences as the priorities of the Hastings Trail Destination Inc are not in the correct order. The organization is looking to expand its destination to include programs to enhance experiences and become part of the Canadian Signature Experience however, more focus needs to be put on the users.

Canadian Signature Experience

As stated on the Canadian Signature Experience website, "Canadian Signature Experiences engage visitors in a series of memorable travel activities, revealed over time, that are inherently personal, engage the senses, and make connections on an emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual or social level"(Canadian Signature Experiences, n.d.). As explored on the Canadian Signature experience website, many of the experiences are memorable activities. Another aspect of a Canadian Signature experience is the aspect of it being once in a lifetime (Canadian Signature Experiences, n.d.). These are two aspects that are currently missing on the trails. Hastings Trail Destination Inc. currently has ideas on how to provide those experiences however there is a lack of knowledge about their trails. There are certain criteria for experiential places to be a part of CSE. With Hastings Trail being new, they are unfamiliar with the criteria or guidelines, and unfortunately, more time is being wasted on becoming part of it rather than understanding their users. Hastings Trail needs to switch its priorities and create a greater focus on the users before they can consider CSE. However, with further exploration and understanding of the users, this can become a great opportunity for Hastings Trail to become a part of. As mentioned above, the organization needs to consider who its target market is as they will want to create a program or activity specifically for them to be featured on the CSE website.

Should Hastings Trail Destination Inc. continue its pursuit to becoming a Canadian Signature Experience, many aspects need to be considered. The trails are currently lacking the additional and scheduled experiences in order to become a signature experience. However, it is

most important the trails are pristine and have high foot traffic before additional experiences can be created. By improving the user experience problems, it can lead to the enhancement and opportunity to create trail experiences. Once the problems are solved, and experiences are created, Hastings Trail can become a Canadian Signature Experience. A Canadian Signature Experience gets featured on the website with lots of traffic which can lead to more visitation to the trails.

Social Media

Social media has become a key aspect for thriving businesses as it connects with consumers, attracts users, and provides information. After research and exploration, it has become evident Hastings Trail is lacking on its social media platforms. They currently have a website and Facebook page however there is very limited traffic and postings on Facebook. For Hastings Trail Destination Inc., knowing their demographic and who they want to attract will play a huge role in the type of social media platforms needed. An older demographic will use a platform such as Facebook to post their experience or review, whereas a younger demographic will use Instagram or Snapchat to post.

Depending on the current demographic using the trails can determine which demographic should be targeted on social media. Appealing posts are necessary to attract people to the page but also attract people to the trails. Having all social media platforms can allow users to post and tag the trails that others will see and be inclined to visit as well. Social media is essentially free marketing through the use of other users' posts. With current and future generations, this is a key aspect that should be created as it can continue to attract many users but also from places all over Canada. Through social media, it can be viewed by thousands from many locations which can overall enhance Hastings Trails.

Hastings Trails has created a new website which is appealing to users however it is lacking information and utilizing social media can enhance their website. They have the opportunity to link their social media and reviews to their website. By linking everything, it will help the user from having to search to find information which will lead to a better overall experience. A huge focus when considering social media is the convenience factor and allowing users to picture what their experience could be like from others. By promoting themselves and having others post about their experiences, it can lead to higher foot traffic on the trails and Hastings Trail being able to create more experiences for the Canadian Signature Experiences.

After exploring all the problems related to user experience on the Hastings Trail, there is one key recommendation for solving and generating an understanding for their users. The key problem stems from the lack of knowledge or understanding of the users which can be easily solved.

Recommendations

After exploring and identifying the problems with user experience there are many ways for improvement however the best one would be to start with a survey. A survey is recommended as it is the first step in understanding the user. Hastings Trail Destination Inc. is looking to create programs related to user experience and being able to identify the user and what they want, can lead to successful program implementation. There are many questions which can be asked to understand who the user is, why they are there but also learning their views and experiences of the trail which can be seen in Appendix A. By doing a survey and knowing user

behavior, it can help influence the important decisions when considering program implementation. To further the survey recommendations, the best way to facilitate implementation of the survey can be done in three ways. Implementation is at the discretion of Hastings Trail Destination Inc as it needs to be feasible for them. The first suggestion is to facilitate the survey on SurveyMonkey which is an online survey platform. SurveyMonkey allows for the survey to be posted on social media platforms and tracks the information gathered during the process. The second option is to post the survey on the website. This can also be done with SurveyMonkey or an external site which can be integrated and linked to the Hastings Trail website. The third option is to have the survey accessible on the trails. This can be done by having QR codes on the trailheads which can be used with any mobile device. It will allow users to answer the survey while engaging in the trail and providing the most accurate representation of their experience and feelings of the trail. These suggestions can be used in conjunction such that not only one method needs to be used. It may be beneficial for Hastings Trail to use multiple methods to ensure they are collecting enough data to make informative decisions. The final recommendation is for Hastings Trail Destination Inc. to have a short survey. This suggestion is given for the reason that many users will not want to take too much time away from their experience to fill out a survey. It is important to keep the survey short, sweet, and to the point. This will also provide accurate and informative data, but not overwhelm the consumer in that they will not want to take the survey. Overall, Hastings Trail Destination Inc. will be able to collect user experience data and make the needed decisions.

Conclusion

The use of user experiences is crucial in the maintenance and improvement of trail management. Through the exploration of the current user experience problems, it became evident for the need to implement strong solutions. Highlighted through the research and recommendations, Hastings Trails must gather the right information about the users of their trails. Being able to know who the users are and why they are using the trails will allow Hastings Trail Destination Inc. to clearly define its target market. Taking the recommendations and tailoring them to fit perfectly within the Hastings Trail vision and goal will be essential to the user experience. This will provide a catalyst in creating a meaningful experience for their users and be able to be featured as a Canadian Signature Experience. Being a Canadian Signature Experience will allow Hastings Trail to become prominent in the Canadian and international market for tourist destinations. Becoming a Canadian Signature Experience will allow users to plan their trips in a more convenient way which will overall lead to an improved user experience. This could have a lasting impact on the surrounding community, allowing them to reap the benefits of increased tourism to the area. Through the problems, research, and recommendations explained within this paper, this will lead to an increased user experience, economic growth, trail development, and use of the trails to enhance healthy living.

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Appendix A

User Experience Survey

Hastings Trails User Experience Survey

To help you make an informed decision regarding your participation, this letter will explain what the survey is about, the possible risks and benefits associated with participation, and your rights as a participant.

Purpose of this survey:

_____ This survey is being conducted by Hasting Trails for internal use. The purpose of the survey is to get a deeper understanding of the users of the 9 Hasting Trails to allow the organization to create better and more meaningful experiences at the Hasting Trails for their users.

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. The responses of this survey will remain completely anonymous, and participants will have the opportunity to decline to answer any questions and may opt-out at any time.

This anonymous survey will take approximately 5 to 7 minutes to complete. Please be aware that anonymous quotations from your open-ended survey responses may be used in papers and marketing tools resulting from this survey. The survey will seek some demographic information (e.g., age, gender, your connection to Hastings Trails), followed by questions asking you to reflect on your experiences on the Hastings Trails and the surrounding community.

If you have questions or comments about the survey, please feel free to contact us here:
[LINK](#)

Consent

- I consent to the information that I provide to be used by the Hasting Trails organization.

We would like a bit of information about you.

1. Age?

- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60- 69
- 70+
- Prefer not to answer

+ (Option to add ages of other group members who visited the trail with them)

2. What gender do you identify with?

- Female
- Male
- Other
 - _____
- Prefer not to answer

3. Do you identify as a person with a disability and use accessibility accommodations?

- No
- Yes
 - (optional)Specify: _____
- Prefer not to answer

4. How long are you staying in the area?

- 1-5 hours
- Full day
- Overnight
- Extended Stay (more than 2 days)
- Resident
- Prefer not to answer

5. Have you previously visited any of the Hasting Trails?

- Yes
 - Please specify: _____
- No
- Prefer not to answer

We would like to know some information about your current trip to Hastings Trails.

6. Which season did you visit in?

- Winter
- Spring
- Summer
- Fall

If you have visited in a different season, which season did you prefer to visit in? (check all that apply)

- Winter
- Spring
- Summer
- Fall

7. Which trail did you visit (select all that apply):

- Brian Goodchild Memorial Trail
- Crowe Valley Conservation Authority – McGeachie
- Crowe Valley Conservation Authority – The Gut
- Eagles Nest Park
- Egan Chutes Provincial Park Preserve
- Lake St. Peter Provincial Park
- O’Hara Mill Homestead and Conservation Area
- Quinte Conservation Authority – Vanderwater
- Silent Lake Provincial Park
- Prefer not to answer

8. How many people did you visit the trails with?

- Individual
- 2-4 people
- 4-8 people
- 8+
- Prefer not to answer

9. Who did you visit with?

- Yourself
- Family

- Friends
- Tour group
- School
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

10. How did you travel to Hastings Trail?

- Car
 - Personal
 - Ride service (uber/taxi)
- Bus
- Bike
- Walk
- Prefer not to answer

11. What equipment did you bring?

- Binoculars
- Cameras
- Hiking poles
- Running shoes
- Hiking shoes
- Other (please specify): _____
- Prefer not to answer

12. As a person with a disability, did you find the trails accessible?

- Yes
- No
 - Optional: Suggestions for improvement _____
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to answer

13. What was your main reason for visiting the trails? (select all that apply)

- To experience nature
- Exercise
- Bird watching
- Bicycling
- Snowshoeing
- Camping
- experience the hiking on the Hastings trails
- Catalog new plants and insects
- Socialize with friends
- Get out of the house
- Picnic

- Other: _____
- Prefer not to answer

14. What was your favorite part/experience of the trail? (select all that apply)

- Experiencing Nature
- Bird watching
- Weather
- Animals
- Meeting new people on the trails
- Rest stops
- Views from lookout points
- Sunrises
- Sunsets
- Other: _____
- Prefer not to answer

15. What contributed to your experience?

- The forest
- Seeing wildlife
- Bicycling
- Lookout views

Your perceptions of the Hastings Trails.

13. How did you find the condition of the trails, in regard to terrain smoothness and overgrowth: (rank 1 being very poor - 5 being exceptional)

1 2 3 4 5

- Prefer not to answer

14. How clean did you find the trails (garbage, etc.) (1 being a lot of garbage and debris - 5 being no garbage of debris at all):

1 2 3 4 5

- Prefer not to answer

15. How clean did you find the restrooms (1 being very unclean - 5 being very clean):

1 2 3 4 5

- Prefer not to answer

16. Were the trail makers clear and easy to follow?

Very unclear Somewhat confusing Satisfactory Clear Extremely clear

- Prefer not to answer

17. How would you rate the knowledge of staff? (1 being very knowledgeable - 5 being knowledgeable)

1 2 3 4 5

- Did not speak with any staff members
 Prefer not to answer

Your experiences within the Hasting region.**19. What other experiences did you take part in in the region (select all the apply):**

- Cycling
 Camping
 Dirt Biking/Atv-ing
 Museum
 Heritage site
 Mountain biking
 Skiing
 Bird watching
 Snowmobiling
 Other
 Please specify: _____
 Prefer not to answer

21. What other experiences would you like to see in this area?**Previous knowledge of the Hastings Trails****22. How did you hear of Hastings Trail?**

- Website
 Social Media
 Tourism Ontario
 Radio

- Television
- Word of mouth
- Other
 - Specify: _____
- None of the above
- Prefer not to answer

23. Are you aware of Hastings Trail's social media accounts?

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Prefer not to answer

24. Have you visited the Hasting Trails website?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Questions for additional feedback on your Hastings Trail experience

25. Have you heard of the Canadian Signature Experience?

- Yes
 - Have you participated in a Canadian Signature Experience? Specify?

- No
- Prefer not to answer

26. If you shared content (photos, videos, shared location, etc.) on social media, which platform?

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Other
 - Please specify: _____
- Prefer not to answer

27. Did you write a review

- Yes
 - Where did you post it? _____

- No
- Prefer not to answer

28. If you said yes, was the review positive or negative?

- Yes
 - Would like to include review: _____
- No
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to answer

29. Would you like to give anymore feedback or suggestions?

- Prefer not to answer

- Check this box to agree to the use of this data for marketing and internal use of Hastings Trails.**
- Subscribe to email updates about Hasting Trails.**
 - Email Address:** _____
 - Prefer not to answer**

Appendix B Infographic



**HASTINGS
TRAILS**

EST. 2019

CANADIAN SIGNATURE EXPERIENCE

memorable, inherently personal, engage the senses, and make connections on an emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual or social level

CRITERIA MET

- operating for 2 years
- owner of the experience

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Meets the definition Canadian Signature Experience
- International market
- Call to action for sales
- High-resolution images
- Nationally accepted export-ready criteria



SUGGESTIONS



- Survey monkey or integrate with the website
- QR codes at the trail heads
- Keep the survey short
- Creation of social media accounts
- List of programs or experiences on website

To Consider: Skyline Sunset Hike

- Cape Breton Highlands National Park
- Guided walking tour through the forest at sunset
- \$14.70 per participant



Made by: Kendra Coertz & Samantha Downie