

# **ECOTOURISM CASE STUDIES**

## **IN THE UNITED STATES**

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Burlington, Vermont, USA

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First Edition

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*\* The International Ecotourism Society (formerly The Ecotourism Society) is an international, non-profit membership organization founded in 1990 to make ecotourism a tool for conservation and sustainable development. The Society provides professionals with the information and educational materials they need to plan and manage ecotourism in destinations worldwide. The Society publishes a quarterly newsletter, books, information packages, guidelines and fact sheets; develops standards and monitoring programs for the ecotourism industry; performs research; and offers educational workshops, seminars, training programs and international forums on key topics within the ecotourism field.*

Production Director: Jeremy D. Garrett

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# Table of Contents

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<b>Foreword .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Acknowledgments.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Map of U.S. Ecotourism Case Studies.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Regional Ecotourism Planning.....</b>	<b>11</b>
Destiny 2000 in Down East Maine.....	12
Florida—Rethinking Tourism.....	20
<b>Chapter 2: Regional Ecotourism Enhancement .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Sussex County, Delaware—Embraces Ecotourism .....	30
West Virginia’s “Corridor L” Tourism Enhancement Project.....	35
<b>Chapter 3: A State Ecotourism Association.....</b>	<b>41</b>
VETA: The Virginia EcoTourism Association.....	42
<b>Chapter 4: Ecotourism Product Development.....</b>	<b>49</b>
Texas—“Gone Birdy” .....	50
Ozark Ecotours in Newton County, Arkansas .....	56
<b>Chapter 5: A Regional Ecotourism Tour Guide .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Forever Green: An Ecotourist’s Guide to Lane County, Oregon.....	64
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Sources .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>77</b>



# Foreword

During the past decade, ecotourists have grown in number until they now make up an important segment of international tourism. Although ecotourists primarily originate in Europe, North America and Australia-New Zealand, their ecotourism experiences usually occur far away from these core regions in what are perceived to be more wild and exotic environments. Interestingly, much less attention has been given to ecotourism within the core countries where these ecotravelers live and work.

Personally, I remember perceiving a lack of attention toward ecotourism within the United States when I began studying global tourism development in the early 1990s. Although the economic impacts of wildlife-watching were known to be large at the national and state level, as periodically documented in surveys by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the implications for tourism were seldom systematically considered. During 1997 and 1998, I worked with Dan Kwasnowski, an undergraduate student in the geography and planning program at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, to conduct a survey of ecotourism and nature tourism initiatives by state tourism agencies in the U.S. This survey identified a few budding state-sponsored programs and a wide variety of perceptions about ecotourism, but relatively few programs were identified by state tourism agencies.

At the same time a related research effort by Edwards, McLaughlin and Ham at the University of Idaho entitled “Comparative Study of Ecotourism Policy in the Americas—1998” also investigated this topic. It independently confirmed the limited scope of ecotourism initiatives within the U.S., the labyrinth of organizational structures involving many different public and private agencies, as well as the varied policy documents and activities regarding ecotourism throughout the Americas.

During this period The International Ecotourism Society (formerly known as The Ecotourism Society) became increasingly aware of the scarcity of research, planning and policy information that dealt with ecotourism within the core countries of the world. This gap and the lack of systematic study raised a series of questions and issues. What did domestic tour operators, tourism agencies, visitors and park managers in the core countries think about ecotourism? What was the relation between the notions of “outdoor recreation” and “ecotourism”? Was the concept of ecotourism being utilized? If so, where was this occurring within the core regions of the world? What strategies and which players—public or private, groups or individuals—were promoting ecotourism in these areas? What kinds of planning, research and community development was being created to advance ecotourism? Was the term ecotourism merely “old wine in new bottles”?

While these and other questions were clearly growing in importance, the Society was fortunate that Alicia Pinto arrived in 1999 and decided to study these issues and write on this topic. After months of hard work, dozens and dozens of interviews, detailed document research and many insightful conversations, Alicia Pinto’s exciting study is ready for its debut. At last we have a study about ecotourism initiatives within the United States. As I read the introduction and various case studies, both their depth and breadth impressed me. For the first time we are introduced to who is undertaking

ecotourism initiatives, what they are doing and how they have approached their diverse communities within the United States.

The selection of case studies from throughout the U.S. provides a broad base of cases from both distinct natural and cultural regions. Since each chapter is approached in a systematic manner, we learn of the project background, its goals, accomplishments, challenges and lessons. This systematic organization is an important asset of the book and is especially helpful to those who may be less concerned with the local development issues than with understanding the dynamics and opportunities for other communities. The thoughtful addition of key documents and surveys in the appendix further extends the applicability of this work to other communities.

Overall, I suspect you, the reader, will find this book engaging and insightful. It offers a diversity of alternatives and strategies for those interested in starting an ecotourism project. Perhaps you will even decide to visit these fascinating communities, support their ecotourism initiatives and enjoy their special place in the biodiversity of North America.

*Bryan R. Higgins  
Professor of Geography and Planning,  
State University of New York at Plattsburgh*

# Acknowledgments

Joining The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in June 1999 as an intern with a strong curiosity and affection for ecotourism in the United States led me to research existing information on the topic and record important case studies. This publication was created for both TIES members and non-members who seek to better understand ecotourism in the United States. May it stimulate others to further research to improve the industry and inform professionals and ecotourists alike.

My gratitude goes to TIES and its small, dedicated staff for the opportunity and guidance to put this publication together. I especially owe great thanks to my co-editors Nicole Otte and Elizabeth Halpenny for their expert brainstorming sessions, support, and editing, and to Ann Dailey for her administrative support. Thanks to TIES president Megan Epler Wood, Lynnaire Sheridan and Jeremy Garrett for their final review of this publication.

Abundant appreciation is due to Michael Sweeney, my ecotourism professor at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, for his expertise and devotion to ecotourism, which has inspired me many times over. Thanks again to Mr. Sweeney and to Edward Sanders for enlightening me through their work to help create an ecolodge with the Yurok Tribe in northern California. More thanks is due to two researchers in the field of U.S. ecotourism: Stephen Edwards with Conservation International and Bryan Higgins with SUNY Plattsburgh – their research and knowledge of the subject was invaluable.

For each case study in this publication, extensive interviews were conducted. Many ecotourism professionals helped compile the facts, figures, and data on their projects, which then became case studies for this book. Their expenditure of time and effort is very much appreciated.

*Special thanks to all of you for your enthusiasm-it inspired me to write:*

- *Destiny 2000 in Down East Maine*: Stephanie Clement, Friends of Acadia; and Michael Good, Down East Nature Tours;
- *Forever Green: An Ecotourist's Guide to Lane County, Oregon*: Dianne Brause, Lost Valley Educational Center;
- *Texas - "Gone Birdy"*: Ted Eubanks, Fermata, Inc.; and Linda Campbell, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department;
- *Ozark Ecotours in Newton County, Arkansas*: Kevin Middleton and Babs Dechant, Newton County Resource Council;
- *West Virginia's Corridor L Tourism Enhancement Project*: Scott Legg and Dave Pollard, Corridor L Tourism Enhancement Commission;
- *Sussex County, Delaware - Embraces Ecotourism*: Cynthia Small, Southern Delaware Convention and Tourism Commission;
- *Florida-Rethinking Tourism*: Kerri Post, VISIT FLORIDA;
- *VETA: The Virginia EcoTourism Association*: Pete Hangen, Virginia Department of Parks and Recreation

Thanks also to Stuart Murray, whose expertise in copy editing and format/design has been so helpful; and thanks to Tordis Ilg Isselhardt for her timely advice and for giving me the working space and peace to write this publication.

*Alicia Pinto*

# Introduction

During the summer and fall of 1999, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) took the initiative to support a research study on existing trends and projects in United States ecotourism. About half of TIES members reside in the U.S., and many are working directly on ecotourism projects within their own country. Considering TIES' membership interest in the field of U.S. ecotourism, the organization felt it was time to put together a document containing information on U.S. ecotourism projects, statistics, resources, and trends.

The eight projects contained in this publication were discovered by networking with TIES members. The projects documented within this publication are presented as in-depth case studies.

## **Ecotourism Defined**

The supporting principles of ecotourism link it closely to other U.S. specialty travel industries. Ecotourism is related to natural, cultural and adventure travel, however there are subtle differences in ecotourism that differentiate the terms. Ecotourism is most often characterized as a sustainable development tool. The International Ecotourism Society defines it as “responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the local people.”

*Ecotourism in its truest form often includes:*

- Travel to natural and cultural areas
- Travel that supports conservation and bio-diversity
- Travel that improves or enhances the lives of local people
- Travel that includes some form of education for visitors and supports education programs for local people

## **U.S. Public Lands – Attractive Destinations**

Travel to natural and cultural areas in the United States was significantly encouraged by the development of the National Park Service (NPS), created by an Act of Congress and signed by President Woodrow Wilson on August 25, 1916. The NPS is one of the four agencies within the Department of the Interior that manage U.S. public lands. Other agencies are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). A fifth agency, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) within the Department of Agriculture, also helps to manage public lands.

The NPS manages more than 80 million acres in 375 park units in every state (except Delaware), the District of Columbia, America Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. In 1998, NPS land received more than 250 million visits. BOR projects make water-based recreation activities possible for about 80 million visitors per year. The BLM is responsible for more than 264 million acres of public land that received more

than 60 million visitors in 1996. The USFWS receives about 29 million visitors a year, and manages a 92 million acre National Wildlife Refuge System, that includes 509 national wildlife refuges, 37 wetland management districts, and 50 coordination areas. The USFS manages 191 million acres of forests, and many of these forests are maintained for recreational purposes.

Public lands, owned by the United States government, are ideal tourism destinations for many different travel experiences including ecotourism.

### **U.S. Ecotourism – An Emerging Niche Market**

Ecotourism is a new and emerging niche market within the larger natural and cultural travel industry. The statistics below give us an idea of the growing natural and cultural travel industry in America. These statistics are a good representation of the overall market. Some assumptions can be made about the potential for the U.S. ecotourism market to prosper, as a smaller niche market, if the following trends for natural and cultural travel continue. Additional statistics can be found on the USA Ecotourism Statistical Factsheet (Appendix 1).

The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (1996) found 62.9 million U.S. residents, representing 31% of the U.S. population 16 years or older, enjoyed a variety of wildlife-watching activities. Wildlife-watching participants spent \$9.4 billion on trips to pursue their activities. An example includes the expansion of bird watching tourism in South Nebraska associated with the migration of the Sandhill Crane. This natural phenomenon brings up to \$60 million to the region every year during the spring (Walle 1997).

The Recreation Roundtable's fifth annual national survey (1998) based on 2,009 in-person interviews with Americans 18 and older, reported that nearly six in ten Americans participate in outdoor recreation at least monthly. Their motivations for participation vary, but their top objectives are fun, relaxation, stress relief, experiencing nature and exercise. Midwesterners remain the most active in recreation with 66% taking part in outdoor recreation, Northeasterners 59%, West 56%, and the South up 6% from 51% in 1997.

Visiting museums and/or historical sites is the third most popular activity for travelers in America. In California, 44.3 million Americans traveled for cultural activities in 1998. Of these 44.3 million Americans, 37.8 were California residents. Cultural activities included a broad range of activities such as visiting museums, viewing historical sites, and attending musical and theatrical events (National Travel Survey and Travelscope 1998).

This quantitative data supports the assumption that there is a growing trend in natural and cultural travel in the U.S. Without ecotourism data of a similar nature, it is difficult to know how often the U.S. public travels with concerns about sustainability, but these statistics provide some background that help support the potential for U.S. ecotourism.

The conceivable environmental and community impacts of increased travel to public lands and around gateway communities (gateway communities surround national park areas) to enjoy these activities call for closer attention, and funding, to help address potential negative impacts.

## **Funding to Support Visitation on Public Lands**

Growing visitation on public lands presents new land management issues such as non-funded infrastructure repair and rising operational costs. In the past, funding for wildlife management has been collected via an excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment and licenses. New fundraising strategies involve raising money to support wildlife and land management by placing an additional tax on outdoor recreational equipment (Teaming with Wildlife) or off-shore oil company royalties (Conservation and Reinvestment Act). Although a smaller version of the latter (popularly called “CARA Lite” because it did not provide the full range of funding or benefits of the original bill) was passed in late 2000, the two tactics are still being debated.

However, in 1996, Congress did create an alternative funding strategy called the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. The demonstration program has allowed the Department of the Interior (NPS, USFWS, and BLM) and the Department of Agriculture (USFS) to test new admission fees and innovative collection strategies at up to 100 projects per agency. This allows all demonstration parks to keep 80% of all fee demonstration revenue that is collected.

## **Ecotourism Equals Economic and Educational Conservation**

These new funding strategies are designed to meet the same objectives ecotourism projects seek to create worldwide. Ecotourism projects have the potential to become economic and educational conservation tools for visited areas and surrounding local communities. According to the “Comparative Study of Ecotourism Policy in the Americas” by Edwards, McLaughlin, and Ham (1999) a total of 25 American state and Canadian province government tourism agencies provided documents that demonstrate their policy and activities regarding ecotourism. This is a substantial number of government agencies addressing ecotourism. It should be noted that each government agency has implemented different ecotourism policies and activities to meet their public demands.

For example the Maryland Department of Natural Resources began a nature tourism program in April 1999 with a full year budget of \$150,000. The program has requested a \$271,000 budget for the 2000 fiscal year. The program has nine full-time employees with the following job descriptions:

1. Chief of the Nature Tourism Program
2. Nature Tourism Manager
3. Administrative Assistant
4. Five Regional Coordinators
5. Two Park Naturalists

Two other part-time employees work within the Nature Tourism Program. They act as an Outdoor Adventure Coordinator and a Market Researcher. Since the program was developed, working partnerships have been developed with the following:

- Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development
- Maryland Office of Tourism
- Maryland Department of Transportation

Developing these partnerships offers two advantages: they offer both financial assistance and inter-active working relationships needed to implement new projects and form interdisciplinary committees.

The Nature Tourism Program has nature tourism in its title, however the program leaders use several of the guiding principles of ecotourism as their focal areas. These focus areas intend to:

1. Inspire a stewardship ethic in the public
2. Stimulate sustainable economic benefits for local communities
3. Introduce more people to Maryland's outdoor activities
4. Respond to the public demand for outdoor adventures
5. Conserve Maryland's natural resources

Government agencies are not the only entities where an ecotourism trend is occurring. In August 1999, the American Indian Tourism Conference was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It had two different tracks. The first track concentrated on conventional tourism strategies. The second track was titled "How can Native American Indians define their destiny through tourism." Canadian tribes led the way in presenting ecotourism projects that showcased their traditional values, both cultural and natural. For example, both the Mosse Cree First Nation and the MoCreebec Council of the Cree Nation are designing ecotourism projects that consist of ecolodge centers on outposts of the Hudson Bay in Ontario. Within the U.S., the Yurok Tribe located amidst the Redwood Forests of coastal northern California is in the preliminary stages of planning an ecolodge. The lodge will showcase their traditional way of life along the Klamath River, and generate economic and educational benefits for the Yurok.

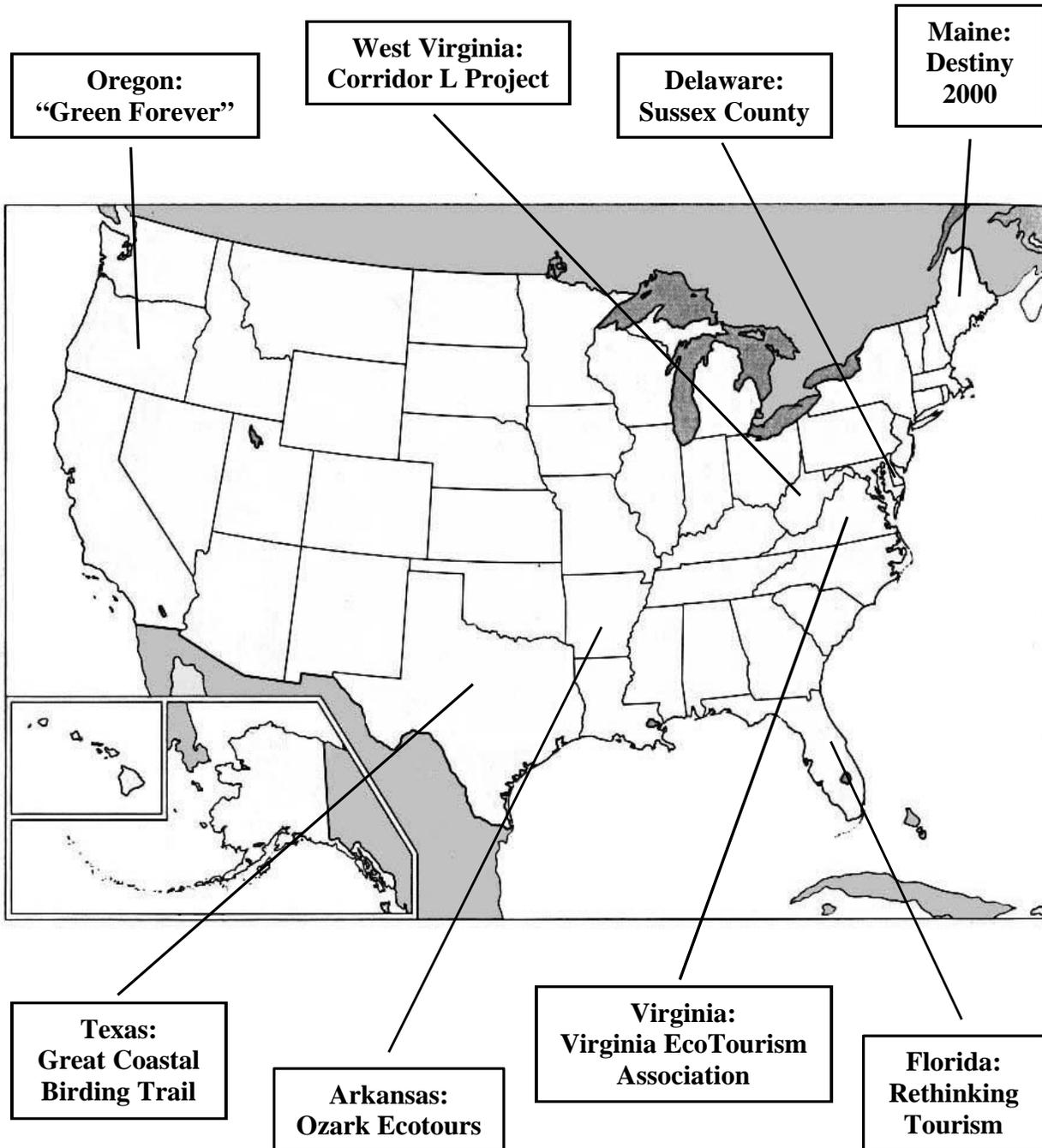
The eight case studies in this book are noteworthy projects that include governmental and non-governmental ecotourism initiatives. The projects enable us to understand the potential successes and difficulties in implementing ecotourism in the United States. After a critical evaluation of these projects, many new lessons can be learned for future ecotourism planners and managers.

### **Ecotourism projects present and future**

The projects included in this publication indicate that a new and emerging ecotourism industry is being established in the United States by a broad range of individuals, business, and governmental agencies. It is hoped that the case studies presented here will serve not only to inform those of us who are dedicated to the values, benefits, and ideals of ecotourism, but also to inspire us with examples of notable success and failure, and give us good reason to further research this emerging industry.

A bibliography of U.S. ecotourism literature and research is presented in Appendix 11, but existing research on U.S.-based ecotourism is limited. One reason for the lack of such research stems from the common misuse and misunderstanding of the term ecotourism. As more groups begin to understand ecotourism and its ability to serve as an economic and educational conservation tool for public lands and communities, we may learn better funding and managing strategies for future projects.

# Ecotourism Case Studies in the United States





# CHAPTER 1:

## Regional Ecotourism Planning

The following two projects are examples of regional ecotourism planning in the United States. Both the *DESTINY 2000 in Down East Maine* and *Florida -Rethinking Tourism* projects have developed working regional ecotourism plans aimed at planning and achieving ecotourism goals for their region.



**DESTINY 2000 in Down East Maine**



**Florida - Rethinking Tourism**



## **DESTINY 2000 in Down East Maine**

*“Down East Maine has incredible natural and cultural resources and, unfortunately, uneven visitation patterns. Acadia National Park receives three million visits a year while areas of Washington County looking to develop their tourism economies go undiscovered. With the DESTINY 2000 plan, we hope to reduce pressures on Acadia while developing other sustainable tourism opportunities Down East that will encourage economic development while protecting the region’s resources.”*

***Stephanie Clement, Conservation Director,  
Friends of Acadia***

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### **A GRASSROOTS-DRIVEN REGIONAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN**

**I**n 1994, the increase in tourism in the Down East region of Maine led to the formation of the volunteer Vacationland Resource Committee (VRC) to preserve and protect natural resources while promoting jobs, tourism and the quality of life through cooperation, proper planning, and management of resources for the generations to come. In 1998, the DESTINY 2000 grassroots plan was created. It reflects the planning and research carried out by VRC and the regional stakeholders. It addresses the strategies needed to implement sustainable tourism in scenic Maine.

### **BACKGROUND**

The region known as Down East Maine is on the northeastern coast of the state and includes two counties, Washington and Hancock, which have a population of approximately 82,000. The area is bound on the east and south by a thousand miles of Atlantic coastline and on the northeast by 70 miles of the St. Croix River, which divides the United States from New Brunswick, Canada. Down East is comprised of 1,200 coastal islands. Although Down East Maine is a major harvester of seafood, tourism is ranked above the fishing industry as the leading employer in the region.

Maine is nicknamed “Vacationland” because of the many natural and historical assets that make it highly attractive to tourists. The Down East region is famous for Acadia National Park on Mount Desert Island, the third largest island on the east coast. There are many harbor towns on the island that offer unique coastal-town charm. Ferries operate from the ports and transport visitors to various destinations around Mount Desert Island. Inland towns feature talented artists and potters, and the community of Blue Hill is a seasonal retreat for chamber musicians who give concerts locally. Deer Isle, an old-fashioned lobstering community, offers the visitor an authentic experience, including education on island life. Whale-watching tours leave from Eastport, the easternmost city in the United States, and chartered interpretive cruises transport the tourist along the coast to Canada.

In 1994, the VRC was set up by the Down East Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) to continue the dialogue on tourism that had started at a public meeting of government and non-governmental participants in early 1994. Run by local people working together to wisely use the region’s resources and enhance the lives of residents, the RC&D has support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is part of a program administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Services.

The VRC consists of representatives from local businesses, non-profit organizations and state and federal government. Throughout 1994 the committee met monthly and began planning for the First Annual Ecotourism Conference in Ellsworth, the gateway town to Down East Maine. The goal of the conference was to bring together a larger representation of local businesses, non-profit organizations, and state and federal agencies to discuss ecotourism in the Down East area.

### **Creating Goals for Sustainable Tourism**

Approximately 110 participants attended the first conference, held in 1995 and entitled “Marketing Tourism in the 90s.” The general consensus of the meeting was that sustainable tourism initiatives and strategies needed to be developed and implemented, at the grassroots level. The conference also addressed environmental concerns associated with increased tourism in the region.

*Four key goals for sustainable tourism emerged from the conference:*

1. To maintain a unique and healthy natural environment capable of supporting nature-based tourism.
2. To establish and maintain local coordination, ownership and retention of related economic benefits.
3. To maintain ecological and cultural sustainability, so that future generations are left with the same quality of resources and opportunities as the present generation.
4. To create/develop a means of education and interpretation for the communities to further the goals of sustainability in the region.

### *Stimulating interest in ecotourism*

The first conference in 1995 was a great success and generated a broader interest in sustainable tourism in the region. A second conference was organized in 1996 to continue the dialogue regarding sustainable tourism initiatives in the area. The theme of the conference was “Defining our Roles.”

Discussions at the second conference centered on opinions about ecotourism, environmental and economic issues, and responsible planning and management of resources. Keynote speakers were invited to discuss environmental issues such as the effects of clear-cutting on wildlife viewing and tourism. Also addressed were the issues of environmentally sensitive lodging, the importance of education and interpretation in the tourism industry, all designed to help the visitor and the service-provider protect Down East's natural resources.

The goal of the 1997 conference, "Your Stake in Sustainable Tourism," was to develop a long-term policy on tourism for the Down East region that would provide jobs, yet would not compromise natural and cultural resources for future generations.

*The key issues discussed at the conference included:*

- Infrastructure challenges
- Maximizing the cultural resources of Washington and Hancock counties
- Marketing
- Education
- Land-use planning
- Fostering new partnerships
- Accreditation and codes of practice

### **DESTINY 2000 Plan**

In the spring of 1997, Devon Danz, a graduate student from the University of Michigan, was hired as an intern by the VRC to conduct an informal needs-assessment with organizations and businesses associated with the tourism industry. The VRC helped Danz identify which key stakeholders to interview, many of whom had been present at past conferences. This made it easier to assess the sustainable tourism needs and concerns of stakeholders in the area.

In April 1998, Danz wrote the DESTINY 2000 plan, a document that proposes strategies for achieving five sustainable tourism goals:

1. Economic Development: Create new employment and business opportunities, and ensure local retention of economic benefits from tourism.
2. Ecological Consideration: Ensure that increased numbers of tourists and related business do not degrade the quality of special natural areas.
3. Cultural Preservation: Protect and revitalize historical places and traditions.
4. Local Coordination: Ensure collaboration among local citizen groups working on tourism, and ensure local ownership and decision-making power.
5. Education: Through local institutions, inform the local community and visitors about the natural and cultural history of the area.

#### ***DESTINY 2000 Mission Statement:***

*To provide for the conservation of local natural resources, preservation of cultural heritage, and regional economic development for the present and future communities of Washington and Hancock counties through sustainable development of cultural and nature tourism opportunities.*

### *Plan Presented at the Conference*

At the Fourth Annual Sustainable Tourism Conference held in Bar Harbor in 1998, the DESTINY 2000 plan was announced. A two-page flyer (Appendix 3) was developed, which summarized DESTINY 2000 and its associated strategies. The plan was seen as a successful representation of the participants' desires and ideas for sustainable tourism in the area.

At the conference, 50 organizations signed up to help implement the plan. "A Taste of Down East Maine" reception was also held, featuring local food and beverage producers. One hundred and fifty restaurants were invited in hopes of matching their supply needs to growers/producers in the region and, as a result, many partnerships were established. These relationships have helped keep small businesses in operation, and they encourage supportive and friendly relations among community members.

Along with the presentation of the DESTINY 2000 initiative and reception, The Wilderness Society presented the findings of a "Community Economic Workshop" for the Down East region. The Wilderness Society spoke on the many industries in the region, with tourism, the production of berries and the logging industry being the most important. Highlighted was the fact that tourism provides a great deal of revenue for Maine, second only to the timber products industry. The main message was that tourism can be an ecologically sensitive alternative to industries that consume local natural resources. Clearly, tourism has potential to further promote a prosperous and healthy economy for the region.

In the summer of 1998, a student intern and a Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA) were hired to help the VRC write grant applications, communicate with DESTINY partners, plan future conferences, and develop priorities for implementation of DESTINY 2000. Despite many grant applications, written in an attempt to fund a permanent staff position, none were selected. However, two local groups, the Sunrise Economic Development Council and the Maine Community Foundation, helped fund the next conference as well as the part-time intern and VISTA volunteer. Other monetary support came from a fundraiser that brought in donations from local businesses, airlines, and non-profit organizations.

### *Grassroots Efforts and Cooperation*

The Fifth Annual Sustainable Tourism Conference built on the basis of the fourth, featured local field trips, "The Taste of Down East Maine" reception, and workshops focused on DESTINY 2000 implementation. The theme of the conference was "Down East Sustainable Tourism Through Grassroots Efforts." Five field trips to local natural and cultural destinations were organized to showcase projects representing each of the five DESTINY 2000 goals. State parks, artist cooperatives, wreath-making companies and historical museums were visited and discussed.

The reception at the 1999 conference featured a salmon cook-off contest and blueberry dessert cook-off. These two foods have been a part of the Mainer's diet for centuries, both commodities being native to the state and very much apart of Maine's cultural tourism market.

Partners were asked to affix their names to those DESTINY 2000 strategies that they wanted to help implement. For example, the Maine Guide Association signed up to help design and implement local training programs. Discussions were held with the Eastern Maine Development Corporation and the Down East Acadia Regional Tourism (DART) business association about funding a joint staff position that would work with both DART and VRC to assist in cooperative tourism marketing and planning of DESTINY 2000. Grant proposals have been submitted for the position. A projects and internship list was developed by VRC to encourage area colleges and universities to use the talents of local students to accomplish DESTINY 2000's strategies.

## **Strategies and Accomplishments**

### *Lengthening the tourism season*

One goal of the economic development initiative was to explore opportunities for expanding the tourism season, possibly extending money-making opportunities throughout the year. The Down East region of Maine receives its highest overnight occupancy rates from July 1 to September 1. As a result, the region's towns sought to promote cultural attractions during other months.

Two October festivals and a June festival were developed to promote Down East culture. "The Blue Hill Heritage" festival held in October 1998 featured story-telling, boat-building and quilt-making demonstrations, which attracted visitors to the area during a low-tourism month. The "Come See What's Cooking" event was created by the Hancock Planning Commission and was also held in October 1998. A guide was published for visitors and featured a week-long itinerary for patronizing local restaurants that were using local growers/producers. Each day was highlighted in the guide with a different restaurant that was a participant in the "Come See What's Cooking" event.

In early June 1998, the "Warblers and Wildflowers" festival offered interpretive guided tours to observe birds and flora, and interpretive talks were given on warblers and wildflowers. The Northeast has the most diverse variety of warblers in the United States.

### *Planning byways and bike lanes*

A second strategy of the DESTINY 2000 plan was to help provide Washington and Hancock counties with infrastructure capable of supporting and managing increased tourism by designating scenic byways and adding bike lanes. Scenic byway plans have been written for State Route 3 on Mount Desert Island and State Route 186 on the Schoodic Peninsula. Once plans are passed at the state and national level, federal funding will be available to create signage, bike paths, and visitor centers. A Regional Transportation Advisory Subcommittee has been formed to examine bicycle trails, and the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) plans to support bicycle plans on Mount Desert Island with \$25,000 in funding.

### *Mass transportation*

A third strategy of the DESTINY 2000 plan was to promote mass transportation where appropriate, to develop the necessary infrastructure, and to encourage use of public transportation in order to minimize the environmental impact and congestion associated with single-car travel. In 1999, the Nonprofit Transportation Organization of Ellsworth received funds from the state to organize a propane-powered bus system on Mount Desert Island. In the first year of operation, more than 142,000 passengers were served in 76 days.

MDOT also has appropriated funds to make improvements to other transportation systems where they connect to the ferry system envisioned in the State's Strategic Passenger Transportation Plan. This plan includes a car-free tourism strategy where visitors will eventually be able to take the train from the major airports at Bangor and Portland directly to the state's ferry system serving two towns in the Down East region - Bar Harbor and Eastport. Funds are also being sought by MDOT for the improvement of port facilities there. Other plans to re-establish working railways are underway at the Calais Branch Railroad. The Railway Commission was formed by the state to complete a feasibility study on the re-establishment of services between the towns of Brewer and Calais.

### *A boost for marketing*

A fourth strategy was to refine and increase publicity for and marketing of the Down East region as a unique cultural destination.

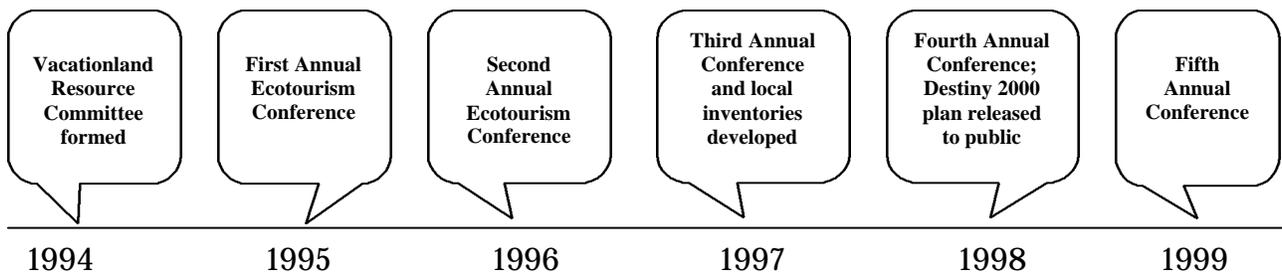
A \$2 million field operational test of "Intelligent Transportation Systems" is being funded by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Transportation in the Down East region. The field test will not only address transportation issues, but will also boost marketing in the region. The test includes setting up kiosks (touch-screen computers) housed in lodging facilities and visitor stations. The computers are web-based systems offering the visitor up-to-the-minute information on buses, parking lot vacancies, as well as restaurant, tour, and lodging information in the region.

Global Positioning Systems (GPS) will be placed in buses to track their departure and arrival times, and this information will be relayed back to the kiosks for the visitor to assess. Remote video cameras will be placed in parking lots so that visitors can determine whether or not to venture to a particular destination by using their car or the bus. This experimental system has the potential to support public transportation and reduce traffic congestion during the busy tourism season. In 1999, two kiosks were placed in the towns of Bar Harbor and Yarmouth.

### *Monitoring the impact of increased tourism*

As part of the ecological conservation initiative, a strategy was devised to implement a system for monitoring the effects of increased tourism on ecological systems. Acadia National Park, in conjunction with the University of Vermont, has set up a system to monitor visitor carrying-capacity for the carriage roads. These roads of crushed-stone were built for horse-drawn carriages in the park, but are now walking, biking and equestrian trails. Electric-eye cameras were used to count the number of people using the carriage roads, and it was found that on peak days 2,200 people entered the park via these roads. Although this number was below the identified 3,000 visitor carrying-capacity, some groups are concerned that this number is still too high.

## TIMELINE SUMMARY



## CHALLENGES

DESTINY 2000 is largely a grassroots project, and it lacks adequate funding to have a full-time staff position. The inability to hire consistent staff has been a continual hindrance to development of the plan.

A number of volunteer organizations have joined forces to meet many of the strategies outlined in DESTINY 2000, but some volunteers who have signed up to help implement strategies have been more cooperative and successful than others. In reaching out to students and universities, the VRC hopes to bring in more working hands and minds to successfully address more of the strategies of DESTINY 2000.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- The DESTINY 2000 plan is published in two formats: a 25-page document and a two-page flyer (Appendix 3) that summarizes all DESTINY's goals and strategies and is easily distributed. The plan strongly advocates community participation by asking for input and ideas regarding sustainable tourism in Down East Maine. It allows the communities of the region to have a voice in the initiative. The DESTINY plan was created out of a participatory, full-stakeholder process.
- The DESTINY 2000 plan limits its use of the word "ecotourism" in favor of "sustainable tourism," and does so for three primary reasons. First, there is common misuse of the term "ecotourism" by groups or businesses that do not actually embrace the standards and ethics described in ecotourism's definition. Second, despite increased research and development in the past 10 years of ecotourism as a specialized sector of the tourism industry, there remains a general unfamiliarity with the word in the Down East region. Third, there is concern that the term is not explicitly associated with two major goals of this strategy - economic development and cultural preservation - although some definitions of "ecotourism" certainly include these elements. When appropriate, the two terms are used interchangeably in the DESTINY 2000 sustainable tourism plan.
- The VRC has held five annual sustainable tourism conferences in an effort to attract larger participation at the grassroots level. The conferences have succeeded as they have reached groups that were not even anticipated.

- The positive effects of bringing concerned community groups together to share ideas regarding sensitive natural and cultural resources go beyond simple conversation, and they actually generate powerful and meaningful enthusiasm for change.



# Florida— Rethinking Tourism

*“The implementation of the statewide ecotourism/heritage tourism conceptual plan in Florida communities has been a huge job for the many parties who have helped to make the plan a reality. We are beginning to see the benefits of the plan that are a direct result of the giant efforts and actions supported at all levels: state, regional, and local. There is a ripple effect occurring in Florida communities. When one community successfully utilizes the plan, it is an inspiration and encouraging example for other communities to follow.”*

**Kerri Post, New Product Marketing  
Department Director, VISIT FLORIDA**

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## **STATEWIDE ECOTOURISM/HERITAGE TOURISM PLAN**

**I**n 1995, a study by the Florida House of Representatives’ Tourism Committee concluded that a regional tourism promotion plan could foster positive economic development in rural counties. The Florida Commission of Tourism was given the task of creating an advisory committee to develop a plan to protect and promote all tourism assets of the state. In 1996, the Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee was formed.

## **BACKGROUND**

Tourism is Florida’s largest industry. In the United States, Florida ranks second to California in total traveler-spending, with \$48.07 billion generated in one year (Travel Industry Association, 1998). For many people in Florida, the tourism industry is their main source of income, so these residents welcome visitors and support tourism promotion. Other residents are indifferent about the tourism industry, while some feel that mass tourism is stripping away Florida’s natural and cultural foundation.

Florida is a very large state, containing 67 counties, of which 34 are rural (rural being defined as fewer than 37,000 people per county). Rural counties make up 80 percent of Florida's land mass. Florida's southern subtropical climate is very different from its northern climate. The two different climates allow for increased bio-diversity and thus different ecosystems within the state's boundaries. Florida is world famous for the Everglades, a vast marl prairie wetland. This wetland system is covered with Sawgrass (*Cladium jamaicense*) for miles and provides precious habitat for wildlife. Florida also contains many historical sites and cultural traditions that represent the past and present influences of native and immigrant inhabitants.

Although Florida has been criticized for over-development and for having artificial tourist attractions such as amusement parks, the state is taking favorable strides towards preservation and conservation. For example, a \$7.8 billion project involving the restoration of the Everglades has begun. The state is also working to connect ecotourism and heritage tourism interests on a local, regional and state level. The Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism Committee has written a comprehensive plan recommending ways to promote and protect the natural, coastal, historical, cultural and commercial tourism assets. The plan recommends strategies for connecting interested entities, agencies and individuals to develop ways to manage and market ecotourism and heritage tourism in Florida.

### **Planning for ecotourism and heritage tourism**

In 1995, the Florida House of Representatives' Tourism Committee conducted an interim study focusing on rural economic development. The committee concluded that a regional tourism-promotion plan could foster positive economic development in rural counties. The committee also anticipated that the plan could augment growth in counties with an existing tourism industry.

The committee gave the Florida Commission of Tourism the responsibility to create an advisory committee to develop a regionally based plan for protecting and promoting all tourism assets in the state. In 1996, the Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee was formed. The Governor of Florida, as the Commission of Tourism chair, appointed the advisory committee members, who represented both the public and private sector, including:

- Department of Agriculture's Division of Forestry
- Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Recreation and Parks
- Department of Community Affairs
- Department of Transportation
- Florida Greenways Coordinating Council
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Division of Historical Resources
- Additional representatives from other federal, state, regional, local, and private-sector associations involved in environmental, historical, cultural, recreational and tourism activities.

Once the advisory committee was formed, many private and public meetings took place to create the plan. The advisory committee was divided into several task forces that were directed to write different components of the plan. Completed in 1997, the draft was presented to the Florida Commission of Tourism. Based on this commission's input and public comment, the plan was finalized and presented to the House Tourism Committee; it was approved in early 1998.

Designed for implementation at the statewide level, the Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee often refers to the plan as a "blueprint" for Florida regions to follow when developing ecotourism or heritage tourism. Each region can tailor the plan to its unique needs and conditions.

## THE "PLAN"



The plan is a conceptual model to help protect and promote Florida's natural, coastal, historical, cultural and commercial tourism assets. It focuses on ways to provide sustainable and continued economic benefits to Florida. In conserving valuable resources, the plan aims to improve the quality of life in Florida by encouraging a strong sense of place, community, and multicultural appreciation. To clarify the understanding of Florida's tourism assets, the committee sought to define those key assets that the plan intends to protect and promote.

## Definitions of Florida's Tourism Assets

*(Note: All the definitions listed below are taken from the plan.)*

- **Natural:** Properties that are present in or produced by nature, not artificial.
- **Coastal:** Locations along the Atlantic coast or Gulf of Mexico: beaches and off-coast assets such as coral reefs, estuaries, etc.
- **Historical:** Of, or relating to, past events based on or concerned with events in history.
- **Cultural:** Properties or events that focus on socially transmitted behavior patterns characteristic of a people or of a state of social and artistic expression - intellectual or artistic activity.
- **Commercial:** Properties engaged in commerce, having profit as a major aim.

## Definition of Ecotourism and Heritage Tourism

### *Ecotourism Definition*

Travel to natural areas that is responsible, conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local peoples while providing a quality experience that connects the visitor to nature.

*Activities included in ecotourism:*

- Nature-based tours
- Managed access to sanctuaries
- Wildlife viewing
- Nature-based attractions
- Visitation to natural areas such as beaches, forests, lakes and greenways
- Outdoor recreational activities such as hiking, canoeing, snorkeling, horseback riding, boating, diving, kayaking, biking, fishing, etc.
- Native American reservations

*Heritage Tourism Definition*

Responsible travel to historic and cultural sites, and activities that educate the community and visitors by providing a quality experience. Heritage refers to evidence of our history and culture. It is represented in our customs, values, beliefs, art and artifacts. It is our inheritance as a society and gives us a sense of who we are. Heritage tourism consists of activities or locations that connect us to history and culture.

*Activities included in heritage tourism:*

- Museums
- Historic sites
- Cultural events
- Agricultural tours
- Architecture and engineering works
- Native American eco/cultural sites
- Performing arts centers
- Festivals
- Interpretive facilities
- Archaeological sites
- Cultural landscapes

**Plan Components**

The Ecotourism/Heritage Advisory Committee recognized five components as the main content of the plan.

*The five components are:*

1. Strategic relationships
2. Inventory
3. Protection
4. Education
5. Marketing

### (1) *Strategic Relationships*

The strategic component developed collaboration among the many public and private sector entities included in the ecotourism/heritage tourism industry. Linking those entities, private and public, which do not normally work together, was seen as a crucial first step in implementing ecotourism and heritage tourism practices. Connecting these parties at all levels, state, regional and local, was a high priority.

#### **Strategic Goals**

- Create a regional plan that links state and community initiatives and coordinates public and private sector efforts to protect and promote natural, coastal, historical, cultural and commercial resources.
- Encourage the integration of ecotourism and heritage tourism into comprehensive land-use plans.
- Develop necessary initiatives to provide public access while ensuring protection of ecotourism and heritage tourism assets.
- Increase private sector participation in natural, coastal, historical, cultural and commercial tourism assets.

### (2) *Inventory*

The inventory component created a methodology whereby regions could identify their assets and link them to a statewide inventory. Without identifying these assets, it would be hard to protect and promote them. Regions must recognize their ecotourism and heritage tourism assets before making management and marketing decisions. “Local Considerations for Inventory Inclusion” (Appendix 4) was created by the statewide Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism Committee for regions to use when deciding which private and public sector entities should be inventoried as ecotourism or heritage tourism. The statewide Ecotourism/Heritage Advisory Committee decided it was not its role to regulate the inventory and that decisions about who to include in the inventory are most appropriately made at the regional level.

#### **Inventory Goals**

- Develop a list of information sources (by region) that would inventory all ecotourism and heritage tourism resources by category and division thereof.
- Develop criteria that would “qualify” resources to be included on the inventory list (Appendix 4).
- Assess and improve directional and educational signage for ecotourism and heritage tourism destinations and coordinate with other programs.
- Create a plan to identify additional infrastructure needed to access resources.

Regional funding for the inventory process came from a variety of sources. The largest funding source was VISIT FLORIDA, a private/public partnership responsible for promoting tourism in the state. VISIT FLORIDA in 1998 gave grants totaling \$68,000 to various regions for both inventory and marketing efforts. Other funds came from local chamber of commerce offices and federal agriculture, forest and water-management agencies as well as private businesses.

By August 1999, 3,000 inventory forms had been returned by members of the state’s ecotourism/heritage tourism industry. Inventory is being entered into regional databases. The database will be consolidated into one and featured on VISIT FLORIDA’s web site ([www.flausa.com](http://www.flausa.com)), searchable by destination or activity.

### (3) *Protection*

The plan’s protection component seeks to maintain a balance between the ecotourism/heritage tourism industry and ecosystem protection, site preservation, conservation and public access. The protection committee stresses the understanding

and consideration of the carrying capacity of ecotourism/heritage tourism sites for their future protection and conservation.

Understanding the implications of advocating additional visitors to Florida's already huge tourist base (48 million in 1998) was of foremost importance for the protection committee. To ensure that Florida's natural, coastal, historical and cultural assets were adequately protected, this committee addressed measures to avoid degradation through visitor usage

#### *Booklet on basic protection*

In cooperation with the strategic relationships task force, a booklet is being created for regional and local communities. This booklet aims to educate communities on basic protection of ecotourism and heritage tourism sites. The booklet addresses both the economic benefits of sustainable development, and also the necessary actions needed to protect Florida resources.

The main message contained in the booklet is that residents and visitors in Florida have a role in protecting these resources. In essence, the idea that "we all live downstream" is interwoven throughout the content of the booklet. Several positive and negative case studies and examples from Florida ecotourism and heritage tourism are highlighted in order to learn from them.

#### *(4) Education*

The education component of the plan established goals and strategies that educate the tourism provider, visitor and community. The committee proposes that visitors and tourism providers be made aware of the place they are visiting and understand that their presence and behavior has a direct impact on resource quality and the quality of experience for other users.

In July 1999, an Education Task Force Meeting was held in which seven environmental educators, practitioners and/or entrepreneurs from Florida were asked to deliver 15-minute presentations outlining their training courses, programs and workshops. The presenters provided the audience with information about their target audience, length/hours of the course, format, major components, and estimated cost to end user/provider. Educational ideas ranged from eco-guide certification to naturalist programs. Additional meetings will address the need for education and training opportunities in ecotourism/heritage tourism in Florida.

#### **Protection Goals**

- Identify the government and private sector roles in maintaining ecotourism and heritage tourism guidelines.
- Determine a method for management and protection guidelines.
- Define "carrying capacity" and encourage the development of site-specific guidelines.
- Create a model of ecotourism and heritage tourism visitor guidelines (Appendix 4).
- Create a model of guidelines for ethical behavior of tour providers (Appendix 4).

#### **Education Goals**

- Develop local and regional training and credential/certification programs for ecotourism and heritage tourism providers.
- Encourage and support the development of local, regional and statewide educational initiatives focusing on the natural, coastal, historical, cultural and commercial tourism assets of Florida designed to inform and educate residents, visitors, government officials and the tourist industry.
- Encourage and support local, regional and statewide partnerships to develop and share educational information, materials, programs, etc.

### (5) *Marketing*

The Marketing Committee's main objective was to assist regions in expanding consumer awareness of the vast array of experiences Florida has to offer.

Traditionally, Florida's beaches and theme parks receive the highest level of visitation in the state. The Marketing Committee addressed the need to broaden the visitor's perception of Florida's natural, historical, cultural, commercial and coastal assets and connect the visitor to these features.

In April 1998, VISIT FLORIDA created the New Product Marketing Department to work in conjunction with the statewide Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism Committee. This team helped to build a tourism inventory, supports future education programs, and is designing the implementation of marketing programs for both consumers and the travel-trade industry. The New Product Marketing Department consists of two employees working with the statewide committee and the tourism industry to address vertical markets in the Florida tourism portfolio. This will ideally attract additional special interest visitors and promote extended stays - thus generating more economic gains.

The 1998/1999 marketing programs included the creation of the "Worth the Drive" series of seven themed, off-the-beaten path, self-driving tours. Grants totaling \$68,000 were awarded, with more than \$25,000 used for in-depth research projects for developing a new Outdoor Adventure and Historical/Cultural section on the VISIT FLORIDA web site. In 1999/2000, there are plans to assist the counties/regions that do not have organized, funded or staffed efforts, particularly in rural areas. VISIT FLORIDA also plans to develop eight more "Worth a Drive" tours, donate \$35,000 to historical and cultural research, and develop a comprehensive "how to" manual for product development and marketing.

#### **Marketing Goals**

- Expand the vacationing consumer's perception of Florida to a more well-rounded experience including nature-based, coastal, historical, cultural and commercial activities.
- Assist regions in their efforts to promote the natural, coastal, historical, cultural, and commercial tourism assets in their area.
- Simplify the ability to select and achieve an ecotourism and heritage tourism experience for our visitors.
- Implement an ongoing data collection mechanism to determine future marketing priorities.

### **Post Plan**

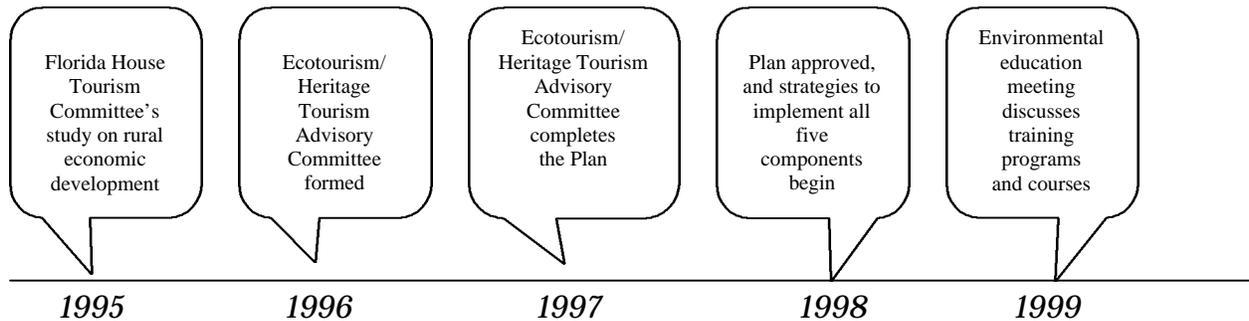
After the plan was finished and approved in January 1998, the original task of the Ecotourism/Heritage Advisory Committee was done. However, some members from the original committee in April 1998 joined a new statewide Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee, which specified eight geographic regions for the state. Two representatives from each region were asked to join the statewide committee, representing a wide range of professions: private industry, land managers, rural planners, cultural and historical councils, and government agencies. In all, 34 professionals representing federal, state, and local entities make up the new statewide Ecotourism/Heritage Advisory Committee.

The two volunteer regional representatives are to establish and coordinate ecotourism and heritage tourism initiatives within their regions and report back to the statewide Ecotourism/Heritage Advisory Committee.

The statewide committee meets quarterly and its decisions affect the future of Florida's tourism. Regional representatives hold monthly multi-county or regional

meetings to disseminate information to local individuals and groups in their communities. A virtual web of communication has been formed to broadcast the latest advancements and developments of ecotourism and heritage tourism in Florida.

### **TIMELINE SUMMARY**



### **CHALLENGES**

The greatest challenge for the New Product Marketing Department of VISIT FLORIDA has been organizing such a large, diverse - and even contentious - group of active professionals, because there are only two full-time employees. A large amount of time and effort has been spent communicating between all parties to ensure proper understanding and implementation of programs. As such, the plan's local success relies heavily on regional volunteers throughout Florida's 67 counties.

Another concern of some residents is that some ecotourism principles may be overlooked due to the large scope of the project. For example, the Guidelines of Consideration for ecotourism and heritage tourism businesses in the inventory do not give attention to small tour sizes, minimal impact, contributions towards conservation, efforts towards sustainable development, and other ecotourism principles.

Consequently, there is no guarantee to the consumer that the businesses listed in the inventory on the VISIT FLORIDA web site supports all or any ecotourism principles.

The education committee is addressing this problem by planning for certification and strong education programs that will educate the tour operator, guide and traveler about what constitutes sustainable ecotourism products and programs. In addition, the protection booklet will focus on the pros and cons of tourism and on ways to develop sustainable heritage and ecotourism practices in local communities. The "how to" product-developing and marketing manual also addresses sustainable tourism practices. It emphasizes the need to actively implement environmentally sensitive business practices, codes and ethics while ensuring that the client is aware of the owner's efforts to run a sustainable business.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

- Florida's statewide initiative to implement ecotourism/heritage tourism is the first attempt of its kind in the U.S. It should be commended, but also studied and scrutinized by other state governments that foresee a need for a similar program for their own communities.
- By bringing the right professionals to the table, Florida was able to launch its ecotourism/heritage tourism plan successfully and without notable delays. The professional committee members who wrote the plan were in positions of influence within the state, therefore the plan was supported by the tourism industry and approved by the legislature. The importance of a private, non-governmental, non-profit organization - VISIT FLORIDA - as the plan's overseer was crucial to the plan's success. A non-governmental organization is typically more responsive, has less bureaucracy and is able to work closely with communities.
- Due to the scope of the project, no mechanism currently exists to assure that the inventory will be composed of products that apply ecotourism principles such as conservation, education, and well-being of local peoples. Thus, the concerned consumer must research tour operators or destinations and seek additional information regarding the extent of their efforts to protect natural and cultural resources in Florida.
- Successful grassroots, community-driven processes take time to initiate. Community involvement, protection, education and successful marketing programs cannot be rushed. The implementation of community-driven Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism is in many ways an evolutionary process. Program leaders must deal with the expectations of the community so that people do not expect total economic or site transformation "overnight."

## **CHAPTER 2: Regional Ecotourism Enhancement**

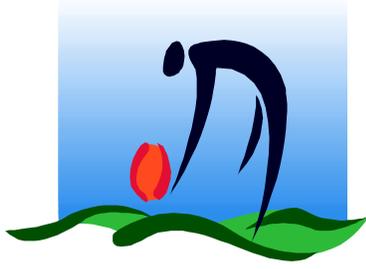
The following two projects are examples of regional ecotourism enhancement in the United States. Both *Sussex County, Delaware—Embraces Ecotourism* and *West Virginia’s Corridor L Tourism Enhancement Project* exemplify how a region can implement ecotourism to enhance an already existing tourism industry.



**Sussex County, Delaware - Embraces Ecotourism**



**West Virginia’s Corridor L Tourism Enhancement Project**



## **Sussex County, Delaware –Embraces Ecotourism**

*“I believe people come to Sussex County to get away from city lives, wall-to-wall traffic, overpopulation and stress. We don’t want to repeat that life here; we want to keep our quiet beauty, lovely rivers and gentle way of life while sharing them with others.”*

***Cynthia Small, Executive Director, Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission***

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### **ENCOURAGING AWARENESS OF ECOTOURISM**

**A** statewide ecotourism conference—*Ecotourism in Delaware: A Workshop to Examine Nature-Based Tourism Opportunities*—was held in 1994 to encourage ecotourism awareness and bring together businesses, government officials, environmental groups, educators and interested citizens to learn more about nature tourism opportunities in Delaware. This initiative has been highly successful since the first conference, with heritage trails, surveys, bird-watching, and publication of the *Delaware Eco-Discoveries* tour guide.

### **BACKGROUND**

Delaware, the second smallest state, is made up of just three counties, but Sussex County in particular deserves recognition for its distinguished ecotourism initiatives. The southernmost county in Delaware, Sussex has an estimated 136,000 inhabitants and encompasses many natural habitats such as forests, wetlands, rivers, and Atlantic coast beaches. These habitats house wildlife, migratory and resident birds, as well as native wildflowers and eastern deciduous trees. The county also contains authentic American cultural heritage.

Sussex is an admirable example of how a county wishing to implement ecotourism as a responsible and sustainable means of bringing in economic support to its communities can do so with cooperation and funding. In 1994, the tourism industry in Sussex County was seeking to share the area’s attractions in an environmentally responsible way. The state park division was already marketing to attract visitors but was concerned about long-term sustainability of natural and cultural resources. The Sussex County

Convention and Tourism Commission hired its first employee, Cynthia Small, who as executive director guided the ecotourism movement in collaboration with the University of Delaware and Delaware's State Park System.

### **Starting With A Conference/Workshop**

In 1994, the statewide conference *Ecotourism in Delaware: A Workshop to Examine Nature-Based Tourism Opportunities* brought together regional businesses, government officials, environmental groups, educators and concerned residents to learn more about nature tourism opportunities in the state. At the same time, the conference sponsors sought to find ways to ensure that Delaware's natural and cultural resources are protected.

The workshop was sponsored by the University of Delaware Sea Grant Marine Advisory Service, Department of Natural Resource and Environmental Control (DNREC) Division of Parks and Recreation, and Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission. Three panels highlighted the day's activity: "Ecotourism Activity in the Region," "Ecotourism Activity in Delaware," and "Ecotourism Means Business."

#### *Goals of the Conference*

- To stimulate year-round participation in ecotourism opportunities.
- To enlist the support of those involved in ecotourism in order to promote environmental stewardship among visitors.
- To foster a better appreciation of Delaware's natural resources.

One of the results of the conference was the emergence of a recurrent theme, "for an ecotourism movement in the county to truly succeed, the county and its residents must operate in a sustainable manner so that natural areas are not harmed by underestimating peak season impact."

#### *Marketing ecotourism*

In 1995 Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission and the University of Delaware Sea Grant Marine Advisory Service worked on marketing the entire state to attract responsible tourists. *Delaware Eco-Discoveries*, Delaware's first nature-based tourism guide, was created by local writers and publishers. A two-page questionnaire was sent to statewide nature-tourism businesses and operators to formulate a comprehensive database for the guide. The goal of this guide was to promote active businesses, environmental organizations, and state agencies. The target audience was residents and visitors who appreciate the environment and can add to the economy without harming the environment. *Delaware Eco-Discoveries* highlights many nature tourism opportunities other than ecotourism, but it equally serves to educate readers about the need to protect and preserve Delaware's natural resources. The guide is updated annually.

### **Another Conference, A Survey and A Heritage Trail**

Ecotourism promotion in 1996 entailed a second conference: *Ecotourism in Delaware: A Conference on Preservation, Packaging and Profitability*. This conference, like the previous one, brought together local businesses, government officials and interested citizens to further explore the market and business opportunities created by ecotourism. The conference presented a global, national and regional context for applying ecotourism business principles to local efforts.

In 1997, Sussex County conducted a survey that looked at Delaware's ecotourists (Appendix 5). The survey gave insights into the market profile of nature tourists and which activities they favored while touring Sussex County.

Another outstanding accomplishment of Sussex County in 1997 was the creation of the Southern Delaware Heritage Trail, which aims to promote tourism in less-visited inland areas by featuring the area's cultural and historical sites. This 130-mile cycling and 70-mile automobile touring loop links six towns of Sussex County that take pride in historic shipbuilding hamlets, old churches, pristine waterways and diverse parks. The trail is the first official heritage trail recognized by the state Department of Transportation. Its value to the community has been recognized as it has twice been funded by the legislature for signage, and private industry and public entities have funded brochure reprints.

#### *Collaborators in the Southern Delaware Heritage Trail:*

- Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission
- Several Town Chambers of Commerce
- One Local Bank
- Governor's Council on Bicycling
- State Department of Transportation

### **Green Hotels Seminar**

In 1998, the Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission prepared for its third ecotourism conference, *Inn Keeping with the Environment: Green Hotels Seminar*. In preparation for the conference, the University of Delaware created a 12-question survey and distributed it to 150 hotels and motels in Delaware (Appendix 6). The survey findings showed that Delaware hoteliers were eager to learn more about new sustainable techniques, such as how to improve their energy conservation and recycling methods.

#### *Topics Covered at the Green Hotels Seminar:*

- Water and Energy Conservation
- Recycling
- Environmental Cleaning, Pest Control and Other Chemicals
- Landscape Design
- Green Restaurant Practices
- Green Marketing

The seminar attracted general managers, executive housekeepers, hotel restaurant managers, sales and marketing managers, tourism industry professionals, and bed-and-breakfast owners and managers.

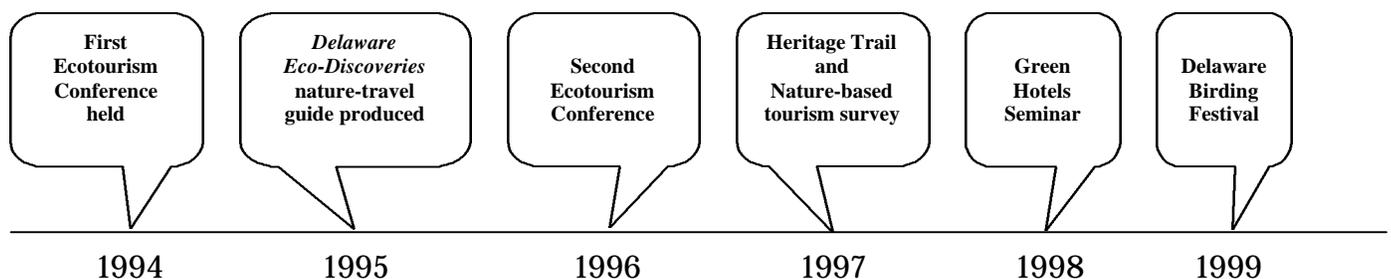
### **Bird Watching in 1999**

In 1999, the focus of ecotourism in Sussex County was avitourism. Although a 1994 study by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ranked Delaware at 49th among 50 states in bird-watching revenues, the state still brought in \$21 million from birding. This was plenty of incentive for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with Kent County Tourism and Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission, to sponsor the Delaware Birding Festival at Bombay Hook, Prime Hook, and Delaware Beaches.

The festival brought tourists into Delaware during the month of May, when shorebirds migrate from South America. On Delaware beaches, shorebirds take advantage of the millions of pea-sized horseshoe crab eggs, a high-protein source greatly needed during long migratory flights. About 1,200 people visited Bombay Hook and Prime Hook during the two-day festival, which featured tours and lectures as well as bus trips to bird-watching habitats. This high turnout was achieved with minimal advertisement and drew visitors to Delaware during a month when business is slow along the coast.

*Bird Watching On Delmarva*, a book designed to introduce families and novice bird watchers throughout Delaware, Maryland and Virginia to bird-watching, also was created this year. This book should continue to boost interest in the region's birds.

### **TIMELINE SUMMARY**



### **CHALLENGES**

Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission reports that their two largest challenges have been securing funding for ecotourism projects and educating the local residents about ecotourism. When the county decided to incorporate ecotourism into their tourism industry in 1994, they discovered many residents were unaware of the definition of ecotourism, its principles and potentials. Over the next two years, the commission sought to educate residents about this niche market through conferences and media. Local community support for ecotourism implementation soon followed the education processes.

The commission also has identified a need to educate potential donors about ecotourism. The public and private agencies and foundations the commission is seeking funds from have a limited understanding of ecotourism. This has been a challenge for the commission, as well as a hindrance to the ecotourism movement in the county.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

- Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission initiated ecotourism in Sussex County by holding a conference that provided the county with a list of interested parties, or stakeholders, who were interested in learning how responsible tourism in Sussex County can protect the environment and benefit local people. The participant list formed at the conference was then used for creating new ecotourism projects like the *Delaware Eco-Discoveries* tour guide.
- Although Delaware was ranked almost last in revenues from bird watching by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Report in 1994, a successful spring festival brought economic benefits during a normally slow visitation month. Thanks to Sussex County's past experience with ecotourism, the county was able to work with neighboring Kent County to make the festival eco-friendly as well as a shared, two-county event. By not over-advertising or over-promoting, the counties were able to make it possible for visitors to view shorebirds without the sites being overcrowded by birders.
- The second 1995 conference brought attendees from the first 1994 conference together with new participants to review lessons learned from past ecotourism projects as well as to discuss new ideas for future projects. The second conference also highlighted other aspects and principles of ecotourism to further educate Delaware's community residents.
- One main goal of ecotourism is to control visitor impact on natural habitats, and the Southern Delaware Heritage Trail has successfully attracted visitors away from crowded beaches during the summer seasons. The creation of the trail has the potential to alleviate visitor impact on Delaware shorelines (an area for future research) and to provide an ecotourism activity that can be marketed during the off season.



# West Virginia's Corridor L Tourism Enhancement Project

*"The development of our new, nonprofit organization and all the sustainable tourism projects that were funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission have given me great access to people working in the field of tourism in this area; it was our conference that was the catalyst to getting our initiatives rolling and partnerships forming."*

***Scott Legg of Backroads Tours, first president of Corridor L Tourism Enhancement, Inc.***

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## **ECOTOURISM IN A PROSPERING ADVENTURE TOURISM REGION**

The "Corridor L" region of southern West Virginia, which incorporates four counties in the Appalachian Mountains, has utilized a \$300,000 grant to develop tourism that is socially and naturally sensitive. This process helped bond the regional communities together in the planning and execution of projects. The grant was divided into smaller grants that were used to educate tourists and enhance sustainable tourism in the region.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was established by Congress in 1965 to support economic and social development in 13 Appalachian Mountain states. The ARC funded the Corridor L Tourism Enhancement Project, which includes the West Virginia counties of Raleigh, Fayette, Nicholas and Braxton.

Corridor L features authentic Appalachian Mountain history, culture and natural resources. The mountains surrounding the New River were once plentiful with coal and boomed with economic prosperity from the early 1920s through the 1960s. In 1960, more than 100,000 people lived in the region, but by the 1980s, only 50,000 remained. Since the virtual shut-down of the coal industry in the Corridor L region, tourism has been essential to the survival of many mountain communities whose residents do not want to relocate.

Local adventure tourism and ecotourism operators offer rafting, mountain-biking, rock-climbing, hiking, llama-trekking and horseback riding along the rivers and creeks. The region's longest steel arch span bridge crosses the New River Gorge and connects U.S. Route 19. Under the bridge lies a Class III rapid named Fayette Station, the last rapid of a 15-mile stretch of the New River Gorge, known as the Grand Canyon of the East. More than whitewater contributes to the attractions of the area, however. Local museums along the river feature historical artifacts, African-American history, pioneer life, an old one-room schoolhouse, and recall the Shawnee tribe, which resisted the coming of the first white settlements to the region.

### **Project Events**

In 1995, a plan to enlarge Route 19 from a two-lane to a four-lane highway was created. The state Department of Transportation expected the volume of cars to almost double from 23,000 a day on the two-lane road to 44,000 cars a day with four lanes.

The ARC saw the potential for tourism growth with this dramatic increase in travelers passing through the area. The commission also recognized the need to help local communities prepare for the increased volume of tourism, and to do so in a sustainable manner that took the natural and social well-being of the area into account. In early 1995, the Appalachian Regional Commission provided \$300,000 to the Fayette County Chamber of Commerce to aid in the development, management and coordination of sustainable tourism projects in the Corridor L region. The grant was divided to fund three different work areas: 1) consultation, 2) school participation, and 3) projects (Appendix 7).

### **Strategic Model**

A model plan for the tourism enhancement project was developed by a regional steering committee together with a Colorado consulting firm called Community First Partners. All four Corridor L counties were represented on the steering committee, made up as follows:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Private Sector Tour Operator
- County Resource Coordinator
- Southern West Virginia Convention and Visitor Bureau
- Historian

The initial plan involved working with West Virginia University and two of the state's colleges on tourism-enhancement projects approved by the steering committee. The schools were to provide technical assistance and, in return, each school received grants of \$10,000 to participate.

To stimulate community involvement, the steering committee announced the availability of grant money in newspapers and on local radio stations. Funds were allotted to projects that involved promotion, marketing and sustainable development of tourism in the Corridor L region. Although building and construction projects were not funded, feasibility studies for building were. By October 1995, 39 project proposals had

been reviewed, and 21 were given grants. The remaining grant money went to the development of the Tourism Management Plan for the Corridor L region and for the Corridor L Overlay Plan, Fayette County's master plan.

## **PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS**

(For a complete outline of projects see Appendix 7)

### **Environmental Enhancement**

#### *Trail Development*

A grant of \$5,000 was given to Glenville State College, Glenville, to plan environmentally sensitive trails. Trails were to be built on land owned by the Army Corps of Engineers. The town of Summersville in Nicholas County - one of the four counties in the plan - was given approval by the Corps to build trails on this land for hiking and biking use.

#### *Corridor L Overlay Plan*

A grant of \$20,000 went to hire a consultant to update Fayette County's master plan. This plan now focuses on environmentally sensitive zoning that prohibits strip malls and enhances the aesthetic natural surroundings of the county. Businesses are allowed to develop within 1,000 feet of Route 19, but they must follow the special overlay guidelines as accepted by the county zoning committee. A user fee is also tied to the amount of land being developed - a fee that rises proportionately with the size of the parcel. This revenue goes to the zoning committee to fund other zoning projects in the county.

### **Community Enhancement**

#### *Festivals and Events*

A grant of \$4,500 went to implement the first annual Regional Tourism Conference, which was held in 1996. The goal of the conference was to disseminate information about tourism in the region to related businesses. The event sought to encourage businesses to continue to work with, and cooperatively support, regional sustainable tourism. Each year, keynote speakers address regional tourism issues such as zoning, sustainable building, marketing and other areas of interest to the communities.

A grant of \$10,960 was provided to implement an Appalachian sports event - the first "Captain Thurmond's Challenge," a triathlon, held in 1996. The triathlon consists of mountain-biking, kayaking, and running along the New River Gorge. The event ties into media marketing, bringing publicity to the area in June, right before the upcoming visitor season.

A grant of \$3,500 was awarded to a high school program entitled "Travel West Virginia." The program encourages students to travel within the state to learn about hospitality and customer services. Seven high schools in the Corridor L region participated in the program and each school visited one of the other regions, learning about tourism in that particular town.

## **Cultural Enhancement**

### *Museum Developments*

A grant of \$5,225 went to West Virginia University to create a plan to turn the old Fayette County Jail into a museum. A professor from the university, with support from graduate students, developed a strategic plan for the museum. The Fayette Historical Society and local people now provide management and technical assistance to the museum.

### *Retail/Merchandising*

A grant of \$5,000 went to Concord College, Athens, to help promote and expand the retail markets of “West Virginia Grown” products by providing point-of-purchase displays to improve logo recognition by tourists. The statewide West Virginia Grown program includes 13 counties and the grant money was used to purchase shelf space in local stores in the Corridor L region.



## **Tourism Enhancement**

### *Marketing*

A grant of \$11,000 went to publishing a map entitled “The New River Adventure Trail,” which identifies and locates all tourist-related businesses along the corridor and within a 10-mile radius of Route 19. Approximately 100,000 copies were distributed to local stores in the region. The map markets the area as America’s recreation destination, listing tourism services and businesses in the corridor.

A grant of \$7,900 went to publishing a brochure linking six small historical and cultural museums along the river. The African-American Heritage Family Tree Museum in Ansted with Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, planned and designed the brochure, which is entitled “Museums Along the River.” The brochure promotes a self-guided tour of these museums and briefly describes each site.

A grant of \$15,000 went to the Southern West Virginia Convention and Visitors Bureau to develop an updated catalog of tourism attractions that is offered to both visitors and locals. The three-inch thick binders are available to local tourism businesses, and they serve as an inventory of tourism services and business in the region.

### *Feasibility Study*

A \$20,000 grant went to a local resident of the region to undertake a feasibility study on a destination resort reflecting West Virginia’s heritage and history along the New River. Moreover, the feasibility study showed the need for overnight accommodations in the area. The wildlife park/resort would be developed in a sustainable manner on 11,000 acres of a former coal-mining site. It plans to educate the visitor on how to reclaim industrial lands. It will showcase what the area was like when Native Americans, trappers, and coal miners inhabited the land. Building has not begun, but plans have been designed.

### *Tourism Management Plan*

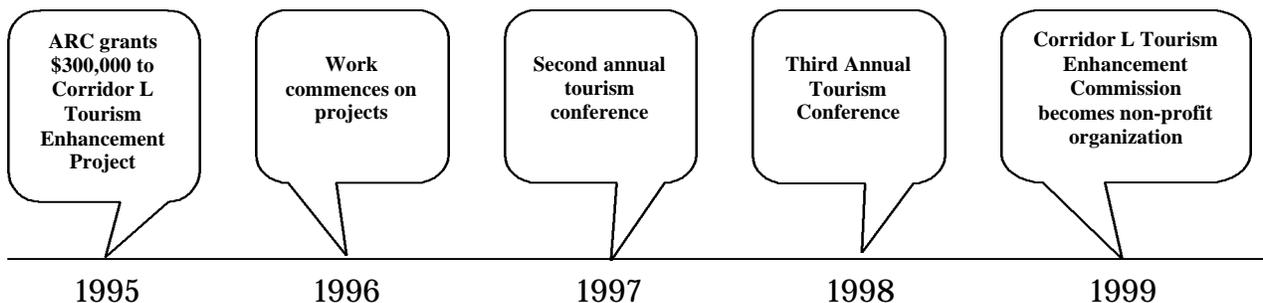
A grant of \$7,200 went to initiating a tourism management plan for the region. In each county a representative of a small non-profit or private industry gathered information on tourism, creating an inventory of all the tourism services, businesses and destinations. Each county wrote a 30-40 page document on its own tourism situation, describing the industry in their county. These documents were combined to make one comprehensive resource document for the entire Corridor L region.

### **Corridor L Tourism Enhancement, Inc.**

In August 1999, local tourism professionals and community planners formed a nonprofit organization - Corridor L Tourism Enhancement, Inc. - to continue funding sustainable tourism projects in the four-county region.

Another goal of the nonprofit organization is to continue bringing the counties together for an annual tourism conference. The organization consists of a president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary and a general board of directors consisting of three representatives from each county.

### **TIMELINE SUMMARY**



### **CHALLENGES**

The steering committee oversaw all the projects, and at times it was a challenge to decide which project was most worthy of supporting sustainable tourism in the corridor, and thus deserving a grant. In the end, many projects were awarded smaller grants to allow a diversity of projects to proceed.

Problems did occur between the committee and colleges that were to provide student technical assistance. Time conflicts did not allow for this partnership to work to its fullest. Professors did not properly anticipate how much student time was needed to work on the various projects that had been approved by the steering committee. Although the schools each aided at least one project, it was decided to allow most projects to find other technical support and assistance.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

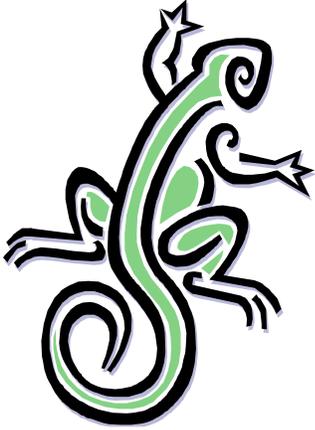
- The steering committee was allocated grant money for specific uses. It was decided to fund as many projects as possible that met the approval of the committee. In this way, by granting small sums of money to a number of projects, the committee was able to address many different needs and concerns within the region's tourism industry.
- The Corridor L Tourism Enhancement Project shows how enthusiasm and pride in regional natural, cultural and historical resources can bring people together to cooperate and plan sustainable tourism projects that will benefit a region economically, environmentally and culturally for many years to come.

## **CHAPTER 3: A State Ecotourism Association**

The following project is an example of the creation of an ecotourism association in the United States. The Virginia EcoTourism Association is one of several such associations that have formed in the United States. A list of regional ecotourism associations in the United States is provided in Appendix 10.



**VETA: The Virginia EcoTourism Association**



## **VETA: The Virginia EcoTourism Association**

*“Ecotourism programs are one of the pieces of the puzzle which will help Virginia to continue to grow economically without sacrificing our natural resources as we do it. VETA is striving to be the driving force behind ecotourism in Virginia.”*

***Pete Hangen, VETA past-president***

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### **DEVELOPING A STATEWIDE NON-PROFIT ECOTOURISM ASSOCIATION**

**T**he Virginia EcoTourism Association was formed in August 1998 with the intent to promote and develop responsible ecotourism practices and projects in the state. The association was formed after several stakeholder meetings were held on regional ecotourism planning; its first-year goal was to find funding to implement ecotour guide certification for Virginia’s ecotourism businesses and guides.

### **BACKGROUND**

In the last decade, ecotourism has germinated and grown in Virginia, and today it is ripening. The seed was planted by a small, diverse group of governmental officials and private individuals who recognized the need to implement sustainable tourism practices. The growth of tourism in Virginia has led this group to promote and support ecotourism and its allied environmental philosophy - to conserve and respect the well-being of Virginia’s inhabitants, natural landscape, and historical resources.

Like many Atlantic coast states, Virginia has an assortment of land features that make it an attractive tourism destination. The Atlantic Ocean and Chesapeake Bay carve out Virginia's shoreline where the Potomac, Rappahannock, York and James rivers drain around the Northern Neck, Middle and Virginia peninsulas. Tidal rivers produce an abundance of fish and shellfish. The Assateague Island National Seashore area remains underdeveloped, with valuable natural resources and considerable ecotourism potential.

The Piedmont Plateau covers nearly half the state, extending to the Blue Ridge Mountains. Between the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny Mountains lies the Shenandoah Valley. Miles of trails are found in the western part of the state, within the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Numerous historical parks and monuments have been created to celebrate and honor the state's past. The historical triangle of Williamsburg-Jamestown-Yorktown, where the first permanent English settlement in 1607 was founded and the last important conflict of the Revolutionary War was fought, draws thousands of visitors annually.

### **Creating a plan for ecotourism**

In 1994, the Virginia Beach Department of Conventions and Visitor Bureau called upon individuals from diverse backgrounds to meet to discuss the potential for ecotourism in Virginia Beach, and eventually for all of Virginia. This group was made up of representatives from the planning department, parks and recreation department, local wildlife refuge, Old Dominion University, tour outfitters, nature reporters from the regional newspaper, and citizens interested in nature-based activities.

*At the meeting, a strategic plan for ecotourism was created with seven focal areas:*

1. Administration
2. Education and awareness programs
3. Facilities
4. Finance
5. Legislative issues
6. Marketing/public relations
7. Regional participation

The seven areas were designed to redirect current tourism towards ecotourism. The plan was not formal, but rather an outline to begin implementing and promoting ecotourism practices in coastal Virginia. At the meeting, subcommittees were formed to address each area, and thereafter individual subcommittees were to meet periodically to address goals and objectives.

### *First symposium*

In 1996, the ecotourism strategic planning group arranged the first Southeastern Virginia Ecotourism Symposium. The keynote speaker—Stanley Selengut, a prominent ecolodge developer—discussed the definition of ecotourism, ecotourism destinations and visitor impacts. Also featured at the symposium was a mini trade show where local tour operators and other related businesses could exhibit products and ideas.

The first symposium was considered a success and has been held annually since 1996. Later symposiums have focused on marketing, financing and advertising ecotourism. The first symposium generated national and international media attention, promoting Virginia as an ecotourism destination and beginning a statewide dialogue among tour outfitters, public agencies, academia and natural science professionals regarding the potentials and pitfalls of promoting ecotourism in Virginia.

### *Curriculum and training*

The main accomplishment of the initial strategic plan was in the area of education. In 1997, a pilot curriculum and training program was created. A Coastal Virginia Ecotour Guide Certification was developed by Sara Mabey, a University of Southern Mississippi graduate student. Funding for the project came from the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program of the state Department of Environmental Quality.

Mabey's underlying concept for the proposed certification program was that natural resources constitute shared capital that cannot be adequately protected or improved by any one individual. To ensure that Virginia's natural resources are protected, all stakeholders - whether private businesses, citizens, organizations or public agencies - must recognize their collective responsibility regarding these assets.

*As proposed, the certification program would educate in the areas of:*

1. Protecting natural resource capital shared by all ecotour operators in coastal Virginia.
2. Providing ecotour businesses with the opportunity to operate sustainably.
3. Helping ecotour businesses mediate use-conflicts over coastal resources.

### **Ecotour Guide Training Program**

The cornerstone of the program is an initial ecotour guide/operator training workshop.

*The ecotour guide certification workshop is designed to include three basic elements:*

1. The role of ecotourism in coastal resource conservation and local economic development.
2. The natural limits of sensitive resources, and the need for a cooperative approach to protecting ecotourism's assets.
3. A basic understanding of the natural history of coastal Virginia.

### *Workshop and Curriculum*

The workshop is divided into two main parts, part one incorporates elements (1) and (2) while part two, comprised of field trips, develops the understanding of element (3). Included in the program's curriculum is a series of appendices focusing on guidelines for bird and marine mammal viewing and on an inventory of natural resource and conservation agencies, public parks, wildlife refuges, natural areas in coastal Virginia and ecotour businesses in the coastal zone.

### *Certification program and a state association*

Starting in the summer of 1997, after the pilot ecotour curriculum was written, a series of meetings discussed the possibility of implementing the ecotour guide certification program. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's Coastal Zone Management Program and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation sponsored the first workshop, which was hosted by the city of Virginia Beach.

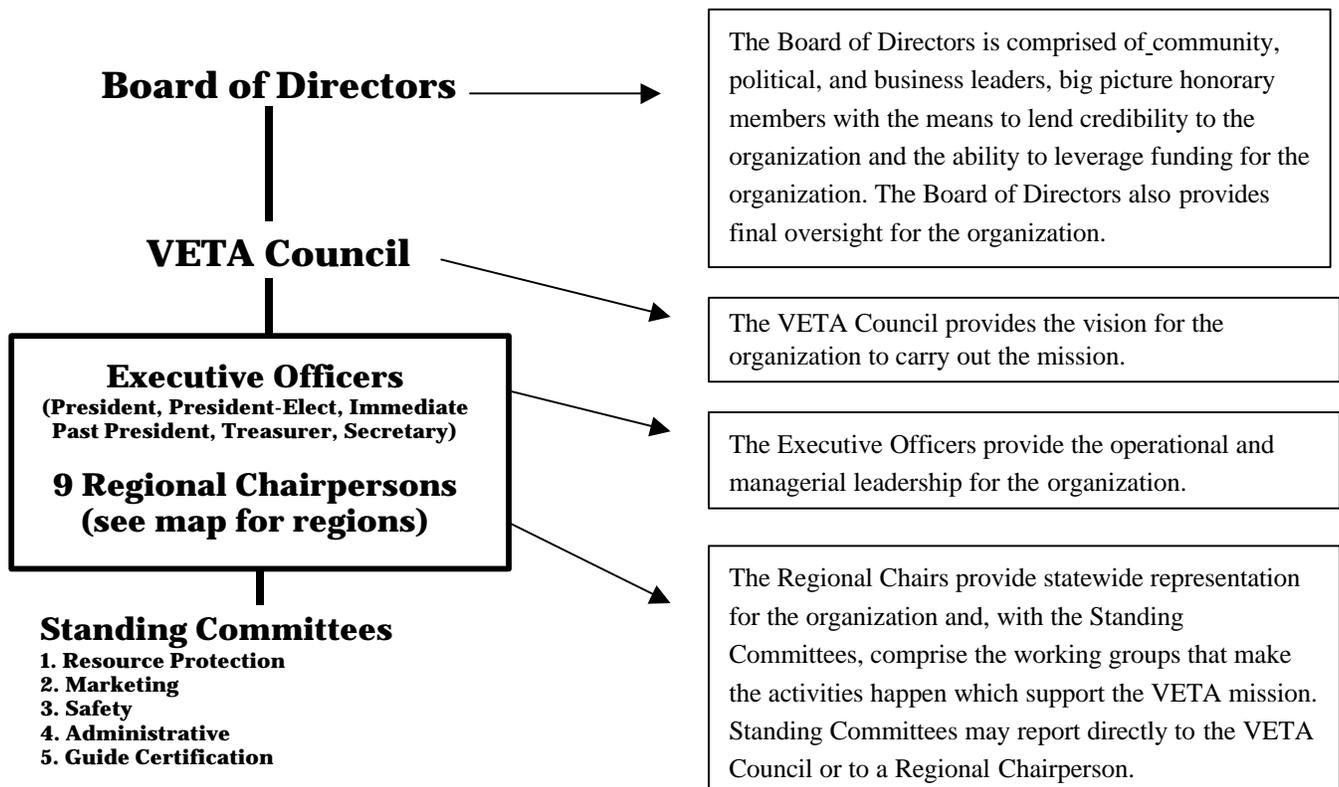
After the first meeting, the 28 participants - including ecotour operators, state natural resource agencies, local governments, academic institutions, and private citizens - agreed that a regional ecotourism association was necessary to manage and bolster an ecotour guide certification program. It was also agreed that an ecotour guide certification program would help protect natural resource capital, provide a valuable marketing edge to guides who earn an official "seal of approval," and foster sustainable growth of Virginia's ecotourism industry.

After several more meetings in 1997, the prospect of forming the state's first ecotourism association became a reality.

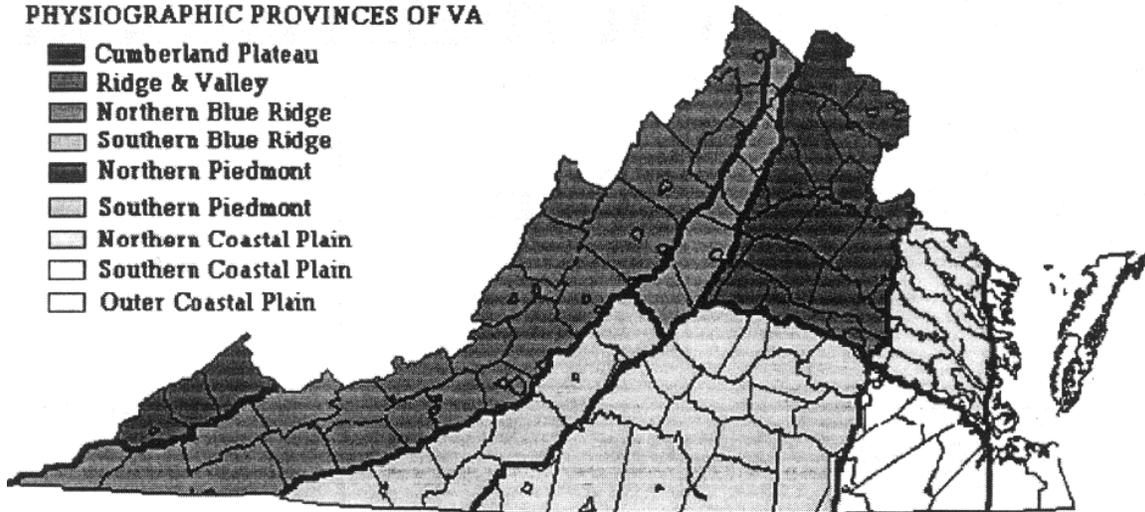
### **The Virginia EcoTourism Association**

In August 1998 the Virginia EcoTourism Association (VETA) was incorporated as a non-profit organization. VETA's mission is to protect Virginia's natural resources, to develop, promote, and market a professional ecotourism industry in Virginia, and to promote safe, quality experiences for ecotravelers.

### **Organizational Chart of VETA**



#### PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCES OF VA



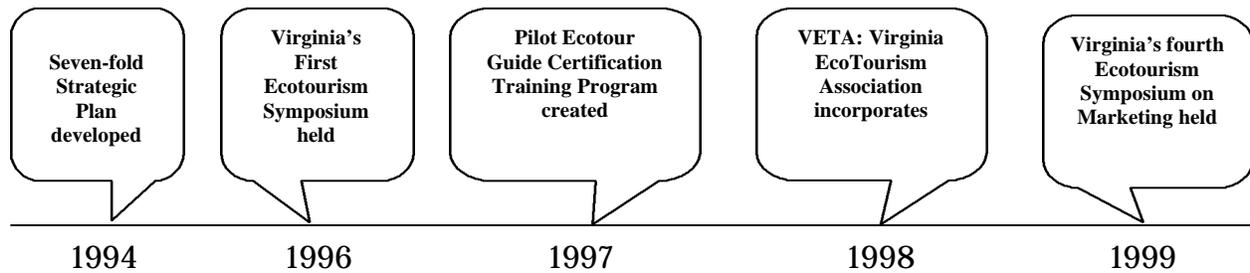
VETA's first year in operation was spent mostly on organizing the association's operations, as well as attracting membership support, as funding for VETA comes solely from members. Annual membership is \$25; benefits include:

- A voice in VETA
- Quarterly Newsletter
- Membership Directory
- Speaker's Bureau
- Workshop and Education Opportunities
- Ecotour Guide Courses and Certification
- Discount on the Annual Southeastern Virginia Ecotourism Symposium

In the first year, more than 50 individuals became members. Currently, VETA's membership is mostly comprised of people from the eastern coast of Virginia, but the association's long-term goal is to attract and maintain a statewide membership base. The association holds meetings every month, with both members and prospective members invited. Meetings consist of associated business and organization, as well as an educational aspect such as field trips and speakers.

VETA's goal for the year 2000 is to hold a workshop for ecotour operators as part of their annual symposium. The workshop is the first component of VETA's ecotour guide certification program. It will serve to train tour operators and guides about the principals of a true ecotourism business and ecotours. VETA hopes to create nine regionally based workshops that focus on particular ecotourism sites and natural attractions within each region. Mabey's curriculum will be used for the workshops.

## TIMELINE SUMMARY



## CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge for VETA has been establishing itself as a functional organization. VETA does not have a full-time staff member. Directors and council members are volunteers. Lack of full-time staff has contributed to VETA's difficulties in raising operating funds. The potential for building VETA into a statewide membership organization depends on future funding and the addition of a full-time or part-time employee.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Annual symposiums in Virginia Beach encourage discussions and have sparked enthusiasm about the prospects of ecotourism in the area. From these symposiums partnerships have developed between private business and governmental and non-governmental agencies that did not previously work together. The symposiums create a network and inventory of those who are interested in making ecotourism a reality in Virginia.
- Creating a functional, non-profit organization such as the Virginia EcoTourism Association will enable an established and enlarged ecotourism network to develop in Virginia. Through education, marketing, and quarterly newsletters that highlight ecotourism accomplishments in Virginia, the association has a base to promote and help develop ecotourism in an organized manner. The formation of VETA will also make it easier to write grant proposals and receive funding for future projects.
- The ecotour guide-certification program, once implemented, will help promote proper ecotourism practices in Virginia. Those tour operators and guides who partake in the program receive an "eco-label" from the Virginia Ecotourism Association. Such certification helps ecotourists be sure they're supporting green businesses, and it also serves as a marketing tool for ecotourism businesses in Virginia.



# CHAPTER 4:

## Ecotourism Product Development

The following two projects are examples of ecotourism product development in the United States. The two projects, *Texas - “Gone Birdy,”* and *Ozark Ecotours in Newton County, Arkansas* exemplify how different ecotourism products are created in regions with distinct natural and cultural assets.



**Texas - “Gone Birdy,”**



**Ozark Ecotours in Newton County, Arkansas**



## **Texas— “Gone Birdy”**

*“When you look at the sheer number and variety of species we have on the Texas coast, there is no richer bird watching experience in the nation. The problem is that, historically, birding destinations in Texas have been unorganized, with most sites functioning independently. The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail combines these independent sites into cohesive, marketable units.”*

**Andrew Sansom, Executive Director, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department**

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### **A COMMUNITY-INVOLVED ECOTOURISM PRODUCT**

**T**exas has “gone birdy” with avitourism travel to enjoy the sights, sounds, and behavior of birds in their natural habitats. With the creation of the Great Texas Coast Birding Trail (GTCBT) along the 500-mile Gulf Coast, Texans have expressed a greater concern for these creatures, whose evolutionary line dates back to the Jurassic Era. Private citizens, land managers, conservation groups, businesses, government agencies and communities continue to work together to develop this model viewing trail, which has given birth to a new economic and conservation industry in the state.

## **BACKGROUND**

The GTCBT was established by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Department of Transportation, and Fermata Incorporated (a tourism consulting firm), in 41 counties along the state's Gulf of Mexico coastline. The trail attracts tourists from around the world, and they bring economic benefit to many communities in the region.

The trail has been divided into three sections of coast: the Upper, Central and Lower coast. Three maps have been designed to feature the Upper, Central and Lower coast, which contain more than 300 separate birding sites. Selected sites have been added to a series of loops that take the visitor on short trips (up to a weekend long).

Texas has recorded more than 600 different species of birds, which is more than any other state in the U.S., and each trail section contains a wide variety of bird species. The Texas coast offers varied marsh habitats - brackish, freshwater, salt water, tidal and intertidal - which birds use as nesting, feeding, roosting and breeding areas. The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas is the most biologically diverse region in the United States.

Research by Fermata, Inc. has proven that the GTCBT has been a true economic and environmental conservation success. Other states have been quick to take notice of the success of the trail and are preparing to implement their own. The trail is an excellent example of a large-scale ecotourism project that has generated community pride in nature and a new appreciation for the environment.

### **Start-up Support and Appropriation**

In 1994, the Governor of Texas appointed a task force to develop nature tourism in the state and increase travel to Texas for the enjoyment of nature. The following year, a plan for the Great Texas Coast Birding Trail was created by two members of the task force, Ted Eubanks of Fermata, Inc., and Madge Lindsay of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The two came together to write a grant proposal for the first phase of the trail - incorporating the Central Gulf Coast.

The grant proposal was designed to obtain funds from the Intermodal Service Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) program, which is financed from a percentage of federal highway funds that are appropriated to each state. The enhancement program goal of ISTEA (now replaced by TEA-21) is to enhance the lives of residents in communities along the road network. Each state is to allot funds for various projects related to the mission of the program. The plan and project goals were approved by ISTEA, and \$500,000 was granted for the first phase of the GTCBT project.

#### *Goals of the GTCBT*

1. Promote the entire Texas Coast as a superb destination for birding tourists.
2. Offer a means by which rural coastal communities can band together with adjacent destinations and enhance the appeal of the entire region as a tourism destination.
3. Heighten awareness among Texas coastal communities - particularly those in isolated rural settings - of the value of these nature resources and the need to conserve them as irreplaceable assets for the future.

#### *Organizing and outreach*

Throughout 1996, Fermata, Inc., organized and structured meetings in communities along and inland from the Central coast. Community outreach was seen by Fermata as an important and necessary preliminary process in the creation of the GTCBT.

Fermata did not plan to run and manage the sites selected for the trail, but instead each community would be responsible for the success of its own area's trail sites by providing visitor services and developing businesses that would cater to the tourist. The public meetings served as a tool to empower community members who were able to voice opinions and share constructive ideas for the trail. The communities nominated more than a hundred sites for the Central coast trail. Fermata personnel inspected each site for its appropriateness for inclusion in the GTCBT.

#### *Site Criteria*

- The site possesses a unique, rich birding experience.
- The site manifests the Texas coastal experience.
- The public has unrestricted access to the site or access can be arranged.
- The ownership of the site is public, or private owners are willing to allow public access to the site.
- Visitor support facilities are available, either on-site or in the nearby communities.
- The site is within 60 minutes (drive time) of additional trail sites, and its location is in close proximity to the main trail route.
- The site has local sponsors and/or partners in the local community to provide management and upkeep.
- A tourism infrastructure exists in or near the local communities.
- Nature tourism is an integral part of the overall regional economic development plan.

#### *Sponsors and contractors*

The project sponsors were the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). This was the only ISTEA project in Texas that included multiple TxDOT districts. Fermata served as the coordinating contractor for the project, hiring additional contractors for the project task force that included engineers, graphic designers, illustrators and printers.

Project sponsors were required by the federal program to provide 20 percent in matching funds for the GTCBT. Funding for the trail eventually totaled \$1.5 million.

#### *Initiatives Funded by ISTEA Program*

- The three maps for each section of the coast (upper, central, and lower) illustrate site locations and birds of interest that one might see along the trail. These maps are free to the public.
- Each site is marked with a number, and trail signs at the entrance of each link the location to a site number on the map. Additional signs were also installed along the main route of the trail to further inform the public.
- Trail enhancements at several locations include hummingbird and butterfly gardens, parking areas with observation areas adjacent to major roads, landscaping with native plants in parks, observation platforms that overlook wetlands, and boardwalks that allow access to swamps and marshes.

### **The Birding Classic**

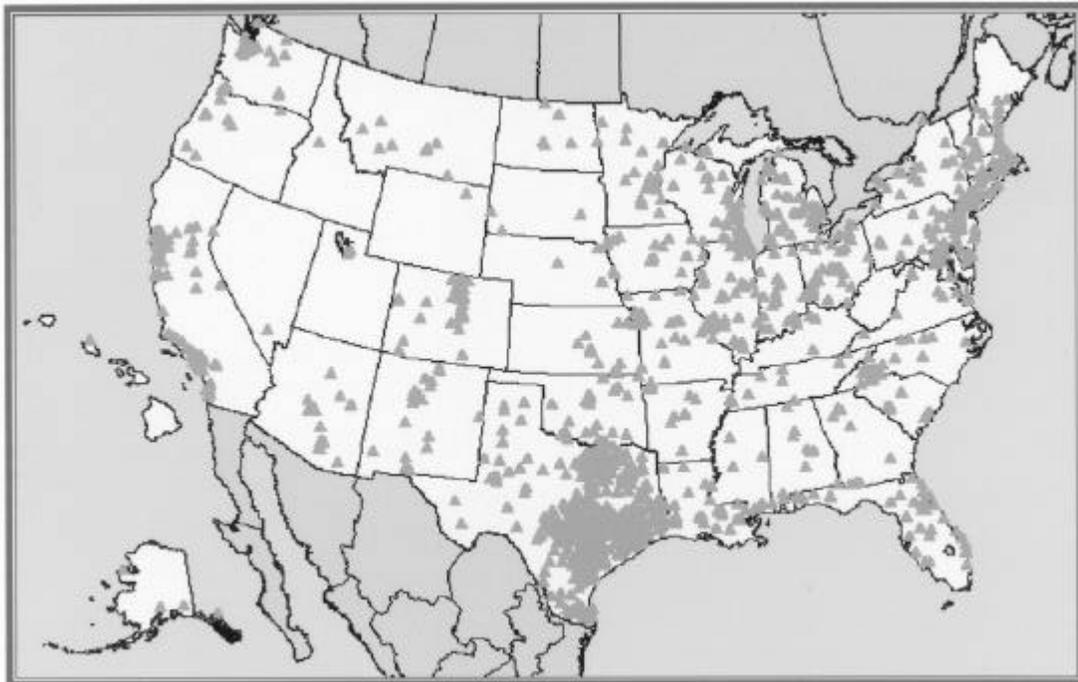
Another project launched as a result of the creation of the GTCBT is “The Great Texas Birding Classic,” which has been sponsored and organized annually by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Audubon Society. First held in April 1996, the Classic is timed to coincide with the spring migration of many bird species.

During the Classic, teams of bird watchers from around the world spend three days officially counting and identifying as many birds as possible along the trail. The three teams that identify the most species by the end of the tournament win “Conservation Cash Grand Prizes” totaling \$50,000. The first, second and third place teams are permitted to designate which conservation wildlife habitat project in Texas receives grants of, respectively, \$25,000, \$15,000 and \$10,000.

### **GTCBT: A Statistically Proven Success**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department funded Fermata, Inc., to survey wildlife viewers along the GTCBT. The survey was compiled in 1999 from travelers who returned a card that was included on the Central Coast map - a request to be placed on the Texas Parks and Wildlife mailing list. A total of 4,000 cards were received, and 3,749 persons representing all 50 states and several foreign countries participated in the survey.

### **Zip Code Distribution of GTCBT Information Cards Returned**

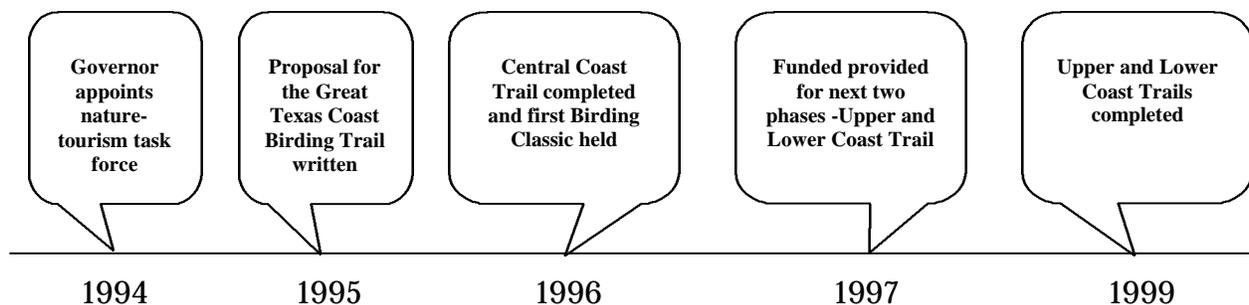


*Eubanks and Stroll, 1999*

It was found that travelers along the GTCBT devoted an average of more than 31 days per year to birding on the trail. The map below contains the zip codes of all 3,749 of the respondents, representing all 50 states and several foreign countries (not plotted). Recent trips lasted almost nine days and eight nights per person, and their travel-related expenditures totaled approximately \$981 per person (\$684 spent within the region, \$198 out of the region but within Texas, and an additional \$100 outside the state). GTCBT travelers averaged expenditures of \$72 per person per day along the Texas coast. If annual trip expenditures were consistent with recent visits, then each GTCBT traveler averaged \$2,452 during the past 12 months in direct expenditures along the GTCBT.

The Fermata survey also showed that 61 percent of the respondents had access to the Internet. Of these, 72 percent had used it to find information about where to go birding, 56 percent obtained information about bird sightings and 27 percent purchased birding-related goods and services. For this particular audience, the Internet is a valuable tool in disseminating birding information.

### TIMELINE SUMMARY



### CHALLENGES

One of the greatest challenges for Fermata Inc, the project coordinator, was organizing the logistics of such a large project. It was very important that the project empower communities, to incorporate their opinions and foresight, but the process was at times difficult to manage. An overwhelmingly large number of sites were nominated for inclusion on the trail. All were then inventoried and inspected for inclusion - a somewhat labor-intensive process, but it allowed the decisions for trail-site selection to be democratic.

Funding for the project was greater than anticipated, but additional funds are still being sought to enhance and monitor sites.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

- The Great Texas Coast Birding Trail project had an organized, succinct and well-defined strategic plan that made trail development very successful. It was important to plan a project strategically, secure funding, and hire a coordinating entity to follow through with the plan. The use of a consulting firm to coordinate the project allowed the initiative to operate, when necessary, outside of government bureaucracy.
- The GTCBT does not market to or cater to the avid bird watcher, but rather markets to a broad audience of wildlife watchers. Some sites on the trail are secluded, but others are in the middle of large cities where one can spot 20 different bird species. An American birder may see these species every day in his or her own backyard, but to a foreign visitor, these 20 new species may be a brand new sight.
- The GTCBT represents a delicate balance between the conservation needs along the Texas coast, and the demands/desires of the people who reside there. Economic sustainability and wildlife conservation are inextricably intertwined. Projects such as the GTCBT respect that essential relationship between humans and the environment.
- The GTCBT plan involved community input and participation. The empowerment of communities in the project process was very important in securing management and support of the trail in the future. Allowing community members to make decisions regarding trail development instilled enthusiasm and support for it in many places where nature tourism had not previously been used as an economic nor a conservation tool.



## **Ozark Ecotours in Newton County, Arkansas**

*“Ecotourism was chosen by the Newton County Resource Council in 1993 as the most sustainable way to stimulate job opportunities for low-income families. It combines the magnificent scenery, bountiful natural resources and the rich cultural heritage of the Ozark Mountains with the diverse backgrounds, talents and knowledge of local people. Ozark Ecotours seeks to preserve the quality of life that makes Newton County unique.”*

***Babs Dechant, Interim Woodland Learning Center  
Director, Newton County Resource Council***

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### **ECOTOURISM CREATES ECONOMIC DIVERSITY IN A GATEWAY COMMUNITY**

**E**cotourism was introduced to Newton County in the Ozark Mountains of northwest Arkansas to help relieve the difficult economic situation in local communities. This area is in great need of economic stimulation, but it is also rich in natural beauty, and is deep-rooted in cultural heritage.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Ecotourism in the Newton County region has enormous potential because of its many natural attractions. The biodiversity in this area is renowned; it is home to some 65 species of mammals (including elk, black bear, beaver and river otter), 79 species of amphibians and reptiles, 90 species of fish, 190 species of birds, and more than 1,500

species of trees, shrubs and flowering plants. The Buffalo National River watershed nourishes the county and its natural treasures. There is also rich cultural heritage in the area that has been documented. Since 1995, Newton County has certified and registered 933 archeological sites.

The group in charge of implementing ecotourism in the region is the Newton County Resource Council (NCRC), a nonprofit community development corporation. In 1994, an ecotourism agenda was introduced to help relieve the difficult economic situation experienced by community members. Newton ranks as the poorest of Arkansas's 75 counties, with 52 percent of the work force employed outside of the county.

Goals were established for the county's future by the NCRC to help stimulate the economy. Ecotourism was chosen as one option because residents considered it to be sensible development, as it values the natural beauty of Newton County. Two NCRC goals included sustainable tourism: one specific goal was to employ 60 people in the sustainable tourism industry, and another was to position Newton County as the sustainable tourism capital of the state.

### **The Development of Ecotourism in Newton County**

The NCRC was organized in 1987 by local leaders and citizens as a community-based membership organization, with the mission to improve the quality of life in the county while preserving and enhancing its traditions, values and natural resources. The council is comprised of a board of directors and several committees.

The NCRC brings county leaders and low-income community members together to assess the needs of residents. All board and committee members receive training to improve their ability to plan, develop, conduct and evaluate county programs. The nonprofit Community Development Corporation works to improve the quality of life in Newton County.

In 1991, a VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) project for community economic development studied the economy of Newton County. VISTA volunteers researched various industries to determine where economic development could be initiated or improved. In 1992, a National Forest Service grant funded an economic diversification study. Studies and surveys were conducted to determine where barriers to economic development existed, and to identify resources that had the potential to create jobs for local people.

In 1993, VISTA volunteers concluded that ecotourism could create employment with little exploitation of natural resources or degradation of the quality of life in Newton County. This conclusion also was backed by the results of the economic diversification study. The NCRC saw ecotourism as the most attractive option because of its ability to combine natural with cultural resources in a way that was compatible with the local community.

## **NCRC Develops a Regional Tour Operation**

Ozark Ecotours, an extension of the NCRC, has been running tours since the fall of 1993. A grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation enabled NCRC to create this tour operation and to hire staff. Since then, Ozark Ecotours has steadily increased its repertoire of scheduled and custom tours. Cultural heritage tours cover the Native American past, pioneer influences and outlaw legends in Newton County. Natural resource-based tours explore forest ecology and wild caves. Tours promote such outdoor activities as photographing nature, canoeing and learning new outdoor skills. Hikes range from easy to strenuous, and guides recount stories about the lifestyle of county residents. Ozark Ecotours also broker three-day packaged Newton County vacations.

Since 1996, Ozark Ecotours has offered the “Adventures for Youth” tour program, which provides outdoor skills activities and recreation/enrichment opportunities that can be customized to any age group. “Adventures for Youth” exposes students to a wide variety of challenges to increase their outdoor skills and confidence. The adventures are designed to complement a classroom curriculum, to create an affinity for the natural world and to follow the “Leave No Trace” wilderness ethic.

Students are encouraged to discover their personal strengths and weaknesses, aspirations and abilities, self-worth and purpose, and they are challenged to improve their own lives.

### *Ozark Ecotour’s Principles*

- All guides are professional and trained in their fields.
- Newton County is unique in that it has developed a site-monitoring plan (photographs and site reports) to assess the accumulated impact of general tourism in each area traveled. Site-monitoring results are shared with interested agencies and individuals.
- Training workshops are scheduled for guides as well as for interested members of the community to learn impact-monitoring techniques.
- Provide personal attention and practice minimal impact, limiting groups to 12 visitors per tour.
- Follow the “Leave No Trace” outdoor ethic.

### **Ozark Ecotour’s: “Leave No Trace - Outdoor Ethics”**

Through Ozark Ecotour’s “Leave No Trace” presentation, guests are taught to travel responsibly to natural areas, and they are encouraged to participate in trail-restoration whenever possible. All guides are trained to use this ethic on tours.

#### *Some guidelines:*

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare - Think about what you expect from your trip. Plan meals properly and take the appropriate equipment.
2. Concentrate Impacts in High-use Areas - Choose a high-use campsite, respect other visitors’ needs for solitude and the needs of wildlife. Hike on existing trails.
3. Minimize Use and Impact in Pristine Areas - Pristine areas are typically remote, seldom visited and have obvious impacts. Visit them only if you are knowledgeable in the “Leave no Trace” techniques for that particular area.

4. Avoid Places Where Impact is Just Beginning - Allow campsites that show slight evidence of use to regenerate. Non-use of faint trails will allow the vegetation to recover eventually.
5. Pack It In, Pack It Out - Consider the words "Leave No Trace" as a challenge to take out everything possible that you have brought into the back country.
6. Properly Dispose of What You Can't Pack Out - Practice the proper disposal methods for human waste and for waste water from cooking and washing.
7. Leave What You Find - Good campsites are found and not made. Avoid damaging trees and plants. Leave natural objects and cultural artifacts.
8. Use Fire Responsibly - The natural appearance of many areas has been compromised by the overuse of fires and firewood. Camp stoves are essential equipment for minimum-impact camping.

### **Ecotourism Feasibility Studied**

Newton County, Arkansas was awarded an Economic Development Administration Grant in 1995 by the U.S. Department of Commerce to prepare an ecotourism feasibility study. The chief incentive for the feasibility study was to estimate the financial status of Ozark Ecotours which had been in operation for just two years.

From 1994 to 1995, 510 travelers partook in Ozark's ecotours. During the 1994/1995 ecotourism seasons, total revenues covered variable costs, but fell substantially short of covering all ecotourism program costs. Although revenue increased substantially from fall 1994 to the spring 1995 ecotour season, costs also increased, and thus net operating loss remained consistent. The main contribution to costs was NCRC staff hours that were essential to developing, monitoring and evaluating the growing program.

The feasibility study was commissioned to research, develop, propose or report: (1) market feasibility of Newton County ecotourism, (2) marketing strategy, (3) operational strategy, (4) organizational structure, (5) financial feasibility, (6) economic impact and (7) environmental and social impact. As a result of the feasibility study, costs were expected to decline over time as the program matured and required less intensive management. (An executive summary of the Newton County feasibility study can be found in Appendix 8).

Since the ecotourism feasibility study, the number of ecotourists rose from 1996 to 1997 with an average of 150 tour participants per season. The program structure did mature and management was more cost-efficient. The "Adventures for Youth" tour program, implemented in 1996, has been the largest source of income for Ozark Ecotours.

In 1997, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation yearly grant ended. The grant had helped cover marketing and newsletter costs, which totaled approximately \$7,000 a year. This loss of the grant, along with a decline of ecotourists participating in Ozark Ecotours in the spring of 1998, led to a reshaping of market strategies and programming.

### *Planning for increased revenue*

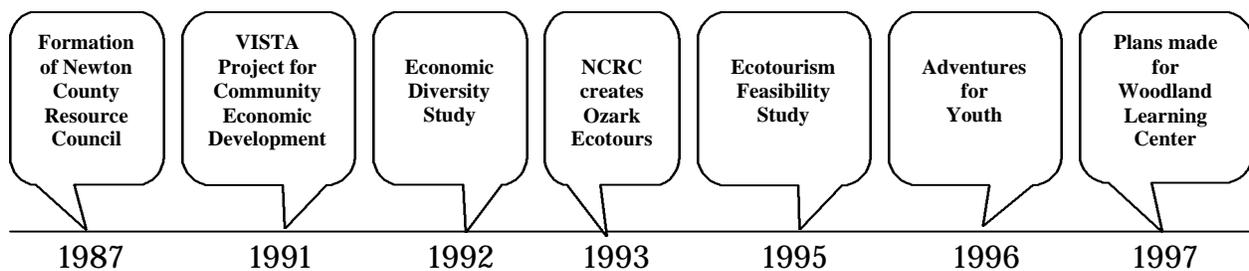
Plans to create the Woodland Learning Center began in 1997. The center is designed to accommodate year-round activities and serve as the Ozark Ecotour central office. The main objective of the facility is to attract groups. In marketing to groups, rather than only to individuals, the Woodland Learning Center can bring in greater revenue while spending the same amount on advertising.

Plans have been made to start building the center in 2000. The center will customize outdoor educational programs for any age group or type of group (family, school or corporate). Program schedules will be custom-designed, offering full-day, three-day, or five-day outings that include hands-on activities and opportunities for discovery.

In the past, the remote location of Newton County and the lack of overnight facilities made it difficult to bring in large groups of ecotourists. The new facility will allow multiple day and overnight excursions, which are intended to be more profitable to Ozark Ecotours and more attractive to tourists.

Funding for the Woodland Center has come from three main sources: The Hitachi Foundation granted funds to pay for an architect and builders; the Department of Human Services Office of Community Services provided funds for building materials; and a local resident donated Round Top Mountain. This 2,050-foot peak located three miles south of Jasper City on scenic State Highway 7 is home to hardwood forests, wildflowers, springs and a variety of fauna. A grant from the State Highway Department has been allocated to reconstruct trails on Roundtop Mountain and new trails will provide for interpretive hikes and specialized tours.

### **TIMELINE SUMMARY**



### **CHALLENGES**

The biggest challenge to Ozark Ecotours has been the difficulty of attracting and managing tourists visiting the remote location of Newton County.

To date, attracting visitors to this wilderness area has not proven cost-effective to Ozark Ecotours. Although the rate of return of visitors is more than 50 percent, attracting new visitors has been difficult. New marketing approaches and development of the Woodland Learning Center as an overnight accommodation with a mountain backyard for a classroom are designed to overcome these difficulties.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

- Newton County Resource Council has learned, through trial and error, which ecotourism programs create the most economic benefit for the county. The Council has set goals to develop ecotourism and has done research to develop strategies to overcome cost obstacles. For example, instead of terminating operations because tour participant numbers were not sufficient to support operations, NCRC has decided to evaluate more profitable business operations. They are now seeking to attract groups and overnight visitors by building the Woodland Learning Center and creating programs for all ages.
- Ozark Ecotours has built a great relationship with community businesses since being established in 1994. Although the number of ecotourists to Newton County has been lower than originally predicted, the benefits have still been substantial. According to the ecotourism feasibility study, the total economic activity generated in 1995 (as a result of spending by fewer than 300 ecotourists) was approximately \$33,000. Included in this total is the estimated \$12,000 generated as a result of the “multiplier effect”—ecotourist spending in local businesses.
- Ozark Ecotours offers a one-of-a kind wilderness experience, but the locality has made it difficult to attract enough ecotourists to make the venture cost effective. When developing an ecotourism destination, the remoteness of the destination must be taken into consideration. Newton County is approximately two hours from a major airport, which serves as a significant disadvantage.
- Other lodge owners in Newton County are supportive of the Woodland Learning Center, because it will provide an overnight service unique and different from traditional lodging facilities. Three lodge owners are on the board of the Newton County Resource Council, and all advocate the center’s development. Collaboration with local businesses is an important component of ecotourism development in a community.



# CHAPTER 5: A Regional Ecotourism Tour Guide

The following project is an example of a regional ecotourism tour guide in the United States. *Forever Green: An Ecotourist's Guide to Lane County, Oregon* is a publication that inventories and advertises the county's environmentally and socially responsible businesses and tourist attractions.



**Forever Green: An Ecotourist's Guide to Lane County, Oregon**



## Forever Green: An Ecotourist's Guide to Lane County, Oregon

*“When I first saw Forever Green: An Ecotourist’s Guide to Lane County, I thought it might be some kind of joke. I’d never heard of the term ecotourism, and to me it seemed absurd to associate ecology with tourism. I was surprised to learn that the two can go together, that in a sense we are all temporary tourists in this ancient ecosystem, and that so many businesses and other organizations are offering practical ways to help us move toward an ecologically sustainable future, step by step. Forever Green is now my favorite reference for living, working, and playing in Lane County. I think every county should have one.”*

**Rowan Smith, resident of Lane County**

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### A REGIONAL ECOTOURISM GUIDE

Concerned about the lack of promotion for ecotourism in Lane County, Oregon, the Lost Valley Educational Center in Dexter created *Forever Green*, a guide to sustainable tourism options in the county. Lane County includes Pacific Ocean coastline, redwood forests, and metropolitan Eugene, which maintains the feel of a small town while offering sophisticated cultural tourism.

## **BACKGROUND**

*Forever Green: An Ecotourist's Guide to Lane County, Oregon* is perhaps the first tour guide in the U.S. to feature only local sustainable businesses, organizations, activities and destinations. The 48-page guide uses black and green soy ink and is printed on recycled newsprint.

The guide was created and designed in 1998 by Lost Valley Educational Center, an environmental organization located in the heart of Lane County on 87 acres of forest, meadow and gardens. The center's main mission is not to attract tourists or promote tourism, but rather to experiment with and create a functional, intentional, community composed of the 25 adults and children who live, work and play with a dedication to the ethics of simple living and a sustainable lifestyle.

Lost Valley Educational Center offers workshops, apprenticeships and programs that aid personal growth and highlight sustainable community development. The center also offers retreats, conferences and workshops put on by other organizations. The center defines ecotourism as "tourism-related activities or services that support the local people, culture, and economy in a positive way, while also being aware of their impact on the environment and working towards ecological protection and sustainability."

In the past, Lane County's economy relied on extraction of natural resources, primarily logging and fishing. A recent influx of tourism in the region has moved ecotourism up on the agenda. The center believes county residents are very proud of the natural splendor of the area, and that to promote ecotourism will help ensure that the area remains naturally attractive.

### **Start-up Support and Appropriation**

In 1998, Lost Valley Educational Center was awarded the "Lane County Tourism Council Grant" of \$10,000 to create and print *Forever Green*. Every year since, a variable sum of money has been granted to tourism enhancement projects (generated by an eight percent room tax for commercial overnight stays in Lane County). The educational center also received a small grant from the Helios Fund under the fund's "Ecological Sustainability Grants" category, which helped to cover some of the printing costs. The *Eugene Weekly* also helped with the printing and distribution of the guide's second print run while other donations came from local green businesses and schools. Additionally, advertisements in *Forever Green* ranging from \$75 to \$450 also raised money.

### **Guide Production**

Dianne Brause, director of Lost Valley Educational Center, worked in collaboration with five part-time employees and approximately 25 volunteers to produce the guide. The first few months of production consisted of going through county directories, magazines and brochures, and assembling a list of potential businesses. Next, the team categorized the prospective 1,250 listings and sent each one a questionnaire (Appendix 9).

The questionnaire's content was developed by Lost Valley Educational Center and asked questions dealing with environmentally sensitive issues. Approximately 10 percent returned a filled-out questionnaire and 20 percent returned a partially filled-out questionnaire. Personal interviews were held with those who did not return a questionnaire, and this helped to gain insight into the environmental and sustainable motivations of those businesses.

## **Project Goals**

*To create a guide which:*

1. Provides tourism information that an ecotourist would require to decide what activities exist, places to visit, people to meet and ways to participate in learning experiences so that he/she leave energized, excited, rejuvenated and very pleased with the visit.
2. Opens a window into Lane County to showcase it as a model for change towards a sustainable future - so that visitors go away with new ideas that they can implement in their lives/work/families/communities at home. Lane County intends to be an inspiration to other communities.
3. Provides the opportunity for visitors to learn about the philosophy and concepts of responsible travel (ecotourism).
4. Creates an avenue for local residents to see themselves as responsible hosts and role models - as these actions are honored and respected by others.
5. Presents ecotourism and related information in a pleasant, easily understood and useful publication that both visitors and residents will want to keep and utilize as a tool to change their lifestyles.
6. Encourages visitors to make face-to-face and heart-to-heart interchanges with the local people, thus creating greater understanding and perhaps friendships that can last for both parties beyond the initial visit.

## **Guide Content**

The guide is divided into several sections for easy reference. The topics differ from those of a traditional nature-travel guide in that they are not broken down into such sections as "State Parks" or "Museums," but instead address such subjects as alternative building and housing, health and healing, responsible business, education, alternative energy, and environmental organizations.

The guide's introduction features businesses and organizations that exemplify innovative or novel approaches to sustainable living. Each topic in *Forever Green* also has an introduction that discusses how that topic relates to ecotourism and to the creation of a sustainable future within Lane County. The directory listing features organizations that represent the standards Lost Valley Educational Center consider most important to creating a green and sustainable future. The qualifying criteria listed in the opening pages of *Forever Green* include:

My Business/Organization/Service:

- Is locally owned or operated
- Supports community and is service-oriented
- Includes locally crafted/value-added items
- Provides direct guest-host relationships
- Is environmentally conscious
- Is environmentally focused
- Composts/recycles (paper, glass, plastic, metal)
- Reduces pollution (air, water, soil, noise)
- Practices/applies innovative & alternative methods
- Offers public education/info through classes/media
- Offers hands-on involvement to tourists/volunteers
- Supports reduction of resource usage (energy, water, transportation)
- Meets a defined “green” criteria (Willamette Green Directory, Ceres Principles, Natural Step, Co-op America, etc.)

*Sections within Forever Green*

- Alternative Building/Housing
- Alternative Energy
- Alternative Transportation
- Arts & Crafts
- Calendar
- Education
- Environmental Organizations
- Events & Entertainment
- Food
- Health & Healing
- Lodging
- Maps
- Media
- Recycling
- Responsible Business
- Social & Culture
- Sustainable Agriculture
- Sustainable Recreation

### **Distribution Strategy**

Since 1998, a total of 60,000 copies of *Forever Green* have been printed, with more than 75 per cent being distributed in Lane County, the Greater Pacific Northwest, and California. Volunteers have distributed the guide in the county's chambers of commerce, local food stores, coffee shops, restaurants and other private-sector businesses. The guide also has been distributed at several environmental conferences held at the University of Oregon in Eugene as well as at other fairs and events throughout the county.

### **Feedback Questionnaire Form**

The questionnaire form on the back page of *Forever Green* served as a method of monitoring the success of the guide. As an incentive for readers to send in the feedback form, a free copy of *Talking Leaves*, a regional journal of the evolving ecological culture, was sent to participants as a token of appreciation. In the first year, 25 feedback forms were returned. There were also six personal phone call responses to the form, totaling 31 responses. This was an extremely low response from users, although 50 percent of survey respondents said the guide encouraged them to stay longer and/or to come again to Lane County, and 90 percent said the guide was very useful.

### **CHALLENGES**

The greatest challenge for Lost Valley Educational Center was the lack of funding to develop and create *Forever Green: The Ecotourist Guide to Lane County*. Editors had to cut the guide down to 48 pages to keep down costs. Had there been more funding, then additional qualified organizations could have been included. The lack of funding also led to a shortage of staff. A larger staff could have worked to bring in corporate sponsors, more advertisers and thus additional funding.

Another concern for the educational center was the low response rate to the questionnaire. With due time and funding, a better strategy could have been developed to attract a larger response.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

- From the demand for the publication, Lost Valley Educational Center staff members believe that visitors and residents appreciate the research done to highlight sustainable tourism options and the resulting ecotourism guide.
- A more comprehensive publication could have been produced if sufficient funding were available. Corporate sponsors and more advertisements in *Forever Green* could have produced additional funding.

# CONCLUSIONS

The eight case studies presented in this publication provide valuable lessons regarding the planning and development of ecotourism projects in the United States. When critically analyzed and compared, the projects have notable similarities and differences. The following comparisons between projects should serve to inform ecotourism planners, managers, and enthusiasts about the potential advantages and obstacles of implementing ecotourism in their community or region.





## Conclusion

The eight case studies presented in this publication provide valuable lessons regarding the planning and development of ecotourism projects in the United States. When critically analyzed and compared, the projects have notable similarities and differences. The following comparisons between projects should serve to inform ecotourism planners, managers, and enthusiasts about the potential advantages and obstacles of implementing ecotourism in their community or region.

### **Funding Problems and Potential**

Many of the projects fell short of their original goals due to inadequate funding. This primary obstacle occurred due to the lack of understanding of what ecotourism is and its economical and conservation potential. In one case, the Great Texas Coast Birding Trail was statistically proven to be a viable economic conservation tool for several communities in Texas. The success of this project could help planners and managers in other states demonstrate why ecotourism projects are worthy of support. However, not every ecotourism project will be a nature trail, nor will it be supported by the state. Thus, where and how else can planners and managers obtain funding?

### **Federal, State and Local Government Funding Sources**

In comparing the eight case studies, all of them received funding from federal, state or local government funds. In many cases, grassroot and local community efforts initiated ecotourism, but funding to meet operational goals was obtained through a federal, state or local government agency. Some of the projects received funds from these sources only, while others used alternative, innovative funding strategies.

#### *Department of Transportation*

Four of the eight project managers received funding from their state Department of Transportation. Many ecotourism destinations do not have pre-existing trails and roads and tend to be found among rural communities. All four transportation departments that were mentioned placed priority on transportation development and maintenance to aid rural development.

Ecotourism planners try to lessen the impacts of automobile congestion on tourism sites by implementing more environmentally friendly ways to access these areas. For example, the DESTINY 2000 plan received funding from the Maine Department of Transportation to develop a propane-powered bus system on Mount Desert Island. This project has successfully had many tourists leave their cars inland, thus reducing congestion and air pollution.

### *Alternative Funding Sources*

Alternative pre-existing funding sources were sought to help fund some of the ecotourism projects. In the United States, many government and non-government agencies provide funding for environmental, educational, and community service projects. Ecotourism has the potential to fit any one, or all of these categories, and it is evident from this review that many of the project leaders have taken advantage of these funding sources.

For example, the GTCBT project receives partial funding and support for the annual Great Texas Birding Classic from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The Lane County Tourism Council funded *Forever Green: An Ecotourist's Guide to Lane County, Oregon* and further funds came from local printers and businesses.

Newton County received funding from two federal sources; the Department of Commerce (to conduct an ecotourism feasibility study), and the Department of Human Services Office of Community Services (for materials needed to build the Woodland Learning Center).

### *Administrative and Operational Funding*

Almost all of the projects suffered from lack of funding to support administrative and operational duties. Funding to support full-time employees to work on implementing projects was hard to obtain. The DESTINY 2000 project and Newton County both received Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), a national service program, to assist them in implementing their projects.

### *Alternative Staff Assistance*

Two of the projects, VETA and DESTINY 2000, both employed graduate students to research and design ecotourism projects. This symbiotic relationship, between the student who gains an educated work experience and the project planner who receives free assistance, is a valuable alternative when staff funding is not available.

### **Ecotourism – Misused and Misunderstood**

Several projects opted not to use the term ecotourism, but rather sustainable or nature tourism to identify their project. The project leaders chose to use a different term because ecotourism is often either misused or misunderstood by groups, businesses, and government agencies.

In 1999 a report entitled "Geographies of Ecotourism and Nature Tourism among State Tourism Agencies in the U.S." Higgins and Kwasnowski surveyed 36 state tourism agencies and found a lack of agreement on the definition of ecotourism. Based upon the replies from 27 of the 36 respondents, five key dimensions or elements of ecotourism were identified. Only one definition contained all five elements (see Appendix 2 for all 27 definitions).

*The Five Elements of the Ecotourism Definition:  
(Higgins and Kwasnowski, 1999)*

1. Sustainably Managed
2. Nature Based
3. Environmental Education
4. Local Benefits
5. Small Group/Personalized

### **Community Participation**

Ecotourism not only incorporates the natural and cultural resources of the region, but also the communities that surround these assets. Many of the project leaders held conferences, symposiums and/or meetings that were open to the community. At these events many partnerships were formed to pursue ecotourism projects in an area. Project partnerships varied from private/private, public/public to public/private stakeholders. This type of community collaboration, on all levels, helped projects move forward quickly and effectively.

It should be noted that of the two case studies that involved the development of a regional ecotourism plan, both held several meetings and conferences to design a working plan. These gatherings brought together the many different stakeholders directly involved in tourism within the region. For example, meetings contained representatives from local restaurants, overnight accommodations, parks, tour operators, and utility companies. All of these entities have a direct or indirect influence on sustaining tourism in a region.

### **Monitoring Ecotourism Projects**

Most project managers have not made it a priority to monitor the outcome of their projects and this may be largely attributed to the lack of funding for staff. The danger, however, is that any tourism has the potential to degrade the very resources that attract the tourist and thus should be monitored.

Ozark Ecotours has monitored tourism impacts by developing site-monitoring plans (photographs and site reports) to assess the accumulated impacts of general tourism in each area traveled. Likewise, the DESTINY 2000 sustainable tourism plan calls for monitoring the carrying capacity on the carriage roads at Acadia National Park. Monitoring tourism sites for overuse and environmental degradation will allow managers to implement restrictions if found necessary.

### **Common Goals**

All the projects were initiated in order to sustain, conserve and/or protect natural and cultural resources. Most project leaders and communities viewed ecotourism as a sustainable development tool that could increase cultural pride and bring economic revenue to local areas with little degradation to, or disturbance of, natural resources. Project leaders were aware of the growing tourism industry and the growing interest in ecotravel within the United States. The projects sought to build ecotourism into the

existing regional tourism industry by creating strategic plans, green marketing, and in some cases, by initiating guide-training and ecotourism-based education.

Each of the regional ecotourism projects and the VETA created clear goals for ecotourism education, strategic relationships between local people, and the protection of ecological and cultural resources. It should be noted that these goals mirror the principles of ecotourism.

A final common theme among many of the projects involved marketing the region as an ecotourism destination. Marketing is an important economic strategy for any industry, but it is particularly so in the field of tourism development. Marketing alliances are one of the most promising techniques for ecotourism projects to find common ground with a wide variety of partners.

### **Final Note**

These case study projects are not a comprehensive account of what is happening in the U.S. ecotourism industry as a whole. They are merely a small selection of what is occurring within the United States. They give a glimpse of the kinds of projects that are being developed, and the successes and obstacles that U.S. ecotourism project leaders have encountered.



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# Appendices

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- Appendix 1:** USA Ecotourism Statistical Factsheet
- Appendix 2:** Number of Elements in the Definition of Ecotourism
- Appendix 3:** DESTINY 2000 Plan Summary  
***DESTINY 2000 in Down East Maine***
- Appendix 4:** Local Consideration for Florida’s Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism Inventory Inclusion, Model of Ecotourism and Heritage Tourism Visitor Guidelines, and Model of Ethical Behavior for Tour Providers  
***Florida - Rethinking Tourism***
- Appendix 5:** Delaware Eco-Discoveries Nature-Based Tourism Survey  
***Sussex County, Delaware - Embraces Ecotourism***
- Appendix 6:** “Environmentally Friendly” Hotel Survey  
***Sussex County, Delaware - Embraces Ecotourism***
- Appendix 7:** West Virginia “Corridor L” Tourism Enhancement Project Outline  
***West Virginia “Corridor L” Tourism Enhancement Project***
- Appendix 8:** Newton County, Arkansas, Ecotourism Feasibility Study, Executive Summary  
***Ozark Ecotours in Newton County, Arkansas***
- Appendix 9:** An Ecotourist’s Guide To Lane County—Qualifying Criteria  
***Forever Green: Ecotourist’s Guide to Lane County, Oregon***
- Appendix 10:** Regional U.S. Ecotourism Associations
- Appendix 11:** Brief USA Ecotourism-related Bibliography

# Appendix 1: USA ECOTOURISM STATISTICAL FACTSHEET

## United States General Tourism Statistics

The U.S. ranked second among most visited destinations in 1997 (TIA) with 48.9 million arrivals. The Travel Industry Association also found in 1998 that U.S. residents made 1.305 billion one-person trips 100 miles or more away from home and that U.S. residents and international travelers to the U.S. spent more than \$495 billion in 1998 on travel-related expenses within the U.S., up 2.8% over 1997. During 1998, spending by U.S. residents and international travelers in the U.S. averaged \$1.36 billion a day, \$56.6 million an hour, \$941,971 a minute, and \$15,700 a second (TIA).

## The Ecotourism Market

### *Market Placement*

Ecotourism is a nature- and culture-based form of specialty travel defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.” This definition has been widely accepted, but does not serve as a functional definition for gathering statistics in the United States. Only nine U.S. government tourism agencies provided written definitions of ecotourism, and six were “homegrown” definitions (Edwards, 1998). A homegrown definition is one that the agency has written or adapted to meet their need or understanding of ecotourism. No national initiative presently exists for the gathering of ecotourism data.

Ecotourism should be considered a niche within the larger nature tourism market. Nature tourism involves travel to unspoiled places to experience and enjoy nature (Honey 1999). It usually involves moderate and safe forms of exercise such as hiking, biking, sailing and camping. Existing nature tourism and outdoor recreation statistics on the U.S. allow us to understand the potential market of ecotourism domestically. These statistics are collected by various agencies within the United States. It should be noted that no one agency is solely responsible for collecting national statistics on any segment of nature or cultural tourism.

### *Market Size*

In 1998, a survey of 3,342 households designed to produce a representative sample of the 47 mainland states outside of Florida found that regardless of the destination of their vacation, respondents had an even chance (48.1%) of participating in nature-based activities during their trip (Bruskin Goldring 1998). Thirty percent of respondents planned trips that focused on some or a majority of time on nature-based activities.

<b>National Incidence Levels of Nature-Based Activities on the Last Vacation (Nationwide mainland survey by Bruskin Goldring for VISIT FLORIDA, Aug. 1998)</b>	
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Response Option	National Incidence
(“ <b>Heavy Users</b> ”) Trip planned so that nature-based activities, like hiking, biking, animal watching, canoeing and going to parks, would account for the <b>majority of the time</b> on vacation. ....	14.5%
(“ <b>Moderate Users</b> ”) Trip planned so that nature-based activities, would account for <b>some of the time</b> on vacation. ....	15.8%
(“ <b>Spontaneous Users</b> ”) Some nature-based activities enjoyed on vacation, although they were <b>not planned</b> . ....	17.8%
<b>Net Sub-Total of Nature-Based Users on Last Vacation</b> .....	<b>48.1%</b>
(“ <b>Not on Last Vacation</b> ”) No nature-based activities were part of the vacation. ....	47.7%
Don't Know .....	4.2%

The same survey found that visiting parks and hiking were the most common nature-based vacation activities.

**“What type of nature-based activities did you participate in during your last nature-based vacation”  
(Nationwide mainland survey by Bruskin Goldring for Visit Florida, Aug. 1998)  
(List was read; “other” was an option)**

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Vacationed Anywhere Incidence</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Visiting Parks*	55.8%	1
Hiking*	55.0%	2
Explored a Preserved Area*	47.8%	3
Wildlife Viewing (non-birds)*	45.8%	4
Nature Trails in Ecosystems*	37.1%	5
Unique Natural Places (sinkhole, dunes)*	27.5%	6
Environmental Education*	20.3%	7
Bird Watching*	19.5%	8
Biking*	18.7%	9
Freshwater Fishing*	17.9%	10
Snorkeling or Scuba Diving*	14.7%	11
Explored a Major Protected Swamp, Marsh*	12.0%	12
Mountain or Rock Climbing*	11.6%	13
Canoeing or Kayaking*	9.2%	14
Ranching*	4.0%	15
Swimming	3.6%	16
Boating	3.6%	17
Beaches	3.2%	18
Visiting Ocean	2.8%	19
Camping	2.0%	20
Sightseeing	1.2%	21
Walking	1.2%	22

\*=Appeared on List Read to Respondent

No \* means was volunteered by respondent after hearing prompt, “Anything else?”

**Ecotourist Profile:**

Based on data collected by a survey completed by HLA and ARA consulting firms of North American travel consumers, TIES has constructed the following ecotourist market profile.

**Age:** 35 - 54 years old, although age varied with activity and other factors such as cost.

**Gender:** 50% female and 50% male, although clear differences by activity were found.

**Education:** 82% were college graduates, a shift in interest in ecotourism from those who have high levels of education to those with less education was also found, indicating an expansion into mainstream markets.

**Household composition:** no major differences were found between general tourists and experienced ecotourists. \*\*

**Party composition:** a majority (60%) of experienced ecotourism respondents stated they prefer to travel as a couple, with only 15% stating they preferred to travel with their families, and 13% preferring to travel alone.

**Trip duration:** the largest group of experienced ecotourists (50%) preferred trips lasting 8-14 days.

**Expenditure:** experienced ecotourists were willing to spend more than general tourists, the largest group (26%) stating they were prepared to spend \$1,001-\$1,500 per trip.

**Important elements of trip:** Experienced ecotourists’ top three responses were: (1) wilderness setting, (2) wildlife viewing, and (3) hiking/trekking.

**Motivations for taking next trip:** Experienced ecotourists’ top two responses were (1) enjoying scenery/nature, and (2) discovering new experiences/places.

\*\* Experienced ecotourists = Tourists that had been on at least one “ecotourism” oriented trip. Ecotourism was defined in this study as nature/adventure/culture-oriented travel.

## **U.S. Travel Trends**

### *Green Travel Products*

The Travel Industry Association of America (1997) states that 83% of U.S. travelers are inclined to support "green" travel companies and are willing to spend on average 6.2% more for travel services and products provided by environmentally responsible travel suppliers. Clients have appreciated the green policies developed by the Boston Plaza, in Boston Massachusetts. For example, an additional \$2 million in new business and a higher occupancy rate was achieved (Rocky Mountain Institute 1997) after the hotel implemented environmentally conscious initiatives, energy efficient lighting, water efficient showerheads, comprehensive recycling program, installation of thermopane windows and a filtration system allowing the hotel to recycle 2/3 of its wash water and retain most of its heat.

### *Recreation Activity*

The Recreation Roundtable's fifth annual national survey (1998) based on 2,009 in-person interviews with Americans 18 and older reported that nearly six in ten Americans participate in outdoor recreation at least monthly. Their motivations for participation vary, but the top objectives are fun, relaxation, stress relief, experiencing nature and exercise. Midwesterners remain the most active in recreation with 66% taking part in outdoor recreation, Northeasterners 59%, West 56%, and the South 51%.

### *Wildlife-Watching*

The National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (1996) found that 62.9 million U.S. residents, representing 31% of the U.S. population 16 years and older, enjoyed a variety of wildlife-watching activities. People who took a primary interest in wildlife around their homes numbered 60.8 million, while those who took trips away from their homes for the primary purpose of participation in wildlife-watching recreation numbered 23.7 million people. Wildlife-watching participants spent \$9.4 billion on trips to pursue their activities. An example includes the expansion of bird watching tourism in South Nebraska associated with the migration of the Sandhill Crane. It currently brings \$60 million to the area every year during the spring (Walle 1997).

### *Adventure Travel*

According to the Adventure Travel Society (ATS), adventure travel is a \$200 billion business in the United States (including transportation, meals, lodging, and equipment), representing half of the nation's \$400 billion tourism industry. The U.S. has 10,000 adventure travel companies and 147 million people who have experienced some form of adventure travel (ATS).

### *National Park Service*

Americans continue to visit national parks in abundance. Twenty-nine million U.S. adults (15% of all U.S. residents) took a trip of 100 miles or more, one-way, to visit a national park during 1997 (TIA), while 70% participated in outdoor activities. Among these outdoor activities, hiking (53%) was most popular. Residents from the Mountain region of the U.S. are most likely to visit a national park, with 37% (TIA) saying they included a park visit while traveling. The Recreation Roundtable (RR) reported that one in three Americans visited a federal recreation site over the past twelve months. Visitors to federal recreation sites continue to believe that they receive good value for the fees they pay. In fact, Americans would have been willing to pay an average of \$9.20 in additional fees for their most recent visit to a federal recreation site (RR 1998).

### *Cultural and Historical Travel*

A California tourism study sampled 45,000 U.S. households per month in 1998 and found that 480 million people took a trip involving cultural activities. In California, 44.3 million Americans traveled for cultural activities in 1998. Of these 44.3 million Americans, 37.8 were California residents. Visiting museums and/or historical sites is the third most popular activity for travelers in America (National Travel Survey and Travelscope 1998).

## Statistical Contact Information

### Travel Industry Association of America

1100 New York Avenue, NW  
Suite 450  
Washington, DC 20005-3934  
Tel: 202-408-8422 / Fax: 202-408-1255

### Tourism Works for America Council

1100 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 450  
Washington, D.C. 20005-3934 USA  
Tel: 202-408-8422 / Fax: 202-408-1255  
E-mail: [ckeefe@tia.org](mailto:ckeefe@tia.org)

### The Recreation Roundtable

1225 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
Tel: 202-682-9530

### ARA Consulting Group

The Marine Building  
355 Burrard, Suite 350  
Vancouver, British Columbia V6C 2G8 Canada  
Tel: 604-681-7577 / Fax: 604-669-7390

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(This factsheet was prepared using selected resources from The International Ecotourism Society's office library, 1999)

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## **Appendix 2: NUMBER OF ELEMENTS IN THE DEFINITION OF ECOTOURISM**

Higgins and Kwasnowski (1999) conducted a study on the perceptions of ecotourism and surveyed 36 state tourism agencies in the U.S. to determine their understanding of the term *ecotourism*.

To provide a qualitative perspective on the diversity of ecotourism definitions, the actual responses to the open-ended question, "What is your personal definition of ecotourism?" are shown below. These 28 responses constitute 78% of all the survey respondents and have been listed from the least to the most common categories. Consequently, from top to bottom they are: SG - Small Groups, LB - Local Benefit, OT - Other, EE - Environmental Education, NB - Nature Based, and SM - Sustainably Managed. It should also be noted that two of the more contentious open-ended responses are numbers 6 and 7 below.

1. Learning about nature and natural processes in small groups led by friendly and skilled guides while maintaining the integrity of the resource. (EE, SG, SM)
2. Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people. (NB, SM, LB)
3. Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people - Ecotourism Society. (NB, SM, LB)
4. Responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people while providing a quality experience that connects the visitor to nature. Included in ecotourism are: nature-based tours and attractions, managed access to sanctuaries, wildlife viewing, beaches, forests, lakes, hiking, fishing, etc. (NB, SM, LB)
5. An exchange where the travelers experience nature-based cultures and/or activities. Travelers learn & experience in a low-impact manner. Tourism dollars remain with the local/indigenous population. Pristine environments & dramatically different cultures are key components. (NB, EE, SM, LB, OT)
6. To me (personally) this term conjures up images of "tree huggers" traipsing around exotic forests along the Amazon River in South America. (OT)
7. It's a politically loaded buzzword that I tend to avoid because it seems to come with overtones which link it to a more broad political agenda. (OT)
8. Not sure that I have one. (OT)
9. We do not use this term. (OT)
10. Don't have one. (OT)
11. Activities that are family oriented involving agricultural/recreational experiences for the visitor, while preserving an area's natural attributes. (OT, SM)
12. Friendly to the environment and educates the traveler on the effects of tourism to the ecosystem. (EE, SM)
13. Low impact, non-extractive, educational visitor experiences that respect the guest and the environment focused on enjoyment of our beautiful, natural environment and resources. (SM, EE, NB)

14. Ecotourism contains a component of educating the visitor to become a more eco-friendly user of our fragile resources. (EE, SM)
15. Hiking, biking, camping, bird watching - all areas of soft adventure. (NB)
16. Travel opportunities that allow travelers to experience the natural environment of the location they are visiting. (NB)
17. Travel that allows visitors to experience a natural environment with a minimal impact on that environment. (NB, SM)
18. Tourism that relies upon natural resources. (NB)
19. All tours regarding tributary water access, fishing and birdwatching are considered ecotourism. (NB)
20. An aspect of the total tourism experience which focuses on nature in a way that does not alter or damage the object of that tour group. In some cases, it includes observing nature without interacting with it (i.e. observing animals from a blind). (NB, SM)
21. Promoting tourism through the state's ecological beauty. (NB)
22. Any attraction or site, open to the general public, that has distinct natural features that can be observed and/or interactively used. (NB)
23. Programs that are designed to promote and protect the ecology of a particular area - urging visitors to practice a "leave only footprints" philosophy. (SM, NB)
24. Ecotourism represents environmental tourism which means protecting the tourism assets you want to enjoy while preserving them for future generations. (SM)
25. Managing our tourism product in a way that ensures it will be sustained and available for future generations. i.e. Promote travel to new locations, promote mid-week travel. (SM)
26. Environmentally friendly tourism, "low-impact" tourism. (SM)
27. Travel that is environmentally and culturally based, operated by companies who use environmentally responsible business practices. (SM)

Higgins, Bryan and Kwasnowski, Dan. 1999. "Geographies of Ecotourism and Nature Tourism among State Tourism Agencies in the U.S.," *Public Planning and Policy Working Paper*, Plattsburgh State University, Plattsburgh, New York.

# Appendix 3: DESTINY 2000 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN OUTLINE

**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN DOWN EAST MAINE: DESTINY 2000**

OCTOBER 1998

**What is DESTINY 2000?**

A group of people from Hancock and Washington Counties is implementing the **Down East Sustainable Tourism Initiative**. Together we are working to enhance opportunities for tourism, providing an economic boost to the people living in the region while conserving cultural and natural resources.

**What is sustainable tourism?**

The goal of sustainable tourism is to minimize social disruption and environmental degradation, while maximizing the associated economic benefits for local residents.

**What can you do?**

Your input and involvement are needed to implement **DESTINY 2000**, the sustainable tourism plan. We now need business people, land stewards, historic preservationists, educators, and any other interested person to help make the plan's strategies happen. Are you already working on a relevant project? Do you have a good idea for how to enhance opportunities for tourism Downeast while providing some local economic gain or protecting valuable natural and cultural resources? Do any of the strategies on the reverse side catch your interest? Please get in touch right away. Plan to attend the fifth annual sustainable tourism conference at the University of Maine in Machias on March 29 & 30, 1998.

**Why do we need a strategy?**

The possible benefits to the region of a sustainable tourism strategy include:

- Development of additional natural and cultural attractions and related educational activities, giving tourists more reasons to visit the region and to stay longer. Residents will also be able to enjoy the attractions and activities.
- Assurance that natural and cultural destinations are not degraded by excessive numbers of visitors and incompatible land uses, maintaining their attractiveness for the long term.
- Increased likelihood that local residents will start and expand businesses and find jobs providing tourist services, keeping the profits in the region.
- Collaborative marketing of the region as a unique cultural and natural destination, making efficient use of the limited financial resources of local businesses and chambers of commerce.
- Coordinated planning for infrastructure improvements to support and manage tourism.

**For more information, to provide comments, or to get involved:**

Vacationland Resources Committee  
Down East RC&D  
PO Box 210  
Cherryfield, ME 04622  
tel: (207) 546-2368  
fax: (207) 546-2369  
e-mail: dered:@nemaine.com

**What do you think of the goals and strategies described here and on the reverse side?**

<p><b>Goal 1</b> <b>Economic Development:</b> Create new employment and business opportunities, and ensure local retention of economic benefits from tourism.</p>	<p><b>Goal 2</b> <b>Ecological Conservation:</b> Ensure that increased numbers of tourists and related business do not degrade the quality of special natural areas.</p>	<p><b>Goal 3</b> <b>Cultural Preservation:</b> Protect and revitalize historical places and traditions.</p>	<p><b>Goal 4</b> <b>Local Coordination:</b> Ensure collaboration among local citizen groups working on tourism, and ensure local ownership and decision-making power.</p>	<p><b>Goal 5</b> <b>Education:</b> Educate local community and visitors about natural and cultural history of area through local institutions.</p>
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## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGIES

**Goal 1 Economic Development: Create new employment and business opportunities, and ensure local retention of economic benefits from tourism.**  
*Objective A: Develop infrastructure to support and manage increased tourism.*  
**Strategy 1.** Promote mass transportation when appropriate and develop infrastructure.  
**Strategy 2.** Improve Rt. 1, including adding bike lanes and designating scenic byways.  
**Strategy 3.** Investigate potential for the Gulf of Maine Council's Coastways project.  
**Strategy 4.** Resolve future of Calais Branch RR ROW.  
**Strategy 5.** Develop selectively back country river and trail infrastructure.  
*Objective B: Refine and increase publicity and marketing for Down East region as a unique cultural and pristine natural destination.*  
**Strategy 1.** Realize DART's Virtual Information Center.  
**Strategy 2.** Carry out state Office of Tourism's "Five-year Marketing and Development Strategy for Maine Tourism", as appropriate to the region.  
**Strategy 3.** Initiate creative marketing, including "green marketing", packages of ecotourism experiences, and coordinated efforts.  
*Objective C: Bolster entrepreneurial and employment opportunities in sustainable tourism for residents of Washington and Hancock Counties.*  
**Strategy 1.** Develop program to address training and technical assistance needs.  
**Strategy 2.** Explore opportunities for tourism as supplemental income for small farms.  
**Goal 2 Ecological Conservation: Ensure that increased numbers of tourists and related businesses do not degrade the ecological quality of special natural areas.**  
**Strategy 1.** Establish a regional "code of ethics" for tourism business operators.  
**Strategy 2.** Create and distribute a low-impact hiking and camping brochure.  
**Strategy 3.** Design/Implement voluntary ecotourism certification program for guides.  
**Strategy 4.** Encourage use of "green design" (energy efficient building design, use of recycled materials for building, etc.) as described by *Green Hotels Association*.  
**Strategy 5.** Produce and install interpretive signs and distribute brochures to educate public about natural history and environmental issues, especially with regard to fragile lands and endangered species.  
**Strategy 6.** Inventory natural areas with the potential for recreational use. Identify fragile lands and unique habitats where use should be limited in consideration of ecological carrying capacity. Develop and implement special use restrictions.  
**Strategy 7.** Devise/Implement system to monitor impacts of tourist use on natural areas, entities and at various levels of government.  
**Strategy 8.** Support protection of vulnerable fragile natural areas and valuable habitat by private entities and at various levels of government.  
**Goal 3 Cultural preservation: Protect and revitalize regional historic places and traditions, with an emphasis on preservation of rural character.**  
*Objective A: Maintain the small-town, New England character and aesthetic integrity of local towns and cities.*  
**Strategy 1.** Encourage land use patterns that minimize urban sprawl and sustain working rural landscapes.  
**Strategy 2.** Collaborate with local officials and resource managers to establish green ways and tree planting for mutual enhancement of natural and cultural assets.  
**Strategy 3.** Design new tourism support facilities to be architecturally consistent with existing, especially historic, buildings.

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGIES

**Strategy 4.** Conduct National Trust for Historic Preservation workshop, "Your Town: Designing Its Future," for municipal leaders to assist with land use planning.  
*Objective B: Highlight culturally unique traditions for economic and education purposes.*  
**Strategy 1.** Develop, enhance, sustain and coordinate festivals to provide activities for tourists, avoiding competition, and creating opportunities for package tours.  
**Strategy 2.** Work with Passamaquoddy Tribe to incorporate local Native American heritage into tourism plan and to secure funds for Wapomahki Museum and Cultural Center renovation at Pleasant Point.  
**Strategy 3.** Develop tourist attractions related to natural resource-based industries, such as fisheries/aquaculture tourism plan developed by State Planning Office; McCurdy's Smokehouse in Lubec, Blueberry Museum in Cherryfield; and cranberry interpretation.  
**Strategy 4.** Collaborate with local timber product companies to design tourism-compatible, economically-beneficial alternative uses for their privately-owned land.  
**Strategy 5.** Develop, promote and implement historic sites bus tour, with special consideration to accommodating extended season tourism.  
**Strategy 6.** Develop, promote, implement a tour package and consider other means of connecting tourists with farming, locally grown and harvested food and sense of place.  
**Strategy 7.** Explore ways to connect tourists with local arts events.  
**Strategy 8.** Develop and promote cultural attractions/destinations across the region, e.g. Quoddy Maritime Museum, Calais Natural Heritage Center, Craig Brook Salmon Museum.  
**Goal 4 Local Coordination: Ensure collaboration among local organizations working on tourism and related issues, and ensure local ownership and decision-making power.**  
**Strategy 1.** Establish committee of local leaders and tourism interests to oversee implementation of plan, with staff person to serve as coordinator.  
**Strategy 2.** Develop and make available across the region an inventory of local guides, restaurants, hotels, and attractions.  
**Strategy 3.** Initiate opportunity for a cooperative for guides.  
**Strategy 4.** Establish a newsletter/home page to provide a forum for exchange of ideas, improve communication between groups, avoid duplication of efforts, publicize issues, and inform stakeholders and interested parties about ongoing local efforts in sustainable tourism.  
**Goal 5 Education: Educate local community and visitors about natural and cultural history of area, especially through local institutions, from elementary school to universities.**  
**Strategy 1.** Develop network of educational interpretive centers; support continuation or expansion of existing centers and assist in development of new centers.  
**Strategy 2.** Develop Ecology of Down East Maine curriculum/outreach program for local schools based on field trips to interpretive centers and special natural areas.  
**Strategy 3.** Solicit undergraduate and graduate students from local universities and colleges for research related to sustainable tourism and GIS mapping projects.  
**Strategy 4.** Provide a range of education/training opportunities at various local institutions, including principles of ecotourism, business planning assistance, hospitality training, training about code of ethics, certification, green design, described in Goal 1.

**What's missing? Your input. What should be done? Will you participate in carrying out these ideas? Let us know.**

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## **Appendix 4: LOCAL CONSIDERATION FOR FLORIDA'S ECOTOURISM/HERITAGE TOURISM INVENTORY INCLUSION**

To encourage travel to and within the state and to extend stays of existing visitors, VISIT FLORIDA will provide a searchable statewide inventory of ecotourism, heritage tourism and cultural tourism sites and experiences as submitted from the counties and regions. We also will provide copies of the inventory database back to the counties and regions as it is best utilized at both the local and state levels. VISIT FLORIDA will promote and market the inventory's availability.

Local entities contributing to the statewide inventory should refer to the definitions and considerations provided and whether the site or experience is an authentic representation of their natural, historical, heritage (including agriculture), or cultural offerings.

The inventory or "menu of special interests" is a list of possibilities only and does not constitute endorsement by VISIT FLORIDA.

**PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY:** The site or activity must exist and be open to the public on a regular, seasonal or by-appointment basis. It should provide, locate or arrange within a reasonable distance adequate parking, restrooms and other visitor amenities.

**QUALITY EXPERIENCE:** The site or experience should have natural, historic, or cultural significance, and provide a quality visitation opportunity. The latter may be accomplished through interpretive and educational means such as printed materials, signage and /or presentations.

**LOCAL MANAGEMENT:** Site and experiences are encouraged to develop sustainable management plans for both the site and host locale. "Sustainable" includes guidelines for historic preservation; maintain the integrity and authenticity of the site or experience; protecting sensitive lands, resources and communities from negative impacts.

## **Model of Ecotourism and Heritage Tourism Visitor Guidelines**

Visitor guidelines are an integral part of a complete ecotourism management and resource protection scheme. They are a fundamental communication tool to reduce visitor impacts and can be particularly useful if regulations governing visitor behavior have not been established already. As with carrying capacity, guidelines are site-specific documents, developed with each resource's individual needs in mind.

*The above notwithstanding, some generalities apply to visitor guidelines.*

*They should:*

- Be self explanatory
- Be positive; avoid language that prohibits actions. Encourage responsible behavior
- Use figures and drawings to explain consequences
- Translate guidelines into foreign languages
- Print on recycled paper
- Solicit evaluations and/or comments on the effectiveness of the guidelines

## **Model of Ethical Behavior for Tour Providers**

*Model of possible ethical behavior of tour providers guidelines:*

- Provide a natural, cultural or heritage experience.
- Wildlife and natural habitats must not be disturbed needlessly.
- Waste must be disposed of properly. Composting and recycling programs are to be implemented whenever possible.
- Tourism should be a positive influence on local communities and provide local jobs that are not destructive to the environment.
- Tourism should be managed and sustainable. Use adequate leadership, and maintain small enough groups to ensure minimum impact on the resource.
- Tourists should leave with a greater understanding and appreciation of nature, conservation, the environment and the area's history.
- Tourism should strengthen conservation efforts and enhance the natural integrity of places visited.
- Develop a company policy and ensure its implementation, which is designed to protect the environment and to minimize impacts on the local culture.

Inventory and Protection Committee. 1997. *Florida's Ecotourism/Heritage Tourism Plan*, Florida Commission of Tourism.

## **Appendix 5: DELAWARE ECO-DISCOVERIES NATURE-BASED TOURISM SURVEY 1997**

*by Cynthia S. Small, Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission  
and  
James M. Falk, University of Delaware Sea Grant College Program*

### **Demographic Findings**

#### *AGE*

- 34% between 40-49 years old
- 22% between 50-59 years old
- 25% greater than 60 years old

#### *MARITAL STATUS*

- 69% are married

#### *CHILDREN*

- 29% with average of 1.84 children under 18 living at home

#### *EDUCATION*

- 54% with college degrees

#### *INCOME*

- 32% with incomes between \$30K - \$49K
- 41% with incomes between \$50K - \$100K
- 12% with incomes greater than \$100K

### **Nature Findings**

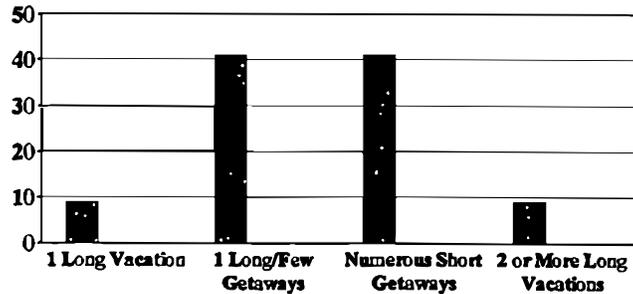
- 2/3 indicated Delaware Eco-Discoveries “Very Useful,” 1/3 indicated “Somewhat Useful”
- 48% had taken vacation or day-trip ecotour
- 86% of travelers to Delaware visited natural attractions in the state
- 88% visit parks and natural areas in hometowns
- 1/3 attended nature festival or event in past year

### **General Travel Findings**

- 68% of all respondents vacationed in Delaware in 1997 (77% were from Delaware and 66% were from outside the state)
- When respondents travel, they typically travel with:
  - Family 60%
  - Family/Friends 23%
  - Friends 10%
  - Alone 8%

## General Travel Findings

Yearly Travel Plans



### Respondent's Choice for Ultimate Adventure Vacation

- Touring Historical/Cultural Sites .....61%
- Hiking/Backpacking ..... 37%
- Camping ..... 23%
- Biking ..... 22%
- Rafting/Canoeing/Kayaking ..... 22%
- Birdwatching.....18%
- Big Game Fishing .....13%
- Scuba/Snorkeling.....12%
- Mountain Climbing ..... 9%
- Hunting ..... 5%
- Other Adventure Travel .....12%

## Appendix 6: “ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY” HOTEL SURVEY

### “ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY” HOTEL SURVEY

Dear Hotel/Motel Manager:

This brief survey is designed to help us better understand if you, and your staff, practice waste reduction and energy conservation at your property. Hotels and motels are a significant sector of the tourism industry and purchase a variety of products and services that affect the environment. Properties across the country are realizing the conservation benefits as well as the cost-savings of keeping their hotels/motels “environmentally-friendly.” We are undertaking this survey to determine if Delaware properties are also realizing these benefits. One organization that is promoting the concept nationally is the The “Green” Hotels Association. Visit their website at [www.greenhotels.com](http://www.greenhotels.com) for more information. Once we have completed this initial task and examined the results, we will determine what assistance we can provide to continue to keep Delaware hotels/motels “green.” Feel free to contact any of us for additional information. Your cooperation is appreciated.

Jim Falk  
Univ. of DE Sea Grant  
(302) 645-4235

Andre Kreiner  
DE Pollution Prevention Program  
(302) 739-3822

Cindy Small  
Sussex County Tourism  
(302) 856-1818

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Have you and your staff identified opportunities for waste reduction and/or energy conservation at your property? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>2. Have you undertaken any water conservation projects/practices at your property (such as reduced-flow shower heads or low-flow toilets, etc.)?<br/><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO<br/>Specify _____<br/>_____</p> <p>3. Have you undertaken any energy conservation projects/practices at your property (such as energy-saving light bulbs, etc.)?<br/><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO<br/>Specify _____<br/>_____</p> <p>4. Do you recycle any products at your property (e.g. newspapers, plastics, aluminum, etc.)?<br/><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO<br/>Describe _____<br/>_____</p> <p>5. If you engage in waste reduction/energy conservation practices, do you promote them to your guests?<br/><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>6. Do you regularly train hotel/motel staff on how to be “environmentally-friendly?”<br/><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>7. Do you operate a restaurant at your property and engage in waste reduction practices there?<br/><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO<br/><input type="checkbox"/> Do not have a restaurant.<br/><i>Sussex County, Delaware – Embraces Ecotourism</i></p> | <p>8. Does your property regularly purchase reusable or recyclable products? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>9. Are you aware of the potential cost-savings that can be realized by practicing waste reduction/energy conservation at hotels and motels?<br/><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I am aware<br/><input type="checkbox"/> No, I am not aware<br/><input type="checkbox"/> I have limited knowledge, but would like to have more information.</p> <p>10. Describe any other environmental projects or activities that your property is involved in, including advertising, promotion, sponsorship of events, etc?<br/>Describe _____<br/>_____<br/>_____</p> <p>11. Would you, or others from your property, benefit from attending a half-day seminar to learn more about reducing waste, practicing energy conservation, and saving money at hotels/motels?<br/><input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p> <p>12. Feel free to provide any other comments:<br/>_____<br/>_____<br/>_____</p> |
|--|--|



*Thank you for your cooperation.*  
Please return completed survey by September 11, 1998 in the enclosed postage-paid envelope or you may fax it to J. Falk at (302) 645-4213.

# Appendix 7: WEST VIRGINIA'S "CORRIDOR L" TOURISM ENHANCEMENT PROJECT OUTLINE

**Projects**  
(\\$225,000)

**Trail Development**

1. *Summersville Lake Trail*: Layout and design plan for a walking/biking trail.

**Festivals & Events Development**

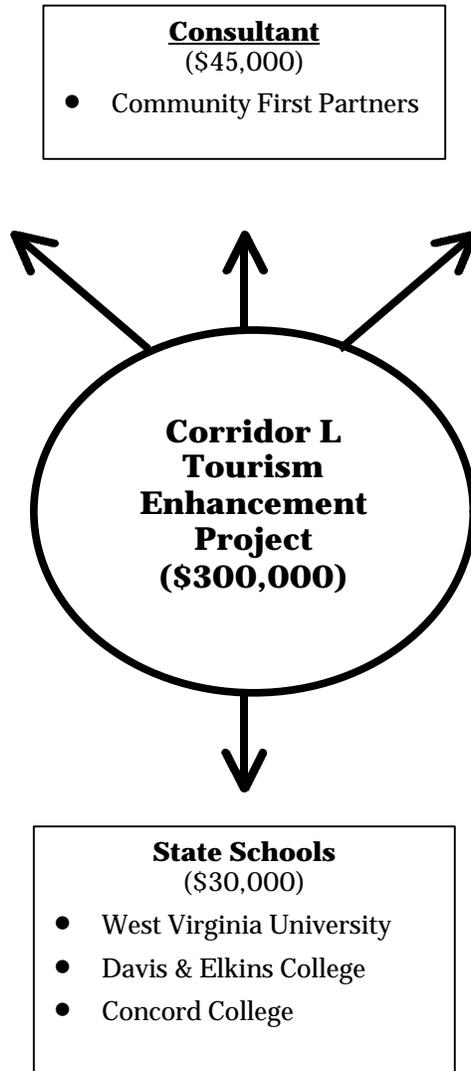
2. *Taste of Southern WV*: A reception for the tourism conference consisting of homemade WV cuisine.
3. *Captain Thurmond's Challenge Triathlon*: Adventure sport triathlon consisting of Mt. Biking, Kayaking and Running.
4. *First Regional Tourism Conference*

**Maps**

5. *New River Adventure Trail*: Highlights tourism in the region; 100,000 copies distributed.
6. *Museums Along the River*: A pamphlet highlighting historical museums along the river; 10,000 copies distributed.

**Unique Individual Projects**

7. *Small Town Survival*: Survey conducted to help towns attract customers and adapt to their needs.
8. *Signage on Route 19*
9. *Promotional Video*: Promotional video on regional tourism created.



**Projects Continued**

**Visitor Centers**

10. *Nicholas County Visitor Center*: Feasibility study.
11. *Route 19 Visitor Center*: Kiosks purchased and travel show display designed.

**Museum Development**

12. *Whitewater Interpretive Center*: Feasibility study.
13. *Fayette County Jail*: Museum plan designed.

**Retail/Merchandising**

14. *West Virginia Grown Products*: Shelves purchased in local food stores for WV products.

**Marketing**

15. *Hospitality/Resource Guide*: Created an inventory of tourism opportunities in the Corridor L region.
16. *Historic Fayette Theater*: Advertisements funded for shows.
17. *7<sup>th</sup> Grade Student 2 day tour*: Historical tour and play funded.
18. *Students Travel WV Program*: Funded students to travel to other WV local schools.
19. *Wildlife Park*: Feasibility study for resort reflecting WV's heritage and history.

Pinto, Alicia. 1999. *West Virginia "Corridor L" Tourism Enhancement Project Outline*, The International Ecotourism Society, Vermont.

## **Appendix 8: OZARK ECOTOURS: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background**

The Newton County Resource Council (NCRC) of Newton County, Arkansas is currently operating Ozark Ecotours—a nature/adventure tourism program—as a community development enterprise to generate employment opportunity and income for Newton County residents. This feasibility study was commissioned to research, develop, propose or report: 1) market feasibility of Newton County ecotourism, (2) marketing strategy, (3) operational strategy, (4) organizational structure, (5) financial feasibility, (6) economic impact, and (7) environmental and social impact.

The NCRC, a community development cooperation, is engaged in numerous initiatives and programs that share the common goal of improving and sustaining the economic and social well being of Newton County residents. Details of program accomplishments and new initiatives are presented below. Thorough descriptions of Newton County, ecotourism, and the Ozark Ecotours Program also follow. A description of key environmental and social impact of existing and projected ecotourism in Newton County is also furnished.

### **Current Program Analysis**

An analysis of the current Newton County ecotourism program (based on NCRC evaluation questionnaires completed by Ozark Ecotours participants) yields the following information:

- Since Newton County's first ecotours began, a total of 510 ecotourists have been guided by Ozark Ecotours.
- Out of 103 Ozark Ecotours participants in Fall 1994, seventy-five percent were from Arkansas (predominantly central and northwest Arkansas); twenty-five percent were from states contiguous with Arkansas and from Wisconsin and Illinois.
- Out of 167 Ozark Ecotours participants in Spring 1995, some two-thirds were from Arkansas; one-quarter were from Missouri with the remainder from West Coast states and Oklahoma.

The participating ecotourists represent a wide range of ages (from students to those over 75 years of age) with an average age of 44 years in both 1994 and 1995 Ozark Ecotours seasons. Participants indicate diverse interests and reasons as motivation for their choice of an ecotour in Newton County with most sharing an interest in hiking and experiencing natural beauty in the open air. The vocations of participants are diverse with some 40% listing "retired" or "student;" the remainder of respondents were from the business/professional and health-care sectors.

Financial analysis of the current program concludes that during the 1994/95 seasons, total revenues covered variable costs but fell substantially short of covering all ecotourism program costs. Although revenue increased substantially from Fall 1994 to the Spring 1995 ecotour season, costs also increased and thus net operating loss remained fairly consistent. One of the main cost increases was due to additional NCRC

staff hours that were essential to develop, monitor and evaluate the growing program. These staff costs (per ecotourist) should decline over time as the program matures and requires less intensive management.

Economic viability hinges on steady, sustainable increases in program revenues and declines in costs per ecotourist. One option to help cover operating costs is to increase prices for Ozark Ecotours. Over half of all evaluation questionnaire respondents said that price was not an important factor in deciding to take a Newton County ecotour. However, very few are willing to pay more than \$50 for a standard one-day ecotour; yet 73% said they would participate in an ecotour similar to that experienced with Ozark Ecotours if the price were \$45. Current cost of a one-day ecotour is \$40.

This indicates a need to either develop new markets among prospects willing to pay more for ecotours or to reduce costs per ecotourist to assure program viability. Analysis is also provided of dollars spent in the Jasper, Arkansas, area and the economic impact of local expenditures on the Newton County economy. Of the total 1994-95 economic impact of ecotourism on Newton County, some 60 percent (or \$19,300) went to local residents, supplementing income and providing part-time jobs where there are few employment opportunities.

### **Potential for Ecotourism Expansion in Newton County**

This section of the report explores state and regional use of Arkansas as a tourist destination; describes the target markets selected by the NCRC and their potential for Newton County ecotourism; and assesses the climate for potential use of Ozark Ecotours by other US markets and international markets. Target markets for this study were (1) current markets; (2) Branson, Missouri; (3) Hot Springs Village and Bella Vista, Arkansas; (4) Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas; and (5) various U.S. print and broadcast media markets. The first three were surveyed with Newton County ecotourism questionnaires and focus groups and the last was sampled via a national Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism (ADPT) mass mail-out (conversion study) that included a Newton County ecotourism questionnaire.

Similarities and differences among the target markets surveyed are summarized; this includes NCRC evaluation questionnaire respondents as well. Additionally, various studies of publications and organizations involved in ecotourism and adventure travel and their potential as viable travel alternatives have been explored and have contributed to the current study.

A total of 2,453 surveys were collected from all four markets; 90% of the total were from the ADPT conversion study alone. Overall survey results indicate that an interest in ecotourism exists in the target markets, although only about 7% of respondents had previously taken an ecotour. Over 90% of respondents in the Branson, Bella Vista and Hot Springs Village surveys indicated an interest in ecotourism; one-third of Dallas/Ft. Worth respondents said they had no interest in ecotourism and one-fourth of the ADPT survey respondents indicated no interest in ecotourism. Average willingness-to-pay ranged from \$28 for a half-day ecotour and \$45 for a one-day ecotour to \$219 for a two-day package ecotour.

The response to our surveys indicates a substantial market exists for ecotours in the United States. Like any market, it contains people with different interests and preferences; also, our survey responses were from a disproportionately larger group of more highly educated people. The responses indicate that the challenge for the NCRC will not be in attracting ecotourists but will be in developing an ecotour program with a specific focus that is targeted to the appropriate audience.

### **Analysis of Expanded Markets**

For Ozark Ecotours to be financially viable, a substantial increase in the number of ecotourists must occur along with an increase in ecotour fees or a reduction in the costs of providing ecotours. Over 9,300 people would be required at the current fee of \$40 (full day ecotour) to recover ecotour program costs using Fall 1995 cost data. Since Newton County and the NCRC do not currently have the resources and facilities needed for 9,300 ecotourists/year, other options can be considered in the short-term.

Raising ecotour fees gradually from \$40 to \$45, and then to \$50 as demand grows would reduce net loss of operations. With an ecotour fee of \$50 per person, it would require 2,252 ecotourists in one year to raise enough revenue to cover all costs. This is nearly eight times the number of people who participated in the 1995 *Ozark Ecotours* season.

The NCRC is targeting their marketing efforts to build gradually on the following current market strength:

- 1) courting in-state retirement community residents who could increase efficiency of operations by taking ecotours during off-peak days;
- 2) developing complementary programming aimed at experiential education for youth, incentive travel and custom tour markets;
- 3) increasing direct mail efforts in contiguous states; and
- 4) slowly expanding direct-mail efforts and marketing to a still larger national audience.

Other cost-cutting efforts can increase program viability (e.g., making every effort to fill the ecotourist roster for each ecotour and monitoring other variable costs closely such as food, vehicle expense, equipment and supplies).

Based on past ecotourist expenditure patterns in Newton County, a hypothetical scenario is posited of 1,200 ecotourists who spend on average \$65 per person in the Newton County area. Total estimated expenditures are \$78,512, which creates about five full-time job equivalents in the area. Some 63% of the money spent in the area is received as income by Newton County residents.

Ecotourist spending has multiplier effects that result in additional jobs created and income received by local residents. Including multiplier effects, an additional \$80,560 in income is received by area residents; total additional sales of some \$140,000 create the equivalent of 6.2 full-time jobs and add value of over \$94,000 to the local economy. Many local residents will benefit from the ecotourism program; close to 60% of the additional ecotourism-related economic activity in the area will be received as income by local residents.

### **Key Constraints/Opportunities Affecting Program Expansion**

Significant service-sector constraints exist in Newton County and vicinity that could negatively impact visitation and spending for an expanded ecotourism program, chief of which is the current limitation in overnight housing and other basic tourism-related services. Preliminary discussions about constructing a group “ecolodge” facility for the NCRC program have occurred with area investors. The natural beauty, biodiversity and cultural heritage of the Buffalo National River and Newton County are major opportunities that traditionally have exerted a positive impact on visitation and spending in the county.

Major transportation routes into the Jasper area are dominated by winding, narrow two-lane state highways, the shortest segment of which is eighteen miles to the nearest four-lane highway. There are no convenient regional airports due to Newton County’s remoteness. Area transportation of ecotourists by NCRC vans does not pose a constraint, no matter how ecotourist numbers may grow in the future.

### **Organizational Structure for Sustainability**

The NCRC will administer Ozark Ecotours and allied programming until 1999, at which time a reassessment of organizational structure will take place. If financial sustainability appears attainable over the next 24 months, it is recommended that the NCRC spin off the non-profit activities (e.g., experiential youth program) from the for-profit activities (e.g., Ozark Ecotours). Subsequent organizational structure options include:

- 1) For-Profit Corporation linked to NCRC to manage Ozark Ecotours;
- 2) Non-Profit Corporation linked to NCRC to manage allied programs;
- 3) Both for-profit and non-profit entities are established as described in 1) and 2).

### **Environmental and Social Impacts**

Environmental carrying capacity and sustainable ecotourism industry development are central to the ongoing debate about the appropriateness and long-term viability of ecotourism and its impact on society, culture and the natural resource base. Due to the historically high levels of “mass” nature tourism in the Buffalo National River Basin (an estimated 40,000 person trips in 1994 to Newton County alone), it is virtually impossible to distinguish the environmental and social impacts of Ozark Ecotours (282 ecotourists in the 1994/95 seasons) from that of the former. Service requirements and infrastructure demands will assuredly climb if ecotourist numbers increase significantly as a result of enhanced marketing efforts and Ozark Ecotours activities will become more concentrated in time and space.

The NCRC has already instituted the Ozark Ecotours Site Monitoring Project, being carried out by NCRC staff and other volunteers throughout each ecotour. The NCRC asked that two national environmental monitoring and evaluation programs be assessed for their potential to enhance the current Ozark Ecotours site monitoring program and possibly expand such efforts county-wide, should a consensus be reached by county residents and interested public agencies to support and participate in such an endeavor. The two national programs discussed in this study are the USDA Forest Service LAC System for Wilderness Planning and the US Man and the Biosphere Program (the latter also has a global division that interfaces with the US division).

### **Management Plan**

The administrative feasibility of Ozark Ecotours for the indefinite future has been established. The NCRC's successful grant proposal efforts have brought significant and diverse fiscal resources to the Council's numerous community development initiatives in recent years—Ozark Ecotours among them. Legal feasibility has been established by the NCRC's Community Development Corporation status and the requisite current Memoranda of Understanding, Special Use Permits and Licenses that are required to access public lands for Ozark Ecotours activities.

The NCRC also has in place a community-based 35-member Ecotourism Advisory Team that provides oversight and guidance to Ozark Ecotours. An Administrative Director, Promotional Director, Tour Development Director, two 30-hour and one 35-hour positions are assigned to Ozark Ecotours and related programs; additionally, two to three VISTA volunteers will be provided through 1997 to assist this program.

*For more information on the Newton County Economic Feasibility Study contact:*

Newton County Resource Council  
PO Box 513  
Jasper, AR 72641  
Tel: 870-446-5898

# Appendix 9: AN ECOTOURIST'S GUIDE TO LANE COUNTY— LISTING INFORMATION

## An Ecotourist's Guide to Lane County

### Listing Information

While listing in The Guide is free, space is limited. Selections will be based on a combination of: ratings from the "Qualifying Criteria," geographic and categorical diversity and balance, uniqueness and timely response.

Organization		Contact Person		
Address	City	State	Zip	
Mailing address (if different)	City	State	Zip	
Toll Free Phone	Local Phone	Fax	E-mail	Website

### Qualifying Criteria

Please rate your business/organization/service by circling the appropriate number according to the following scale:  
(0 = not relevant, 1=limited, 5=extensive)

Please explain any rating of 1-5 by jotting down specific examples of how you/your organization demonstrates that quality.

**Example:**

0 1 2 3 <b>4</b> 5	supports the local people and local culture	<i>We provide paid volunteer hours to employees for tutoring in neighborhood public schools</i>
--------------------	---	---

**My Business/Organization/Service . . .**

0 1 2 3 4 5	is locally owned and operated	
0 1 2 3 4 5	supports community/service oriented	
0 1 2 3 4 5	supports the local people and local culture	
0 1 2 3 4 5	includes locally crafted/value-added items	
0 1 2 3 4 5	provides direct guest/host relationships	
0 1 2 3 4 5	is environmentally conscious	
0 1 2 3 4 5	is environmentally focused	
0 1 2 3 4 5	composts/recycles (paper, glass, plastic, metal)	
0 1 2 3 4 5	reduces pollution (air, water, soil, noise)	
0 1 2 3 4 5	practices/applies innovative and alternative methods	
0 1 2 3 4 5	offers public education/info through classes/media	
0 1 2 3 4 5	offers hands-on involvement to tourists/volunteers	
0 1 2 3 4 5	supports reduction of resource usage in areas of energy/water/transportation/etc	
0 1 2 3 4 5	meets a "green" criteria as defined by Willamette Green Pages, Ceres Principle, Natural Step, Coop America, etc.	

## **Appendix 10: REGIONAL ECOTOURISM ASSOCIATIONS IN THE U.S.**

It is worth noting how few regional ecotourism associations are located within the United States. Existing associations are in states where ecotourism, nature and cultural tourism have established a large market. Alaska, Hawaii, Virginia and Florida each have very unique ecosystems to attract ecotourists, and they also have developed strong conventional tourism industries. Ecotourism is becoming a niche market in these states.

### **Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Associations (AWRTA)**

PO Box 1353  
Valdez, AK 99686  
Tel: 907 835 4300  
Fax: 907 835 5679  
Email: awrta@aol.com  
Web: [www.alaska.net/2awrta](http://www.alaska.net/2awrta)

### **Hawaii Ecotourism Association (HEA)**

PO Box 359  
Hau'ula, HI 96717  
Tel: 808 237 8067  
Fax: 808 237 1027  
Email: bobbee@lava.net  
Web: [www.planet-hawaii.com/hea](http://www.planet-hawaii.com/hea)

### **Virginia EcoTourism Association (VETA)**

PO Box 8754  
Virginia Beach, VA 23450-8754

### **Visit Florida**

661 E. Jefferson St., Suite 300  
Tallahassee, FL 32301  
Tel: 850 488 5607  
Fax: 850 224 2938  
Email: [kpost@flausa.com](mailto:kpost@flausa.com)  
Web: [www.Flausa.com](http://www.Flausa.com)

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