

Appalachian

Gateway Communities Initiative

An Assessment and Recommendations Report
for Natural and Cultural Heritage Tourism Development
in Calhoun County, Alabama



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for Natural and Cultural Heritage Tourism Development
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Funded by the
National Endowment for the Arts



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Appalachian Regional Commission



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America's Partner in Conservation

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Introduction

In March 2007, the Appalachian Regional Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts announced a new initiative to provide assistance to Appalachia's gateway communities in natural and cultural heritage tourism development. Gateway communities are defined as towns that border national and state parks, wildlife refuges, forests, historic sites, wilderness areas and other public lands. The initiative's intent is to assist communities in enhancing natural and historic assets and to emphasize the role of the arts in the development of a comprehensive strategy.

Calhoun County, Alabama submitted an application in the 2008 grant round. The application submitted by the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce described key challenges and opportunities that could be addressed by an assessment visit and report:

Opportunities And Challenges Identified by the Calhoun County Planning Committee

Opportunities

1. **The area is a gateway to public lands.** Being a gateway community to both the Talladega National Forest and the Appalachian Mountains (offers) untapped potential for eco-tourism.
2. **New recreation resources can attract more tourists.** The Alabama portion of the Chief Ladiga Trail is completed, and the state of Georgia is expected to finish its section by September (2008) opening a tremendous resource to bicyclers and hikers. The Alabama River Scenic Trail held its grand opening in June (2008)....
3. **Unique ecosystems offer educational opportunities.** The Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge, with its 6,000 acres that protect a unique and endangered ecosystem...and the Frog Pond Wildlife Preserve are significant gathering places for educational professionals and classes.
4. **Anniston has two outstanding museums.** From a cultural standpoint, the Smithsonian-affiliated Anniston Museum of Natural History takes a back seat to no one. Next door lies another outstanding museum, the Berman Museum of World History.
5. **Neighboring counties can be partners.** We would also like to reach out to other transitional counties adjoining us – in particular Talladega, Cleburne and Clay....

Challenges

1. **A master plan is needed.** The challenge we face as a community is to develop a master plan to successfully market these resources.

2. **Marketing is currently limited.** Informational brochures have been produced featuring the Chief Ladiga Trail and the Alabama Scenic River Trail, and resources are available on most of our other areas of interest at all eight of Alabama's Welcome Centers and our website, but our range is rather limited.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Heritage Tourism Program and The Conservation Fund were retained by the Appalachian Regional Commission and National Endowment for the Arts to conduct the site visit and to prepare the assessment and recommendations report. Services were provided by Carolyn Brackett, Senior Program Associate, National Trust for Historic Preservation Heritage Tourism Program, and Kendra Briechle, Senior Training Associate, Conservation Leadership Network, The Conservation Fund.

The assessment visit itinerary was developed by Mike Galloway, Director of Tourism, Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce, and Sherri Summers, President, Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce.

The assessment visit was conducted March 23-25, 2009. The itinerary included opportunities to meet with chamber tourism staff and community stakeholders to gather information about cultural, historic and natural resources and to discuss ideas, challenges and opportunities for tourism development and promotion. Carolyn Brackett's site tour focused on cultural and historic resources while Kendra Briechle's site tour focused on natural and recreational resources. (Itineraries are included at the end of this report.)

We would like to thank the many Calhoun County stakeholders who assisted with this assessment by providing tours, information and insights about the area:

Mike Galloway, *Director of Tourism, Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce*

Sherri Summers, *President, Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce*

Terry Wilson, *Board Member, Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce*

Elmer Wheatley, *Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce*

Hartley Fred, *Superintendent, Cheaha State Park*

Ed Fowler, *Vice President for Operations, Anniston Star*

Phillip Tutor, *Commentary Editor, Anniston Star*

Brian Casey, *Assistant Superintendent, Cheaha State Park*

Mike Warner, *Owner, Terrapin Outdoor Center*

Betsy Bean, *Executive Director, Spirit of Anniston*

Eli Henderson, *Chairman, Calhoun County Commission*

Larry Lee, *Sons of Confederate Veterans, Janney Furnace*

Mike Poe, *Chairman, Cheaha Challenge and Noble Street Festival*

Margie Conner, *Marketing Manager, Anniston Museum of Natural History
and Berman Museum of World History*

Daniel Spaulding, *Curator of Collection, Anniston Museum of Natural History*

David Ford, *Executive Director, Berman Museum of World History*

Alberta Cooley McCrory, *Mayor, Hobson City*

Steve Baswell, *Mayor, Obatchee*

Johnny Smith, *Mayor, Jacksonville*

Donna Fathke, *Principal Planner, East Alabama Planning and Development Commission*

Kim Bittle, *Ranger, Talladega National Forest*

Kevin Garrett, *Associate Pastor in Education and Outreach, Parker
Memorial Baptist Church*

Glenda Barker, *Interim Secretary, Grace Episcopal Church*

The Rev. Bruce A. White, *Rector, St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church*

Pete Conroy, *Director, Field Schools and Environmental Policy Center,
Jacksonville State University*

Fred Couch, *Founder and President, Alabama Scenic River Trail*

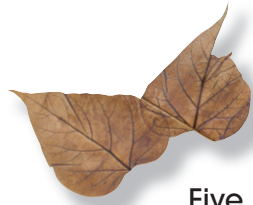
Don Hopper, *President, Calhoun County Economic Development Council*

Kristi R. King, *Senior Director of Communications and Consumer Marketing,
Talladega Superspeedway*

Andy Smith, *Talladega Superspeedway*

David Schneider, *Anniston Historic Preservation Commission and Director,
Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation (telephone interview)*

Mark Hudson, *Alabama Land Trust (telephone interview)*



Five Principles of Successful and Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism

Through its work with communities across the country, the National Trust for Historic Preservation Heritage Tourism Program has developed five principles to help guide successful and sustainable cultural heritage tourism development:

PRINCIPLE ONE: Collaborate

By its very nature, cultural heritage tourism requires effective partnerships. Much more can be accomplished by working together than by working alone.

PRINCIPLE TWO: Find the Fit between the Community and Tourism

Cultural heritage tourism should make a community a better place to live as well as a better place to visit. Respect carrying capacity so everyone benefits.

PRINCIPLE THREE: Make Sites and Programs Come Alive

Look for ways to make visitor experiences exciting, engaging and interactive.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: Focus on Quality and Authenticity

Today's cultural heritage traveler is more sophisticated and will expect a high level of quality and an authentic experience.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: Preserve and Protect Resources

Many of your community's cultural, historic and natural resources are irreplaceable. Take good care of them, if they are lost you can never get them back.

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Sustainable Ecotourism Principles

According to development expert Ed McMahon, sustainable tourism is about authentic experiences that are unique and specialized to the place's resources (its culture, heritage, and natural resources). Sustainable tourism emphasizes quality over quantity. Sustainable tourism focuses on distinctive destinations, unspoiled landscapes, and historic buildings. It differs from mass-market tourism by favoring locally-owned businesses, thereby increasing circulation of money in the local economy.

Sustainable tourism is a strong component of gateway communities. The Conservation Fund promotes the strategies used by successful gateway communities as cited in *Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities* by Jim Howe, Ed McMahon, and Luther Propst. Successful gateway communities:

- Develop a widely shared vision
- Create an inventory of local resources
- Build on local assets
- Use education, voluntary initiatives, and incentives as well as regulations
- Meet the needs of both landowners and communities
- Partner with public land managers
- Recognize the role of non governmental organizations
- Provide opportunities for leaders to step forward
- Pay attention to aesthetics

Additionally, the Rural Ecotourism Assessment Project by Gail Y.B. Lash and Alison Austin lists three components of community-based tourism:

1. Understand and meet the needs of the community
2. Realistically deliver a long-term quality tourism product
3. Make specific efforts to connect these products to international and local markets

Target Audiences and Marketing Calhoun County

Alabama Tourism

The Alabama Department of Tourism targets the state's travel marketing within the Southeast region as 85% of visitors come from within this 500-mile radius. The department's *2007 Economic Impact Report* documented travel impact data for the state including:

- An estimated 22.4 million people visited the State of Alabama during 2007.
- The most visited counties were Baldwin, Jefferson, Madison, Mobile, and Montgomery, accounting for 63% of the total number of visitors.
- Travelers are estimated to have spent over \$9.3 billion in Alabama. This represents an increase of 10 percent over 2006 spending.
- An estimated 170,686 jobs – 8.5 percent of non-agricultural employment in Alabama – were directly or indirectly attributable to the travel and tourism industry.
- The total impact of the travel and tourism industry on Alabama's earnings in 2007 is estimated at almost \$3.7 billion.
- In 2007, over \$685 million of state and local tax revenues were realized, primarily due to travel and tourism activities.

Calhoun County Tourism

The Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce houses the tourism office for the county.

The tourism office's mission is:

To provide information to both residents and non-residents – primarily in the Southeast region – concerning the numerous natural resources and attractions the county has to offer in order for visitors to not only visit our destination but spend hotel nights and shopping/dining dollars in our area. Included in that group are a growing number of retirees who express interest in establishing permanent residence in our community.

A 2004 study titled *Calhoun County Brand Print*, documented data on the county's visitors including:

Top Visitation Markets for Calhoun County:

1. Atlanta
2. Birmingham
3. Huntsville-Decatur
4. Montgomery
5. Mobile
6. Nashville
7. Dallas-Fort Worth
8. Charlotte
9. Greenville-Spartanburg
10. Augusta

Key demographic characteristics of Calhoun County visitors are: the majority of visitors are white (71.3%), high school graduates or attended college (29.8%/25.3%), professional or blue collar workers (26.7% manager/31.8% other white collar/26% blue collar) and married or married with children (28.2%/26.7%). Age ranges were fairly evenly spread among adults ages 18 to 65+. Visitors most often came to the area for the Talladega Superspeedway or to enjoy the area's natural attractions. They generally stayed one night or were day trippers. Top attractions are:

Calhoun County

1. Anniston Museum of Natural History
2. Chief Ladiga Trail
3. Lake Neely Henry/Logan Martin Lake
4. Terrapin Creek
5. Berman Museum of World History
6. Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail at Silver Lakes

The chamber's tourism office is funded from a county lodging tax collected from the county's 1,900 hotel rooms. The tourism office estimates overall occupancy rates at 70% with the majority coming from business travelers staying at interstate exit hotels during the week.

The tourism office's most recent marketing plan focused in five areas:

- Promoting the opening of the Chief Ladiga Trail
- Hosting the 11-12 year old Dixie Youth State Baseball Tournament
- Attending the T.E.A.M.S. sports event trade show in Louisville.
- Assisting with development and promotion of the Alabama Scenic River Trail
- Promoting the area as a location for retirees

The tourism office also distributes press releases on upcoming events and produces brochures highlighting the county's attractions.

Mountain Longleaf Region

The *Calhoun County BrandPrint* report also recommended formation of a regional partnership which was named the Mountain Longleaf Region. The region includes DeKalb, Cherokee, Calhoun, Cleburne, Clay and Talladega and focuses on eco-tourism. Top attractions in the Longleaf Region are:

Mountain Longleaf Region

1. Talladega Superspeedway
2. Cheaha State Park
3. Little River Canyon
4. Weiss Lake
5. International Motorsports Hall of Fame
6. DeSoto Caverns
7. DeSoto State Park

Calhoun County is spearheading the effort to market the region, using the Mountain Longleaf brand and the "You Set The Pace" tagline, following the recommendations of the *Calhoun County BrandPrint* report. The Calhoun Chamber of Commerce serves as the visitor center for the Mountain Longleaf Region and coordinates the nascent regional partnership.

Pete Conroy, director of the Field Schools and Environmental Policy Center at Jacksonville State University, artfully describes the Mountain Longleaf Region as stretching from the state's deepest canyon (Little River) to its highest mountain (Cheaha). According to Conroy, the Mountain Longleaf Region sports the highest concentration of nationally protected natural lands: a National Park (Little River Canyon), National Wildlife Refuge (Mountain Longleaf), National Forest (Talladega), Wilderness Area (Dugger Mountain), and National Recreation Trail (Pinhoti Trail). The state park and wildlife management lands, the Alabama Scenic River Trail, and the county-managed Chief Ladiga Trail complement the federally owned and managed lands.

In the county's largest town, Anniston's Main Street Office, the Spirit of Anniston, focuses on the revitalization of the historic downtown which was a retail hub for the entire region in its heyday. Additionally, the office has undertaken promotion of the downtown with the creation of posters encouraging visitors to "Explore All the Possibilities" and rack cards highlighting shopping, dining and special events.

In addition to promotions, the tourism office and Anniston Main Street, as well as other stakeholders interviewed during the site visit, are interested in further developing the area's tourism product – sites related to the area's heritage and natural resources – as well as visitor services such as restaurants and places to stay, in particular focusing on campsites.

Overview of National Tourism Trends

Tourism is big business. According to 2005 figures by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), domestic travelers in the United States spent over \$650 billion, generating approximately 8 million jobs, \$171.4 billion in payroll income and \$104.9 billion in tax revenues for federal, state and local governments.

Travel habits have changed in the past few decades to reflect changes in lifestyles. The typical family

of the 1950s and 1960s with a single income, a stay-at-home mom, open-ended summer vacations and less structured activities for children is no longer the norm. Today, it is much more common to find dual-income families with children who are programmed with after school daycare, summer camps, sports teams and a host of other organized activities.

In addition, the population is aging – 84% of America’s population growth in the next 20 years will be age 50+. By 2020, more than one-third of Americans will be over age 50. Because Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) generate more travel than any other age group and intend to continue this active lifestyle, this population segment will create new demands on the travel industry such as more experienced-based travel, accommodation for those with limited mobility, and travel experiences geared toward empty nesters traveling without children.

For all population segments, time has now become the new sought after commodity as demographers refer to the “Great American Time Squeeze” that reflects today’s busy lifestyles.

The impact on the tourism industry has been an increase over the past few decades in shorter, weekend getaway trips to destinations closer to home. At the same time, there has been a corresponding decrease in extended vacations. With less time to plan, travelers are increasingly turning to the Internet for immediate access to travel information. Interest in travel packages and itineraries has grown as travelers have less time to spend on planning their trips.

Ecotourism Trends

Ecotourism and associated outdoor recreation represent fast-growing segments of the tourism industry and generate significant revenues for businesses and governments. According to the World Tourism Organization, ecotourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourism market, with a 5 percent annual growth rate.

Nationwide, in FY 2007, visitors spent \$11.79 billion in local regions surrounding national parks, thus supporting 244,400 jobs in gateway regions. National parks received 275.6 million visits, while the Forest Service had 204 million visitors.

A Baldwin County, Alabama study cites the Outdoor Industry Association that: “Three of every four Americans participate in active outdoor recreation, which supports nearly 6.5 million jobs nationally and provides \$88 billion in annual state and federal tax revenue. An estimated 60 million American participate in bicycling, 45 million in camping, and 33 million in fishing.” The study continues: “Outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy.”

The Baldwin County, Alabama study noted that bird watching alone generated \$626 million in 2006. Alabama’s 850,000 anglers generated another \$1.7 million in economic output for the state.

National Trends in Cultural Heritage Tourism

The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines cultural heritage tourism as “*traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present.*” In addition to creating new jobs, new businesses, higher property values and a diversified economy, a well-managed tourism program improves the quality of life, builds community pride and brings expanded goods and services that benefit visitors and residents alike. This is particularly true for the cultural heritage segment of the tourism market.

Communities need to weigh the benefits of tourism against the challenges it can bring. While tourism is generally a “clean industry”, large numbers of visitors can place demands on a community’s infrastructure. For communities that succeed in attracting visitors, it can be a challenge to balance the needs and interests of residents with those of visitors. For heritage attractions, competing in the tourism arena can be overwhelming as tourism is a competitive, sophisticated and fast-paced industry. Heritage tourism requires an initial investment and a commitment to ongoing marketing efforts.

Heritage tourism has seen tremendous growth in the past two decades and now is recognized as a major travel industry segment. According to the *2003 Historic/Cultural Traveler* study by the Travel Industry Association and Smithsonian magazine, 81% of the U.S. adults who traveled in 2002 were considered cultural heritage travelers. These travelers included historical or cultural activities on almost 217 million person trips, up 13% from 192 million in 1996.

Recent research indicates that cultural heritage travelers stay longer and spend more than other kinds of travelers. According to the Travel Industry Association, cultural heritage travelers:

- Stay longer than other types of travelers—5.2 nights compared to 3.4 nights

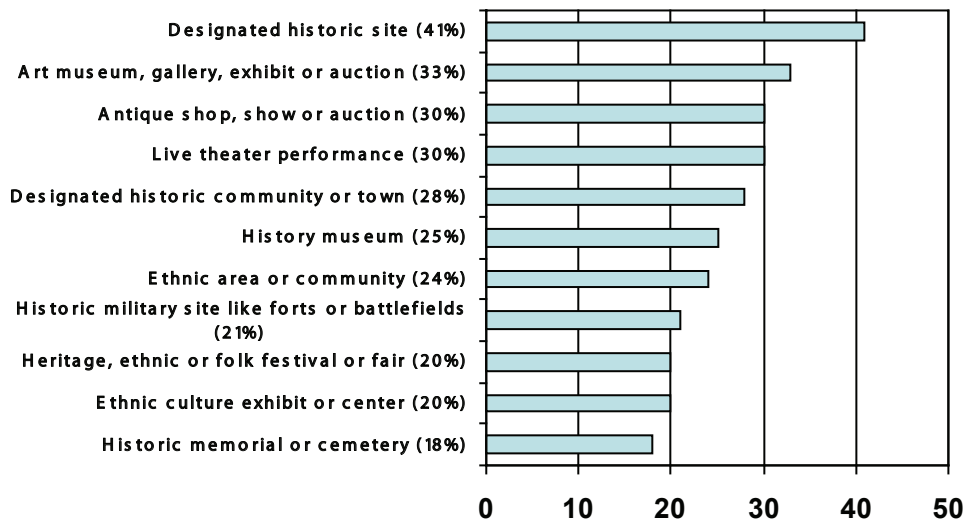
- Spend more than other types of travelers—\$623 per trip compared to \$457
- Shop more than other travelers—44% compared to 33%

A TIA study of travelers who shop indicates that they are looking for stores they do not have at home (73%), items they cannot get at home (67%), items that represent the destination they are visiting (53%) and a unique shopping atmosphere (52%).

Cultural heritage travelers take frequent trips, with 25% taking three or more trips a year. With a growing interest in more frequent, shorter vacations to destinations closer to home, successful destinations must offer a variety of changing experiences to attract repeat visitation. Travelers to historic and cultural sites are also, in general, slightly older than other travelers and more likely to have a college degree (6 in 10).

Baby Boomers currently make up one of the strongest markets for cultural heritage tourism. Boomers make 241 million household trips each year, and 14% pay \$1,000+ for a vacation. Like all cultural heritage travelers, boomers are more likely to stay in a hotel or motel. In 1998, the National Tour Association completed a study of boomers which predicted “...because boomers are more experienced travelers, they will expect more from their experiences and terms such as cultural tourism, heritage tourism, sports tourism, active tourism, adventure travel and ecotourism will be commonly used within the next decade.” A decade later that prediction has come true with a host of niche tourism experiences being marketed to this target audience.

Visitation at Cultural and Heritage Attractions
(Source: U.S. Travel Association)



Like many other sectors of the travel market, cultural heritage travelers are increasingly planning their trips with a shorter lead time. Fifty-five percent of cultural heritage travelers plan their trips a month or less before traveling. With shorter planning time, the Internet has become an essential marketing tool. At the same time, as busy lifestyles limit the amount of time travelers have for trip planning, an increasing number of decisions are being left until after visitors arrive. Thus although the Internet is becoming an increasingly important trip planning tool, it is still important to have more detailed visitor information and wayfinding tools such as maps easily accessible for visitors after they have arrived at their destination.

Cultural heritage travelers are most likely to travel by car (68%). They are twice as likely as other U.S. travelers to take a group tour (7% vs. 3%), although the market for group tours is still a relatively small part of travel overall. The group tour industry has found that to attract today’s traveler, it is important to offer exclusive opportunities for behind-the-scenes tours or other benefits that travelers would not be able to get on their own.

Cultural heritage travelers are more likely to take part in many different kinds of activities when they

are traveling. 17% participate in four or more activities as compared to 5% of all travelers, with nature based attractions such as state or national parks being a strong draw.

The economic benefits of heritage tourism include creating new jobs and businesses, increasing tax revenues and diversifying the local economy. In addition to the economic benefits, heritage tourism is good for the community and there are quality of life benefits as well. Heritage tourism helps preserve a town's unique character, which results in more civic pride. Residents also have more opportunities available to them—shops, activities, and entertainment offerings that the local market alone might not be able to support.

Calhoun County – Overview of Communities

Anniston

Anniston was founded in the late 19th century – many years after other communities in Calhoun County – by Samuel Noble and Daniel Tyler in order to develop industries in iron and steel. These progressive businessmen decided that their town would be a model city – as it was later dubbed – complete with plans for beautiful landscaping, elegant residential neighborhoods, stately churches and carefully laid out and constructed public, commercial and industrial buildings. In 1917, the addition of Fort McClellan, an army training camp, brought more people and prosperity to the city. As with all Southern cities, Anniston essentially developed as two towns – West Anniston, where African Americans lived and East Anniston, where white residents lived. After World War II, the town began to demolish its historic structures, a pattern which continues to the present.

In recent years, there have been on-again, off-again attempts to cultivate an interest among elected officials and residents in historic preservation. Anniston is a Certified Local Government – an important designation from the Alabama Historical Commission as it reflects an intended commitment to historic preservation and provides access to grant funds. There is a city Historic Preservation Commission which is currently working on an updated National Register of Historic Places nomination for downtown. There are 12 Alabama Historic Register listings. There are two locally designated historic districts – The Park Historic District and Fort McClellan Post Headquarters Historic District. Other neighborhoods identified in inventories as being historically important have no district designation, design review or protection against demolition. Quintard (Highway 431) is the main commercial thoroughfare through Anniston. This street, which once showcased elegant Victorian homes, is now commercial – with chain drug stores, fast food restaurants and retail businesses. The surrounding neighborhoods are quickly losing residential

housing as they are demolished and replaced by doctors' offices in a multitude of nondescript architectural styles. Fortunately, downtown Anniston still retains a remarkable building stock which is being inventoried as part of the updated National Register nomination.



Piedmont

In the northeast of the county, Piedmont serves as a gateway to the Chief Ladiga Trail, as well as the Talladega National Forest, Terrapin Creek, and the Pinhoti Trail. Piedmont welcomes Chief Ladiga Trail users at their historic trailside Eubanks Welcome Center and the railroad station has been converted to a historical society and museum. The cotton mill still

Downtown Anniston



stands but is in need of redevelopment and reuse or it risks being torn apart for its old-growth lumber. The Cheaha Challenge starts and ends in Piedmont.

Ohatchee

Town along the Alabama Scenic River Trail. Not included in assessment tour.

Oxford

While booming with strip retail development, Oxford also retains a small historic downtown. More attention to the downtown could revitalize the area but the Mountain Longleaf Region may want to consider directing investments to other downtown areas that serve as gateways to natural resources and provide a more authentic experience. Oxford Lake Park features lovely lake with a walking trail, ballfields, a playground, and a covered bridge.

Jacksonville

The Chief Ladiga Trail crosses through the university town of Jacksonville. Along the trail, interpretive signs and kiosks introduce trail users to the region and its assets.

The city is restoring its 1860s train depot as a trail visitor center, with a planned July 2009 opening. The depot redevelopment provides a great area success story. After securing a half-million dollar federal Transportation Enhancements grant for the station restoration, the redevelopment bid topped \$900,000. A community member who regularly walked the trail suggested instead that volunteers restore the station and with support from the community, the cost to date has been just over \$100,000. In addition to sweat equity, the project has garnered donations such as a heating and cooling system and replaned old wood from a Georgia cotton mill. Retired senior volunteers will staff the facility and showcase historical artifacts as well as provide snacks and access to restrooms for trail users.

Jacksonville hosts several festivals including an April Living Museum festival, featuring area craftspeople, the annual Taste of the Town, and an infrequent Fall Fest.

Hobson City

Hobson City was the state's first all African-American city, founded in 1899 following a divisive local election. The town has a population of less than 900 residents. Although much of the town's historic fabric has been lost, local leaders are trying to revitalize the community. The Community Development Corporation has developed a 5-year strategic plan to guide the process and has had a town hall meeting to talk with residents about implementation. Activities to date include documenting the community's history and holding an annual event to celebration Hobson City's founding. Future plans call for obtaining highway signage and reprinting a book on the town's history.



Summary of Findings

Summary of Findings

Calhoun County is blessed with treasured natural resources that offer significant opportunities to expand ecotourism and outdoor recreation. The towns and cities of the region still retain some of their historic fabric and serve as clear gateways, stepping-off points for visitors to explore the natural beauty or enjoy the recreational ventures or to explore the region's culture and heritage.

Various groups in the region have realized the tourism opportunities that stem from the area's farms, forestry, natural beauty, culture and heritage. Nevertheless, many attractions are little known or demand attention to enhance or realize their potential. A visitor to Calhoun County is likely to come away with little increased understanding of the many fascinating stories the area can tell.

A striking fact is that while Cheaha State Park is the state's oldest continuously operating park, many of the area's natural attractions were recently created or protected (Frog Pond in 1994, Dugger Mountain Wilderness in 1999, Mountain Longleaf Refuge in 2003, Chief Ladiga Trail in 2007, Alabama Scenic River Trail in 2008, Rebecca Mountain in 2009). These resources, new and old, demand attention, enhancement, investments, and planning on their own and in conjunction with other resources.

People involved in the sustainable tourism efforts recognize the need for a new chapter in the region. As one interviewee mentioned (and others expressed), "to succeed we just can't keep doing what we've been doing."

The Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce has done a tremendous job nurturing the broader marketing effort of the Mountain Longleaf Region. The Chamber directed creation of the Mountain Longleaf logo and tagline among county chambers (the vision) and included 60+ regional attractions in its "You Set The Pace" brochure (the area inventory).

Still, the region needs to carry out additional strategies to achieve success as a gateway region. Strategies addressed in this report include:

- The region needs to connect the multiple attractions with the broader Mountain Longleaf Region vision by using the region's brand at these attractions (with parameters/requirements on the logo use) and cross-marketing attractions.
- The communities need to facilitate the connections--both virtual and real-- to the area's natural resources to ensure residents and visitors alike can access the resources. This could include links on the region's Web sites that package the heritage to the natural or the outdoors to restaurants and shops. It also means trails that connect the people (residents and visitors) to nature.
- The region needs to seek new ways to make preservation a priority and to bring its cultural and heritage attractions alive for the visitor.
- The region needs to bring together community and private, nonprofit, and public sector partners in the opportunities for sustainable tourism, using regular meetings but also familiarization tours and special events that engage partners in a stronger discussion on how to work together.
- The area also needs to focus on aesthetics and make development choices that complement culture, heritage and conservation. For example, the region needs to reinvest in its downtowns and seek creative solutions to the many vacant buildings and parking lots.
- The region's leaders should also seek to manage the proliferation of signs and sprawling strip development along the area's roadways, particularly those areas serving as entrances to the Mountain Longleaf Region.



Recommendations

Recommendations

The assessment team visit confirmed the interest of local stakeholders in increasing tourism to Calhoun County and the surrounding area by making ecotourism a primary focus with the development of cultural and heritage resources preserving the area's unique character and giving additional reasons for tourists to come to the area, stay longer and return often.

The following recommendations are presented in phases to allow each product or marketing development activity to lay the foundation for the next phase. Phases are: phase one – 1-2 years; phase two – 3-5 years – recognizing that these phases provide a starting point while many activities may take several years to develop and implement.

Phase One: 1 to 2 years

1) Organize a unified tourism effort

The consultant team talked with many stakeholders engaged in tourism development and marketing in Calhoun County. These included the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce tourism office, the Spirit of Anniston Main Street Program, the Calhoun County Commission, Talladega National Speedway, Alabama Scenic River Trail, Anniston Museum of Natural History and Berman Museum of World History, as well as volunteer efforts such as the Cheaha Challenge bike race and Noble Street Festival, the Sons of Confederate Veterans Civil War re-enactments and several historic churches which offer tours. *Although there are some promotional partnerships, for the most part each entity is making and carrying out its own vision and plans.* We recommend that all of these organizers become not only stakeholders in Calhoun County tourism, but partners in these efforts. Collaboration is the first of five principles for successful cultural heritage tourism development and is critical for a successful tourism program.

Specific Recommendations:

1. The tourism office should host a regular gathering of cultural, heritage and natural resource attraction representatives – perhaps monthly or every other month – to generate discussion about plans and to cultivate partnerships.
2. Meetings can also grow to include partners in the surrounding Mountain Longleaf Region counties.
3. Participants should work together to review recommendations in this report and to develop a plan of action for implementation.

2) Stabilize tourism promotion funding

The Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce tourism office is the countywide promotional entity. The office is funded by a percentage of the county's lodging tax levied on the county's 1,900 hotel rooms. In 2008, this tax generated approximately \$163,000.00. The first months of 2009 show a decline in revenues, reflecting the current state of the economy. The county retains some of the funding for promotion of events and the remainder is transferred to the chamber. In previous years, funding has been used for promotions ranging from attending travel trade shows to promoting state baseball tournaments. Because funding fluctuates from year to year, it is difficult to plan ahead and to develop a comprehensive marketing plan.

Specific Recommendations:

We recommend that funding be stabilized as much as possible and that the tourism office be given an annual budget to use in developing a marketing plan. Assistance from a development consultant in assessing revenue sources and identifying new streams of funding could be helpful in this effort.

3) Enhance Communications and Marketing

Many research studies show that use of the Internet for travel planning is second only to asking friends and family for recommendations on places to visit. A January 2009 study by Destination Analysts, Inc. found that 30% of travelers use the Internet as their *primary* travel planning



Anniston
Museum of
Natural History

resource compared to 31% who rely on friends and family. A 2004 U.S. Travel Association report shows that 64 million travelers use the Internet for travel planning with 44 million booking some or all of their trips online. Among the uses of the Internet for online travel planners are: maps/driving directions (70%), things to do (49%), local event calendars (35%), travel packages (35%) and places to go (34%).

We recommend that the Calhoun County Chamber's tourism office respond to this trend by enhancing the tourism section of the chamber's website to create an inviting, user-friendly site that will pique visitor interest and encourage a trip to the area.

Currently the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce Web site is the primary promotional vehicle for the both the county and the Mountain Longleaf Region. While the Mountain Longleaf Region brand and logo is prominent, the sustainable tourism focus is but one piece of the Chamber's work, and the Web site makes this clear.

The Web site is very busy and the Mountain Longleaf Region story and local tourism information is subsumed. Area attractions are featured, but some, such as Cheaha State Park (the region's second most popular attraction), have inadequate information. It would be better to link to brief summary information with photo and contact information than to provide links that fail to engage or inform visitors. The Calhoun County Web site also connects to the county's recreational sites, but the link (to just four attractions!) is buried. The Web site could be improved to have a more vibrant design and to link to the overall Mountain Longleaf Region brand and experience.

The Alabama Tourism Department's Web site is weak on ecotourism: the outdoor activities link should include two of the strongest segments of ecotourism: wildlife watching and birding. The site's links should also connect properly to intended sites and provide robust information and photos, as well as links.

The Alabama Welcome Center on the Georgia line provided a great introduction to the region, the county, and the area’s resources. But the staff person at the Welcome Center is one voice. Likewise, the “You Set The Pace” brochure is a great start but needs more interpretation and the region needs to provide a map of the region’s attractions. The area map in the Mountain Longleaf Region brochure is too small and the Calhoun County map lacks any detail on the natural resources.

Specific Recommendations:

1. Create a Website for the Mountain Longleaf Region and Calhoun County and populate it with information on a diversity of attractions, packages, themes, and authentic experiences. The information on chamber membership and member activities that is currently located on the tourism page should be removed. The Website should include:
 - Images – pictures showing the region’s recreational, cultural and heritage attractions
 - About the Mountain Longleaf Region and Calhoun County – descriptive text about the area and why it is a great place to visit; provide an overview of the county’s communities
 - *Historic Driving Tour of Calhoun County* – post this excellent publication as a downloadable PDF file
 - Maps – include a map of the county and maps of each community in downloadable files; include links to Mapquest or other mapping system
 - Calendar of Events – year-long calendar
 - What’s New – grand openings, special offers, etc.
 - An attraction heading with subheading for history, arts, events, sports and recreation – include a brief description of each attraction with a link to the attraction’s website
 - Headings for lodging, restaurants and shopping – brief descriptions and links



Terrapin Creek

- Planning Your Visit to the Mountain Longleaf Region – suggested itineraries, link to order visitor information and telephone number to call for more information
- Media Center – post press releases, story ideas and contact name, email and telephone number

Websites that can provide ideas for Calhoun County include: www.oxfordcvb.com, www.visitcabarrus.com, www.lyhr.org, www.visitlex.com, www.daytoncvb.com

2. Engage Calhoun County local governments in Mountain Longleaf Region promotion. Help them recognize this as a key industry for attracting visitors, as well as residents and other non-tourism related businesses interested in a good quality of life. For example, they should hold familiarization trips for local government officials within the Mountain Longleaf Region so they gain knowledge of the wealth of resources and the actions needed to attract tourism to the region.
3. Engage the Alabama Tourism Department to improve information on sustainable tourism, Calhoun County, and the Mountain Longleaf Region. Tell them the Mountain Longleaf Region story and make it easy for them to tell others by providing the logo, talking points and a powerpoint.

4) Look for ways to cross promote attractions

A key area of focus for this collaborative group should be finding ways to cross promote each other's attractions. Cross promotion can help create a more seamless experience for visitors – rather than having to piece a trip together, they can easily gather information and decide on activities for their trip.

Research by the U.S. Travel Association shows that visitors make many decisions after they arrive at a destination:

- Restaurants – 48%
- Shopping – 45%
- Museums – 26%
- Sightseeing Tours – 24%
- Movies – 16%
- Theme Park – 15%
- Religious Service – 14%
- Live theater or performance – 14%
- Festival or parade – 13%
- Other activities or attractions – 24%

Specific Recommendations:

- **Poster and Rack Cards** —The Spirit of Anniston Main Street Program has already made steps in this direction with the creation of colorful posters that encourage visitors to “Explore All the Possibilities” in downtown Anniston. The poster has pockets for placement of rack cards highlighting dining, events and shopping. The posters will be placed in locations such as hotels and restaurants. With a collaborative effort, this creative idea could “grow” to include posters and rack cards that feature attractions, dining, shopping and events throughout Calhoun County and the Mountain Longleaf Region.
- **Tear Off Maps** — Tear off maps have become a popular way for tourism destinations to inexpensively provide information to visitors about what there is to see and do in the area. These pieces are usually printed in pads of 100 at a cost of about \$700-\$800 for 10,000. The placemat sized piece has a map of the area on one side and listings on the other side of attractions, restaurants, shopping, etc. A sponsor can often be found to underwrite the cost. The pieces can also be posted on a website to be downloaded by visitors. The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, a regional tourism organization representing parts of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, has used this approach to create a series of thematic tours highlighting shopping, outdoor recreation, history, farm stands and family fun. Examples are found at <http://www.tourblackstone.com/detours.htm>

Janney Furnace

- **Itineraries** — Developing suggested itineraries around themes or events helps a visitor to plan a trip more easily. This is a no-cost way for Calhoun County’s attractions to work together to develop a series of itineraries which can be posted on attraction and tourism office websites. An example is found at: <http://www.visitbutlercounty.com/travel-tools/itineraries/>

5) Support and build on successful events and seasonal attractions.

There are several events in Calhoun County that bring anywhere from hundreds to thousands of people to the area.. The area’s largest events are at the Talladega Speedway where races bring in 250,000 visitors from across the country and world on two weekends each year generating \$407 million annually.

Events create opportunities for media coverage and other promotions to encourage event attendees to plan extra time for exploring and visiting attractions. Sustained effort can result in more of these visitors staying longer to enjoy the natural, cultural and heritage resources. Two events which should receive the focus of tourism partners are:

1. **Cheaha Challenge Century Bike Ride and Noble Street Festival** – The Cheaha Challenge Century Bike Ride is in its 17th year while the festival was started seven years ago to encourage riders to bring their families and stay for several nights. Riders are given an information packet about area attractions. The events, held the first weekend in May, are organized by a dedicated group of volunteers with the Northeast Alabama Bicycle Club and attract 700-800 riders from 28 states. A survey of participants in 2008 showed this is a highly desired group of visitors with high incomes and a willingness to travel to enjoy their passion for bike racing. The Spirit of Anniston Main Street Program has added to this successful event with the creation of the “Bike Parts” art competition. Artists retrieve bikes from the landfill and other locations and create unique sculptures. The entries are judged and prizes awarded. The website, www.noblestreetfestival.com, promotes the race and festival with detailed information about each event.

Specific Recommendations:

- **Link promotions to the Mountain Longleaf Region brand** – Linking to this brand will enhance recognition of the Mountain Longleaf Region as well as letting participants know that there is an entire region they should plan to stay and explore.
- **Promote the ride and festival through other Websites** – Several months in advance, showcase the events on the first page of the Calhoun County Chamber’s Website tourism section. Additionally, look for Websites that cater to niche tourism interests including bike races, festivals and arts contests. Link the Noble Street Festival to these sites.
- **Create a souvenir publication** – Organizers already produce a piece that



NORTHEAST ALABAMA BICYCLE CLUB neabc.org

17th Annual Cheaha Challenge
 Sunday, May 3, 2009
 Piedmont, Alabama

We will have ride-times up ASAP
Tell Us About Your Ride!
[Read Comments About the Ride](#)

THE FINAL RESULTS ARE IN!
[Click Here to View Photos of you on the course from Birds Eye View Photography](#)

A Top 10 Event in the State of Alabama
 as selected by the Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel, 2006

New! Cheaha Challenge - Rest Stop #3 - Photos with Podium Girls
 You can see all of the Rest Stop #3 photos here, but you must join snapfish (it's free) to do so. Prints of any photos from snapfish are inexpensive. Alternatively, if you want only your photo (attached digitally in an email), E-mail drbarrnicholls@amcvets.com with an approximate time you reached Rest Stop 3 (at Mile 33) and your jersey description.

New! Check out this Cheaha Challenge blog!
[NEW! :30 Second 5MB Video](#)
[View 28MB Video](#)

[Watch Videos from the Noble Street Festival and Sunny King Criterium](#)

Frankie Andreu is back to ride the 2009 Cheaha Challenge
[Read this rider's account of his encounter with Frankie at the ride.](#)

neabc home
 century home
 register
 all the details
 saturday festival
 cyclist dining
 event jersey
 our sponsors
 photo gallery
 why we do it
 volunteer groups
 results
 rider comments
 in the news
 contact

We had 650 cyclists registered from more than 25 states in 2008... come join us in 2009!

www.cheahachallenge.com

promotes the century ride and festival. A follow up publication could list all riders and their times as well as featuring winners of the Bike Parts sculpture competition. This souvenir publication could be mailed to participants with the cost being added into registration fees. The publications could include advertisements from local businesses and feature stories on local attractions.

- **Improve access to Cold Water Mountain** – This area includes 4,000 acres of protected wilderness within Anniston’s city limits managed by the state of Alabama. State officials have indicated that mountain bike trails would be allowed along with hiking and horseback riding. Parking lots and trail roads need to be constructed to provide access to the area. Local tourism organizers should contact state officials and encourage this development. Once the area is accessible, it can be promoted to participants of the Cheaha Challenge and encourage return visits throughout the year.
2. **Anniston’s Downtown Farmer’s Market** – The Spirit of Anniston Main Street Program recently began the Downtown Farmer’s Market, held in Zinn Park each Saturday during the summer. Fresh produce, garden plants and arts and crafts have attracted a steady crowd. The Alabama Farmer’s Market Authority also lists several you-pick farms in Calhoun County in Wellington, Anniston and Jacksonville, roadside stands in Piedmont and Wellington, and two additional farmer’s markets in Anniston. The presence of farmer’s markets, roadside stands and you-pick farms in Calhoun County provides an opportunity to capitalize on the growing popularity of agritourism.

Agritourism is a rapidly growing segment of the travel industry. According to the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (www.agmrc.org), agritourism is generally defined as:

activities that include visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation to enjoy, be educated or be involved in what is happening at that locale.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s research finds that the top reason that visitors travel to farms is “to enjoy rural scenery.” Other responses included: “learning where food comes from,” “visiting family and friends,” “watch/participate in the farm activities,” “purchase agricultural products,” “pick fruit or produce,” “hunt and fish,” and “spend a night.”

Additionally, the Alabama Farmer’s Market Authority recently announced a partnership with several state agencies including the departments of tourism, agriculture, cooperative extension and transportation, to create an Agritourism Association. One of the association’s activities will be to create at Alabama Agritourism Trail with signage guiding visitors to sites across the state.

Specific Recommendations:

1. The region’s agritourism attractions should be listed on the Alabama State Tourism Website and on the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce Website’s tourism section.
2. A focus of tourism planning for the region should be to capitalize on the opportunity created by the Alabama Agritourism Association’s plans to create an Agritourism Trail and to become actively involved in promoting the county’s agritourism resources.
www.fma.alabama.gov
3. As agritourism promotions grow, consider adding a separate section to the Calhoun County Chamber’s tourism website to focus on these attractions and activities. The Lancaster York Heritage Region in Pennsylvania has done this very successfully with their *Growing Traditions Discovery Guide* which includes a website as well as a publication that can be downloaded. <http://www.growingtraditions.org/GTIntro.asp>. Loudoun County, Virginia organizes twice yearly Farm Tours, publicizes farms and rural sites, and facilitates the growth of the rural economy by fostering rural and farm-based hospitality, farm sales, value-added small-scale processing, and equestrian uses.

6) Complete current trail projects to enhance tourism product offerings.

Stakeholders agreed that they want to increase the activities that visitors can enjoy in order to encourage longer stays and repeat visits. The Chief Ladiga Trail provides an excellent opportunity to achieve this goal.

Specific Recommendations:

1. **Complete Jacksonville train depot.** This local success story will provide an additional resource for trail users and an example of the determination of the region’s citizens.
2. **Complete Chief Ladiga Trail to Anniston.** The Trail’s current termination point in Weaver means that only the most dedicated—and well-informed trail user—can continue to Anniston and its train station. Completion into Anniston will provide an easy-access point for bicyclists or hikers and encourage their exploration of the town.
3. Investigate the feasibility of using the Anniston train station as a trail hub for the Chief Ladiga Trail. Make it a welcome center but also promote additional uses to sustain viability of building and businesses.

7) Work with experts to document the cultural and heritage resources and history in Calhoun County.

Principle #4 for successful cultural heritage tourism is “Focus on Authenticity.” Calhoun County has important history that helps tell the story of regional and national events including the Civil War, post-Civil War industrialization of the South, the growth of small Southern towns, the influence of the military on small towns and rural areas in various eras of history, the importance of religion in influencing local cultural norms, segregation and Civil Rights, the role of local newspapers in documenting and editorializing on events, the growth of African-American businesses, the changing uses of the land from agricultural and industrial to recreational use at state and national parks and forests, and the reflection of local culture in arts, crafts and culinary traditions. As noted in the Summary of Findings section of this report, Calhoun County’s history is not currently being shared with visitors to any extent. We believe that there is an opportunity to incorporate these stories into the visitor experience.



Specific Recommendations:

1. To accomplish that goal, we recommend that work begin to document the county's history and culture. This can be done through historical research and creating an inventory of cultural resources.
2. Once this information is accurately documented, decisions can be made in future phases about venues to interpret this history (examples are given later in this report).
3. We also recommend that qualified historians and folklorists be engaged in this process to ensure accuracy in research and documentation. These experts can also assist the community with understanding how some of its more difficult stories – such as Civil Rights – can be told for visitors. There are many resources for research assistance guidance and funding through state and federal agencies. Resources include:
 - Alabama Humanities Foundation – www.ahf.net – Provides small grants for workshops, public discussion, exhibits and media projects.
 - National Endowment for the Humanities – www.neh.gov – Provides grants for many types of projects including research, exhibit planning and implementation. Grants are larger than those offered at the state level, but are also more competitive.
 - Alabama State Council for the Arts – www.arts.state.al.us – The Alabama Center for Traditional Culture provides grants for folklife projects including field surveys (documenting local resources). The Council defines folklife as encompassing traditional crafts, music and dance, regional foodways, folk architecture, beliefs, storytelling, myths, medicinal practices, etc.
 - National Endowment for the Arts – www.nea.gov – Provides grants for many types of projects related to arts planning, programming and implementation. Grants are larger than those offered at the state level, but are also more competitive. (Note - As NEA was one of the funders of this assessment, along with the Appalachian Regional Commission, grant applications to the NEA

(below) **Anniston – original bus station**
(right) **Grace Episcopal Church**



should be sure to note this connection.)

- College and university programs – Many colleges and universities engage in scholarly research as part of their community outreach and education of students. Jacksonville State University would be an obvious potential partner to discuss obtaining assistance in historical research of various topics. Additionally, the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, <http://histpres.mtsu.edu/histpres/>, has a long-standing program of engagement with communities across the region to help document local history. For example, in 2008, graduate students assisted a local group in Tuskegee, Alabama in conducting research on the infamous syphilis studies conducted from the 1930s to the 1970s by the U.S. government.
- Story Corps – www.storycorps.net – Some of the important historical stories of Calhoun County, in particular Civil Rights and Fort McClellan’s military history, were experienced by people who are still living in the area. Additionally, local residents can share many memories of special occasions in their communities as well as local traditions. Story Corps is a nonprofit organization that was created in 2003. The organization has helped many communities gather their residents’ stories by bringing the Story Corps booth to town and facilitating interviews which provide a permanent record of a person’s memories. Working through Story Corps – or other venues such as university programs – to gather oral histories will contribute to the documentation of Calhoun County’s history.

7) Plan for more lodging facilities

The Mountain Longleaf Region seems well served by chain motels along the interstate. But visitors seeking natural, heritage, and cultural history often desire more authentic lodging experiences. The Victorian Inn is a lovely facility and the recent acquisition by Jacksonville State University may provide a much-needed gentle update. But the surroundings need a significant



Anniston —
Original Land Sale Office Building

boost as the views of vacant shopping centers, vast parking lots, and empty chain restaurants negatively affect the visitor experience. The Longleaf Lodge provides additional options but it seems geared to the business traveler more than the tourist. Lodging at Cheaha and campgrounds on state and federal lands provide other overnight accommodations.

Specific Recommendations

1. Conduct a market study to determine opportunities for additional hotels, bed and breakfast, and other inn lodging.
2. Expand lodging across the region and its quality and appeal to tourists interested in cultural, heritage, and natural tourism and promote these lodging options throughout the region.

8) Launch awards program for sustainable tourism and small business development in the Mountain Longleaf Region

Success begets success. Recognizing the homegrown leaders in sustainable tourism spotlights local efforts as well as provides others with tangible examples that can catalyze additional projects. An awards program is a low-cost method to spur action, help local businesses, recognize partnerships, and build community pride and sense of place.

Specific Recommendations

1. Launch an annual awards program that recognizes leaders in sustainable tourism—business owners, public officials and entities, individuals—in the Mountain Longleaf Region.
2. Have the Chamber of Commerce organize the program and possibly partner with the Anniston Star to promote. This can help build Chamber’s relationship with businesses and vice versa.
3. Make the award itself sustainable or invest in the community such as planting trees or shrubs or flowers.
4. Document the success stories and promote on Web and throughout the region.

9) Engage recreational outfitters in Mountain Longleaf Region efforts

Several recreational gear equipment outfitters serve the area: Terrapin Outdoor Center,

Choccolocco Canoe & Kayak, J. Bradley and Braden Outfitters, Shotgun Sports Supply Co., Wig's Wheels, Bama's Bikes, T&L Outdoors, Hibbetts, Diggs, and others, both locally owned as well as regional and national outlets. These outfitters are great partners in promoting and supporting sustainable tourism and great resources about the market for equipment, tourism, and packages.

Specific Recommendations

1. Engage outfitters in tourism stakeholder meetings and in development of promotional plans
2. Ask outfitters to post brochures about other area attractions and to participate in travel packages.

10) Implement creative marketing strategies

Just like a successful individual, any successful community or region draws lessons from other's experiences, but also thinks creatively to come up with a unique best approach. The Mountain Longleaf can learn from other regions that have implemented sustainable tourism efforts but should think creatively.

For example, the National Park Service encourages park visitation through its successful Passport to the National Parks. Participants record park visits with special rubber stamps in a booklet at each park unit. The Alabama Scenic River Trail created a similar program that links river users to riverside businesses that provide stamps.

Specific Recommendations

1. The Mountain Longleaf Region could consider an area-wide passport program, and reward completed passport holders with a special prize such as discounts at area businesses and the chance to win larger locally-based prizes.
2. Other ideas include regional scavenger hunts (annual events or a hunt outlined on a Web site or in hard copy), or geo-caching.

11) Support training for area businesses and service providers

The wait staff, hotel desk clerk, gas station attendants, and shop owners are the front-line ambassadors who field questions like, "Where can I get a good dinner?", "Where can I learn about the area's cotton history?", or "Are there any good areas for bird-watching around here?" Training can provide these service people with ready answers while expanding their knowledge and pride in the area and possibly improve their professional skills.

As an example, Alabama's Gulf Coast is one area in the state that is strongly promoting nature-based tourism. In 2008, Joanne McDonough, a nature-based tourism specialist with the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), organized a workshop to provide these businesses with necessary skills and information to improve their operations and in turn enhance the visitors' experience.

In an article on Baldwin County.now, McDonough explained: "Through my position in this nature tourism partnership (between Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Extension and the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau, I am charged with the mission of working with local businesses and communities to provide a quality nature experience for our guests while also encouraging good stewardship and sustainability of our natural resources."

Specific Recommendations

The region should convene classes for shop owners and multiple service providers in the region on the area's assets as well as services, and provide training on marketing, entrepreneur development, and customer service so the service providers can promote the area's crafts, culture, and natural heritage.

Phase Two: 3 to 5 years

1) Develop murals to reflect Calhoun County's history.

Anniston has begun a beautification project for the backs of some of the downtown buildings by painting colorful murals. (It was also noted that murals are being developed in Piedmont.) This idea can be expanded in Anniston and other communities in Calhoun County and throughout the Mountain Longleaf Region to focus on scenes that reflect the area's history. A murals project could provide a way to unify the county by bringing together stakeholders from each community to work together in determining what murals should be painted, where they should be located and what the murals should look like. Once the murals are painted, a guidebook or interpretive signage can be developed to inform visitors about the stories behind the paintings.

Murals have become a popular way for many communities to beautify vacant or unattractive buildings and to tell some of their history. Rural Action Ohio, an economic development organization in southern Ohio, undertook a multi-county mural project through its Arts and Cultural Heritage Program. The project evolved over six years and involved a number of partners including the Ohio Arts Council.

Rural Action Ohio has published a guidebook titled *Community Murals Handbook and Case Studies* which provides step-by-step guidance on how to engage communities in developing murals, how to obtain funding, selecting an artist and other valuable information.

Information on the guidebook and how to order is at http://www.ruralaction.org/arts_toolbox.html.

A particularly successful mural project was developed in Portsmouth, Ohio along the community's floodwall. The murals function as an outdoor art gallery telling the history of Portsmouth over the last 200 years. The paintings are done by a well known muralist and have become a popular tourist attraction. For more information visit <http://www.sciotocountyohio.com/mural.htm>.

Specific Recommendations:

1. Review information from other communities that have developed murals.
2. Evaluate current status of Anniston and Piedmont projects and assess opportunities to expand.
3. Investigate grants opportunities from the state arts council and NEA.

2) Highlight the area's crafts through public art, demonstrations, festivals, holiday sales, craft fairs, etc.

Events like the Cheaha Challenge and the U.S. Forest Service picnic pavilion "raising" using traditional craftspeople are two examples. But the community can think more creatively of how to physically translate the story and unique heritage of the area. When an old oak falls in the tree-lined Victorian neighborhoods in St. Paul, Minnesota, local carvers turn it into art, depicting lamplighters or other people who used to walk those streets. The town of Ridgway in the Pennsylvania Wilds has, each February for the past seven years, held a Chainway Carving Rendezvous, an event that last year attracted 25,000 people and carvers from around the world. The Cumberland Gap National Park features a gateway to the Gap with hoofprints, footprints, and wagon ruts imprinted into the sidewalk and surrounded by the sounds of the people and animals who traversed the mountain pass into the frontier promised land of Kentucky. Gilroy, California celebrates the "stinking rose" with its annual garlic festival. Numerous examples abound on celebrations of local music, crafts, food, and arts.

The region could provide a guide to area crafts and include the handmade dolls from Ohatchee, Hobson City quilters, woodworkers from the region, etc.

These events all enliven the visitor's experience with the region. They connect residents and visitors to the place and build a sense of local pride. They also expand the market for the



Anniston – murals

region’s artisans, musicians, and craftspeople, providing expanded opportunities for revenues and jobs. And they help tell the story of the place.

Specific Recommendations

Include information on area’s arts and crafts on the region’s Web sites.

3) Develop an interpretive plan to encourage visitors to explore and learn about the country’s history.

As previously discussed, Calhoun County has many stories that connect to regional and national historical events. Principle #3 for Successful and Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism Development is “Make Sites and Programs Come Alive.’ Developing and implementing an interpretive plan will make Calhoun County’s attractions come alive and offer new attractions to visitors with many different interests.

Specific Recommendations:

1. We recommend working with an interpretive planner to develop the plan. An interpretive planner can take the documentation of historic events that is developed in Phase One and organize it into a thematic presentation that will be appealing to visitors.
2. Develop “centers” that function both as a visitor center and an interpretive center – In recent years, the popularity of buildings with this combined function has grown because it allows visitors to orient themselves to their destination and to gather information on things to see and do. There is already a visitor center in Piedmont with another being developed at the Jacksonville train station. Options in Anniston may include the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce office or the Amtrak station. In addition to providing brochures and maps, these locations can feature various aspects of the county or community’s history with interpretive panels. An example of this type of panel is found in Natchitoches, Louisiana’s Events Center.

3. Create satellite heritage exhibits – A series of thematically linked exhibits can guide visitors through the county, resulting in wider exploration and more expenditures. Small exhibits – containing pictures, text and artifacts (or reproductions of artifacts depending on the location) could be placed in locations where visitors are likely to be such as hotel or restaurant lobbies.
4. Develop interpretive signage and maps – The stories of the Mountain Longleaf Region seem to be closely guarded secrets. Kiosks with interpretive signs greet bicyclists on the Chief Ladiga Trail. A lovely iron and stone gateway provides hikers on the Pinhoti Trail with physical depictions of the area’s trees. Fewer interpretive signs are evident throughout the Talladega National Forest and at Cheaha State Park. Signs can tell the story of the creation of these sites, the natural and human history, and the management issues. Strategically placed interpretive signage can also direct visitors to historic attractions throughout the county. Signage could include historic and current photographs and text. An accompanying map will tell visitors where the signage is located. Other sites that should be considered for interpretive signage include such places as Centennial Memorial Park, downtown Anniston, Hobson, Howell Signs (site of the Freedom Riders bus burning), Janney Furnace, West Anniston and historic churches such as Parker Baptist and Grace Episcopal. Examples include the Norfolk, Virginia Cannonball Heritage Trail, http://www.downtownnorfolk.org/enjoy/attractions?location_id=615; and a series of thematic trails found at www.southeasttennessee.com.
5. Create audio tours – Audio tours, particularly those that are downloadable from a tourism website, have become a popular format in many cities, rural areas and at individual sites to provide a “tour guide” for visitors. Using technology allows creativity in developing interpretation because in addition to a narrator, these devices can include voices of current residents sharing their memories, voices of actors portraying historical figures and music from a particular historical era or indigenous to a location. They can also provide directions to guide a visitor from one site to another, creating a comfort level for visitors that they know where they are going and that their destination is a place that welcomes visitors. Organizing audio tours into thematic routes will attract visitors with particular interests. Example of audio tours include:
 - **Cemeteries** – Westview Cemetery, Moultrie, Georgia – <http://www.moultriega.com/cemetery/index.htm>
 - **Cities** – Philadelphia – <http://www.gophila.com/soundabout>; Washington, D.C. - <http://www.audisseyguides.com/washingtondc>
 - **Sites** – Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina – www.biltmore.com
 - **Regions** – Northwest Heritage Tours <http://www.washingtonfolkarts.com/>

4) Develop a regional wayfinding signage program.

Signs are clearly needed to locate the area’s attractions and link them to the broader region. For example, signage to the Janney Furnace are “hit or miss,” appearing at some turns and not others. Likewise, there is no clear signage directing visitors to downtown Anniston or from downtown to the Anniston Museum of Natural History and Berman Museum of World History.

Wayfinding signs can use the Mountain Longleaf Region logo to direct visitors to multiple sites. Specific journeys can also be created to guide visitors through various themes. These journeys can be mapped and provided in brochures, as well as reinforced through physical signage. Given the proliferation of signs along the region’s roadways, Mountain Longleaf Region signs will need to be carefully placed and designed to be seen and inform visitors. Examples from other regions can help Calhoun County and surrounding participants in the Mountain Longleaf Region.

A countywide – and eventually region wide - wayfinding signage program will make visitors feel comfortable and encourage exploration. To paraphrase one wayfinding signage company: “People get lost. Signage fixes that.” Wayfinding signage requires an investment of initial planning time to

ensure the best results. Factors to consider include:

1. **Where do we need signage?** – Include someone who is not from the community in this process. Someone who is unfamiliar with the county is more likely to see where a visitor will have difficulty finding his way.
2. **What kind of signage is needed?** This can include individual site signs and directional signs. Be sure to include mileage, i.e. Anniston Museum of Natural History, 1.5 miles.
3. **What kind of design is best?** Work with a specialist in wayfinding signage to come up with a design that can be adapted for various kinds of signs.
4. **What are the best signage materials?** A wayfinding signage specialist can also provide guidance on sign materials that will require minimal maintenance.
5. **What approvals are needed?** – Determine who must approve placement of signs in local, state and federal government.
6. **What group will be responsible for sign placement and maintenance?** – Decide which Calhoun County organization will assume responsibility for this project.
7. **How can the design be used in other tourism materials?** Consider how the signage design can be echoed through brochures, advertisements, website design and other places to create a total image for Calhoun County.

Companies that specialize in wayfinding signage include: www.leesdawson.com; www.corbindesign.com; www.cloudgehshan.com.

5) Make preservation of historic resources a priority

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Heritage Tourism adheres to five principles for successful and sustainable cultural heritage tourism development. Principle #5 is **Preserve and Protect**. A community's cultural, historic, natural and folklife resources are irreplaceable elements of a cultural heritage tourism experience. These resources are tangible reminders of a community's past and are essential in telling the community's story to visitors.

Most of the culture and heritage itinerary for the assessment visit took place in Anniston, therefore the following comments focus on this town. However, the need to preserve and protect historic resources applies throughout the county.

In recent years, Anniston has witnessed on-again, off-again attempts to cultivate an interest among elected officials and residents in historic preservation. Anniston is a Certified Local Government – an important designation from the Alabama Historical Commission as it reflects an intended commitment to historic preservation and provides access to grant funds.

There is a city Historic Preservation Commission which is currently working on an updated National Register of Historic Places nomination for downtown. There are 12 Alabama Historic Register listings. There are two locally designated historic districts – The Park Historic District and Fort McClellan Post Headquarters Historic District. Other neighborhoods identified in inventories as being historically important have no district designation, design review or protection against demolition.

Quintard (Highway 431) is the main commercial thoroughfare through Anniston. This street, which once showcased elegant Victorian homes, is now commercial – with chain drug stores, fast food restaurants and retail businesses. The surrounding neighborhoods are quickly losing residential housing as they are demolished and replaced by doctors' offices in a multitude of nondescript architectural styles.

Downtown Anniston still retains a remarkable building stock which is being inventoried as part of the updated National Register nomination. The Spirit of Anniston Main Street Program works to revitalize the downtown with programs, events and other activities which will generate patrons for businesses and cultivate appreciation of these historic resources.

There are many tools for historic preservation and resources to assist in developing preservation plans. Key agencies in Alabama are the Alabama State Historic Preservation Office and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation (statewide nonprofit advocacy organization).

Most important for Anniston – and Calhoun County – is cultivating an appreciation for the area’s historic resources and educating residents about how to use various preservation tools to preserve and protect resources. (A handout titled “Where to Begin” is included with this report to provide some ideas.)

Additionally, many of the area’s natural resources (Frog Pond in 1994, Dugger Mountain in 1999, Mountain Longleaf Refuge in 2003, Chief Ladiga Trail in 2007, Alabama Scenic River Trail in 2008, Rebecca Mountain in 2009) are recently created or protected and need enhancement, investments, and planning on their own and in conjunction with other resources.

Although signage, brochures and other interpretive tools are useful in telling the story of Anniston and Calhoun County, the bottom line is that visitors want to feel a sense of place and to experience the character of a community. In order to provide that experience and to succeed in heritage tourism, preservation and protection of historic and natural resources is essential. For Anniston, the report titled *Anniston’s Historic Resources: A Status Report, 2007*, prepared by Schneider Historic Preservation LLC, is an excellent place to begin. The report provides a thorough look at the city’s historic resources, identifies challenges and offers practical solutions that are time-tested as successful strategies in cities across the country.

Specific Recommendations:

1. Tourism stakeholders should become familiar with preservation reports for Anniston and other parts of the county.
 2. Local and state preservationists should be invited to tourism meetings to present reports and to discuss opportunities for education of residents about the importance of preservation.
 3. Tourism stakeholders should become actively engaged in advocating for preservation of the region’s historic resources.
 4. Consider dedicating portion of lodging tax receipts or dedicated fundraising for asset protection and preservation.
 5. Develop similar historic resource reports for all of Calhoun County’s communities.
- 6) Enhance and invest in existing natural resources, in public and private land ownership**
Sustainable tourism efforts need to focus on managing, enhancing, and investing in the “product”. In general, the region should support investments in the publicly owned land and support private conservation efforts as well as promote better management of natural resources on public and private lands and develop select sites to improve and enhance the visitor experience. For example, the county and U.S. Forest Service should jointly build a shelter at the cabin on Rabbittown Road, along Pinhoti Trail spur. Another example, rising out of the Choccolocco State Forest and immediately adjacent to Highway 9, is Morgan Mountain. A trail to the top of Morgan Mountain, a small publicly owned mountain, would provide great views of the valley, of the Talladega National Forest to the east and the tall ridgeline in the Long Leaf Pine Wildlife Refuge to the west. It could possibly connect with the Pinhoti Trail in the Talladega National Forest, to the National Wildlife Refuge, and to Fort McClellan.
- 7) Enhance the connections to the gateway communities and between gateways and cultural, heritage, and natural resources**
The journey is fundamental to the visitor experience. Cattle and cotton farms, whitewater rivers, scenic overlooks, breathtaking blue and green mountains, the longleaf pine interspersed with redbuds and dogwoods, and Alabama’s traditional small towns and Main streets are in evidence within the region.

However, the visitor also sees sprawl development and sign pollution countered with vacant



strip shopping centers, vast parking lots, and underperforming downtowns. Visitors coming from the interstate are overwhelmed by signs for chain stores, hotels, and restaurants. All the “noise” from these signs, makes it more difficult to find the way. Travelling along Highway 21 provides visitors with a backdrop of mountain vistas, a view interrupted by a foreground of signs cluttering the road’s edge.

The downtown areas have potential for serving as the springboard to exploration of natural, cultural, and heritage sites. Reinvestment in these areas can help revive the downtowns, providing housing and supporting locally-owned businesses while helping preserve historic structures and the traditional fabric of the community as well as sustain the substantial infrastructure investments that have been made in the gateway communities of Anniston, Piedmont, and Jacksonville.

Specific Recommendations

1. Develop more interpretation of the area’s natural resources through tours, outdoor discovery activities, and signs.

8) Create design guidelines

The region can promote better development through inspiration and ideas, before regulation. Many communities have discovered the use of design guidelines that encourage development respectful and reflective of community character and sense of place. Carroll County, Maryland created its *Design Expectations* guide about five years ago. The guide provides developers and landowners with examples of the vernacular architecture. At county pre-application meetings staff request that landowners incorporate specific design elements in construction or redevelopment. This voluntary process has resulted in changes to new development in the county.

The two-year old *Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide* is another guide that has resulted in new commercial buildings integrating traditional and/or culturally appropriate building styles. These guides provide local government officials and staff with a way to open a discussion and ask for development that respects community character, creating good economic opportunities and sense of pride for the place.



9) Provide sustainable tourism packages.

Recognize that packaging should be authentic. For example, Cherry Springs State Park in north central Pennsylvania has some of the darkest skies on the East coast, a feature only realized and nurtured as an asset in the last five years or so. The park itself now provides a dome for setting up telescopes to observe the night skies, features lighting that minimizes impact on the night sky, and hosts Dark Sky Parties, gatherings for amateur astronomers. The park has also engaged the nearby hospitality industry and adjacent communities to promote “dark sky tours”, coupling special rates at area B&Bs and lodges with stargazing programs by park rangers, and links to community crafts and artisans. Local businesses have even sprung up to provide stargazing talks, following the park’s popular, family-oriented Music and Stars programs. Visitation jumped 30 percent in less than two years, attracting 10,000 visitors in 2007.

10) Consider creation of new scenic byway along Alabama Highway 9.

Scenic roadways can provide a huge economic boost to the communities they link. A few years ago the U.S. Travel Data Center estimated that every mile of a designated scenic highway generates between \$30,000 to \$35,000 in annual tourist spending.

In the late 1990s, Governor Don Siegelman’s Alabama Scenic Byway Commission recommended a Scenic Byway route that would link the Little River Canyon National Preserve to Cheaha State Park. At one point, the Alabama State Legislature also adopted a resolution naming such a route. A route along Highway 9 also provides access to the east side of the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge and provides various points of access to the Talladega National Forest and Choccolocco State Forest.

11) Consider creation of a sustainable tourism specialist position

The Alabama Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau has a dedicated nature-based tourism specialist with the Gulf Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). Currently the Chamber of Commerce supports the director of tourism position. Additional responsibilities may be better supported through support for a specialist on sustainable tourism. The Pennsylvania Wilds

created a Small Business Ombudsman and a Community Outreach Specialist to foster growth in small businesses as well as assist communities with the numerous issues associated with sustainable tourism, rural economic development, community character, and management of natural and cultural resources.

12) Create visitor center(s)

A regional visitor center can guide visitors to multiple experiences. The best visitor centers do more than just provide brochures or promote attractions, they introduce the visitor to the region, stir the imagination, feed the mind, intrigue. The best site will showcase the region's feel, its architecture, heritage, culture, and natural features. They can also help invigorate the redevelopment of gateway communities such as Anniston, Heflin, Piedmont, or Jacksonville.

A visitor center can house a nature and/or historical center or include multiple uses such as city/town offices or services, a restaurant or cafe, nonprofit organizations, artist studios, a business incubators, or private businesses (such as a law offices, architect or design firm, consultants, etc.) within its walls. A diversity of uses helps sustain building rent, maintenance, and operations, reduces reliance on any one use, improves safety, and provides a steady stream of users.

Construction of the Jacksonville visitors' center along the Chief Ladiga Trail is underway and Piedmont's visitors' center is open. Both centers provide local success stories that other towns in the region might draw on for ideas. Anniston's train station, soon to be the terminus of the Chief Ladiga Trail, might be a good location for one visitor center.

Other potential sites might include Heflin, as a visitors center for the Talladega National Forest , and near Fort McClellan, at the National Wildlife Refuge. A visitor's center could include multiple uses. The region could benefit from creation of a nature center with environmental education and interpretive sites of natural resources.

13) Use market studies to determine additional opportunities for outfitters in the region.

While hard to judge given the limited time in the county, it seems likely that the region can support and sustain more outfitters and recreational-based businesses. One local paddlesports outfitter, Terrapin Creek Outfitters, has grown steadily over its 14 years in business, relying on a mix of sales and rentals, and steady growth based on word of mouth. This despite conducting very little marketing and offering no packages. The Mountain Longleaf Region can help support and enhance this part of the local economy by providing training and networking opportunities, potentially bringing small business owners from other parts of the state or region to share strategies for growing a successful recreational outfitter business.

Should studies determine the need for outfitting in the area, the region can foster or strengthen businesses that support camping along the Chief Ladiga Trail and the Alabama Scenic River Trail, wildlife watching, hunting, fishing, biking, kayaking, hiking and other ventures. The region may even bring in outfitters or tourism officials from other areas to help support or train small businesses to build their market and operations in support of sustainable tourism.

Mountain Longleaf Region

The Mountain Longleaf Region has been addressed throughout this report. The following section highlights important opportunities created by the region and expands on some of the points made earlier in the report.

While awareness of the Mountain Longleaf Region is limited, the brand is relatively young and its potential use across the region is strong. The region's leaders should keep in mind that tourists often identify with an area, a region such as the Adirondacks or the Badlands, instead of individual counties or towns. To fully benefit from sustainable tourism the region needs to embrace the following strategic changes:

- 1) **Recognize the value of sustainable tourism efforts.**

Sustainable tourism should be viewed as an essential industry, one that is homegrown and that fosters jobs that start and stay local. You can't outsource your heritage and natural resources. As an industry, **sustainable tourism in Calhoun County and throughout the Mountain Longleaf Region should be built, and nurtured, enhanced, and promoted, and managed and maintained over time.** Most naturally the Chamber of Commerce and the local governments in the region would continue as the entities responsible for bringing people together and nurturing tourism as one part of the region's economic development strategy. However, the tourism effort could be led by a separate established 501(c)(3) and independent coordinator who continues to tap the Chambers and local governments as well as other stakeholder.
- 2) **Recognize the importance of aesthetics in shaping the visitor experience**

Much of the area's current development detracts from the natural beauty and rich heritage. Signs, sprawl, vacant shopping centers, all are prevalent. Yet, aesthetics, or a community's image, while often seen as an amenity, are the basis of decisions made everyday as to whether to work, play, or live in a community. Image, or community appearance, is fundamental to a community's economic well-being (Edward T. McMahon, Better Models for Development publication series). Area leaders should recognize the importance of good design decisions to its economic development and quality of life and reinforce community character and sense of place through each investment in the region's development and redevelopment. As stated in this report, implementing good design can be done through a variety of techniques; including education, incentives, and voluntary initiatives as well as regulations.
- 3) **Link investments in natural resources with area's heritage and culture**

The Talladega National Forest is redeveloping the Coleman Lake recreational area including replacing bathrooms, beach area, and playground, and creating an accessible hiking trail to the beach. As part of the improvements, the Forest Service has contracted with a New Hampshire timber framing guild and iron workers from Fort Toulouse/Fort Jackson Living History site near Montgomery to build a hand-hewn picnic pavilion at Coleman Lake. The craftspeople will provide woodworking training while on site, providing job and cultural heritage education as part of the investment in the area's resources. If linked into cultural groups within the region, the "pavilion raising" could spawn renewed interest in local craftsmanship and heritage in towns.
- 4) **Strengthen communication and collaboration among the many organizations active in sustainable tourism within the region and engage more stakeholders as partners**

The team involved in the assessment includes diverse interests. But more work needs to be done to engage stakeholders in the vision of a Mountain Longleaf Region and the benefits for all. Towns, counties, and Chambers from across the region need to realize the worth of sustainable tourism for residents and visitors and commit to investing in natural, cultural, and heritage resources. Other stakeholders and partners include landowners, outdoor recreational outfitters, small shopkeepers, artisans, and members of the minority community. The Congressional delegation should also be part of the region's plans for sustainable tourism and future needs.
- 5) **Use the Mountain Longleaf Region brand across the region, with solid parameters to its use.**

The Mountain Longleaf Region is a strong and positive brand that conjures up images of the natural beauty and heritage of the area. This brand and the "You Set The Pace" logo should be used consistently throughout the region to build the regional identity, help visitors locate attractions, and support future activities. The Chamber of Commerce should establish clear parameters governing the brand's use to be sure that it reflects the goals of sustainable tourism. The development and use of the Pennsylvania Wilds logo can be instructive for Calhoun leaders. (see online guidelines).

6) **Recognize local success stories and sources of funding.**

The Jacksonville welcome center on the Chief Ladiga Trail provides a great case study of the pluck and power ingrained in the region. The “Habitat for Humanity”-style approach to creating the welcome center resulted in a building rich in sweat equity, at a fraction of the cost. In creating a quilt of implementation techniques, Mountain Longleaf Region should dig out other sources of funding within the region.

The Talladega National Forest can help get federal money for projects in communities within or near the forest. The U.S. Forest Service has federal stimulus money available now. Additional federal grants are available for community roads designated as forest highways, economic development (USDA), and “kids in the woods” opportunities.

[Note: “More Kids in the Woods,” is a challenge-grant program initially involving 24 programs across the nation and \$1.5 million in Forest Service and non-federal funds. The initial Forest Service grants total \$500,000. Details on the grants can be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/woods/index.shtml>.

The Alabama Scenic River Trail is another example of successful fundraising, its organizers steadily securing state commitments for designing and printing guidebooks, as well as accessing federal Boating Infrastructure Grants, funds from the area’s Resource Conservation and Development districts, and other grants. The trail even attracted the attention of a graduate student who wrote his master’s thesis on the financial benefit of the river trail.

Resource Overview and Site Specific Recommendations

Talladega National Forest

Despite national trends that show visitation decreasing in national parks, the Talladega National Forest Park is welcoming between 15 to 20 percent more visitors from two years ago. Ranger Kim Bittle attributes the increase in visitors to people staying closer to home, an unexpected bump in a down economy. Users vary from through-hikers on the Pinhoti Trail, Scouts on weekend jaunts, regional visitors from Atlanta, Birmingham, and elsewhere, mountain bikers seeking an adventurous ride, residents out for a scenic drive, horse enthusiasts enjoying a backcountry ride, and families interested in hiking and camping. County schoolchildren visit through the Open Air Classroom. Each spring and fall, the mountains famous for turkey hunting also attract hunters from across the United States.

The *Warden Station horse camp* provides three trail loops totaling 35 miles of varying difficulty through long-leaf pine forests into the Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area. Trails are also open to hikers and mountain bikers. Warden Station provides 45 primitive campsites for small RVs, horse trailers, and tents. Water and vault toilets are available but there are no showers or electrical hookups. Auburn University, with the input of horse groups, recently designed a site plan to improve the camp site, recommending use of horse-friendly gravel, showers, flush toilets, horse stalls, manure pails, and high-tie posts.

A recent economic study by the Alabama Horse Council found that Alabama's equine industry contributes \$2.4 billion to the state's economy. In FY 2008, 3,600 campers and day riders used facilities at Warden Station.

Nearby *Coleman Lake Recreation Area* offers overnight visitors 39 combined tent/RV camp sites, 29 picnic areas, and additional lakeside beach and playground plus an accessible trail, all of which are also enjoyed by day users. The Forest is in the process of replacing the picnic area, bathrooms, beach area, and playground and recently added the accessible beach trail along the 21-acre lake. The site also features a small boat ramp, fishing, and picnic tables. Coleman Lake, open from mid-March to November, hosted 3,700 campers in FY 2008. Coleman Lake offers access to the Pinhoti Trail as well as the Coleman Loop trail.

Campers can also use the primitive facilities at Pine Glen (880 campers in FY 2008) and Chinnabee (306 campers). Visitors are also tracked at Henry Creek Shooting Range (700 users), Chinnabee (2,134 day users), and Shepherd Branch (1,315 day users). Off-road vehicle riders and mountain bikers can also visit 23 miles of trails at Kentucky. Hunting for deer, turkey, raccoon, squirrel, quail, and rabbit is allowed in the upland forest of the Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area. Several waterfalls pepper the forest.

Visitors who are physically disabled can access Coleman Lake as well as the hunting opportunities at the Big Oak Camp.

The *Shoal Creek Church* is a rural Alabama treasure. Constructed around 1885-1890, the one-story, log structure lies in a clearing within the Talladega National Forest. As one of the few remaining hand-split, hand-hewn log churches in Alabama, it has earned a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The church hosts the annual Sacred Harp Singing and Dinner on Labor Day as well as weddings and special events.

Other attractions within the Forest include the 9,220-acre *Dugger Mountain Wilderness Area* and the *Lake Chinnabee Recreation Area*. This assessment visit did not include either of these areas.

Talladega National Forest has a one million dollar operating budget. The Forest conducts regular timber sales, selectively harvesting short-leaf, Virginia, and loblolly pine. Eighty percent of the user fees collected at the Talladega National Forest come back to the forest for local projects.

The Talladega National Forest budget does not include marketing but the Web site and public affairs officer in USFS regional office in Montgomery provide updates on forest events. The Forest often relies on word of mouth rather than formal marketing of the special features available throughout Talladega National Forest. The Forest does not sponsor any festivals but hosts ad hoc events such as the upcoming picnic pavilion raising using traditional tools and methods. Management activities such as clean-up days or prescribed burns might provide grounds for interpretation and community outreach. The Forest could also connect to existing festivals such as the Longleaf Festival by having related activities in the Forest or participating in the Festival.

The 1,100-acre Rebecca Mountain acquisition this spring protects the largest privately held land within the Talladega National Forest and will provide a key connection to the Pinhoti Trail.



Challenges

Interviews suggest that local residents and public officials lack awareness of the Forest's natural resources and their management needs. For example, residents and visitors may be unaware or misinterpret the prescribed burns that are used to manage the longleaf pine ecosystem. More outreach and education is needed to engage residents and build awareness of the National Forest and its rich beauty and assets. Past staff turnover at the forest may have contributed to the lack of awareness and the uneven coordination and communication between Talladega National Forest and the surrounding communities and local leaders.

The National Forest lacks a visitor's center or a site to welcome visitors and introduce them to the forest's attractions and its natural resource issues. The Forest lacks a specific Friends group although local service groups, environmental groups, and others contribute volunteer hours on forest clean-up days. Calhoun County has provided support for special projects. Adjacent landowners provide "eyes" on the forest, alerting rangers of suspicious activities or concerns.

The region can also benefit from connecting Talladega National Forest management with the adjacent lands owned by the Alabama Forestry Commission and the Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge.

Site-Specific Recommendations:

"Build it and they will come." The Talladega National Forest should:

- continue making improvements to camping and day use sites at Lake Coleman
- implement plans for improvements to horse camp
- create a visitors, welcome, or interpretive center, perhaps at Talladega National Forest offices (if appropriate) or in a nearby community, to provide visitor information, tell the Talladega National Forest story, and educate about natural resource management on weekends and holidays when Forest offices are closed

- add interpretive signs and information throughout the forest use areas to inform public on the history of the national forest, prescribed burns, species of note, and other forestry issues
- strengthen coordination and outreach between Talladega National Forest and surrounding communities on marketing, grant opportunities, trail connections, special events, tourism, etc.
- market special events and forest features through more formal channels in combination with MLR partners
- foster coordinated management activities between Talladega National Forest, Alabama Forestry Commission, and the Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge
- consider creation of a Friends group
- participate with schools on bringing students to the Forest and engaging them in the natural resource management
- place Forest brochures at area attractions and services such as hotels, restaurants, shops, and other attractions.

Cheaha State Park

Cheaha State Park is a 2,799-acre state park, located in Clay, Cleburne, Calhoun, and Talladega counties. Surrounded by the Talladega National Forest, this foothill of the Appalachian Mountains attracts a half-million visitors annually. Park facilities include a lodge, restaurant, general store, campsites, and hiking trails. Originally developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the park, in continuous operation since 1933, is the oldest operating state park. Hiking trails, including the Pinhoti Trail system, weave

through Cheaha on the way to Cheaha Mountain, the highest point in Alabama. The Pinhoti Trailhead at Cheaha is a rustic stone and aged iron gateway with sixty slate tile imprints of southern Appalachian foliage identified.

In addition to fabulous views, the park is also part of the Auburn Birding Trail. The high point within the Cheaha park is marked with *Bunker Tower*; a stone building with an observation deck on top. Near the peak is *Bald Rock*, which recently was improved with a half-mile, wheelchair-accessible, wooden walkway that provides an overlook of the surrounding region. The park also features two areas with mountain climbing: *Rock Gardens and Pulpit Rock* area.

Cheaha State Park is second only to the Talladega Speedway in popularity among the region's visitors. Around 50 percent of the visitors are families, 20 percent senior citizens, 10 percent church, school, and scouting groups, and the rest through-hikers and the general public. The park hosts numerous weddings. The park and its facilities are open year-round. Visitation was down slightly more than usual this winter but the spring had a strong start.

The park offers several options for overnight visitors: the hotel (with 30 rooms), the Bald Rock lodge (for groups, up to 32), 11 one- and two-room cabins, five two-room chalets, 73 improved campsites, and additional tent camping sites. Peak overnight visitation ranges from 600 to 800 visitors. Park revenue comes from the lodging, dayuse and camping fees, and the park store.

Park events include hosting the 104-mile Cheaha Challenge bike race (May 3, 2009) and the twice-yearly

Cheaha Fire Tower, Alabama's Highest Point



50K Cheaha Romp. Many event participants stay at the Park's facilities. Other festivals include the Chili Cook-Off, the Cheaha Arts and Crafts Festival (with more than 6,000 visitors), the Mountain Festival, and the Indian Festival plus seasonal events at the lodge such as the annual Easter Egg Hunt, Breakfast with Santa, Halloween, and Valentine's Day specials. Race weekends at the Talladega Speedway also bring sizable groups of day and overnight visitors. Park staff is interested in hosting a Bluegrass Festival but cited a lack of parking on-site.

The lodge manager handles marketing for the Park. Visitors hear about the park equally through the Web site and the brochure. Park staff acknowledged that the Web site needs more development.

Park staff frequently help guide visitors to attractions within the surrounding Talladega National Forest, for example, by providing directions to the Forest's waterfalls. The park's Web site mentions attractions within the Forest. Cheaha staff also frequently receives inquiries about the National Forest since the Park is open throughout the week while the Forest office is only open Monday through Friday. The state park and national forest often coordinate on management and operations.

Challenges

The restaurant and hotel could use updating, but the overall facilities and the surrounding natural beauty make the overall experience to be recommended. Cheaha is in great demand and planning should focus on how to grow without overwhelming the park resources, for example, using shuttles for large events to relieve reliance on on-site parking.

Site-Specific Recommendations:

- Improve Web site to provide more information on attractions
- Consider the use of a shuttle from hotels or downtown areas to enable larger events such as a Bluegrass Festival or other events.

The Conservation Fund video on Zion National Park's use of a shuttle to Springdale, Utah is a useful resource on this topic.

Pinhoti Trail

The Pinhoti Trail is a National Recreation Trail that connects to the foundation of the national trail system, the Appalachian Trail. The Pinhoti traverses more than 325 miles through eastern Alabama and passes through the Talladega National Forest and connects to the Cheaha Wilderness and Cheaha State Park, before terminating in north Georgia. The Pinhoti meanders through rolling hills, pine and hardwood forests, rocky crags, past mountain streams and waterfalls, and along scenic ridgetops. Camping is permitted along the trail with camping shelters available year-round at Laurel, Lower Shoal, and Blue Mountain between Coleman Lake and Cheaha State Park. Information on Pinhoti Trail is available on the Talladega National Forest Web site.

As mentioned earlier, the Pinhoti Trailhead at Cheaha State Park, an iron and stone gateway with tiles of southern Appalachian forest foliage, provides a lovely welcome to the trail's natural beauty. The National Endowment for the Arts project grant, called Millennium Trails, provided the support to construct the Pinhoti Trail Sculpture Archway in 1997.

Organizers are planning the second annual Pinhoti 100-mile race in November 2009.

Site-Specific Recommendations:

- Promote connection to Appalachian National Trail through cross-marketing with the National Park Service as well as the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) and user groups. Meet with ATC representatives and discuss possibilities for partnership and coordination.
- Strengthen the Trail's connections to gateway communities that provide services for all kinds of visitors, from baby boomers seeking a soft bed after a day's hike, to locations that provide adequate resupply for thru-hikers. (Some online hiking pages referred to lack of nearby supplies.)
- Develop trail connections that link Pinhoti Trail to other area resources, such as Morgan Mountain, without current connections.
- Make entrances to Pinhoti Trail reflect local culture and crafts, such as the Pinhoti Trail Archway



Artwork at Pinhoti Trailhead Gateway, Checha State Park

Chief Ladiga Trail

Rail-trail projects tend to increase tourism, benefit business, and increase the quality of life. The Chief Ladiga Trail is Alabama's first extended rails-to-trails project. The Ladiga Trail passes 33 miles from the Georgia state line through Jacksonville, Piedmont and Weaver and terminates in north Anniston, with planned connection to downtown Anniston. Seen along the way are beautiful wetlands, streams, forests, farmland, and a horizon of mountains. The Trail is a family-oriented pathway that provides a safe, non-motorized way to travel, exercise, and relax while enjoying the outdoors.

The trail is paved for 21 miles with gravel along the remaining 12 miles through Talladega National Forest. By connecting to Georgia's Silver Comet Trail, bicyclists can now ride 90-plus miles one way between Atlanta to Anniston and return via Amtrak back to their home city.

Piedmont offers a staffed trailside welcome center in a restored 1800s house with restrooms and seven acres of campsites along the trail. Jacksonville has information kiosks and is creating a welcome center.

Challenges

However, given the current termination point in Weaver, just north of Anniston, riders have to take an intermediate route to reach the train station. A search via the Web couldn't locate the exact directions.

Interviews and Web information yielded the need for additional services and improved experiences along the trail to entice day-trippers as well as through-travelers to stop and learn more about the area's history as well as spend money on dining, supplies, and exploration of the region's history, heritage, and natural resources.

Specific Recommendations:

- Complete connection to Anniston
- Promote the Chief Ladiga Trail. Rail-trails are great community assets. They are popular with residents and can also attract visitors. Mountain Longleaf Region should celebrate the trail and partner with the state to promote in promoting it. Florida provides a good example of promoting the state's trail system for state residents and visitors.
- Provide and promote trail packages and trail tips
- Develop ride guides on what to do and see along the trail
- Identify outfitters, trailside attractions, and services with select trail signs and on trail Web sites
- Invite Atlanta's PATH bike advocacy group and mayors of towns along the Silver Comet Trail to speak to elected and local government officials in Calhoun County. Since Atlanta's PATH bike organization got started about ten years or more years ahead of the Alabama groups, PATH officers or staff and Atlanta area mayors from the Silver Comet Trail might provide useful insight on experiences and opportunities as well as issues associated with trail operations and maintenance. Such a meeting could also help to build stronger relationships and coordination for trail users.
- Update news items and links on EPIC Chief Ladiga Trail Web site. News items are old (2007 Trail Ride) and the trail map has broken links.
- Cross market with area attractions through brochure placement and outreach/ meetings to rangers and Trail volunteers.

Alabama Scenic River Trail

One of the area's most recent attractions, the Alabama Scenic River Trail provides 631 miles of paddling opportunities from Cedar Bluffs near the Georgia state line to the mouth of the Mobile Bay, following the Coosa and Alabama Rivers and into the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. Despite the short lifetime of the trail and lack of user data, the trail is already garnering strong interest and is ripe for further product development.

Already this year, 18 new campsites have opened along the trail. The Trail's Web site recently broke 1,000 hits per month. The River Trail skirts Calhoun County at the small city of Ohatchee. Ohatchee features a primitive campground and a bait shop and plans to designate a park along the river trail.

During its short history, the trail has hosted several special events, starting with its grand opening in June 2008, timed to coincide with National Trails Day. The Trail also hosts Paddle Alabama's fall birding journey, an April birding and naturalist trip, three-day trips on Weiss Lake, cleanup activities in August, and night paddles under the full moon.

Specific Recommendations:

Time constraints prevented visitation to the River but interviews yielded the following suggestions, mostly focused on Ohatchee, given its location in Calhoun County.

- make improvements to Ohatchee campsite
- designate rivertrail park in Ohatchee
- increase Ohatchee services to provide supplies to thru-boaters or offer a destination for daytrippers to spend time on land
- strengthen partnerships to provide/improve Ohatchee boat ramp
- increase number of boat ramps along the river trail
- link river events with community festivals and events to engage more people in the river care
- provide branded wayfinding signs along the river and in riverside communities to help visitors access the river trail and boaters to connect to town services and attractions
- include outfitters on trail Web site



Anniston Museum of Natural History

Anniston Museum of Natural History

The Museum, the top attraction in Calhoun County, features an introduction to the area's natural history both inside and out. A ¾-mile trail meanders through the property and short trails wind past birds of prey. The property also showcases various gardens including woodlands, native wildlife, and others. A "treehouse" auditorium hosts up to 200 people for live animal programs featuring reptiles and birds.

The Museum's Web site is very informative, easy to navigate with a wealth of educational resources. The site links to the Berman Museum, its sister museum, and the Chamber of Commerce. The museum operates jointly with Berman Museum, allowing visitors to purchase a joint ticket or membership at either site. The museums are marketed through the state welcome center, AAA, the local newspaper and the chamber tourism office. Visitation records show a high volume of repeat visitation from local residents.

Specific Recommendations:

- Link the museum's environmental education to issues in the broader region such as prescribed burns, longleaf pine, and red cockaded woodpeckers in the Talladega National Forest and Cheaha State Park.
- Build visitation by catering to local residents – offer specials such as free or reduced admission when bringing an out-of-state guest to the museum.
- Participate in planning for area wayfinding signage to ensure that the museum will have adequate signs to guide visitors to the site.

Berman Museum of World History

The Berman Museum showcases what began as a private collection of Farley Berman. In 1996, Berman donated part of his collection for the museum and the remainder was willed to the museum upon his death in 1999. Because of Berman's fascination with collecting objects related to many different topics, the resulting museum offers an interesting assortment of priceless, one-of-a-kind artifacts.

Berman hosts a very well-done Web site with good information and resources as well as links to the Natural History Museum and the Chamber of Commerce through Local Accommodations. The site notes that the section on the museum's collection is being added in the near future.

A 10-year development plan has been created for the museum to guide enhancement of collections and to reach a broader audience.

Specific Recommendations:

- Engage museum specialists in implementation of the development plan.
- Highlight Mr. Berman throughout the museum – his unique passion for collecting these objects sets this museum apart from any other.
- Focus in particular on creating context for the museum's exhibits – for example, tell the story of why Mr. Berman wanted to collect objects that contained hidden weapons or what parts of the story of World War II are told through the collection?
- Seek ways to "make the site come alive" by adding video and audio at appropriate places throughout the museum.
- Use Web site to include more information and convey excitement for the collection and resources.

Anniston's Historic Churches

Anniston has many beautiful, historic churches that tell part of the story of the town's history. Parker

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Baptist Memorial Church, Grace Episcopal Church and St. Michael's Episcopal Church were visited as part of the assessment tour. Grace Episcopal's story is linked with the founding of Anniston. In the late 19th century, as General Tyler and Sam Noble founded the town, they began holding services at the local hotel for the skilled workmen who had been brought from Sweden and England to build blast furnaces for the foundry. In 1881, they decided to build an English-style church. In 1890, St. Michael's was completed as a mission church. Each church offers tours to visitors who call in advance to schedule an appointment.



Specific Recommendations:

1. Work with representatives of these and other churches to collect information their history.
2. Create a section on the tourism Web site to post pictures and information about the churches. Record choirs or music performed at the churches to provide background in the Web site.
3. Include the churches in plans for wayfinding and interpretive signage to encourage visitors to stop at these sites.

Alabama Welcome Center



Berman Museum of World History

The state-run Welcome Center on the Georgia line provided an excellent introduction to Calhoun County. The Center had a rack of brochures on Calhoun County and the staff person at the Center was very familiar with the county. A Calhoun native provided the history of the area and offered numerous suggestions about things to do and places to visit including trails, natural and historic resources, hiking, horseback riding, etc.

Specific Recommendations:

- Continue to provide information and build relationship with state-run visitors center
- Propose a special exhibit on the Mountain Longleaf Region at the state's visitor center
- Consider telling your own story by creating Mountain Longleaf Region visitor's center

Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge

Per the Refuge's Web site, the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge protects the last remaining old growth stand and the best remaining mountain longleaf pine forests in the Southeast. Created in May 2003 from the decommissioned Fort McClellan army base, the 9,000-acre refuge contains beautiful vistas and a rugged landscape of unfragmented forest that rises along the Choccolocco Mountain, the state's third highest mountain. Approximately 6,000 acres of the refuge are closed due to unexploded ordnance or inadequate infrastructure for public visitors.

Access to the refuge is on Bain's Gap Road. Ridge Road, both north and south, is also open to the public. An information kiosk is located at the junction of Bain's Gap Road and Ridge Road South provides additional refuge information. The refuge office is located in the Army Garrison Transition Force within Fort McClellan and open daily during the weekday office hours.

The Fish and Wildlife Service anticipates employing up to 10 people at the Refuge, and opening additional areas of the refuge to the public, attracting thousands of visitors to the region.

The Web site is brief, but nicely done. The Web site could include more information for public visitors including planned trails. As it is, the public has to be very dedicated to visiting the refuge.

A formal visit to the Refuge was not part of the itinerary but the interviewer did travel through part of the Refuge between Talladega National Forest and Fort McClellan. Other interviewees did discuss the Refuge and the recommendations here are based on observation, interviews, and review of other materials and Web sites.

Challenges

While the Army is still conducting ordnance cleanup on part of the Refuge, 3,000 acres of the refuge is currently open, at least in name, to the public. Currently the Refuge has only two employees with a \$250,000 annual budget. Trails are constructed but none are marked or open. In addition, wayfinding signs for the Refuge are not in evidence.

Specific Recommendations:

- Make the Refuge a more public presence in the community. Signs should clearly indicate the entrance to the Refuge. Refuge staff should engage in the Mountain Longleaf Region efforts. A visitor center should welcome and provide an introduction to the refuge, its purpose and its resources.
- Strengthen communication and resource management between the National Forest, state lands, the Refuge and even land at Fort McClellan to the benefit of both human and natural communities and ecology.
- Embrace and celebrate the National Wildlife Refuge. One idea was for the Chamber of Commerce to hold a NWR Appreciation Day.
- Partner with Refuge as the region expands wildlife dependent uses in the near future. The Refuge should be a partner in community and regional efforts to promote and expand hunting, fishing, wildlife photography, bird watching, wildlife observation, environmental education and other forms of nature study.
- Promote military and connection to military history and use this connection as a marketing component.



Talladega Superspeedway

The region's largest tourist attraction, the Talladega Superspeedway, brings 250,000 visitors from across the country and world on two weekends each year. (Average travel by a race spectator is greater than 300 miles. Just 25 percent of fans hail from Alabama.) The track—the longest and steepest on the NASCAR circuit—seats 143,000 in the grandstand and the remainder in the 212-acre infield.

Talladega holds a race driving school over 40-some weekends per year. The speedway also operates the nearby International Motorsports Museum which hosts visitors interested in learning more about the history and the evolution of racing and which honors the sports' legends. The Museum is available for rentals for weddings, corporate events, and other functions. The Speedway contributes \$407 million to the region but ticket sales are down 12 percent for the spring race. Due to its financial straits, the Speedway has recently expressed interest in partnering with the community. The Speedway attracts huge number of visitors, which translates to increased visitors at other county attractions, but that visitation is concentrated on two weekends in the year.

Ryan Newman and Bobby Allison's Racing for Wildlife fundraising effort to protect the 1,100-acre Rebecca Mountain offers a unique opportunity to link Talladega racing with Talladega natural resources.

Specific Recommendations:

- Take advantage of Speedway's interest in partnering by offering special race weekend packages
- Share "You Set The Pace" brochures or special promotion for racetrack visitors
- Promote unique connection between Rebecca Mountain conservation and the two Talladegas: the Superspeedway and the National Forest

Resources and References:

Racing for Wildlife protection of Rebecca Mountain <http://www.racingforwildlife.org/node/334>

Economic Impact Alabama Travel Industry 2008, released April 2009.
<http://www.alabama.travel/media-room/report2008/>

Outdoor Alabama, <http://www.outdooralabama.com/>

Action newsletter, Ecotourism in Alabama issue, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Community Resource Development unit, Winter 2006.

Baldwin County Commission, Planning and Zoning Department, *Exploring the Baldwin County Flood Zoning Plan and the Benefits of Flood Hazard Mitigation*, November 2007, <http://www.co.baldwin.al.us/uploads/Flood%20Zoning%20Plan%20White%20Paper%2011-13-2007.pdf>.

Curt Chapman, "Agri-tourism leaders gather to exchange ideas," *Baldwin County.now*, March 9, 2009, http://www.baldwincountynow.com/articles/2009/03/09/local_news/doc49b18d3a750cd423165647.txt

Kim Shumack, "Nature tourism initiative hits the Gulf Coast," *Baldwin County.now*, March 22, 2008, http://www.baldwincountynow.com/articles/2008/03/22/arts_and_entertainment/doc47e402f81fc35634833929.txt

Pennsylvania Wilds logo use, <http://mediaroom.visitpa.com/default.aspx?id=38>

Dave Caldwell, "Dark Sky, Bright Lights Over Pennsylvania," (about Cherry Springs State Park), *New York Times*, November 2007, <http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/09/14/travel/escapes/14dark.html>.

Carroll County Department of Planning, *Carroll County, Maryland Design Expectations*, <http://ccgovernment.carr.org/ccg/compplan/design/default.asp>

Pennsylvania Wilds Resource Center, <http://www.pawildsresources.org/index.html> includes link to Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide and info on Small Business and Community Outreach.

The Conservation Fund publications, available online through <http://www.conservationfund.org/sites/default/files/PublicationsOrdering%20Form.pdf>

- Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities, by Jim Howe, Ed McMahon, and Luther Propst, 1997.
- Better Models for Development series (8 publications), by Edward T. McMahon and others, 2000 to 2005.
- Gateway Community Case Study, Zion National Park and Springdale, Utah, 2003.

Kodak American Greenway Awards, for small greenway grants, see The Conservation Fund Web site at http://www.conservationfund.org/kodak_awards.

National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance
http://www.nps.gov/nrcr/programs/rta/contactus/cu_apply.html

Smart Growth Implementation Assistance
<http://www.epa.gov/piedpage/sgia.htm>

Sustainable Design Assessment Teams
<http://www.aia.org/about/initiatives/AIAS075425>

