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THE COUNTY OF UNICOI



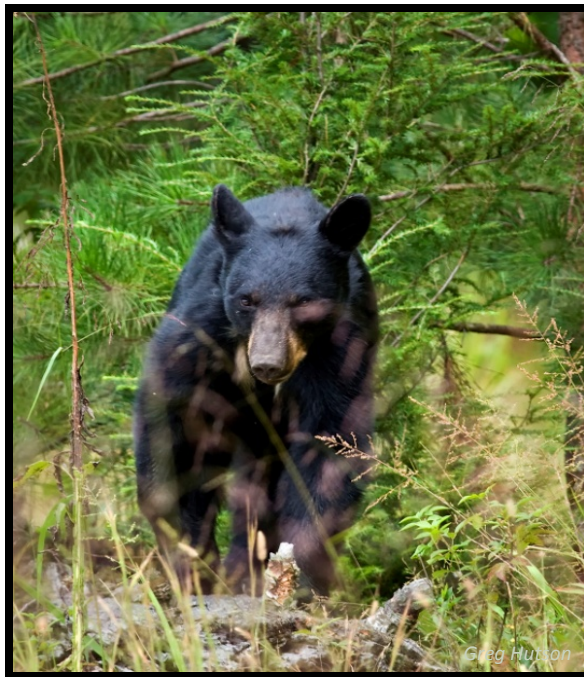
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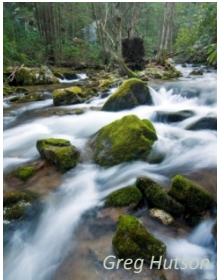
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[SUSTAINABLE TOURISM INITIATIVE]

Sustainable Tourism Initiative Report for Unicoi County, Tennessee



INTRODUCTION

“Although attracting tourists is a competitive affair; businesses that cooperate with each other in order to attract visitors are more likely to succeed than those businesses that decide to ‘go it alone.’”

--Julie Leones

Despite the current economy, Unicoi County was one of only 13 counties in Tennessee that demonstrated employment growth between 2007 and the end of 2009.¹ In addition, Unicoi’s tourism revenues increased 23% over six years, reaching \$7.62 million in 2008.² This same six year period resulted in 10% growth in the tourism and hospitality industry sector.³ Unicoi County is seeking opportunities to expand this growth—to increase the jobs, state and local tax revenue, paychecks, and tax relief that tourism provides—yet desires to protect the qualities that have long made the Valley Beautiful a destination for outdoor recreation and discovery of natural beauty as well as a cherished place to raise a family and share traditions. County leaders have sought out Sustainable Tourism as a way to diversify the economy and provide economic opportunity and growth for the community.

In 2008, a team of county leaders⁴ attended The Conservation Fund’s national course offering of *Balancing Nature and Commerce in Communities that Neighbor Public Lands*. The purpose of the course

¹ An Economic Report to the Governor of the State of Tennessee: The State’s Economic Outlook, January 2010, http://www.tnecd.gov/pdfs/Economic_Report_Governor.pdf.

² Tennessee Department of Tourist Development and U.S. Travel Association. *The Economic Impact of Tourism on Tennessee Counties, 2002-2008*.

³ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Labor Statistics as compiled by Steve Morse, Ph.D., University of Tennessee Tourism Institute.

⁴ Workshop Participants: Terry Bowerman; Doug Bowman; Beulah Ferguson; James Hatcher; Doris Hensley; Greg Lynch; Morgan Summerville.

is to explore the needs of the public lands and their surrounding community partners and to jointly develop action plans that mutually benefit both entities, capitalizing sustainably on the natural resources and forging stronger partnerships for long-term gain. The Unicoi team developed an action plan to both build support for the stewardship and use of public lands by the local residents and to increase sustainable tourism as part of the economic mix. As a result of participating in the course and development of the action plan, the team was subsequently awarded a \$50,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). With this investment from the ARC, the County embarked on implementing its action plan.

This report provides a summary of economic and tourism trends and demographics in the area, observations on the current state of Unicoi County’s sustainable tourism efforts, an overview of initiatives underway, and recommendations for strengthening the County’s economic development based on the natural and cultural resources of Unicoi County.

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TOURISM TRENDS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Tourism is the largest industry on Earth. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism accounts for 10% of the worldwide gross domestic product. More people earn wages from tourism than any other employment sector.⁵

Tourism is important to Tennessee's economy as well. As one of Tennessee's biggest industries, tourism supports 180,000 jobs and provides an economic benefit of \$14.4 billion to the state.⁶

But tourism—an ever-changing industry—spans many experiences. The fastest-growing segments within tourism focus on experiencing unique and authentic places and cultures while being sensitive to maintaining or enhancing the qualities that attract visitors in the first place. Called Sustainable Tourism, such tourism encompasses many sub-categories including cultural heritage, nature-based, community-based, outdoor recreation, agritourism, and even “voluntourism” or vacation-based

⁵ United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2006.

⁶ Barry Young, Tennessee director of welcome centers, as cited in article by Brad Hicks, “Welcome to Unicoi County,” *Johnson City Press*, May 15, 2010, p. 7A.

philanthropy. In contrast to mass-market tourism, such as cruise ships and theme parks, sustainable tourism stresses quality over quantity, favors unique experiences based on a place's resources (such as distinctive destinations, unspoiled landscapes, and historic sites), and relies on locally-owned businesses that circulate money in the local economy.



The State of Tennessee recognized the importance of sustainable tourism, holding its first Sustainable Tourism Summit to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 2008. The State's tourism Web site acknowledges its commitment to a "Sustainable Tourism effort to preserve and protect our state's unsurpassed natural beauty while encouraging the growth of the tourism industry in Tennessee." The State recognizes that tourism should benefit more than the wallet of out-of-state travel agents or franchises, and that sustainable tourism can be what provides opportunities and benefits to residents. The recent report, *Economic Impacts of Tennessee's Parks*, documents that state parks and their nature-based recreation and tourism can:

- Generate economic activity and create thousands of jobs in many rural areas of the state
- Reduce physical and mental health costs and increase overall productivity for visitors
- Improve economic well-being by increasing an area's attractiveness to outside industries, retirees, and people seeking to relocate in areas rich in natural amenities.⁷

Types of Sustainable Tourism

Ecotourism

- 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 2009, visitors spent \$13 billion directly in communities within 50 miles of National Forests and Grasslands. The money spent during those visits generates \$14.5 billion in economic activity within the local communities, thus supporting 223,000 jobs in gateway regions.⁸
- National Forest System lands received an estimated 173.5 million visitors in 2009. In addition, the Forest Service recorded more than 300 million occasions of people driving to National Forest specifically to view the scenery and wildlife.⁹

⁷ J. Mark Fly, Ph. D., Burton C. English, Ph. D., R. Jamey Menard, M.S., Kim L. Jensen, Ph. D., *Estimated Economic Impacts of Tennessee State Parks*, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, Spring 2010, http://tn.gov/environment/parks/economic_impact/.

⁸ USDA Forest Service. *National Visitor Use Monitoring Results*. National Summary Report, April 2009, retrieved from: http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/nvum_national_summary_fy2009.pdf

⁹ USDA Forest Service. *National Visitor Use Monitoring Results*. National Summary Report, April 2009, retrieved from: http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/nvum_national_summary_fy2009.pdf



- An estimated 4 million people walk some portion of the nearly 2,180-mile Appalachian Trail annually.¹⁰ According to 2000 statistics, AT hikers tend to be highly educated (over 70% of trail users are college graduates; 27% have obtained an advanced degree). Thru-hikers report lower incomes than other trail users, but this is somewhat a factor of their overall younger age. Nevertheless, 26% of thru-hikers earn more than \$60,000 compared to 44% of other users.¹¹

Cultural Heritage Tourism

- According to the 2003 Historic/Cultural Traveler study by the Travel Industry Association (TIA) 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 1996¹².
- 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%).¹³
- Cultural heritage travelers take frequent trips, with 25% taking three or more trips a year.
- Cultural heritage tourists represent a very well-educated demographic (6 in 10 have a college degree) and are slightly older than other travelers.¹⁴



¹⁰ Morgan Summerville, ATC, May 2010 interview.

¹¹ Use and Users of the Appalachian Trail: A Source Book, December 2000, http://www.nps.gov/appa/parkmgmt/upload/Main_Report-3.pdf; <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/tourism/demographics.htm>; and Nature Tourists, http://www.agmrc.org/commodities__products/agritourism/naturebased_tourism.cfm

¹² Travel Industry Association of America TravelScope survey 2003; *The Historic/Cultural Traveler, 2003 Edition*, TIA and Smithsonian Magazine.

¹³ National Trust for Historic Preservation and The Conservation Fund, *An Assessment and Recommendations Report for Natural and Cultural Heritage Tourism Development in Calhoun County, Alabama*, June 2009.

¹⁴ National Trust for Historic Preservation, Cultural Heritage Tourism Web site and data sheet: <http://www.culturalheritagetourism.org/resources/visitorProfile.htm>.

Agritourism

- Agricultural tourism is particularly high in beneficial economic impacts because the labor used, business ownership and the products sold are usually local.¹⁵
- According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, 23,350 farms indicated they provided agritourism and recreation services valued at \$566 million. Of the total farms, 3,637 farms indicated gross farm receipts of \$25,000 or more.¹⁶
- Examples of Agritourism include: equine agritourism, fee and lease pond fishing, game bird and hunting leases, farm tours and hands-on-chores, rural weddings, and wine tours.¹⁷



Tennessee Department of
Tourist Development

Benefits of Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is particularly attractive for communities interested in maintaining or enhancing their community's character and sense of place. Here is a list of some of the ways sustainable tourism can benefit a community like Unicoi County:

- Economic development and job creation
- Increased draw of outside industries looking to relocate their businesses
- Increased attractiveness to retirees and people seeking to relocate in areas rich in natural amenities
- Preservation of the unique character and sense of place
- Reduction in physical and mental health costs and increased productivity. Research has proven that proximity to nature can have dramatic effects on the quality of human life. People with access to nearby natural settings are healthier, more satisfied with their home, with their job, and with life in general.¹⁸
- Increased civic pride and community stewardship among residents
- More shops, activities, and entertainment offerings for residents and visitors that the local market alone might not be able to support.

See ***Estimated Economic Impacts of Tennessee State Parks*** from the University of Tennessee, Institute of Agriculture¹, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation for more information about the benefits of sustainable tourism. Additionally, the USDA's Rural Information Center provides a host of Rural Tourism resources: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/v/ric/ricpubs/tourism.html>

¹⁵ Julie Leones, "Tourism Trends and Rural Economic Impact", *Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Handbook*, Consumer Profiles and Tourism Trends 1995, 15-18.

¹⁶ US Census of Agriculture, USDA. Table 7. Income from farm-related sources. Retrieved from: http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_US/st99_1_006_007.pdf.

¹⁷ Agricultural Marketing Resource Center. Agritourism Profile. http://www.agmrc.org/commodities__products/agritourism/agritourism_profile.cfm.

¹⁸ Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, St. Leger. "Healthy nature healthy people: 'contact with nature' as an upstream health promotion intervention for populations". *Healthy Promotion International*, Vol. 21 No. 1 2005. <http://heapro.oxfordjournals.org> on July 15, 2010.

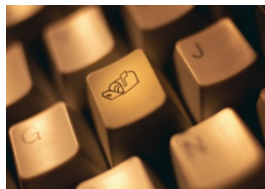
The Future of Sustainable Tourism

Touring Baby Boomers



Sustainable tourists are particularly attracted to unique and authentic experiences and often spend more compared to mass-market tourists. Baby Boomers represent one of the strongest markets for cultural heritage tourism. Not only are there more of them—by 2020 more than one-third of Americans will be over age 50—but they also pay more for their vacations and are more likely to stay in a hotel or motel. As early as the mid-1990s, researchers noted the Baby Boomers penchant for “cultural tourism, heritage tourism, sports tourism, active tourism, adventure travel and ecotourism”.¹⁹ That certainly plays out today as Boomers generate more travel than any other age group and demand experienced-based travel as they age.

The Role of Technology in Tourism



Any area that wants to attract visitors needs to acknowledge the time crunch facing most Americans and the importance of access to online information. One in five people spends 50 hours or more working each week, with email consuming over an hour a day.²⁰ From a 2009 Harris Interactive poll, the age groups that spend the most time online are those aged 30-39 (18 hours per week), 25-29 (17 hours per week) and those aged 40-49 (17 hours per week).²¹ With less time to plan and more online access, travelers are increasingly turning to the Internet for immediate access to travel information.²² Web sites and social media sites are important sources for visitors to access online reviews and add their own content. Technology continues to define the visitor experience from information they access at home before their trips to the entertaining and sophisticated resource interpretation technology displays they experience during travel. Wireless Internet is also changing how people get their news, find directions, and learn about events. As more travelers are able to access the Internet in the palm of their hand, they will expect their destinations to offer wireless on-demand connections as well.

¹⁹ Julie Leones, “Tourism Trends and Rural Economic Impacts” from *Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Handbook*, Consumer Profiles & Tourism Trends 1995, pp. 15-18. <http://ag.arizona.edu/arec/pubs/dmkt/TourismTrends.pdf>

²⁰ Randall Travel Marketing, “Time Poverty” *Presentation on 2010 Travel Trends*, December 2009, <http://www.yorkpa.org/docs/2010Trends.pdf>

²¹ Wauters, Robin. “The rumors are true: we spend more time online.” TechCrunch Online. December 2009, <http://techcrunch.com/2009/12/23/harris-interactive-poll/>

²² National Trust for Historic Preservation and The Conservation Fund, *An Assessment and Recommendations Report for Natural and Cultural Heritage Tourism Development in Calhoun County, Alabama*, June 2009.

Time Poverty



The time crunch facing American workers combined with the economic downturn has meant that “staycations”, that is, shorter vacations close to home, have become the norm. Some predictions are that travelers, following the recent frugal period, are readying for more ambitious travel and a return to the “awaycation”. Nevertheless, with the prevalence of “time poverty” among Americans, the norm will likely continue to be short, weekend getaway trips close to home. With less time, travelers want an easy way to plan their trips themselves and to connect to multiple experiences in one place.

Julie Leones notes, “To convince a visitor to make an extended trip to an area, there have to be enough activities or places to visit. In rural communities there may not be enough to do in a single community to keep a visitor in the area for more than a few hours. If a group of communities work together and promote their whole region, they may be much more successful in both attracting visitors and convincing them to stay more than just for a day. This is why although attracting tourists is a competitive affair; businesses that cooperate with each other in order to attract visitors are more likely to succeed than those businesses that decide to ‘go it alone.’”²³

Touring Green



Travelers are increasingly interested in “green” tourism; lessening their environmental impact through lodging choices, using transit or bicycles, or offsetting their carbon emissions. Community-based tourism and sustainable tourism continue to be strong attractors to those looking to tour green²⁴.

Finally, within the tourism industry, more travelers are also giving back to the destinations they visit by donating time, money, talent and their repeat business to protect and positively impact the cultures and environments they visit. More people are participating in “voluntourism”, a form of travel philanthropy in which travelers visit a destination and take part in projects within the local community. Projects are commonly nature-based, people-based or involve such things as restoration or construction of buildings, removal of invasive species, and planting trees.

²³ Julie Leones, “Tourism Trends and Rural Economic Impacts” from *Direct Farm Marketing and Tourism Handbook*, Consumer Profiles & Tourism Trends 1995, pp. 15-18. <http://ag.arizona.edu/arec/pubs/dmkt/TourismTrends.pdf>

²⁴ Sources for this section include: Laura Bly, “Top Travel Trends for 2010”, *USA Today*, January 8, 2010, http://www.usatoday.com/travel/news/2010-01-07-travel-trends-for-2010_N.htm; Brian Mullis, “Trends in Sustainable Travel and Tourism”, *Green Money Journal*, Spring 2010, <http://www.greenmoneyjournal.com/article.mpl?newsletterid=48&articleid=677>; Rossitza Ohridska-Olson, *Cultural Realms* blog, accessed on May 21, 2010, <http://www.culturalrealms.com/> and Trend Tracker Newsletter: Tourism Industry, accessed on May 21, 2010 as cited on <http://www.slideshare.net/Stutts/tourism-trend-tracker-may-2010>; Lisa Wolfe, *Heritage Traveler* blog, accessed on May 21, 2010, <http://theheritagetraveler.com/2010/02/10-hot-travel-trends/>. National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Summary

For Unicoi County, these changing trends indicate an opportunity to capitalize on people's desire to connect to authentic experiences and products that remain unspoiled and are economical. Unicoi is well positioned to capture this market of sustainable tourists provided that they invest in some needed features such as technology upgrades (i.e., both to attract tourists and to keep them once in the county), and develop design guidelines to protect and maintain the county's character and natural beauty.

PROGRAM RESULTS AND DELIVERABLES

Using the funds received from its ARC grant, Unicoi County embarked upon a workplan with The Conservation Fund's Conservation Leadership Network to build capacity for sustainable tourism in the area. The work of the Fund and Unicoi citizens centered on four deliverables: the development and delivery of a Balancing Nature and Commerce workshop tailored to the needs of Unicoi County; an offering of an Entrepreneurs workshop; development of a standardized PowerPoint presentation that can be used for community education; and a final summary report outlining recommendations for future actions.

1. Balancing Nature and Commerce in Unicoi County Workshop

The Conservation Fund worked with a local design team²⁵ to develop a two and a half day workshop program tailored to Unicoi County. The purpose of the workshop was to promote local buy-in and awareness of natural assets in the area for sustainable tourism and to develop action plans for moving forward with a sustainable tourism economy. On January 11 – 13, 2010, the *Balancing Nature and Commerce in Unicoi County* workshop was held. The event kicked-off with an evening program presented by national tourism and planning expert, Ed McMahon, a Sustainable Development Fellow with the Urban Land Institute, and a share fair of resources available in the region. Over 100 community attendees participated in the event. The full workshop program provided more than 60 participants with an in-depth look at sustainable tourism and led them through an action planning process based on the need to enhance and protect the area's overall community character, including its natural and cultural assets. Through expert lectures and detailed exercises, participants were able to develop action plans for the following asset groups in Unicoi County: commercial services, physical infrastructure, recreational assets, natural assets, and cultural assets. The asset-based action plans provide the foundation for an ongoing sustainable tourism strategy.

²⁵ Design Team: Terry Bowerman; Amanda Delp; Beulah Ferguson; Mickey Hatcher; Doris Hensley; Julie Judkins; Ralph Knoll; Greg Lynch; Johnny Lynch; Morgan Sommerville.

Action Plans and Progress Update since January 2010 Workshop

The five asset-based team action plans are briefly summarized below along with mention of notable progress made as of June 2010.

Recreational Asset Report:

- Primary Action Plan: Pursue recreational activities at Rocky Fork
 - County leaders have expressed interest in creating a state park at Rocky Fork and have begun exploring this possibility with state officials.
 - The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) during the January workshop offered to convene a group of Unicoi County stakeholders to discuss and develop possible recreational uses at Rocky Fork. The county agreed to form a stakeholder group to work with the state.
 - Johnny Lynch (and others) met with Tennessee's commissioner of Tourism & Development, Susan Whitaker, at the Tennessee Municipal League legislative convention this spring to discuss the future tourism potential of Rocky Fork.
 - County leaders have met with the Congressional delegation and others to advance the designation of a National Recreation Area for Unicoi County.



Physical Asset Report:

- Primary Action Plan: Develop programming showcasing Unicoi County at the new Tennessee Welcome Center
 - Mayor Greg Lynch met with the head of the Welcome Center about programming. The Center is currently developing protocol for demonstrations and screening of potential demonstration volunteers.
 - Some Unicoi County residents have volunteered to run programs ranging from traditional Appalachian music to quilting at the center. The goal is to showcase Unicoi County and have 'ambassadors' present in the Center.
 - Unicoi residents were among the new employees hired to staff the Welcome Center.
 - The Welcome Center opened in February 2010, with a grand opening in May during state tourism week.

- Once volunteers have been identified to serve as ‘ambassadors’, the effectiveness of the program should be monitored.

Cultural Asset Report:

- Primary Action Plan: Develop design guidelines. In the interim, ‘guidelines’ may take the form of a booklet illustrating pictures of building designs that reflect the character of Unicoi County.
 - Team members have secured copies of other design guidelines to review. At a minimum, the team would like to develop a picture book highlighting those architectural designs that resonate with the existing community character and those that do not. This document would be presented to all developers seeking to develop new projects or refurbish existing buildings.
 - The town of Unicoi has approved a resolution that permits formation of a design board to review all design plans for future businesses.²⁶ The town has also engaged in discussions with the potential developer of a combined inn, restaurant and service station on building materials and site design that reflect the community character. The business owner is enthused about the possibilities.
 - The Joint Economic Development Board has briefed the county commission on design guidelines.



Commercial Services Asset Report:

- Primary Action Plan: Strengthen destination planning with a beautification plan for the area and hospitality training for the local merchants and guest services staff.
 - The Chamber held training for local businesses on customer service that included recognition of Unicoi's tourism assets.
 - Erwin was selected as one of 10 communities to participate in Tennessee Downtowns, an 18-month community improvement program to revitalize traditional commercial districts. A team led by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program and the Tennessee Main Street program conducted an initial assessment of Erwin in April.

²⁶ Cody B. Lewis, “Unicoi rezoning request withdrawn after public outcry,” *The Valley Beautiful Beacon*, February 16, 2010, p. A6.

- Erwin received a \$120,000 Tennessee Roadscapes Grant from the Tennessee Department of Transportation to improve roadside design along the Harris Hollow exits. The design will use split-rail fencing, rocks, and landscaping. The town will also provide funding of \$14,000.
- The Chamber of Commerce launched its “Be a Tourist in Your Own Community” campaign to spotlight recreational activities and outdoor adventure. The Chamber and other groups have been providing tourism-focused articles to the area newspapers and other media.

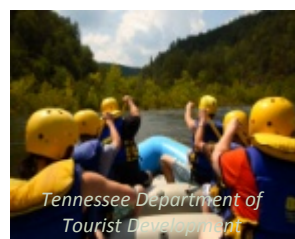
Natural Resources Asset Report:

- Primary Action Plan: Develop marketing plan for the area
 - Form a volunteer “Discover Unicoi Group”
 - Aggressively and systematically implement social media marketing using Facebook, Twitter, Constant Contact and secure a website domain called “Discover Unicoi”.
 - Obtain East Tennessee State University interns to assist with the effort.
 - Research grants to pursue to ultimately hire a marketing firm to develop a marketing plan, a logo, and a brand for the county.
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2. Entrepreneurs in Unicoi County Workshop

On April 27, 2010, 25 potential entrepreneurs interested in investing in Unicoi County attended the *Entrepreneurs in Unicoi County* workshop. The Conservation Fund worked with the local design team to develop the workshop content and led facilitation of the daylong workshop. The workshop featured an overview of economic trends that support development of additional tourism and recreation-based businesses, an introduction to writing a business plan, financial strategies and resources, and case studies from successful tourism-based entrepreneurs. Participants shared their ideas for possible new or expanded businesses in the county including:

- vineyard and winery
- a horse boarding facility and campground
- a locally-owned travel center combining a cafe/restaurant, service station, and inn
- a river-rafting outfitter
- a crafts studio featuring dollmaking, needlework, and knitted wares
- an ecotourism recreation venture such as a zipline tree canopy tour



3. Community Education Kit

In response to the need for communications tools and with input from local leaders, The Conservation Fund developed a PowerPoint presentation and talking points that Unicoi County leaders and residents may use to engage community members, government officials, prospective business owners, and stakeholder groups on the value and benefits of sustainable tourism. While this PowerPoint will be an effective tool for helping to gain local support, it is still critical that Unicoi County launch an external marketing campaign.

4. Report on Sustainable Tourism Recommendations

Following on the community's assessment of tourism assets during the *Balancing Nature and Commerce* workshop, the Fund has developed this report to assess progress and potential for sustainable tourism and provide recommendations to engage and educate a larger segment of the community.

To prepare this report, the Conservation Fund drew from results of both the January and April workshops, interviewed by phone and in person numerous Unicoi residents and partners, and reviewed online research and several months of local newspaper articles. Finally, this report was

supplemented by the wealth of experience we have accumulated in working with communities on rural economic development related to public land management.

PROGRESS TO DATE: MOMENTUM IS BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM EFFORTS

The County's leaders—civic, community, business—and volunteers have pursued numerous project initiatives to enhance the community for residents and visitors alike. We summarize several of these as evidence of the continuing capacity building and progress toward sustainable asset-based economic development.

In the short time since Unicoi's participation in the national course in January 2008 to spring of 2010 there has been *significant progress* toward the County's action plan for building support for and use of public lands and increasing sustainable tourism in the economic mix. This list shows that sustainable Tourism has real momentum in Unicoi County. The key will be to ensure that each step, each success – no matter how large or how small – is effectively transmitted to the broader community. Nothing breeds success like success is an old axiom that happens to be true! The leaders in Unicoi County need to develop a plan for communicating and continuing to build the momentum.

Some items in the below list are programs that were underway prior to the workshop but were greatly accelerated with the partnership and shared purpose that the team achieved while attending the national *Balancing Nature and Commerce* course in 2008. Many of these items have been *quietly achieved*. Both small and large, when combined and connected to the broader effort, they create a solid and impressive foundation on which to build and promote future tourism and asset-based community and economic development efforts. Select achievements to date include:

Expanding Recreational Opportunities

The U.S. Forest Service to build a five-mile hiking and biking trail to Pinnacle Mountain Fire Tower to be completed by the end of 2010. Additional plans to restore the Fire Tower.
Request for an additional \$5 million Congressional appropriation in support of Rocky Fork acquisition.
Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation's (TDEC) commitment to form a subcommittee and explore the future recreational uses of Rocky Fork with possible creation of a state park.
Restoration of the historic 18 th century Bogart-Bowen log cabin near completion at the new Buffalo Creek Town Park. Additionally, the Town of Unicoi secured state grant money for 56 trees for a community tree planting at the park and a \$2,000 Heal Appalachia grant to be used for a walking trail.
Expected opening of the state's Sunny Side Trail through east Tennessee that features Unicoi County outdoor and heritage attractions.

Local Community Events

The expected launch of an open-air farmers market at the Erwin Town Hall parking lot in July 2010 as an outlet for sales of Unicoi-grown produce and other local foods and crafts. The market is made possible through grants secured by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and state Department of Agriculture.

The town of Unicoi's inaugural Pinnacle Run 5K which attracted 50 runners while raising money for the Pinnacle Fire Tower.

The town of Erwin approved a late-summer bicycle race developed by the Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the U.S. Cycling Association. The weekend event is targeted toward attracting 200 people for a community bicycle race up Gentry Mountain, a time trial to Unaka Mountain, and a closed circuit race.²⁷

National Recognition

Unicoi County recognized as an Appalachian Trail Community by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) in May 2010. Unicoi is one of only four communities along the Trail to earn this designation—and the first in Tennessee.

Selection of a Unicoi teacher in the Appalachian Trail Conservancy’s highly competitive and selective Trail to Every Classroom (TTEC) program that provides a full year of professional development. In the future, because of the County’s designation as an AT Community, Unicoi’s teachers can benefit from priority consideration for participation in the TTEC program which will help them develop their own curriculum to increase student literacy and stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

Feature titled “Valley Beautiful: Erwin, Tennessee” in the March-April 2010 issue of *AT Journeys* magazine.²⁸

Meeting with Congressional delegation about gaining designation of Unicoi County as a National Recreation Area.

Planning and Design Milestones

Completion and opening of the Tennessee Welcome Center along I-26.

The town of Unicoi's passage of a resolution permitting formation of a design board to review plans for future businesses.

Local Business Support

Fundraising for a commercial kitchen in the town of Unicoi to support local businesses needing access to facilities for food production. This included a meeting with the Appalachian Regional Commission. As of May 2010, two-thirds of the total \$300,000 is in hand. Unicoi officials hope for a spring 2011 opening.

The Chamber of Commerce and the County used asset maps developed by the USFS to create a map and brochure of 60 additional attractions, including restaurants, arts, historic sites, natural resources, and waterfalls, that complement the Sunny Side Trail guide.



²⁷ Cody B. Lewis, “Erwin BMA approves annual fishing day, upcoming bike race,” *The Valley Beautiful Beacon*, February 23, 2010, p. A5.
²⁸ David Ramsey, “Valley Beautiful: Erwin, Tennessee”, *AT Journeys*, March-April 2010, <http://www.appalachiantrail.org/atf/cf/%7BB8A229E6-1CDC-41B7-A615-2D5911950E45%7D/Trail%20Towns%20ErwinTNATJournneysMarApr2010.pdf>

Working Partnerships

A restored relationship with the U.S. Forest Service that has led to USFS action on several projects cited by community leaders including:
 Developing 12 miles of horseback riding trails at Limestone Cove/Dark Hollow and supported by parking for horse trailers and new bathrooms.

- Enhancing Unaka Mountain Recreational Zone with themes of camping, watersports, sightseeing, and hiking.
- The Forest Service with help from the “Hot Shots” cleaned up the Unaka Mountain Overlook and Beauty Spot, replaced signs, and built picnic tables. The Forest Service and the County are working together to improve the mountain road.
- Engaging with Northeast Tennessee Mountain Biking Club to design and create legitimate mountain bike trails on Buffalo Mountain.
- Posting additional brown National Forest signs, purposely routed through the towns, to direct visitors to Chestoa, Rock Creek and other Cherokee National Forest attractions.
- Rehabilitating the Rock Creek campground including an update of the CCC bathhouse and day use area; better trail connection to access Rock Creek Trail and Rattlesnake Ridge; new bathrooms; and partnership with the Kiwanis on the campsite fireside program. The USFS also plans more work to improve accessible design of the amphitheater at Rock Creek.

STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES

Part of preparing a community for change includes an honest review of strengths, opportunities, and challenges. The Conservation Fund conducted this broad overview during visits of local attractions, interviews with community leaders, public land managers, and local business owners as well as other stakeholders, and review of newspapers, Web sites, and online studies. Below is a summary highlighting select recommendations and observations as a first step in preparing the community for the development of a broader natural and cultural heritage tourism strategy.



Unicoi Strawberry Festival (Linda March)

Strengths

Unicoi County already holds numerous festivals based on the unique character of the community: the Fiddle and Fiddlehead Festival (April), Arts in the Park along the Linear Trail (summer), the Ramp Festival (May), Strawberry Festival (May), the Fourth of July Freedom Festival, the Apple Butter Festival (October). Each festival seems to grow—attracting 100 to 110,000 participants. Festivals are a great way to share the unique character of Unicoi County

and to attract visitors even in typically slow parts of the year. Cross-marketing of all Unicoi's assets and features should be prominently included in all festival materials.

Unicoi is "investing in itself", by planning for sustainable tourism versus mass-market tourism. Numerous people in Unicoi County have stressed their aversion to the mass-market tourist development of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge. Instead, they are inspired by places like Townsend, Tennessee, a town that promotes itself as "the peaceful side of the Smokies", rich with locally-owned businesses and events every

weekend. Unicoi's action plans of developing design guidelines and a beautification plan are evidence of Unicoi's desire to focus on sustainable tourism. In addition, Unicoi's leaders are committed to sustainable tourism rather than mass-market tourism. Having leadership that recognizes the difference and is willing to invest in the future rather than just a 'political term' is a critical key to success.

Unicoi County is continuing to work to strengthen its relationship and partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. This has already resulted in additional resources and action dedicated to addressing community concerns about locally cherished places within the Cherokee National Forest. Because of the partnership and the county's realization that the Forest Service lands are an asset, the Forest Service has responded and made more investments that benefit the county, e.g., recent completion of the Unaka Mountain Overlook clean up, the clean up and access on the Unaka spur road, and additional recreational access and facilities as well as the potential creation of a National Recreation Area.

Unicoi County is blessed with tremendous assets. The 640,000 acres of Cherokee National Forest, the largest tract of public land in Tennessee, are easily accessible by Unicoi County residents and visitors. There are over 63 miles of local trails within the forest in addition to segments of the Appalachian Trail. There are also several parks within the Town of Erwin for family outings and community recreation. The Erwin Fishery Park, the most recent extension of Erwin's award-winning linear park, features stunning views of the Unaka Mountains and many recreational facilities. The Nolichucky River's white waters run through the deepest gorge in the eastern United States with cliffs that rise more than 2,000 feet, offering rafters an exhilarating experience with beautiful scenery.

Unicoi County's assets are also unspoiled. Rural towns are non-renewable assets, a concept that should be embraced and actively marketed by Unicoi County.

Resource

Townsend, Tennessee's Web site suggests ways for visitors to enjoy a "low-impact" vacation, including activities, lodging, and even the purchase of organic food at a nearby farm. <http://www.townsendchamber.org/> and <http://www.smokymountains.org/attractions/low-impact-vacation.html>



Opportunities

The potential exists for sustainable tourism to increase dramatically in the county. Steven Morse of University of Tennessee’s Tourism Institute compared Unicoi’s tourism spending with seven surrounding Tennessee and North Carolina counties and found Unicoi’s closest competitor, Mitchell County, N.C., has double the tourist expenditures (see Table 1). Historic Washington County, TN earned a whopping \$197.37 million from its 2008 visitors. The potential for Unicoi to increase its economic impact is enormous. This same conclusion was reached in the *Upper Nolichucky River Watershed Benefit Study* of 2005.

Table 1: 2008 Tourist Expenditures, Selected TN & NC Counties²⁹

2008 Tourist Expenditures	
Washington Co., TN	\$197.37 million
Avery Co., NC	\$89.76 million
Greene Co., TN	\$71.83 million
Carter Co., TN	\$31.27 million
Madison Co., NC	\$29.26 million
Yancey Co., NC	\$26.33 million
Mitchell Co., NC	\$19.86 million
Unicoi Co., TN	\$7.62 million

Unicoi County is barely tapping the possible tax revenue from increased sustainable tourism. According to Dr. Steven Morse’s research, between 2002 and 2008, tourism spending in Unicoi County increased by 24 %, from \$6.15 million to \$7.62 million.³⁰ In 2008, the \$7.62 million in tourism revenues generated state and local tax revenues in excess of \$1 million and supported 73 jobs. Tourists in the

²⁹ TN Dept. of Tourist Development & U.S. Travel Association; NC Dept. of Commerce, Tourism Division (from Steve Morse presentation).

³⁰ TN Dept. of Tourist Development & U.S. Travel Association; The Economic Impact of Tourism on TN Counties , 2002 – 2008 (from Steve Morse presentation).

county spend \$20,876 each day, resulting in paychecks worth \$4,667 daily, state taxes worth \$1,155 daily, and Unicoi County taxes worth \$1,693 daily. As a result of the economic activity from tourism, each household in Unicoi County pays \$121 less in state and local taxes. This fact, along with other economic benefits associated with sustainable tourism, should be actively transmitted to all residents of Unicoi County.



Tourism decisions should benefit residents as well as visitors.

For example, should Unicoi establish a beautification plan whereby utilities are placed underground, trees are used as buffers, and design guidelines are established for new buildings, a sense of community and place will improve overall health and well-being for residents alike. An extensive study in the Netherlands found “in a greener environment people report fewer health complaints, more often rate themselves as being in good health, and have better mental health”, and “when it comes to health, all types of green seem to be equally ‘effective’”; similar benefits were found from living near city parks, agricultural areas, and forests.³¹ Overwhelming amounts of research also demonstrate that children not only benefit from an increase in physical activity, but contact with the outdoors can bring about multiple health benefits. It has been suggested, for example, that “greenness”, or the degree of contact with nature, in a child’s everyday environment is linked to higher levels of cognitive functioning³². Research also suggests that the presence of natural features, e.g. trees, within the spaces in which children play aids children in developing creative play activities.³³

Sustainable tourism can define an outlet for Unicoi’s products. The Tanasi Center will provide a high-profile center for the sale of Unicoi-produced crafts. While Tanasi is in the design and construction phases, consider interim steps to establish connections between artisans and their markets and admirers. The County might consider launching a Tanasi Festival, developing the Tanasi brand-products, an artisan trail, or a crafts registry to build excitement and interest—and create additional markets for the existing arts entrepreneurs.



More dispersed sales are possible at festivals, at shops in downtown Erwin and Unicoi, and along scenic byways and driving trails. The farmers market in Erwin will provide local farmers with a Unicoi-based location to sell their goods, rather than having to ship or sell their products out of county. Creating

³¹ de Vries Sjerp, Robert A. Verheij, and Peter P. Groenewegen. “Nature and Health: The Relation between Health and Green Space in People’s Living Environment.” Paper presented at the conference “Cultural Events and Leisure Systems,” Amsterdam, the Netherlands, April 2001.

³² Wells, N., M., (2000) ‘At home with nature: effects of “greenness” on children’s cognitive functioning’, *Environment and Behaviour*, 32 (6), pp. 775 – 795.

³³ USDA Forest Service (2001) ‘Trees for children: helping inner city children get a better start in life’, *Technology Bulletin 7* (Pennsylvania: USDA Forest Service).



local markets for local products and services mean farmers and craftspeople can earn money locally. More money circulates in the local economy, more local jobs are possible, farming is stabilized, heritage is preserved, and the community benefits from capture of the sales tax. Unicoi needs to provide opportunities to discover authentic Unicoi County experiences.

The potential for Agritourism exists in Unicoi County to complement and diversify nature and cultural heritage tourism. Agricultural tourism is particularly high in beneficial economic impacts because the labor, business ownership, and the products sold are usually local (see Leones study). A more concerted effort could convince local farmers to engage in agritourism, thus diversifying their own business base.

Moreover, Unicoi County already has stops on the Quilt Trail attracting numerous visitors, many of whom may be interested in visiting farms as well. Unicoi should actively look at all opportunities for tourism and assess whether package opportunities exist, e.g., development of sample itineraries for week-long, day-long, and weekend tourists. Some tourists may want to explore quilting trails, working farms, railroads, and even participate in moonshine tours!

Agritourism Resources

At the Entrepreneurs workshop, Ann Birdwell of Still Hollow Farm provided a good case study of the possibilities to add agritourism to a farm's conventional agricultural production. <http://www.stillhollowfarm.com/>

The state's Department of Agriculture has additional resources to support agritourism. The Tennessee Century Farm program is one such program that provides recognition and is another marketing tool for some of Tennessee's oldest farms and farm families. <http://www.tncenturyfarms.org/>

Potential Challenges / Issues

Despite solid opportunities, Unicoi County faces certain challenges to implementing sustainable tourism and asset-based economic development. These are surmountable but will require ongoing consideration and development of cross-cutting strategies. There are five main areas of challenges:

Unicoi can follow the conclusion of a study on *Tourism Trends and Rural Economic Impacts*:

“To convince a visitor to make an extended trip to an area, there have to be enough activities or places to visit. In rural communities there may not be enough to do in a single community to keep a visitor in the area for more than a few hours.

If a group of communities work together and promote their whole region, they may be much more successful in both attracting visitors and convincing them to stay more than just for a day.

This is why although attracting tourists is a competitive affair; ***businesses that cooperate with each other in order to attract visitors are more likely to succeed than those businesses that decide to ‘go it alone’.***¹

~~Julie Leones, “Tourism Trends and Rural Economic Impacts”

1. Partnerships and Organizational Structure

Unicoi County's organizations need to identify roles and communicate regularly and openly in order to reinforce how they complement each other while promoting and developing sustainable tourism.

Unicoi's organizations need to think and work cohesively together. Visitors seek a seamless experience where one attraction leads to another. Attractions are intertwined; the business recruitment, tourism promotion, and marketing needs to follow. The most effective sustainable tourism will result from working in partnership, not at cross-purposes.

The County should help connect efforts so leaders “row together”. The Chamber and County Web sites provide outlets for connecting attractions and services together. But this same clustering should also occur on-the-ground through signs, information at attractions, and informally by the front-line services provided to the public.

County leaders should consider the best organizational structure for engaging and recruiting additional supporters and to coordinate the multiple facets of the initiative. The County or design team might designate a coordinator for the initiative or create a leadership committee charged with contacting workshop participants and other key public officials, citizens, and business people, devising strategies for next steps, and ensuring ongoing activity on the action plans. Leaders also need to consider whether to coordinate efforts under an existing organization or to pursue creation of a new coordinating entity under a 501c3 designation. Ultimately the group needs a champion(s) to continue moving the initiative forward.

2. Community Support

Following the national and locally-based workshop, county leaders need to maintain momentum for community understanding and support for public lands and sustainable tourism. Many opportunities exist for broadening the engagement such as:

The initiative should provide more regular communications about successful efforts and the progress to date. These efforts are critical for informing the public and keeping supporters motivated as well as for bringing in additional people. The County is strongly suggested to create

a Web site or some sort of forum to actively monitor and promote the successes that occurs under the broader sustainable tourism initiative. It is vital that momentum be maintained and the best way to maintain momentum is to communicate action and successes! See the website developed by the Pennsylvania Wilds for communicating its success: <http://www.pawildsresources.org/>

The County may consider designating a communications coordinator to provide regular updates and resources to the network. The County could also secure volunteers from ETSU, AmeriCorps or VISTA to help generate regular communications.

Example

The resurrection of Chattanooga may provide Unicoi with an example of a local group leading an effort to engage residents and start with small successes toward realization of a broader vision.

“Chattanooga began a series of public meetings in 1984 to gather resident dreams for the future. After two years of job and population losses, Chattanooga residents were urged to rethink their community. Nearly 2,000 people answered the call to generate a list of dozens of community projects. In the process, organizers of Vision 2000 say that Chattanooga rediscovered its riverfront birthplace and its community pride.” As a Brookings report on Restoring Prosperity notes, “Ultimately, Chattanooga’s recovery was the result of planning, citizen engagement, public-private partnerships, and smart investments in transformative projects—a process that came to be known as “the Chattanooga way.”

<http://timesfreepress.com/news/2009/may/04/past-learning-future-plans/> and http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/reports/2007/05metropolitanpolicy_vey/200809_Chattanooga.ashx

3. Recognizing Tourism as an Economic Development Opportunity

There is a need to build the understanding that tourism is an industry capable of broadening the tax base and providing “real” jobs for residents. Unicoi should realize that tourism is an industry capable of providing good jobs that support families. An increase in tourism businesses can also directly support other professions including software and IT specialists, graphic artists, marketing, and accountants as well as other business owners who may be attracted by the natural beauty and outdoor opportunities available in the Valley Beautiful.

County leaders should encourage and seek industrial and commercial development in line with outdoor recreation and sustainable tourism. High-tech entrepreneurs and those in the “creative economy” may be attracted to the Valley Beautiful for its quality of life, natural assets, and supportive business environment.

The County can also cultivate businesses that produce products to support the nature and cultural heritage tourism market. These might include crafting kayaks, fishing equipment, hiking or camping gear that might be produced by existing business owners or craftspeople in the county.



County leaders should continue to cultivate entrepreneurs in the County. The design team can reach out to workshop registrants (those that attended and those that did not), following up on business ideas, perceived barriers, and their needs. The team can also create a network of support to nurture these entrepreneurs by creating a Web page and considering a blog or other regular online or print communications. The County should also reach out to professional resources such as the Business Enterprise Resource Office, East Tennessee State University, and the Small Business Administration about ongoing entrepreneur training programs.



As stated earlier, provide locations for visitors to purchase authentic locally-made goods such as farm quilts, wood-turned bowls, musical instruments, and discover local experiences as varied as music, moonshining, craft making, farming, and traditional cooking.

4. Community Character / Risk of Incompatible Development

The area's resources may be vulnerable to incompatible development. The challenge is to maintain natural and heritage resources—the sites as well as the appearance of a community and region that provides a visitor's impression of the experience that the region offers. The area needs to address incompatible development through the following actions:

Provide guidelines for local businesses—seek development in line with traditional community character and natural resources.

Be sure that tourism experiences connect to protection of natural resources. The County needs to protect, enhance, and interpret the resources that attract people in the first place.

Create signs at entrances to the county that set the stage for the visitor experience and shape overall impression of the community. Develop guidelines for signage and bill-boards.

Develop and implement an area beautification plan. Actively work to bury utilities, complete sidewalks, and add tree buffers.

Encourage conservation development. The 1000 Friends of Minnesota have just released a Conservation Design Scorecard (<http://www.1000fom.org/growing/lakes/conservation-design-scorecard>) as a guide to accommodate unprecedented growth while still conserving limited, yet cherished, natural resources.



Kendra Briechele



Kendra Briechele



Kendra Briechele



Kendra Briechele

5. Marketing

As Unicoi County develops a marketing and outreach strategy, it needs to communicate, educate, and promote using new technologies including social media outlets, Web-based material, and access to handheld devices (“Smartphones”). The County and its organizations need to increase its online presence. As acknowledged earlier in the Trends section, more Americans are using online or wireless media for everyday tasks, including researching travel destinations, booking trips, locating things to do and buy, and learning about a place before, during, and after a journey. Unicoi County needs to factor these technologies into their communications and realize the opportunity to reach new populations, including historically hard-to-reach groups or those traditionally underrepresented in conservation and outdoor recreation.

Continue outreach and promotion to the community. The town of Unicoi, the county Chamber, and other groups have regular features in county and regional newspapers but more groups need to reinforce these messages and voice support for how the tourism and recreation efforts benefit the community and local residents. The purpose is to create buzz through newspaper articles and other communication vehicles—especially Web sites and social media—to provide the sense of momentum and recognize the accomplishments. Leaders may also consider creating a regular blog, newspaper column, or radio feature. The community should also celebrate successes, being sure to engage residents in the changes for the better.

Consider how Unicoi County relates to surrounding counties.

Consider the tourism activities of surrounding counties and evaluate possibilities for working together. The Leones study supported this: “To convince a visitor to make an extended trip to an area, there have to be enough activities or places to visit. In rural communities there may not be enough to do in a single community to keep a visitor

See the **Pennsylvania Wilds** for information on weaving together a 12-county region (<http://www.pawilds.com/index.aspx> and <http://www.pawildsresources.org>) and the proposed **Columbia-Pacific National Heritage Area** that includes three counties, national and state parks, and two states. (<http://www.sbpac.com>)

in the area for more than a few hours. If a group of communities work together and promote their whole region, they may be much more successful in both attracting visitors and convincing them to stay more than just for a day.” Examples abound of how on-the-ground partnerships across jurisdictional lines resulted in increased tourism and benefits to the region’s communities.

6. Other Sources of Support

Unicoi County faces the challenges of development and sustaining other sources of support for the tourism initiative. Possible ways to do this might include:



Build/strengthen partnership with Tennessee Department of Transportation and pursue transportation enhancement money to support trail development, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, signs, building facades, and other enhancements.

Sustain relationships with Tennessee's strong resources for development of sustainable tourism, rural economic development and rural entrepreneurs. The design team should maintain contacts with University of Tennessee's Tourism Institute, East Tennessee State University's Small Business Development Center, and explore University of Tennessee's Institute of Agriculture's program on Creating a Rural Entrepreneurial System in Tennessee – CREST, led by Michael Wilcox. <http://trend.ag.utk.edu/crest.html>



Capitalize further on programs such as the Quilt Trail, Sunny Side Trail, and the Civil War Trails but tell Unicoi's own stories as well.

The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development has developed several driving trails under the Discover Tennessee Trails and Byways program. The Sunny Side Trail launched in May and the Chamber intends to supplement the attractions featured in the State's promotion of the Sunny Side trail. The Appalachian Resource Conservation & Development Council has coordinated the Quilt Trail, with five quilt stops featured in Unicoi County. The RC&D is further exploring creation of a driving tour brochure, similar to Greene County's "Main Street to the Mountains" guide of four tours outlined in a four-color, spiral bound booklet. The Greene County guide offers a series of day trips with scenic drives, points of interest, picnicking, and short walks and hikes.

Recruit more teachers to participate in the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Trail to Every Classroom (TTEC) program. Also, link workshop action plans with the TTEC curriculum to have Unicoi's youth involved in implementing actions such as signs, interpretive materials, Web site development, videos, and other components.

Support creation of the Tennessee specialty license plate for the Appalachian Trail (AT). North Carolina's AT license plate generates over \$100,000 yearly for grants back to projects that support the Trail. Tennessee is about 25 people shy of the 1,000 potential subscribers to launch the license plate program that will provide funding for Trail and facilities maintenance, land conservation, public information efforts, environmental monitoring, and the ATC's A Trail to Every Classroom

program.

See: http://www.appalachiantrail.org/site/c.mqLTIYOwGIF/b.4806113/k.ED0A/Tennessee_Appalachian_Trail_License_Plate.htm.

Seek additional funding. Communities that demonstrate vision, a sense of purpose, and strong, diverse partnerships are more likely to receive funding. In a competitive market, corporations, foundations, and even government agencies want to invest in ideas and initiatives with the possibility of strong returns. Through participation in The Conservation Fund's national course, through the award of the ARC grant and resulting work products, and the County's significant action to date, Unicoi has demonstrated its commitment and will have a story and track record to share with other potential future funders. Resources include the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Show Me the Money Web site: <http://nthpgrants.blogspot.com/>

7. Other Needs Identified

Other needs that interviewees expressed and the Fund shares:



The county needs additional services such as lodging and restaurants.

If Unicoi wants to expand the dollars spent in the county, it should provide more opportunities to do so. The county should encourage bed-and-breakfast lodging, inns, and additional cabins and locally-owned hotels and eating establishments. These establishments can serve residents as well

as visitors and they contribute to the authentic character of Unicoi County. New services should complement the existing design and scale of the community, ideally following design guidelines unique to Unicoi created by the county or towns.



Encourage stables and campgrounds for horse enthusiasts.

The National Forest offers horse trails (and is expanding them) that local businesses could complement by providing trail rides or campgrounds for horseback riders.

Provide additional campgrounds. Currently, only a few campgrounds exist. Private businesses could offer more quality campgrounds to attract families and outdoor enthusiasts.

Recruit industrial and retail uses to locate in the downtown. The County might consider acquisition of a downtown building to create a business incubator.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS/GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Over the last year, The Conservation Fund has talked with and interviewed numerous community leaders. Based on this on-the-ground research and our experience in communities across the country, we have developed this summary of findings. Our overarching observation is the following:

Unicoi County captivates. Every interaction with Unicoi County has made clear that this is a county poised to succeed. Community leaders have demonstrated a commitment to economic vitality based on the county's natural, cultural, and heritage assets. Community leaders achieve results because they truly believe in what they are doing. Unicoi County's commitment is compelling and as a result is attracting support.

During the time we've worked with Unicoi County, we've observed the following:

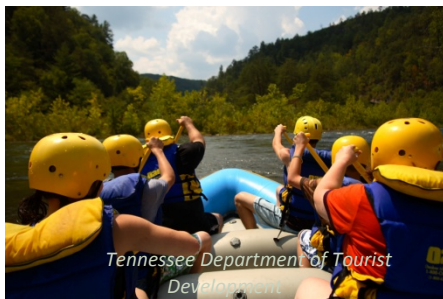
1. **Unicoi's leaders clearly articulate big-picture vision**—such as creation of Tanasi Arts Center, establishment of Rocky Fork as a state park, and the launch of a National Recreation Area.
2. **Unicoi's leaders are motivated by the desire to create a better place for themselves, their families, and the overall community quality of life.** They seek business growth but ask how economic development can serve the community.
3. **Citizens of Unicoi County chose to re-elect community leaders committed to sustainable tourism and outdoor recreation.** More action is anticipated as people see the initiative has “legs” and is here for the long-term.
4. Unicoi's leaders have been studying success stories and lessons learned from other examples of sustainable tourism but **have steadfastly defined their own vision and approach, based on the unique assets and vision for Unicoi's people and communities.** The strength of community economic development relies on, in the words of Johnny Lynch, the town of Unicoi's mayor, “use what we got to create jobs and revenues”. Unicoi County's assets are the mountains, the Forest, trout streams, Appalachian Trail, railroad and mountain heritage, and other natural and cultural heritage attractions.
5. Unicoi has embraced the natural resources of the Valley Beautiful, **strengthening its relationship with the U.S. Forest Service and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.** The County now holds monthly meetings with the Forest Service. These *strengthened relationships are already paying dividends* by the investments that these organizations are making in the community. **Unicoi County has realized it pays to be a “Trail Town”.** Unicoi County can further capitalize on the AT connection. One of the core tenets of business is to expand services to existing customers. By embracing the trail users—who are already attracted to the community, Unicoi may be able to attract more residents, visitors, and businesses. It may be an investment that takes awhile but one can look to other well-known Trail Towns (such as

Harpers Ferry, WV or Damascus, VA) that welcome hikers and reap benefits from that hospitality.

CONCLUSION

Nothing succeeds like success. Each sustainable tourism and nature-based recreation project that launches in the area provides evidence of the reality of the broader initiative. Support grows as more people see how each project strengthens the community—the appearance, the job opportunities, the activities that create enjoyment for residents and visitors, the pride conveyed to the county's youth. The projects catalyze to engage more residents in both silent and active support.

Attitudes are changing in Unicoi County with regards to tourism. As Unicoi County leaders continue to demonstrate their confidence and implement the tourism and outdoor recreation initiative, the public will continue to realize the benefits that can accrue from good jobs, retention of young people, stronger schools, continuation of community character and heritage, increased tax revenues, as well as the enthusiasm that comes from people attracted to the beauty and charm of Unicoi County. The County is well-positioned to attract additional support as momentum continues to grow!



RESOURCES

Pennsylvania Wilds Resource Center <http://www.pawildsresources.org/index.html>

Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guidelines http://www.pawildsresources.org/design_guide.html

Carroll County, Maryland Design

Expectations <http://ccgovernment.carr.org/ccg/compplan/design/default.asp>

Pennsylvania Wilds Artisan Trail http://www.pawildsresources.org/artisan_trail.html

Handmade in America <http://www.handmadeinamerica.org/>

Active Living by Design <http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/>

Economic Impact of Tennessee's State Parks http://tn.gov/environment/parks/economic_impact/

National Trust for Historic Preservation's Heritage Tourism

program <http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/heritage-tourism/>

Tennessee DOT enhancement funding program <http://www.tdot.state.tn.us/local/grants.htm>