

Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

Date of Submission: July 31, 1999

Title of Project:

Principal Investigators:

Ecotourism depends on natural resources such as forests, mountains, rivers and lakes. Most ecotourism activities take place on public lands or waterways, but are supported by a network of locally owned businesses. One of the most important aspects of this project has been the overwhelming interest in the project by people contacted as interviewees. They volunteered their time and shared their experiences with us. The many businesses offering or supporting nature-based/ecotourism activities, and the participation of interviewees in the project reveal the importance of nature-based tourism to people living in the area.

The project focused on determining existing and potential ecotourism activities, and identifying a set of key personal, environmental, economic and social factors needed for successful ecotourism operations, including barriers to their success. The study area is Bedford and Somerset counties in Pennsylvania, and Garret and Allegany counties in Maryland, with results having potential applicability to other regions in the Northeast.

In-depth interviews were chosen as the primary method for collecting data because we wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the nature-based tourism industry and the factors affecting the success of individual nature-based tourism businesses. Interviewing people with knowledge and expertise on the subject provides an important knowledge base which will contribute to improving the promotion and management of nature-based tourism. A list of 40 potential key informants was compiled, including individuals from state and county government agencies, tour operators and private landowners with ecotourism-related businesses. An interview instrument was designed to obtain the information base for this study. The instrument provides for a guided interview format that allows specific topics to be addressed in any order, at different lengths and in varied depth by each

interviewee. This has the advantage of letting interviewees freely give their insights on nature-based tourism and the factors affecting its success.

Most of the originally-planned set of key informant interviews have been already conducted. However, we are considering adding some additional groups of individuals to include, so it is likely that additional key interviews will take place. The set of personal, economic, environmental and social factors involved in running a successful ecotourism operation will be identified using content analysis of transcripts from the key informant interview transcripts. The wealth of information provided by key informants will be translated into business profiles, which will be disseminated through research and extension publications. Private landowners and local entrepreneurs interested in additional sources of income will be able to use these guidelines to start (or run) businesses that support ecotourism activities. Results will also help guide the decisions of state government and county agencies, and other organizations interested in promoting ecotourism.

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This is the final report for the project *Promoting Ecotourism on Private Lands*. The report highlights the activities carried out to date and our plans to follow up on the project. We intend to conduct additional key informant interviews which were not in the original study plan. The information from these interviews will be analyzed this fall, and publications are expected to follow. The following sections review the problem the study will address, the project goals and objectives, the methodology, and our plans for continuing the project.

For the purposes of this study, ecotourism is defined as follows:

“environmentally conscious nature-based travel enjoyed by people interested in learning about the nature, history and culture of the area visited, while providing economic and social benefits to host communities by expanding the community’s economic base, and contributing to natural resource conservation through nature interpretation and environmental education.”

The increase of ecotourism within the tourism industry has prompted governments, organizations and communities to develop strategies to promote ecotourism in their regions.

Numerous

counties have an existing extension focus on additional sources of income for private landowners, and e) these counties are adjacent to each other. A relatively small study area was selected to keep the focus of the project local and because of the time and budget constraints of the project.

The first step toward achieving project objectives was to conduct library and internet searches for relevant literature. The literature review provided a definition for ecotourism, a framework for classifying the key elements of ecotourism, an initial list of the factors in favor of and barriers to ecotourism success, and a list of options for linking ecotourism to private lands. (The Literature Review is attached as an Appendix). Information on existing nature-based/ecotourism operations was gathered for the study area from different sources, including promotional brochures and travel guides, the world wide web, natural resources maps of the area, and interviews of key informants. Examples of ecotourism for areas other than the study site were also gathered.

In-depth interviews were chosen as the primary method for collecting data because we wanted to understand nature-based tourism and the factors affecting the success or failure of ecotourism-oriented enterprises. Although research has addressed nature-based tourism as an activity, little is still known about the provision of ecotourism itself and the factors affecting its success or failure. Interviewing people with knowledge and expertise on the subject will provide an important knowledge base which will contribute to improving the promotion and management of nature-based tourism. Stratified purposeful sampling was used to select 40 key informants. This type of sampling involves selecting sources of information (i.e., key informants) that will provide the researcher with important and detailed information about the research problem under study (Patton 1990). The framework used for stratifying and selecting key informants is presented in Figure 1. Key informants were selected at the state and county levels (including government agencies, tour operators and private landowners in each county) because ecotourism is (or can be) promoted at each level. The

triangle

Level	

The list of agencies and businesses from which the key informants were drawn is presented in Table 1. We sought people who would be able to provide the most information about nature-based tourism in the study region, programs promoting nature-based tourism in the area, and factors related to the success of nature-based tourism enterprises. As potential key informants were identified, they were contacted by telephone. After a brief description of the project, they were asked to participate as key informants, and, if they agreed, the time, date and location for a face-to-face interview was identified. A complete list of the specific key informants and their addresses is included as an Appendix.

An interview instrument was designed to obtain information relevant to the objectives of this study. The instrument was designed using a semi-structured format with both open- and closed-ended questions, including specific prompts to elicit additional information if specific items were not addressed. This instrument was further adapted into three formats by changing question ordering and language used. The different formats were designed for different categories of interviewees: government, tour operators, and private landowners. This was done to increase rapport and elicit the

most appropriate information from interviewees. Language can be a significant barrier to obtaining good information. Using language that the interviewee would use in a day-to-day environment is important to assure the amount and quality of the information provided. It was important to minimize possible confusion about the intent of specific questions and to ensure that the interviewee feels comfortable talking to the interviewer (Henderson 1998).

Key informants from government agencies were especially important for providing information about the tourism promotion programs for each state and county considered and the business development activities in each region. Tour operators provide either tours, guide services

or Key Informants identified a 23 question top

and campgrounds. Also, tour operators and outfitters provide equipment and guided tours to visitors. Restaurants and convenience stores supply ecotourists with food and other supplies during their stay.

The rails-to-trails section of Somerset county (PA) is an increasingly important area for ecotourism. The number of local businesses supporting ecotourism has increased in areas such as Confluence and Rockwood. Also important in attracting ecotourism enthusiasts is the C&O Canal and Tow Path in Allegany county (MD). However, much potential is yet to be realized in this area, particularly in terms of the network of local business needed to support ecotourism activities. Local events have been one way to promote tourism and bring people to an area. Many of these events focus around historical events or local traditions. Maple syrup and fall foliage festivals are but two examples of such events that bring together local residents and visitors. The importance of local events was repeatedly mentioned by key informants as central to the success of locally owned businesses and of ecotourism ventures in general.

A list of potential ecotourism activities and the natural resource base supporting them has not been completed because information of existing ecotourism in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and examples from other areas has not been synthesized and integrated. Additionally, a qualitative evaluation of the potential for ecotourism activities in the study area has not been possible because key informant interviews have not been completed, and many of those that have been completed have not been transcribed or analyzed. The following summary of potential ecotourism activities and their natural resource base has been drafted based upon the information gathered to date.

Examples of ecotourism abound in the United States. Tour Operators and outfitters have designed tours around ecotourism activities and are actively promoting nature-based tourism. Examples of operators for the Northeast include Approach Adventure Travel and Escape Routes out of Vermont, Earth Treks out of Maine, True Wheel Tours of New York, Adventure Plus based in

Illinois, and Zoar Outdoor in Massachusetts. These operators offer custom trips for ecotourism enthusiasts. Trips are usually offered as a tour package, including meals, lodging, equipment, instruction, and self or guided tours. Prices range from \$30 to \$700 depending on individual trip characteristics (e.g., activities included, length of stay, number of participants).

Most key informant interviews have been conducted. Only those key informants on the List of Key Informants marked with an asterisk have yet to be interviewed (See List of Key Informants in the Appendix). Interviewees expressed their interest and support for the project through their volunteer participation and by sharing their experience with us. The wealth of information provided by key informants will be translated into business profiles, which will be disseminated through research and extension publications. These profiles can be used by people interested in starting (or already running) businesses linked to ecotourism. Additionally, they will help guide the decisions of those interested in promoting ecotourism in their areas. This includes private landowners and local entrepreneurs interested in additional sources of income and for government agencies and policy makers designing strategies to promote and implement ecotourism.

We are currently completing key informant interviews and transcribing information from the interviews that have been completed. We plan to include 2 additional groups of key informants to the project. The first group includes environmental organizations working in the area. Their views are expected to bring a more preservationist, non-use perspective on natural resource strategies for the area. The second group is natural resources managers and foresters working with public lands, or as consultants for private landowners. This group is expected to provide insights into ecotourism activities being carried out on public or private lands and their impact on the resource base (such as

overuse of natural resources, degradation of trails, and potential conflicts with extractive industries, such as forestry and mining).

Additionally, we will conduct 2 facilitative discussions, one in Maryland for people from Garrett and Allegany counties and another in Pennsylvania for people from Bedford and Somerset counties. Anyone interested in ecotourism in the region will be invited to the discussions, which will be publicized through local extension organizations, business development organizations, and newspaper advertisements. The objective of these discussions is to validate and complement the information obtained from key informant interviews. The format of these discussions will consist of an oral presentation by the project coordinator on ecotourism and factors for its success (based on the initial results of the study), followed by a discussion to answer the questions: “Do you agree? Are these the key factors for ecotourism success?”

We are in the process of seeking travel funds to carry out interviews of the two new groups of key informants and for conducting the two facilitative discussions.

Table A1.1 below lists the expenditures made under the project “Promoting Ecotourism on Private Lands.”

All of the funds budgeted for graduate assistantships were spent. The majority of the budget for graduate assistantships (\$6,007.50 out of \$8,410.50) was used to pay for Gabriela Silva’s assistantship. Gabriela is the person responsible for conducting the majority of the proposed work under the project. The original plan, however, was to spend these funds during the second half of the project year, as we had obtained funds for Gabriela for the first half of the proposed laPersonnel

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Gabriela Silva made several trips to conduct key informants interviews in the study area

Although frequently associated with third world destinations, ecotourism is now common in first world destinations such as Australia, Canada and the United States. The use of the term ecotourism is mostly attributed to Ceballos-Lascurain (1987) who used it to describe nature-based tourism in tropical areas (Boo 1990). Elizabeth Boo (1990) used the term interchangeably with nature tourism. However, as the ecotourism industry began to flourish and more studies on the subject became available, the term ecotourism was subsumed as a subset of the umbrella-notion of nature tourism.

Definitions of ecotourism abound (Orams 1995, Wight 1993, Boyd and Butler 1996, Mandziuk 1995, Herath 1996, Buckley, 1994, Linberg, Enriquez and Sproule 1996, Nelson 1994). However, all have common characteristics such as

- nature-based tourism,
- appreciation of nature as the primary motive to participate,
- fostering conservation of the natural resource base on which it depends (which translates into protecting and minimizing negative impacts on the environment),
- providing benefits to local hosts (which translates into economic opportunities),
- respect for local culture and minimizing social impacts, and

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Most ecotourism studies have focused on the experience itself, and the setting in which it occurs (Boo 1990, Valentine 1993, Aylward et al. 1996). With respect to the experience, ecotourism normally involves

- travel to natural areas (Boyd and Butler 1996, Wight 1993, Orams 1995),
- low-impact on the destination site (Williams 1992, Nelson 1994) and
- fostering environmental principals (Boyd and Butler 1996).

Ecotourism experiences also contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of the culture and natural history of the area visited (Mandziuk 1995, Herath 1996), and of the environment (Nelson 1994).

The setting for ecotourism includes the natural environment, host communities and the equipment involved in the activities. Structures for ecotourism frequently involve rustic accommodations, trails, and basic amenities that tend to foster a stronger appreciation and closer contact with nature (Williams, 1992). A key factor relating to host communities is whether ecotourism providers are local. Local providers generally benefit host communities more than outside providers by reducing economic leakages. Thus, local providers tend to provide greater expansion of the local economic base (Lindberg, Enriquez, and Sproule 1996).

No studies were identified that focus on the provider or on the provision of ecotourism itself. Some of the case studies on ecotourism consider how ecotourism is being provided by addressing the need for – or existence of – a code of ethics for operators. Private lands can play a significant role in providing “settings” where ecotourism can take place, and private landowners are interested in providing ecotourism as an additional source of income. Thus, studies such as this one are needed which will focus on the provision of ecotourism on private lands and on the factors related to successful ecotourism on private lands.

Providing ecotourism means making available the resources people need to get involved in ecotourism activities. Ecotourism typically is provided by a network of businesses that, together, offer the different products and services needed by the ecotourist. This includes food services and food supplies, sports and outfitting equipment and supplies, lodging, and guide services. These businesses have some underlying characteristics that make them successful.

Table 1 presents a list of factors which from the definition of ecotourism given earlier. The natural environment is the location where ecotourism takes place. Culture refers to the cultural aspects, including the history, of the host community and of the area that are part of the

they take place (Orams 1995). In many cases, and despite good intentions and attempts to reduce negative effects on the natural environment, tourism has been detrimental to the environment. Damaged vegetation, disruption to wildlife, soil compaction, water quality problems, air and noise pollution, are but a few of the negative environmental effects caused by tourism(Mathieson and Wall 1982). Additionally, protected areas (e.g., national and state parks) have undergone the cumulative and interactive effects of many small-scale, independent, low-intensity tourism developments over the decades (Nelson 1994). Increasing the number of ecotourism activities can pose environmental problems because, despite being non-consumptive and low-impact, people engaging in ecotourism consume resources and generate waste (Office of Technology Assessment 1993).

Based on Mathieson and Wall (1982), economic factors are those related to economic structure and economic development including the economic base, patterns of investment, and economic leakages. Tourism can help the stability of local economies by diversifying the economy through the creation of businesses providing tours and catering the tourist. However, the seasonal character of tourism creates economic fluctuations throughout the year that can be detrimental to the stability of the local economy. Additionally, the existence of personnel skilled in the provision and management of tourism enterprises is key to tourism success. The existence of educational programs is fundamental in training these personnel. Local investment in tourism is important to strengthen the local economy and minimize economic leakages. Economic leakages occur when profits generated locally are exported (i.e., “leaked”) to another locale.

Additionally, marketing and human resources play an important role in the success of ecotourism enterprises (Mandiuz 1995). Following Mandiuz (1995), for individual businesses,

cooperative marketing is an affordable way to attract visitors to an area. For regional agencies, strategies based on symbols, images and other regional characteristics can attract visitors by setting the region apart from others.

Social factors are related to social structure and organization, including demographic characteristics, availability and quality of social amenities, attitudes toward tourists, and local traditions and culture (Mathiesen and Wall 1982). A friendly and cooperative host community enhances local business opportunities for tourism (Bird and Inman 1969). Focusing on impacts, Fox suggests that social factors are expressed by changes in values, relationships, life styles, quality of life, behavior and creative expressions in the locale (Fox 1977, In: Mathiesen and Wall 1982).

Additionally, ecotourism should be locally defined and implemented in terms of specific activities and structures, and potential environmental, cultural, and economic effects for the host area (Nelson 1994). Visitor guidelines are key in enhancing appropriate behavior of visitors to both cultural and natural areas. Ecotourism guidelines highlight expected behavior of visitors with respect to nature and to the host community and environmentally sensitive and low-impact activities (Mandziuk 1995). Two important factors for successful ecotourism destinations go beyond quality of services and facilities to include the quality of the experience itself and the positive host environment (Moore and Carter 1993)

The concept of carrying capacity is often mentioned in the ecotourism literature. Carrying capacity is the maximum number of visitors who can visit an area without leading to severe environmental degradation or serious decline in the quality of the experience gained by visitors

Grouseland Tours

Tours at Old Bedford village, Adventure Marine, and Grouseland

Telephone (814) 784-5000

C: Mountain and soft ride biking. Also canoe trips available

E: Biking tours and sales

Farm tours

Fishing

Hiking

Blue Knob Resort

Telephone (814) 239-5111

C: four-season resort

E: Resort

Hunting

Site Seeing

Bedford County Covered Bridges

Bedford County Conference & Visitors Bureau

Telephone (814) 623-1771

C: car tour, historic

E: Covered Bridges

Jenny's Custom Journeys

Telephone (814) 623-0965

C: Guided tours for groups of 20 or more

E: Tours and travel

Lodging with nature packages

Bedford's Covered Bridge Inn

RR 2, BOX 196, Schellsburg, PA 15559

Telephone (814) 733-4093

C: catch and release fly fishing in a limestone stream

E: Lodging

Name:

Agency:

Position:

Length of time in position:

. (Existing) What nature-based tourism opportunities are available in the county?

. (Promotion, programs, coordination among agencies, examples, private landowners, local entrepreneurs).

(coordination with businesses, motivation, steps, factors, success, characteristics of entrepreneur, problems, mistakes, barriers.) Examples. What steps do people need to follow to start a nature-based tourism business? What are some of the things people need to consider before starting this business? What kind of person do you think it takes to be successful in this kind of business? What are some of the problems people face when starting a business? How can they avoid or overcome these problems? What were some of the mistakes people make when starting a business? What are some of the barriers that prevent people from starting their own nature-based tourism business?

. (State programs in starting, and in running, help, problems, importance to success.) Has the state government helped you start your businesses in any way? In what way? state government programs? Importance to your success? state government as a source of problems in starting your business? overcoming problems? Has the state government helped you with your business in any way after it was running? In what way? state government programs? Were you involved? In which ones? Importance to your success? state government as a source of problems in running your business? overcoming problems? Do you think there is something the state government ought to be doing that it is not to help people start (or run) a nature-based tourism business? Examples.

. (State programs in starting, and in running, help, problems, importance to success.) Has the local government helped you start your businesses in any way? In what

way? local government programs? Importance to your success? Local government as a source of problems in starting your business? overcoming problems? Has the local government helped you with your business in any way after it was running? In what way? local government programs? Were you involved? In which ones? Importance to your success? Local government as a source of problems in running your business? overcoming problems? Do you think there is something the local government ought to be doing that it is not to help people start a nature-based tourism business? Examples.

. (Help, problems, events.) Has the local community helped your business? In what way? Has the community given you any problems with respect to your business? Give me some specific examples. Do you think there is something the community ought to be doing that it is not to help people start nature-based tourism business? Examples.

. (Examples, support in starting, and in running, importance to success.) Are there any local organizations that supported you in starting your business? What organizations? type of support they give? importance to your success? Examples. Are there any local organizations that supported you in running your business? What organizations? type of support they give? importance to your success? Examples.

. (Potential, ecotourism.) What nature-based tourism opportunities are available in the county but are not currently being promoted? Have you heard of the term ecotourism? How would you define ecotourism?

. Is there any other information you wish to share about your experience with your business?

Name:

Name of Business:

Position:

Length of time in position:

. (Guided tours offered, tours on private lands, certified guides, motivation, steps, factors, success, characteristics of entrepreneur, problems, mistakes, barriers.) Tell me a little bit about your business. How did you become interested in starting this business? What steps did you follow to start your business? What are some of the things you considered before starting this business? What kind of person do you think it takes to be successful in this kind of business? What problems did you face getting started in this business? How did you overcome these problems? What were some of the mistakes you made when starting your business?

. (Help, problems, events.) Has the local community helped your business? In what way? Has the community given you any problems with respect to your business? Give me some specific examples. Do you think there is something the community ought to be doing that it is not to help people start nature-based tourism business? Examples.

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. (State programs in starting, and in running, help, problems, importance to success.) Has the local government helped you start your businesses in any way? In what way? local government programs? Importance to your success? Local government as a source of problems in starting your business? overcoming problems? Has the local government helped you with your business in any way after it was running? In what way? local government programs? Were you involved? In which ones? Importance to your success? Local government as a source of problems in running your business? overcoming problems? Do you think there is something the local government ought to be doing that it is not to help people start a nature-based tourism business? Examples.

. (Existing, potential, ecotourism.) What nature-based tourism opportunities are you aware of in the county? not currently being promoted? Have you heard of the term ecotourism? How would you define ecotourism?

. Is there any other information you wish to share about your experience with your business?

Name:

Name of Business:

Position:

Length of time in position:

. (Motivation, steps, factors, success, characteristics of entrepreneur, problems, mistakes, barriers.) Tell me a little bit about your business. How did you become interested in starting this business? What steps did you follow to start your business? What are some of the things you considered before starting this business? What kind of person do you think it takes to be successful in this kind of business? What problems did you face getting started in this business? How did you overcome these problems? What were some of the mistakes you made when starting your business?

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Choice Camping Grounds
Doris Wertz
209 Choice Camp Ground Rd.
Mann's Choice, PA 15550
(814) 623-9272

Black Timber Outfitters
Thomas Mills
8631 Somerset Pike
Boswell, PA 15531
(814) 629-9307

Cedarrow's Bison Farms
Ann Darrow
Rt. 30 (2 miles west of Schellsburg)
Schellsburg, PA
(814) 733-4908

River's Edge Café
Anna Marie Yakubisin
203 Yough St.
Confluence, PA 15424
(814) 395-5059

Chamber of Commerce
Hank Park, Executive Director
601 N. Center Ave.
Somerset, 15501

Woodland Campsites, Inc.
Grace Shoffspall
Route 601 North
RD 7, Box 189
Somerset, PA 15501
(814) 445-8860

Somerset County Development Council
Nicholas Felice, Director
125 N. Center Ave.
Somerset, PA
(814) 445-9655

In Town Inn
Paul Hendershot
906 E. Main St.
Rockwood, PA 15557
(814) 926-4131

Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau
Lynn Barger, President
120 E. Main St.
Ligonier, PA
(724) 238-5661

Country Trail
Douglas Morgan
7 Bridge St.
Rockwood, PA 15557
(814) 924-2117

White Water Adventures
James Greenbaum
Ohiopyle, PA
(800) 992-7238

* The Maryland Department of Natural
Resources (MDNR)
Outdoor Adventures
Barbara Knisely
Tawes State Office Bldg.
Annapolis, MD 21401
(410) 260-8155

* Maryland Office of Tourism Development
(410) 767-3400

Allegany Visitors Bureau
Kevin Adams, Executive Director
P.O. Box 1445
Cumberland, MD 21501
(301) 777-5132

Small Business Development
Mark Malec, Director
957 National Highway
LaVale, MD 21502
(301) 729-8700

Adventure Sports
Joshua Nossaman, Manager
131 E. Main St.
Frostburg, MD
(301) 689-0345

Allegany Expeditions, Inc.
Darrell Spence
10310 Columbus Ave.
I-68 exit 45
Cumberland, MD 21502
(301) 722-5170

The Inn at Walnut Bottom
Kristen Hansen
120 Greene St.
Cumberland, MD 21502
(301) 777-0003

Hidden Springs Campground
Linda Klingerman
Pleasant Valley Road
I-68, exit 50
Flintstone, MD
(814) 767-9676

Little Orleans Campground & Park Area
Elaine Sipes
31661 Green Forest Drive, SE
Little Orleans, MD 21766
(301) 478-2325

Town Hill Hotel B & B
Robert Sinclair
I-68 exit 68
Little Orleans, MD 21766
(301) 478-2794

Chamber of Commerce
Kenneth Wishnick, Director
15 Visitors Center Dr.
McHenry, MD 21541
(301) 387-4386

Cooperative Extension
Jim Simms
1916 Maryland Highway. Suite A
Mountain Lake Park, MD 21550
(301) 334-6960

Adventure Sports Institute of Western
Maryland
Sharon Elsey
Office Manager
P.O. Box 151
McHenry, MD 21541
(301) 387-3032

Savage River Lodge
Mike Dreisbach and Jan Russell
I-68 exit 29
(301) e-6nnFWa.6.92 TD -0.0351 Tc 0.p.92 nj 0e

* Golden Wings Nature Tours
Connie Skipper
293 Bray Hill Lane
Oakland, MD 21550
(301) 387-5227

Spring Creek Outfitters
Allen Noland
578 Deep Creek Dr.
McHenry, MD 21541
(301) 387-2034

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