Combining Sustainable Community Development with Sustainable Tourism Development

J. Thomas Chesnutt
National Extension Tourism Conference
Park City, Utah
June 15, 2009
Sustainable Tourism Programs
Extension Involvement

• Alabama Communities of Excellence
• Alabama-Mississippi Rural Tourism Conference
• Alabama Scenic River Trail
• Alabama Agri-tourism Trail
• Outdoor Alabama Partnership
• Alabama Scenic Byways
• Alabama Wildflower Advisory Committee
• Alabama Birding Trails
• Gulf State Park Partnership
Alabama Communities of Excellence
Alabama Communities of Excellence

Need sustainable communities in order to have sustainable tourism.

Requirements for Success

- Leadership
- Strategic plan
- Implementation of plan
Alabama Communities of Excellence

Two States

“Clearly, there are two Alabamas, one urban and the other rural. The first is enjoying relative success, although there are deeply distressed pockets within our urban areas. The second, for the most part, is making little or no progress and continues to keep Alabama from being recognized as a successful competitor…”

Alabama Commerce Commission Report
March 23, 2000
Alabama Communities of Excellence

What is the Alabama Community of Excellence Program?

• A broad, comprehensive approach to community development
• Directed to communities with a population of 2,000 to 18,000
• Intended to serve as a vital link between government, private sector, and centers of higher learning across the state
Alabama Communities of Excellence

How is it structured?

- Graduated, three phase initiative, with specific components
- Each component is managed by a partner
- Communities receive recognition of accomplishment following the completion of each phase
- The community is declared an “Alabama Community of Excellence” once the final phase is completed
- Re-certification required to maintain status
Alabama Communities of Excellence

Partners in the ACE Program

- Alabama Association of Regional Councils - AARC
- Alabama Cooperative Extension System - ACES
- Alabama Power Company - APC
- Alabama Historical Commission - AHC
- Alabama Southern Rural Access Program - ASRAP
- Tennessee Valley Authority - TVA
- Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama - CCAA
- Reading Alabama Inc. - RAI
- Region’s Bank - Region
- Auburn University’s Economic Development Institute - AU/EDI
- University of Alabama’s Center for Economic Development - UA/CED
- United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development - USDA
Who are the players in Alabama Tourism?

Alabama Tourism Partnership
Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel
Convention & Visitors Bureaus and Chambers of Commerce
Alabama Travel Council

Trade Associations
Alabama Hospitality Association
Alabama Association of C&VBs
Alabama Restaurant Association
AAA Alabama Motorists Association

Other State Agencies
Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources
ADECA – Land & Water
Dept. of Transportation
Alabama Historical Commission
Alabama Arts Council
Who are the players in Alabama Tourism? (continued)

Tourism Organizations
  Local
  Regional

Federal Agencies
  US Forest Service
  Extension
  USDA Rural Development
  Army Corps of Engineers
  National Park Service
  TVA
  Appalachian Regional Commission

Statewide Groups
  Regional Planning Agencies
  Small Business Development Centers
Alabama Tourism Partnership

Purpose – implement the Tourism Strategic Plan for Alabama

Mission – To help Alabama realize the full potential of its tourism industry
Alabama Tourism Partnership

Partners:
Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel
Alabama Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus
Alabama Travel Council
Alabama Hospitality Association
Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Alabama Cooperative Extension System - ECDI
Alabama Tourism Partnership

Activities/Products:

Raising awareness of tourism as economic development

Legislative Tourism Reception

Current Legislative issues:

Tourism incentive legislation
Lodging taxes
Funding for ABTT
Sustainable Tourism

“Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of the present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing the opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.”

World Tourism Organization
Sustainable Tourism

Sustainability Principles:

• Sustainability implies permanence
• Optimum use of resources
• Sustains the well-being of local people
• Stresses local ownership
• Sustainability is integrated into all aspects of development
Alabama - Mississippi Rural Tourism Conference
Ala-Miss Rural Tourism Conference

- Focus is always on helping Alabama and Mississippi communities capitalize on tourism opportunities
- 2-day conference packed with educational sessions
- Emphasis is on success stories
- Desire is to keep cost affordable to individuals/organizations on a limited budget
Ala-Miss Rural Tourism Conference

2007 – Tuscaloosa, AL

Keynote - Phil Hardwick, Stennis Institute of Government Tourism
Nature Tourism
Impact of the Arts in Rural Communities
Branding and Positioning a Community on a Limited Budget
Themes and Trail Development
Marketing History
Music Trails – the Mississippi Blues Trail
Mystery of Motorcoach Success: Building a Prize Package
Trends in Cultural and Heritage Tourism
Practical Tips for Reviving Your Communities Image

Keynote – Lee Sentell, Alabama Tourism Department
Ala-Miss Rural Tourism Conference

Sponsors
- Tenn-Tom Waterway Authority
- Mississippi Development Authority (Tourism)
- Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel
- Appalachian Regional Commission
- Greater Starkville Development Partnership
- Tuscaloosa C&VB
- Aberdeen Visitors Bureau
- North Alabama Tourism Association
- Mississippi State University Extension Service
- Alabama Cooperative Extension System
Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail
Alabama AgriTourism Trail

• Partners:
  – Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel
  – Alabama Cooperative Extension System
  – Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries
  – Alabama Farmers Federation

• Established:
  June 2003
# Alabama AgriTourism Trail

## Activities & Attractions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm tours</th>
<th>Holiday visits/tours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bed &amp; Breakfasts</td>
<td>Hay rides</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roadside stands &amp; markets</td>
<td>Barn dances</td>
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<tr>
<td>U-pick operations</td>
<td>Petting zoo</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-farm sales</td>
<td>Photography/painting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Festivals or fairs</td>
<td>Camping &amp; picnicking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture related crafts/gifts</td>
<td>Habitat improvement projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guided crop tours</td>
<td>Bird watching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garden/nursery tours</td>
<td>Wildlife viewing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winery tours</td>
<td>Hunting dog training &amp; competition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical agricultural exhibits</td>
<td>Trap &amp; skeet shooting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exotic animal farm</td>
<td>Fee fishing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farm visits &amp; stays</td>
<td>Fee hunting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazes (corn, hay)</td>
<td>Farm skills/ farm work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Alabama AgriTourism Trail

Product of the Partnership

- Assessment of existing agri-tourism attractions in Alabama.
- Comprehensive inventory that is updated periodically.
- High quality advertisements (print and web) to promote a single web site to allow tourists to identify agri-tourism attractions that are currently available to travelers.
- Web site that will identify, by category and location, agri-tourism attractions. Key will be keeping the site up-to-date.
- Marketing of Agri-Tourism Trail, including links with Partners’ web sites – links should be prominently featured in each of these web sites.
- Development of a series of workshops, seminars and publications to assist farmers and entrepreneurs in the development of future agri-tourism attractions.
- Certification of attractions on the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail.
Alabama AgriTourism Trail

Search the Alabama Agri-Tourism Trail

Agri-tourism can take many forms. Roadside stands and farmers' markets offer farm-fresh produce and interaction with growers. Farms may open to the public for wildlife watching and hunting. Ag tours, on-farm bed-and-breakfasts, and dude ranches give tourists the fresh air, open spaces, and relaxation of country life.

U-pick operations, pumpkin patches, Christmas tree farms, hay mazes, farm-animal petting zoos, wine tasting, ag heritage museums, festivals, and fairs all attract visitors.

Agricultural tourism operations provide a bridge between urban and rural dwellers.

Agri-tourism is one alternative for improving the incomes and potential economic viability of small farms and rural communities. Some forms of agri-tourism enterprises are well developed in Alabama, including fairs, festivals, etc. Other possibilities still offer potential development.
Alabama AgriTourism Trail

Tourism Partnership

Four agencies and organizations have joined together to form the Alabama AgriTourism Partnership. These agencies and organizations are:

- Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries
- Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel
- Alabama Farmers Federation
- Alabama Cooperative Extension System

The purpose of the AgriTourism Partnership is to develop and market a statewide agri-tourism database and directory, the Alabama Agri-tourism Trail.
Alabama AgriTourism Trail

Marketing Examples
Alabama AgriTourism Trail

Marketing Examples

Agri-tourism is a growing business in Alabama. Be part of the new Agri-tourism trail by registering your farm today! Whether you operate a U-pick farm, roadside stand, pumpkin patch or innkeeping lodge, www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com can help you advertise. And it’s FREE!

The site, which was developed by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System in cooperation with Alabama Farmers, restaurants and lodging, will give customers a one-stop home on the Internet for agri-tourism information.

Farms, festivals, petting zoos and more may join the Alabama Agri-tourism trail by filling out an electronic application at www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com. Once an inventory of agricultural destinations is compiled, the site will be marketed to travelers.

Register your farm today!

www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com
Alabama AgriTourism Trail

Marketing Examples

AgriTourism Website Helps Farmers Advertise

By Jeff Hallow

The Alabama Farmers Federation has joined forces with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries and Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel to launch a new website aimed at promoting Alabama farms as travel destinations.

The website, www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com, will provide resources with a one-stop home on the web for agriculture-related information. J. Paul Till, director of the Federation’s Department of Public Relations and Communications, said the website will help Alabama farmers cash in on the agritourism boom.

“Agritourism, U-pick operations and agricultural festivals are a big business. With farmers facing low commodity prices and escalating input costs, they are looking for new ways to add value to their products,” Till said. “Agritourism has the potential to increase farmers’ profits while stimulating economic development in rural Alabama. We are proud to be among the partners who are making www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com a reality.”

Till said right now the Alabama agritourism partnership is asking farmers who are engaged in tourism-related activities to provide information about their operations to the site. Farmers, farm sales, parks, zoos and more may join the Alabama agritourism mail by filling out an online application at www.AlabamaAgriTourism.com. Once an inventory of agricultural destinations is completed, the site will be marketed to tourists.

The online application includes information about tourism activities offered at the farm as well as hours of operation and driving directions. There’s also a place to list the farm’s website, if available. In addition, agritourism sites will be able to check boxes on the form to indicate the availability of restrooms, facilities for the disabled, food service and if the farm accepts credit cards.

Till said this online database of agritourism destinations will allow travelers to search for farms and events by activity, product or region of the state.

“This online listing is FREE to Alabama farmers and is a great way for them to promote their operations,” Till said.
Alabama AgriTourism Trail

Desired Results of Partnership

• Added revenues for farmers and agri-businesses.

• Increased attractions for small communities – develop critical mass of attractions.
Alabama AgriTourism Trail

Publications

Developing an Agri-Tourism Attraction in Alabama
Outdoor Alabama Partnership

Ala Cooperative Extension System
Ala Bureau of Tourism & Travel
Ala Dept. of Conservation
Ala Wildlife Federation
ADECA
Ala Farmers Federation
Nat‘l Park Service
Tennessee Valley Authority
US Forest Service
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Fish & Wildlife Service
USDA NRCS
Outdoor Alabama Partnership

Purpose

• Promote existing outdoor recreation opportunities to both travelers and residents.
• Assist communities in developing nature and outdoor-based tourism opportunities, particularly in rural areas.
• Assist local community development by providing assistance in planning and developing outdoor recreation activities
Outdoor Alabama Partnership

Product/Strategies

- Initial focus will be on assisting ABTT in their promotion of 2006 as the Year of Outdoor Alabama.
- Develop a comprehensive inventory of outdoor recreation opportunities in Alabama. ADECA will take the lead in this area.
- Develop a resource booklet of outdoor recreation related resources available from each partner. This would include funding/grants, technical assistance, and availability to assist local communities.
- Web site that would provide “one stop shopping” for outdoor recreation in Alabama that would include county, state and federal resources.
- Develop workshops, seminars and publications to assist communities and entrepreneurs in the development and marketing of nature and outdoor-based tourism.
- Long term – develop a physical center that would highlight Alabama’s outdoor recreation opportunities. Each agency/organization would provide information.
Outdoor Alabama Partnership

Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel
Alabama Department of Conservation
Alabama Wildlife Federation
Alabama Cooperative Extension System
Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs
Alabama Farmers Federation (ALFA)
Alabama Power Company
National Park Service
Natural Resources Conservation Service
US Forest Service
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Alabama Scenic Byways Program
Alabama Scenic Byways Program

Alabama Scenic Byways Program is still developing
Established in 2000 with the Alabama the Beautiful Act
Prior to that there was no standard for the designation of scenic byways in Alabama
Currently Alabama has:
  3 national scenic byways
  6 “official” state scenic byways
Alabama Scenic Byways Program

What is a Scenic Byway?

A Scenic Byway is a route that connects the traveler to the unique natural, scenic, historical, recreational, archeological, and/or cultural heritage of the area and whose intrinsic qualities are protected.
Alabama Scenic Byways Program
Alabama Scenic Byways Program

Why these roads?

• The resources found along the road
• The quality of the visitor experience
• The passion of the people who live near them
Tourism Dollars

- Visitors spent $1.8 billion in counties adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway, according to a recent study.

- Two scenic byways in Colorado had an estimated 10% increase in tourism related sales due to byway designation.
Alabama Scenic Byways Program

Major obstacle to becoming a state scenic byway – developing Corridor Management Plan

• Average cost = $213,250
• Demonstration project
  o Estimated cost = $49,000
Alabama Wildflower Advisory Committee
Alabama Wildflower Advisory Committee

Goals

• Establish a marketing plan for public awareness
• Establish a strong working relationship with all parties interested in roadside wildflowers
• Effectively and efficiently manage wildflowers on Alabama’s roadways
• Establish a permanent Alabama Wildflower Committee
Alabama Wildflower Advisory Committee

ALDOT Wildflower Program

Focus was to develop guidelines that encompassed the use and preservation of wildflower species that are compatible with the Department vegetation management program and will add color to the state’s highway roadsides.
Alabama Wildflower Advisory Committee

Concerns of Wildflower Advocates

- Too much mowing and herbiciding
- Mowing at incorrect times and in inappropriate locations
- Lack of concern for naturally-occurring wildflowers
- Too much reliance on non-native wildflowers
Alabama Wildflower Advisory Committee

Implementation of Strategic Plan

Areas of Controversy:

• Native versus non-native
• What is native?
• Maintenance procedures
  – Herbiciding – amount and location
  – Mowing – amount, when and where
Alabama
Scenic River Trail
Alabama Scenic River Trail

“The Nation’s Longest One State River Trail”

- Coosa River to Alabama River to Mobile Bay
- Completed trail will be 631 miles long
Alabama Scenic River Trail

Program Status:

- 1 ½ years of planning
- Initiated by three individuals with a passion for boating/canoeing
- Grand opening – June 6, 2008
- Nominated for National Recreational Trail designation
Alabama Scenic River Trail

Obstacles:

- Six dams without locks in upper portion of Trail
- Lack of designated campsites
- Lack of fuel in lower stretches of Trail
- Mixed user type interactions – paddle versus power
Alabama Scenic River Trail

Partners:
- Alabama Power Company
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel
- Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources
- National Park Service
- Alabama Association of Resource and Conservation Districts
- Alabama Cooperative Extension System
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Alabama Historical Commission
- Chambers of Commerce & CVBs & Regional River & Canoe Organizations
- Boy Scouts of America
Alabama Birding Trail
Alabama Birding Trail
Alabama Birding Trail

Organizer: Alabama Tourism Department

Consultant: Ghostwriters Communications

Process:

• Focus on regions
• Statewide criteria established
• Volunteers identify potential sites
• Consultants visit and score each site
• Each region makes final decisions
Alabama Birding Trail

Existing Trails:

• North Alabama Birding Trail
• Black Belt Nature & Heritage Trail
• Coastal Alabama Birding Trail
Alabama Birding Trail

Trails Under Development:

- West Alabama Birding Trail
- Piedmont Birding Trail
- Lake Martin Birding Trail
- Pineywoods Birding Trail
- Wiregrass Birding Trail
Gulf State Park Partnership
Gulf State Park Partnership

2004 AU was invited to partner with the state to build and operate a resort hotel on state land in Gulf Shores.

Partners:
- Auburn University
- Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- West Paces Hotel Group
- Alabama Gulf Coast CVB, Gulf Unified Metro Business Organization, mayors and city councils
- Educational institutions in the area
- Developer (yet to be determined)
Gulf State Park Partnership

The Opportunity

“With Florida having experienced uncontrolled growth in its Gulf destinations, and Mississippi relying heavily on gaming as its Gulf tourism attraction, Alabama’s Gulf resort promises guests a serene natural environment surrounded by protected lands and waterways, miles of undeveloped beach, and replete with opportunities for learning.”
Gulf State Park Partnership

Gulf Coast Education Institute

- To be created by Extension and partners (public and private)
- Purpose would be to develop, market and conduct natural resource-based educational and entertainment programs
- Would be self-sustaining
- Focus would be on the 6000 acres of the state park, but would also involve the significant natural resource sites throughout the northern Gulf coast
Extension Resources

Publications

ACES & ECDI

Tourism: An Effective Tool for Economic Development
Extension Resources

Publications

ACES &

ECDI

Action – Public Issue Information for Alabama Citizens
Quarterly Newsletter
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