

EXTENSION FOUNDATION

Publications



The **NET** Effect

Members of the National Extension Tourism network
help raise the bar in sustainable tourism and outdoor recreation

INSIDE



6 Ways to Use this Publication

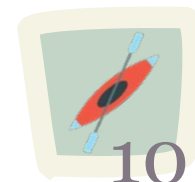
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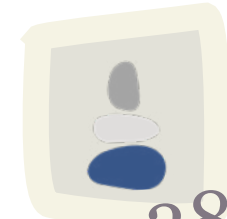
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WELCOME

to “The NET Effect,” a publication created by the Extension Foundation for the Cooperative Extension Service. This magazine is an outcome of a partnership of the National Extension Tourism (NET) design team, the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (NERCRD), and the New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE) grant program. The NET design team, in collaboration with the NERCRD, was one of more than 20 teams awarded a 2022 NTAE grant, which gave NET critical funding and support to scale up the network's activities.



The NTAE program is made possible by funding from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, through a partnership with Oklahoma State University and the Extension Foundation. The NET-NTAE project built on a longstanding partnership between NET and NERCRD, which provided leadership for this project. Dr. Lisa Chase, University of Vermont Extension natural resources specialist and director of the Vermont Tourism Research Center, was the project's fellow. Dr. Scott Reed, emeritus vice provost for university outreach and engagement at Oregon State University, was the project's catalyst, providing mentorship and guidance and connecting team members to the Extension Foundation's expertise, which includes professional writing, design, digital engagement and marketing, and evaluation. The foundation's publishing and evaluation team chose to feature the NET project in its new NTAE publication model, which will inform the content and look of future project publications.

We are excited to present our work in this new format and we hope Cooperative Extension readers find this magazine informative and inspirational.

EXTENSION
FOUNDATION

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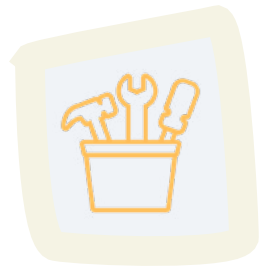
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6 WAYS TO USE THIS PUBLICATION

1. Network.

Like what you see? Connect with NET on LinkedIn or join the NET mailing list to receive periodic news and announcements from NET community members.

2. Collaborate.

See a program you'd like to replicate in your community? Connect with NET members to learn more.

3. Dig Deeper.

Visit the links featured throughout to learn more about the people, places, and programs featured here.

4. Be inspired.

Relatively few Extension and Sea Grant professionals have a dedicated tourism focus, but a few who do are featured here. Imagine the possibilities if there were more.

5. Advocate.

Show this publication to your Extension Director and talk about ways in which tourism and outdoor recreation programming can be leveraged in your state.

6. Share.

Share this publication with community partners and potential funders. Programs like this rely on the support of stakeholders.



Connect with us on the [NET website.](#)

Our library never closes.



Check out the Extension Foundation virtual bookshelf for the latest Extension research and program development across the country.



Support System

The National Extension Tourism network (NET) helps build local economies through **sustainable tourism, agritourism, and outdoor recreation**

A s a trusted source of research-based information, Cooperative Extension professionals have been providing tourism-related education and programming to support informed community decision-making for more than 50 years. At the forefront of this work is the National Extension Tourism Network (NET), which engages hundreds of professionals from the Extension and Sea Grant systems, as well as from government, chambers of commerce, destination marketing organizations, and nonprofits. This publication showcases a selection of success stories from the field and shines a light on the people doing innovative work that makes in impact in their communities. Their examples show what's possible when states commit resources for staff development and expansion to address opportunities in tourism and community economic development.

In 1993, a group of Extension and Sea Grant professionals formed the National Extension Tourism (NET) design team, with a mission to integrate research, education, and outreach within Cooperative Extension and Sea Grant to support sustainable tourism, contributing to the long-term economic development, environmental stewardship, and socio-cultural well-being of communities and regions. Since then, this volunteer organization has provided leadership to Extension tourism work across the United States and has become the leading networking and resource-sharing platform for Extension and Sea Grant professionals in tourism-related programming.

The NTAE Boost

As a participant in the 2022 New Technologies for Agricultural Extension (NTAE) accelerator program, the NET design team received funding and technical support for organizational growth and to expand the reach of Extension programming and research on tourism and recreation. Outcomes of the 18-month project included:

- a publication series about how Extension tourism programming can elevate other program areas
- an outreach program, which sent NET ambassadors to five national conferences to engage with new audiences
- publication of the first NET Conference proceedings
- formation of a NET committee on diversity, equity, inclusion, and access
- an organizational growth plan
- a redesigned logo and new marketing materials, including a traveling display

What's Possible

The tourism and outdoor recreation programming that NET members engage in supports multiple community development goals, such as economic and workforce development; health equity; climate



Engagement

NET collaborates with land grant university faculty and students as well as community members and partners to set priorities and solve problems.



Inventory

NET is documenting and assessing Extension and Sea Grant tourism programs.



Professional Development & Networking

NET provides knowledge- and research-based educational opportunities to Extension, Sea Grant, and other stakeholders (e.g. land owners, public officials, industry leaders).



Sharing

NET offers applied research, special programs, and other tourism development/outdoor recreation expertise to key stakeholder and audiences.

change adaptation and resiliency; and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Despite the effects this work has, there are relatively few Extension and Sea Grant staff with dedicated tourism-related responsibilities. In a survey NET conducted to assess tourism-related programming nationally, they found that almost all of the 49 states that responded reported needing additional capacity to develop and/or deliver tourism-related Extension programs. The programs highlighted in this publication— from Oregon State University, University of Georgia, Michigan State University, South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium, West Virginia University, Utah State University, University of Minnesota, and University of Vermont—are models of what can happen when Extension teams have the resources to help their communities develop sustainable tourism practices.



Why Tourism?

Tourism and recreation, including agritourism, community (or rural) tourism, and coastal tourism, make up a rapidly growing segment of the economy and offer rural and urban communities of all sizes an important strategy for growing their economies and building economic resilience. However, these opportunities often come with serious challenges, ranging from workforce issues to managing environmental impacts at popular destinations. Local leaders and policy makers need unbiased information and objective data about their local economies in order to make sound decisions about tourism management, planning, and policy issues. The Cooperative Extension System is a trusted source of this information and a natural partner in community-driven tourism and recreation projects.

Tourism
Contribution
to U.S. economy (2019)



U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



What's in STOR?

Tour guides, communities level up with Oregon Sea Grant certification and training programs

The Oregon Sea Grant Sustainable Coastal Tourism and Outdoor Recreation (STOR) training programs are raising the level of professionalism in the tourism industry and enhancing the economic vitality of the regions STOR serves.

Miles Phillips, associate professor of sustainable tourism at OSU, works with communities,



Q&A

Miles Phillips
Associate Professor,
Sustainable Tourism
Oregon State University
miles.phillips@oregonstate.edu

organizations, businesses, farmers, and ranchers to help them achieve their goals related to successful sustainable tourism. In 2018, in response to stakeholder needs, four new training programs were created. Hundreds of tourism industry professionals and interested stakeholders have completed trainings.

In this Q&A, Phillips talks about the inspiration for and the purpose and impact these training programs:

- Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) certification courses
- Oregon's Marine Reserve Area training
- "Know Your Community" course
- "Practical Customer Service" course

Describe the GORP training program.

The GORP program fills a need for training not provided by existing training and certification programs in United States. It is a course applicable to any guide but with an emphasis on those that provide outdoor recreation experiences. A key element in that is provides awareness and knowledge of industry best practices and avenues for further business skills development. GORP is a short course that is intended to used with other skill-specific live training. GORP is a short online training that does not intend to turn novice guides into experts

These courses help guides become better tourism professionals. A charter fishing guide wouldn't



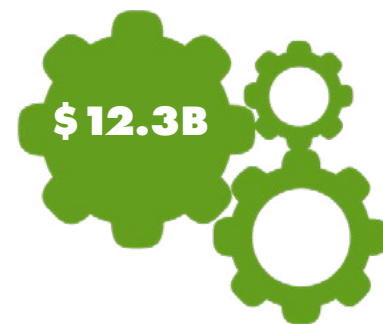
come to us to learn how to operate a boat or how to fish. They'd come to us to learn how to deliver better service, to learn more about best practices in things like marketing and promotion, and to understand how to operate their business more effectively. For example, they might learn skills like how to talk to guests about the wildlife in and the history of the environment where they're fishing. Another lesson might cover how to give guests the kind of unique experience that makes the guests want to refer the guide's tours to other people.

The programs also help us contribute to the economic development of communities in Oregon and other states—because professionally managed tourism activities are more sustainable, which leads to greater long-term economic impact.

Why did you create GORP courses?

We wanted to raise expectations in the tour business, because we've all had underwhelming guided experiences—like when the person leading the group sounds like they're tired of their own speech

Economic impact of tourism in Oregon



or when the goal seems to be to “guide” you to the gift shop. In Oregon alone, there are over 1,400 licensed guides and many more tourism-related staff. But before GORP, there was no formal training program for people in the industry. Our program was designed not only to train guides, it was designed to give them more visibility and credibility. If you book a tour with a GORP guide, you know you're going to have a rich experience that you couldn't create on your own. We also wanted to boost the tourism economies in the communities where GORP guides work. Being able to promote

professionally guided tours is a huge benefit, and it gives communities an incentive to help sustain and grow the GORP guides' operations.

What are the benefits of professionally guided tours and excursions?

When visitors have a memorable, meaningful experience on a tour, they tell other people about it, which brings more business to that guide or tour operator. This brings more awareness of and potentially more revenue to the community where the guide operates. Also, popular destinations like Oregon's coast can draw so many visitors that local communities can feel overwhelmed if they don't know how to manage and leverage the tourist traffic. Our guides design and lead tours and excursions that take environmental and social concerns into consideration.

“

When visitors have a memorable, meaningful experience on a tour, they tell other people about it, which brings more business to that guide or tour operator.

—Miles Phillips

How did you decide what to cover in the training programs?

We consulted professionals across the industry—including veteran guides and outfitters, educators, and tourism marketing organizations. I researched guide training and certification programs across the U.S. and the world and then tested various methods in the field. And we always get input from participants about how we can improve. We also aligned our program with Adventure Travel Trade Association best practices for



guided adventure travel, including special topics like wilderness medicine and first aid, customer service and group management, natural and cultural history interpretation, and sustainability.

What kinds of partnerships should professional guides to develop?

A lot of guides don't take advantage of all of the resources available to them. We help them understand how groups like destination management organizations, convention and visitors bureaus, and chambers of commerce can help them grow and promote their services. We also make sure that participants are aware of groups such as natural resource management agencies that will keep them up to date on things like environmental regulations or projects (like an estuary restoration) that could affect their operations.

What's next?

We are developing a webinar series and case study video interviews with professional guides and related stakeholders to help share and grow their success. The GORP program has expanded and the core courses (Global and National) are open to any guide in the country. We've also gotten requests from more states for Local course content. (See “The World According to GORP” for course descriptions.)

The world according to
GORP
 (and other STOR programs)



**Guide and Outfitter
 Recognized Professional (GORP)**

This series of online courses gives guides and outfitters a deeper understanding of their industry and the regions where they operate—it also gives them strategies and resources for enhancing and promoting their businesses. Guides can take just some of these courses, but certification requires them to complete all four.

Guides with a lot of experience get credit for what they bring to the table and can move on from a section as soon as they can pass that section's quiz with a perfect score. But they also can keep taking a quiz until they get all of the answers right. We designed it this way so that all participants demonstrate that they know the same content.

Global GORP

This business course covers universal topics like group management, customer service, interpretative presentations, and more and is applicable to any guide anywhere in the world.

National GORP

This course covers national symbols (such as for the national bird (bald eagle), etc.), economics, tourism

and environmental agencies, and natural features. It's useful for any guide or outfitter anywhere in the country.

State & Local GORP

The state and local courses are for guides in the coastal areas of Oregon, South Carolina, and Wisconsin and for guides on the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

- The state course covers statewide symbols (such as for the state tree, state fish, etc.), economics, tourism and environmental agencies, and natural features.
- In the local course, guides learn to identify the plants and animals in the regions where they work. They also learn more about the history of their region and become familiar with environmental agencies and travel and tourism organizations in their communities that can help them enhance their work.

Oregon's Marine Reserve Area Training

This series of six online courses covers Oregon's system of marine reserves—from how they function to what habitats and organisms they host. Participants also can take courses about each of the five reserves.

"Know Your Community"

This online course is for tourism industry professionals who work along the Oregon South Coast. It provides an overview of restaurants, lodging, and other amenities as well as local tours and guided excursions. It's also a primer on the economic impact of tourism on the coast. It's organized into four modules, each of which covers a group of three to five communities.

"Practical Customer Service"

In this online course, participants learn how to interact effectively with customers and how to create a positive work environment. It includes a module on tsunami safety.



2023 National Extension Tourism Conference



SAVE THE DATE

Milwaukee, WI
September 24 — 27

Hosted by Wisconsin Sea Grant
go.wisc.edu/075h11



NATIONAL EXTENSION
 TOURISM NETWORK

PHOTO: TRAVEL WISCONSIN



▲ Marine City, Michigan, is one of many towns that have benefited from Michigan State University's FIT assessment.



▲ Langsburg, Michigan, established an outdoor seating zoning ordinance based on FIT suggestions—serendipitously, just before the COVID-19 pandemic began. ►



Michigan State University Extension visitor experience assessment helps small towns look at themselves through fresh eyes

The way they see: **FIT**

ourism is a major part of the Michigan economy, accounting for 6% of all jobs and \$24.6 billion in revenue (from visitor spending). In the state's rural communities, in particular, tourism can bring much-needed income and economic diversification, but many rural areas aren't aware of how visitors perceive them and may be overlooking assets that could attract tourists. Michigan State University's [First Impressions Tourism \(FIT\)](#) assessment is making a difference in the tourism industry one small town at a time, through outsiders' evaluations of what these towns have to offer to visitors and residents and through recommendations for what communities can do to improve their image.

In this Q&A, FIT creator and MSU's Community Vitality and Sustainable Tourism Educator Andrew Northrop talks about how FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors. It empowers leaders and stakeholders to develop an action plan to improve their communities based on new perspectives and suggestions from these visitors. These action plans ultimately strengthen the quality of life for residents and visitors.



Q&A

Andrew Northrop
Community Vitality and
Sustainable Tourism Educator
Michigan State University
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How does FIT work?

Our five-member assessment teams go into communities for approximately 24 hours. They're invited by a community leadership team of public- and private-sector representatives, but they arrive unannounced and then spend a significant portion of their time incognito, visiting a wide range of amenities (such as restaurants and retail shops) and cultural, agricultural, and ecological assets (such as museums, wineries, and natural areas). They also generally explore the town and areas outside of what the host community might consider "theirs." This helps communities see that assets can belong to more than one community or county, which improves their awareness and understanding of regionalism and the importance of collaboration. The FIT team uses a comprehensive assessment tool to take notes and capture their first impressions about what they experience as first-time visitors; then they write a report about the community's strengths and opportunities and present those findings at a forum hosted by the community.

Why did you launch FIT?

Early in my Extension career, I saw a need to help rural communities recover from the 2008 economic crash, which had decimated many of them. At the time, many communities were mostly dependent on manufacturing and didn't see tourism as a viable, complementary solution to their economic struggles. I had years of experience living and working abroad in sustainable tourism development, and I knew that Michigan

“
This program
highlighted
recreational assets we
didn't realize we had.

—FIT Participant



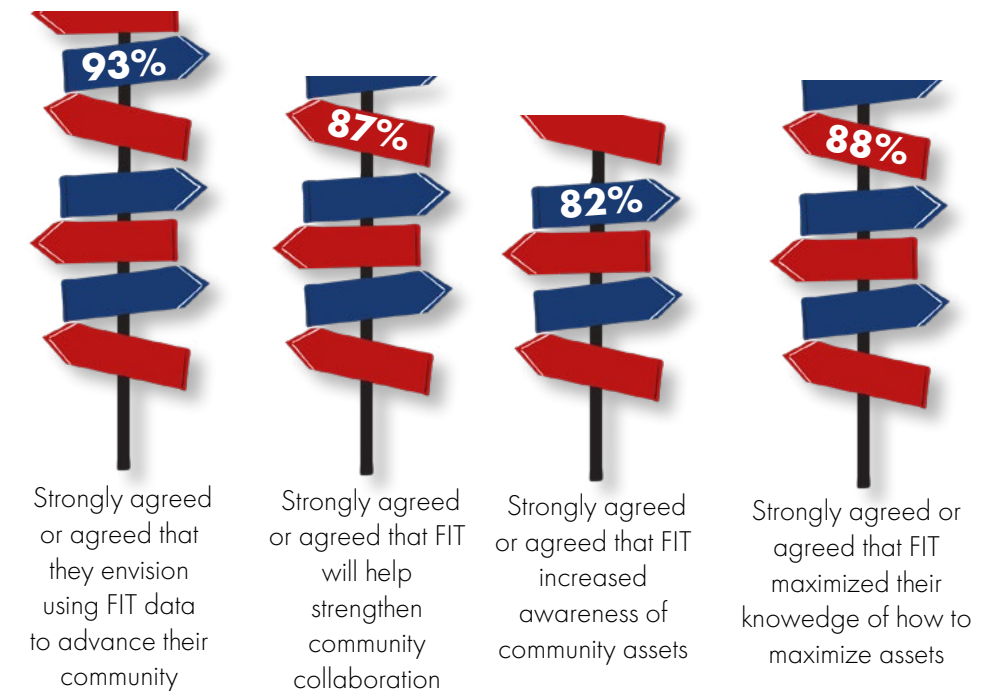
▲ Marine City, Michigan, established a business loop district based on FIT's suggestions and funding from a local economic development organization.

communities could benefit from different perspectives and ideas from a wide range of visitors. I specifically wanted to help towns move beyond "placemaking," a popular revitalization strategy at the time, and learn to recognize and embrace things they already had that could help them (re)grow their small-town visitor and tourism economies.

I am thrilled by the idea of helping small towns see themselves through an outsider's eye as a way to help them be as unique as possible. The idea that a passer-through would stop in a community based on something we've identified through the

FIT's Working!

FIT's objectives are to increase awareness of community assets among community leaders, increase knowledge of how to maximize those assets, increase community collaboration by sharing FIT assessment results, and encourage community members to take on leadership roles to implement community change. Our survey results* indicate that we're meeting our goals.



*73 of 318 Michigan FIT participants in 2021 and 2022 completed the survey.

FIT assessment as important—and then return next time because they had a positive, memorable experience—is success to me!

I enjoy helping communities identify, preserve, and create unique experiences based on what they have. FIT does just that. It highlights existing assets so that communities don't feel pressure to install a water park or a roller coaster, *per se*, and instead, capitalize on what they already have. This is true sustainable tourism development, but it's not always well understood at the community level. FIT offers a baseline that communities can start with and expand from.

Is FIT an original idea?

Yes and no. FIT is essentially the product of how Extension teams build on what colleagues in other states have tried with or without success. I adapted it from a "First Impressions" model deployed in West Virginia through a multi-state grant from the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development in 2015.

The grant helped lay the foundation of what I then modified, developed, and rebranded as MSU Extension's FIT program to meet the needs of our communities. We are the only state and Extension service that call this first-time visitor assess-

“
Many recreation sites
were mentioned that I
was unaware of,
and I moved here
in 1973!

—FIT Participant

ment “FIT.” The approach to branding and strong focus that FIT has on small-town tourism development has generated ongoing demand for the program and solidified partnerships across Michigan, as well as spawned interest from multiple Extension services and, more recently, developing countries, to adopt the program or facets of it.

How do communities usually react to their FIT results?

Some of our findings surprise them with ideas previously not considered; others confirm what a community has suspected about itself but hasn’t had evidence to prove. Some communities are convinced they know what we are going to find and say, but after hearing our results many are pleasantly surprised, or even shocked. Many FIT towns have made significant changes based on what they learn from our assessments. (See “Getting Fit.” ►)

Give examples of surprising FIT findings.

Towns are often surprised to find out that people visit other communities to do things besides traditional tourist activities. They may go to a church or a grocery store in another town; they might stop for gas in a small town while they’re on a road trip; a town might have a park or event that draws visitors from outside the community. We

Getting FIT



▲ A FIT report encouraged the city of Allegan, Michigan, to promote and encourage public art.

The Michigan State University’s FIT team had completed 18 assessments by the summer of 2022 and as of December, was on track to complete two more by the end of the year. Small Michigan towns such as St. Clair, Dundee, and Cassopolis have received insights into such things as what visitors thought of the food and lodging options, how safe the visitors felt, which attractions were most (or least) interesting or accessible, and even how easy it was to find helpful information about the town online. FIT reports have inspired communities to

- redesign or expand municipal websites to make them more useful to visitors and residents;
- apply for thousands of dollars in grants for community projects;
- create new amenities like a farmer’s market, a park, and an historical walking trail;
- make themselves more pedestrian friendly;
- reshape long-term development plans; and
- diversify the membership of their business development groups.

worked once with a small town where some residents were skeptical that many outsiders stopped there, until we showed them a Michigan Department of Transportation traffic report. The report showed that 4,000 cars drove through the downtown on a Saturday in the summer. I said, “If you give just 10% of the people driving through your community a reason to stop, think of what it could do for your downtown and surrounding area.”

We helped another town understand that it had potential to leverage its annual world-class canoe race as not just an event but also as a way to strengthen their community’s identity and attractiveness to visitors. A majority of the race’s history is housed in their local museum, unavailable and unknown to the many tourists who visit this outdoor recreation mecca in central Michigan. We emphasized to them that even though the event attracts canoe racers from all over the world, few visitors are likely to know the significance of the race and its long history in the community or state. Our suggestion was to weave that canoe race event history narrative into their community’s branding, image, and year-round tourism industry.

How will you expand FIT?

FIT’s potential isn’t limited to US communities. With extensive international development experience, I have had eyes on taking FIT to developing countries with similar needs in sustainable tourism. It’s a vision I will soon be able to carry out, having recently been selected as a Michigan State



University Global Scholar in Extension. The Global Scholars program, administered by the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR), supports established and early-mid career faculty members with seed funding and travel support for two years to strengthen and expand their global linkages, networks, and collaborative programs. I have already spearheaded relationships with tourism officials and academics in Costa Rica, Nepal, Thailand, and Vietnam.

What lesson have you learned that could help Extension professionals and universities that want to launch a FIT initiative?

You need to be intentionally inclusive by including not only local government and business-centered organizations, but also inviting destination marketing organizations, other community organizations, and, equally important, representatives of youth and under-served audiences; having a well rounded representation of the community is essential for success.



Listen Up!

Our podcast, “MI Community Minutes,” addresses issues facing Michigan communities and what some local governments are doing to address them.

Extension team at University of Minnesota Tourism Center measures economic impact of and opportunities for destinations, events, and other community assets

Established in 1987, the University of Minnesota Tourism Center is one of the oldest tourism-focused groups in Cooperative Extension. It was created to help strengthen the state's tourism economy, and today Minnesota's \$16 billion tourism industry relies on research and education from the Center to understand, manage, and grow Minnesota's tourism and travel assets. From visitor profiles to economic impact and outdoor recreation studies, the data and analysis the Center provides help guide local decision-making, inform policy and marketing strategies, and strengthen the economy through tourism. In this Q&A, Center Director Xinyi Qian talks about the work that the Center does and the impact it has had on the state's tourism market.

VALUE, PROPOSITIONS



UNIVERSITY
OF MINNESOTA

Q&A

Xinyi Qian

Director

University of Minnesota

Tourism Center

qianx@umn.edu



Describe the Center's main focus areas and their benefits.

We conduct tourism- and visitor-related research, create and deliver educational programs to other tourism professionals, present at community gatherings and industry conferences, and support university students.

Through our research, we have assessed the economic impact of the Minnesota Zoo, examined the state of sustainable tourism in various Minnesota communities, and looked at how COVID-19 affects telecommuting now and how it might affect it in the future. The Center's research informs local decisions (e.g., maybe a community decides to finish paving the last stretch of a trail), drives marketing strategies (e.g., perhaps an event starts targeting a niche market), and helps tourism businesses and communities address their priority issues. (See the following page for samples of specific research findings.)

Our education and training programs provide hands-on information that participants can use in their work. For example, participants in our festival and event management online program

have used what they learned to add components to their events or to overhaul existing components. After taking the event management course, one attendee decided to relaunch a festival that had gone dormant in his community.

We have presented many times at the Minnesota Festival and Event Association conference and have participated in the Minnesota Resort and Campground Association conference, the Explore Minnesota Tourism conference, and the Minnesota Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus education summit. Community members often

come to us with questions about a wide range of topics—from the value of welcome centers to the impact of aquatic invasive species to the future of electric vehicle charging stations. Sometimes we have the answers, and sometimes we connect them with another university or state resource.

Students from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, the College of Food, Ag-



▲ A bike path in Hastings, Minnesota, a community that the Tourism Center has assessed in several ways.

riculture, and Natural Resources, and the College of Education and Human Development all have contributed to the Center’s work, enhancing what we deliver while honing their research, curriculum development, and presentation skills.

How will you expand or enhance the work of the Tourism Center?

In 2021, the Tourism Center developed a research and programming agenda to guide our work for the next five to eight years. For example, we have begun using a mobile analytics tool in a project with Explore Minnesota Tourism to estimate welcome center visitor volumes. We also plan to do more work on outdoor recreation and to update our curriculum to meet the needs of the industry and communities.

I hope Cooperative Extension will work more closely with the National Extension Tourism network, which connects Extension professionals working on tourism-related issues across the country. For example, a few states have been doing educational programs that nurture future leaders in the tourism industry. Would it be possible to pool resources to create a nationwide program? Doing so will both increase Cooperative Extension’s impact and help Extensions

The Numbers

100,000+
education and training
program participants

Work done in 87
Minnesota counties
(and beyond)

60,000+
research report
downloads since 2014

Developed 1st winery trail
in Minnesota

across the country be a lot more efficient. Would it be possible to host an annual virtual research showcase, so folks from across the country can talk about their latest research projects, learn from and network with each other?



◀ A father and son
boat on Gull Lake in
Minnesota

OF NOTE

Minnesota has more than 90 county fairs.

Applied Research

The University of Minnesota Tourism Center’s research has been valuable for Minnesota communities that want to understand and strengthen their visitor and tourism economies. We dive into demographic information and economic benefits as well as qualitative measurements. Here are highlights from three of the 120+ research projects we’ve led or done in partnership with state agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Transportation and state and local tourism organizations.

OF NOTE

Range Recreation is known primarily for the sport of curling.

OF NOTE

Most people come to Union Depot because they are passing through, catching a bus, or boarding an Amtrak train.

▶ Photo courtesy
of Shelburne Farms in
Shelburne, Vermont

As rural

communities all over the country look for ways to diversify their resource-dependent economies, many are recognizing untapped economic potential in their agricultural assets. In Vermont's rural areas, promoting farms, vineyards, and other agricultural areas as recreation, education, hospitality, and retail destinations (agritourism) is becoming a significant economic driver, generating more than \$50 million annually.

The University of Vermont (UVM) Extension Agritourism Support Program is helping Vermont's producers leverage agritourism opportunities, with connections, research-based information, and resources like video case studies featuring successful operations and a series of how-to guides. The program operates under the auspices of the Vermont Tourism Research Center, the only research center in the state focusing on tourism (including agritourism) and recreation.

In this Q&A, Lisa Chase, a natural resources specialist at UVM Extension and director of the Vermont Tourism Research Center, discusses the agritourism support program and its impact.



Agritourism
support program from
University of Vermont
helps build **capacity,**
sustainability
for producers

Farm *to* Stable





◀ Photo courtesy of
Boyd Family Farm in
Wilmington, Vermont

▼ Photo courtesy
of Liberty Hill Farm in
Rochester, Vermont

tissue, creating a system that is greater than the sum of its parts by linking consumers to producers and promoting environmental stewardship.

What are the benefits of your program?

Agritourism contributes to rural community development and the conservation of agrobiodiversity by valuing traditional food cultures and heirloom crops. While agritourism is beneficial for visitors (or consumers) in many ways, producers also benefit. They benefit by generating additional sources of income, creating more jobs on the farm, and creating different types of jobs that require different skills. This can be especially valuable for farm families wanting to keep the next generation on the land, whether it is their own children or new and aspiring farmers. Another benefit for producers is the opportunity to

share their agricultural heritage and educate the non-farming public about food, fiber, and fuel production and the stewardship of healthy ecosystems and working lands. Farmers and other agritourism enterprise operators learn skills such as marketing, customer service, and hospitality, as well as how to handle safety and liability issues that arise when farms open to visitors.

How does your program use research?

We conduct regular needs assessments for producers and agricultural service providers. In 2019, we conducted a nationwide survey of producers and published the results in a variety of formats, including fact sheets. (See Vermont producer responses in the “What’s in Agritourism For Me?” infographic.) We used these results to develop new resources that producers identified as priorities.



The University of Vermont



Q&A

Lisa Chase
Natural Resources Specialist
University of Vermont
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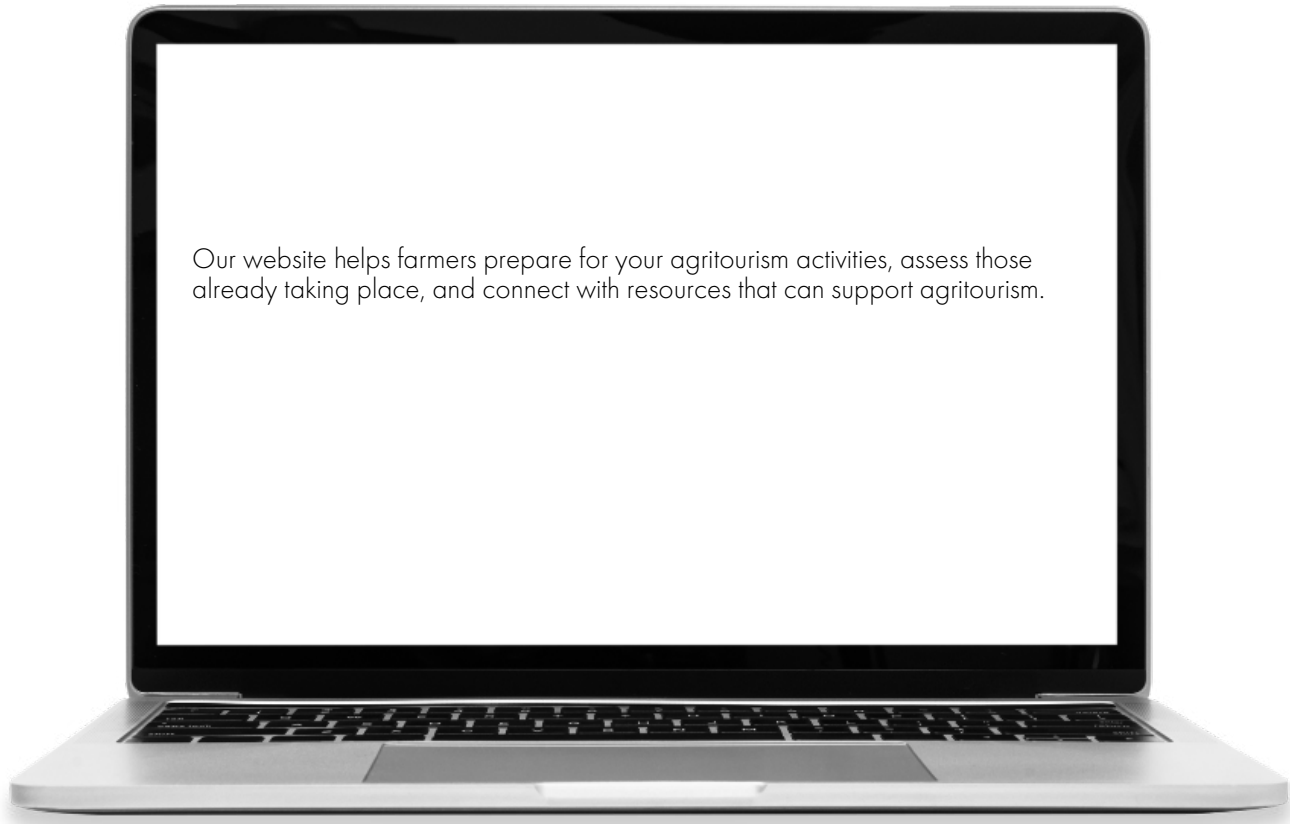
What issues does your program address in your communities?

Spending time on farms and celebrating agriculture was a regular part of life for most Americans 100 years ago, when 70% of this country’s employment was in agriculture. Today less than 2% of U.S. employment is on farms. Agritourism

is an ideal way to raise awareness of the value of farms and to promote agricultural literacy. It educates visitors about farming and allows them to experience how food, fiber, and fuel are produced. Agritourism also provides a way for visitors and the community to connect with natural spaces and access local products. Public understanding and appreciation of the value of agriculture is a critical part of sustaining farms and rural communities.

Agritourism also diversifies income streams for producers, which helps farms remain economically competitive. And it promotes the development of viable working landscapes, vibrant communities, and healthy ecosystems, which are the building blocks of sustainable and regenerative food systems. Small and medium farms are connective





As an example, producers wanted an easier way to understand agritourism regulations, so we created an [online tool](#) to help them navigate those regulations. We also use research, often from Extension, to develop tools and resources for producers and agricultural service providers.

What kinds of partnerships do you have and why are they important?

We partner with farmers and producer associations; community organizations; local and state government; non-governmental organizations and nonprofits; and Extension colleagues in other states. Our partner organizations in Vermont include the Vermont Farm to Plate Network, the Agency of Agriculture, and the Department of Tourism and Marketing. On a national level, we work closely with the National Extension Tourism Network. These partnerships ensure that our programs are relevant, timely, and have significant impacts.



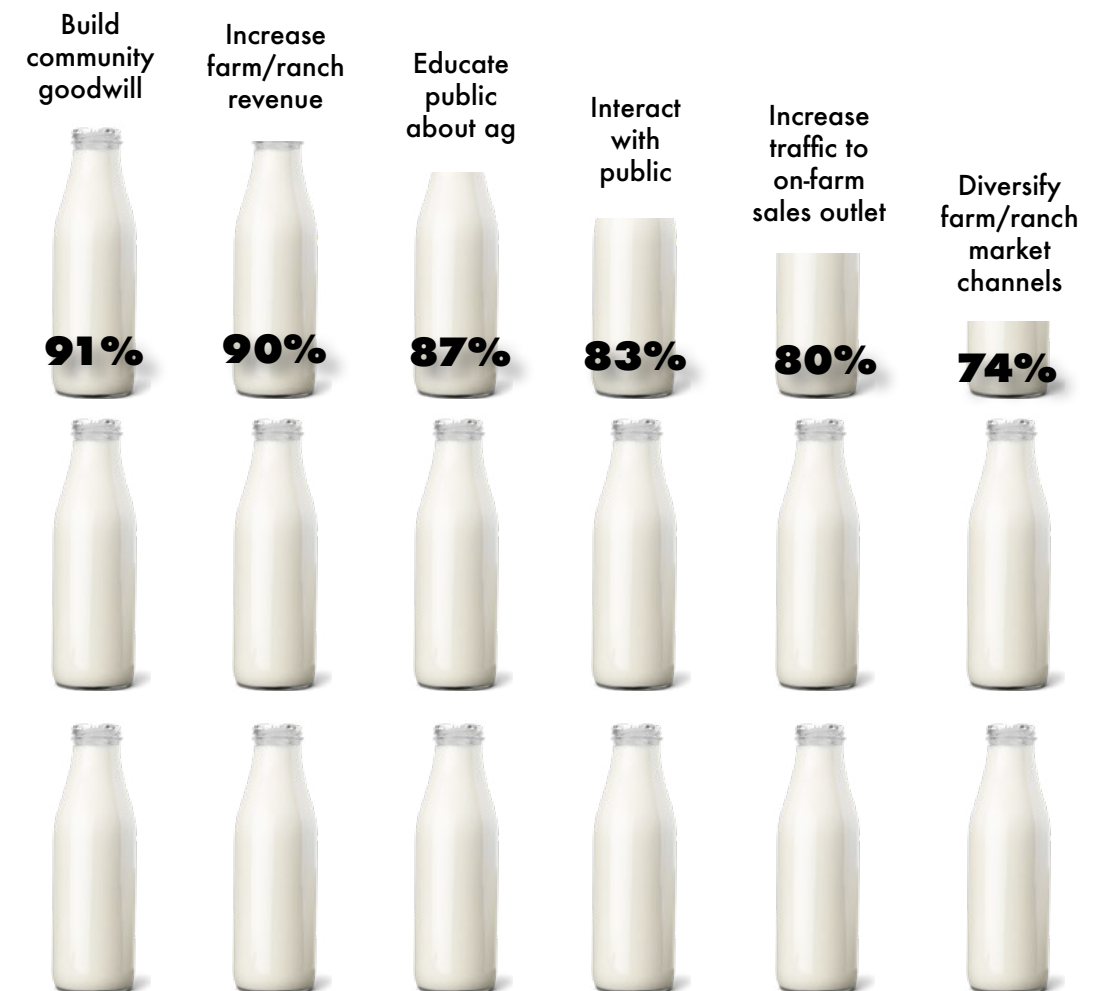
▲ The 2022 [International Workshop on Agritourism](#) drew 504 participants (352 in person, 152 virtually). Photo by Bear Cieri, courtesy of Hello Burlington.

► Photo courtesy Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing



“What’s in Agritourism For Me?”

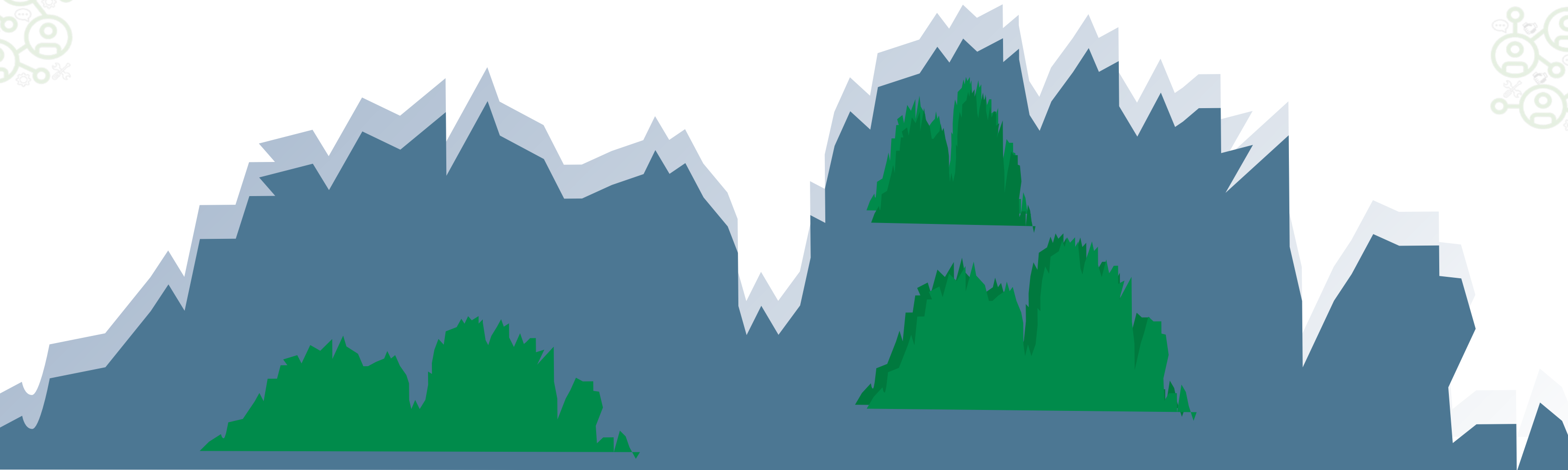
Vermont producers have a variety of motivations for exploring agritourism as a way to make their operations more sustainable. In a recent survey, they rated the following goals as *important* or *very important*.



Moving Mountains

West Virginia University Extension leans on partnerships to make meaningful differences in rural tourism

It's almost impossible to say the state's name without singing the song—and it's just as difficult to deny West Virginia's other-worldly grandeur. Its endless mountains, deep forests, cool rivers and lakes, and meandering rural landscapes make it an ideal (and increasingly popular) outdoor tourism destination.





► Seneca Rocks is one of West Virginia’s best-known landmarks. Spruce Knob–Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area is one of the National Forest Service’s first national recreation areas.

According to the [West Virginia Department of Tourism](#), the state drew more than 65 million visitors in 2021, and travel-related spending reached \$4.6 billion that same year. Tourism is becoming a vital part of the state’s overall and local economies—which makes long-term planning for sustainable tourism critical. [West Virginia University \(WVU\) Extension Rural Tourism](#) works with a variety of government agencies, other WVU departments, and community and business leaders to identify tourism development strategies that maximize economic potential while preserving the region’s character, cultural heritage, and environment. In this Q&A, WVU Extension Specialist Doug Arbogast talks about the impact that the rural tourism program is making and the importance of collaboration when it comes to big, complex transformations.



Q&A

Doug Arbogast
Extension Specialist
Rural Tourism
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West Virginia University
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Describe some of WVU Extension Rural Tourism’s hallmark projects.

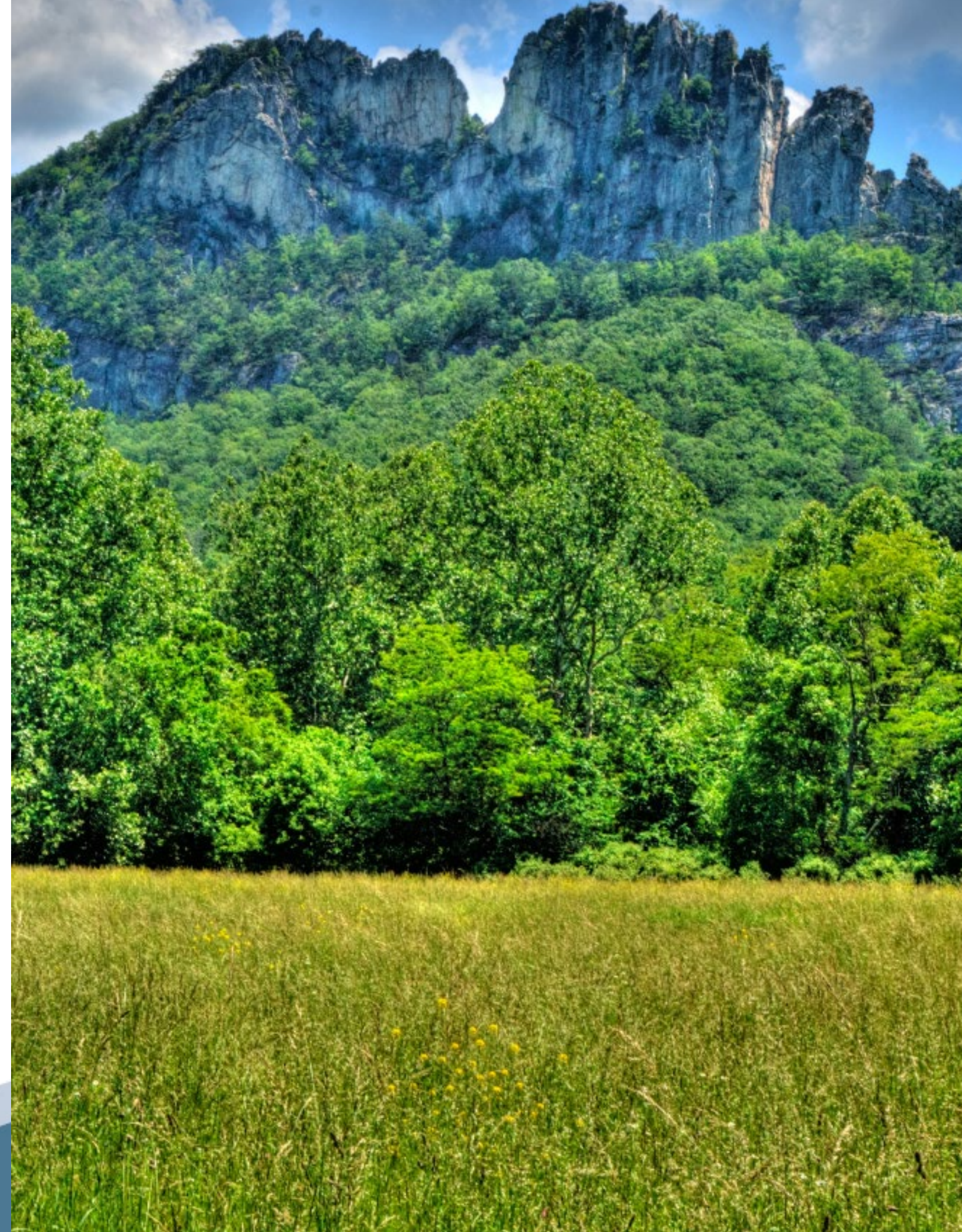
Four of our most noteworthy are the [Mon Forest Towns](#) project, the [Voices of Change](#) project,

the [Tourism First Impressions](#) program, and the [Sustainable Tourism](#) webinar series.

The goal of Mon Forest Towns is to connect the 12 gateway towns within and near the Monongahela National Forest to improve quality of life for residents and visitors. Our Extension team partnered with the Monongahela National Forest and USDA Rural Development and representatives from the MNF communities to assess the recreation economy strengths and opportunities in these towns, determine how best to brand and market Mon Forest Towns, and create a shared vision for a strong, sustainable recreation economy for the greater

MNF region.

In the “Voices of Change” project, based on the [University of Minnesota’s rural tourism development](#) model, we developed case studies of tourism development in West Virginia. The four video stories we’ve produced so far feature tourism leaders in West Virginia discussing the successes and challenges of tourism development in each of their rural communities.



“ Sustainable tourism projects are complex and require the perspectives of people from multiple fields and disciplines.”

The Tourism First Impressions program was adopted by WVU Extension in 2012. It helps communities see their town through the eyes of the first-time visitor, revealing their strengths and weaknesses as tourist destinations. The findings can then form the basis for future development. This program has been a catalyst for other efforts—such as asset mapping and more thorough assessments and other kinds of participatory research.

The Sustainable Tourism webinars draw on the lessons we’ve learned from doing this kind of tourism development work over the past ten years, providing participants with some foundational principles of sustainable tourism development so they can collaborate in their communities to enhance their tourism opportunities. We can’t work with all the towns at the same time, so the webinars provide a tool for scaling up. It’s been great to see interest and regular participation, and a dynamic and evolving curriculum.

Talk about the role of partnerships in your tourism development work.

The participatory approach we use is critical,

because no single program or organization—no matter how well managed or funded it is—can single-handedly create lasting large-scale change. Within WVU, Extension partners with faculty and staff from a variety of colleges and departments, including recreation, parks, and tourism; landscape architecture; the Natural Resources Analysis center; graphic design; public administration; and business and economics. Collectively, they provide a depth of knowledge and expertise and enhance our ability to help build economic development capacity in under-resourced rural communities.

How does your program use research and best practices?

Research is a significant component of the work we do. We help communities collect and interpret primary data and make good use of secondary data to understand visitor preferences and resident attitudes toward tourism projects, to measure the impact of tourism, and to identify trends.

In addition, we use a methodology called “trans-disciplinary public interest design.” We also refer to this process as “Design for Good,” a term coined by the landscape and graphic designers on our team.

This approach recognizes that sustainable tourism projects are complex and require the perspectives of people from multiple fields and disciplines. This approach takes time, but the long-term investment allows us to develop strong, trusting relationships with the communities involved.

What are some examples of “Design for Good” projects?

We recently published a peer-reviewed paper that describes how we used this process in our Shar-

ing Tucker project. Our transdisciplinary team—which included graphic designers, landscape architects, Extension specialists, and members of the local cultural district authority— co-created a comprehensive tourism development strategy that includes a cultural tourism agenda, trailhead improvements, sustainable growth strategies, and cultural identity components to share, protect and connect Tucker County culture for visitors and residents. I also was recently awarded funding from USDA NIFA to lead a multi-state integrated research-Extension project that ultimately will result in an evidence-based destination management framework for rural gateway destinations. We’ll be including some of these participatory design principles into our research activities.

What are your plans for expanding the program?

I am leading two new multi-state projects that will examine resilience and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of rural tourism in the Northeast region. We’ll convene Extension and academic faculty across the country to encourage collaborative assessments of rural tourism at the multi-state level; investigating the resilience, adaptability, and recoverability of different components of the rural tourism system; and identifying strategies that tourism businesses and destinations are using to cope with the pandemic.

A USDA NIFA funded project with partners in four states (Vermont, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and West Virginia) will focus on helping

communities establish indicators that they can measure over time to ensure that their tourism activity is sustainable. TRIP (Tourism, Resilience, and Indicators for Post-Pandemic Planning) will provide a feedback loop that will enable communities to use data to reframe their tourism promotion activities and manage growth by establishing sustainable tourism management strategies and having data they can measure over time to track success and revise strategies as needed.

What lessons are you learning that could help other Extension professionals?

Be patient. Collaboration (the participatory approach) takes time. You have to be willing to put egos aside and realize that you’re co-learning, and that it’s a mutual process. You are the

expert, but you’re also a learner. Your approach makes a big difference in gaining trust. You must be able to see it from the community’s perspective.

Mutual trust and respect are the pathway to deeper engagement. Extension provides a pathway to access land-grant resources. There’s tremendous potential there. That’s why it’s very exciting for me to be able to do this work in Extension. Extension is the perfect combination of higher ed and also spending time in communities. I feel as if I’m part of their work at the local level. Our work can shed light on opportunities within Extension and elevate awareness about the need to invest in tourism faculty and support them in Extension work.



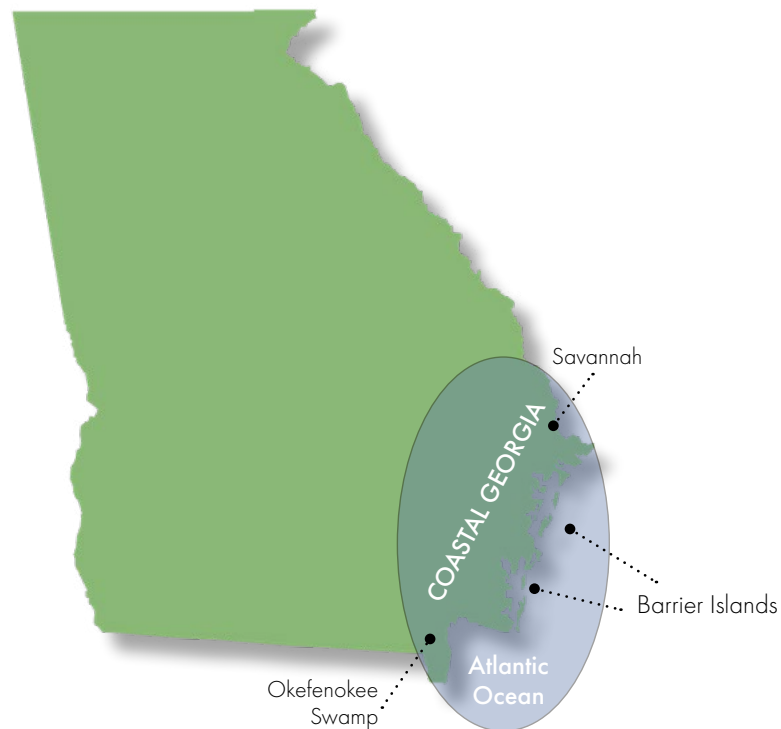
► St. Simons Island, along the southeast coast of Georgia, one of the state's most popular tourism regions

While Georgia's coastal tourism is a significant driver in the state's **\$63 billion tourism industry**, it also has the potential to overwhelm the natural features of the region, which is already the state's second-fastest-growing area. The Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant program works with business owners, tourism officials, government representatives, academia, and community organizations to promote coastal tourism while preserving coastal Georgia's unique environmental and cultural resources. In this Q&A, Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant Associate Marine Extension Director Bryan Fluech talks about three of the programs UGA Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant has developed and how they are building capacity and cooperation among the coast's tourism-related organizations.



Delicate Balance

University of Georgia Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant's coastal tourism program promotes economic resilience and environmental sustainability



Coastal Crowd

Georgia's 100-mile coastline

attracts **30 million visitors** every year from across the state and around the world. They are drawn by the biological diversity of the area—which includes **370,000 acres** of salt marshes, **14 barrier islands**, and upland wetland and freshwater systems such as the iconic Okefenokee Swamp—as well as the coastal region's long history and rich culture.

Georgia Sea Grant financial assistance program that supports Georgia seafood and communities that depend on these resources (*adapted from Maine Sea Grant program*)

\$90,000
awarded
to date

**\$10,000 &
\$15,000**
grants

Eligible Applicants

Any business or non-profit connected to Georgia seafood or tourism industry or the heritage of fishing and aquaculture communities

stewardship of important habitats and wildlife on the coast. CARE was developed with a Coastal Incentive Grant from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Coastal Resources Division and is led by Marine Educator and Volunteer Coordinator Katie Higgins.

What impact are these programs making?

The three programs reflect local needs and are helping to strengthen the working relationships among tourism-related organizations so that they will be better able to respond to pressing coastal environment issues together. The evaluation results from our 2019 Coastal Georgia Tourism conference were validating. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive about the need for such a meeting: 80% of participants said the meeting should be an annual event. We have held it twice since

then, attracting more than 100 attendees. The information discussed and shared about cultural tourism at the 2020 Coastal Georgia Tourism

the tools to implement best practices for water-based tourism. We believe that engaging ecotourism companies through a certification course will build support for the conservation and



◀ Funds raised from Georgia Sea Grant's "Oyster Roast for a Reason" event support aquaculture research and training opportunities, environmental education efforts, and internships for college students.



Q&A

Bryan Fluech
Public Service Assistant &
Associate Director
Marine Extension and
Georgia Sea Grant
University of Georgia
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Describe Marine Extension's key tourism programs and why they were created.

While there is a lot of interest in seeing tourism expand in coastal Georgia—particularly in its more rural communities—there is also concern that too much growth could jeopardize Georgia's unique coastal environments and culture. This was why we created such initiatives as the Georgia Coastal Tourism Conference, the "What's the Hook?" sea-

food pitch competition, and the Coastal Awareness and Responsible Ecotourism (CARE) program. Georgia Coastal Tourism Conference provides opportunities for networking and information sharing among organizations that manage tourism in popular destinations such as Savannah and the Golden Isles (Saint Simons, Jekyll, Sea Island, and Brunswick). We held the first conference in 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 conference was a series of online facilitated discussions, but we were able to hold an in-person conference again in fall of 2022. We heard from locally owned businesses, agencies, and organizations that they needed more opportunities to connect and collect best practices beyond what exists for the larger communities and destinations. We all knew that there were lots of wonderful tourism-related activities happening along the coast, but the left hand doesn't always know what the right hand is doing.

In 2021, we launched CARE— a certification program that provides ecotour companies with



◀ On Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant's annual "Skidaway Marine Science Day" the public is invited to enjoy (among other things) catch-and-release crabbing from the dock behind the facility and to meet reptiles native to the coast. ▼

Conference resulted in Georgia Sea Grant funding a two-year research project focusing on economic development for Black/African American/Gullah Geechee businesses and entrepreneurship in Coastal Georgia. What we learn from that research will be applied in local efforts.

What kinds of partnerships do you encourage, and why are they important?

Partnerships are central to all of our work. We incorporated input from various stakeholders to initiate these projects, but in each case, we partnered with Explore Georgia (our state tourism program) to help us. For the CARE program, we also worked closely with Manomet, a shorebird research/con-

servation organization, along with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to ensure that the training information presented on shorebirds was accurate, current, and relevant to our coast.

What are your plans for expanding your program?

The CARE training is ongoing, and we want to expand it to include topics beyond shorebirds. We also will survey participants about their involvement and needs for future programming. If we can secure more grant funds, we'd love to hold another pitch competition. We're also adding a Coastal Tourism Extension Specialist to our program and hope they'll be on board early in 2023.





n a t u r a l b e a u t y

South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium shores up support for sustainable tourism

from the warm sands of Myrtle Beach to the marshes, preserves, and estuaries of the Lowcountry, South Carolina's coastal areas are among the palmetto state's most brilliant.

◀ A South Carolina
barrier island



These areas also are a significant contributor to the state’s economy. The U.S. Travel Association (USTA) estimates that visitors to South Carolina’s eight coastal counties spent over \$9.1 billion in 2018. Of this, it is estimated that up to \$1.31 billion is spent on coastal nature-based tourism, leading almost \$1.5 billion in economic output, when including multiplier effects. The environmental and social impact of this activity can be equally significant, though—so many local and state agencies, small businesses, conservationists, and educational organizations, including the [South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium](#), work diligently to develop and support sustainable economic development and tourism practices that keep the coastal areas healthy and thriving, while honoring and preserving local histories and cultures.



Q&A



Matt Gorstein
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April Turner
Coastal Communities
Program Specialist
South Carolina
Sea Grant Consortium
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The Consortium focuses its work on five areas: healthy coastal ecosystems, sustainable coastal development and economy, weather and climate resilience, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, and scientific literacy and workforce development. In this Q&A, Assistant Director for Development and Extension Matt Gorstein and Coastal

Communities Program Specialist April Turner talk about the Consortium’s recent accomplishments and how they partner with the community to meet program goals.

Give some examples of the kinds of projects the Consortium has done.

Over the past decade, food tourism and cultural heritage tourism, in particular, have begun to thrive. Several coastal states—including Virginia, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Maryland—have created “seafood trails,” for example, as a way to promote local seafood businesses. In 2020, in Georgetown, South Carolina, the Consortium helped the [Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce](#) obtain a **\$282,000 grant** from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to develop the [Gullah Geechee Seafood Trail](#), in partnership with several other community-based organizations. The goal of the trail is to enhance the economic resilience and marketing potential of small, mostly rural, locally owned seafood businesses—including fishers, harvesters, aquaculturists, seafood markets, and restaurants. The idea is also to share stories of maritime cultural heritage.

We also have several initiatives that strengthen nature-based tourism operators, such as kayak tour outfitters, stand-up paddleboarding outfitters, edible foraging guides, and festival and outdoor adventure operators. We train them to use social media and their websites to promote their businesses, teach them to write business plans, help them apply for grants, coach them in best



▲ South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium has several initiatives that strengthen nature-based tourism operators, such as kayak tour outfitters and stand-up paddleboarding outfitters. (Photos courtesy Elizabeth Andregg, outfitter with Nature Adventures, LLC)



“

When partner organizations have enhanced capacity, they can then do things that serve the greater mission of improving sustainable economic opportunity in tourism.

practices for community engagement, etc.—all of which builds their capacity to reach and accommodate more customers.

What are some recent outcomes of the Consortium’s work?

In addition to the grant from NOAA, we have received funding from the National Sea Grant Office to work with regional tourism experts and agencies to develop and implement market strategies to help the [South Carolina Nature-Based Tourism Association \(SCNBTA\)](#) and its small business members to cope with impacts of the COVID pandemic and ultimately enhance the resilience of the nature-based tourism industry. This included a membership recruitment campaign with the SCNBTA, which resulted in a 50% increase in membership from 2020-2021.

Overall, the Consortium’s work in extension tourism programming has cultivated several community-based partnerships to connect coastal small businesses that rely on tourism with relevant resources, including marketing and promotional capacity, training sessions, research, and grant opportunities.

How has research informed the Consortium’s work?

A [three-year study](#) (2012 to 2015) in partnership with Clemson University explored the feasibility

and stakeholder perceptions of the seafood trail. In a series of interviews, we asked food harvesters, seafood retail owners, a restaurant manager, a tourism promoter, and an ecotourism provider about the viability of such a trail as well as the best ways to develop and maintain it, how to fund marketing and promotion, and what the trail membership criteria should be for businesses and attractions.

We discovered strong stakeholder support, which gave us confidence that it was a project worth pursuing and one that would celebrate South Carolina’s maritime cultural heritage and leverage untapped economic potential in underserved communities. The need for a champion was clearly identified in these interviews, as well. In 2020, the Consortium partnered with the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce and realized we had several mutually beneficial goals. With the chamber as the champion and the Consortium, along with several other partners, providing support, the Gullah Geechee Seafood Trail began to develop.

On the nature-based tourism side, the Consortium partnered with Clemson University and the College of Charleston to estimate the economic contribution of nature-based tourism in coastal South Carolina. We surveyed visitors to gauge their knowledge of, attitudes about, and perceptions of nature-based tourism, asking them where they go,

why they go there, etc. This [study](#), in combination with the USTA’s tourism data, underscored the importance of nature-based tourism in the culture and history of the state. The Consortium also [tracks trends](#) in tourism spending, jobs, establishments, wages, and gross domestic product to help monitor and support the state’s marine economy.

Talk about some of the Consortium’s partnerships and why they’re important.

In addition to our university partners, we collaborate with organizations that represent the interests of businesses that rely on coastal tourism—such as the SCNBTA and the [South Carolina Association of Tourism Regions](#). We also partner with several state agencies, including the [South Carolina Department of Natural Resources](#) and [Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism](#), as well as the Coastal Carolina University Athenaeum Press.

For the Gullah Geechee Seafood Trail project, we partnered with organizations that promote diversity, equity, inclusion, environmental justice, historic preservation, and sustainable economic opportunity—such as the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce, [WeGOJA Foundation](#), [South Carolina African American Heritage Commission](#), [Gullah/Geechee Sea Islands Coalition](#), and the [Gullah/Geechee Fishing Association](#).

These partnerships are important for enhancing access to economic opportunity and resources for business owners, and for promoting envi-

ronmental stewardship. They are also important for building trust and relationships in rural and underserved communities.

How do you plan to expand and promote the Consortium’s work?

As a part of the Gullah Geechee Seafood Trail project, the team offers “[Business of Doing Business](#)” courses and plans to expand this program. Also planned for year two of the project is sponsoring Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point training that will cover safe seafood handling

best practices and offer HACCP certification for Gullah Geechee Seafood Trail entities.

Membership expansion is also a priority for SCNBTA and the Seafood Trail. For the Seafood Trail, near term plans are to cover the entire South Carolina coast, including the development of a website and a digital Trail Map in year 2 of the

grant. But the long term goals are to expand into North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida to encompass the entire [Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor](#).

What lessons are you learning that could help other Sea Grant professionals?

One of the most important things we’ve learned is that building capacity in our partner organizations increases indirect benefits of the work. When partners have more capacity, they can improve sustainable economic opportunity in tourism with less effort from our Sea Grant program. This also enables partners to be more self-sustaining.

Spending on coastal South Carolina nature-based tourism



Overall visitor spending in coastal South Carolina



Popularity Problems

Utah State University Extension web hub helps small tourist towns handle big tourism challenges

Lake Tahoe, Utah ►

U

tah and other western states are home to many gateway communities—those that lie just outside iconic landscapes that draw steady streams of tourists and visitors.

These communities support the recreation industry that contributes an estimated \$4.9 billion dollars to Utah's economy alone. But this support comes at a price. Because they are directly in the path that visitors take to reach these popular natural attractions—and because their populations are growing as people relocate to live near these amenities—gateway communities face specific challenges, including severe congestion, lack of affordable workforce housing, and concerns about sprawl.



◀ Moab, Utah, and Sandpoint, Idaho ▶ are two of the most popular tourism locations in the western gateway region.

cross-university, interdisciplinary hub, which we now call the GNAR Initiative and which was adopted into USU IROT in 2020.

Describe the GNAR toolkit and how gateway communities are using it?

The toolkit is GNAR in action. We've curated case studies, tools, templates, and other resources that cover a wide range of topics—including sustainable tourism, short-term rentals, water conservation, historical preservation, housing affordability, and a lot more. For example, there's a "Dark Skies Toolkit" that provides best practices and certifications for conserving dark skies in natural areas. There are webinars about communities that have found innovative solutions to things like affordable housing for tourism industry employees (a chronic challenge). And there are tools that public officials can use to communicate with the public positively and effectively. The content comes from a variety of public, educational, and nonprofit sources as well as from USU Extension, and we are constantly expanding the toolkit to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

How did you determine which community challenges needed to be addressed most?

One of the guiding principles of the initiative has always been to "diagnose before intervening." The



first thing we did was host a series of listening sessions. We brought gateway community leaders, organizations that support gateway communities, and state and federal government partners together to discuss the status of gateway communities and identify gaps in knowledge or resources that the GNAR Initiative could fill.

These listening sessions not only provided information and identified immediate needs, they helped us establish a network of thought partners who have supported and guided GNAR through its evolution and growth.

The Gateway and Natural Amenity Region (GNAR) Initiative—hosted at Utah State University's Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism (USU IROT)—helps western gateway communities like Moab, Utah; Lake Tahoe, California; and Sandpoint, Idaho, preserve the things that make them special and ultimately thrive as they manage their unique challenges.

In this Q&A, Jake Powell—GNAR Initiative co-director and assistant professor of landscape architecture and environmental planning at USU—discusses the need for GNAR, how it works, and the impact it's having on the tourism industry as well as on the quality of life in gateway communities.

Why did USU Extension create the GNAR Initiative?

Many USU faculty work, live, and play in gateway

UtahState
University

Q&A



Jake Powell
Co-director, GNAR Initiative
Extension Specialist
Department of Landscape
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Environmental Planning
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communities and have experienced the challenges associated with living in and visiting these places. In 2018, Dr. Danya Rumore—a researcher and professor in the University of Utah's law and planning programs—proposed a hub of resources and research that would help gateway communities overcome these challenges. Because community development is a key Extension focus area, we worked with Dr. Rumore to create a

What kinds of university and community partnerships are important to the work GNAR does and why?

Partnerships are the core of the GNAR Initiative. There are many players working in the gateway community field, however there was no common place where information was shared across disciplines, geographies, and institutions. The GNAR Initiative is that common hub, and it's guided by a group of public land managers, state agencies, non profit organizations, and universities. This group feeds the GNAR Initiative current challenges and helps distribute opportunities and resources through their networks. They are a key sounding board for any strategic step the initiative wants to take.

Gateway communities are as different as their names, however, there are commonalities among their challenges and unique solutions that we work to understand and then share. Each community partner and the story of their community and the challenges they face are important to our understanding of the larger tapestry of western gateway communities.

What are your plans for expanding and promoting GNAR?

We are developing a training series that invites participants to fully participate in interactive webinars, peer-to-peer learning sessions, and follow-up content to help GNAR communities reimagine planning as a vehicle to empower the community to take hold of their collective future. Community-focused planning works best when a community comes together to identify what is important and then creates plans and policies that sustain that vision.

We also are supporting and preparing to be a platform for sharing the results of several research projects focused on better understanding the relationship between housing and transportation in western gateway communities.

How could you help develop Cooperative Extension's reputation as an expert in the tourism economy?

A gateway community isn't made up of just the amenities that draw the tourists. It is a living, evolving organism made up of people, schools, infrastructure, and landscapes that are affected, positively and negatively, through our visitation. Often the communities themselves lack a voice at the tourism economy table.

“

One of the guiding principles of the GNAR Initiative has always been to “diagnose before intervening.”

The GNAR Initiative wants to provide a space where more traditional aspects of Extension—such as agriculture, tourism, and economic development—can include community concerns in their research, outreach, and service efforts. We have observed that when we get people interjecting tourism into their Extension roles, it tends to change their perspective to a more outward focus, and then they realize how much they have to share with visitors. Extension can be catalytic in inspiring those we work with to open up, share what they have, and engage with visitors.

Our initial focus was gateway communities in Utah, and we quickly realized that there were lessons to be learned and shared throughout the west. Now we see participants joining our events from Canada, the east coast, and we have even had people from Australia join because they are dealing with very similar challenges and have something to learn.

The GNAR online learning series is one of the initiative's most visible products, drawing hundreds of attendees from up to 30 states and provinces.



Upcoming Sessions



REENGAGE:
Mobilizing Your Community Through Proactive Engagement

REDEFINE:
Solutions Beyond Boundaries

REIMAGINE:
Planning, Not Plans

From GNAR to NET

Webinar series promotes peer-to-peer learning

In September 2021, with COVID's impacts on iconic outdoor spaces and gateway communities still fresh in the minds of tourism professionals nationwide, Powell offered a deep dive into the GNAR initiative during a webinar hosted by National Extension Tourism (NET) webinar committee, on which he serves. Titled "Thriving or Surviving? Exploring GNAR(ly) Challenges Occurring in Western Gateway Communities," it provided an opportunity for other Extension and tourism professionals to learn from Powell's experience—best practices, lessons learned, and resources for carrying out the work.

That's what the NET webinar series is all about: providing a platform for Extension, Sea Grant, and other tourism professionals to share with and learn from one another. The series, which launched in 2020, has since delivered seventeen webinars on topics ranging from aquaculture tourism to customer-service training programs to "Craft Beer and Extension." With more than 1,800 registrations to date (averaging 100 registrations and 62 live attendees per event), it is clearly meeting a need. In addition to Powell, the NET webinar committee includes Doug Arbogast, Kristen Devlin, Bryan Fluech, and Miles Phillips.

The National Extension Tourism (NET)

Design Team provides leadership to NET work collectively across the U.S. The Design Team structure is geographically aligned with the four Regional Rural Development Centers, with three tourism-

focused Extension and Sea Grant professionals representing each region. The Design Team also engages federal partners from USDA NIFA and National Sea Grant, and partners from the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDC). As of January 2023, the NET Design Team Members include the following:

NET Executive Committee (until 2023 conference)

- **Chair:** Andy Northrop, Michigan State University Extension
- **Vice Chair:** Xinyi Qian, University of Minnesota Tourism Center
- **Secretary:** Stacy Tomas, Oklahoma State University
- **Past Chair:** Lisa Chase, University of Vermont Extension
- **Admin:** Kristen Devlin, Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

2023 Conference Chair

Natalie Chin, Wisconsin Sea Grant

2021 Conference Chair

Bryan Fluech, University of Georgia Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant

Northeast Regional Representatives

- Doug Arbogast, West Virginia University Extension Service
- Jada Lindblom, University of New Hampshire Extension
- (one vacant seat)

Southern Regional Representatives

- Ann Savage, North Carolina State University Extension
- April Turner, South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium
- Matt Ulmer, Auburn University Extension

RRDC Partners

- North Central Regional Center for Rural Development
- Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development
- Southern Regional Development Center
- Western Rural Development Center

Western Regional Representatives

- Dolan Eversole, Hawaii Sea Grant
- Miles Phillips, Oregon State University Extension Service/Oregon Sea Grant
- Jake Powell, Utah State University Extension

North Central Regional Representatives

- Natalie Chin, Wisconsin Sea Grant
- Gwynn Stewart, Ohio State University Extension
- Diane Van Wyngarden, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Federal Liaisons

- Sarah Rocker, USDA NIFA
- NOAA Sea Grant (vacant)



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