

**UA Center for Economic Development**

**Ecotourism and  
Outdoor Recreation**

## **Ecotourism and Outdoor Recreation**

With a growing concern for the environment, coupled with a strong desire to escape from the traditional vacation, many travelers are beginning to discover the benefits and advantages of ecotourism, which has become the fastest growing tourism market in the world. Ecotourism now makes up about 10-20% of all tourism in the world. Alabama has a vast array of natural resources and beautiful land that could capitalize on this growing craze. Outdoor recreation has been shown to help individuals mentally, physically, and spiritually. It also gives them a sense of ownership, which makes them want to see the environment flourish and sustain its natural beauty.

### **What is Ecotourism?**

Ecotourism (sometimes also referred to as nature tourism) can be defined as travel to relatively undisturbed or historical areas to study, admire, and enjoy scenery, plants, animals, and cultural attractions. Ecotourism is a big industry where lovers of nature and all of its surroundings can enjoy the atmosphere. It has become increasingly popular form of tourism in which tourists seek out wild and scenic areas for an active and educational trip.

Ecotourism is responsible travel that promotes the conservation of nature and sustains the well-being of local people. Ecotourism is a specialty segment of nature tourism. Nature tourism has been increasing at an annual rate between 10-30 percent a year, while overall tourism has grown at a rate of 4 percent annually.

Today's marketplace is becoming "greener" and more environmentally sensitive than ever, with 85 percent of the industrialized world's citizens believing that the environment is the number one public issue. This attitude has evidently had an effect on the rise in popularity of ecotourism, which has been called the fastest growing tourism market in the world, and its growth is expected to continue. According to the Ecotourism Society, it is estimated that ecotourism is expected to expand by 20 percent to 25 percent each year for the remainder of the decade

### **How Does Ecotourism Benefit the Community?**

Ecotourism is characterized by small scale development designed to:

- Attract tourists to natural environments which are unique and accessible.
- Use tourism to bring about improved nature conservation through education, changing attitudes at all levels.
- Provide employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local residents

The following are benefits from a successful ecotourism plan:

- Generates local employment, both directly and in the tourism sector and in various support and resource management sectors.
- Stimulates profitable domestic industries:
- Hotels and other lodging facilities, restaurants and other food services, transportation systems, handicrafts, and guide services.
- Generates foreign exchange for the country and injects capital and new money into the local economy.
- Diversifies the local economy, particularly in rural areas where agricultural employment may be sporadic or insufficient.
- Encourages productive use of the lands which are marginal for agriculture, enabling large tracts to remain covered in natural vegetation.
- Enhances local community esteem and provides the opportunity for greater understanding and communication among people of diverse background.
- Demonstrates the importance of natural and cultural resources to a community's economic and social well-being and can help to preserve them

### **What is Outdoor Recreation?**

Outdoor recreation, like ecotourism, is another way that a community can use their natural resources to join the growing trend of nature tourism. Outdoor recreation/education is recreation that takes place in the outdoors, about the outdoors and for the outdoors. At the same time, the benefits of outdoor recreation for personal, social and group development, enhanced physical and psychological wellness, and aesthetic and spiritual appreciation and renewal are being increasingly valued. Outdoor recreation includes hunting, fishing, riding bikes, mountain climbing, and a vast array of activities that are involved with the environment.

Specific concepts and skills addressed in the outdoor emphasis stream include:

- The nature / value of outdoor recreation
- The outdoor recreation market
- Outdoor leadership skills
- Outdoor recreation programming
- Adventure and risk recreation
- Risk management and liability

- Environmental values/attitude/behavior
- Environmental sustainability
- Ecological Integrity
- Environmental Philosophy
- Recreation Impacts
- Minimal Impact wilderness ethics
- The benefits of outdoor recreation

### **What are the Benefits of Outdoor Recreation?**

Benefits of outdoor recreation include:

- \$400 billion+ in annual economic activity and an economic lifeline for countless communities
- 78% of adults participate at least monthly, and 58% partake at least monthly as a family activity
- Vital force for mental, physical and spiritual health
- A prime lure for visitors from overseas
- A growing factor in travel and residency patterns
- Perceived by the public as valuable in addressing other key societal concerns, including problems with education, substance abuse, parent/ child communications, and childhood obesity
- Public lands are a recreation magnet, with 40% of all Americans reporting they visited a federally-operated recreation site during the past year. Federally-managed lands and waters, one-third of the U.S. surface, attract two billion visits annually and constitute the nation's Natural Health and Fitness Centers.
- A vital force in developing an environmental ethic which embraces both use and protection: a right to enjoy the legacy of their Great Outdoors and a responsibility to enjoy that use appropriately.

## How Do I Start an Ecotourism Project and Outdoor Recreation?

- First look at your community's assets and resources. Identify what your advantages are and which are most marketable for a tourist (beach, forest, lake, river, mountain)
- Next involve the community and explain to them the benefits it will provide by bringing in tourists (hotels, restaurants, transportation systems, and guide services)
- Next contact state officials and ask about funding the start-up (the state wants tourism because it boosts the economy, so they should be very helpful). There are funds for these kinds of projects.
- Contact your game warden and ask about licenses and fees associated with the program  
([https://www.alabamainteractive.org/dcnr\\_hf\\_license/welcome.action?apk=hf](https://www.alabamainteractive.org/dcnr_hf_license/welcome.action?apk=hf)) is the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources for the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries)
- Then obtain the necessary legal matters such as insurance for the program
- After evaluating the advantages of the program, make a brochure outlining these advantages and send it to adventure, wildlife, and adventure magazines. Also send it to the state department so that they can put it in their brochure on the advantages of Alabama. Then register for a website through the proper authorities and create a website detailing what your program has to offer.
- Finally hire flexible workers with good communication skills that can showcase what the program has to offer. They will often have a generalist background with widely ranging interests and knowledge.