

EDGECOMBE COUNTY SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN 2008



Submitted to the Edgecombe County Extension Center, Edgecombe County Government
and the residents of Edgecombe County

On November 12, 2008

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North Carolina State University Tourism Extension Program

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INTRODUCTION

Acknowledgements and Gratitude

Our class had the privilege of meeting and working with dozens of talented and passionate Edgecombe County residents during the spring of 2008. The people listed on page six provided insights, opinions, ideas, support, and healthy criticisms throughout the planning process. Without them, the following pages would be blank.

We appreciate all of the people who took the time to complete the online surveys associated with the tourism plan and for sharing your candid thoughts with us on the county, your feelings about tourism, and your concerns and vision for the county's future. While four months is not adequate time to learn the heritage, goals, and personality of the community, we hope that the suggestions and insights in this plan will provide a launching point for a formal county-wide tourism program that brings new wealth, an expanded quality of life, and benefit to the natural environment.

The Daily Southerner's Sherry Brunson helped publicize the effort and thereby gain more participation in the planning process. Thank you to County Manager Lorenzo Carmon and to each of the County Commissioners for supporting this effort from the beginning. Thank you to all of the Edgecombe County Cooperative Extension staff for your hospitality and support. Thank you to the county for providing the necessary funding and staff support to undertake this process – we are grateful. Special thanks go to Eric Evans and James Pearce. Without their vision, hospitality and guidance, these important ideas of the community would not have been captured. Because of their time, energy and knowledge of the county, this document exists and will hopefully spur further action and communication.

Dr. Candace Goode in the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management has been a loyal ally of this project and of Tourism Extension initiatives in general. Having the emotional, logistical, and administrative support of your home department is critical. Thank you, Dr. Goode! Special recognition goes to Carrie Banks, Jessica Carr and Amanda Williamson for their smooth execution of the research components of the course, for developing the tourism development goals, and for providing oversight and guidance to the overall process. Thank you, Jess, Jennifer, James, Eric, and Brookie for

your editing prowess.

And finally, thank you to the students who took a chance by enrolling in a “special topics” class that called for lots of independent work and self-motivation, creativity and collaboration, regular communication outside the classroom, good spirits, organizational skills and structure, and blind faith in the planning process. It was an honor to work with you:

**Jennifer Beedle, Emily Blackwell, Trevor Hudspeth,
Mimi Kennedy, Josh Marcero, Jennifer Knutson, Alison Murray,
Grace Riddle, Bob Safrit, and Niklas Velandar**

Carol Kline (and the spring 2008 class of Tourism Planning: Keeping it Real)

Thank you to...

Alan Matthews	Martha Lamm
Andre Knight	Marva Scott
Art Bradley	Megan Hanks
Betty NeSmith	Michael O'Brian
Brenda Cooper	Monika Fleming
Buddy Hooks	Nat Patel
Carisa Rudd	Ola Pittman
Carol Quigless	Oppie Jordan
Calvin Anderson	Paul Joyner
Charles Finn	Penny Hill
Charles Penny	Peter Varney
Charlie Harrell	Raj Patel
Cliff Hickman	Richard Anderson
Deborah Lamm	Roberta Cashwell
Delia Perkins	Rose Fox Hunter
Denise Anderson	Reuben Blackwell
Eric Greene	Rudolph Knight
Eugenia Wade	Rusty Holderness
Hiram Perkinson III	Sam Knight
Rev. Hudson Barksdale	Sherry Brunson
Inez Holderness Ribustello	Steve Butcher
Joe Dickens	Steve Raper
Joe White	Steve Webber
Jonathan Felton	Thomas "TC" Cherry
Joyce Dickens	Troy Lewis
Larry Flowers	Trudy Lynn
Laurence Auld	Viola Harris
Leonard Wiggins	Virginia (at comfort inn)
Lisa Walton	Rev. Wayne Hines
Lois Watkins	Pamela Whitaker
Lorenzo Carmon	Lugenia Leonard
Lynn Cale	

This plan is dedicated to Lou Ellen Gardner Kline of Pinetops
who inspired my appreciation for the good people in Edgecombe County many many years ago.

Why Tourism in Edgecombe County?

Tourism is the world's largest industry according to the World Tourism Organization (2007). The tourism industry can generate substantial economic growth by creating jobs and increasing revenue. There are many counties feeling the economic downturn from the closing of textile and agricultural industries within the state; Edgecombe County is no exception. Tourism is often identified as a key industry with the potential to assist in diversifying local economies.

The development of a thriving tourism industry in a rural county contributes to improved socioeconomic conditions including increased community wealth, higher employment rates, diversified economies, and enhanced quality of life. Edgecombe County possesses many unique assets that, if properly developed and managed, can create an image as a destination. This attractive image will enable Edgecombe County to reap the benefits of planned, sustainable tourism.

The county's predominant assets are its rich cultural heritage and innate inclination for historic preservation. Existing elements of this preservation include architecture, historic archives, folk-life, industry, and oral traditions. Edgecombe County's dedication to preserve and embrace the assets that make it unique is shared by multi-generational residents as well as newcomers.

Agriculture is another aspect of Edgecombe County culture that can be transformed into a tourism product. There are a few farmers currently interacting with visitors and others that have expressed interest in joining this statewide and national trend. There is also an opportunity for both consumptive (hunting and fishing) and non-consumptive (bird-watching and wildlife-watching) enjoyment of wildlife on several farms and county natural areas.

The landscape of Edgecombe County is ideal for many outdoor recreation activities. Activities like kayaking and biking have taken on enormous popularity. Edgecombe County is in an advantageous position to welcome visitors from around the world who travel to participate in outdoor recreation activities in pristine, untouched landscapes.

Finally, opportunities for discovering the arts in Edgecombe County would significantly contribute to a visitor's experience. Cultural tourists wish to connect with the place they are visiting in a real and meaningful way. A thriving arts scene not only provides

an aesthetic and vibrant "backdrop", but also translates, teaches, represents, and reminds visitors and residents about the community's identity.

Tourism brings in *direct revenue* to the private sector as well as the county government. It creates an *indirect economic impact* when direct revenue re-circulates through supporting businesses and employee spending. It diversifies the job base in the county, gives young adults an economic incentive to stay in the county and provides an outlet for entrepreneurial energy. Tourism is a way to grow the economic health of the county by not sacrificing, but enhancing the natural and cultural environment. Based on multiple open forums with county officials, community groups and organizations and residents Edgecombe County is more than ready to see its economic situation turned around. The county has the potential to make great strides in community revitalization and tourism development. Community planning, communication, and action are the keys to realizing the county's economic, social, and environmental goals.

Why a Tourism Plan?

As rural areas become rarer throughout the state from urban development and growth, the qualities of rural life will continue to increase in value because people will seek out communities that still exhibit them. The Piedmont area of North Carolina continues to undergo tremendous change as urban sprawl continues, the state's population steadily increases, and the demographics and industry priorities shift. It is imperative to be proactive in community planning so that vulnerable, rural areas are able to control the direction of change and manage growth.

Currently, Edgecombe County residents are not benefitting from the tourism industry as much as they could. Because there are limited opportunities for visitors to spend their money within the county, there is a need to explore new ways to generate revenue from tourism. Additionally, for tourism to be sustainable, the efforts must be driven by the community and implemented in realistic, logical, strategic steps. During the initial planning period of January through May 2008, input from county residents was sought through a survey, individual discussion, meetings, and focus groups. Several themes consistently emerged during our meetings and discussions with county residents.

1. Residents desired supplemental income sources and community-wide economic growth.
2. Likewise, residents wish for expanded community development amenities to increase the quality of life with a variety of recreational activities, healthy living outlets, and expanded personal and community services.
3. Residents are aware of the local urban markets and Interstate markets within their reach.
4. They realize that their county is still relatively unspoiled and how that characteristic is becoming a precious commodity. Visitors are desired, but not at the cost of losing the current “small town charm.”

This tourism plan focuses on community-based, sustainable tourism, which is a form of tourism that aims to include and benefit local communities, particularly those in rural areas. Community-based tourism planning is done with the involvement and consent of local residents. The benefits go directly to the citizens, and efforts are environmentally sustainable as well as respectful of traditional culture and social structure.

Sustainable tourism in its purest sense is an industry which attempts to make a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate income, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems. It is responsible tourism that is both ecologically and culturally sensitive. Below are some of the benefits and byproducts of sustainable tourism:

- Provides economic benefit and can improve socioeconomic conditions: increase employment rate and land value, improve quality of life, and contribute to the creation of infrastructure benefiting residents.
- Can create a supplemental, sustainable income stream, or augment an existing one as well as diversifying the economy.
- Helps to minimize negative impacts from overuse and overdevelopment through proper planning
- Creates an opportunity for residents to feel pride in and promote the county by sharing their community with visitors.
- Provides ways to deliver experiences unique to the area so that the history of the community will be preserved and remembered.

- Generates support for protection of natural resources for the future through revenue, creation of environmental programs, and exploration of the area.
- Increases visitation to heritage sites.
- Brings new ideas and perspectives to the community.
- Gives an opportunity to host visitors who wish to connect with the community and give back through monetary or volunteer support, and perhaps most importantly...
- **Gives residents an opportunity to control and impact future conditions in their community.**

Without a plan, communities are susceptible to impulsive development decisions or a one-sided vision. Appendix D presents a list of potential pitfalls that can occur when tourism is not planned thoughtfully or without the input of citizens. To realize the vision and strengthen the economy and community of Edgecombe County, a strategic, proactive, longitudinal effort must be undertaken. This plan serves to outline strategies that will contribute to the residents' vision of their county's economic, cultural and environmental future.

Goals of Tourism Development for Edgecombe County

The mission of the county's tourism program should be to make Edgecombe County a celebrated place to live and to visit. Focusing on the overarching goals of economic growth, environmental protection, community involvement, and social justice will do this. Each of the strategies in this plan serves to meet one or more of the following goals. Later in the plan, evaluation methods are offered for assessing milestones towards each goal.

Goal 1: Enhance Edgecombe County's economy.

Goal 2: Develop community infrastructure and tourism products.

Goal 3: Involve and inspire community.

Goal 4: Increase tourism partnerships within the county and the region.

Goal 5: Market and create demand for Edgecombe County products and services.

Goal 6: Preserve and celebrate the small town charm, arts, atmosphere and culture of Edgecombe County.

Goal 7: Protect the natural resources through mitigating the negative impacts of tourism.

In Appendix J, a chart is offered cross-referencing each of the strategies in this plan with these seven goals. This chart will suggest to which goal(s) each strategy contributes.

How the Plan is Organized

This plan is a working document meant to serve as a starting point to formalize tourism development efforts in Edgecombe County. It was researched, organized, and written in a period of ten months and reflects an estimated 1,090 student hours, 520 instructor hours, 535 hours from James Pearce and Eric Evans, and 600 hours invested by Edgecombe County residents and employees. The strategies contained in the plan are the result of many sources including national tourism trends and statistics, local historical and contextual data, traffic estimates for the county, focus groups and interviews with residents, a three-phase survey of residents, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis and a tour of the county's communities (see appendices for supporting documentation). Even with this intense input into the planning process, the attempt to capture the complex history and multifaceted vision of an entire county can only result in a sketch. It is the intent of the authors for this plan to be that sketch. To that end, the document is organized as a blueprint in the following manner:

- ✧ Executive Summary/ Critical Initiatives – the initiatives in this section should be a part of every discussion regarding tourism development in the county and represent the foundation for community and economic development efforts from 2009 on.
- ✧ Tourism Development Strategies Section – many ideas were generated during our visits to the county and input we received through the online studies conducted. These ideas are formulated and reflected in product development, community involvement, marketing, and natural resource management strategies.
- ✧ Implementation/Timeline of Strategies – this section provides a hypothetical structure for the multitude of strategies suggested in the strategies section of the plan. Once the actual strategies have been agreed upon for the coming years, the timeline should be revised and adopted as the official Edgecombe County Tourism Plan for 2010-2015.
- ✧ Evaluation Methods – this section offers ways to measure the completion and effectiveness of strategies and objectives.
- ✧ Appendices/Supporting Data – probably the largest section of the plan, the documents in the appendices provide supporting information for the strategies as well as inspire additional ideas, exploration, and solutions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/ CRITICAL INITIATIVES

Edgecombe County, like any rural county, has its share of assets, opportunities, and challenges unique to its particular location, topography, history, and culture. Unfortunately, with each positive feature comes a related drain on resources. This executive summary will present the county's greatest features, note the corresponding issue that hinders positive growth and utilization of the features, and propose actions towards mitigating the limiting or unconstructive forces.

The county has a wealth of tourism development assets – a larger variety and more visitor-ready than many other rural counties in North Carolina. But corresponding to that is the need to organize, link, package, interpret, and market them. Because there are so many, this cannot be left to a collaborative volunteer effort. A Tourism Development Authority must be put in place in the near future if the municipal and county governments, businesses and residents wish to maximize these assets as tourism products. Additionally, an attractive website that organizes and presents the assets in a professional and user-friendly format is essential.

1. Form a Tourism Development Authority
2. Put considerable resources towards the development of a tourism website

The county is in a superb location, near significant urban centers, along two major interstates, and adjacent to neighboring counties with complementary tourism products. While tourism development is a regional activity, it is often planned in localized manner because of regulatory and fiduciary boundaries. It takes vision on the part of all leadership to implement policies that lead to good of the region. To compound the natural tendency to localize growth strategies, the fact that Rocky Mount is part of two counties often polarizes economic development issues in Edgecombe and Nash. The tourism director for both counties would normally promote each other's assets, knowing that the tourist does not know the difference and understanding that both counties will benefit. However, because the economic and community development efforts in Rocky Mount have been primarily within the Nash County lines, there is little benefit for Edgecombe County to promote the city. Further, when visitors and new residents of Edgecombe note the higher

level of amenities in Rocky Mount (consequently concentrated in Nash); they naturally choose to spend their dollars there, thereby increasing the economic gap between the two. This problem goes beyond the scope of tourism development, and influences many decisions made about industry recruitment and location, residence purchases, and business start-ups. It certainly influences where Edgecombe businesses choose to entertain and house company colleagues and where families recommend their relatives stay during reunions and weddings. In order for Edgecombe to “catch up” to the rest of the region, it must intensely focus on its local economy while remaining an amiable regional partner.

3. Revive the revitalization
4. Locate examples of successful development policies, incentives, and tax structures.
5. Recruit additional dining and entertainment options from outside the county or grow them from within.
6. Invest/focus locally
7. Increase entrepreneurship

The natural and human heritage of the county is complex, powerful, and intriguing.

However, key components contributing to this – the historical notoriety of the county, relationships between black and white residents, and the beautiful Tar River - are the very features that continue to prevent the county from working in a unified fashion. Because the county is one of the oldest in the state and almost became the capital, its industrial, political, and social roots are over 250 years deep. Fertile agricultural fields, trade on the river, and its location inland from the coast shaped the county’s history, which in turn shapes the present. The place, as one resident commented, is “a county of divides,” referencing the racial divide, the political division of county and city governments, the variations between blue and white collar workers, the disconnect between long-time residents and newcomers, the two-county split of Rocky Mount, and even the Tar River that runs through the county. By far, the most intense and detrimental divide is the historic mistrust between black and white populations. “There is enough history on both sides to generate a lot of bad feelings,” one resident summated. “There isn’t an element of community life it doesn’t permeate and it is really affecting people’s decisions to live and work here.” For this reason, one of the critical issues for the county to address is race relations.

8. Create an aggressive effort to bridge racial divide.

These initiatives are critical to the economic and social health of the community and imperative to implement if tourism is to become a contributing factor in the county's economy. They are not repeated in the tourism development strategies section of this plan. They are the foundation for economic, residential, and community development for the next decade.

1. Form a Tourism Development Authority

Begin lobbying efforts for the formation of a Tourism Development Authority (TDA) and a full-time tourism director position. Tourism is an elaborate effort and it is too much to manage without a full-time position. Resources to pay this position could come from the establishment of an occupancy tax. Please see the appendices for a discussion on occupancy tax, occupancy tax revenues for North Carolina counties in 2006-2007, the role and responsibilities of a Tourism Development Authority, measures of success for a tourism director, as well as sample budget for a TDA (Appendices O-S). Below is a suggestion for how the TDA director might allocate their time to aspects of tourism development:

Community relationship building (leaders & citizens)	25%
Product development/ linking of assets	25%
Marketing	25%
Regional networking/partnership building	10%
Grant-writing	10%
Tourism research	5%

2. Continue Development of Website

Edgecombe County needs to develop the website more in order to effectively communicate all that it has to offer. The Internet is a major resource for potential visitors, so it is imperative that the website include everything visitor-related that Edgecombe County has to offer. The website needs to be neat, easy to navigate, and comprehensive. It should also include images and information that demonstrate what the county stands for and represents. In addition to a listing of lodging, dining, and attractions, the website much include:

- Directions to Edgecombe County
- Things to Do

- Lodging and Dining
- Calendar of Events
- Shopping
- Meeting Spaces and Services
- Planning a Wedding
- Media Leads, Photographed Images to download, previous press releases
- Group Travel information
- Suggested itineraries for varying length of stay
- Images of historic houses, Tarboro Common, streetscapes, farmland, Tar River, attractions, artifacts
- Images of people attending festivals, recreating, shopping, farming, meeting, doing business
- Quotes from visitors
- Quotes from historic people
- Interesting facts about the county
- About the community section
- An easy to find contact link for more information and planning
- Links to local business websites
- Links to and from VisitNC.com

3. Revive the Revitalization!

Perhaps the single most important action undertaken by community leaders and citizens would be to contribute public resources, know-how, creative problem-solving, policy construction, and individual sweat to the revitalization of main streets in Tarboro, Princeville, and every other town in the county. Downtown and community revitalization efforts encompasses volunteerism, visioning, planning for the next generation, economic restructuring, marketing, re-design of public areas, multi-use buildings, creative financing, tax incentives, landscaping, multi-generational collaboration, public art, community celebrations, education, and cohesion. In short, by focusing on revitalization, a host of benefits will occur: increased economic activity, increased entrepreneurial energy, increased tourist traffic, decreased out-migration, improved community aesthetics and historic preservation, bolstered community pride and self-esteem, and reinvestment in the county. Some great sites to learn more include:

- National Trust for Historic Preservation Community Revitalization Programs <http://www.preservationnation.org/about-us/programs/community-revitalization.html>
- Project for Public Spaces <http://www.pps.org/>

- NC Department of Commerce’s Community Services
<http://www.nccommerce.com/en/CommunityServices/>

Locally, the small towns of the County can contact Bob Murphrey, Small Town Main Street Coordinator of Eastern NC, who is based out of Wilmington, and can be reached at (919) 218-2934 or rmurphrey@nccommerce.com. Additionally, the NC Rural Center has a Small Town Program (<http://www.ncruralcenter.org/smalltowns/index.html>) that has included Pinetops in its Economic Prosperity Demonstration Program. The website says of Pinetops,

“...they plan to pursue retirement-related development such as retirement homes, group homes and nursing care facilities. The town (also) hopes to develop more affordable housing for low- to moderate- income renters and homeowners. One possible solution being investigated is the renovation of the former Highland School for low-income housing.”

This type of revitalization is a good first step in diversifying the county’s economic portfolio. Additionally, entrepreneurship resources can be found at universities (<http://ncsu.edu/enitiative/>), community colleges, and small business administration offices. See Appendices V and W for a short word about revitalization programs and community appearance standards.

4. Locate successful development policies, incentives, and tax structures

Create a task force to find tangible examples of innovative and forward policies, practices and incentives that spur economic growth. Seek out municipal and county policies, incentives, tax structure, real estate laws, and other programs that have been successful in boosting rural areas. At the same time, compare existing policies within the county that may hinder development opportunities.

This is not a new idea or one that county officials have not considered, but because of other more immediate concerns and priorities, there is a lack of time to research the issue. Additional manpower should be applied to researching this topic by a committee composed of members from public, private, and non-profit sectors. An external member would be beneficial to lend an outside view – perhaps a representative from the Department of Commerce, Division of Community Assistance would be available for a temporary commitment to assist.

5. Recruit additional dining and entertainment options from outside the county or grow them from within

The grassroots effort to recruit hotel rooms to the county was successful; a similar effort must now be made for additional dining and entertainment options...

6. Edgecombe County must invest locally

While economic development in Edgecombe County has had successes in the past decade, it has come at a slower rate than the community can tolerate. The population of the county is decreasing and neighboring counties continue to tap regional opportunities due to more favorable property tax rates, school amenities, restaurant and entertainment options, and better infrastructure. Several strategies enacted in concert can slow the economic leakage and increase future wealth within the county.

Edgecombe County is full of energetic community-minded folks wanting to improve the quality of living in the county for their families, their neighbors, and the community at large. Eat and buy local campaigns can raise awareness on the individual impact of buying locally, spark community pride and encourage healthy eating habits. Special cooking events could be scheduled at the farmer's market, entrepreneur workshops could be offered, and informal lectures/ open discussions might be given at the community college or Extension office explaining the concept of economic leakage and its relationship to a healthy economy. Designate an "eat local" week or "buy local" week to raise awareness about supporting the county's farmers and decreasing economic leakage is an example to create community awareness and increase community support.

Particular to the tourism industry, we were distressed to hear evidence of county businesses being unsupportive of the hotels located in the county. While not all accommodations are created equal, if they are operating an appropriate standard, agencies, organizations and businesses should place guests in Tarboro hotels when at all possible. Tourism encompasses all visits from outside the county, not merely the leisure-oriented ones. If the existing hotels do not thrive, much less survive, a downward spiral of tourism and related economic development will be amplified.

7. Increase Entrepreneurship

The first step in generating entrepreneurial activity is education. A series of "assessment

workshops" could be held around the county to determine which citizens have interest in running their own business. There are several opportunities for residents to create their own business, especially related to tourism. In an online entrepreneurial climate survey yielding thirty responses in 2006, 13% of residents said they already owned their own business. Another 13% of respondents said they were in the process of, or considering starting their own business. A third question asked respondents to assess their own entrepreneurial ability "Do you consider yourself entrepreneurial either in your profession or how you contribute to your community?" Over 26% of respondents said they were absolutely entrepreneurial and another 26% said somewhat entrepreneurial! These numbers indicate that citizens of Edgecombe County are ready to explore entrepreneurial opportunities (please see the appendices for the full report on the entrepreneurial climate survey data.). Perhaps a business relating to the tourism industry would fit their personal needs and provide a viable venture.

Economic development offices, universities, and policy-makers nationally are recognizing the power of entrepreneurship. Economic development is classically linked to a three-legged stool where business recruitment, business retention and expansion, and business generation all play a role in a healthy economy. Because of globalization, shifting labor laws, and the gains in technology, encouraging business generation is getting more attention in the last few years. An initiative out of the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship called Energizing Entrepreneurs is a leading source of information on how to assess entrepreneurship, encourage it, and build capacity with the effort. This is *the* place to start to learn about what entrepreneurs need to be successful (www.energizingentrepreneurs.org). Closer to home, the NC Rural Center Institute for Entrepreneurship has begun a rural entrepreneurship initiative (<http://www.ncruralcenter.org/entrepreneurship/index.asp>), which includes an assessment of the entrepreneurial climate in the state (<http://www.ncruralcenter.org/entrepreneurship/markelypagesreport.pdf>). Growing entrepreneurial potential should be a county-wide priority in the coming years.

8. Create an aggressive effort to bridge racial divide.

The environment of tension between black and white races in Edgecombe County can and will act as a barrier to successful tourism development if it is not addressed. Visitors are likely to feel a certain discomfort with the tension that is pervasive throughout the county. This discomfort will create a negative image of the county in the eye of the visitor and

counteract any progress made towards sustainable tourism development. Additionally, the tension creates discomfort among residents, which manifests itself with self-segregation – a terrible foundation for community development projects, economic advancement, and attracting new residents to the county. Our group learned that some long-time residents move out of the county when retirement allows them the opportunity, and youth decide to live somewhere more “progressive” when they are able.

In an article published in the Raleigh News & Observer on May 18, 2008, Timothy Tyson, author of *Blood Done Sign my Name*, notes, “If we ignore or rewrite our history, we lose control of our greatest power -- the ability to shape the future. Because we don't look at our history honestly, our conversations about race are often filled with false clichés. What we get is a lot of finger-pointing and hand-wringing, guilt, blame and shame. What we need to do is start thinking about what kind of community we want our children and grandchildren to grow up in.”

Edgecombe County has significant racial issues to overcome. The ramifications of these issues are not only social and psychological, but also economic. Inviting Timothy Tyson to come to Edgecombe County to hold a circuit of discussions in the county would be a proactive step. Inquire about his group Big Picture Talkers, formed to work for racial reconciliation. Consider sending a group of elected officials and community leaders to the course "The South in Black & White," that Tyson teaches at the Hayti Heritage Center in Durham. An aggressive and public initiative should be launched to begin to create and strengthen relationships within the county and across black and white communities.

As the Latino population and influence increases in the nation and within the state, the county's population will continue to transition. Two sources to assist are the Center for New North Carolinians at UNC Greensboro (<http://cnnc.uncg.edu/>) and NCSU Extension Latino program at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/Latino.html>. The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation (<http://winterinstitute.org/>) is based in Mississippi and has several online tools and resources. Additionally, many faith-based programs exist to help bridge racial rifts.

Each issue is daunting, but can be addressed successfully with the cross-cut support of the community. The greatest asset of Edgecombe County is its strong, resilient, intelligent, passionate, caring, creative, and motivated residents. We met a lot of them during our visits and know that even more are ready to take on what needs to be done to ensure a positive future in five, ten, and fifty years.

For each of the Issues 3-8, a committee of ten should be formed (involving 60 people total), representing a broad spectrum of talents, towns, and perspectives. This may include business owners from across the county, community leaders, educators, activists and interested citizens. These committees reach beyond tourism development, and so should the committee members. **These critical initiatives are not mentioned in the rest of the plan because they represent larger efforts than tourism, but they should be considered the first priority by those interested in tourism.**

There are many ways to inform community members about this effort and ensure that a broad spectrum of individuals will represent each committee. Meetings to recruit committee members should be promoted through a variety of outlets such as community colleges, churches, government agencies, and local businesses. The TDA and the website initiative should be managed by the Tourism Roundtable.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

This section provides suggestions on the four key areas of sustainable tourism development: product development, community involvement, marketing and natural resource management. A suggested timeline for these strategies are included following this section of the plan.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Edgecombe County is a crossroads of history, transportation, and waterways. With the rich history of Tarboro and Princeville, the amenities of Rocky Mount, the recreation opportunities of the Tar River and the easy access to I-95 and US-64, Edgecombe County has the ability to attract many types of visitor markets. These are just a few of the things that make this county special, but there are many more assets within the county lines that remain understated or undeveloped and need to be celebrated.

Product Development is the process of enhancing these assets; this may be the start of new elements, such as the establishment of a bike trail, or it may be the enrichment of existing elements, such as sharing the stories about a local historical event. Either way, these products are part of the experience that holds value to a visitor.

After a brief discussion of managing the tourism assets inventory, the product development strategies are broken into the following niches:

- Historical
- African-American Travel
- Cultural Scene
- Agricultural
- Culinary
- Nature/Outdoor Activities
- Healthy Living
- Interpretation, Tour Operator and Guided Services
- Itineraries, Tours and Packages

Assets Inventory

Edgecombe County offers lodging, dining, historical sites, arts & culture, farms, hunting, fishing, boating, civic organizations, churches, as well as the necessities for a town to function such as hospitals, banks, fire departments, police departments, and grocery stores. A detailed inventory of all of these assets is located on a CD in Appendix Y. Below is a summary of categories of assets included in the inventory.

The Edgecombe County Assets Inventory includes:

- health, medical and rescue services
- banks and grocery stores
- dining
- lodging

- historical offerings
- arts and culture
- parks and recreation opportunities

It is important to remember that the number one asset is the people. This asset is not tangible, like a building or a river, but it has the largest effect on whether or not visitors are going to return.

An assets inventory is not only valuable in knowing what is available to tourists but what is available to the citizens as well. To make this assets list a valuable tool in development and marketing, it will be important to keep it updated as new attractions, businesses, and infrastructure are added to the county. The assets inventory is a critical resource for forming packages and themed itineraries for visitors and groups coming to the county. In addition, performing a “gap analysis” to determine what is missing from the product mix will reveal opportunities for entrepreneurs who wish to tap into the growing tourism industry.

Product Development Strategy (PD)1. Maintain an updated assets inventory

A key part of a sustainable tourism program is to maintain and consistently update the assets inventory of the county. The inventory should be mapped in order to get a better feel for the county’s product and infrastructure “clusters” and to identify infrastructure gaps.

PD2. Conduct a gap analysis of assets

In order to continuously provide quality visitor experiences it is necessary to identify “gaps” within the county’s tourism product mix. Edgecombe County possesses a number of valuable assets to share with its visitors, however, product gaps such as a lack of nightlife, or a lack of activities for children can prevent visitors from having the best possible experience. These gaps can be turned into opportunities for new tourism products and new tourism related-businesses in the county.

Historical

Edgecombe County is rich in southern heritage and American history. With the Blount Bridgers House and the historic tour of Tarboro, the deep African-American roots of Princeville, and the interesting history of Old Sparta, Whitakers, Leggett and the many other townships, this county offers an extensive history lesson. These lessons are invaluable for tourism development in Edgecombe County and offer one of the most promising avenues for growth in the tourism industry. Each of the product development strategies below will be represented by PD and a number, to make ease of referencing this strategy later in the document.

PD3. Develop a script for 12-15 historic tours of varying length and focus.

These scripts will serve as training materials for a cadre of local guides that must be groomed in the coming years. Perhaps funding might be acquired to pay a local expert(s) to teach a special topics class at the Community College where these scripts might be created as part of the class deliverable. Historic tours should include:

- ✧ Tarboro Historic District National Recreation Trail

- ✧ Princeville Community Tour
- ✧ Historic Homes and Family Stories of the county
- ✧ Agricultural county heritage (could include Pinetops and Macclesfield)
- ✧ African-American heritage
- ✧ Ghost/historical stories

PD4. Expand the ghost tour offerings, especially in the historical areas of the county. These do not have to be limited to the fall.

Ghost tours have become increasingly popular in places with well preserved historic areas like Edgecombe County. Expanding this product niche might be achieved in the following ways:

- 1.) Extend the idea of creating a ghost tour company to entrepreneurial-minded citizens.
- 2.) Partner with the community college to create an introductory tourism class. The major project for the students will be to create ghost tours, promote them to the community and run them at the end of the semester.

PD5. Choose and create visitor merchandise.

When people visit a place different from their usual locale, they often want something tangible to take home with them, to remember the experience, as well as for gifts for family and friends. Edgecombe County should focus on what types of products they would like to represent the county. Some possible products are:

- Peanut butter
- Sweet potato products
- Peanuts
- Pork products
- Maps
- Reproductions of relevant historic documents (for example, the written Charter for the town of Princeville)
- Books
- Historical trinkets/items
- Post cards
- Local art such as CDs of local musicians, paintings, etc.
- Christmas ornaments
- Shirts
- Cookbooks
- “Old-Time” games
- General store type items
- Handmade wood crafts
- Handmade soaps
- Handmade textiles (woven, sewn, knitted)
- Models of historic homes
- An afghan or throw blanket featuring the historic homes of Edgecombe county

PD6. Continue efforts to partner with Edgecombe Community College to offer classes in Historical Preservation.

Historic Preservation certificate programs are a growing curriculum across the United States. These programs give students a unique opportunity to learn about such topics as conservation, sustainability, technique and treatment of historic structures. In turn, students can apply their knowledge to assist with the ongoing preservation of Edgecombe County's historical structures and areas. Several community colleges nationwide have begun certificate programs in Historical Preservation.

www.hartford.edu/bpr/index.html ---Hartford Connecticut Community College

www.bucks.edu/catalog/3127.html ---Bucks County Pennsylvania Community College

PD7. Expand the programs of History Days to include more interactive/storytelling activities for children and adults.

Devise a 10-year plan to add new elements each year. A storytelling contest or workshop, brief performances where the public is asked to participate in the acting, cooking and culinary aspects such as a cookbook which includes traditional family recipes handed down generations, dancing lessons with optional dance in period costume, and creation of a county timeline and mural are all activities to expand the popular weekend event. History Days packages should be formed in partnership with local lodging and dining establishments.

African American Travel

African-American travel volume is up 4 percent from 2000 to 2002 (increasing from 72.2 million to 75.2 million person-trips), higher than the two percent increase for travelers overall during the same time period. A majority of African-American person-trips are for leisure (74%), most often to visit friends or relatives (44%). One in five (22%) African-American person-trips are taken for business, including combined business and pleasure purposes. Florida, North Carolina, and Georgia are the most popular Southern destinations. Virginia and Texas are also popular destinations. Group tours are popular among African-Americans. Compared to travelers overall, nearly three times as many African-American trips involve group tours (10% vs. 3%). African-American households spend \$428 per trip, on average, excluding spending on transportation to their destination. (Source: The Minority Traveler, 2003 Edition)

PD8. Create an African-American Heritage Trail.

Rocky Mount, Princeville, Tarboro, Bricks, and many, many other sites in the county exemplify the contributions of African-Americans. Work with Phoenix Society, Rocky Mount-Edgecombe County CDC, Buck Leonard Association and many other individual and organizational leaders to create a detailed trail itinerary that would be suitable for self-guided driving tours and tour operators and school groups. Explore opportunities for extending the trail beyond the county borders to establish a larger footprint, increased visibility, and collaborative promotional opportunities with surrounding counties

PD9. Continue development and promotion of the Princeville Heritage Museum.

Continue to expand interpretation for the museum and the community's story. Increase awareness of the museum by collaborating with other tourism promotions in the county. Create programs within the museum to foster community, children and youth development, and visitor education. Work with North Carolina school districts to create field trips to the museum. Write grant proposals to create a video of Princeville's history that can be sold on location. Create a brief marketing plan that can be implemented in partnership with the tourism roundtable and/or the future TDA.

PD10. Collaborate between Tarboro and Princeville to offer tours that cover the whole area. Alternatively, create a package where a visitor who pays full price for one town tour receives the other town tour for half price. Tours format should be varied: driving tours, walking tours, guided and unguided.

PD11. Tap into the African-American group tour market.

As mentioned above, nearly three times as many African Americans participate in group tours compared to travelers overall. Edgecombe County should be listed on the Destination Carolinas motor coach group tour website not only for civil war heritage trails, but also for African American heritage and cultural sites. The Phoenix Society describes many potential tour sites in the brochures they publish.

PD12. Expand opportunities for musical expression.

Work with the Phoenix Society to urge local African American musicians to out on a concert on the public commons in Tarboro, or in Princeville. Collaborate with On The Square to create one night a week where a local African-American artist performs. Tap into gospel groups and competitions.

Cultural

The downtown areas of Tarboro embody many people's view of the perfect small town atmosphere with shops, restaurants, and municipal buildings. However, people need more reasons to visit the downtown. Local artists could use the open downtown spaces to showcase and sell their unique art. Edgecombe County is also the host of many family and church reunions, and the timing these events should be considered when planning cultural events in the county. Another draw for cultural tourism is the Keihin Auditorium and the Mobley Atrium at Edgecombe Community College where the Edgecombe Performance Series has brought in high attendance from inside and outside the county.

PD13. Create a collaborative art space.

A collaborative art space providing support to small, local businesses is sorely needed. A collaborative art space would allow different mediums of art to combine in one space to sell local art. It creates a profitable working atmosphere and a popular draw for visitors wishing to sample Edgecombe County arts.

Perhaps this might also be a place for the public to learn and create art. This art space would be good for school groups, church groups, and the general public by providing a learning experience while producing some revenue. This can also become a partnering business with other businesses in the area. For example, it may be included with a class

fieldtrip to the Princeville area. Classes can be conducted focusing on activities such as jewelry making, sewing, knitting, crocheting, metal work, etc.

The county might want to consider offering a tax benefit for a building owner dedicating his/her space. A tax incentive would make it more appealing to building owner to facilitate this project. See Appendix V. for a sample of revitalization incentive programs currently employed in North Carolina.

PD14. Assimilate an inventory of county artists.

Having a list of artists categorized by art form will ease arts events planning, communication with artists, and potentially provide additional exposure for the artists if they are listed online. Examples of artist registries include:

<http://www.handmadeinamericacraftregistry.org/artists/artists.php>

http://www.blueridgeheritage.com/directory_about.asp

PD15. Install a downtown mural (or sculpture).

This would be an outlet for local artists to show their talent to visitors and certainly a way to boost community pride. Public Art provides a visible identity for communities, reminds residents of heritage and future aspirations, beautifies public areas, and provides fodder for discussion. Initiate a ten-year project to establish one piece of public art in each town in Edgecombe County. The Arts Council should work with community leaders to identify a desired piece to create or commission for each town. Contact Jeffrey York, Public Art and Community Design Director (jeffrey.york@ncmail.net) and Linda Bamford, Arts in Education Director (linda.bamford@ncmail.net) and see the NC Arts Council website (http://www.ncarts.org/freeform_scrn_template.cfm?ffscrn_id=35) for guidance in getting started.

PD16. Create public gardens that can be maintained by community organizations.

Public gardens can add to the character and aesthetic appeal of communities. The upkeep of a public garden could be done by a number of organizations such as religious groups, civic groups, school groups, etc. This project can also be developed through the NC Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program

(<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/masgar/>). The program is designed to enhance public education in consumer horticulture. It “provides educational assistance to the citizens of the county concerning lawns, fruits, vegetables, trees, and ornamentals through the utilization of a trained and supervised volunteer staff” (North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardner Program, 2007).

A flower growing/gardening competition might also be incorporated and held at the public gardens. Competitions excite local residents and draw garden enthusiast visitors. This competition should be done in partnership with local area lodging and dining facilities.

Bucks County Pennsylvania has done a noteworthy job of creating public garden space designed to beautify the county and enhance sense of pride in the community - see

(<http://bucksbeautiful.com/html/competitions.htm>).

PD17. Invite each township in Edgecombe to participate in the Happening on the Common.

Events held on Tarboro’s common are a distinctive resource that cannot be found in any other North Carolina county. In addition to showcasing the artists in the county, invite each township in Edgecombe to participate in the Happening on the Common in any number of

forms: a booth, a workshop or demonstration, a performance – something that would portray their unique contribution to the county’s heritage, culture, and arts scene.

PD18. Build an additional entrance and restroom facilities to the Keihin Auditorium so that the atrium and the auditorium can be rented separately to increase use and economic draw.

PD19. Create classes on meeting and special event planning.

Classes could be offered via Cooperative Extension, the Blount-Bridgers House, the Edgecombe County Community College system or some combination.

PD20. Create effective destination imagery by having local artists depict various aspects of the county in their artwork.

The goal would be to offer visitor merchandise at varying price points to encourage visitors to take home a piece of the county, thereby extending their experience. One merchandise idea could perhaps be a coffee table book of artwork depicting aspects of the county. Once published, it can be sold through local businesses and online at the county’s or TDA’s website.

PD21. Partner with all levels of schools to hold a county-wide photography contest representing different themes relative to the county: agricultural, natural resources, architecture, etc.

While instilling community pride, the photographs could also be compiled into a permanent public display and/or used for visitor merchandise. Or, alternatively in this age of YouTube.com, schools might issue a video contest. Submit the winning entries to “This Place Matters” a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (<http://www.preservationnation.org/>).

PD22. Utilize local photography and art throughout the county.

Remind county businesses that displaying local art is a sign of community pride and goodwill. Organize a liaison/system of communication between artists who have works to display and businesses who are willing to rotate local pieces in their facility.

Agricultural

There are over 280 farms in Edgecombe County and about eighty-five percent of these farms are owned by families, people who may have cultivated this land for generations. These farmers are passionate about their land and their heritage and many are willing to share this asset with others if given the opportunity.

PD23. Develop an Equine Complex at the East Carolina Agriculture and Education Center

Equestrian tourism (both equestrian events and trial riding) is on the rise. Developing a horse complex at Edgecombe County’s state of the art East Carolina Agriculture and Education Center will provide an additional venue for horse related activities in the eastern part of the state and will draw visitors from throughout the region in addition to giving Edgecombe County residents the benefit of using the facility to enrich their educational experience.

PD24. Set up an annual farm tour where people can learn about the crops harvested and the animals raised in the county.

The emotional claim that farmers have with their land will “sell” the farm to visitors. Four to five farms is enough to get the annual tour started and if planned well, the tour could expand each year.

PD25. Support efforts related to the recently-approved a Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD).

The recently approved VAD program is a strong step to preserving the heritage and the open-space of the county. According to Brandon King of NCSU’s Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics, advantages to Volunteer Ag Districts include:

“raising awareness about the importance of agriculture and the needs for working open space within a community's planning jurisdiction, possible increased protection from nuisance actions for farm, forestry, and horticultural operations, increased participation from members of these industries in planning efforts -- and conversely -- increased participation from planners and other professionals in the promotion and protection of working open space. For both counties and municipalities a voluntary agricultural district program can be one piece of a larger overall program for land conservation; particularly with regards to working open space. Many of the ordinances we see also list as a responsibility of the agricultural advisory board the development of a farmland protection plan, which can be used as a blueprint for promoting and protecting agriculture within planning jurisdictions -- and assist with obtaining better funding percentages under the North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund as described in N.C.G.S. § 106-744(c). These plans can also be referenced within a county or municipality's broader land use plan as the sections that address working open space.”

King also notes, “a fairly comprehensive list of towns and cities with these programs is available here: <http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/wq/lpn/ncordinances.htm>.” Support efforts related to farmland protection, as well as other open-space and green infrastructure projects.

PD26. Increase promotion of the Tarboro Farmers Market to farmers and customers.

Work with NC Agriculture Extension and NCDA Agricultural Marketing Service to increase farmer participation in the Tarboro farmer’s market by 10%. This can be done by conducting farmer’s market promotion workshops and by holding meetings with farmers to discuss incentives or current barriers to participation.

PD27. Provide classes through Cooperative Extension on the various forms of agritourism and how to start a venture.

These classes would provide information about managing visitors, programming activities, pricing to make a profit, and marketing and could be combined with other workshops and tourism entrepreneurship training programs.

Culinary

North Carolina is the 5th most-visited state for culinary and wine tasting so the diversity and abundance of eating establishments in Edgecombe County is a great asset for the county to have. On The Square restaurant is an excellent upscale restaurant in downtown Tarboro and has received numerous awards from Wine Spectator magazine. Myrtle Grove is a treasure for the region. There are also the many barbeque restaurants scattered across the county

such as Abrams Restaurant, Country Sunrise Grill & BBQ, and Hinton's Barbecue. While Edgecombe County will not reach the culinary heights of say, an Asheville, the foundation is already laid for this niche. Edgecombe County's location along the NC 64 corridor brings opportunity for partnering with other areas in the corridor such as Lexington that has an established reputation for barbecue. Creating partnerships like this will make Edgecombe County's culinary assets marketable to tour companies. With the culinary talent and the fresh ingredients already available in the county, some directed creativity could grow the culinary tourism niche in Edgecombe.

PD28. Bring the barbecue restaurants together for a barbecue contest in concert with Happening on the Common or Cantaloupe Festival.

The Happening on the Common will be celebrating its 38th annual celebration this spring. This event hosts hundreds of people and grows in size and scope each year. Combining this event with a barbecue cook-off would give new energy to the Happening and also serve as a kick-off for the barbecue event.

PD29. Hold a wine tasting event at On the Square.

Residents and/or visitors can experience North Carolina wines or compare to compare them to California wines. Wine tasting events are also great when held in conjunction with art, history, or other cultural festivals. Also, a wine tasting event could be held as a fund-raiser to support a particular tourism-related project, such as Visitor/Resident Information cards (see Tourism Development Strategies - Community Involvement section)

PD30. Hold a heritage festival in honor of historic Edgecombe County resident and wine maker, Paul Garrett.

Paul Garrett was born in Edgecombe County in 1863. His father and uncle purchased the Medoc Vineyard in Halifax County and became involved in North Carolina's wine industry in its early days. Garrett took what he learned from the family business and begun his own winery in 1900. Garrett developed a new label "Virginia Dare" and began promoting American wines for Americans. Virginia Dare white and red became the nation's leading selling wine. It won the grand prize in the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in 1904, and according to the sixth federal census, North Carolina was the leading wine producing state in the U.S.

When Prohibition was repealed in 1933 Garrett was the only vintner ready again to sell wine. Virginia Dare red and white immediately went on sale in every wet state. Garrett also launched the first singing commercial ever broadcast for wine, "Say it again....Virginia Dare.

Heritage festivals are a way to honor infamous residents of a place, celebrate culture and history, and promote community sense of pride. Festivals are also a way of attracting visitors from outside the area. The Paul Garrett Festival should have wine and wine making heritage as a theme. Incorporate area heritage into the festival by providing "old-timey" games for children, entertainment such as music from area artists, and local arts and crafts vendors. In the evening, transition to wine-tasting events.

PD31. Offer cooking class weekends on nouveau Southern cuisine to draw people into the county from nearby urban areas.

Cooking, cheese-making, and other culinary classes are on the rise as tourist activities. Only three culinary tours/classes are listed on the VisitNC website. Be the first rural county to

offer a culinary tour package, and be sure to offer a menu of activity options during their non-class “leisure” time.

Nature/ Outdoor Activities

The Tar River is a critical asset to Edgecombe County. The fact that both Tarboro and Princeville border the river gives many people access to the resources it provides. There are already some boat ramps and accesses to the river but they need to be utilized more and made visitor-ready. Great outdoor facilities can make or break the success of an outdoor enthusiast’s trip.

PD32. Develop better river access and parking.

Continue to maintain and promote the Tarboro and Edgecombe County paddle trail. Update paddle trails for canoes and kayaks. Make an updated map and brochure which could tell people about the waterways in Edgecombe. Invite Darrell McBane of NC DENR’s State Trail Program to come to the county and discuss additional access sites, signage and site amenities. The involvement of the State Trails program will ensure all paddle trail access sites meet the state’s proposed safety standards. The standards will become the basis for receiving future grants and marketing assistance. Research potential grant opportunities with the State Trails Program for improving paddle trails in Edgecombe County. Inquire with the Wildlife Resources Commission as to the potential for increasing the number of public boat ramps on the Tar River. Work with Old Sparta Historical Society to develop/expand paddling opportunities in Old Sparta. Publish a web-based paddle trail map.

PD33. Develop a local or regional series of workshops that would instruct a committee of interested citizens how to develop trail systems.

The State Trail Program and NCSU Tourism Extension and NCSU Extension Forestry could assist in this effort (please see <http://www.ncsu.edu/ncblueways/index.html> for a list of resources and workshops held in previous years). Contact appropriate leadership in each township to gauge interest in recreational trail development throughout their town.

PD34. Recruit or help develop an outfitting business to serve the equipment rental needs. Consider alternative business models, such as a community outfitter cooperative.

Each kind of recreation the county offers involve equipment or supplies. With a good outdoor/hardware center, all of these opportunities could be made more popular and profitable. The county lacks a central location where the public might access maps, contacts, supplies, and other details that would benefit an outdoor experience in Edgecombe County. Establish an outdoor recreation center/ outfitting business to lead tours on the Tar River both on the water and walking along the river. Train guides to lead tours and create opportunities for tourists to explore the natural environment that Edgecombe County has to offer.

PD35. Acquire county-owned canoes and kayaks, fishing equipment, etc. for residents and visitors to rent.

Until an outfitter is established, operate from a suitable parks and recreation venue such as Riverfront Park in Tarboro and Heritage Park in Princeville.

PD36. Explore opportunities for including Edgecombe County sites on the NC Birding Trail and/or set up independent bird-watching trails or tours.

Partner with NC State Wildlife Extension to conduct an inventory of bird species in the county.

Contact NC Birding Trail coordinator, Salinda Daley, to explore opportunities for including Edgecombe County sites on the NC Birding Trail. Consider starting a regional Audubon chapter. Good places get a glimpse of area birds are on paddle trails and farmlands. Consider approaching farmers who do not already use their land for hunting and would embrace the idea of allowing people to use their land for bird watching.

PD37. Become the first North Carolina County to initiate a wildlife-watching tourism program.

The interest in non-consumptive wildlife watching is rising both nationally and statewide. Partner with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission and NC Division of Tourism to initiate a menu of wildlife tours for this innovative and lucrative tourism niche.

PD38. Designate a park or area of an existing park as a Dog Park.

“Off-leash” dog parks are a growing trend in many urban and suburban communities. Providing these facilities promotes responsible pet ownership and gives dogs as well as their owners the opportunity to recreate together in a controlled environment. The right-sized dog park in Edgecombe County could also be a host to a “dog-days” type event including agility and other types of contests.

PD39. Encourage hunters to come to the county by setting up formal weekend or week-long hunting packages that include lodging and hunting guides.

These packages could utilize public game lands as well as private hunting venues.

PD40. Create more environmental education opportunities and programs (for a fee).

It is essential to inspire children and youth to be good stewards of natural resources. It behooves the tourists and residents alike to nurture good outdoor ethics by offering environmental education among the young. Not only do these programs promote a responsible lifestyle, but they provide a fun “product” to budding outdoorsmen and nature lovers to purchase while on a getaway. (Please note that this strategy could be listed under Interpretation below, but is placed here to emphasize its place in the outdoor niche of tourism).

PD41. Find appropriate sites to build and operate yurts as an alternative lodging option.

A yurt is a portable, felt covered, wood framed dwelling. It is a very appropriate form of lodging for eco-tourists and those wanting a primitive experience with more protection from the elements than a typical camping tent. Because of Edgecombe County’s mild winters, yurts would be good for all seasons of the year and can be easily dismantled and relocated., Locate appropriate sites to operate a yurt lodging venture. Some sources for yurt building instructions include the following:

- Yurt Info.Org - <http://www.yurtinfo.org/yurtinfo.php>
- The Construction of a Yurt - <http://www.pbm.com/~lindah/Articles/yurt/>

- Woodland Yurts - http://www.woodlandyurts.co.uk/Yurt_Facts/Build_Your_Own.html

PD42: Construct camping platforms along the Tar River.

Build a series of camping platforms for people hiking along the Tar River or paddling through to stay the night.

PD43. Work towards setting up designated camping areas at parks or available land within the county. RV camping, car camping and primitive camping would be necessary infrastructure to increase families, couples, scouting and faith-based groups, and outdoor clubs.

PD44. Hold marathons in the county where people could run from one town to the next, through various parks, or around the downtown area of a town within the county.

A “Rural Running” could solicit community solidarity as well as attract a growing market of runners who travel to participate in competitions. Contact organizations that sponsor marathons, for example, the American Heart Association and the American Lung Association assist with organizing and marketing marathons. Consider getting in touch with the National Rural Health Association to see how their experts could be of assistance in planning a marathon in a rural area.

PD45. Develop a biking or hiking tour, where visitors bike or hike their way from one B&B to another, stopping along the way to take in the local sites, history or culinary fare.

Multi-day bike, hike, or paddle tours are a great way to showcase local historical and cultural sites while at the same time promoting local bed and breakfasts and restaurants. New Orleans has tapped into this market and has begun to establish guided and unguided tours and created multi-day packages for its visitors. To view sample programs, see the website for Laid Back Tours in New Orleans (www.laidbacktours.com).

PD46. Have an annual “River Celebration” day where the county is encouraged to hold an event to honor the Tar River.

This would be a time to recognize the positive and negative role the river had in shaping the heritage of the county, remembering those lost in the flood and drawing strength on the progress since, offering free workshops on fishing, paddling, swimming, and other water-based skills, holding a big sweep clean up and/or coordinating a community construction project for a river access site. Because the river has been a pivotal part of the county’s history, the River Celebration might be an extra day added to the front end of History Days in September.

Getting people involved facilitates a personal connection between the place and the volunteer and they are much more likely to come back to the park or area of the river after helping out than if they just randomly visited. They will also be more inclined to share these places with visitors.

Healthy Living

The mental and physical health of a community can greatly affect its ability to grow and to bring in visitors. A healthy mindset and outlook on life, which can be enhanced by involvement in the community and its visitors, creates a happy and healthy environment to which visitors want to return. The crime rate of Edgecombe is slightly higher than the North Carolina average and working to increase the safety of troubled areas would help welcome more visitors to the county. Forty-three percent of the county is either eighteen years old or over sixty-five years old and the health and safety of these people should be of a particular focus when increasing the health of the county. Heritage Hospital and Chesapeake Hospital need to be utilized for information regarding overall human health.

PD47. Continue the county's focus on healthy living.

During the spring of 2008, county employees engaged in a weight loss competition. This kind of public awareness campaign on healthy living goals should be applauded and continued. Land use planning should include a system of greenways and trails to facilitate outdoor exercise. A variety of national programs exist to encourage healthy and walkable communities and manifestation of these programs make the quality of life and atmosphere better for residents but also contributes significantly to the experience for visitors. Some well-established programs include:

- Walkable Communities, Inc. (www.walkablecommunities.org)
- Active Living Resources (www.activelivingresources.org)
- The National Center for Bicycling and Walking (www.bikewalk.org)
- Smart Growth Resource Library (www.smartgrowth.org/library)

Interpretation, Tour Operator and Guiding Services

Interpretation is a way to connect people with a natural or cultural asset by increasing their understanding of the asset with a hands-on experience or techniques that engage them intellectually and emotionally. It provides interactive learning to pass on information. With this come greater understanding, appreciation and acceptance of the resource, culture or lifestyle. A well-known example of interpretation would be the first-person reenactments that take place at Williamsburg, Virginia but interpretive methods do not have to be as elaborate to be extremely effective.

Likewise, storytelling is considered one of the earliest forms of folk art and is an effective, creative way to talk about historic events. Stories have the power to entertain as well as inform. Introducing visitors to the heritage of Edgecombe County through stories will draw listeners into the lives and history of the people living in the area and create a sense of depth in the county's tourism products. Storytelling can be woven into other forms of interpretation or be a stand alone event, such as a Storytelling Festival.

PD48. Survey all of the tourism experiences in the county (heritage, nature-based, arts, etc.) to establish an inventory of existing interpretation and environmental education programs.

This will serve as an invitation list for interpretation trainings, a resource list for tapping into potential interpretation talent, and as a benchmark to base future progress.

PD49. Bring the stories of county notables alive.

Create scripts about county notables and make these available to tourism businesses throughout the county. Highlight colorful elements in the stories into “sound bytes” that could easily be translated to visitors. The goal of personal stories is to add depth to the historical interpretation of the county (see Appendix Z for a sample of county notables).

PD50. Construct Interpretation Workshops

The interpretation task force will be in charge of bringing in guest speakers for interpretation workshops. A good resource for this is the National Association for Interpreters, at <http://www.interpnet.com/> who offers instructional DVDs and other resources for interpreters. There are many reasons to take the time to create quality interpretative programming:

- It is generally low impact, low cost, and once established, low time requirements.
- Programs can typically occur with and among the existing infrastructure.
- Interpretation provides jobs and skill building opportunities to residents
- Enhanced appreciation for resources fosters the preservation of county's heritage and history among visitors and residents alike.
- Through the sharing of cultural roots, an increase in community pride and involvement is noted.
- Interpretation allows a business to charge more for a tour/service because it enhances the experience for the visitor. Visitors have a better understanding of the resource, attribute a higher value to it, and a happy memory of the experience. As a result, they are willing to pay more for it.

The National Association for Interpreters is the premiere source for interpretation education and assistance. Other resources include:

- *Interpretation of Cultural and Natural Resources* (2nd Ed.) by Knudson, Cable and Beck Venture Publishing, 2003.
- National Park Service Interpretation and Education (<http://www.nps.gov/learn/>)
- NC Office of Environmental Education (<http://www.ee.enr.state.nc.us/>)
- *Interpreting our Heritage* by Freeman Tilden

PD51. Devise a formal interpretation curriculum that can assist tourism entrepreneurs in all niches.

Guiding and interpretation skills are critical to generate revenue and repeat customers in the natural resources and eco-friendly niches of tourism. To date, there is no formal “school” within North Carolina that teaches more than one class on interpretation. A professional development curriculum of revenue-producing short courses might be designed by several county partners to encourage the enhancement of interpretation and guiding skills for entrepreneurs wishing to tap into the ecotourism market. Over time, the curriculum offered on an annual basis (such as a week-long workshop) could draw in tourism and park professionals from all over the state and parts of Virginia to hone their skills.

Itineraries, Tours and Packages

Sometimes the only tourism development that needs to occur is simply linking together the existing resources. Creating itineraries, tours, and packages go hand in hand in developing Edgecombe County's tourism product.

Phase 1 - Create self-drive itineraries. Phase 2 – Work with local hotels, restaurants, and other businesses to form packages to further enhance the visitor experience and choice for enjoying the county.

Phase 3 – Place itineraries and packages on the website in downloadable format. Develop an e-commerce function of the website so that packages may be purchased online.

Phase 4 – When possible, print them to have available as collateral for phone/ email inquires or to stock around the county.

Phase 5 – Use the itineraries to court tour operators and use as suggested routes on a tour.

Phase 6 – Create an interpretation script for potential guides. Seek out county entrepreneurs who wish to be step-on guides as needed or to create a part-time guiding business.

PD52. Create Self-Drive Itineraries

Self-drive itineraries are a tool that visitors can use to visit sites in an area. An itinerary is simply a travel plan or schedule with suggested routes for visitors to take around the county. Include a map and provide directions and other information about each attraction to make their visit to the area convenient and easy. Points of interest, travel amenities and scenic byways should all be included as options for visitors (but be cognizant of areas that can become extremely congested when developing routes). Self-drive itineraries are especially useful for independent travelers such as families, couples and business travelers and could be developed on various themes (arts, food, and scenic vistas).

PD53. Package the experience for the visitor.

When visitors come to Edgecombe County they may be unsure how to go about seeing all the things they want to do. It takes the stress out of planning a trip, and makes your destination more convenient for the visitor. In the past two years 8% of visitors purchased packages for most or all of their trips. Thirty six percent (36%) bought packages for one or some trips (Travel Industry Association). Packages can be area-oriented, themed, or comprehensive. Packaging also emphasizes value and convenience, both of which are very desirable characteristics to today's consumer. See the appendix CC for sample packages.

Some ideas for packages include the following:

- History and Heritage
- Arts Workshops
- Wildlife viewing / birding
- Hunting
- Fishing
- Biking
- Walking
- Paddling
- Relaxation
- Wedding (see Appendix DD for a brochures for wedding planners)

- Agricultural/Rural
- Educational
- Festival packages

PD54. Fashion County and Regional Tours

A fully guided tour takes guests through an area, while led by trained guides. These tours typically have one main driver and/or tour guide that escorts guests to the destinations, while also narrating on the bus or van. “Step-on” tour guides also meet the tour at a specific site to “step on” the vehicle and provide specialized knowledge or direct an activity at the site. The step-on guides should be used as necessary, each site may not require a separate guide. The decision to use step-on guides will also be influenced by the availability of trained community residents. Step on guides can also provide a full service and lead all day or weekend activities (not just for a specific area of the county or event). Most tour companies have a tour manager and link up with local guides who provide area knowledge, not just event knowledge.

Tourism development leaders will draw from their past to create a tourism product that will be of interest to visitors and residents of neighboring counties. Guided tours should include historic sites, storytelling, performance, and cultural crafts. Because travel is often a “family affair” it is important to consider hands on activities to interest both adults as well as and children (see Adventures by Disney – Mid-Atlantic vacations to reference multi-generational activities for historic products). Establishing tours will impact the community in several ways, providing economic development, as well as heritage preservation.

Economically tours will: (to list a few examples of economic benefits)

- Encourage new visitors to the area
- Stimulate growth of local businesses
- Further skill sets among residents who participate in the tour
- Aid in future funding opportunities for local farms

To preserve local heritage, tours can:

- Protect and celebrate history by recording family stories and traditions
- Create awareness of the wealth and diversity of natural resources
- Inspire the restoration of historic buildings and homes
- Encourage the participation of youth in the community
- Bring attention to Edgecombe County’s goals in land conservation

PD55. Create a calendar of events.

Creating a comprehensive calendar of all the events that take place in Edgecombe County throughout the year is important in order to show visitors the activities available to them. It may help them in choosing the time of year they wish to visit, or encourage them to make the trip if they see something they find interesting. Consider providing links on an Internet calendar of events where people can register, pay in advance, make a donation, or advance order something related to an event. The TDA or Chamber might also make printed/hard copy calendars available for purchase. Money from the purchase of the calendars might be a way to raise funds for new events or to enhance already existing events. Appendix EE offers a beginning list of county events to promote.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Resident participation is important in the success of making Edgecombe County a community that can successfully accommodate tourists. The community includes all citizens in the county. Whether they are currently involved in the tourism planning process or simply living there, their input is important. Having suggestions, ideas, and support from everyone will spur economic growth and community change. The rewards and benefits will be much greater and the costs shared more equally with the involvement of as many as possible.

Current status of population and level of involvement

The current population of Edgecombe County is 53,964 and only a small part of the community is involved in seeing the community change. The majority of involvement is concentrated within the community elected officials, county employees, a handful of business and organizational leaders. Increasing involvement from the broad base of the community would distribute much of the work to be done as well as allow for additional perspectives and ideas to be discussed when implementing changes that would impact the entire community. (Appendix FF provides a list community organizations to include in the tourism planning process).

According to the 2006 Entrepreneurial Climate Study, 44% of respondents volunteer for one or two community organizations, another 26% volunteer in three to five organizations, and 20% volunteered in six or more organizations. Ten percent of respondents did not volunteer or did not respond (see appendices for full results of the study). These numbers indicate a dedicated citizenry, but likely are more reflective of the type of committed person to respond to a survey about the community. Still, Edgecombe County has a powerful force in its citizens and must inspire a broader force towards change.

Attitude towards Tourism

Tourism in Edgecombe County is not currently a booming industry. The idea of tourism is somewhat new to residents; however they are excited to see what tourism will bring to the community, economy, and their county. We talked with many of the town officials on our visits to Edgecombe County and they are willing to help bring visitors into the community in whatever ways they can. The biggest challenge that they anticipate is getting all of the towns in Edgecombe County to work together. It will be important to make sure we market each town for what they have to offer as well as Edgecombe County as a whole.

Edgecombe County understands that tourism equals dollars in the economy. The longer the visitor stays the more economic impact will be seen. Involving the community in making their county a destination will increase support for the changes that will come. When you get more people involved you bring fresh ideas and a way to educate the residents about the benefits of tourism in their community. Rotating the Tourism Roundtable through the county will encourage more participation. Residents of the individual towns will feel included and a sense of county unity will result.

Community Involvement (CI)1. Design workshops, conferences, and training opportunities to help entrepreneurs tap into tourism.

Offer workshops and other training opportunities to residents for individual and professional development. A partnership with the local community college to provide these

opportunities would also foster community support. Training and mentoring programs for small businesses and entrepreneurs are cited repeatedly in entrepreneurship development literature; therefore, contacting successful tourism entrepreneurs to share their story is an important part of training and should be included. These workshops will provide a clear and recognizable connection between tourism and economic development. Most importantly, these workshops and classes give the locals the chance to become competitive in the market and meet the demand of their specific market so that local companies will continue to be in control without outsourcing. Examples of these include:

- Who's who of tourism: intro to the tourism system and stakeholders
- Small business tourism concepts
- Writing a tourism business plan
- Financing a small business
- Professional development opportunities in tourism
- Pricing your tourism product
- Staff retention and development
- Computer skills including web-site set-up
- Activity programming and interpretation
- Partnerships in tourism
- Marketing on a shoestring
- Business ethics
- Greening your tourism business
- Land use and tourism
- Public speaking
- Media Relations 101
- Hospitality training
- Visitor education and guidelines
- Monitoring impacts

These workshops could be advertised in the newspaper, other local print publications and on community websites. Also, visit www.energizingentrepreneurs.org to tap into a portal of resources designed to help communities assess their entrepreneurial climate and boost their entrepreneurial energy.

CI2. Partner with Edgecombe County Extension to offer the NC Hospitality Training program to county businesses and organizations.

A high level of hospitality is important in any business and can affect a visitor's experience greatly. Partner with the local Extension Center to bring the NC Hospitality Training Program to the county. This North Carolina-specific program was designed by the NCSU Tourism Extension program to help rural counties establish customer service training.

CI3. Provide free or low-cost First Aid and CPR classes in conjunction with established youth organizations and adult events.

CI4. Create a task force to explore and develop options for improving the county's entrepreneurial climate.

Members of the task force should represent a variety of local business owners. The task force should invite the community to discussions designed to gain an understanding of issues with operating businesses. Additionally, the task force should explore out why residents might be apprehensive about starting a business in the county. Finally, the task force must educate itself on those elements of a community that support or thwart an entrepreneur's efforts. This task force would be a first step in supporting the efforts of Critical Initiative #7 in the Executive Summary (Increase Entrepreneurship). Please refer to the executive summary for additional resources on entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial climate. See the appendices for the results of the pilot project - 2006 Entrepreneurial Climate Study for Edgecombe County.

CI5. Hold Tournaments for Tourism

Organize annual golf tournaments at local golf courses such as Cotton Valley Golf Club or Hilma Country Club in Tarboro or Maccripine Country Club in Pinetops to raise funds for a tourism-related project. The winning team should get donated prizes and/or the glory of being the current year's champs.

Raise Awareness/ Develop Methods of Communication Regarding Tourism

For tourism to evolve in Edgecombe County, the community needs to take an active role. The more involved the community the better the results realized. Raising awareness and gathering support is best done through assorted methods in order to reach the broadest range of citizens. In addition to publications and the use of the internet, the following are other ways of reaching community members:

- Town Meetings
- Focus Groups
- Surveys
- Discussions on local radio programs

Materials and programs must be available and provided to the community to answer questions and citizens must know where to find information- the Edgecombe Herald could provide a good medium for reaching community members. Information to share with residents could include any of the following. It is not a conclusive list, but provides general ideas of what could be relevant to members of the community:

- Progress reports on local tourism developments
- Case studies/ examples of successful tourism development
- General tourism statistics
- Examples of successful ecotourism opportunities, eco-lodges
- Explanations of rural tourism, agritourism, heritage tourism, etc.
- Community volunteer opportunities
- Events schedule
- Workshop and training opportunities
- How to guides
- Reiterate mission statement and goals
- Announcements of citizen awards for tourism service/
community project participation

Tourism is a non-traditional industry, which, like any industry, comes with positive and negative impacts. Most citizens of Edgecombe County are familiar with tourism as they have traveled themselves, but are not fully versed or trained in how a community might manage the negative impacts of tourism, while maximizing the positive. A comprehensive educational effort on tourism can empower the residents of Edgecombe County.

The best way to provide education, and at the same time a forum for community input, would be to hold meetings where concerned citizens could come and voice their opinion and have their questions answered. Focus groups could also be conducted to discuss ideas and ways to prevent potential problems from occurring. These meetings could be held at the community college, churches, businesses, or public facilities and led by neutral service providers who are actively involved in this process and who can answer questions objectively.

Tourism is happening all over North Carolina and the urban and rural U.S. With education and planning, Edgecombe County can plan for it and channel it in a positive direction.

CI6. Invite the community to come to meetings to give input and see plans.

There should be open meetings where the leaders could take feedback from the community on changes that they like /dislike and suggestions on what else they would like to see happen. These meetings could be hosted by the community leaders who have an active role in implementing these changes. The meetings could be advertised in the Tarboro Daily Southerner, Grassroots of Tarboro, and organizational newsletters/listservs. The meetings would consist of:

- the town officials giving an update about what has been going on for the past month
- a question and answer period where anyone can ask questions about concerns they may have about the town
- announcements from residents about upcoming events that people can get involved in

Minutes from the meeting would be available for the public to see following each meeting. These minutes should be kept in a place that is accessible for all such as the library and on the Chamber website.

CI7. Approach town leadership for each town in the county and ask them to discuss with residents and document how they would like to be involved in tourism (if at all).

Ask them to provide suggestions for potential attractions and experiences that could be included in the county product base.

CI8. Initiate a series of Coffee Talks.

A county coffee talk would be a way to get the citizens of Edgecombe County to meet and discuss ideas involving the county in an informal setting. Residents could host the gatherings at various private or public locations around the county on a monthly or bimonthly rotation. Alternatively, each town could have their own coffee talk for six to twelve months to brainstorm on tourism planning issues and development opportunities. This would be an opportunity for interested town members to voice concerns, ask questions, and generally weigh in on the development of tourism in the county. At the end of the twelve months, each town might report their thoughts regarding a future tourism-related

effort, and the community members will have had the chance to strengthen relationships through regular meetings.

CI9. Invite 3-4 speakers a year for “brown-bag” lunches who could address topics such as community-based planning and sustainable tourism.

One of the biggest issues facing Edgecombe County is the lack of community cohesiveness and pride. Multi-level community buy-in would involve getting the general public involved and aware of tourism, increasing pride and support of the county, and bringing stakeholders together and encouraging them to work inside and outside the county. One of the most important methods for promoting buy-in is through educating citizens.

Invite speakers from community development field, such as NC Main Street program, HandMade in America’s Small Town Program and NC Smart Growth Alliance to annual meetings or create special meetings to specifically cover development and tourism topics. Make sure to include a broad range of citizens in the invitation. Promote the events through faith-based organizations, Extension’s communication channels as well as local trade associations and special interest groups. Other community development organizations that can provide speakers and other education tools are:

- Walkable Communities, Inc. (www.walkablecommunities.org)
- Smart Growth America (www.smartgrowthamerica.org)
- Smart Growth (www.smartgrowth.org)
- UNC School of Government (<http://www.iog.unc.edu/>)
- NC Association of Planners/ NCPLAN listserv (<http://www.nc-apa.org/>)

This will not only educate citizens, but by seeing and hearing what other communities have accomplished, Edgecombe County residents will also get excited about change and development possibilities.

CI10. Familiarize roundtable members with other county’s destination marketing operations.

Invite in other Destination Marketing Organization leaders to share their challenges in being a small TDA and ideas for regional collaboration, marketing, funding, and community involvement. Additionally, “field trips” can be taken to learn about the operations of other TDA’s.

CI11. Approach Grassroots of Tarboro about forming a small task force that would be responsible for keeping the county aware of efforts or decisions relevant to tourism.

While this would be beyond their service area of Tarboro, they are uniquely positioned to garner input and support.

CI12. Continue to nurture the relationship with the Tarboro Daily Southerner and Rocky Mount Telegram.

The newspaper is a favored source of news and current events for the residents of the county. Their coverage of the tourism planning process has been stellar; it would benefit the entire county if the local media continues to report on meetings and events regarding tourism and community development.

CI13. Analyze Resident Survey 2008 results and use as a benchmark to evaluate change in resident attitude towards tourism over time.

The appendices contain the results of the Resident Survey conducted in 2008 using an online tool called “Survey Monkey.” The same survey should be repeated every 2-3 years to assess the community attitude towards tourism and any changes noted over time.

CI14. Continue to gather community development resources.

There are a number of free or inexpensive community development manuals, publications, toolboxes and other resources that could be acquired and compiled for community use (see Appendix AA for organizations who provide some of these valuable resources). The Chamber, Cooperative Extension Center, County Development office or CDC could assemble a small pool of resources to create a community development section in the library where an abundance of resources and publications would be housed. Even publications that are offered online might be printed and bound so that they are available in hard copy form. Perhaps a special topics class might be designed at the Community College for individuals studying public administration or another related field in order to educate young people about various forms of Community Development, the role of grassroots and non-profit organizations, overcoming barriers to community development, and the related social benefits such as community cohesion and pride.

Community Beautification/ Development Projects

Concrete, hands-on projects will enhance the community's appearance and self-esteem, as well as create buy-in and foster roundtable/TDA-community relations. Beautification or "face-lift" projects are highly visible to both residents and visitors. Examples of these would be tree planting, downtown clean up, community gardening or trail maintenance. Additionally, there are other quality of life initiatives that may not result in a tangible outcome but rather enhance an existing program with new activities. The key is for residents to select an effort that they are passionate about – projects they can really "rally around." Any community development initiatives will enhance not only the livability for residents but improve the "canvas" for setting as a destination for visitors. In the end, they can create a great deal of enthusiasm for both change and pride in the community.

CI15. Develop a series (or menu) of initiatives in which citizens can participate.

Make these projects short-term, repeating and rotate them among neighborhoods. Citizens are often more willing to participate in projects that have an ending date. Also, in the recruiting campaign tell volunteers exactly what they will be doing and what the end result will be of that day. This program would encourage a side-by-side working relationship between tourism roundtable members and other citizens and a chance to network on an informal level. In future years, the TDA could print T-shirts for volunteers to commemorate the projects and the efforts of the "community cadre" that participate, which will also provide lasting marketing for the TDA's community efforts.

Involve churches, schools, clubs and civic organizations. Soliciting the participation of already-formed community organizations, such as scout groups, Kiwanis Club, garden club, or church youth groups, are a great way to expand the manpower and community reach (see Assets Inventory for a list of community organizations). These groups can be an effective way to involve and get feedback from citizens. These groups are already formed based on a common interest, and may be willing to apply their collaborative energies to a community development interest. Their involvement will increase overall community pride because they know that they made a difference in the quality of life.

Highlight and celebrate all of the new developments (i.e., trail openings, parks, new events and museums). The new developments are exciting and with each change or addition the community will start to see the county differently and in turn share a positive self-image and vision for the future. A very few suggestions for a project menu are listed below.

- Examine gateways - Improve gateways so that visitors feel welcome when they have entered the county. There is funding available for this through the NC Department of Transportation Enhancements Funds found at <http://www.ncdot.org/financial/fiscal/Enhancement/>.
- Wayfinding Signs - Partner with the city and county officials and private groups to get funding for new decorative banners and wayfinding signs, create consistent design and placement of banners and signs. Wayfinding systems are coded for easy use and help direct residents and visitors in and out of the county and to destinations throughout the county. Signs can also be placed throughout the county for pedestrian and bicycle users. Other cities in NC have used wayfinding systems including Raleigh, Asheville, Greensboro and Cary. A few examples can be seen in on these websites but there are many others throughout the state. Additionally, Appendix GG provides some “mock ups” of signage samples for the county.
 - <http://www.downtowngreensboro.net/package.pdf>
 - <http://www.townofcary.org/depts/dsdept/P&Z/tcap/trailblazing.pdf>
 - <http://www.brilliantsign.com/way.html>
- Historical Timeline of the County - Create a public timeline of Edgecombe County history depicting layers of immigration, industry, transportation, natural and ecological events, etc. This project, while taking at least one year to bring together many groups to plan, will be an innovative community-development effort, resulting in overall education and cohesiveness.
- History Days - Continue this tradition of engaging the entire community in celebrating its history. This event takes place each year and there are several events over the weekend that highlights Edgecombe County. Increased citizen participation in this event can help in two ways – to expand the current offerings of the event and to groom a cadre of ambassadors who are knowledgeable and caring about the county’s history.
- Ghost Tours/Oral Histories - The Ghost Tours that are held in Tarboro during History Days have become extremely popular. The tour goes through the town and focuses on the history and “old stories” that have been passed down – this is a great opportunity to collect oral histories of the county’s families and when appropriate, to expand the ghost tour repertoire.
- Happening on the Common - Not only is this a great event, but the concept and name is very marketable. Citizens interested in growing tourism may wish to volunteer their time here, supporting, expanding and marketing the many artists and arts programs of Edgecombe County.
- Edgecombe County Road Race - This event could be held each fall or spring and could raise money to be donated to a need identified by the citizens. The race course would need to be decided by the race committee and could include a fun run, a walk, and a road race for kids. This would be an event that the entire community could get involved in.
- Bike Trails and Walking Trails - The Tar River is a wonderful resource for Edgecombe County. A committee should be formed to design, organize, plan and find funding for bike trails and walking trails along the river and through Tarboro and Princeville. The trails would be an asset for the community as well as visitors. They would encourage the citizens to be more physically active and to explore and

appreciate the towns. Likewise, a county bike trail would lend itself to overall community health as well as future revenue-producing bike events.

CI16. Create a formal program for county-wide youth involvement in community development.

Additionally, instilling community pride by youth participation in community projects is a worthwhile venture in any community. Inventory the faith-based organizations, 4-H outlets, after-school programs, parks and recreation offices to assess the current level of community investment by youth. Gauge the willingness of these organizations to partner on a large-scale, highly visible project that youth of all ages and interests might contribute. If executed well, a project of this caliber would not only meet a beautification or community need but foster civic pride and create a lasting memory for county youth while participating in a larger cause. Projects of this size can also gain state wide notice and free media publicity.

If a large-scale project seems too daunting, picking up street side trash or raking leaves are easy task for children of all ages. Community parks, sports and recreation centers can always use volunteers to help with light maintenance and grounds keeping. Youth activities that focus on the community (and not necessarily just tourism in the community) will create positive values into the future generations of the county.

Another tactic for smaller groups would be to encourage problem-solving behavior in the youth themselves. Participants in such an effort would foster community pride by

- Identifying community concerns or needs,
- Planning specific projects to address the need,
- Noting the impact individuals can have through group participation,
- Developing citizenship and leadership skills, and
- Exploring career possibilities.

CI17. Create a tourism club that is led by students at Edgecombe Community College.

A tourism club that is comprised of and run by students in Edgecombe County could be an enormous asset. If the students take on leadership roles and feel a responsibility to see their organization succeed, it will teach them valuable skills. They will also be responsible for deciding what type of service or volunteer work they want to provide to their community.

CI18. Hold a community contest on MAKING HISTORY FUN.

Engage each level of school in both K-12 and post-secondary institutions to devise ways to “make Edgecombe County history fun.” In addition to learning techniques of interpretation, the contestants would learn about the county’s history while they are developing their “method” for their contest entry. This might also be an opportunity to merge “history” (the past) with “technology” (the future) by creating a technology entry category. Offer awards to contestants in each town as well as a “county” winner where the top entries from each town compete for a donated prize.

CI19. Create an awards/ recognition program.

Research and highlight a local business each month for doing something positive in the community that relates to tourism. The business could be featured in a local publication and on the evening news.

There should also be rewards and appreciation opportunities for those that put forth a lot of effort into the community. Because no effort should be unnoticed, having an annual awards dinner or appreciation lunch could be a way to give recognition where it is needed.

Sacred places and Hot Issues

After speaking with residents and county officials we found that there are no places that are off limits to tourists, or sacred places to be protected from visitor traffic. Residents are eager to share their community with visitors. The only “place” that arose as a concern was hunting land. While many wish to capitalize on the revenue gained from hunting, there is an awareness and concern that the availability of land for public/community hunting is shrinking. This could ultimately result in a loss of wildlife.

As the tourism plan is developed and implemented, the community should be aware of places that residents think should be preserved. It is possible that as tourism is developed, some places in the community may become crowded or degraded and the amount of visitation to these locations will need to be limited.

CI20. Form a Hunting Task Force to work with local hunters, hunting clubs, and hunting guide businesses.

Already the local hunting interests are feeling pressure from sprawling development and tourist hunters crowding traditional hunting rights. The Tourism Roundtable should form a task force to study this issue, work to increase the acreage of WRC game land, hold focus groups with hunters, hunt clubs, and hunting guides to develop a plan to balance local hunter rights and new economic interests. This group would provide direction to the development of a website that posts hunting regulations, restrictions, opportunities and expected behavior of tourists.

Hot issues are issues that were brought up multiple times during our formal and informal discussions with county residents. They consisted of issues from the past or concerns for the future: recovery from the flood, preservation of small town charm, lack of activities for youth, and funding for tourism efforts.

Recovery from the Flood

The issue that surfaced most in community discussion was the flood. The devastation the county experienced from Hurricane Floyd was unparalleled. The towns of Princeville and Tarboro faced the prospect of being completely destroyed. Despite having their homes and memories washed away, the residents overwhelming sense of pride in their community provided a foundation to rebuild upon. The flood recovery efforts these communities displayed the unbreakable spirit of the residents and their unwavering dedication to preserve their history and culture.

CI21. Create interpretive techniques to tell the stories of the flood.

The new museum in Princeville will be a prime way to show pictures and tell the stories from the flood. The flood could also be brought up on walking tours by showing the watermarks on buildings in downtown Tarboro. The point is not to commercialize the horrible impacts of the flood, but to honor the perseverance and goodwill of the people who lived through it.

Small Town Charm

Another issue that came up while in Edgecombe County was the growth that tourism would bring. The residents showed concern for how it might take away the small town charm that Edgecombe County has. The main concern voiced with increased tourism is people moving into the town and trying to change too much.

However 90.3% of residents surveyed stated that they were happy that new residents were buying and restoring the old homes in the county. Those who participated in the study seemed to hold a balanced view of this – they realize external funds and energy is needed for growth and revitalization and understands that there would be a point where too much change and growth would not be acceptable.

CI22. Outline the high preservation priorities for the county.

Create a working document of high priority (next 5 years), moderate priority (next 10), and priority (20 years) architectural sites and buildings to be preserved and renovated.

Documenting these priorities will help preservation projects to remain a priority, resources and funding are explored, and projects are implemented. Look into joining the Professional Associates Network of Preservation North Carolina at <http://www.presnc.org/content/view/61/124/>.

Youth Involvement

Another issue that was raised is a dearth of productive leadership activities for youth as well as the lack of youth involvement in community matters.

CI23. Provide workshops on camping and orienteering skills to community residents through church youth groups, 4-H, after school programs, scouts and the CDC.

Camping and orienteering skills benefit youth by instilling in them respect for nature and the outdoors, as well as contributing to their knowledge of their area's geography and native species.

CI24 Offer workshops on good practices for volunteer athletic coaches.

Multiple organizations are available to provide coaching courses that will foster volunteers to participate with afterschool sports.

CI25. Getting children in all areas of the community involved in a seasonal athletic league would be beneficial to the county.

Edgecombe County already has some great sports opportunities for youth and children. Considering the major health and social benefits of sports, however, expanding these programs would take advantage of two of the counties major assets – its youth and its land.

Pitt County and other surrounding counties have some of the best youth baseball programs in the nation sending AAU teams to the national championships every year. This is promising news when trying to start a local league and may indicate that participation would not be the issue. Moreover, this may lead to hosting additional tournaments in the county. There are several grants for sports programs to help offset the cost of starting up new programs (see Appendices for funding list).

CI26. Host step competitions at the Edgecombe County Community College.

The art of stepping has been becoming more and more popular, especially in Edgecombe County and surrounding areas. The county already hosts events like this once or twice a year,

but having them more frequently could make this upcoming art a popular commodity specifically to the area.

CI27. Develop Civic Leadership Programs for Youth

Seek out ways to involve students in civic decisions and projects. The Tourism Roundtable, for example, might approach teachers, scout leaders, and church youth ministers to develop way for the youth to become involved in issues facing the county and contribute to decisions and outcomes. Because tourism involves some of the “fun” features of the county such as dining, arts, outdoors and entertainment, young people might find appeal in getting involved.

Funding for Tourism Efforts

A major task involved in tourism development is locating sources of funding. Project funding to develop infrastructure and seed funding for programs can often be financed through grants and fund-raising campaigns (see Appendix JJ for a full list of tourism-related grants). On-going funding for TDA operations and marketing is a more difficult fix. The county must determine a long-term funding source for the salary, benefits and travel of a full-time director as well as a competitive marketing budget. The following two strategies would allow for considerable input on these financial issues.

CI28. Form a funding task force to prioritize the feasible grants, identify financing options for small businesses, and study other communities who have recently begun endeavors in tourism development.

While the private sector should be represented on the funding task force, so should the public and non-profit sectors. The goal of the task force after one year would be to propose a short and long-term funding plan where the costs of development are shared throughout the community.

CI29. Develop a one-year task force specifically to address hoteliers concerns and relations.

The Tourism Roundtable should form a task force to expand and improve relationships with lodging facility owners and managers in the county. The hoteliers should be invited to be a part of the task force with the express purpose of sharing information, concerns and business perspectives from all sides of tourism development issues. Keeping all individuals updated with county’s expanding tourism products, ideas, and services will assist with future planning endeavors. Hoteliers and tourism planners should be on the same page to ensure better visitor experiences and long-lasting gain from tourism.

The Image of Edgecombe County

The self-identity and self-esteem of a place is part of what makes up its image. Its assets, culture, location, and personality all play into how a destination wished to be portrayed to the world. Specifically, a destination must focus on that which makes it unique. The main asset that distinguishes Edgecombe County from surrounding places is its historical offerings. During all group discussions everyone in the county seemed to agree on one topic , people want to preserve and teach the historical values and lessons of the communities in the county.

Between the Civil War stories, artifacts, the cotton press, Princeville’s history, and Tarboro’s town common and historical district, there are plenty of things the county could

promote and take advantage of. Doing this and many other historical related things around the county would give Edgecombe just the image present, past and future residents would like to promote.

CI30. Create a working website that contains personal (oral and/or written) histories of Edgecombe County.

Ask people to share their stories of growing up in Edgecombe County and create an online document to preserve these stories. Collect oral histories and provide creative mechanisms for Edgecombe County residents and leaders to document and share their personal histories. The collected stories can then contribute to an oral histories folk life program as well as outstanding interpretation programs for the county's tourism products.

CI31. Raise resident awareness and self-esteem regarding the county assets.

During a visit to Edgecombe County, travelers will find hospitable residents who are proud to show off their county. Business owners are more than willing to talk to visitors and answer any questions they may have, and although some residents were not born in Edgecombe County, they are very knowledgeable about everything that takes place in the community. It is imperative that residents in the county continue showing a sense of pride about their community, because this shines through to the visitors, making them feel welcome and inspiring them to see what the county has to offer.

One program that raises resident awareness of their area assets is called the "Doors Open" concept. Cities and regions are coordinating weekend events to provide the public with access to numerous cultural, histories, and natural sites. These events are marketed primarily to local residents and feature both well-known and less familiar attractions. This concept has been occurring in Europe and Canada for years and is beginning to catch on around the United States as a way to give residents and local leaders a chance to connect with their local resources in new ways. As residents become bigger advocates and stewards of these resources they are likely to become more willing and proud to show them off to visitors. For information on more Doors Open programs, see http://www.doorsopentoronto.on.ca/userfiles/HTML/nts_1_121_1.html.

CI32. Begin a library of resources on tourism.

This strategy is similar to C14. *Continue to gather community development resources*, however it is more specific to materials from state and national tourism organizations. Educational materials and resources should be available and provided to the community to answer tourism-related questions. A multitude of materials already exist, still more are being developed, and some can even be adapted to meet a community's unique situation. Examples of such resources include expertise on tourism media relations, tourism education and training, community participation, societal trends affecting tourism, as well as focused knowledge on tourism niches such as agritourism, paddling, cycling, ecotourism, small meetings and motorcoach travel. These resources come in many forms ranging from books, journals and Internet articles to videotaped focus groups, and minutes taken at planning meetings. Appendix AA. lists key organizations involved in tourism and sustainable development. Check their websites for a arsenal of workbooks, toolkits and publications to download. The most important element to keeping a library of resources is ensuring they are available to the public in a central location, such as at the TDA, the county offices, the Chamber or the library.

Finding your way around/ Shopping the Community

An idea for helping the county to make sure they have good signage is for a business owner to imagine that they are a visitor who has never seen the county. How would the visitor find your business or service if they have never been to the county before? Also business owners should ask visitors how they heard about the business and if the business was easy to find, enabling the owner to know if there is sufficient signage to point visitors in the right direction. This is somewhat similar to a concept called “shopping the community”. When shopping a community, a visitor who is from outside the area visits the area (usually a tourism professional traveling “undercover”) and asks local residents and business owners about what activities and attractions there are in the area. The “shopper” would then use all the answers received over the course of the day to develop an understanding of how the people in the community view their own town.

CI33. Shop the Community

Recruit either a tourism professional from another county or a student studying tourism from NC State or East Carolina University to “shop the community” using the techniques outlined above.

CI34. Form a task force to design a draft of what signs are needed along the highway and throughout the county.

Although Hurricane Floyd devastated the county in 1999, it has many places that have bounced back and once again become very aesthetically pleasing. There is a lot of open farmland that is incredible and the towns have historic buildings and houses with astonishing architecture. The town common, creeks, rivers and other features that the county has to offer add to its appeal.

Signage is a major problem in Edgecombe County. There are many wonderful things for people to stop, do, and see but there just aren’t enough signs on the highways and surrounding roads to advertise these attributes and historical draws. Not only is the lack of signs on the highway, there is a lack of signage within the county. With US-64 and US-95 running through and near the county, there is a tremendous opportunity for signage to encourage people to stop. (For a “mock up” of a county signage program, see Appendix G.)

A committee of residents needs to be formed to brainstorm the best way to display signage along the highways. They should think about:

- where and what types of signs are needed for residents
- where and what types of signs are needed for visitors
- where do we want people to go
- what regulations need to be considered
- how do we get funding for the signs
- who do we need to contact to make sure the signs are erected and maintained

The task force should include the DOT District Engineer or a representative from DOT that can focus on rules and regulations that need to be followed.

Visitor Information/Hospitality

Once the marketing efforts have attracted visitors to the county, the flow of information cannot stop there. Visitor information must be readily available to educate and inform on what the county, each town and each site has to offer. Right now the county is doing a good job of this but there are ways to increase the quantity and quality of visitor information available to the public. The best way to make information available to potential visitors is through a comprehensive, user friendly website. GoTarboro.com, and TarboroLife.com have done a good job of creating visually attractive, informational websites highlighting community events and activities. A county-wide site similar to these would make it easier for visitors to find information on where to go/what to do on trips to Edgecombe County. Please refer to Executive Summary/ Critical Initiatives section for more information on what should be include in the website.

CI35. Create information cards for visitors and residents

There is a lot going on in Edgecombe County, but it is not organized at a county level nor is it well-known. The community has to know what is available in the county before they are able “sell” and exude pride about the county. An inexpensive way to provide useful information to visitors and residents is to create Information Index Cards on what the county offers. Each card could exhibit a theme, such as dining opportunities, African-American sites, fishing areas, churches and so on. Likewise, seasonal card could be created to tout agricultural products and where to buy them or events happening in a specific time of year. Typical information provided on such cards includes directions, contact information and operating hours.

If Tourism Roundtable formed themselves into groups of three or four people, and each group committed to attractively formatting three cards in the period of one month, a wealth of information would be ready to share. A start up budget of \$5,000 would purchase 500 expandable folders for storage at each business as well as make 20 copies per card for 30 cards to place in each folder. Distribution would be the biggest hurdle, but until a mailing/delivery budget could be worked out, the cards could be available on the Chamber or County website for businesses to download and print at will.

CI36. Create a Edgecombe County Ambassador Program.

The Chamber of Commerce or Tourism Development Authority (once created) would gather a cadre of passionate volunteers from the community. These volunteers could be commissioned to help with town clean up days, litter pick up, revitalization efforts, and other projects that contribute to community development in Edgecombe County. Additionally, they may wish to providing hospitality services for visiting groups, leading tours, and assisting with registration for small meetings.

CI37. Form an Edgecombe County “Welcome Committee” to get new citizens involved in the community. It will be important to tap into their energy and ideas early and education them about the culture of Edgecombe County.

The welcome committee would be responsible for knowing new families or individuals that move into the area. Their first priority would be to introduce themselves to the families and the families to Edgecombe County. An information packet with some highlights of the town, and a who’s who of important organizations and phone numbers would be very useful. They could also include suggestions of ways for new residents to get involved in the community.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – MARKETING

The most current definition of marketing, published in October 2007 by the American Marketing Association, is “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” In the case of Edgecombe County’s tourism industry, marketing will be the activity of identifying the products and services it has to offer to tourists and finding a way to effectively communicate the availability of these things to potential visitors.

The following marketing strategies were adapted from proven marketing methods, influenced by Edgecombe County resident recommendations and adapted from established tourism plans such as the Edgecombe County Tourism Plan, Edgecombe County Tourism Plan and Sandhills Sustainable Tourism Plan. Short-term strategies are strategies that can be initiated within three to five years. They are characterized as tactical and low-cost strategies, requiring an investment of a staff person’s time. Long-term strategies are initiated after a five year ramp-up period and require a moderate operating and marketing budget.

Competitive Analysis

Potential and growing travel destinations must take into consideration their competition in order to find the most appropriate and promising position for their geographical market. It is important to understand what nearby destinations are offering and for what price so that the new destination can use competitive pricing for similar products or services, so that they will know what price the market will bear, and so that they can employ aggressive pricing on product elements unique to their area.

Edgecombe County is most likely to be a driving destination, and because of this status it is important to consider the competitors that also fall into this category, other towns and attractions that are in the I-95 corridor and the US-64 corridor. Some of the possible competitors in the I-95 corridor are Wilson, Smithfield, Dunn and Fayetteville. In the US-64 corridor some competitors may be Lexington, Asheboro, Siler City/Pittsboro, Raleigh, Williamston, and Manteo. Some things that make Edgecombe County different from these other destinations are:

- A more rural setting
- Small town feel
- Rich African-American and European-American stories
- Water access on the Tar River
- Less commercialized
- Continued agrarian and hunting culture
- Tarboro’s Common

These characteristics can be used in marketing to set Edgecombe County apart from its competitors and should be used whenever possible in marketing messages and images.

Short-Term Marketing (STM)1. Differentiate yourself from other counties/regions. Initiate and ingrain this mindset in the community and marketing messages from the outset.

Take into account what your competitors offer and then make sure you market things you have to offer that are different than your competitors' offerings. It is important to emphasize your uniqueness in order to draw visitors to Edgecombe County. Some aspects of the Edgecombe County story to emphasize might be:

- The significance of Princeville in African-American history
- The large historic district of Tarboro
- Specific agricultural crops and their importance to North Carolina
- Significant people in the county's history
- All of the activities, history and uses of the Tar River

Branding

Branding is an essential part of the marketing mix because it sets your product apart from competitors. Some important considerations in branding are:

- It should identify the benefits and special characteristics of the county
- It should set Edgecombe County apart from other destinations
- It should be easy for visitors to understand and remember
- It should sum up the county in one fluid thought

Branding should also create a positive image of Edgecombe County in the visitor's mind. Some possible branding concepts or mottos may include:

- Edgecombe: a historical and natural escape
- A taste of small town life
- An escape from the bustle
- A natural escape
- Experience the past with modern southern comfort and charm

The brand should be depicted in both a visual logo and messages, and used in all outlets of marketing including Internet, television, signage, pamphlets, official correspondence, and events. Branding decisions should not be made quickly or randomly. Before a brand is created, the appropriate surveys, focus groups and interviews need to be completed. Once a brand is established it should be revisited periodically for the purpose and evolution of the brand.

STM2. Create a market "position" or brand.

Positioning means creating a mental image of Edgecombe County. Positioning is the promises made and message sent about your destination through advertising and other marketing methods. It is important to be honest and to avoid misleading visitors - to accurately describe what Edgecombe County is about and what it has to offer. During the first year of organizing for tourism, a brand that the community supports should be established. Based on the research conducted in April, May and June of 2008, residents and non-residents both felt that the brand should encompass the county's historic assets and friendliness as well as its qualities of being quaint, rural, and relaxing (see Appendix L for results of the Destination Imagery Study).

STM3. Adopt a logo that represents Edgecombe County's history and culture.

Creating a logo is part of the branding process. The logo must be based on the brand of the county and could be featured on maps, books, souvenirs, and other items that could be purchased at the Chamber of Commerce and historical sites throughout the county.

Focus efforts on niche markets.

Edgecombe County is a halfway point for people traveling from New York or New Jersey to Charleston or Hilton Head via I-95. It is also halfway for people traveling from Blowing Rock or Statesville to the Outer Banks via US-64. Many of the people making these trips are retired, putting them into the senior citizen age group. It is common for this age group to stop halfway to their destination for a night or two. This traveling community is a certain market for Edgecombe County to target, however many additional markets are viable now and in the future.

Catering to niche markets is important to tourism success in that they narrow down the potential audience. Do not attempt to market to the public “at large” because niche markets add up to a healthy and sustainable tourism destination. **Formal marketing efforts should begin with direct contact to specialized groups.** Niche markets that Edgecombe County can target immediately and certainly over the next ten years are featured below.

- History enthusiasts
 - African-American heritage
 - Ghost Tour
- Outdoor Recreation Participants: paddling, fishing, biking, birding, wildlife watching
- Genealogists
- Baby Boomers: this age group is doing much of the traveling and is more likely to stop and stay for a night or two to break up their trip
- Senior couples
- Visiting Friends and Relatives Market (VFR): this is the largest visitor market in the nation
- Artists: the natural beauty and historical houses provide inspiration
- Hunters and anglers
- Competitive runners and bikers: this area has great spaces for training
- Geographical Markets: residents living in a 50, 100 or even 150-mile radius are all viable markets for one overnight, three-day getaways, meetings and retreats, and special events.
- Homecoming and reunion markets: churches, high schools, and family
- Weddings
- Motor coach tours
- Small Meetings
 - For more information on Social, Military, Educational, Religious, Fraternal special markets (SMERF) see <http://www.smerfmeetings.com/>.
- Genealogy researchers
- Home and garden shoppers
- Festival/special event attendees
- Sporting Event attendees

STM4. Engage in a number of direct marketing activities.

A multitude of recreational clubs and associations exist within a 100, 200 and even 500-mile radius that should be targeted through direct contact. Phone calls or emails, followed by sending collateral material about the area, would go a long way towards forging new relationships with organizations that might become long-term. Examples of organizations to contact include:

- Agricultural Associations and Commodity Groups: A list of associations can be found on the NCDA website (<http://www.ncagr.com/markets/assoc/index.htm>). Contact NCDA for commodity lists.
- NC Genealogical Society (<http://www.ncgenealogy.org/>)
- Church denomination meetings
- Musical performance groups
- Equestrian groups: American Endurance Ride Conference.
- Road bikes: Carolina cycling association (George Heagerty is the USAC Road Regional Coordinator. Discuss the possibility of hosting one of their road races.)
- OHV: Carolina Off Road Extremists (CORE are enthusiasts that enjoy the outdoors, meeting off-roaders and camping. They adhere to the “tread lightly” policy.)
- Paddling: Carolina Canoe Club, North Carolina Paddle Trail Association
- Birding: Carolina Birding Club (holds three general meetings a year)
- Marathons/Ultra-races: Road Runners Club of America” (Lena Hollmann is the North Carolina State Representative. Talk to her about the possibility of hosting a race.)
- Geocaching: GSMGC “Great Smoky Mountains Geocaching Club”

The goal here is to invite the groups to come to the area to hold a club event (a bike ride, a group paddle or to hold a meeting. Once groups have visited the region, they may continue to come back as a group for other events, however, the greatest victory is the reputation now known and spread by word-of-mouth of individuals in the organization.

These are only a sample of agricultural and outdoor groups. Many other niche associations and clubs – meetings, groups, reunions, sports - can all be contacted directly. While this takes more time and you reach out to less volume than doing a mass mailing, the success rate is so much higher. Almost every interest or hobby has a club – railroads, forestry, disc golf, beer brewing, gospel singing; brainstorm as to what types of groups would “fit” the assets of Edgecombe County and contact them directly. Because Edgecombe County is in the beginning stages of becoming a destination, every successful booking will make a large impact in long-term marketing.

STM5. Advertise in club, society and association newsletters.

For a fraction of newspaper advertising, a targeted audience can be reached by placing cooperative ads in newsletters. Some outdoor recreation examples include:

- American Endurance Ride Conference - “Endurance News”
- Carolina Canoe Club has the bi-monthly “Paddler” newsletter
- Road Runners Club of America - “Inside Track” newsletter.

- The managing company for geocaching.com is Groundspeak. Contact them about advertising opportunities on the geocaching website.

STM6. Target the Baby Boomers and AARP crowd.

Baby Boomers make up a considerable portion of the American population and will soon be retiring, leaving them with plenty of time to spend on touring and exploring new places. There is substantial research available on Baby Boomer market trends; gear your products and your marketing messages towards their desires.

AARP sends its members various publications including an extensive one on travel and leisure. Consider advertising the county in a publication such as this one geared towards retirees. Additionally, consider developing tour products for Elderhostel (<http://www.elderhostel.com/>).

STM7. Target African-American audiences.

Begin to identify publications, direct mail outlets, websites, family and school reunions, special interest clubs, radio and other media geared towards African-Americans. Remember to begin with local and regional audiences first.

STM8. Focus on the reunion travel niche – families, churches, and schools.

Create packaged activities for visitors attending family reunions. Market a one to two-hour county tour for people attending reunions and family events. Showing people more about the place where their ancestors lived will encourage them to come back for another visit.

STM9. Target sports groups.

Athletic leagues draw a large number of visitors to the areas hosting their competitions or tournaments. These leagues can be comprised of athletes competing in traditional sports like soccer and softball, or non-traditional sports like billiards and Frisbee. People dedicated to hobbies and games like chess, dominos, and poker also enjoy gathering for friendly competition or exhibition. In fact, the Edgecombe County town of Whitakers is currently the location for monthly high-powered rocketry launches. It would be beneficial to research additional sport/hobby groups that exist throughout the Southeast and encourage them to hold their competitions in Edgecombe County.

STM10. Partner with local Bass Federation chapter, the Tarboro Association of Saltwater Sportsmen and other fishing clubs to hold fishing tournaments in the Tar River.

In 2001, over one million anglers from out-of-state spent \$325 million on trip and equipment expenses to North Carolina (US Fish and Wildlife Service). Fishing tournaments bring in large numbers of visitors including competitors as well as spectators. Continue the Tarboro Association Saltwater Sportsmen's annual shad fishing tournaments. Contact Kyle Briggs, WRC hatchery production coordinator, to explore opportunities for stocking more local waterways with native fish. Edgecombe County's pristine waterways provide a great resource for additional fishing events.

STM11. Tap Into the Most Obvious Market of All...

Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) remains the largest leisure tourism market in the world.

Launch a VFR campaign to encourage residents to get out and about in the county when they have guests. Offer free admission, local swag or discounts to residents who bring out of county visitors to attractions, restaurants and events.

STM12. Discover the SAVE market.

The SAVE market is a strong (but undervalued) market that is based on Science, Academics, Volunteerism, and Education. This market is interested in performing educational or community-based activities that align with their personal or professional pursuits. They might help build a boardwalk, monitor number of species in a certain area, maintain trails, clean up area after a disaster, build or repair houses, conduct medical examinations, and document the quality of the local water supply. Courting the SAVE market would bring visitors who actually wish to help preserve the beauty of the area. Develop a list of SAVE projects that would enhance community quality of life, expand access to natural resources, or monitor and protect habitat. Through direct interaction with applicable groups outside the county, encourage their visit and a long-term relationship with Edgecombe County.

STM13. Explore the niche of pet-friendly travel.

More and more, Americans are wishing to travel with their pets. A new online guide lists lodging, restaurants and bars across the nation that allow pet-owners to bring their dogs along. Explore the idea of making Tarboro a pooch-friendly destination.
<http://www.petfriendlytravel.com/>

Prime for the Groups and Meetings Market

Unlike many rural counties, group lodging is already available through the Comfort Inn, Budget Inn and Holiday Inn Express. Additionally, there are family-style restaurants with large parking lots that might accommodate a big influx of visitors. Both group tours and meetings offer a controlled and known visitation pattern because they require planning and advance reservations. Because of the central location and comparatively lower prices, Edgecombe County will have a lot to offer meeting groups once the lodging situation is addressed. It offers a great escape for corporate planning purposes as well as the availability of team activities like fishing, paddling or hiking. Remember the SMERFS (Social, Military, Education, Religious, Fraternal, Sports) groups, but also target recreation clubs as well as historical organizations, agricultural associations and commodity groups for their annual meetings or retreats. Family, church and school reunions are a viable market that could be expanded considerably.

STM14. Target agricultural commodity groups, livestock shows, horticulture clubs and agricultural trade associations.

Work with Edgecombe County Cooperative Extension, NC Department of Agriculture and the 4-H to create a marketing brochure highlighting the County's desire and ability to host agricultural shows, exhibitions, and competitions.

STM15. Court the small meetings market

In recent years, the small meetings industry has evolved significantly—generally 150 attendees or fewer. Edgecombe Community College both has facilities to accommodate small meetings. Inventory the county for other potential hosting sites and partner with

hoteliers to market the county as a desirable place for Eastern North Carolina businesses to hold their meetings.

(For more information, go to

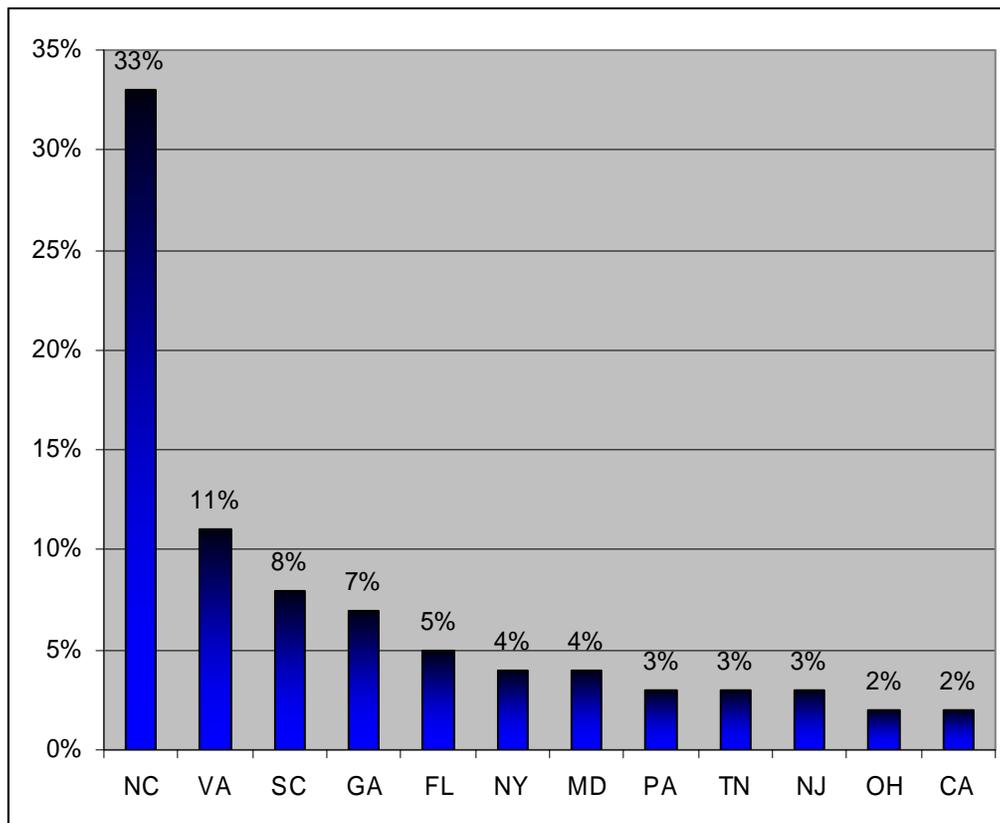
<http://www.meetingsmarket.com/displayarticle.asp?origin=articles&id=6709&title=Small%20Meetings>).

STM16. Form a relationship with an established tour operator.

Holiday Tours, Inc. operates out of Randleman, North Carolina but uses Raleigh as a gateway city. Contact this company and or one like it to discuss creating a tour around Edgecombe County. Once a tour is booked, work on establishing a relationship with a second company. Build a solid partnership with one company at a time.

North Carolina Market

According to the North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film, and Sports Development, 33% of visitors to North Carolina are traveling from another area of the state. This demonstrates that Edgecombe County can benefit from in-state marketing. South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia make up another large part of visitors coming to North Carolina. With Edgecombe's proximity to I-95, the county is poised to tap into any of these neighboring states. The following chart shows the top eleven states of origin for NC visitors in 2006:



It is equally vital to understand what visitors are doing so we know what to offer to visitors. The top four activities for North Carolina visitors in 2005 are:

- Shopping 26%
- Family Reunion 24%
- Fine dining 16%
- Rural Sightseeing 12%

Some other important statistics follow to keep in mind for planning.

- In 2006 the average party size was 2.8 people
- Only 29% of visiting parties included children
- 40% of visitors have an annual household income of over \$70,000
- The average age of visitors is 45
- 59% of visitors are married

These demographics help us understand who is traveling and how we should cater to them. Most visitors are traveling without children, are married, and are over the age of 45. Edgecombe County's current and potential assets would be very attractive to this demographic.

STM17. Target North Carolina residents

The North Carolina Division of Tourism has successfully encouraged more travel within the state by using the marketing campaign "Discover the State You're In." Play off the success of this program by implementing a "discovery" campaign of your own, marketing Edgecombe County as a destination for both new and long-time North Carolinians.

STM18. Market packages and themes.

Visitors enjoy the convenience of pre-arranged packages and the luxury of choosing among several options. Once the Product Development work of creating packages and themed experiences (see Appendix CC for samples), advertising must evolve into messages that support these themes and highlight the visitors' opportunity to choose packages. One example would be a drop down menu that is available on the Chamber's (or TDA's) website, as well as the websites of all participating businesses, that would allow potential visitors to check out any number of Edgecombe County packages.

Partner, Partner, Partner

Establish a mindset from the beginning that tourism is based on collaboration and not competition. With the exception of outright duplication, there is "a lot of room" in the tourism industry to serve visitors' ever-expanding and individual needs. Remember that visitors think broadly about "the experience" and rarely notice county lines. Beef up the product base within the county with localized product development activities but also join forces with anyone having a geographic or thematic commonality for marketing. Aim for forging partnerships with at least two of the surrounding counties in 2009 and partnerships with the rest of the surrounding counties by 2010.

STM19. Structure opportunities for cooperative marketing of county businesses.

Cooperative marketing is when two or more businesses or services cooperatively plan and market a package for visitors to enjoy. Each business included in the package may pool funds for an advertisement or add a feature on their individual websites to feature the package. In like fashion, thematic marketing provides benefits to both visitors and business owners. For visitors, it provides convenience but more importantly, it portrays a critical mass of professional services, which adds confidence and desirability about an area. Many visitors want to avoid over-developed destinations, but need the reassurance that it is a destination and *some* visitors have already discovered it.

For the business owner, three or four similar ventures should not be viewed as competitors. The others are very important in establishing a critical mass of activity and a sense that there is enough to do in the area that it warrants more than a skeleton of service providers. Rarely will a visitor make a travel decision based on ONE business, but will be attracted to an area when it is perceived that there is "lots to do." Additionally, it presents a positive, collaborative atmosphere to visitors and saves the business owner money by pooling funds.

STM20. Engage in regional cooperative marketing.

It is extremely beneficial to partner with surrounding counties to join marketing efforts since visitors rarely notice or pay attention to municipal or county lines. Rural destinations often have very little resources for marketing, but if counties pool their resources, it provides a bigger presence and clearer message for the region overall, offers visitors a broader and more complete product base for consumption, and saves limited county resources. Regional partners are Nash Halifax County, Pitt, Wilson and Martin Counties; meet with each county's tourism representative to find out how Edgecombe can collaborate and/or invite each representative to the county and host a brainstorming session on regional opportunities.

STM21. Plug into existing tourism programs. Become a part of established marketing mechanisms.

Jumpstart the tourism effort in Edgecombe County by attending meetings and becoming involved in programs that are already well-established and successful. The NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development is the state agency for tourism, mandated to market to potential out-of-state visitors, and have many programs including grants, research, advertising and technical assistance to benefit large and small destinations (www.nccommerce.com/en/TourismServices/PromoteTravelAndTourismIndustry/).

Getting into their database (www.visitnc.com) and visitor guides, and participating in their trade shows and promotional programs are good, basic ways of getting more exposure.

Arrange an "armchair" visit with the women who answer the 1-800-VISITNC phone line. They do an excellent job of promoting our state's resources to potential visitors who phone in for information, but are unable to visit the destinations themselves, so representatives of the destinations must go to them. To arrange a visit, contact Esther Dunn at (919) 733-2616 or edunn@nccommerce.com.

The Division's media relations experts can help with promotion through travel writers, maintain an extensive archive of press releases, and offer good basic information on working with media in a crisis (<http://www.nccommerce.com/en/TourismServices/PromoteTravelAndTourismIndustry/MediaRelations/>). Subscribe to the VISITNC weekly newsletter to keep up with relevant happenings in the tourism industry

<http://www.nccommerce.com/en/PressRoom/MailingListsSubscriptions/Subscriptions/>.

And contact their sports

(<http://www.nccommerce.com/en/TourismServices/DevelopSportsVenuesAndEvents/>)

and film (<http://www.ncfilm.com/>) sections for expertise on developing exposure in these segments of the economy.

Additionally, regional efforts such as North Carolina's Eastern Region (regional economic development organization) (<http://www.nceast.org/tourism.htm>) would be a critical partner. While Edgecombe County is not located in the service region of the Northeast NC Commission for Economic Development (<http://www.ncnortheast.info/>), the county borders Halifax and Martin who are part of the NENC region. Northeast NC Commission has long embraced tourism as an economic development tool and should be regarded as a resource for success stories, policy examples and "how to" procedures for rural areas. Examples of other recommended programs to partner with are below.

- HomegrownHandmade.com: <http://www.homegrownhandmade.com/AboutHgHm.htm>
- NC Birding Trail: <http://www.ncbirdingtrail.org>
- The Historic Albemarle Tour (<http://www.historicalbemarletour.org/>) is one of North Carolina's first tourism trails, its origin dating back to 1975.
- North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA) Agritourism Program <http://www.ncagr.com/markets/artitourism> and NC Agritourism Networking Association <http://www.ncagr.com/markets/agritourism/ANAmision.htm>
- NC State Trails Program http://www.ncparks.gov/About/trails_main.php
- Carolina Farm Stewardship Association: <http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/>
- Cooperative Extension's Growing Small Farms Program: <http://chatham.ces.ncsu.edu/growingsmallfarms/>
- Value Added and Alternative Agriculture Program: <http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/value-added/>

Explore a deeper relationship with the Foundation of Renewal for Eastern North Carolina (FoR ENC). Evidently, Tarboro is part of the Creative Communities Initiative (<http://www.creative-enc.com>) initiated by FoRENC although this fact never came up during the tourism planning process. FoRENC's full Project Portfolio, including the Eastern NC Film Commission and VenturEast (<http://www.venture-east.com/>) can be found at <http://www.forenc.com/portal/page.php?3>. ForENC is the most recent in a long line of organizations that provide assistance to Eastern NC in community and economic development efforts. Edgecombe County should consider joining efforts with this organization IF the relationship seems genuinely beneficial to the communities in the region. FoRENC has begun compiling themed information to promote the region (<http://www.venture-east.com/community/index.cfm>) such as bicycle tours, historic tours, visual arts trails, golf and birding – these are long-term efforts that were developed by others but compiled on the website of VenturEast. FoRENC could play an important role in marketing the eastern region of the state by its promotional efforts such as this film (http://www.footpathpictures.com/FoR_ENC/FoR_ENC_Video.html) and the Inner Banks (IBX) branding campaign if they gain the trust and buy in from the many communities in the area of North Carolina that fall within their service region.

STM22. Join the I-95 Corridor marketing coalition to leverage marketing power and associate with a larger region. Approach TDA’s along US-64 to explore opportunities for capturing coastal traffic.

By partnering with other communities along the I-95 and US-64 corridors, Edgecombe County can apply for marketing dollars from private foundations and government agencies who understand the power of collaboration and joint advertising. Contact Donna Bailey-Taylor, Executive Director of the Johnston County Visitor Bureau (dbtaylor@johnstoncountync.org) to enter discussions on how to play a part in the Interstate 95 corridor program. Also, refer to Appendix U for the results of the I-95 Survey of Visitor Bureaus and background data on this interesting marketing effort.

Market the county to internal audiences as well as external.

When visitors come to Edgecombe County they are likely to ask locals for directions and advice on local attractions. It is important for the local residents of the destination to be knowledgeable and proud of what their county has to offer. However, it is not unusual for rural citizens to think of their town as ordinary while other towns have lots to offer in the way of activities, attractions, dining and entertainment. It is necessary to market the county’s offerings to residents to encourage a sense of local pride. If residents are apathetic or unknowledgeable about their hometown, it influences the visitors’ impression negatively as well.

STM23. Organize internal familiarization tours

It is common for citizens to be unfamiliar with their own community resources. Surprisingly, this can include the elected officials, city/county administration and the tourism industry leaders themselves. Internal FAM tours are well worth the cost and effort put into planning. They pay off with more knowledgeable citizens, a better community self-image and pride, increased buy-in to the tourism industry, positive PR for the TDA and/or tourism roundtable, and better cross-marketing efforts between sites.

- Create at least one Familiarization (FAM) tour of Edgecombe County for cultural heritage community leaders and county officials. Many community leaders are not aware of the various assets in the county. These tours should be held annually.
- Create a FAM tour for city and county government officials. Although the impact of tourism is beginning to be seen, some government officials still don’t understand the many dimensions of tourism and the county’s assets.

Develop Marketing Outlets/ Materials

Marketing outlets are the channels through which products and services are sold to potential buyers. It is important to determine appropriate and effective ways to “sell” Edgecombe County to the visitor.

STM24. Design and maintain the Edgecombe County visitor guide in various formats.

A visitor guide should contain all the attractions, programs, events, dining opportunities, and lodging options that a destination has to offer. The Edgecombe County visitor guide should be comprehensive and available to any visitor who requests it promptly. This can be done

by putting the guide online on the Edgecombe County Tourism website, as well as mailing them to any potential visitor who requests information. The guide should be updated regularly with new attractions, programs, etc. Offering the guide additionally in CD format allows the guide to be easily updated. It is also environmentally friendly and cost-effective, as it prevents wasteful use of expensive paper. By offering the guide in digital format in addition to a hard copy, it demonstrates to the visitor that Edgecombe County is a modern place to visit, even in light of being considered a historic destination. The CD guide can do all the things the traditional paper guides could, and can be used interactively to help the potential visitor find what they are looking for more easily.

STM25. Channel local marketing efforts into county websites.

Further develop historic town websites as well as other tourism-related websites. The Historic Tarboro website (<http://www.historictarboro.com>) is a clean, well-designed site. Purchase the domain name <http://www.historicprinceville.com> and develop a complementary look to promote this aspect of the county's history.

Kudos to On the Square, GoTarboro, Mainstreet Inn, Edgecombe Arts and many others who have attractive, easy to use websites promoting county businesses and interests. An effort should be made, from the private sector or subsidized by future tourism funds to expand the web presence of attractions, businesses, organizations and places relating to Edgecombe County's tourism industry. The Chamber website must be updated and reorganized – it is currently not conducive to attracting or guiding visitors. As further funds are available for marketing, developing a comprehensive Edgecombe County web presence will be critical to boost the overall image of and traffic to the county.

STM26. Outline obtainable marketing steps for the Cantaloupe Festival.

Create a two to three-page marketing plan for the festival that will encourage organizers to increase promotional efforts each year. Write a press release that can go to multiple media sources. Create partnership with Future Farmers of America and other organizations that would be interested in the festival. Develop a cantaloupe recipe book.

STM27. Create a list of all hunting and fishing lodges, clubs, and organizations in the area.

Great hunting lodges and clubs are prevalent in the county but there is no central listing of them with contact and other information. If this information was available, with the land and game in the area, hunting could be a great source of tourism revenue. When hunting you need a gun, ammunition, gear and a variety of other tools that could be made available in a local hardware/outdoors center. Have this list available to send out to perspective visitors and posted on the main Edgecombe County website. The list could also be published in outdoor magazines and in the local outdoor and hardware stores.

STM28. Create and design a brochure that could be displayed in visitor's centers and rest stops along the highway.

Nearly 1.8 travelers stopped at the I-95 North Welcome Center in 2007; nearly 1.3 million at the I-95 South Center. Brochures at visitor centers and rest stops are very beneficial when considering the number of people that travel on the I-95 corridor each day (also, see Traffic Counts in Appendix G).

STM29. Create trail maps showing visitors where to find outdoor recreation opportunities.

These maps should be available in hard copy displayed at visitors' centers and available online in a format which can be printed.

STM30. Get listed in the Carolina Heritage Guide

The Carolina Heritage Guide lists all museums in North Carolina (<http://www.carolinaheritageguide.com/>). Contact the guide and get all museums in Edgecombe County into the next edition. This will bring the county to the attention of people who pick up this guide who may otherwise not be aware of museums within the county.

STM31. Cultivate relationships with AAA offices.

AAA has 50 million members in the United States and 1.6 million in North and South Carolina. AAA has been a counted on source of travel and touring information for 100 years. By taking advantage of a relationship with AAA offices Edgecombe County could gain visibility through AAA publications and promotions. Contact local offices to discuss how they like to be kept informed.

STM32. Get listed with organizations that promote small towns in America

There are many websites that exist with the sole purpose of promoting small towns in America. Getting listed on these websites will give Edgecombe County greater exposure to the people who truly desire to visit small towns. Some of these organizations are:

- Small Wander (<http://www.smallwander.com/>) is a site started by a former arts council director in Hillsborough, NC that offers listings and other services to small towns wishing to expand their tourism base (http://www.smallwander.com/About_Us/Listings.asp).
- ePodunk, this organization has a list of America's Most Historic Small Towns. <http://www.epodunk.com/top10/historic/index.html>
- Budget Travel, has a "Ten Coolest Small Towns" feature each year <http://www.budgettravel.com/index.html>.

STM33. Seek assistance from organizations specializing in small destination marketing

Organizations that have experience with small destination can be of great assistance in the tourism planning process. Greta Lint from Asheboro has worked in the North Carolina tourism arena for many years and launched a business in 2003 that assists in tourism promotion (<http://gretalint.blogspot.com/>). Hensley-Fontana is based out of Charlotte and has specialized in tourism marketing and public relations for over 20 years. A menu of their extensive services can be found at www.hensleyfontana.com/Services/MenuofAgencyServices/tabid/322/Default.aspx.

Branding for Small Cities by Bill Baker was released in paperback form in 2007. The author's website also offers self-assessment quizzes for burgeoning destinations (http://destinationbranding.com/pdf/Destination_Branding_Quiz.pdf and http://destinationbranding.com/pdf/Visitor_Readiness_Quiz.pdf). While this is not an endorsement of these services, it is an

encouragement to search for consulting, web and print resources aimed towards small town or rural area marketing.

Invest in Marketing Intelligence

Marketing intelligence is acquiring and analyzing information to ensure that the best possible, and most recent information is available for ongoing marketing projects.

STM34. Invest time in database management.

Keep a list of people who travel to the county and learn as much information about them as you can. It is easier and less expensive to keep repeat customers than it is to find and create new customers (Rouse). With the ease of e-marketing and web-based advertising, direct marketing efforts are very inexpensive and effective when targeted to the interests of the previous visitors. The more information that the county knows about current visitors, the more focused its marketing efforts will be (and more financial resources saved). Information about visitors can be obtained in many ways and from many sources.

STM35. Utilize secondary data in marketing decisions.

Much data that is beneficial to tourism planning and marketing already exists and can be easily accessed. To detect industry fluctuations or trends in travel patterns, it should be monitored on a regular basis. Economic impact and visitor profile data can be obtained from the North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film and Sport Development, NCSU Tourism Extension, NC Department of Transportation, Travel Industry Association, Southeast Tourism Society, World Tourism Organization, as well as national and statewide trade organizations. Labor market profiles are found at the Employment Security Commission. Geographic Information System data is available from the Office of State Planning, and NC Natural Heritage Program. With the exception of Cooperative Extension, each of these state agencies can be accessed at the North Carolina Information Server.

Subscriptions to weekly or monthly newsletters will be key to keep up with current industry trends. The VISITNC Newslink is distributed weekly by the NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development. To subscribe to this electronic newsletter, go to <http://www.nccommerce.com/en/PressRoom/MailingListsSubscriptions/Subscriptions/>. Back issues of the Newslink can be found here <http://www.nccommerce.com/en/TourismServices/PromoteTravelAndTourismIndustry/Newslink/>. Search for other tourism, economic or community development newsletters to tap into – these newsletters are free or a minimal cost. One such resource is The Trend put out by National Tour Association. This publication supplies current broad-based research on groups and packaged travel (\$120 per year). To subscribe, e-mail Sandy Stansfield, National Tour Association's research analyst, at sandy.stansfield@NTA.travel. For a sample of trends from 2007, go to http://www.ntaonline.com/index.php?s=&url_channel_id=19&url_subchannel_id=&url_article_id=3276&change_well_id=2. This January sample issue includes traveler trends, international travel statistics, results from the 2006 American Hotel and Lodging study, types of vacations growing in popularity, trends in African-American Travel, and other traveler statistics.

Ensure a Quality Experience

Visitors want to have the best experience possible when they travel to a new destination. Mediocrity does not leave a positive lasting impression and “word of mouth” is still the biggest of advertising. If you make sure that every visit to Edgecombe County is a quality experience, visitors are more likely to return as well as tell others about the trip they took.

STM36. Avoid common mistakes in public relations and marketing

Bill Hensley, a seasoned travel promoter and father of Bruce Hensley mentioned above, wrote an article in the summer 2002 Travel Post, a publication for North Carolina’s Tourism Business printed by the Travel Council of North Carolina, Inc. This article lists 10 common mistakes made by tourism professionals. As Edgecombe County begins to build rapport in the tourism professional community, these would be nice guidelines to keep in mind.

1. Not returning phone calls; not answering letters [or e-mails].
2. Not sending out the publicity material that was requested.
3. Being inaccessible, unmotivated, and uncooperative.
4. Not developing a travel writer contact base of local, regional, and nation writers.
5. Not suggesting feature stories to writers.
6. Not keeping up with travel stories in consumer and trade publications to understand the format of these publications and what they are writing about.
7. Not maintaining adequate photo files and mailing lists; not sending out effective news releases; and not creating promotional opportunities.
8. Not acknowledging a travel story after it has been published with a brief “thank you” note.
9. Not knowing the simple essentials of the product that is to be publicized and promoted.
10. Not knowing what to do when a travel writer appears, unsolicited, on your doorstep with pen in hand ready to write an article.

Long-Term Strategies

Long-term strategies are meant to build on short-term successes and take the tourism industry to the next level while maintaining control of the growing visitation patterns in the county. These strategies are to be implemented after the Tourism Roundtable and/or TDA has established a solid foundation of basic marketing activities.

Long-Term Marketing (LTM)1. Track media impact, inquiries, and trip conversions

When Edgecombe County’s assets are presented in media external to the county or region, keep a file of the exposure and note any impact it has on tourism. Over time, this will create a record of the county’s media relations and the impact it makes. Document the coverage of the media and the audience reached (who and how many).

There needs to be a record of phone numbers, web and e-mail addresses on **all** marketing pieces and the inquiries from each campaign need to be tracked. Conduct an inquiry conversion periodically to find out how many people who asked for information about the region actually made a trip to the area. Success can be evaluated by dollar amounts collected from occupancy tax, expenditure estimates given by visitors and/or visitor counts.

LTM2. Work towards a full collection of marketing materials

A sample of all materials used to market the destination should be collected and kept in one place for reference. A library of photos must be maintained and easily accessed by media or community organizations. Other materials that over time should be development include:

- Brochures
- Directional signs
- Visitor guides in CD format
- Maps
- Internet resources, including the Edgecombe County website, internet articles featuring Edgecombe County, and websites that offer tickets to attractions and tours in Edgecombe County
- Visitor merchandise
- Media kits

LTM3. Keep current on marketing practices/test methods of distribution

As more resources for marketing become available and additional marketing media are developed through technology, test various methods of distributing information and keep records of the success for each method. Some typical forms and channels of distribution are:

- Specialized travel agencies
- AAA
- Visitor information centers
- Guidebooks
- Direct mail and telephone contact with specialized associations and groups
- Press kits and press releases
- Public service announcements
- Signature events
- Travel shows

Once each method's success has been recorded and compared, continue using the most effective methods.

LTM4. Host a familiarization tour for travel media and intermediaries

A familiarization tour is offered to travel media (such as magazines) and intermediaries (such as travel agents) so that they might experience the destination and get an idea of what it has to offer. Familiarizing these people with Edgecombe County will enable them to better promote the area, which will in turn bring more visitors to the county. This tour should only be offered after the visitor attractions are well-established and truly visitor-ready.

LTM5. Work with Elderhostel International to create a program for their 2015 catalogue.**LTM6. Focus on film.**

Contact the NC Film Office (<http://www.ncfilm.com/>) to establish a working relationship and learn how to tap into filming possibilities.

LTM7. Aim for a NC Weekend TV feature

A feature on NC Weekend TV would provide great exposure for Edgecombe County. This show is popular and has an established rapport with the NC Division of Tourism. It would be an opportunity to market to North Carolinians who desire to travel within their own state.

LTM8. Participate in travel and sales missions

It can be helpful to visit travel agents, community groups and organizations representing other niche markets. Visiting them not only familiarizes them with your destination but establishes a personal relationship with their organization. Strong relationships established early will provide a strong foundation for repeat group travel and word of mouth recommendations.

LTM9. Create a Safety and Emergency Preparedness/ Crisis Communications Plan.

Public perceptions of contingency plans for communities have had negative reflection in the media over the past few years. When a crisis occurs, whether caused by natural or human forces, having a plan in place can save a destination's reputation and the public trust in its' government leaders. The TDA should push to create an emergency plan or be aware of the one in place because events of this magnitude do affect travel and tourism in the community. An excellent beginning reference to Crisis Communications can be found in Travel Industry Association of America's *Travel Industry Public Relations Handbook*.

LTM10. Develop an independent bus tour.

Visitors may have disabilities that make it difficult or impossible to take a walking tour of downtown Tarboro or Princeville. There will also be visitors who prefer not to take a walking tour, but still want to take some type of guided tour of the historic district. Purchasing a small 15 or 20-passenger bus would make it possible and desirable to create a bus tour of the district. This tour would cover the same important landmarks the walking tour does, but it would be conducted from the comfort of the bus. Particularly handy for pre-formed groups such as family or church reunions or meetings, the marketing outlets for the tour would be multiple. People are also willing to pay more for a bus tour than for a walking one, so the promise it being profitable is not far-fetched.

LTM11. Create partnerships with other tour companies.

Once tour routes and scripts are established, and a stable and profitable relationship is established with Holiday Tours, Inc. (or another North Carolina bus tour company), start talking with tour companies external to Edgecombe County to encourage them to make Edgecombe County a stop on their larger trip. . Invite them to the county to experience the sites themselves (familiarization tour).

LTM12. Write a marketing plan for 2012 and beyond

Marketing plans are essential for guiding product development efforts, segmentation strategies, public relations and advertising decisions. County, regional and statewide marketing plans should hold common goals, or at least avoid conflicting goals. Objectives should reflect local priorities. These steps should be taken in the first few years of TDA operation to establish smooth marketing efforts in the future

- Write a tourism marketing plan outlining strategies for years 2012-2020
- Establish measurable objectives for this same time period
- Initiate methods for periodic evaluation

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Much of the Natural Resource Management section is adapted from the Pamlico County Tourism Plan (2007) and the Montgomery County Tourism Plan (2008). Many of the principles of natural resource monitoring, management and education are similar across ecosystems, therefore general best practices are submitted here. When appropriate, suggestions applicable specifically to Edgecombe County are offered.

Assessment of Natural Resources

The first step to preserving natural resources is to have a current assessment of the components that make up the ecosystem. Edgecombe County has an abundance of natural resources related to its agricultural and natural heritage as well as its location on the scenic Tar River. Monitoring farming practices, waste management, construction run-off, and tourism / recreational impacts will be key to keeping a healthy ecosystem. Civic efforts related to natural resource management include the “Adopt-a-Spot” program, Tar River Civic Club (in conjunction with Nash County), and 4-H program. These civic efforts combined with vigilant regulation and active environmental education for multiple audiences - adult residents, school children, community college students, visitors, business leaders and front line employees - will ensure that Edgecombe County’s natural resources will continue to be enjoyed by generations to come.

Threats

The following list outlines areas of concern in which natural resources are being or could be threatened in the county.

- **Urban crawl:** The southeast side of the county is bordered by Pitt County and is 20 minutes outside of Greenville. The land in this area is mostly used for farming and hunting practices. Development on these lands could displace the deer population and other animals natural to that area. Urban sprawl from Pitt, Wilson and even Wake County would significantly change the landscape of the area by replacing farm lands with homes and infrastructure. An increase in non-permeable surfaces such as roofs and pavement will increase the amount of run-off going into the local streams. Increased run-off can increase the amount of pollutants in waterways and can overwhelm existing storm drain systems.
- **Farming:** must be sure that buffer zones are properly maintained to help filter ditch runoff. Maintain riparian buffers along natural waterways such as creeks, streams, and rivers. More buffer resources are available from NC State University.
- **Depletion of the striped bass:** Striped bass fishing is a popular activity and brings money into the county every year with an annual fishing tournament in addition to the traditional fishing during the "Rock" season. However, there is a concern as the striped bass population has been dramatically reduced over the past 20 years. Efforts to restore this population have been moderately successful. This population is drastically lower than the same resource in the nearby Roanoke River which has much more recreational dollars coming in from the pursuit of the species by fisherman. Restoring a large, viable striped bass population could

add considerably to the tourism dollars spent in Edgecombe County.

- Tourism: an increase in the number of visitors to Edgecombe County will place further demands on the natural resources. The current use of water in the county should be audited and water savings measures should be enacted. In addition to resident water-use, an increase in tourism infrastructure could also lead to water depletion within the county. Major hotels, pools, and attractions have the potential to use large amounts of water.
- Storm damage: suggestions for controlling damage of manmade structures include elevating houses and maintaining wind breaks. Habitat and land loss would occur mainly from wind and water erosion or during a storm.
- Industrial/ economic development: soils, minerals, fossil fuels, water, forests are all impacted in new construction.

Opportunities

Edgecombe County is a place of natural beauty. The Tar River and large amounts of flatland can be very profitable to the county without disturbing the natural surroundings. The following are opportunities within the county for improvement of management of natural resources.

- Tar River – The Tar River has great potential as a ecotourism asset for the county. The camping platforms along the Roanoke River designed and operated by the Roanoke River Partners have been very successful. Introducing platforms along the Tar River would increase camping and use of the Tar River for people who are not from the county by providing them with an affordable and memorable place to stay along their paddling trip.
- Agriculture - Many farms in Edgecombe County could transition part of their operation into a Agritourism venture. This could range from showing visitors normal farm operations to allowing visitors to work their way through a corn maze, providing farm stays and seasonal u-pick operations. The Agritourism Networking Association is a great way for farmers to become familiar with how agritourism works and learn valuable lessons from seasoned agritourism entrepreneurs.
- Hunting/fishing – Hunting and fishing are culturally important to the citizens of Edgecombe County. Edgecombe County is already a prominent place that visitors from outside of the county and state come to hunt or fish. Every year the county hosts a shad fishing competition. Stocking the water with more shad and striped bass would increase tourism in that area. Increasing the acreage of Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) Gamelands in the county is one way to increase hunting and fishing opportunities in the county. Increasing the number of WRC boat ramps is another opportunity.
- Parks – the county could improve the infrastructure and programming of its existing municipal parks. Public parks are a great way to connect citizens with the natural environment and serve as natural classrooms for after school programs and summer camps. MLK Park is the end of the greenway through Rocky Mount. Developing additional events and programs at MLK Park would bring more people to the Edgecombe side of Rocky Mount.

Limits of Acceptable Change

Limits of acceptable change are ways for managers to measure the amount of use a certain place can absorb and still be a safe and attractive environment for the users. Limits of acceptable change can be applied in a large scale (beaches and forests) or small scale (trails and buildings).

Objectives

Monitor and maintain the physical state and sustainability of trails, facilities, and the environment.

Implementation

First, an assessment of current assets must be made, using previous environmental data and entering it into a database of county information. Often this type of data is stored in layers of data in Geographic Information System software. The county should be divided into districts or existing boundaries should be as manageable units to monitor and evaluate. Create list of indicators and units of measurements for various environmental factors within each district. Review existing objectives for contingency with any legislative environmental mandate that may apply. Create lists of desired conditions for each asset under evaluation (water level, water quality, trail or campground condition, soil ph level, etc.). At designated intervals of time, measure the current state of the natural asset and determine a consistency or discrepancy with desired standards.

Types of Impacts

Visitor use in any environment will cause some negative impacts. Ecosystem Management is practices that keep the ecosystem in tact and working properly for the sake of the natural system. However, preserving the integrity of an intact ecosystem does have benefits for human populations, like preventing sedimentation pollution, or could play a role in flood mitigation or keep populations of game fish in tact.

The most common impacts to the ecosystem affect soil, water quality, air quality, vegetation, wildlife, and the experience of other visitors (Driver 2005). Impacts differ by outdoor recreation activities; however, there are some general categories of impacts that appear across all activities. Impacts should be monitored closely to determine if recreational pursuits or an increased number of people in the area they are having an effect on the environment. All of these categories are related and each one must be taken care of for the entire system to be healthy (Leung, 2007).

Impacts to Vegetation

Vegetation requires proper soils and water, as well as wildlife to survive in some cases.

- Loss of vegetation
- Compositional change
- Control of non-native species
- Tree damage and root exposure
- Loss of shrubs

Recreation activities that disturb vegetation include:

- Trampling seedlings and groundcover
- Gathering firewood
- Tying horses and other pets to live trees
- Carving into trees
- Introduction of exotic plants and species (through planting, horse manure, inadvertent seed dispersal etc.)
- Gasoline lanterns on live trees
- Gathering flowers and other plants
- Grazing horses
- Improper disposal of human waste and litter (Driver 2005)

Impacts to Soil

Soil is comprised of different minerals, living and dead organic material, water, dissolved substances, and the air spaces between the solid particles (Driver 2005). Soil requires vegetation and wildlife to be healthy just as much as vegetation requires soil. Vegetation helps keep soil in place and reduce erosion.

- Loss of topsoil – Due to wind and water erosion, related to lack of vegetation
- Soil compaction
- Decreased soil moisture – Related to compaction and loss of vegetation
- Soil erosion – Related to vegetation loss

Activities that impact soil include trampling from people, horses, bikes, and vehicles.

Wildlife Impacts

Water, soil, and vegetation must all be healthy to have healthy wildlife.

- Habitat alteration
- Wildlife disturbance and harassment
- Modification of wildlife behavior. This primarily occurs when wildlife becomes accustomed to human interaction.
- Displacement from food, water, and cover. Pristine wildlife corridors must be maintained to facilitate the movement of wildlife from one area of the county to another.
- Reduced health and reproduction
- Increased mortality
- Control of non-native species

Impacts on wildlife caused by unfettered outdoor recreation activities include:

- Poaching of wildlife
- Pursuing animals to take pictures
- Damaging food supply
- Camping near water sources
- Disturbing animals in their territory during mating season
- Affecting nutrition and tolerance of people by feeding animals
- Bringing pets into the environment

- Chasing wildlife with off highway vehicles (Driver 2005).

Water Resource Impacts

Healthy vegetation serves as a buffer between possible pollutants and water bodies. Without buffer zones of vegetation and soil to filter pollutants, groundwater and other water bodies would be of poorer quality.

- Increased turbidity
- Phosphates
- Fertilizer runoff (nitrates)
- Fuel spills from marinas and refueling areas
- Seafood processing waste
- Fecal wastes (Giardia, E. coli)

Water is one of the most important resources for outdoor recreation management. Impacts to water quality affect every part of the ecosystem. Activities that impact water quality include:

- Improper disposal of human waste
- Introduction of exotic species or plants
- Chemical pollution from gasoline, oil, etc.
- Bathing using nonbiodegradable soaps
- Washing dishes near water sources (Driver 2005)
- Shoreline erosion
- Litter
- Vegetation trampling leading to sedimentation

Air Quality

Visitors use trails to experience fresh air in the outdoors. Air pollution from cars and other motorized vehicles can severely damage air quality. Activities that impact air quality include:

- Industrial pollution
- Pollution from motorized vehicles (ATV, cars, RVs Water vehicles)
- Camp fire smoke
- Trash burning
- Burning coal (grills)

Aesthetic Impacts

These must be controlled through visitor education and signage. Visitors can impact the soil, water, wildlife, and vegetation in negative ways and therefore these impacts must be controlled.

- Litter
- Human Wastes
- Graffiti, vandalism

Social Impacts

People visiting outdoor recreation can have a negative experience because of negative impacts to the ecosystem, but visitors can be very affected by other visitors and negative interactions with one another.

- Crowding – Perceived crowding can occur with negative appraisal of the density of other people in an area (Driver 2005).
- Recreational Conflict – Conflict, like crowding, is based on an individual's interpretation of past, present and future contacts with others (Driver 2005).

Suggestions for Protection

The following are suggestions for natural resource management to benefit both the community and visitors. Many of these tasks are already being implemented by individual government agencies and non-profits, however the implementation of an inter-agency council of environmentally-minded agencies and organizations will be crucial to managing natural resources. The council would meet to share new information, communicate on current efforts and potentially collaborate on projects and/or funding proposals. This inter-agency council could meet bi-monthly to keep each other informed of current projects and impending issues.

Natural Resource Management (NRM)1. Form an inter-agency council to address environmental concerns.

Found an inter-agency council of environmentally-minded organizations and agencies to meet and inform each other and share ideas about current projects and impending issues. Increasing resident knowledge of the current state of natural resources in Edgecombe County is the first step. Having a clear understanding of where the county is now in terms of natural resources is the only way to begin to protect them. The Natural Heritage Program has already done an assessment of the natural areas in the county.

NRM2. Divide county into management areas.

Very diverse habitat types exist in Edgecombe County. Use the designated townships as a way to divide the county into 5 or 6 districts, or use existing divisions, making it more manageable. Management strategies and resulting successes could be documented for each area.

NRM3. Raise awareness around non-native species.

Develop an educational message to homeowners, landscapers, developers and school nature programs regarding the selection of native species. Incorporate controls of non-native plant and animal species into farm and natural area management so that they do not out-compete and eliminate the native species.

NRM4. Designate areas of the county as environmental research regions.

These regions are not meant to be kept "off limits" but merely act as a defined area for scientists, academia and researchers who would like a field laboratory for their own investigation or as a teaching lab. Not only will these audiences bring some "tourism" funds into the county, the new knowledge generated and potential grants they could leverage would further the protection of the delicate ecosystems.

NRM5. Groom adult and youth residents to be model stewards.

Feature NC WILD, WET, CATCH, and Project Learning Tree environmental education activities to help educate not only youth but also adults. Advocate more environmental education into the K-12 curriculum. This would encourage more interaction with the parks and waterways in Edgecombe County and enhance what the children are already learning in the classroom about nature and stewardship of our resources. They are also in sync with the North Carolina Science Curriculums and there are certification seminars throughout the state for those that are interested in becoming instructors. These same programs can be utilized by after-school, 4-H or parks and recreation programs. The NC Office of Environmental Education program is outstanding. To find out how to become further involved, see

<http://www.eenorthcarolina.org/>.

NRM6. Develop a Visitor Guidelines program.

Teach visitors about Leave No Trace principles, natural resource protection, proper trail use, and conservation. This program should instill a sense of environmental stewardship in every user. In order to protect the natural resources of Edgecombe County, they must be marketed to the public in such a way as to convey their importance and develop an understanding of this importance. Doing so will make the resources valuable, allowing for easier environmental protection.

Develop a set of “minimum impact guidelines” for distribution to visitors. Post guidelines on the Edgecombe website. See The International Ecotourism Society’s website for examples on how to help tourists be responsible (www.ecotourism.org - see Travel Choice) as well as Appendix HH for a draft of some guidelines that might apply to Edgecombe County.

NRM7. Begin a County Certification Program for Green Businesses and Programs.

Only a few states have formed their own “Ecotourism Association” and fewer still have adopted a green certification program for businesses wishing to adhere to a formal set of standards surrounding energy, construction, and policy and operations issues. (Currently Wisconsin is the only state to have such a program.) Edgecombe County could forge new ground by adopting standards for businesses, facilities and towns to “be green” on varying levels of practice. The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program is a great example for how to certify varying stages of “greenness.” By awarding certification at each level, it only encourages businesses and towns to reach higher. See the appendices in this plan for more information on green building practices and programs. The International Ecotourism Society has many resources on this topic and would be willing to work with entities wishing to initiate such a program. Having a green certification program would increase the environmental health of the county and the tourism product, but would also serve as a sophisticated marketing spin.

NRM8. Embrace Low Impact Development (LID) principles.

Require developers to attend low impact development workshops. Appropriate programs and organizations can be found through the Office of Environmental Education (<http://www.eenorthcarolina.org/>). They help planners learn ways to lessen the impact of development on the ecosystem.

Tap into university and college expertise. North Carolina State University has resources for low impact development, water quality assessment, wildlife habitat management and many other environmental science programs. Likewise, NC A&T, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC-Charlotte and UNC-Greensboro have applicable programs to explore, as well as the Community College System. Smart Growth Alliance offers guidelines and principles of smart growth to assist communities in making responsible development decisions (<http://www.smartgrowth.org>). Plug into organizations whose mission is to help communities thrive while preserving the natural landscape that supports them.

NRM9. Monitor changes in ecosystems.

Many resources exist on what resources to monitor as well as monitoring methods. Please consult the County Extension Office, Soil and Water Conservation or the NC Office of Environmental Education for more information. Encourage the Edgecombe County Soil and Water Conservation District to become involved with tourism planning. Every five years, conduct thorough assessments of natural resources as listed above. In addition to the “usual suspects” of interested agencies and citizens, enlist school groups or volunteer tourists (part of the SAVE market) to help.

NRM10. Creating a stronger recycling program will increase community involvement towards protecting natural resources.

NRM11. Reach out to regional and statewide conservation programs to explore and establish mutually-beneficial relationships.

- Tar River Land Conservancy (TRLIC) is a non-profit organization working to protect farms, forests, water, wildlife and scenic rural landscapes in the counties of the Upper Tar River Basin. TRLIC currently manages a conservation easement along Fishing Creek. Further work and partnership with TRLIC could lead to more conservation planning in the county.
- The Rocky Mount P & R department has a functioning canoe trip program in place.
- The Conservation Fund's Resourceful Communities Program has worked with Princeville communities and is thus familiar with much of the county's history. Meet with TCF's Ecotourism Programs Coordinator, Justin Boner, who has been working in Tyrell County to create and promote ecotourism.
- Land For Tomorrow
- N.C. Paddle Trails Association

NRM12. Get involved with the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) is the community assistance arm of the National Park Service. RTCA staff provide technical assistance to community groups and local, State, and federal government agencies so they can conserve rivers, preserve open space, and develop trails and greenways. The RTCA program implements the natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation mission of the National Park Service in communities across America. RTCA provides technical assistance to locally-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects. The project applicant may be a state or local agency, tribe, non-profit organization, or citizens' group. RTCA does not provide financial assistance to support project implementation. For general information, go to <http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/index.htm>.

To apply for assistance, see

http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/contactus/cu_apply.html.

For helpful tools involving river conservation and usage, see the Community Tool Box at http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/helpfultools/ht_publications.html.

NRM13. Target the green tourist.

Establish Edgecombe County's place in the market as a rustic destination by promoting the area's natural resources and making it known how pristine the land is. There is very little pollution in the county and surrounding waters. Along with the undeveloped nature of the area it is a prime candidate for marketing as a destination for conservation-minded visitors.

NRM14. Go High-Tech.

There are numerous opportunities for protecting the natural beauty of Edgecombe County. One suggestion for educating the public on all of the treasures in the county's ecosystem would be an online interactive medium that users can manipulate in order to see the various types of wildlife and ecosystems present in Edgecombe County. A system like this could be accessed not only at home prior to a visitor's stay but also in the county through the use of some kind of kiosk system. One way to do this is through the use of an Application Programming Interface (API). Web APIs such as Google's *Google Maps API* can be embedded within websites so that users are able to navigate through maps chosen by the provider. A mashup (hybrid application that uses content from multiple sources and combines them) could be used to display aerial photos of chosen areas and overlay them with any available data layers (Google Code). For an example of a mashup, go to: <http://fullmeasure.co.uk/mashups/ecsitemap.htm>.

Also, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission offers an excellent example of incorporating technology into environmental education. Visit the learning centers at their headquarters and across the state for more ideas.

Evaluation Methods

Evaluation refers to measuring effort against a set of standards for the purpose of tracking success. Organizations need evaluation because essentially, what gets measured gets done. Additionally, evaluation is important because if achievements can be demonstrated, organizations can gain public support.

Each year, the tourism program should be evaluated to assess progress, celebrate successes and note areas for improvement. The overall goals must be examined as well as the success or failure of individual strategies. Below are a few suggestions for evaluating each of the goals.

Evaluation of Goals

Goal 1: Enhance Edgecombe County's economy.

- Track number of tourism related businesses by building off of the assets inventory.
- Investigate how much staff each business employs and estimates of annual income.
- Document seasonal occupancy rates, occupancy tax and average daily rate.

Goal 2: Develop community infrastructure and tourism products.

- Maintain assets inventory. Compare inventory from year to year.
- Track tourism-related new businesses.
- Compile existing annual reports, such as from county and city parks, Edgecombe County Arts, the Rocky Mount-Edgecombe County CDC, Chamber and tourism roundtable task forces to track county infrastructure improvements from year to year.

Goal 3: Involve and inspire community.

- Keep records of volunteer hours committed by each member in the task forces. These hours are an investment in the community, hold value and should therefore be tracked. Likewise, document community attendance as it relates to tourism programs.
- Gather contact information of attendees at all training events. Evaluate training sessions by offering a brief questionnaire at the close. Contact attendees within three to six months to find out if attendees took action or if follow-up training is needed.
- Track media attention to tourism issues.
- Poll community on their understanding of and attitudes towards tourism. Repeat resident survey every two to three years.
- Record attendance at community special events.

Goal 4: Increase tourism partnerships within the county and the region.

- Document the number of tourism related partnerships that have been formed and the role each plays.
- Measure how these partnerships have contributed to tourism development by keeping a record of projects that have been initiated.
- Monitor tourism impacts through partnerships with conservation organizations, such as the Tar River Land Conservancy and the Coastal Land Trust.

Goal 5: Market and create demand.

- Track media hits by keeping a file of local and regional coverage.
- Maintain database of inquiries from people requesting information about Edgecombe County. Every two years, conduct an *inquiry conversion* study to determine how many “inquirers” actually “converted” to being a visitor.
- Encourage tourism-related businesses to keep registration book that asks for town of origin and “how did you hear about us.” By leaving out personal information such as names and contact information such as email addresses, it would be appropriate to share origin and source of information data in a public setting.

Goal 6: Preserve the small town charm, arts and culture of Edgecombe County.

- Work with historic and arts groups to document programs available throughout the year. Record attendance at events and classes.
- Maintain assets inventory. Compare cultural and heritage assets from year to year.
- Work with preservation groups to keep track of progress on current projects as well as to identify and prioritize future projects.
- Save GIS tax parcel data each year so that changes in property ownership can be measured.

Goal 7: Protect the natural resources through mitigating the negative impacts of tourism.

- Document the parcels of land available for public use.
- Work with historic and arts groups to document programs available throughout the year. Record attendance at events and classes.
- Work with the school system to document educational programs and outcomes geared towards environmental and cultural appreciation and preservation.
- Maintain assets inventory. Compare cultural and heritage assets from year to year.
- Document the amount of undeveloped acres each year to track development and land-use changes.

Sample Evaluation of Strategies

The following section provides sample evaluation methods that can be performed to measure the progress of selected tourism strategies listed throughout the plan. These methods correspond with each section of the plan: Product Development, Community Involvement, Marketing, and Natural Resource Management.

Strategy	Evaluation Method
Chose and create visitor merchandise, i.e. reproductions of historical documents.	Record the number of documents being sold, which are selling best, and measure the profit made on each reproduction.
Work with the community college to offer classes in historical preservation.	Keep track of enrollment in these courses as well as where enrollees are from.
Develop ghost tours.	Record the amount of tickets purchased for the tours to compare which tours, times of day, week, and year are the most and least successful and adjust accordingly.
Set up county tours for visitors attending family reunions.	Track which tours are most popular among visitors by administering a brief survey.
Build an additional entrance and restroom facilities at Keihin Auditorium.	Complete additional entrance and restrooms. Track bookings of special events and ticket sales to compare to previous years
Provide first aid and CPR classes.	Track the number of participants and graduates.
Create a calendar of events.	Record attendance at events after the calendar is made available to the public. Recruit volunteers to ask event attendees if they have heard of or seen the calendar.

Product Development

Community Involvement

Strategy	Evaluation Method
Encourage the community to take an active role in tourism planning.	Track the number of residents that join planning committees and attend meetings.
Educate the community on the benefits of tourism.	Issue a survey to measure residents' current level of tourism knowledge. Issue a follow up survey the following year to see if residents have increased their knowledge
Host step competitions at the community college.	Document the number of competitors and spectators.
Make residents aware of the county's assets.	Compare data from the 2007 resident attitude survey to a follow up survey in 2010 designed to measure changes in resident attitudes/beliefs.
Form a relationship with the Tarboro Daily Southerner.	Clip articles written about tourism planning efforts, benefits of tourism etc.
Feature one business each month for outstanding work in the community.	Keep a list of all featured businesses. Document what each did to earn the honor.
Develop/expand youth athletic leagues	Count the number of expanded programs over the next five years. Record all registrations in the leagues, keep track of new registrations.
Use the Edgecombe County "Welcome Committee to get new citizens involved in	Inquire about and record the number of new citizens in attendance at the meetings. Keep

making changes. The new citizens may be a great resource for ideas.	minutes at all meetings to use as a reference.
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Marketing

Strategy	Evaluation Method
Identify current and future markets; focus efforts on chosen markets.	Compile a list of current visitor markets and chosen markets for the future. Conduct visitor studies every three years and compare it to target market goals.
Increase Agritourism—create a county farm tour.	Work with county farmers to create a farm tour package. Keep record of farm tour participants and measure profits for the farms.
Seek assistance from organizations specializing in small destination marketing.	Measure the increase in visitation related to partnerships with these organizations.
Work with Cooperative Extension to hold hospitality training classes.	Record number of participants and certification recipients.
Work towards a collection of marketing materials.	Keep a file of each year's marketing materials to document progress over the years.

Natural Resource Management

Strategy	Evaluation Method
Create an outdoor recreation center and camping platforms on the Tar River.	Keep statistics on usage of these facilities including number of users and their demographics. Administer survey to determine user motivations and how the sites could be improved.
Develop an active visitor education program.	Evaluate with exit surveys after interpretive programs. Monitor parks and resources to see if there is degradation and if there is a correlation between this and survey findings.
Target “green” tourists.	Monitor local business trends to see who is shopping and what they are buying. Use visitor surveys to check interest levels in “green” activities.
Get East Carolina University involved. Encourage professors and students to visit the county for natural resource assessments and to test soil and water samples in the county and report back to show their findings.	Keep track of how many class projects are undertaken in the county. Distribute surveys to ECU professors to determine what they are interesting in accomplishing in the county.

Concluding Comments

Edgecombe County has a need and an opportunity to develop its tourism product base, protect its natural resources, and interpret its unique heritage. The energy, passion and time of a few strong community leaders and caring citizens have begun this effort and the hope is that the community as a whole will continue the charge. It is easy to cast criticism and cynicism on daily events and operations of a community. And it is effortless to hide from change. It is difficult but noble to spread positivism, inspire hope, and maintain a can-do attitude. It is exactly this mindset of a community that enables it to survive economic and social trends and transform itself into a vibrant place to live and work.

A two to three year commitment to initiate strategies in this plan could yield visible and promising results. A five-year commitment by the community will yield considerable traction. If enough residents take their responsibility seriously to pass on to the next generation a beautiful, healthy and successful Edgecombe County, the next decade of work will be a lot of fun.

IMPLEMENTATION/ TIMELINE OF STRATEGIES

Tourism Plan Implementation and Task Forces

The Edgecombe County Tourism Roundtable should be reformed with the broad purpose of using this document as a working plan for furthering the county's tourism development program. Once the original roundtable members and any other applicable groups have been invited to participate again in a newly formed long-term effort, the following can act as a guide for key initial tasks. To create a balanced partnership between roundtable and the Edgecombe County Chamber and Economic Development office, these tasks need to be largely undertaken by the members of the roundtable with the Edgecombe County Chamber and Economic Development staff acting as support and coordinating body.

1. Roundtable members should work together to develop a mission statement as well as statements addressing their values and vision for the group.
2. Using this tourism plan as a guide, create a list of long-term and short-term measurable goals for the council as a whole. These goals should serve as yardsticks of evaluation in third, sixth and tenth years after adoption of the plan.
3. Divide the roundtable into task forces to accomplish these goals. Task forces should be formed in-line with the strategies recommended in the earlier sections of this document. Suggestions for task force groups are:
 - Entrepreneurship Training
 - Interpretation
 - Community Pride/ Beautification
 - Packaging
 - Youth Activity
 - Environmental Stewardship
 - Direct Marketing
 - Long-term Marketing
 - Media Relations
 - Tourism Research
 - Community Festivals
4. Ask members of the roundtable to assign themselves to a task force in which they will agree to commit their services, resources, and time for a period of three years.
5. The task forces should use the strategies outlined in this document as a jump-start in defining their own long and short-term goals. Based on supporting data, strategies have been recommended for the three-year period of 2009-2011. **However, each task force should be responsible for approving/ adopting its priority recommendations for the kick-off period of 2009-2011.**
6. Once strategies are given a priority rank by task force members, each can use the methods discussed in the evaluation section of this document to develop their work plan. Each project should have a brief document listing project goals, partner identification, implementation steps, timeline and evaluation methods. Evaluation allows each member of the task force to better understand the work ahead and also promotes proactive thinking among members.

7. At the end of 2011, the strategies should be re-assessed and ranked for priority in 2012 and beyond. New strategies can also be incorporated to the plan at this time.

Allowing the members of the roundtable to decide on which committee they would like to serve will promote better partnerships between all of the tourism stakeholders and between the stakeholders and the roundtable. (Appendix KK offers a sample press release to help get the word out on a Tourism Roundtable planning retreat).

Another method to encourage partnerships is to use the Edgecombe County Chamber newsletter to promote the roundtable task forces and the projects on which they are working. Promotion of the roundtable in the newsletter not only highlights the work being done by individuals and organizations in the community, but can also be used to encourage citizen participation in the community by asking residents to get involved in these projects. Within the roundtable there needs to be a good understanding of what each task force is working towards and what resources they need and what resources they have to offer. Members of the roundtable should understand that some task forces might need to work together to accomplish goals.

This document contains an enormous amount of planning, review, implementation, partnering, and promotion initiatives. The tourism roundtable must act as leadership to tourism development initiatives until a TDA can be formally established, the TDA board formed, and a director hired. Edgecombe County is so very fortunate to have the roundtable already in place to take on a leadership role during this transition. The next two to three years will be an exciting and crucial time in Edgecombe County.

Proposed Timeline and Task Force Responsibility

The following timeline is offered for the consideration of the Edgecombe County Tourism Development Authority, various task forces, and interested citizen groups and individuals. The first year focuses more on community involvement and marketing the resources that are visitor-ready, while building momentum in product development and setting good habits regarding tourism's relationship with the natural resources. Each subsequent year should build upon the previous year's efforts and all strategies would be reevaluated in year three, or 2010. These are truly suggestions and the definitive course of action should be determined by the local leadership of the task force members.

The task forces below are suggested to target the efforts outlined in the overall plan. Task force members should commit to two-three years of active involvement. At times, two or more task forces may need to work together to accomplish a strategy. In this case, the strategy is listed under both task forces.

- o Entrepreneurship/ Training
- o Green Infrastructure
- o Culinary Development
- o Interpretation
- o Community Pride/ Beautification
- o Packaging
- o Youth Activity

- o Environmental Stewardship
- o Direct Marketing
- o Long-term Marketing
- o Public/ Media Relations
- o Tourism Research
- o Community Festivals

Connections between some of the task forces naturally occur and in some cases, it is logical for two task forces to work together on a particular initiative. Perhaps they execute this through joint working meetings or a liaison is chosen to coordinate communication between the task forces. The point would be to combine two perspectives (for example, packaging and environmental stewardship) on an effort (developing ecotourism packages), but above all to avoid duplication of effort or two task forces going in different directions on the same effort. Some expected overlap might include but is not limited to:

- Entrepreneurship/Training and Interpretation
- Green Infrastructure and Environmental Stewardship
- Interpretation and Environmental Stewardship
- Community Pride/ Beautification and Youth Activity
- Packaging and Direct Marketing
- Environmental Stewardship and Youth Activity
- Direct Marketing and Packaging
- Long-term Marketing and Direct Marketing
- Public/ Media Relations and Community Festivals
- Tourism Research and Long-term Marketing
- Community Festivals and Interpretation

Task forces should be small enough to remain focused on their mission but large enough to accomplish tangible results. A suggested size is offered below to help in the initial formation of the groups. The roundtable may at any point wish to consider the addition of other task forces as appropriate. Particularly with large-scale initiatives, a task force for one effort may be established, such as in the case of a collaborative art space.

In addition, several one-year task forces are suggested to focus on important topics in the community that need further exploration and intense, focused attention. These do not have specific strategies to achieve, but are purposed with studying, gathering information and fostering lots of communication. It is suggested that these also commence in 2009, reporting out to the larger community via the Roundtable in early 2010. The reports may indicate the need for additional strategies to be created and included in the 2010 and 2011 timelines. These research committees are:

- Entrepreneurial Climate
- Funding
- Hunting
- Hotelier Concerns
- Race Relations
- Architectural Preservation
- Signage

Key

PD: Product Development Strategy

CI: Community Involvement Strategy

STM: Short Term Marketing Strategy

LTM: Long Term Marketing Strategy

NRM: Natural Resource Management Strategy

2009

One-year Task Forces

CI: Create task force to explore and develop options for improving the county's entrepreneurial climate.

CI: Form a funding task force to prioritize the feasible grants, identify financing options for small businesses, and study other communities who have recently begun endeavors in tourism development.

CI: Form a Hunting Task Force to work with local hunters, hunting clubs, and hunting guide businesses.

CI: Develop a one-year task force specifically to address hoteliers concerns.

CI: Create an architectural preservation task force to outline the high preservation priorities for the county.

CI: Form a task force to design a draft of what wayfinding signs are needed along the highway and throughout the county.

Entrepreneurship and Training (suggested size 5-6 members)

CI: Design workshops, conferences and training opportunities to help entrepreneurs tap into tourism.

CI: Provide free or low-cost First Aid and CPR classes in conjunction with established youth organizations and adult events.

CI: Invite 3-4 speakers a year for "brown-bag" lunches who could address topics such as community-based planning and sustainable tourism.

NRM7. Begin a County Certification Program for Green Businesses and Programs (work with Environmental Stewardship).

Green Infrastructure (suggested size 3-4 members)

PD: Develop a biking or hiking tour, where visitors bike or hike their way from one B&B to another, stopping along the way to take in the local sites, history or culinary fare.

PD. Develop better river access and parking.

NRM1. Form an inter-agency council to address environmental concerns (work with Environmental Stewardship)

Culinary Development (suggested size 3 members)

PD: Hold a wine tasting event at On the Square.

STM. Outline obtainable marketing steps for the Cantaloupe Festival.

Interpretation (suggested size 3 members)

PD. Survey all of the tourism experiences in the county (heritage, nature-based, arts, etc.) to establish an inventory of existing interpretation programs.

PD: Continue development and promotion of the Princeville Heritage Museum.
PD. Construct interpretation workshops.
CI. Create interpretive techniques to tell the stories of the flood.
Community Pride/ Beautification (suggested size 6-7 members)
PD: Continue the county's focus on healthy living.
CI. Invite the community to come to meetings to give input and see plans.
CI: Approach town leadership for each town in the county and ask them to discuss with residents and document how they would like to be involved in tourism.
CI. Initiate a series of Coffee Talks.
CI: Create an Edgecombe County Ambassador Program.
CI. Create an awards/ recognition program in 2009 with the first awards being given in 2010.
CI: Continue to gather community development resources.
CI: Create information cards for visitors and residents (work with Packaging)
NRM: Creating a stronger recycling program will increase community involvement towards protecting natural resources

Packaging (suggested size 3 members)

PD: Create an African-American Heritage Trail.
PD. Assimilate an inventory of county artists.
PD: Package the experience for the visitor.
PD. Create Self-Drive Itineraries.
PD: Create a calendar of events.
CI: Create information cards for visitors and residents (Work with Community Beautification/Revitalization)
STM: Create a list of all hunting and fishing lodges, clubs, and organizations in the area.

Youth Activity (suggested size 2-3 members)

CI. Expand seasonal youth athletic leagues
CI. Provide workshops on camping and orienteering skills to community residents through church youth groups, 4-H, after school programs, scouts and the CDC.
PD. Expand the programs of History Days to include more interactive/storytelling activities for children and adults.

Environmental Stewardship (suggested size 4-5 members)

PD: Continue efforts to form a Voluntary Agricultural District.
NRM1. Form an inter-agency council to address environmental concerns (work with Green Infrastructure)
NRM2. Divide county into management areas.
NRM4. Designate areas of the county as environmental research regions.
NRM. Raise awareness around non-native species.
NRM5. Groom adult and youth residents to be model stewards.
NRM7. Begin a County Certification Program for Green Businesses and Programs (work with Entrepreneurship and Training)
NRM8. Embrace Low Impact Development (LID) principles.

Note: To prepare for NRM (Monitor changes in ecosystems), the Environmental Stewardship task force should take 2008 baseline indicator measurements in regions determined in NRM4 to monitor over the next several years for changes.

Direct Marketing (suggested size 4-5 members)

STM: Differentiate yourself from your competitors.

STM. Engage in a number of direct marketing activities.

STM. Advertise in club, society and association newsletters.

Long-term Marketing (suggested size 4-5 members)

While the following strategies are listed as short-term strategies, the effect is lasting. These are long-lasting marketing principles that should be initiated now and strengthened and nurtured over time.

STM: Engage in regional cooperative marketing.

STM: Plug into existing programs. Become a part of established marketing mechanisms.

STM: Create a market “position” or brand.

STM: Channel local marketing efforts into county websites.

STM: Avoid common mistakes in public relations and marketing

STM. Differentiate yourself from other counties/regions. Initiate and ingrain this mindset in the community and marketing messages from the outset.

Public/Media Relations (suggested size 3-5 members)

The Public and Media Relations task force is the communications arm of all the efforts extended by the other task forces but particularly the Community Pride/ Beautification task force. Because communication pieces developed for internal audiences (county residents) can easily correspond to external audiences (potential visitors and travel intermediaries), this task force is formed to focus on communications.

CI. Approach Grassroots of Tarboro about forming a small task force that would be responsible for keeping the county aware of efforts or decisions relevant to tourism.

CI. Continue to nurture the relationship with the Tarboro Daily Southerner and Rocky Mount Telegram.

CI: Create information cards for visitors and residents.

STM. Differentiate yourself from other counties/regions. Initiate and ingrain this mindset in the community and marketing messages from the outset.

Tourism Research (suggested size 2-3 members)

Begin gathering baseline statistics of visitation and other tourist activity.

STM. Invest time in database management.

STM: Utilize secondary data in marketing decisions.

LTM. Track Impact, Inquiries and Trip Conversions

Community Festivals (suggested size 3-4 members)

Continue to plan and expand activities at History Days, Happening on the Common and the Cantaloupe Festival. Use the festivals as a platform to promote all other tourism products in the county.

STM. Outline obtainable marketing steps for the Cantaloupe Festival.

2010

Entrepreneurship and Training

PD: Provide classes through Cooperative Extension on the various forms of agritourism and how to start a venture.

PD: Continue efforts to partner with Edgecombe Community College to offer classes in Historical Preservation.

CI: Partner with Edgecombe County Extension to offer the NC Hospitality Training program to county businesses and organizations.

CI: Invite 3-4 speakers a year for “brown-bag” lunches who could address topics such as community-based planning and sustainable tourism.

CI: Familiarize roundtable members with other county’s destination marketing operations. Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Green Infrastructure

PD: Develop a local or regional series of workshops that would instruct a committee of interested citizens how to develop trail systems.

PD: Develop better river access and parking (work with Environmental Stewardship).

PD: Recruit or help develop an outfitting business to serve the equipment rental needs. Consider alternative business models, such as a community outfitter cooperative.

PD: Acquire county-owned canoes and kayaks, fishing equipment, etc. for residents and visitors to rent. Operate from a suitable parks and recreation venue such as Riverfront Park in Tarboro and Heritage Park in Princeville.

STM: Partner with local Bass Federation chapter, the Tarboro Association of Saltwater Sportsmen and other fishing clubs to hold fishing tournaments in the Tar River (work with Direct Marketing)

STM: Create trail maps showing visitors where to find outdoor recreation opportunities (work with Long Term Marketing).

Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Culinary Development

PD: Increase promotion of the Tarboro Farmers Market to farmers and customers.

PD: Bring the barbeque restaurants together for a barbeque contest in concert with Happening on the Common or Cantaloupe Festival.

PD: Offer cooking class weekends on nouveau Southern cuisine to draw people into the county from nearby urban areas.

Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Interpretation

PD: Develop a script for 12-15 historic tours of varying length and focus.

CI: Hold a community contest on MAKING HISTORY FUN (work with Community Pride and Youth Activity)

NRM: Develop a Visitor Guidelines program.(work with Environmental Stewardship). Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Community Pride/ Beautification

PD: Develop a local or regional series of workshops that would instruct a committee of interested citizens how to develop trail systems.

PD. Create public gardens that can be maintained by community organizations.
PD: Create effective destination imagery by having local artists depict various aspects of the county in their artwork.
CI: Partner with all levels of schools to hold a county-wide photography contest representing different themes relative to the county: agricultural, natural resources, architecture, etc. (This Place Matters)
PD. Utilize local photography and art throughout the county.
CI. Hold a community contest on MAKING HISTORY FUN (work with Interpretation and Youth Activity).
CI. Create a working website that contains personal (oral and/or written) histories of Edgecombe County.
STM. Organize Internal Familiarization Tours
Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Packaging

PD: Collaborate between Tarboro and Princeville to offer tours that cover the whole area.
PD: Encourage hunters to come to the county by setting up formal weekend or week-long hunting packages that include lodging and hunting guides.
STM: Join the I-95 Corridor marketing coalition to leverage marketing power and associate with a larger region. Approach TDA's along US-64 to explore opportunities for capturing coastal traffic.
STM. Form a relationship with an established tour operator.
STM. Create trail maps showing visitors where to find outdoor recreation opportunities (work with Green Infrastructure and Long-Term Marketing).
Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Youth Activity

CI. Hold a community contest on MAKING HISTORY FUN (work with Community Pride and Interpretation).
STM: Organize Internal Familiarization Tours
Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Environmental Stewardship

PD. Develop better river access and parking (work with Green Infrastructure).
PD: Continue efforts to form a Voluntary Agricultural District.
PD. Create more environmental education opportunities and programs (for a fee).
Note: The Interpretation task force is to do a survey of these in 2008. Working with the Interpretation task force, use this survey as a starting point for the development of more programs.
NRM3. Raise awareness around non-native species.
NRM4. Designate areas of the county as environmental research regions.
NRM. Develop a Visitor Guidelines program (work with Interpretation).
NRM. Monitor changes in ecosystems.
NRM: Reach out to regional and statewide conservation programs to explore and establish mutually-beneficial relationships.
Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Direct Marketing

STM: Target African-American audiences.

STM. Target Sports Groups

STM. Target the Baby Boomers and AARP crowd.

STM: Target agricultural commodity groups, livestock shows, horticulture clubs and agricultural trade associations.

STM. Partner with local Bass Federation chapter, the Tarboro Association of Saltwater Sportsmen and other fishing clubs to hold fishing tournaments in the Tar River.

STM. Tap Into the Most Obvious Market of All...

STM. Form a relationship with an established tour operator.

Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Long-term Marketing

STM: Adopt a logo that represents Edgecombe County's history and culture.

STM. Create and design a brochure that could be displayed in visitor's centers and rest stops along the highway.

STM. Create trail maps showing visitors where to find outdoor recreation opportunities (work with Green Infrastructure and Packaging).

STM: Design and maintain the Edgecombe County visitor guide in various formats.

STM: Get listed in the Carolina Heritage Guide

STM: Seek assistance from organizations specializing in small destination marketing

STM: Join the I-95 Corridor marketing coalition to leverage marketing power and associate with a larger region. Approach TDA's along US-64 to explore opportunities for capturing coastal traffic.

STM: Seek assistance from organizations specializing in small destination marketing (work with Public/Media Relations)

STM. Discover the SAVE market.

Note: Work with the Environmental Stewardship task force to identify environmental-based projects that could be performed by a group in the SAVE market.

STM. Cultivate relationships with AAA offices.

Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Public/Media Relations

STM: Seek assistance from organizations specializing in small destination marketing (work with Long-term Marketing).

STM: Organize Internal Familiarization Tours (work with Community Pride and Youth Activity).

Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Tourism Research

LTM: Track media impact, inquiries and trip conversions

Continue or build efforts from 2009.

Community Festivals

PD: Expand the programs of History Days to include more interactive/storytelling activities for children and adults.

PD: Invite each township in Edgecombe to participate in the Happening on the Common.

PD: Have an annual “River Celebration” day where the county is encouraged to hold an event to honor the Tar River.

PD: Bring the barbeque restaurants together for a barbeque contest in concert with Happening on the Common or Cantaloupe Festival (work with Culinary Development).

2011

Entrepreneurship and Training

PD: Create classes on meeting and special event planning.

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Interpretation

PD: Expand the ghost tour offerings, especially in the historical areas of the county. These do not have to be limited to the fall.

PD: Set up an annual farm tour where people can learn about the crops harvested and the animals raised in the county (work with Culinary Development and Packaging).

PD: Devise a formal interpretation curriculum/school that can assist tourism entrepreneurs in all niches.

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Green Infrastructure

PD: Explore opportunities for including Edgecombe County sites on the NC Birding Trail and/or set up independent bird-watching trails or tours.

PD: Become the first North Carolina county to initiate a wildlife-watching tourism program

PD: Work towards setting up designated camping areas at park land within the county.

PD: Construct camping platforms along the Tar River (work with Environmental Stewardship and Community Pride).

PD: Designate a park or area of an existing park as a Dog Park.

PD: Update paddle trails for canoes and kayaks.

PD: Find an appropriate site to build and operate yurts as an alternative lodging option.

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Culinary Development

PD: Set up an annual farm tour where people can learn about the crops harvested and the animals raised in the county (work with Interpretation and Packaging).

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Community Pride/ Beautification

PD: Install a downtown mural (or sculptures).

PD: Construct camping platforms along the Tar River (work with Environmental Stewardship and Green Infrastructure).

CI: Form an Edgecombe County "Welcome Committee" to get new citizens involved in the community. It will be important to tap into their energy and ideas early and education them about the culture of Edgecombe County.

CI: Getting children and the community involved in a seasonal athletic league would be beneficial to the county (work with Youth Activity).

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Packaging

PD: Set up an annual farm tour where people can learn about the crops harvested and the animals raised in the county (work with Interpretation and Culinary Development).

PD: Contact tour companies already offering historical tours around the state and solicit them to bring groups to Edgecombe County.

PD: Hold marathons in the county where people could run from one town to the next, through various parks, or around the downtown area of a town within the county.

STM: Explore the niche of pet-friendly travel.

STM: Market packages and themes.

Note: Work with Direct Marketing and Long-term Marketing task forces to promote the packages, itineraries and tours developed previously.

LTM: Develop an independent bus tour.

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Youth Activity

CI. Form an Edgecombe County “Welcome Committee” to get new citizens involved in the community. It will be important to tap into their energy and ideas early and education them about the culture of Edgecombe County.

CI. Host step competitions at the Edgecombe County Community College.

CI. Getting children and the community involved in a seasonal athletic league would be beneficial to the county (work with Community Pride).

CI: Offer workshops on good practices for volunteer athletic coaches.

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Environmental Stewardship

PD. Construct camping platforms along the Tar River (work with Green Infrastructure).

CI: Provide workshops on camping and orienteering skills to community residents through church youth groups, 4-H, after school programs, scouts and the CDC.

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Direct Marketing

STM: Market a one to two-hour county tours for people attending reunions and family events.

STM: Market packages and themes.

Note: Work with Packaging and Long-term Marketing task forces to promote the packages, itineraries and tours developed in 2008 and 2009.

LTM. Create partnerships with other tour companies.

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Long-term Marketing

PD: Choose and create visitor merchandise.

STM. Structure opportunities for cooperative marketing of county businesses.

STM. Engage in regional cooperative marketing.

STM. Market packages and themes.

Note: Work with Packaging and Direct Marketing task forces to promote the packages, itineraries and tours developed in 2008 and 2009. Incorporate on appropriate websites.

STM: Get listed with organizations that promote small towns in America.

LTM. Focus on film.

LTM: Work towards a full collection of marketing materials.

LTM. Keep current on marketing practices/ test methods of distribution.

LTM. Write a marketing plan for 2012 and beyond

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Public/Media Relations

LTM. Create a Safety and Emergency Preparedness/ Crisis Communications Plan
Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Tourism Research

LTM: Track media impact, inquiries and trip conversions
Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

Community Festivals

Continue efforts building on the momentum of the first two years.

2012 and Beyond

Strategies should be re-evaluated each year to determine what is realistic and what are the priorities. After three years, stakeholders may wish to take on new or larger endeavors such as those listed below. Additionally, new task forces may be created to address the evolution of the process. Two, “Major Infrastructure” and “Groups and Meetings” are suggested below, however, many other themes might apply.

Major Infrastructure

PD: Build an additional entrance and restroom facilities to the Keihin Auditorium so that the atrium and the auditorium can be rented separately to increase use and economic draw.

PD. Create a Collaborative Art Space

PD. Develop a Horse Complex and the East Carolina Agriculture and Education Center

Groups and Meetings

Continue efforts from previous years developing tour products and direct marketing to groups and meetings.

Long-Term Marketing

PD: Create effective destination imagery by having local artists depict various aspects of the county in their artwork.

LTM: Host a familiarization tour for travel media and intermediaries

LTM: Aim for a NC Weekend TV feature

LTM: Work with Elderhostel International to create a program for their 2015 catalogue.

LTM: Participate in Travel and Sales Missions

Interpretation/ Environmental Stewardship

NRM. Go High-Tech.