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Tennessee Sustainable Tourism Initiative

Implementation Dates:
August 2007 – February 2010
Project is Ongoing

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www.tnsustainabletourism.com
www.tnvacation.com/green



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Tennessee Sustainable Tourism Initiative

"The stage is set for thinking of tourism in a NEW way."

OBJECTIVE:

In honor of the 75th anniversary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee & North Carolina came together for the first Southeast Regional Sustainable Tourism Summit to provide Great Smoky Mountains gateway communities and other interested communities with practical solutions to sustain historic, cultural and environmental resources while sustaining economic growth through tourism.

NEED:

The initiative addressed a critical issue facing this region recognized as a World Heritage Site, "How to sustain strong economic growth while sustaining natural beauty and the heritage that makes this area appealing to both residents and visitors."

EXECUTION:

- Commissioner Susan Whitaker began this initiative by building a strong 13-member steering committee including representatives from both sides of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in NC and TN.
- The National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations, recognizing the economic importance of a World Heritage Site to both states, joined the initiative to implement a three-year pilot project in the gateway communities to develop sustainable tourism projects.
- The Commissioner and her team took a unique grassroots approach by hitting the road and holding 10 Town Hall Forums in the gateway communities which were attended by over 400 people including local, state and federal elected officials, developers, tourism and economic development partners, and others interested in sustainable tourism.
- The Town Hall Forums were the beginning of an ongoing discussion to identify challenges, opportunities, and sustainable tourism best practices. This information was compiled and reviewed by the planning committee in order to develop the two day agenda for the Summit.
- The Sustainable Tourism initiative included the development of an industry Web site, www.sustainabletourismsummit.com, a brochure mailed to over 5,000 contacts in TN and NC, a 6-week email campaign, a Sustainable Tourism Toolbox of resources, and a video produced in coordination with National Geographic and Radiant Films.

COST:

A group of 12 sponsors joined together to provide a budget of \$150,000 to cover the cost of the Summit so that an affordable registration fee of \$110.00 could be offered to the gateway community attendees. The cost of the Town Hall Forums were covered by the gateway communities and TDTD. Sponsors included both public and private organizations: Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film & Sports Development, National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations, The University of Tennessee, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Tennessee Department of Transportation, Knoxville Tourism and Sports Corporation, Pilot Oil, and the Friends of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



"The Summit was about starting a dialogue."



Connecting People & Place

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Sustainable Results

- Two competitive states, TN & NC**, partner to preserve, protect and grow a World Heritage Site, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and its gateway communities, through sustainable tourism.
- Grassroots campaign initiated in the gateway communities.** TDTD held 10 Town Hall Forums attended by more than 400 community & industry leaders creating an open dialogue to identify challenges, opportunities, & case studies.
- Agenda developed for the inaugural GSM Sustainable Tourism Summit**, from this grassroots campaign, which included more than 70 influential speakers from across the country & 30 case study presentations.
- Sustainabletourismsummit.com launched** by TDTD to build on the grassroots initiative & continue the open dialogue on the Sustainable Tourism Initiative & the Summit. Since Jan. the homepage has received 7,000 page views with more than 9,000 total page views of the sustainable tourism Web site.
- 6 Week E-Communication Plan initiated by TDTD.** Leading up to the Summit a weekly email was sent to more than 5,000 contacts to build participation for the Summit and to drive people to the website. The plan was a huge success with more than 35,000 emails sent resulting in an additional 200 people registering for the Summit.
- Sustainable Tourism video produced** by TDTD in coordination with National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations to highlight the importance of rural stewardship & leaving a legacy for our children.
- A Call to Action** best describes the Summit attended by more than 500 community leaders & business professionals who were inspired to preserve, protect & grow their destinations through sustainable tourism.
- Sustainable Tourism Toolbox developed and distributed** to all Summit attendees. The Toolbox is an in-depth eco-friendly guide containing 40+ best practice case studies, research, sustainable resources & contacts.
- Not a one and done.** Following the Summit, all speaker presentations, Toolbox, & video were launched on the Web site.
- Pre and post-event media coverage** of the initiative included 1.2 million in print media impressions & \$100,000 in total media equivalency.
- Consumer sustainable tourism minisite** to tnvacation.com launched to promote sustainable destinations across TN.



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RESULTS:

- Defined sustainable tourism: Tourism sustainability is sustaining the environment, and historic and cultural heritage of a region, while simultaneously sustaining the economic growth of that region.
- Initiative drew significant media response resulting in impressive newspaper, television, and internet coverage including 1.2 million in print media impressions and \$100,000 in total media equivalency. The Associated Press, as well as all four major papers in TN ran the story, with the Knoxville News Sentinel taking the lead featuring strong pre and post-event stories. Television coverage saturated the Knoxville market with prime news stories on ABC's WATE and NBC's WBIR. Radio highlights include WUOT in Knoxville and WPRN in Nashville.
- GSM Sustainable Tourism Summit, held April 28-29, 2008 in Knoxville successfully brought together more than 500 community leaders and tourism professionals for two days of "green" discussions.
- Summit featured influential leaders from across the country who presented principles and best practices in sustainability meant to inspire action. Keynote speakers included United States Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne and Patrice Frey, director of sustainability for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
- Over 70 speakers presented, offering over 30 sustainable tourism best practices. The mix of case studies offered participants a range of topics from nationally recognized "green" initiatives such as Kimpton Hotels EarthCare program to the City of Sevierville's internationally recognized waste management system.

- The following are just a few quotes marking the impact of this initiative:

"The Great Smoky Mountains Sustainable Tourism Summit went above and beyond in providing practical solutions to help us keep our visitors happy while decreasing their impact - and our own - on the environment." *Amanda Maples Marr, Sevierville Chamber of Commerce*

"We've been asked to speak at many sustainability conferences to discuss our experiences, challenges, and successes with Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants national EarthCare environmental program. I was blown away by the attendance and participation by such significant decision makers such as the Governor and Secretary of the Interior. Last week we had just participated at San Francisco's very successful 7th annual EcoCity event and I can say the Great Smoky Mountains Summit was a huge success and it is unbelievable to me this was the inaugural event." *Jeff Slye, Business Evolution Consulting, Strategic Advisor to Kimpton's EarthCare program*

"The Summit was essential to the future vision of tourism, and the caliber of speakers who participated, the information disseminated, catapulted our conference into a world-class league. It was an invaluable experience that motivated and inspired us all to continue sustainable practices throughout our communities." *Commissioner Susan Whitaker*

- Created a "Call to Action" responded to by business owners, local leaders, communities and citizens. The ROI can be seen in the many initiatives, next steps, and sustainable plans being implemented in communities across our state. The bullets to the right are just a few of the sustainable next steps in process as a result of this initiative.

- The Sustainable Tourism Initiative set the stage to allow our citizens and visitors to think of tourism in a NEW way as we work to preserve, protect and grow the natural beauty of our state while enhancing the state's overall tourism brand.

"Sustainable ROI"



Sustainable Results

- National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations implements 3-year pilot project** in the GSM National Park's gateway communities.
- Appalachian Regional Commission announces grants** to promote sustainable tourism & cultural heritage projects in TN & NC in the GSM National Park & Cherokee National Forest gateway communities – two rounds in 2008 and 2009.
- MTSU's Center for Historic Preservation & the City of Gatlinburg** submitted the "Historical & Architectural Resources of Gatlinburg, 1807-1960" to the Tennessee Historical Commission.
- Gatlinburg City Commission halts all ridgetop development** until further review of Saratoga Taskforce Plan.
- Gatlinburg Goes Green** campaign launched by the Gatlinburg Chamber of Commerce in 2008 and to date has 75% participation by local businesses.
- SmartBank in Gatlinburg uses energy efficiency** to save by taking advantage of natural light and energy efficient technology.
- Rock City announces Green Partnership** with Orange Grove Center's Recycling Program.
- Knoxville Zoo Announces Green Monkey Program** and new Web site, www.thinkgreenmonkey.org, to promote conservation & green practices.
- Cades Cove Shuttle Task Force purchases eco-friendly shuttles** for the Cades Cove Heritage Tours Program.
- City of Gatlinburg installs new recycling** containers for environmentally conscious visitors and citizens.
- Secret City Festival in Oak Ridge** implements a two-year plan to become a green event.
- Friends of the Smokies Green Partners** encourage the use of at least two conservation practices in local businesses.
- Cocke, Blount, and Sevier County partner to host Gateway Green: Options for Sustainability.**
- Mini-Sustainable Tourism Summit** planned as one of the 75th anniversary community events.
- City of Oak Ridge plans Oral History Program** to preserve the stories collected from the original pioneers of the Manhattan Project.



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The Tennessee Department of Tourist Development is fully committed to the continuation of education and outreach of this important initiative.

We feel the Sustainable Tourism Initiative provides a great opportunity to raise the level of awareness regarding the importance of protecting Tennessee's treasured destinations while continuing to explore sustainable ways of achieving economic growth through tourism.

With the upcoming 75th anniversary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park there is no better time to educate our leaders, business owners, and citizens on this important message. This message is reflected throughout our sustainable tourism industry resource website www.tnsustainabletourism.com which provides communities with cutting-edge information on the rationale and solutions for implementing sustainable tourism practices, as well as over 100 best practices in sustainable tourism which show the practical and economic benefits of embracing sustainable practices. Our goal is to provide those interested in sustainable tourism with the tools to preserve, protect and grow the Tennessee economy.

In addition, the department has launched a new consumer travel planning microsite, www.tnvacation.com/green which promotes sustainable tourism destinations, lodging, and attractions across Tennessee. This new site, launched in May 2009, has received over 7,000 page views. The site is also linked to the industry resource site to allow consumers to learn more about Tennessee's Sustainable Tourism Initiative.

As part of this continued sustainable tourism plan which is detailed to the right the department has partnered with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation to host four regional sustainable tourism "training" workshops. Our goal for these workshops was to provide practical "green product" demonstrations, applicable sustainable tourism practices which would allow communities and businesses to become more focused, more strategic, and more successful.

The workshops created an open forum where all groups came together to work toward a more sustainable Tennessee. The direct and indirect impact of the workshops can be seen in communities across Tennessee. The following are just a few of the sustainable tourism best practices which have been or are currently being implemented in communities across our state, in order to make Tennessee one of the top destinations' for sustainable travel:

INDUSTRY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- 🌱 **U.S. Travel Association recognizes Tennessee's** initiative as a best practice in sustainable tourism planning - featured on travelgreen.org.
- 🌱 **Southeast Tourism Society awards Tennessee** with the STS Shining Example Award for Tourism for Tomorrow.
- 🌱 **Consumer and industry sustainable websites rank in top 10 Google** searches for keywords "sustainable tourism."

Tennessee Sustainable Tourism Initiative Education & Outreach

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- 🌱 **2007 / 2008** – 10 Town Hall Forums on Sustainable tourism held in the Gateway Communities of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park
- 🌱 **April 28-29, 2008 – Knoxville**
Great Smoky Mountains Sustainable Tourism Summit – Attendance 500
- 🌱 **August 2008 – Florida (National Conference)**
Educational Seminar for Travel Organizations:
Sustainable Tourism Breakout Session – Attendance 350
- 🌱 **October 2008 – Oregon (National Conference)**
Marketing Outlook Forum: Sustainable Tourism Breakout Session – Attendance 350
- 🌱 **April 24, 2008 - Gatlinburg**
Gateway Community Sustainable Tourism Meeting – Attendance 140
- 🌱 **Sept. 25, 2008 – Gatlinburg**
Governor's Conference on Tourism: Why Sustainable Tourism Makes Dollars & Sense Breakout Session – Attendance 100
- 🌱 **January 29, 2009 - Sevierville**
Gateway Green: Options for Sustainability – Attendance 125
- 🌱 **March 10, 2009 - Kingsport**
East Tennessee Environmental Conference: Keynote speaker and Breakout Session – Attendance 300
- 🌱 **April 2-4, 2009 - Nashville**
Green Business & Living Summit Expo: Sustainable Tourism Breakout Session – Attendance 500
- 🌱 **May 14, 2009 - Franklin**
Middle Tennessee Hospitality & Lodging Sustainable Tourism Workshop – Attendance 140
- 🌱 **June 16, 2009 – Baxter**
Upper Cumberland Hospitality & Lodging Sustainable Tourism Workshop – Attendance 190
- 🌱 **August 14, 2009 – Nashville**
Tennessee Hotel & Lodging Association Annual Conference: Sustainable Tourism Breakout Session - Attendance 100
- 🌱 **September 16, 2009 - Murfreesboro**
Governor's Conference on Tourism : Simply Sustainable Session — Attendance 175
- 🌱 **October 1, 2009 – California (National Conf.)**
California Sustainable Tourism Summit
Keynote Speaker – Attendance 300



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INDUSTRY ACCOMPLISHMENTS *continued*

- ♻️ **1st new LEED certified hotel in Tennessee opens in Gatlinburg** - Hilton Garden Inn, Gatlinburg.
- ♻️ **Ruby Falls in Chattanooga named 1st attraction in U.S.** to receive dual Green Globe certification.
- ♻️ **Chattanooga launches Tennessee's 1st city wide Green Certification Program** for lodging facilities and restaurants.
- ♻️ **Chattanooga Certification Program receives dual Green Globe recognition and certification.**
- ♻️ **Unicoi County hosts two day Sustainable tourism workshops funded** by the Gems of Appalachia grant.
- ♻️ **Cooper Hotels installs solar technology** at two of their existing Tennessee hotels - Knoxville and Oak Ridge.
- ♻️ **LEED ND certification awarded to The Gulch** in Nashville which is Tennessee's first LEED certified neighborhood development.
- ♻️ **Gatlinburg Green programs receives 75% participation** from local businesses in their green certification program.
- ♻️ **Deaderick Street named Tennessee's first green street** – The City of Nashville invests \$5 million to transform Deaderick Street through the use of sustainable building practices.
- ♻️ **City of Chattanooga reviews sustainable urban planning regulations** with their City's Planning Commission.
- ♻️ **Ripley launches "From Red to Green" Revitalization Project** to transform their city into a 21st century sustainable destination.
- ♻️ **Great Smoky Mountains National Park Lab Wins Gold LEED Certification** for sustainable building, design and construction.
- ♻️ **Tennessee Welcome Center offers greener, more friendly welcome** – Sustainable building practices utilized to build the new Lookout Valley I-24 Welcome Center.
- ♻️ **Montgomery Bell State Park's eco-friendly cabins open** – Tennessee State Parks are tapping into the earth for heating and cooling to reduce costs and pollution. This is the first of a series of more energy efficient and eco-friendly cabins at Tennessee State Parks.
- ♻️ **Discover Tennessee Trails and Byways Program Launched** to enhance established tourism offerings and bring greater awareness to lesser-known attractions located in communities throughout all 95 counties of Tennessee.
- ♻️ **Tennessee launches website** to commemorate Civil War Sesquicentennial, www.tncivilwar150.com

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- ♻️ **October 17-19, 2009 – Nashville (National Conference)**
National Preservation Conference
Sustainable Tourism Breakout Session – Attendance 1,200
- ♻️ **November 16, 2009 – Jackson**
West Tennessee Hospitality & Lodging Sustainable Tourism Workshop – Attendance 100
- ♻️ **November 17, 2009 – Memphis**
West Tennessee Hospitality & Lodging Sustainable Tourism Workshop – Attendance 100
- ♻️ **March 22-24, 2010 – Nashville (National Conf.)**
Southeast Tourism Society Spring Conference:
Sustainable Tourism Breakout Session – Estimated attendance 300

Tennessee Sustainable Tourism GeoGreen Webinars

- ♻️ **July – November 2009**
A Series of 5 GeoGreen Webinars were held at no cost to the industry. The webinars featured national speakers and covered the following topics:
 - Green Travel Industry Overview
 - Green Meetings
 - Green Lodging
 - GeoTourism—Who is Doing it Right and What Does it Take?
 - Green Websites
- ♻️ **Spring / Summer 2010**
A second series of 5 GeoGreen Webinars planned for 2010 to focus on these topics:
 - Sustainable Projects – Where's the Funding?
 - Sustainable Travel – Authenticity
 - Green Products – Do They Work?
 - Greening Your Events/Festivals
 - Green Certification Programs

If you have questions or need additional information please contact Patricia Gray at 615-741-9004 or patricia.gray@tn.gov or Lee Curtis at 615-741-9045 or lee.curtis@tn.gov.