

**Tourism Feasibility Study
of Monroe, Lee, Arkansas, and Phillips
counties of eastern Arkansas**

Prepared by

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Executive Summary

This study was done to determine the feasibility of diversifying and expanding the tourism attractions and infrastructure in the Arkansas counties of Monroe, Lee, Arkansas and Phillips. Although the region currently has an active tourism industry focused mainly on consumptive forms of recreation, primarily duck hunting, an analysis showed the area to be performing below its potential.

This analysis included a review of market research and interviews with owners of duck hunting businesses, representatives from recreation associations, and North American tour operators. The study team toured many of the tourism facilities and resources in the four counties area during a site visit held in late January 2002. The site visit and accompanying assessment was critical to the tourism feasibility study because of the need for opinions from experienced and external tourism professionals.

The four counties area was found to have the resources needed to develop compatible tourism products. There are several outstanding natural areas, and the existing duck hunting industry has created a significant infrastructure of lodges, boats, vans and guides that could be used in other forms of tourism. The quality of tourist facilities found in the study range greatly. Some facilities and attractions would probably not meet the expectations of the adventure, nature, culture or historic tourist at this time. However, there are sufficient natural resources and tourism amenities available to create new and viable tourism products that are suitable for the area.

From the market research gathered, the results of the site visits, numerous personal and telephone interviews, the four counties area appear to have the greatest potential for success in the development of adventure and nature-based tourism products. The market for these products is larger than those found in the historic or cultural segments, these types of travelers are more forgiving of quality deviations in food and lodging, and much less infrastructure is required to launch this type of tourism product. There are some opportunities to develop historical or cultural-based tourism products especially in the area of larger-scale festivals. However, no one county has sufficient number or quality of sites to attract large numbers of visitors, although some opportunities exist to market to special interest travelers such as lawyers, religious studies experts, or historians. Some of the most impressive historical collections reside with private collectors, and will likely require funding or assistance to make them accessible to the tourist trade, meaning that their tourism potential may take years to realize.

Some of the best product development opportunities involve the creation of natural history boat tours (motorized and non-motorized) of the bottomland hardwoods. Other heritage products that offer good potential are the completion of the Delta Heritage Trail, larger festivals focused on nature and local culture, and a canoe/kayak livery. Half and full day bus tours can be developed for cultural and historic products if they are linked to major transportation hubs, special interest travelers, or the conference market.

Marketing of the area will require an aggressive approach starting with the development of a community image or theme. The State of Arkansas currently positions itself as "The Natural State" so linking to that image and related marketing programs will provide the greatest progress in establishing destination awareness among travelers. Many of the tourism products identified will be targeted to the regional traveler — those people travelling approximately 90 miles or less — although some opportunities exist to attract national or international visitors. In many cases,

the use of publicity and familiarization tours will be invaluable in making travel writers, agents and packagers aware of the area's special features.

With proper planning and marketing, the compatible tourism initiatives identified in this study are financially viable and can be expected to generate significant economic spending of approximately \$41million. Recommendations for product development, marketing and land use planning are provided along with a high-level implementation plan. Development of compatible tourism in the four counties area will require "seed" money for product development, although much can be done with sweat equity and minimal resources. Potential sources of grants have been provided but tourism businesses may be better served to develop strong marketing plans.

Several issues should be considered as the development of these tourism opportunities unfolds. Encouraging entrepreneurs to start tourism businesses must be a high priority for the plan to succeed. Conflicts between agriculture, consumptive and non-consumptive tourism activities should be discussed at a community level with attempts made to develop a land use plan that promotes sustainable activities.

In conclusion, compatible tourism opportunities do exist in the four counties area. Progress will be seen quickly if products are developed using the excess capacity of existing infrastructure, and grass roots marketing leverages existing funds. Longer-term development can be expected if community level cooperation and planning occurs, and efforts are made to build upon early successes.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the feasibility of diversifying and expanding the tourism attractions and infrastructure in the Arkansas counties of Monroe, Lee, Arkansas and Phillips. Although the region currently has an active tourism industry, focused mainly on traditional forms of recreation such as duck hunting, the area would appear to be performing below its potential. There is a desire to expand tourism with compatible nature and cultural based tourism products. Compatible tourism uses may include wildlife watching, photography, canoeing, biking, riverboat rides, airplane rides, heritage tours, or historical tours.

To meet the overall study goals, smaller objectives were set. They were:

- to assess market potential for compatible tourism products in the 4 counties area
- to determine what resources exist or can be developed to support tourism activities
- to evaluate existing tourism facilities and infrastructure relative to their ability to meet market needs
- to identify tourism products most suited for the resource base and with the greatest market potential
- to provide an estimate of the potential economic impact of compatible tourism activities
- to provide an implementation plan for the development and marketing of tourism products
- to identify liability issues relative to product development
- to identify potential sources of project funding

1.2 Background

The area studied for this report includes the four eastern counties of the Arkansas Delta region, Lee, Monroe, Arkansas and Phillips. Found in this predominately rural area are two distinct land types, bottomland hardwoods and the grand prairie. Crisscrossing the land are 3 major rivers, The White, The St. Francis and the Arkansas. The White River and the Arkansas are used for commercial transport and are dredged to maintain shipping routes. No tourism operators currently conduct tours on these rivers.

This land in the study area has traditionally been dominated by agriculture. Sorghum, wheat, rice, cotton and soybeans are the major crops. Historically, this region was a major producer of cotton but now rice production exceeds cotton. Three major rice mills are found in the four county area in addition to cotton gins.

Technological innovations have increased the mechanization of the farms in the area resulting in 43.5% fewer farms over the last four decades (USDA National Agriculture. Stats. 1999). The move to bigger, more efficient farms has lead to a decrease in the number of people employed in farming and new businesses starting in the area have not been able to keep up, resulting in a net loss of jobs and associated economic activity. The overall population of the Delta region has

decreased 4% during the 1990-1999 period (UA 2000, p. 7). Much of this loss has come from the 20 to 45 age group, leaving the delta with an older population base than is the national average (US Dept. of Commerce, 2001).

Rural Arkansas overall has a higher poverty rate (20.2%) than the national average (13.8%). Two of the counties in the study area, Lee and Phillips, have the highest poverty rates in the state, 42% and 42%(UA 2000, p. 20).

Within the study area the main towns are Brinkley, with Interstate access, Stuttgart, a major agricultural center, Helena, with close proximity to a Mississippi casino, Marianna, Clarendon, and DeWitt. Tourism facilities found in these areas are most developed at Brinkley, which sports a modern conference center and several chain hotels. In addition to several parks and protected areas, the study region boasts a rich cultural heritage starting with the aboriginal people who lived in the area thousands of years ago, through the growth of the Mississippi river trade, plantation farming, and the civil war. Confederate cemeteries, museums, and historic sites dot the area.

The rice paddies and bottomlands habitat of the White and the Arkansas rivers make good habitat for birds, especially waterfowl. This proliferation of waterfowl has made eastern Arkansas a popular destination for duck hunters. Numerous hunting lodges from the rustic to the deluxe are found in the area and many people supplement their agricultural livelihoods with income from guiding or lodging. The hunting season is 60 days long and falls somewhere between November 1 and January 31 depending upon the migration of the birds. The short season requires owners of duck hunting lodges to make their year's profit in a few short months. This and the fact that some years such as 2001-2002 have very low numbers of ducks, have some lodge owners considering nature tourists as possible customers during their shoulder seasons.

The bottomland hardwood habitat that is so attractive to birds was cleared extensively for agriculture over the last century. Now one of the last intact stands of this habitat has been preserved through efforts of the Nature Conservancy and the Department of Arkansas Heritage – Natural Heritage division. Some farmers are finding that land rentals are now higher for hardwood habitat than cleared land due to the demand from hunters, and are making efforts to restore the original landscape (Jeff Fisher, pers. comm.).

There are approximately 230 bird species found in the area and they are the most visible wildlife population. White-tailed deer, beaver, opossum, and armadillo are also common. Several venomous species, such as rattlesnakes, cottonmouths and copperheads, are often seen, as are alligators and several species of turtles. The weather in the area runs from mild to hot with two rainy seasons, November to December, and then March to May. July and August are hot with a large number of ticks, chiggers and mosquitoes although touring towns and villages during the day is relatively bug-free.

1.3 Study Method

The study was composed of the following steps.

1. A Review of Existing Market Research

Research studies done in the area of heritage, adventure and nature travel were reviewed and results relevant to Arkansas examined to determine the potential market characteristics, and estimate the size of the tourism market. Surveys from the U.S. were the main focus although relevant international studies were included. Previous studies by the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism were also reviewed for estimates of market potential and travelers characteristics.

2. Telephone Survey of Existing Lodges

Work has been done previously to contact the owners of tourism lodges currently operating in the area. A limited number of operators have responded. Efforts were made to contact approximately 20 of the lodge owners to assess their interest in offering non-hunting tours or activities, and the level of service and facility that they would be able to offer tourists. Due to the difficulty in obtaining participation from these businesses, only 15 completed surveys were obtained.

3. Telephone Survey of Tour Operators and Tourism and Recreation Associations

Given the regional nature of the study and the interest in nature and cultural tourism products, the secondary market research was supplemented with a telephone survey of tour operators and relevant tourism or recreation associations. The telephone interviews were used to determine what these organizations consider desirable characteristics in a travel destination, and their possible interest in tourism experiences in the study area.

4. Site Survey

In addition to reviewing previous resource inventories of the area, the study team conducted a 7-day site survey of the 4 counties area to assess the existing and potential compatible tourism products.

Major tourism service providers and adventure tour operators were visited to determine the type and quality of product offered. These products were considered against similar products of national or international quality. For those business owners not in the area during the winter, attempts were made to call or email them for their input.

Although the site survey was done in the off season, the physical characteristics of the region were assessed, to the extent possible, for the potential to offer compatible tourism products. Issues related to land ownership, access, user conflicts, and liability were identified.

A summary of findings from the site surveys is included in Section 4-1.

5. Identification of Feasible Tourism Products

Based upon the market research information gathered, the site survey results, and the experience of the project team, the best product-market matches were identified. The feasibility of these products were assessed primarily in the context of market viability, but consideration was also given to issues related to the physical environment and regulatory or policy constraints. As

heritage and nature tourism encompasses a wide range of products and markets, those areas where the eastern counties area can be most successful were highlighted.

When assessing the feasibility of tourism in the area, emphasis was given where possible, to developing options that would provide more opportunities for extended stays, i.e. keeping tourists in the community longer or attracting tourists with multi-day packages.

6. Estimate of Economic Impact

Compatible tourism products with the best chances of success as identified above, were analyzed to determine the potential economic impact. Economic benefits were calculated using estimated market size, average tourist daily spending, and assumptions surrounding product development and marketing. Benefits and potential growth were estimated for the first five years.

7. Review of Similar Tourism Developments in Comparable Communities

A small number of tourism developments in other communities with a strong nature or heritage focus, and that may be comparable to the study area were considered. Descriptions of their product offerings, marketing strategies and impacts (if known) were provided. Reasons for their success or failure, and implications for the implementation plan were identified.

8. Development of Implementation Strategies

Where feasible compatible tourism products exist, a development strategy was formulated. It focused on product development and marketing, and identified strategies needed for tour operators, local tourism organizations, and the community at large. Implementation strategies were grouped into short, medium and long-term categories. An order of magnitude (using a high-level dollar estimate) for the strategy was provided where it can reasonably be done. The costing sets the strategies in context but is not intended to replace detailed market or business planning processes needed by the community or individual organizations.

9. A Listing of Funding Sources

To support the community in completing the implementation strategies, possible funding sources were identified. This includes funding available from Arkansas state or county governments, federal programs, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and the private sector. Opportunities to form strategic partnerships were also identified where appropriate

10. Website Conceptual Design

The conceptual design of a Website to promote the study area as a tourism destination is provided. This design indicates the major pages such a site would require, along with possible features to:

- increase site visitation

- provide advertising or linking opportunities
- develop a database of possible customers

Suggestions for image types on the site are provided, with the selection of actual images remaining the responsibility of Website programmers in the future.

11. Report Preparation

This report summarizes the market research, site observations, and community discussions. Findings and assessments of the project team along with their recommended strategies are included and summarized.

12. Presentation of Final Report

Subject to the availability of the advisory committee, the final report is to be delivered during a verbal presentation prior to April 19th.

Project Personnel

The following people participated in the feasibility analysis:

Carol Patterson, Kalahari Management Inc. is an ecotourism industry consultant, lecturer, author and seminar leader. She publishes a quarterly newsletter *EcoTourism Management* and is the author of *The Business of Ecotourism*, a book which offers business guidance for individuals, companies and organizations involved in the nature tourism industry.

Bill Cacciolfi, New World Expeditions, has been leading and selling adventure travel for close to two decades. He is a world class white-water paddler and was the official white-water kayaker for the U.S. Air Force from 1979 to 1985. He has worked with Jack Hanna, host of the popular Discovery show *Jack Hanna's Animal Adventures*, to provide expedition support for people and film crew, accompanying Jack on his trips to find and photograph animals.

Pam Wight, Pam Wight and Associates, has been involved in consulting since 1974, and has been involved in a range of socio-economic research, feasibility studies, development studies, planning and marketing.

2.0 Area Resources

The study area included the counties of Lee, Monroe, Phillips and Arkansas. Found within these counties are a range of facilities and infrastructure, some of which could be used to support increased tourism. The area has two important links to large numbers of travelers. The town of Brinkley has interstate access for Highway 40 and is approximately halfway between Little Rock and Memphis. It is also situated halfway between Jonesboro and Pine Bluff. Helena is the town closest to a large casino in Lulu, Mississippi and a stop on a major route for people traveling to Branson, Missouri from the southern states. (Joe St. Columbia, pers. comm.) The population

within a 90-mile radius of the study area is approximately 1.8 million people, a significant resource from which to draw regional tourists. (US Dept of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2001).

The tourism facilities and amenities found within the area are summarized in Table 2-1. The study area possesses all the basic requirements for an emerging tourism industry. Within the area are a number of hotels, most of them found in Brinkley. Outside of Brinkley, there are few good quality hotels. However, tourist quality accommodation can be found at several duck hunting lodges, B&Bs and small inns. Dining options are limited but good restaurants are found in each community. Shopping ranges from outdoor and hunting gear to fine antiques and bridal wear. Some shops like Low's Bridal Boutique draw customers from an area several hours drive away. Small airports are found at Stuttgart, DeWitt, Marianna, Brinkley, and Helena although there are no regularly scheduled flights into the area. Major airports are found in Memphis and Little Rock just over an hour's drive away. Hospitals are located in Stuttgart, DeWitt and Helena.

Table 2-1 Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe Counties Inventory of Tourism Facilities and Amenities	
Description	Number
Cultural and Historic Sites	132
Festivals and Events	33
Guides and Lodges	77
Lodging Establishments *1	36
Stores-Recreational Supplies and Equipment	19
Recreations Sites and Parks	91
Restaurants	83
Support Amenities *2	24
Transportation Providers	15
Source: 2001 Resource Inventory provided by The Nature Conservancy	
*1 includes duck hunting lodges	
*2 includes antique and gift shops	

Brinkley boasts a new conference center that can hold groups of up to 900 people. Helena has an attractive visitor center and the Delta Cultural Center where people can learn about the history and culture of the region. A Delta Heritage Trail is in the development stage. When complete it will allow hikers and cyclists to travel 70 miles along an abandoned railway bed. Four miles of the trail are complete and can be accessed near Helena.

The study area is rich in natural areas. Found within the study boundary are the White River National Wildlife Refuge, Arkansas Post National Memorial, Louisiana Purchase Historical Monument, and the St. Francis National Forest, which has plans to add a state park within its boundaries. Crowley's Ridge, a National Scenic Byway crosses the study area and it is expected that the Great River Road (Highway #1) will receive National Scenic Byway status shortly.

Several festivals are held within the area including the well known, King Biscuit Blues Festival, which draws many thousands of visitors each year to Cherry Street in Helena. Stuttgart has its popular Wings Over The Prairie festival each fall and several smaller festivals provide entertainment for residents. A festival celebrating the spring warbler migration will be held in Clarendon in the spring of 2002.

A number of communities have small museums, historic buildings and sites which are open to the public although in many cases, lack of funding means viewing hours are very limited. There are also several private collections that would have tourist appeal if placed in public facilities. In Helena there is a large private collection of Indian artifacts and in Brinkley there is a large collection of tractors and early gas pumps. DeWitt is home to an extensive and rare collection of Bibles that will be open to the public in the near future.

Helena and DeWitt have community colleges. At the Helena campus there is a large auditorium which is used for musical performances and special interest lectures.

3.0 Potential markets

3.1 Findings of Secondary Market Research

The resources in the study area hold potential appeal for those tourists looking for nature, culture, historic or adventure experiences. To determine which products are most likely to attract tourists in sufficient numbers to create viable business opportunities, a review of secondary market research was conducted. Information sought from the research included:

- their motivations when selecting a destination,
- activities that were most popular with each type of traveler,
- the estimated size of the market,
- the composition of travel parties, and
- the age, gender, and income of travelers.

National studies of ecotourism, nature, adventure, culture and history seekers were reviewed and the results summarized in Appendix A. Studies included in the review were:

- The 1996 National study of wildlife related recreation, a study undertaken every five years to assess Americans participation in wildlife-related recreation.
- The Travel Industry of America's (TIAA) study on adventure travel, a survey undertaken in 1997 (published in 1998) to probe the habits of Americans undertaking adventure trips.
- The Travel Industry of America's study on Culture and Historic travelers which provides information on those people traveling for the purpose of visiting culture or historic sites.
- The 1994 study, Ecotourism: Nature/Adventure/culture: An Alberta and British Columbia Market Demand Assessment. This study originates in Canada however the population sample included data drawn from 5 major US cities.
- A 1999 study done by Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources on Outdoor Tourism

There is considerable confusion around the travel associated with ecotourism, nature, culture, heritage and adventure travel. Some publications combine experiences at cultural, historic heritage and natural sites, possibly overstating the appeal of cultural and historical attractions. The TIAA study on culture and history has more appropriate definitions. Culture travelers are

defined as one who has included a visit to a cultural event or festival as a trip activity, historic travelers are those who have included a visit to an historical place or museum as a trip activity. (TIAA, 1997) Ecotourism for the HLA study was defined as “vacations where the traveler would experience nature, adventure or cultural experiences in the countryside or wilderness”. (HLA, 1994) For the purposes of the TIAA study on adventure travel, they profiled the activities of travelers who in the last five years, took a vacation trip that included soft adventure activities like camping, canoeing, bird watching, sailing or horseback riding, and travelers who had taken a hard adventure trip in the last five years that included activities like white-water rafting, hang-gliding, mountain biking, skate boarding, or scuba diving. (TIAA, 1998)

A review of these research studies shows that ecotourists are looking for scenery, nature and new experiences when choosing a vacation destination. An interest in a specific activity is what motivates many adventure travelers when planning a holiday. Culture and historic travelers look for cultural events or festivals, or historical places or museums, and one-third of US adults report taking an historic or cultural trip in 1996, however only 5% of US adults reported that an interest in an historic place or museum prompted their trip. Similarly, only 6% of US adults cited an interest in a cultural event or festival as the reason for their trip. (TIAA, 1997)

Activities that are most popular with adventure travelers are soft adventure activities such as camping, hiking, biking, and bird or animal watching. Most popular activities for hard adventurers were whitewater rafting/kayaking, snorkeling/scuba diving, and off road or mountain biking. As might be expected wildlife watchers rated observing wildlife as their most popular activity followed by photographing and feeding wildlife. Wildlife related recreation shows that expenditures for trips and equipment associated with wildlife watching grew by 21 percent from 1991 to 1996 (US Dept. Interior, 1996). The 2000 participation study done by the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America’s (ORCA) study shows that the most popular forms of outdoor recreation are bicycling paved road, hiking, car camping, and bicycling wide dirt track with 228 million Americans participating in these activities. Sports participation is decreasing but involvement in outdoor activities is expanding, with the fastest growing areas being camping, snowshoeing and kayaking. (ORCA, 2001)

Cultural travelers reported that visiting a cultural event or festival was their most popular activity followed by shopping, and thirdly, by visiting historical sites or museums. Historic travelers reported that visiting a historic site or museum was their most popular activity followed by shopping, or visiting a National or State park.

Research on Arkansas travelers shows that the most popular activities they undertake in the 4 counties area is sightseeing, attending live performances, and visiting attractions (Arkansas Dept of Parks and Tourism, 2001). Information from the Arkansas Parks and Tourism on the travelers visiting the study area is summarized in Table 3-1. Most people visit the area for business although visiting friends and relatives is also important. Providing activities for these visitors, possibly ½ to full day tours, would likely represent the best market opportunity in the short term.

Table 3-1 Market Characteristics of Arkansas Tourists	
Market Characteristic	Arkansas Parks and Tourism 2001 Tourism Information Center Surveys for Lee, Arkansas, Monroe and Phillips counties
Activities participated in	61% Sightseeing 31% Live Performances

	18% Attractions 15% Fishing/Hunting 8% Historical Sites 3% Museums 3% Festivals 2% Hiking 2% Water sports
What most influenced trip	47% Business 43% Previous Visit 11% Shortest Route
Total nights spent in Arkansas	31% Two nights 24% Three nights 16% One night 15% Four nights
Purpose of Trip	33% Business 24% Visit Friends 16% Recreation 13% Sightseeing
Description of Travel Party	66% Individual 33% Family
State of Origin	11.6% Mississippi 9.0% Arkansas 7.7% Tennessee 4.5% Texas
Source: Arkansas Parks and Recreation Department, 2001	

The numbers of tourists visiting the four counties area is summarized in Table 3-2. Visitation to the four counties represents 16% of the total Delta ByWays region. Visitation to the four counties is down 9% from 1994 although Arkansas and Lee counties have seen slight increases in the number of visitors.

County	Total Travel Expenditures (Dollars) 2000 Preliminary	Visitors (Person-trips) 2000 Preliminary	Visitors (Person-trips) 1994
Arkansas	21,552,922	123,756	118,180
Lee	2,577,199	11,113	10,628
Monroe	22,043,243	122,286	155,584
Phillips	17,117,854	93,849	102,308
Total - 4 Counties	63,291,218	351,004	386,700
ARKANSAS DELTA BYWAYS REGION	406,875,031	2,341,802	N/A
Source: 2000-01 Arkansas Tourism Annual Report			

3.1.1. Implications For Product Development

In terms of overall market share, some of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry are adventure and nature travelers. One in two Americans have taken an adventure vacation in the last five years (TIAA, 2001). Culture and Historic tourism represents a large number of people but few travelers undertake a trip for the primary purpose of seeing cultural events or festivals or

historic sites. Adventure seekers in keeping with the nature of their travel often have less stringent requirements for accommodation, being willing to stay in B&Bs, modest hotels or inns. They tend to focus on their activity and the natural setting required for it to occur, and may represent the best market opportunity for the four counties area.

3.2 Findings From Telephone Interviews

3.2.1 Findings from Interviews with Duck Hunting Lodges

The four counties area is a premier duck-hunting destination and has a well-developed infrastructure. There are numerous lodges, guiding services, and stores that stock everything a hunter could require for his hobby. Stuttgart also has a major duck calling contest as part of the Wings Over The Prairie festival that launches duck hunting season each fall.

Interviews were conducted with duck hunting lodges to obtain more information about their operations and to determine what level of interest might exist for other forms of tourism, such as wildlife watching. Staff at the Nature Conservancy had created an inventory of duck hunting lodges and outfitters in 2001. From this list, it was hoped twenty duck hunting lodges or outfitters would participate in the survey. Due to the difficulty in reaching lodge owners and outfitters for such an interview, it was necessary to call all seventy-seven operators on the list to obtain an interview group of 15. During duck hunting season, many of the owners were busy with clients and unavailable for interviews. After duck hunting season, many of the lodge owners were busy with work in agriculture or had left the area.

The results of the telephone interviews are shown in Appendix C. As can be seen from the survey, there is some interest in offering nature tours; six respondents said they had some interest in offering tours or accommodation to nature tourists. Although this represents 40% of the survey sample, it cannot be assumed that there is a corresponding level of interest among those guides and lodges not participating in the survey. It seems that those people who were interested in nature tourism made themselves available for the survey; it is likely that those people who did not participate will have little interest in new markets, at least until some success is seen in these markets by other hunting businesses.

For those businesses who did express an interest in nature tourism, there is a need for more information on what nature tourists are seeking in a vacation experience and how to best market to this segment. Assistance in this regard can be provided through the distribution of this study or possibly some training by a tourism professional, such as the tourism champion described in the recommendations section.

Overall, the duck hunting infrastructure represents a tremendous opportunity for building compatible tourism products. The lodges that can offer higher quality tourism accommodation can partner with other tourism businesses to offer such products as wildlife watching trips, natural history or personal growth workshops, astrology nights, to name a few.

3.2.2 Findings from Interviews with Recreation Associations

Many recreation associations were unwilling to participate in the survey due to their corporate policies, but responses were received from the Professional Paddlesports Association and the American Canoe Association. As water-based activities hold great potential in the four countries area, these surveys are most helpful in determining what paddlers are looking for in a vacation experience.

The survey results are shown in Appendix E. Several of the qualities that paddlers look for in a destination such as value, family experience, connection with nature and peacefulness, can all be offered in eastern Arkansas. Several of the most popular activities, such as paddlesports, canoe trips, and recreational kayaking can be offered on the waters of the White and Arkansas Rivers. The perceived opportunities for the future show an increased interest in exploration and paddling, peace and quiet, and recreational kayaking; all of which can be packaged and offered through eastern Arkansas tour operators.

3.2.3 Findings from Interviews with Tour Operators

Several nature tour operators were contacted to determine what their customers look for in a destination, and what a destination must do or offer to attract their company. The results of these surveys are shown in Appendix F. One company currently takes tours to western Arkansas for bird watching; the others do not offer trips to Arkansas. Their customers look for value, comfort, and safety while taking part in wildlife or bird watching, or some adventure activity. As tour operators they look for destinations that offer something unique in flora or fauna, an existing infrastructure of accommodation, transportation and interpretation services, and good “ground” i.e. local, operators.

Most tour operators felt there might be more opportunities for domestic travel since September 11th as many people are staying closer to home and are more safety conscious. Tour operators expressed a variety of preferences on how they like to be approached by destinations or ground operators. Email seemed to be most popular although people stated a mass email would unlikely generate a response.

One of the survey respondents is responsible for the ecotour program of a large zoological society. Zoos, aquariums and museums form large institutional client bases for many nature tour operators across the country. This person had worked with an organization that had tremendous success in with tour programs aimed at people’s interest in reptiles, amphibians, water creatures, and folklore. These marsh tours included a demonstration of methane gas ignition and the link to the will o’ the wisp phenomena. Marketed as “Exploding Marsh Tours”, these trips were wildly popular and consistently sold out (Brian Keating, pers. comm.). Mr. Keating felt that the swamps found in the study area could develop a similar concept with great success. The Memphis Zoo is within a 90- minute drive of the study area and could be a potential partner in developing this type of nature or education travel product.

Another suggestion from a large nature tour operator was to contact The Nature Conservancy to market tours in the area when the infrastructure is ready. The Nature Conservancy offers several tours to its members and these ‘affinity programs’ are increasing in popularity with adventure, nature and educational travelers.

4.0 Assessment

4.1 Findings of Community Interviews and Site Inspections

An important part of this study was the site visit of the four counties. Representatives from each county provided the consultants with tours of their facilities, attractions and natural areas. While time limitations precluded a visit to all facilities and attractions, sufficient numbers and variety of facilities and resources were viewed to assess the area's potential and opportunities. A list of the facilities viewed is provided in Appendix G.

The objectives of the site visit were to determine:

- the quality of tourism facilities
- the types, quality and potential appeal of attractions existing in the area
- the existing or potential outdoor recreation, nature and adventure activities in natural areas
- the possible barriers to tourism development
- the service level of tourism facilities and amenities
- local or regional organizations that may be able to support tourism development

As well, the site visit provided the opportunity to gather information on community attitudes towards local tourism. Some of the information sought was:

- What do you think eastern Arkansas does well in terms of meeting the needs of tourists?
- What opportunities for tourism businesses do you think eastern Arkansas could capitalize on in the future?
- What are the biggest limitations to developing tourism at this point?
- How do they think these limitations could be overcome?
- Are there types of tourism that you do not want to see in this area?

Again due to time limitations and the number of people included during the site visit, not all questions were asked of each person however there was sufficient time for discussion to provide a general overview of people's opinions and concerns.

The site visit and accompanying assessment was a critical component of the tourism feasibility study. It is necessary to have people skilled in the tourism industry review what exists or could be developed and it is helpful to have outside opinions on where the best opportunities exist. People residing in an area may take for granted those things that will have the greatest appeal for a tourist, and at the same time, over value the attractiveness of a site or facility because of historical or emotional connections.

The site visit for this study was done in January 2002 and the assessments from these inspections are summarized in Table 4-1. As can be seen, the four counties area does boast a range of resources on which to further develop compatible tourism. There are several outstanding natural areas, and a duck hunting industry that has created a significant infrastructure of lodges, boats,

vans and guides that could be used in other forms of tourism. The quality of facilities found in the study range greatly. Some facilities and attractions would probably not meet the expectations of the adventure, nature, culture or historic tourist at this time. However, there are sufficient natural resources and tourism amenities to create new and viable tourism products. Those elements that were felt to meet minimum tourist standards and attract sufficient people to make a viable tourism product, became the basis for recommendations developed in Section 5.1.

**Table 4-1
Assessment of Four Counties Tourism Resources**

Area Resources	Quality	Appeal to Visitors R = Regional, N = National, I = International	Comments
Hotels & motels	Range from substandard to moderate quality	R	Better ones found in Brinkley
B&Bs, Historic Inns	moderate to very high quality	R, N, I	
Duck hunting lodges	Substandard to very high quality	R,N,I	Some adjustments would be required to meet nature tourism market requirements e.g. handicap accessibility, older, more female clientele
Restaurants	Limited range, adequate quality	R	
Shopping	Poor to very good	R, N	Better stores offer antiques, limited offering of local handicrafts
Historic Sites	Very good to relatively undeveloped	R,N,I	Individual sites do not offer sufficient appeal to attract national or international attention
Delta Cultural Center	Very good	R,N	May benefit from linkages to organized tours
Festivals	Good for regional markets	R,N	Few large festivals
National Memorial	Very good	R,N, I	Requires more activities
National Forest	Good to very good	R, N,I	State park under development will provide valuable facilities
Wildlife Refuge	Very good	R,N,I	Requires more guided activities, staging areas to develop tourism potential
State Parks	Good to very good	R,N,I	Require more guided activities to develop tourism potential
Convention Center	Very good	R,N	Excellent location for trade shows related to outdoor recreation
Byways and trails	Good	R,N,I	Requires further development of tourist facilities e.g. campgrounds, trails, to attract national and international travelers

Discussions with community representatives and business owners revealed that community members were very proud of the culture and history found in the four counties and delta region and the tourism opportunities they provide. Many people pointed out features from the Civil War and talked about the Blues music found at the King Biscuit Blues festival or the unique architecture found in Marianna or Helena and West Helena. The Visitor Information Center at Helena was seen as successful in providing information to travelers passing through the area along with the Delta Byways marketing activities outside the region. The Convention Center at Brinkley was also regarded as a significant asset although there were times it could be more heavily used.

Most people thought that cultural and historic tourist markets had great potential for the area however none seem opposed to creating tourism products aimed at nature or adventure markets. As some historic resources lack the proper facilities or staff for proper presentation, several people commented on the lack of funding as one of the major limitations in growing tourism. Other people were concerned with the human infrastructure and the lack of new entrepreneurs, noting that many young people are lured from the area by better economic opportunities in the cities. A hospitality program with low enrollment offered at the local college was recently cancelled, further exacerbating a lack of trained people for the tourism industry. Communities such as Helena and St. Charles felt they would benefit from the construction of a tourist quality hotel.

People associated with the duck hunting industry commented on the changing weather patterns and noted that 2001-2002 was one of the worst duck hunting seasons in recent memory with many of the birds remaining further north due to milder weather.

Overall many people felt that additional funding would significantly improve their tourism facilities, and most felt that increased tourism would bring much needed employment to the area and hopefully slow the urban migration that is underway. Tourism appeared to be perceived favorably by the people interviewed, mainly for its economic development potential and few concerns were expressed over potential impacts, such as overcrowding or environmental degradation.

Based upon these comments and the site visit observations, a SWOT (strengths weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis was prepared on the study area to assist in the planning and development of the study recommendations. It is presented in Table 4-2.

4.2 Four Counties as a Tourism Destination

From the market research gathered, the results of the site visits, numerous personal and telephone interviews, it would appear that the four counties area has the greatest potential for success in the development of adventure and nature-based tourism products. The market for these products is larger than those found in the historic or cultural segments, these types of travelers are more forgiving of quality deviations in food and lodging, and much less infrastructure is required to launch a tourism product. There are some opportunities to develop historical or cultural-based tourism products especially in the area of larger-scale festivals, but no one county has sufficient number or quality of sites to attract large numbers of visitors although some opportunities exist to market to special interest travelers. Some of the most impressive historical collections reside with private collectors and will likely require funding or assistance to make them accessible to the tourist trade meaning that their tourism potential may take years to realize.

Several product development opportunities for the four counties area are identified in Section 5, along with general suggestions for improving visitation to the area. With proper planning and marketing these new tourism offerings can be expected to generate significant economic spending of approximately \$41million (see Section 5.2).

**Table 4-2
Tourism SWOT Analysis
Lee, Monroe, Phillips and Arkansas Counties**

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerous natural areas, many of them protected as state parks or forests, wildlife refuges or national memorials • Unique habitats e.g. cypress, bottomland hardwood forests • Approximately 230 species of birds; located on one of four major bird migration routes • Good to excellent quality duck hunting lodges with surplus capacity from February to October • Duck hunting guides who may have transferable skills for nature tours • Large, well-staffed visitor center in Helena • Steering group for tourism and economic development (Vision for Clarendon) • Located within 70 miles of the major metropolitan areas of Little Rock, Memphis, Jonesboro and Pine Bluff. • Sufficient historical attractions over the REGION to develop package trips • One scenic byway (Crowley Ridge), another soon to be designated (Great River Road) • A well-located convention center • Access to Interstate traffic via Brinkley • Friendly people • Two large festivals already established, i.e. The King Biscuit Blues Festival and The Wings Over the Prairie • The ongoing transformation of an abandoned railway bed into the Delta Heritage Trail • State of Arkansas and Delta Byways region provide good marketing support • Government officials interested in and support tourism • Arkansas marketed as "The Natural State"; provides links to nature tourism products 	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empty buildings in some downtowns • Negative perception by travelers from outside the region e.g. "nothing to see", "a bunch of swamps and ducks" • Lack of entrepreneurs • Lack of signs e.g. Delta Cultural Center • Some historical resources reside in collections that may have inadequate protection for the long term • Summers hot and buggy
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casino in Lulu, Mississippi brings people to Helena area; may be opportunities for co-operative marketing • Memphis Zoo is world class; has access to nature lovers and possible opportunities for ecotourism or education programs • Memphis area has active birding and natural history groups • Brinkley convention center is well located and designed to attract recreation-related trade shows and expositions • Habitat found in the four countries area is becomingly increasingly rare • Adventure travel is one of the fastest growing segments of the population; almost half of Americans have taken an adventure holiday • Bird migrations are popular with wildlife watching travelers • Off road cycling, hiking and walking trails such as those offered by defunct railway beds have become very popular in other destinations 	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak economy and loss of young people to urban areas • Dredging of rivers and agricultural runoff altering riverine habitat • Terrorism activities and economic downturn has negatively impacted tourist departures and spending
<p>* A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis is a planning technique for analyzing a situation and developing suitable strategies</p>	

4.3 Issues and Challenges

The four counties area has good potential for tourism development as outlined in the preceding section. Several issues should be considered as development of these opportunities unfolds. First, is the need for entrepreneurs to create tourism products. Due to the migration of younger people to bigger cities, people who can start an adventure tourism product may be few or lacking the skills and capital needed. This barrier may be overcome through creative partnerships.

Community organizations or municipal governments may be able to obtain the equipment, for example, boats for a nature tour, and then lend or rent them to a business owner who will offer the tours. This could be done on a short-term basis with the option of selling the equipment to the tour operator after their business is established. A similar relationship could also be created within the private sector, if there were investors who would be willing to provide private funding to start a tourism business. In addition to financing, it may be worthwhile to consider a mentoring program where start-up business owners are linked with people in the community who already have successful businesses. This access to intellectual capital would increase the chances of success for young tourism organizations. Other communities facing similar situations have taken steps to encourage residents to start small tourism businesses. They have undertaken community meetings where the benefits of tourism are explained and discussions are held to envision what tourism opportunities might look like for entrepreneurs.

Another issue that may become more visible with tourism development is the environmental pressure being placed on the land. Much of the potential for tourism development in the four counties area rests upon the natural environment. If agriculture, dredging or other human activities compromise that resource base, the potential tourism revenues will decrease. Conflicts currently exist between conservationists and industrial users over the diversion of water for agricultural uses and the dredging of rivers. Additional diversion of river water and dredging activities are planned and it is expected that this conflict will expand. Given that all users of the land will continue to want their "piece of the pie", community level planning must occur.

Consumptive and non-consumptive tourism operators, farmers, government agencies, and community representatives must plan for land's use at an ecosystem level. Adding economic values to tourism uses will be necessary to gain credibility in any such planning discussions. Only by showing that tourism is a "resource" industry, and one that can generate significant economic benefits, will the number of compatible land use decisions increase. For a good example of a similar strategy, see the web site for the Wilderness Tourism Association at www.wilderness-tourism.bc.ca. The assigning of economic values to tourism and the push for compatible land zoning are techniques being employed with some success by tourism operators in British Columbia who are facing grave pressures from the forestry industry.

Another challenge for the communities in the study area will be the run-down or empty appearance of some of the downtown areas. While all communities are working at beautifying and revitalizing their town centers, it is prudent to recognize that visitors may find some areas unappealing at this stage. It is important from a marketing perspective that accurate images be used to entice visitors. Brochures, web sites and other promotional material should focus on the tourism attractions with the greatest appeal, and downplay those facilities that are still under redevelopment. This is further justification for seeking out the nature or adventure travel market. For these lovers of the outdoors and adventure, the natural environment or the physical activity is the attraction, and these travelers are more likely to overlook a lack of street appeal than more

conventional tourists are. The development of this market will also attract businesses over the medium and long term to fill in storefronts.

There is a significant African American community in the study area and attempts are being made to develop related tourism products. One such undertaking is a self-guided tour of several Black cemeteries. Other attempts to engage the African American community have not generated much response to date. Without a stakeholder to pull people together, and generate interest in an African American attraction or tour, it will be difficult to develop tourism in this sector. The best chances for success at this time may come from smaller product offerings, like the cemeteries tour, being linked to the overall cultural and historic tours proposed. Another possibility may be to develop an affiliation with a university with an active African American population and educational travel program.

The four counties area is not unlike many new tourism destinations, in that they must build a positive image in the minds of travelers. Eastern Arkansas has not traditionally been a tourism destination except for duck hunters and anglers. Some people interviewed during the study commented on the area's hot and uncomfortable summers. Other people thought the area had a "bunch of swamp and not much else". These perceptions while somewhat negative, are not insurmountable. By adopting a theme that plays on the area's strengths, perhaps swamp adventures or delta explorations, the region can be positioned as a unique destination worth seeking out. Where climate or insects make some months uncomfortable, price discounts can be offered at those times, similar to those offered in shoulder seasons by other destinations. What is critical however, is for the communities to realize that they must align their resources to develop a successful tourism industry. No one area has sufficient attractions to create destination appeal, i.e. make a visit to the four counties area the purpose of their trip. By developing tour packages that encompass many of the region's attractions and natural areas, sufficient tourism appeal for regional and national tourism markets can be created. Festivals and specialty interest tours will also help position the four counties area as a destination.

4.4 Communities with Similar Tourism Products

During the development of new tourism products, valuable information can often be gained by looking at examples of similar tourism experiences. The following tourism products were selected as examples of tourism activities or communities with similar characteristics to the study area. Information is provided on each, with the intent that some of their strategies may be adapted for the four counties area.

Butterfly festival - Mt. Magazine

Festivals can be invaluable in establishing a destination's image and creating an awareness with tourists. One community that has been very successful in developing a regional festival is Mt. Magazine, Arkansas. Their butterfly festival occurs over two days and attracted approximately 4,500 visitors last year. This event was started in 1997 and attracted between 3,000 and 10,000 visitors in the first year (historical records are sketchy). The theme revolves around the rare Diana fritillary, rarely seen in other states, but abundant atop Mt. Magazine.

Festival goers can participate in butterfly tours or special talks, enter a photography contest or enjoy the photos of others, shop at the craft fair and displays, or participate with their family in the children's events.

Over 60% of the attendees drive more than 90 minutes to attend the festival, with many coming from across the country or overseas. Interestingly, about half the people come for the nature and education, the other half come to shop so providing plenty of displays and buying opportunities is critical.

The festival is sponsored by the Paris Chamber of Commerce and has a paid employee who is the chair of the festival committee. About 35 to 40 volunteers work on the festival and have developed some unique ways to promote their event. One week prior to the festival there is a Butterfly Pageant, a beauty pageant for local girls. Each girl will get up to 5 points towards her score based upon her ability to sell 100 raffle tickets for a handmade quilt at \$1 each. The actual raffle occurs as part of the festival. The sales of these raffle tickets alone can raise \$4,500.

Other funds are generated through the sale of T-shirts, caps and posters. Sponsorships of between \$50 and \$5,000 are sought and donor recognition varies with the level of sponsorship. Display booths are rented at \$75 per booth for crafts, \$100 for food booths; all booths are outside. Electricity costs extra as does the option to get a booth with a tent cover. Between 75 and 100 booths are rented each year. This year there will be a fee for parking and for nature tours. In past years, these were offered at no cost but there is a need to cover costs. Unfortunately, it has been difficult to increase prices on items that people have come to expect for nothing. The festival organizer emphasized the importance for new festivals to start out with fees for services.

The festival is marketed through craft magazines, mail outs to 700 organizations, a web site, and media advertisements. Children's activities, lots of shopping opportunities and the involvement of the State Parks are three factors that have been very helpful in creating a successful festival. It is expected that this year's attendance will grow to 7,000 – 8,000 people. More information on the festival can be obtained from the Paris Chamber of Commerce at 1-479-963-2244 or at www.butterflyfestival.com.

Cane Creek Kayak Rentals

One of the recommendations in this study is to start canoe or kayak rentals in the four counties area. Cane Creek State Park offers a similar service, i.e. kayak rentals and tours to its visitors. This service was started in the spring of 2001 and has been extremely successful.

Ten kayaks were purchased along with paddles, life jackets and a trailer. Kayaks were chosen for the program over canoes, as they tip less easily and have a lower draft making them better for the shallow waters in the park. The kayaks are leisure boats and cost between \$300 and \$600 each. Single kayaks are rented at \$5/hr, \$7.50/half day and \$10/day, and \$7.50/hr \$10/half day and \$15/full day for the double kayaks.

One scheduled tour a week was offered from March through November and special requests for tours, usually about two per month, were also accommodated. Tour sizes range from two to 14 people. Additional tours were tried but weekday and early morning tours were difficult to sell. Sunset tours and moonlit tours have been very popular.

To date, the guided tours have been more popular than the rentals and income in 2001 was approximately \$2,000. It is expected that more money will be made in 2002 as awareness of the program increases. Many of the people taking the tours or renting kayaks are campers staying in the park or come from an area of less than 80 to 90 miles away. The paddlers tend to be older than those you would expect on whitewater rivers. Grandparents and their grandchildren, fathers and children, and youth groups are the most common customers.

The rentals and tours have been advertised in a variety of ways. There are notices in the Park advertising the services, and the tours are listed on the Arkansas State web site. Staff has also done numerous paddling demonstrations and several press releases. Media reaction has been very positive and there have been several stories done on the program. Staff has noticed that attendance at the park has increased with the addition of the kayaks, and they expect numbers to continue to climb, as more people become aware of the program.

The environment at Cane Creek is similar to the one found at Arkansas Post National Memorial. The waters are slow so there are few hazards from the water itself. The banks however are muddy and slippery making entry to the boats hazardous. As the vast majority of any kayaking accidents will occur as people enter or leave the boats, the staff at Cane Creek is fortunate to have a permanent cement dock to use for launching their boats. All paddlers are supervised as they start to avoid accidents or flips. The muddy waters can make boats dirtier than if they were operated in clear waters so extra effort is required to keep them clean.

Other hazards include the submerged stumps in the water. Boats can become stuck but can be freed by rocking the boat or having another kayak provide a bump. Snakes on low hanging branches can be a concern if people were to brush against them, or if the snake were to drop into a boat. Tour leaders take care to steer people away from these branches and to date, no problems have occurred.

Mosquitoes are a problem at night, and land-based explorations in the area during the summer can be a difficult due to the ticks and chiggers, but the kayak experience is pleasant and relatively bug free. Boats are available year round but the majority of business comes from late spring to early fall.

Insurance for the program is provided under the State's existing self-coverage policy. One of the staff members is a certified kayak instructor but certification is not required to lead trips.

Funding for the kayaks came from the State's capital budget and it is expected that they will recover their money by the end of 2002. The cost of buying the kayaks, paddling equipment and trailer was approximately \$7,400. Due to the program's popularity, the Park expects to purchase two additional kayaks this year.

Information on starting such a program can be obtained from the Professional Paddlesports Association. Their web site is found at www.propaddle.com.

Palmetto-Peartree Preserve, North Carolina

The Conservation Fund, a national non-profit organization, has been active in the development of a nature tourism strategy for the Palmetto-Peartree Preserve in Tyrrell County, North Carolina.

The reserve is home to large numbers of Red-Cockaded woodpeckers (RCW) and it hoped birdwatching would form the basis for nature tourism in the area.

The environment at the reserve is similar to that found in the four counties area, i.e. bottomland hardwoods. It is unusual to find so many RCWs in this environment, which is one of the reasons the preserve was established. The Department of Transportation as part of their efforts to mitigate the loss of RCW habitat as roads are built, provided the money for the purchase of this land. The Conservation Fund owns the preserve lands and has an agreement to manage them with an endowment fund providing operating funds.

Tyrrell County is a rural area with only 4,000 residents and one incorporated town. There is little tourism infrastructure, a shortage of entrepreneurs, and no tour operators in the county.

The Conservation Fund has several objectives related to the preserve, and hopes to preserve the area's biodiversity. It does allow logging in the area as part of their land management. As an objective ecotourism is ranked third for the preserve. To foster that goal the Conservation Fund started an ecotourism committee developed a tourism implementation plan in conjunction with North Carolina State University. The plan was completed in November 2001.

The first steps of the plan focus on developing tourism infrastructure and to that end, work is underway to develop a trail and prepare signage. The development of tour packages and operators is part of the plan, however, a critical step in the plan's success will be soliciting and encouraging entrepreneurs. This shortage of tourism entrepreneurs is a problem shared by the four counties area.

To develop entrepreneurs a community outreach program has been started in the region. The focus is on informing the community about the benefits of nature tourism and in helping them to visualize what tourism businesses might look like. For example, if someone has an interest in crafts, they may explore the idea of a craft fair. Many people feel "it's just a swamp" and need assistance in seeing the area as a tourism resource. These community meetings have been held every 2 or 3 months and include discussions on Palmetto-Peartree Preserve and broader issues. The attempt is made to link tourism with some of the other issues affecting the community to determine possible solutions.

Attendance at the meetings was low initially but when work was underway for the implementation plan, meeting frequency was increased to monthly, and attendance increased. With that major step completed enthusiasm has waned somewhat, and it will be necessary to find new ways to keep the community involved.

There are some tourists already using the Preserve. They are few in number and tend to be interested in environmental education. They seek out the area on their own initiative. Per the implementation plan, the target for attracting the first tourists to the area will be 2004. It is felt that two years will be required to develop the tourism infrastructure needed to attract tourists.

One of the principles the Conservation Fund has found important in the continued development of this site, is the need to balance action and process. Both are needed in a project of this scope, but one cannot overshadow the other or success will not be achieved. For more information on the Palmetto-Peartree Preserve, contact Mickey Sager, The Conservation Fund at 919-967-2223.

Trans Canada Trail

This is a recreational trail that will span Canada when it is complete. Started in 1992, over 8,000 kilometers (approximately 5,000 miles) have been completed with the remaining 9,000+ kilometers to be completed by 2006. Begun initially with government funding, the trail now generates its revenues from "sales" of trail meters and corporate sponsorships.

The intent of the trail is to provide off road recreational opportunities for five core activities: hiking, cycling, horseback riding, cross country skiing and snowmobiling. Many parts of the trail are abandoned rail lines that have been converted to recreational use. While there are sparsely developed parts of the country where trail development is slow, some provinces, like Prince Edward Island, have completed much of their trail. The trail in PEI, known as the Confederation Trail, has become a popular destination for tourists. While many people still come to PEI for the beautiful beaches, in recent years, a growing number of visitors are coming to cycle the trail.

Research done on trail users shows that 75% of them will be from the local area, with 25% of users travelling longer distances. The average long distance trail user spends \$40 per day locally (Alberta Community Development, 2000). A trail through undeveloped areas without support services is unlikely to attract visitors. Those communities that have attracted the greatest economic benefits from the trail development are those that offer tourism facilities such as Bed and Breakfasts or Bed and Bales (for equestrian users).

Building a trail of almost 10,000 miles is no simple matter. The Trans Canada trail is represented by provincial or territorial organizations in every region of the country. These organizations have been active in the planning and construction phase to ensure the Trans Canada is built according to the needs and wants of local communities. Communities, businesses and individuals are encouraged to "adopt" a kilometer of trail, and provide the resources to build that kilometer. This sharing of the cost and the effort has meant that a significant amount of trail has been completed in relatively short time.

The Trans Canada Trail Foundation has been very innovative in developing a brand identity and in creating funding sources. For those tourism operators wanting to use the logo of the Trans Canada trail on their brochure, the fee payable to the Foundation varies based upon the use and size of the organization, but as a minimum it is several thousand dollars per year. To become an official supplier for the trail will cost more, depending upon the exclusivity sought. One valuable partnership has been created with a bicycle manufacturer who sells a bike that is the "official bike of the Trans Canada Trail". To obtain that marketing claim, they pay the Foundation a flat fee per year plus a royalty on each bike sold. Other sponsorships are in place with automobile companies such as Chrysler, advertising partners like Canadian Geographic and Maclean's, and financial institutions such as Canada Trust.

Further work is underway to develop the trail as a tourism destination. The Canadian Tourism Commission has a product club dedicated to the Trans Canada Trail and its partners. The Trans Canada Trail foundation has approached a national travel agency, hotel chain and travel wholesaler about possible marketing partnerships. More information on the Trans Canada Trail can be found at www.tctrail.ca.

Many of the promotion and fund raising techniques described here could be adapted to the Delta Heritage Trail. The success of the Trans Canada Trail also supports the premise that the Delta Heritage Trail could become a significant tourism attraction in the four counties.

5.0 Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

5.1 Recommendations

Several opportunities exist for compatible tourism products in the four counties region. In the following sections, recommendations have been made for product development, marketing and land use activities. Each item is described in detail and a priority assigned. Those items rated as a high priority represent:

- the greatest opportunities for success,
- services or tours that build upon existing infrastructure, or
- improvements that can be started relatively easily.

5.1.1 Product Development

Create Nature Tours Based upon Swamp Adventures

Priority: High

Boat tours should be developed that take people into the bottomland hardwoods of the White or Arkansas Rivers to explore and learn about their unique flora and fauna. The swamps that occur in this part of the world represent an increasingly rare habitat along the alluvial floodplains of the Mississippi's great tributaries, and would lend themselves well to nature "adventures". By drawing on the existing infrastructure such tours could soon be offered.

The White River around Clarendon and St. Charles would lend itself to guided nature tours using motorized boats. These tours could be offered using the Jon boats that are popular with hunters. The Arkansas River found at the Arkansas Post National Memorial would be better suited to canoes or kayaks. At the National Memorial, the waters are safe for paddling and a nature tour could attract more park visitors.

Tours could be 1.5 to 2 hours in length and offered for \$30/person. The trips offered by motorized boats would appeal to the mass market, although groups such as natural history clubs, birding organizations, and school groups would be specific targets for such undertakings. The tours offered using non-motorized watercraft will likely appeal to a slightly older crowd, for example, grandparents and grandchildren, families or mature couples travelling without children, or members of birding or natural history groups. It is expected that these tours could attract approximately 50 people per week to the Clarendon/Bayou DeView area. The season would likely occur over 6 months from early spring to late fall. Arkansas Post National Memorial currently has 70,000 visitors per year. It is expected that with additional marketing, you could increase park visitation and offer 5,000 nature tour-days in a year, possibly growing this to 10,000 over 5 years.

Similar tours could also be offered by some of the duck hunting lodges. Properties like Wildlife Farms have sufficient land and facilities to offer self-contained nature tours. With high quality

accommodation and well-designed itineraries, these tour packages could be marketed to natural history groups, Elderhostel or corporate groups. Some FIT (fully independent travelers) could be expected as well. These activities could be offered for six weeks in the spring (around the fishing customers) and for two or three weeks in the early fall before the hunting season starts. It is expected that groups of 15 people could be attracted to the area several times a week during the spring and fall with approximately 2,000 visitor nights created by year 2. Growth of 15% a year would be reasonable as word of mouth recommendations occur.

There will be opportunities to offer short nature tours (1.5 to 2 hours) in the St. Charles area when the visitor center is complete at the White River National Wildlife Refuge. These tours could be marketed to school groups, family reunions, and independent travelers. It is expected that tours to school groups could reach 3 groups of approximately 40 children per week for six months of the year or approximately 3,000 visitors. Family reunions could attract another 500 people per year and guided tours for independent travelers could see another 50 people per week from spring to fall visiting (approximately 1,200 people in total).

Create Themed Festivals That Focus on Local Culture

Priority: High

Many festivals currently exist in the four counties area but attract mainly residents. Only two appeal to a wider market, the King Biscuit Blues festival at Helena, and the Wings Over The Prairie at Stuttgart. The region should consider developing other festivals that will hold greater appeal with regional or national markets.

Some possibilities are a festival in the DeWitt area focusing on rice. The area is a large rice producer and has the Cormier mill in the area. Activities could be offered with a rice theme, e.g. cooking contests, demonstrations of jewelry making using rice grains, art displays, rice mill tours, food fairs. Sponsorships should be sought from manufacturers of rice products or suppliers to the industry e.g. pet food makers, equipment dealers, etc. These sponsors can provide money for festival promotion, offer product in kind for raffles, and set up display booths.

The rice mill at DeWitt uses equipment manufactured in Japan. Possibly DeWitt could develop a sister city relationship with the city in Japan where the equipment originates. A link to another country would generate greater media interest and provide the opportunity to showcase other cultures. In Japan, fishermen use Cormorants to fish by putting loops around the birds' necks that give them control of the birds. The birds then dive for fish but are prevented from swallowing the fish and are brought back to the boat. The DeWitt area has a good population of Cormorants so an interesting link could be made between local birds and the culture of its Sister City.

The festival may provide an opportunity to educate people on the relationship between the environment, agriculture, transportation, recreation and tourism. A key component of the festival would be the vendor booths and displays that would showcase local products, food and entertainment. A booth run by an environmental or educational group could provide information on how maintaining the health of local rivers is necessary for community well-being and future ecotourism activities. Alternatively, the community may want to host an environmental expo to focus not just on the topics mentioned above but include general scientific education, possibly themed around, "It's not just a swamp".

Promoting a rice festival could be done through food editors in newspapers, craft magazines or linking to entertainment listings offered through radio or print media. A festival that offers a wide variety of activities could expect to draw people from Little Rock, Memphis and cities further away. By the second year, this festival could probably attract 5,000 people, with aggressive marketing and new activities each year, it could grow to attract 10,000 in year 3, and by the fifth year, be bringing in 25,000 people.

Clarendon is the process of creating its first festival themed around wildlife. This one day festival will be held in May and focus on the Warbler migration. While hard for inexperienced birders to identify, warblers are beautiful songbirds and the sight and sounds of large numbers of them will hold appeal to bird watchers. To increase the festival's appeal for general nature or culture lovers, other activities will be needed. Art displays, dunk tanks, booths with food or entertainment, guest speakers, films or slide shows, and tours of the swamp area will all help to attract people. Swamp tours can also be critical in generating publicity. Special tours should be offered to the media in advance of the event to generate publicity in regional television or print media. Sponsorships should be sought from companies such as binocular distributors. They can offer product for use at the festival or for raffle items.

Natural history or Audubon groups from outside the area would have a special interest in a warbler festival. A flyer should be sent to the groups in neighboring regions promoting the festival and offering special tours for these groups. Bus tour operators should also be approached using the same method. It is likely that seniors groups, churches or youth groups would be interested in tours of the area.

In its early years, this festival would probably attract 200 to 1,000 people, with good marketing and new activities each year, it could be grow to attract 3,000 in year 3, and by the fifth year, be bringing in 5,000 people.

Brinkley has a fall festival called the Fall Round Up. This festival currently serves the local market. It may be possible to expand this festival by renaming it and focusing more on the unique features of local history. Apparently, during the civil war, when food was served in skillets, the last man in each evening would miss the meal and all they could do was lick the bottom of the skillets for leftovers. A "Lick-Skillet" festival could create greater market appeal along with the chance showcase local history through civil war reenactments or displays. T-shirts or souvenirs could be popular with people due to the unique Lick-Skillet image.

Organize Special Interest, Cultural/Historic and Educational Tours

Priority: High

There are several opportunities for tour packages in the four counties area. Those that would be most viable are:

1. **Helena Historic Tour** – A tour of 2.5 hours in length of the Helena area could be marketed to people stopping at the casino or visitor center, and business travelers. Stops on the tour could include the Delta Cultural Center, the Pillow Thompson House, the Helena Public Museum and possibly, Joe Madonia's archaeological collection. At a suggested price of \$19.95, such a tour could attract 10 people on 3 tours a week for a total of 30 people each week.

2. **Four Counties Circle Tour** – A longer tour of 8 hours could be developed through the four counties area. In addition to the activities described for the Helena area, a nature boat tour could be added along with stops at the Louisiana Purchase State Park and a crayfish farm. Lunch could be served at one of the state parks or atop a levee. Ideally, such a tour would start in Helena or Brinkley, where the trip could be marketed to visitors attending events at the convention center or those passing by on the interstate. Such a tour could be priced between \$50-\$60. It is anticipated that there could be 50 customers a week for such a trip if it was developed in conjunction with greater marketing of the convention center and the new visitor center at Brinkley.
3. **Educational Tours** – Tours aimed at educational markets such as religious studies of the Bible Collection in DeWitt could be developed in conjunction with the museum being created there. This facility has been created for reasons other than tourism so it is difficult to estimate the number of tourists that may be attracted. However, it is reasonable to expect with marketing there could 1,000 – 2,500 visitor nights generated each year from this attraction.
4. **Specialty Tours** – The location of the Louisiana Purchase in the area and its related history may present opportunities to create special interest tours marketed to lawyers, legal experts, or academics. The tour could include guest lecturers, visits to law libraries and museums, and up-scale, private dining experiences. A trip of this nature could be 5 days in length, offered once a week for 15 to 20 people for 40 weeks during the year, at a price of approximately \$1,200 land cost. More information on the types of specialty tours being offered, tour prices, and operators can be found at www.specialtytravel.com.

Complete Delta Heritage Trail

Priority: High

The Delta Heritage Trail is a rail to trail conversion that was acquired by Arkansas State Parks in 1993. Four miles have been completed and will be opened to the public this spring. When complete, this trail will provide 73 miles of recreational opportunities for walkers, hikers and cyclists. This trail represents tremendous potential in attracting compatible tourists to the four counties area and further development of this trail should be actively pursued.

This trail would be of great interest to wide dirt (dirt roads greater than 5 feet wide) bicyclists. One in five Americans participates in bicycling on dirt tracts, and bicycling on paved roads is the most popular recreational activity in the country (ORCA, 2000). Cycling tourists can have a dramatic impact on a region's economy. In Hatfield-McCoy, West Virginia, cyclists come to bike 300 miles of trails that use old mining roads. The community now attracts 303,000 visitors annually for an economic impact of \$51,730,000 (Dan Varadamis, International Mountain Bicycling Association, pers. comm.) Plans are underway to expand the trail system to 2,000 miles, which is expected to double visitation. Dunedin, Florida was experiencing 35% storefront vacancy in its downtown core until the 47-mile Pinellas Trail system was established. Now storefront occupancy is 100%.

Developing a cycling destination requires a minimum of 50 miles of trail preferably with differing levels of difficulty. The Delta Heritage Trail when complete will exceed this length. Other requirements to develop this type of tourism are maps, signage and bike patrols. Popular tourism options include hut to hut, or hotel to hotel routes, and the ability to participate in other recreational activities. This also allows communities to capture more of the tourist dollar. The International Mountain Bicycling Association will provide assistance to communities wanting to build trail systems through grants, tools, equipment, and volunteers. For more information visit www.imba.com.

Significant visitation will not likely occur until sufficient trail is complete for a two-day trip, likely the 50-mile minimum mentioned above. At that time it is expected at a minimum, 200 visitors would come for two days over 8 months of the year or approximately 96,000 visitor days a year. Shorter distances will hold appeal to hikers and walkers if tourism facilities and attractions are linked to the trail, i.e. accommodations, meals, shops, and museums found within close proximity. It is also expected that local people will use the trail as residents heavily use recreational facilities of these types.

Establish a Canoe Outfitter

Priority: High

A canoe outfitter at Arkansas Post National Memorial would be a tremendous feature for this park. It would provide visitors with additional recreation and education opportunities, and it could increase park visitation. The Memorial currently receives 70,000 visitors, which is low compared to other areas in the National Park system.

The water at the Arkansas Post is slow moving with the exception of one area where access could be restricted to tourists. This would allow tourists to rent kayaks or canoes, and tour independently. Kayaks may be the better choice as they are more stable and can move easily through the shallow waters common in this area.

Rentals can be advertised at the park but advertising through Arkansas Parks and Tourism Publications would attract visitors not already at the site. Flyers could be distributed through the visitor centers at Helena and Brinkley, and through gas stations, hotels, and restaurants in the area. Paddling demonstrations, inviting travel writers or media representatives for tours, and displays at neighboring festivals, are also good ways to generate business.

With a base number of ten boats, it is anticipated that 2,500 rentals a year could be generated at an average rental of \$10 per boat.

Protect Assets in Private Collections

Priority: High

In the four counties area there are significant collections of archaeological, antique agricultural machines, gas pumps, and furniture held by private collectors. In some cases, the collections are vulnerable to theft as they are in facilities that could be entered relatively easily by intruders. Some items are probably also at risk of degradation due to improper ventilation or climate

conditions. The individuals who own these items are dedicated to the restoration and display of their collections but are short of funds.

Where possible, steps should be taken to protect these resources. Securing physical sites may be a short-term step. Other avenues may involve discussions with owners about the possibility of donating their collections to state museums. State facilities can offer collections appropriate care, and may be able to arrange displays of some items in regional museums or attractions like the Delta Cultural Center. If these collections hold items of significant archeological or historical interest, it may be possible to attract interest from national museums that are able to display the items, although this could result in them leaving the four counties area. Museums may be able to offer tax receipts for donated items, which could provide some tax relief for donors. Ethical considerations preclude museums from offering financial compensation for donations.

There are empty buildings in most of the towns in the study area. It may be possible to secure one of these for the purposes of displaying collections such as Joe Madonia's archeological artifacts. However, the simple presence of a museum will not attract visitors, especially in sufficient numbers to recover basic operating costs. Any museum or display will need a marketing plan that identifies ways to link with packaged tours. Without incorporating a display into tours targeted at educational or cultural tours, it is unlikely there would be large numbers of visitors. A detailed feasibility study on such a project should be done before funding options are pursued.

Discussions should be held between municipal representatives and the people holding these collections to determine what vision exists for the future of these items. As these collections may represent a potential tourism resource, and it is likely to be some time before a collection can be donated or established in a museum, it may be desirable to discuss estate planning to ensure that future wishes are observed.

Hire a Tourism Champion

Priority: High

Developing tourism in the four counties area will require much effort on behalf of business owners and community volunteers. Tourism products, especially packaged tours, are needed to attract more visitors to the area. Tourism infrastructure now used for duck hunters can be utilized for other forms of nature tourism, but will require guide training in wildlife and bird watching skills, and support in positioning their facilities with new markets. Marketing of the area will need to be increased and in the absence of large budgets, promotional activities are often labor intensive.

While business owners and volunteers will be critical to the success of any tourism plan, progress will be quicker if a tourism resource person, in the form of a tourism champion, can be hired to co-ordinate and facilitate tourism development. The most valuable role that this position can fill currently is in the area of product development, as many of the highest priority recommendations occur in this area. Marketing activities also require attention but some support can be found through the marketing efforts of Delta ByWays and Arkansas Parks and Tourism.

Ideally, a tourism champion would be someone with experience in the tourism industry, as a tourism operator or in a marketing capacity. Knowledge of what travelers seek in an adventure or nature vacation, along with hands-on experience in developing tour packages will be critical in

coaching business owners and start-up enterprises. Having a staff person in this position would also allow the four counties to co-ordinate market and publicity activities among the communities and Delta ByWays.

The need for a land use planning committee (see Section 5.1.3) would also benefit from the involvement of a tourism champion. As there may be difficulty in attracting entrepreneurs to start tourism businesses, the first step in the planning process may be to educate the community about the value and benefits of tourism. While this will be needed to start discussion on the role and appropriate locations for tourism in the community, it can also be used to generate interest in starting small businesses.

Another role the tourism champion might possibly fill would be that of grant writer. There may be public funds provided for tourism development if someone was given the official role of identifying and applying for grants.

Create a Guide Training Program

Priority: High

The four counties area has had a vibrant duck hunting industry for many years. Many of the guides in the area have skills that can be transferred to the nature tourism industry. They are comfortable in the outdoors and proficient in locating wildlife. Most can identify waterfowl and several other species of birds. With some training in bird identification, natural history interpretation, and customer service for nature travelers, these people can function as guides for the nature tours recommended earlier.

Several publications that can function as reference material reside at The Nature Conservancy office in Clarendon. The study team identified those with the greatest relevance during the site visit. The tourism champion, with the assistance of local experts in bird watching or interpretation, could offer a 1-day guide training program for hunting guides or interested parties. A demonstration of an actual tour during the program would be helpful in communicating the expectations of a nature tourist.

Develop Tourism Knowledge

Priority: High

Tourism is a specialized field and very competitive. Nature and adventure travelers are fast growing segments of the tourism industry and hold great potential for the four counties region. Developing appropriate products for viable market segments requires an understanding of the tourism industry and good marketing skills. Visions for Clarendon or a similar organization should consider ways to provide support for entrepreneurs and community organizations wanting to offer tourism services, especially in the areas of product development and marketing. Some topics they may want to include in their training would be:

- Marketing plans
- Pricing
- Commissions and the use of travel intermediaries
- Tour packaging

- Customer service
- Risk management
- Financial management
- Business planning
- Customer retention
- Media relations and publicity

A copy of Carol Patterson's book The Business of Ecotourism can be used as a reference guide for entrepreneurs and has been provided along with the study report. On-site training in the form of workshops or mentoring should be explored with tourism experts or university extension services.

Establish a RV Park in the Helena Area

Priority: Medium

The opening of the casino in Lulu, Mississippi has dramatically increased the numbers of visitors on Highway 49 through Helena. Prior to the casino opening, 3,000 visitors a day crossed the bridge from Helena into Mississippi; with the opening of the casino that number has swollen to 13,000 (Joe St. Columbia, pers. comm). The casino is a stop for many people travelling from Florida, Alabama and Tennessee to Branson, Missouri. There are no campsites in the Helena area at the current time that offer serviced sites and there may be an opportunity to develop a small campground that offers electricity, water and sewage services for people travelling by recreational vehicle. It is expected that a campground located in close proximity to major roadways could expect 50% occupancy or approximately 3,500 camper nights a year. Organizations interested in pursuing this project should undertake a business plan prior to construction.

Integrate the Development of the St. Francis State Park/National Forest with other Tourism Activities

Priority: Medium

St. Francis National Forest is undergoing several changes as a State Park is being developed within its boundaries. This park will add several recreation facilities and provide greater leisure opportunities for residents and visitors alike. It will be the only State Park in Arkansas on the Mississippi River. This large project will be completed in approximately four to five years. As these facilities near completion, opportunities should be sought to develop compatible tourism products based upon the park's resources. These could take the form of packaged nature tours using the forest ecosystem as the base as opposed to the swamp environments recommended for the other counties, or the creation of a festival that builds on the a local theme or the overall tourism image developed for the community.

5.1.2 Marketing

Optimize use of Brinkley Convention Center

Priority: High

The Brinkley Convention Center has a capacity of 900 people and is located near the I40 interstate. It is midway between Little Rock and Memphis, and Pine Bluff and Jonesboro; this central location has made it popular for business meetings and conventions. There are roughly 500 beds in the immediate vicinity.

The Center is managed by the town of Brinkley, which has been fiscally responsible in the first years of the center's life. It is expected the facility will be paid for in one year's time. The facility is used on average three days per week. With additional marketing the convention center should be able to attract more trade shows and conventions. Industry sectors that may be interested in holding shows or conventions in the area are: agricultural implements sales or manufacturers, chemical producers or distributors, medicine, pharmaceuticals, wilderness medicine, conservation groups, manufacturer representatives especially for goods produced in Arkansas. Organizers of "hook and knife" shows would also be a good market given the large duck hunting industry in the area.

Trade show representatives are listed in publications such as *Shooter's Digest*. Letters should be sent to these people informing them of the conference centre's location, rates and area facilities. Professional show promoters or event managers can also be hired to organize trade shows. Names and phone numbers can be obtained by searching the yellow pages of telephone books in major cities. A newsletter with information on trade show promoters can be found at www.eventweb.com. Another source of information can be found at www.festivalnet.com/promts/promotrs.html

Executive Directors of trade associations are another critical market for conventions and meetings. These directors are members of the American Society of Association Executives and should be approached about using the Brinkley Convention Center. More information on their organization can be found at www.asaenet.org.

With aggressive marketing, it is expected that the Brinkley Convention Center could attract an additional 150 shows a year. Some shows may be open to the public while others will be targeted at industry. It is expected that 300 to 500 people would attend an average trade show that occurs over two days.

Additional work should also be done to create a spousal or pre and post conference tour program. The nature or historical tours recommended elsewhere in this section could be marketed to the spouses of people attending events and half or full day tours can be offered before or after conferences.

Create a Tourism Affinity Program to Encourage Longer Stays

Priority: High

The four counties area at present does not have sufficient activities, besides duck hunting, to attract large numbers of tourists to the destination. If the communities combine their activities and facilities, and use a tourism affinity program, they will be able to increase the attractiveness of the area, and optimize their marketing activities.

Tourism affinity programs if executed properly will increase customer loyalty and spending. A possible program may be to create a "Delta Adventurers' Club" or similar concept, complete with "passport" that allows visitors to collect stamps as they visit various sites and attractions. The passport serves several functions; it will make visitors aware of a range of activities in the area, and it encourages people to linger in the four counties or return later to collect more stamps. It can also be used by people in the local area to entertain their visiting friends and relatives by answering that question "What is there to do?"

Other communities have used similar concepts with great success. Grande Cache, Alberta, Canada has created a "Passport To The Peaks" program which allows people to collect stamps for each summit they hike, thus encouraging them to return to the community time and time again. It has been successful in generating greater hiking activity in area. Information can be found at [www. passporttothepeaks.com](http://www.passporttothepeaks.com)

Creation of a Tourism Image

Priority: High

This study was undertaken for the counties of Arkansas, Lee, Monroe and Phillips. For the purposes of the study, this region has been referred to as the "four counties". The region does not have a developed tourism image aside from its place in the larger Delta ByWays, or as a major duck hunting area. A tourism image is critical in developing promotional strategies. It will be the anchor for tourism slogans, brochures, web sites and advertisements, as all of these should follow the same image. Consumers will identify the area as a tourism destination only when all businesses in the area are united in the messages they portray to customers.

Work needs to be undertaken to develop a compatible tourism image for the four counties that draws on its unusual geography, history and culture. It is possible that the image could tie to the Delta or possibly swamps. The state of Mississippi is most strongly associated with "delta" so if this image is selected, work will be needed to create visitor awareness of Arkansas's Delta region and distinguish it from other states.

Tourism surveys from Arkansas Parks and Tourism shows that visitation to the Delta ByWays region was 2,341,802 person trips in 2000 (Arkansas Parks and Tourism, 2000). Several people commented to the study team that the area is strongly associated with swamp. While this may not have a positive association with all people, it may be possible to use the "swamp" environment as the basis for the area's image. The bottomland hardwoods habitat does possess striking physical characteristics that lend themselves well to promotional images.

Where possible, development of the image should include community input. This can take the form of school contests, community meetings, or newspaper articles. By getting people's input, the chances are greater that a truly unique image will be created, and as a side benefit, there will be immediate awareness of the new image. This will be important in keeping the message consistent in all marketing materials.

Once the image is selected, the recommendations in this report should be reviewed again to consider how each item can be related to the image to generate greater marketing benefits.

Increase Publicity Activities

Priority: High

The media is an excellent source of free advertising through the publicity they can generate. Some media organizations provide public service announcements of upcoming events. These should be used wherever possible to advertise festivals and special events in the four counties area. The media should also be invited out to special events such as the opening of the Delta Heritage Trail. If an event was scheduled for the official opening, such as inviting school children or local citizens to be the first to walk the new trail, media could be convinced to attend and publicize this new attraction. People offering swamp tours can offer special trips for media representatives. The action and visual images that can be captured during such a trip would be of great appeal to television or print media outlets. Press releases can be sent to major newspapers in the state to announce key steps in the tourism development process, such as the release of this study. All of these activities will increase the awareness with people of this region as a tourism destination.

Do Familiarization Trips for Travel Writers, Travel Agents and Bus Tour Companies

Priority: Medium

The community and private businesses should offer familiarization (fam) tours to travel agents, travel writers, and bus tour companies. By offering a complimentary tour to people best positioned to sell the product, tourism can be increased. Invitees could include travel agents within a 90-minute drive of the area, likely those found in Little Rock or Memphis. Some travel agents will specialize in adventure or nature tours; these should be identified and given special attention. Other people who should be offered fam trips would be travel writers, media representatives, and bus tour companies. These tours should profile the natural attractions and activities the area has to offer. Developed and promoted properly, these trips can be used to:

- Increase awareness of the area through print and visual media
- Attract FIT travelers (fully independent travelers)
- Develop interest among tour packagers.

Invite Members of Arkansas Film Commission to View Possible Film and Commercial Sites

Priority: Medium

The bottomland hardwoods represent a visually stunning landscape and could be suitable as a backdrop for commercials, or as a movie location. Representatives from the Arkansas Film Commission should be invited to tour the area. Sites of highest interest may be the Bayou DeView tributary and the White River National Wildlife Refuge, although other sites in the region could hold potential appeal as well. The relative proximity to major airports and accommodation facilities at Little Rock and Memphis would allow film crews to utilize the area.

A package outlining the accommodation, food and transportation providers in the area should be prepared and made available to interested parties.

5.1.3 Land Use

Establish a Community Level Land Use Planning Committee

Priority: High

Developing compatible tourism products in the four counties area will require non-consumptive tourism activities to coexist with consumptive forms of tourism, agricultural and other human activities. Some activities can share the land base at different times, for example, hunting and bird watching. Other activities may not be compatible at all, for example, kayaking and large boat traffic. Many communities find that as their tourism industry grows, land use conflicts become more defined. Those communities that start a process early to discuss the various uses of the resource base, their vision for the future, and possible way to accommodate different users, have the most success in developing a successful nature tourism industry, a strong economy, and quality of life for residents.

The four counties area should establish a committee that can discuss the future of tourism in the area and the best ways to use the land base. The committee may be part of the existing Visions for Clarendon committee or some other interested group could sponsor it. The planning of land use will likely require some discussion around the vision of the future and current issues in the region, tourism and non-tourism. Work has been done already by the Visions for Clarendon on setting a vision so it may simply require a validation of earlier work. With the release of this study however, there may be additional interest in tourism, so new people may be drawn to the process, and require a chance to share their views.

The committee will need to discuss the various tourism, agricultural, industrial and human uses of the land, the source of conflicts, and possible ways to mitigate them. Some areas may be zoned exclusively for one use; others may allow multiple use with certain guidelines or restrictions. It will be important to present the economic opportunities associated with compatible tourism to give it appropriate weight when planning land use.

The BC Wilderness Tourism Association, who is struggling to find a place alongside forestry companies in western Canada, has developed an excellent model for organizations looking at nature tourism as a sustainable resource-based industry. They have been assigning economic values to tourism, and developing mapping and zoning strategies that show how tourism and industry can work together. More information is available at www.wilderness-tourism.bc.ca/case.html.

A side benefit of the planning process will be the opportunity to inform people about the value of tourism, and possibly, create interest in starting tourism businesses. As people become aware of the income they can generate from nature tourism, and ways they can become involved, hopefully entrepreneurial-led developments will occur. It may also be beneficial to invite representatives from the region's Chamber of Commerce or economic development agencies to these meetings to gain their support and to disseminate information.

Establish a Code of Ethics for Tour Operators

Priority: Medium

Tour operators providing nature tours will want to ensure those activities undertaken on the river and in the protected lands of the wildlife refuges and state parks, are undertaken in a responsible and sustainable manner. It would be desirable to develop a code of ethics for nature tour operators before large numbers of businesses are operating in the region. Such a code of ethics could outline proper operating procedures for vessels, how to approach wildlife, proper conduct in protected areas, and guiding and naturalist requirements. The whale watching industry off the West Coast has developed best practices guidelines to promote responsible tourism amongst whale-watching companies. Their guidelines can be found by viewing the Whale Watch Operators Association Northwest (WWOAN) at www.whalewatchers.org/guidelines.

The University of Arkansas has a UA Community Design Center in Clarendon. This center, with its expertise in planning and access to student resources, could develop a code of ethics or conduct for the region. They could meet with local people interested in this form of tourism, business owners, and land managers to develop a set of guidelines acceptable to the stakeholders. The ability to link this project to an educational center could allow a code of ethics to be established in the near term and with minimal cost.

5.2 Estimated Economic Impact

Using the recommendations in Section 5.1 it is possible to estimate the economic impact that compatible tourism initiatives can have in this area. Using the estimated number of visitor days that can be expected from new activities and the average daily expenditures for Arkansas tourists, the estimated visitor spending is calculated and shown in Table 5-1.

Arkansas' Department of Parks and Tourism has determined for the state, that average expenditures **per person trip** in 2000 were \$188.98 (Arkansas Dept. of Parks and Tourism, 2000). A person trip is defined as "one person travelling 100 miles or more one way and or/spending at least one night away from his point of origin." The expenditures are for the total trip however the same research shows that the average trip length was 3 days, which equates to \$63 per day for visitor spending.

Conservative estimates were used for the number of visitors tourism businesses could expect with proper product development and marketing. It is possible with aggressive marketing to exceed the forecasts provided. As well, no estimates have been included for other members of a travel party. If only one member of a travelling group undertakes the activity, no spending was attributed to other group members even though it is reasonable to assume they would be in the study area, so it is possible tourism spending will be greater than that shown.

The per diem spending figure represents the amount of money spent by people traveling more than 100 miles. It is possible that regional tourists will not journey this distance, however a study done by D. K. Shifflet on travel spending in Arkansas included excursionists or day-trippers, in addition to overnight tourists, and found that average daily spending for the Delta region was \$66. For the purposes of Shifflet's study travel, was defined as "any trip with a night away from home or a Day-Trip, which is 50 or more miles one-way from home" (Shifflet, 2001). This per diem spending figure is very close to the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism number, so the

**Table 5-1
Economic Impact of Tourism Activities**

Recommendation	Number of Visitor Days Expected	Estimated Visitor Spending * - Year 1 *¹	Estimated Visitor Spending - Year 2*²	Estimated Visitor Spending - Year 3	Estimated Visitor Spending - Year 4	Estimated Visitor Spending - Year 5
Offer Nature Tours						
a. Clarendon and Bayou DeView area (50 people/week for 24 weeks)	1200	37,800	75,600	86,940	99,981	114,978
b. Arkansas Post National Memorial:		157,500	315,000	409,500	504,000	630,000
• Year 1 - 2,500						
• Year 2 - 5,000						
• Year 3 - 6,500						
• Year 4 - 8,000						
• Year 5 - 10,000						
c. In Conjunction with Duck Hunting Lodges	2000	63,000	126,000	144,900	166,635	191,630
d. St. Charles area upon completion of Visitor Center (school groups 120students/week for 24 weeks; family gatherings - 500/yr; FITs 50people/week for 24 weeks)	4580			144,270	288,540	331,821
Create Themed Festivals						
a. Warbler festival		31,500	63,000	189,000	252,000	315,000
• Year 1 - 500						
• Year 2 - 1,000						
• Year 3 - 3,000						
• Year 4 - 4,000						
• Year 5 - 5,000						
b. Rice festival		157,500	315,000	630,000	1,134,000	1,575,000
• Year 1 - 2,500						
• Year 2 - 5,000						
• Year 3 - 10,000						
• Year 4 - 18,000						
• Year 5 - 25,000						
Organize Special Interest, Cultural/Historic & Educational Tours						
a. Helena Historic Tour (30 people/wk;50 wks)	1500	47,250	94,500	108,675	124,976	143,723
b. Four Counties Circle Tour (50 people/wk ;50wks)	2500	78,750	157,500	181,125	208,294	165,281
c. Educational Tours	2000	63,000	126,000	144,900	166,635	191,630
d. Specialty Tours	3000	94,500	189,000	217,350	249,952	287,445
Optimize Brinkley Convention Center Use	45000	1,417,500	2,835,000	3,260,250	3,749,289	4,311,681
Establish a Canoe Outfitter	2500	78,750	157,500	181,125	208,294	239,538
Establish a RV Park	3500	110,250	220,500	253,575	291,611	335,353
Delta Heritage Trail	96,000					6,048,000
Increased marketing and publicity efforts* ⁴	70,200 person trips	663,320	1,326,640	1,326,640	1,326,640	1,326,640
TOTAL		\$3,000,620	\$6,001,240	\$7,278,250	\$8,770,847	\$16,207,720
TOTAL ALL YEARS				\$41,258,677		
* based upon the Arkansas Parks and Recreation Annual Report. \$63/day = average spending per person trip.						
* ² it is assumed that first year visitation would be 50% of average annual visitation						
* ³ visitation would be expected to increase 15% in years 2 to 5 unless otherwise noted						
* ⁴ current visitation to the 4 counties is 351,004 person trips. It is expected the implementation of the additional marketing activities recommended could generate an additional 20% person trips with average spending of \$188.98 per person trip.						

\$63 per diem used is a reasonable estimate of economic spending from increased tourism activities.

The total economic impact from compatible tourism activities is considerable, and is borne out by similar studies done of other groups of nature based tourists. The most recent National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation shows that 77 million Americans over the age of 16 participated in wildlife-related activities in 1996, and 62.9 million of them enjoyed at least one type of wildlife related recreation activity. (U.S. Dept of Interior & U.S. Dept of Commerce, 1996) They spent \$9.4 billion on trips carried out to pursue their activities.

Birdwatching is a popular form of tourism and an activity that can be enjoyed in the four counties area. The American Birding Association (ABA) saw its memberships increase from 6,000 in 1990 to 21,000 in 1997 with two thirds of their membership taking ten trips a year to watch birds, spending on average more than \$3,000 per year on their trips. (Ceballos-Lascurin, 1998). ABA has become involved in birding economics, hoping to assist local communities in taking advantage of the economic value of local wildlife resources that birders use in a non-consumptive manner. Their web site at www.americanbirding.org provides a wealth of information on how to attract birdwatching tourists, what they are looking for, and some success stories of bird festivals and viewing sites.

Texas, which has embraced nature tourism, has found many economic benefits from wildlife watching tourism. In 1995, 2000 birders attended the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival in Harlingen creating an economic impact of \$1.5 million. Each year 48,000 birders visit Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and spend \$400 per trip for an annual expenditure of nearly \$20 million. 79% come from out of state and almost all spend more than one day in the area. Visitors to the Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary near Brownsville spend approximately \$6.9 million annually. At the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, 99,000 birding visitors spend approximately \$34.5 million on these visits with \$14.42 million going to local communities. (Eubanks, Kerlinger & Payne, 1995)

Birding festivals can be important contributors to the economic health of a region. In Grand Island, Nebraska, 80,000 avitourists (birdwatchers) visit this rural community to see the Sandhill Crane migration and spend more than \$15 million. (Lingle, 1991) The Hummer/bird festival in Texas generated spending of \$2.5 million from non-resident visitors and created 73 jobs. (Kim et. al, 1998)

5.3 Potential Funding Sources

Development of compatible tourism in the four counties area will likely require “seed” money for product development, although much can be done with sweat equity and minimal resources. Often people feel they need funding when the real requirement is for a solid marketing plan and better product development and presentation. If a tourism product is developed and marketed properly, money for expansion will come from customers or bank financing, not from grants.

To gain the start-up funds that may be required several funding sources have been identified in Appendix H. In addition, a private foundation has been contacted by The Nature Conservancy in Clarendon regarding the possibility of funding the tourism champion position identified in the Recommendation section.

Other ways of generating revenue should not be overlooked. As mentioned in Section 4.4, other communities have made money by selling booth space or memorabilia at festivals. The Trans Canada Trail foundation has been able to generate much of their money by attracting sponsors and by “selling” meters of the trail to the public. The Cane Creek State Park is generating money from their kayak tours and rentals to recoup their capital investment. These options should be given a very high priority as accessing grant money can be a very time intensive and slow process, and it may be that time is better spent on money making ventures. A Watchable Wildlife Coordinator with the Colorado Division of Wildlife applied for money under the TEA21 program. After almost 3 years of dealing with government regulations and “red tape”, they received funding. (John Koshak, pers. comm.)

Another possible source of information on funding alternatives may be gained by participating in the upcoming online conference on Financing Ecotourism. During June and July 2002 there will be a public forum on developing the business side of ecotourism. For more information and registration go to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ecotourism_financing.

5.4 Regional Web Site

The four counties area will benefit greatly if they can develop a common Internet web site that can be used in the marketing and promotion of their destination to tourists. Such a web site will be most effective if it can be developed around the image or theme recommended in Section 5.1. While the four counties, or Lee, Phillips, Arkansas and Monroe counties of eastern Arkansas, are accurate geographic descriptions of the region, these titles will do little to attract visitor interest. A region in southern Alberta, Canada faced a similar issue. Several small towns located along a road called the Crowsnest Highway 3, had little tourism potential individually. They have joined together in a marketing partnership under the theme of “Follow the Crow” and promoted their links to aboriginal culture and the “Wild West”. Their web site at www.highway3.ca is a good example how communities can partner to develop a more viable tourism destination.

The possible content of a web site for the four counties region is shown in Appendix H. This is intended to provide suggestions for the organization and content of a web site. Photos are not shown but they will be an integral part of the web site design. The colors, photos and text fonts should be selected in the context of the general theme, but it is recommended images focus on the swamp and delta features to be found here.

Some examples of web sites that promote regional tourism destinations are listed in Figure 5.1. These can provide ideas and inspiration when developing the “look” of the four counties web site. These sites show effective uses of themes to tie together towns, cities and attractions over a wide area, are well organized, and are visually attractive.

Figure 5-1 Examples Of Destination Web Sites
www.highway3.ca www.loscaminos.com www.deltabyways.com www.greatpikespeakbirdingtrail.org

www.trailofthegreatbear.com
www.saskriverbasin.ca
www.passporttotexas.com

When developing a web site, ensure that qualified individuals are involved in the design and maintenance. A web site must load quickly, and look appealing, or users will move onto other sites. Ensuring that a reliable service provider hosts the site is important.

Web Site Promotion

Many travelers will use the Internet to research travel decisions. However, the worldwide web is a crowded place, and it will not be enough to create a web site and hope that web users will find it. The web site will need to be integrated into marketing plans in the same ways as print media. Tourism businesses in the region should be encouraged to show this web site address on their marketing materials, and it should be included on brochures, directories, festival posters, press releases and kits, direct mail pieces, etc.

One of the most effective ways of promoting the four counties web site will be through the use of links to other web sites. Where possible offer reciprocal links with major web sites that are likely to drive traffic to this site, for example, Delta ByWays. Links with individual tourism businesses should also be made wherever possible.

The site should be registered with as many search engines as possible. These registrations should be sure to include metatags (key words used in the search process) that will attract nature and adventure travelers. Some possible key words for this region could be adventure, ecotourism, nature tourism, heritage tourism, delta, birdwatching, wildlife watching, etc.

Building a database of customers to use in other marketing campaigns may be desirable. This can be done by asking people to subscribe at the site for the latest information on new products or travel specials, and by gathering the names and addresses of people requesting information.

Financing The Web Site

The web site will require funding to cover the basic hosting package. In addition there will be costs associated with the design and ongoing maintenance of the site. Some options that may be helpful in providing an ongoing revenue stream may be:

Listing Charge – This could entail a charge for detailed listings on the site, or for links from the four counties site to individual businesses. The benefits of charging for listings must be weighed against the advantages of having more information on the site, as would likely be the case if listings were free.

Advertising and Sponsorships– Obtaining sponsorships or selling advertising space on the web site can also be used to generate revenue. The web site for the Great Pikes Peak Birding Trail in Colorado (see Figure 5-1) uses advertising and sponsorship. Advertising may detract from the appearance of the web site but can be valuable in meeting ongoing operating costs.

Cooperative Marketing Partnerships – It may be possible to establish cost-sharing arrangements among the Chamber of Commerces in the four counties area. An increase to Chamber membership fees may be needed for the support of the web site. However, if it were shared among all businesses in the region, it would be a modest amount and would benefit the overall economy.

5.5 Implementation Plan

Many recommendations have been made in this report. Implementing them will require effort from business owners, community volunteers, and state and federal agencies. Priorities for implementation steps are shown in Table 5.3 along with a suggested time frame for starting these items. Responsibility for leading or starting each item is suggested, although in some cases, it may be necessary to involve more people as the projects unfold.

Recommendation	Priority	Time Frame	Responsibility	Order of Magnitude
Create Nature Tours	High	Immediate	Local businesses	\$1-5K
Create Themed Festivals	High	Immediate	Community volunteers	\$5-20K
Establish a Canoe Outfitter	High	Immediate	Local businesses, National Park staff	\$5-10K
Hire a Tourism Champion	High	Immediate	Town of Clarendon	\$25-50K
Optimize use of Brinkley Convention Center	High	Immediate	Town of Brinkley	\$1-25K
Increase Publicity Activities	High	Immediate	Local businesses, festival organizers, state officials	\$1-5K
Create a Guide Training Program	High	3 to 6 mos.	Visions For Clarendon, Tourism Champion	\$1-5K
Create a Tourism Affinity Program	High	6 to 18 mos.	Tourism Champion, local businesses, community volunteers	\$5-10K
Create a Tourism Image	High	6 mos. to 1y	Tourism Champion, community volunteers, Vision for Clarendon	\$1-10K
Establish a Land Use Planning Committee	High	6 mos. to 1 yr.	Community volunteers, Visions for Clarendon	Not available
Organize Special Interest, Cultural/Historic and Education Tours	High	6 mos. to 1 year	Local businesses	\$1-5K
Develop Tourism Knowledge	High	6 mos to 1 yr	Tourism Champion, University of Arkansas	\$1-10K
Protect Assets in Private Collections	High	1 year	Municipal representatives	Not applicable
Complete Delta Heritage Trail	High	1 to 5	Municipal, state	Not available

		years	governments, community volunteers	
Offer Familiarization Tours	Medium	6 mos. to 2 yrs.	Local businesses, tourism champion	\$1-25K
Establish a RV Park	Medium	2 to 3 years	Local businesses	Not available
Establish a Code of Ethics for Tourism Operators	Medium	1 to 2 yrs	Visions for Clarendon, University of Arkansas	\$1-3K
Integrate the Development of the St. Francis State Park/National Forest with other Tourism Activities	Medium	4 to 5 years	Local businesses, community volunteers	Not available

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Appendices

Appendix A - Secondary Market Research Tables

Table 1: Profiles of Adventure, Nature and Cultural/Historic Travelers

Market Characteristics	N. American General Ecotourist ² : N/A/C, N = 1,384	N. American Experienced Ecotourists ² : N/A/C, N = 424	Culture Tourists ³ N = 6,224	Historic Tourists ⁴ N = 10,131
Household Income	Live in neighborhoods with >US\$35,000 (CDN\$45,000)	no information	median \$40,907 mean \$50,970	median \$43,503 mean \$52,806
Age	10% 18-24 24% 25-34 25% 35-44 18% 45-54 23% 55+	2% 18-24 20% 25-34 28% 35-44 28% 45-54 23% 55+	mean 48 years 33% 55+	mean 48 years 35% 55+
Gender	males & females, varies by activity	males & females, varies by activity	info. not available	info. not available
Household	44% couples 1/3 families	47% couples 1/4 families	66% married 37% children @home	75% married 43% children @home
Education	45% college grads 30% some college 21% high school 5% some HS	82% college graduates 14% some college 4% high school 1% some HS	55% completed college 22% postgraduate education	54% completed college 21% postgraduate education
Party Composition/ Travelling Companions	59% couples 26% families w. children 7% alone	61% couples 15% family 13% alone	45% alone 35% 2 people 15% 3-4 people	41% alone 36% 2 people 17% 3-4 people
Activity Preferences	Hiking (37%) Touring (20%) Camping (19%) Boating (17%) Walking (17%) Fishing (16%) Scenery other than mtn./ocean (14%) Swimming (12%) Other water (9%) Local cultures (8%) Cycling (8%)	hiking (60%) rafting (25%) & other boating (13%) cycling (25%) camping (21%) wildlife viewing (15%) scenery other than mtns/ocean (13%) skiing (13%) canoeing (13%) kayaking (13%) fishing (12%) local cultures (12%)	100% cultural events/festivals 43% shopping 30% historic places/museums 15% outdoor activities	100% historical places/museums 49% shopping 29% National/State Parks 20% outdoor activities
Reasons, Motivations	45% scenery & nature 28% new experiences /places 16% been & want to return 15% cultural attraction 15% see mountains 14% study/learn nature & cultures 13% relax & get away from it all	45% scenery & nature 22% new experiences/places 16% land activities 15% wildlife viewing 14% see mountains 11% wilderness 11% not crowded 11% water activities 10% cultural attraction 10% study/learn nature & culture	67% personal enjoyment 14% personal education 6% education of children 4% experience something genuine or authentic 3% investigate place heard about 5% support historical sites	44% personal enjoyment 21% personal education 13% education of children 9% experience something genuine or authentic 9% investigate place heard about 3% support historical sites

1. HLA/ARA 1994; 2. HLA/ARA 1994; 3. TIAA 1997; 4. TIAA 1997

Table 1A: Profiles of Adventure, Nature and Cultural/Historic Travelers

Market Characteristics	US Adventure & Outdoor Traveller ¹ N = 1,172	US Adventure Traveller ² : N = 608	US Wildlife Watchers ³ : N = 14,414	Pennsylvania Outdoor Travelers N = 1,994 ⁴
Household Income	76% >US\$30,000 (CDN\$40,000) 24% < US \$30,000 (CDN\$40,000) 18% >US\$75,000 (CDN\$100,000)	11%< \$20,000 US 14% \$20-29,999US 34% \$30-49,999 US 41% \$50,000US+(combined) median \$44,900 US	16%< \$20,000US 23% \$20-29,999US 26% \$30-39,999US 14% \$40-49,999US 16% \$50-74,999US 16% \$75-99,999US 17% \$100,000US+	16% < \$25,000 US 42% \$25-50,000 US 26% \$50-75,000 US 16% > \$75,000 US
Age	51% 25 – 40 25% 45 – 64 10% 65+ Average is 40	43% 18-34 42% 35-54 14% 54+ mean age 39	10% 16-24 19% 25-34 29% 35-44 22% 45-54 10% 55-64 9% 65+	17% 18-34 41% 35-49 27% 50-64 15% 65+
Gender	51% male (vs. 60% travelers overall), varies by activity	51% males 49% female	50% males 50% females	No information
Household	66% married (vs. 56% travelers overall) 50% have children (vs. 37% travelers overall)	65% married 27% single 8% divorced/widowed /separated 55% child in household 58% multiple wage earners	No information	68% married 15% never married 11% divorced 5% widowed 2% separated
Education	41% completed college	27% high school 33% some college 24% college graduate 16% post graduate	21% 5+yrs college 18% 4+yrs college 26% 1-3yrs college	No information
Party Composition/ Travelling Companions	58% couple 36% w. (grand) children 34% w. other adults 11% w. (grand) parents	60% spouse (soft) 41% spouse w. children (soft) 48% friends (hard)	No information	38% families 32% couples 15% 3+adults 9% alone
Activity Preferences	camping (85%) hiking (74%) skiing (51%) snorkel/scuba (30%) sailing (26%) kayaking/ whitewater (24%) biking (24%) rock climbing (18%) cattle/dude ranch (14%) hang glide/parasail (8%)	Soft adventurers: Camping (70%) Hiking (49%) Biking (30%) Bird/animal watching(26%) Hard adventurers: Whitewater rafting/kayaking (48%) Snorkeling/scuba diving(40%) off road biking or mtn biking (35%) backpacking (26%) rock climbing (24%) spelunking (18%)	Observing wildlife (97%) photograph wildlife (51%) feed wildlife (42%) type: birds (75%) land mammals (75%) fish (36%) marine mammals (15%) other -turtles, butterflies (49%)	nature/sightseeing (20%) camping (19%) hiking (9%) hunting/fishing (6%) rafting/boating/ canoeing (6%)
Reasons, Motivations	71% fun & entertainment 51% get away from it all 21% thrill 15% try/learn something new 14% interest in env. 7% learn/test something about selves 7% health	48% soft:39% hard interest in a specific activity 25% adventure participation just an activity not a motivator 68% are middle of the road in their interest in adv activity 12% live for adventure	no information	64% not to far to travel 56% friends/relatives in the area 41% more beautiful landscape/scenery 27% traditionally vacation there 20% wide variety of activities there 20% good value for the money

1. TIAA 1994; 2. TIAA 1998; 3. US Dept Interior 1996; 4. Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. 1999

Appendix B - Duck Hunting Lodges and Guides Participating in Study

Bayou Meto Lodge, Stuttgart
Beaver Lake Lodges, St. Charles*
Buckshot Duck Lodge, Stuttgart
Cox Bend Lodging, Stuttgart
Duck Hunt With The Earlywines, Stuttgart *
Eagles Bluff Lodging and Guide Service, Stuttgart*
Fin and Feather Lodge, Reydell*
Maddox Bay Landing, Holly Grove
Moore Wings Hunting Club, Stuttgart
Poppa Duck Lodge, St. Charles
Razor Back Lodge, Hazen*
School House Lodge, Dewitt
Slick McCollums, Stuttgart
Wild Wing Hunting Club, Stuttgart
Wildlife Farms, Cascoe*

* expressed some interest in marketing to nature tourists.

Appendix C – Results of Interviews with Duck Hunting Lodges and Guides

1. What services/experiences do you provide?
 - 11** Accommodation
 - 7** Meals
 - 1** Cater Meals
 - 1** Meals by request
 - 6** Guides
 - 5** Hunting
 - 1** Fishing
 - 1** Bait shop, fishing supplies
 - 1** General Store
 - 2** Licenses
 - 1** Grocery delivery
 - 1** Lease blinds/pits for use
 - 1** Party Barge

2. How long have you been in business?
 - 1** <2 yrs **8** 2-5 yrs **2** 6-8 yrs **4** 9+yrs

3. What is your current occupancy rate?
 - 1** 25-49% **1** 50-74% **4** 75-99% **5** 100% **2** N/A

4. What has been your experience in marketing to nature tourists?
 - 1** Some (birdwatchers) **11** None **3** N/A
 - Are you interested in expanding into this market?
 - 6**Yes **9** No N/A

5. How many visitors do you currently get in a year?
 - 3** <100 **4** 100-300 **1** 301-500 **2** 501-1,000 **3** >1,000 **2** N/A

6. What are your peak periods?
 - 1** Mid-Nov – end of Jan 31
 - 2** Nov 15- Jan 15
 - 10** November -January
 - 1** Mid-Jan and Spring
 - 1** Weekends/Holidays

What time of year would you like additional visitation?

 - Spring and early fall
 - Weekends and holidays

7. What type of services/experiences would you like to market to non-hunters?
 - lodging, meals, transportation, party barge, fishing
 - lodge or retreat feeling

- lodging, meals, guides
- photography
- meeting facility, birdwatching, general nature, wedding, reunions
- bird watchers, canoeing
- lodging, meals, deer hunting, all kinds of guide services
- fishing-jet boat, water ski, nature tours, 4 wheelers
- nature walks, trails, canoeing, birding
- rent blinds

8. Would you be willing to form marketing partnerships with other tourism businesses? With conservation groups?

9 Yes **5** No **1** N/A

9. What would you require in order to become more active in this market in the future?

- some education on the types of tours wanted and what to do
- some education and direction in reaching other markets like birding
- we have to know the person, and services on private property
- help getting into the system
- guidance in getting the market
- employees, good marketing campaign
- direction in marketing
- leadership to help market to other business

10. What is biggest challenge in your business right now?

- there were no ducks this year (the worst year in 40 years) (5)
- cashflow and marketing
- advertising; getting the word of the location out
- can't manage mother nature; no ducks this year
- enter new markets
- good guides and employees
- mother nature, long term commitment from customers
- trying to get more people in the off season
- selling the land
- part time work (seasonal)

11. How many employees* do you have?

4 <5 **3** 6-10 **2** 11-25 **1** >25 **5** N/A

* May constitute full and part-time employees

Appendix D - Recreation Associations and Tour Operators Participating in Study

Shirley Anderson, Victor-Emmanuel Nature Tours Tel. 800-633-4734
Chuck Bell, American Birding Association/AVA Tours Tel. 970-484-8791
Mason Fischer and Judy Barber, International Expeditions Tel. 800-633-4734
Barry Griffiths, Quest Nature Tours and Worldwide Quest International Inc Tel. 416-633-5666,
email: travel@worldwidequest.com
David Jenkins, American Canoe Association Tel. 703-451-0141
Brian Keating, Calgary Zoological Society Tel. 403-232-9352
Chad Kirtland, American Canoe Association & Professional Paddlesports Association Tel. 703-
451-3864 ext. 14 email: chad@propaddle.com
Rob O'dear, OBServ Inc Tel. 615-292-2739
Carol Petersen, Nature Encounters Tour & Travel Ltd, 403-949-3007,
inquiry@natureencounterstours.com
Penny Warris, Pipestone Travel Outfitters 403-777-1630, penny@warris.com

Appendix E – Results of Interviews With Recreation Associations

1. What do your members look for when they select a destination?
 - Value
 - Family experience
 - Enjoyable recreation
 - Easy access (2)
 - Connection with Nature
 - Scenery
 - Water Quality
 - Peacefulness
 - Convenience
 - Proximity to home
 - How interesting the offer is
2. What types of activities are most popular?
 - Paddlesports (2)
 - Canoe trips (2)
 - White-water rafting (2)
 - Fishing day trips
 - Birding day trips
 - Wildlife viewing
 - Sea Kayaking
 - Recreational boats
 - Kayak Tours
3. How important is "name recognition" to your members when selecting a holiday destination?
 - A big deal
 - Some destinations are touted as the place to see (as per articles), drawing in the tourists
4. How far in advance do they make travel decisions?
 - Pretty far in advance due to family vacation or distance to be traveled
 - Both spur of the moment and scheduled trips – sea kayakers tend to plan further ahead
5. What types of trips do your members tell you are most popular?
 - white-water trips
 - recreational kayaking

What changes have you noticed since September 11th?

 - No real changes (2)
6. What do you think will be the biggest opportunities for the future? (in terms of new activities, locations, themes, etc)
 - Recreational kayaking
 - Coastal kayaking
 - Lewis & Clark Anniversary
 - Exploration and paddling
 - Peace and quiet

Appendix F – Results of Interviews with Tour Operators

1. What types of trips do you offer?
 - Wildlife watching (1)
 - Birdwatching (4)
 - Ecotours (2)
 - Adventure Travel
 - Nature Travel (2)
 - They run an endorsement program (don't organize own trips)
 - International
 - General History
 - Natural History (2)

2. Do you currently take trips into Arkansas or western Tennessee? If yes, what types of trips are they and what areas do you visit?
 - No (9)
 - Yes (Ozark/Prairies, bird watching)

3. What things do your customers consider important when selecting a trip?
 - Value (2)
 - Natural beauty and wildlife watching opportunities (3)
 - Safety (3)
 - Birds (3)
 - Looking for specific bird (2)
 - Want to go somewhere with lots of different species
 - New birds for the customer
 - Ease of trip
 - Activities in the area for the tourists (2)
 - Group size
 - Trip Leader
 - Comfort Level
 - Infrastructure
 - Length of trip
 - Interpretive services
 - Availability of trip
 - Culture
 - Overall quality of the trip
 - Rare wildlife species

4. What things do they (the tour operator) look for when selecting a destination?
 - Great wildlife (2)
 - Infrastructure in place to provide trip up to clients expectations (2)
 - Hard to find birds (3)
 - Area with a variety of birds (4)
 - Safety (2)
 - Natural history of the area (2)
 - Transportation (2)
 - A minimum of 3 different habitats with a variety of transportation modes
 - Diverse program
 - Variety of Habitat

- Interpretation
 - Cycling
 - Walking
 - Rivers and associated activities
 - Interesting trip overall
 - Quality of trip
 - Wildlife viewing opportunities
 - Recognized destination
 - Comfortable accommodations and capacity
 - Use of local guides
 - Good communication by operators
5. What changes have they noticed in their buying behaviors of their customers since September 11th?
- Less people looking to travel overseas currently but planning for overseas trips in 2003 (3)
 - Americans more nervous than Canadians
 - No changes
 - Downturn in the mid-price range for Domestic
 - People staying closer to home (2)
 - Buy more insurance
 - Looking more into the safety issue
 - Will stay away from U.S. destinations (if they aren't from U.S.) but willing to go overseas
 - Travel to arrive at the destination is more of an issue
 - Booking closer to the departure date
 - Initial lull, but business has steadily increased since
 - Bookings have increased twenty percent
6. How do they like to be approached by operators or destinations that they haven't worked with before?
- Fam Trip
 - Emails – personalized (5)
 - Phone first then email (2)
 - Industry tradeshow
 - Brochure
7. How many trips would they be willing to take into a new destination if they decide to expand into an area?
- Unlimited number if client interest exists
 - Once per year (3)
 - N/A
 - Depends on how many new birding species are located in this area
 - Customer demand (2)
 - Once a month in prime time

Appendix G - Attractions and Facilities Seen During Site Visit

Arkansas Post National Memorial
Bayou DeView
Beaver Lake Lodges
Brinkley Convention Center
Cedar Heights Cemetery
Clarendon Visitor Center
Confederate Cemetery, Helena
Cormier's Rice Mill
Crowley Ridge National Byway
Delta Cultural Center
Delta Heritage Trail
DeWitt Bible Collection
DeWitt town center
Dixon Cemetery, Helena
Edwardian Inn
Elaine General Store
Gallery G, DeWitt
Genealogy Center in Marvel
Helena River Front Park
Helena's Cherry Street
Joe Madonia's archeological collection
Lake Greenlee
Lonnie Coudle antique tractor & pump collection
Louisiana Purchase Historic State Park
Low's Bridal Shop
Maddox Bay Landing
Magnolia Cemetery
Marianna town center
Marianna/Lee County Museum
Memphis Zoo
MJ Sweatt Camp
Naomi's Gifts & Collectibles
Old Town Lake Access
Pendleton Park River Access and RV Park
Phillips County Library & Museum
Pillow Thompson House
St. Charles Monument
St. Charles Museum
St. Francis National Forest
The L'Anguille River
University of Arkansas Cotton Branch Experiment Station
White River National Wildlife Refuge
Wilbur Botts Access Area
Wildlife Farms, Casscoe

Appendix H – Grants, Tax Credits and Government Funding

Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism Funding

Arkansas Parks and Tourism has some funding available for tourism projects. A total of \$50,000 is available each year for feasibility studies. This must be matched by funds from cities or counties, and all applications from around the state share in the \$50,000. In years where there are several applications, the amount available for a county or city could be relatively small.

Arkansas Tourism Development Act

(Act 291 of 1997)

This legislation was intended to stimulate expansion of Arkansas's tourism industry by offering economic incentives to qualified private development projects in the form of sales and income tax credits. Under this Act, tourism projects that meet the following criteria are eligible to apply:

- costing at least \$500,000
- intended to attract at least 25% of their visitors from out of state
- produce sufficient revenues and public demand to be operating and open to the public on a regular basis
- likely to attract overnight guests from outside the state who would be likely to stay in commercial lodging near the attraction
- unlikely to negatively impact existing employment in the state.

Businesses receiving approval under this program (and approval must be received before construction commences) will be eligible for sales and use tax credits. For projects of between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000, sales tax credits of 25% will be available. For more information contact the Arkansas Department of Economic Development at 501-682-7387.

Challenge America Fast Track Grants

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is offering grants of \$5,000 or \$10,000 through the Community Arts Development priority of the Challenge America Fast Track Grants program until May 1, 2002. These grants are to support partnerships between arts organizations and community groups that use the arts to address key concerns of rural areas and under served communities. More information is available at www.nea.gov/guide/challenge02/ChallengeIndex.html or by calling 202-682-5700.

DOI (Fish and Wildlife)/North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the North American Wetlands Conservation Council will accept proposals under the Small Grants Program. Applications are for grants of \$5,000 or less that request matching funding for wetland conservation projects. Projects must meet the purposes of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989, and priority will be given to projects that ensure long-term conservation benefits. For more information, contact Dr. Keith A. Morehouse, Small Grants Coordinator, North American Waterfowl and Wetlands Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 703-358-1784 or www.nfwf.org/programs/guidelines_small.htm.

Department of the Interior – North American Wetlands Conservation Grants

Challenge grants are available for wetlands conservation projects in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Every \$1 of federal money is matched by \$1 from non-federal sources and has funded over 960 conservation projects to date. Information is available at www.ducks.org/conservation/nawca_processes.pdf.

Environmental Justice Small Grants

The Environmental Protection Agency has awarded grants of up to \$20,000. These are awarded to help community groups or tribal governments that are working on projects that address environmental justice issues. Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, culture, education or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. Funds may be used to develop new activities or substantially improve the quality of existing programs. For more information contact Gloria Love, USEPA Region 4, 61 Forsyth St., Atlanta, GA 30303-8960; 404-562-9672, love.gloria@epa.gov.

International Mountain Biking Association

The mandate of this association is to keep bike trails open, and improve the sport. The association will provide volunteers, equipment, and guidance to communities wanting to develop biking trails. They can provide small financial grants from their association, and also maintain a listing of other funding sources. Their web site at <http://www.imba.com> provide direct listing to several funding programs, some of which will benefit other forms of compatible tourism in addition to cycling.

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Small Grants

Organizations can submit requests for \$5,000 or less at any time during the year for projects that:

- address priority actions promoting fish and wildlife conservation, and the habitats on which they depend
- work proactively to involve other conservation and community interests
- leverage available funding
- evaluate project outcomes.

As a policy, the foundation seeks 2:1 return on its project portfolio or \$2 raised in challenge funds for every federal matching dollar awarded. For more information contact National Fish and Wildlife Foundation at 202/857-0166 or http://www.nfwf.org/programs/guidelines_small.htm.

National Leadership Grants for Library- Museum Collaborations

The Institute of Museum and Library Services offers National Leadership Grants of \$15,000 to \$500,000 to Library-Museum collaborations. The grants support innovative projects that demonstrate how museums and libraries can work together to expand their services to the public. Programs should have national impact and serve as models for others. Collaborations must include at least one eligible library and one eligible museum. 1:1 matching is required for grants over \$250,000. More information is available at www.ims.gov/grants/l-m-l_lead.asp.

State Wildlife Funds (Commerce-Justice-State-Appropriations)

State fish and wildlife agencies have received funds from the federal government through the Conservation and Reinvestment Act. This money known as mini-CARA or CARA-lite is granted to wildlife conservation/education/recreation projects. Examples of projects that have received funding under this act are the Tennessee Valley Birding Trail, a birding trail coordinator in Mississippi, the Susquehanna River Birding and Wildlife Trail in Pennsylvania, and wildlife observation enhancements (viewing blinds, equipment, special handicapped access) in South Dakota. For examples of bird related projects visit the Teaming With Wildlife site at www.teaming.com/site/index.cfm.

\$50-80 billion is available each year through state fish and wildlife agencies although it is hoped this amount will be increased in 2003. Allotments to states are based upon population and geographic area. State agencies must submit a list of projects to the U.S. federal Fish and Wildlife agency by year-end in the hopes of receiving funding. For more information contact the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission at 501-223-6305, www.agfc.state.ar.us, or the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Associations at www.iafwa.org.

TEA21/Recreational Trails Program

Through the Federal Highways Administration, money is available under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) for the Recreation Trails Program. This money is to fund to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities. Congress has authorized \$50million annually for 2002 and 2003. The recreation trails program apportionment for Arkansas in 2002 is \$822,512. Information on project criteria and other details can be found at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrail.htm. The state trail administrator for Arkansas is Steve Weston, Transportation Study Coordinator, Highway and Transportation Department at 501-569-2020.

TEA21/National Scenic ByWays Program

The National Scenic Byways Program provides funding for roads with federal scenic byways status. This money can be used for projects that protect the scenic, historic, cultural, natural, recreational, and archaeological integrity of a highway or adjacent areas. The program has been expanded to include funding of development and implementation of scenic byway marketing programs. For more information visit www.fhwa.gov/tea21/factsheets/scenic.htm. Money for this program comes from TEA-21. Funds authorized for 2002 are \$25.5 million, and for 2003, \$26.5 million.

Transportation Enhancements

The Transportation Enhancements program provides \$20million in federal funding for projects in Arkansas in 2002. This funding can be used for non-traditional transportation enhancements such as the restoration of historic transportation facilities, bike and pedestrian facilities, landscaping and scenic beautification, or the mitigation of highway runoff problems. DeWitt and Stuttgart have both accessed this program for main street and courtyard improvements. More information can be found at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/guidebook/index.htm.

Appendix I – Conceptual Web Site Design

HOME PAGE

**FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS
(alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)**

LODGING

**TOURS &
ATTRACTIONS**

**FESTIVALS &
EVENTS**

COMMUNITIES

**PARKS &
REFUGES**

SCENIC BYWAYS

SHOPPING

MAPS

LINKS

CONTACT US

Click here for
**Your Passport
to Adventure**
This should link to
a page describing
the tourist affinity
program

Text describing the overall ambience of the
counties of Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe.
Description should link to the overall theme and
image selected to market the region.

LODGING PAGE

FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS (alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)

**HOTELS /
MOTELS**

LODGES

**BED &
BREAKFASTS**

CAMPGROUNDS

HOME

General text describing the accommodations found in the counties of Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe. Pages behind each section would provide descriptions, photos, and contact information for each facility. Links to web pages of tourism businesses could also be provided.

TOURS AND ATTRACTIONS PAGE

**FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS
(alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)**

TOURS
WILDLIFE WATCHING SITES
MUSEUMS / CULTURAL CENTER
GALLERIES
HISTORIC SITES
CEMETERIES
DELTA HERITAGE TRAIL
HOME

General text describing the tours and attractions found in the counties of Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe. Pages behind each section would provide descriptions, photos, and contact information for each tour, site, attraction or gallery. Links to web pages of tourism businesses could also be provided.

**FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS
(alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)**

EXPERIENCE THE LIGHTS
FALL ROUNDUP
KING BISCUIT BLUES FESTIVAL
ROLLIN'-ON-THE RIVER FESTIVAL
WARFIELD MUSIC FESTIVAL
WILD HOG MUSIC FESTIVAL
WINGS OVER THE PRAIRIE
others
HOME

Text describing the variety of events and festivals to be found in the counties of Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe. Pages behind this one could include descriptions of major events and contact information; smaller events may just provide contact information. Major events and festivals may have links to their home pages.

COMMUNITIES PAGE

**FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS
(alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)**

BRINKLEY
CLARENDON
DEWITT
HELENA / WEST HELENA
MARIANNA
MARVELL
ST. CHARLES
STUTTGART
HOME

Text describing the overall ambience of the communities of Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe counties. A page for each community could be provided for each selection with links to home pages of individual communities where they exist.

PARKS AND REFUGES PAGE

**FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS
(alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)**

**ARKANSAS POST
NATIONAL MEMORIAL**

**LOUISIANA PURCHASE
HISTORICAL MONUMENT**

**ST. FRANCIS
NATIONAL FOREST**

**WHITE RIVER NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REGUE**

HOME

Text describing the abundance of natural areas found in the counties of Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe. Pages for each park should include descriptions of the habitat and activities found there along with contact information and links to appropriate sites.

SCENIC BYWAYS PAGE

**FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS
(alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)**

**CROWLEY'S RIDGE
PARKWAY**

GREAT RIVER ROAD

HOME

Text describing the scenic byways found in the counties of Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe. These could then link to the web sites for each of the byways.

SHOPPING PAGE

**FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS
(alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)**

LISTING
OF
RETAIL
STORES
WITH
TOURIST
APPEAL
IN
AREA
HOME

Text describing the shopping opportunities found in the counties of Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe that may appeal to tourists. These could include descriptions and location on this page or detailed pages could be provided for individual stores.

MAPS PAGES

FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS (alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)

This page should include a map of the counties of Lee, Arkansas, Phillips and Monroe showing major roadways, towns and cities.

HOME

LINKS PAGE

FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS (alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)

This page should include a listing with links to major sites in the region or that would be of interest to travelers. Some suggestions may be the websites of :

- Delta ByWays
- Arkansas Parks and Tourism
- Crowley's Ridge Parkway
- Great River Road
- Delta Cultural Center

HOME

CONTACT PAGE

FOUR COUNTIES, ARKANSAS (alternatively DELTA ADVENTURES)

This page should include some information on the organization that is creating the website and how they can be contacted. Street address, telephone, toll free and fax numbers should be included along with an email address. The option to send an email to someone in the area requesting more information may also be desirable assuming there is someone available to fill such information requests.

HOME