

Excerpt from the Book: *Vision – We Are Re-Creating the World: A Resource Manual “tool-box” for Revitalization and Empowerment through Grass-roots Strategies and Environmental Awareness* by Andrew N. Skadberg, Ph.D.

Section II: Theoretical Foundations and Some Background Materials

Chapter 4—Theoretical Groundings and the Development of a Systems Approach.

This next section may seem a bit ironic after my critique of academia. However, as the old saying goes we “shouldn’t throw the baby out with the bath water”. Science provides us a set of tools by which to understand reality. Some are better than others. The entire process of the “scientific process” is likely in need of evaluation. As my friend J.R. suggests, it has not been modified in centuries. I agree with him. However, like all things in the world, there appears to be “good” mixed with “bad”. The fulfillment of this book is the result of my experiences. These experiences have, as mentioned before, been drawn from many areas of life, but significantly so from academia.

The grounding principles, and foundational ideas for the concepts presented in the last two sections of this book have developed from a series of theoretical perspectives that come from academic research.

As for the “over-arching” analytical perspective, Systems Thinking is the tool that has been chosen for looking at the bigger picture, and then delving into the various parts. However, there has been a progression of theories that have led to Systems Thinking. I used Systems Analysis (SA) in my Masters thesis, but for my PhD I began looking at more substantive theories that would support a perspective that took more into account the driving forces behind the situations we see in the world.

On its own, Systems Thinking does not look at causes in an empirical fashion, it is more of a tool to develop better strategies to solve problems. Additionally, Systems Thinking does not emphatically address the causative forces, or motivators for change. These impetuses in any given situation could be from internal or external forces, whether they be with individuals or groups.

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I believe it will be informative for the reader to understand the progression of ideas, or theoretical perspectives that have led to Systems Thinking, which is the primary theoretical approach guiding the creation of the various strategies for the rural revitalization and empowerment strategies (RRES). Even though these theories are not presented as “foundational principles”, they have greatly influenced the development of the ideas contained in this book, and potentially could be important for direct consideration within a particular project or strategy. For example, “adoption and diffusion” and “optimal experience theory” (Flow Theory) are two that will not be presented here, but could potentially have an important part to play in the future progress of “*VISION We Are Re-Creating the World*”. Even though these two theories will not be summarized here, you will see reference to them in various sections of this book.

Three theories that will be presented here are “political ecology”, “actor-network theory”, and a third “perspective” call the “co-evolutionary perspective”. These are not being included here to add length to this book, or to mire the reader in academic rhetoric, but to describe the process, and potentially another part of the “context” of the vision behind this book.

If the reader is more interested in the “practical” and “applied” ideas and approaches, you may want to skip to the next sections. However, one of the key and important “good” aspects of the academic approach is the idea of moving from the theoretical to the applied. I will apologize to the non-academically inclined reader at the start of this section, because the material may seem rather dry. It was written in an academic context. However, if the reader can bear with the potential obtuseness, there are very important ideas that create a progressive view of things.

The first theory that I present here is called “Political Ecology”. Originally for my PhD dissertation I was looking at the situation of the Lower Rio Grand Valley in Texas. It is a very complex situation, involving many factors that are affecting the natural environment (water, ecology, etc.) of the region and the quality of life for the people that live there. The regions population is growing incredibly fast even though there is really no metropolis. The border between the U.S. and Mexico has created many issues related to international trade, transportation, immigration and others that each have many “issues” and complexities.

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My original interest for my PhD was to look at the situation comprehensively in the context of pressures for environmental degradation that was impacting the development of tourism in the region, specifically for “nature tourism”. In preparation for my dissertation, I wrote about five term papers on this topic. I found political ecology to be a wonderful perspective to begin to unravel, and understand the situation in the valley.

However, after delving fairly deeply into the topic, I discovered the situation to be far too complex and involved for one person to tackle in the year or two that is normally dedicated to a dissertation. I realized that normally entire teams of researchers from a variety of disciplines would deal with a political ecology research project. So, I decided to change my topic. Nonetheless, what I learned as I prepared these papers educated and influenced my thinking from that point on.

Political Ecology

Blaikie and Brookfield’s (1987) political ecology approach provided one of the early theoretical frameworks for this book. Emel and Peet (1989) feature Blaikie’s (1985) political economic approach as it was used to describe the dynamics of soil erosion in developing countries. Emel and Peet (1989; 60) describe his theoretical approach as a combination of “two systems, the physical and the socio-economic in integration.” Blakie (1985) argues for the necessity to do more than consider one aspect (e.g. social, economic) of an area when making a resource assessment. He points out that a comprehensive perspective needs to place what one is trying to assess in a socio-political, geographical and historical context. Blakie’s (1985) emphasis is on the social element assessing, that is why certain land uses take place in terms of the political-economic context in which land users find themselves.

Blaikie and Brookfield (1987) expand on this theory in *Land Degradation and Society*. They argue that a “fundamental, theoretical confusion exists in the literature on land degradation.” They (1987) suggest that a theory to address land degradation must be able to explain the “local conjecture of physical and social processes as well as provide a clearly understood basis for generalization about processes worldwide”. Blaikie and Brookfield (1987) suggest that there are three causes of confusion about land degradation that arise from the literature.

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1) “the nature of the debate between scientists, commentators and decision-makers has not been critically examined” (p. xvii)

Land degradation is by nature an interdisciplinary issue. Thus, there is a need to develop a comprehensive theory in which analytical tools of both the natural and social sciences are combined. Such a comprehensive approach will more effectively address the central question; “why land managers (e.g., peasants, pastoralists, commercial farmers, state forest departments etc.) are so often unwilling or unable to prevent such accelerated degradation?”

The second cause for confusion is:

2) “Profound differences of opinions about the significance of land degradation which arise from opposing theories of social change degradation” (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987: xviii).

Some researchers see there to be no degradation problem. Others treat land degradation as an externality—an unavoidable result of development and economic growth. The third point of view is that economic growth comes first and land degradation issues can be dealt with if the first task has been accomplished.

The other side of this confusion resides with natural scientists who don’t give due consideration to the social, economic, or political realities. They fail to ask the ‘right questions about the deeper causes of land degradation’ (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987: xix).

The third point of confusion is related to the previous points:

3) “...failure to view degradation within a wide historical and geographical framework” (p. xix).

An example of this point is highlighted by attempts to export policies and techniques from the U.S. to deal with land degradation in developing countries” (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987).”

Apparently, Blaikie’s approach has received significant recognition as a valid geographical approach. Westcoat (1991: 76) recognized Blaikie and Brookfield’s approach as fusing ecological and political-economic approaches. However, Watts (1997) in *Progress in Human Geography, Classics in Human Geography Revisited*,

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criticizes Blaikie’s first book (and the sequel) as having an “impoverished and non-dynamic sense of politics and the way in which power is exercised.” Watts (1997) provides a fairly blunt review of the political weaknesses of Blaikie’s book. Nonetheless, in the end, he praises the “stunning effect” in which Blaikie employed the political economy approach. Blaikie’s approach has withstood the test of time and is still recognized as an approach that merits credibility. This same theory might be applied to other contexts and regions (Westcoat 1991), such as with the case of the Lower Rio Grand Valley.

Tourism provides an initial starting point for context

Impacts from tourism are well documented in the literature on tourism. Specific emphasis on nature and heritage tourism which makes a direct link to environmental and social impacts, however, is quite limited. Thus, our interests will be about creating an ongoing process to review the general tourism literature and identify credible techniques for conducting impact assessment. Economic impacts are discussed in several articles and various methods are used to assess impacts on a country, region or destination community. Input-output assessment and contingent valuation (CV) are two of these methods. Social impacts are also measured or assessed in a number of articles. Articles on environmental impacts are not as numerous and most often discuss the issue in the context of resource management concerns associated with a specific area. (Mak and Moncur 1995). Very little literature directly addresses the political context of tourism development and impacts. However, a number of articles frame their presentation of economic and social impact assessment models in the context of how they can inform or influence policy-makers.

Due to fact that this discussion is really ancillary to our main focus I will not provide a review of the literature. This essay discusses various issues that arise in the development of methods to conduct tourism impact assessment that can be informative for the RRES. This discussion is a preliminary attempt to pull together and organize the diffuse sets of information to build a framework for conducting a comprehensive impact assessment that then provides useful information in our Systems Thinking model.

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A multi-disciplinary perspective and a comprehensive solution

Tourism impact analysis seems to be riddled with challenges. Smith (1995) suggests these are:

- 1) the lack of credible measurements for describing the size and impact of tourism;
- 2) great diversity in the industry, with some analysts questioning whether tourism is a single industry or group of related industries;
- 3) spatial and regional complexities; and
- 4) a high degree of fragmentation.

Echtner and Jamal (1997) suggest that the dilemma of tourism analysis is that it crosses many disciplinary boundaries which then results in fragmented and weak tourism theory. However, instead of developing theories that solve this multi-disciplinary dilemma, current research often isolates different components of tourism impacts within disciplinary boundaries (Echtner and Jamal 1997, 868). Their criticism was verified from my review of the tourism literature.

The dilemma of tourism impact analysis can be rectified through a comprehensive approach which combines environmental, economic and sociopolitical considerations. Geography provides the disciplinary perspective to consider these “sectors” in combination. Tourism is an inherently geographic activity in that its very nature involves travel and a sense of place (Smith 1995, 174). This aspect of tourism suggests developing a theoretical basis for tourism impact assessment within a geographical context. Although there appears to be little specific reference to tourism impact assessment theory in the geographical literature, there is a basis from the literature on natural resource geography. Peet and Thrift (1989) describe a political-economic theoretical view employed by Blakie to evaluate soil erosion in developing countries by integrating both physical and the socio-economic systems. Blakie (1985) argues for the necessity to do more than consider one aspect (e.g. social, economic) of an area when making a resource assessment. He points out that one must develop a comprehensive perspective that “contextualizes” what one is trying to assess. Blakie’s (1985, 32) emphasis is on the social element assessing why certain land uses take place in terms of the political-economic context in which land users

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find themselves. This same theory can be applied for tourism (or nature and heritage tourism) impact assessment.

This perspective is supported in many other places including the literature on tourism analysis. Various models have been developed that attempt to bring together multi-disciplinary approaches to making impact assessments. Benefit-cost analysis is probably the longest standing example that attempts to measure all benefits and costs associated with the implementation of a project. This methodology is a credible tool for conducting tourism analysis, but has also been identified with a number of potential pitfalls, one being the possibility of ignoring environmental “externalities”. (Smith 1995, 295).

Analyzing impacts of projects from a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary perspective is also supported by environmental impact assessment (EIA), which is the process mandated by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) of 1969. NEPA requires the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) when Federal agencies plan actions that would result in some change or impact on the natural or human environment (Skadberg 1992). Established as Federal policy in the United States this process has been embraced internationally. The European Community (EC) has adopted EIA for a specified list of projects that is guided by four principles, one being that preventive action is better than remedial action (Therivel and Morris 1995, 2). NEPA requires that an EIA and subsequent EIS give due considerations to all potential impacts of a federal action. In most cases this includes economic, social and environmental issues.

Various techniques developed by governmental resource managers also point towards this comprehensive approach. The Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) management strategy developed by the United States Forest Service (USFS) outlines a specific integrated approach which considers the resource, and the social and economic situation as it applies to developing an effective management strategy for recreation settings (Stankey et al 1985). Lindberg and Johnson (1996) suggest the LAC process be considered as an alternative to benefit-cost analysis.

An additional and critical component that needs to be considered when developing an impact assessment methodology is the political context. Skadberg (1992) used expert opinion to determine the political and social context of an agronomic and energy

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production demonstration project. The political arena ultimately is where decisions are made. Thus, it is imperative to determine the political atmosphere when trying to develop a course of action. Nigel and Peet (1989, 60) describe Blaikie’s political-economy approach: “Blaikie proposes two spheres of political-economic relations which explain soil erosion: social relations of production at the level of the enterprise; and exchange and other relations at the level of the world economic system. In both spheres surplus is extracted from peasants: at the local level through wage labour or rents; at the international level through unfavourable terms of trade and low product prices.” Although aimed at describing a system associated with soil erosion, this theory can be adapted to tourism development. Given the socio-economic situation in rural regional development contexts, Blaikie’s (1985) approach may have specific applicability.

Whether or not a political component can be built directly into the model is unclear at this point. Nevertheless, research on impact assessment is framed in how models will influence or fit into a political context (Freeman 1993; Fletcher 1989).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into all four of the subjects--economic, social, environmental and political. This paper focuses on introducing the need for solid theoretical grounding, and the consideration of a comprehensive model.

A Technological Approach with Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Later in this paper we delve deeper into the relationship between technology and ways to deal with various environmental and social challenges. Geography, as stated by Thomas Berry, provides a means by which to deal with complexities. However, without the aid of computers, there is absolutely no way that we could deal with the complexities or quantities of information and data that is necessary to analyze the situations that we are, or will be, dealing with. As discussed in more detail in the section on the remote sensing institute, specifically in relation to the hyperspectral sensor, what we are dealing with here is “new science”, science that cannot be conducted without the aid of new technologies.

One of the exciting and emerging areas of technology development in geography is Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Over the last dozen or so years, I have found the only reasonable way to deal with the complexities, and capitalize on the opportunities with

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regional tourism, are in the development of new technologies. These are not necessarily the creation of a new or specific technology, but the utilization and combination of existing technologies that can be brought to bear in the tourism “sector”. Specifically for the RRES we are talking about GIS and other remote sensing technologies and Internet based technologies for education, tourism and small business development (e.g. Community Network, Location Based Services-LBS).

Specifically for the RRES, the initial stages for these technologies are not primarily to take advantage for economic and social change, but more to ascertain the situation, or overall context. To this end GIS becomes an important tool, and can help us begin to create “spatial analysis” models. These models can be built around various theoretical and analytical methods that are available. One of my particular favorites is Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) (see discussion of LAC in Chapter 8). This information also becomes very valuable for the continued development of the project. Data sets such as environmental, social and economic become baseline layers that build a foundation for understanding context, but maybe more importantly, over time, to have the means by which to evaluate change, impacts and progress for the accomplishment of various goals and objectives that can be measured using geographic data sets. Hyperspectral imaging systems (is especially important and valuable for the environmental impacts management and amelioration, and even more so over time.

But before we can utilize the technologies, and various analytical methods we must provide an overall conceptual or theoretical framework by which to “couch” our systematic analysis. To develop the most effective way to accomplish this will be of great value in identifying the most credible impact assessment methods. These methods could then be combined into a comprehensive system, such as a geographic information system (GIS) where the data could be visualized. This will assist researchers in deciphering and determining the intricate and complex relational and spatial patterns that are involved. MacEachren et al. (1992, 99) highlights this point in the following: “Even when dealing with nonspatial relationships, geographers are most comfortable with a depiction that allows them to visualize relationships and connections that in turn lead to hypothesis about underlying causes for the patterns that become apparent when data are presented in a spatial format”. MacEachren (1993, 108) further illuminates the process of visualization:

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“As investigators gain confidence in a theory or perspective on a problem, they use visualization tools to synthesize ideas and formulate a coherent abstract statement of what at that stage might only be loosely connected threads”.

The “loosely connected threads” of tourism analysis suggests the need for developing computer applications in tourism impact assessment. However, Smith (1995, 14) suggests that the tourism industry as a whole is reluctant to adopt new technological tools and that they are hesitant to develop or adapt to new technologies. Nevertheless, multi-disciplinary impact analysis of tourism requires the development of an analytical tool that supports visualization.

Even though tourism researchers and decision-makers are reluctant to utilize new technologies, we will not let that slow us down or deter us. In fact, this lack of interest creates great opportunities for us to not only utilize these technologies to fulfill our needs, but also to be the harbinger of these technologies.

It might be considered risky to venture into these uncharted waters if these technologies that we are considering were new or untested. But the reality is that all of the technologies have been available for some time, they just have not been used in this context, or with this level of comprehensiveness. We will be benefitted from designing our approach and perspectives based on the challenges presented by tourism because what we develop and learn can then very likely be generalized and applied to other situations.

It is important to note that we are not talking about creating hard and fast lines that are expected to be used in all contexts. That will never work because there are too many variables and it is not about creating a “one size fits all model”. Like the analogy of a car. The general principles of design and function for a car work in any environment. The key issues about a particular situation are about adaptation and flexibility. For example, the same basic components for a 4 wheel drive vehicle are the same as a two wheel drive. But, for places that do not have established roads, it is necessary to have a vehicle with modifications (like 4 wheel drive and more sturdy suspension) in order for the vehicle to perform its function.

Challenges and progressing to the Executive Summary of the RRES

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This discussion is about identifying the most credible techniques for tourism impact assessment with the idea that a model can be developed combining various techniques into a comprehensive analysis model. Nevertheless, the challenge for this can be formidable. One must assume that the lack of prior work in this area implies the difficulty of such an endeavor. Tourism has been identified as an extremely diffuse economic activity that does not lend itself to simple and straightforward analysis (Smith 1995, 17). This task is further hindered when one considers combining techniques to evaluate environmental, economic and social impacts. However, in order to advance Systems Thinking planning, it is imperative that a comprehensive model be developed. No matter what the challenges may seem to be, considerable literature suggests that impacts of tourism on the human or natural environment can be determined. This suggests an adaptation of the same basic principles to our greater context of rural revitalization and empowerment.

The RRES steps outside of all existing boundaries whether geographical, jurisdictional or institutional. This does not mean that efforts should not be conjoined with any organization. However, after many years of working inside and attempting to create innovative, cutting edge projects, I have found that most institutions actually drain the majority of resources and energy of systems with limited outputs. I will not go into deep detail of actual examples of working inside and outside of these various agencies either as an employee, consultant or collaborator, but the experience across the board was of inefficiencies and obstacles to innovation. These bureaucratic and institutionalized systems appear to exist in all places. I have personally experienced them directly in Iowa, Texas, Washington DC, China and now Colombia. I have experienced and worked hard to instigate projects of different types, sometimes with short-term successes, others with marginal success and many other with little or no effective results. In other cases I have personally observed incredible inefficiencies, incompetence's and sometimes illegal, or what should be illegal actions. I have personally observed state agencies, and political operators “handing out” millions of dollars to absolutely useless statewide projects, and been the observer of unbelievable activities at the highest levels of state government that ended in the death of people.

Now it is not the point to focus on these problems. Nor do I intend to go to great detail to describe and figure out how to try to convert or educate the various existing systems of

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institutions. For lack of a better term, the RRES is really a work-around strategy, essentially side-stepping these institutions and creating a grass-roots, replicable model. This idea is inherent throughout this book and it is really another foundational principle that will not be described in any detail.

That being said, if we are to understand the “context” of what we are trying to work within, and develop these strategies, we must get a clearer picture of how things operate. Now, this idea can have many layers. I am personally not ignorant of many layers of problems in institutions and governments and corporations. And this discussion could easily digress into deep, deep controversial issues and conspiracy. The truth of these “far fetched” conspiracies are essentially unfolding before our eyes as various world historical events unfold. As the truth about 9/11 slowly emerges and the most recent as of this writing the this book, major shifts in legislation enacted in the United States affecting the banking and money systems. The changes and implications of these changes are so far reaching and profound as to change the course of human history. Another example, which I have come to understand is to occur very closely with broad economic changes, is the official “Disclosure” of the existence of extraterrestrial life, and our various governments interactions with them. Although the United States seems to be holding out longer than other nations, Britain, Brazil, Mexico and a number of other nations are releasing previously classified files, and the number of “whistle-blowers” about this topic and “secret government” activities seems to be breaking open like a ripe watermelon.

These ideas and events are mind boggling when first considered, but as world events and all of the evidence is considered, the duplicity of our leaders is even more mind boggling. However, I do not want to delve into those topics in this book. This book is about keeping an even keel, and developing strategies to work back from these systems that are not working, and create ways to keep a stable economic and social system afloat as we create the new models.

In order to get a clearer picture we need to examine how the existing system, and the complexities operate. For that purpose a case study of the examination of the most complex “sector” of the economy, namely nature tourism, has been handled by the various state agencies in one state, Texas. Then, as the case study examines, we discover

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how a seemingly simple policy change in the state legislature essentially stymies any advancement and coordination of this highly important industry that touches all aspects of life in communities in practically all places.

It is important to mention here a very little known fact. Tourism, often vying for the number one position in economic importance in the world economy, is within the top three positions economically in all states and nations throughout the world. Tourism is a highly complex industry that touches all sectors of the economy. Entire books are written on these topics and it is not the point to discuss this in detail here, but one interesting point that I often share when I speak at conferences on tourism is that if a community is a nice place to visit as a tourist destination, it is often a nice place to live. And the better a community is for visitors, the more challenges that arise for managing the impacts and controlling population growth and the loss of the exact things that attracted the people in the first place. But this is a digression.

One relatively recent validation of the idea that tourism is a primary economic driver, especially in rural places, came while I was presenting at four conferences hosted by the Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines. One of the other keynote speakers has written a book entitled “Boomtown USA”. In the book the author had begun examining thousands of rural communities across the U.S. to discover the key elements for economic success. The thesis for the book was that rural America is reviving and that there are 7 1/2 identifiable steps to success, as derived from these case studies. The book discussed some 130 cases.

Now what was most interesting to me was that the book did not at all focus on tourism. In fact in his presentation he mentioned half a dozen “top trends” and of course tourism was not included in that list. I say “of course” because his book was about economic revitalization, and business. And being a traditional business type person his focus tended to lean towards industry and agriculture. However, as I examined and actually counted the number of times that tourism was a primary element in the case studies that made the final cut for the book, tourism was a key factor and actually highlighted in the discussion over 75% of the times.

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This is the case with nearly all places. It is really a case of “can’t see the forest for the trees”. And because tourism is so, apparently, elusive, it is often overlooked, underutilized and ill managed in so many places. But again this is a topic for another time. The point at this juncture is to introduce a fairly broad scale “case study” of nature tourism in Texas. The topic could easily expand to “tourism”. And the article will provide the reader with a clearer understanding of why tourism is so misunderstood and unappreciated as an industry. An exaggerated analogy might be that tourism is like the air around us, it is everywhere, but we just don’t see it or really appreciate how much it affects our lives. When we do start to notice it is when it has caused problems for us, then we are in a really serious situation. When it is clean, and fun, we just totally take for granted that it is what we enjoy the most in life. Tourism, or “leisure” is what we work so hard to enjoy.

This article will also provide more evidence of why I have chose tourism as a major topic for the “case studies” included in the latter part of the book. As I have made my best attempt at providing the necessary broadest “context” view, using such perspectives as the geographic, political ecology, or systems thinking, tourism somehow touches all aspects of our lives, and these linkages and impacts, whether it be environmental, social, economic or otherwise, must be considered with due diligence in order to avoid disaster (there are innumerable cases of this to cite).

This article was written while I was a professor but was not acceptable to academic “peer reviewers”. One commenter said that it seemed more like a “consulting report”. Well, in reality that was the intent. To gain an understanding why over a dozen state agencies, with literally billions of dollars of funding annually could not successfully support an expanding industry that was, from a grass-roots perspective, providing a serious economic boost to rural communities and farmers and ranchers. The final findings have motivated me to stop trying to change politics and agencies policies, it’s like trying to “move oil tankers with my kayak pushing on the front”. A better strategy is just develop strategies that can grow organically and naturally of their own volition. If these organizations would like to join, and they do not deter or slow the process down, that is great. But for me, the times of standing in lines waiting at the banks or agencies has ended, much less to write elaborate and mostly obtuse business plans and proposals. My interests now are to go directly to the people, generate the enthusiasm and interest, propose “conceptual”

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models for revitalization and empowerment, and then see what we can get accomplished together.

Case Study Article—Nature Tourism in Texas: Efforts, Challenges and Opportunities

This article was researched and written during the years 1998 to 2001. The statistics are dated, however, the general trends will likely not have changed to a great extent, but this is not the key point to be drawn from the article. More important than the statistics is the information gleaned from an examination of the policies and overall characteristics of what was learned. This research paper began with one simple question “why is nature tourism development so slow in Texas”.

Having been one of the key players in the first “nature tourism” project of the Texas state government in 1993, I had been privy to the process. The first nature tourism project was called Texas Adventures and was an entrepreneurial endeavor of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). I was the assistant director of the initiative. After this project I became the Assistant Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Collection which was another entrepreneurial project, a mail order catalogue featuring products featuring nature and providing a sort of educational character to the content. I was a very successful endeavor until it was claimed by certain Texas legislators to be competing with business. My final responsibility was as the fundraising coordinator for the Great Texas Coastal Birding Classic which was a week long birdwatching tournament hosted in conjunction with the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail.

Being employed by TPWD from 1993 until 1997, I was informed and involved with the beginning stages of projects launched by Andrew Sansom the Executive Director of TPWD. These years, under Andy’s direction, were some of the most progressive during the agencies existence. The agency at the time was challenged by bi-annual budget reductions in State funding and was investigating a variety of entrepreneurial and innovative projects to become creative to maintain, and potentially expand, the responsibilities and services provided to the citizens of Texas. These developments appeared to be in tandem to the Governor’s new policy to stimulate “nature tourism”. Likely one of the most successful projects was the creation of the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, although based on follow-up research and following the developments of this initiative, a great deal more

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benefits could have been realized if there was more planning and involvement for businesses and communities. Essentially, the Birding Trail established some 300 birding “sites” that were identified as being good for birdwatching. The trail was promoted through the production of a map, and site location signs located along Texas highways.

In any case, after nearly six years keeping apprised of nature tourism development in the state I was curious why some of the projects seem to be at a stand still. After I had returned to get my PhD in 1997, focusing on nature tourism and technology, specifically the Internet, I decided it was time to examine why the original vision expressed by the State Task Force of Texas Nature Tourism (established by Governor Ann Richards) was not being realized. By 1999 I had been in Texas for a decade, and becoming informed and experienced in the State’s potential for nature and outdoor recreational opportunities and tourism, I was a bit baffled by the slow, or practically speaking, no progress.

Although the following research article was never accepted in the academic circles, it likely, as one specific undertaking, gave me the first real glimpse of the ineffectiveness of state agencies to create innovation, or accomplish progressive projects. At the time that the article was written I was much more “politically correct” since I was working for Texas state agencies (first Texas State University in San Marcos and then Texas A&M), even though at the time what I discovered was quite disappointing. Essentially state agencies were talking about doing things but nothing was happening. There are innumerable reasons that I don’t intend to get into great detail, but the article reveals some of the more glaring aspects.

This research, coupled with my experiences with all of the major state agencies involved with tourism in Texas gave me a somewhat jaded outlook on working within state government to accomplish anything of note, especially because my forte, and experiences in the main have been entrepreneurial, and leading edge for most of my life.

It is not the point to venture down a road of negativity, but more to suggest that these experiences caused me to decide that it is absolutely critical for us to develop “grass-roots” initiatives, and projects that could support themselves more as a private endeavor. Of course we will not exclude the involvement of any organization, as long as they don’t become an obstacle, or stymie the process.

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The original “seeds of the ideas” for these “grass-roots” regional initiatives, including the RRES, were planted while I was writing the original strategy for the Texas Historical Commission’s (THC), Texas Heritage Trail Program in 1997. Under the supervision of Dr. Kimmel, the then Director of the Center for Nature and Heritage Tourism at Southwest Texas State University, we proposed the development of regional “centers” that would host information, expertise and assistance to communities and local leadership. The idea was to create a sort of “central repository” and then develop outreach and extension efforts to make the communities aware of the various programs to stimulate regional heritage tourism. To prepare this strategy I utilized extensively the University of Minnesota’s tourism planning materials.

We took this small \$15,000 contract because the original request by the THC staff person paralleled what we viewed as the most effective and efficient strategy. One of their main objectives was to develop these regional programs but also improve the agencies “accountability” which we were pleased to provide a strategy to accomplish. However, as we began to work the proposed initiative up the “chain of command” at the THC the entire project was transformed from a “lean and mean”, grass-roots initiative, to the traditional “top-down” approach. After my initial involvement in 1997 I followed and contributed assistance when requested to the continued development of the Heritage Trail Program and I was surprised by what I witnessed. Even though the staff, and regional trail coordinators were well intentioned, the overall program was less than marginal. Communities were drawn in by promises of access to grants, only to get mired in significant bureaucratic “red-tape” writing proposals, and fulfilling the policy guidelines established by the agency. Only a few communities received awards even though many were drawn in by big promises for success. Additionally, the THC created regional boards of advisors that were too large. The ten trail regions were so large that not all counties would be represented on the board of directors. This is a recipe for conflict and resulted in a bad reputation for the program. Also, those involved as part of the board of directors were required to attend numerous meetings with marginal results. This was not only my assessment, but the assessment of people who had been early leaders for the first regions that were established.

The situation continued to baffle me in 2004 as I watched the agency receive \$4.1 million

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to develop three of the trails. I am still at a loss to discover what the money was actually used for because the productivity, effectiveness and impact on rural tourism for this amount of money was nil. The final chapter came in 2006 when the Texas Heritage Trail Program received a Presidential Award from then President George W. Bush.

It was no surprise to me of this because the Chair of the Commission, John Nau, who had also been appointed to be in charge of the national Preserve America program was the largest Budweiser beer distributor in the nation, whose main operation was Houston, Texas which is where the Bush family does much of its business.

At the time that the THC was receiving this financial support, our little team from Texas A&M had successfully launched seven TexBox Travel Information kiosks in Dept. of Transportation Rest areas for only \$44,000. The TexBox Community Network project was successful enough that during 2003 the state launched its statewide “Wireless Internet and Tourism Information” as part of the project revitalizing the State’s rest areas.

However, due to budgetary constraints the company that won the contract was required to install 98 wireless Internet canopy systems that made access available, even over the parking lots, for free! The idea was that they could develop their business model in process, but this was such a new concept that the financial challenges put the fledgling company “Coach Connect” out of business. (I was the contracted author of the proposal that won Coach Connect this first contract. I was working with the company AdventGX, which we spun out of Texas A&M’s Technology Transfer Commercialization Initiative (TTCI), under Dr. Ewing, in 2003. The story of the TTCI is a strange one, and was in a way Dr. Ewing’s crown achievement for his career. However, political maneuvering resulted in the project ousted from him, which then led to the confrontations and challenges which ended with Dr. Ewing passing from stress and disappointment in December of 2007. It is a strange story indeed, one which I will not elaborate here, but one day may share my insider’s view since I was able to work very closely with Dr. Ewing the last few months of his life. He was a really great man and I was blessed in many ways by his vision and dedication during my years at Texas A&M University.

Even though these new “technology and tourism” projects in Department of Transportation rest areas are still young, their success and appeal has spawned similar “wireless projects” in about a dozen states. Zoom Information Systems is the company

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winning these contracts and I assisted them to prepare proposals for Minnesota and Texas based on my experiences. And Iowa, my home state, was the first state to actually install kiosks in all of its rest areas (40 in total). (The original TexBox proposal is included in the Experience Iowa Tourism Case Example, Chapter 9).

However, progress on the projects for Zoom is really challenged due to funding. Also, I believe that only about one half of the original vision is being developed. It is easy to see that the provision of services to travelers and truckers is important, essentially about technology and information, but the missing element is the assistance to the rural communities, landowners and small businesses. This would be a perfect opportunity for a university with a strong emphasis on Extension programs, as described previously.

With this as a brief highlight of just two examples of experiences and observations (there are plenty more), here is the article that was instrumental in me deciding that alternative strategies for rural revitalization and empowerment were necessary if we had any hope of a widespread “grass-roots revolution”. In many respects these experiences were the original catalyst for the RRES concept.

This article was written and researched from 1998 to 2000 and submitted to the Annals of Tourism Research in 2001 which is why it has an academic style.

Nature Tourism in Texas: challenges, efforts and opportunities

This article was co-authored by James R. Kimmel, Ph.D.

Abstract

This article provides an overview of nature tourism development in Texas and offers a critical assessment of what has been accomplished and what needs to be done next. Nature tourism development in Texas has been hindered by a lack of coordination between state agencies and inadequacy of programs to assist communities, private operators, and landowners. The State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism, established in 1993, identified areas of need. However, by not establishing clear goals and measurable objectives identifying responsible parties, progress on statewide efforts has been limited.

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Nonetheless, much has been accomplished in the State through individual initiative and cooperation. Communities and landowners have recognized nature tourism’s potential and have been pushing state agencies to address their needs.

Introduction

Both the petroleum and agricultural industries have declined in rural Texas creating an economic crisis for communities and individual landowners. Nature-based tourism seems to have substantial potential as an alternative economic resource. Tourism in general is already important to the Texas economy. The Texas Department of Economic Development reported that in 1998 visitors to Texas spent over \$34.6 billion on transportation, lodging, food, entertainment and recreation, and incidentals, up 6.5 percent over 1997. Visitor spending in Texas directly supported 370,000 jobs (an increase of 2.0 percent over 1997) with a payroll of \$7.6 billion in 1998 (up 8.6 percent over 1997). Both local and state tax revenue generated by travel increased in 1998. Local tax revenues in 1998 were \$572 million and State tax revenues were \$1.7 billion (up 9.7 and 6.5 percent respectively over 1997) (TDED 1999: 6).

The State of Texas, under Governor Ann Richards, began an initiative in 1993 to develop nature tourism as a form of local economic development. The purpose of this article is to evaluate the progress of that initiative. This evaluation rests on two “baseline” documents. The first is *Nature tourism in the Lone Star State: economic opportunities in nature* (STFTNT 1994) which set out goals and strategies for nature tourism development. The second is an article by Var (1997) that provides an overview of the potential for nature tourism development in Texas. The evaluation is based on both authors’ close professional involvement with most of the groups in Texas concerned with nature tourism development. A qualitative rather than a quantitative approach has been employed in this research in order to “examine ‘reality’ in all its complexity” (Walle 1997: 534). Although it identifies problems, the intent of this article is to emphasize the lessons learned that can benefit tourism development in Texas and other states.

This article will:

- Summarize and evaluate development efforts of government agencies, non-government organizations (NGO’s), universities, communities, and the private

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sector

- Discuss alternative strategies
- Identify further research needs
- Make recommendations and conclusions

As was the case with Brohman (1996: 49) this paper emphasizes the need for understanding the process of nature tourism development that will lead to the creation of “alternative tourism strategies that call for increased community participation and more coordinated state involvement in tourism planning to serve broadly based development goals.”

Potential challenges facing tourism and nature tourism

Nature tourism, as with tourism in general, is a difficult industry to analyze and evaluate because its impacts are spread so broadly. Controversies still exist in the literature about whether tourism is a single industry or a group of industries, because economically its impacts cross many industry boundaries. Major challenges exist in how to measure the economic impacts of tourism. Smith (1997: 149) outlines the conceptual challenges facing tourism.

- Tourism is a non-traditional industry
- The tourism product depends on the effective integration of many different commodities
- Tourism data too often are incompatible, inconsistent, and not credible

Smith (1997) suggests that these issues are interrelated. Misunderstanding of the tourism industry and the tourism product exists within the industry itself and has plagued tourism analysts, policy makers, and leaders for years.

The Texas Department of Economic Development echoes Smith’s points, highlighting the challenges created by tourism’s diversity. Government officials, business executives and the public have been slow to appreciate “the significance of travel away from home and the industry that has developed to serve it” (TDED 1998: 2). The agency further suggests that these issues are a barrier to reaching its full potential while it also makes the industry

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“vulnerable to negative and unfair policy such as reflected in the governments proclivity to over-tax travelers to generate much-needed revenues” (TDED 1998: 2).

Also reflecting the diffuse character of tourism is the large number and diversity of state agencies, NGO’s and universities involved in nature tourism in Texas. These agencies, their acronyms, and the abbreviated names that will be used in the remainder of this article are:

Southwest Texas State University	SWTSU	Southwest Texas State Univ.
State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism	STFTNT	State Task Force
Texas A&M University	TAMU	Texas A&M Univ.
Texas Commission on the Arts	TCA	Arts Commission
Texas Department of Agriculture	TDA	Dept. of Agriculture
Texas Department of Public Safety	TDPS	Dept. of Public Safety
Texas Department of Transportation	TxDOT	TxDOT
Texas Department of Economic Development (Texas Department of Commerce to 1997)	TDED	Dept. of Economic Development
Texas General Land Office	TGLO	General Land Office
Texas Historical Commission	THC	Historical Commission
Texas Nature Tourism Association	TNTA	Nature Tourism Assoc.
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department	TPWD	Parks and Wildlife Dept.
Texas State Agency Tourism Council	TSATC	Tourism Council
Texas Travel Industry Association	TTIA	Travel Industry Assoc.

Summary and Evaluation of Nature Tourism Development in Texas

State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism

As a concept and a “quasi” industry, nature tourism has been recognized in Texas for a number of years. However, as an industry that is understood, developed and promoted it is still in its infancy. Nonetheless, since at least the early 1990’s nature tourism has been

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important enough to be recognized on an official basis. The State Task Force was a 21 member committee co-chaired by the Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., and the Executive Director of the Dept. of Economic Development (TPWD 1999a). The State Task Force defined nature tourism as “discretionary travel to natural areas that conserves the environmental, social and cultural values while generating an economic benefit to the local community.” Nature tourists are defined as “travelers who spend their time and money enjoying and appreciating a broad range of outdoor activities that have minimal impact on the environment.” The following was the mission given to the State Task Force by Governor Ann Richards (STFTNT 1994)

- Examine the potential of nature tourism in Texas.
- Recommend opportunities for developing and promoting it.
- Build upon local efforts already under way.
- Preserve local, social and cultural values.
- Promote sustainable economic growth, restorative economic development and environmental conservation through nature tourism.

Given this mission statement, the State Task Force made recommendations under four categories: conservation, legislation, promotion and education. Various actions have occurred as a result of these recommendations:

- conservation -- wildlife management tax exemption
- Landowner Incentive Program (under the Parks and Wildlife Dept.)
- legislation -- cap on landowner liability
- promotion -- marketing campaign featuring natural attractions

For this article the recommendations for educational efforts will be used as a framework to evaluate nature tourism’s progress to this point in time. Educational efforts are the proper focus because their purpose was to facilitate nature tourism product development in the state. These educational recommendations were also developed because the State Task Force recognized the need to provide training to rural community leaders involved

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with tourism (Var 1997). The educational recommendations were (STFTNT 1994):

- Develop a step-by-step nature tourism handbook targeted to communities and private landowners.
- Provide training and outreach for local communities, individuals and companies to nurture and enhance nature tourism in their areas.
- Enable the development of local tourism infrastructure to support the nature consumer's needs.
- Provide training for public and private sector employees who interact with the public concerning basic hospitality skills and nature tourism opportunities in their areas.
- Identify and coordinate public private organizations with the financial resources and expertise to help communities and individuals in their nature tourism efforts.
- Identify nature tourism products and infrastructure that are both available and needed to promote sustainable growth and environmental conservation.
- Develop programs to communicate the importance of protecting and managing the state's nature resources.

These suggestions address direct “in the field” activities for developing nature tourism. Evaluating what has been accomplished on these tasks will provide insights for future development needs. Table 1 is an overview of the status of the educational suggestions.

Var (1997: 204) recognized that these “recommendations do not give the responsibility for education to one agency. They emphasize the importance of cooperation and coordination of various public and private institutions.” Herein is a dilemma, that an effort to develop and promote a new and ambiguous endeavor like nature tourism cannot be left to its own momentum without leadership. While the intent to create a unified and cooperative effort is recognizable in these seven recommendations, they are not realistic in that responsibilities among state institutions are not clearly outlined. A review of progress, at the state level, reveals that only the first suggestion has been accomplished—

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and only in a rudimentary fashion. Our experience is that lack of coordination is the primary contributing factor.

Government Agency Efforts to Develop Nature Tourism

Efforts to develop nature tourism in Texas are being supported by several different agencies. However, at the agency level it is difficult to separate efforts to promote general tourism from nature tourism. TxDOT and the Dept. of Economic Development, two of the major agencies involved with supporting nature tourism development, do not specifically have programs aimed at nature tourism development. Their efforts

Task Responsible Org. Current Status

1. Step by step handbook	TPWD, LCRA, TAMU, and TNTA	Completed, but very general, not a specific how-to handbook.
2. Training and outreach	None specified; however, current efforts involve TNTA, TPWD, TDED, TAMU, and SWTSU	Needs assessment initiated in late 1998 by TAMU, SWTSU, TPWD, TDED and TNTA but resources are insufficient to meet demand.
3. Development of local tourism infrastructure	None specified. TPWD, TxDOT, THC and local communities are taking initiative.	The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail established an identifiable nature tourism infrastructure along the Texas coast. Communities are participating, but state support beyond trail establishment is limited. State supported birding trails in other parts of the state are being proposed.
4. Hospitality and opportunity training	None specified. TDED, TxDOT, TPWD, and universities are making individual efforts.	Community Workshop Series for Tourism Development coordinated by TDED includes workshop topic on nature/culture/heritage tourism as one of eight topics. TAMU conducted workshop entitled <i>Marketing natural resources through recreation and tourism enterprises</i> as part of a series to assist landowners develop nature tourism.

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5. Financial assistance	None specified. TPWD, and TGLO offer some assistance to landowners and communities.	Programs specifically designed to fund nature tourism efforts have not been established. TPWD's Landowner Incentive Program provides funding for protection of rare plants or animals. TGLO's Texas Coastal Management Program provides grants that include support for waterfront revitalization and ecotourism development.
6. Product and infrastructure identification for sustainable growth and conservation.	None identified. SWTSU TAMU, TPWD, and TDED are making individual efforts.	Coordinated effort is lacking. To date a piece-meal effort being conducted by each agency. Currently efforts are being developed between these entities to advance this task.
7. Program development about importance of nature protection.	None identified. TPWD, TDED, TAMU, SWTSU, TxDOT, TGLO	All programs being developed inherently address this.

Table 1. Summary of progress on educational tasks outlined by the State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism

focus on general tourism development. However, requests for assistance in nature tourism development are increasing (Tumlinson-Page 1999; Campbell 1999;

Table 2 provides an overview of programs that are currently in place in the agencies involved in nature tourism development. The Parks and Wildlife Dept. has had the most significant impact since about 1991. Before that time the Parks and Wildlife Dept. did not fully recognize its role in tourism development, but the current Executive Director is a strong proponent of nature tourism, including private sector activities (Howdeshell 1999, personal communication). Programs within the other state agencies have not significantly changed. With the Parks and Wildlife Dept., however, the programs or projects outlined in Table 2 have developed primarily during the 1990's. Additional activities related to nature

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tourism are occurring, but at this stage they are not formally recognized as programs.

The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail: a Success Story

One of the most ambitious nature tourism endeavors in the state is The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail (hereafter birding trail). Developed by TxDOT and the Parks and Wildlife Dept., and funded through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), the trail consists of nearly 300 birding sites located along the Texas Gulf Coast (TPWD 1996b). This nature tourism attraction has brought together government agencies, communities, corporations, and private landowners. The goals of the birding trail are to protect wildlife habitat, raise people's environmental awareness, and provide economic support for communities. Birds can be viewed in various habitats along the Texas coast from sites that are accessible from public roadways. The trail was developed in three sections. The Central Coast Section was completed in 1995. The Upper and Lower Coast sections were completed in the spring and fall of 1999 respectively. The assumption underlying the birding trail was

Next Page—**Table 2.** Nature tourism programs within Texas State agencies

Agency	Programs & Services	Characteristic
Parks and Wildlife Dept.	The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail (with TxDOT)	Trail developed as a marketing platform to benefit communities and enhance habitat protection (Campbell 1999). Trail consists of 300+ birding “sites” located along public roadways. Map provides directions, local information and interpretation (TPWD (a)).
	Great Texas Birding Classic	Birdwatching competition held along the birding trail to promote it and raise money to establish more wildlife habitat (TPWD (a)).
	Technical assistance	Staff training to be initiated in Spring 2000 (TPWD (c)).

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	World Birding Center	Currently under development and International in scope, the mission of the birding center is to “significantly increase the appreciation, understanding and conservation of birds, wildlife, habitat and Texas' natural heritage...(TPWD (d)).”
	Texas Conservation Passport	Park users get free or reduced rates on park fees, camping and programs. Additionally, programs are held at state parks, state historical parks and other cooperating areas (TPWD (b)).
Dept. of Economic Development	Community workshop series for tourism development	Workshops held in each of the seven tourism regions of the state. Designed to assist rural areas with tourism development. Participants include chambers of commerce, councils of government, tourism councils, city managers, etc.
	Market research	Tourism Division captures tourism data and is beginning to track statistics about nature related activities (Jackson 1999, personal communication).
TxDOT	Travel Division, Information Services	Produce and disseminate informational books and brochures to travelers through travel information centers and other outlets.
	Grants program	Provide funding to community enhancement projects.
General Land Office	Texas Coastal Management Program	Provides financial assistance for coastal protection including projects associated with nature tourism.

that the State could create regional marketing “packages” for the communities along the Texas coast that would result in local economic development and interest to promote the

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protection of bird habitat (Eubanks 1999, personal communication).

The Birding Trail is an impressive undertaking; however, field visits to the ninety-five sites of the Central Coast showed great variations of community involvement. Some sites appear to be underutilized. Nonetheless, the Birding Trail is, and will continue to be, an innovative and unparalleled endeavor.

Memorandum of Understanding

One of the greatest obstacles for coordinated tourism development efforts has been the requirement to establish Memorandum of Understanding (hereafter MOU) between state agencies involved in tourism including the Dept. of Economic Development, TxDOT, the Parks and Wildlife Dept., the Historical Commission, and the Arts Commission. These agencies are all members of the Texas State Agency Tourism Council. The Tourism Council was established in 1988 on a voluntary basis to coordinate activities of the various state agencies to meet the travel and tourism mission of the state of Texas. In their efforts to accomplish this mission, a strategic plan was developed that contained an MOU. The first MOU was originally intended to provide a voluntary basis to clarify relationships with the goal of eliminating waste and duplication of services--in the interest of saving the State money and to coordinate efforts on a statewide basis (Howdeshell 1999, personal communication). The first MOU was created in the Strategic Travel and Tourism Plan of 1990. Table 3 lists the MOUs that have or will be signed between state agencies in Texas. The impact of the MOUs increased significantly in 1993 when the Texas Department of Commerce was created by the state legislature. Under this legislation, the Dept. of Commerce was directed to enter a MOU with TxDOT and the Parks and Wildlife Dept.

Before the MOU was signed it had to be adopted as administrative code within each of the agencies which, by itself, was a year-long process. After two years of work defining the roles for tourism development, the MOU was signed. In this MOU the Dept. of Commerce was identified as the “advertising agency” responsible for promoting tourism, TxDOT was identified as the agency responsible for travel information centers, publishing and distributing travel literature, and the Parks and Wildlife Dept. was

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Date MOU initiated and signed	Agencies affected	Motivation	Agreement reached
1990	Dept. of Commerce (currently TDED) and TxDOT	Voluntary to minimize duplication of services	Each agency would cooperate in the development of tourism publications to eliminate waste of state monies.
1993—signed 1995	Dept. of Commerce, TxDOT and Parks and Wildlife Dept.	Mandated by State Legislature	Legally defined roles for promoting the State as a travel destination and to provide services to travelers (TDOC 1995).
1997—signed Oct. 1998	Dept. of Economic Development and TxDOT	Mandated by State Legislature—Senate Bill 932	Restructured TDOC into TDED and transferred responsibility for publishing from TxDOT to TDED. MOU reached to allow TxDOT to continue as publisher—TDED should have input into production (Section 481.028(b) Government Code) (Seventy-fifth Texas Legislature 1997).
1999--Pending	Dept. of Economic Development, TxDOT, Parks and Wildlife Dept., Historical Commission, and Arts Commission	Riders attached to appropriations bill	Pending

Table 3. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) entered for tourism development between Texas State agencies

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identified as the agency responsible for nature tourism development and outreach (Howdeshell 1999, personal communication).

A final MOU was mandated by the Texas Legislature during the 1999 legislative session. Riders were attached to the state agency appropriations bill that directed all five major tourism agencies (TDED, TxDOT, TPWD, THC, and TCA) to enter into a new MOU about responsibilities for tourism development (Howdeshell 1999, personal communication). Based on the experience from the previous MOUs, it is apparent that it will be some time before there is a clear understanding of each agency's responsibility.

The MOUs have had a major impact on the efficacy of state agencies involved with tourism development because they have the force of administrative law, as required by the Legislature in 1993. This has forced the agencies to be very deliberate and limits their potential to respond quickly to a rapidly evolving industry.

Texas State Agency Tourism Council

The Tourism Council is comprised of the Dept. of Economic Development, TxDOT, the Parks and Wildlife Dept., the Historical Commission, the Arts Commission, the Dept. of Agriculture, the Dept. of Public Safety, the General Land Office and Texas A&M Univ. Designed to provide a venue for discussion, the Tourism Council has produced the Strategic Travel and Tourism Plan (Tourism Plan) which is a document that has been produced every two years since 1988 (TSATC 1994). The Tourism Plan lays out goals, strategies, and responsibilities for the state as a whole and for each of the participating state agencies. Originally, the role of the Tourism Council was to oversee tourism literature and eliminate redundancy in printed materials produced by TxDOT and the Dept. of Economic Development. Since its inception the membership of the council has expanded to include every state agency that has any relationship to tourism.

The first MOU was established out of the Tourism Council's Tourism Plan of 1990. From this assessment it is apparent that the Tourism Council has been prevented from making significant contributions to nature tourism development due to changing legislation. As with coordinated tourism development efforts in the State, the efficacy of the Tourism Council and its efforts have been stifled by the MOUs.

Texas Nature Tourism Association

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Among the recommendations of the State Task Force was the establishment of a non-profit industry organization to be called the Texas Nature Tourism Association. The Nature Tourism Association was established in 1995 as an educational subsidiary of the Texas Travel Industry Association. The Nature Tourism Association was formed to: “...educate individuals and communities on 1) How to expand their income through nature tourism; and 2) How to utilize and preserve their natural resources for benefit and enjoyment” (TNTA 1999). The State Task Force further outlined specific tasks to be accomplished by the Nature Tourism Association. Table 4 lists these tasks and provides a brief evaluation of progress to date.

Membership of the Nature Tourism Association includes landowners, tourism managers, regulatory agencies, tour operators, guides, conservation groups, chambers of commerce, convention and visitors bureaus and service providers. In early 1999 the Nature Tourism Association Board of Directors voted to dissolve the Nature Tourism Association as a separate organization and fold it into the Travel Industry

Association. It is now called the Texas Nature Tourism Council and operates as a committee within the Travel Industry Association. Functionally, the organization has lost virtually all of its momentum.

It was not successful for several reasons. The Travel Industry Association provided financial and administrative support and originally hired a dynamic retired tourism professional for a short time to serve as Executive Director. This individual jump-started the organization, but when his term was complete there was no one to continue his work with the same level of energy and dedication. The second problem was financial. The Board of Directors felt that the membership fee should be kept low to encourage wider membership, especially considering that many nature tourism enterprises are poorly capitalized. Fees ranged from \$25 - \$50. However, this did not generate sufficient revenue to provide valuable services to its members, so the membership steadily declined. Some people that previously participated in the Nature Tourism Association now say that the organization was a top-down structure that did

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Task	Status
1. Develop voluntary guidelines for nature tourism sites and providers	TNTA developed and adopted a voluntary Code of Ethics for its members.
2. Assist in the promotion of nature tourism in Texas	TNTA held three annual conferences and organized regional workshops. Lack of resources prevented TNTA from meeting the state-wide need for technical assistance.
3. Assist in developing and coordinating an overall marketing strategy and individual marketing elements for nature tourism	The agencies with the responsibility and resources for overall tourism marketing did not have a specialized emphasis on nature tourism.
4. Establish a Texas Nature Tourism Information Center to provide centralized access for those seeking nature tourism and travel information.	Web page established that provides links to information sources and a searchable database of destinations in the state. Requires more research to include resources that are not currently listed.
5. Conduct demonstration programs in various regions of the state to show the benefits of nature tourism.	TNTA developed a curriculum for workshops, but did not have the resources to conduct them state-wide.

Table 4. Tasks to be completed by the Texas Nature Tourism Association

not gain the confidence of the people it was intended to serve. There is now some discussion among nature tourism professionals to start a new organization perhaps regionally based rather than state- wide. In summary, the Nature Tourism Association did not provide services that justified even its minimal cost.

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University Efforts to Develop Nature Tourism

Two universities, Texas A&M Univ. and Southwest Texas State Univ., are developing programs to address the growing demand for information, research and services for nature tourism development. Table 5 outlines programs that have been initiated.

The Landowner Assistance Program developed by Texas A&M Univ. is probably the most positive movement towards addressing some of the educational suggestions outlined by the State Task Force. The program began with an intensive effort to listen

to the potential audience—What information do they need, what are the best means for them to access information, how will they use that information? The program is now developing means to meet the needs of its audience.

The Center for Nature and Heritage Tourism at Southwest Texas State Univ. developed in 1997 out of a recognized need for information, research, and a supply of professionals that could enter the workforce of this burgeoning industry. It focuses on product development and management, with a special emphasis on interpretation.

Community Nature Tourism Development

Rural Texas communities have increasingly sought ways to diversify their economies, due to the oil and real estate crisis of the 1980's and the early 1990's (Var 1997). Represented primarily by chambers of commerce and convention and visitors bureaus, these communities have become active in promoting the special character of their communities through nature tourism. Several successful community-based

nature tourism activities are being sponsored across the state. Bird festivals are one of the best examples of community sponsored and coordinated initiatives as can be seen in Table 6.

Many communities include both public-sector and private-sector nature tourism attractions as a major part of their tourism promotion. Table 7 is a sample of Internet websites of Texas communities promoting nature tourism.

Private Sector Activities

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The previous discussion should not suggest that enterprise level nature tourism development is not occurring in Texas. In the private sector ranchers and other landowners are undertaking entrepreneurial nature tourism endeavors to supplement their income. Some success stories are in the making. Table 8 describes a few examples.

Program	Status
Landowner Assistance Program, Texas A&M Univ.	<p>Conducted assessment workshops (in Kerrville, TX) in late 1998 for landowners. Participants identified and ranked informational needs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing Education and information Attitudes and psychology Liability Operations Federal and state government resources <p>First landowner workshop on marketing held in early 1999, subsequent workshops and demo- web site launched in the fall of 1999.</p>
Center for Nature and Heritage Tourism, Southwest Texas	<p>Established to facilitate the development of nature and heritage tourism in Texas by conducting research on critical topics and to provide information and assistance to landowners and communities.</p>

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<p>Minor in Nature and Heritage Tourism, Southwest Texas State Univ.</p>	<p>An interdisciplinary minor that prepares students for professional work as program planners, developers, and managers.</p>
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Table 5. University efforts to assist nature tourism development

Attwater’s Prairie Chicken Festival (Eagle Lake, April)
Bluebird Festival, (Wills Point, April)
Eagle Fest, (Emory, January)
Hummer/Bird Celebration, (Rockport/Fulton, September)
Migration Celebration, (Lake Jackson, April)
Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival (Harlingen, November)
A Celebration of Flight (Corpus Christi, September)
The Great Texas Birding Classic (Texas Coast, April)
Texas Tropics Nature Festival (McAllen, April)
Songbird Festival (Lago Vista, May)
Celebration of Whooping Cranes & Other Birds Port Aransas, February)

Source: TPWD (d)

Table 6. Texas Bird Festivals

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Name	Attractions/Activities	Website
Aransas Pass, Texas	Wildlife Refuge, national seashore birding, fishing	http://www.aransaspass.org/
Bandera, Texas	Birding, horseback riding, hunting	http://www.tourtexas.com/bandera/
Beaumont, Texas	State park, preserves, coastal areas, etc./ birding, canoeing, hunting, fresh and saltwater fishing, etc.	http://www.beaumontcvb.com/
Burnet, Texas	Walking/hiking, hunting, fishing, camping, climbing	http://www.burnetchamber.org/main.htm
Fredericksburg, Texas	State Park and Wildlife Management Area walking, hiking, biking, bat watching	http://www.fredericksburgtexas.net/fun.htm

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Harlingen, Texas	Wildlife refuges, sanctuaries, and state park/birding festival, bird and wildlife watching, etc.	http://www.harlingen.com/Default.asp
Luling, Texas	State Park. Camping, bird watching, nature study, photography	http://www.bcsnet.net/lulingcc/
Marfa, Texas	Birdwatching, photography, hiking, hunting	http://www.iglobal.net/marfacoc/
Port Arthur, Texas	Birding, fishing, Great Texas Birding Classic	http://www.portarthurtexas.com/pavb/new.htm
San Angelo, Texas	Guest and working ranches, state parks, historical sites, numerous nature related activities	http://www.sanangelo-tx.com/highindex.html

Table 7. Texas communities promoting nature tourism on the Internet

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Name	Activities	Location	Internet Address
B Bar B Ranch	Guest ranch, wildl and birdwatching, hunting, fishing	Kingsville, Texas	http://www.b-bar-b.com
Continental Ranch II	Petroglyph site (ancient rock carvings) custom tours can include birds and wildlife in their natural habitat, native desert plants	Del Rio, Texas	http://www.tourtexas.com/@txtrailbig.html
The Friday Ranch	Guest ranch, wildlife refuge, wildlife watching	Uvalde, Texas	http://www.fridayranch.com/
Hummer House/ Brown Ranch	Guest cottage, birdwatching, wildlife viewing	San Angelo, Texas	http://www.sanangelo-tx.com/highindex.html
King Ranch	Bird and wildlife watching, and nature tours	Kingsville, Texas	http://www.king-ranch.com/visit.htm
Lamesa 6 Ranch	Working ranch	San Angelo, Texas	http://www.sanangelo-tx.com/highindex.html
X Bar Ranch	Guest ranch, horseback riding, mountain biking, hiking, bird and wildlife watching	Eldorado, Texas	http://www.xbarranch.com

Table 8. Nature tourism enterprises in Texas

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These enterprises are being developed in many forms. Some ranchers are expanding on already developed hunting programs, while others are focusing on non-consumptive activities like bird or wildlife watching. In any case, these entrepreneurs are leading a “grass-roots” effort to take advantage of the growing popularity of nature tourism. However, in most cases these efforts are small-scale, new start-ups. It may be too early to make an overly optimistic prognosis. Experience in the areas of marketing, legal issues, business planning and general resource management is necessary for these individual operators to move forward with confidence.

Overlooked Issues

Both resource management/protection and interpretation have been almost completely overlooked as Texas has promoted nature tourism as a form of economic development. However, our country’s long experience with public-sector nature tourism in state and national parks tells us that these are critical issues that should be given high priority.

Resource management/protection is especially critical because the entrepreneurial character of nature tourism may lead to overuse of sites. There are very few regulations that govern wildlife watching. Ranchers and other landowners may not have funds to spend on resource monitoring, as is common in state and national parks. In addition, the management methods that are used in the public sector may not be directly transferable to the private sector. If a rancher depends on income from wildlife watching to secure the ranch’s debt, he/she may not financially be able to close an area to let it regenerate, as is the case in a public area. Research into alternative and appropriate management methods is essential.

Interpretation, or lack thereof, is a problem because many landowners are not trained in either the substantive content or the methods of interpretation, yet interpretation is the core content of nature tourism. At present, neither the state agencies nor the universities have the resources or the responsibility to help private landowners develop this essential aspect of nature tourism.

Development Strategies

Texas is recognized as a leader in nature tourism development (Var 1997); however, from this analysis of its progress, it is apparent that much remains to be done. The educational

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objectives outlined by the State Task Force can still provide a satisfactory framework for development strategies. However, because of the dynamic character of nature tourism, and because of the constraints created by the MOUs on state agency efforts, universities should take the lead to develop alternative mechanisms to advance these efforts. To accomplish this the following items can provide some developmental guidelines.

- Coordinate and develop ways to provide technical assistance in feasibility analysis, planning, marketing, management, and resource protection to communities and landowners
- Establish or stimulate mechanisms for coordinated and cooperative marketing
- Conduct applied research in marketing, product development, interpretation, and resource management.

As discussed in the previous sections, various efforts are being made to address some of these issues. However, these efforts are not well coordinated or well-funded. No organization has clear responsibility or authority, so the efforts are diffuse.

Further Research

More research is needed about nature tourism development, operation, and management. Case-study research of enterprise-level nature tourism operations would help identify the ingredients for success and would be invaluable for the continued development of Texas A&M Univ.'s landowner assistance program. This research would help to identify a set of measurable objectives for a coordinated statewide effort, specifically focusing on the needs of landowners and ranchers. In addition, a clearer understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of rural citizens would help to meet their needs. Research should be conducted to profile their attitudes to discover the potential stumbling blocks for accomplishing the suggestions outlined by the State Task Force.

Communities should also be given priority. Currently communities are asking for assistance to better utilize their nature tourism resources. Tourism planners, on the other hand, are “being asked to use greater community participation in tourism planning”

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(Simmons 1994: 98). However, Simmons (1994: 106) discovered that the “public’s knowledge of tourism appears, at best, to be barely adequate to instill confidence in the soundness of their contribution. Public education therefore has a key role to play...” in tourism planning. Nonetheless, the importance of community participation is commonly understood because the positive and negative impacts of tourism are most apparent at the level of the destination (Simmons 1994). In addition, more research should be conducted on those communities that have capitalized on nature tourism and what is learned should be provided to assist other communities in the State.

Conclusions

A first result of this fact-finding effort has been to identify the next step in this development process. The authors recognize the need to go to the people involved or interested in nature tourism development and ask them what the next step should be. Further research being planned is a *Delphi study* (Sackman 1974; Sheldon and Var 1985; Erffmeyer, Erffmeyer and Lane 1986) to gather input from three critical groups in nature tourism development: communities, landowners, and outfitters. Instead of having the State develop another “agenda,” it seems logical to let the “grass-roots” identify the critical next-steps in this process.

On the other hand, the state of Texas has taken on the task of addressing the issues of nature tourism development, and regardless of the institutional and political challenges that it faces, it is quite clear that it should continue to forge ahead in these efforts. It is apparent that the economic, cultural and environmental benefits that can be reaped justify a patient and persistent effort--not to mention the potential negative environmental repercussions that could result from an unmonitored and unplanned nature tourism development process. In light of these issues, this overview highlights the following recommendations for state level efforts:

- Effective coordination between government agencies and NGO’s
- Appropriate division of labor between government, NGO’S, communities and the private sector
- Commitment of resources for R&D, technical assistance, and marketing

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- On-going marketing and evaluation
- On-going research on interpretation, resource protection, development, management, cost & benefits, and marketing

Tourism is an ambiguous and difficult field of development (Smith 1997). Nature tourism, as a form of economic development at the community and individual level, is even more ambiguous in terms of responsibilities. The State of Texas and the various organizations in the state have ventured into these uncharted waters and have learned a great deal. As in any exploration, there have been some false starts and surprises. The effort here has been to set these efforts in context, learn what can be learned and set the stage for the next phase of the exploration.

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