

**STATEMENT OF
PATRICK T. LONG, ED.D.
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DIVISION OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES
EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA**

**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, MANUFACTURING AND
TRADE
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

MAY 16, 2012

Sustainability in Tourism
“Balancing Profitability and Social and Environmental Responsibility”

Highlights

- Sustainability should be an ethic embedded in all policies and activities of the U.S. tourism industry. Three effective venues to affect change within tourism in the use of energy, in waste and water management and in how visitors interact with host residents, are through business operations, public policy and personal traveler behaviors.
- Tourism companies typically are motivated to adopt sustainable strategies in order to 1) decrease costs/improve profits; 2) create greater brand recognition; 3) enhance reputation; 4) increase market share; 5) increase employee loyalty and cost savings; 6) contribute to the well-being of the community; and, 7) improve relationships/meet regulations with governmental entities.
- Successful rural tourism communities are finding that beauty pays, that sustainable tourism provides more benefits than mass-market tourism, that retaining community character is a key to economic success, and that thoughtful management of public resources and well-planned development can help prosperity occur.
- To develop a tourism industry that is both successful and sustainable requires careful consideration of five main components. These components include: (1) *tourism resources*, (2) *traveler services*, (3) *infrastructure*, (4) *tourist markets*, and (5) the concerted effort to accommodate the needs and expectations of the *host community*.
- Sustainable tourism development places great emphasis on identifying, analyzing, and enhancing the characteristics and processes that give destinations a unique character. Such character can serve as the foundation for both an improved resident assessment of quality of living as well as an enhanced economy by attracting visitors and their expenditures.
- Although jobs are paramount in the thinking of many, tourism will not be considered an acceptable economic development strategy, if it does not serve the needs of local residents in preserving and honoring what is held most dear—and that is their “community” and those elements and components that contribute to their sense of place.

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“Where the Jobs Are: Promoting Tourism to America.”

Chairman Bono Mack, Ranking Member Butterfield, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments today.

I am Patrick Long, Founding Director of the Center for Sustainable Tourism previously located at the University of Colorado at Boulder and now located at East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina. We are the only such research Center in the United States and host the nation’s only interdisciplinary graduate degree program in sustainable tourism. I am also a past chair and past president of the National Rural Tourism Foundation (NRTF) authorized by Congress under the Tourism Policy and Export Promotion Act of 1992.

I am speaking today to the topic of **Sustainability in Tourism--Balancing Profitability and Social and Environmental Responsibility**. Let me start my comments noting there is nothing more unsustainable than a bankrupted business! Nor is there a tourism destination in the world that attracts visitors with its polluted water or air, with a trash infested beach or mountain, or that features poor stewardship of its natural resources, that has offensive or no hospitality, that destroys its community sense of place and that treats its employees and the residents of the region with disdain. One question I frequently ask those I speak to is “What are we going to rename Glacier National Park now that only 23 of the original 150 plus glaciers are left.” This move to sustainability in our tourism industry recognizes that economic gain and job growth quickly goes away if the tourism product is not protected—this sustainability is of particular importance to our rural communities rich in tradition, heritage, culture and natural environment.

Thus, I offer you this working definition of **Sustainable Tourism**: *Sustainable tourism should contribute to a balanced and healthy economy by generating tourism-related jobs, revenues, and taxes while protecting and enhancing the destination’s social, historical, cultural, built, and natural resources, for the enjoyment of both residents and visitors.*

There is not a sector of the tourism industry today whether accommodations, transportation, public lands, tour operators, the cruise line or ski industries, that is not embracing sustainable practices in an effort to save money, increase profits, or simply because it is in the best interests of the local, national and world environment. In fact, I would like to note that Marriott International, Inc., also testifying today stated in its Sustainability Report Update 2010 that: "As global travel increases, Marriott has an obligation to ease our business impact on the natural environment. Because we strive to operate our hotels more efficiently, we are committed to offering our communities an opportunity for a better and more sustainable future. Their stated environmental goals are to:

- Further reduce energy and water consumption by 25 percent per available room by 2017;
- Create green construction standards for hotel developers;
- Green our multibillion dollar supply chain;
- Educate associates and guests to support the environment;
- Invest in innovative conservation initiatives including rainforest protection and water conservation."

I would also like to note Madam Chair, that Palm Desert has been identified as a city dedicated to eco-friendly design and initiatives. The city is leading the way in several key environmental areas including energy efficiency, recycling, water conservation and sustainable development and was recently named one of the top five cities on the leading edge of energy efficiencies in the United States by the Natural Resources Defense Council. I have to assume that this is spilling over into the many and varied products of the City's travel and tourism industry.

Probably the three most powerful ways to affect change within tourism are through business operations, public policy and personal traveler behaviors. Tourism companies typically are motivated to adopt sustainable strategies in order to 1) decrease costs/improve profits; 2) create greater brand recognition; 3) enhance reputation; 4) increase market share; 5) increase

employee loyalty and cost savings; 6) contribute to the well-being of the community; and, 7) improve relationships/meet regulations with governmental entities.

The following action areas provide opportunities for engaging in sustainable practices in tourism:

1. **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Management and Reduction.** Air and ground transportation alone are two of the largest contributors of greenhouse gas emissions effecting global climate change. By decreasing greenhouse gas emissions you can reduce global warming and promote energy independence from foreign non-renewable sources.
2. **Solid Waste Management, Reduction, Reuse and Recycling.** By minimizing the amount of solid waste that goes to landfills and incinerators you can reduce negative environmental impacts. Most importantly, minimizing waste will limit the amount of greenhouse gases that are released throughout a product's life cycle of extraction, manufacturing, distribution, use and disposal.
3. **Freshwater Consumption Reduction.** It's often stated that water will become the most sought-after natural resource of the 21st Century with water scarcity already a reality throughout the world. Reducing your level of water consumption will help to reduce your operating costs while helping to conserve this precious resource.
4. **Wastewater Management.** Conserving water not only means reducing consumption but also maintaining and monitoring the quality of the water we put back into the environment. The purpose of wastewater management is to protect aquatic ecosystems and increase the availability of potable water for human consumption and use.
5. **Energy Efficiency, Conservation and Management.** By investing in renewable energy technologies such as solar, wind, hydro and thermal power and integrating energy efficiency practices into your operations, you can reduce greenhouse gases. Integrating energy efficiency practices into your operations will help conserve natural resources and reduce operational costs by 10-20%, providing a quick return for taking simple actions.
6. **Ecosystem and Biodiversity Conservation.** Business activities undoubtedly affect our ecosystems and biodiversity. Biodiversity provides us with life-sustaining systems such as clean air, productive ecosystems, fresh water and fertile soil. We also depend on healthy, diverse gene pools for our understanding of medicine, science and for our own survival. Ecosystem and biodiversity conservation helps to maintain the delicate ecological balance of the planet.
7. **Land Use Planning and Management.** Establishing land use planning strategies and management plans in conjunction with stakeholders will help to reshape and guide community land use decisions toward sustainability and quality of life, benefiting everyone. Exercising your influence to protect the environment and enhance the well-being of local

communities through land use planning and management will help to ensure your business positively impacts both.

8. **Air Quality Protection and Noise Reduction.** We're all exposed to environmental pollutants and related health risks almost every day of our lives. Though some risks are almost unavoidable, by ensuring that your air is clean and that your noise levels do not adversely affect others you can take action to address the less visible impacts your business may have on its surroundings.
9. **Preserving the Social Norms and Cultures of Local and Indigenous Communities.** Socio-cultural sustainability is achieved when businesses make a concerted effort to work with local people to maintain and protect the social structures as well as the cultures of the local communities where they operate. The best way to find out what impacts you are having on the local community where your business operates is to create opportunities for them to provide you with feedback.
10. **Providing Economic Benefits to Local and Indigenous Communities.** Economic sustainability is achieved in part when businesses actively contribute to the economic well being of the local communities where they operate without adversely affecting other aspects of local people's lives. Tourism has the potential to support community development including providing jobs, educational and professional training opportunities, health care, and environmental stewardship.
11. **Responsible Purchasing.** One of the most powerful ways you and your business can help make the world a better place is to vote with your dollars through responsible purchasing. Responsible purchasing, also known as green purchasing and environmentally preferable purchasing includes buying locally produced products and services from locally owned businesses as well as purchasing products that have a reduced environmental impact.
12. **Training and Education for Employees and Clients.** Educating your customers and training your employees is a critical component to achieving your goals and objectives. Through educating customers and training employees on the current sustainability policies and the related goals and objectives, you are improving your chances for a successful sustainability management system. Both the employees and the clients need to understand what your actions are, why they are important, and how they can positively contribute to your overall sustainability effort.

Specific to rural communities, particularly those adjacent to our Federal recreational lands and often referred to as "Gateway Communities", the importance of sustainable or green actions is paramount. Good stewardship of the region outside a park is just as important as inside it. While the towns and cities of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, Seward, Alaska, Bar Harbor, Maine, each has highly varied history, climate, culture and terrain they all

have one important thing in common. Each of them is a close neighbor to a large national park that draws tens of thousands of tourists each year. They are not just important for their growing role in providing food, lodging, transportation and other business support for visitors but also as portals to cherished landscapes such as Yellowstone, Great Smoky Mountains, Kenai Fjords and Acadia National Parks.

You find gateway communities all across America, and they are increasingly popular places in which to live, work, vacation and retire. Communities with natural beauty and a high quality of life are magnets for businesses, working families and retirees. But rapid growth and popularity with visitors can place stress on communities. Here are just two examples:

- Bar Harbor, Maine, the gateway to Acadia National Park, has a population of 5,000 but sees 2.5 million tourists a year, most during the short summer season.
- Rural land near Bozeman, Mont., outside Yellowstone National Park, has gone from \$600 per acre in 1981 to more than \$20,000 an acre today.

Many groups including the Urban Land Institute and The Conservation Fund are working with communities across the country to create strategies that preserve their unique heritage while growing their economy and preserving their appeal. Here's what they've learned:

- The vast majority of residents, new and old, feel a strong attachment to the landscape and the character of their town. They want a healthy economy, but not at the expense of their natural surroundings or community character.
- Elected officials and residents want to find ways to preserve what they love about their communities without saying no to jobs and economic development.
- Across America, there are communities that have found that economic prosperity does not demand degraded surroundings, loss of community character or becoming a congested tourist trap.
- Successful communities are finding that the opposite is true: that beauty pays, that sustainable tourism provides more benefits than mass-market tourism, that retaining community character is a key to economic success, and that thoughtful management of public resources and well-planned development can help prosperity occur.

No matter where your community is located, there are two things to keep in mind. First, special places do not remain that way by accident, and second, whether fast or slow, change will

occur. Tourism has the capacity for substantial economic, environmental and social benefits and costs, and its effects, positive and negative, can be felt even more in tourism-dominated destinations that have not planned effectively.

Generically, to be successful in tourism, a community or region must be able to capture and maintain the interest of potential visitors, provide reasonable access and basic human services, meet needs for safety and security, and demonstrate relatively intense levels of hospitality. To develop a tourism industry that is both successful and sustainable requires careful consideration of five main components¹. These components include: (1) *tourism resources*, (2) *traveler services*, (3) *infrastructure*, (4) *tourist markets*, and (5) the concerted effort to accommodate the needs of the *host community*.

Tourism resources may be defined as natural and man-made, scenic, scientific, cultural, historic, and recreational attractions and amenities, as well as interpretive, educational, and recreational programs and special events that are managed specifically for use by various publics. *Traveler services* provide the visitor with accommodations, food and beverage, modes of transportation (bus, taxi, train, aircraft, boat and bicycle), shopping, access to emergency care, information about the area, and friendly and knowledgeable assistance. *Infrastructure* means suitable utilities (water, sewer, and electric), communication, and transportation access such as roads, airports, railways, and waterways. *Tourist markets* are the consumers (and users) of the tourism product. Understanding who the potential visitors are, where they come from, what they are interested in seeing and doing and how much they are willing to pay for these experiences are important visitor characteristics that can be often overlooked. Knowledge of existing and potential tourist markets will greatly improve an area's chances for success.

¹ See "Organizing Resources for Tourism Development in Rural Areas" accessible at: <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/sustainabletourism/Rural-Tourism.cfm> under Organizing Resources.

Finally, and most important, is the *host community or region*. Developing a tourism industry directly and indirectly affects the entire community. Both tourism and non-tourism businesses as well as the local citizenry all have the potential of being positively or negatively impacted as a result of tourism, and thus play a key role in the industry's success. In addition, the quality of the host-guest relationship plays a major part in determining the overall quality of the visitor's travel experience and his or her perception of the community. For tourism to succeed, efforts must be made to contribute to, rather than disrupt, the local quality of life. Taking all five of these components into account is essential when developing tourism in order to ensure a successful and sustainable tourism industry.

So, what we should be shooting for are sustainable tourism destinations that are implementing green practices and that highly value their community sense of place (a cross-disciplinary concept that recognizes the many ways in which places take on special meaning to people). Sustainable tourism development places great emphasis on identifying, analyzing, and enhancing the characteristics and processes that give destinations a unique character. Such character can serve as the foundation for both an improved resident assessment of quality of living as well as an enhanced economy by attracting visitors and their expenditures. Factors that impact and contribute to a distinctive sense of place are varied. A few examples include:

- Migration, demographics, and class dynamics;
- Transportation, housing, and workforce issues;
- Community political relations and civic culture;
- Ecosystems, climate, natural resources, and environmental planning;
- Heritage, traditions, and histories;
- Architectural design and landscape aesthetics;
- Recreational and leisure opportunities;
- Public health, recreation, and wellness;
- Fine/performing arts and place-defining literature and music;
- Marketing and promotional strategies;
- Business and entrepreneurial development; and
- Smart growth.

Communities with a distinctive sense of place often enjoy greater quality of living and attract more visitors. However, the impacts of tourism in amenity-rich destinations often dominate decisions regarding the community's economy, environment, and culture. At the forefront of such a tourism-oriented economic structure are issues related to land use, real estate prices, cost of living, transportation, business diversification, workforce availability, water quality, and the environment.

The Center for Sustainable Tourism is aggressively addressing the sustainability of the tourism industry, particularly the balance of the Triple Bottom Line that includes the economy, the environment and the socio-cultural community aspects, through a number of initiatives.

These include:

- Development and promotion of the U.S. Travel Care Code (www.travelcarecode.org)
- NCGreenTravel (www.NCGreenTravel.org)
- RETI-Renewable Energy in Tourism (www.renewabletourism.com)
- Climate, Weather and Tourism (www.climateandtourism.org)
- RESET-Race, Ethnicity and Social Equity in Tourism (<http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/sustainabletourism/RESET-Initiative.cfm>)
- Community Sense of Place (<http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/sustainabletourism/Community-Sense-of-Place-Initiative.cfm>)
- Sustainable Practices in Tourism (<http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/sustainabletourism/Sustainable-Tourism-Practices.cfm>)
- Engagement and Community Outreach (<http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/sustainabletourism/Engagement.cfm>)
- Master of Science in Sustainable Tourism (www.mastersofsustainabletourism.org)

Although containing universal elements, these initiatives all have particular relevance to the further development of tourism in Eastern North Carolina. Although rich in natural resources with a history and culture influenced by water, both inland and coastal, Eastern North Carolina faces many challenges in establishing a regional brand, and in attracting, efficiently moving, and serving, its tourists. Although jobs are paramount in the thinking of many, tourism will not be considered an acceptable economic development strategy, if it does not serve the needs of local

residents in preserving and honoring what is held most dear—and that is their “community” and those elements and components that contribute to their sense of place.

Regarding sustainability or green practices, District 1 in North Carolina, represented by the Honorable G.K. Butterfield, is rapidly adopting actions that are more energy efficient, conserve precious water resources, reflects well on the tourism business interaction with the community, and that further the sustainability brand for the region thus improving its image to the to more “green” discerning traveler. Three such tourism entities include Mother Earth Brewery in Kinston, the New Bern Riverfront Convention Center, and the Roanoke River Partners along with its recently formed Mayors Association.

Some of the Mother Earth Brewery sustainability features include:

“A six-kilowatt solar array on the roof and blue jean insulation, a 100% recyclable product, was used to insulate the walls. In addition to being a recyclable product, it also has outstanding sound barrier qualities. Soy-based spray foam insulation protects the second story ceiling. Low VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint covers the walls. The flooring wasn't ignored, either. Mother Earth Brewing's corporate offices will sport eco carpet partially made from renewable resources. Eco flush valves on toilets know just the right amount of water needed for "the job" and reduce water needed for flushing by 30%. Eco faucets in both bathrooms offer an unimaginable savings in water compared to conventional faucets. A state-of-the-art tankless water heater heats water on demand, instead of using needless energy to keep hundreds of gallons of water heated at all times.”

In New Bern at the Riverfront Convention Center, there is featured:

- Signed recycling containers
- Use of bio-degradable products or china service
- Eliminated use of plastic cups and pre-bottled items
- Donate excess food to local homeless shelters
- Use of sensor lighting turnoffs and 5-yr. fluorescents
- Hand wash faucets sensor controlled with temperature preset
- Shred office paper, and,
- Use 8-yard compactor thus reducing # of trash pickups

The Roanoke River Partners (RRP), in 1997, set out to identify their goals, establish a plan of action and incorporate as a non-profit group. Then, the hard work began. One of RRP's first and biggest projects was to create a paddle/camping trail along the river and its creeks that

would increase awareness of the treasure they called the Roanoke, *and* build infrastructure for small businesses like guides, outfitters and many others in the region, new and old. Visitors can now trace the curves of the Roanoke and its tributaries, discovering the variety of wildlife and habitats it offers and enjoying the unique experience of spending a night (or more) in the breathtaking beauty of its moss-draped back swamps on one of 14 camping platforms. In this special type of eco-tourism, the Roanoke River Paddle Trail would be the first private system of its type in the nation. Recently, a RRP Mayor's Association was formed to create a forum for collaborative regional efforts in economic development and environmental and cultural protection—an association that is now becoming a model for other rural regions wishing to benefit from tourism.