

TOURISM AGENDA-RECREATION INITIATIVE
SALTWATER ADVENTURE TRAIL
Croatan National Forest



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Project Description: The Saltwater Adventure Trail is unique in that it is the only saltwater trail in the nation. It is a water-based trail that serves as a conduit to display the unique ecosystems and history of the eastern coastal tidelands. The trip is as long as a seven-day adventure for novices, especially if they visit the points of interest along the way. The route is approximately 100 miles long and nearly circumvents the Croatan National Forest. Recreational opportunities are numerous and visitors can enjoy many different outcomes on this trail, depending upon their personal desires and interests but **the focus of this trail is adventure, exploration, accessibility and a unique setting.** Many of the features along the trail can also be accessed by a loop driving route. Much of the infrastructure along the route already exists, some of which was developed through significant partnerships. This project represents a significant opportunity to showcase and market federal, private and state owned and operated recreation opportunities in a coordinated fashion.

The Place---The Experience

Day one in our paddler's diary begins at Brices Creek:

“ Our anticipation rises as we leave the pavement and the rush of everyday life seeps into the sands to be left behind. We look forward the peace and quiet folded within the corridor of Brices Creek. Finally, we arrive at the parking area and unload the kayak from the vehicle. As we slip the kayak into the creek, a dragonfly dances for us atop the black reflective waters. We ease ourselves into the kayak and begin the journey into a world that belongs to the creatures of the forest – where we are the visitor. The laziness of the creek is intoxicating and relaxing. The water is like a mirror that reflects the beauty surrounding us. We see a turtle resting in the sun on an old log, but only for a brief moment, for as we paddle closer, it slips effortlessly into the protective blackness.



We are in awe of the beauty that surrounds us and the uniqueness of this area where water meets land. The vegetation is so green and lush that it seems like a curtain is drawn across the waters' edge. Our curiosity grows as we see what lies within this forest, where the cypress sit at the edge, their knees forming a barrier daring anyone to crawl behind the curtain. Suddenly, like a

stage curtain opening, we approach a view of the heart of the woods. A flutter of heavy wings shatters the quietness above the canopy as a flock of turkeys take flight.



There is a change in the vegetation as we leave the swamp for a brief moment and float by the higher ground where loblolly pines, maples and oaks stand like sentinels. As our eyes climb upward, we see an observation tower which invites to climb its steps. We pull the kayak ashore and ascend the structure to see the world below. The view is breathtaking, for you see as far as the earth will allow before your eye slips over the edge of the horizon.

Flying above the carpeted forest roof is an osprey with a freshly caught fish clenched between its powerful talons. We can see the winding path of the creek that lies ahead of us like an artery flowing away from the heart of the forest. We see a log slide into the waters below and suddenly realize the



log has transformed into a living creature---the American alligator! A splash of commotion erupts downstream from where we saw the alligator and the flash of silver between the alligator's teeth indicates to us that, like the osprey, it has found its meal for the day. We get back into our kayak a little more aware of the powerful creatures that live here. Our eyes are glued to the shoreline as our minds begin to see imaginary alligators with every log we pass.

As the kayak glides around the bend we see a deer jump into the creek and swim gracefully across the 25-foot expanse to the other side. Within the blink of an eye, the deer disappears into the brush as quickly as it had entered the scene. We inhale the essence of this wonderful experience and realize we can smell the earth, the water and the leaves. My partner taps me on the shoulder and points upward where we spot a huge nest tucked snugly between the top branches of a dead tree. My thoughts focus on how wonderful Mother Nature is as life is born out of the death of something as strong as a tree. We are snapped away from our thoughts by the beating of wings off the water.



These are wood ducks that inhabit the trees along the water's edge. A few more strokes of our paddles and we arrive at our campsite for the night.



We settle into our evening routine, and just as this water reflects back all that we can see, we share again all that we have experienced this day. As we drift off to sleep we look forward to what will be revealed to us tomorrow in nature's own way!"

Day two: Our voyager's paddle to the Trent River and in about three miles arrive at the City of New Bern (founded in 1710) on the Neuse River, the English colonial capital of North Carolina from 1766 through 1776. After docking at the city waterfront, our voyagers tour outstanding examples of early American architecture, including Tryon Palace,



considered the finest government building in America in 1770. During this leg of the trip, river traffic includes shrimp boats, fishing boats, tugboats with barges, ocean going yachts and

small pleasure craft. After leaving New Bern, the paddlers make their second overnight landfall where they will camp at Fisher's Landing, site of the civil war Battle of New Bern (1862) and a historic CCC camp.

Day three: Our adventurers continue down the river where they land and enjoy a few hours fishing in Cahooque Creek, beach combing at Cherry Point



and picnicking at Pine Cliff.. After maneuvering around an Outer Banks ferry,



our voyagers arrive at Siddie Fields and camp for the night.

Day four: After an early start, our travelers enter the historic Harlowe Canal, dug by African slaves in 1848, which connects the Neuse and Newport Rivers.

They will end their day and overnight at Oyster Point, the terminus of the Neusiok Trail. There they share stories of their adventures with fellow travelers.



At Oyster Point, since it is in season, they gather a bucket of oysters, catch fresh fish and enjoy their evening meal in a rustic, near primitive setting.

Day Five: At daybreak, the paddlers break camp, launch their kayaks and set out for Bogue Sound,



just west of the barrier islands and location of the Intracoastal Waterway. They stop over at historic Beaufort, established in the early 1700's, visit the NC Maritime Museum, view the artifacts from the Queen Anne's Revenge (Blackbeard's flagship) visit the Hammock House (Blackbeard's headquarters), the grave of an American

privateer and view the wild horses in the Rachel Carson Preserve on Carrot Island (descendants of Spanish Conquistador's horses).



At the end of a very long day, our voyagers paddle into a private campground near Salter Path, take a welcome shower and spend the night.

Day Six: After a leisurely breakfast,



our travelers paddle the short distance to the North Carolina Aquarium and spend a leisurely hour or two viewing the exhibits. After paddling on the Intracoastal Waterway for several miles,



our travelers turn into the White Oak River and arrive at the Cedar Point Recreation Area, where they decide to camp for the night. After dinner, in order to view the early evening wildlife, they walk the two-mile Tidelands National Scenic Trail where they view



interpretive exhibits, see abundant evidence of recent hurricanes and the thriving birdlife, crabs, fish.

Day Seven: In the morning, some of our travelers decide to paddle about a mile to the Atlantic Ocean for a little surf kayaking. After an exciting couple of hours, the paddlers reluctantly depart and paddle up the White Oak River, a National Wild and Scenic study river. Along the way, they paddle up scenic Hadnot Creek, visit the historic sawmill site and enjoy the scenery. At lunchtime, they stop at Long Point Recreation Area, site of a significant Native American settlement and view the interpretive signs that explain the

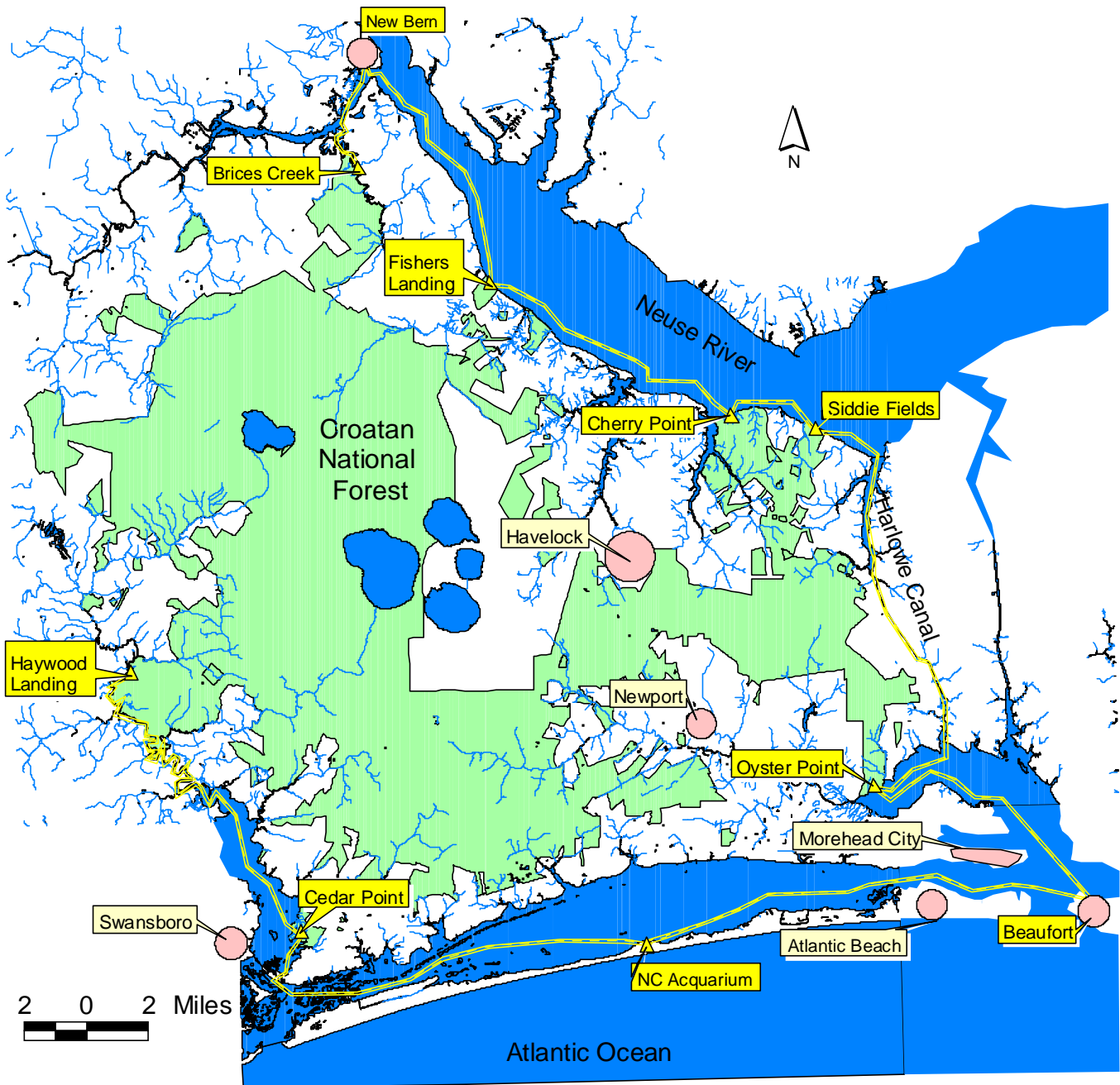
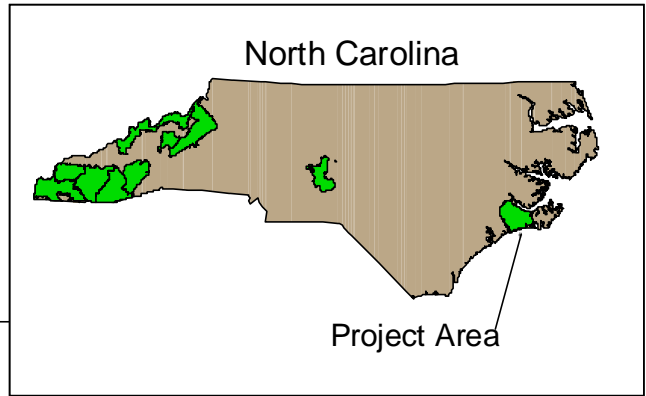
function of the site and the culture of the original inhabitants.



Finally, after an hour or two of fishing, our voyagers end their journey at Haywood Landing, where friends pick them up and take them to a motel and restaurant for the evening before they travel home, tired in body but refreshed from their journey and excited about the prospect of returning again.



Croatan National Forest Saltwater Adventure Trail



Specific Project Actions

The proposed project is a tourism development proposal that would continue work that began in 1993 involving several partners. An extensive partnership will be pursued with the regional tourism authorities to market the Saltwater Adventure Trail. Local outfitter-guides will be cultivated to provide guide services for the trail under special use permit.

The following improvements would be made to Forest Service facilities to support this project:

- Along Brice Creek we propose to reconstruct three dispersed land based campsite areas and install accessible landing areas for each, construct two floating campsites and construct a land based interpretive trail.

- On the Neuse River, the project would install interpretive signage and reconstruct the stairs from the beach to the camping area at Fishers Landing, reconstruct existing campsites, and develop and provide access to a new campsite. In the Cherry Point area, at Pine Cliff Picnic Area, the project would replace a toilet, relocate and repair a historic CCC picnic shelter, and replace the water system. In addition, the project would reconstruct hiking trails at Cherry Point. At Siddie Fields, existing campsites would be reconstructed, an accessible campsite and access would be constructed and a new SST toilet and water system installed.

- On the Newport River, the launch area at Oyster Point would be reconstructed, the existing fishing trail would be reconstructed and made accessible, an accessible fishing pier would be constructed and new accessible campsites, toilet and water system would be installed.

- At Bogue Sound, a partnership will be developed with the NC Aquarium, NC Maritime Museum and private businesses to market the Saltwater Adventure Trail and provide environmental education opportunities.

- On the White Oak River, a partnership with the Coastal Federation will be pursued to enhance environmental education (a teach the teachers program) at Cedar Point, interpretive signage would be installed at Long Point. Accessible campsites would be constructed and an SST installed at Haywood Landing. Finally, the access road would be improved, a small parking lot constructed, primitive campsites would be improved, an SST would be installed, and an accessible small launch platform would be developed at the upper reaches of the river.

Project Role in Implementing the Forest Service National Recreation Agenda:

The Saltwater Adventure Trail will support the National Recreation Agenda in five major emphasis areas of the six-point action plan:

First, the project showcases nationally designated areas and is a plan for the future of water-based recreation. It includes the Tidelands National Scenic Trail and the White Oak Wild and Scenic study River, Historic New Bern, the Tryon Palace and Historic Beaufort (National Historic Sites), and several eligible historic sites (Fishers Landing civil war site and CCC camp, Pine Cliff CCC shelter and the Harlowe Canal), by incorporating them as major components of the Saltwater Adventure Trail.

Secondly, by replacing/repairing existing deteriorated facilities, the project will reduce the deferred maintenance backlog by \$615,000. Many of the improved sites would be placed under the Fee Demonstration program in order to help pay for future maintenance.

Third, the project will help deliver a successful conservation education program. The Brice Creek interpretive trail, and the partnerships with the NC Aquarium and State Fish and Wildlife Service will help in this effort. In addition a partnership with the NC Coastal Federation to host a "teach the teachers" environmental education program at Cedar Point will deliver a successful program.

Fourth, the project provides better service to a growing and diverse public and provides new business opportunities and services for underserved and low-income people. Encouraging private outfitter-guides to utilize the trail and facilities adds a new dimension in service for the public who are not accomplished paddlers and provides a low investment business opportunity for low-income people. Interpretive signing provides additional service and meets the demand for more and better information by our public. The proposed bi-lingual interpretation meets the needs of a rapidly increasing Hispanic population. NC has 10th largest Hispanic population in the US. Providing diverse trails types, such as a water-based trail loop that traverses from fresh water ecosystems to brackish ecosystems to salt water systems, to meet the rapidly expanding water-based recreation market, meets the demand for diverse recreation experiences and outcomes. Finally, better service will be provided to the public by constructing flush toilets at more highly developed sites and SST toilets at the concentrated dispersed camping areas. This meets the needs and expectations of the majority of our users.

Fifth, replacing facilities with those that meet ADA Guidelines and providing accessible facilities in all new construction will increase access to recreation opportunities for people with disabilities. Paddling is an outdoor sport that can be pursued by paraplegics and others with mobility restriction that limit their participation in many outdoor adventure sports.

Project Role in Meeting Regional Recreation Goals or Objectives:

Completion of this project will address regional goals of rural economic development in addition to the national goals previously mentioned. It will be managed utilizing the new Recreation Business Management System to address costs, outcomes of visitor experiences, and protect and feature landscape settings. The project also provides opportunities for cooperative efforts in watchable wildlife and fisheries management. In addition, the project showcases the potential of a very unique area by diversifying and adding to the recreational opportunities in the area and improving relations and partnerships with the local community, state government, and the private sector.

Financial Information for FY 2001:

No concrete partnerships have been specifically agreed upon for the remainder of this project. As previously mentioned, the project has been pursued since 1993. Since then,

several significant partnerships have been instrumental in its development. A partial list of those partnerships is listed in the table below:

| <u>NFS Costs</u> | <u>Partner/Grant Contribution</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|------------------|--|--------------|
| \$00 | Weyerhauser \$123,500 Land donation | \$123,500 |
| \$9,100 | NC Dept Fish and Wildlife \$40,000 accessible pier construction, boat ramp construction | \$49,100 |
| \$5,000 | NC State University \$5,000 interpretive information | \$10,000 |
| \$15,000 | US Marine Corps \$20,000 toilet construction | \$35,000 |

Potential partnerships for the remainder of the project include partnerships with state agencies, local governments, and regional tourism bureaus. We have preliminary agreement from the Carteret County Department of Tourism (annual budget of \$1,00,000) to assist in marketing this adventure opportunity. We also have preliminary agreement with the NC Coastal Federation to provide environmental education on the project area. We anticipate a partnership with the State of NC at boat docking sites along Brice Creek, reconstruction of the Oyster Point launch site, and construction of the takeout site on the White Oak River. In addition, we anticipate additional partnerships in marketing the recreational opportunities and promoting rural economic development. We will pursue partnerships with the NC Aquarium regarding camping, and educational opportunities on state lands.

Outyear Funding for Phased Projects:

Phase I & II: The project could be phased in two segments: FY 2001 at \$1,050,000 and FY 2002 or later at \$765,000. Partnerships would be a significant portion of funding Phase II, supplemented with Recreation Facility Capital Improvement funding.

Cost Estimate:

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Brice Creek -Reconstruct three dispersed camp areas | \$30,000 |
| Install three single unit SST's | \$60,000 |
| Install floating campsites | \$80,000 II |
| Construct interpretive trail | \$20,000 II |
| Install interpretive trail exhibits | \$30,000 II |
| Fishers Landing -Reconstruct stairs | \$50,000 |
| Reconstruct existing campsites | \$75,000 |
| Construct accessible campsite | \$10,000 |
| Construct single unit SST | \$25,000 II |

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Construct accessible trail | \$20,000 |
| Install interpretive exhibits | \$15,000 II |
| Pine Cliff - Replace toilet with flush toilet | \$75,000 |
| Relocate and repair CCC shelter | \$50,000 II |
| Provide electrical service, replace well, install well house | \$75,000 |
| Reconstruct picnic sites | \$20,000 |
| Construct accessible trail | \$20,000 |
| Cherry Point - Reconstruct hiking trails | \$50,000 |
| Siddie Fields -Reconstruct campsites | \$95,000 |
| Install SST | \$50,000 |
| Construct accessible campsites | \$10,000 |
| Construct accessible trail | \$20,000 |
| Install well | \$30,000 II |
| Oyster Point - Reconstruct Launch Site | \$50,000 |
| Construct Phase I campsites including accessible sites | \$95,000 |
| Construct Phase II remaining campsites | \$125,000 II |
| Construct 2 SST's | \$100,000 |
| Reconstruct trail | \$15,000 |
| Install well | \$30,000 |
| Install accessible fishing pier | \$50,000 II |
| Long Point – Install interpretive signing | \$25,000 II |
| Haywood Landing - Construct campsites, Phase I | \$40,000 |
| Construct campsites, Phase II | \$45,000 II |
| Construct accessible path | \$10,000 |
| Install SST | \$50,000 |
| Install well | \$30,000 II |
| White Oak Takeout - Construct access road | \$100,000 II |
| Construct parking area | \$50,000 II |
| Install SST | \$50,000 II |
| Improve campsites | \$20,000 II |
| Construct takeout platform | \$20,000 II |
| PHASE I (subtotal) | \$1,050,000 |
| PHASE II (subtotal) | \$ 765,000 |
| TOTAL | \$1,815,000 |



The End