



TESTIMONY OF SOUTHEAST TOURISM SOCIETY
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC WORKS

“The Issue of the Potential Impacts of Global Warming on Recreation and the Recreation Industry”

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Introduction:

Good morning! Thank you Madam Chairman for inviting me to testify before this esteemed body. I come to you wearing several hats. First, I am representing the Southeast Tourism Policy Council, an arm of the Southeast Tourism Society which is a non-profit, 501(c)6, membership organization that covers eleven Southern States. The organization is dedicated to the development of industry organizations & professionals and the promotion of tourism within and to STS member states by sharing resources, fostering cooperation, networking, providing continuing education, cooperative marketing, consumer outreach, advice & consultation, governmental affairs and other programs. Membership includes State Travel Offices, Convention & Visitors’ Bureaus & other Destination Marketing Organizations, attractions, advertising, lodging, media, educational institutions, product suppliers, travel writers and other related industry segments.

Second, I come to you as the Senior Vice President of a regional economic development organization, AdvantageWest Economic Development Group, created by the North Carolina General Assembly to serve twenty three mountain counties in North Carolina. I work in rural, gateway communities every day as part of my job.

Last, but not least I am a small business owner. My husband and I own and operate The Linville Falls Lodge adjacent to the first wilderness area in Eastern America, the Linville Gorge and less than a mile off the Blue Ridge Parkway, America’s most visited Scenic Highway. Our business has been in his family since 1937.

STS appreciates your invitation to appear before the Environmental and Public Works Committee to discuss the issue of the potential impacts of global warming on recreation and the recreation industry and I want to thank you for your service in this body. It is no simple task to assume the responsibility of debating public policy regarding global warming and its effects on our society and the generations that come after us. As a tourism professional, I have witnessed the impact environmental changes are having on the travel and tourism industry as a whole. The Blue Ridge Parkway was closed almost two years after the flooding caused by the hurricanes of 2005. We were fortunate to weather that disaster at our small business. However, many of our friends were not so fortunate.

The tourism industry knows that fundamental policy issues must be addressed in order to sustain many of the very products, such as our publicly owned lands to remain appealing and available for future generations.

As tourism professionals, we recognize the impact environmental changes are having on the travel and tourism industry as a whole. In fact, in 2004 STS brought together private sector tourism marketers and public sector federal land managers to find common ground on ways that our natural, historical and cultural treasures could be preserved for future generations. As such, it represented a milestone in the changing tourism environment. The summit proposed to explore the magnitude of the travel and tourism industry and to develop a better understanding of the economic and social roles played by public land managing agencies at the Federal and State levels. Such a Summit was long overdue, and it was essential that the private tourism industry and public lands agencies engage one another in positive dialogue and comprehensive strategies to develop, market, and use public lands in sustainable ways that will not impair resource values.

The policies that guide the operation of the tourism industry and the policies that guide the use and development of public lands deserve thoughtful attention and the travel and tourism industry in the southeast is aggressively pursuing public private partnerships to insure protection of our treasured natural, cultural and historical resources for future generations.

Fundamental policy issues must be addressed in order for the tourism industry to sustain itself and for our publicly owned lands to remain appealing and available for future generations. Tourism is hugely important to our region's economy and to our quality of life. We recognize the need to address environmental change and degradation on our industry's future ability to provide economic stimulus to so many of our rural communities.

As recreationists, we understand our environmental responsibility to be stewards of the treasured resources in our region. In fact, recreationists were at the vanguard of calling for environmental legislation in the 60's and '70s, which is the primary rationale behind many of the regulatory goals that are framed in "fishable and swimmable waters" and Class 1 viewsheds in national parks. Protecting both the

recognition of tourism as a vital component of federal land management policies and our natural resources is why we favor, common sense proposals to balance the needs of tourists and the environment, for example, lowered emissions from our cars and trucks and other recreational products.

That said, Americans love the outdoors and benefit from time in the outdoors -- both the magnificence of significant parklands like the Great Smokies and small wonders like urban green space -- and we can't take actions which shut people up in their homes, unable to enjoy and benefit from the public lands and waters that are their birthright.

There is nothing wrong with driving to the beach, a national park or a ski area. And there is nothing wrong with camping and boating and riding horses and ATVs -- activities that require an ability to carry and tow sizeable items. As we encourage changes to reduce emissions, let's not create other problems -- including health problems or crises for rural communities dependent on recreation and tourism.

In our smaller rural settings and gateway communities, recreation is the primary economic generator.

In fact, the recreation economy:

- Contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy
- Supports nearly 6.5 million jobs across the U.S.
- Generates \$88 billion in annual state and national tax revenue
- Provides sustainable growth in rural communities
- Generates \$289 billion annually in retail sales and services across the U.S.
- Touches over 8 percent of America's personal consumption expenditures -- more than 1 in every 12 dollars circulating in the economy

In my home state of North Carolina, spectacular recreation sites, from Mt. Mitchell to the Outer Banks, bring tourism dollars from out-of-state outdoor recreation participants. In the small village of Linville falls where I live and operate a business, we depend on it for our livelihood. In North Carolina alone, outdoor recreation contributes more than \$7.5 billion annually to North Carolina's economy and supports 95,000 jobs across the state. The bottom line for us is simple. Outdoor recreation creates sustainable long-term economic growth and community development for many small businesses.

I would like to share another perspective with you regarding the economic importance of outdoor recreation I have seen recently in the mountains of North Carolina. As you know, North Carolina led the nation for two years in the loss of manufacturing jobs. Those jobs were primarily in textiles and furniture. We have been

on a long road of recovery. However, the mountain region in particular, has sustained itself because of their bountiful natural resources and our people's ability to focus on an asset-based economic development strategy. It has been interesting to see the boat manufacturers moving to our region to fill the gap created by the loss of furniture manufacturers. They have come for many reasons, but certainly the skills of fine furniture makers in our labor force have been very instrumental in luring them to North Carolina. In addition, we at AdvantageWest find ourselves now working with entrepreneurs manufacturing new bicycle products, better kayaks, innovative campers, and high-end tailgating equipment. All of these products focused on the great outdoors.

Outdoor recreation is vital to the local economies of rural America. White House recognition of tourism as an important tool in rural economic development came on Jan. 22, 1990, when the President ordered implementation of the *Report on Rural Economic Development* for the 90s. This report explains that opportunities for economic development for rural America will be found primarily in off-farm employment opportunities, especially in industries such as tourism, retirement living, and commercial recreation, which all serve to bring additional income to rural communities. In remarks on Oct. 28, 1991, the President state: "More and more rural communities are making tourism a part of the economic development option for the nineties. And the U.S. Travel and Tourism Administration, along with other government agencies, is working to put small-town America on the tourist map. As part of that initiative, federal agencies will provide leadership for educational outreach programs in rural tourism development."

But outdoor recreation encompasses far more than economic development. Perhaps one of the most significant observations with regards to the benefits of outdoor recreation is the important role it can play in improving the overall health of Americans. There is a profound connection with outdoor recreation to a healthy lifestyle. Obesity has been declared epidemic. Connecting the benefits of outdoor recreation and the positive effects it can have on obesity offers a possible solution for this crisis affecting so many Americans.

Now, more than ever, we need to be promoting outdoor recreation and its benefits, particularly to our youth. There is growing evidence that today's children are gravitating away from outdoor experiences and towards a virtual indoor reality. This disconnect from nature has serious long-term implications for the cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being our nation's children. Richard Louv's recent book "Last Child in the Woods -- Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder" analyzes the societal problems that have arisen in the last generation of youth, who have lost contact with nature. Louv quoted a fifth-grader who claimed, "I like to play indoors better 'cause that's where all the electrical outlets are."

We must find smarter solutions to the global warming issues, but we cannot replace the value of a family spending time together in their RV in a national park, or a grandparent's right to pull the family boat to the lake to teach their grandchildren the

excitement of catching a fish. We cannot simulate those priceless experiences through video games from inside our homes without becoming unhealthy and uninspired.

Kids need to know about nature. It nurtures, educates and instills them with a sense of stewardship for the environment. A survey reported in 2002 in *The Journal of Science* found that more children knew the characters in the electronic game Pokemon than could identify an otter, beetle or oak tree. Nationwide, the science literacy of citizens -- both young and old -- has eroded. The implications of this oversight represent the most critical global challenge, one that our country cannot afford to overlook. The promotion of outdoor recreation offers a significant alternative approach towards educating our young people about the importance of stewardship.

Knowledge of nature is their best weapon if young people are to ultimately make good decisions about personal health, climate change and land-use management. They need to touch flowers and know why some plants cannot survive without insect pollinators, to walk in a forest and understand how many millions of years were required to create petroleum from dead plants.

So important is this issue that the American Recreation Coalition and the National Forest Foundation convened a series of Recreation Forums in earlier this year designed to provide organizations and individual's opportunities to:

- identify unmet needs and challenges facing recreation on public lands; and
- provide examples of successful and innovative efforts to provide the nation with outstanding outdoor recreation experiences on public lands, and especially national forests; and
- express ideas and offer suggestions for enhancing the ability of public lands to meet the recreation needs of - and the resulting benefits to - the American public.

Concluding Remarks:

Like it or not, inevitably change is a part of life. As we grapple with changes to our environment, changes in our economy, and changes to the way our children play and learn, we must recognize the critical role that tourism plays in addressing each of these challenges. The impact of environmental change and global warming has the potential to profoundly affect our businesses and our communities. Recognizing this is why the tourism industry has already begun to reach out to our federal partners to collaborate on ways we can blunt the impact of environmental change and protect our natural resources of decades to come.

Through the STPC and a memorandum of understanding with 12 federal agencies, we have already begun to partner with the federal management, we stand ready to work with Congress to identify and implement policies that will ensure our environment, our communities, and our economy are not only protected, but thrive.

In conclusion, we believe we must all work together, across party lines and across economic and environmental barriers to do the right thing for us, our children and our grandchildren. We must make the hard decisions. However, as you move forward developing national policies in this regard we would urge you to keep the delicate balance we have discussed today in the forefront so as not to have “unintended consequences” that develop from over-reaching federal regulations.

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