A STORY WORTH TELLING

The Tennessee River Valley STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL
The Tennessee River is one of the most ecologically important river systems in the country. Through the efforts of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the river system has also become an American treasure for recreation diversity and a place for exceptional economic development opportunities.

Early in 2016, civic leaders and tourism professionals in the mid-south recognized an opportunity to unify the Geotourism efforts of the 125 counties in seven states that embrace the Tennessee River waterway system. In February of that year, The Tennessee River Valley Stewardship Council was launched for that purpose.

Geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. Geotourism incorporates the concept of sustainable tourism—that destinations should remain unspoiled for future generations—while allowing for ways to protect a place’s character.
Since its founding in 2016, the Stewardship Council has been composed of a prominent list of tourism and travel professionals who are volunteering their efforts towards the visionary goal of economic development through Geotourism for the Tennessee River Valley.

TRV Mapguide Executive Director (Volunteer)
Julie Graham, Executive Director-Middle East Tennessee Tourism Council/Chair Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful, Norris, TN

TRV Mapguide Portal Editor
Angie Pierce, Vice President Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, Decatur, AL

TRV Mapguide Social Media Manager
Melea Hames, Social Media Manager, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, Decatur, AL

2020-2021 Officers of the TRV Stewardship Council
Chairman: Tami Reist, Alabama
Vice-Chair: Jennifer Wheatley, Kentucky
Secretary: Karin Landers, Tennessee
Treasurer: Angie Pierce, Alabama
Volunteer Members:

Ida Walker  
Tourism & Recreation Development Specialist, Friends of Southwest Virginia

Alicia Phelps  
Executive Director, Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association

Linda Lewanski  
Director, Middle East Tennessee-Cocke County Tourism

Adrian Lambert  
Director, Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association

Jode Mull  
Director of Tourism Blue Ridge, Georgia

Tami Reist  
President & CEO, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association

Mary Cates Williams  
Tishomingo County Development Foundation, Mississippi

Abbie Gristy  
Rural Tourism Program Manager, Tennessee Dept. of Tourist Development

Karin Landers  
Director, Visit Humphrey County TN

Jennifer Wheatly  
Director of Outreach & Sustainability, Friends of Land Between the Lakes, KY

Laura Oswald  
Director of Marketing, Paducah Convention & Visitors Bureau

Susan Jones  
Jones Public Relations

Laura Suzanne Fisher  
Ex-Officio Senior Program Manager, River and Resource Stewardship at Tennessee Valley Authority
The Stewardship Council is dedicated to serving the same geographic and economically diverse watershed region of the southeast United States as the Tennessee Valley Authority. This area is made up of more than 41,000 square miles embracing the Tennessee River Valley in portions of seven states.

**STATES WITH REGIONS SUPPORTED BY THE TRV STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL**

ALABAMA  GEORGIA  KENTUCKY  MISSISSIPPI
NORTH CAROLINA  TENNESSEE  VIRGINIA
The mission of the Stewardship Council is to expand the economic health and to stimulate economic development within the Tennessee River Valley region through sustainable tourism, i.e. Geotourism. This mission is achieved through a variety of targeted methods with the purpose of showcasing the region as the premier destination for heritage and/or recreational tourism in America.
A study of more than 200 cities over the past 23 years confirms that destinations with substantial and growing visitor economies tend to outperform their peers, making destination promotion a true engine of economic development.”
Destination Promotion: An Engine of Economic Development

How investments in the visitor economy drive broader economic growth

ATTRACTION STRATEGIC EVENTS
By securing meetings and conventions, DMOs attract the very prospects that economic development agencies target. Not only do these events create valuable exposure among business decision makers, they create direct opportunities for economic development agencies to deepen connections with attendees.

“Economic clusters and conventions have become synergistic”
Tom Clark
Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation

BUILDING TRANSPORT NETWORKS
By developing the visitor economy, destination promotion supports transportation infrastructure, providing greater accessibility and supply logistics that are important in attracting investment in other sectors.

“Air service is profoundly important to corporate investment and location decisions... This is one of tourism’s most significant contributions since the levels of air service at New Orleans far exceed what local demand could support.”
Stephen Moret
Secretary
Louisiana Economic Development

RAISING THE DESTINATION PROFILE
Destination promotion builds awareness, familiarity, and relationships in commercial, institutional and individual networks that are critical in attracting investment.

“We are learning a lot from Visit California by how they brand California and how to take their model and apply it to economic development.”
Brook Taylor
Deputy Director
Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz)

RAISING THE QUALITY OF LIFE
Visitor spending helps support a broader and higher quality set of local amenities than an area could otherwise sustain. The cultural, entertainment, culinary, and retail attractions that visitors support make a place more attractive to investors.

“Traveler attractions are the same reason that CEOs choose a place.”
Jeff Malehorn
President & CEO, World Business Chicago

The Catalytic Impacts of DESTINATION PROMOTION

Oxford Economics
The Tennessee River Valley Stewardship Council
MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS

7 STATES • 1 RIVER

EXPLORE MORE
AMERICA’S TENNESSEE RIVER VALLEY
WWW.TENNESSEERIVERVALLEYGEOTOURISM.ORG
53% Increase in nominations in past three years.
2,452 Total nominations with more than 9,500 images.
35 Custom trip plans on site.
50 Featured blogs/stories.

Website Stats
(July 2019-Aug. 2020:
5,055 Users.
# of New visitors: 331,046 (55% increase)
# of Organic visits: 84.9% (70.51 % increase)
# States, DC, PR visits: 52
# of Direct visits: 33,758 (18% increase)

Supporting E-newsletter:
E-newsletter sent every month. E-newsletter has 3,200 active subscribers. Average open rate is 17% which is 1% higher than the industry average.
In April 2020, TRVSC announced the migration to a new platform for its newly revamped website.

New features include "Book Now", "Reserve Now" and "Visit Now" buttons, simpler mapping tools, a more user-friendly nomination process, capability to change featured attractions and events on the home page, and blog capability.

The TRV Stewardship Council manages a second website focused on conservation and partnerships: www.trvstewardshipcouncil.org
MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS: INTERNET

Facebook growth
July 2019 – 13,833 users
July 2020 – 15,241 users

Instagram growth
July 2019 – 5,425 users
July 2020 – 10,411 users

Pinterest growth
July 2019 – 422 users
July 2020 – 1,000 users

DIGITAL ADVERTISING
Revamped to promote social distancing outdoor travel activities.
Targeting: Nashville, Atlanta, Birmingham, St Louis, Chicago, Detroit, Ohio, and Indiana.
DIRECT MAIL POSTCARD

IN RIVER VALLEY

Geotourism (n.): tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.

Play like a local.

Adventure is all around in the Tennessee River Valley.

raft • zip-line • boulder • bike • jet-ski • atv • paddle • sail.

IN RIVER VALLEY

TENNESSEE RIVER VALLEY MAPGUIDE

www.tennesseerivervalleygeotourism.com #TNrivervalley

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

TENNESSEE RIVER VALLEY

There is an Adventure to be Discovered

Roots of American Music
Authentic Experiences
Appalachian Culture
Vibrant River Communities

TENNESSEE RIVER VALLEY

History Lives and Thrives Here
Find authentic places to go and things to do in this region that is rich in natural and cultural heritage. Discover the heritage of Native American people, Civil War sites, and African American roots told through the stories of people and place. All of the listings on our site have been nominated by local people who know the region best and offer visitors the most unique, fun, and interesting experiences.

TennesseeRiverValleyGeotourism.org

DOWNLOAD OUR MOBILE APP
Visit and tell us your story!

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

MapGuide Destination

INFORMATIONAL CARD FOR TOURIST DESTINATIONS

GEOTOURISTS patronize locally owned businesses and guides. They buy from local craftspeople and eat at restaurants serving regional cuisine. They seek out traditional music and dance.

As a result, the money they spend helps local people earn a living and preserve the place’s authenticity.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC COLLABORATION HAS IT BENEFITS:

- Free to participate in FAM tours
- Free to participate in consumer shows
- Free to participate in blog stories

Joppa Mountain Pottery

“Lots of response to ours already...thank you!”
- Ann Crosby
Joppa Mountain Pottery
The Tennessee River Valley Stewardship Council
MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS: PRINT

COLLATERAL PIECES
- Tear-off Map
- Trifold Brochure
- Tour Itineraries Booklet
- Business Cards
Food Festivals Offer Tasty Trips to Tennessee River

The food festivals of the Tennessee River Valley offer delicious opportunities to explore how food has shaped local culture. From the pungent ramps of the Appalachian Mountains to the delectable country ham in the western region, visitors have a lip-smacking, good time discovering the historic specialties of these charming, small towns.

The word “cuisine” may seem a little uppity for affairs that tout foods such as cornbread, ramps, catfish or ham, but these storied staples of the Appalachian Mountains have paid their dues. They now appear in the kitchens of celebrity chefs from New York City to Los Angeles. Their beginnings, however, were less than glamorous.

Long before European settlers sought farming advice from Native Americans, these indigenous people were cultivating, preserving and cooking with vegetables such as corn, beans and squash. As time passed, these foods were adopted by the colonists and pioneers. Many of the recipes were adapted as these individuals moved west into the Appalachian Mountains, which border the eastern edge of the Tennessee River Valley.

Early settlers probably thought they had created something special when they came up with johnnycakes, a mixture of corn flour, water and eggs, but Native Americans had been making similar bread recipes for millennia. If these two groups could take part in the National Cornbread Festival in South Pittsburg, Tennessee, they would see how far their humble creations have come. The 2017 winning recipe, Cornbread Cubans, was inspired by the Cuban food truck scene. It includes corn, buttermilk and a few other items that would have been familiar to mountain dwellers.

Cornbread isn’t the only cuisine that residents of the Valley put on a pedestal. For generations, spring in the mountains has signified ramp gathering, another food that was highly prized by Native Americans. Later, settlers survived, in large part by what the mountain forests offered, from fruits to nuts to ramps. Sometimes described as a cross between a spring onion and a garlic clove, ramps were the first plant to produce in the spring and were thought to help thin the blood after the cold winter months. Eaten both raw and fried, they are a delectable addition to beans, salads, eggs, potatoes and more.

Attendees of Ball Play Rutten Ramp Festival in Tellico Plains, Tennessee or the Polk County Ramp Tramp Festival in Reliance, Tennessee can enjoy plenty of ramps along with their traditional companions of soup beans or pinto beans, fried potatoes, streaked meat and cornbread. Visitors are lured by the delicious dinners, but the live music and local crafts are as enticing as the food.

As good as ramps and cornbread are, for some folks it takes a tasty mess of fish to complete a dinner. The Cherokee of the Valley used several methods to catch their meals, including the fishing wic, a trap constructed of stones that channelled fish downstream into a basket. Today, most fishing is not for subsistence, but rather for recreational purposes, and its devotees are passionate.

The Tennessee River offers anglers everything from bass to crappie to bream and more, but in Paris, Tennessee, catfish is king. To illustrate their enthusiasm for this whiskered species, locals serve more than six tons of tasty, fried filets during the World’s Biggest Fish Fry. A group of600 people enjoy creative catfish recipes and other activities create non-stop fun throughout the last full week in April.

Date:

✓ Average Potential audience- 30 Million
✓ Average pick-up by media sources- 100
✓ Average views and hits: 3000
✓ Average reach- US, Canada, International (Germany, UK, India,)
✓ Influencers following us- 365
✓ Atlanta, National Geographic, World Wildlife Federation, NEEF, National River Travel, local media, South Arts, Conservation Fund.
✓ Explore Tennessee River Valley has an influence rating of 63 (out of 100). This is up from 61 in 2019.
✓ Value of campaigns: 49K reach, 847.1K impressions, a .57% engagement rate, and an EMV of $11K. (The EMV is what this content would have been worth had it been paid advertising.)
In This Edition

Dear Angie,

Water sustains and connects all of us in so many ways.

When the first settlers came to the Tennessee Valley, they came for the water. They fished the fertile bottomlands for farming, lumber to build and heat homes, and game to fill their winter larder, and water, the most necessary of elements for human survival.

Today, these same abundances draw people to the Tennessee Valley. The rich recreational assets are destination experiences for outdoor enthusiasts. By the numbers, the region boasts seventeen National Park Service units, forty-six lakes, and seventy-six rivers, all providing a bounty of outdoor, cultural, and heritage activities to experience.

This month’s edition is dedicated to the paddlers we met at Canoeopia and our readers who understand the importance of water to our good health. We are sharing some of the best paddling trails to explore; checking in on the progress of the Cumberland Trail, talking southern biscuits and grits, and getting to our roots by honoring strong women who have made their impact on the region through their music.

In the Tennessee Valley, there is a bounty of riches to explore!

14 Water Trails you want to Paddle in 2021
by Mark Engler

The Tennessee River Valley’s sprawling system of waterways is not by one, but by numerous great rivers that gather in the rugged highlands of the Appalachian Mountains and Cumberland Plateau. Waterways throughout the region offer ample opportunities for paddlers to enjoy swimming, fishing, and the water and smooth currents paddlers to enjoy some of the best
In 2020, COVID changed the landscape of tourism.
Focused on drivable vacations
Social distancing
Recovery opportunities for metro regions (headlines of stories)

Conservation- Launched a secondary site trvstewardshipcouncil.org (we have stories and headlines)
Sustainable Travel- COVID Impact and outdoor visitation
Water and land stewardship

Connecting with motivated travelers-https://tennesseerivervalleygeotourism.org/explore-more
FAMS and story blogs
Virtual Travel Shows
Joppa Mountain Pottery

TOURISM BOOSTS SMALL BUSINESSES

Rutledge, Tennessee- Family-owned business- 2 employees

Known for stoneware and raku pottery, Joppa Mountain Pottery's award-winning work has been featured several times on HGTV and PBS. It has a growing reputation with collectors and galleries worldwide.

Challenges-
• Geographic location is off a rural road and no easy access from a major road.
• Grainger County, TN has a budget of less than $1000 to market tourism.
• No website. Broken link on the state website. No paid tourism staff to correct.
• Small business with no funds to market via print or digital. Marketing is word of mouth, Facebook, ETSY.

TRV Geotourism Benefits-
• The owners can manage their nominations and refresh with information, events, and pictures as needed. A narrative can be built. This also brings the nomination to the top of the site.
• Provides geographic relationships. What’s nearby to do, see, grab a meal, or a place to stay.
• Provides direct contact information for visitors to take action.
• Power of SEO and SEM with a larger brand. Increased visibility and higher page 1 listings.
• Ability to promote events on a larger platform to a broader market.
• Most visits are organic. Visits to a specific page are motivated leads for that attraction.
• Partners can use the “Nat Geo Destination” badges on their websites.
ONCE WAS THE LARGEST COAL PRODUCING COUNTY IN TENNESSEE

TRANSITIONING COUNTY: COAL TO TOURISM
Norris Lake, Campbell County, Tennessee

- Designated an ARC Distressed Area with average per capita income of $13,301 and 22.8% living below poverty line.
- Tourism boom centered around Norris Lake created by TVA dam helping area expand economic base.
- Natural assets: Norris Lake, 4 state parks, 2 wildlife management areas, 11 marinas, an annual private investment of $3.5 million, and more than $57 million in sales for the Royal Blue Trails Complex.
REDEVELOPMENT OF ABANDONED INGALLS HARBOR SHIPYARD INTO

INGALLS HARBOR AND EVENT CENTER

Wheeler Lake, Decatur, Alabama

- Features 10-boat wide launch ramp. Has hosted major fishing tournaments from BASS, FLW, Crappie USA.
- Features a 27,000-square foot multi-purpose pavilion that more than doubled the city’s capacity for hosting large gatherings.
- Spurred development of a new hotel on the riverfront, and event, restaurant, and retail business development in downtown Decatur.
CITY HARBOR DINING & ENTERTAINMENT
Lake Guntersville, Guntersville, Alabama

- 55,000 Square feet of restaurants, entertainment venues, and available business space.
- Dallas-Fort Worth Developer Patrick Lawler said he believes the City Harbor development will generate more revenue to the area.
- Local City Council expands project to include short-term rental condos.
The Tennessee River Valley Stewardship Council

A STORY WORTH TELLING

7 STATES • 1 RIVER

EXPLORE MORE

AMERICA’S TENNESSEE RIVER VALLEY
www.tennesseerivervalleygeotourism.org

Thank You for Your Interest in the Tennessee River Valley and The Tennessee River Valley Stewardship Council. To join the TRVSC, please contact Julie Graham at 865-585-0811 or tennesseerivervalleymapguide@gmail.com.

Nominate a Place to the MapGuide
Help tell the story of what is special about this place. Nominations open now!
Nominate at: www.tennesseerivervalleygeotourism.org