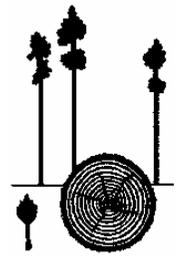


GROWTH RINGS



Newsletter of the Forestry Heritage Trail Project

What is the Forestry Heritage Trail?

The Forestry Heritage Trail Project (FHTP) is a grant-supported regional initiative to organize forest-based historic sites, artisans, manufacturing firms, and working forests into a cohesive network of forest heritage tourist destinations. The goal of the project is to create a unified tourism theme for the central Appalachian Mountain region including West Virginia and Western Maryland. The project capitalizes on the rich forestry heritage of mountain communities in this region. It will also provide public education regarding historical and contemporary efforts to maintain healthy forest ecosystems.

The Forest Heritage Trail Project depends on the active participation of all interested stakeholders, agencies, and individuals. The first of several project meetings was held in November 2001 at Blackwater Falls State Park, and involved more than 85 people representing a diverse array of interests from around the region. From that beginning, we'll continue to work in small groups and all together to develop the strategic agenda for forest heritage and tourism development in the region.

Next Meeting -- April 3 & 4, Elkins

The next general project meeting will be held in Elkins, starting Wednesday afternoon, April 3 with a variety of tours and field trips to see local forestry heritage assets. Task Group follow-up meetings will be held Wed. evening, plus food, socializing, and entertainment. Thursday, April 4, we'll continue with the group planning begun in November, with Task Group reports, sharing of ideas, and hopefully finding answers to some vexing questions.

Save this date!!

Forestry or Forest?

One of the issues that came out at our first planning meeting at Blackwater Falls in November was whether to continue to use the project title of "Forestry" Heritage Trail. An alternative suggested by some in our group was to use the more generic "Forest" Heritage Trail. In a sense this language difference represents two differing points of view. From one viewpoint "Forestry" is a discipline that directs knowledge of ecology, history, mathematics, politics, biology, chemistry, and law towards managing forested ecosystems to benefit society. The other viewpoint seeks to broaden the project description to include more than just the forest's benefits for society. This broadening includes the story of how living in the forest has impacted people and highlights studies of forest ecosystems and wildlife not necessarily with regard to human actions.

Forestry--1a. The science and art of cultivating, maintaining, and developing forests. b. Management of a forestland. 2. A forestland.
From: The American Heritage Dictionary of the American Language

In a sense, this issue raises two different questions.

- What is included in our area of study, and thus in our regional focus to promote tourism opportunities?
- What will we call the project?

Comments:

Stacy Jiles -- Georgia Pacific Corporation

I believe any heritage tourism plan should be well thought, planned and monitored. There are very few, if any, occurrences in history that are viewed as a complete success by all people. The history of the interaction of humans and the natural environment in West Virginia definitely has many different prerogatives. To me, the potential of this project can be limited only by the desire of people to apply special interest agendas, whether they be politically oriented to the left or right. I think heritage tourism must be an unbiased account of what occurred with the opportunity for people to form their own opinions and enjoy all of the recreation, education, spiritual, natural resource, wildlife and aesthetic treasures the Appalachian Mountains offer.

In the many suggested definitions of "Forestry Heritage" at the meeting, there were suggestions that represented both points of view. Certainly the story of Forestry and the timber industry of the state are key and central themes to West Virginia and western Maryland heritage.

From lumbering history to the development of modern day best management practices, this is a large part of what we want to present -- and indeed of what is unique about what we want to present. Yes -- we are definitely telling the Forestry story.

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How to Help! Task Groups

To reach the first year objective of developing a strategic plan for how to coordinate and implement this heritage tourism project, we need input and help from the broad range of stakeholders. The Task Group leaders who volunteered in November met in early January to start the process of moving forward with the work of these groups. We need the help of all the stakeholders to decide together how we identify, develop and present the assets, and how we structure the project so that it will last and continue to benefit our communities long past this specific grant project. If you are on one or more of the Task Groups, please come to the meetings. If you are not yet on one, please contact the coordinator to join the group you are interested in. If you cannot attend the meetings, please let us know your areas of interest so we can help find other ways you can participate.

Task Group Meetings scheduled are:

February 15, 10 am -- Asset Mapping Task Group,

Railroad Depot & Welcome Center, Elkins.

Agenda: Start work on identifying and recording the forest assets through the region.

February 20, 10 am -- Interpretation Task Group, WestVaco Natural Resources Center near Morgantown.

Agenda: Facilitated discussion led by Matt Graves of significance statements and overall regional themes, as first steps in the Comprehensive Interpretive Plan.

February 25, 10 am -- Organization / Sustainability Task Group, Holiday Inn, Bridgeport.

Agenda: Possible models for long-term organization; Ensuring equal representation for all interests; Possible leadership groups or key partners; Beginning to identify possible funding sources

February 27, 10 am -- Marketing Task Group, Holiday Inn, Morgantown.

Agenda: Begin work on Marketing Plan; Setting up and improving data gathering; What are the existing marketing efforts; How to implement regional effort to supplement and not duplicate?

Business and Infrastructure -- Meeting TBA in early March, call for info.

Networking and Communication -- coming soon!

To RSVP or for info, contact the staff coordinators:

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Comments:

Bob Hoke, Mountain State Railroad & Logging Historical Association, Cass, WV

West Virginia's forests have had a major impact on the economic and social development of the State. Visitors and residents need to be able to learn how the forests influenced development in the state and how man has influenced the forests.

Initially, there should be a series of driving tours, each with a forestry theme (original forests, rebirth and regrowth of the forests, historic logging, current logging and mill operations, logging railroads, social and cultural impacts of forestry, and products - then and now). Each tour would include a descriptive brochure and map, and there would have to be appropriate signage and displays at significant locations. Needless to say the communities along the tour routes should attempt to capitalize on the additional tourism and entice tour participants to linger in their town. These enticements could include walking tours, appropriate craft and retail shops, industrial tours, themed food and lodging, etc.

We must be careful to limit the initial tasks to those things that can realistically be done on a relatively short budget and schedule. Setting up the driving tours and improving the interpretation on the routes will provide a good start.

Forestry or Forest? Continued

How much else we also want to present is the question. A big part of the initial planning of this project is figuring out how broad a brush we are painting with, how much we are concentrating on the story of Forestry per se, and how much we are presenting the breadth and diversity of the whole Forest story. Once we have determined our scope, we can address which term best conveys this to the public in a way that is accurate, exciting, and effective.

Essential challenges we face include learning to work together and listening to each different point of view so we can respectfully present the diversity of "truths." Only in facing these challenges can we know how to best tell these exciting and thought-provoking stories to the public.

Community Design Team Helps Pilot Areas

Elkins has been selected for a visit this spring from the WVU Community Design Team. While the visit will focus on a range of issues identified as important to the community, Forestry Heritage issues will be at the forefront. The FHT leadership team will be working closely with the CDT to identify goals, objectives, and some quick success projects for the pilot community.

The other pilot area, Webster Springs, is already a graduate of the CDT process. The FHT leadership staff is planning a visit there this spring to help evaluate the best way to implement goals, objectives, and projects that will fit into the Forestry Trail plan.