Voluntary Certification
Nature-Based Tourism
in the Atchafalaya Basin
Voluntary Certification

A voluntary procedure which assesses, monitors, and gives written assurance of conformity to specific requirements.
Why?

• “…to conserve, restore, and enhance (where possible) the natural habitat and give all the people the opportunity to enjoy the Atchafalaya Experience.” A. Basin Master Plan

• Proactive
This Study’s Objectives

• Inventory existing voluntary certification programs
• Partner with a special ABP committee to identify inventory applicable findings
• Consult with stakeholders and committee and to develop recommendation
Information to Consider

• Description of nature-based tourism in the Basin

• Description of voluntary certification elsewhere
Nature-based Tourism

Travel based on appreciation of an area’s natural and cultural heritage, including consumptive and nonconsumptive recreation
Nature-Based Tourism

• Travel to natural sites
• Minimum impact on environment
• Builds environmental awareness
• Activity-oriented
• Benefits conservation
• Benefits communities
• Respects local cultures
In the Basin

• 8 boat & charter rentals
• 28 campgrounds
• birding tours
• 14 swamp tours
• 13 wildlife management areas
• 5 state parks and historic sites
• hunting and fishing guide services
Certifying the Process

• Identify good environmental management recommended for daily operations
• Certify participation and regular practice of processes in these systems
• Certify improvement in practice of these processes
Certifying the Performance

• Certify implementation of good environmental management practices beyond regulatory requirements
• Certify visible impacts
• Certify impacts on community, economy, as well as the environment
Combine Process and Performance

- Costa Rica
- NEAP
- Blue Flag
- Green Globe
- Horizon

- Clean Marinas
- State of Virginia, Guides
- State of South Carolina
Costa Rica

• **Problem**: Small country, fragile resources
• **Goal**: To develop without pollution and natural destruction early in tourism development
  – Educate accommodations developers & operators to conserve water, control point- and nonpoint-source pollution
  – Eventually involve to all types nature tourism attractions
NEAP (Australia)

• **Problem:** Large country, small population, development and volume of tourists degrading natural resources

• **Goal:** Stop destruction and instill value of natural resources among developers and tourists
  – Design specific levels of nature-interaction in the attractions to sustain resources/environment
  – Educate operators and tourists
Blue Flag (worldwide)

• **Problem**: Beach pollution and degradation from misuse and overuse

• **Goal**: BMPs for water quality and environmental management are practiced by beach operators and tourists
  – Use signage, user education, beach sweeps, management/maintenance practices
Green Globe (worldwide)

- **Problem**: Tourists degrade or stress natural environment in all entities from hotels to taxis

- **Goal**: To instill conservation BMPs in the operations of all tourist-associated entities
  - Involve tourists in BMPs (i.e., reuse of sheets and towels in hotels to reduce water consumption)
Horizon (Canada)

- **Problem**: Tourist activities use and degrade natural resources
- **Goal**: Tailor tourist activities to conserve and sustain the natural environment
  - Set and enforce certain standards
  - Educate operators, owners, and tourists
Clean Marinas (US)

- **Problem:** Marinas and boaters can degrade natural environment.

- **Goal:** Encourage BMPs related to clean water and clean air among operators and boaters
  - Educate marina operators and boaters on pollution, erosion, environmental conservation
  - Enforce Clean Air & Clean Water acts voluntarily
State of Virginia

- **Problem**: Tour guides degrading Eastern Shore by poor practices
- **Goal**: Guides and tourists sustaining the Eastern Shore while enjoying it
  - Formal ecological training and testing of guides
  - Educate tourists
State of South Carolina

• **Problem:** Degradation and pollution due to poor understanding of watersheds, natural history

• **Goal:** To sustain natural resources by BMPs based upon understanding and science
  – Require seminars and test attraction operators
Common to All

- Education for operator and client
- Baseline of standards
- Auditing entity
- Costs

- For both specific types of entities or broad groups
- Visible sign of achievement
Objectives of a V-C Program

- To increase business carefully
- Raise existing standards/practices
- Promote environmentally, socially, economically responsible practices
- Provide travelers with information on these to increase/improve their travel experience
Why the Program Differences?

- Based upon problem and natural situation
- Guided by leadership
  - Usually Government Agency or Trade Association
- Developed by stakeholders
- Enforced by stakeholders/program
Why Better Than Outreach-Education?

- Developed by stakeholders
- Enforced by peers
- Provides group/area marketing opportunities
- Provides structure for future planning & development
How to Establish a Program?

• Establish a committee of stakeholders to
  – Identify/articulate sustainability problem in Basin
  – Set goal
  – Select/agree upon standards or baseline criteria
  – Design auditing procedure and authority
  – Design/select logo or seal of achievement

• Implement and administer program
• Market program to community and travelers
Resource Information

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