

A scenic sunset over a river with silhouetted trees. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow across the sky and reflecting on the water. The trees are dark against the bright sky, and the overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

**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
- Activity-oriented
- Minimum impact on environment
- Benefits conservation
- Builds environmental awareness
- Benefits communities
- Respects local cultures



# In the Basin

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





# 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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