Economic Development through Partnership with State Parks

“Rocky Fork State Park: Linking Natural and Economic resources through Oral Histories and Community Engagement”

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) students collaborated with Rocky Fork State Park (RFSP) in Unicoi County, Tennessee to document oral histories of land uses and local cultural importance of the park and adjacent land areas.

Working with the RFSP park rangers and members of the Friends of Rocky Fork State Park community group, students assisted in identifying strategies for further developing Rocky Fork State Park as a sustainable economic and cultural asset that is part of the community’s efforts to honor local culture and broaden economic diversification. Students learned the principles of ethnographic fieldwork, conducted archival research, engaged with the community through participant-observation and fieldwork, collected oral histories, and learned the skills of collaborative research and community partnerships. Following collection of the oral history narratives, students transcribed the narratives for deposit into the ETSU Archives of Appalachia and presented their research in several venues.

The project was designed to enhance cooperation and unity in the community and to further the development of creative strategies to utilize the natural and cultural assets of the park to promote ecotourism.