

**Elk Knob Art and Planning Project**

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**Project duration  
July, 2014 – April 1, 2015**

**Today's date  
May 11, 2015**

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## **Final Report Narrative**

Title of Project: **Elk Knob Art and Planning Project**

Grant Period: **August 19, 2014 – May 1, 2015**

Grantee Name: **Appalachian State University**

Project Directors: **Thomas S. Hansell and Dr. William R Schumann**

### **Description of Project:**

Appalachian State University (ASU) collaborated with the Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization (EKCHO) and other local organizations to develop a sustainability plan that will facilitate independent community development work based on more than a decade of collaboration with ASU. Student researchers administered a sustainable community planning workshop and updated a public art plan to promote local heritage and encourage tourism in the communities of Meat Camp, Pottertown, and Sutherland, NC.

### **Activities:**

#### **MEETINGS WITH THE COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

- August 5, 2014 – Site visit at Elk Knob State Park. Project directors met with park staff to discuss coordinating local community development planning with park activities, including funding initiatives.
- September 4, 2014 – Class visit to property of Pat Kohle (EKCHO board member) on Meat Camp Road and visit with the rangers at Elk Knob State Park. Students view public art and discuss how to engage local community members in the planning process.
- September 13, 2014 – Elk Knob Community Headwaters Day at Elk Knob State Park. This is an annual event organized by EKCHO. Students assisted with the event, which was attended by community members, EKCHO board members and park officials.
- September 23, 2014 – EKCHO board meeting at Profit's Grove Fellowship Hall, Meat Camp, NC. Students presented themes for art plan to EKCHO board and discussed potential sites to include in the art plan with our primary community partner.

- October 1 - 31, 2014 – A series of one-on-one student meetings at individuals' homes in the Elk Knob community to discuss elements of the art plan. Community members who participated included Larry Braswell, Yvonne Settle, Pat Kohle, Tom Sternal, Chris Smart, Kelly Safley, and Brandi Belville. Cherry Johnson of the Watauga County Arts Council and Jane Lonon of the Ashe County Arts Council also met with students. The specific purpose of these meetings was to work out the details (logistics, costs, materials, etc.) for the sites included in the student-developed plan.
- December 2, 2014 – EKCHO board meeting at Profit's Grove Fellowship Hall, Meat Camp, NC. Students presented art plan to our primary community partner. The board voted unanimously to approve the plan.
- December 5, 2014 – Presentation and Poster presented to the Appalachian Regional Commission's Appalachian Teaching Project in Washington, D.C.
- February 11, 2015 – Students presented their work on local radio (WASU 90.5 FM in Boone, NC).
- March 28, 2015 – Student-led presentation at Appalachian Studies Association Conference hosted by East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, TN

### **Project Outcomes:**

Students collaborated with the Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization to develop a community-based art plan that promotes local heritage and encourages sustainable tourism in the communities surrounding the Elk Knob State Park in Ashe and Watauga counties of North Carolina. During the participatory process of creating the art plan, students researched local history and culture, created themes that responded to the communities' needs, facilitated a community meeting to discuss the art plan, and broadened the network of individuals involved in the work of the Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization.

As a result of the students' work, the Elk Knob State Park now sees community-based art as a way to increase visitors and support local sustainable development efforts. This partnership will be important for future work.

In addition to presenting to the community partner and the Appalachian Teaching Project annual conference, students presented their work to the local public via a radio broadcast on WASU 90.5 FM and at the annual conference of the Appalachian Studies Association at East Tennessee State University. All of these presentations were publicized via social media. A group from the Copper Basin Learning Center (a community partner for another ATP institution) attended our presentation at the Appalachian Studies Association conference and requested a copy of our presentation and art plan to use as a model in their community.

### **Problems Encountered:**

The biggest problem is making long-term community-based work fit into the academic schedule, which is defined by 75-minute class periods and 16-week semesters. Our plan required students and faculty to work many late nights and weekends to reach our goals. Specific problems included the time involved in transporting students from campus to meet with the community partners, and the logistics of creating an off-campus project around students' other class schedules.

### **Program Continuation and Sustainability:**

We plan to build on our engagement in these communities by partnering with the Elk Knob State Park as a primary collaborator next year. Park staff are excited about executing ideas generated by the students and community and view this program as supporting local sustainable development efforts. While remaining committed to the value of community-based art to add value and build capacity in rural Appalachia, this project represents a significant departure from the engagement model established over many years of work in this area by the Center for Appalachian Studies. First, research will revolve around recruiting an even mix of graduate and undergraduate students to expand the value-added potential of student labor, including grant writing, marketing work, and advanced network-building. Second, research will focus on the commercial potentials of art installations through the development of specialty events on park lands, including public lectures from faculty and students and (more substantively) informal music "jam" events, digital applications that enhance visitor experiences, and a ballad singing/storytelling event that is an underutilized resource in the regional tourism economy. Third, faculty will explore opportunities for students to build on documentary research training in partnership with the University's television programming arm to develop informational and promotional assets that will elevate public awareness about resources and events at Elk Knob State Park. Faculty have begun feedback meetings with park officials to ensure the range of activities calibrates with the strategic goals of the community partner.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

The Elk Knob Art and Planning project was well received by the community and students. To build on our work with the Elk Knob Heritage Council, we recommend engaging the Elk Knob State Park as our primary community partner for next year. The park is interested in using community-created art and performance to help celebrate the centennial of North Carolina State Parks. The deep level of engagement and high visibility of community-based art is part of the park's vision for sustainable development of the neighboring communities.

### **Attachments (in .PDF format):**

- Photographs showing students in action (.pdf file)
- Elk Knob Community Art Plan (.pdf file)
- Student presentation on WASU Radio:  
<http://wasuradio.com/2015/02/appalachian-1800-elk-knob-community-art-plan/>
- EKCHO board minutes (.pdf file)