

Elk Knob Asset Development Project

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**Project duration
August 19, 2015 – April 30, 2016**

**Today's date
May 11, 2016**

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Final Report Narrative

Title of Project: Elk Knob Asset Development Project

Grant Period: August 19, 2015 – May 1, 2016

Grantee Name: Appalachian State University

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

Description of Project:

Appalachian State University collaborated with Elk Knob State Park to develop culturally-based programming and other park assets that promote local heritage tourism in the communities of Meat Camp, Pottertown, and Sutherland, in Ashe and Watauga Counties of North Carolina. These counties are identified as “at risk” by the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Activities:

1. Meetings With Community Partners

- June, 2015 - Site visit with Elk Knob State Park staff to discuss coordinating local community development planning with park activities, and to identify specific events to develop.
- August 27, 2015 - Students meet with Park Staff to plan events.
- September 13, 2015 - Students participate in Elk Knob Community Day at Elk Knob State Park
- September 22, 2015 – Students meet with Park Staff and EKCHO board at Proffit’s Grove Church, Meat Camp, NC to build local support for events.
- November 10, 2015 – Students report on their work to Elk Knob State Park staff
- December 1, 2015 – Faculty meet with Park staff and EKCHO board at Proffit’s Grove Church, Meat Camp, NC to evaluate student participation
- December 31, 2015 – Planning session for first hike at Elk Knob State Park

2. Presentations and Public Events

- September 28, 2015 - Students present Old Time Jam event at Elk Knob State Park
- October 18, 2015 – Students present Old Time Jam event at Elk Knob State Park
- December 5, 2015 – Students present at Appalachian Teaching Project annual conference Crystal City, VA (live presentation and poster session)
- January 1, 2016 – Student work presented to the public at “First Hike” on Elk Knob Art Trail.
- March 20, 2016 – Students present at Appalachian Studies Association Annual conference Shepherd University Shepherdstown, WV
- April 1, 2016 - Students Present at Creative Social Stewardship Symposium, Boone, North Carolina (this presentation included a roundtable discussion of best practices for community engagement)
- April 17, 2016 – Students present Old Time Jam event at Elk Knob State Park

Project Outcomes:

- Development of a new cultural programming series at Elk Knob State Park
- Development of an Art Trail connecting native plants to the cultural heritage of the communities surrounding Elk Knob State Park
- Planning for future events at the state park that support sustainable development in the Appalachian region.
- Increased cooperation and enhanced partnerships between ASU, The Elk Knob State Park, the Elk Knob Community Heritage Council, and the Appalachian Regional Commission.
- Enhancement of student and community awareness of rural development work, including the role of federal agencies like the ARC
- Presentation of student work at the ATP Conference in Washington, D.C., December 4 and 5, 2015.
- Presentation at Appalachian Studies Association Conference in Shepardstown, WV, March 25-27, 2016
- Creation of a poster and other presentation assets for the conference in Washington, D.C.
- Placement of two students in internships with the Elk Knob State Park
- Development of leadership and civic capacity among the students engaged in the project

Problems Encountered:

The biggest problem is making long term community-based work fit into an 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, which was a challenge but helped develop leadership capacity. Specific problems included the time involved in transporting students from campus to the community, and the logistics of creating an off-campus project around students' class schedules.

The only deviation from our original proposal is that we were unable to schedule a radio broadcast due to a change in management at the radio station. To accommodate for this unexpected development, we were able to involve students in an additional presentation that was not part of our original proposal. Students presented April 1, 2016 at a Symposium at for Creative Social Stewardship in Boone, NC.

Program Continuation and Sustainability:

- a. Short-term impact
 1. A pilot performance series in the Elk Knob State Park amphitheater, including a catalogue of performers available for the park, and a set of recommendations about how to sustain the performance series beyond the project period.
 2. Site-specific art to help park visitors interpret local cultural connections to native flora and fauna and on the Beech Tree Trail in Elk Knob State Park. This work opened to the public on January 1, 2016
 3. Planning for a July, 2016 event at Elk Knob State Park celebrating the centennial of the North Carolina State Park System.
 4. Development of student leadership skills

- b. Long-term impact
 1. This project was used as a model by other ATP institutions as a way to engage students and communities with public lands such as National Forests and parks.
 2. The pilot performance series was successful and the park now presents the Elk Knob Old Time Jam monthly between April and October.
 3. The park has used the increase in public events to advocate for expansion of their facilities, which will help draw more visitors to the area.
 4. Two students have been placed as interns at Elk Knob State park, providing job experience and continuity for the pilot programs created in the fall of 2015.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The Elk Knob Asset Development Project was well received by the community and students. The project has made lasting change in the community. To build on our work with the Elk Knob State Park, we recommend engaging the New River Conservancy as our primary community partner for next year. This organization works to protect the water supply and recreational resources throughout the New River Valley, which flows from North Carolina through Virginia to West Virginia. The Elk Knob State Park contains many springs that create the headwaters of the New River and this project will focus on the portions of the river in Ashe and Watauga Counties of North Carolina. A partnership with the New River Conservancy will build on existing partnerships and expand the impact of student's work supporting sustainable development of communities along the upper New River Valley.

Attachments (in PDF format):

1. Newspaper article in local paper about the Old Time Jams
2. Notice of Old Time Jams on State Park Website
3. Photos of old time jams
4. Photos of student participation in Elk Knob Headwaters Community Day
5. Photos of students working on Art Trail
6. Photos of community hike on Art Trail
7. Elk Knob Old Time Jam facebook page
8. Creative Social Stewardship Symposium program