

“Expanding Tuskegee National Forest as a Community Asset”

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Project Period

September 1, 2015 – June 15, 2016

Date Submitted

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ATP PROJECT TEMPLATE (June 15, 2015, Deadline)

PROJECT FOCUS: The Auburn University ATP team will work with National Forests of Alabama and local community partners on research and action related to the Tuskegee National Forest as a community asset.

PROJECT DETAILS:

Course Number, Name, and Instructor: LBAR 3910: Practicum in Liberal Arts, Dr. Mark Wilson

Community Partner: National Forests of Alabama staff (Tuskegee National Forest); Macon County Cooperative Extension; Tuskegee University class and students

Need: The Tuskegee National Forest is the smallest national forest in the United States, and the 11,000 acre natural resource has a unique history and unrealized potential for ecotourism. Macon County is an ARC-distressed county, and while it is known for its county seat of Tuskegee, the forest seems to have little public recognition for tourism and recreation than it deserves. Forest Service personnel are unable to conduct surveys, so they have asked us to assist with research related to public perception and awareness of the forest. In addition to a survey, the forest service and its partners have developed a festival-in-the-forest event, and they have asked us to develop activities for attendees related to history and culture. In addition to development of the forest as an asset used by local citizens, the forest service is interested in citizens from surrounding counties understanding the recreational benefits of the forest, and they have asked our team to develop and execute two classroom presentations in adjacent counties (Lee and Russell).

Number and description of planned meetings with the community partner:

Tentative Schedule

August 24 – Tuskegee Forest Visit. This introduction to the forest with rangers will allow us to observe signage, use of existing maps, quality of trails, and amenities for the public. We will get a feel for the layout of the Festival in the Forest and begin determining types of activities that we might plan.

August 31 – Update visit. We will meet with partners to present ideas for the history/culture rotation.

September 14 – Walkthrough of festival plans at the forest with partners. We will finalize our festival contributions.

September 26 – Festival in the Forest.

October 5 – Festival reflection meeting, as well as updates on the surveys. Develop additional ways to get citizen surveys completed if we are not on track.

November 2 – Update meeting with partner on citizen surveys results. Also update on results of the two classroom presentations in adjacent counties.

November 30 – Final meeting with partner before ATP presentation. Practice the presentation with partners and guests.

Overview of the project, including its central focus (10-12 sentences):

The Tuskegee National Forest is a community asset, one that can be leveraged for education and tourism. The forest service cannot help the asset reach its full potential alone, and Macon County Extension and Tuskegee University have become significant partners in the work. After an initial planning meeting with partners, we determined that the Auburn ATP team could assist with administering a citizen survey on knowledge and use of the forest; research and coordination for history and culture tent at the second annual Festival in the Forest; and development and execution of two presentations on the forest to groups in adjacent counties. The survey is beneficial for future grant applications related to activities in the forest. The Festival participation will allow the second annual event to grow in size and scope. The presentations will challenge students to convey the qualities of the forest to potential visitors.

In addition to learning about the work of the Appalachian Regional Commission, students will learn about the work of the Forest Service and its partners, as well as the ways in which partners from various institutions work together for a common purpose. Auburn students and Tuskegee University students will have an opportunity to collaborate, which will strengthen both universities as a result. One of our partners is a Nature-Based Tourism and Economic Development Specialist for the National Forests of Alabama, so students will have a chance to learn about this growing professional field as a result of the activities.

Goals and Objectives: Please use a bulleted or numbered list and also show how the project addresses one or more goals of the ARC (see Scope of Work, “Project Goals,” p. 2.

1) Distribution of IRB-approved survey to citizens in and around Macon County and compilation of data. (Aligns with ARC goal #2. We need data regarding public perception and use of the forest to determine the forest’s potential for economic development. Also aligns with ARC goal #3, since we are seeking to add value to a community asset.)

2) Research, development and execution of history and culture activities at the Festival in the Forest. (Aligns with ARC goal #2, since the festival aims to attract visitors from outside of the county.)

3) Development and execution of two classroom or public programs outside of the county encouraging visits to the Tuskegee National Forest. (Aligns with ARC goal #2 as well).

PROJECT OUTCOMES: In bulleted format, list all anticipated activities that meet the goals and objectives, including the poster, the conference presentation in Washington, D.C., and the required community presentation(s).

1. Poster describing our project to be presented at the ATP symposium.
2. 15-minute presentation at the ATP symposium.
3. Partner/community presentation reporting out the results of the project.
4. Memorandum of agreement executed between Tuskegee National Forest and Auburn University for this project, which represents a new partnership for the area and improved working relationships between local, state, and federal partners.
5. We anticipate scheduling a presentation with staff at the National Forest Service while in Washington, D.C. for the conference.
6. Through the development of presentations introducing people outside of the county to the benefits of Tuskegee National Forest, students will develop leadership and confidence.