

USDA FOREST SERVICE INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS



NATURAL RESOURCE BASED TOURISM



A new paradigm: Increasingly, planners are trying to better incorporate broader economic development concerns with natural resource based tourism efforts. Partnering with more mainstream tourism venues, targeting broader market segments beyond the backpacker crowd, and linking with auxiliary small businesses—taxi cabs, restaurants and local artisans—all represent important ways that sustainable tourism is evolving.

Did you know?

A 2003 study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers found that nature-based recreation visitors spend an average of \$23 per visit, excluding the expenses for gear, apparel and outfitter guides. That is good business for local restaurants, hotels and gas stations.

A Century of Expertise

For more than a century, the US Forest Service has managed 191 million acres (77 million hectares) of National Forests. Each year we host 205 million visitors to Forest Service lands, generating an estimated \$11.2 billion dollars in related spending. Also striking is the composition of Forest Service lands: one third is in wilderness, the most protected land in the US and meeting the highest standard of protection under the IUCN categories; another one third is pristine back country that is completely roadless, and another one third are lands which are managed for multiple uses including watershed, timber and non-timber forest product harvesting, wildlife and other uses. The US Forest Service has developed sustainable recreational venues on *all* of these lands, balancing the complex array of commercial interests, concessionaire require-

ments, and the needs of local and indigenous residents who live within and around the National Forests themselves.

Uniquely Positioned

The US Forest Service is uniquely positioned to work with partners overseas in developing sustainable tourism. Our Agency has technical depth along the entire spectrum of recreation: from designing activities for public access in primitive wilderness areas to managing forests that are directly adjacent to urban centers and have been under multiple use plans for decades. In addition, the US Forest Service works across a wide array of land ownerships through many collaborative projects. Included among these projects are innovative nature-based tourism ef-



forts that span many jurisdictions including privately-owned land such as the Front Range Trail which stretches 750 miles (1207 kilometers) from Wyoming to New Mexico. This landscape approach ensures that development is ecologically sustainable.

Our domestic work translates in an overseas setting because the context is analogous: our challenge has always been balancing the social and economic needs of local communities with protecting the natural resources. The US Forest Service contends with many of the same issues as counterparts in developing countries: encroachment, settlements, boundary issues, concession management, poaching and buffer zones. Internationally, Forest Service experts apply their technical expertise to these challenges from the Panama Canal area to the Lake Baikal Trail.



Selected US Forest Service - USAID Partnership Activities

Planning for Sustainable Tourism in Gabon's National Parks: President Omar Bongo's dramatic creation of 13 national parks in Gabon in 2002 created one of the richest and most diverse networks of protected areas in Africa with promising opportunities for investment in nature-based tourism products. With very little experience in protected area management, Gabon had no strategy to market its tourism products and to establish the necessary infrastructure. Since 2003, USAID has provided funding for the US Forest Service to support the development of management plans for these parks, and to incorporate strategies to promote, develop and market nature-based tourism within these parks. Future work will focus on the development of a permit and fee structure for all park uses, especially tourism, and the development of recreation infrastructure in the parks.

Southern Africa – Capacity Building for Community Involvement in Tourism: In August 2006, the US Forest Service, in collaboration with the Universities of KwaZulu – Natal and Montana, will hold the first ever *African Seminar on People and Conservation*. This seminar will target key decision makers from Southern African conservation organizations and will expose them to new thinking about people and conservation. An important component of this seminar is how to integrate communities into tourism opportunities in and



around protected areas in the region. Case studies from successful community-managed tourism products, such as eco-lodges, ranches and guiding operations, will be studied and strategies to promote similar products will be developed by seminar participants. Our aim is to build this initial seminar into an annual event for protected area managers in the region.

Albania: Since 1998, USAID has provided funding and support to the US Forest Service for a diverse array of technical assistance in Albania including recreation planning and specialty tourism. Albanian protected areas are becoming important tourist attractions yet there are no management plans to ensure that recreation and tourism activities are sustainably developed and do not threaten the resource base. The results of a 2004 needs assessment conducted by the Forest Service are serving as a foundation to increase capacity in Albania in these areas. USAID is looking to Forest Service expertise to complement their current activities by strengthening the planning processes to improve protected areas management, ensure quality visitor experiences, promote development of tourism and recreation opportunities and promote ecological longevity.

Panama Tourism Survey: With support from USAID, US Forest Service is working to integrate mainstream tourism with nature-based tourism. Part of the work involved conducting surveys of cruise ship passengers traveling to the Panama Canal area. The results showed there is great potential for local businesses despite the fact that they had not yet tapped the tourists' interest to explore local culture, history and amenities. The US Forest Service team will work with local entrepreneurs and land managers to develop strategies to target these tourists more effectively.