

## Teaching and Learning Objectives

Below are the teaching and learning objectives for this case, followed by examples:

1. *Teaching Objective:* Offer students an opportunity to understand and thereby explain definitions and applications of sustainability.

*Learning Objective:* Students will be able to explain and describe definitions and applications of sustainability in their own words.

The case achieves this first objective via the following:

- Use of terminology related to sustainability.
- Varied examples of policy, process, and practice related to increasing sustainability.
- Examples include the Sustainable Event Planning Resource Guide provided by the county Chamber of Commerce and an alternative fuel program using vegetable oil in use by the school district.

2. *Teaching Objective:* Provide students with current information about a variety of sustainability efforts, using a rural country in North Carolina as an example.

*Learning Objective:* Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of current practices of sustainability by identifying them in the case study and by providing further examples of their own.

The case helps achieve this objective through the following:

- As the case study was completed in 2011, the information is up to date and provides current and future plans for sustainable policy and practice in Jackson County.
- Some examples are the growing recycling program, the planned expansion of the Jackson County Green Energy Park, and the continuation of events like Greening Up the Mountains festival.

3. *Teaching Objective:* Stimulate student discussion over the definitions of and application of sustainability in a variety of settings.

*Learning Objective:* Students will be able to share definitions and describe applications of sustainability in a variety of settings.

- Jackson County is an example of the issues that come with a growing tourism economy and as a case it also offers possible solutions for reconciling economic growth with environmental harm.
- Students may discuss the pros and cons of the growth of tourism on destinations, as well as the cost, practicality, and timeframe necessary to implement sustainable solutions.

4. *Teaching Objective:* Identify themes in sustainability in a variety of hospitality related sectors.

*Learning Objective:* Students are able to identify themes in sustainability in a variety of hospitality related sectors.

- Many of the sustainable practices currently in use in Jackson County are well suited to satisfy their needs as a natural and heritage tourism locale, but can also be applied to other types of destinations and hospitality sectors.
- The recycling, alternative fuel, local and organic food, and sustainable event planning practices might be successfully applied to other factions of the hospitality industry.

## Suitability for Use

This case is suited for use by instructors and students in undergraduate tourism planning and development, introduction to hospitality and tourism, and hospitality and tourism marketing courses, in settings where the instructors wish to provide students with opportunities to develop an understanding of sustainability practices and issues and encourage students to think about and discuss issues critical to sustainability.

## Sources and Methods of Collecting Information for the Case

Information for this case was collected via interviews and observations, through perusing related websites, and by reading documents provided to the authors by those interviewed.

## Teaching Approach and Suggested Sequence or Timeframe

Instructors may use this case in a variety of ways. These include using the case as:

- an individual assignment
- a group assignment
- an essay item on an exam—perhaps as a take-home exam question with extended time to process the case and to re-search the answers to the questions
- a class discussion exercise
- a combination of individual and group assignment activity

The case could be assigned to read out of class and then a one-two hour in-class session could provide students with an opportunity to discuss and process the case. The case can be used over several class sessions if students are required to complete the points for discussion prior to class and then come to class either face-to-face or online ready to discuss the varied topics and issues related to the case. As an individual assignment in a smaller class setting, students might be assigned the case to read and answer several or all of the discussion questions, followed by a class discussion and comparison of their answers. On an exam, students might be challenged to read and

analyze the case by identifying the problem and analyzing the plans and solutions put into place or answering some or all of the discussion questions for credit. The related cases and recommended reading might be assigned as part of the background research on the case before a class discussion or as a contrast/comparison to the Jackson County case on an exam.

The following items provide instructors with questions and activities to guide their students' work with the case:

### **Questions to Generate Interest**

- What is sustainability?
- What is sustainable tourism?
- What kinds of sustainable practices, if any, have you noticed at tourism destinations you have visited?
- What possible benefits do you think a location might see as a result of the rapid growth of hospitality and tourism, especially in an area rich in natural or heritage related attractions?
- What problems or issues do you think a location might face as a result of the rapid growth of hospitality and tourism, especially in an area rich in natural or heritage related attractions?
- Can you think of any specific examples of locations that have been adversely affected by the rise of a tourist economy?
- How has the recent recession influenced tourism and sustainable practices?

### **Topics and Questions for Discussion:**

*1. What are the major sustainability initiatives and projects undertaken in Jackson County?*

In a relatively short amount of time a number of sustainability initiatives are in place or have a solid foundation. One step in identifying the need for sustainable practices took place in 2008 when the county Board of Commissioners created a report on the effects of development on the county. Then the community based Jackson County Greenway Advisory Committee began work on the county's first greenways project in 2009. The Green Energy Park is another major effort that is drastically reducing pollution and energy waste in the county by saving hundreds of tons of methane and carbon emissions, as well as the reuse of "waste" heat. As far back as 2004 the county's seat, Sylva, was designated as a "Tree City" requiring financial and policy obligations to the preservation of forestry. Looking into the future there are plans to enhance the recycling program to include more hazardous waste like electronics, televisions and computers and to replace diesel fuel purchased by the school systems with biodiesel produced from vegetable oils.

*2. Is there any additional information that you would like to have to further understand the sustainability efforts in the county and if so, what is it and why do you want to know more about it?*

Answers may vary but might possibly include further information on long term plans (beyond 5-10 years) for sustainable efforts, project-

ed growth of the tourism industry as well as the general population of Jackson County, as well as possible plans for new tourism ventures like larger hotels and resorts. Inquisitions might be based around the possibility for new, unforeseen issues in tourism and sustainability in Jackson County or similar locales. Students might also ask about the expansion of the economy through the growth of tourism, and the issues that might arise from dependency on one particular industry like those seen in casino communities, or seasonal attractions with a wide variance during the busy and slow seasons.

*3. Compare and contrast sustainability in Jackson County with that found in other counties in North Carolina, other states, and other countries around the world.*

Answers vary and this question might be used most effectively to guide a two-part exercise—first, an out-of-class activity whereby students, either individually or in small groups of two or three, go out to the web and other sources to find information and then second as in in-class activity when they organize their findings and share and discuss them with the class.

*4. Select one of the topics concerning sustainability outlined in the case and interview someone in your own community who has knowledge of the topic/issue to find out where he or she believes this topic/issue is at the current time in your community and where it is headed in the future.*

Answers will vary. This could also be completed as a combination of an in-class and out-of-class exercise in the following manner:

- As a class, develop questions that can be asked to learn about sustainability through the interviews
- Go out of class and conduct the interviews, either individual or in small groups of two or three students
- Come back to class, share the interviews, and discuss the findings (Note—in an online class—the "in-class" part can take place in a discussion board format)

*5. Discuss the major factors that you believe will influence the future of sustainability in Jackson County.*

The continued commitment of the community and local government are essential to the future of sustainability in Jackson County. For any current plans to come to fruition, fiscal and moral support and participation are necessary. Another important factor is the maintenance or growth of the tourism industry in the area. The community has found ways to balance profitability and sustainability within the framework of the tourism industry, but this needs to continue to thrive. The economic output of the industry is necessary for some of those changes to remain efficient, like attendance in the national parks and Qualla Boundary. At the time of this writing the national average price for a gallon of gas is \$3.80 (US). If gas prices or other factors prohibit travel during peak travel times, the fate of sustainability programs may change in the future.

*6. Discuss the major factors that you believe will influence the future of tourism in Jackson County.*

Answers will vary, but might include factors like the sustainability and maintenance of the natural and heritage sites in the county. This may be influenced by the availability of federal, county, and municipal funds for maintenance as well as expansion plans noted in the case study. April 2011 saw the threat of a government shutdown, which may have resulted in the closing of many national parks. (National Parks, n.d.) According to the National Parks Conservation Association, every dollar invested in national parks generates at least four dollars of economic value to the public. They also generated \$13.3 billion of activity in the local, private-sector and create 267,000 private-sector jobs (National Parks). Also, continued interest in the national parks and heritage sites located in Jackson County. Ninety percent of Americans have visited a national park (National Parks), so it seems that they continue to be a popular destination especially for Americans who choose to vacation domestically during harsh economic times and with unstable political climates abroad.

*7. Develop a strategy for tourism in Jackson County that both provides for the growth of tourism and for the further development of sustainability practices.*

A good strategy will maintain or reduce current costs, increase revenue, and expand sustainable practices in the future. Costs affect profits, and profitability is the key to the growth of an industry. If the tourism outlets in the county like lodging facilities, restaurants, and parks are not making money the industry will lose momentum and give way to another one that brings in more revenue. Due to the nature of the tourism industry in Jackson County and its basis on natural and heritage sites, it is also important that sustainability be a focus. Promoting sustainable practices in business as well as among visitors is one way to do so, as well as providing incentives for participation. Possible plans of action might include:

- Increasing Internet marketing about the county and its tourism destinations
- Offer incentives for organizations to bring meetings and events to the area
- Offer incentives to businesses to meet sustainable benchmarks
- Create a county-wide marketing plan (i.e. "Virginia is for Lovers" campaign)
- Increase target marketing to environmentally-friendly travelers
- Promote sustainable practices to travelers
- Inviting community input into sustainability plans

*8. Conduct a SWOT analysis (an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) of the sustainability practices and projects in Jackson County. As an extension of this item - Conduct a SWOT analysis activity for other locations.*

Answers will vary, but related to the other items in this list. This item could be extended so that Jackson County is used as an example and then students conduct a SWOT analysis of their own community or another community of choice.

*9. What do you see as possible advantages and disadvantages of Jackson County's focus on sustainability and why?*

One advantage is the long term profitability of the tourism industry in the county. The more focus put on the maintenance and preservation of resources, the longer these resources will be available and profitable as part of the tourism infrastructure. Another advantage is reduced costs that come with limited use of resources, as well as the limited damage to the physical environment that accompanies resource use like pollution, waste water and depletion of the land. A disadvantage of focusing on sustainability could be that the tourism industry might be limited in its ability to grow and continue to introduce new attractions. Other locations that are willing to compromise sustainability have the opportunity to build new attractions and develop tourism without regard to environmental harm. Destroying land, trees, water and wildlife do not seem to be an option in the expansion of the tourism industry of Jackson County so care and creativity with their existing resources are critical.

*10. How could Jackson County further reduce its carbon footprint?*

Some Jackson County schools and local businesses have begun buying supplies from local and organic sources, but integrating these practices into the city and county government will reduce their carbon footprint. Energy analyses are also in place at some facilities like the Green Energy Plant and implementing these procedures into the maintenance routines of all public buildings like libraries, schools, and office buildings will reduce waste as well as costs while increasing sustainability. This will result in water, energy, and fuel savings county-wide. Centralized heating and air controls are another way to reduce energy usage. This method of controlling temperatures for several locations from a central one is a strategy used by many corporations in the private sector to save money and could be beneficial in the public sector as well. Most importantly, a public transportation system would make a huge difference. A bus system of some kind could make a huge difference, for example, between the town of Sylva and the university campus or between the town of Sylva and the Qualla Boundary. Also, a more extensive system of bike paths and walking trails would be advantageous as well.

*11. What kinds of tourism products and services do you feel would be compatible with the sustainability efforts in Jackson County and why?*

Tours and events to showcase the county's efforts toward sustainability and sustainable food and lodging experiences might be great product/services to offer in Jackson County. To highlight and involve tourists in sustainable efforts, and also give them a fun and educational experience would make for a great attraction. A customized tour like this might include spending a little time at some of the county's best offerings, like an afternoon hike, sometime at the Qualla Boundary, and a rafting trip. The Green Energy Park has already proven that sustainable efforts can become an attraction, so tours and food and lodging experiences designed around sustainable practices are a

feasible option. Another example might be a local and organic food tasting tour that includes tasting menus at restaurants for breakfast, lunch, and dinner each day of a visitors' stay. In addition to showcasing local and organically grown foods, this type of attraction would support the farmers and families that grow them. Eventually this might even turn into a food festival or tasting event.

12. *What barriers to implementing sustainable practices were overcome in Jackson County that might make their efforts more feasible in other locations or industries?*

As noted previously, budgetary issues are huge in the current economic climate. In addition, continuing to garner citizen support for the efforts toward sustainability takes much effort and time and competing issues take their toll as well. The whole balance between growth and preservation continues to face counties like Jackson.

## Related Cases

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## Suggested Readings

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