

Rural Coastal Virginia Ecotourism Branding & Marketing Planning Meeting

Tuesday, February 6, 2018
Webinar 10:00 A.M.

On the webinar/conference call, Shannon Alexander, A-NPDC, Staci Martin, VTC, & Stephanie Heintz, Consociate Media discussed the outcome of the January 31 meeting of the Rural Coastal Virginia Ecotourism Steering Committee, focusing on best practices for branding and marketing for the logos and web site.

Both Staci and Stephanie are happy to be on the Steering Committee, and we are lucky to have their expertise and ideas to make this project as successful as possible!

Committee Vision Statement, Goals, Objectives - Staci indicated that the legal language in the Rural Coastal Virginia Community Enhancement Authority should be reviewed and referenced when developing these products. Additionally, she suggested that some key words/phrases are used to improve likelihood of future funding: Entrepreneurship, Workforce Development, & Economic Development.

Web Site Domain – Both Stephanie and Staci like www.VirginiaWaterTrails.com/org and www.VAWaterTrails.org/com as they offer more flexibility in the future, are shorter, and align with other Virginia initiatives (www.VirginiaOysterTrail.com, www.VABoatLovers.org (launching February 14th), etc.). Shannon is to reach out to DCR to insure that there is no conflict with the long-term plans of DCR or their partners. (**Since this conference call Shannon spoke with DCR staff, Jennifer Wampler, and assured her that DCR is happy that we are moving forward with this effort and that DCR has no state mandate to work on water trails and no staff currently or planned to be working on water trails. They are happy to have open communication throughout the project and serve as a resource and support this project.*) Stephanie and Staci also indicated that they do like a domain title with an action, but prefer something like ‘get on the water’ to ‘paddle’ as it is more compatible with other activities and resources (i.e. birding and wildlife trail, small sailing vessels, etc.) and that this would ideally be an additional domain purchase that would redirect to the main www.VAWaterTrails.org site. Stephanie is happy to put their web designer, Mark, in direct contact with ours, Bruce, to give advice about potential plug-ins for categorizing activities and other lessons learned. Having the user be able to filter trails by difficulty ranking and accessibility was highly recommended, specifically those that have launches that are accessible for individuals with disabilities. A recommendation was also made to include some testimonials and photos where possible. Stephanie is to share information

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about their Virginia-based host company with Shannon. Staci pointed out the data share capabilities of the www.Virginia.org web site, and Shannon is to look at the <http://www.visitstaunton.com/> web site to see an example of how resources available on www.Virginia.org were shared and integrated into the Staunton web site.

Logo – After much discussion, an agreement that a common logo with a place for the regional name would be more marketable and easier to recognize for ecotourism purposes. For example, look at the Michigan Water Trails logo below, and imagine different colors/image and at the top the word “Eastern Shore”, “Northern Neck”, “Middle Peninsula”, “Chesapeake Bay”, “Coastal”, “Hampton Roads” etc. always with uniform font. Having too many unique logos can be confusing for the user, more difficult to brand, and seem overwhelming/crowded. Staci suggests using blue and green to reflect sustainability and stewardship focused entrepreneurial initiatives that use blue and green infrastructure. Staci recommended using the Chesapeake Bay outline in the logo as that sets the rural coastal regions apart from other water trails and initiatives. Maybe a slant logo with the bay outline with rivers conveyed. Something that would convey "Navigate the Maritime Highway." They also suggest “Water Trail” as opposed to “Blueways”, as Blueways is not understood in most circles.

Additionally, they suggest looking at options for ‘matching’ the logo for the Rural Coastal Virginia Community Enhancement Authority, at least in color or some other aspect.

ACTION: *Steering Committee Members:* Please reply with your opinion about this, as I’d like to get the graphic designer starting the logo ASAP. If you have a shape preference (circle, oval, square, rectangle), please indicate this as well.

Virginia Certified Ecotour Guide Course - Shannon gave an update about the course and expressed some concerns about long-term sustainability. Staci is to reach out to DCR about their potential involvement moving forward. Staci also suggested that we use the term "workforce development" when referring to any ecotour guide educational initiatives as workforce development appears to be a pillar of the governor's work plan.