

Report Date: October 2009



Rocky Knob Sustainable Tourism Centerpiece Project



Final Report Summary



 **VirginiaTech**
Invent the Future[®]

CLEMSON
UNIVERSITY

Authorship and Acknowledgements

The following individuals (presented in alphabetical order) are the primary project leaders and authors of this report:

Cari Goetcheus - Assistant Professor, Clemson University, Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture

Dr. Jeffrey C. Hallo - Assistant Professor, Clemson University, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management

Dr. John A. McGee – Assistant Professor, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation / Virginia Cooperative Extension

Dr. Nancy McGehee - Associate Professor, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management

Dr. William C. Norman - Associate Professor, Clemson University, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management.

Dr. Chi-Ok Oh – Assistant Professor, Michigan State University, Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies

We would also like to gratefully acknowledge the invaluable help, advice, guidance, and involvement of the following individuals and organizations in the completion of this project:

Congressman Rick Boucher, 9th district of Virginia

Rebecca Coleman, Senior Advisor for Policy and Development, Congressman Rick Boucher

Lee Chichester, Blue Ridge Heritage, Incorporated

Jarred Drown, Virginia Tech

John Getgood, Blue Ridge Heritage, Incorporated

F. Matthew Holly, Clemson University

Gary Johnson, National Park Service

Suengwoo “John” Lee, Virginia Tech

Seong Ok Lyu, Michigan State University

Pat Sharkey, ‘Round the Mountain

Steve Swartz, Blue Ridge Heritage, Incorporated

Patrick Henry Community College

The Jacksonville Center

Clemson University Regional Landscape Planning and Design class Fall 2008

Notes on Data, Analyses, and Recommendations

Data, analyses, and recommendations presented in this report are intended for informational use only by Blue Ridge Heritage Inc. and the National Park Service. They do not represent any predictions of future events or financial returns. The sole intended purpose of this report is to help inform the development of a sustainable tourism centerpiece for the Rocky Knob region of Virginia. The information contained in this report is provided without any warranty expressed or implied. It is the responsibility of the reader to determine the usefulness of this report. Decisions made resulting from this report are at the discretion of Blue Ridge Heritage Inc. and the National Park Service.

Executive Summary

- The Floyd and Patrick County region has existing potential tourist assets that can be better marketed through a visitor's center. For example, the GIS-based community asset inventory identified approximately 400 potential business (e.g. restaurants, galleries) and public attractions (festivals), and meeting locations (centers, schools) in the region. The region supports over 150 miles of state designated birding and wildlife trails and 116 miles of state scenic byways. In addition, 73 options for accommodations (e.g. hotels, B & B's, cabins, campgrounds, etc.) were identified and mapped across the two counties. Community assets located within the identified zone of influence should, when possible, be leveraged and linked with assets across the broader region.
- The zone of influence (ZOI) was delineated along the political boundaries of Floyd and Patrick counties. The ZOI was delineated after conducting a thorough community mapping inventory across the region.
- Results from the community-centered interviews, workshop feedback questionnaires, field notes, media, blogs, other internet sources, and previous reports indicate the following as major areas of consideration in terms of development of a Rocky Knob Tourism Centerpiece:
 - Authenticity: Historical, natural, and agricultural
 - Sustainability: Water issues, light pollution, built in scale with the surroundings, utilizing local resources – agriculture, artisans, builders, workers, etc.
 - Respect: for local residents, existing businesses and projects, and the integrity of the parkway
 - Positive Economic Impact: for the community
 - Political Sensitivities: minimize misinformation, keep stakeholders involved in an equitable way
 - Target Markets: minimize negative tourism impact, keep land prices reasonable
 - Programming Tips: themed visitor center, similar to Tamarack or Peaks of Otter
- The results of the community asset/resource inventories and survey of current visitors directed a suitability analysis and development of seven potential tourism scenario concepts.
- The visitor survey found that agritourism businesses (e.g., wineries, local produce markets), parks, and cultural/historic sites are the types of attractions within Floyd and Patrick Counties that are most utilized by current visitors. Survey results suggested two broad themes for a tourism centerpiece – (1) local products and (2) mountain life. Also, survey findings support locating a destination centerpiece near the intersection of the Blue Ridge Parkway and either route 8 or route 58.
- In the general population study of potential visitors to the Floyd and Patrick counties region, when respondents were asked specifically: “How likely would you or the members of your household be to visit the following types of tourist attractions in the Floyd and Patrick County region,” the most popular responses included:

- A regional touring center (Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail) that reveals key cultural and natural history events in the area
- An agritourism heritage center (Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail) that presents the rural roots and agricultural heritage of the region;
- Results of the economic impact revealed that the projected annual incremental impact associated with an increase in visitation to the Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail will range from \$1,313,398 to \$9,295,763 per year. This amount is dependent on how many nature-based and heritage tourists visit the centerpiece and how successful the facility is in extending the visitor's length of stay. The potential employment impact associated with Trillium is estimated between approximately 26 and 178 jobs.
- Likewise, results of the scenario based economic impact analyses reveal that the annual incremental impact associated with an increase in visitation to Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail ranges from \$967,888 to \$8,996,721 per year depending on how many additional day trippers, art, wine and heritage tourists visit the centerpiece and how successful the facility is in extending visitors' length of stay. The projected number of jobs associated Miller's Way is estimated between approximately 20 and 176 jobs depending on visitation and length of stay variables.
- Overall, a new tourism center is expected to generate an extensive increase in economic impacts in the Floyd and Patrick County Region. However, caution should be exercised in understanding the economic impacts of the two different options of Trillium and Miller's Way. Differences in economic impacts may result from the assumption used that each tourism center will attract different tourist groups. Consequently, if this assumption is altered, estimated economic impacts will also change.
- Floyd and Patrick Counties possess several viable tourism products and attractions. In order for these attractions to produce economic impacts, non-local visitors must inject money into the local economy when visiting these attractions. If public agencies and private businesses set their goals and objectives for more effective management and marketing programs to attract more visitors, the result will be an increase in economic impacts at the regional level.

Introduction

The final report details the individual tasks undertaken to develop a sustainable tourism strategy for Floyd and Patrick counties, Virginia. Each of these tasks represents a substantial part of a larger integrated project. Each task builds on the work and outcomes of other tasks previously conducted. This provides opportunities to extend and refine the empirical line of inquiry that underlies the project. Also, this approach allows the tasks to validate each other's findings.

This summary of the final report is intended to (1) describe how the individual tasks build on each other to result in two tourism centerpiece development alternatives (2) provide a detailed description of each development alternative, including site acreage and budget requirements, (3) identify potential funding sources for these development alternatives, and (4) discuss challenges and limitations related to the development of these alternatives.

Synthesis of the Project Tasks

The first task in this integrated project was a review and validation of Floyd and Patrick counties as a potential zone of influence for tourism development in the Rocky Knob Area. This work consisted of a community asset and resource inventory using both a map-based (i.e., Geographic Information System) approach and qualitative interviews with community and tourism stakeholders. This work showed that Floyd and Patrick counties contain the necessary assets to act as a tourism destination. In addition, the map-based inventory and assessment produced a set of spatial data that were heavily utilized in later tasks. Also, the stakeholder interviews provided information to begin to generate ideas for potential tourism centerpiece topics, and to filter tourism development topics or approaches to only those that would respect and enhance the current way of life in Floyd and Patrick counties. These interviews allowed other tasks to proceed with a reasonable assurance that the results generated would be acceptable, in large part, to residents and community leaders within Floyd and Patrick counties.

The second project task was a needs analysis to determine what attractions tourists and travelers would like to visit. This task relied on two surveys. The first survey conducted for this task was developed, in part, based on outcomes of the community asset and resource inventory described above, and a discussion of these outcomes at a meeting (May 2008) with project researchers, the NPS, and BRHI members. This survey was directed at current visitors to Floyd and Patrick counties, and results from it indicated that current visitors would be most likely to visit a tourism attraction based on two themes – (1) mountain life or (2) local products. The survey of current visitors also suggested some general topics (e.g., organic farming, sustainable living techniques, changes in mountain life over the past century, traditional skills for mountain and outdoor living) that might be included within each of these themes.

The third project task consisted of rigorous suitability analyses of a wide range of tourism development scenarios, including ones focused on mountain life and local products. Work for this task was done at the same time as the survey of current visitors. This task indicated there were seven plausible tourism scenarios including: an ecological sustainability center and site, a regional center emphasizing natural and cultural heritage (i.e., mountain life and related

nature/natural history), an agritourism center and routes (emphasizing local products), a regional artisan school, a unified water conservation and recreation network, a biodiversity conservation concept and a bison reintroduction tourism scenario. Each scenario and related suitability analysis revealed potential ways that aspects of mountain life, nature and natural history, and local products might be incorporated into the final two tourism destination centerpiece alternatives described fully below.

The second survey conducted as part of Task 2 was developed based on results from both the current visitor survey and the tourism scenarios/suitability analyses described above. In addition, a review of the literature on sustainable tourism was used to develop survey questions that examined potential visitors' attitudes towards specific amenities, sustainability features, services, and programming alternatives at a tourism centerpiece. Results from this potential visitor survey supported previous findings that two possible scenarios would be of interest to potential visitors: a centerpiece strategy based on mountain life (including related nature and natural history) or an agritourism heritage center that presents the rural roots and agricultural heritage of the region. In addition, survey results showed what design alternatives for a tourism centerpiece would be favored by visitors.

Information derived from the survey of potential visitors serves as the primary basis for the two tourism development scenarios presented in the next section of this report. Furthermore, the detailed description of each alternative is based on the results of this survey.

The final project task was an economic impact analysis of these two tourism centerpiece development alternatives. This analysis extended the consideration of these alternatives beyond the wants of tourists; it considered the economic suitability and sustainability of each development alternative. Results from this analysis suggested that a new tourism center is expected to generate an extensive increase in economic impacts in the Floyd and Patrick County Region. However, caution should be exercised in understanding the economic impacts of the two different options of the Trillium and Miller's Way centers. Differences in economic impacts may result from the assumption used that each tourism center will attract different tourist groups.

To assist in the future promotion and advertising of a Rocky Knob tourism centerpiece, further marketing research analysis was conducted for the two proposed development scenarios. In addition, market segmentation analysis was conducted to determine if respondents could be clustered into unique groups based on their likelihood of visiting the region and visiting the two different attractions. Results of the additional marketing segmentation analysis revealed that four out ten respondents (43.7%), deemed the "Premium Target Market", were likely to visit the Floyd and Patrick County region in the next two years and expressed an interest in visiting both proposed tourism centerpiece alternatives. As a result, there is the potential to develop a Rocky Knob tourism centerpiece that incorporates elements of both scenarios if properly planned, located, designed and promoted.

Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail (A Regional Touring Center)

Based on a suitability analysis, the Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail would best be located in Meadows of Dan, taking advantage of transportation access via Interstate 77, State Highways 221 and 58 and the Blue Ridge Parkway. This location's proximity to existing businesses, tourism assets and infrastructure makes it a wise location investment.

Even though the facility is located adjacent to several main roads, it should still be located some distance off of the interstate, appealing to visitors interested in the facility having authentic charm and not necessarily being "just off an exit."

The Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail concept combines a visitor center with associated adjacent new trails, along with a series of self-guided travel routes that wander throughout both counties. Floyd and Patrick counties pride themselves on their rural mountain heritage, scenic mountain vistas, natural areas and artistic ingenuity. The intent of this scenario is to reveal the wonders of the counties to local residents and visitors alike.

The goals of this scenario are to:

- Simultaneously conserve and perpetuate heritage and natural amenities in Floyd and Patrick Counties
- Provide a nature and heritage-based educational experience for local residents and visitors of all ages by providing access to resource information at both a centrally located interpretive site/building and through "guided wanderings"
- Develop a series of travel routes that highlight the various types of amenities in the counties. These travel routes would be continually researched and reflected upon to evolve over time.
- Provide opportunities for visitors to venture beyond the main transit corridors to have a true economic impact in the counties.

A key to the success of this concept is branding. Because the attractions will be scattered across the counties, a brand/logo and signage system should be developed so that it unifies them as part of a large accessible interconnected system. This branding should be used as a logo, functioning in both color and grayscale for easy photocopying and publication via radio, television, and internet advertisements. Also, branded signage promoting the center and helping with wayfinding should be placed on Interstates 81 and 77, and on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail will provide an overview of resources located in both Floyd and Patrick counties for those visitors who are not interested in wandering far off the Blue Ridge Parkway. However, this center will also encourage visitors to explore beyond the site and adjacent trails to the two counties. Topical themes highlighted at the Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail include:

- Changes in mountain/rural life over the last 100 years
- Nature and natural history
- Local products
- Mountain history and folklore

Some of the physical features of the Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail include:

- Contextual design of the facility to ensure that it blends with regional architecture
- Sustainable design of the facility and opportunities for visitor education on the local environment, as well as appropriate siting of structures on land to take advantage of local climate, as well as appropriate use of native plants to reinforce local ecological communities and wildlife habitats
- Sustainable infrastructure by providing financial benefits and empowering local people through employment and spin off business opportunities related to the center

Program features of the Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail include:

- Educational exhibits, displays, and interpretive signage on both the natural and cultural history of the area
- Presentations by naturalists knowledgeable about the area
- Audio tours of the local area or attractions
- Handicap-accessible walking trails
- A store that sells a variety of authentic products including crafts, recordings of local musicians, etc.
- Assistance with way-finding
- A variety of educational opportunities for adults and children
- Themed routes with brochures and audio tours
- GPS “guided wanderings” using interactive technologies for serendipitous but safe travel
- Local cultural/history field guides
- Customized activity maps
- Tickets for local tours, attractions and events

The proposed trail network at the visitor center could consist of three separate routes: a native fauna trail, a native flora trail, and a bushcraft skill trail. Designed to offer education and entertainment for a broad audience, the native flora and fauna trails focus on endangered species providing information on what threatens these subjects and what society and individuals can do to protect these species into the future. The bushcraft skills trail teaches visitors at each feature node about a different skill set that would be useful in the wild. In addition to the three walking trails, a separate biking trail surrounds the bushcraft skills trail, taking advantage of the same feature nodes, with the object of offering an option to visitors with bicycles. The trails are short, comfortable walks (approximately 1.5 miles) that are intended to appeal to the road-weary travelers, looking for an opportunity to stretch their legs. A system of signage for trail features and directional purposes should also be created for direction and identification purposes, information panels, and cabin-style information hubs.

Further, to assist in safe wanderings throughout the two counties, a system of comprehensive information stations (unstaffed and accompanied by branded signage) located along the Blue Ridge Parkway and throughout Floyd and Patrick counties will allow visitors to penetrate deeper into the local economies.

Single attraction routes should be developed utilizing existing structures, major and secondary roads. Using the interstates and highways allows visitors to travel from greater distances more directly, while the less travelled roads affords visitors the opportunity to more closely explore the hidden charms within the counties. The single attraction routes guide them in an organized fashion. For example, routes could focus on visiting attractions such as wineries or historic sites. By overlaying these single attraction routes, mixed attraction routes naturally emerge that may then provide opportunities for visitors to see a variety of differing attractions based on their personal preferences. These routes are designed with the intent that visitors would travel in their own private vehicles, but future opportunities should be sought to allow movement between amenities using public transit.

One of the critical aspects of the self-guided travel routes is the ability for an individual to feel like they are wandering into the unknown to discover interesting things, yet feel safe that they will not get lost in the process. This suggests that it may be an effective tourism development strategy to use Geographic Positioning System (GPS) units preloaded with detailed information on lodging, dining and entertainment options, local history and other attractions throughout the two counties, as well as the numerous designated travel routes. Inviting commercial sponsorship of the GPS units, for example through GPS unit manufacturers, may be a cost-effective strategy for implementing this. GPS manufacturers may see an incentive for such sponsorship in that it could potentially result in a consumer market that has become familiar with its product and feels comfortable buying a product that they have experienced and trust.

Through the combination of a visitor center, new trails, and GPS guided discovery routes, this diverse yet easy to navigate system encourages visitors to wander the counties for different durations and purposes. The various natural, cultural and historic amenities will be perpetuated through education as locals and visitors discover Floyd and Patrick counties.

Results of the economic impact revealed that the projected annual incremental impact associated with an increase in visitation to Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail will range from \$1,313,398 to \$9,295,763 per year. This amount is dependent on how many nature-based and heritage tourists visit the centerpiece and how successful the facility is in extending the visitor's length of stay. The potential employment impact associated with Trillium is estimated between approximately 26 and 178 jobs.

Site Acreage and Rough Budget

- Location of site:** near the intersection of the Blue Ridge Parkway and route 58
- Acreage of site:** 20-50 acres
- Cost per acre:** \$15,000-18,000 (based on current real estate values in the area)
- Land cost:** \$300,000-900,000
- Total square footage of visitor center:** 15,000-25,000 square feet
- Cost per square foot:** \$300 (based on current building costs for LEEDS certified building in the **Floyd-Patrick County area**; this is for the basic shell of the building only)
- Building cost:** \$4,500,000-7,500,000
- Building enhancements:** This includes, but is not limited to, architectural drawings, information kiosks, furnishings, etc. \$4,500,000-7,500,000 (based on a 1:1 match with the shell construction as reported by other similar centers)
- Site enhancement cost:** Parking, trail development, etc. \$3,000,000-4,000,000 (will depend on the length of the trail, the terrain, size/number of demonstration areas, etc.).
- Environmental Impact Analysis and Statement:** \$250,000

Total **estimated** cost for the Trillium Mountain Life Visitor Center and Nature Trail:
\$15,010,000-24,180,000

Land costs:	300,000	900,000
Building costs:	4,500,000	7,500,000
Building enhancements:	4,500,000	7,500,000
Environmental assessment	250,000	250,000
Site Enhancement cost	3,000,000	4,000,000
20% “uncertainty” costs	2,510,000	4,030,000
Total ESTIMATED cost	\$15,060,000	\$24,180,000

Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail (An Agritourism Center)

Based on a site suitability analysis, Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail will be located off of Route 8 between Route 221 and the Blue Ridge Parkway on an existing farm. The criteria for the suitability included a parcel of existing farmland or pastureland; land suitable for agricultural businesses such as vineyards, orchards, berry, tobacco, and corn production based on slope, aspect, elevation, and depth of soil; proximity to highways and major roads; and proximity to existing agritourism sites. Also, the visitor survey revealed a desire to be located near an area with locally owned shops and restaurants. After considering all of these site selection constraints, the most likely sites for this center are located within 5 miles of the town of Floyd.

The Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail concept embraces agricultural traditions of Floyd and Patrick counties by enhancing the local economy through establishment of a self-sustaining agritourism network. The network would consist of a central farm hub with a "slow food" restaurant and county-wide agri-tour routes. All of these features would reinforce to locals and visitors alike the need for and practices of agricultural sustainability – from seed to consumption. People throughout the United States have increasingly become interested in the idea of agritourism, especially in areas that have a heritage of such industry. Many people enjoy learning about local food and products, yet, there seems to be a disconnect between the process and the product. One of the goals of this scenario is to take advantage of this existing interest by providing opportunities for visitors to see and experience the processes associated with local agricultural products.

Some of the goals of the Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail include:

- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect in the region
- Provide financial benefits and empower local people
- Use local vegetables, produce and other farm products
- Establish environmental tobacco smoke control
- Raise sensitivity to host communities' political, environmental, and social climates

Again the key success of this concept is branding. Because the farm attractions will be scattered across the two counties, it will be necessary to develop a brand/logo and signage system that unifies the sites as part of a large accessible interconnected system. The brand can be used for publication via radio, television, and internet advertisements, as well as way-finding from Interstates 81 and 77, and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail will provide an overview of county agritourism resources for those visitors who are not interested in wandering far off the Blue Ridge Parkway. However, the center will also encourage visitors to explore beyond the site to the wide ranging agritourism attractions along trails that meander throughout the counties.

Topical themes highlighted at the Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail include:

- Local foods
- Changes in mountain/rural life over the last 100 years
- Local products
- Organic farming and sustainable living
- Local artistry or crafts
- Agriculture and farming

Program features of the Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail include:

- A store that sells local agricultural products, such as fresh fruits and vegetables
- Educational exhibits on the natural and cultural history of the area incorporating interactive technologies
- A restaurant that serves local foods
- An indoor theater with occasional dance performances
- On-site demonstration gardens of locally grown fruits and vegetables
- Audio tours of the region, potentially with GPS self-guided interactive tours
- Local cultural/history field guides
- Customized activity maps
- Tickets for local tours, attractions, and events
- Opportunities for participatory experiences, such as workshops that provide hands-on experiences and result in a product (at an attraction within Floyd or Patrick counties)

Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail will act as the central hub for the agritourism trail network, and it will showcase local products found throughout the two counties in its store and restaurant. The intent is to offer a concentrated educational experience to visitors, exposing them to farm processes, walking trails, farm animals, crops, a historic farmstead and agriculture museum, access to local products, and a dining opportunity. The intent of this center is to expose visitor to a preview of what they will see along various agritourism trails throughout the counties, and to encourage visitors to go to and further experience the sites that make up these trails.

A potential vision of this center would begin with visitors arriving and parking in a sustainable material parking area where the parking spaces are defined by low shrubs. Leaving their car, visitors walk through an orchard surrounded by agricultural plots transitioning into the heart of the farm. This 'heart' is an interactive farming plot where visitors can participate in physically planting or harvesting crops, gaining instruction on various farming techniques, and other hands-on experiences. From the interactive farm plot, visitors venture through other orchards to a restaurant with attached market, both featuring local foods. This would be located in a rehabilitated barn. Surrounding the restaurant are various agricultural plots including an organic garden, a heirloom vegetable garden, and a series of berry patches. Extending from the restaurant is a central walkway leading to an area where visitor will find various types of farm animals (e.g., ponies, dairy cattle and goats). Visitors will interact with animals by petting, feeding, and in cases (such as ponies) riding them. A cow pasture and dairy cattle barn will be present for milking demonstrations. Also, a small area will be used to demonstrate production of some foods, like cheese. A series of areas will be dedicated as a concentrated educational section of the Miller's Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail farm. These areas include an agricultural

history garden showing the evolution of farming equipment and techniques, a model barn with information about historic building techniques, and a seasonal activities plot for a corn maze or Christmas tree harvesting. An 18th century historic farmstead will serve as a final attraction. Separated from the main farm, this site will provide the ambience of a historic farmstead and tells the story of individual local farmers.

The agritourism trail network may consist of three trails evenly distributed between the two counties. The “Farms and Produce Trail” highlights individual farms and establishments that produce food or organic products and sell them for a profit. Travelers will visit various farms and see what goes into the production of their favorite foods. The “Animal Trail,” has farms or establishments that primarily focus on producing animal products. There will be hands-on educational opportunities at these sites that allow visitors to gain a personal experience with the animals and learn about the large role that agricultural animals play in people’s lives. The “Seasonal Activities Trail” will link farms and businesses that offer seasonal recreational activities (e.g., pumpkin picking, Christmas tree harvesting). Only a portion of this trail will be in operation at any given time throughout the year, calling more attention to the specific seasonal locations along this trail. A typical experience along any of these three trails will include views of open farmland, pastures and mountain scenery; sites and attractions directly related to the agriculture trails; hotels, restaurants, and art centers also dispersed along the trails; and information kiosks at farm stands scattered throughout the network.

Results of the scenario based economic impact analyses reveal that the annual incremental impact associated with an increase in visitation to Miller’s Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail and ranges from \$967,888 to \$8,996,721 per year depending on how many additional day trippers, art, wine and heritage tourists visit the centerpiece and how successful the facility is in extending visitors’ length of stay. The projected number of jobs associated the Miller’s Way is estimated between approximately 20 and 176 jobs depending on visitation and length of stay variables.

Site Acreage and Rough Budget

Location of site: near Route 8 between Route 221 and the Blue Ridge Parkway on an existing farm

Acreage of site: 30-60 acres

Cost per acre: \$15,000-18,000 (based on current real estate values in the area)

Land cost: \$450,000-1,080,000

Total square footage of visitor center and retrofitted existing farm structures: 20-25,000 square feet, 5,000-10,000 sq ft for new restaurant and market, 15,000-20,000 retrofitted farm structures

Cost per square foot: \$300 (based on current new construction costs for LEEDS certified building in the Floyd-Patrick County area; this is for the basic shell of the building only); \$100 for retrofitting existing farm structures

Building cost: \$3,000,000-4,500,000

Building enhancements: This includes, but is not limited to, architectural drawings, information kiosks, furnishings, etc. \$3,000,000-4,500,000 (based on a 1:1 match with the shell construction and retrofitted structures as reported by other similar centers)

Site enhancement cost: Parking, trail development, etc. \$3,000,000-4,000,000 (will depend on the length of the trail, the terrain, size/number of demonstration areas, etc.).

Environmental Impact Analysis and Statement: \$250,000

Total **estimated** cost for the “Miller’s Way Farm Life Visitor Center and Trail”:
\$11,640,000-18,060,000

Land costs:	450,000	1,800,000
Building costs:	3,000,000	4,500,000
Building enhancements:	3,000,000	4,500,000
Environmental assessment	250,000	250,000
Site Enhancement cost	3,000,000	4,000,000
20% “uncertainty” costs	<u>1,940,000</u>	<u>4,030,000</u>
Total ESTIMATED cost	\$11,640,000	\$18,060,000

Challenges and Limitations

Regardless of the level of analysis and preparation, any development proposal for a centerpiece project in the Rocky Knob region will come with potential challenges and limitations. The following are some of the key issues that will need to be recognized and faced as this project progresses.

Water. A primary concern for this region will surround the issue of water resources. As a watershed region with no inflowing sources of water, any truly sustainable centerpiece will need to rely heavily on the use of cisterns and gray water as well as other green technologies. For example, if the development site is located on the ridge line, there will be little opportunity to take advantage of gravity, making hydrologic and water flow critical to the long term success of the facility.

Political and cultural sensitivities. An additional concern that is true for any project of this scale located anywhere in the United States, surrounds the possible political and cultural issues associated with development in rural, non-zoned counties. Community concerns must be taken into consideration; community participation is a standard practice in any development process. A concern unique to the land surrounding the Blue Ridge Parkway comes from the residual (and understandable) hard feelings that still exist within families who lost part or all of their farms when the Parkway was initially developed. Regardless of which development scenario is selected, it is the belief of the research team that the sacrifice of these families must be honored in some way as a part of the project. Further, private property rights, a lack of zoning, and competing land uses could have an impact if abutting parcels are privately owned.

Staffing. In the process of conducting research for this project, one of the current issues discovered in the region surrounds the lack of available funding for staff on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Is it important to recognize that gaining the financial resources for the physical facility is one issue, but staffing it will be an equally (if not more) crucial issue. As was found in the results of the potential visitor survey, travelers want to be able to talk to knowledgeable staff and feel confident in the information they have gained. This level of competence does not come cheaply, nor should it be short-changed when the time comes to staff any centerpiece facility.

Long-term facility maintenance and improvements. In the same vein as staffing, funding cyclic maintenance as well as improvements to the physical structure and interpretive media and exhibits must be taken into fiscal consideration.

Appropriateness of scale. In addition to the realities of finding funding for staffing a centerpiece project and maintaining it over time in the Rocky Knob region, any project of this type must recognize the appropriateness of scale and “fit” with other tourism resources in the broader region of Southwest Virginia. This facility has been envisioned by the research team as a small-to medium-sized facility that will complement existing facilities such as the Jacksonville Center for the Arts, The Crooked Road, and the Blue Ridge Music Center, without competing with them.

Risk management/litigation. Potential lawsuits are a reality for any facility that is open to the public. This may be especially important should the Miller’s Way Farm Life Visitor Center and

Trail be selected as the appropriate scenario. There is a certain risk assumed with farm implements, animals, and the consumption of farm products that will need to be included in any insurance package for a facility such as this.

Potential Funding Sources

A major challenge for any facility in the Rocky Knob region will be in finding funding sources for the building, staffing, and maintenance. The following are a few potential sources for funding:

- The Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission <http://www.tic.virginia.gov/> grant program, which is particularly interested in economic development and agribusiness.
- The Appalachian Regional Commission Area Development Program, particularly the Asset-Based Development Initiative, Entrepreneurship Initiative and the Business development Revolving Loan Fund Grants.
- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (recovery.gov). Accessing this source of funding will be especially plausible should a centerpiece project be selected that focuses on a green building and/or job creation with a “buy America” focus. There are also some programs available to assist with any green retrofitting that may be necessary, should a facility be chosen that includes existing structures. Specifically, the Pathways Out of Poverty program, the Department of Labor Recovery Act Competitive Grant Opportunities, and the Rural Business Enterprise Grant programs offer potential sources of funding, but do note that these programs have a small window of opportunity with upcoming deadlines.
- Private Investment and Donations. Ultimately, some form of private investment or donations will need to occur for this venture to be feasible – and successful in the long-term. Potential corporate stakeholders such as GPS manufacturers, farm equipment manufacturers, large agri-business, and non-profit groups with ties to the National Parks (e.g., Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway, National Parks Conservation Association) may be potential sponsors. Once definitive plans for a site and a center are made, BRHI will need to embark on an intense capital campaign to explore and secure private investments and donations.

As grants and private investment opportunities are highly fluid, and as there is no clear timeline for this project, specific funding sources will be few and far between. However, utilizing online resources such as www.grants.gov should provide continuing grant funding opportunities as the project and its timeline become better defined. Also, maintaining an awareness of current trends in grants funding (e.g., providing funding for efforts such as enhancing sustainability, utilizing green building techniques, offering job training, and the reduction of rural poverty) will aid in identifying funding opportunities in the future.