

Leave Only Footprints/Money, and Take Only Memories

For National Tourism Week '05 the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau reported the results of recent surveys. Typically, these results are likely to reflect what is occurring across the entire urbanizing region. Of particular note may be the results applicable to North Carolina residents visiting the area.

The top five reasons NC residents reported for visiting the area were: Family & Friends (24%), shopping (15%), culture (13%), close by/convenient (12%), and sports (8%). Only two of these reasons, culture and sports, are items that government's tend to support through programming, facilities, and/or extension of credit. They are also items that can be connected by, integrated into, and otherwise enhanced by the existence of local greenway systems and regional networks.

The top seven activities local residents reported doing when entertaining visiting family and friends were: restaurant (49%), shopping (36%), universities (25%), museums (20%), outdoor recreation (20%), sports event (14%), and theater/concert (11%). Five of these activity areas are likely to be supported by government programming, facilities, and/or appropriations. Again, they are items that can be connected by, integrated into, and otherwise enhanced by the existence of local greenway systems and regional networks. Of greatest significance is the presence of outdoor recreation, tied for fourth on the list, because of its direct implication on the importance of greenways.

When residents and their visiting family and friends seek outdoor recreation opportunities, it will most likely be somewhat spontaneous, involving activities that are unscheduled/unprogrammed by an government agency. The chosen activity is also most likely to occur in a natural environment, on or near water, because these are the outdoor characteristics preferred by the public. So where are the Triangle's residents going to find such outdoor recreation opportunities? Greenways, large state and regional parks, and Corps of Engineers lakes are the most obvious destinations.

Local governments can make their communities, and collectively the region, more attractive to tourists and residents alike through increased investments in greenways. To date, tourist enhancement dollars generated through the local Hotel and Meals Tax has not been directed to greenway system development. Perhaps this will be reconsidered in the future since greenways surveyed higher than the types of facilities that have been funded. Until then, local governments must rely upon traditional funding sources to meet growing greenway demands.