



Using the Extension Service to Increase the Capacity of Ecotourism Development in Florida

University of Florida

Taylor Stein,
Kate Nelson, Shane Feyers & Kotryna Klizentyte

Emerging Enterprises IST, 10 December, 2019

Ecotourism

“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education

*with the specification that education is to staff and guests.”

The International Ecotourism Society, 2015

Nature Tourism in Florida

In 2018, Florida
saw 126 million
out-of-state
tourists, **highest in
history**



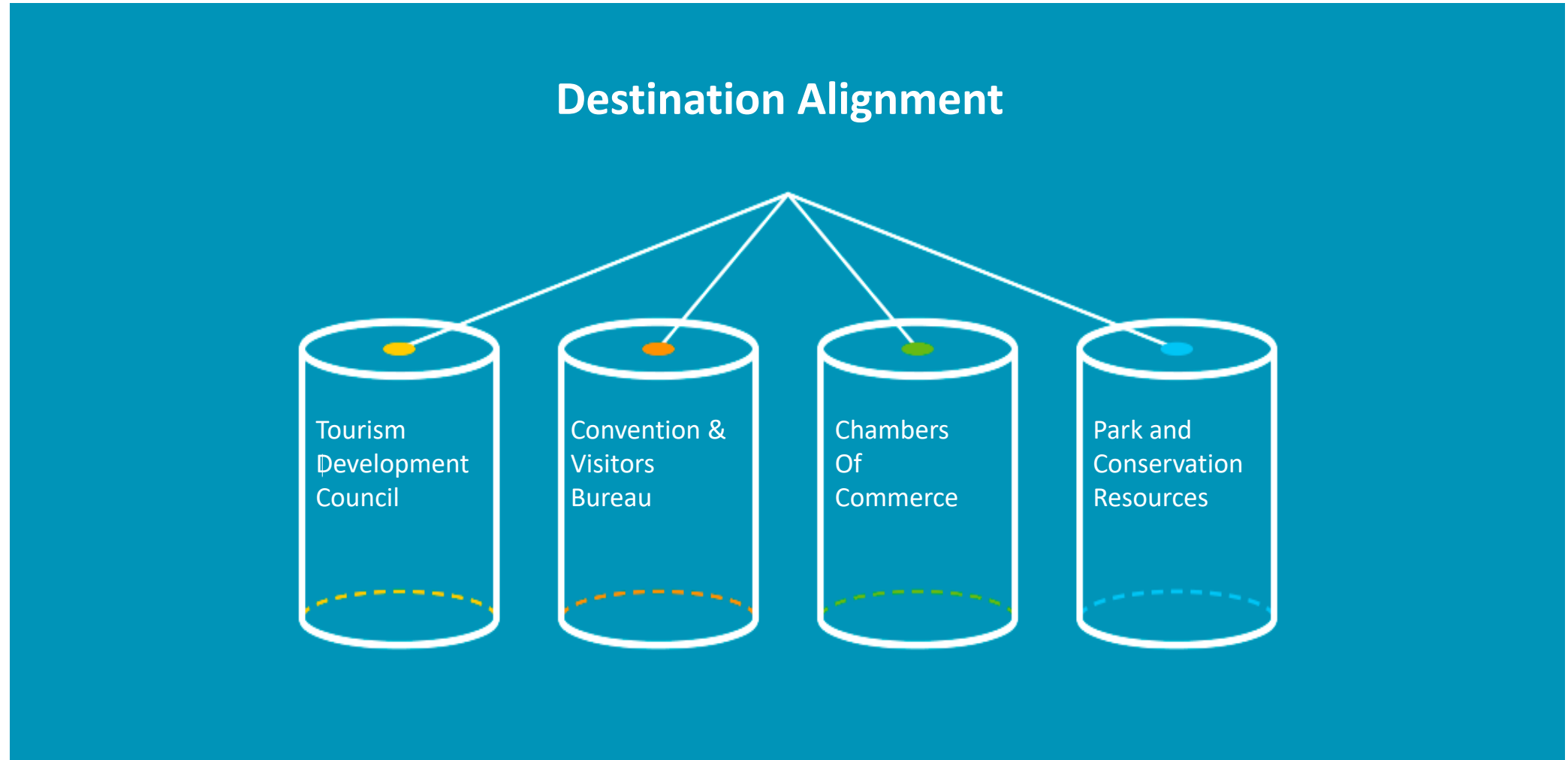
Value of Nature Tourism in Florida

- Total economic impact of outdoor recreation activities estimated at \$145 billion
- \$70 billion in visitor spending and \$20 billion in resident spending
- Florida's parks and other public lands generated \$60 billion in consumer spending.
- 1.2 million jobs supported.
- Nearly \$10 billion in tax revenues generated

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2017



Current Tourism Planning & Management

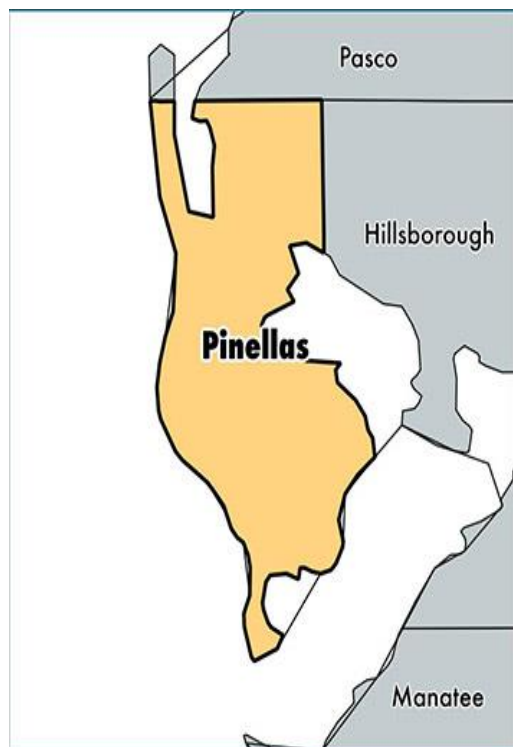


Extension's role in ecotourism development in Florida



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

Pinellas County Ecotourism Needs Assessment



Lessons Learned

To manage and improve ecotourism opportunities Extension service must be
Educators, Leaders & Collaborators



COALITION
BUILDING



KNOWLEDGE
PRODUCTION



COMMUNICATION



FACILITATING
CERTIFICATION,
MONITORING,
REPORTING



REWARDS AND
INCENTIVES



PARTNERSHIPS

A long wooden boardwalk stretches from the foreground into the distance, flanked by wetland vegetation and water. The boardwalk is made of wooden planks and has wooden railings on both sides. In the distance, a few people can be seen walking on the boardwalk. The sky is clear and blue.

Next steps...

Capacity building for an ecotourism role in
Florida's Extension Service

Interview Results

Agent ecotourism activities

INPUT

BARRIER

Stakeholder buy-in
Expertise
Funding
Software
Space
Time

Couldn't convey the value added for certification process to ecotour operators
Hard to access ecotourism operator audience, no directory for nature guides
Competition between ecotourism operators
Level of complexity in valuing ecotourism in their county
Understanding distance education
Not understanding what ecotourism operators need or want
Difficulty partnering with tourism council, CVB, etc.
Software and IT problems
Difficulty finding continued funding for ecotourism projects

Extension's role in supporting and managing ecotourism in Florida

Agent's perspective

- Educating operators, not tourists
- Promoting sustainable science-based approaches to tourism practices
- Helping clients benefit from, enjoy and protect their resources
- Helping operators navigate and communicate difficult topics (threats, degradation, etc.) to tourists while inspiring them to make changes to protect those resources
- Helping businesses market better
- Facilitate business development workshops for ecotourism operators
- Facilitating partnerships among stakeholders



Resources for support

EDIS Papers for the Extension Service

- Guide on partnership development in the tourism world (who they are and why partner)
- PowerPoint framework and guide for conveying the value of ecotourism in your county

Ecotourism Job Description

- Example of what an ecotourism agent would do

Organized and adapted resources

- Resources from other successful extension tourism programs and organizations to support ecotourism initiatives

Moving forward...

Research

- Ecotourism needs assessments for your county
- Understanding the value of ecotourism in your county
- Visitor assessments for ecotourism sites

Extension

- Facilitate partnerships with tourism stakeholders (tourism professionals, guides and operators) and get groups working together
- Provide information and training for clients

Integration

- Use resources we've developed to support and understand ecotourism in your county

We want your feedback!

Please use the evaluation form to tell us your thoughts or ways we can improve our resources to support an ecotourism role.

References

Pinellas County Ecotourism Needs Assessment, 2018.

Extension Agent Interviews, 2019.

Institute for Service Research. (2017). Florida Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Outdoor Industry Association. 2017. The Outdoor Recreation Economy. Outdoor Industry Association: Boulder, CO.

The International Ecotourism Society (Ed.). (2015). What Is Ecotourism. Retrieved from <https://ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism/>.