

## The Promotion of Southern & Southwest Virginia as a Premier Fishing Destination

A whitepaper outlining the *Fish Virginia First* cooperative marketing initiative

### INTRODUCTION

In late 2007, Scott Martin, with Franklin County, Virginia, contacted the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) to inquire about possible interest in developing and promoting a fishing trail, as a visitor targeted trail for anglers and their families. Citing other successful trail promotions such as the Crooked Road and the Wilderness Road Heritage Trail, his inquiry questioned the possibility of connecting Virginia’s vast fisheries and amenities in an overall promotion of the Southwest and Southern Virginia as a premier fishing destination. Recent success in securing major fishing tournaments, and the possibility of attracting more tournaments through a concerted promotional effort by localities, was also highlighted as a possibility of a cooperative promotion within Scott’s inquiry.

The inquiry led to follow-up discussion by VTC staff, and Department of Inland Game and Fisheries (DGIF) staff. As a result of that discussion, an initial discussion meeting was held with Randall Rose, Tourism Development Specialist - VTC, Bud LaRoche–DGIF, Dan Wilson–DGIF, and Scott Martin participating. During that discussion meeting, various aspects of the opportunity were discussed, but the need to pull potential stakeholders together and evaluate interest in the concept was determined as a key action step.

On May 28, 2008, a roundtable discussion meeting of various localities, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO), Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVB), and fishing related business representatives was held and facilitated by Scott, Randall, and Bud. Presentations regarding the economic impact of fishing and past successful fishing tournaments were highlighted. Participants were asked to provide their general thoughts regarding the pros and cons of the concept. The roundtable discussions resulted in a general consensus of support and interest in the concept.

On July 16, 2008, an expanded group of interested stakeholders met at the Bedford, Virginia Welcome Center to begin outlining potential planning steps (facilitated by VTC staff). The majority of the content in this document is a result of that full day of discussions.

### THE OPPORTUNITY

The southwest and southern regions of Virginia are abundant with fisheries and tourism infrastructure that can accommodate and sustain visitation. Further, these amenities and attractions are competitive on a national scale in terms of the visitor experience, the quality of the fisheries, and their proximity to major population centers. These amenities exist. There is no need to add significant investments in capital to expand the awareness of these high quality fishing destinations. This is a unique opportunity in that the attraction is present and available – the issue is how we capitalize on it as a state and region? Never before has there been a multi-regional effort to promote such fisheries and other amenities such as lodging, restaurants, shopping, outfitters, etc. With well established DMO’s and CVB’s in many localities, and many other rural localities establishing formalized tourism programs, the possibility of a cooperative effort is feasible at this time. Additionally, assistance is available from other resources such as pro-fishing organizations, and state agencies such as VTC, DGIF, and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Furthermore, the economic impact of fishing and outdoor recreation in Virginia demonstrates that the angler market is one of significance to tourism. Following are 2006 freshwater sportfishing economic statistics for the U.S. and Virginia.

Statistics	United States	Virginia
Freshwater Anglers	25,035,000	622,000
Retail Sales	\$31,182,648,546	\$500,663,394
Economic Output	\$87,954,360,057	\$809,227,963
Salaries, Wages and Income	\$26,468,323,702	\$248,392,324
Jobs	709,508	9,213
Federal and State Taxes	\$11,495,751,764	\$105,641,717

# APPENDIX C: WHITEPAPER ON “FISHING VIRGINIA FIRST”

---

Tourism is a significant aspect of Virginia’s economy: as an \$18.7 billion industry in Virginia, supporting 210,000 jobs and providing \$1.2 billion in state and local tax revenue for Virginia’s communities. Outdoor recreation visitors to Virginia stay longer and visit more frequently than the average visitor, and a significant percentage of all visitors to Virginia incorporate outdoor recreation into their visit.

Since many Virginia localities and businesses are already interested in being promoted to the fishing enthusiast audience, a cooperative effort has the potential to allow such interested parties to reach and penetrate larger markets at a much lower marketing cost.

## THE VISION

A fully implemented fishing promotional effort, supported by various southwest and southern Virginia localities, businesses, and organizations, and agencies of the Commonwealth, resulting in significant economic impact to participating localities is the vision. Projected outcomes include:

- The completion and implementation of an overall marketing plan, to include promotional efforts such as name/branding, paper fulfillment piece, targeted research-based advertising through various forms of media, a robust public relations campaign, and various marketing promotions.
- A cooperative effort to establish and promote various levels of fishing tournaments within the appropriate fisheries, and resources to assist localities and businesses that would like to develop tournaments. The goal could include a plan to ensure that at least one Virginia site hosts a nationally televised fishing tournament each year.
- An alignment with regional economic development recruitment efforts to attract new investments in fishing related industries
- Through national campaigns and angling related activities, raise the visibility and national awareness of rural Virginia as a competitive location to live, work, invest, learn, and fish.
- A fully interactive promotional website that allows users to view and develop (user-designed) fishing trails of various types, including but not limited to:
  - Rivers Trail
  - Species Trails
  - Tournament Trail

All trails are intended to be fully promoted by season, species, etc. through the flexibility of web-based electronic marketing. Trail promotion and electronic marketing should allow potential visitors to also consider the following amenities as part of their visit planning:

- Shopping
- Attractions
- Restaurants
- Outfitters/Guides
- Lodging
- Marinas, Tackle Shops, etc.
- Other Places of Interest

## TIMELINE

April 2009	Soft Roll-out (announce marketing initiative, interim brochure and website completed)
May 2009	Larger Marketing Plan Completed
June 2009	Locality Partner Commitment Deadline
July 2009	Full Roll-out (implement larger marketing plan)

## COMPETITION

Virginia is not the first state to realize or attempt to capitalize on its quality fisheries for economic development and job creation purposes. Georgia, Alabama, Florida, and Alaska have all worked on their respective state levels to market their fisheries and add/coordinate attractions and amenities so as to increase the amount of visitation at their public fisheries. To this end, Georgia recently announced the most ambitious plan in their state history to expand fishery marketing and access aimed at attracting fishing tournaments and anglers. Georgia’s investment in new tournament hosting facilities and the efforts to recruit these events may well exceed \$20 million once completed.

For information on Georgia’s ambitious plan, please see:

<http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us/assets/documents/GFGI%204%20Page%20Updated%20Map.pdf>

A similar cooperative effort through DMO’s in Alabama has resulted in the Alabama Hunting and Fishing Trail, promoted through a premier website:

<http://www.westalabamahuntingandfishingtrail.com/>

While Virginia has outstanding fisheries, the fact that other states are improving their facilities and increasing their marketing is important, and that should be considered carefully as the attempt for a collaborative marketing effort in Virginia develops.

## FISHERIES TO PROMOTE / POTENTIAL PARTNERS

The map below highlights the targeted project area based upon commonality of determined fisheries:



## APPENDIX C: WHITEPAPER ON “FISHING VIRGINIA FIRST”

The following waterways and lakes (and the array of fish species within) have been determined as some of the potential assets to promote as angler destinations and tournaments sites. Virginia DGIF staff has already begun to draft a rating system for the listed fisheries for the potential promotion.

### Reservoirs (Greater than 500 acres in size)

RESERVOIR	COUNTY
Briery Creek Lake	Prince Edward
Buggs Island Lake (Kerr Reservoir) *	Halifax/Charlotte/Mecklenburg
Carvins Cove	Botetourt
Chesdin Reservoir**	Dinwiddie
Claytor Lake *	Pulaski
Flannagan Reservoir**	Dickenson
Gaston Reservoir *	Brunswick/Mecklenburg
Leesville Lake**	Pittsylvania/Campbell
Lake Moomaw	Alleghany/Bath
Philpott Reservoir**	Franklin/Henry/Patrick
Sandy River Reservoir	Prince Edward
Smith Mountain Lake*	Bedford/Franklin/Pittsylvania
South Holston Reservoir**	Washington

\* = Reservoir capable of holding a large tournament

\*\* = Reservoir capable of holding a small tournament

### Lakes (Less than 500 acres in size)

LAKE	COUNTY
Abbott Lake	Bedford
Amelia Lake (VDGIF)	Amelia
Back Creek Reservoir	Bath
Bannister Lake	Halifax
Brunswick Lake (VDGIF)	Brunswick
Burton Lake (VDGIF)	Pittsylvania
Conner Lake (VDGIF)	Halifax
Cumberland State Forest lakes	Cumberland
Dan River Reservoir	Danville
Fairystone Lake (SP)	Patrick
Ft. Pickett Lakes	Nottoway/Dinwiddie
Gordon Lake (VDGIF)	Mecklenburg
Goodwin Lake (SP)	Prince Edward
Great Creek Lake	Brunswick
Hale's Lake	Grayson County
Hidden Valley Lake (VDGIF)	Washington
Holiday Lake (SP)	Appomattox/Buckingham
Horsepen Lake (VDGIF)	Buckingham
Hungry Mother Lake (SP)	Smyth
Keokee Lake (VDGIF)	Lee
Laurel Bed Lake (VDGIF)	Russell
Lincolnshire Lake	Tazewell
Lovill's Creek Lake	Carroll
Nottoway Lake (VDGIF)	Nottoway
Martinsville Reservoir	Henry
Mill Creek Lake	Amherst
Modest Creek Lake	Lunenburg
Moores Creek Dam	Rockbridge (Lexington)
Nelson Lake (VDGIF)	Nelson
Nottoway Falls Lake	Lunenburg
Pound Reservoir (North Fork)	Wise
Prince Edward Lake (SP)	Prince Edward
Lake Robertson (VDGIF)	Rockbridge
Rural Retreat Lake (VDGIF)	Wythe
Stonehouse Lake	Amherst
Thrashers Lake	Amherst
Victoria Reservoir	Lunenburg
Wick's Lake	Prince Edward
Lake Witten	Tazewell

# APPENDIX C: WHITEPAPER ON “FISHING VIRGINIA FIRST”

## Major Rivers

Clinch River
Dan River
Holston River
James River (upper - above Richmond)
Maury River
New River
North Fork Holston River
Staunton River (Roanoke below Leesville Dam)
Roanoke River Upper (above Niagara Dam)

## Coldwater Streams/Lakes (Special Regulation Wild or Stocked)

STREAM	COUNTY
Buffalo Creek	Rockbridge
Buffalo River	Amherst
Cabin Creek	Grayson
Dan River	Patrick
East Fork Chestnut Creek	Grayson/Carroll
Elk Creek	Grayson
Holston River (South Fork)	Smyth
Irish Creek	Rockbridge
Jackson River	Bath
Jackson River Tailwater	Alleghany
Lexington City Reservoir	Rockbridge
Little Stony Creek	Giles
Maury River	Rockbridge
Mill Creek	Rockbridge
North Creek	Botetourt
Piney River	Nelson
Pound River	Dickenson
Roaring Fork	Tazewell
Roaring Run	Botetourt
Rockfish River	Nelson
Smith Creek	Alleghany
Smith River Tailwater	Henry
South River	Rockbridge
Stewart's Creek	Carroll
Tye River	Nelson
Whitetop Laurel/Green Cove Creeks	Washington
Big and Little Wilson Creeks	Grayson

## Trout Fee Fishing Areas

STREAM	COUNTY
Clinch Mountain Fee Fishing Area	Smyth/Washington/Russell
Crooked Creek	Carroll
Douthat Lake and Wilson Creek	Bath

## Trout Delayed Harvest Streams

STREAM	COUNTY
Back Creek	Bath
Chestnut Creek	Carroll
Holliday Creek	Appomattox/Buckingham
North Fork Pound River and Pound River	Wise
Peak Creek	Pulaski
Pedlar River	Amherst
Roanoke River	Roanoke County and City of Salem

## **Stocked Trout Waters**

There are 122 streams (or sections) and lakes stocked with catchable size trout from October 1 through May 31 in Southwest and Southside Virginia.

Potential partners (DMO's, CVB's, businesses, etc) from these target fisheries are invited to participate in future planning and potential implementation of the overall promotional plan. While initial funds may be requested from funding sources such as the Virginia Tourism Corporation and the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Revitalization Commission for key start-up expenses, the promotional effort will require partners to not only play an active role in implementing the concept plan, but also will hinge on appropriate financial contributions from each partner in the effort.

## **POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

While uncertainties regarding this concept are numerous in regards to uncontrollable factors such as the economy, fuel prices, weather, and environment and its affect on fisheries, the following are some determined implications and risks that have been determined as important for consideration during planning and implementation:

- The large multi-region approach of the concept may prove challenging in finding a neutral and centralized organization to handle future actions such as making grant requests and serving as the fiscal agent for the overall promotional effort. For that reason, the feasibility of a newly formed organization to lead a long-term promotional effort might be considered.
- The return-on-investment for the overall effort and fishing tournaments specifically could result in less-than-expected outcomes if not planned effectively.
- Elevation of the fisheries and the water quality/environmental risks that each face may produce new dialogue in rural communities about responsible and effective natural resource stewardship.

## **PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY / HOW TO SUPPORT THE INITIATIVE**

The initiative is a grassroots one, facilitated by involvement from Virginia agencies and other resource providers. Any interested individuals should attend and participate in planning meetings, and ask to be added to the project contact list to receive future updates and announcements.

### **Partnership Opportunities (Localities, DMO's, CVB's, etc)**

As an initial key step for the project, localities, DMO's, CVB's, and Chambers of Commerce have the opportunity to partner in the effort by committing \$500, and providing an initiative support letter or resolution prior to the June 30, 2009 deadline. Annual financial commitments afterwards from partners will be needed to sustain the effort (with future amounts dependent on such factors as the success of the initiative, total partner numbers, and other secured funds). By partnering, locality promotional information will be included in the overall marketing and advertising efforts designed by the project marketing committee. One representative from each partner locality or organization will be invited to serve on the marketing committee.

Committed initiative partners include but are not limited to the following:

Alleghany Highlands Chamber  
Amherst County  
City of Bedford  
Botetourt County  
Campbell County  
City of Danville  
Franklin County  
Grayson County

Halifax County  
Highland County Economic Development  
Authority  
Lexington/Rockbridge County  
Lynchburg Chamber  
Pulaski County  
Roanoke Valley CVB

### **How to Support the Initiative (Businesses and Individuals)**

Partnership and sponsorship opportunities for businesses and corporations are being considered and will be announced as soon as it is feasible to do so. In the mean time, there are various ways to support the initiative if you are not a representative of a locality, DMO, CVB, etc.:

- Stay informed of the initiative planning by attending steering committee meetings and reviewing applicable correspondence – volunteer to assist with specific project tasks as they arise.
- Express support for the *Fish Virginia First* initiative to your locality, DMO, CVB, etc. representative. Encourage them to partner in the effort if they have not already.
- Provide any valid research data that will help the marketing committee make good research-based decisions as part of their goal to reach the angler market that may visit Virginia. For example, an outfitter or marina business might provide general customer data that emphasis certain market areas to consider.
- As initiative funding requests are made to various other funding sources (e.g. Virginia Tobacco Commission) and other potential partners, express support for the initiative to those targeted funding source representatives.

Those interested in participating or learning more about the *Fish Virginia First* marketing initiative should contact:

**Scott Martin** (Chair of the Overall Initiative)

Director of Commerce & Leisure Services  
Franklin County, Virginia  
(540) 483-6606  
[smartin@franklincountyva.org](mailto:smartin@franklincountyva.org)

**Kevin Costello** (Initiative Marketing Committee Chair)

Tourism Coordinator - Botetourt County Office of Tourism  
Tel: (540) 473-1167  
[kcostello@botetourtva.us](mailto:kcostello@botetourtva.us)

**Joseph L. Bondurant** (Initiative Finance Committee Chair)

Director of Tourism - Amherst County Department of Tourism  
434- 946-9366  
[jlbondurant@countyofamherst.com](mailto:jlbondurant@countyofamherst.com)

**Bud LaRoche** (DGIF's Initiative Technical Advisor)

Regional Fisheries Manager  
Virginia Department of Inland Game & Fisheries  
540-525-7522  
[Bud.LaRoche@dgif.virginia.gov](mailto:Bud.LaRoche@dgif.virginia.gov)

**Randall Rose** (Initiative Facilitator)

Development Specialist  
Virginia Tourism Corporation  
276-322-2044  
[rose@virginia.org](mailto:rose@virginia.org)