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# **Empowering nature's potential to increase income in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Bryson City NC**

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**Abstract**--Efforts to increase tourism income in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park are by exploiting its natural potential. Empowering natural potential through sustainable management of existing potential, namely processing it into a tourist attraction, is expected to increase city income which will automatically increase community income. The concept of empowering natural potential to become a tourist attraction with sustainable management is the basis for community service activities carried out at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Bryson City NC. The activity began with a survey of the location to identify and verify the natural potential in the city, namely the existence of mountains which are the mainstay potential of the tourist city, then continued with focus group discussion activities and closed with training activities for the community in Bryson City consisting of tourism awareness groups. as well as city residents who will be involved in managing the Smoky Mountains as a tourist attraction. For sustainable management, in the future, it is targeted that there will be sustainable synergy between the government and the tourist city of Bryson in assisting the management of the Smoky Mountains as a tourist attraction as well as managing homestays as supporting tourist destinations in Bryson City.

**Keywords**---Bryson City, community service, income, Smoky Mountains, tourism.



## Introduction

As a developed country that has a wide range of tourism potential, in Bryson City, tourism development of whatever type and name requires creative and innovative management functions based on careful, consistent planning, and measurable and constructive evaluation (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Sutawa, 2012). In the context of tourism, resources can be defined as anything that has the potential to be developed, such as water, mountains, beaches and natural landscapes.

The natural potential is the overall appearance of nature and the natural resources found in an area that can be processed and developed (Reynolds & Rohlin, 2015). There are natural resources that have the potential to be developed into tourism resources. This can be utilized as a potential in tourism development. Natural potential is closely related to increasing the productivity of natural resources, one of which is tourism (Galiè & Farnworth, 2019). Tourism is defined as a variety of tourist activities and is supported by various facilities and services provided by the community, entrepreneurs, government and local governments.



Figure 1. Explore the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Bryson City NC

A tourist city is a tourist attraction that can be developed and can make a positive contribution to society. What needs to be considered in developing this tourist city is the commitment between the government, city officials, community leaders and city organizations to make it a tourist city (Paul et al., 2000). One of the efforts to increase city income, especially in tourist cities, is by empowering the natural potential of the city. Empowering natural potential through sustainable management of existing potential, namely processing it into a tourist attraction, is expected to increase city income which will automatically increase the income of city residents.

## Method

The methods used to achieve the set goals include lectures, discussions, training and practice with a community-based problem and solution approach. Participatory Rural Appraisal. The Participatory Rural Appraisal Method is a technique for compiling and developing operational programs in city-level

development. The Participatory Rural Appraisal method is applied to be able to reveal the desires of the community, mobilize local resources to increase productivity, and community income, and stabilize and preserve local resources (Stinson, 2017; Weaver, 2005; Tanguay & Bernard, 2020). The process of expressing potential and desires is carried out through discussion forums, both individual and group, or Focus Group Discussion/FGD. The method applied in this activity consists of several stages, namely identifying natural potential that can be explored, socialization, and discussion, The next stage is training and related practice.

## **Discussion**

### **Identify Natural Potential**

Clingmans Dome is known as the highest point of the Great Smoky Mountains with an elevation of 6,634 feet, Clingmans Dome is home to many hiking trails and an observation tower, which overlooks miles of the national forest. A park visitor centre and restrooms are available. Several other hiking trails can be accessed from this point as well, including the Forney Ridge Trail that leads to beautiful Andrews Bald. Start your trek to our highest peak. The road to Clingmans Dome is open from April 1 - November 30.

Deep Creek is known as one of the most stunning areas of North Carolina's Great Smoky Mountains National Park and is located just a few miles from downtown Bryson City. Deep Creek is home to three cascading waterfalls - Tom Branch, Indian Creek and Juney Whank - which can all be accessed easily by venturing down the Waterfall Loop, a 2.4-mile, easy hike that passes all three falls. Other popular activities at Deep Creek include tubing, fishing, biking, horseback riding, and picnicking (Sadik-Zada et al., 2023).

One of the most unique areas in Bryson City is found on Lakeview Drive in an area locally known as "The Road to Nowhere," part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park After the construction of Fontana Dam flooded other access roads, a replacement highway was promised in the 1960s, However, construction was halted due to environmental issues, and the Road to Nowhere was born.

Steeped in history, the Road to Nowhere is a scenic drive, hiking destination and monument to the past, nestled in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. A six-mile winding road weaves through the National Forest, with multiple scenic stops along the way to pull off and take in the view of Fontana Lake. At the road's end, a mile-long tunnel stretches under a rock, which must be traversed on foot to reach hiking trails on the other side, including Noland Creek Trail, the Goldmine Loop, and Lakeshore Trails. Be sure to bring a flashlight on this adventure!

Along the curvy road, you'll see the scenic mountainside with occasional views of Lake Fontana. From the Lakeview Drive entrance, the first pull-off on the left is a scenic view known as "Fontana Lake Overlook." The next pull-off on your left is the parking area for the Noland Creek Trails North and South. These two trails offer epic creekside views and plenty of solitude. The Noland Creek South Trail

travels one mile to Fontana Lake, with one mile back to the parking area, whereas the North Trail meanders along the creek with forest and rushing creek views.

Directions: From downtown Bryson City head north on Everett Street and continue on Fontana Road for about 2.5 miles until you reach the national park entrance called "Lakeview Drive." This scenic drive travels another six miles to the "Road to Nowhere Tunnel." Consider these half-day and full-day hiking options.

Close to Bryson City in neighbouring Cherokee, NC, the Oconaluftee Visitor Center and Mountain Farm Museum are home to trails and historic buildings along the Oconaluftee River. With elk wandering around just about all of it - in the waterways and streams, along the trails and especially in the low-lying fields - this area is a must-see for wildlife viewing! Historic Mingus Mill lies just half a mile north of this area. Take part in a longstanding pastime of our visitors and plan your visit to Oconaluftee.

The Smokemont section of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is just 3.8 miles north of the Oconaluftee Visitor Center along Newfound Gap Road (U.S. 441). Here you'll find a campground, hiking trails, horseback riding and the Smokemont Baptist Church.

Discover a magical place on the North Shore of Fontana Lake for boating and fishing and access to remote, historic areas of the Park such as Hazel Creek and Eagle Creek. Abundant in nature-related activities, explore this vast wilderness for a unique perspective on the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This area is not accessible by car, however, the Lakeshore Trail - accessible at Fontana Dam or the Road to Nowhere - provides access to Fontana Lake wilderness campsites and Hazel Creek backcountry. Fishing guides will help you get to the unique fishing spots for native trout at Hazel Creek and Eagle Creek. Tour guides will take you on a North Shore cruise, or take you across the lake to some remote hiking areas.

Newfound Gap Road, also known as US Highway 441, connects Cherokee, NC to Gatlinburg, TN. This 33-mile scenic drive takes you up and over the Great Smoky Mountains. There are ample turnouts and photography opportunities as you drive the Newfound Gap Road. Upon entering the Park in Cherokee, make sure to stop at the Oconaluftee Visitor Center and Mountain Farm Museum. Just one mile north of the visitor center on Newfound Gap Road, is Mingus Mill.

Travelling north along US 441/Newfound Gap Road reveals a plethora of winding roads and higher-elevation views of mountain layers. As you continue to climb to the higher elevations of the Park, where long-range views of mountain ridges are plentiful. Most of these overlooks and parking areas will be on the left side, the first one being Charles Webb Overlook, followed by Swinging Bridges Overlooks.

Oconaluftee Valley Overlook provides stunning mountain landscape scenery. Photographers love this spot for sunrise photos. Next up on the left, is the turn for Clingmans Dome Road. This 7-mile stretch of scenic roadway takes you to the Clingmans Dome Observation Tower, the highest point in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Return to Newfound Gap Road from Clingmans Dome. Continuing north on Newfound Gap Road is another gorgeous overlook with some history, appropriately named Newfound Gap Overlook. The North Carolina/Tennessee border is located here, along with stunning views from the parking lot. A public restroom is adjacent to the parking lot.

Just past Newfound Gap, is Morton Overlook, a great spot for sunset views. On the way down the mountain toward Gatlinburg, the winding road takes you through forested mountainsides and tunnels. Near Gatlinburg, be on the lookout for Little River Road, which provides access to Elkmont, Tremont, Greenbrier, and Cades Cove.

To return to Cherokee and Bryson City, just take the same road back - US 441 S/Newfound Gap Road. When it's time to head back to Bryson City make sure to go slowly by the Oconaluftee Visitor Center to see the Elk that might be roaming in the Fields.

Fontana Dam is a towering structure that was impounded and created by Fontana Lake in World War II and is the tallest dam east of the Rocky Mountains. Accessed via NC-28-N, you can walk or drive across the Dam's surface to enjoy sweeping views of the surrounding, untouched natural landscape, including the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Appalachian Trail, which extends over 2,000 miles from Georgia to Maine, crosses Fontana Dam. Take the scenic drive and discover the beauty that awaits.

The Fontana Dam Visitor Center is open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. April through August, and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. September and October. The centre will close on the last Sunday in October.

Interesting Facts: Construction of Fontana Dam began in 1942 and was completed in 1944. The dam impounds beautiful Fontana Lake and all its recreational opportunities in a pristine natural environment. The dam is 480 feet high and stretches 2,365 feet across the Little Tennessee River. Fontana Lake (also known as a Reservoir) provides 238 miles of shoreline and 10,230 acres of water surface for recreation activities. In a year with normal rainfall, the water level in Fontana Reservoir varies about 56 feet from summer to winter to provide seasonal flood storage.

The Cataloochee Valley section of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is approximately a 1 hour and 20 minutes drive from Bryson City. If you have already explored Oconaluftee and are seeking more of the same features, this is a great spot to visit. A variety of historic buildings have been preserved in the valley, including a school, church, barn, outbuildings, and several homes. Five buildings are along the road in the valley. An additional four buildings can be reached via a hike down the Little Cataloochee Trail. This is the best place in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to see historic frame buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The self-guiding Auto Tour Booklet (usually available roadside near the entrance) provides brief histories of each structure.

Of historic significance, the valley was one of the largest and most prosperous settlements with 1,200 people living here in 1910. Most made their living by farming, including commercial apple growing. Early tourism developed here and some of the families boarded fishermen and tourists who vacationed in the mountains. The plan to create a national park left few people living in Cataloochee by 1938. Cataloochee Valley contains several old homes that you can still see and walk through, such as the Beech Grove School, Palmer Chapel and numerous frame houses that help us take a step back in time and imagine what life might have been like in Cataloochee.

To get there from Bryson City, follow US-74E/Great Smoky Mountains Expy and US 276 North and continue to Cove Creek Rd in Haywood County. Continue on Cove Creek Road. Drive to Cataloochee Entrance Road. An alternate route along US 19 East is more scenic, and takes you past Soco Falls, but will add about 10 minutes to your travel time one way. The entrance road to Cataloochee Valley is a winding, gravel road that has some steep drop-offs with no guard rails. The road is narrow, so drivers may be required to stop or back up their vehicles to allow oncoming motorists to pass. Horse-trailer traffic may be encountered on the road. Please use caution when driving on this road.

Explore Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This expansive, beautiful valley is surrounded by the towering peaks of the Smokies and is one of the best spots to spy wildlife, including whitetail deer, bears, coyotes and others.

Located two hours from downtown Bryson City, the drive out to Cades Cove takes you along Newfound Gap Road through the highest peaks of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and then along Little River Road. Lined with towering trees and stunning overlooks, you'll enjoy this journey so much that you won't even realize how much time has passed. Along the way, stop at Oconaluftee Visitor Center, Mingus Mill, Oconaluftee Valley Overlook, Newfound Gap, and Morton Overlook, just to name a few of our favourite places in the Park.

Once you arrive at Cades Cove, an 11-mile loop awaits. Several structures still stand from the days when European colonists first came to the area. Churches, a working grist mill, barns, log houses and other historic buildings can be found during your exploration. Hiking trails are also abundant at Cades Cove, with some treks stretching up to Thunderhead Mountain. An alternative exit from Cades Cove to the North Carolina side is Parsons Branch Road - a one-way gravel road on the back side of the Cades Cove Loop Road and is suitable for vehicles with moderate clearance (gravel road). The road also provides access to Gregory Bald via the Hannah Mtn. Trail, a popular spot for viewing azalea blooms in early summer.

Campgrounds are located onsite for those wanting to extend their adventure here. From May through September, Cades Cove Loop Road is closed to vehicles on Wednesdays, which allows pedestrians and bicyclists more access to roam the grounds.

Cades Cove offers the widest variety of historic buildings of any area in the national park. Scattered along the loop road are three churches, a working grist

mill, barns, log houses, and many other faithfully restored eighteenth and nineteenth-century structures (Akama, 1996). Pick up the self-guiding tour booklet available at the entrance to the loop road for information about the buildings you'll see in the cove and the people who live here.

## Conclusion

Bryson City is home to five entrances to the North Carolina side of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the nation's most visited national park, more than any other destination surrounding the Park. In addition to these five entrances, visitors can explore all the access points once inside the Park. If you're looking for a quiet destination without the hustle and bustle of Gatlinburg or Pigeon Forge, these numerous access points to the National Park make Bryson City a better alternative for outdoor adventure. In addition to Oconaluftee at Cherokee, Clingmans Dome, the Road to Nowhere, and Deep Creek, you can also access remote areas of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park after crossing Fontana Dam, on the Appalachian Trail, or by boat on a North Shore excursion, or on a guided hike to Hazel Creek. There are endless opportunities for outdoor fun, ranging from hiking and waterfalls, biking, horseback riding, tubing and other adventures. Or take a more leisurely approach with a scenic drive or catch the sunset at an overlook in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

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