

Nature Tourism in Garrett County

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**

Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**



The benefits of nature tourism were realized by the tourist industry nearly twenty years ago. Initially focusing on outdoor activities in extremely remote or exotic areas, nature tourism programs have since been developed in a variety of locations within the United States. Maryland's efforts to organize travel for vacationers, that promotes both appreciation and conservation of the environment, began four years ago when partnerships were formed between the private and public sectors. Tourists may now select from a wide range of outdoor activities that highlight the natural beauty of Garrett County. Nature tourism development has proven to be a good match between private vendors and the public's trust, as it preserves the quality of natural resources, while also providing jobs and additional tax revenue for local governments.

According to Patty Manown Mash, with Maryland Department of Natural Resources, State Forest and Park Services for Garrett County, the program was developed to increase the outdoor recreational opportunities on public lands for visitors, while enhancing economic development. Vendors may operate their businesses on public lands, only after meeting Maryland Department of Nature Resources (DNR) criteria and signing a use agreement with the state. Qualified vendors must follow a code of ethics, including "Leave No Trace" ethics, a statement of principles developed in conjunction with federal, state, and local authorities. This requires that whatever people place in the environment, they must remove. The "bring in, take out" policy has been successful in preserving the beauty of our environment. The success of Maryland State Park's "Trash Free"

program, in all day use areas, is evident to visitors.

There has been significant growth in tourism, as vacationers increasingly seek the 'get-a-way' activities offered by vendors in western Maryland. According to Patty Mash, "People want to be active and try something new on vacation that cannot be done at home, maybe a family float trip.

Perhaps father hasn't had time to learn canoeing techniques, and his kids want to go. With knowledgeable vendors to lead, everyone is happy because the family doesn't have to worry about all the details of canoeing. They just enjoy themselves." The same can be said of fishing. "It is great to be there when the son catches his first fish, while dad is watching. It makes for an enjoyable experience, instead of frustration, when a trained vendor is available. They know what to bring, how to get there, and what to do."

People often come to Deep Creek Lake to have a water related experience, such as boating, but according to Mash, "That is only a small part of what Garrett County has to offer. I put myself in the shoes of a tourist and observe their reaction to all we offer." Not content to administer the program from a distance, she actually participates in events to monitor program quality and tourist satisfaction.

The number of nature tourism activities in Garrett County has increased over the years. Kayaking, mountain biking, farm tours, nature hikes, water quality surveying trips, rafting and/or float trips and sporting clays are just a sampling of what awaits visitors. One of the most successful programs in recent years has been kayaking tours. Patty Mash summarizes, "Keep in mind that we have something



from the mild water to the wild water for all ages to enjoy.” You can visit www.dnr.state.md.us/outdooradventures to be informed about vendors.

While tourists and vendors benefit from nature tourism programs, so does the hospitality industry. They now have more activities to offer their guests. Vendors work closely with a variety of hosts who comprise the hospitality sector, and vendors assist each other with referrals and recommendations by listing each other on their websites.

Patty also notes the Discovery Center, located on State Park Road at Deep Creek, is a wonderful educational/interpretive resource for both local residents and visitors. No visit to Garrett County would be complete without a visit to the Discovery Center. It is a way to “bring natural resources and people together.” It is also the location of her office, should information on nature tourism be needed. Always an advocate for Garrett County, Patty Manown Mash encourages everyone to visit and make nature tourism a part of his or her vacation experience. Her office number is: 301-387-7314 or email at: pmanownmash@dnr.state.md.us.

You may visit the website: www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands to learn about state parks and the Discovery Center.

For more information about Nature Tourism Vendors please contact:

Patricia Manown Mash
 MD Dept. of Natural Resources
 898 State Park Road
 Swanton, MD 21561
 Phone: 301-387-7314
 Fax: 301-387-7316
pmanownmash@dnr.state.md.us

Editors note: On the following page are some of the Nature Tourism Vendor ads with their contact information. They can and will make your Garrett County/Deep Creek Lake experience memorable.

