

Vision: Making the NRG the top East Coast recreation destination

Well, I'm in Moab, Utah doing a little active recreation research. This place is what stimulated my thinking about what the NRG area could become. I want to use Moab as a comparison in terms of what they have done rather than what they have, because what we have is different.

Moab (Grand County, Utah) is probably the recreation destination of the West. Several years ago it was a declining mining town. They became serious about tourism and the results show that that vision is working: Their tourism-related tax receipts are over \$6 million per year with tourism-related sales of more than \$100 million per year. They have developed several major recreation activities. You can see a rough comparison to Fayetteville in the tables below:

Table 1. Moab Recreation

Resource	Activities	Significant features	Investments
River	Rafting, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, jet boats		
Rock	Rock climbing	World-class crack climbing.	Approximately 1500 routes
Trails	Mountain biking, hiking, 4x4 driving	World-class mountain biking	300 miles of mountain bike trails + 1 paved trail. Adding approximately 50 miles per year.
Landscape	Driving windshield tours, photography	Dramatic scenery	Two National Parks + BLM land
Dining	Eating, drinking	Two good restaurants, one is a brew pub	

Table 2. NRG Recreation

Resource	Activities	Significant features	Investments
River	Rafting, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, jet boats	World-class white water in three rivers (New, Gauley, & Meadow rivers)	
Rock	Rock climbing	World-class rock climbing.	Approximately 3000 routes
Trails	Mountain biking, hiking,		Approximately 35 miles of mountain bike trails; hiking trails through preserved and historic areas with educational signage.
Major Events	Bridge Day	Famous for base jumping	
Dining	Eating, drinking	Many very good restaurants, one brewery	

As I see it, we have about the same number of world-class activities. Moab has more acres of land devoted to recreation, but the NRG area has a much larger population within a day’s drive. Both towns are former mining areas that have to shift their economic vision.

Moab has gone “all in” with recreational tourism. We could do the same. We already do several things well: climbing, white water and Bridge Day. One more sport developed to this high level plus a team approach could tip the balance and make the NRG area the top East Coast recreational destination.

The missing sport we have the terrain for and a beginning with is biking. Biking is good for your health and it contributes to the economy. For instance, in the Rocky Mountain Region, bicycling contributed \$6.2 billion in 2010 to the regional economy. For the Slickrock Trail in Moab, the economic value of one trip has been calculated as \$586 per person per trip. OK, it’s the world-famous Slickrock Trail, but you get the idea. The economic benefits of bicycle trails has also been studied and found to produce a positive return on investment.

So the economic potential is there and we have the terrain. What we need is a vision and teamwork. Create Fayetteville could provide the vision and coordinate the teamwork. Just like the teamwork, the vision should be a group activity. Here's mine (it's big I know, but no apologies):

NRG area becomes The East Coast Recreational Destination by virtue of three world-class sports and associated activities. The world-class sports are climbing, white water paddling, and mountain biking. Trails are built, lots of trails. There are 100+ miles of mountain bike trails in the NRG in five years, paved trails connect Oak Hill to the NRG, a gravel rail trail on the Meadow River that connects to the Greenbriar Trail, hundreds of miles of useable mountain biking and hiking trails in the Monongahela National Forest. People stream into Fayetteville and the surrounding towns. They wear themselves out on these activities then enjoy a variety of good dining experiences. They are happy and they happily spend their money at the bike shops, climbing shops, boating shops, motels, campgrounds, restaurants, rafting companies, Fayetteville Theater and other places because they are having so much fun. They go home and tell their friends. Even more people come. They don't want to miss out on the fun. They spend even more money. We have enough tax receipts to fix our schools, good companies are attracted here, partly because of those educated people. Fayetteville, and towns like it, prosper, have better jobs and have a very high quality of life.

To make this happen, the city, county and state governments, Park Service, Boy Scouts, bike club, climbing alliance, rafting companies and schools work together because they have a common and compelling goal. They realize they are all in the same economic boat and it's more functional to make more pie than to fight over whose slice of the shrinking pie is bigger.

References:

Mountain bike trails near Moab: <http://www.mtbproject.com/directory/8010576/moab>

Biking contribution to the economy: <https://www.imba.com/resources/research/economics>

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Utah state tourism: http://utahtourism.org/?page_id=9

Money raised by tourism in Utah: <http://utahtourism.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Tourism-Works-Nov14.pdf>

Grand County tourism:

https://bebr.business.utah.edu/sites/default/files/tourismprofile_grandcounty_0.pdf

Tourism vs oil and gas:

<http://www.durangoherald.com/article/20140713/COLUMNISTS02/140719917#/storyimage/DU/20140713/COLUMNISTS02/140719917/AR/0/AR-140719917.jpg&maxw=620&maxh=400>

Moab city data: <http://www.city-data.com/city/Moab-Utah.html>

Fayetteville City data: <http://www.city-data.com/city/Fayetteville-West-Virginia.html>

Hiking in the NRG: <http://www.nps.gov/neri/planyourvisit/upload/Trail-newsletter-2012-FINAL.pdf>

Growth of mountain biking: <https://www.imba.com/resources/research/demographics-mountain-biking>

Money spent on mountain biking: <https://www.imba.com/news/mountain-bike-sales-climbing>

Monongahela National Forest https://www.google.com/?gws_rd=ssl#q=monongahela+national+forest