

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Tourism Coalition Seeks Proposals on Tourism Development Contract

Eastern North Carolina's three regional economic development commissions announced today that they are joining with local tourism officials to seek National Heritage Area designation status for an area of up to 40 counties. The coalition for the proposed National Heritage Area initiative invites heritage tourism, branding, marketing, or economic development consultants to submit proposals for work to meet requirements to secure National Heritage Area designation status for up to 40 Eastern NC counties.

The qualified person or organization will interact with local tourism professionals to obtain site information, consult on improvement opportunities, establish a brand and marketing theme for the proposed heritage area, develop a heritage asset inventory, and submit federal application forms to the National Park Service. Copies of the Request for Proposals are available from all three Economic Development Commissions: North Carolina's Northeast Commission, Anita Johnson, (888) 872-8562, www.ncnortheast.info; North Carolina's East Region, Erin Eatman, (800)-474-8499, www.nceast.org; and North Carolina's Southeast, Julie Thomas, Tourism Development Officer for NCDCCR, (252) 830-6580, www.ncse.org. Deadline is May 24, 2010.

A National Heritage Area designation will pave the way for federal funds to develop, package and promote historical, natural and cultural sites and unleash the full potential of the area's tourism economy. The goal is to spur new jobs, businesses and infrastructure from which all Eastern North Carolina residents can benefit. In assembling Congressional support for this designation, regional leaders hope first to engage a qualified consultant to survey and catalogue relevant heritage tourism assets across Eastern North Carolina. This project received support from the Golden LEAF Foundation.

A vast and vivid history helps drive economic opportunity across Eastern North Carolina, as visitors from around the state and across the world seek stimulating, meaningful and memorable sites and activities during their travels. Cultural and heritage tourism accounts for "up to 40%" of the state's large tourism industry, according to a study from the John C. Walker College of Business at Appalachian State University. Tourism topped \$15 billion in 2009 in North Carolina, based on NC Department of Commerce figures.

Nowhere in the United States are four centuries of American history more readily on display than in Eastern North Carolina. Home to the first English and Swiss outposts in the New World, it is where the nation began. Its Colonial Era ports, courthouses, farms and marketplaces were central to America's drive toward independence and later provided the backdrop for key conflicts during the American Revolution and the Civil War. Several of the nation's Founding Fathers, including two signers of the Declaration of Independence, were either natives or residents of the region. Eastern North Carolina is where the Aviation Age was born. More recently, the region's massive defense installations offer visitors a unique look at the skills, tools and traditions required to maintain freedom and peace.

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