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S.C. tourism study touts York County's history, recreation

By Jason Foster - jfoster@heraldonline.com

CATAWBA INDIAN RESERVATION -- The history of the Catawba Indians and the recreational allure of the Catawba River should be the top focal points for the York County area to boost tourism locally and statewide, according to a new study.

State and local tourism leaders unveiled the study Wednesday at the Catawba Cultural Center to highlight plans to bring more tourists into the state by enhancing existing destinations and finding new opportunities to lure travelers — and their money.

The six-year study, conducted by the Ireland-based Tourism Development International for the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, looked at eight inland regions across the state with strong tourism potential, based on existing resources, interviews with tourists, state tourism experts and others.

[Catawba Region Tourism Development Plan](#)

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The Catawba Region — which includes York, Chester, Lancaster, Fairfield and Union counties — offers strong historic and cultural appeal and opportunities to attract a more adventurous crowd, officials said.

“There is still a lot of potential for growth,” said Chad Prosser, state PRT director.

Tourism experts see Rock Hill as both a hub and gateway into the great Catawba region.

In particular, the study cites the Catawba Indian Reservation and the scenic Catawba River as lynchpins. The former has allure to lovers of history and culture, the study concludes, while the latter appeals to outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

The study recommends leaders create two flagship attractions in Rock Hill that cater to those groups and that could complement other existing attractions. The study

doesn't offer specific suggestions.

But leaders agree there is untapped potential in the area.

“We have a lot to offer,” said Wenonah Haire, executive director of the Catawba Cultural Preservation Project. “We can make this one of the best places to visit in the region. ... We're looking for the 'wow' factor.”

But for now, the survey argues, the region lacks anything significant along those lines.

Though the region has an important built-in connector in Interstate 77, nothing along the corridor can be considered a visitor magnet, according to the study. But creating something

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like that would not only boost the local tourism economy, but also siphon visitors to other parts of the Catawba region and hopefully entice them to plan day trips or even overnight stays throughout the area, the study says.

"Ultimately, each of these eight regional plans will be stitched together," said Peter MacNulty, the consultant who worked with state tourism officials on the study. "Consumers and travelers have no interest in state or regional boundaries. They just want to have fun."

To that end, it's important to know what travelers want, MacNulty said. With that information in hand, a region can try to create something that influences travel habits based on that area's strengths. The goal is to have something that's considered a must-stop location.

Two signature attractions in Rock Hill, combined with existing attractions, such as sports tourism destinations like Cherry Park and Manchester Meadows, the Carowinds amusement park and the history-centered Historic Brattonsville, could make the Catawba region a formidable travel option, officials say.

"I've been encouraged. ... I feel very positive about what this group has identified as opportunities for us," said Bennish Brown, executive director of the Rock Hill/York County Convention and Visitors Bureau. He said the study affirms what leaders already knew about the area's strength.

Asked whether an emphasis on history, culture and outdoor recreation is the right approach to lure significant amounts of tourists, Brown said yes.

"It's who we are," he said. "You run into trouble when you try to be something you aren't."

But turning these plans into reality will require cooperation from many groups, organizations and tourism projects already in place, officials said. It will require a lot of money, which isn't exactly flowing at this point. The study doesn't peg a dollar amount to its proposals, but it does say if all the plans it suggests are carried out, tourism revenue could more than double and bring in around \$500 million to the region each year.

It would take around 10 years for the plan to be complete, MacNulty said.

Officials acknowledge that funding will be a huge hurdle. But grants and private investment could help things move forward, they said.

"You've got to have the vision first," Prosser said, adding that money will come eventually if a plan is well presented and promoted. "This can happen. It's not just a great presentation that sits on a shelf."

Brown hopes to use the annual York County Tourism Summit on Feb. 23 as a starting point for conversations. Having tourism representatives from throughout the region will allow for some brainstorming, and hopefully some common goals, Brown said.

If officials can identify some early projects to proceed with, it will feel like progress is being made, he said. That's an important aspect of making the overall plan work, Brown said.

"I think we can get behind one or two issues and make them happen," he said.

Jason Foster 803-329-4066



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Spelling_Nazi_Police_Check_Force wrote on 12/10/2009 09:58:33 PM:

Maybe we can get the Chief to 'Invite' york County sherri to smoke Peace Pipe?

Then he'll think the Chief tried to Poison him, as he starts Hallucinating. He'll go on a killing spree and slay 25 Catawba's.

We can 'arrange' it in the media, make it look like 'Cover Up.'

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Spelling_Nazi_Police_Check_Force wrote on 12/10/2009 09:50:15 PM:

I forgot, the part about STEALING from them, taking all their Profits!

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Spelling_Nazi_Police_Check_Force wrote on 12/10/2009 09:41:32 PM:

Why don't we "Make" the Remaining Catawba Indians hand produce 'Native-American' artifacts for profit, and sell them to the stupid tourists?

Would not that cause the Chief to turn over in his Grave? The production and sale of Religious Artifacts for Money, Profit... the Almighty American dollar? Who wants to 'buy' a Genuine Hand-Crafted Native American Catawba Indian "dreamcatcher?"

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Dont_Worry_Be_Happy wrote on 12/10/2009 09:19:50 PM:

Yeah, that's Great. Whittle the indian-man down to little Reservations through brutal slaughter, then try to use him as Marketing material?

How does The Catawba feel, 'bout this? Any-one checked? Native-American's fury is Deeper than African Americans. Think about it:

They lost a Whole Continent to white men. There will be a Day, when Reservation chiefs look, and they will see a Whole New World, a New America, and they will come out, leave the Reservations and interact with the rest. I can't wait.

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