

Climate, Weather and Tourism in North Carolina: Issues and Opportunities

Center for Sustainable Tourism
Division of Research and Graduate Studies
East Carolina University

Vice Chancellor Deirdre Mageean

“The most important fact about [the planet] is that an instruction book didn’t come with it.” Futurist inventor and ecologist Buckminster Fuller encapsulated the great challenge we face in the global community today, of balancing social development and preserving the planet’s natural resources.

The Center for Sustainable Tourism here at East Carolina University takes an integrated approach toward addressing the needs and issues facing our tourism industry. As entrepreneurs, scientists and educators, and culturalists, you understand the interdependence of economic development and environmental sustainability. We are excited to have this strategic collaborative gathered here today forging the science linkages that will inform the changing needs of tourism.

On behalf of the Division of Research and Graduate Studies here at ECU, I welcome each of you to our campus and to this first Climate, Weather and Tourism event. ECU has for some time now been conducting research and offering educational programs about climate both on and off-campus. Two recent examples include the publication entitled *North Carolina’s Coasts in Crisis: A Vision for the Future* and an additional report entitled *Global Warming and Coastal North Carolina*, both authored by Professors Stan Riggs and Steve Culver. The reports

were prepared in response to Senator Marc Basnight's request to ECU research scientists for a background paper on the problems of global warming and proposed mitigation efforts.

Let me also acknowledge that the Center for Sustainable Tourism could not have organized this workshop today without sponsorship by the National Climatic Data Center, NC Sea Grant and ECU's Institute for Coastal Science and Policy. We thank our sponsors not only for providing funding but also for being active participants in the program and for being friends of this institution. I'd also like to thank the North Carolina Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development and the ECU Office of Economic Development for their strong support on a number of projects to benefit and promote tourism in North Carolina. It is this type of collaboration and cooperation among academic institutions, government agencies and industry that is critical to addressing the important socio-economic questions inherent in our topic today.

The Center for Sustainable Tourism is an interdisciplinary unit of the Division of Research and Graduate Studies established to support responsible tourism development across North Carolina and beyond. The Center supports research, academic offerings, and community outreach and will soon offer the nation's first Master of Science in Sustainable Tourism. The Center offers *greening* action points and support for businesses, governmental institutions and individual

travelers. The Center is developing a number of initiatives, including a study of the impacts of second home development on tourism and community quality of life, and an initiative in conjunction with the National Renewable Energy Lab and the University of Colorado to assess best practices in energy use for key tourism sectors.

As a research institution, our focus centers on the important questions that must be addressed to solve societal problems. Tourism and its ancillary industry are inexorably linked to the viability of North Carolina's economy, accounting for some \$17 billion in travel expenditures, more than \$4 billion in payroll, \$2.5 billion in tax receipts, and employing some 200,000 residents. It is imperative that our tourism industry has the advantage of every available tool that informs a greater understanding of the complex effects of weather fluctuations and climate variability.

We are delighted that you have joined us today to participate in this discussion. In designing the program before you, we have sought to balance the varied knowledge and experiences of scientists, educators, policy makers, nonprofit groups and entrepreneurs. We hope you find this informative and that you will raise any issues of specific importance to you, to interact with those gathered here today, and to forge new relationships. It is our hope at ECU that we move forward together to meet the challenges ahead.