

## **Climate, Weather and Tourism Workshop Welcome Comments**

Welcome, and thank you for being with us today. My name is Pat Long and I am the Director of the Center for Sustainable Tourism here at ECU.

First, I appreciate your tolerance of our efforts to go paperless—you should find what you need for program information over the next two days on the large posters scattered about. Additionally, you will find our speakers presentations posted on our website by Monday and a summary report of this event by December 15<sup>th</sup>

I want to take a minute to thank our partners in this workshop--the National Climatic Data Center, NC Sea Grant, ECU's Institute for Coastal Science and Policy, our Colleges of Business, Health and Human Performance, Human Ecology, the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences, and the Coastal Resources Management Program, along with many other campus units and programs.

A few weekends ago I was headed north on Hwy 12 on the Outer Banks near Hatteras on my motorcycle riding in the wind and rain--soaking wet--when I came upon a stretch of road where the sky was filled with what seemed to be hundreds of kite boarders. Apparently, what to many would seem to be miserable weather (me being one of them) was in fact, the "perfect storm". Weather fluctuation and tourism are main ingredients in our discussions over the next two days; throw in a bit of climate change and we have the necessary makings for an interesting batch of economic, environmental and community impacts, both positive and negative.

The Center for Sustainable Tourism, a relatively new entity here at ECU, is working to support research, academic activities and community programs in tourism which contribute to our state's economy. Tourism that can contribute new revenues, jobs, and local and state taxes derived from tourists who support the services we all have come to expect. But, of equal importance to our mission is the continued health and vitality of the places and people who make up the destinations that attract our visitors. Tourism by its nature both contributes to, and is impacted by, the forces of Mother Nature; it is the responsibility of all of us to strive for a balance of economic viability with socio-cultural and environmental enhancement and equity.

We know that tourism is significant to our communities. Without tourism, many community amenities, including quality restaurants, convenience stores, retail shopping, cultural, educational and historic offerings, special events, and outdoor recreation opportunities, would substantially decline or disappear. We also know that climate and weather significantly impact tourism—in the type of offerings, the consistency of products and services and the length and quality of tourism seasons, the health of tourists, and the quality of tourism experiences.

We have some clear objectives for this gathering. First, we would like to develop a strategy for *raising awareness of issues* linking tourism, weather and climate. Second, we would like to develop a framework for *collaborative research* on climatic risks, opportunities, and information needs for reducing impacts on our state's tourism industry. Third, we would like to identify *sources of data and potential partnerships* to

investigate interactions of tourism, weather and climate in order to provide usable information for planning and management. The World Tourism Organization in recent meetings addressing climate and tourism, noted that climate is perhaps the most important influence on the choice of leisure travel destinations.

We do know that climate scenarios need to be more local specific and there is a need to increase understanding of the economic costs of creating favorable tourism conditions. We know there is a need for new management strategies that take into account a changing resource base and effects on vegetation, wildlife and recreational choices. We know there is competition to this region and opportunity costs to the tourists we desire. And, we need to anticipate resource conflicts due to competition for scarce water resources and determine the process for resolving such conflicts.

We have the “perfect storm” brewing in this room. We have scientists, academics, policy makers, business owners and operators and students at all levels interested in and committed to, a better understanding of climate, weather and tourism. We have with us experts whose knowledge and insight can add to our ability to respond to the research and management challenges facing the tourism industry and its many sectors. And, we have an institution poised to provide leadership to our Eastern region and across North Carolina, from Manteo to Murphy, on issues of great economic and community significance.

I would like to now call upon Mary Paul, a Research Assistant at the Center and master’s student in Public Administration to introduce the Honorable Congressman, Walter B. Jones.