

Ecotourism on the Outer Banks



STANDARD COURSE OF STUDY CORRELATIONS:

Earth/Environmental Science, Goal 4: The learner will build an understanding of the hydrosphere and its interactions and influences on the lithosphere, the atmosphere, and environmental quality.

Biology, Goal 5: The learner will develop an understanding of the ecological relationships among organisms.

INTRODUCTION TO LESSON: Students will learn the three components of assessing a business in terms of sustainable development and use them to analyze an existing ecotourism business on the Outer Banks. Students will then work in pairs or groups to design their own ecotourism business plan. The business must meet sustainable development criteria that factor in the fragile nature of barrier island ecosystems.

MATERIALS

- ☀ Copies of Case Study: Kitty Hawk Kayak and Surf School, one per student or pair of students
- ☀ Copies of Sustainable Ecotourism Rubric, one per student or pair of students
- ☀ Copies of Project Guide: Developing an Ecotourism Business, one per pair or group

BACKGROUND FOR THE TEACHER: In 1987, the United Nations defined the term *sustainable development* as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In 1992, the U.N. further clarified the concept of sustainability with three specific components:

- Environmental protection
- Economic growth
- Social development

These components are known as the “triple bottom line.” If a development or business decision is good for the *planet*, for *profit* and for *people*, then it is considered truly sustainable.

Ecotourism and Sustainable Development by Martha Honey defines ecotourism in terms of seven key components:

1. Involves travel to natural destinations
2. Minimizes environmental and cultural impact
3. Builds environmental awareness
4. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
5. Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
6. Respects local culture
7. Supports human rights and democratic movements

A close comparison of these seven components and the three components of sustainable development shows that the terms are closely related and that businesses engaged in ecotourism also meet the criteria for sustainable development. The terms are used interchangeably in this lesson. For the sake of simplicity, this lesson has students use the U.N. definition of sustainable development for their evaluations.

Ecotourism is a key component of sustainable development on the Outer Banks because it meets the economic needs of the local community while working to ensure that the barrier island ecosystem is preserved for future generations. Ecotourism businesses enable people to visit pristine environments while minimizing environmental impact. Ecotourism businesses also work to educate their clients about the local environment and culture, support the local economy, provide funds for conservation, and build community connections and partnerships.

engage ➤ Write the word *sustainability* on the board. Ask students to define or explain what sustainability means.

Introduce the three-layer concept of sustainability: the overlap of environmental protection, economic growth and social development. Explain the idea of the triple bottom line: planet, profit and people.

Show the video. If time is short, you may show only Chapter 5. Write the three components of the triple bottom line on the board. Have students describe factors discussed in the video related to these components. List them under each heading on the board.

explore ➤ Ask students what the term *ecotourism* means. Clarify the concept and then help students make connections to a business involved in ecotourism, the definition of sustainable development and the triple bottom line.

Hand out copies of the Case Study and Sustainable Ecotourism Rubric. Students may work on their own or with a partner. Have them read the description of the business, answer the discussion questions and then evaluate the business using the rubric.

explain ➤ Discuss the students' analyses as a class. Clarify components of *sustainable development* and clear up misconceptions as discussion progresses. Some discussion questions:

1. What are the positive aspects of the business?
2. What are some possible ways the business could be more sustainable? *(Students may need some leading suggestions—You might prompt them by asking how the business transports its clients and kayaks, e.g., fuel efficiency; where it gets power; where it buys equipment; etc.)*
3. What types of businesses do you know of that you would consider good ecotourism models? What types of businesses are clearly not good models?
4. How could you determine whether an ecotourism business lives up to its claims? *(Here you might introduce the term “greenwashing,” the practice by companies of marketing themselves as environmentally friendly while not actually adopting sustainable practices and policies.)*

elaborate ➤ Divide class into pairs or groups and give each a copy of the Project Guide. Hand out additional copies of the rubric (if necessary) for students to use as they develop their project. Tell students that they are to invent an ecotourism business that could be located on the Outer Banks or in their community.

evaluate ➤

1. In-class assessment: Students turn in answers to discussion questions accompanying the reading and the rubric used to evaluate the Kitty Hawk Kayak and Surf School.
2. Assess student businesses using the rubric.

Teacher's Notes:



BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Plan an ecotourism field trip to the Outer Banks. Have students research ecotourism businesses prior to the trip.

Additional Resources:

Ecotourism and Sustainable Development. Honey, Martha. 1999. Island Press.

United Nations definition of sustainable development • http://www.unngosustainability.org/CSD_Definitions%20SD.htm

Untamed Path ecotourism definitions • <http://www.untamedpath.com/Ecotourism/defining.html>

The Center for Responsible Travel • <http://www.responsibletravel.org/home/index.html>

Facing the Future • <http://www.facingthefuture.org/Default.aspx> • Additional curriculum resources related to sustainability

North Carolina Coastal Federation • <http://nccoast.org/restorationeducation/index.asp> • Habitat restoration and education resources



A Case Study in Sustainable Development: The Kitty Hawk Kayak and Surf School

Kitty Hawk Kayak and Surf School has been developing its ecotourism business on the Outer Banks since 1984. Surrounded by National Seashores, National Wildlife Refuges, State Parks, Coastal Reserves and the Atlantic Ocean, the business is in a prime location for providing adventure vacation trips and educational outings for school groups and other organizations.

As long-time residents of the Outer Banks, the owners of the school understand that these barrier islands are a unique, fragile ecosystem and that tourism can have either a positive or damaging long-term influence. For this reason, the business owners try to be stewards of the environment in all of their activities:

- ✿ By leading trips in pristine environments, the school helps educate tourists about local history, culture, the environment and ecology. Guides and instructors take pride in their jobs and the opportunity to educate clients.
- ✿ Kayak trips and surfing experiences allow people to enjoy the natural environment and beauty of the Outer Banks. Trip leaders teach “Leave No Trace” camping and travel techniques.
- ✿ In addition to pleasure trips, the school also provides educational outings for schools and groups.
 - Field trip programs may satisfy some requirements of environmental science, earth science, coastal science and physical education classes.
 - Tours of Kitty Hawk Woods Coastal Reserve may include water quality experiments and salt marsh/wetlands observation.
 - Tours of the salt marshes of Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge may include sediment sampling. Discussions of estuarine health and federal environmental protection may also be a part of this tour.
 - Paddling trips to see oyster reef restoration may feature water quality experiments, salt marsh and wetlands observation and presentations from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff.
- ✿ The school partners with The Nature Conservancy to lead hikes and paddle trips at Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve.
- ✿ The school partners with the Coastal Land Trust to help protect barrier island beaches, riparian corridors and other special natural areas.
- ✿ As members of 1% for the Planet (<http://www.onepercentfortheplanet.org>), the school donates 1 percent of its profits to environmental groups around the world.



Photo courtesy of N.C. Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development.

- ✿ The business sustains itself through tourist spending, contributing to the local economy through taxes and job creation.

Discussion Questions

1. How is Kitty Hawk Kayak and Surf School a sustainable ecotourism business in terms of its impact on the **planet**?
2. How is it a sustainable ecotourism business in terms of **profit**?
3. How is it a sustainable ecotourism business in terms of its impact on **people**?
4. Make two suggestions for how Kitty Hawk Kayak and Surf School could be more sustainable or list two questions you might want to ask the owners about their plans to become a more sustainable business in the future.

Use this rubric to rate the business on its sustainability. Circle the appropriate box, then add the numbers to find the total score.

	3	2	1	0
PLANET (Environmental impact)	Business has minimal impact on natural environment. Actively works to conserve natural resources and educate community about importance of natural resources.	Business has minimal impact on natural environment or actively works to conserve natural resources and educate community about importance of natural resources.	Business has some impact on natural environment and makes little effort to conserve or educate community about importance of natural resources.	Business has significant impact on natural environment (contributes to water/air pollution, uses inefficient vehicles, uses excessive resources, etc.).
PROFIT (Economic viability and support of local economy)	Business strongly supports local economy by bringing in outside revenue (tourism, sales, etc.). Provides good jobs and contributes to local tax base.	Business somewhat supports local economy by bringing in outside revenue (tourism, sales, etc.). Provides some jobs and tax revenue.	Business provides minimal jobs and income either from inside or outside the community.	Business is operated by absentee owners and does not provide any support for local economy.
PEOPLE (Impact on local and extended community)	Business actively works to support and preserve local and regional culture. Works to preserve local and international human rights by providing safe working environment, living wages and health care for all involved in its industry.	Business supports local cultural activities and events, such as festivals, music and education. May provide safe working environment, health care, etc., for local employees but does not work to ensure others in its industry do the same.	Business does not actively support local culture or education. It may help out when approached. Business does not provide health care or living wage to employees.	Business is operated by absentee owners and demonstrates little or no consideration of local culture or needs of extended community.

Assignment

Develop an Ecotourism Business Project Guide.

Based on what you have learned about sustainable development and ecotourism, develop an idea for an ecotourism business on the Outer Banks or in your local area. Follow these guidelines and use the boldfaced terms as headings for your final project description.

1. **Business Focus:** Your business is more likely to succeed if it is built around something you enjoy. Think about what activities you would like your business to provide. Describe the focus of your business.
2. **Business Location:** Where will you open your business? Look at a map and decide on a specific location that makes sense for the activities you will offer. Describe the location and explain why you chose it.
3. **Target Clientele:** Who is your target client base? Vacationing families? School groups? Other businesses? Describe your target group or groups.
4. **Aspects of Sustainable Development:** How will your business meet current community needs while preserving resources for future generations? Describe how your business will meet the triple bottom line:
 - **Planet** – How will your business benefit the planet through education, action and minimum impact on the environment?
 - **Profit** – How will your business make a profit and support the local economy?
 - **People** – How will your business help the community? This can include the immediate local community, an extended global population or both.

Remember:

- Your final project should be typed and edited for grammar and spelling.
- You must complete a self-evaluation of your project using the Sustainable Ecotourism Rubric provided by your teacher. Hand in the completed rubric with your finished project.