Request for Proposal:

Inventory & Needs Assessment of the Southwest Virginia Outdoor Recreation Industry and Supporting Businesses – EASTERN REGION

Issue Date: 8/25/2017

Title: Outdoor Recreation Business Inventory and Needs Assessment

Issuing Organization: Friends of Southwest Virginia

Close Date: 9/8/2017

Purpose:
Friends of Southwest Virginia (Friends), a non-profit organization, is soliciting proposals from qualified individual(s) or organization(s) to develop an inventory of the assets of key local communities within their outdoor recreation initiative (formally known as Appalachian Spring) and an evaluation of the outdoor recreation and tourism economy to provide a guide for future economic development and business growth initiatives.

About Friends of Southwest Virginia:
Southwest Virginia includes 19 counties and four independent cities located near the southern and western border of Virginia. Its 8,600 square miles – more than a fifth of Virginia’s total – is located along mountain ridges and in fertile valleys, with two national parks, nine state parks and over a thousand square miles of national and state forests. It’s where you'll find a culture of music and craft that is authentic, distinctive and alive. A natural landscape that is breathtaking in its magnitude and scope. A place where the pace of life is slower and people are friendly. A premiere place for recreation of all kinds.

By capitalizing on the unique qualities of our region, Southwest Virginia utilizes its cultural and natural assets to build a comprehensive, long-term, sustainable economy through organizations like Heartwood: Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Gateway, The Crooked Road, ‘Round The Mountain and related cultural heritage organizations and venues that promote entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.

The Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission, established in 2008 by the Virginia General Assembly, took the lead in developing a creative economy in Southwest Virginia. In 2011, the Commission became the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, a self-sustaining community development nonprofit. Through a supporting non-profit, the Friends of Southwest Virginia, businesses and individuals help artists, crafts people, localities, nonprofits and entrepreneurs mobilize and succeed.

A multifaceted plan identifies the cultural and natural assets of the region; coordinates initiatives, organizations and venues engaged in cultural and natural heritage toward more efficient operations for all partner organizations; and develops a comprehensive strategy and capital improvements plan to maximize the impact of state investments in this significant restructuring effort.
Key initiatives include:

- Branding and marketing Southwest Virginia to the world as a distinct culture and destination
- Developing and sustaining Heartwood: Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Gateway
- Expanding outdoor recreation development initiatives and marketing throughout the region
- Planning and implementation of downtown revitalization throughout the region to instill a high quality of life within our communities and promote them to the world for a broad spectrum of economic development opportunities

On July 1, 2011, the Commission received a new name: the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation, representing the coming transition from governmental body to self-sustaining community development nonprofit. Through an organization known as the Friends of Southwest Virginia, businesses and individuals will be able to help artists, craftspeople, localities, nonprofits and entrepreneurs mobilize and succeed. Such success will lead the way for a stable economic base for the people of Southwest Virginia.

Partners include the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, Virginia Tourism Corporation and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Funding partners include the Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission and Appalachian Regional Commission.
About the Appalachian Spring Initiative:
Appalachian Spring is a partnership of community and regional development, tourism, environmental stewardship, outdoor recreation, and entrepreneurial assistance stakeholders to develop and promote Southwest Virginia as a world class destination of natural and recreational assets for visitation and enjoyment.

By focusing attention on these unique assets, we seek to provide economic opportunities and a high quality of life for our communities. The initiative has two overarching objectives:

- Connecting major natural/recreational anchor areas to surrounding communities, and to each other, to create an aggregation of world class assets to establish Southwest Virginia as a national outdoor recreation destination.
- Developing an outdoor recreation industry in Southwest Virginia and its communities.

Anchor recreation destinations serve as focal points for the region's recreation:

- **The Appalachian Trail**: a 2,000 mile hiking trail, one of the two most celebrated hiking trails in the world, with its greatest mileage in Virginia.
- **The Blue Ridge Parkway**: America's Favorite Drive and the most visited national park in the United States with unbelievable views, wineries and musical communities.
- **Breaks Interstate Park**: "the Grand Canyon of the South," with 4600 acres in Virginia and Kentucky and world class whitewater and over 25 miles of trails for hiking, biking and birdwatching.
- **The Clinch River**: One of the most bio-diverse ecosystems in the United States, with nationally significant geological landmarks and a burgeoning 60 mile waterway.
- **The Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail**: America’s first frontier and gateway to western migration. The 300,000 who traveled through Cumberland Gap founded communities in Kentucky, Missouri, the Midwest and beyond.
- **High Knob Recreation Area**: one of the largest land masses in the US, with magnificent multi state views from its observation tower, horse trails and incredible hiking and water sports.
- **The Mount Rogers Recreation Area**: 200,000 acres of populated wilderness with 11 campgrounds and over 500 miles of trails. It is the home of the two highest mountains in Virginia, Mount Rogers and Whitetop.
- **The New River**: the second oldest river in the world with magnificent water sports and fishing opportunities and a 57 mile biking trail.
Objectives:

Community Inventory & Needs Assessment Reports
Approximately 20 reports (TBD by community response): 1-3 pages each

Produce an evaluation report of the current outdoor recreation industry and supporting business inventory & needs assessment for each of the communities (divided into anchor regions):

EASTERN REGION

- The Appalachian Trail
  - Bastin
  - Bland
  - Damascus
- The Blue Ridge Parkway
  - Floyd
  - Galax
  - Stuart
  - Woolwine
- The Mount Rogers Recreation Area
  - Troutdale
  - Konnarock
  - Whitetop
  - Chilhowie
  - Saltville
- The New River
  - Mouth of Wilson
  - Independence
  - Fries
  - Austinville
  - Draper
  - Pulaski
  - Fairlawn
Reports will be completed on a template determined and created in conjunction with the Friends of Southwest Virginia staff. Friends of Southwest Virginia has an incomplete database of outdoor recreation for use by selected contractor as a base.

Each community report should include the following information:

**Business and Asset Inventory:**

1) Primary Outdoor Recreation Assets:
   a. List of outdoor recreation assets within community. Examples include:
      i. Mountains, rivers, streams, lakes, trails, water trails, road trails, public lands, parks and attractions, rock-climbing, golf courses
   b. For each asset, the following should be identified:
      i. Name
      ii. Accessibility (Open / closed to the public; admission charged; etc.)

2) Primary Outdoor Recreation Destination Businesses
   a. Non-Profit, For-Profit, or government businesses and enterprises operating as a destination attraction in any area of outdoor recreation
      i. Outdoor recreational activities include, but are not limited to, boating, angling, hunting, jeep touring, backpacking, mountain climbing, camping, trips utilizing pack animals, dog sled trips, whitewater float trips, rafting trips, drift boat trips, kayak trips, inflatable canoe trips and canoe trips. The duration of any outdoor recreational activities may be for a few hours or for several days or weeks.
   b. For each primary business, the following should be identified:
      i. Name
      ii. Associated Natural Asset
      iii. Location (Address)
      iv. Contact Information (Website and Phone Number)
      v. Owner or Contact (if available)
      vi. Season of operation
      vii. Years in operation (if available)

3) Secondary Tourism / Hospitality Support Businesses
   a. Defined as tourism-oriented businesses used during a destination visit. Examples:
      i. Hotels, Motels, B&Bs, Lodges, Cabins and Hostels
      ii. Restaurants / Dining
      iii. Specialty / activity-support shopping (tackle / bait shops; outdoor gear shops)
   b. For each secondary business, the following should be identified and divided into categories of operational type (lodging, dining, shopping, etc.):
      i. Name

4) Tertiary Non-Tourism / Hospitality Support Businesses
   a. Defined as general businesses used during a destination visit. Examples:
      i. Gas Station
      ii. Convenience stores
      iii. Grocery / Department Stores
      iv. Banks / ATMs
      v. Etc.
b. For each tertiary business, the following should be identified and divided into categories of operational type (lodging, dining, shopping, etc.):
   i. Supply of category (either available or unavailable)

Business Needs Assessment / Gap Report:

Easy to comprehend lists and narrative addressing the following topics:
   1) Identification of underutilized assets
   2) Prioritization of business needs (based on gaps in businesses serving assets):
      a. Primary Outdoor Recreation Destination Businesses
      b. Secondary Non-Destination Tourism / Hospitality Support Businesses
      c. Tertiary Non-Tourism / Hospitality Support Businesses
   3) Recommendations: Existing Business Expansions
   4) Recommendations: Creative Economy Opportunities
   5) Recommendations: Community / Regional Partnerships

Anchor Region Summary Reports

4 reports: approximately 2 pages each

Produce a summary report of the current Outdoor Recreation Industry and Supporting Businesses including a summary of the inventory status & needs assessment for each of the Appalachian Spring anchor regions:

- The Appalachian Trail
- The Blue Ridge Parkway
- The Mount Rogers Recreation Area
- The New River

Summary reports should include the following information:

- Overview: Business Inventory for each anchor region
- Overview: Business Needs Assessment & Gap Report for each anchor region
- Recommendations: Business Connectivity across Anchor Region
  - How can existing businesses better work together to support and sustain expanded tourism in the anchor region?
  - What new businesses can fill multiple economic gaps across several communities within the anchor region?
Selection Criteria

All applications should provide a work plan/strategy to accomplish the described objectives outlined in the request above. Proposals will be reviewed by Friends of Southwest Virginia.

Applications should include the following information:

- Qualifications and availability of staff member(s) that would be working to accomplish proposed tasks.
- Description of approach to develop reports.
- Familiarity with the communities included in inventory and evaluation.
- Examples of previous work including outcomes from previous projects worked on by staff member(s) assigned to the task.
- Proposed timeline for this project, and present workload of candidate(s) assigned to the task.
- Financial commitment (including travel and per diem) required to complete objectives.

Interviews may be conducted with at least one of the top-ranked firms, with the final selection based upon the sole discretion of the Executive Director of Friends of Southwest Virginia. The selected firm will enter into contract negotiations with Friends of Southwest Virginia, and a final scope of services, amount and method of compensation will be determined. If a mutually acceptable contract for services cannot be successfully negotiated, the organization will commence negotiations with the next highest rank firm, and continue until a contract is successfully negotiated. Friends of Southwest Virginia reserves the right to retain the awarded individual(s) or firm(s) for future projects similar to the one described herein. Additionally, Friends of Southwest Virginia reserves the right to reject all proposals.

Submissions:

All proposals must be submitted by August 31st, 2017 at (5 p.m. Eastern Time) via digital copy to ccannon@myswva.org. Additional information or questions should be directed to Chris Cannon, Executive Director (ccannon@myswva.org | 276.492.2424).

Two business development RFPs are currently active: one each for the Eastern and Western portion of the regions. RFP’s should be submitted separately if apply for each.

Staff Contact:

Direct all questions and inquiries to Chris Cannon, Executive Director: ccannon@myswva.org | 276-492-2424.