

2011 VACo Achievement Awards
Botetourt County – Upper James River Water Trail

Narrative:

The mighty James River finds its source at the confluence of the Jackson and Cowpasture rivers in Botetourt County. These headwaters commonly known as the Upper James River have played an important role in the economies of the communities along the river. Historically, the river was used as a transportation system with a series of locks and canals used to carry goods downstream towards Lynchburg. Today, the river is a recreational corridor used for fishing, canoeing, kayaking and water viewing along is 45-mile stretch in Botetourt. The major assets of the Upper James River include its scenery, world-class bass fishing, friendly small town atmosphere and its rich history and diverse character.

In order to capitalize on the many assets of the Upper James, Botetourt County Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Department developed a strategic analysis to use as a tool to improve, enhance and preserve the environmental, historic and recreational opportunities on the river for future generations to enjoy. The goal is to create a water-based trail system that will link the different assets found on the river to form the Upper James Water Trail.

A “Water Trail” is a small boat and/or paddling route (or series of routes) along a waterway that combines recreation and environmental awareness while linking communities and land-based attractions such as recreational trails, historic sites, and parks.

Problem:

The problem for the project was how to develop a viable outdoor recreation and tourism attraction using existing river access points that are owned and operated by two different State agencies, develop traditional access points that are found on private property by working with local land and business owners, and to encourage new local business development. The county wanted to capitalize on the many assets that the river has and to make the Upper James River Water Trail a premier outdoor recreation asset.

Results:

The Upper James River Water Trail project has been the most successful tourism initiative undertaken by Botetourt County since the tourism office opened in 2005. The goal of the project as outlined in the grant application was to design a brand for the water trail, produce a brochure, website and marketing campaign. This goal was accomplished and has produced a multi-award winning program that is now being copied by localities across the state and region.