

# An Integrated Approach for Coastal EcoTourism Training and Certification

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Virginia Coastal Zone  
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM



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## **Executive Summary**

Much of Virginia's coastal zone exists in rural parts of the state. The natural beauty and rural character of these less urban areas presents tremendous tourism opportunities. Tourism represents significant economic development potential for Virginia's coastal regions, particularly the more rural areas where few large industries exist.

According to the Virginia Travel Corporation, domestic travel tourism in Virginia generated \$34.1 Billion in 2011 (including direct, indirect, and induced output) and is on the increase. Even though tourism is big business in the state, there are few ecotourism businesses along the coastline taking advantage of this growing market.

Developing ecotourism along the coastline is especially important given the relative lack of public access along Virginia's shores. Only about 1% of the coastal zone in Virginia is publicly owned, which translates into limited public access to coastal areas. First-hand experiences provide a greater basis for caring about resources. Ecotourism not only increases access to our coastal resources and spurs economic development within rural communities; it also generates an increased sense of "ownership" and stewardship of Virginia's coastal zone.

Virginia's Community College system is leading workforce development efforts throughout our state, particularly in rural areas. Developing this Virginia Ecotour Guide Certification and training program through their infrastructure built on their strengths and allowed easily accessible training for a wider audience.

### **Certifying Virginia Ecotour Guides, 2014**

Our program was based on a 2009 ecotourism training and certification program run through Eastern Shore Community College (ESCC) and also funded through Virginia's Coastal Zone Management Program. That program, open to the public, focused primarily on kayak tours along the Eastern Shore of Virginia and successful participants were awarded a three-year ecotourism certification. Participants were trained to provide interpretive tours of the Eastern Shore ecosystem. Their certification program provided program graduates a consistent logo to use that was easily recognizable by the public. The initial three-year certification window ended in 2012 and participating eco-guides were due for re-certification. Our project partners were able to access their course outline and logo, though most other associated materials were no longer available. The previous instructor was also no longer available to teach courses.

Our Ecotour Guide Certification program expanded the geographic range of participants by offering the course online through RCC and ESCC. Shannon Alexander and Paula Jasinski developed the full online curriculum that is now available for use in subsequent courses. Our team also redesigned the official program logo to update the graphics and create a consistent branding image for guides and tourists. Shannon Alexander, an experienced ecotourism guide, was contracted as the course instructor. She, Ms. Jasinski, and RCC faculty developed

regionally specific modules on ecosystem function and natural resources, coastal access, business development, and community engagement.

Although our original intention was to hold classes at both RCC and ESCC, our students expressed a strong interest in taking the classes online. Virtual classes allowed many students to participate that otherwise would not have been able to because of long commutes or scheduling conflicts- including one participant from Norway. RCC offered the class through the virtual system BlackBoard. The entire curriculum (including quizzes, tests, and videos of speakers) is available through RCC's BlackBoard and can easily be replicated in future years.

The online course began April 3<sup>rd</sup> and ran for 8 consecutive weeks through May 22<sup>nd</sup>. The class included several external professional speakers, weekly assignments, quizzes, and a final exam for a total of 150 possible points. Final class grades were awarded by May 31<sup>st</sup>. In 2014, the program trained nine and certified eight ecotour guides. These number include one student who was being re-certified from the last Ecotour Guide Certification course.

This grant included funds to hire a professional videographer, Bruce Nelson, who developed a short summary video of the Ecotour Guide Certification program and its value for economic development and environmental protection within coastal Virginia. That video is available at <http://youtu.be/FVctoxPIwqY>

### **Deliverables**

The larger suite of deliverables has already been submitted to the Coastal Program Office via connection to Google Drive ([https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B8MA4kP\\_uZifaDN0UWs2T01Zam8&usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B8MA4kP_uZifaDN0UWs2T01Zam8&usp=sharing)). This drive can be shared with others by requesting access through either Shannon Alexander or Paula Jasinski. This Google Drive includes the full class curriculum (presentations, videos, quizzes, discussion questions, assignments, etc. by week/topic of the class), instructor information, photos, overview video, logo files, lists of resources, field trip materials, recommended reading, and the course outreach/advertising fliers. This information was delivered via a link to Google Drive because the file sizes were too large to email.

## Virginia Ecotour Guide Certification Logo



### 2014 Certified Ecotour Guides

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# Virginia Certified Ecotour Guide Course 2014

April 3-May 22

A weekly online course offered through  
Rappahannock Community College



April 3 – Overview & Introductions, Sustainable Ecotourism & LNT Principles  
☞ Course & Instructor Introductions and Expectations - Shannon Alexander  
& Paula Jasinski  
☞ Ecotourism & LNT  
☞ **Dave Jasinski CEC Ecosystem Science BAY101**

April 10 – Local Ecosystems  
■ **Dot Field (DCR, NHP, Eastern Shore Region Steward)**  
☞ Local Ecosystems and Resource Management

April 17 – History of Local Ecotourism Sites  
■ **John Page Williams (CBF) - cultural history and Bay settlement**  
**Cindy Chance (NPS-JSWT) – John Smith Water Trail and more!**  
☞ Local landmarks, Parks, Preserves and more

April 24 – Customer Service  
☞ **Harriette Dawson - RCC**

May 1 – Essential Teaching Skills  
☞ Shannon Alexander - Teaching curriculum and resources; Translate skills  
& class info; activity forums

May 8 – Ecotourism Business Development and Partnerships  
☞ **Warren Green, The Adventure Travel Trade Association**  
☞ Local Resources/Entities

May 15 – Essential Guide Skills  
☞ **Richard Ayers (DCR, NHP, Coastal Operations Steward) -  
preparation, navigation, & emergency situations**  
☞ Shannon Alexander - Guide Skills, Trip Planning curriculum and resources  
☞ Translate class info into business skills

May 22 – Final Day for Project Presentations forum discussion; End of course.  
**EVALUATION OF PART-TIME FACULTY**  
**CONTINUING EDUCATION NON-CREDIT COURSES**

**COURSE EVALUATION SUMMARY**

Rappahannock Community College is interested in your opinions about its programs, personnel, and plans. We would appreciate your responses to the following questions as well as any additional comments you may wish to share with us.

Record additional comments to questions 9-12 on the opposite side of this sheet if needed.

Do not sign your name. Thank you.

- |  |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|
|  | YES   | NO    |
| 1. Were you satisfied with the quality of instruction? | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Were you satisfied with the content of the course?  | _____ | _____ |

EXCELLENT = A                      GOOD = B                      FAIR = C                      POOR  
= D

- |   |       |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
| 3. Instructors' familiarity with subject.                     | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4. Instructors' ability to get across important points.       | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Instructors' clarity in responding to student's questions. | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 6. Instructors' ability to keep class interesting.            | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 7. Instructors' willingness to help those having difficulty.  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 8. Instructors' ability to encourage student involvement.     | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

9. What did you like most about this course?
10. What did you like least about this course?
11. What other courses would you like to see offered at RCC?
12. Other comments (How did you hear about this class?)

13. Please provide your current employer so that we may contact them with future training opportunities:

COURSE NAME: ENVR 1126 42WF Virginia Ecotour Guide Certification Course                      SEMESTER: Spring 2013

DATE: April 3, - May 16, 2014  
INSTRUCTOR: S. Alexander/P. Jasinski

CLIENT: Open Enrollment

Summary of feedback from the 5 course evaluations that were completed.

1. All 'YES'
2. All 'YES'
3. All "A's"
4. All "A's"; 1 "B"
5. All "A's"
6. All "A's"; 1 "B"
7. All "A's"
8. All "A's"
9. Flexibility; didn't lose money from lost work; guest speakers; other course participants
10. Technical difficulties; online platform not very user friendly; sometimes difficult to maintain engagement due to online nature of course.
11. Mostly blank; 'anything with content similar in nature'
12. Chincoteague Charter Boat Association; Bay Country Kayaking Facebook Page; DGIF; VIMS personnel

## COURSE FLYER

To expand your business and prepare for the upcoming season, register before March 31

# VIRGINIA ECOTOUR GUIDE CERTIFICATION COURSE



April 3<sup>rd</sup> – May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014

### Online Course

Register now through March 31<sup>st</sup> to join this dynamic class and gain certification as an Ecotour Guide.

To register call one of the numbers listed below.

**Course Cost: \$135**

*Discounted to \$90 for guides seeking recertification*



This eight-week non-credit class, offered online with computer and Internet access required, will provide successful students with certification credentials to lead their own Ecotours. The class will focus on the aspects of ecotourism, including "Leave No Trace" principles, ecosystem science, customer service, essential guiding skills, culture, and natural history.

A variety of speakers from within the tourism and natural resource management fields will share their knowledge; online attendance for "live" guest speakers will be required on several Thursday evenings from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Interpretive materials and resources for the course will be provided. In order to qualify for ecotourism certification, Red Cross certification in CPR & First Aid Certification is required and can be obtained at the student's convenience.



**To register or for more information, please call:**

**RCC's Glens Campus Workforce Development Center: 804-758-6750 or  
Eastern Shore Community College at Melfa: 757-789-7979**

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