

## **National Parks, Private-Sector Tourism Association Look to Future**

*Signing of 'Memorandum of Understanding' set for December 8*

ATLANTA (Dec. 7, 2009) -- The Southeast Tourism Society (STS), an Atlanta-based tourism association, is launching a formal relationship with the National Park Service (NPS) that looks to enhance the future of national parks in the Southeastern U.S.

Representatives of the park service's Southeast region and STS plan to sign a Memorandum of Understanding Dec. 8. The MOU's core concept is to open channels of communication between the NPS and private-sector entities that promote tourism.

The Southeast region of the NPS covers nine of the 12 states that are members of STS.

"Some of the Southeast's greatest treasures are its national parks. The park service and the private sector alike want to look beyond immediate visitation to issues such as the long-term protection of the parks and making sure future generations appreciate the access to nature and history that parks represent," said STS President Bill Hardman.

"All too often, we work in silos. This MOU broadens everyone's horizons and allows ideas to flow back and forth. It should lead us to cooperative projects and better understanding of our respective goals," Hardman said.

There are 66 NPS units in the NPS Southeast region (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee, plus Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands).

Signing of the MOU will occur at an STS board of directors meeting. Among the signatories:

- David Vela, NPS Southeast Regional Director
- Bill Hardman, STS President and CEO
- Betty Huskins, Chair of the Southeast Tourism Policy Council

Among the MOU's objectives:

- Create dialogue between public and private tourism professionals.
- Facilitate cooperative projects to improve recreation and tourism in the Southeast.

- Prepare for and celebrate the NPS centennial in 2016.
- Encourage the education of youth about national parks
- Encourage citizens to participate in tourism for physical activity and a healthier lifestyle.

The Southeast Tourism Policy Council has an existing MOU with 12 federal agencies to support collaborative tourism efforts across the Southeast.

Southeast Tourism Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and development of tourism throughout the Southeast. Its member states are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. Society members include convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, tourism authorities, state tourism departments, tourism attractions, lodging businesses, tour companies, parks, travel media, transportation companies, special events and colleges and universities.

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