



NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWNS OF CASHIERS,
CHEROKEE, DILLSBORO AND SYLVA

To: TDA Board

From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Executive Director
Caleb Sullivan, TDA Sales & Marketing Manager

Date: November 8, 2019

Subject: Updates for TDA Board

Executive Director Report – Nick Breedlove

September stays

Starting off with great news, October collections for September 2019 stays increased significantly over last year and helped close the gap with our fiscal year budget decrease due to HHR's closure. We had roughly \$600,000 more in accommodation sales this during September compared to last year, generating a net increase of approximately \$24,000 in occupancy tax funds. In my estimation, that increase is likely due to two factors – more pleasant weather this year and a more strategic marketing and communication plan based on our visitor profile research.

VRBO Collections

VRBO began collecting and remitting tax on behalf of its property owners in North Carolina on Oct. 1, 2019 directly to the NC Dept. of Revenue who will remit it to us. It is unknown at this time the effect this will have on our collections and/or the number of previously non-reporting owners. It will likely be with our December financial report until we understand initial implications of this change with the first remittance expected to be reported at that time. It will take a longer study over several months to see any trends related to this change.

New brand videos

As we work to create more engaging content to inspire visitation during our need periods, this week we captured footage of the WNC Pottery Festival, which was well attended. The video is available online at this [link](#). The next video capture will be of the Dillsboro Lights and Luminaries, of which, we currently have no existing video footage. We will also capture winter hike scenery over the coming months to use in winter campaigns on social media.

New website features

It has been incredibly busy on all fronts in implementing new website features. While we shared these previously with the board, if you have not had an opportunity to view them, they are listed here, and you should familiarize yourself with them.

1) **Accessible Jackson** which highlights attractions for persons with disabilities. We worked with WCU on the proper wording and how to ensure we represent everything appropriately and only focus on attractions that are truly accessible. We plan to work with a WCU class to expand on this guide with more detailed information over the next year:

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/attractions/accessibility/>

2) **Motorcycle Guide** to Jackson County - we worked with three seasoned local riders - Mick McCardle (who owns Lulu's), Steve Bennett, and Steve Dennis (who owns Hollifields) on the best routes to feature:

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/outdoors/motorcycle-routes/>

3) A full featured **Wedding Guide** expanding on our previous wedding page that only offered venues. The Chamber Directors and staff were very helpful in sourcing all of this information that is often requested:

<https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/your-trip/weddings/>

These projects have included collaboration among almost every partner and staff member to bring to fruition. We are glad to have these features launched.

Print versions of all of the above are in development with the printed version of the Wedding Guide already delivered to our Chambers of Commerce.

4) Lead capture on our Visitor Guide request page has been expanded to collect information on those who also want an Ale Trail Guide or WNC Fly Fishing Trail® Map or any combination of those with the Visitor Guide. Due to the custom sizes of these products and issues with fulfilling these through the Chamber, the TDA will fulfill the leads requesting more than just the Visitor guide within its office. This expands what we are able to offer in terms of information to our visitors and have already received many requests for the new collateral pieces.

In addition to these recently launched projects, new website features are launching soon:

-Our Interactive Map project which showcases all attractions, lodging, restaurants, etc. with clickable and zoomable programming to locate what is nearest to the location the user selects. This has been in testing for a few months and is ready to go live soon.

-A Sustainability and Stewardship page which highlights the efforts of the JCTDA within the community towards that aspect. These initiatives are worthy of highlighting in a central place to showcase our dedication to the environment. Many of these projects have been one-off individual efforts, but collectively they represent our continued dedication to our environment and community.

-Chatbot – Our web team is working on finalizing an interactive chat bot feature on our website which will answer common visitor questions. Both staff and our agency have spent extensive time researching commonly asked questions and providing human answers to pair with the questions along with testing the best tool for deployment.

-A larger project we are exploring is optimizing our destination for Voice Search technology including Siri, Alexa and Google Assistant/Home so we ensure our content is on those platforms. This week staff programmed Alexa skills related to answering Jackson County related questions and once published would be available to every Amazon Alexa smart speaker worldwide. As voice search is expected to account for 50% of all searches in 2020, we want to be on the forefront of this effort as an initiative of the Director.

New print products

-The TDA Office recently revised several print products. We printed 20,000 updated Dillsboro Maps for train passengers, which is the first of its kind to ensure train riders all had up to date, in hand information about the town to help drive Visitor spending within the town. This is a minimal cost to the JCTDA budget with potential to drive visitor spending greatly.

-We recently distributed all 10,000 of the initial Ale Trail maps and reordered another 20,000 maps as this item has proven very popular with our visitors in generating great awareness of our six breweries with over 120 craft beers on tap in Jackson County. We did a massive PR campaign and put together personalized media letters with the map, Ale Trail coasters and sent them out to major travel editors.

-I revised the Hiking & Waterfall map and reordered the folded maps as stock was running low. As part of this project, I redesigned the back panel to separate Fishing Guides, Gear, Lake-related activities and others from all appearing in one category. This should aid the visitor in finding information easier. As part of the map reworking, at the suggestion of the CACOC, we added Lake Glenville Waterfalls to the map along with GPS coordinates for the four falls along the lake. We also added High Falls/Cullowhee Falls, a very popular waterfall, to the map.

-Our Visitor centers are now stocked with JCTDA branded recycled Kraft paper bags to distribute materials to visitors. Previously the CACOC did not have an enclosure to distribute materials within and the JCCOC utilized plastic bags and expressed the desire to switch to a more sustainable material. These are branded with the JCTDA logo and website and are a minimal impact on our budget and are great to reinforce our brand and enhance the visitor experience.

Sustainability

In addition to the above-mentioned Sustainability website project, we made an inaugural donation of \$500 from our donation line item to the 'Keep our Mountains Clean and Green' initiative to help do just that. Now a partner of that program, we help support litter pickup coordinated by the Jackson County Public Works office and education programs. It is critical to keep our corridors in top shape for those visiting and our residents. This effort was spearheaded by Commissioner Gayle Woody and we are planning on this as an annual investment.

Grant Funding

As the board recalls, we placed grant funding on hold with \$10,000 remaining in that line item. We reworked the grant program prior to having our strategic plan and we want to ensure that initiatives funded and recent data from past grants can be analyzed by committee to inform how that program moves forward. This will be a task for the committee next year to realign that program again as we continue to optimize our offerings to deliver the highest return on investment in service to the local economy.

As part of that, it is unlikely we have time this fiscal year to: 1) reformulate the grant program to reflect all of the components related to incorporating our research 2) an opportunity to reopen the cycle to affect our need season (Jan.-March) and 3) inform the community with ample time to apply.

My suggestion presented to Executive on Wednesday, Nov. 6 (unanimously agreed to put forward to the full board) is to reallocate the \$10,000 in grant funding already programmed in budget (no new funds) as follows:

- 1) Allocate \$7,480 in those funds to an advertising campaign on social media to boost stays during our research-identified need periods (midweek, weekends), January through June.
- 2) Purchase weekly STR reporting to identify impact we are having on the above stated period; we previously had this reporting but eliminated it due to budget. To measure the above, we need the weekly YOY reporting by day of week. Cost: \$2,520.

This will be a good opportunity to go ahead and execute the main focus of our strategic plan and see the impact we have vs. having to wait another year to implement this strategy. I will ask for a consensus among the full board to reprogram these funds at our Nov. 13 meeting.

Community Engagement

- In engagement I presented to two WCU Hospitality and Tourism classes on Nov. 4. The presentations were well received.
- I reviewed the first round of David Orr Belcher Catalyst Grants for Western Carolina University and see tangential positive impacts on tourism in the top-rated proposals.
- I have been selected to serve as the community liaison on WCU Chancellor Kelli Brown's Installation Committee and we held our first meeting on Nov. 7 for the week of events leading up to her March 27 installation. The event is expected to bring several hundred

people to our community from across the state and southeast, which will also impact our overnight stays.

- Met with TWSA Interim Director Dan Schaeffer and discussed infrastructure as it related to Tourism
- Led a panel at the second Outdoor Economy Conference: Marketing to the Evolving Outdoor Consumer which was well received.
- Met with NC State's Laura Lauffer to discuss agritourism funding opportunities
- Held conference call with Blackberry Farms to discuss workforce, housing, employment-related topics
- Met with Highlands new DMO Director Kaye McHann and established a good working relationship which will benefit our mutual promotion of the region and the Highlands-Cashiers plateau
- Met with citizen Eric Myers with concerns regarding issues related to fly fishing/Tuckasegee River
- Attended the Cullowhee Small Area Plan Community Meeting
- Named to the SCC Career Technologies Advisory Board and attended their Annual Meeting and Dinner.
- Attended the Mountain West Partnership Regional Tourism and Economic Development Roundtable Nov. 7

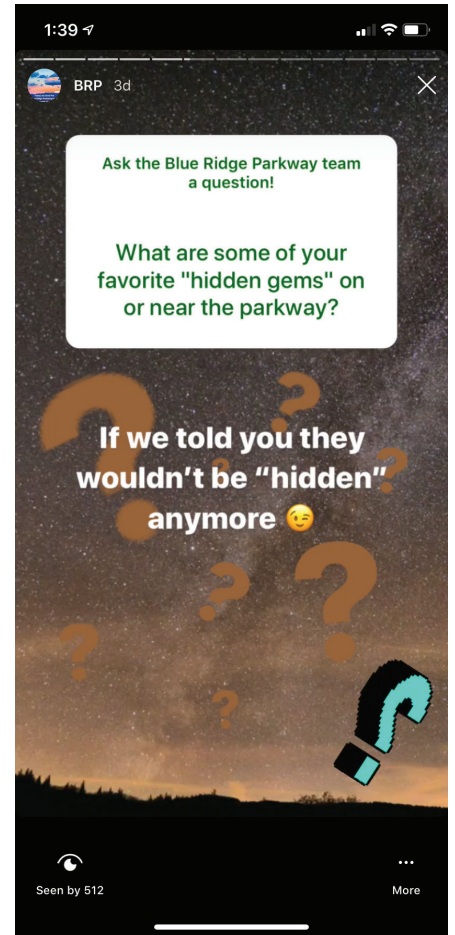
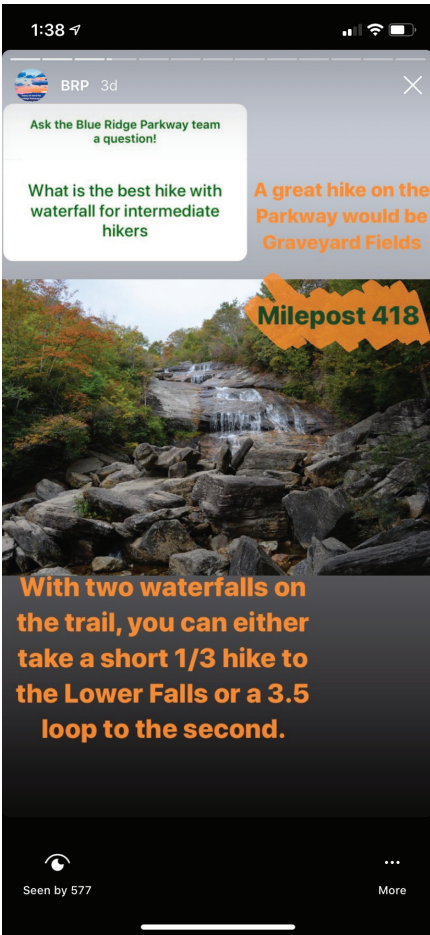
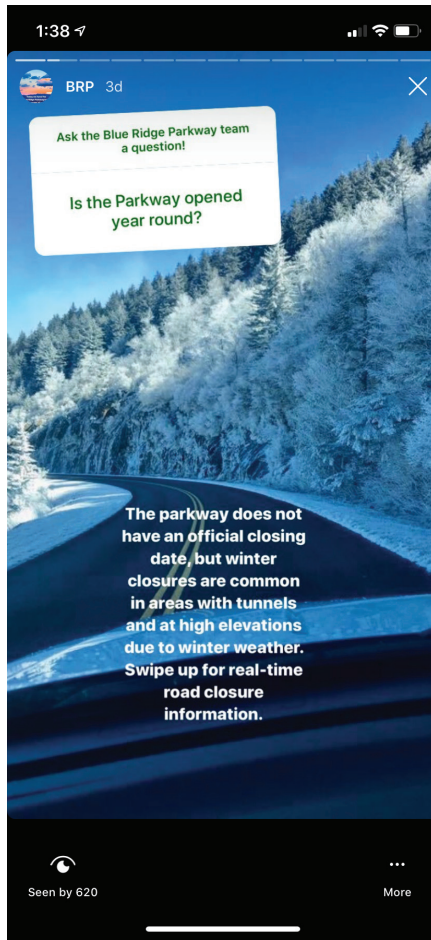
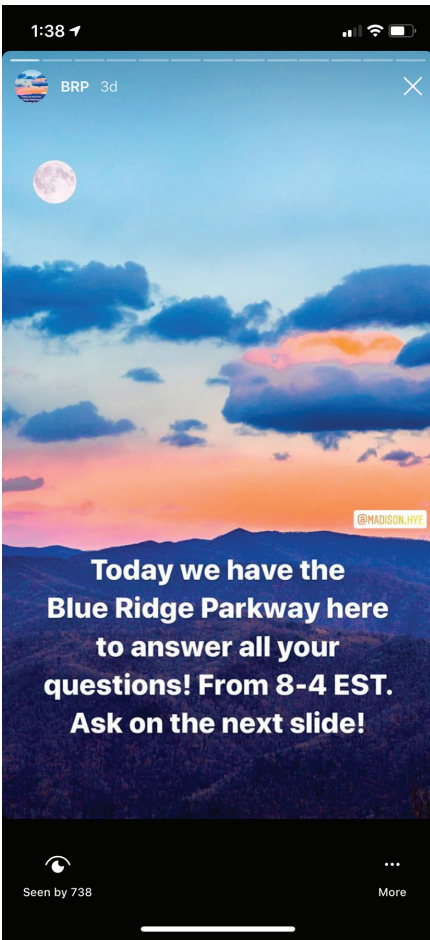
Social Media Report – Caleb Sullivan

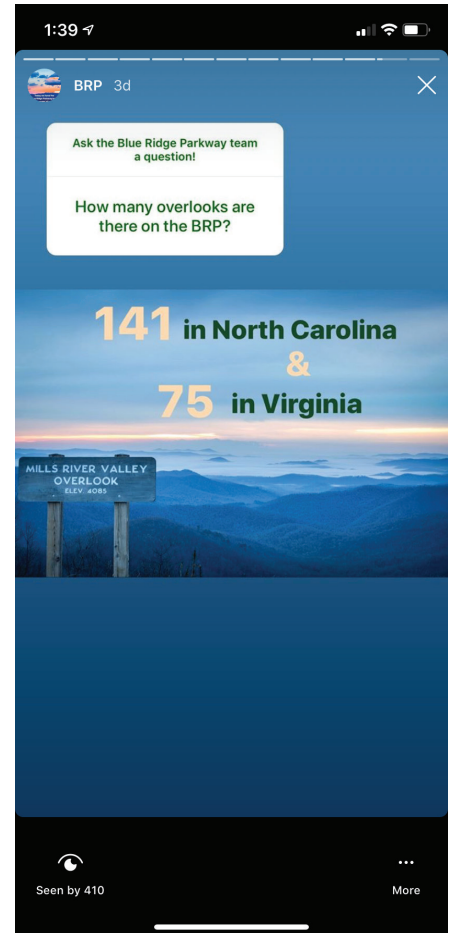
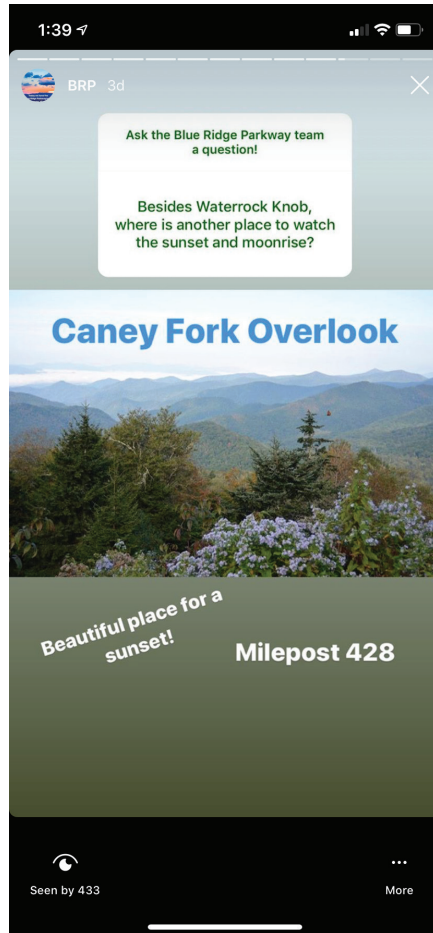
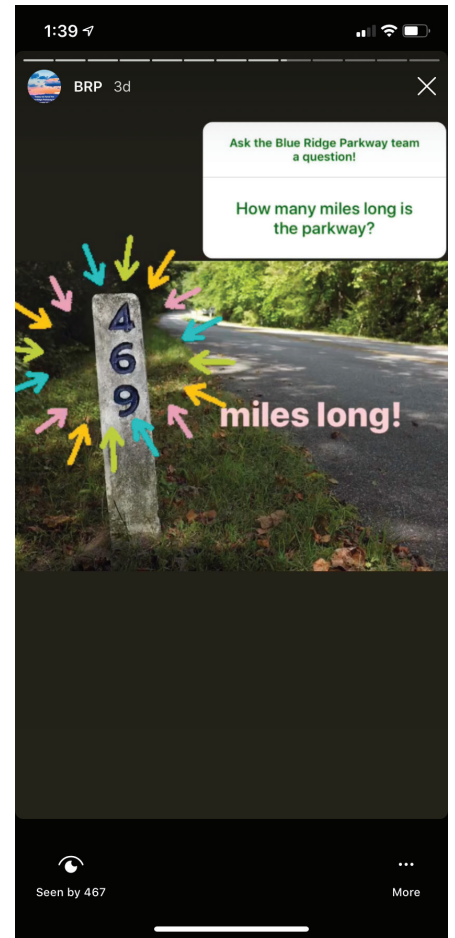
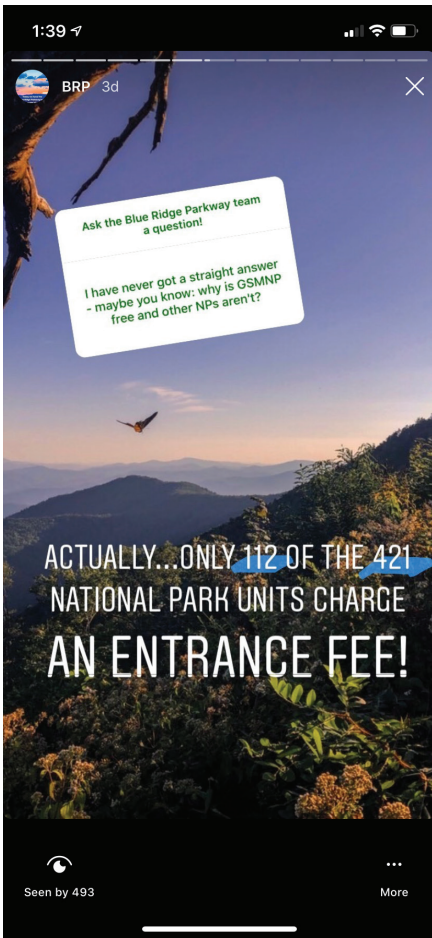
- Social platform aggregated statistics for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter & Pinterest
 - September MOM engagements increased 29.6%
 - September MOM impressions increased 36.8%
 - September MOM followers increased by 1%

 - October MOM engagements decreased 6.3%
 - October MOM impressions decreased by 8%
 - October MOM follower increases .8%

 - Facebook following: 190,632
 - Instagram following: 14,218
 - Twitter following: 1,935
- Hosted our first social media takeover with the Blue Ridge Parkway, whose total social media followership is nearly half a million across their networks.
 - The Twitter takeover was shared by VisitNC
 - Twitter engagement was up 165.5% as a result
 - Instagram Story takeover received over 7,000 views
- Began creating and tracking viewership of Google Posts weekly
 - Since the beginning of October, they have generated almost 60,000 impressions.

NEXT Pages: Blue Ridge Parkway Social Media Takeover







Joseph Dabbs When does the parkway close down for the winter and does it stay closed for bikes or just cars?
Like · Reply · Message · 3d

Blue Ridge Parkway Although the parkway does not have an official closing date, sections of the parkway (especially those with many tunnels, high elevations or north facing slopes) are often closed through much of the winter. Unlike emergency or inclement weather closure...
See More

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Winter Recreation on...
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Write a reply...

Allison Lane I'm coming from Charleston, SC and want to do a three-day trip along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Any must-sees I shouldn't miss?
Like · Reply · Message · 3d

Blue Ridge Parkway Hi Allison Lane, you could see a lot of the parkway in three days! Remember, the parkway is best enjoyed as a "drive a while, stop a while" experience. Plus, there is plenty to do in the surrounding communities just off the parkway. Here is a link to help plan your Blue Ridge Parkway visit, including some popular destinations:
<https://www.nps.gov/blri/playourvisit/index.htm>

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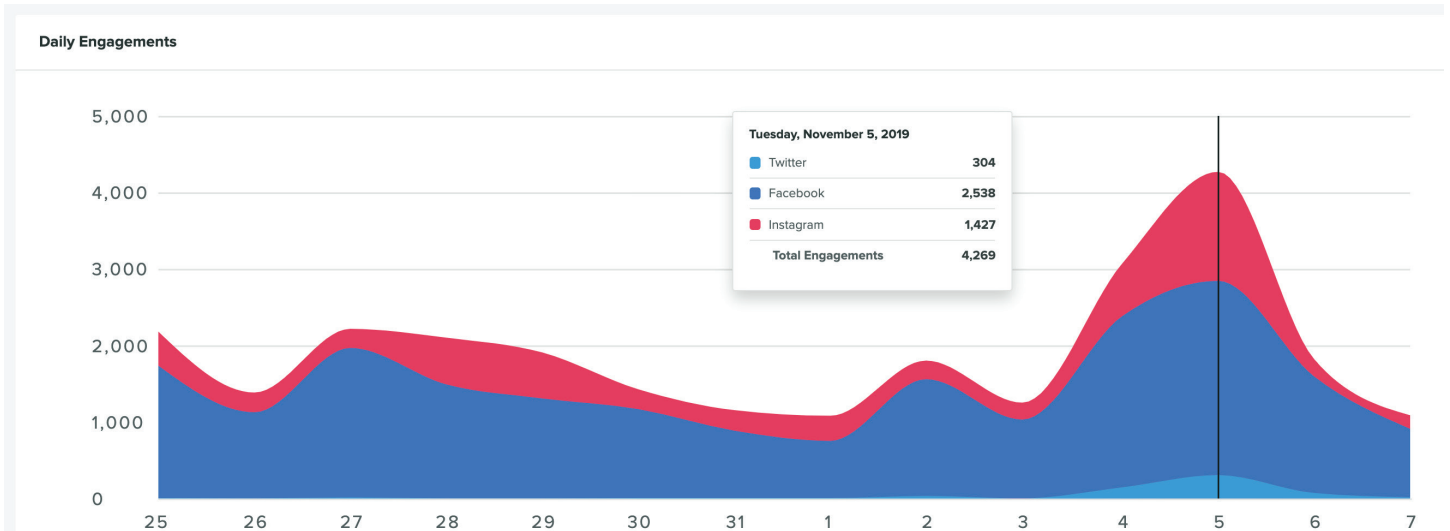
All Mentions

Blue Ridge Parkway @BlueRidge... · 3d
Have some questions about the Blue Ridge Parkway's southern end? We will be taking over the @VisitJacksonNC Twitter page tomorrow to share some info and answer your questions. See you then!

Visit Jackson County @Visit... · 3d
Tomorrow, @BlueRidgeNPS will be taking over our Twitter and answering YOUR questions. What would you like to know? 😊 Tweet your questions to @VisitJacksonNC 📧 Dylan Christian Rose

#DiscoverJacksonNC #BRP #BlueRidgeParkway #828isgreat #mountains #TravelTuesday

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Sales and Marketing Report – Caleb Sullivan

- Attended DI's Fundamentals of Sales PDM course in Sacramento, California
- Met with Haywood County's TDA Sales Manager to make regional introductions and better understand DMO sales on a local level
- Attended the Outdoor Economy Conference in Asheville on October 10
- Attended the Mountain West Partnership Regional Tourism and Economic Development Roundtable
- Attending the Georgia Group Sales Symposium Nov. 13 & 14.
- Ongoing: Working on Sales and Marketing Strategic Plan