

March 25, 2016

## LOCALS ATTEND APPALACHIAN GATEWAY COMMUNITIES WORKSHOP

Recently members from Cherokee, Dekalb and Etowah Counties, attended the Appalachian Gateway Communities Workshop. The Appalachian Regional Commission partnered with the National Endowment for the Arts, which provides support for natural and cultural heritage tourism activities in Appalachia's gateway communities. This year, the workshop was held February 9-11 at Joe Wheeler State Park in Rogersville, AL.

The sessions were conducted by The Conservation Fund. The three-day workshops was team-based; communities sent a team of 4-7 community members (e.g. public land managers, arts representatives, elected officials, local business owners, tourism officials, etc.) that made up a cross-section of their local leadership. Experts assisted each team in developing an action plan for capitalizing on their specific natural/cultural resources.

The eligible gateway communities must be located in an ARC distressed, at-risk or transitional county. They must also border or be near publicly owned lands such as national and state parks and forest. The cost to participate in the workshop provided through a grant from ARC.

Those attending locally were Shannon Mackey (Cherokee Rock Village), Hugh Stump (Greater Gadsden Tourism), Steve Black (Little River Canyon National Preserve), Anna Lindsey (JSU Canyon Center Gift Shop), Marsha Merrell (Friends of the Little River Canyon), Peggy Casey Hale (Arts Council), Pete Conroy (JSU Field School), Thereasa Hulgán (Cherokee County Chamber), Candace Johnson (University of Alabama EDC Department of Tourism & Arts). Also serving on the project committee are Kirk Day (Cherokee County Probate Judge/County Commission Chairman), and Cal Breed (Orbix Hot Glass).

Our big picture for the project is a trail linking three Lookout Mountain Parks to encourage stewardship and growth in eco-tourism at these parks. It will connect Noccalula Falls (City Park), Cherokee Rock Village (County Park), and Little River Canyon National Preserve (National Park) together. The trail will be around 60 miles. It will include historical, cultural, and arts within it. The committee has developed a Strategic Plan that will take place from April 2016 through 2018.

Cherokee, Dekalb and Etowah Counties work closely together on many current tourism projects and marketing aspects for the Northeast Alabama region. They are three of the sixteen counties of Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association.

The project is an ongoing project of the Friends of the Little River Canyon National Preserve.