

December 10, 2008

Crooked Road is drawing tourists

A study indicates that it has brought in revenue, created jobs and boosted economic development.

By [Tad Dickens](#)
981-3474

The road might be crooked on Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, but business is good, according to an economic impact study released Tuesday.

The estimated economic impact along the trail commonly known as The Crooked Road is \$23 million this year, with 445 jobs created, according to the study by Lebanon-based Sustainable Development Consulting International. Wages and sales tax benefits are more than \$400,000 per year to Virginia, the study showed.

Floyd and Galax are clearly seeing the benefits of being part of the approximately 260-mile-long corridor linking Franklin County to Dickenson County. According to the study, accommodation spending in Floyd (home of the Floyd Country Store) increased by 90 percent from 2003 to 2007, and by 232 percent in Galax (home of the Rex Theater and Blue Ridge Music Center).

The year 2003 is significant because that was when organizers began their push to have Virginia recognize this section of the state for its bluegrass and country music heritage in an effort to generate tourism and other economic development.

The assessment shows how a region can use its own culture to increase its appeal to the outside world, said Robert Jones of Sustainable Development, which The Crooked Road hired to do the study.

"This is our product," Jones said. "It can only be homegrown. It can't be outsourced."

Jones' company interviewed 253 visitors to five major Crooked Road venues, and one affiliated business, during 13 occasions from May to September. It assessed in detail Clintwood, Galax and Floyd -- communities with major venues on the trail -- as well as Patrick County, which is on the trail but has no major venue. The study also looked at nearby Pulaski, which is not part of The Crooked Road.

Jones said the numbers in the report come from very conservative estimates. For example, total visitation in 2008 at eight major venues was 109,450. But the report factored in for overnight stays and multiple visits to venues, thus refiguring the visitor estimate to 85,371.

"We didn't try to oversell the results in any way," Jones said. "This is a baseline for future monitoring."

Blue Ridge Music Center, near Galax, has drawn the most, with an estimated 32,700 visits this year, while in the city, the Rex Theatre had 12,500 visits. Carter Fold, in Hiltons, had 21,700 estimated visits. Floyd Country Store had 18,000.

No specific financial numbers were available for Franklin County, but the study estimated 4,940 visits this year to the Blue Ridge Institute at Ferrum College.

Jones said the numbers show that investment in the trail was worthwhile.

He said \$23 million total economic impact "is a significant number. It's a good thing to support."