

Outer Banks Long-Range Tourism Management Plan (LRTMP)

Looking Ahead: 2026 Planning & Goal Setting

GOAL 1: STRENGTHEN RESIDENT AND VISITOR ENGAGEMENT

The Why? Build shared understanding, trust, and long-term support for tourism by meaningfully engaging residents, second homeowners, visitors, students, nonprofits and industry partners—ensuring tourism benefits the community while preserving the Outer Banks’ character, culture, and quality of life.

Desired Outcome: Goal 1 initiatives collectively strengthen relationships, amplify community voices and position tourism as a shared community asset—one that is understood, valued, and stewarded by residents, visitors, and partners alike.

Theme 1: Community Partnerships & Nonprofit Support 🤝

Deepen relationships with local organizations to elevate their impact and connect visitors and residents to meaningful causes.

Continue to connect visitors with area nonprofits to support and elevate their work.

→ Expand existing nonprofit partnerships, while cultivating new relationships and opportunities

- Collaborations with OBCF, Coastal Studies Institute, CEEN, Outer Banks Health (events and collaborations)
- Dare County Tourism Board grant program and partnerships > continue proactive communication about DCTB grants to elevate awareness of their impact on local partners and the community; Bring the grant program to life on outerbanks.org (photos, video, testimonials, etc.)

→ Explore connecting Leadership OBX (Outer Banks Chamber) graduates with nonprofit board opportunities (Recruitment event?)

Theme 2: Voluntourism & Community Service 🌱

Position volunteerism as a meaningful way for residents and visitors to give back while strengthening community pride.

Lead investment in the development of a voluntourism strategy.

→ Volunteer OBX portal – continued growth, communication and awareness

→ Develop the 2nd Annual Outer Banks Volunteer Week (October 10, 2026 – October 17, 2026)

→ Create Season 2 of ‘The Voluntourism Experience’ video series with Caleb Olewabi to showcase local nonprofits and connect visitors with volunteer opportunities

→ Spotlight local organizations and their volunteers who are making a difference in the community through volunteer efforts (highlight video? recognition on Volunteer OBX portal?)

→ Encourage community activities that are Thrive-inspired to promote engagement with neighbors (volunteering? community project(s)?)

Theme 3: Community Engagement & Tourism Advocacy

Foster two-way dialogue to build trust, awareness, and shared ownership of tourism's role in Dare County.

- Continue 'LRTMP Road Show' presentations with local organizations and community groups
- Explore the creation and implementation of resident and visitor surveys to solicit input on the positive and negative impacts of tourism in Dare County, and measure, track and compare sentiment over time.
- Find ways to better engage with our local students and younger workforce population
 - May 4-8, 2026 / In-person sessions at FFHS, MHS, CHSS, DEC to engage with students in an interactive way to share tourism impacts, expose students to career paths and gather LRTMP feedback
 - [Other DCS/COA opportunities ... Speakers? Career Fairs? Elementary/Middle? Tourism curriculum?](#)
- Activate the OBVB Welcome Centers in Kitty Hawk, Manteo and Hatteras Village by creating community engagement gatherings that incorporate nonprofit and industry partners (Community Social/Open House); Perhaps kick this off during National Travel & Tourism Week (May 3-9)
- Explore the creation of an Outer Banks Tourism Ambassador Program to help educate our local community (tourism/hospitality workforce and community members) about the impact of tourism in Dare County, as well as provide them with tools to enhance visitor experiences by sharing information on local sites, boosting knowledge and skills and creating a more connected community to support responsible tourism growth.
 - [Is there an appetite for this among partners? If so, ask for input on creation and delivery](#)
- Create quick polls on [OuterBanks.org \(Community section\)](#) to engage the public on various topics
- Be proactive with realty companies by offering to speak at Homeowner gatherings and share OBVB initiatives
- Establish better lines of communication with second homeowners for engagement and collaboration
- Explore opportunities to engage with residents, homeowners and business partners on **Hatteras Island**
 - [Organize a specific OBVB and/or LRTMP meeting on HI to share updates and solicit feedback related to the LRTMP, etc. \(April or early May?\)](#)
 - [Consider hosting a meeting or small event to get Hatteras Island businesses to learn about and support The Outer Banks Promise; Encourage a 'State of Dare County' presentation \(County\)](#)
- Consider the creation of a program that enables DCTB/OBVB/LRTMP Committee members to "reward" residents, second homeowners and visitors (with gift certificates?) throughout the year when they're "caught" making a positive impact in the community (impromptu reward at the discretion of the DCTB/OBVB/LRTMP rep)

Theme 4: Destination Values & Visitor Responsibility

Clearly communicate shared values and expectations for how visitors engage with the Outer Banks.

- Expand outreach/participation in and structure of The Outer Banks Promise destination pledge
 - Further develop the Promise section of [outerbanks.org](#) (blog, specific Promise pages)
 - Create a more robust toolkit and activation plan to encourage more businesses to participate and share their involvement (social/email content, window clings, coasters, etc.)
 - Consider the creation of a youth Promise Passport program
 - Continue to find ways to get the Promise in front of visitors more effectively (website, Welcome Centers, social media, etc.), both in advance of a trip or while they're in-market
 - [Share what participating companies are doing to be more responsible when they make their Promise \(how are they making an impact in their community\) ... make it actionable!](#)
 - [Connect The Outer Edge participants with The Promise; how are they making an impact?](#)

GOAL 2: ADOPT AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

The Why? Position the Outer Banks as a leader in environmental stewardship by advancing data-informed decision-making, strengthening partnerships and advocating for sustainable infrastructure and mobility that protect natural resources while supporting resident and visitor experiences.

Desired Outcome: Goal 2 initiatives protect natural assets, elevate stewardship leadership and align tourism growth with environmental responsibility.

Theme 1: Environmental Partnerships & Community Heroes

Collaborate with trusted partners to elevate sustainability benchmarks and amplify local stewardship efforts.

→ Schedule at least 4 Promise for the Park' beach cleanups as part of the National Park Service 'Adopt-a-Beach' program (*Cape Hatteras National Seashore Ramp 1*) ... *Saturday, February 21 (10am-12pm)*

→ Solicit and help amplify stories of the work that local municipalities and community/industry partners are doing to enhance environmental stewardship efforts in Dare County; [Create a communications channel to share these efforts with OBVB](#)

- *Ex) Jennette's Pier/N.E.S.T. wildlife-friendly lighting project, Outer Banks Homebuilders' low lighting pamphlet, Duck Dark Sky, Town of Nags Head shoreline stabilization projects*

→ [Support efforts to communicate the impacts of natural/environmental influences on various aspects of community and physical infrastructure \(beach erosion and its impact on oceanfront structures, Hwy 12 overwash/access, etc.\)](#)

→ [Consider creating some sort of 'green' moniker to designate businesses who have gone above and beyond to be more environmentally friendly with their business practices? Ex\) Surfrider Ocean-Friendly Biz](#)

→ [Set up a program for OBVB to incentivize environmentally friendly events at the Soundside Event Site \(and elsewhere\); can this be part of the DCTB event grant application/process?](#)

→ [Collaborate with local partners to create a local Education Series on a variety of environmentally focused topics, including flooding, coastal erosion, septic, planning \(post-storm\)](#)

→ [Dedicate a future episode of The Outer Edge to profile community heroes in environmental stewardship](#)

Theme 2: Policy Advocacy & Infrastructure for Sustainability

Advocate for systems and policies that reduce environmental impacts and support long-term resilience.

→ [Advocate for greater residential and commercial recycling options in each town](#)

→ [Gain a better understanding of local restaurant policies surrounding the disposal of oyster shells and encourage participation in the NC Coastal Fed Oyster Shell Recycling Program](#)

→ [Encourage property management companies to include enhanced stewardship messaging](#)

→ [Advocate for expansion of balloon ordinance and creation of monofilament \(fishing line\) recycling](#)

Theme 3: Outdoor Recreation Leadership & Trail Stewardship

Strengthen the Outer Banks' identity as a premier outdoor recreation and stewardship destination.

- Continue participation in the Outdoor NC program (Trail Town Stewardship, Trail Town Guide)
- Participate in the newly created Northeast NC Regional Trail Organization, including enhanced local collaboration as part of a sub-committee of Dare County organizations
 - Dare County trails map(s)? How are Outer Banks trails represented on trails apps such as Trail Link, AllTrails, The OBX Way, etc.?
 - Trail stewardship and volunteer opportunities (creation and maintenance)
- Attend the 2026 Great Trails State Conference (August 2026 – Winston Salem, NC)
- Explore the creating an OBX Recreational Guide Summit (*similar model to Outdoor NC Guide Summit*)
- Consider a future indoor recreation complex as part of the Soundside Event Site
- Advocate for additional recreation facilities for resident and visitor use (swimming pools, splash pads, playgrounds, etc.)

GOAL 3: SUPPORT COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT THAT ENHANCES RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

The Why? Advocate for infrastructure investments that support quality of life, accessibility, safety, and resilience for both residents and visitors.

Desired Outcome: Goal 3 strengthens the infrastructure foundation needed for a resilient, accessible, and thriving Outer Banks community.

Theme 1: Community Assets & Quality of Life 🏠

Highlight and strengthen infrastructure that supports daily life and community well-being.

- Continue to spotlight and communicate the various community infrastructure assets that we have (playgrounds, skate parks, splash pads, museums, trails, State/National Parks, etc.) to residents and visitors
 - How can we better engage with and support organizations that are doing great work in the community infrastructure space (healthcare, education, childcare, etc.)?
 - Support efforts to enhance community infrastructure elements on Hatteras Island such as child care, communications services (internet and cell service), Hwy 12 (safety during storm events and long-term future of that corridor), etc.
 - Explore data / strategy that looks at Hatteras Island vs. the northern OBX beaches. Is there a need to focus more attention on Hatteras Island through positive ads and earned media opportunities?
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Theme 2: Talent, Workforce & Economic Vitality 📁

Support a sustainable workforce by aligning infrastructure and talent strategies.

- Explore how to help COA and DCS promote tourism/hospitality program and showcase grants/scholarships for local students who can be the future of our Outer Banks hospitality industry
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Theme 3: Accessibility, Safety & Mobility ♿

Ensure the Outer Banks is accessible and safe for people of all ages and abilities.

- How can we continue to highlight and support the work that community and industry partners are engaged in on the topic of accessibility, as well as identify new opportunities to advocate for and/or support?
 - Collaborate with the Outer Banks Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Coalition to raise awareness
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Theme 4: Capacity, Density & Shoreline Resilience

Plan proactively for growth while protecting shoreline vitality.

- Consider the creation of a tourism carrying capacity study for the Outer Banks; Develop metrics and measure over time; How can/does this relate to workforce and housing issues?
 - How can OBVB marketing and communications resources be used to better manage density?
 - Gain a better understanding of property management practices and thoughts of offering guests alternative check-in days to consider
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GOAL 4: COLLABORATE TO ADVOCATE FOR AN INCREASE IN RESIDENTIAL HOUSING DIVERSITY

The Why: Support a more diverse, sustainable housing ecosystem that meets the needs of residents and the workforce while balancing tourism demands.

Desired Outcome: Goal 4 initiatives support housing solutions that sustain the local workforce, strengthen communities, and ensure long-term economic vitality.

Theme 1: Housing Awareness, Data & Education

- Continue to support efforts of Dare Housing Foundation, as appropriate (*How?*)
 - Ask the Dare Housing Foundation and/or ECU to provide an overview of the findings of the 2025 ECU Sentiment Study
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Theme 2: Housing Diversity & Home Ownership Options

- Support alternative and sustainable housing models
 - Advocate for incentives that increase home ownership opportunities
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MISC: STRUCTURE & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Determine desired meeting frequency for 2026 and consider at least 2 'other' locations, including HI
- Schedule a future LRTMP Special Committee meeting as a NPS beach cleanup to show leadership as a group
- Continue to host presentations from subject matter experts in our meetings to better inform the Special Committee on work that is being done that may overlap with an aspect of the LRTMP and allow for collaboration. Suggested topics/presenters include:
 - Dare Housing Foundation (*new structure and next steps; update on ECU Housing Sentiment study*)
 - Dare County Schools (*how students can engage – summer work, internships, job fair; LRTMP opptys*)
 - Children & Youth Partnership (*childcare, etc.*)
 - NC Coastal Federation (*priorities and impact, oyster program, etc.*)

- Video capture of expert speakers to share with the community; provide the forum for this discussion and raise awareness of the topic