

Agencies working together on tourism DEP director joins

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DAILY MAIL STAFF An eco-tourism agreement between the Department of Environmental Protection and Tourism Division doesn't mean much now but could mean quite a bit in the future, state Environmental Protection Secretary **Mike Callaghan** said this morning.

Callaghan and Tourism Director Alisa Bailey signed the agreement at the start of the second and final day of the 2001 West Virginia Conference on the Environment.

The agencies are agreeing to work together to develop a sustainable eco-tourism industry in the state. The agreement says that the typical eco-tourist takes trips of about eight to 14 days and spends \$1,000 to \$1,500 during the trip.

Callaghan said after the signing that the agencies still have to work out a specific plan for implementing the agreement.

David Bassage, administrator of DEP's Office of Innovation, said the main importance of the agreement is that the agencies are now committed to the project.

"It's got the ball rolling. The nuts and bolts are yet to come," he said.

Eco-tourism has three characteristics, Bassage said. One is care for the environment; another is engagement of the local community; and the final one is profitability for the business.

Bassage said one of the first steps will be for the agencies working out criteria to determine which businesses qualify as eco-tourism businesses and then come up with a plan to promote them to potential eco-tourists.

"I don't want to get into too much detail because I'm not sure what direction it will go in," he said.

Bailey said the agencies will put up a Web site that will keep the public informed of their progress.

Following the announcement, about 40 people attending the second day of the conference held a three-hour brainstorming session on ways the state could coordinate economic and environmental development.

The participants included government officials, business leaders, environmental advocates and regular citizens.

Some of the proposals included:

- n Telling the governor and the Legislature to come up with a plan for reducing air, water and ground pollution emissions to zero in the state by 2020
- n Increasing funding for DEP, environmental remediation and wastewater treatment
- n Increasing the accountability of DEP.
- n Requiring all state buildings to follow federal sustainable construction guidelines, and provide incentives for private builders to follow them
- n Require the state to make an annual report on the state's environment
- n Improve environmental education and outreach for both children and adults
- n Simplify and shorten the environmental permitting process
- n Recognize the true cost of doing business and the true value of having business in the state.

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