

# A Tourism and Recreation Future for Arizona's Copper Corridor Region

*A report on the collaboration of community leaders and businesses working to grow local and regional opportunities for economic, social and environmental benefits*

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## **Student Portion of the Project**

**Tourism Research Class TDM402, School of Community Resources and Development, Arizona State University**

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## **About this Report**

This report presents the results of research conducted on the tourism resources that can be leveraged to assist the Copper Corridor communities to develop a region destination. Multiple visits to the area, along with several meetings with community stakeholders, were integral to this research study. A unique aspect to this report is the many methods that provided primary and secondary data analysis.

Partnering with the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT), Dr. Christine Vogt, the director of the Center for Sustainable Tourism, and the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 classes of TDM 402 "Tourism Assessment and Evaluation" at Arizona State University were invited to assist local partners in developing a regional tourism plan. In the Fall, 2015 semester each member of the class of senior undergraduate tourism students joined one of seven research teams to assess community resources, current infrastructure, and tourism services in the Copper Corridor communities. Several survey instruments were created by students and primary data were collected in the field by ASU students. In the Spring, 2016 semester each student completed a series of assignments focusing on data resources from Arizona Office of Tourism and Arizona State Parks which contributed to this project.

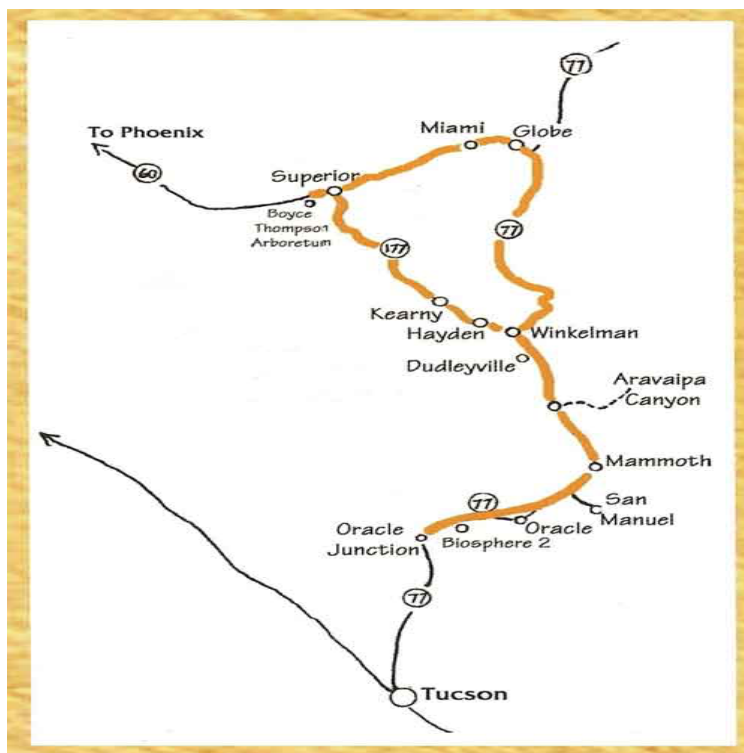
## Acknowledgments

The authors of this report would like to thank the Arizona Office of Tourism and the cities of Superior, Oracle, and Kearny for their assistance in supporting the assessment of the Copper Corridor for tourism potential. The authors would also like to thank the Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 TDM 402 classes for all their hard work on this project. Four people provided leadership to the project:

- **Glenn Schlottman, former Community Development Manager for the Arizona Office of Tourism**
- **Liz Harris-Tuck, Copper Corridor Economic Development Coalition Program Manager**
- **Bill Bolin, Copper Corridor Economic Development Coalition consultant**
- **Colleen Floyd, Arizona Office of Tourism Research Manager**

## Copper Corridor

The Copper Corridor encompasses 2,000 square miles, has more than 150 businesses and is home to Arizona's richest mineral finds. The region itself is made up of 11 mining and former mining communities. The physical corridor that the region creates travels northeast of Tucson on Route 77 and north on Route 177 (figure 1). The Copper Corridor has important territorial history, as it was the last major acquisition completing the southern border of the United States. This acquisition was a part of the Gadsden Purchase, which consisted of a 29,670 square-mile region of what is now present-day



southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico. By gaining this new territory, the area acquired track expansion of the Southern Pacific Railroad causing mining to flourish. Prior to the land purchase and mining industry, primarily Native Americans inhabited the Copper Corridor. This area, not far from the urban centers of Phoenix and Tucson, has a fascinating history starting with a rugged landscape and eras of mining, ranching, and tourism and recreation.

Figure 1. Picture of Copper Corridor Region, Arizona, USA

In recent years, mining industries have taken financial hits which has led surrounding communities to seek new approaches for economic development, entrepreneurship, and community cohesion. Tourism development is where the region has set its sights to improve economic and social prosperity. Currently the Copper Corridor offers world-class outdoor adventure recreation, countless attractions in the realm of arts, culture, and heritage, and a growing number of local eateries. The Copper Corridor is a prime location for those trying to escape the hustle and bustle of metropolitan living.

The Copper Corridor Economic Development Coalition and its member communities have established a board and working group to advance tourism in the region. The coalition involved the Arizona Office of Tourism in community development assistance. This ASU project is a continuation of that assistance.

## **Approach to Studying Regional Tourism Planning and Development**

Tourism planning often uses Clare Gunn's approach to the tourism system – a interconnected set of stakeholders and sectors that support an industry. ASU began their analysis by forming seven sectors with the coalition that matched their working groups and efforts. Each group analyzed secondary data and some groups conducted primary data in the region. The content of these groups is solely written by ASU students, many of whom bring a Millennial perspective to this development project.

These stakeholders and sectors include:

- Stakeholders
- Inventory of Visitor Services and Facilities
- Market Assessment
- Visitor Market
- Events
- Outdoor Recreation
- Art-Culture-Heritage



# INVENTORY OF VISITOR SERVICES

## GROUP OBJECTIVE

To provide tourists and excursionists with adequate information and services so that they can have the experience they intended on their current trip.

## RESEARCH TEAM

Nico Dicerbo                      Megan Johnson  
   Jonathan Tipton  
Marisella Gonzalez      Qian Liao



## METHODS

The research conducted by the inventory group was based on secondary data collected through a review of websites such as Yelp and Facebook. This group assessed visitors' preferences using online social media and review sites. Data about businesses located in the Corridor were obtained from previous research by Bill Bolin, a community economic consultant to the Copper Corridor Economic Development Coalition, and provided in Excel. This group evaluated gaps in visitor services.

## FINDINGS

There are four visitor centers in the corridor – three physical locations and one mobile. Local businesses provide important visitor services. Select businesses have an online presence and were found to have reputable reviews about the products they offer. More businesses need an online presence and online linkages to community and regional networks that are also online. Besides online, businesses could be better represented at visitor centers as a way to market to tourists and residents. Local businesses can improve on promotions through workshops and classes on quality service to tourists. Gaps in visitor services are in accommodations and are needed to attract overnight tourists. The region particularly has few properties and existing properties are small in number of rooms and facilities available. Transportation is another sector that is lacking services such as air, bus, and taxi. Visitors need their own vehicles. A through hiker on the Arizona Trail would have few or no transportation resources to arrange with to restock in one of the communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Schedule more opportunities for the mobile visitor center to be out on the road and marketing the region to urban areas such as Phoenix, Tucson, and Flagstaff
- Attract new tourism businesses, such as various forms of accommodations and tourist transportation services, and provide workshops and services to help be successful
- Use communications and training workshops to encourage and help more businesses extend their presence online using Google, Facebook, Yelp and other common web and social media resources
- Utilize branding more effectively to create a regional image that connects the communities together

## MARKET ASSESSMENT

### GROUP OBJECTIVE

To increase the number of overnight visitors in the region with more bed and breakfasts and hosting more cultural fairs, festivals, and events.

### RESEARCH TEAM:

Brooke Beneze            Tim Kelly  
                                 Steve Timmer  
Marissa Jimenez        Ashley Statt



### METHODS

A Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat (SWOT) analysis was conducted at the stakeholder focus group on October 26, 2015. Stakeholders were asked to articulate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Copper Corridor's tourism sector. Facilitators at this meeting were there to help guide the stakeholders to categorize their opinions.

Interviews were held with Kimber Lanning of Local First AZ, a non-profit focused on local business development, and Craig Outhier, editor of Phoenix Magazine, on their insights into rural tourism in Arizona. Ashley Statt turned the interviews into a YouTube video ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhNzp\\_0cw5g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhNzp_0cw5g)) to provide advice to the Copper Corridor on how to further develop tourism in their region. Secondary data analysis was conducted from reports released by the Arizona Office of Tourism.

### FINDINGS

The stakeholders have substantial ideas of how to improve tourism, target market reach, and increase overnight stays. Stakeholders agree the region needs to come together and work towards improving tourism. The success of the Copper Corridor will depend on improvement of the number of overnight stays as accommodations often provide the tax base to fund tourism offices and those who stay longer in an area see more and spend more money in local businesses. The area has the assets and resources to improve tourism, however they are not currently promoting them to the fullest potential. The region is rich with history and original materials and culture of early Arizona history. Without this mining area, Arizona would not exist as it does today.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create more lodging such as bed and breakfast accommodations or Airbnb offerings
- Encourage citizens to support initiatives to grow the tourism sector by showing data generated by state tourism office
- Communicate with the community the benefits tourism will bring to the region – National Tourism Week is in May each year. See <https://tourism.az.gov/arizona-travel-and-tourism-week-may-1-7-2016>
- Host and promote at least two festivals per season, including one music event
- Get local businesses to encourage visitors to review their business on Yelp, TripAdvisor, and other social media sites
- Highlight Native American culture by opening art galleries and souvenir shops

## **VISITOR MARKETS**

### **GROUP OBJECTIVE**

To create an enjoyable and memorable experience that brings visitors back to the Copper Corridor in the future.

### **RESEARCH TEAM**

Kayenne Kyenz      Destinee Palosaari  
Jennifer Smelser  
Matthew Metiner      Taylor Shearer



### **METHODS**

Visitor Center logs, from two locations in Superior and one from Oracle, were analyzed to interpret visitor profiles. Visitor logs collected data of how many people were traveling within the party, including children if applicable. The log data indicated how many nights were spent in the community, how many nights were spent in the state of Arizona, and the purpose of their visit. The results of these logs are found in three reports on each of the Visitor Centers.

### **FINDINGS**

Data analysis indicated that the majority of visitors traveling to the Copper Corridor live in Arizona and take trips to the region for leisure. Most visitors to the area come without children. Currently there are few international visitors. There is a lot more to be learned about visitors if a longer survey is administered.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Create more family friendly activities to encourage a new market to the region
- Publicize the region trying some press releases to writers or media outlets. Consider popular travel and lifestyle publications like Arizona Highways, Phoenix Magazine and Edible Phoenix or Edible Baja Arizona. Host a familiarization trip for journalists or influencers. Contact AOT's Media Relations and Trade teams to see if there are opportunities to be an add to a East Phoenix or Tucson trip.
- Incorporate free social media marketing strategies to reach new visitor markets
- Encourage locals to promote some of their favorite activities to visitors using Facebook, blogging or other online media

## EVENTS

### GROUP OBJECTIVE

To increase tourism by improving and increasing community events.

### RESEARCH TEAM

Rachel Barringer      Melanie Slosser  
Lauren Bender        Melinda Mosakowski



### METHODS

Primary and secondary data were analyzed on local community events and from outside communities. Primary data was gathered through a survey at the 2015 GLOW event at the Triangle L Ranch in Oracle. The GLOW results are reported in a stand alone report. These data represent guests' perceptions of a current event in the Copper Corridor. Secondary data were analyzed using case studies in towns similar to those in Arizona's Copper Corridor. These data provide insight into the types of events that are working for other mining towns.

### FINDINGS

The data analyzed from the event showed that GLOW was primarily a locally attended event with a lot of support from the community. A few key findings from analyzing the data were as follows: the majority of participants purchased their tickets online and almost all respondents did not stay in paid local accommodations. Seventy percent were not familiar with the Copper Corridor as a tourism region, however 20% did do something else in Oracle before heading to the event. Fifteen percent of respondents were 50 miles or more from home. This analysis supports the suggestions for greater marketing efforts.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish two new events that highlight unique Copper Corridor offerings to attract tourists to the region. A few suggestions are food competition event, business conference for mining, and a midnight or full moon community event where stores and restaurants stay open late.
- Expand marketing strategies that entice tourists to visit the Corridor
- Utilize online marketing resources, particularly Facebook which was a top promotional vehicle for several current events, to grow event attendance
- Host recommendation cards at new events to get feedback from attendees



## **OUTDOOR RECREATION**

### **GROUP OBJECTIVE**

To promote outdoor recreation and sightseeing as a spectacular experience.

### **RESEARCH TEAM**

Kayla Colon                      Jessica Michaels  
Renard Smith  
Vanessa Manke                Miranda Poocha



### **METHODS**

Primary and secondary data collection were conducted. For primary data, a survey was designed and distributed to Picketpost trailhead users on the Arizona Trail during the peak hours of recreation usage. Research was conducted on activities and recreation currently being offered in the area and the types of additional activities could bring the possibility of more visitors to the Copper Corridor area. Secondary data were analyzed using recent state park studies. A stand alone report on Arizona Trail users is available.

### **FINDINGS**

Data analysis indicated most visitors to the Corridor were in the area for trailheads and hiking. The majority of visitors learn about the Copper Corridor by word-of-mouth or a friend who has visited the area. A majority of Arizona Trail users visit the Copper Corridor seasonally. The Arizona Trail users in the Copper Corridor area were most likely to be 45 to 64 years old (40%) or 25 to 44 years old (36%). Young adults (18-24 years old) were the small segment with 8% of respondents.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Place a greater focus on promoting the Corridor and its outdoor offerings
- Create and distribute up-to-date maps of trailheads, activities, and costs associated with public land use or visitor services
- Brand as “go green” areas and promote environmentally friendly practices (recycling, compost, solar) in outdoor recreation facilities and tourism areas
- Educate residents on importance of tourism to create sustainable community
- Brand across outdoor places in a fashion like the Arizona Trail logos and signs

## ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

### GROUP OBJECTIVE

To create an environment enriched with arts, culture, and heritage that allows for guests to comprehend the history and culture behind the art offered throughout the Corridor.

### RESEARCH TEAM

Lizzie Anders  
Tatum Carlie  
Grace DeJohn  
Sierra Johnson  
Michael Spadafore



### METHODS

The arts-culture-heritage group applied four methods to assess community art. The group attempted online content analysis, asset mapping, finding case studies on similar communities or regions with a strong art-culture-heritage, and surveying visitors to inquire about their perceptions of art in communities.

### FINDINGS

Arts and culture offerings vary across communities. Secondary data analysis of Copper Corridor websites indicated that most attractions and events feature some aspect of the heritage of the Copper Corridor region.

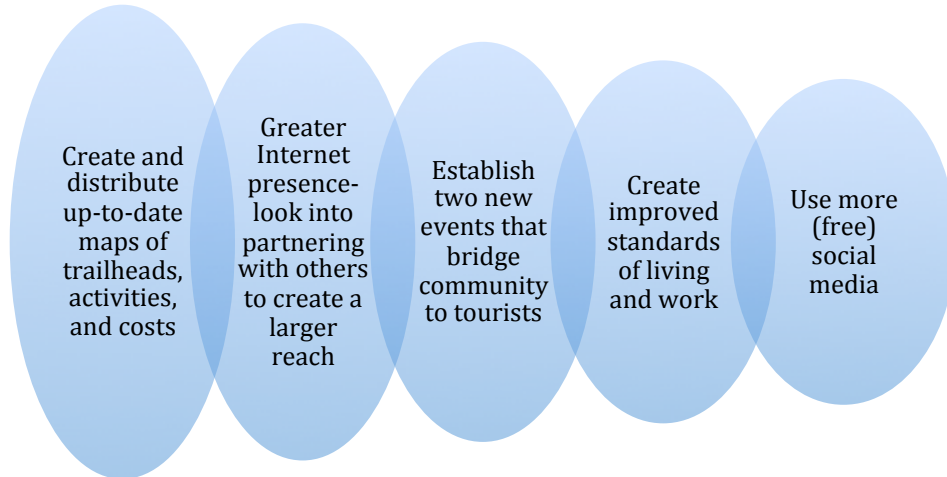
### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote the Oracle Artist Studio Tour more extensively through traditional media and social media outlets
- Establish a greater Internet presence by partnering with organizations that already have a generated following, such as LocalFirstAZ
- Promote the railroad heritage throughout the communities of the Corridor
- Create opportunities for former and current miners to create copper and other resources into some form of art
- Conduct an art survey including regional residents' art interests and skills

## Leading Recommendations Across the Groups

Each of the seven groups in the Fall 2015 TDM 402 class provided several recommendations based on primary and secondary data analysis from their specific focus. Each group shared all of their recommendations as a class and collectively the class chose the top five recommendations using nominal group process. Nominal group process is a technique used in groups of any size to reach decisions, generate solutions, and identify problems. For this class, after all the recommendations had been given by every group, they then ranked their top five choices of the group recommendations in rounds of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>. When the five rounds were recorded the top five selections were chosen based on which recommendations were most favored. The top five recommendations are displayed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. TOP 5 COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN TOURISM PRESENCE IN THE COPPER CORRIDOR**



## CLOSING

The Copper Corridor is a region of Arizona that is still a hidden treasure waiting to be found. With competition of the Grand Canyon and Sedona to the North, and urban attractions and resorts in Phoenix and Tucson, the Copper Corridor needs to promote the closeness factor to attract tourists.

The use of primary and secondary data collection has empowered the Copper Corridor in a new way and provided a launching pad for the positive potential of tourism development as a sustainable asset to the area.

## Economic Impact of Tourism

The Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) is the official marketing agency for the state. Created as an executive agency in 1975, AOT is the only statewide entity that brings national and international recognition to Arizona as a premier travel destination. The agency works to enhance the state economy and the quality of life for all Arizonans by expanding travel activity and increasing related revenues through tourism promotion and development. AOT serves the Grand Canyon State's travel industry and related businesses, the traveling public, and the taxpayers of Arizona. At the time of this report, 2015 projected economic estimates were the best data available. Pinal County estimates are featured here as the Copper Corridor Tourism Region is primarily focused on communities located in Pinal County.

### Pinal County\*

\$568 million direct destination traveler spending

6,010 jobs supported by tourism

\$147 million job earnings generated

\$21.2 million taxes generated in bed (city and rate varies), local/city (rate varies), and county (1.198%) tax receipts

\$29.4 million taxes generated in state (5.5%) tax receipts

### Arizona

42.1 million domestic and international overnight visitors traveled to Arizona

\$21 billion direct traveler spending

\$3.0 billion local, state and federal tax revenue generated from direct traveler spending

179,600 industry related jobs directly generated by traveler spending

For more general research information, visit <https://tourism.az.gov/research-and-statistics>

**The data featured here can be found at <https://tourism.az.gov/research-statistics/economic-impact>.** The methods are important to understand. Pinal County data starts on p. 35.

*\*Pinal County data includes the towns of Florence and Casa Grande, which are outside of the Copper Corridor. 2015 data are projected numbers.*

Sources: Dean Runyan Associates, June 2016.