

Does RDU's Vision 2040 Compliment Wake County's Destination 2028 Plan?

By Natalie Lew, November 29, 2018

Destination 2028, Wake County's 10-year Tourism Plan, states that Wake County's goal is to "increase overnight visitation to Wake County and the 12 municipalities within it" and "to evolve the county from being a strong regional destination to one that is nationally renowned." Wake County's regional and national success with Destination 2028 will positively affect surrounding areas like Orange and Durham counties and municipalities within these counties.

The Raleigh-Durham International Airport (RDU), although owned by four public entities (Wake County, Durham County, Raleigh City, and Durham City), sits entirely within the borders of Wake County. Thus, what happens with RDU immediately and greatly impacts Wake County.

The Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority (RDUAA) created RDU Vision 2040, the Master Plan for the growth of RDU. RDU Vision 2040 is supposed to "improve our region" and includes goals such as optimizing "infrastructure and resources in an...environmentally sustainable manner."

Under RDU Vision 2040, several tracks of land owned by the RDUAA were deemed not needed for aeronautical use. These lands: 1) are immediately adjacent to Umstead State Park, the most visited state park and a state park located entirely within Wake County's borders, 2) include Lake Crabtree County Park, one of the most used parks in Wake County, and 3) border Crabtree Creek, an environmentally sensitive creek that is subject to flooding and is enjoyed by many via this area's expansive and growing greenway system.

Given the proximity of RDU and Wake County, what is the RDUAA doing to ensure that RDU Vision 2040 compliments Wake County's Destination 2028 plan, especially with lands not needed for aeronautical?

Currently, RDUAA plans to lease land adjacent to Crabtree Creek and Umstead State Park to Wake Stone Corporation for purposes of creating a rock quarry. This would take the lands away from the public for an extended period time with potential negative short- and long-term consequences. However, there is better idea, an idea that has immediate, short-term, and long-term positive results - create RDU Forest, a forested recreation and outdoor education center within the heart of a fast-growing metropolitan area. RDU Forest immediately supports the goals and plans of both RDUAA's Vision 2040 Plan and Wake County's Destination 2028 Plan.

The RDU Forest Recreation and Education Center not only benefits residents, it will also attract visitors and be a factor in making this area a regional and national destination. Visitors will spend money on transportation, lodging, dining, entertainment, etc.

Local families and individuals enjoy outings to natural environments like our beautiful mountains and coast. However, we don't always have time to make the 3-4 hour trek to these locations and we don't always have the money to spend on lodging, meals, entertainment, etc. in these areas. But, with RDU Forest, residents have a local, centrally-located, family-friendly forested recreation area creating easily accessible and ever-important family bonding opportunities and respites from our modern, hectic world. This forested environment is accessible to people on a daily basis, thus creating a more balanced lifestyle. Having such a place to visit locally means also having a place to spend locally!

The idea of forested recreation is a straight-forward concept. What about forested outdoor education? Education not only occurs in a classroom in a brick and mortar school building, but also occurs outside of this classroom setting. Excursions to a naturally forested environment can reinforce what is learned in a classroom setting for subjects such as biology, ecology, geology, hydrogeology, etc. Experiencing life and testing oneself individually and in group settings in an outdoor environment can also serve to build self-confidence, self-worth, and teamwork by participating in ropes courses, day hikes, bike rides, camping, etc. This forested outdoor education serves the entire population, from the at-risk youth to the high-paid executive of a multi-national corporation. All benefit from forested outdoor education.

Per the RDU Vision 2040 website, RDU Vision 2040 was "crafted...by our entire community through a collaborative process." The community has clearly shown preference for using these non-aeronautical lands for the RDU Forest Recreation and Education Center concept over the rock quarry, so we ask the RDUAA, elected officials representing the four municipal owners of RDU, and elected officials of communities directly affected by these decision makers to embrace the community ideas and forgo the quarry idea in favor of the RDU Forest idea.

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