

NORTH ALABAMA

# CREATING ACCESSIBLE DESTINATIONS



A Strategic Grants Program by the  
**Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association**

Everyone deserves access to adventure.

That's why North Alabama is committed to providing memorable travel experiences for all abilities.



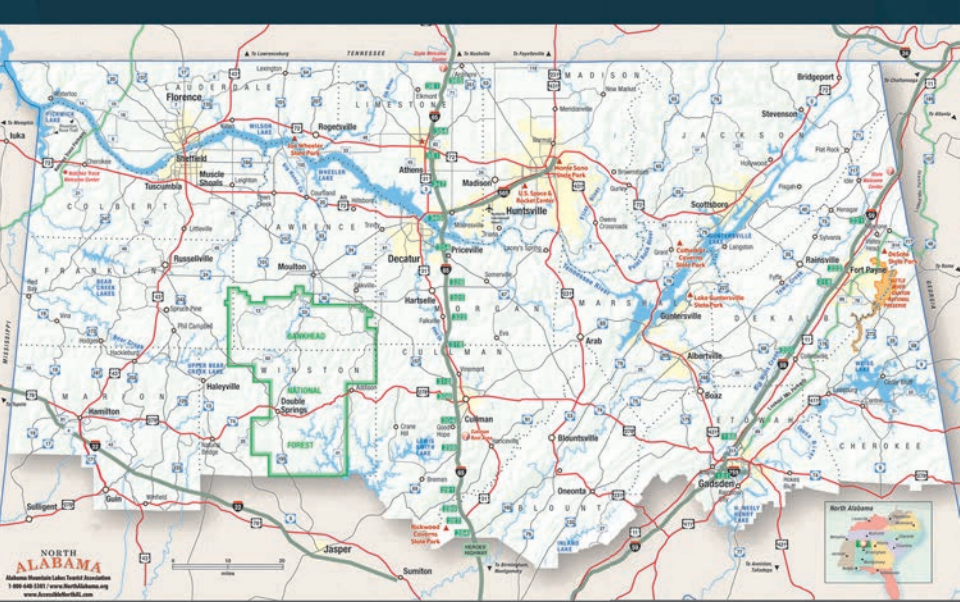
NORTH  
**ALABAMA**  
ALABAMA MOUNTAIN LAKES  
TOURIST ASSOCIATION

## CREATING **Accessible DESTINATIONS**

Welcome to North Alabama, where accessibility meets the beauty of our landscapes and the warmth of our hospitality. Whether you're planning a visit or are already here, we're dedicated to making your experience as inclusive and enjoyable as possible. Discover resources, tips, and information tailored to ensure visitors can fully appreciate our region's rich heritage and natural wonders. Explore North Alabama with confidence, knowing we're here to support your journey every step of the way.

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Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association  
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800-648-5381 | [www.NorthAlabama.org](http://www.NorthAlabama.org) | [www.AccessibleNorthAL.com](http://www.AccessibleNorthAL.com)



The Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association's 16-county region embraces the scenic southern foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and the southern-most bow of the mighty Tennessee River. These inspiring counties make-up the northern-most region of the State of Alabama and include:

- |                 |                 |                   |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Blount County   | DeKalb County   | Lauderdale County | Marion County   |
| Cherokee County | Etowah County   | Lawrence County   | Marshall County |
| Colbert County  | Franklin County | Limestone County  | Morgan County   |
| Cullman County  | Jackson County  | Madison County    | Winston County  |



**Tami Reist**  
President and CEO,  
Alabama Mountain Lakes  
Tourist Association

The Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association's mission is to promote North Alabama as a destination that celebrates its natural beauty, cultural richness, and welcoming spirit to travelers.

# Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association: **Shaping** a Culture of Inclusion Through Accessibility

Article by Destinations International spotlighting the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association's accomplishments. <https://destinationsinternational.org/case-studies/alabama-mountain-lakes-tourist-association-shaping-culture-inclusion-through>



Social Impact Framework: Accessibility

## What was the issue you were trying to solve?

As part of the upcoming U.S. Semiquincentennial, we wanted to ensure that North Alabama is positioned as a welcoming destination for all, including individuals with disabilities. Our region had not yet addressed accessibility at a strategic and coordinated level, and we recognized that barriers in infrastructure, information, and perception could hinder visitor experience, community strength, and economic opportunity.

We set out to bridge that gap through practical improvements and a commitment to accessibility through marketing, planning and regional development.

## What were the stated objectives of your initiative?

Our accessibility initiatives had several core goals:

First, to make North Alabama a destination where people of all abilities, physical, sensory, cognitive, and invisible, can confidently plan and enjoy travel experiences. This meant establishing shared standards, messaging, and partnerships, so accessibility efforts are coordinated, scalable, and sustainable across the entire region. This meant improving transparency and trip planning confidence by providing visitors with clear, accurate, and detailed accessibility information (measurements, layouts, amenities, sensory considerations) prior to arrival.

Second, to position accessibility as a welcoming culture, not just a compliance tactic. We did this by equipping hotels, attractions, DMOs, and frontline staff with training, tools, and best practices to better serve



AMLA staff (left to right): Thereasa Hulan, Membership and Film Commission Coordinator; Karen Beasley, Vice President of Marketing and Communications; Tina Lawler, Community Engagement Representative; Randa Hovater, Graphic Designer & Community Engagement; Tami Reist, President & CEO; Penne Beasley, Visitor Services Representative; Craig Johnston, Director of Workforce Development Training & Advocacy; and Angie Pierce, Vice-President.

travelers with disabilities and their companions. We worked to shift the conversation from minimum ADA requirements to a mindset of hospitality, dignity, and proactive inclusion across the tourism industry.

Third, to grow the visitor economy through an underserved market, by creating regional consistency across 16 counties. This meant marketing accessibility as a competitive advantage that drives longer stays, repeat visitation, and higher economic impact.

Fourth, to leverage storytelling and partnerships, and emerge as a national leader. We aimed to do so by amplifying authentic stories through influencers, media, and strategic partners.

Fifth, to use the Semiquincentennial as a catalyst to leave a lasting legacy of impact, ensuring improvements made today benefit residents and visitors for generations.

### **What were the specific metrics you used to measure the success of your efforts?**

Success was measured not only by how many partners we trained or pages we built, but by the confidence we created—for visitors to travel, for partners to serve, and for our region to lead with inclusion. We used a mix of visitor-centered and industry-focused metrics, including:

Visitor Confidence & Trust. This included visitor feedback expressing appreciation for transparency and honesty, feeling “seen”, “welcomed”, and “respected”, and indications of reduced anxiety around travel planning. Confidence also extended into testimonials from travelers and families who said they would not have traveled without accessible information provided.

Partner and Industry feedback. This included reporting from our hotel and attraction partners emphasizing an increase in confidence when serving guests with disabilities, in addressing accessibility internally among teams, and in proactive service and voluntarily making improvements beyond ADA minimums.

Regional Cultural Changes. Accessibility became a measured and standardized talking point in sales calls, marketing discussions, and community engagement meetings. We saw an increase in collaboration among



*AMLA is Accessibility Verified by Wheel the World, an organization dedicated to providing expert travel solutions to improve accessibility.*

tourism, workforce development, and community organizations.

Storytelling and Representation. We aimed to measure the quantity and reach of authentic stories from individuals with disabilities, their families, and caregivers. Our storytelling extended into our communities as well, and we sought to measure the reach of our rural communities seeing themselves reflected nationally. Finally, we closely monitored the feedback from media and partners who recognized our region's efforts as genuine, not performative.

Leadership and Legacy Indicators. Across our efforts, we tracked how our accessibility initiatives were represented as a model for rural destinations, a long-term investment, and in alignment with our Semiquincentennial legacy goal, benefiting both visitors and residents.

### **What were the specific outcomes of our efforts?**

Through intentional and collaborative initiatives across our region, our efforts led to meaningful and measurable change. We saw a tangible shift beyond infrastructure, and into the identity and mindset of our communities. Our industry is stronger, and our workforce is empowered.

Importantly, North Alabama became a more confident regional destination: visitors with accessibility needs reporting feeling more welcomed and supported, while local businesses responded enthusiastically and made valuable improvements both physically and digitally. The region's availability of ramps, signage, and assistive accommodations increased.

From a marketing lens, our strategies evolved to become human-centric. We developed an inclusive messaging toolkit, broadened narratives, and ensured accessible information was updated throughout online platforms.

### **What other best practices or key lessons can we share?**

Inclusion is a brand value. We learned that accessibility isn't a side project; it's core to our region's story and identity. Our efforts proved that accessibility is an opportunity to innovate, and to make visitors truly feel confident, safe, seen, and empowered.

From an education standpoint, many of our partners didn't know what was possible. Training created buy-in and sparked creativity. Ongoing collaboration was also essential. From public partners to private businesses, change happens faster when it's shared. Sustainability matters, too. Accessibility needs maintenance and updates as a living part of destination planning.

We are proud to make North Alabama stronger, more resilient, and more welcoming for people with disabilities.



*AMLA President/CEO Tami Reist tries the Terrain Hopper accessible-friendly all-terrain vehicle during an accessibility conference.*

# WHY VISION 2030: THE ACCESSIBILITY MOONSHOT

AGING BABY BOOMERS WILL MAKE  
ACCESSIBILITY MAINSTREAM



## 2030 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Average net worth:  
**\$1.2 MILLION  
PER HOUSEHOLD**

Source: Yahoo Finance



They hold  
**50%**  
OF U.S.  
WEALTH

Source: Federal Reserve  
Distributional Financial  
Accounts



**72% ARE RETIRED**

Source: US Labor Dept 2024



**70% PLAN  
TO TRAVEL  
THIS YEAR**

(average of 27 travel days)

Source: AARP 2025



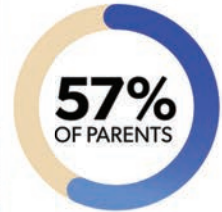
## TRAVEL DATA

**44%**

OF GRANDPARENTS  
HAVE TAKEN A  
MULTIGENERATIONAL  
TRIP WITH THEIR  
GRANDCHILDREN

And roughly half help  
pay for those trips.

Source: AARP



**PLAN TO  
TRAVEL WITH  
GRANDPARENTS  
AND CHILDREN**

which could influence  
35% of all travel

Source: Family Travel Association



**18%**

Percentage of travelers  
that had someone in their  
travel party that required  
accessibility services in 2025

Source: Longwoods International 2025 Survey



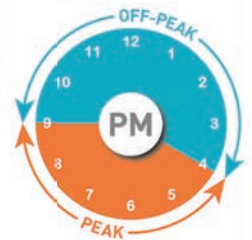
**30,000 MONTHLY**  
requests  
received by  
the call center  
of a major  
cruise line.

Source: CruiseCritic

**62%**

**PREFER TO TRAVEL  
OFF-PEAK**

Source: McKinsey & Co



**\$75 MILLION:**

The amount of accessible luxury travel  
sold by Fora travel advisors in 2025

Source: Fora

## FUN FACTS

Japan, where 25% of the  
population is over 65,  
**PRODUCES MORE  
DIAPERS FOR ADULTS  
THAN CHILDREN**



By 2030,  
**23%** 2030  
OF THE  
US POPULATION  
WILL BE OVER 65,

representing 40 million people

Source: US Census

# Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association: Accessibility Advancement Grant Program Achieves Success

The Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association (AMLA) launched its new Accessibility Advancement Grant program at the beginning of 2026. The grants were available to the tourism bureaus in each of the 16 counties within the AMLA region. These North Alabama include Blount County, Cherokee County, Colbert County, Cullman County, DeKalb County, Etowah County, Franklin County, Jackson County, Lauderdale County, Lawrence County, Limestone County, Madison County, Marion County, Marshall County, Morgan County and Winston County.

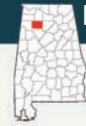
The purpose of the program was to encourage local tourism bureaus to identify and complete small-scale projects that make North Alabama more inclusive and welcoming for visitors with disabilities.

Each of the tourism bureaus were eligible for one \$500 grant. Funds could be used only for accessibility-related improvements or initiatives geared to individuals with physical, sensory, or cognitive needs. Project proposals were due by March 31, 2026.

AMLA is pleased to announce that tourism bureaus in all 16 counties of the region signed-up for the Accessibility Advancement Grant program. The following pages outline each program being implemented by individual counties.



Presentation ceremonies of Accessibility Advancement Grants were held with each of the participating 16 counties' tourism bureau representatives. The events helped to recognize the tourism bureau's efforts in this important area and to help bring public awareness of their local bureau's work on their behalf. Pictured are (left) Blount County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Indya Guthrie, and AMLA President/CEO Tami Reist.



## BLOUNT COUNTY ACCESSIBILITY GRANT PROJECT

# Signage & Fencing Allows for Opening of Happy Trails Site

Happy Trails of the Locust Fork is seeking funding for a sign and fencing for our property in Blountsville, AL. We currently do not have any safety measures to protect the equipment we use on site for guests (track chairs and solar charging trailer). Due to this, we are unable to open our facility to the public yet. With this grant, we will be able to purchase our signage, a 3 x 6 metal sign mounted on our 8-foot privacy fence. Having these two items added to our property will allow us to be fully open to the public and allow us to have sign exposure to each person that drives past the property. This grant will be used to cover the full cost of the sign and remainder will go towards the cost of the fencing; the remainder of the fence will be covered by another grant through Walmart.

Happy Trails of the Locust Fork is a nonprofit organization dedicated to offering free reservations for EcoRover chairs, enabling people to explore and enjoy nature in a sustainable and eco-friendly way. Our mission is to make nature more accessible to everyone, promoting environmental awareness and appreciation for the great outdoors.





# Wheelchair Users **Swing** into National Preserve Park

**Applicant Organization:** Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism  
**Partner Organization:** Friends of the Preserve at Little River Canyon

## Project Need

The wheelchair accessible swing located at the Mouth Park playground within Little River Canyon National Preserve is in urgent need of replacement. This swing is the only piece of playground equipment capable of safely accommodating a child who remains in their wheelchair. It is heavily used by visitors with limited mobility and is essential for ensuring that children of all abilities can enjoy the park. Without this swing, children with physical disabilities lose access to a meaningful recreational experience that their peers enjoy. Replacing it is critical to maintaining an inclusive, welcoming environment for all families who visit the preserve.

## Project Description

This project will replace the existing broken wheelchair accessible swing with a new, durable, safety compliant model designed specifically to secure and support a wheelchair. The new swing will restore full accessibility to the playground and ensure long term usability for children with disabilities.

**Completion Date:** December 1, 2026



# **Braille** Brochures In the Works for Helen Keller Birthplace

Colbert County is using its accessibility grant to expand inclusive visitor experiences at the Helen Keller Birthplace at Ivy Green and the Colbert County Visitor Center. The funding is supporting the development of Braille brochures designed for visitors who are blind or have low vision.

The project builds upon a tradition established by longtime staff member Sue Pilkilton, who previously provided Braille materials for visitors touring the historic site. With the help of this grant, the museum team is working with a specialized Braille printing company to recreate and expand these materials so they can once again be available to guests.

The Braille brochures will allow visitors to learn about Helen Keller's life, legacy, and the history of the home where she was born, ensuring that the story of one of the world's most recognized advocates for people with disabilities is accessible to all.

This project aligns closely with the region's broader Accessible Friendly North Alabama initiative, helping ensure that cultural and historic sites continue to welcome visitors of all abilities.

### Ice House

The building was constructed in 2009 with the help of the State of Alabama. In the 1800s, Captain Keller would travel 6 miles to the Tennessee River in late January or early February to harvest ice for the summer. The ice pile was a weighted, horse-drawn contraption with a row of sharp teeth which cut a narrow furrow 6 inches deep. Ice was hauled to the icehouse by horse and wagon. Layer by layer, the ice was placed in the icehouse, sprinkling sawdust between each layer. This made it easier to separate when the ice blocks were taken out. After the last layer was stored, it was covered with a thick layer of sawdust to help keep the ice throughout the summer. Servants would use a crane to go down into the icehouse to store the ice and also to retrieve ice for everyday use. A drain at the bottom of the icehouse kept the ice free of melted water, as moisture melts ice as quickly as heat.

### The Gardens

The Shoals Master Gardeners design, build, and maintain the flowering beds on the grounds. Using examples from Helen's writings, they seek to capture Helen's memories of the gardens by using her favorite plants. The rose garden between the house and carriage contains heirloom roses and fragrant plants, and the butterfly garden in the backyard has plants that attract birds, bees, and butterflies. The Japanese garden showcases the Japanese lantern, one of the many gifts she received.

### Lion's International Memorial Garden

From fountain to brick fence. Displayed are gifts given to the Keller Shrine in honor of Miss Keller from many different countries.

### The Clearing

Through the iron gates is the Alabama Federal Garden Club's District 1 tribute to Helen Keller, included are many native trees and shrubs, a log cabin, gazebo, and "moon tree," a pine tree grown from a seed flown to the moon in a U.S. spaceship.

The City of Tusculum acquired the Birthplace of Helen Keller, which is situated on a ten-acre tract of land, in 1951. The dedication ceremony was held June 27, 1952.

Helen graduated from Radcliffe College in 1904 with Teacher by her side at all times. Helen was actively identified with the American Foundation for the Blind from 1924 until her death on June 1, 1968. Anne Sullivan Macy was Teacher and Companion to Helen from March 3, 1887 until her death on October 20, 1938. After that, Polly Thompson, who had been her secretary since 1914, became her companion.

### The Miracle Worker

"The Miracle Worker," the play written by William Gibson, is produced each summer on the grounds of Ivy Green. It is now the official outdoor drama of Alabama. The Helen Keller Festival takes place annually the last weekend in June at Tusculum's Spring Park and in downtown Tusculum.

### Gazebo

In 1981 the Southern Dames of America built the gazebo to honor Helen Keller, who was made an honorary member of the National Society Southern Dames of America during the 1964 National Assembly held in Washington, D.C. The gazebo is located in the "Clearing."

## WELCOME TO IVY GREEN



Birthplace of Helen Keller  
Tusculum, Alabama



## Ramping Up Annual Festivals and Special Events

In Cullman, our public festivals and events are more than entertainment—they are gathering places where residents and visitors come together to celebrate our community. Approximately 18% of the population lives with some level of disability, a number that increases significantly with age. In a community like Cullman where families, older adults, and multigenerational visitors regularly attend festivals improving accessibility directly improves the experience for a wide range of guests.

Cullman County hosts some of North Alabama’s largest and most beloved festivals at Depot Park, including Christkindlmarkt, which recently welcomed more than 415,000 attendees.

While evaluating accessibility needs at these events, the Cullman County Tourism Bureau identified two recurring challenges that directly affect our festivals: access to large temporary attractions such as the Ferris wheel, and access to elevated performance stages used for concerts, ceremonies, and programming throughout the year. Because these features are temporary, permanent construction solutions are not always feasible, leaving accessibility gaps during our largest events.

Through collaboration with a local partner, the Tourism Bureau identified a practical, community-focused solution that aligns with the purpose of the Accessibility Advancement Grant. A local marina had previously purchased modular accessibility ramps that were not suitable for their operations and offered to make them available at a small fraction of their original cost. These portable ramp systems can be assembled by City of Cullman Parks and Recreation staff and used where they are most needed during festivals and events at Depot Park.

This modest investment will help ensure that individuals with disabilities, older adults, and families can safely enjoy attractions, performances, and shared experiences alongside friends and neighbors. By improving accessibility at our festivals, Cullman strengthens its reputation as a welcoming destination and demonstrates its commitment to inclusion, dignity, and community connection.



## Partnering for New Accessibility Playground Equipment

DeKalb Tourism is requesting the accessibility grant to assist Little River Canyon National Park repair a broken handicapped swing at Canyon Mouth Park. Along with the handicap swing, Canyon Mouth Park offers dozens of picnic tables and grills, a modern restroom, a water fountain, an outdoor rinse-off shower, a pavilion, a playground, and a soccer field.





## ADA-Compliant Handrails for the Gadsden Museum of Art

**Project description and intended impact:** This Accessibility Advancement Grant Proposal supports the installation of a new ADA-compliant handrail at the Gadsden Museum of Art, to be installed during the construction of the new third-floor space. The addition of this handrail will significantly improve accessibility by providing much-needed stability and support for visitors and tourists, ensuring a safer and more inclusive museum experience.

**Budget outline for the \$500 grant:** ADA-compliant handrail materials, mounting hardware, and brackets at approximately \$500.

**Expected completion date:** April 20, 2026.



## Lightweight Wheelchair to Assist People with Limited Mobility

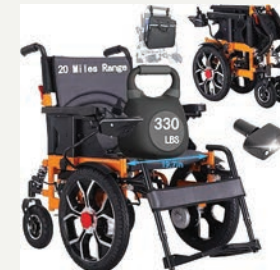
The Franklin County Chamber of Commerce proposes funding to purchase a WEYRAL Electric Wheelchair to enhance accessibility for residents and visitors. This lightweight, foldable wheelchair features a detachable battery and is designed to navigate a variety of outdoor surfaces, including grass, gravel, and moderate slopes. Equipped with a 12Ah lithium battery, it provides a travel range of up to 15 miles per charge, and includes an automatic braking system that engages when the joystick is released, anti-tip rear wheels for added stability, and puncture-resistant tires for durability across different terrains.

The Chamber office serves as a central hub for visitors, local businesses, and community members seeking information and resources. Providing an electric wheelchair on-site will allow people with limited mobility to fully participate in Chamber activities, as well as community events and festivals held throughout Franklin County.

The purchase of the WEYRAL Electric Wheelchair will significantly improve accessibility and inclusion within the Chamber and at county-wide events.

- Increased access for individuals with limited mobility due to upper body limitations, chronic pain, or other physical conditions
- A more welcoming and inclusive environment that reflects the Chamber's commitment to accessibility for all
- Expanded participation in community events and festivals by individuals who may otherwise face mobility barriers
- A durable, mobile accessibility resource that can be used across multiple locations and events throughout Franklin County.

Expected Completion Date: December 31, 2026.





## Digital, On-Site Info Graphics to Enhance Boat Launching

In 2019, Goose Pond Colony installed an accessible boat ramp designed to support individuals with mobility challenges, providing equitable access to Lake Guntersville and enhancing inclusive outdoor recreation in Jackson County. Although the ramp is fully functional, it remains significantly underused. The primary reason: visitors are not aware the ramp exists, and those who do see it do not understand how to use it safely without instruction.

This project will create clear, user-friendly instructional signage with simple diagrams illustrating the three essential steps:

1. Position the boat to the correct height
2. Remove the designated rail for access
3. Transfer safely using a transfer board

The signage will be accompanied by short instructional videography for online placement and an on-site QR code linking to additional guidance. The project also includes minor paint and handlebar enhancements to increase visibility and usability. Additionally, funding will allow the purchase of at least one transfer board, ensuring that users have the tools they need immediately on-site without having to bring specialized equipment.

The goal is to transform an unused accessibility feature into a meaningful, widely used asset that improves independence, safety, and confidence for boaters with mobility impairments. By providing clear instructions and visibility improvements, this project will help fulfill the original purpose of the ramp and strengthen North Alabama's commitment to accessibility.

Expected Completion Date : March 31, 2026



## Parking Signage and Striping Paves Way to Improvements

This proposal requests funding to replace outdated, damaged, or non-compliant accessible parking signage outside the Florence-Lauderdale Convention & Visitors Bureau facility. Updated signage will improve visibility, ensure ADA compliance, enhance safety, and create a more welcoming environment for visitors with disabilities.

Accessible parking is often the first point of contact for visitors with mobility challenges. Many of our current signs show signs of wear, fading, or physical damage. Several no longer meet ADA visibility standards, including height requirements, reflectivity, and the use of the updated International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA).

The AMLA grant project Includes:

- Removal of all outdated or damaged accessible parking signs.
- Installation of new, ADA-compliant reflective signage using the updated ISA.
- Ensuring proper mounting height, visibility, and placement according to federal and state guidelines.
- Conducting a final accessibility audit to confirm compliance.



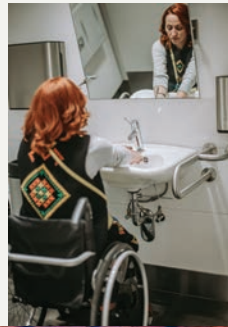


# Enhanced Restrooms to Feature Motion-Activated Faucets

The Oakville Indian Mound Education Center is part of the Lawrence County School System but also functions as an educational museum and recreation park open to the public. Our mission is to foster public history education as a pre-European contact archaeological site while providing a safe and accessible recreational space for all visitors.

In collaboration with the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, our staff has been actively participating in their initiatives. The museum has completed the Wheel the World onsite accessibility survey and the Tourism ALL-A-Bama training program, which have helped us identify ways to make our museum more inclusive - particularly for wheelchair users and visitors on the autism spectrum.

To further our commitment to accessibility, we will use the AMLA grant for partial payment for the installation of two ADA-compliant sinks featuring touch-free, motion-activated faucets. Total cost for the project will be \$975. The Lawrence County Schools maintenance department has agreed to provide removal and installation labor at no additional cost.

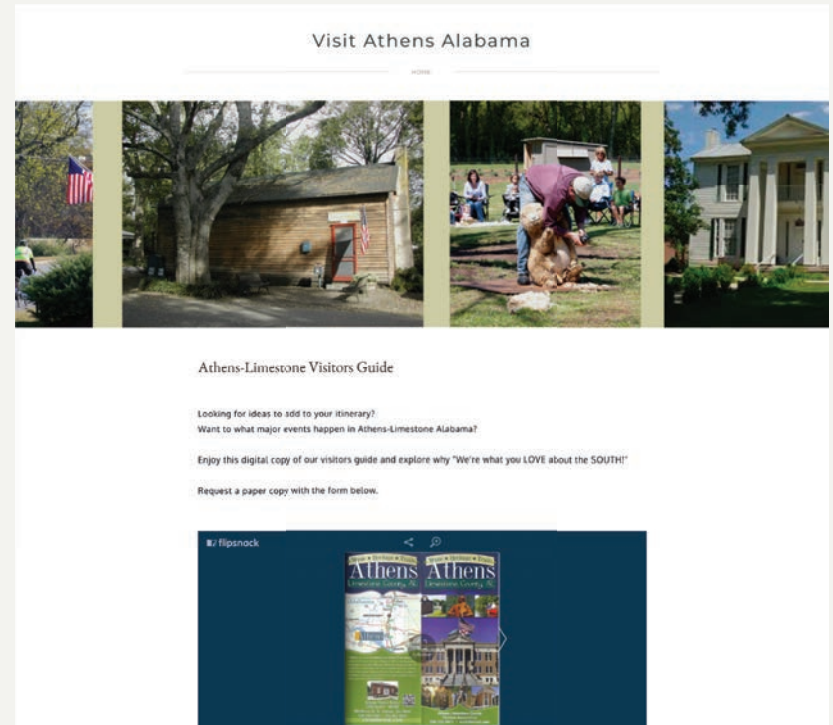


# Website Expansion to Focus of Easy Accessibility Controls

The Athens-Limestone County Tourism Association is pleased to join with the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourism Association's vision of promoting accessibility tourism in our area.

To that end, we are submitting our grant request for \$500. We are currently in the process of designing a website and we will use this grant for our accessibility page. We intend this page to have dyslexic-friendly font, alt-text for images, keyboard navigation, among other features. This page will highlight our accessible venues, restaurants, and hotel offerings.

The entirety of the grant funding is intended to go to building this page on our website [www.visitathensal.com](http://www.visitathensal.com). We anticipate the website will be launched in the early spring.





## Automatic Entrance Doors to Remove Accessibility Barrier

The Huntsville/Madison County Convention & Visitors Bureau will be pursuing the installation of automatic door openers at our front doors facing Church Street. Currently, our accessible parking is in our main lot facing Church Street and the ramp to the building is across from that spot, however, on the opposite end of the building from the doors. Once the doors are reached, the doors open outward leaving very limited space on the stoop for wheelchair maneuvering. We have met with City of Huntsville reps and have presented two possible solutions, both involving electronic doors. We see this as the most important accessibility barrier to overcome.

We met with Leslie Walker Consulting and plan to implement some of the ideas she recommended as well. These include the following and specifics are to be determined.

- **Silent Video Indicator:** Add a small, clearly visible icon or sign indicating that the lobby video plays without sound.
- **Sensory Kit Availability Signage:** Install a small sign or countertop display stating that sensory kits are available upon request.
- **Rear Exit Door Warning Sign:** Add a clear sign stating: "This door is not an exit and will lock behind you."
- **Accessibility Quick-Reference Sheet at the Desk:** A one-page internal guide outlining available accommodations, restroom access, sensory kits, seating options, and how to assist with the door.
- **Standard Welcome Script Option:** A simple staff prompt like: "Let us know if you'd like seating, sensory support, or help navigating the space."
- **"Ask Us for Written Info" Sign:** Lets visitors know staff can provide information in writing instead of verbally.
- **Exterior Restroom Diagram:** Install a tactile-friendly, high-contrast restroom layout diagram near the restroom entrance.

**Expected Completion Date:** December 31, 2026



## Website Upgraded to Ensure It Meets ADA Accessibility Goals

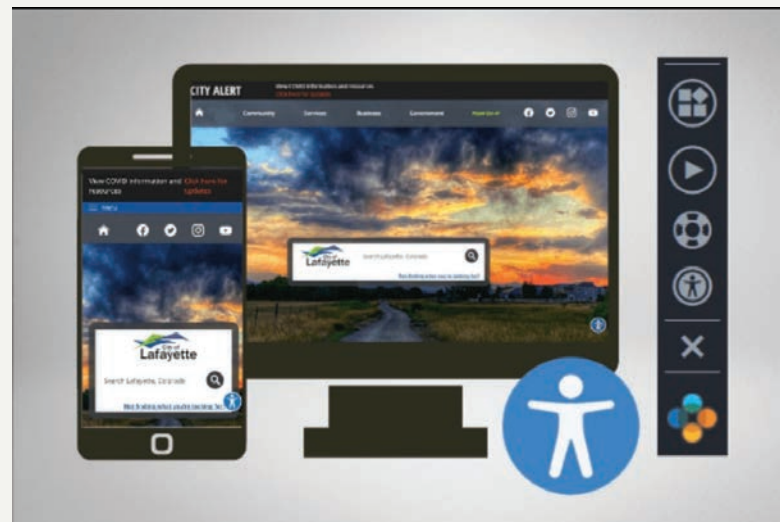
Marion County recently utilized its \$500 accessibility grant to enhance its website and ensure it meets ADA accessibility standards, making information more usable for all visitors.

With these funds, Marion County was able to implement updates that improve the digital experience for individuals with disabilities. Enhancements include improvements that allow screen readers to better interpret website content, clearer navigation for users with visual impairments, and overall compliance with accessibility guidelines.

By prioritizing website accessibility, Marion County has taken an important step toward ensuring that travel information, local attractions, and community resources are available to everyone.

This project demonstrates how even a small investment can create meaningful change, helping destinations become more welcoming and inclusive while preparing for the growing market of travelers with accessibility needs.

Marion County's initiative serves as a model for other communities, showing that improving accessibility does not always require large budgets - just commitment to making travel accessible to all.





## Signs for **Top 10 Instagrammable Spots** to be **ADA Compliant**

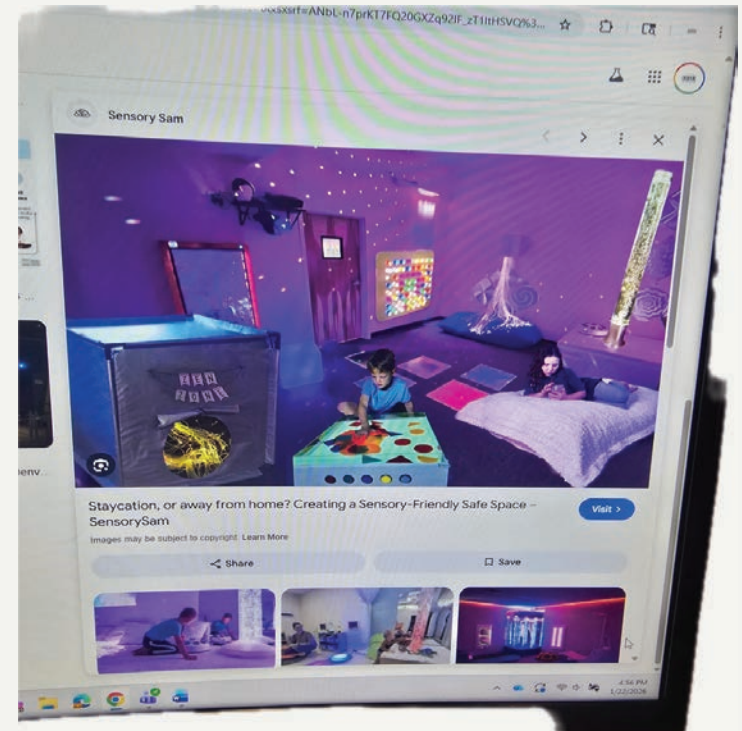
Marshall County Tourism is requesting the \$500 grant for new signage. We are currently working on developing the Top 10 Instagrammable spots across Marshall County. We plan to have signage at each location to mark the locations and then promote these as tourist stops within the county.

We would like for the signs to be translated in braille and be ADA compliant. We will use the \$500 grant to help pay for the signage at each of our locations.



## Decatur-Morgan Visitor's Center to Add Unique **Sensory Space**

Decatur-Morgan County Tourism plans to use the \$500 grant to create a sensory-friendly space in the Decatur Morgan County Visitor's Center.





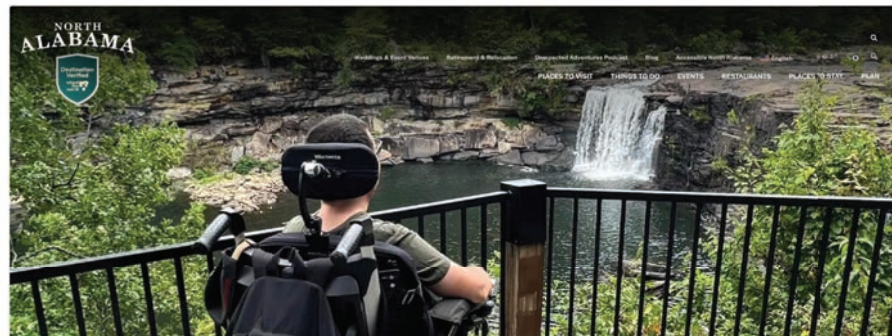
## Access Ramps Planned for Looney's Complex Renovations

The Winston County Arts Council's next project in the renovation of Looney's Amphitheater Complex is tearing down the old, unsafe porch on the former restaurant building. Now called The Lodge, it functions as a venue for parties, meetings, exhibits, etc. At the present time, we have a temporary wooden ramp for wheelchair users, but we would like to build a permanent, wide ramp when the porch is finished.

The project is necessary because the steps in front are not wheelchair-accessible. The impact will be great because the ramp will not only be used by wheelchair users, but also those who use a walker or anyone else who has difficulty with stairs.

The completion date for the ramp is projected to be July 31, 2026.

The following photo shows the rickety porch as it is now. The temporary rail is at the far left and is not shown, but the new rail will be wide, accessible, and clearly marked at the handicap-parking site.



### Accessibility in North Alabama

Welcome to North Alabama, where accessibility meets the beauty of our landscapes and the warmth of our hospitality. Whether you're planning a visit or are already here, we're dedicated to making your experience as inclusive and enjoyable as possible. Discover resources, tips, and information tailored to ensure visitors can fully appreciate our region's rich heritage and natural wonders. Explore North Alabama with confidence, knowing we're here to support your journey every step of the way.



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# Bear Creek Collaborative: Adaptive Archery Equipment and Accessible Stand for Universal Program Access

Bear Creek Collaborative operates the Bear Creek Education Center at Overton Farm in Hodges, Alabama. This location is barrier-free on approximately 400 acres of land and surrounded by Bear Creek water access. It is also home to one of the last remaining pioneer villages in the state of Alabama. For Bear Creek Collaborative, this outdoor setting creates a natural learning environment making it more realistic to help build on emerging skills. Since the 1970s, children, community members, and individuals from across the country have created their own personal Bear Creek story. We're here to continue that tradition.



## Project Description and Intended Impact

Bear Creek Collaborative's archery program is a cornerstone of the organization's outdoor education offerings, teaching focus, discipline, and confidence to participants of all ages. However, the program currently lacks equipment and infrastructure to serve individuals with limited mobility or upper body strength, creating an unintentional barrier to participation for community members with physical disabilities.

This project will introduce adaptive archery equipment and construct an accessible archery stand, creating a universally designed experience that welcomes participants regardless of physical ability. The adaptive equipment will include specialized bows with reduced draw weights, assistive release mechanisms, and stabilization aids that accommodate users with limited grip strength or motor control. The accessible archery stand will provide a stable, elevated platform with proper positioning for wheelchair users and individuals who cannot stand for extended periods.

By implementing these modifications, Bear Creek Collaborative will transform archery from an activity available only to those with full mobility and strength into an inclusive program where all participants can experience the mental focus, achievement, and confidence that archery provides. This enhancement directly aligns

with the organization's mission to provide outdoor education opportunities that are available for all individuals.

## Budget Estimate (for \$500 Grant Request)

- Adaptive archery equipment (reduced draw weight bows, assistive releases, stabilizers)
- Materials for accessible archery stand construction

## How This Project Supports Accessibility

This project eliminates both physical and psychological barriers to outdoor recreation participation. Many individuals with mobility limitations or reduced strength have been unable to participate in traditional archery programs due to equipment designed exclusively for able-bodied users. By providing adaptive equipment and an accessible shooting platform, Bear Creek Collaborative will ensure that archery instruction is available to all community members, regardless of physical capability.

The project directly advances the mission of the Alabama Mountain Lakes Association by transforming an existing program into an inclusive experience that demonstrates universal design principles. It will serve as a model for how outdoor education programs can be modified to welcome participants with disabilities, strengthening Northwest Alabama's commitment to accessible recreation for all.



## Joe Wheeler State Park: A Letter of Appreciation from Alabama State Parks

I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for helping make the Terrain Hopper available at Joe Wheeler State Park. I also wanted to share a story that I thought you would appreciate.

Jennings Earnest, JWSP naturalist, recently shared that he was planning a special event for a 16-year-old girl who wanted to become a Junior Ranger. She has spent much of her life in the hospital and has had very little opportunity to experience the outdoors. Her mom wasn't sure if she would be able to use the Terrain Hopper, but they were willing to give it a try. Jennings said that if it doesn't work out, he was planning to push her around the day-use area himself so they can go birding together.

Well she was able to use the terrain hopper and she loved every moment. Moments like this are exactly why tools like the Terrain Hopper matter. They open the door for experiences that many people might never otherwise have the chance to enjoy. Your support is helping create opportunities for guests to connect with the outdoors in meaningful ways, and this is a perfect example of that impact.

Thank you again for your support and for helping make stories like this possible.



Best regards,  
Matthew Capps  
Director of Alabama State Parks





# NORTH ALABAMA

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