



**The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce**

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May 10, 2011

The Honorable Phil Berger  
President Pro Tempore  
North Carolina Senate  
via electronic mail

The Honorable Thom Tillis  
Speaker of the House  
North Carolina House of Representatives  
via electronic mail

Dear Senator Berger and Speaker Tillis:

On behalf of more than 1,000 business members of the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to strongly urge the continued funding and support for the Roanoke Island Commission (RIC). The RIC not only oversees Roanoke Island Festival Park, but also the Marshes Lighthouse, the Maritime Museum on Roanoke Island and the land owned next to the Wright Memorial Bridge which connects mainland Currituck County to the Outer Banks.

Roanoke Island Festival Park is the only site in the state which interprets the Roanoke Voyages which led to the colonization of the New World by the English. Roanoke Island is the site of the first colony of English speaking people – now known as The Lost Colony - and predates both Plymouth Rock and Jamestown settlements.

As part of the Outer Banks visitor experience, Roanoke Island Festival Park has made many significant impacts, both locally and statewide. Income from vacation home rentals benefits all of North Carolina because a majority of rental properties are owned by investors who reside outside of Dare County. Much of the income from these rentals is spent throughout the state in other communities. State coffers benefit from the sales taxes as well as the investment income taxes collected.

Any reduction in venues that educate and entertain the public will have a ripple effect throughout the state. When choosing a vacation destination, visitors want to insure an assortment of activities that are family oriented. Roanoke Island Festival Park certainly enhances the visitor experience on the Outer Banks. Over 130,000 visitors last year benefitted from visiting the park and participating in its education programs or by touring the Elizabeth II as it visited ports along the coast.

Last calendar year, visitors spent more than \$357 million for lodging and \$187 million for prepared food. These expenditures generated a significant amount of sales tax revenue as well as income for investment owners in places such as Chapel Hill, Greensboro, Rockingham and many other communities throughout the state. Visitors to Dare County also contributed revenues to the state through taxes collected on merchandise sales as well as gasoline sales.

The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce is comprised of business people who do understand the need to cut costs in tough times. However, they also understand that an investment from the state of \$1.8 million to generate more than \$600 million flowing through the state's economy is a valid investment.

We understand the desire for the RIC to be self-sufficient. However, this transition must occur in such a way as not to destroy everything that has been accomplished thus far. Imposing a 50 percent reduction in FY 2011-12 and elimination of all funding the following year will not allow the Park to remain viable. The possibility of having to close the Park would shutter one engine of many needed to keep the economies of the Outer Banks – and the state of North Carolina – moving forward.

We respectfully, but strongly, ask that funding be restored to the Roanoke Island Commission.

Sincerely,



Robin A. Mann, Chair  
Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce  
Board of Directors

cc: Sen. Stan White  
Rep. Tim Spear  
Rep. Bill Owens  
Dare County Board of Commissioners