

# Computer-assisted Promotion of Recreational Opportunities in Natural Resource Areas: A Demonstration and Case Example<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Filevision IV is a multilayer imaging and data-base management system that combines drawing, filing and extensive report-writing capabilities (Filevision IV, 1988). Filevision IV users access data by attaching graphics to text-oriented data-base records. Tourist attractions, support services, and geographic features can be located on a base map of an area or region. Record-keeping and customized responses to visitors' inquiries are accomplished with powerful report generating and mail merge capabilities. These features provide the agency with a cost-effective tool to interpret the recreational opportunities in natural resource and surrounding areas to potential visitors and tour brokers.

In 1989, an interdisciplinary, interagency team began examining ways to use technology to market the recreational opportunities of a nondestination county in northern California. The purpose of the project was to develop ranch vacations using area farmers and ranchers as hosts and guides for hunting, fishing, and other forms of recreation. Field interviews were used to inventory existing services and attractions. Geographic information was collected to locate each property on a data-base map and photographs were taken of major attractions at each site (Sheffield, Furr, Nelson and McIntyre 1991).

Insufficient accommodations and attractions proved to be a limitation of the ranch vacation approach to tourism development. One strategy to address this situation would be a partnership of area agencies, private landowners, and businesses to develop and promote the attractions and services needed for a successful tourism industry.

In northern California, Federal agencies such as the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Park Service are among the largest land stewards in many counties. These resource agencies are grappling with budget and personnel reductions, changing clientele, and increasing pressure to serve as partners or catalysts for tourism development. Software packages such as Filevision IV provide an inexpensive and sophisticated tool to create timely, high quality, customized responses to visitor inquiries about area attractions and services.

## Software Overview and Features

Filevision IV, the software selected for this demonstration, combines a multilayer data-base with a drawing program. In creating the data-base, individual records are developed for each site. Within each record, attractions, activities, and services are keyword indexed. Photographs can be scanned or imported into the data-base record. Each attraction or service is entered into the data file as a record and as a location on the base map.

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A unique aspect of this software is its ability to link text-oriented data-base information with spatial information such as pictures, diagrams, or maps. This object-data-base link allows a user to attach a record to its location on a map. Once a record is linked to its place on the map, the user can click on the appropriate icon or polygon to retrieve the full record about a site. Enlargements ("pop-ups") and shaded thematic maps can be created to illustrate key areas such as campgrounds, hiking trails, interpretive sites and other areas of special interest to visitors. Links can also be established between two or more data files. For example, separate files can be created for each community in the vicinity of the natural resource area. When accessed via the link, a new file, complete with a new map (e.g., a nearby downtown commercial district), is opened and the resource area map is closed. Up to 32 data-bases or data-base layers can be established in one working file.

Once the data-base has been created, it can be utilized in a variety of ways. Maps and records can be printed or viewed on a computer screen. The entire data-base can be queried, sorted, and presented using a highlight command to locate only those records matching the potential visitor's specifications. Files can be viewed graphically (on the map), or an entire record can be retrieved and viewed intact. Specific records can be transferred into form letters for personalized responses to inquiries. Mailing labels, form letters, and custom reports are easily created and managed using embedded word-processing capabilities.

## Implications and Applications For Natural Resource Agencies

Although Filevision or similar software packages have been utilized in tourism and recreation settings (Devine and Kuo 1991; Foust and Botts 1991; McNiel and Supernowics 1991), they were used in destination areas or urban environments. This proposal is unique in its approach to tourism development in rural areas with natural resource agencies but no strong tourism industry. This technology has powerful potential to aid in marketing an area to visitors, thereby stimulating demand.

In northern California rural areas that are not destinations, the natural resource base is often the most promising attraction and resource agency personnel have the tools, training, and technology to participate in cooperative ventures with other area stakeholders. Further, if agency resources have already been entered into a data-base, the file importing capabilities of Filevision IV reduce data-base development time and eliminate duplicate mapping.

Because natural resource areas cross-county borders, agency personnel are in a unique position to encourage cross-jurisdictional collaborations. This is important since a single rural community or county may possess an insufficient number of attrac-

Lions and services to draw many visitors. Acting as a partner to community-based hospitality service providers, private landowners, and local economic development organizations, resource agencies can serve as lead agencies in rural tourism promotion in northern California. Centralized reservations and information can aid in regional tourism development and promotion. Information exchange and referrals can be facilitated as can the training and planning needed to create a vital visitor support system.

## References

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