

# Guidance Document for Local Governments

## PART I: OVERVIEW AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The “**Tennessee Adventure Tourism and Rural Development Act of 2011**” creates a mechanism by which communities can apply to be certified as an adventure tourism district (“district”). Certification as a district allows certain businesses to qualify for a jobs tax credit specific to the Adventure Tourism Act. Certification of a district must be obtained by receiving approval from both the commissioner of the Department of Revenue (“DOR”) and the commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development (“ECD” or “the department”) (collectively, “the departments”). This approval is based upon a “best interests of the state” determination made by DOR and approved by ECD. This guidance document has been drafted to help local governments navigate the certification process. Items requiring action by local governments are noted as “Action Item” in **bold** below.

### **ACTION ITEM:**

**To apply for certification as a district, a local governing body must authorize the creation of a district by a two-thirds (2/3) vote. Alternatively, two or more local governing bodies may enter into an intergovernmental agreement for a district that contains area within the boundaries of more than one local government. Adventure tourism professionals may petition local governing bodies for creation of a district. Such petition must include specific business plans based on quantifiable data demonstrating that the creation of an adventure tourism district would enhance sustainable economic development in the area. Upon approval by the local governing body as may be required, the district plan must be submitted to DOR and ECD.**

Upon receipt of the district plan by DOR and ECD, the departments must make a determination as to whether the allocation of franchise and excise tax credits is in the “best interests of the state.” This determination consists of three criteria:

- 1) That the qualified business enterprise or enterprises made within an adventure tourism district are a result of the special allocation and tax credits provided for in § 67-4-2109(b)(2)(C);
- 2) That the adventure tourism district is a result of such qualified business enterprise or enterprises; and

3) That the district is not structured to create a competitive advantage for one business.

A “qualified business enterprise” is defined as “an enterprise in which the business has made the required capital investment necessary [*\$500,000 in accordance with § 67-4-2109(a)(7)*] to permit the creation or expansion of [...] **tourism related businesses, including, but not limited to, restaurants, lodging establishments, or other tourism related attractions.**” Accordingly, any “tourism related business” including restaurants, lodging establishments and other tourism related attractions may form the basis of a local governing body’s application for creation of a district and may benefit from the tax credits provided for in the Adventure Tourism Act once a district is certified by DOR and ECD.

**If a district is certified by DOR and ECD,** “qualified business enterprises” in the district may receive special tax credits which are administered by DOR. The requirements to be eligible for the credit vary based upon the tier designation of the county in which the business resides. If the qualified business enterprise is located in a Tier 1 enhancement county, the business must create 25 qualified jobs as defined in § 67-4-2109(a)(6). If the qualified business enterprise is in a Tier 2 enhancement county, the business must create 19 qualified jobs as defined in § 67-4-2109(a)(6). If the qualified business enterprise is in a Tier 3 enhancement county, the business must create 13 qualified jobs as defined in § 67-4-2109(a)(6). If these requirements are met, a credit of \$4,500 per qualified job will be allowed. This credit may offset the business’s franchise and excise tax liability. These credits can be carried forward for three years for businesses in Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties and five years for businesses in Tier 3 counties. Additionally, businesses in certified districts may receive promotional support from the Department of Tourism through its existing resources.

## **PART II: ECD APPLICATION PROCESS**

**Application Requirements.** Interested local governments will find ECD’s streamlined application for certification of an adventure tourism district online at: <http://tn.gov/ecd/AdventureTourism.shtml>. The application will require local governments to provide ECD with certain information regarding the proposed district. All questions on the application must be answered thoroughly and completely in order to be considered for certification.

### **ACTION ITEM:**

**All interested local governments must submit their completed applications to ECD by April 15, 2015. The department will then review all completed applications. Approved applications will receive certification for a period of three (3) years. Upon expiration of the three (3) year period, a local government must submit a new, complete application for certification.**

**Filling Out the Application.** Local governments should fill out the application thoroughly and completely. The proposed district must be assigned a name by which it will be identified for certification and tax credit administration purposes. The preparer should provide the name of the

mayor or executive as well as contact information for the local government. If the local government was petitioned by an adventure tourism professional, the preparer will be required to provide information concerning that professional, including the company's FEIN and headquarters address. The application will require the local government to list one or more eligible adventure tourism activities that can or will be conducted in the proposed district. The list of eligible activities can be found at T.C.A. § 11-11-203.

**ACTION ITEM:**

The local government will also be required to upload four supporting documents in order to complete its application: 1) a copy of the resolution from the local governing body authorizing creation of the district (T.C.A. § 11-11-204); 2) a parcel map of the proposed district (in order to administer tax credits if a district is approved, DOR requires a parcel map of the proposed district); 3) a business plan based on “quantifiable data demonstrating that the creation of an adventure tourism district would enhance sustainable economic development in the area” (T.C.A. § 11-11-204(b)); and 4) a notarized letter from the local government mayor or executive that contains the following statement:

*“I, [local government mayor or executive], hereby confirm that this application, including all attachments, does not contain any representations of fact which are false or misleading in any respect.”*

## PART III: POST-CERTIFICATION REPORTING AND PROCEDURES

**Claiming of Tax Credits.** Qualified business enterprises located within the certified adventure tourism district must apply to DOR in order to claim tax credits under the Adventure Tourism Act. DOR will provide forms to enable those qualified business enterprises to apply for credits for which they may be eligible.’

**ACTION ITEM:**

Each local government which has received certification of an adventure tourism district must submit an annual report to the department that includes the following information: a complete list of businesses in the district, including the location of incorporation of those businesses; the number of jobs created by each entity during the reporting year; and the capital investment by each entity during the reporting year. This report is due to the department on July 1<sup>st</sup> of the year following certification and on July 1<sup>st</sup> of each year thereafter throughout the period of certification.

**Redrawn Districts.** Once certified, a district will not be redrawn or altered during the three (3) year period. A district may only be redrawn or altered in a new application for certification following the end of the three (3) year period.

**Revocation of Certification.** If at any time during the three (3) year period the departments find that any of the representations made by the local government in its application were false or misleading, the departments may, in their discretion, revoke the certification of the district.

## PART IV: NEED ASSISTANCE?

If you have any questions regarding ECD's role in the Adventure Tourism and Rural Development Act of 2011 or the application process, please contact Ramay Winchester at 615-975-4237 or [ramay.w.winchester@tn.gov](mailto:ramay.w.winchester@tn.gov).