Indicators site studies tourism
EWU Web site project invites leaders to form tourism questions

By Youssef Sleiman
Of The Miner

COLVILLE – A project to build a Web site showing local statistics for Pend Oreille, Stevens and Ferry counties is inviting business and community leaders to pose the questions the statistics Web site will be answering.

A recreation and tourism focus group will meet Friday, Feb. 19, from 2-4 p.m., at the Colville Center of the Community Colleges of Spokane, 985 S. Elm, in Colville.

The Web site project, from Eastern Washington University’s Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis, has been coordinating with Tri-County Economic Development District (TEDD) since last fall. Already six focus groups have reviewed other topics: people, schools and education, health, economic vitality, environment and public safety.

A developing site

In December, the project’s leader Patrick Jones spoke about the interest many in the region had about recreation and tourism.

According to the agenda, meeting attendees will be briefed on the project’s progress thus far, explain how the data is used, then define the indicators for the tri-county area, then finally discuss and refine those definitions.

The EWU institute has created similar “community indicator” Web sites for Walla Walla County as well as a joint site for Chelan-Douglas counties. The Web site project, federally funded for start-up costs since last April, may have a Web site available for the tri-county area in April or May this year, Jones said in December.

The Community Indicators Project is designed to provide a regional snapshot of a large collection of data elements that can provide business, public sector, and civic leaders with a more factual understanding of the region as they plan and make decisions on present and future activities and ventures. Each Web site product is custom-built through the focus group process. Area leaders provide input on the questions they would like the statistics to answer.

Funding sources

A $200,000 federal grant in 2009 allowed the institute to begin the community indicator project for Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties.

Now, Washington’s senators Patty Murray, D-Wash., and Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., have both helped bring an additional $250,000 to the institute’s efforts “to foster economic development in rural counties of the Inland Northwest,” according to a EWU press release.
The senators have helped secure a federal appropriation to support start-up costs for the individualized Web sites – as well as begin a thorough economic analysis of business opportunities in rural counties. Surveys of minority business owners will be included in the analysis.

“As our economy continues to struggle it is more important than ever that we support efforts to foster economic development in rural counties,” said Murray, who is chairwoman of the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee. Sen. Cantwell said, “The community indicators project helps underserved populations identify and capitalize on economic opportunities that create and maintain jobs.”

To attend the tourism and recreation focus group, contact TEDD at 509-684-4571 or at mconner@teddonline.com.