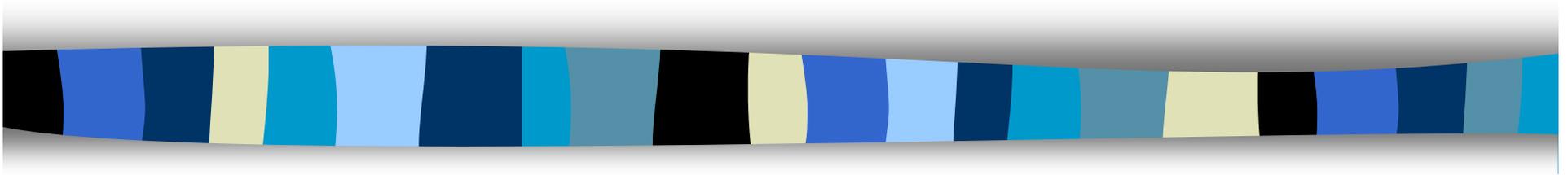


# The Lower Rio Grande Valley Nature Tourism



## Developing a Research Approach

- Andy Skadberg
- Geography 7305, May 6, 1999



# Introduction

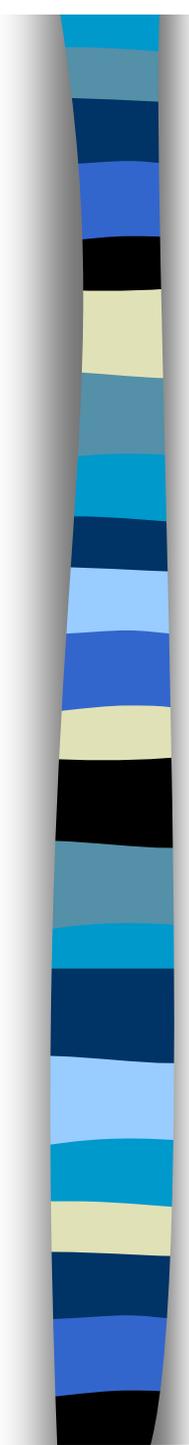
Original topic was to review historical literature about the LRGV to create a backdrop for analysis of Nature Tourism development

Lack of material--refocused paper



# New Agenda

- Overview historical material found
- Overview the situation in the Valley
- Literature review for the development of a theoretical framework
  - cultural ecology
  - political ecology



# Literature Searches

- Wildlife, birds, nature, ecological
- Tourism development, nature tourism
- Historical
- Socio-economic and political
  
- People's attitudes towards nature and tourism



# Valley Historical Literature

- History books--Texas/Mexico
- A lot of “Boosterism”
- Some of more recent address serious social concerns
- Most have very little reference to Nature



## Valley Literature cont.

- Research literature was virtually non-existent
- In the promotional pieces some reference to how beautiful the Valley was--nothing usable for a research paper



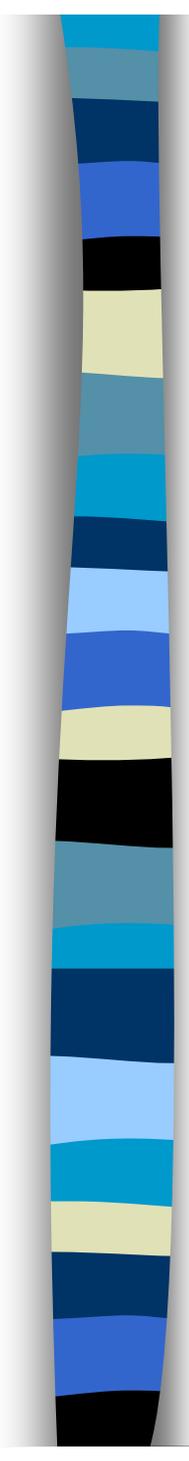
## Valley Literature cont.

- Really decided to re-focus, 1 reference
- “In almost every home in Mexico, one finds flowers and singing birds, for all Mexicans seem blessed with the green thumb and all love their feathered friends” (Gilpin 1954)



# Questions--from looking at the Valley

- How do efforts at nature tourism appeal to local people? Isn't the success of nature tourism dependent of the support of local people?
- Can nature tourism benefit the Mexican majority and economically disadvantaged? Have efforts been focused to consider these groups? If so how?
- Is there a way to study the situation and gain insights into the most beneficial development of nature tourism?



# Study Area-Ecological

- Two bird flyways meet
- Up to about 500 species of birds
- Ecologically diverse
- 90% of natural brushland has been lost
- 99% riparian vegetation cleared



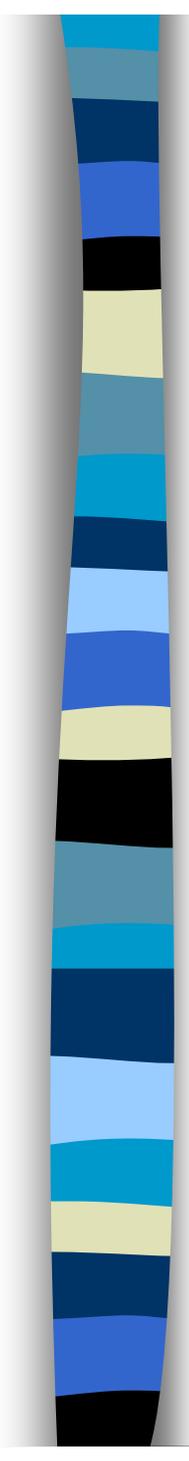
# Study Area--Socio-economic

- Population growth by 2020 predicted to be 4.3 million
- Half population below poverty level
- Development pressures
  - Trade                      -Manufacturing
  - Agriculture, Oil and Gas, Tourism
  - Trade with Mexico up 250% since 1983
  - Predicted up 400% by 2020



## Pressures against conservation or nature tourism

- Natural areas are fragmented
- Several resource mgmt. interests
- More areas more mgmt. problems
- Urban and economic development



# Literature review

- Tourism/nature tourism
- Resource management
- Social driving forces
- Perceptions and attitudes
- Gov't policies, roles of institutions
- Theoretical frameworks
  - human ecology, cultural ecology, ecological anthropology, political ecology



# Tourism/Nature tourism

- **Defintion:** an aspect of adventure tourism where the focus is upon the study, and/or observation of flora, fauna and/or landscape. It tends towards small-scale, but it can become mass or incipient in many national parks.



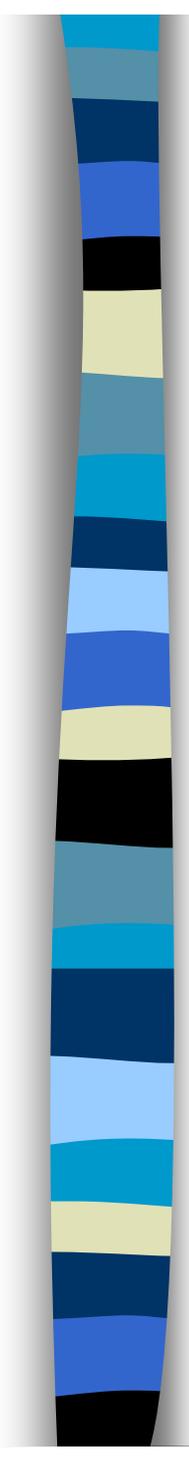
# Tourism Theory

- **MacCannel** (1976) Five stage semiotic perspective of development in a destination
  - naming
  - framing
  - elevation
  - enshrinement
  - mechanical and social reproduction



# Tourism Theory

- **Butler** (1980) Evolution of a destination over time (life cycle)
  - exploration
  - involvement
  - development
  - consolidation
  - stagnation
  - decline



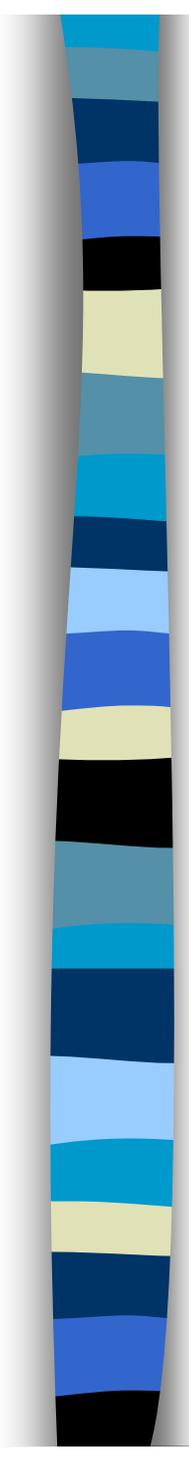
# Tourism Theory

- Two alternative perspectives
  - One looks at an area as it becomes an attraction
  - Other is the life cycle from introduction to decline



# Tourism Theory

- What is missing?
- A comprehensive approach that places Nature Tourism in context



# Nature Tourism

- Has become a “buzzword”
- Research is fragmented
- No dependable theory
  
- Nature tourism brings together
  - economic development
  - resource conservation & management



# Driving forces--Nature Tourism

- Human driving forces-generalized
  - attitudes/beliefs
  - the economy
  - resource institutions
  - political structures
- These factors influence/instigate the development of NT



# Nature Tourism

- Complex strategic behavior
- Inter-dependencies between environment, local communities, institutions
- To analyze need to consider various socioeconomic and cultural factors
- Cultural ecology
- Political ecology
  - used for less developed areas



# Cultural ecology

- Studies relationship of people and the environment
  - emphasis: human activities, behavior and adaptation
  - avoids broader socio-political considerations
  - how people live within environmental and social constraints
  - human behavior has cognitive dimensions



# Political ecology

- Also, studies relationship of people and the environment; however, it
  - emphasizes social structures and political institutions--roles and power
  - driving forces within and beyond the region



# Political vs. Cultural Ecology

- Cultural ecology emphasizes human adaptation
  - including proximate activities and driving forces immediate to the region
- Political ecology emphasizes
  - driving forces both within and beyond the region



# Conclusion

- Cultural and Political Ecology complement each other as theories
  - Nature tourism is a complex human activity
  - CE & PE address different scales and aspects of human activities