

# ALLEGHENIES OUTDOORS

*Moving the Recreation Economy Forward*

March 2024



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alleghenies region of Pennsylvania hosts a diverse offering of outdoor recreation experiences, often located in close proximity to the region's historic downtowns, residential areas, and commercial centers. The economic impact of outdoor recreation in the region is seen in the 240+ private businesses that are directly involved in providing outdoor recreation goods, services, and experiences. More broadly, employers, economic development organizations, and local governments are recognizing the potential of outdoor recreation as a tool for business and workforce recruitment and retention, and are increasingly incorporating outdoor recreation stewardship and promotion into their work.

Increased interest in outdoor recreation as an economic driver in the region has revealed shared challenges as well, notably that:

- Increasing costs, uncertain funding streams, and limited volunteer capacity are challenges for maintaining recreational trails and facilities to a high standard of quality.
- Residents and visitors aren't always aware of recreational opportunities and aren't always welcomed in.
- There is limited state-level support for this economic sector compared to others.

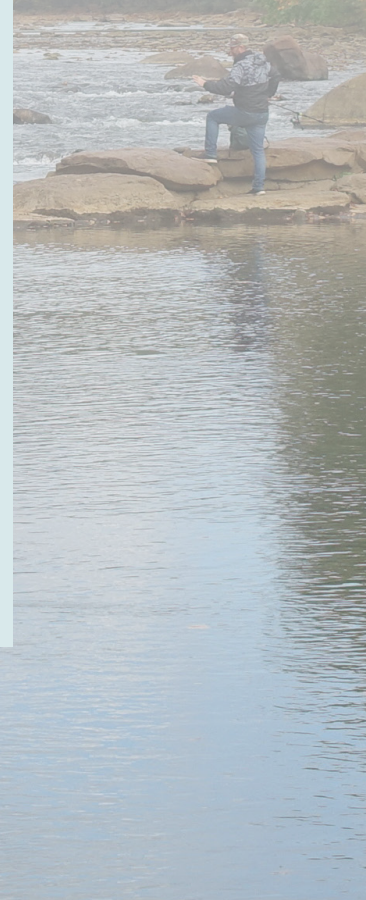
***Alleghenies Outdoors: Moving the Recreation Economy Forward*** is an effort to define the current outdoor economy of Alleghenies region of Pennsylvania, to examine its strengths, weaknesses, and areas of opportunity, and to lay out a set of principles, strategies, and actions that can serve as catalysts. This plan sets the stage for needed regional collaboration around the outdoor economy and offers ideas and approaches that individual non-profits, governments, economic development organizations, land managers, and advocates can incorporate into their ongoing work.

## ***Principles of Advancement for the Regional Outdoor Economy***

- **BE STRATEGIC:** Strategically invest in and steward recreational assets and experiences.
- **BE COLLABORATIVE:** Leveraged shared resources across the region to steward the outdoor economy.
- **BE WELCOMING:** Welcome residents and visitors into the outdoors and into communities.
- **BE A DESTINATION:** Steward and enhance key recreational destinations for residents and visitors.
- **BE CHAMPIONS:** Advocate for and celebrate the role of the outdoor economy as a positive force in the region.

## ***Key Regional Actions to Move the Outdoor Economy Forward***

- **TRAIL STEWARDSHIP:** Through regional partnerships and collaboration, build needed capacity for recreational trail development and long-term stewardship.
- **SHOWING PROGRESS:** Track and disseminate information on outdoor recreation participation, investment, and economic contributions in the region.
- **WORKING TOGETHER:** Foster regional cooperation amongst economic development organizations for enhancing the outdoor economy.





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

Nestled in the heart of south-central Pennsylvania within the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, the Alleghenies landscape comprises six counties: Cambria, Somerset, Blair, Bedford, Huntingdon, and Fulton. Spanning a vast 3,400 square miles, this region is characterized by its rural charm, extensive forests, and the Allegheny Mountain Range, a prominent feature that connects each of the six counties.

The Alleghenies captivates with its diverse geography, showcasing low, rugged mountain ranges, picturesque rolling countryside, and meandering river valleys. This varied topography supports an array of outdoor recreation opportunities for residents, and the proximity of the region to major metropolitan areas promotes recreational tourism.

Waterways crisscross the region, with the Juniata River and Raystown Lake, the largest inland lake in Pennsylvania, offering 30 miles of pristine waters and 118 miles of shoreline, respectively. Embraced by a humid continental climate at a relatively high elevation, the region experiences cool winters with snow and beautiful temperate summers, creating a year-round haven for outdoor pursuits.

## WHY AN OUTDOOR ECONOMY PLAN?

***“Embracing risk and collaboration are central to the work of successful regions in the 21st Century.” – Alleghenies Ahead, 2018.***

Much has been written and said about the economic transitions and challenges experienced in the Alleghenies region. Two quotes from stakeholders at the beginning of *Alleghenies Ahead: Shared Strategies for a Stronger Region* summarize this predicament:

- » *“We need jobs. Jobs will solve our problems.”*
- » *“We can’t find people for the jobs we do have.”*

Rather than a pivot away from these challenges, harnessing the economic potential of outdoor recreation is an opportunity for the region to address these overriding economic and demographic issues head-on. Employers, economic development organizations, and governments across the region are looking to outdoor recreation as a means for improving



Allegrippis Trails at Raystown Lake Recreation Area



Seven Springs Ski Area



Stonycreek River at Greenhouse Park, Johnstown



Confluence, PA & The Great Allegheny Passage Trail



the quality of life for residents, retaining businesses and their workforce, and attracting potential new employers and employees. Outdoor recreation tourism is both an existing economic driver in some communities across the region and an opportune complement to initiatives aimed at workforce attraction and retention. With a wealth of natural assets and existing recreational opportunities, the Alleghenies region is well-positioned to invest in outdoor recreation as a tool for moving the region forward and enhancing the region's already-robust outdoor recreation economy.

To be successful, a collaborative and comprehensive regional approach is needed. The natural landscapes and features that support outdoor recreation in the region do not conform to political boundaries, and many actors and advocates across the region's outdoor recreation industry have a similar set of goals, needs, and constraints. This approach must not only consider the outdoor recreation assets and experiences available in the region, but also the economic linkages between outdoor recreation activity and the communities where businesses operate and employees reside.



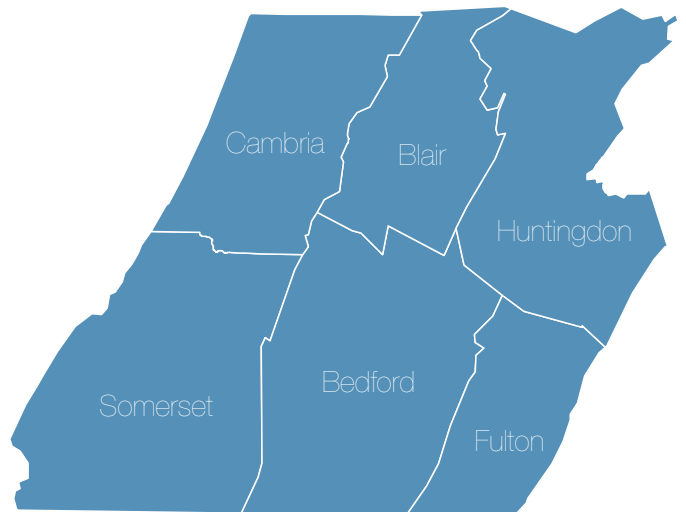
Fat Jimmy's Bike Shop & Olde Bedford Brewing

***Alleghenies Outdoors: Moving the Recreation Economy Forward*** is an effort to define the region's current outdoor recreation economy, examine strengths, weaknesses, and areas of opportunity, and lay out a set of principles, strategies, and actions that can serve as catalysts. This plan sets the stage for needed regional collaboration around the outdoor recreation economy and offers ideas and approaches that individual non-profits, governments, economic development organizations, land managers, and advocates can incorporate into their ongoing work.

## SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

The Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC) is a non-profit economic and community development organization serving the six-county Alleghenies region. Governed by a Board of Directors, including County Commissioners and private sector representatives, SAP&DC addresses human resource development, job creation, transportation infrastructure, residents' quality of life, and commissioned the development of this plan.

With a focus on assisting small and medium-sized businesses, SAP&DC provides technical and financial support and contributes to regional economic capacity-building. This includes free counseling to identify growth opportunities, aligning seamlessly with its dedication to fostering economic resilience. As the driving force behind this plan, SAP&DC emerges as a central strategic partner, leveraging its expertise and regional reach to promote initiatives that stimulate economic growth and enhance the allure of outdoor recreation in the Alleghenies and support aligned actors helping to develop this vital economic sector.



SAP&DC's Six-County Planning Region



# The Regional Outdoor Economy Today.

ROTHROCK  
Outfitters

Manufactured By  
1101  
Kanoë

Latvija

Peach Bottom, PA  
717-548-2174














# REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The Alleghenies hosts a diverse offering of outdoor recreation experiences, supported by over 450,000 acres of public land, 1,300 miles of recreational trails, major reservoirs and waterways, and mountainous terrain reaching the highest elevations in Pennsylvania. Many of these amenities are located near the region's historic downtowns, residential areas, and commercial centers. This proximity provides critical linkages between outdoor recreation experiences, residential quality of life, and tourism spending that form the basis of the region's outdoor economy.

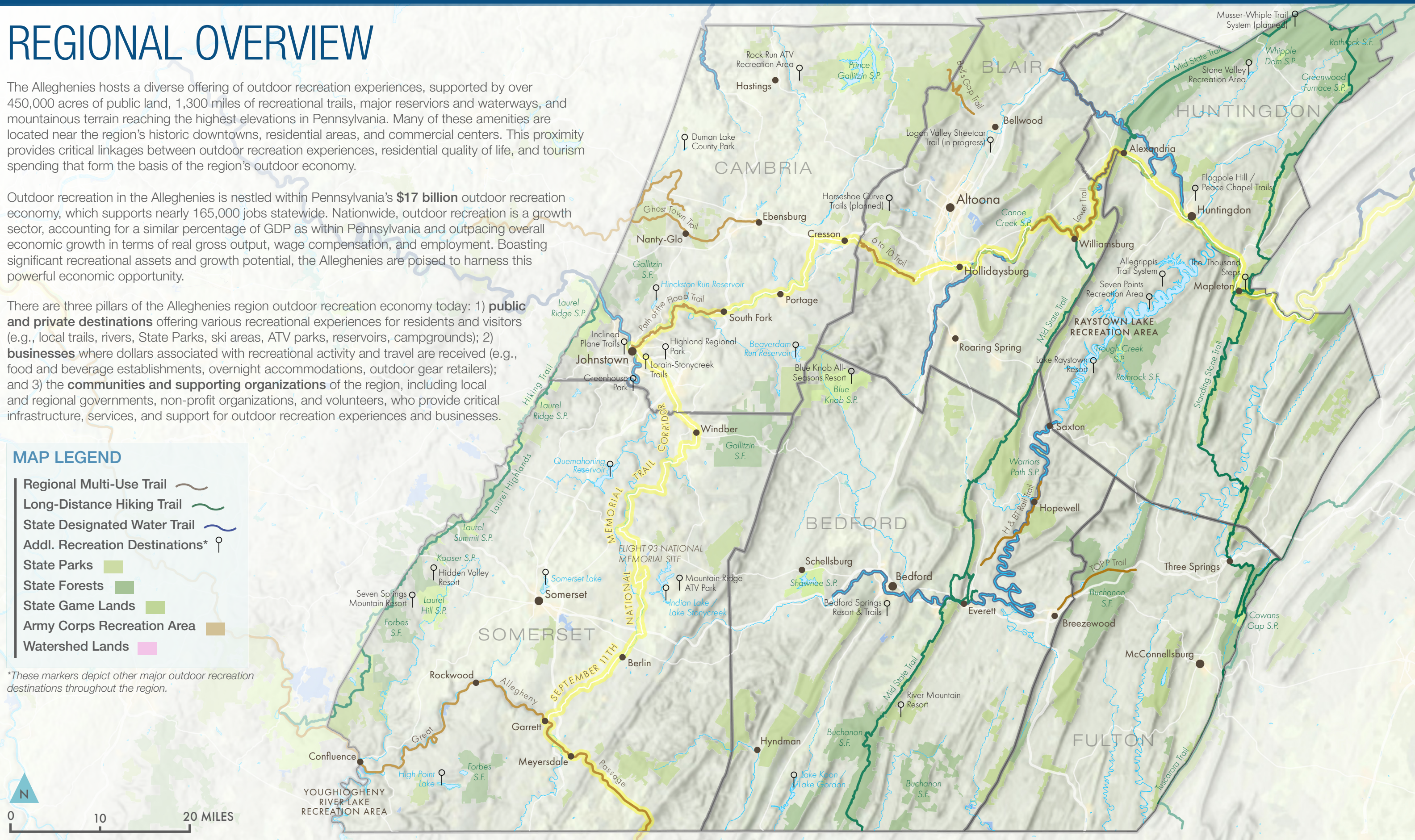
Outdoor recreation in the Alleghenies is nestled within Pennsylvania's **\$17 billion** outdoor recreation economy, which supports nearly 165,000 jobs statewide. Nationwide, outdoor recreation is a growth sector, accounting for a similar percentage of GDP as within Pennsylvania and outpacing overall economic growth in terms of real gross output, wage compensation, and employment. Boasting significant recreational assets and growth potential, the Alleghenies are poised to harness this powerful economic opportunity.

There are three pillars of the Alleghenies region outdoor recreation economy today: 1) **public and private destinations** offering various recreational experiences for residents and visitors (e.g., local trails, rivers, State Parks, ski areas, ATV parks, reservoirs, campgrounds); 2) **businesses** where dollars associated with recreational activity and travel are received (e.g., food and beverage establishments, overnight accommodations, outdoor gear retailers); and 3) the **communities and supporting organizations** of the region, including local and regional governments, non-profit organizations, and volunteers, who provide critical infrastructure, services, and support for outdoor recreation experiences and businesses.

## MAP LEGEND

- Regional Multi-Use Trail 
- Long-Distance Hiking Trail 
- State Designated Water Trail 
- Addl. Recreation Destinations\* 
- State Parks 
- State Forests 
- State Game Lands 
- Army Corps Recreation Area 
- Watershed Lands 

\*These markers depict other major outdoor recreation destinations throughout the region.



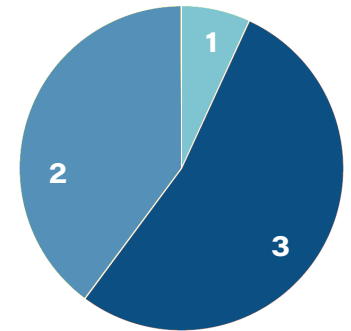


# ALLEGHENIES REGION OUTDOOR ECONOMY PROFILE

The Alleghenies region offers a diverse landscape, with each of the six counties contributing uniquely to a range of outdoor recreation opportunities. With its well-connected trail systems and state parks, the Alleghenies are strategically positioned to further integrate outdoor recreation into its economic development approach, ensuring a balanced and sustainable trajectory for the region.

## OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSET SUMMARY

- 1** 31,232 acres of State Park
- 2** 179,520 acres of State Forest
- 3** 240,192 acres of State Game Lands
- 1,361** miles of off-road trail
- 91** public access points to water
- 50** campgrounds
- 3** downhill ski areas



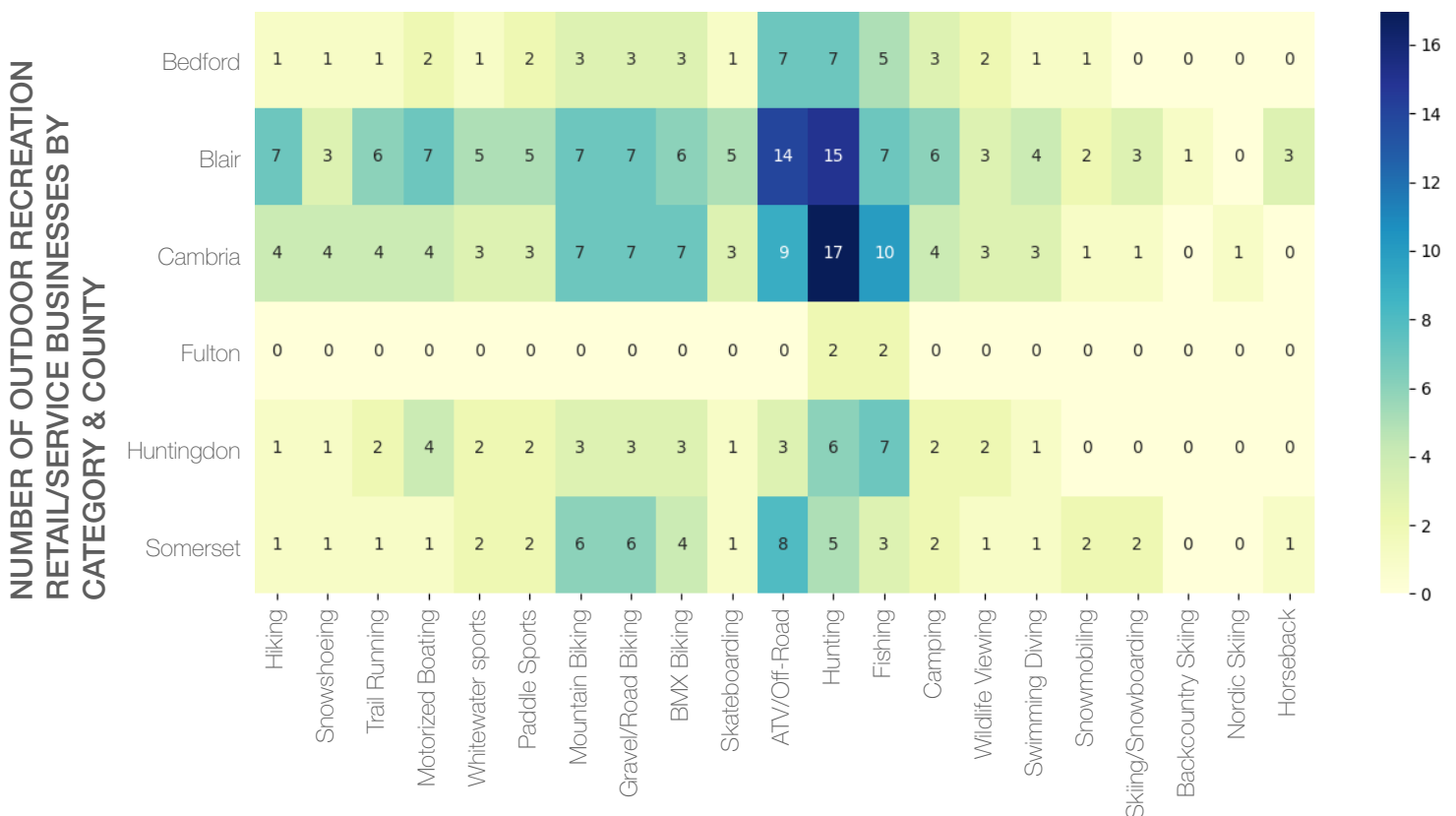
## OUTDOOR BUSINESS ASSET SUMMARY STATS

**142** outdoor recreation-related retail and service businesses (e.g., gear retailers, bike shops)

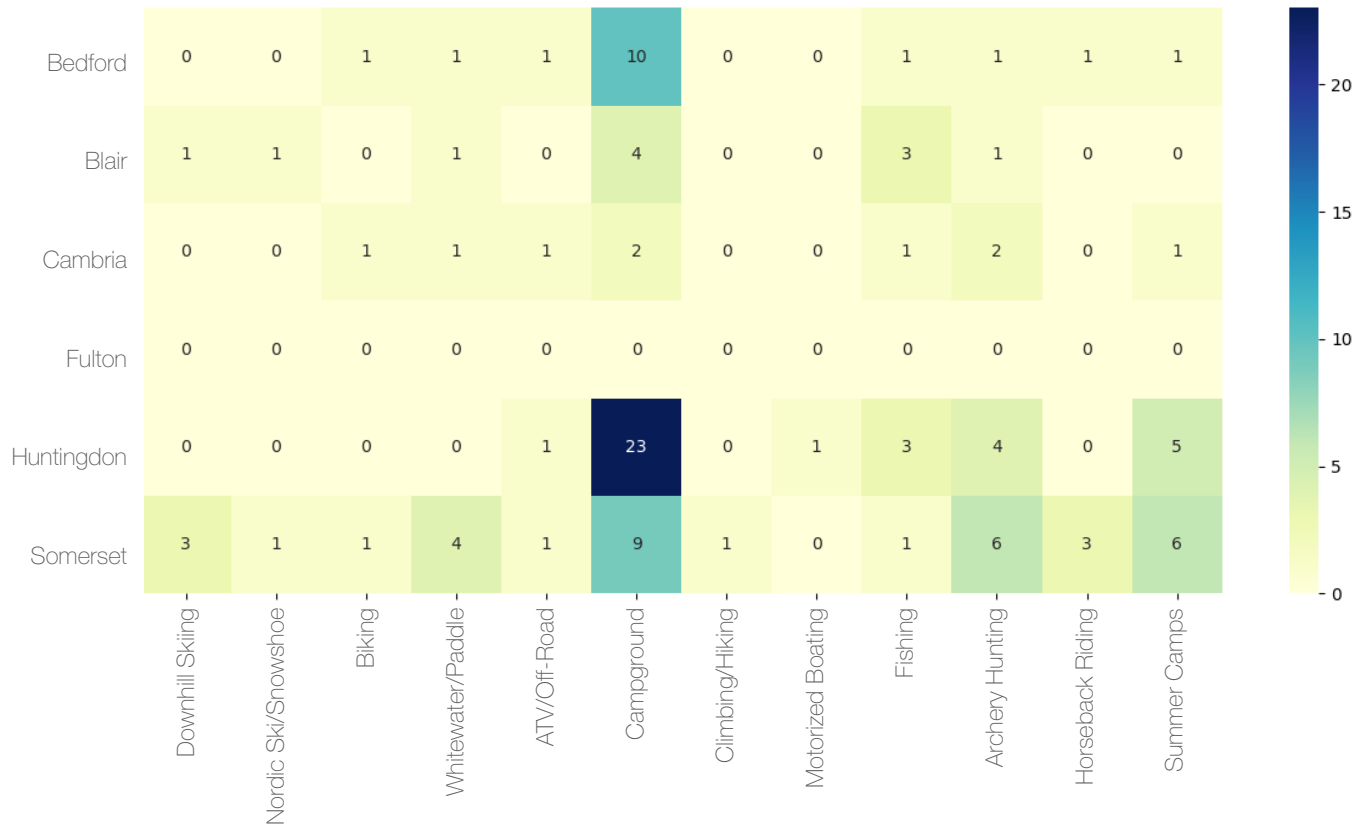
» *Most common business category: Hunting*

**98** outdoor recreation provider businesses (e.g., campgrounds, outfitters)

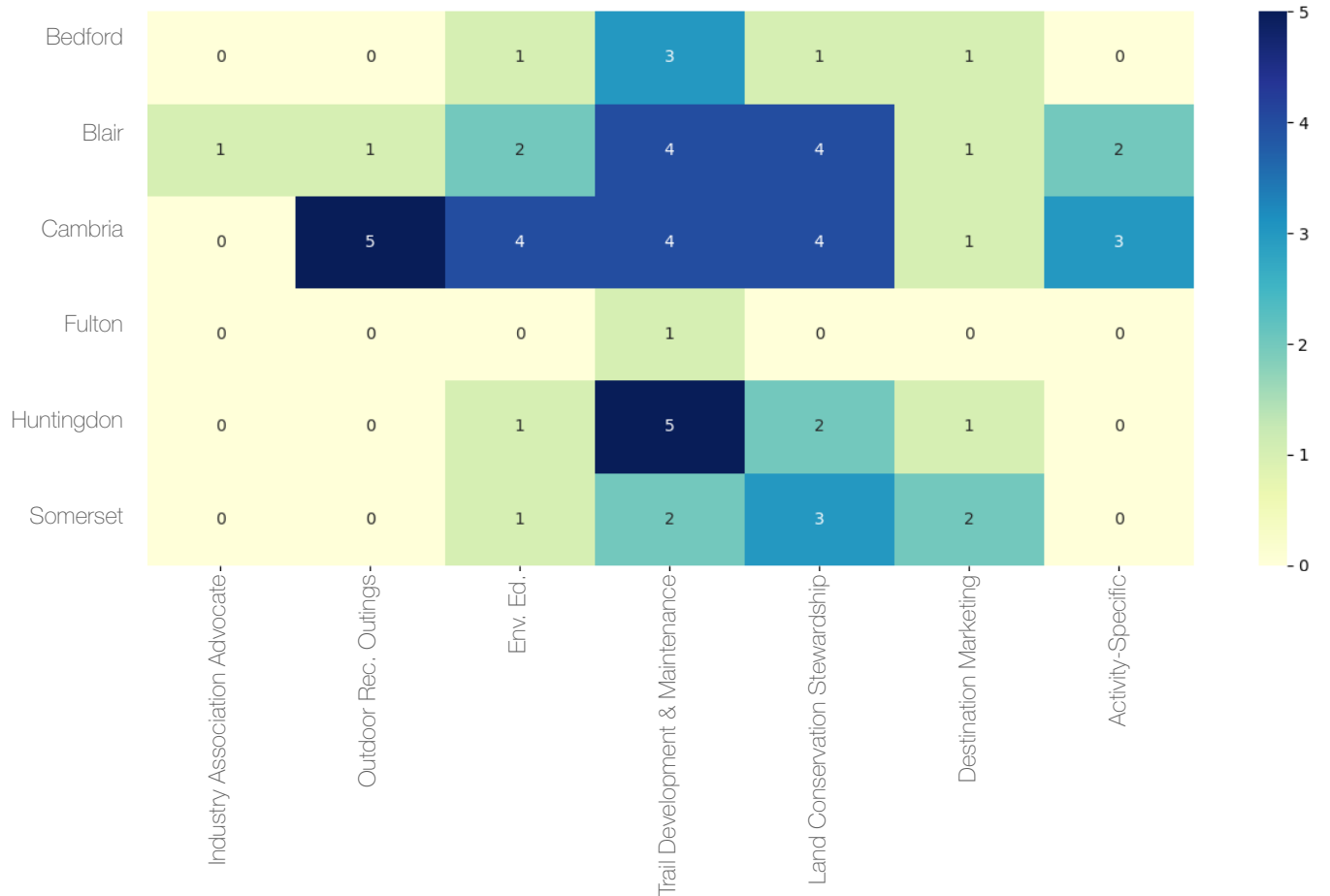
**46** outdoor recreation-related nonprofits



NUMBER OF OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDERS BY CATEGORY & COUNTY



NUMBER OF OUTDOOR REC. NON-PROFITS BY CATEGORY AND COUNTY





# BEDFORD COUNTY

## OUTDOOR ECONOMY PROFILE

Pop. 47,461



Bedford County is emerging as a vibrant hub for outdoor recreation. Home to the Bedford Springs Resort, a magnet for visitors seeking luxury and adventure, the county has the chance to bolster hiking, mountain biking, and other outdoor recreation opportunities to complement this historical destination. Notably, the Bedford County Development Association has prioritized outdoor recreation in its economic development strategy, recognizing the sector's potential for growth and sustainability. The presence of major players like the REI Distribution Center and The Organic Snack Company further solidifies Bedford as a burgeoning outdoor recreation hub, contributing significantly to the regional economy.



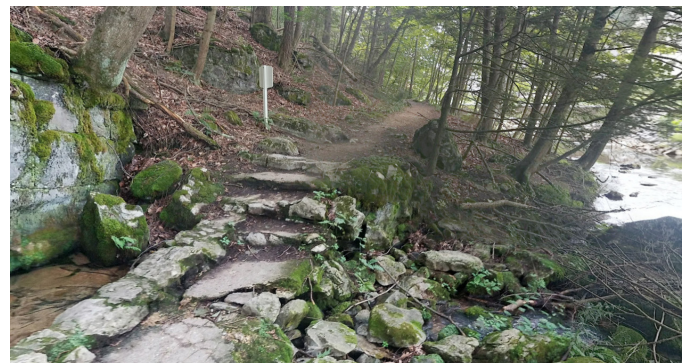
The Mid State Trail at Tenley Park.



The Olde Bedford Brewing Company.



Shawnee State Park.



Bedford Springs OMNI Resort Trails.




### KEY RECREATION DESTINATIONS

- Bedford Springs OMNI Resort & Trails
- Mid State Trail
- Shawnee State Park
- Blue Knob State Park
- Blue Knob All Seasons Resort
- Huntingdon & Broad Top Rail Trail
- The Old Pennsylvania Pike Trail (TOPP)
- River Mountain Resort
- Raystown Branch Juniata River Water Trail

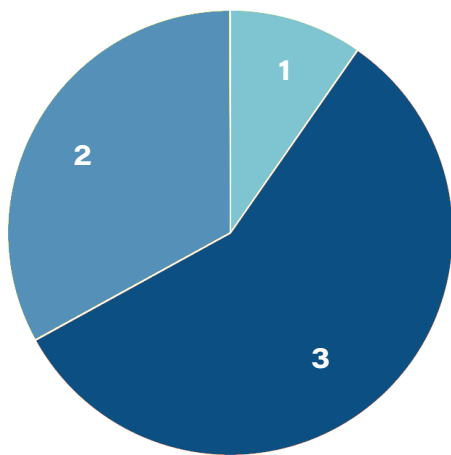
### KEY OPPORTUNITIES, NEEDS, & INITIATIVES

- Complete Bedford County Trails Plan
- In-town Events and Programming
- Invest in the TOPP Trail
- Huntingdon & Broad Top Rail Trail extension
- Align outdoor recreation investment with downtown linkages and economic impact
- Improve public awareness of available recreation assets such as Bedford Springs Trails

### OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSETS

- 1** 9,088 acres of State Park | 10% of state lands
- 2** 30,976 acres of State Forest | 33%
- 3** 53,824 acres of State Game Lands | 57%
-  **239** miles of off-road trail
-  **19** public access points to water
-  **10** campgrounds

State Lands Breakdown



### KEY AGENTS IN THE OUTDOOR ECONOMY

- Bedford County Development Association | Economic development organization
- Bedford County Conservation | Conservation authority
- Rails to Trail of Bedford County | Trail club
- Mid State Trail Association | Trail club
- Friends of Shawnee & Blue Knob | Friends organization
- Bedford Fulton Joint Recreation Authority | TOPP Trail Manager
- Bedford Joint Municipal Authority | Management entity for the Shuster Way Heritage Trail
- Bedford County Visitors Bureau | Destination marketing organization

### OUTDOOR RECREATION BUSINESSES

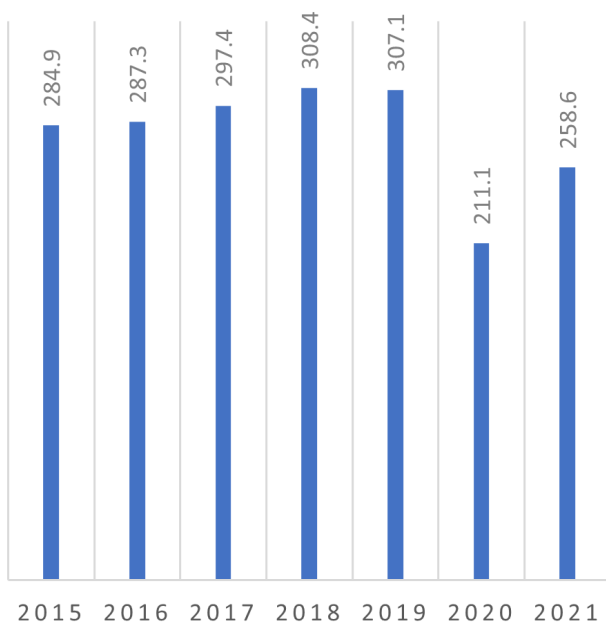
**17** outdoor recreation-related service/retail businesses

» *Most common business category: Hunting*

**14** outdoor recreation provider businesses

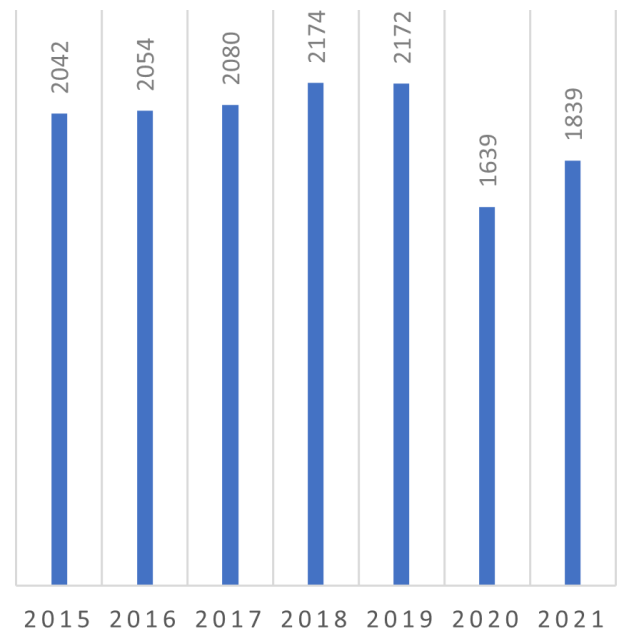
**5** outdoor recreation-related nonprofits

### TOURISM VISITOR SPENDING (\$ MILLIONS)



Source: Pennsylvania Tourism Office

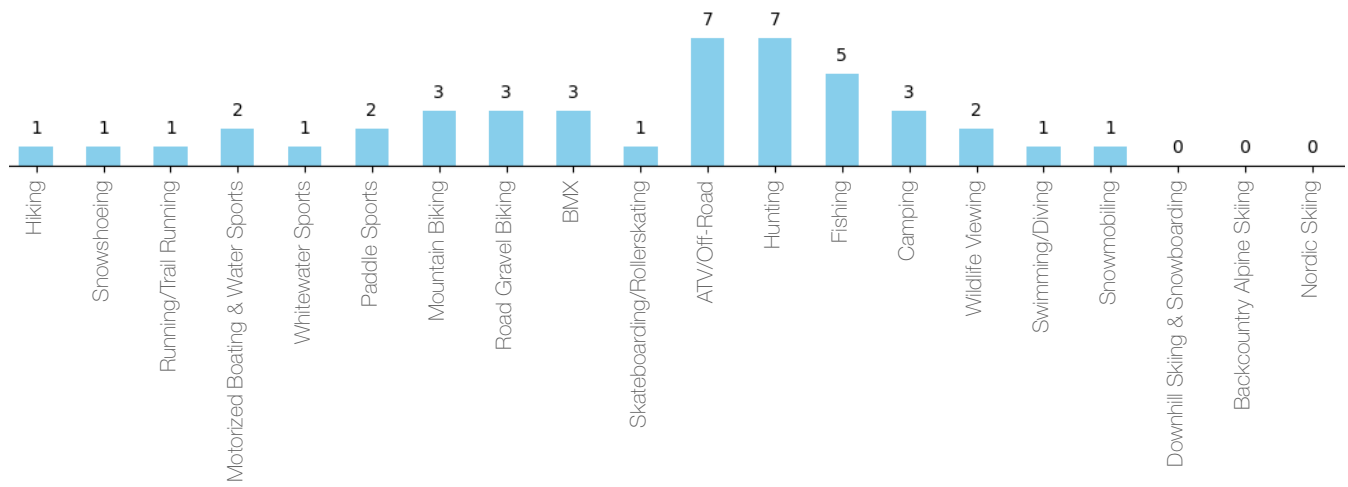
### TOURISM INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT (# JOBS)



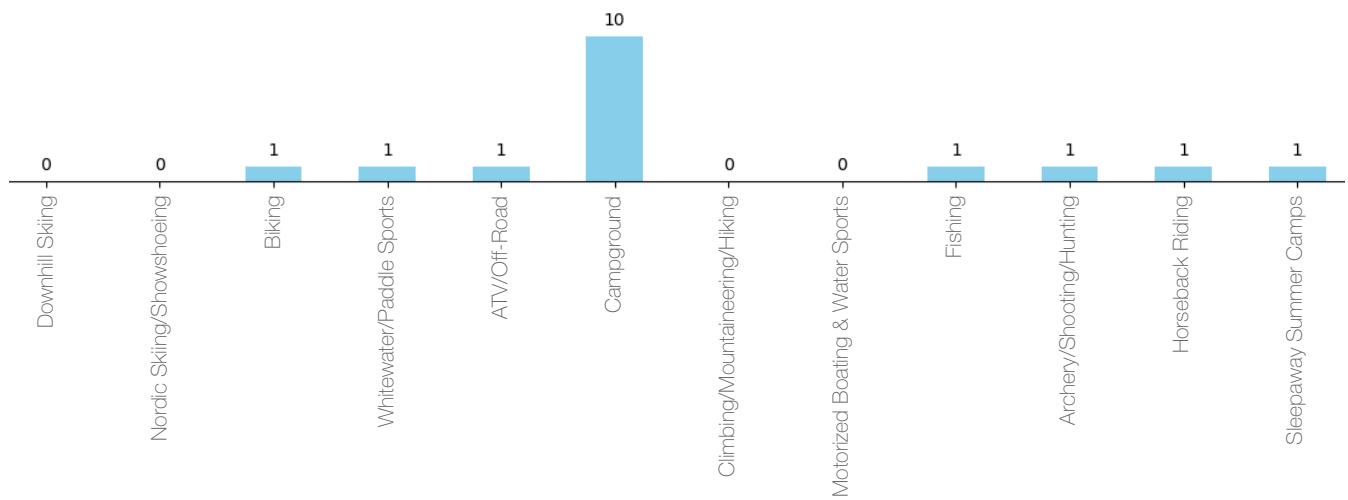


## OUTDOOR RECREATION RETAIL & SERVICE BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY

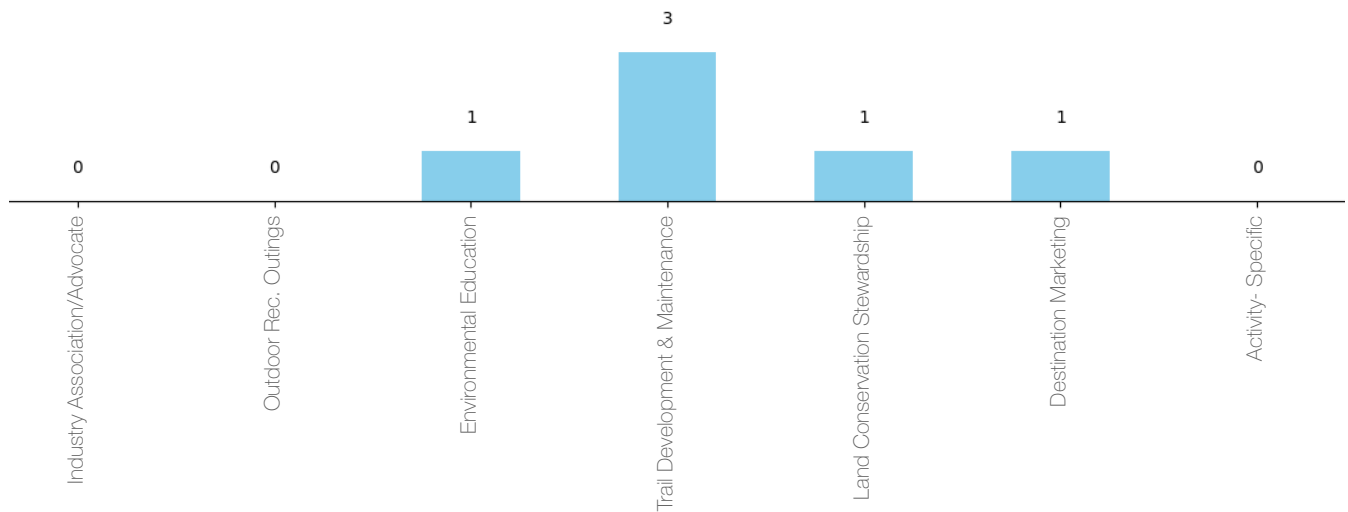
Bedford County



## OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDER BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY



## OUTDOOR RECREATION-RELATED NON PROFITS BY CATEGORY



# BLAIR COUNTY

## OUTDOOR ECONOMY PROFILE

Pop. 121,767



Blair County is a dynamic hub for outdoor enthusiasts. The Mid State Trail, weaving through picturesque landscapes, and the Lower Trail, providing a scenic route for cyclists and hikers, epitomize the county's relation to outdoor recreation. Notably, local stakeholders are exploring fresh opportunities for mountain biking around the iconic Horseshoe Curve, envisioning an expanded trail network to attract mountain biking enthusiasts. Blair County's opportunities for outdoor recreation are defined by a strong population base and excellent access to regional trails.



Canoe Creek State Park.

### KEY DESTINATIONS

- Canoe Creek State Park
- Lower Trail
- Blue Knob All Seasons Resort
- Mid State Trail
- 9/11 National Memorial Trail
- World-Famous Horseshoe Curve
- Bell's Gap Trail
- Upper Juniata River Water Trail



Hollidaysburg.

### OPPORTUNITIES, NEEDS, & INITIATIVES

- Develop the mountain bike trails at Horseshoe Curve and connect to Altoona
- Support the development of the 9/11 Trail
- Develop consistent Trail Town standards along the Lower Trail and 9/11 Trail
- Expand offerings at Canoe Creek State Park
- Complete the Logan Valley Streetcar Trail






The Lower Trail.



World-Famous Horseshoe Curve.



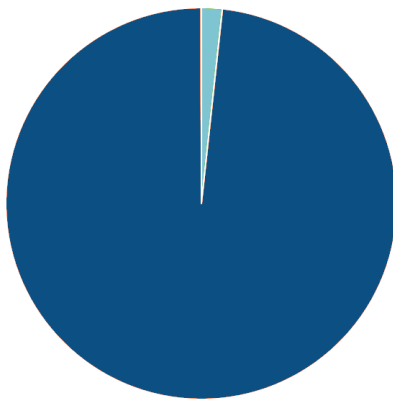
### OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSETS

- 1** 960 acres of State Park | 2%
- 2** 0 square miles of State Forest | 0%
- 3** 54,912 acres of State Game Land | 98%
-  69 miles of off road trail
-  7 water access points
-  4 campgrounds

### KEY AGENTS IN THE OUTDOOR ECONOMY

- Altoona Blair County Development Corporation | economic development
- Explore Altoona | Destination marketing organization
- Allegheny Ridge Corporation | economic development, historic preservation, outdoor recreation, and environmental conservation
- Rails to Trails of Central Pennsylvania | Trail club

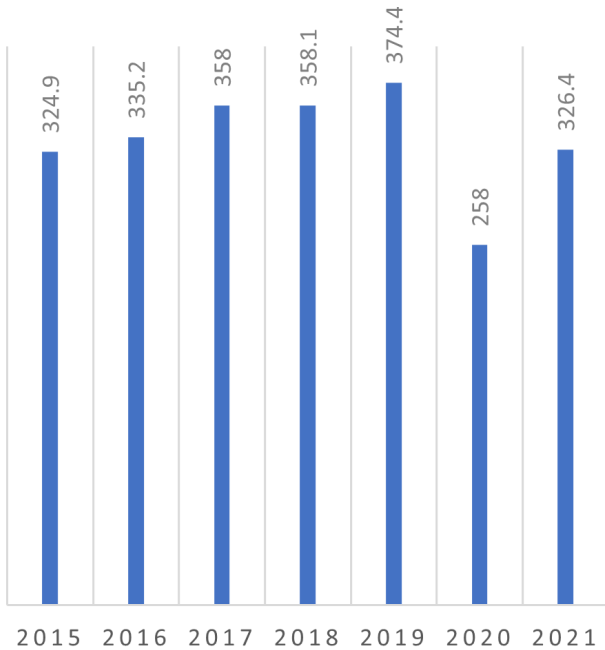
State Lands Breakdown



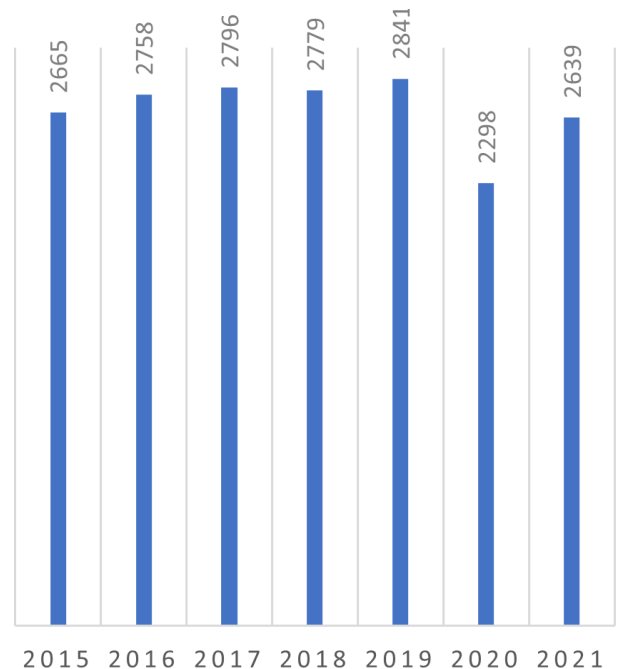
### OUTDOOR RECREATION BUSINESSES

- 43** outdoor recreation-related service/retail businesses
  - » *Most common business category: Hunting*
- 10** outdoor recreation provider businesses
- 9** outdoor recreation-related nonprofits

### TOURISM VISITOR SPENDING (MILLIONS)

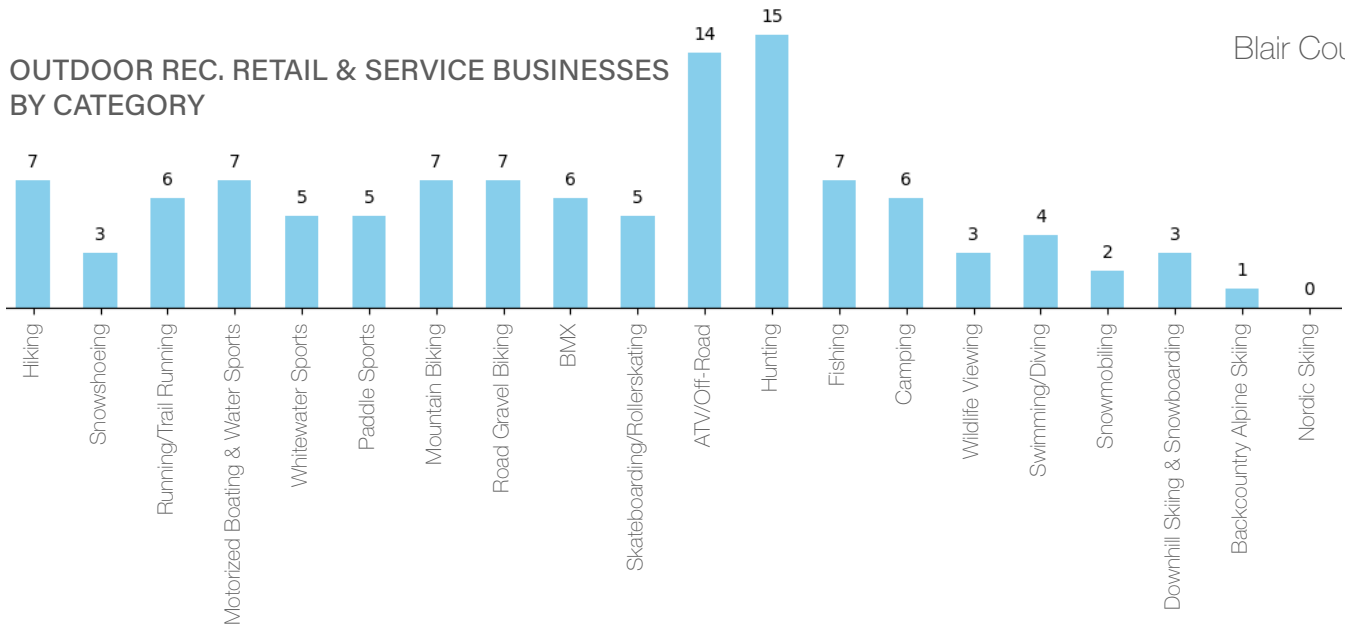


### TOURISM INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT (# JOBS)

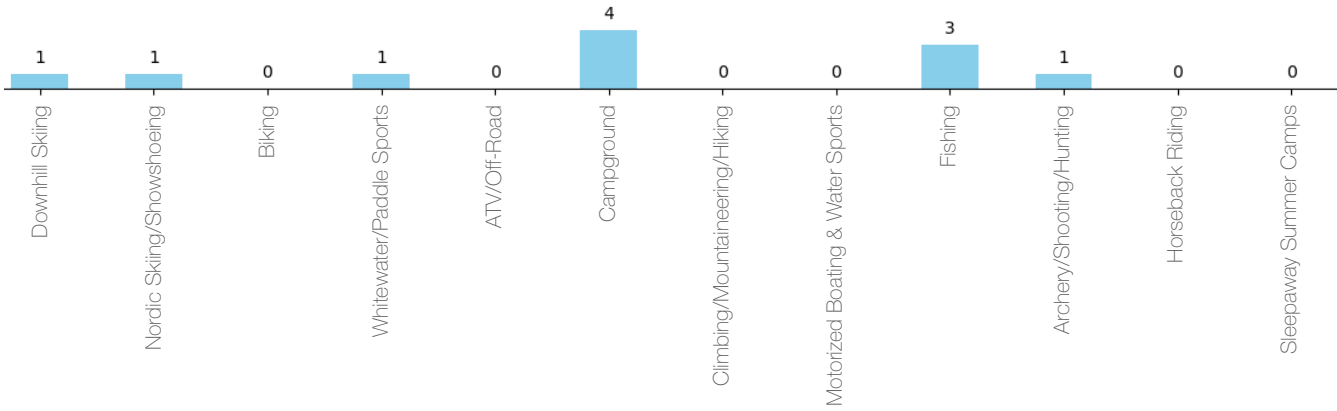


Source: Pennsylvania Tourism Office

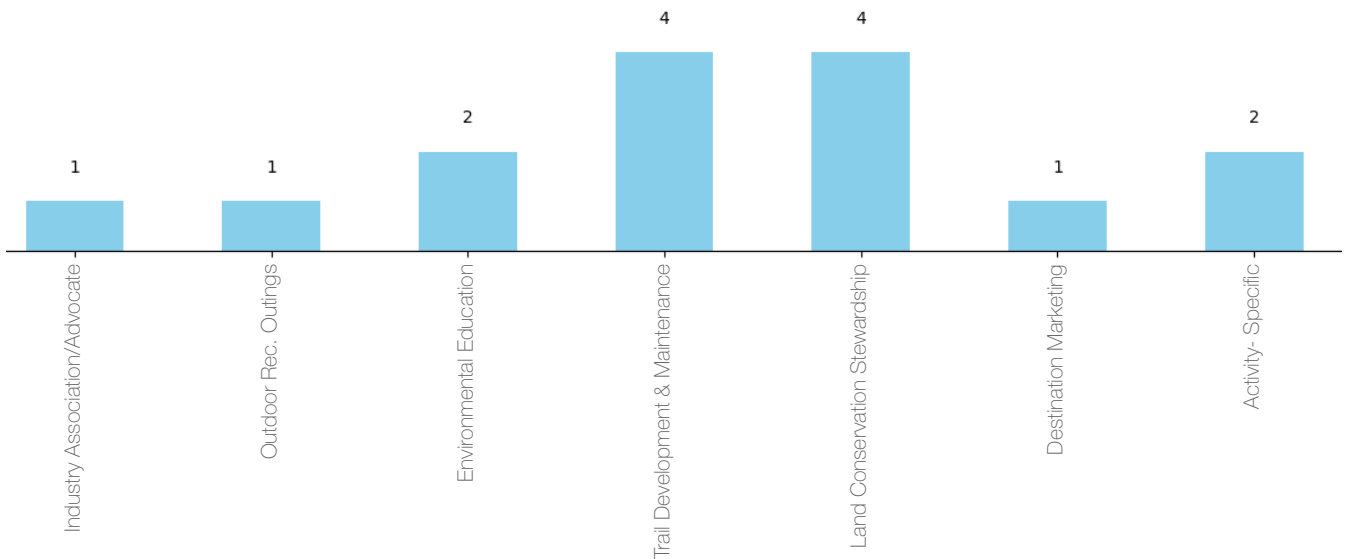
### OUTDOOR REC. RETAIL & SERVICE BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY



### OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDER BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY



### OUTDOOR RECREATION-RELATED NON PROFITS BY CATEGORY





# CAMBRIA COUNTY

## OUTDOOR ECONOMY PROFILE

Pop. 132,167



Boasting several trail systems, including the scenic Path of the Flood, Jim Mayer Riverswalk, and captivating walking trails at Stackhouse Park and Prince Gallitzin State Park, Cambria County offers a myriad of opportunities for outdoor exploration. Home to a variety of parks and public lands, the county's steep valleys and winding rivers set the stage for thrilling activities such as rafting and river access, expanding the scope of outdoor recreation. Furthermore, Cambria County's rich industrial history adds an intriguing layer to the outdoor experience, creating a unique synergy between the region's past and present. As visitors explore the trails and delve into recreational activities, they are immersed in a dynamic landscape that seamlessly blends natural beauty with historical significance, contributing to the vibrant outdoor recreation economy of the region.

### KEY DESTINATIONS

- Inclined Plane Trails
- Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail (LHHT)
- Jim Mayer Riverswalk
- Stonycreek River
- Path of the Flood Trail
- Rock Run ATV Recreation Area
- Highland Regional Park
- Stackhouse Park
- Prince Galitzin State Park
- Ghost Town Trail

### OPPORTUNITIES, NEEDS, & INITIATIVES

- Bringing the Path of the Flood Trail and 9/11 Trail into downtown Johnstown.
- Improving overall trail stewardship capacity.
- Maintaining and enhancing the Inclined Plane Trails.
- Branding and marketing outdoor recreation opportunities in and around Johnstown.



Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail.



Jim Mayer Riverswalk.






The Inclined Plane Trails.

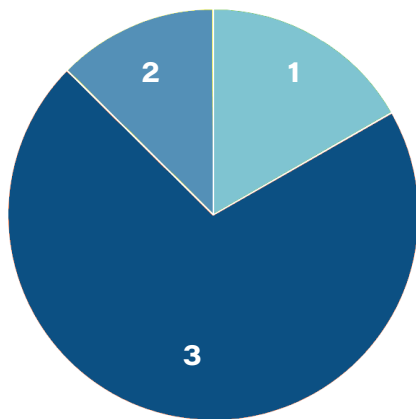


Path of the Flood Trail.

### OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSETS

- 1** 9,856 acres of State Park | 17% of state lands
- 2** 7,360 acres of State Forest | 13%
- 3** 41,600 square miles of State Game Land | 71%
-  **114** miles of off road trail
-  **18** water access points
-  **4** campgrounds

State Lands Breakdown



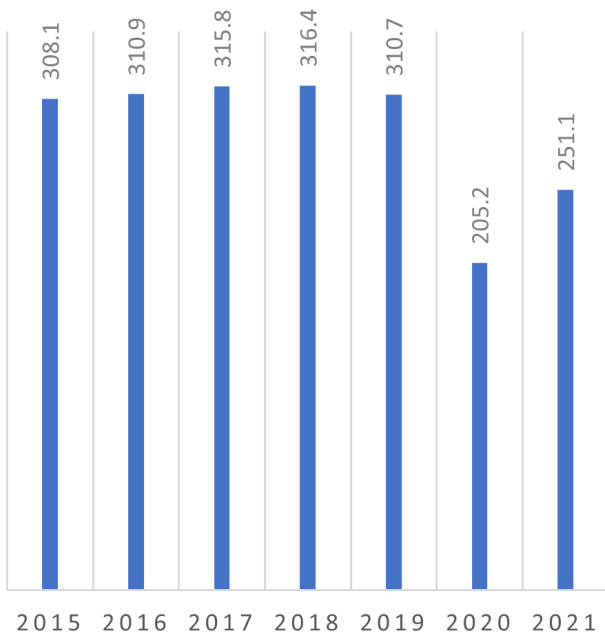
### KEY AGENTS IN THE OUTDOOR ECONOMY

- Benscreek Canoe Club | Canoe and kayak club
- Conemaugh Valley Conservancy Inc | Conservation organization involved in outdoor facility development.
- Cambria County Conservation and Recreation Authority | Organization focused on recreation and environmental remediation projects.
- The Community Foundation | Non-profit in Johnstown
- Cambria Regional Chamber | Economic development and marketing
- Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI) | Non-profit economic development organization
- Laurel Highlands On- and Off-Road Bicycling Association | Trail maintenance, builds, & events
- Visit Johnstown | Destination Marketing Organization

### OUTDOOR RECREATION BUSINESSES

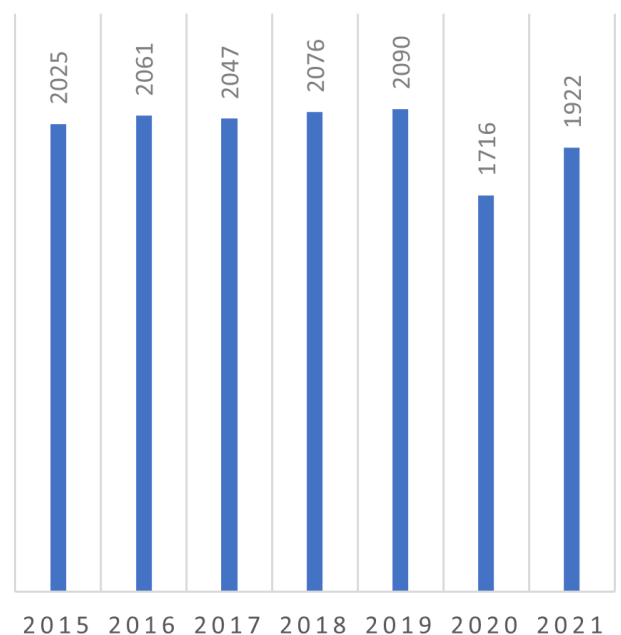
- 35** outdoor recreation-related service/retail businesses
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- 9** outdoor recreation provider businesses
- 9** outdoor recreation-related nonprofits

### TOURISM VISITOR SPENDING (\$ MILLIONS)



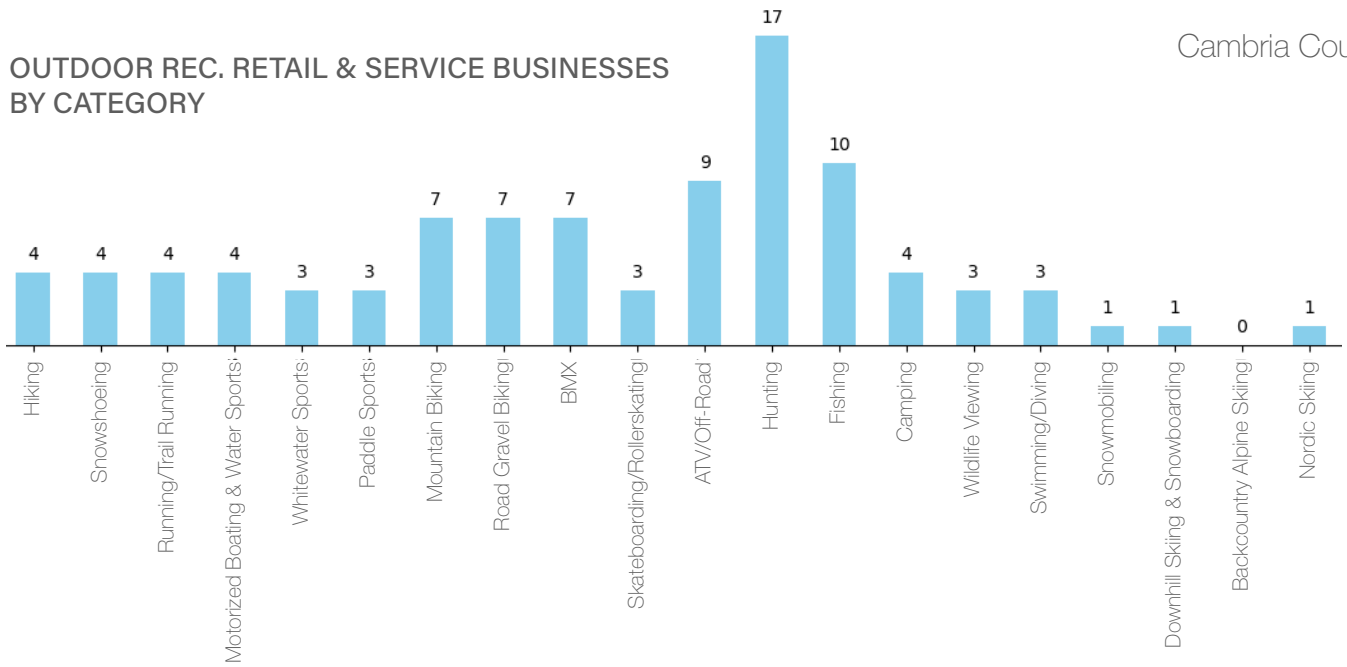
Source: Pennsylvania Tourism Office

### TOURISM INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT (# JOBS)

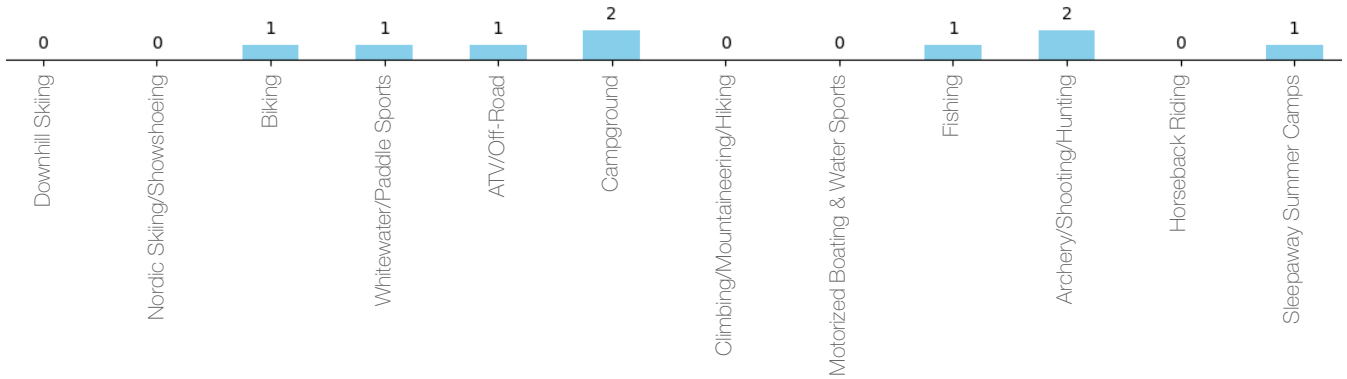




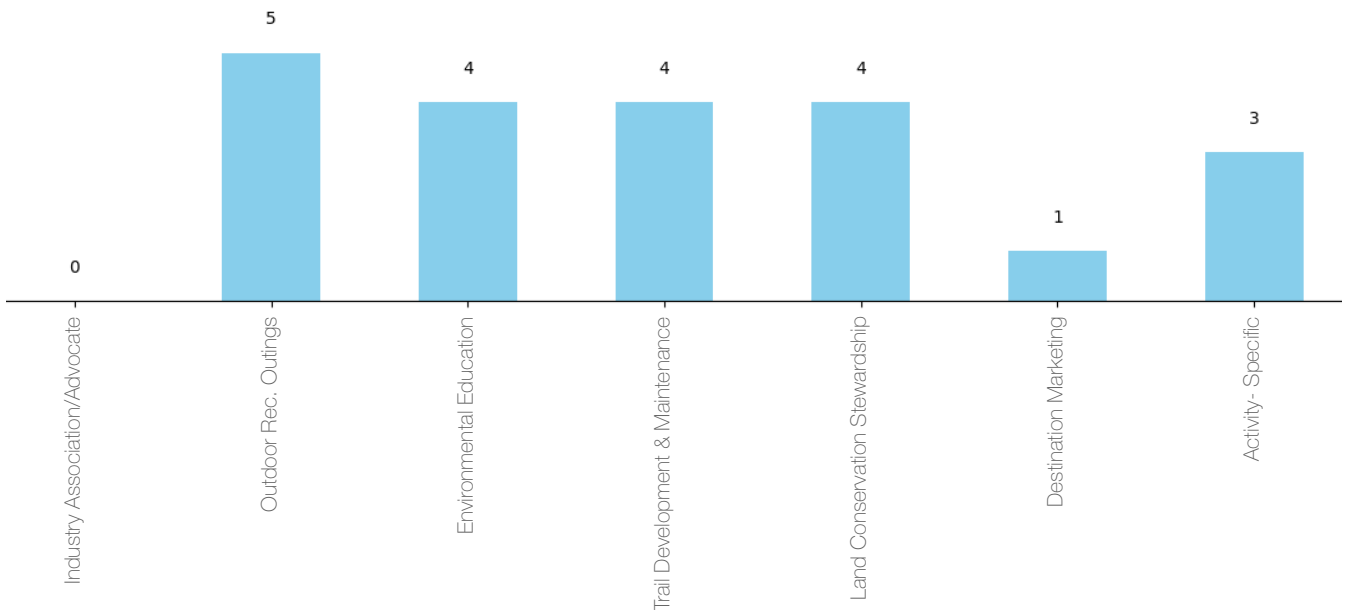
### OUTDOOR REC. RETAIL & SERVICE BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY



### OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDER BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY



### OUTDOOR RECREATION-RELATED NON PROFITS BY CATEGORY



# FULTON COUNTY

## OUTDOOR ECONOMY PROFILE`

Pop. 14,523



Fulton County, the region's smallest by population, is located among beautiful natural landscapes and undeveloped rural character. With 114 miles of off-road trails, ample state game land, and quiet state forests, Fulton County caters to those seeking a serene outdoor experience. The Old Pennsylvania Pike Trail an abandoned turnpike system, though in need of maintenance, stands as a unique feature, offering a potential path to transforming Fulton into a distinct and quietly charming outdoor destination.



View from Sideling Hill

### KEY DESTINATIONS

- The Old Pennsylvania Pike (TOPP) Trail
- Cowan's Gap State Park
- Standing Stone Trail
- Sideling Hill State Forest Picnic Area
- Buchanan State Forest



State Game Lands No. 53

### OPPORTUNITIES, NEEDS, & INITIATIVES

- Maintain and invest in The Old Pennsylvania Pike (TOPP) Trail, including upgrading and maintaining tunnels and trail surface.
- Enhance economic linkages between communities and the TOPP Trail.



The Old Pennsylvania Pike Trail



Path to Sideling Hill Picnic Area at Buchanan State Forest.

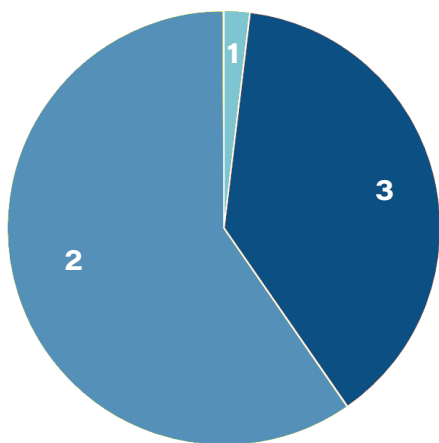
### OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSETS

- 1** 1.5 square miles of state park | 1.9%
- 2** 46.7 square miles of state forest | 59.7%
- 3** 30.1 square miles of state gameland | 38.4%
- ~** 114 miles of off road trail
- 🚣** 2 water access points

### KEY AGENTS IN THE OUTDOOR ECONOMY

- Friends of Cowan’s Gap State Park | Friends Organization
- Bedford-Fulton Joint Recreation Authority | County management authority for TOPP Trail
- Fulton County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism
- Fulton Industrial Development Association | Economic development organization

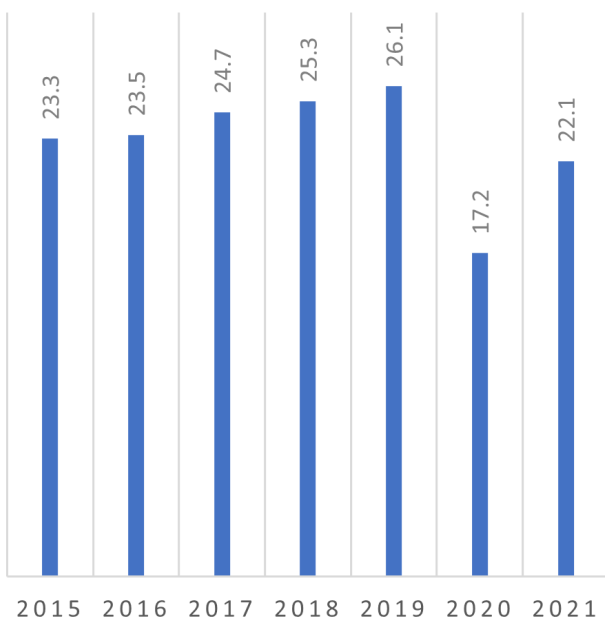
State Lands Breakdown



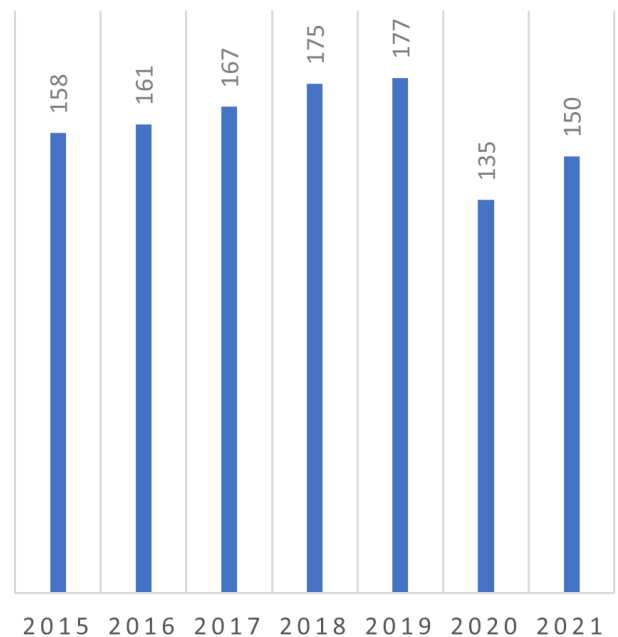
### OUTDOOR RECREATION BUSINESSES

- 2** outdoor recreation-related service/retail businesses
  - » Most common business category: Hunting
- 1** outdoor recreation-related nonprofit

### TOURISM VISITOR SPENDING (\$ MILLIONS)



### TOURISM INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT (# JOBS)

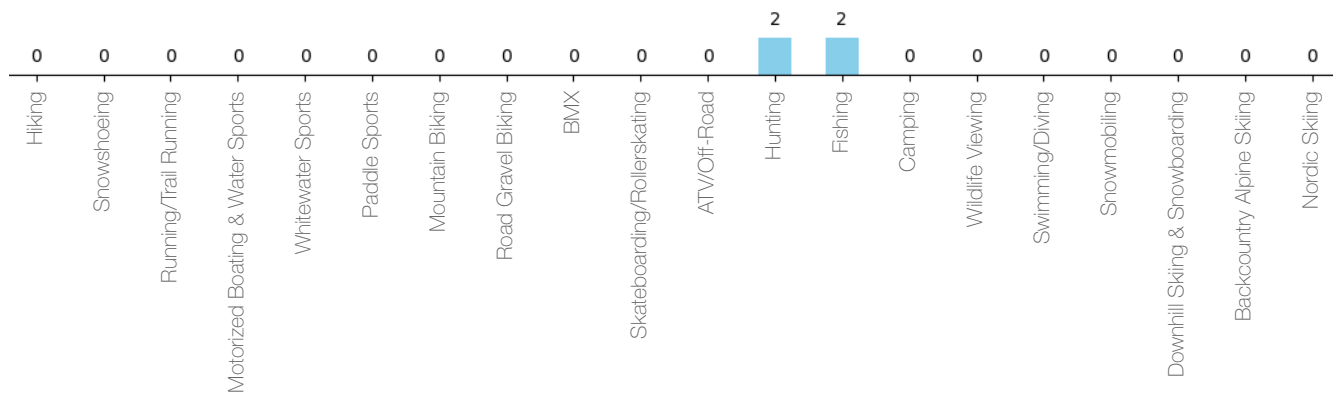


Source: Pennsylvania Tourism Office

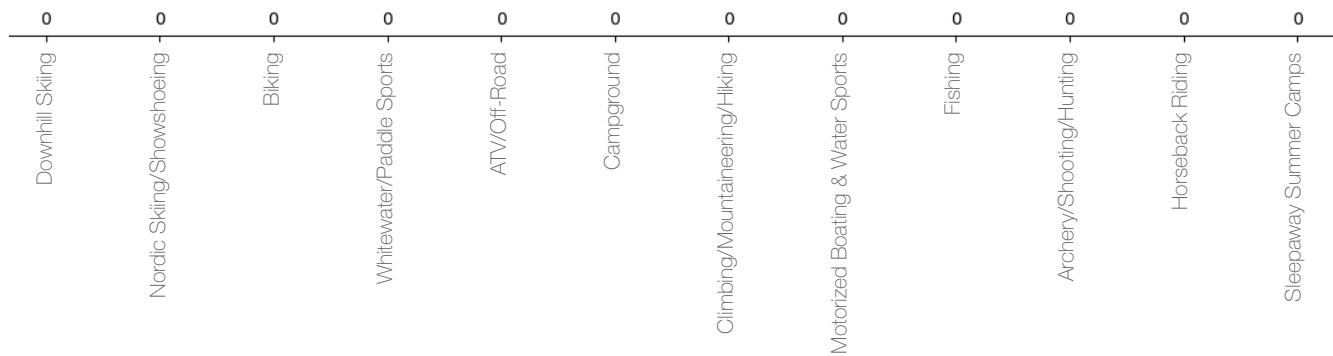


## OUTDOOR RECREATION RETAIL & SERVICE BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY

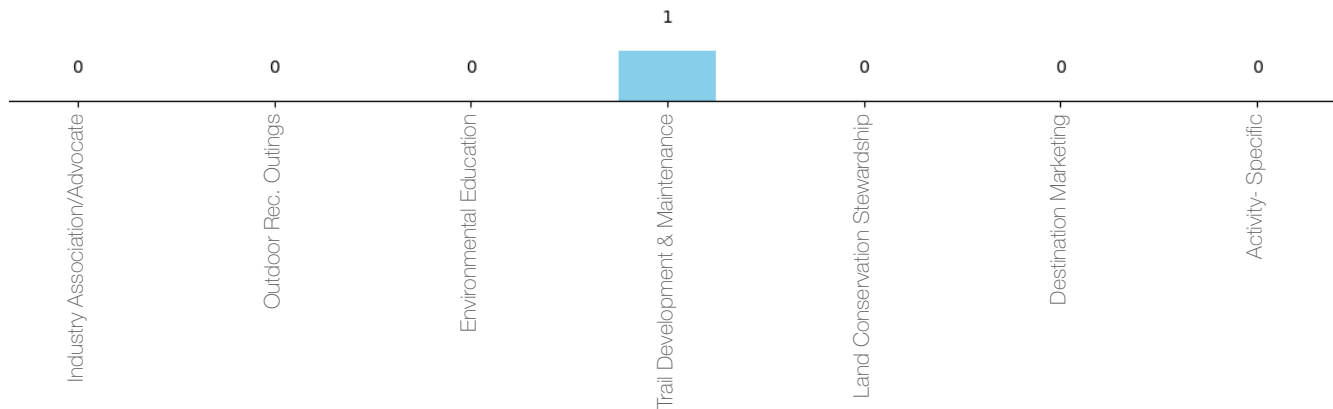
Fulton County



## OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDER BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY



## OUTDOOR RECREATION-RELATED NON PROFITS BY CATEGORY



# HUNTINGDON COUNTY

Pop. 43,889

## OUTDOOR ECONOMY PROFILE



Situated in the Northeast corner of the region and in proximity to State College, Huntingdon County is home to the vibrant Raystown Lake. Drawing substantial summer visitation, the reservoir has spurred a flourishing market for overnight camping and water motorsports, becoming a focal point for aquatic outdoor recreation. The county boasts an extensive trail network, featuring notable hikes such as The 1000 Steps, and regionally renowned mountain bike networks like the Allegrippis Trails. Huntingdon already offers an appealing array of outdoor recreation offerings for both avid outdoorspeople, casual explorers, and summer lake-goers.



Raystown Lake Recreation Area.



The Thousand Steps.

### KEY DESTINATIONS

- Raystown Lake
- Allegrippis Trail System
- The Thousand Steps
- Standing Stone Trail
- Rothrock State Forest
- Upper Juniata River Water Trail

### OPPORTUNITIES, NEEDS, & INITIATIVES

- Build volunteer capacity and funding sources for the continued maintenance of regional assets.
- Implement the 9/11 Trail through the county.
- Planned multi-use trail development in Rothrock State Forest.
- Support development of more overnight accommodations in the county.
- Enhance economic linkages between Raystown lake and nearby communities.






Allegrippis Trail System & Raystown MTB Skills Park.



Downtown Huntingdon.

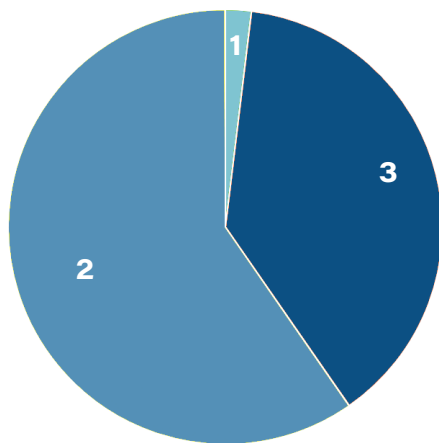
### OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSETS

- 1** 1,152 acres of State Park | 1%
- 2** 71,104 acres miles of State Forest | 64%
- 3** 39,296 square miles of State Game Land | 35%
-  566 miles of off road trail
-  27 water access points
-  23 campgrounds

### KEY AGENTS IN THE OUTDOOR ECONOMY

- Standing Stone Trail Club | Trail club
- Friends of Raystown Lake | Friends organization
- Huntingdon County Visitors Bureau | Destination marketing organization
- Huntingdon County Business and Industry | Non-profit economic development association
- Rothrock Trail Alliance | Trail club
- The Pennsylvania State University | Land manager for Lake Perez/Shavers Creek Environmental Center

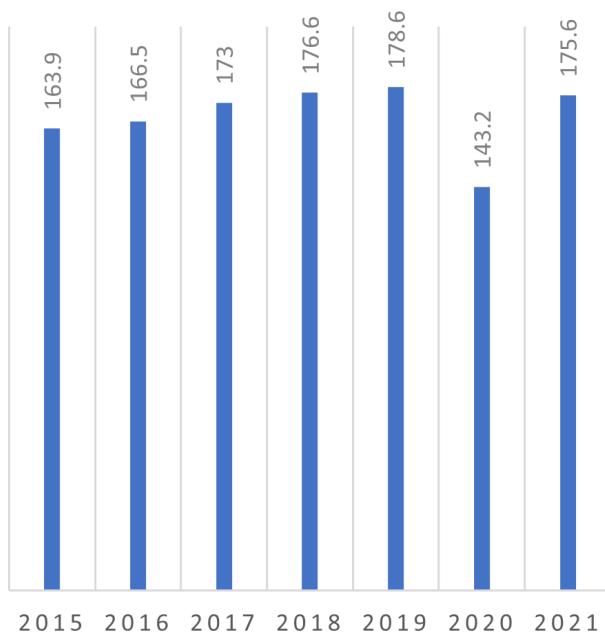
State Lands Breakdown



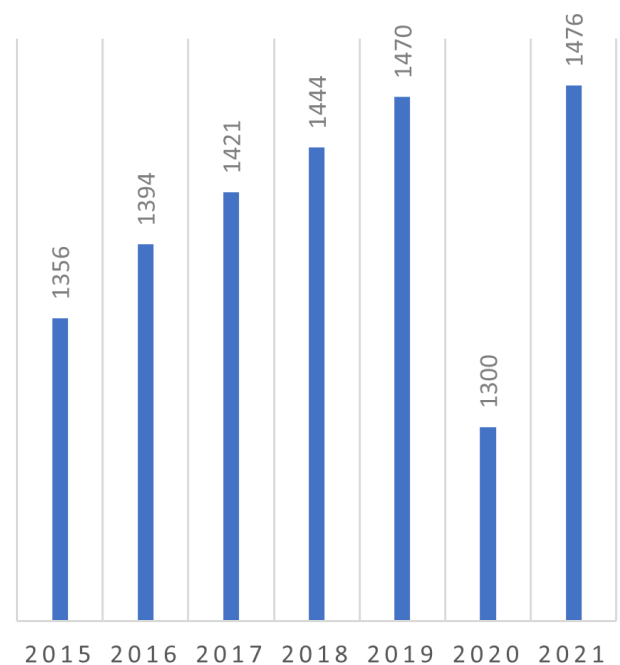
### OUTDOOR BUSINESS ASSET SUMMARY STATS

- 20** outdoor recreation-related service/retail businesses
  - » *Most common business category: Fishing*
- 33** outdoor recreation provider businesses
- 7** outdoor recreation-related nonprofits

### TOURISM VISITOR SPENDING (\$ MILLIONS)



### TOURISM INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT (# JOBS)

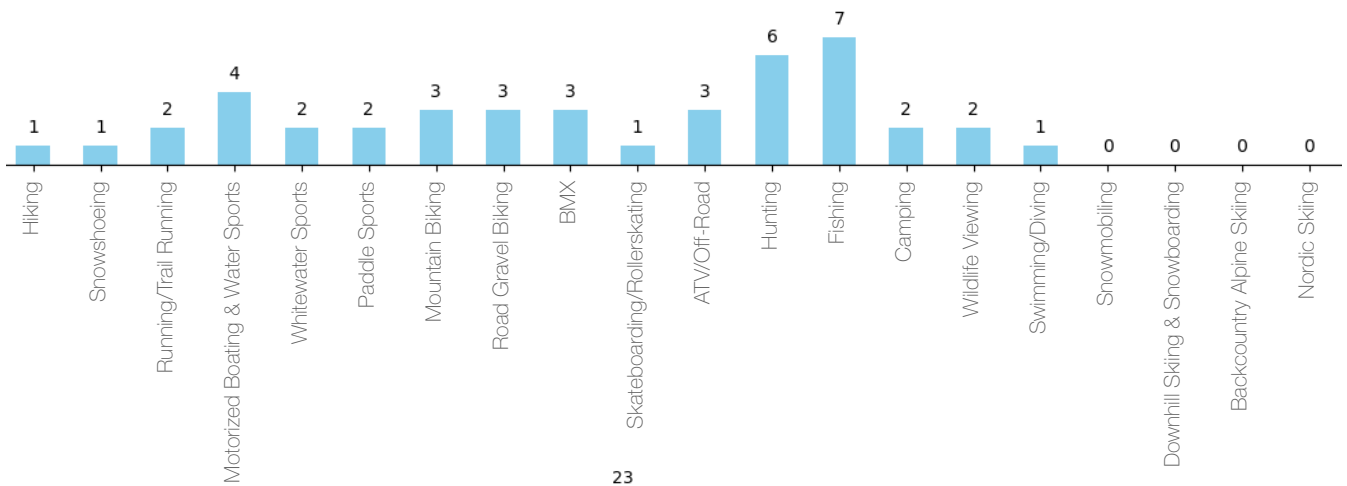


Source: Pennsylvania Tourism Office

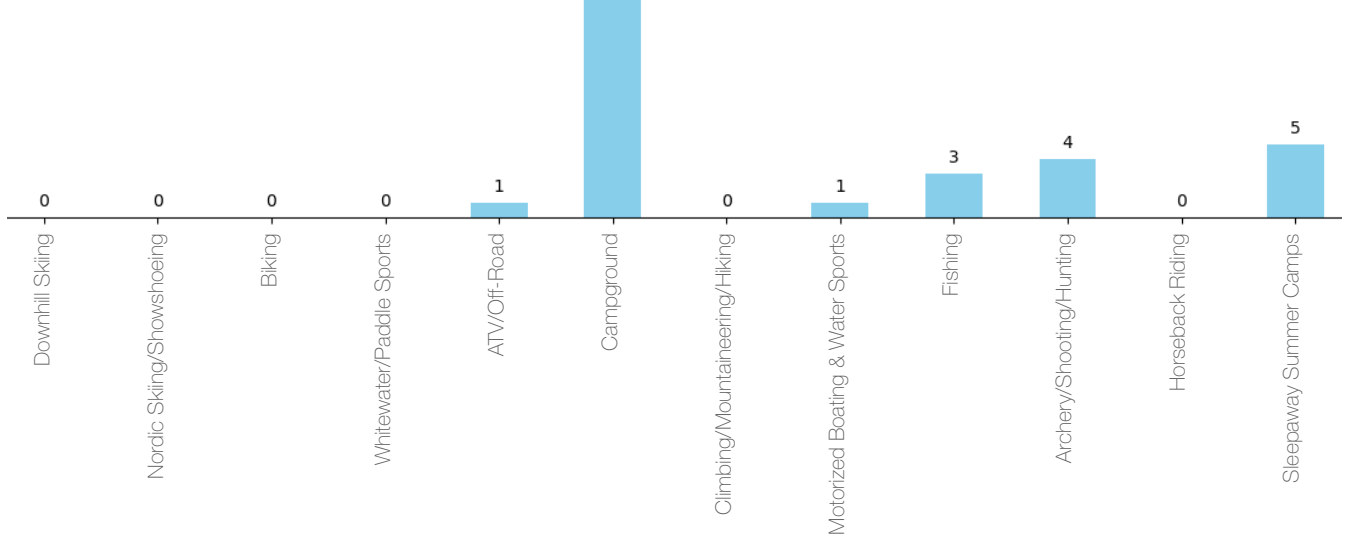


## OUTDOOR RECREATION RETAIL & SERVICE BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY

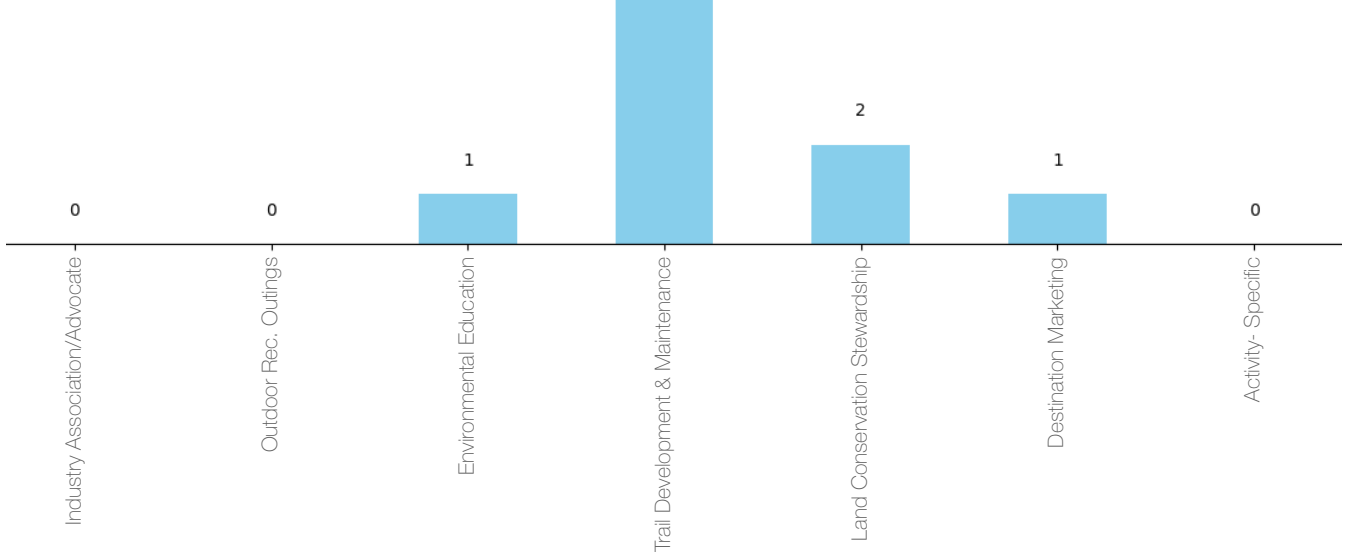
Huntingdon County



## OUTDOOR REC. PROVIDER BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY



## OUTDOOR RECREATION-RELATED NON PROFITS BY CATEGORY



# SOMERSET COUNTY

## OUTDOOR ECONOMY PROFILE

Pop. 73,627



Nestled at the highest elevation in the region, Somerset County boasts two major ski resorts, adding an alpine charm to its diverse offerings. As a key passage for the Great Allegheny Passage, this county features lively trail towns, drawing significant visitation and enhancing the region's outdoor allure. The southern reaches of Somerset County, with meandering rivers, provide ideal settings for rafting and water-based activities. Somerset County stands out for its proactive trail management efforts, spearheaded by the Somerset County Recreation and Trail Association, ensuring well-maintained and organized recreational assets. With a robust presence of outdoor recreation providers, Somerset County plays a pivotal role in shaping the thriving outdoor recreation economy of the region.

### KEY DESTINATIONS

- Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail (LHHT)
- Laurel Hill State Park
- 9/11 National Memorial Trail
- Hidden Valley Resort
- Seven Springs Resort
- The Great Allegheny Passage
- Somerset Lake
- Mountain Ridge ATV Park
- Greenhouse Park
- Quemahoning Reservoir
- Youghiogheny River Lake Recreation Area

### OPPORTUNITIES, NEEDS, & INITIATIVES

- Secure funding for long-term maintenance of the Great Allegheny Passage.
- Improve and maintain linkages between trail towns and the Great Allegheny Passage, especially at Garret and Berlin.
- Develop and steward the 9/11 National Memorial Trail in conjunction with neighboring communities.
- Promote existing outdoor recreation assets through destination marketing.



Confluence and the Great Allegheny Passage.



Downtown Berlin, PA With New Streetscape Updates.






Bikers on the Great Allegheny Passage in Meyersdale.

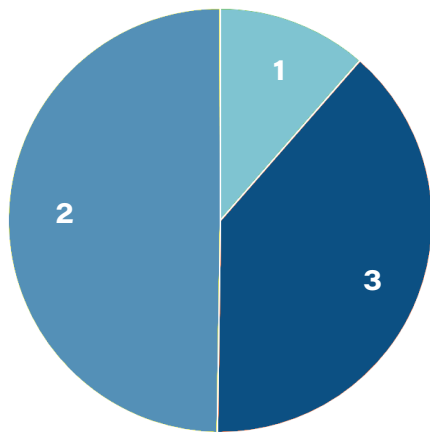


Laurel Hill State Park.

### OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSETS

- 1** 9,216 acres of State Park | 11%
- 2** 40,128 acres of State Forest | 50%
- 3** 31,296 acres of State Game Land | 39%
-  **259** miles of off road trail
-  **18** water access points
-  **9** campgrounds

State Lands Breakdown



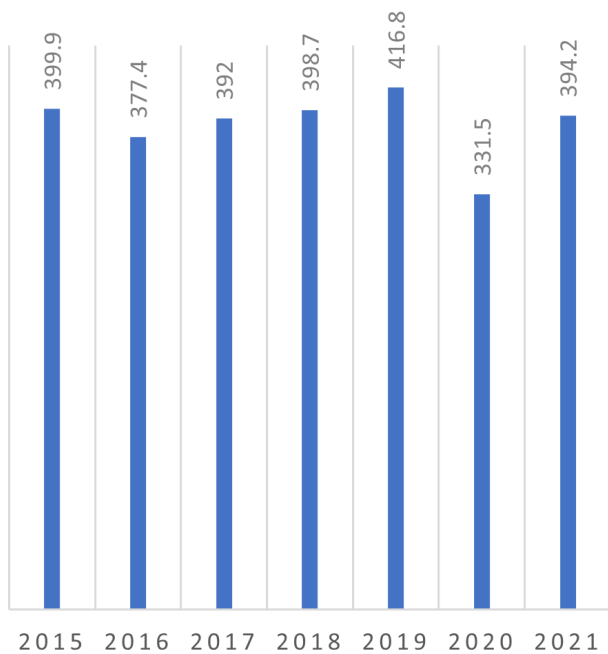
### KEY AGENTS IN THE OUTDOOR ECONOMY

- Somerset County Recreation and Trails Association | Government trails organization
- Friends of Laurel Hill | Friends organization
- Somerset County Conservancy | Conservation organization
- The Progress Fund | Trail Towns program sponsor
- Johnstown Area Regional Industries | Non-profit economic development organization
- Local merchants associations
- Go Laurel Highlands | Destination marketing organization

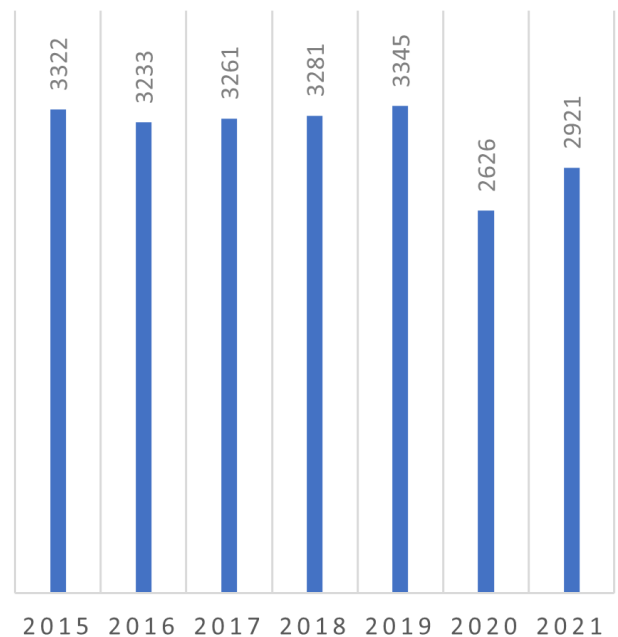
### OUTDOOR RECREATION BUSINESSES

- 19** outdoor recreation-related service/retail businesses
  - » *Most common business category: Fishing*
- 29** outdoor recreation provider businesses
- 7** outdoor recreation-related nonprofits

### TOURISM VISITOR SPENDING (\$ MILLIONS)



### TOURISM INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT (# JOBS)

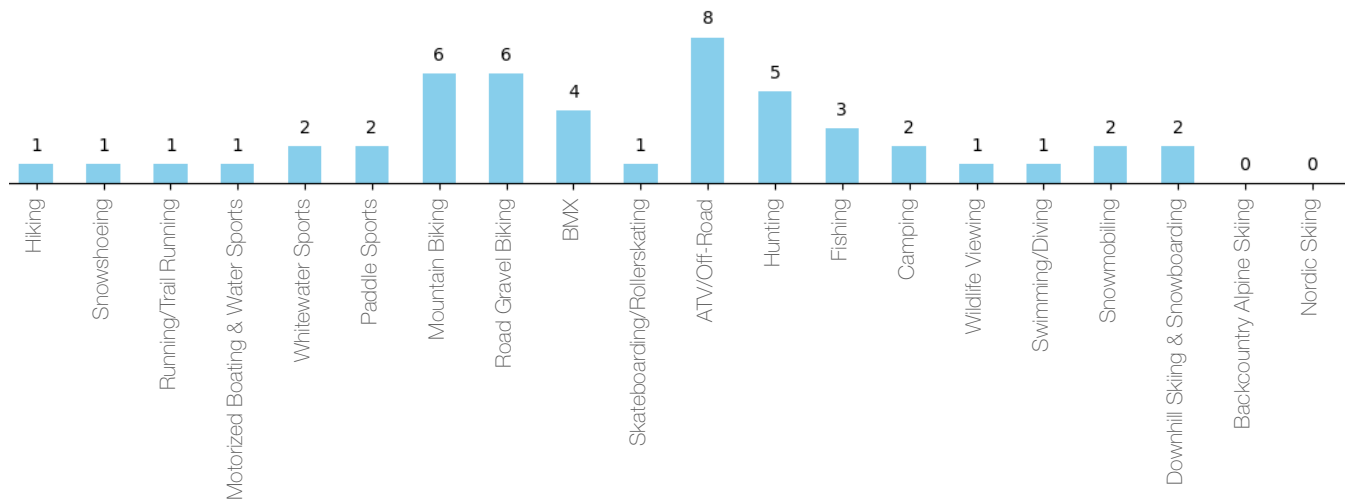


Source: Pennsylvania Tourism Office

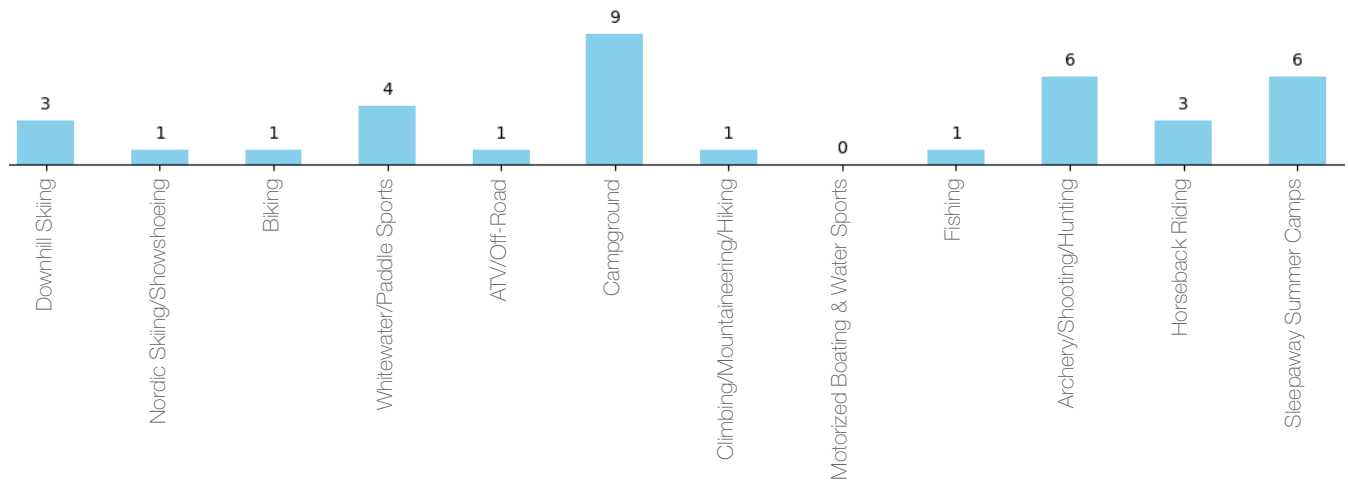


## OUTDOOR RECREATION RETAIL & SERVICE BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY

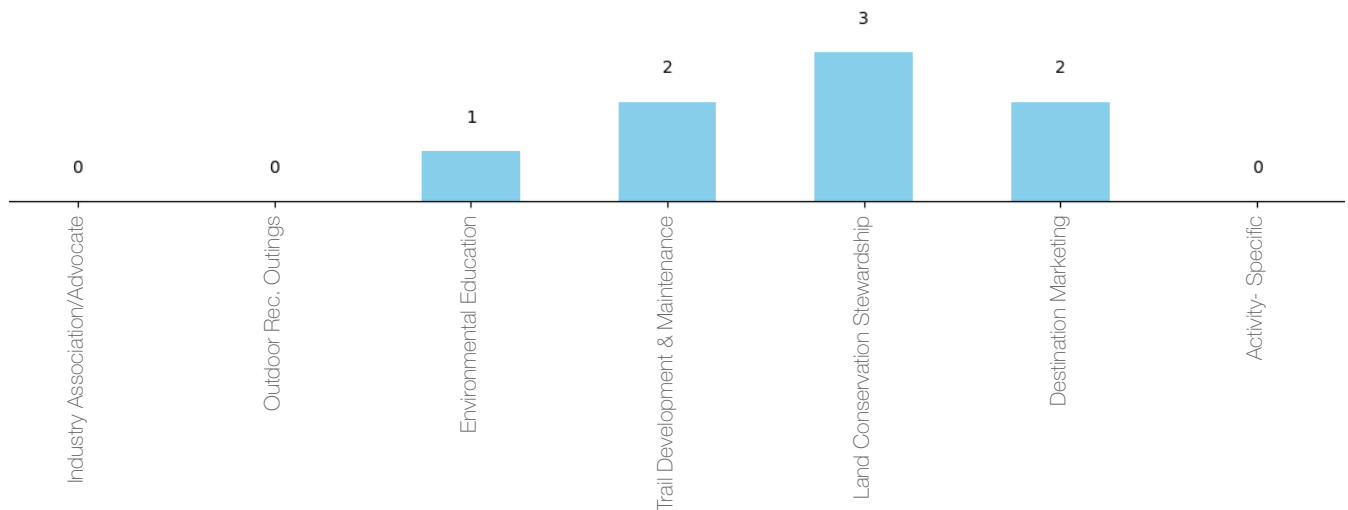
Somerset County



## OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDER BUSINESSES BY CATEGORY



## OUTDOOR RECREATION-RELATED NON PROFITS BY CATEGORY



# REGIONAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY: *STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES*

## UNIQUE TERRAIN SUPPORTS A DIVERSE ARRAY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSETS AND EXPERIENCES.

Featuring the highest point and largest lake located entirely within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and straddling the Eastern Continental Divide, the Alleghenies region is an area of significant elevation and topographic relief. Prominent ridgelines, rolling hills, and snaking river valleys form terrain supportive of a variety of recreational activities and facilities – developed ski areas and recreational reservoirs, scenic and secluded hiking and biking trails, productive hunting and fishing areas, motorized recreation areas, and a variety of whitewater and flatwater paddle sport opportunities. The region’s topography affords frequent scenic vistas and a picturesque backdrop to historic downtowns, supporting more passive recreational activities such as scenic touring and heritage tourism. The result is a four-season recreational destination for residents and visitors alike with a large variety of recreational opportunities as well as a distinct geographic feel.

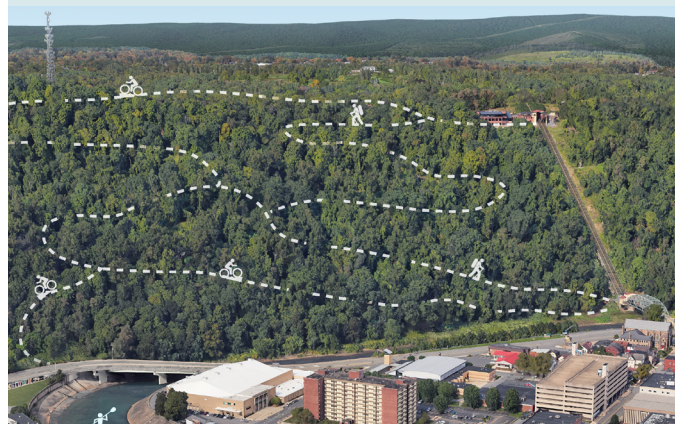


## PROXIMITY OF RECREATIONAL ASSETS AND TERRAIN TO COMMUNITIES AND DOWNTOWN AREAS.

Many of the regions’ recreational opportunities are within relatively close proximity to downtowns and residential areas. In particular, many of the long-distance trails of the region, such as the Great Allegheny Passage and the Lower Trail, pass directly through downtowns, delivering trail users and visitors directly into communities. There are also notable opportunities to create new recreational opportunities using this same nearby terrain. This proximity is a distinct economic advantage for the region – from the appealing quality of life that can be marketed to prospective employers and employees, as well as the opportunity to bring recreational visitors into downtowns and commercial areas to patronize local businesses.

### ***INCLINED PLANE TRAILS***

Over a period of years, volunteers in Johnstown have developed a series of mountain biking and hiking trails around The Johnstown Inclined Plane. Conveniently accessed from the edge of downtown, the trails provide a unique recreational experience for residents and visitors, with downhill mountain bike riding supported by the Inclined Plane’s uphill conveyance. The trails feature heavily in the 2023 Johnstown Branding, Development, & Marketing Action Plan.





## ESTABLISHED DESTINATION RECREATION SITES AND NOTABLE DESTINATION RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES.

The Alleghenies are home to a variety of beloved recreational destinations that are major draws for both residents and visitors. Raystown Lake Recreation Area hosts approximately 1.5 million visitors per year, including boaters, campers, and mountain bikers accessing the well-regarded Allegrippis Trail System. Seven Springs Mountain Resort is the largest ski area in Pennsylvania and one of several well-loved ski destinations in the region, along with Hidden Valley and Blue Knob. The Great Allegheny Passage, part of a popular long-distance cycling trail from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C., sees tens of thousands of trail users as it passes through Somerset County, including over 30,000 recorded trail visits annually in the Borough of Garrett. Hikers from across Pennsylvania travel to Huntingdon County to hike the Thousand Steps trail near Mapleton, with over 25,000 trail visits in 2021. A variety of State Parks scattered around the region provide opportunities for recreational hiking, biking, boating, and camping.

In addition to these well-established recreational destinations, there are opportunities to enhance key recreational assets and develop new ones that can result in economic benefit for the region. The ongoing development of the September 11th National Memorial Trail is a major opportunity to connect downtowns and recreational experiences across the region, and there are other examples where local initiatives aimed at enhancing recreation for economic impact are poised for success.



## GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE SUPPORTS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Local and visitor use along the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) trail results in \$43.7 million in annual economic impact in the greater Somerset County region. In Confluence, a remote borough of less than 800 residents, use of the GAP supports a diverse business mix that includes a local market, eateries, and overnight accommodations. In Rockwood, a similarly sized community, 2022 saw the opening of Trailhead Brewing Company, a brewery and e-bike rental outfit located near the trail.



## ONGOING INTEREST AND INVESTMENT IN TRAIL DEVELOPMENT.

There is significant momentum in the Alleghenies towards the development of new recreational trails and enhancement of existing trails. This includes a variety of types of trails, from non-motorized, multi-purpose trails such as the September 11th National Memorial Trail, the Huntingdon & Broad Top Rail Trail, and The Old PA Pike (TOPP) Trail, as well as purpose-specific trails for mountain biking and other uses. Some communities, such as Confluence and Meyersdale along the Great Allegheny Passage, have taken additional steps to “activate” the trail in their community through wayfinding signage and coordination with the local business community. Work to develop, enhance, and steward recreational trails is being carried out by a patchwork of non-profit organizations, municipalities, economic development organizations, and community volunteers across the region. There is a continuing opportunity to leverage this momentum and interest in trail enhancement for community and economic benefit through strategic planning, collaboration, and investment.

## PROXIMITY AND ACCESS TO VISITOR MARKETS.

The Alleghenies are well-positioned for regional tourism. The region is sandwiched between the Greater Pittsburgh metropolitan area to the west, home to 2.4 million residents, and Harrisburg–Carlisle metropolitan area to the east, home to nearly 600,000. East-west access to and through the region for this population of 3 million people is facilitated by Interstate 76 and US Route 22. Looking at the broader region, Interstate 70 provides direct access from Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, major hubs of a 6.3 million-person metropolitan region.

### **THE 9/11 TRAIL THROUGH BERLIN**

The planned construction of an off-road trail along the 9/11 Trail route from the Great Allegheny Passage in Garrett up to downtown Berlin has already spurred significant community development activity in this economically disadvantaged borough of 2,000. In 2022, Berlin was awarded \$1,000,000 in federal grant funds to upgrade Main Street along the future 9/11 Trail route, including creating a more attractive and pedestrian-friendly streetscape.





# REGIONAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY: *WEAKNESSES, CHALLENGES & AREAS OF FRAGILITY*

## TRAIL STEWARDSHIP FUNDING & CAPACITY

Trail infrastructure requires significant resources to build and maintain. This infrastructure includes trail surfaces, culverts and bridges, retaining walls, parking areas, and signage. Maintenance of existing trail infrastructure can entail resurfacing of treadway material, re-decking and replacing bridges, ditching and drainage work, and clearing downed trees and debris.

**At a time where limited dollars are being stretched further to maintain existing trails, the ongoing availability of dedicated funding to support trail maintenance efforts in the region is uncertain. As the region's trail systems look to expand further, there will need to be dedicated efforts to secure the necessary financial and organizational resources to properly steward these trails.**

## FUNDING CHALLENGES

- Managers of existing trail systems in the region have reported significant increases in the costs of materials and contracted services in recent years. Recent major trail maintenance projects have relied on one-time funding allocations and expiring funding sources, such as American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.
- Some of the region's counties, particularly Somerset and Cambria counties, have taken a proactive role in funding trail maintenance; however, the continued availability of these funds is subject to future revenue levels, competing priorities, and county policies.
- Philanthropic and grant funding sources within the region are highly competitive and have traditionally focused their resources on other community needs.
- There are some state-level grants and funding sources available for the creation and enhancement trails; however, there is no dedicated state funding source for trail maintenance activities.



Along the 43 miles of the Great Allegheny Passage in Somerset Count, there are 42 bridges and tunnels that must be maintained, in addition to the trail surface, signage, and parking areas.

## RELIANCE ON VOLUNTEERS

- The region's trail managers rely heavily on volunteers to perform routine trail maintenance. There are ongoing challenges with volunteer recruitment and retention across the region.
- Even routine trail maintenance requires some level of skill and experience to do properly, putting pressure on a small set of volunteers that are trained and experienced.
- In some cases, such as with the Inclined Plane Trails in Johnstown and the Thousand Steps Trail near Mapleton, trail maintenance is largely covered by a single volunteer. While an admirable undertaking, the lack of additional support for these volunteers is a potentially fraught situation – should these individual “trail champions” be unable to continue, important economic assets for these communities could fall into disrepair.



## OUTDOOR RECREATION CULTURE.

Despite a wealth of outdoor recreation opportunities, the Alleghenies region has not fully embraced outdoor recreation as a lifestyle or economic driver. In some cases, traditional outdoor activities like hunting and fishing may be embraced more by residents, with activities like hiking, mountain biking, or kayaking largely seen as being reserved for visitors. In other instances, residents may not be aware of the outdoor recreation activities available to them or may have overcome certain barriers to entry, such as the cost of required gear, lack of youth programming, or a lack of skill or confidence in the activity. Addressing barriers to entry and increasing resident participation in outdoor recreation can pay future dividends for the region's outdoor economy, with residents being more likely to support conservation and stewardship of recreational assets through financial and/or volunteer means and businesses and economic development organizations better understanding the marketing value of outdoor recreation in the region.

## WELCOMING PEOPLE INTO THE OUTDOORS.

Overall, the Alleghenies region could be more welcoming for outdoor recreationalists. Wayfinding signage along major travel corridors is inconsistent or lacking. Signage at trailheads and parks tends to focus on rules and regulations, rather than inviting people in with descriptions of available recreational experiences, maps, or helpful tips. Digital resources for outdoor recreation activities are somewhat scattered and can be difficult to find and interpret. Access to public lands is inconsistent, with residents and visitors being welcomed into a variety of State Parks and State Forests across the region but largely unable to access over 240,000 acres of State Game Lands except for hunting and fishing during defined blocks of time. These challenges represent additional barriers for participation and promotion of outdoor recreation in the Alleghenies and may be limiting the ability of the region to benefit economically from outdoor recreation tourism.





## REGIONAL PROMOTION.

In previous decades, state-level funding supported significant tourism promotion for the Alleghenies region, helping establish the Alleghenies brand in key visitor markets, including the Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. metropolitan areas. Today, people still refer to the region as “the Alleghenies” thanks to these efforts; however, the supportive state funding no longer exists. In absence of these funding, Visitor’s Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce, and other economic development organizations across the region have continued to brand and promote their respective areas using locally-available funds. While these organizations are doing quality work for their communities and regions, it naturally creates silos that can be challenging to overcome for potential coordinated regional promotion efforts like those that existed previously.



Brochures prepared by the now-defunct Alleghenies Tourism Council, a former partnership of tourism organizations that was supported through state-level funding.

## COMPETITION FROM OTHER REGIONS.

The Alleghenies are far from the only region in greater Appalachia that is seeking to grow and enhance outdoor recreation for the purposes of economic development. Communities and regions that were once heavily-reliant on resource extraction are looking at the same mountains, forests, and waterways that have supported mining and timber industries and examining how those same landscapes can be supportive of outdoor recreation as a means of economic stabilization.

### **OUTDOOR RECREATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN APPALACHIA**

In Logan County, WV, the development of the 800-mile Hatfield-McCoy trail system has resulted in a total economic impact of \$68 million per year in a county where the traditional coal and timber industries have declined. Bordering the Alleghenies region to the north, the Pennsylvania Wilds region has launched a successful branding and marketing campaign that leans heavily on the recreational experiences available in this rural and mountainous region. Other regions in Appalachia, such as the Cumberland Plateau area of northern Virginia, are undertaking strategic planning efforts aimed at emulating these and other success stories.

## LARGE AND DISPERSED REGION.

The Alleghenies region is broken up by topography. In keeping with the industrial heritage of the region, most downtowns and boroughs are nestled into valleys, with sporadic regional highway connections climbing over and around steep ridgelines. With these relatively isolated communities and political jurisdictions, there is not a substantial tradition in the region of the type of regional collaboration that is critical for stewarding the outdoor economy.





**Moving the  
Regional  
Outdoor  
Economy  
Forward.**



**What does it mean to “move the regional outdoor economy forward” in the Alleghenies? There is not a simple answer to this question, given the diversity and complexity of the outdoor economy sector in this region. For this plan, we start by identifying higher-level desired outcomes, areas of focus, and principles of advancement. Based on these principles, we then identify more targeted strategies, actions, and partnerships that are needed to advance the outdoor economy.**

### **DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR THE REGIONAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY**

- Increased participation in outdoor recreation in the region by both residents and visitors as part of an enhanced outdoor recreation culture.
- An improved quality of life that encourages residents to stay.
- Employers are better able to recruit and retain employees.
- Economic development organizations are better able to recruit and retain businesses.
- The economic contributions of outdoor recreation are understood and celebrated.
- Trails and other core recreation infrastructure are built to a high quality and are well-maintained.
- The Alleghenies are recognized as a premier regional outdoor recreation destination.
- The outdoor economy is stewarded through regional collaboration and the effective use of limited financial and volunteer resources.



Raystown Mountain Bike Skills Park

### **AREAS OF FOCUS FOR OUTDOOR ECONOMY PLANNING**

The Alleghenies are blessed with a large variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. Traditional recreation activities like **hunting and fishing** are well-established in the region, and have benefited from significant investments in land conservation and water quality initiatives over the course of decades. The impact of these activities and investments is seen in the 86 hunting and fishing businesses that dot the region. Other activities, like **downhill skiing**, are similarly established and rooted in the region.

Today, **trail-based activities** like hiking and biking are also emerging as popular activities, with significant interest and increasing investment in trail development and stewardship occurring around the region. Trail-based recreation is not as well-established historically as traditional recreation activities are in the region; accordingly, there are many emergent needs and opportunities around trails that could benefit from additional strategic planning, stewardship, collaboration, and investment.

**Water-based recreation activities**, such as kayaking, whitewater rafting, and river tubing, are also seeing increased interest, with the establishment and enhancement of regional water trails and outfitting businesses. These emergent activities are the focus of much of the strategies and actions presented in this plan, as well as cross-cutting strategies that speak to the needs of all outdoor recreation activities and the outdoor recreation economy more broadly.



# FIVE PRINCIPLES OF ADVANCEMENT FOR THE REGIONAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY

**BE STRATEGIC.....39**

*STRATEGICALLY INVEST IN AND STEWARD RECREATIONAL ASSETS AND EXPERIENCES.*

**BE COLLABORATIVE.....41**

*LEVERAGE SHARED RESOURCES ACROSS THE REGION TO STEWARD THE OUTDOOR ECONOMY.*

**BE WELCOMING.....43**

*WELCOME RESIDENTS AND VISITORS INTO THE OUTDOORS AND INTO COMMUNITIES.*

**BE A DESTINATION.....47**

*STEWARD AND ENHANCE KEY RECREATIONAL DESTINATIONS FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.*

**BE CHAMPIONS.....55**

*ADVOCATE FOR AND CELEBRATE THE ROLE OF THE OUTDOOR ECONOMY AS A POSITIVE FORCE IN THE REGION.*



# BE STRATEGIC

*Strategically invest in and steward recreational assets and experiences.*

Across the Alleghenies region, there is significant interest from communities and economic development organizations in enhancing and promoting recreational offerings for economic benefit, particularly recreational trails. In Confluence and Meyersdale, there have been successful efforts to enhance the connection to the Great Allegheny Passage to bring visitors into the community to eat and stay. Other communities have been active in developing new trails, such as the recent completion of the Huntingdon & Broad Top Rail Trail in Bedford County, with future plans to connect the trail to Raystown Lake.

**Trails can deliver real economic benefits for communities and regions – if they are developed and stewarded with intention.** Like other forms of infrastructure, trails require thoughtful planning in order to provide desired recreational experiences and dedicated maintenance attention to sustain those experiences. If economic impact is a primary goal of investing in a trail, then additional strategic considerations come into play. Since there are not infinite dollars and volunteer resources to invest in trails, it will be important for the region to apply a strategic lens for trail development and properly fund trail maintenance to ensure there is an economic return on investment and that trails are maintained to a high standard of quality.

## PRINCIPLES FOR INVESTING IN RECREATIONAL TRAILS AND FACILITIES FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT

The following principles should be used to evaluate and inform the development of new trails and recreational facilities for community and economic benefit.

### DELIVERING QUALITY RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES

- The trail(s) or facility offers a unique, new recreation experience not currently available in the community or region.

- The trail(s) or facility enhances an existing recreational destination or trail network by offering an improved or more accessible recreation experience.
- The trail(s) or facility is designed to thoughtfully consider the site's physical and scenic qualities and use them to add interest, offer challenges, and/or exhibit scenic values that contribute to the user experience.
- The trail(s) or facility is accessible to a wide range of users or is strategically targeted to provide an exemplary experience for a specific user group.
- The trail or trail system incorporates sustainable trail design principles that limit wear and tear on the trail surface and reduce future trail maintenance obligations.

### ENABLING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- The trail(s) or facility is proximate or physically connected to a downtown area, neighborhood, or commercial area.
- The trail(s) or facility is connected to a local economic or community development initiative.
- There are community groups that are interested in promoting and activating the trail through local marketing, outreach, programming, and/or events.
- There is adequate existing or planned infrastructure to support access to the trail(s) or facility, including parking, wayfinding signage, and/or pedestrian and bicycle connections.

### COMMITTING TO STEWARDSHIP

- There are adequate financial and volunteer resources to support long-term maintenance of the trail(s) or facility without diverting resources away from other trail(s) or facilities.
- There is an organization or government entity that is committed to long-term stewardship of the trail(s) or facility.



## KEY ACTIONS

These are concrete actions that can be taken by regional partners to aid in the development and stewardship of recreational trails and facilities that deliver community and economic benefits.

- Promote good planning, including preparing local and regional trails plans and incorporating recreational trails into municipal and county comprehensive plans and active transportation plans. Include community and economic development partners in the planning process.
- Strategically invest in enhancing and stewarding trail and recreational facilities in line with recreational experience and community connections principles, and in alignment with community development goals.
- Identify creative funding sources for trail and recreational facility development and enhancement by connecting outdoor recreation to transportation, economic development, public health, and/or conservation funding priorities.
- Examine opportunities for creating new funding streams, with potential sources including corporate philanthropy, advocating for dedicated state-level funding support, use of hotel occupancy tax revenue, and other sources.

### TRAILS PLANNING IN THE ALLEGHENIES

Adopted in 2023, the Huntingdon County Active Transportation Plan identifies three priority segments along the 9/11 National Memorial Trail route where proposed trails will take users off busy roadways. In addition to creating new recreational amenities, these trail segments will enhance active transportation safety for residents and will be well-positioned to compete for transportation-oriented grant and funding programs.

Starting in 2024, the Bedford County Development Association will undertake a master trails connectivity plan for the county, supported by funding from the Pennsylvania Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program.

## NORTHERN PA ATV REGIONAL TRAIL CONNECTOR PILOT

Starting in 2023, in response to demand for long-distance riding experiences connecting multiple trail systems, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) initiated a pilot program in a four-county region. This pilot program permits ATV riders to use designated on-road routes and State Forest roads to connect to different trail systems. On-road routes are signed and riders are required to obtain permits. The pilot program is the result of a **coordinated planning effort** between DCNR, municipal and county governments, trail organizations, and private sector businesses, and seeks to promote responsible riding and economic impact in communities along connector routes.

### ATV Regional Trail Connector Pilot Signs

<p><b>Road/Trail Open to ATVs</b></p>   <p><i>State forest designated ATV Trail.</i></p>	<p><b>Trail Reassurance Markers</b></p>  <p><i> Tells off-road riders that they are on a designated trail.</i></p>  <p><i>Indicates the direction to go to stay on the designated trail.</i></p>	<p><b>Share the Road</b></p> 
<p><b>Summer Riding Season</b></p> 	<p><b>Directional Arrow</b></p> 	<p><b>Registration Plate</b></p> 
<p> <b>pennsylvania</b> DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES BUREAU OF FORESTRY</p>	<p><b>No ATVs Permitted</b></p> 	<p><b>More Information</b></p>  <p><i>For more information, please email <a href="mailto:PaForester@pa.gov">PaForester@pa.gov</a>.</i></p>

# BE COLLABORATIVE

*Leverage shared resources in the region to steward the outdoor economy.*

Throughout the region, a patchwork of governments, land managers, non-profit organizations, economic development organizations, and volunteers are investing time and money in supporting outdoor recreation. In many cases, this work boils down to a set of core activities:

- Maintaining existing trails and recreational infrastructure;
- Building new trails and recreational infrastructure;
- Programming and promoting outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences, and
- Leveraging the region's outdoor recreation offerings for economic development.

Often, this work occurs in silos and is challenged by funding limitations and capacity constraints. To build the necessary capacity to steward existing recreational assets and expand recreational offerings in support of the regional economy, it will be important for the region to break down silos, share resources, and engage new partners.

## STRATEGIES

### ACTING REGIONALLY

- Align local and regional initiatives where organizations are engaged in similar work, such as volunteer coordination, youth programming, or tourism destination management.
- Enhance regional trail stewardship capacity through collaboration and enhanced volunteer leadership.
- Promote collaboration between different user groups with shared needs. For example, hunters and hikers may use the same trailheads, and snowmobilers and mountain bikers may use the same trails, just during different times of year.

### COORDINATING WITH THE COMMONWEALTH

- Improve and sustain collaboration with state partners, including DCNR and the Office of Outdoor Recreation.
- Ensure regional representation in statewide outdoor recreation planning processes, committees, and other venues for regional advocacy, such as the DCNR Recreation Engagement Coalition.





## KEY ACTIONS

### SHORT-TERM

- Promote regional collaboration for volunteer coordination and training. Provide a centralized volunteer coordination platform.
- Regionally coordinate volunteer training for needed skills (e.g., sawyer training, trail maintenance, volunteer leadership). Explore the use of federal Local Technical Assistance Program funds to support trail maintenance training.
- Create regional circuit rider positions to provide shared project management services for large trail and recreational facility projects.
- Engage DCNR to lead a regional working group of trail organizations.

### MEDIUM-TERM

- Create a centralized Regional Trails Coordinator position to lend strategic capacity to various trail organizations and serve as a central repository and point of contact for all things trails in the region.
- Engage with schools and youth organizations to develop a Youth Trail Maintenance Corps.
- Reactivate and rebrand the Rec the Alleghenies Expo to represent Alleghenies Outdoors initiatives and provide a venue for outdoor recreation advocates, trail and land managers, and economic development interests to discuss shared opportunities and challenges.
- Create a branded “Alleghenies Outdoors” umbrella program to promote recreation-friendly businesses, including technical assistance services, branded materials, a standard checklist of actions that businesses can take for mutual benefit in support of the outdoor recreation economy, and/or periodic trainings and business owner forums.

### LONG-TERM

- Explore the creation of an Alleghenies Regional Trails Alliance, a membership-based non-profit with membership from government entities, trail organizations, land managers, and economic development organizations. The Alliance would create strategic capacity for trail maintenance, volunteer coordination, trail construction and major capital projects, fundraising, and advocacy.

## UPPER VALLEY TRAILS ALLIANCE (VERMONT & NEW HAMPSHIRE)

Recognizing the need to align resources for trail stewardship and enhancement, a consortium of trail organizations and government bodies in Vermont and New Hampshire came together in 1999 to establish the Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA). A non-profit organization, UVTA maintains formal partnerships with over 30 municipalities and organizations for trail stewardship services and covers a 43-town service area. This work includes staff-led trail construction and maintenance projects, overseeing a high school student trail corps, serving as the fiscal sponsor for major trail improvement projects, coordinating trail-based events, managing the regional TrailFinder web platform, and coordinating a variety of volunteer-led trail maintenance efforts.





# BE WELCOMING

*Welcome residents and visitors into the outdoors and into communities.*

A region could have a comprehensive set of outdoor recreation assets, but if residents and visitors are not invited to use or made aware of these opportunities, the economic development and quality of life benefits can be largely missed. The physical access to outdoor recreation is only half of the equation, equally important is welcoming people onto the land through the right signage and messaging while building a friendly culture around outdoor recreation. Addressing barriers to entry and increasing resident participation in outdoor recreation can pay future dividends for the region's outdoor economy, with residents being more likely to support conservation and stewardship of recreational assets through financial and/or volunteer means and businesses and economic development organizations better understanding the marketing value of outdoor recreation in the region.

In the Alleghenies region, as is common across the country, signage at trailheads can overemphasize messages of warning, caution, restrictions, and other legal information well-intended to protect users from danger and providers from liability. While this information is important, signage that only delivers these types of messages can scare users and is a missed opportunity to simultaneously provide positive messaging that can reinforce a culture of outdoor recreation. Regions that emphasize allowed activities, provide helpful resources, invest in outdoor education, and involve local business communities in the recreation sector can help welcome diverse users into these spaces. Being welcoming can pay dividends for inclusivity and access, as well as help a region start to build its brand as an outdoor recreation-loving community. The following section provides strategies and principles that the Alleghenies can apply to further increase efforts to welcome casual and extreme adventurers alike, as well as concrete actions to contribute to these intentions.





## STRATEGIES

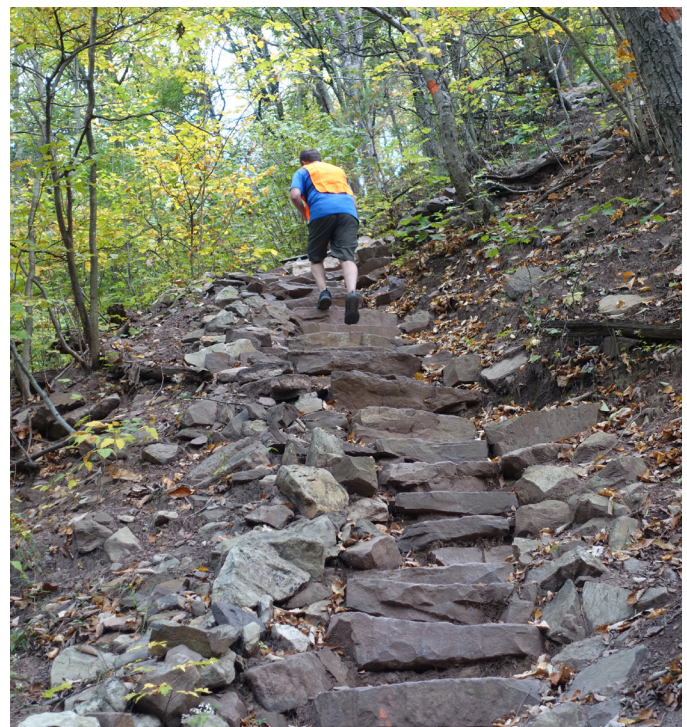
### WELCOME PEOPLE ONTO THE LAND FOR RECREATION

- **Improve signage, wayfinding, and messaging.** The messaging along access routes and entry points to trails, public lands, and other recreational assets should be welcoming, informative, and positive. While sharing legal disclosures and safety information is necessary, signage and wayfinding should also emphasize what activities are allowed and suggested. Providing information such as trail maps, recommended supplies and safety procedures, and information about trails and opportunities makes it clear that outdoor recreation is intended and encouraged.
- **Support recreation on public lands.** State lands in the Alleghenies vary in their land management priorities and resources. There are well-developed State Parks that welcome in a variety of visitors and provide accessible recreational experiences. On the other end of the spectrum, there are State Game Lands that are tightly managed for a very specific set of users, with the majority of these lands being closed to recreation other than hunting and fishing during defined seasons. A spectrum of recreational uses and land management priorities is typical for any major land management agency, and each agency must manage the “dual mandate” of recreational access and natural resource conservation to the degree that aligns with its stated mission.

In the Alleghenies, over 240,000 acres of State Game Lands provide critical habitat that supports the region’s longstanding affinity for traditional recreation activities of hunting and fishing. **With the emerging popularity of and interest in trail-based recreation in the region, it is worth examining opportunities for these two constituencies to work together towards shared goals.** Advancements in the science of trail building and understanding of the conservation impacts of trail-based activities can inform discussions about where there may be targeted corridors within state managed land that are suitable for recreational trail development, and what resources the trail community can bring to the table to support the conservation mission of the State Game Lands.



An example of welcoming and informative trailhead signage in Vermont’s Mad River Valley.



The Thousand Steps is one of only a handful of recreational trails on State Game Lands in the Alleghenies that are open to the general public.



## BUILD A CULTURE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

- **Engage the region's youth.** Youth programming through local schools, private organizations, and summer camps help reinforce the idea that the outdoors is open for recreation. Students often bring ideas back to families who may be introduced to new opportunities through their children. Furthermore, over time education helps younger generations build a connection to their community and region with an inherent understanding of how to use, preserve, care for, and respect the natural environment, water bodies, and trail systems they learn to love. The power of these programs comes from inviting diverse user groups into building an outdoor recreation culture, engaging residents in the idea of outdoor recreation, and getting people excited about the quality-of-life benefits and opportunities for business and economic impact.
- **Build a big tent.** There are many civic-minded organizations in the Alleghenies that do not focus on outdoor recreation but have a vested interest in bringing people together and seeing their communities succeed. Engaging organizations with missions around community service and economic development, such as Rotary Clubs and faith-based groups, can help build coalitions to advance outdoor recreation initiatives, raise funds, recruit volunteers, and more generally ingrain outdoor recreation into the fabric of a community.
- **Welcome in the business community.** Playing the role of a convener is impactful to promote the connections and create the energy around outdoor recreation in the business community. Hosting expos and conventions for existing and prospective business owners can demonstrate that they have the support of their local municipalities and government leaders. Topics to engage the local business community could include marketing to outdoor recreation users, financing a small business, and hospitality workshops. Communities can further engage the real estate and development communities by promoting vacant properties and opportunities as they become available, and demonstrating the connection to outdoor recreation.



## ACTIVATE EXPERIENCES FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

- **Welcome recreationalists into communities for economic impact.** In cases where communities and recreational assets are in proximity, it is essential to promote those linkages. Outdoor recreationalists are often looking for restaurants, breweries, and other in-town amenities after spending a day outdoors. Through carefully placed promotional materials, communities in the region should position themselves as the obvious next step in a fun day spent outside. Businesses leaning into this market can do small things like keep information on ski conditions, trail conditions, and upcoming events, and train front-line staff to provide outdoor recreation knowledge to customers. Subtle connections like these have an outsized effect on developing a culture, and make it clear that downtown businesses see themselves as part of the quality-of-life ecosystem built around outdoor recreation.
- **Provide beginner-friendly and accessible recreation opportunities.** Whenever developing new trails and recreation facilities, prioritize finding ways to incorporate beginner-friendly and easily accessible recreational opportunities. To invite new individuals and demographics into the outdoor recreation space, they must have somewhere to try non-extreme versions of outdoor activities like easy mountain bike trails, simple well-maintained hikes, and calm water experiences.



## TRAIL TOWNS WELCOME IN VISITORS & SUPPORT RESIDENTS

For over a decade, The Progress Fund has assisted communities in the Alleghenies with enhancing their economic linkages to nearby trails through the Trail Town Program. Certified Trail Town communities include Confluence, Rockwood, and Meyersdale along the Great Allegheny Passage trail and Ebensburg along the Ghost Town Trail.

The program promotes best practices for leveraging trails for community and economic development using five strategic tools: Partnerships, Assessments and Research, Development, Marketing, and Connecting Town to Trail. Certified business community members of the Trail Town Program receive networking support, promotional support, and access to small business loans. In the first ten years of the Trail Towns Program, The Progress Fund reported wins of 65 new businesses with 270 new jobs created, while growing revenues of existing merchants as well.



- **Invite people into the outdoors through events and programming.** Community partners can plan and support events and programming that position their towns as recreation destinations. Hosting a race, biking event, or fishing competition can draw in visitation and leave a lasting impression connecting a community to outdoor recreation in the minds of the public. Organizing more locally-focused events, such as group hikes and community bike rides, can help connect residents to their surrounding natural areas and creates opportunities for social gathering.

- **Build and promote local and regional itineraries.** Communities can develop and promote targeted itineraries for how residents and visitors might spend a day in their community or broader region. Itineraries are particularly beneficial for new residents and beginner recreationalists who may not know what experiences are available for them or feel intimidated about planning the logistics of an outing themselves. Itineraries should showcase the unique experiences available in the area as well as the connection to local businesses.

## KEY ACTIONS

### WELCOME PEOPLE ONTO THE LAND FOR RECREATION

- Include signage as a core element of planning for new or enhanced trail systems.
- Where needed, augment or replace existing trailhead and park signage to be more welcoming and informative.
- Enhance wayfinding signage on major regional travel corridors. Engage with PennDOT to streamline and standardize the wayfinding signage permitting process.
- Proactively engage state land managers to understand possibilities for partnership and mutual support.

### BUILD A CULTURE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

- Engage with schools and youth organizations to understand current outdoor recreation programming and identify collaborative opportunities to bring youth into the outdoors.

### ACTIVATE EXPERIENCES FOR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

- Organize community events around outdoor recreation experiences and local businesses, such as “bike and brew” events. Promote events through employers and partnerships with popular social media channels.
- Develop and promote itineraries that promote unique recreational experiences and opportunities to patronize local businesses. These itineraries can use fun and creative branding (e.g., “challenges”, “trails”, etc) amplify their appeal.

# BE A DESTINATION

*Steward and enhance key recreational destinations for residents and visitors.*

Outdoor recreation destinations are the backbone of the Alleghenies region outdoor economy. Destinations can include local trails, State Parks, reservoirs, and conserved forests – any facility or landscape that supports outdoor recreation activity. Some of the region’s well-known destinations, such as Raystown Lake and Seven Springs Ski Area, are well-established operations with decades of operational success. Other destinations, including those listed in this section, are emerging, being planned, or are in need of additional investment, enhancement, and stewardship.

This section does not represent an exhaustive list of all potential recreational investment needs in the region; rather, it presents a snapshot of key destination recreation opportunities and investment needs that are well-positioned to capitalize on community linkages and result in economic benefit for the region.

## SEPTEMBER 11TH NATIONAL MEMORIAL TRAIL

**Somerset, Cambria, Blair, and Huntingdon Counties**

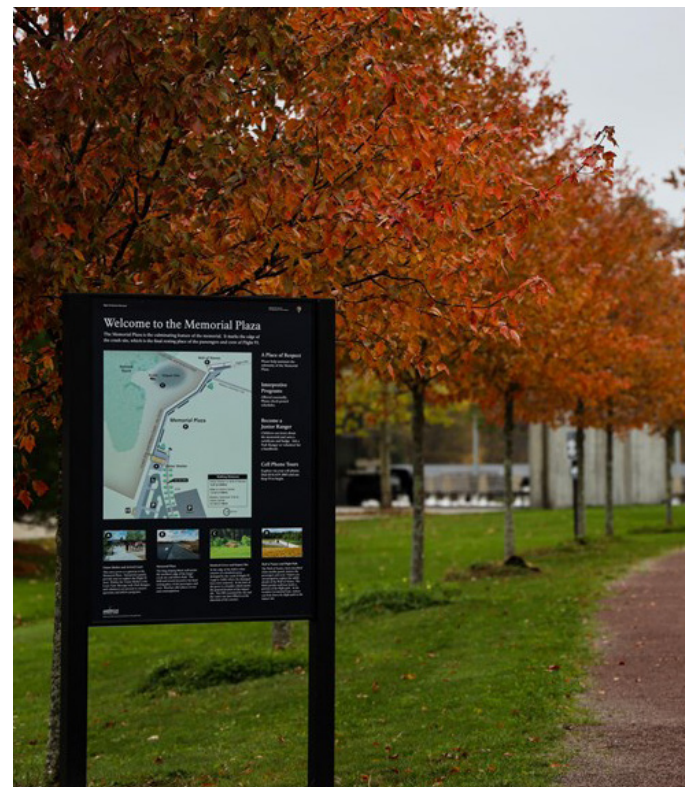
### INTRODUCTION

The September 11th National Memorial Trail (“9/11 Trail”) is a 1,300-mile walking and bicycling route connecting the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., the Flight 93 National Memorial in Somerset County, PA, and the World Trade Center in New York City. Today, the 9/11 Trail primarily follows roads through Somerset, Cambria, Blair, and Huntingdon Counties before connecting to the Great Allegheny Passage trail in Garrett – a total of 140 miles. In partnership with the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance, a non-profit organization, communities and advocates along the route in the Alleghenies have been working to bring the route off of main roads and on to a network of connected trails to provide a safer and more enjoyable recreational experience. In addition to accessing the Flight 93 National

Memorial, the route connects directly through a number of downtown areas and utilizes a variety of existing recreational trails, such as the Lower Trail and the Path of the Flood Trail.

### THE OPPORTUNITY

In October 2021, President Joe Biden signed H.R. 2278, a bipartisan bill that made the 9/11 Trail the first federally-designated National Memorial Trail. As more of the 9/11 Trail route is moved off of main roadways and on to recreational trails, the potential for this trail to support a variety of community and economic development initiatives will grow. For communities with a direct connection to the route, the 9/11 Trail presents a unique “Trail Town” opportunity, providing a new recreational amenity for residents as well as a tourism asset that brings visitors directly into their community. While it is difficult to project the number of visitors that the 9/11 Trail will bring into the region, the unique National Memorial Trail designation is a potential opportunity to engage a distinct visitor market from other comparable long-distance trails and funnel community investment dollars into the region.





## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS, NEEDS, & CHALLENGES

### BUILDING AND MAINTAINING THE TRAIL

Implementing and managing vast mileage of the 9/11 Trail within the region will require significant financial, staff, and volunteer resources. Building this strategic capacity will be critical to the success of the trail. Currently, trail implementation projects are being spearheaded by a patchwork of government and non-profit organizations in partnership with the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance. While these partnerships have yielded some appreciable progress towards trail development in the region, overall capacity for long-term trail implementation and stewardship in the region is lacking.

- Continue to partner with the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance to create new off-road trail connections along the 9/11 Trail route.
- Build coordinated regional capacity for trail implementation and develop a long-term strategy for long-term maintenance of trail infrastructure, including holding trail corridor easements, securing funding for ongoing maintenance and capital projects, and volunteer recruitment.
- Work towards centralized ownership and management of the trail corridor, including identifying and seeking potential partnerships with large trail and conservation organizations and/or creating a strategic alliance of regional governments and organizations. Consider opportunities for statewide collaboration.
- Perform outreach to potential trail stewardship and volunteer partner organizations, such as veterans' associations.
- Incorporate 9/11 Trail implementation projects into county comprehensive plans, as well as regional active transportation plans to qualify projects for transportation-oriented funding sources.
- Identify other areas of alignment with community development needs (e.g., recreational access, public health, school transportation) to expand potential funding opportunities.
- Leverage National Memorial Trail designation to unlock unique funding sources and compete strongly for federal funding programs.

- Advocate for dedicated state and federal funding streams to support 9/11 Trail development and maintenance.
- Promote alignment between PennDOT, regional planning bodies, and 9/11 Trail advocates for statewide trail planning, wayfinding signage, and project implementation opportunities.
- In partnership with PennDOT, develop a standard streamlined process for wayfinding signage permitting.

### COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC LINKAGES

Establishing a primarily off-road route will be a key milestone for the development of the 9/11 Trail in the Alleghenies region. To realize the economic and community development potential of the trail, additional strategies will need to be deployed.

- Ensure that the route still connects to downtown areas as it is moved off-road.
- Connect the trail to additional recreational and cultural attractions through physical trail connections, wayfinding signage, and/or promotional efforts.
- Invest in supportive amenities and facilities at strategic intervals along the trail, such as trailside parks, rest areas, and restrooms.
- Activate 9/11 Trail experiences within the Alleghenies region by developing and promoting trail itineraries, organizing trail events and rides, and forging connections with hospitality businesses along the trail corridor.
- Promote the Alleghenies region as a unique and distinct section of the 9/11 Trail, leveraging the region's mountainous topography, scenic beauty, cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities.
- Encourage collaborative promotion of the 9/11 Trail in the Alleghenies region by visitor's bureaus and other destination marketing organizations.
- Follow "Trail Town" principles for linking trail users to local business establishments, such as providing wayfinding signage and partnering with local merchants to encourage trail-friendly businesses.

# INCLINED PLANE TRAILS

## Johnstown, Cambria County

### INTRODUCTION

The Inclined Plane Trails are a remarkable outdoor recreation asset, located in the heart of Johnstown, PA. Adjacent to the historic downtown on a steep hillside, these trails evolved from a unique synergy with the world's steepest vehicular inclined plane, built in 1890 by the Cambria Iron Company. Originally designed to carry people and supplies to the new hilltop community of Westmont, and to serve as an escape route in the event of a catastrophic flood, today the Johnstown Inclined Plane is a unique tourist destination, and mountain bikers use it to complete laps on the new hillside trails. Spearheaded by resident Mike Cook, the trail system offers a thrilling downhill mountain biking experience with a unique blend of history and adventure all within a few steps of downtown.

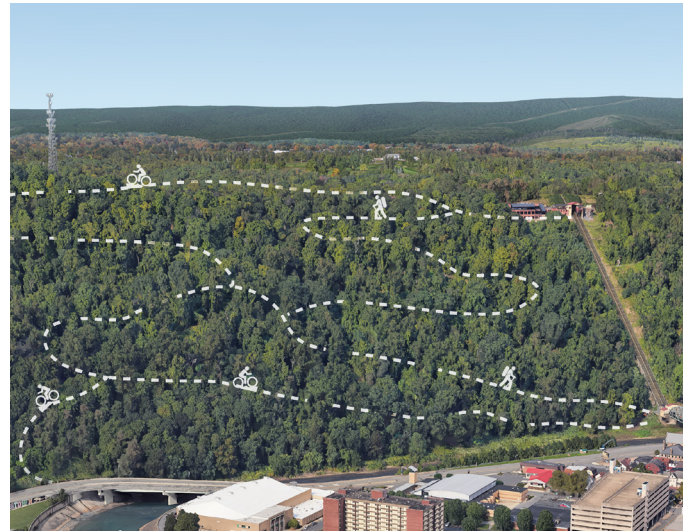
### THE OPPORTUNITY

The Inclined Plane Trails are one of many outdoor recreation assets that help position Johnstown as a magnet for outdoor enthusiasts. The uniqueness of this asset has the potential to draw visitors from the broad region, and the proximity to downtown provides a convenient recreational asset for residents and presents an opportunity for businesses to capture visitor spending. By attracting more visitors who choose to stay and explore the local offerings, including businesses, hotels, and breweries, the trails are becoming a contributor to the city's economic growth and are helping to build an outdoor recreation culture in the community.

## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS, NEEDS, & CHALLENGES

### TRAIL SYSTEM

- Trail maintenance capacity is a primary need of the Inclined Plane Trails. Currently, the trails are primarily built and maintained by a single passionate resident. Identifying strategies and funding to provide additional trail maintenance support will be important to the long-term success of the trail network, especially if any expansion of the current trail network were to be considered. Organizing community events around trail maintenance volunteer efforts is one interim strategy that could be considered.



Long-term, the recruitment or development of a permanent non-profit organization to oversee the trail network should be a priority.

- Connecting the Inclined Plane trails to nearby Stackhouse Park is an opportunity create a larger network with more varied riding opportunities.
- As capacity and terrain permits, explore opportunities for a top-to-bottom beginner-friendly trail.

### COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC LINKAGES

- Promote a “trail to town” experience at the Incline Plane Trails. Encourage visitors to park and start their ride or walk from Central Park and/or other downtown hubs and identify opportunities to enhance pedestrian and bicycle connections to the Incline Plane.
- Develop wayfinding at strategic nodes that invites trail users into the city to patronize breweries, restaurants, and other relevant businesses.
- Recruit existing trail event series and plan unique “urban adventure” events that utilize the trails and uphill conveyance provided by the Incline Plane, such as races and non-competitive trail events and challenges.
- » Enhance community programming around the Incline Plane Trails. This could include a variety of strategies:
  - » Youth programming for outings, bicycle skill building, and gear lending
  - » Bike repair, trail maintenance, and volunteer leadership programs through secondary education institutions.



# GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE

## Southern Somerset County

### INTRODUCTION

The Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) trail offers a spectacular 150-mile multi-use path that weaves through the natural beauty of Maryland and Pennsylvania. Originating in Cumberland, Maryland, and culminating in Downtown Pittsburgh, this crushed-limestone trail traverses valleys and mountains, and parallels the Casselman River, Youghiogheny River, and Monongahela River. Following old footpaths and railroad corridors, the GAP Trail provides a glimpse into the country's westward expansion and industrial heritage. The GAP Trail is a major recreational asset in the Alleghenies, traversing 43 miles through southern Somerset County and several small towns along the way including Confluence, Meyersdale, and Garrett. This trail offers opportunities for short day hikes, invigorating bike trips, and immersive multi-day excursions.

With an annual visitation of approximately 1 million people along the full length of the trail, the GAP Trail not only draws outdoor enthusiasts but also brings a substantial economic impact (\$44 million annually in the region) to the local economies it traverses. The trail has become a unique recreation asset for Somerset County communities along the corridor, and many have already capitalized on this connection. Confluence, Rockwood, and Meyersdale have positioned themselves as veritable "Trail Towns", becoming welcoming destinations, attracting the time and money of trail users passing through, and resulting in noticeable economic advantages for an otherwise small and remote communities.

### THE OPPORTUNITY

The GAP Trail is already well-established and critical economic asset for Somerset County, thanks to years of investment and coordination in local wayfinding, trail connectivity, and local business community coordination under the auspices of The Progress Fund's Trail Town Program. The 9/11 Trail route joins the GAP Trail in Garrett, following the trail south through Meyersdale. The inclusion of the GAP Trail in this federally-designated National Memorial Trail presents an opportunity to bring more visitors on to the trail, enhance connectivity to other communities,



and leverage critically-needed funding for trail maintenance. The 9/11 Trail designation has already resulted in a planned trail connection to downtown Berlin and trailhead enhancements in Garrett.

### STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS, NEEDS, & CHALLENGES

- GAP Trail infrastructure in Somerset County requires significant ongoing maintenance, which is the responsibility of Somerset County with support from the Somerset County Recreation & Trails Association. There are a total of 42 bridges and tunnels in 43 miles, many of which are former railroad bridges. There are significant maintenance needs with some of these structures with escalating repair costs – a recent project to re-deck three trail bridges ran a price tag of \$2.4 million and was supported by one-time American Rescue Plan Act funds. The stone dust trail surface requires regular resurfacing as well, and the trail requires periodic clearing of downed trees and landslide debris. Somerset County has annually dedicated funding to trail maintenance in recent years; however, future funding levels could fluctuate based on County policy, revenues, and competing needs. The trail is in need of a dedicated, long-term funding source to support maintenance of critical infrastructure.
- Continue to follow Trail Towns Program principles for enhancing community and economic linkages to the GAP Trail, including thoughtful wayfinding signage, visitor itineraries, and engagement with new businesses. Identify a pathway to bring Garrett into the Trail Towns Program.
- Complete the 9/11 Trail connection to Berlin and identify a long-term, dedicated funding source for maintenance.

# HORSESHOE CURVE TRAILS

Altoona, Blair County

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a local effort to establish a network of non-motorized, multi-purpose trails on lands owned by the Altoona Water Authority in the vicinity of the Horseshoe Curve National Historic Landmark. Volunteers recently constructed a small network of trails off Veteran’s Memorial Highway several miles west of Horseshoe Curve. A group of local advocates has envisioned a major expansion of this trail network to become a regional mountain biking destination and key recreational amenity for greater Altoona area residents.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

There has been significant effort in Blair County to establish an outdoor lifestyle brand – a strategy that highlights the existing recreational opportunities present in the county to attract, engage, and retain a strong and talented workforce. In keeping with this economic development initiative, there is an opportunity to establish a new major trail system that addresses a well-understood recreational amenity gap in the county. Despite being surrounded by a variety of forested ridgelines and public lands, Altoona area has comparatively few opportunities for recreation on natural-surface trails near the city. More broadly, Blair County lacks a significant mountain biking trail network.

The potential for the trail system to connect directly to Altoona is a unique opportunity to “unlock” the scenic and mountainous terrain surrounding the city. This opportunity can create a special recreational amenity for residents and visitors of Blair County, and attract visitors to spend money at local businesses downtown.

## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS, NEEDS, & CHALLENGES

### TRAIL SYSTEM

- Explore opportunities for bringing the trail system into Altoona and making Altoona the hub for trail access.



- Consider system-wide trails planning approaches that address a variety of skill levels, opportunities for skill progression, sustainable and low-maintenance trail design, and thoughtful use of challenging terrain.

### ECONOMIC LINKAGES

- Develop creative branding for trail system that celebrates Altoona and Blair County
- Engage the local business community to cross-promote the trail system through frontline staff and other initiatives.

### COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Explore opportunities for establishing long-term organizational support for trail stewardship, including corporate sponsorship.
- Consider strategies for activating the trail system for the community through events and guided outings oriented at beginner trail users.



# HUNTINGDON & BROAD TOP RAIL TRAIL

## Bedford County

### INTRODUCTION

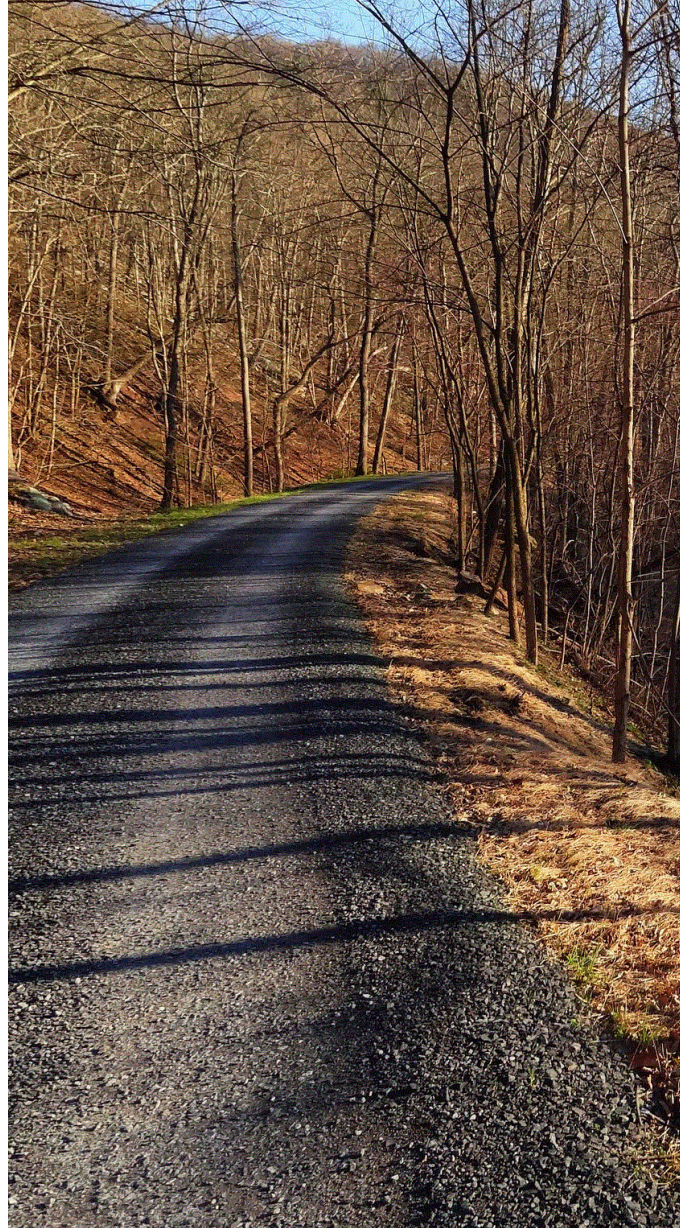
Stretching over 12 miles, the Huntingdon & Broad Top Rail Trail (H&BT) meanders along the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River through rural Bedford County. The opening of the trail in 2019 followed years of planning, partnership, and investment on the part of Broadtop Township and Rails to Trails of Bedford County. Starting a few miles north of Everett, the trail heads north through the small boroughs of Hopewell and Riddlesburg before terminating at the Red Cut Picnic Area just south of Warrior's Path State Park. Walking and pedaling the crushed stone trail offers a serene and scenic experience for residents and visitors to this part of Bedford County. The trail hosts a variety of community events and also forms an important linkage in the Eastern Divide Trail, a nearly 6,000 mile off-road-focused bicycle touring route stretching from Newfoundland, Canada to Key West Florida (the longest such route in the world).

### THE OPPORTUNITY

The H&BT Rail Trail is positioned to be central recreational asset for Bedford County. A 1.1-mile extension, planned for 2024, will connect the trail to Warrior's Path State Park, where park facility upgrades are envisioned. This extension will also facilitate a local connection to the borough of Saxton along the park access road. Thoughtful activation of this connection can provide a new recreational amenity for residents of Saxton and bring visitors into the downtown area to patronize local establishments. Beyond this important project, the H&BT is well-positioned to be the hub of future recreational connections and events for Bedford County. In 2024, the Bedford County Development Association plans to launch a county-wide trail system planning process, which will be a key opportunity to examine possibilities for trail enhancements and connections.

### STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS, NEEDS, & CHALLENGES

- As with any major regional trail, ensuring there is funding and capacity long-term maintenance of trail surfaces and infrastructure (bridges, drainage,



trailheads, etc) will be critical to ensuring safe, quality recreational experiences.

- Extend the trail to Warrior's Path State Park and identify opportunities for enhanced trail connections to downtown areas and recreational amenities through the upcoming Bedford County-wide trails planning project.
- Employ Trail Towns program principles for future community and economic linkages to the trail, including thoughtful wayfinding signage, visitor itineraries, and engagement with new businesses.
- Activate trail experiences for residents and visitors through events, programs, itineraries, and creative branding.

# BEDFORD RECREATION HUB

## INTRODUCTION

Bedford is a borough of just under 3,000 residents and serves as a primary residential and economic center for Bedford County. Major employers in Bedford include the REI distribution center, the Organic Snack Company, and the OMNI Bedford Springs Resort. The well-preserved historic downtown is nestled in the valley of the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River, with the waterway and resulting topography supporting a variety of recreational experiences in and around the heart of the community. The downtown features a variety of restaurants, a combination brewery and bike shop, and multiple overnight accommodations. Key recreational amenities extending out from the downtown include the Shuster Way Heritage Trail, which snakes its way from downtown to the publicly-accessible walking and mountain biking trails at Bedford Springs Resort through a scenic valley, and the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River Water Trail, where paddlers can access the river for fishing and float trips ranging from a few miles to several dozen, with the ability to paddle all the way to Raystown Lake. Other impressive recreational assets, such as Shawnee Lake State Park, Blue Knob All Seasons Resort, and Blue Knob State Park, are located within a convenient drive of downtown.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

With a well-preserved downtown area, local access to trail- and water-based recreation, and proximity to nearby State Parks, Bedford is well-positioned to be a veritable hub of recreation for residents and visitors alike. While strategic trail and facility enhancements can certainly contribute to this concept, the primary opportunity for Bedford lies in community collaboration and activation of existing recreational experiences. Together, the community can make residents aware of recreational experiences and create programs and social events to activate these experiences and enhance community cohesion. Importantly, Bedford has many elements of the social infrastructure needed to make this happen, with bike shops, breweries, major employers, and economic development partners having a vested interest in outdoor recreation, employee retention, and community development.



## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS, NEEDS, & CHALLENGES

- Organizing social events and promoting existing recreational offerings to residents requires time and resources. Identifying key community partners with a shared vested interest in outdoor recreation, workforce retention, and community development can be the first step towards creating partnerships and building capacity.
- While there are some informational resources available on recreational experiences available through Visit Bedford County, stakeholders report that this information is not as effective in reaching residents, particularly younger residents. There is a perception that many residents are not aware of all the recreational experiences available to them.
- While there are direct recreational connections to downtown Bedford, these connections could be better advertised to residents through signage.

## POTENTIAL INITIATIVES

- Create a local collaborative of stakeholders to activate recreational experiences in Bedford.
- Organize local social events that involve recreation and community, such as “bike and brew” mountain bike trail rides that start and end at a local brewery or eatery, or an “outdoor recreation discovery” series in partnership with local employers.
- Identify opportunities for additional youth outdoor recreation programming in partnership with schools and community organizations.
- Partner with major employers for corporate stewardship initiatives, such as trail maintenance.
- Partner with OMNI resorts to examine opportunities for further activating and enhancing the mountain bike trails at Bedford Springs, including creating a greater variety of trails and providing a more welcoming trailhead.



# THE OLD PENNSYLVANIA PIKE (TOPP) TRAIL

## INTRODUCTION

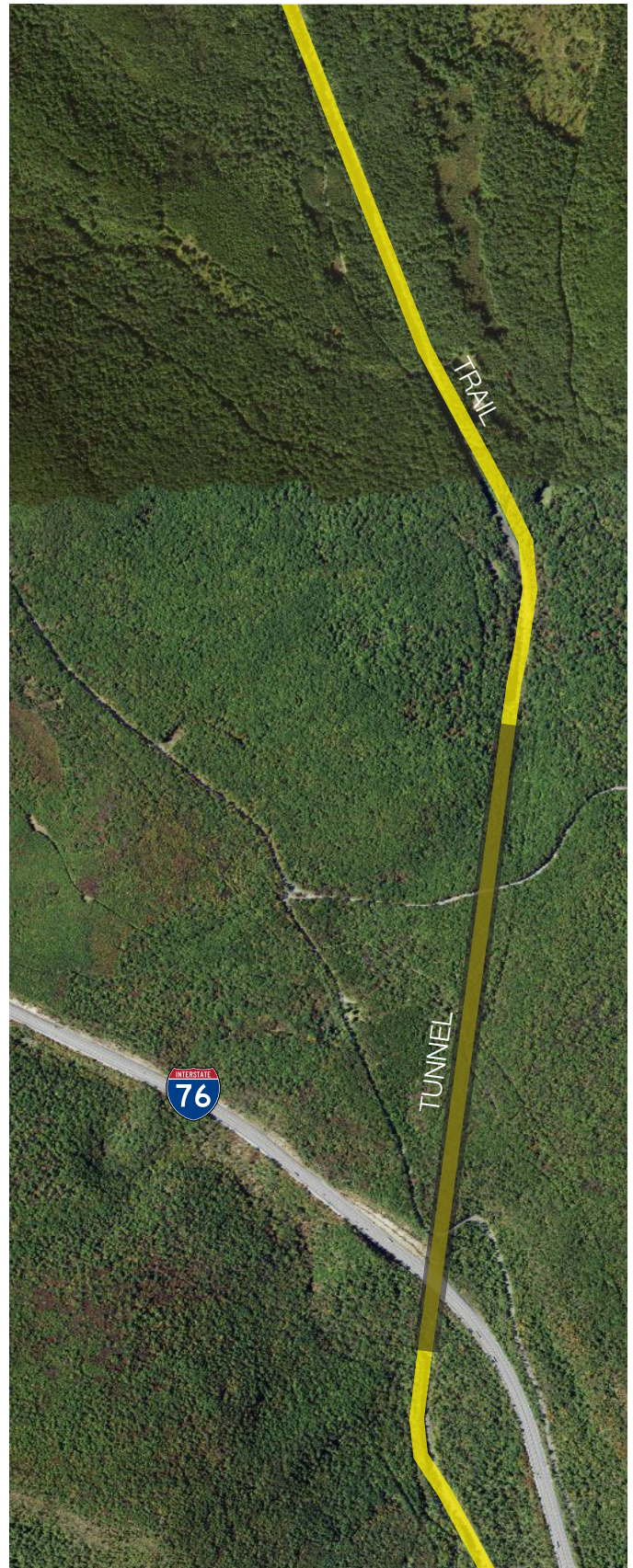
The TOPP trail is a 13-mile stretch of old abandoned Pennsylvania turnpike, starting in Breezewood in Bedford County and terminating a few miles east of Hustontown in Fulton County. Last opened to motorized vehicles in 1968, visitors are welcome to explore the old trail by foot or bike. With the inherent challenges of navigating previously unmaintained infrastructure, and two nearly mile-long unlit tunnels along the way, present-day trail users are encouraged to bring headlamps and exercise personal caution. Overall, this recreational asset is unique and offers mountain bikers and hikers an unforgettable experience that combines outdoor recreation with regional history, heritage, and a unique sense of adventure.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

While the TOPP Trail is a special recreational asset, its remote location has made it difficult to maintain and capitalize on for local communities. However, with the proper investment, the site could become a more popular, safer, and well-connected destination to nearby local communities. Breezewood PA, on the west side of the TOPP trail, could see significant economic benefits from increased use of the trail and has the hotels and amenities to support visitors to the trail who want to stay overnight. Other nearby communities along the I-76 corridor in Bedford and Fulton Counties, like Hustontown, could benefit from increased visitation as well. The TOPP trail sits at the nexus of I-70, I-76 and State Highway 30, making it well-connected and easy to access from a variety of nearby larger markets such as Harrisburg, DC, and Pittsburgh.

## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS, NEEDS, & CHALLENGES

- The aging infrastructure of the TOPP trail poses potential safety risks to visitors. With more investment in remediating these hazards, the experience can become more marketable and accessible.
- Despite linking into Breezewood, PA, the physical connection between the TOPP trail and the town could be strengthened to invite visitors to spend money in town.



- The TOPP trail could also benefit from increased promotion, especially given its remote location.



# BE CHAMPIONS

*Celebrate the outdoor economy as a positive force in the region.*

The outdoor economy is emerging as an economic contributor to the Alleghenies region, and is well-positioned to further sustain economic recovery and growth. However, there may not be a wide recognition of these contributions, and the needs and operational principles of this economic sector may not be well-understood. To build supporters and advocates of the outdoor recreation economy, it first must be recognized and understood. To that end, partners in the outdoor economy should make a dedicated effort to celebrate the impact that it has and promote a forward-looking vision of what it can be.



## STRATEGIES

- Champion the region and continue to promote the “Alleghenies” brand.
- Promote the “outdoor economy” to stakeholders.
- Celebrate wins and demonstrate the impact of the outdoor economy using the “Alleghenies Outdoors” moniker.

## ACTIONS

- Create an “Alleghenies Outdoors” regional working group consisting of economic development organizations, visitor’s bureaus, and chambers of commerce. Key actions for this group could include:
  - » Create and share “Alleghenies Outdoors” promotional materials to celebrate and promote the outdoor economy
  - » Develop an Alleghenies Outdoors logo and brand kit
  - » Develop standard messaging for press releases and interviews
  - » Create promotional media around the outdoor economy
  - » Nominate projects and people for statewide awards and recognition
- Monitor and measure the success and impact of the regional outdoor economy
  - » Produce an annual Alleghenies Outdoors Impact Report that includes Pennsylvania Travel Stats data, trail usage statistics, projects funded or completed, profiles of new businesses created, and success stories from economic development partners.
  - » Create a central Trails Data Repository that includes available data on trail usage and economic impact.
  - » Commission additional economic impact studies for trails and recreational destinations within the region.



# SUMMARY OF KEY ACTIONS

## MOVING THE RECREATION ECONOMY FORWARD, TOGETHER

This plan identifies a variety of actions that can be undertaken by individual communities, organizations, and agencies. The following tables summarize key short-term and long-term actions to be undertaken collaboratively through regional coordination and partnership that address major, cross-cutting needs throughout the region.

<b>BUILDING REGIONAL TRAIL STEWARDSHIP CAPACITY</b>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Partner(s)</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Implementation Actions</b>
<b>DCNR-led working group of regional trail organizations</b>	DCNR, SAP&DC, trail organizations	Short-term	\$	Coordination with DCNR; outreach to trail organizations
<b>Regional volunteer coordination support</b>	Trail organizations, SAP&DC, DCNR	Short-term	\$	Purchase volunteer coordination software; outreach and partnership agreements with trail organizations
<b>Regional coordination for volunteer skills training</b>	Trail organizations, SAP&DC	Short-term	\$	Outreach to trail organizations; partnerships with skilled trail professionals
<b>Regional trails circuit rider position(s)</b>	SAP&DC, DCNR, trail organizations	Short-term	\$\$	Outreach to trail organizations; project identification; conduct Peer-to-Peer studies and secure grant funds
<b>Regional Trails Coordinator position</b>	SAP&DC, DCNR, trail organizations	Medium-term	\$\$	Identify funding opportunities and sponsor organization
<b>Alleghenies Regional Trails Alliance</b>	SAP&DC, DCNR, trail organizations	Long-term	\$\$\$	Identify potential fiscal sponsor(s)/ incubation partners; recruit organizations to join the Alliance; identify core strategic priorities and work plan; pursue non-profit status

See p. 47- 48 for descriptions of key actions.

Short-term = 1-2 years

Medium-term = 2-4 years

Long-term = 5+ years

\$ = achievable with existing resources and/or using small-dollar grants

\$\$ = requires new, dedicated funding and/or larger grants

\$\$\$ = requires significant dedicated long-term funding

## CHAMPION THE “ALLEGHENIES OUTDOORS” ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

<b>Action</b>	<b>Partner(s)</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Implementation Actions</b>
<b>Create Alleghenies Outdoors regional working group</b>	SAP&DC; economic development partners	Short-term	\$	Outreach to partner organizations; recurring meetings
<b>Alleghenies Outdoors Impact Report</b>	SAP&DC; economic development partners	Short-term	\$	Collaborative effort by regional working group
<b>Trails data repository</b>	SAP&DC	Short-term	\$	Build on existing SAP&DC trail use reporting web platform
<b>Create a branded “Alleghenies Outdoors” business support program (p. 42)</b>	SAP&DC; economic development partners	Medium-term	\$\$	Identify lead and partner organization; pursue grant funding; recruit business participants.

See p. 42, 47-48, and 61-62 for descriptions of key actions.

Short-term = 1-2 years

Medium-term = 2-4 years

Long-term = 5+ years

\$ = achievable with existing resources and/or using small-dollar grants

\$\$ = requires new, dedicated funding and/or larger grants

\$\$\$ = requires significant dedicated long-term funding