



WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS

OUR WILD AND WONDERFUL MON



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THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Monongahela National Forest is the crown jewel of West Virginia's public lands. Created in 1920 and known as the Mon, it encompasses 1.7 million acres, 921,000 of which are actively managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS).

Located in central Appalachia, the Mon is one of the most biologically complex forest systems on the planet. It's home to at least 75 tree species, more than 225 bird species, 60 nongame/forage fish species, 12 game fish species, and numerous other wildlife species. Additionally, eight federally listed, threatened, or endangered bird, bat, salamander, and plant species call the Mon home.

This yearlong effort by West Virginia Rivers Coalition (WV Rivers) to listen to the public about outdoor recreation and environmental quality in the Mon enables WV Rivers to be inclusive of and responsive to the diverse array of users in its conservation and public lands policy work.

For nearly two decades, agencies across the federal government have experienced declining budgets, and the USFS has not been immune to these cuts. Throughout the Our Wild and Wonderful Mon Listening Sessions, forest users expressed concerns about the impacts of these cuts on both recreational experiences and environmental quality. Hikers, mountain bikers, anglers, and tourism developers alike voiced concern about the forest service's ability to creatively manage a 21st-century forest if the operating budget continues to wane.

West Virginia's waterways are most significantly at risk amidst the declining USFS resources. The Mon Forest is headwaters to many West Virginia Rivers such as the Potomac, Greenbrier, Elk, Tygart, Cheat, and Gauley. These waterways are crucial to local economies and provide drinking water to many residents downstream. In some regards, West Virginia is a water tower for the eastern United States; our waterways provide clean flowing mountain water to 9% of the nation's population.

Expanding the resources available to the USFS in the region is critical. Widening the financial and human resources available to the Mon Forest Service will take a concerted effort of advocacy by constituents and legislative action by West Virginia's elected officials, both in Washington, D.C., and Charleston.

While the budget and resources of the USFS need to increase, it doesn't mean the federal footprint of the agency must expand. The Mon Forest encompasses a diverse region of small communities with vibrant non-profit organizations and a strengthening business sector. Empowering these organizations as USFS partners is the creative solution to broadening recreational opportunities and environmental restoration within the boundaries of the forest.

The U.S. Forest Service could serve as the pass-thru of funding to organizations or businesses to operate any number of recreational and visitor services, in addition to necessary habitat restoration projects. Working through public and private partnerships, we can build a 21st century Monongahela National Forest that not only continues its legacy as a Land of Many Uses but also ensures that ongoing legacy is responsive to the changing needs of its residents and users. These types of cooperative partnerships empower local communities to have healthy relationships with the Forest Service. They leverage local and state investment into Mon Forest projects, and these efforts are attractive to private foundations. Additionally, this type of programmatic effort doesn't require an expansion of federal employees or property. It ensures that tax dollars are reinvested directly into projects that enhance the community.



There are many forces placing pressure on the integrity of the Mon Forest and its communities beyond declining budgets. The pandemic has increased visitation to the region, with many people looking for socially-distant outdoor experiences. Likewise, the newly designated national park at the New River Gorge will likely increase visitation to the state in the coming years. Once visitors experience the beauty of the Mon forest, they inevitably return. As the pandemic winds on the economic pressures of various magnitude are deeply affecting families and communities across the Mon region and our nation.

Visitors create tremendous economic value, but also place pressure on facilities and natural habitat. Finding a balance between economic value and environmental sustainability is crucial and requires long-range planning with input from all entities that value the resources of the Mon Forest.

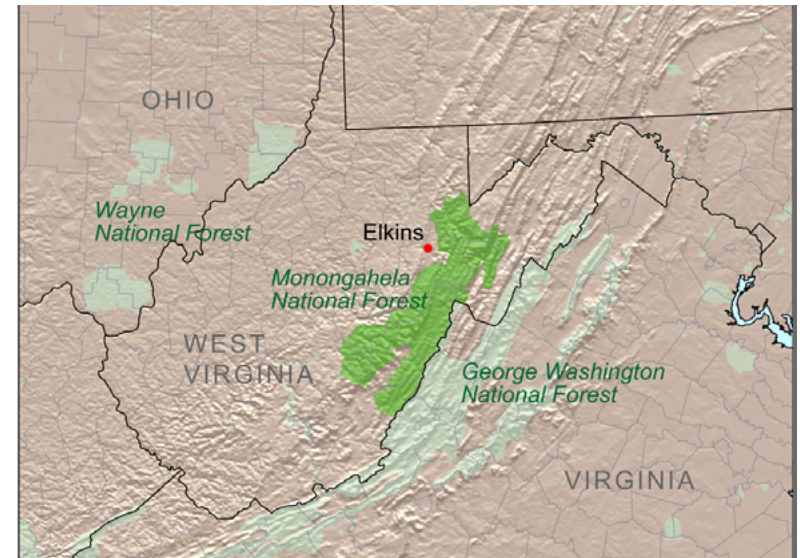
Timing is also critical on a political level, as each election brings new opportunities and challenges. West Virginia is in a unique situation with Senator Manchin serving as chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. WV Rivers can take this opportunity to convey the public's experiences, concerns, and needs to the Senator, thus painting a broader picture of how public lands and conservation policies under his committee's jurisdiction impact West Virginia and users of the Mon.

The Mon Forest is the best of West Virginia, truly wild and wonderful. As a state, we should strive to create a forest that provides recreational users with unique experiences they will cherish for a lifetime. We should make the Mon Forest the most data-connected forest in the nation, giving foresters, scientists, and decision-makers cutting-edge tools for their work. Lastly, we should always ensure that this precious land is carefully managed and respected for the next century of West Virginians to enjoy.

PROJECT AREA

The Project Area is the Monongahela National Forest, which was established in 1920. It encompasses 1.7 million acres; 921,000 of which are actively managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS).

Located in central Appalachia, it is one of the most biologically complex forest systems on the planet. The forest is home to at least 75 tree species; more than 225 bird species; 8 federally listed, threatened, or endangered bird, bat, salamander, and plant species; 60 nongame/forage fish species; 12 game fish species; and numerous other wildlife species inhabit the forest.



WHY TAKE ON THIS VIRTUAL LISTENING SESSION NOW?

The Monongahela National Forest, also known as “the Mon”, is the crown jewel of West Virginia’s public lands. This yearlong effort by West Virginia Rivers Coalition (WV Rivers) to listen to the public about outdoor recreation and environmental quality in the Mon enables WV Rivers to be inclusive of and responsive to the diverse array of users in its conservation and public lands policy work. Locally informed and directed conservation priorities gleaned from this project will be critical as the Biden administration carries through an executive order to protect 30% of the nation’s lands and waters by 2030. Information collected from the project also informs a proactive approach to the forthcoming Monongahela Forest Plan, which should take place around 2026.

Additionally, West Virginia is in a unique situation at this moment, with Senator Manchin serving as chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. WV Rivers can take this opportunity to convey the public’s experiences, concerns, and needs to the Senator, thus painting a broader picture of how public lands and conservation policies under his committee’s jurisdiction impact West Virginia and users of the Mon.

(National forests) exist today because people want them. To make them accomplish the most good the people themselves must make clear how they want them run.”

~Gifford Pinchot, The Use of the National Forest, Dept of Agriculture Pamphlet 1907



PROCESS

Our listening process began with outdoor recreation user groups as defined by the facilitator and staff. This list included several broad recreational interest groups, the forestry industry, and state and federal agencies that have oversight and input into the management of the Monongahela National Forest.

The facilitator focused initial work on understanding the operations and organizational history of WV Rivers Coalition through staff and board interviews. During this time, key players in the West Virginia public lands non-profit landscape were interviewed in preparation for focus groups.

Focus group work began in May 2021. While there was hope for in-person meetings in the Monongahela Forest region during the summer months of this project, the focus groups were all held on the Zoom virtual communications platform due to complications brought on by the pandemic.

Ultimately, this virtual format provided the most suitable option for interviewing recreational users across the massive Monongahela Forest region. Users from across multiple counties and from out-of-state could participate in the meetings. The nexus of energy and input of users participating from across the region at once was truly invaluable.

The listening session work has expanded as we have identified other user groups throughout the process. We continued focus group work and one-on-one conversations through the fall 2021. This report serves as a final report of information collected through September 2021.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The Monongahela National Forest is truly a “Land of Many Uses,” as evident when users championed their favorite activities, locations, and memories in our listening sessions.

ECOLOGICAL PRESERVATION

Focus group attendees recognize the Mon Forest as some of the most pristine and beautiful lands and water in the state. It was with that in mind that many expressed concerns for the ecological future of the area. Fishing and boating communities all expressed a need to protect the headwater areas of the forest. They recognized that safeguarding these areas is not only critical to their recreational interest but also to the economy and health of the state.

Anglers were concerned with inappropriate stream restoration, which often takes place after flood events, often by private landowners. While no specific stream locations were referenced in group discussions, it was merely pointed out that the widening of streams to ameliorate flooding can have damaging long-term effects on cold water fisheries.

Several individuals also expressed concern about the growing off-highway (OHV) vehicle movement. While OHVs are not allowed within the boundaries of the Mon, there will be continued pressure for OHV on all public lands. Focus groups expressed concern over sedimentation created by OHVs and general noise pollution.

Non-native invasive species were also a concern expressed by focus groups. Currently, West Virginia lacks a coordinating entity to oversee invasive species management across government agencies, nor does one exist at an interstate agency level. This leadership vacancy is problematic and should be resolved so state, federal, and local governments have a cohesive understanding of the problems and can work towards unified solutions.

The atmosphere, the earth, the water and the water cycle - those things are good gifts. The ecosystems, the ecosphere, those are good gifts. We have to regard them as gifts because we couldn't make them. We have to regard them as good gifts because we couldn't live without them.

~ Wendell Berry, Farmer, Poet, and Writer



ACCESS

Concerns over impeded access to recreation were expressed in all focus groups. These issues included inadequate parking facilities, appropriate signage, camping facilities, internet service while traveling, and mapping services.

Handicapped accessibility is an issue throughout the Monongahela Forest region. While federal and state government buildings meet ADA standards for accessibility, many small businesses do not. The lack of accessibility hinders West Virginia's attempts to attract and accommodate the largest minority group in America. In addition, virtually no public streams or docks in the region provide modern accessible boat launches. Parking lots often do not accommodate the vans and trailers necessary to haul handicap-accessible rafts.

SIGNAGE

While signage is part of access issues, it is a different problem. Signage has been a perpetual concern in the travel and hospitality industry for many years. The signage in West Virginia rarely matches that of other states and regions, particularly in terms of its aesthetic: robust size, vibrancy, and consistency.

Signage needs to be considered broadly, beyond just directional signage, which often is constrained by the Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Code Devices. However, West Virginia could be more creative with our traffic signage in the Monongahela Forest.

We need to consider increasing the amount of interpretive signage that educates the public about the places they visit. Cautionary signage also needs to be improved in critical habitats such as Dolly Sods, where it will protect users and critical habitats as visitation increases in the future.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

Mountain bikers, hikers, and tourism directors are all concerned by the declining conditions of trails throughout the region. The Forest Service makes an easy scapegoat for deferred trail maintenance, but the problem seems to lie more within their shrinking budget than with any other factor. Regardless, the declining quality of trails in the region impacts the user experience and may eventually impact the region's economy.

RECREATIONAL DISPARITIES BETWEEN FOREST SERVICE DISTRICTS

The diverse landscape of the region provides ample opportunity for exploration and recreation. In the northern districts of the Monongahela Forest, rock climbers frequent the Seneca Rocks National Forest Recreation Area; there is no comparable feature anywhere else in the forest. The northern districts also possess a significant number of wilderness areas, as mountain biking is prohibited in wilderness areas this affects that activity in the northern region of the forest. As a result, the southern region of the forest has a greater network of mountain biking trails. While this isn't a large issue, it was brought up in several meetings and is worth keeping in mind for recreational planning purposes.

NEED FOR INCREASED VISITATION TO THE REGION

There is a consensus that the region will benefit economically from responsible tourism development that increases visitation by outdoor recreationalist. Participants see both the short-term economic activity and the long-term economic stability for the communities as helpful to the region and state. However, some worry about overuse and the ability to manage growth in the long-term.

OVERUSE OF PRIMARY VISITATION AREA AND CRITICAL HABITAT

Visitor impacts to the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area is a primary issue for Mon Forest users. It was called to attention in every single focus group and many one-on-one phone calls throughout these listening sessions. It brought out frustration and even visceral anger in some participants.





Despite most participants' interest in attracting more visitors to the area, there is concern about managing the impacts of increased visitation. Dolly Sods is an extreme example. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased visitation to nearly all the Monongahela Forest counties as people have sought socially distant outdoor experiences. Expectations are that this trend will continue even as the pandemic problems may even out over the coming years.

Participants were concerned that this type of overuse will spread to other areas as West Virginia becomes more popular, given the jump in visitors to the newly designated national park.

HUNTING AND FISHING INPUT

WV Rivers prioritizes learning about the recreational needs of hunters and anglers. The return on these efforts has been mixed. Fishing focus groups have been well attended with valuable input. A focus group was held with Trout Unlimited, and there was a general fishing focus group, also.

Efforts to engage hunters have resulted in sparse participation and, thus, little input. Surveys were deployed to National Wild Turkey Federation, Ruffed Grouse Society, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers Association, WV Bowhunters Association, and West Virginians for Better Buck Management. The latter three groups have been responsive to accepting the survey, with only one organization returning the survey.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

This section represents broad policy considerations for WV Rivers and partners as they move forward in their work on The Mon and public lands in West Virginia. These are only policy considerations based upon views heard from the public and other interviews. The policies and ideas shouldn't be interpreted as an endorsement by the WV Rivers Coalition and its Board of Directors.

These policy considerations were formed based on the discussions generated in listening sessions and may continue to be shaped and constructed in the future. Several policies were initially presented in [West Virginia University's BRIDGE Initiatives report, The Waters of West Virginia: A Science & Technology Policy Perspective, released earlier in 2021.](#)

THE HEADWATERS OF THE MON FOREST – OUR SHARED LEGACY

The Monongahela National Forest is home to the headwaters of multiple rivers that flow past 9% of our nation's population.. Many communities use these rivers for drinking water, farming purposes, and other uses. Most of the Mon waters flow to the Gulf of Mexico, while some reach the Chesapeake Bay. The WV Rivers Coalition staff often refer to the Mountain State as the Water Tower of the East because our beautiful mountains provide so much fresh, clean water to our nation.

Throughout the listening sessions, virtually all participants were concerned about the future of Mon Forest waterways. Anglers, kayakers, and backpackers alike all recognized the waters of the Mon as the cleanest in the state, thanks to the efforts of the US Forest Service. However, they expressed concern that this care is limited to the prescriptions provided in the management plan, which can be changed from time to time. Additionally, the Forest Service, like all agencies, operates at the whims of changing executive administrations and orders, which can impact the interpretation of management plans, treatment of water resources, and forestry practices.

Participants expressed hope that the Mon and its headwaters will be conserved and protected to allow continued access. They also seek assurances that these waterways, which are significant recreational and economic resources, continue to as free-flowing rivers. The USFS has listed 12 Mon Forest waterways as eligible for wild, scenic, or recreational river designation



"This is the most beautiful place on Earth. There are many such places. Every man, every woman, carries in heart and mind the image of the ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary."

~ Edward Abbey, Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness

Action Item: Given the concern and interest in the headwaters and streams within the Mon Forest, the listening sessions should continue on the ground, in Mon Forest communities, with a focus on water. Now that the pandemic situation has become more manageable, these meetings can take place at shelters or campgrounds near the streams or community facilities in the towns that are environmentally and economically impacted by these waterways.

These sessions should inquire into local sentiment on conservation, recreation, tourism, and economic vitality for the communities. Policy options to protect Mon Forest headwaters and other waterways, and to continue and advance the protections already provided by the Forest Service, should be evaluated by residents, businesses, and other community leaders. The sessions should also include a discussion into ways that communities and non-profit organizations can forge stronger relationships with the US Forest Service to enhance the Mon Forest's reputation as having the cleanest waterways and most memorable recreational experiences in West Virginia.

Action Item: Continue reinforcing the importance of waterway conservation by hosting events and programs that discuss how conservation practices have impacted communities around the country. One possible example of this would be a WV Rivers Film Festival, this would be a traveling tour of river-oriented films in locations throughout the Mon Forest region. These in-person events will be valuable points of contact to advocate for the importance of water quality, public lands, and the mission of the WV Rivers Coalition. Such events can also be used as general fundraisers, whether by selling tickets or via some other type of friend-raising and fundraising structured event. They are great opportunities to build membership, recognize longtime donors from specific communities, or present River Coalition/Public Lands Award to special stewards in those communities.

There is always someone in the community you are visiting or working who exemplifies the values of your organization and deserves to be recognized in traditional media or social media. Use every opportunity to reward those individuals and groups and raise your own organization's value in that community.

In addition to theatres screenings, these films could be a partnership with regional libraries which often seek adult programming of this nature. See appendix for a list of suggested films and potential theatre venues.

AN INTENTIONAL TRAIL MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE MON FOREST

SUMMARY

The backlog or deferred maintenance of trails in the Mon Forest is a concern voiced in multiple listening sessions. The Mon Forest is not unique to this problem. It is an agency wide problem that the Forest Service is trying to address, but it needs the help of partners to identify creative solutions that will increase volunteers, funding avenues, and raise awareness of the issue to the public and public officials.

Participants in the listening sessions repeatedly voiced a need for a methodical and predictable trail maintenance schedule. The same concerns came up at the WV TRAIL Statewide Trail Conference in November 2021. Groups working across the forest, trail groups, and marketing agencies all want to see a more organized and well-funded approach to maintaining trails across the region.

Creating a trail 'plan' for one million acres is a cumbersome task. All participants agreed that creating a forest-wide trail maintenance plan would be untenable. The overwhelming recommendation was to begin at the district level or employ even smaller-scale solutions, depending on the organization's mission.

In 2017, the Forest Service outlined a National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System that should be used as a framework for creating scalable trail planning and maintenance systems in any of its national forests. The report outlines a major paradigm shift for the agency, which recognizes limited financial resources, the increased cost of wildfire suppression, and the loss of nearly 40 percent in nonfire personnel. The shift places greater emphasis on non-governmental (NGOs) and volunteer partnerships to execute a variety of work on trails.

[National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System](#)

"The key to a management plan...is to have a detailed understanding of the trail network. This includes existing, offline, and proposed trails; it also means understanding them in every season. Maintenance is a year-round issue..."



The Forest Service identified six Areas of Action that should drive sustainable trail development and management in the forest system.

1-**LEADER INTENT**: Cultivate leadership desire for and commitment to a sustainable trail system.

2-**ORGANIZATION AND TALENT**: Leverage an expanded and combined workforce to increase stewardship capacity.

3-**RELEVANCY**: Connect with diverse communities and trail users.

4-**SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS**: Collaboratively create and achieve a common vision.

5-**AGENCY PROCESSES AND CULTURE**: Maximize opportunities for effective partnering and trail stewardship.

6-**INFORMATION**: Provide readily available, up-to-date, and credible trail information.

The Listening Session participants have augmented these action areas with their experiences working in the Mon Forest. Together the USFS framework and local knowledge of the Mon should create workable plans in each of the ranger districts that are responsive to the needs of those districts and the organizations actively working in those districts.

Keys to Maintenance Planning

The Mon Forest has one million acres with a vast trail system, a newly minted National Park to its south, and an expanding visitation log of its own. It needs more volunteers, as do all of West Virginia's public lands.

The key to a management plan as voiced by our listening session participants is to have a detailed understanding of the trail network. This includes existing, offline, and proposed trails; it also means understanding them in every season. Maintenance is a year-round issue, one that requires a ready supply of volunteers with a knowledge base and skillset to address a variety of landscape problems.

A ready supply of volunteers is more than a singular trail cleanup event with food celebrations at the day's end, which is often the case for many regional trail organizations and the USFS. They end up juggling social organizations seeking service work.

While these social groups play a vital part in the volunteer trail work equation, trail advocates see a growing need to build a larger volunteer base that is highly skilled. It was emphasized repeatedly that volunteer groups need to be highly structured, professional organizations. When these seasoned, professional non-profit organizations work alongside the USFS and shadow the staff members on a regular basis it provides the opportunity for building a great deal of mutual trust and confidence on both sides.

There is wide-spread concern among the non-profits about staffing and/or funding shortages in districts just as there is concern with the increasing use of volunteers in the forest for maintenance work. National forests around the country are experiencing their key, skilled volunteers aging out of service work, and this has a dramatic effect not only on the amount of maintenance work getting accomplished in the forest but also the transfer of skills and knowledge to a new generation of volunteers.

As the USFS continues to move to a system of contracted and volunteer-based maintenance, our region may be at a critical disadvantage given our aging population. Many of the trail groups are already frustrated with the trail conditions and the pace of their own non-profits work in the forest.

As one listening session member put it, "We currently have a large demand for volunteers, and we are forecasting an even greater demand, and yet we can't forecast any ability to meet the supply necessary to take care of our public lands. We need to build that volunteer base."

There are multiple groups addressing trail maintenance from a variety of angles within different regions of the forest. Each has experienced different successes and struggles. Rather than artificially creating a pilot project that would drag USFS and partners into a lengthy and perhaps arduous planning process, it is better to support these organizations in their present efforts and help meet their needs as they evolve as organizations.

"If trails don't get maintained, if new trails aren't built, it's going to be hard to keep people coming here. There are so many other cool places to go mountain biking like Deep Creek Lake, Big Bear Trail Center, Harrisonburg, VA, Allegrippis (PA), New River that are working hard to develop the product."

~ Tucker County Small Business Owner and Mountain Bike Advocate



West Virginia Highlands Conservancy – This organization has a long history of advocating for Mon Forest’s trail system. Currently, they’re prioritizing work in Dolly Sods Wilderness with hopes of trail inventory and monitoring, primitive trail maintenance if given permission, and continuing a successful solitude monitoring program established in 2021. While focused on Dolly Sods, their work will be useful throughout the Mon Forest as more users explore wilderness areas. They are partnered with the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards and USFS staff.

West Virginia Scenic Trail Association – Founded in 1958, WVSTA is the steward of the Allegheny Trail and works year-round at its maintenance. Their members attended the listening sessions and voiced concern about the future and conditions of all trails in the forest. They also voiced an interest in working with other organizations to grow and educate volunteer skill sets. They expressed a need for skilled and professional grant writing and management to assist their organization so they can grow capacity.

Appalachian Conservation Corp (ACC) – A subset of Conservation Legacy, ACC works throughout the Mon, both directly with USFS on projects and contracting with nonprofits working in the Mon to assist with difficult projects. They could help scale a variety of volunteer endeavors in the forest that include volunteer management, training, and skill building.

Mon Outdoor Volunteers – This group is meticulous and methodical in their organizational planning. They have completed extensive research on trail groups nationwide, often traveling to experience their operations firsthand. They are working closely with the Gauley ranger district on the constant inventory of trails, maintenance, and long-range planning with the recreation staff and district ranger.

Tucker County Trail Plan- A variety of partners in the county have begun to undertake a comprehensive county wide trail plan that looks at long-range planning and maintenance of multi-use trails in this county where federal and state land occupies much of the land base.

These are a sample of organizations that participated in the listening sessions that are currently working with the USFS and engaged in different types of maintenance activities. The best solution to the trail maintenance problem is to work with each of these organizations by meeting them where they are, in their arc of organizational development, helping them grow to exceed their own expectations while also meeting the needs of the USFS.

A MODEL OF CHANGE

In the White Mountains of New Hampshire, a model for change has emerged for how units of the Forest Service can address the backlog of trail maintenance and meet the call-to-action in the National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System.

The White Mountain Trail Collective began in 2011 out of need to address the mounting logjam of trail maintenance in White Mountain National Forest, a backlog of maintenance that by current estimates is \$35 million in cost. Using the Collective Impact Model for change they have brought together the trail organizations that were working in isolation within the White Mountain to work together on A Common Agenda. Collective Impact is a tool to raise the consciousness of a region to bring attention to a particular issue that can lead to systemic change.

[American Trails Webinar: White Mountain Trails Collective and Collective Impact](#)

There are **Five Conditions of Collective Impact** to make it a successful engine of change. *Tamarack Foundation and Stanford Social Innovation Review

Common Agenda—All participants have a shared vision for change, common understanding of a problem, joint approach for solving.

Shared Measurement—Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants, ensuring continued alignment.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities—Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a reinforcing plan of action.

Continuous Communication—Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and appreciate common motivation.

Backbone Support—Creating and managing collective impact requires a dedicated staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.



“We currently have a large demand for volunteers, and we are forecasting an even greater demand, and yet we can’t forecast any ability to meet the supply necessary to take care of our public lands. We need to build that volunteer base.”

~ Trail Management Listening Session Participant

As the White Mountain Trail Collective formed, they found all their groups had two of three conditions in common:

- 1) Collectively as a group they were **An Influential Champion** of their cause.
- 2) **Adequate Funding** for lead organization and programs of partners.
- 3) A **Sense of Urgency** for change.

At the time the participating organizations lacked adequate funding to address working together collectively to create the impact necessary upon the trail system. However, they felt the sense of urgency and the collective voice was so great that they could overcome that hurdle and address the funding issue in the long-term. In addition, the Great American Outdoors Act has stabilized the funding of projects for many of these organizations. WMTC feels that adequately funding trails in their region is slowly coming into a better position than it was just a few short years ago.

The convening organizations in New Hampshire found a Common Agenda in their efforts to address the Backlog or Deferred Maintenance of the White Mountain National Forest. It should be noted here that WMTC credits their open dialogue with USFS for helping to bring partners to the table and providing transparency on the full scope of the maintenance needs. As their diagram on page 20 illustrates, the backlog is a cyclical problem that requires multiple intervention points and flexible funding opportunities for the partners. This diagram resembles many of the problems in the Mon National Forest that were echoed by the participants of the Listening Sessions.

Keys to Making It Work

- Constant communication among partners, facilitated by the Backbone Organization.
- Agreement on key outcomes.
- Finding joined strategies to achieve those outcomes.
- Backbone Organization orchestrates collaboration, funding, long-range 3–5 year planning.
- Shared measurement of work, track data on work progress and work to be done. Improves accuracy of costs.

Common Agenda - Trail Maintenance





The Challenges

- It can be difficult to build buy-in.
- Can be difficult to fund (though trail funding is difficult regardless).
- Difficult to breakdown organizational silos and power hierarchies that require trust and time.

In our follow-up listening session with trail groups, they defined a variety of needs for their organizations that would allow them to grow their capacity and thus become better partners of the Forest Service, those needs are outlined below.

NEED: Regular programs that teach and reinforce a variety of trail-building skills that will raise a volunteer base across the forest that can engage with multiple organizations and USFS to address maintenance as needed.

NEED: There is a need for volunteer coordination both at an internal USFS level and an external non-profit level. Both trail organizations and USFS staff voiced a sense of frustration and difficulty when dealing with requests from volunteer groups or simply placing volunteers on projects.

NEED: Professional grant writing and management that allow the trail organizations to focus on what they do best: maintain trails rather than pushing paper.

NEED: There is a need to better engage local populations on the value of trail-building and place-making as healthy and economically important activities. Seeking out marketing and promotional campaigns that demonstrate the importance of being outdoors is essential. These are internal campaigns celebrating local places—NOT marketing money spent on heads in beds and vacationing but encouraging West Virginians to value the forest and water.

The value should be put on “working the land”. With the appropriate message West Virginians should respond, as there is great muscle memory in working the land. These connotations of settling land, farming, forestry, and caring for the land are values that can be used to tap into West Virginians’ state pride. However, marketing only works if it is repetitive and long-term.

A comprehensive internal marketing campaign will take serious capital. It should focus on engaging residents across the entire forest but should also work to help develop the marketing and promotion of each individual organization so that they strengthen their own communication, membership, and donor development.

NEED: Donor development is an issue that lies beneath all conversations with trail groups. Fundraising capacity drives all organizational activities. It is apparent that many organizations operate with internal fundraising mechanisms that are outdated or non-existent and therefore not helping them achieve their mission.

Need for Investment from Outside the Region

Seeking financial investment from outside the region is imperative. The pandemic has shown the importance of the outdoors as ‘medicine’ for the soul. Research at the University of Vermont demonstrated that during the pandemic “people experienced a shift in why they value nature.”

In that study 59% of respondents cherished a greater sense of mental health and well-being by being in nature. While others pursued activities in nature for exercise purposes (29%) or spirituality purposes (29%). The same study saw the largest increase during the early days of the pandemic in people taking walks (70%), observing wildlife (64%), and taking photos or doing other art in nature (54%).

West Virginia, much like Vermont in its rural small-town mountainous landscape, saw record increases in visitation to our forests and parks. These numbers should be available from the Division of Natural Resources and Tourism and should be used to pursue funding to ensure our wild places remain places of value and solitude.

WV Rivers Coalition and its Public Lands partners are tremendous fundraising organizations. Their collective help in nurturing this conversation about trail maintenance and the needed components would be beneficial. Pursuing outdoor recreation funders that support national or international projects and enticing them to invest in the Mon Forest will be crucial to solving the backlog of trail maintenance, maintaining its unique habitat and importance within the American watershed system.

**[In Pandemic, People Are Turning to Nature – Especially Women](#)*

**[COVID-19 and human-nature relationships: Vermonters’ activities in nature and associated nonmaterial values during the pandemic](#)*

“The pandemic has shown the importance of the outdoors as ‘medicine’ for the soul. Research at the University of Vermont demonstrated that during the pandemic “people experienced a shift in why they value nature.”



Division of Tourism and Convention and Visitors Bureau

Creative trail planning and declining trail conditions in the region will continue to have an impact on heads-in-beds. Therefore, the WV Division of Tourism and each Convention Visitors Bureau in the region should take an active role in Mon Forest trail planning and maintenance. Trail groups and local CVB's repeatedly voiced concerns throughout listening sessions that trail conditions in the region are beginning to negatively affect user experience. Reinvesting this out-of-state bed tax into trail maintenance would pay for itself as the user experience improves in the coming years.

ACTION ITEM: Engage White Mountain Trail Collective, White Mountain National Forest Staff, National Park Service Recreation Trails Conservation Assistance Program Staff for New Hampshire and West Virginia to lead a workshop on the development and operation of WMTC and using Collective Impact, with a specific focus on how that knowledge can be transferred to the Mon Forest.

Contacts:

White Mountain Trail Collective-Executive Staff

White Mountain National Forest-Stanley Carte, Assistant Recreation and Wilderness Program Leader

National Park Service Recreation Trails Conservation Assistance Program- Nathan Hilbert

ACTION ITEM: Create an Endowment for Mon Forest Trail Maintenance and Development. As outlined in the National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System, there is an ongoing conversation and effort to create a USFS national endowment for trail maintenance. While this may take several years to gain traction, it doesn't prohibit our partners from putting in place endowment(s) for the million-acre Mon National Forest.

Monongahela Forest Trail Work Recognition Day

Mon Forest trail workers and organizations rarely get recognition for their accomplishments. This includes the USFS staff, who put in countless hours of time assembling funding, volunteers, and equipment.

ACTION ITEM: Create a Mon Forest Trail Work Recognition Day that includes federal, state and local elected officials, USFS Supervisor's office, and the numerous volunteer groups working on trails in the forest to celebrate the miles that were repaired in the prior year.

This should include tours of problematic areas that demonstrate the need to elected officials. It should also celebrate areas where some great successes have been made in the past year. It should also provide an opportunity for WVU Outdoor Economic Development Center to engage the elected officials in a training activity. Lastly, it should provide the opportunity to recognize trail groups and individuals with awards for their work. Recognition is key to continued volunteer recruitment and achievement.

Anecdotes from the Trail Listening Sessions

Happy Relationships with the USFS Make Happy Trails

Trail groups, wilderness advocates, and the USFS staff affirmed, repeatedly, that good communication and follow-through on projects is essential to building trust with one another. Specifically, trail groups demonstrated how they built trust with increasingly larger scale projects over the years. Other groups elaborated how the start-up of their organization was fostered by working closely with the USFS to create baseline data for trail maintenance surveys.

These groups also discussed how jarring staffing changes can be, particularly if those changes reshuffle priorities, or if there is a lag in the hiring process that jams up projects. This is a scenario in which partner organizations that shadow the staff weekly would tremendously help to fill these personnel and knowledge gaps.

Gate Keys in other Forests

Professional organizations with skilled staff are essential to building trust with the National Forest staff. Structured, professional, non-profit





organizations in other national forests are working alongside USFS on the ground, in the truck, and in the office. Working parallel to them as assistant staff provides the non-profit comprehensive knowledge about the forest and the activities of the USFS.

This type of relationship is like those seen in the marketing and advertising ecosystem—firms will place staff within a client’s office to work seamlessly with the client. It creates transparency and mutual trust. Pisgah National Forest was cited as a place where this model succeeds with the Pisgah Conservancy as a partner.

It was suggested that in the Pisgah National Forest, organizations are trusted with forest gate keys, which then allows them access to manage their workflow and plan around USFS staff schedules. Some volunteer groups working in the Mon believe this level of trust with gate keys is due to the level of professionalism of non-profit organizations working in Pisgah vs the Mon. Regardless, they do assert that gate keys promote greater productivity of maintenance organizations. The issue of gate keys was brought up in several Listening Sessions, so this anecdote was worth noting in the report. The partner organization and shadow work efforts are more the key takeaway.

User Conflicts and Trail Design

Some trail groups expressed frustration that the USFS will not limit types of user groups on certain trails despite specific types of activities causing damage to the trail. Cow Pasture Trail was cited as a trail that is heavily promoted by local and state agencies and receives a great deal of visitation. However, it is a rather wet trail throughout the year. It remains open to all use types: horses, bikes, and foot traffic, but its regular, wet conditions make it very difficult to maintain.

As noted by attendees, the “USFS closes many roads and gates during the winter seasons because they cannot be effectively managed in those conditions, some trails should be closed during certain seasons and to certain users.” As the Mon Forest staff and region reimagines itself into an outdoor recreation economy forest, rethinking policies around trail closures and user conflict—not just with other users, but with the trail conditions—should be one of the priorities.

Loop Trails

Out-and-back trails are a regular frustration of hikers and bikers alike and voiced as such in the listening sessions. Many people pointed to the numerous abandoned logging roads that could be connected to create looping trails. Certainly, there are miles of dormant logging roads and trails waiting to be connected or reopened.

DOLLY SODS, BEAR ROCKS PRESERVE, AND INCREASED VISITATION

SUMMARY

Dolly Sods Wilderness and Bear Rocks Preserve are precious landscapes that many West Virginians hold dear. They are sensitive areas that have seen overwhelming visitation in recent years which place the unique habitats in danger of losing their wilderness quality. Fortunately there are organizations beginning to track the human impact upon the wilderness.

Additionally, as West Virginia seeks to attract remote workers and keep its own young talent at home through promotion of incentive programs and outdoor recreation opportunities, it needs to keep in mind the economic disparities that can be created in local recreation dependent communities.

Overcrowding at Dolly Sods Wilderness came up in every listening session. Participants voiced concerns not just about traffic and access, but also the more important aspects of solitude and critical habitat.

Traffic is the visible symptom of a larger problem; the traffic isn't created so much by Dolly Sods itself but by Bear Rocks Preserve, which is popular with day visitors.

Bear Rocks Preserve is often featured in tourism marketing materials, it fuels much of the human activity in the wilderness area. Dolly Sods is unusual in that it is a wilderness area bounded by a public road on 50% of its area which then easily connects users to numerous trails into the backcountry.

In 2021, the West Virginia Highland Conservancy (WVHC) Public Lands Committee began a wilderness monitoring program at Dolly Sods. The committee contacted USFS to ask what could be done to prevent the erosion of wilderness character in Dolly Sods. This led to a six-component program that stretched through the camping season and the group also partnered them with the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards in solitude monitoring, a core component of wilderness experience.

Traffic is the visible symptom of a larger problem; the traffic isn't created so much by Dolly Sods itself but by Bear Rocks Preserve, which is popular with day visitors.



The program consists of six components, though not all of them could be pursued in the initial year. WVHC hopes to address all six in the summer of 2022.

- 1) **Wilderness Survey Registration Boxes** – Boxes contain wilderness surveys for users to voluntarily fill out. These are a joint project between the USFS and WVHC.
- 2) **Trail Stewards** – Volunteers are stationed at the busiest intersections and trail heads to educate visitors on No Trace Principles, characteristics of wilderness, and Dolly Sods' unique characteristics.
- 3) **Inventory of Campsites and Trail Conditions** – This will hopefully take place in 2022 but requires training and equipment. The inventory will help USFS decide whether campsites should be closed or designated as restoration areas, and whether trails need to be repaired or temporarily closed.
- 4) **Development of Trail Maintenance Group** – This group's work will be determined by the inventory. Intervention in wilderness areas necessitates greater justification than in other parts of the forest. It requires primitive tools and procedures, so any trail work will take time. Engineering solutions where necessary (such as primitive pedestrian bridges) requires permission. This work cannot take place until the inventory process is complete.
- 5) **Solitude Monitoring** – A key element of the Wilderness Act and wilderness character is solitude, something that has been compromised in Dolly Sods. There is a need to identify these areas and quantify the problem. Teams will hike the trails several times a week at random, document trail activity, and collect data for the USFS's Wilderness Management Plan. The goal is to prevent loss of character.
- 6) **Traffic monitoring**- Traffic and parking monitoring is a necessary task within wilderness management planning but is one that USFS can handle using available technology: standard roadway traffic counters, personnel counting on peak weekends, etc.

The USFS had determined they can handle the traffic counting and WV Highlands Conservancy's time was best spent on other tasks more critically connected to wilderness and habitat.

WVHC INITIAL FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Registration and Survey Boxes

In the first month of observation of 2021, there were 1100 party nights ("party" refers to "groups"), with backpackers filling out 50% of the surveys.

Trail Stewards

There were 20-25 Trailhead Steward volunteers, and the solitude monitoring program will continue in the summer of 2022 with a more ambitious protocol.

ACTION ITEM: Consider creating a series of 'Trail Steward' infographics, videos, and other content that illustrates how to respect wilderness and other hikers seeking solitude fo social media. Brand the content to WVHC, Dolly Sods, and the Mon Forest, in a way that gives it "local color". Distributed the content on Dolly Sods social media pages, Tucker County CVB, WV Rivers, WVHC, and USFS (if that type of content is not already on federal sites).

ACTION ITEM: The information collected by the WVHC should be regularly formalized into a digestible report for the public so human impact on backcountry wilderness can be better understood. Dolly Sods is one of the highest concerns in the forest among WV Rivers constituents and should be the lead hook in getting the public, funding organizations, and our Congressional Members aware of the Mon National Forest's funding needs.

Promotion and Marketing of Bear Rocks and The Sods

Bear Rocks and Dolly Sods have amazing beauty. Photos of spring sunrises glinting through "those rocks" and fiery autumn mountain laurel and huckleberry have been luring tourists to West Virginia for decades. However, it has come time to reconsider the value in promoting



Bear Rocks and Dolly Sods have amazing beauty. However, it has come time to reconsider the value in promoting places with critical habitat and places that have such intrinsic value to West Virginians.

places with critical habitat and places that have such intrinsic value to West Virginians.

Social media changed the dynamic of word-of-mouth advertising and do-it-yourself adventuring. Tourists can get detailed information, travel plans, and step-by-step photos of adventures without engaging anyone in the tourism or adventure recreation industries.

Additionally, West Virginia Tourism Office and the counties surrounding Dolly Sods and Bear Rocks have a feast of vistas that can be employed to entice visitors to put their heads-in-beds.

Wilderness Counties are Attractive

For some, the above title is strikingly obvious. “Of course they’re attractive—it’s why we want those lands preserved.” But wilderness is a magnet for people to move and stay. Research by Headwaters Economics, a non-profit research group that works to improve community development and land management decisions has shown that wilderness areas over time attracts people to not only visit those places, but live in the counties where those wilderness areas are located.

The population numbers for Mon Forest wilderness counties don’t quite square up with wilderness counties in the west where Headwaters Economics have conducted their research, likely for a variety of differing social and economic factors. However, those working to nurture a better life for communities in those counties should seek to understand what drives people to relocate and live near wilderness.

People relocate to wilderness counties for quality-of-life, not economic factors. Per the Headwaters Economics Research, “Economic motivations accounted for about 30% of the reasons for moving.” Their work took two approaches to investigating why people chose to move to wilderness counties and adjacent; both findings showed that the attractiveness or “pull” of these areas was more important than the “push” of any negative features of the areas people were leaving.

Once people had relocated to the region, they found themselves living a greater quality of life. “People were less stressed, happier, more satisfied, and became attached to the areas. And this was despite up to one-third of the [persons] taking income losses or moving with no job waiting for them. People were often trading off higher incomes in urban areas for perceived higher levels of amenities.”

As marketing agencies and local communities amplify efforts to develop outdoor and adventure recreation in the Mon Forest, there will be greater exposure to the benefits of living in these counties. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic and the creation of New River Gorge National Park have awakened the beauty and accessibility of West Virginia's public lands to millions of new eyes in a time when relocation from urban places is front of mind.

Having a full understanding of factors driving this relocation is imperative to reshaping the region. Headwaters work suggests that over time "demand has increased for goods and assets that more rural high-amenity areas can provide (solitude, outstanding scenery, outdoor recreation, large estates, etc.). Much of what people moving to these areas want is provided by public rather than private goods."

*Rudzitis, G. 2019. Public Lands, Place, and Quality of Life. Rasker, R., ed. People and Public Lands. Bozeman, MT: Headwaters Economics.

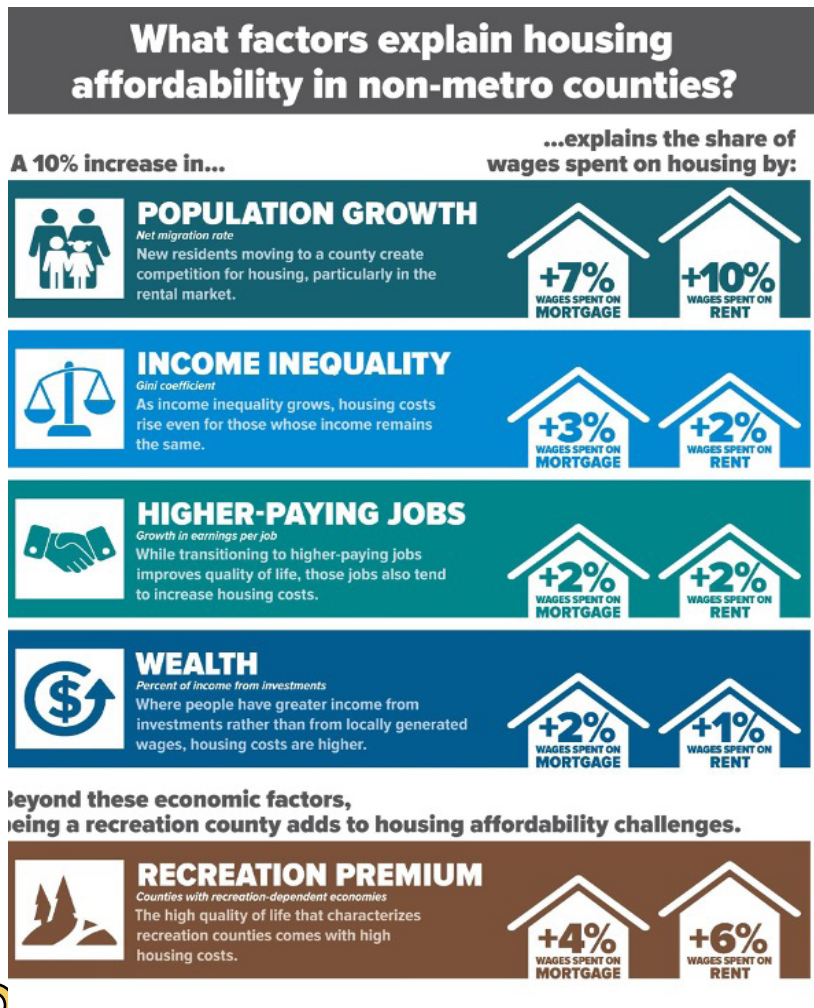
Recreation Dependent Counties and Housing

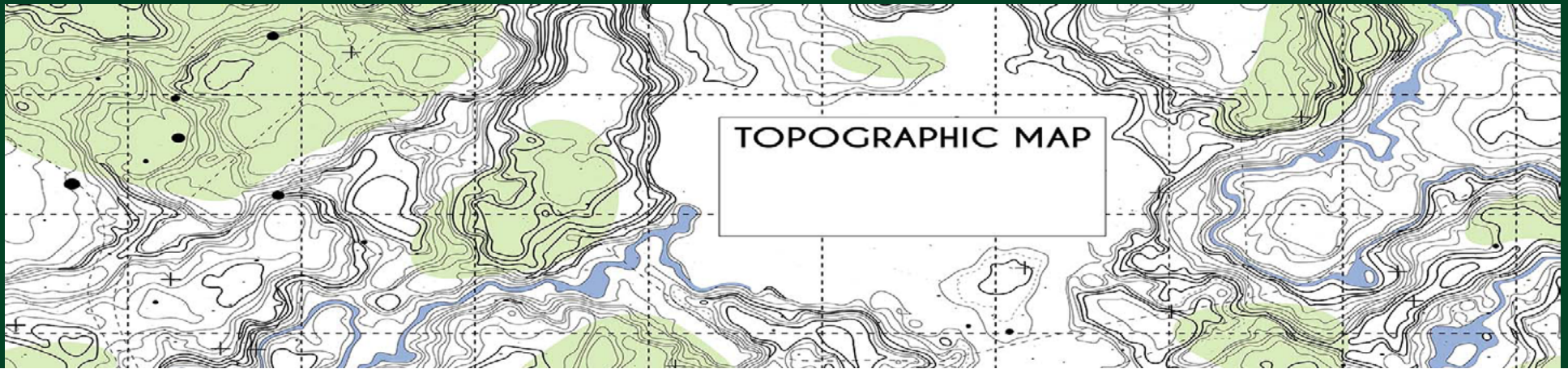
As West Virginia communities continue their investment in outdoor recreation and tourism as a diversifying agent of change, it is necessary to be aware of the growing disparities in the cost of living of those industries and the changing local economy. These disparities become even more pronounced in times of great economic fortune or distress for the locality. The housing recession of 2007-08 and the pandemic have both demonstrated the fragility of our economy. Being attentive of these factors is vitally important as West Virginia continues to focus on economic development, and even more so when that economic development is reliant upon the outdoors.

As part of a 2020 report on Housing Affordability in Recreation-Dependent Counties, Headwaters Economics sampled three Mon Forest Counties. Greenbrier, Pocahontas, and Tucker were part of the nationwide sampling of recreation counties. All three counties fall under 25% Wages Spent on Rent/Mortgage; however, Greenbrier and Pocahontas are inching toward that quarter-mark of a person's income. See Appendix for county sampling data of the above counties.

Headwaters Economics suggests several tools that communities can employ to tackle housing disparity in their community.

Community Land Trusts have been involved in increasing the supply of low-cost housing in communities like [Moab, UT](#), [Orcas Island, WA](#), and [Jackson Hole, WY](#). In some major ski towns, [employers have raised wages](#) to better meet employee needs. Regional housing authorities in communities such as [Summit County, CO](#), [Blaine County, ID](#), and [Aspen, CO](#) help to coordinate workforce housing strategies on a regional basis.





MAPPING THE FOREST

SUMMARY

Listening Sessions participants noted that maps are the foundation of all forest planning and development projects. Moreover, these organizations stressed they appreciate the ability to engage in informed commentary on the Forest Service Schedule of Proposed Actions, WV Department of Environmental Protection comment periods and other activities afforded by WV Rivers and partners. However, the quality of map data in the forest prohibits accuracy of informed commentary and could be improved.

Participants also expressed the need to have better online mapping services available to the traveling public and that map applications available for cellular phones often miss the mark in terms of accuracy and trail ratings.

Mapping is the foundation of forest planning, environmental advocacy, timber sales, tourism development, and outdoor recreation planning. WV Rivers is again in the position to be the facilitator of this important conversation, which provides the basis for building a large portion of our economy. The need for more accurate and accessible mapping resources were widely discussed in several listening sessions.

Participants also expressed frustrations with the accuracy of general online mapping tools. It was pointed out these applications can have poor accuracy. In addition, trail popularity rankings within applications over-expose certain trails in comparison to other well-maintained, equally valuable trails in the community.

NEED: Fine-scale Lidar for the Mon Forest

There is a need to complete and make public Lidar for one-third of West Virginia which includes the majority of the Mon. The data needs processed for use at fine-scale for online and offline use. The Lidar currently available to the public is 3-meter elevation data. The quality of the elevation data between 3-meter and 1-meter data (fine-scale) is dramatic, particularly when dealing with issues of water quality, soil erosion, and seeking scientific opinion based on that data.

Fine-scale would provide information at a 1-meter elevation dataset. This would greatly improve the accuracy of information used in responding to projects on the Mon Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions and/or other federal or state agency's proposed projects and reviews. Fine-scale Lidar would also improve trail planning, habitat restoration, and a host of other projects, forest-wide.

ACTION ITEM: Convene the agencies and organizations needed for the completing and processing of 1-meter Lidar data for the remainder of the state. If necessary, seek federal, state, and private funds to assist in this effort. Engage strategic partners, such as the WV Mountain Hydrology Lab and WV Water Research Institute, who have a use for improved data. These strategic partners can also leverage the influence of West Virginia University, if needed, for completing this important survey work. As the state's largest Land Grant Institution, it should be in WVU's interest to ensure this data gets into the hands of the public in a free and accessible manner.

NEED: Mapping Data Equity

Throughout the course of the sessions, it became evident that each organization and agency had various levels of capacity for mapping. Likewise, each organization has a great desire and need for using maps to convey their mission and projects.

There are also organizations that have specialized skills and staff that work with mapping datasets. These organizations and their staff speak a different language than many other advocacy organizations, a language specific to the science of mapping. It became apparent in conversations that the mapping information available is not always equitable across the groups that work with WV Rivers on a regular basis.

ACTION ITEM: Convene organizations that are actively engaged in Mon Forest mapping to assess needs and data gaps within their organizations. (This may or may not be the same group that seeks to achieve the above Action Item - Lidar for Mon Forest.)



There is an ongoing need for education about cutting-edge tools in the world of mapping (for WV Public Lands Partners and other groups in WV). Use the Public Lands Forum as a means for continuing a conversation regarding mapping, data, and illustrating innovative tools.

While these groups may presently convene to discuss Mon Forest mapping data, it would behoove WV Rivers to lead a meeting from the perspective of conserving headwaters, Public Lands, and the Mon Forest. Any continued conversation about conserving headwaters would be an opportunity to start a discussion about mapping the forest, to connect new partners, and to raise more capital for using technology wisely in the forest. To raise that capital, WV Rivers will need to understand what data scientists see as needs and gaps.

Potential Participants

West Virginia Land Trust	Downstream Strategies
Allegheny Blue Ridge Alliance	WV Highlands Conservancy
West Virginia University	US Forest Service
Mountain Hydrology Lab	WV Dept. Environmental Protection
Water Research Institute	

NEED: There is an ongoing need for education about cutting-edge tools in the world of mapping. Many software products and online applications have outreach staff whose job it is to lead either educational workshops or “sales pitches” to potential users and consumers. Engaging with these developers and bringing them to West Virginia either physically or virtually for educational purposes would be a community building opportunity for WV Rivers and its Public Lands Partners. This would also present the opportunity for these companies to get feedback about their product from on-the-ground trail groups that find the product missing the mark in places and perhaps can help remedy the problems West Virginia trail groups have with its accuracy.

ACTION ITEM: Use the Public Lands Forum as a means for continuing a conversation regarding mapping, data, and illustrating innovative tools. Investigating educational opportunities with ESRI, AllTrails, Trail Link, Gaia GPS, Farout Guides, TroutRoutes, etc. would be places to start. Additionally, partnering with current partners with mapping expertise to lead workshops would be helpful as well, partners such as WVU Mountain Hydrology Lab and Allegheny Blue Ridge Alliance.

NEED: Trail Applications and Trail Mapping Tools

Frustration with online and phone applications was expressed in multiple listening sessions. User-driven applications may be biased; many of the users aren't from the area or familiar with the trails. Mislabeling of trails or spurs by users can lead to poor trail reviews.

ACTION ITEM: A locally built and managed trail application for the Mon Forest may be a solution worth investigating. The Allegheny Blue Ridge Alliance staff mentioned their interest in collaborating with partners on such a project.

The baseline forest data exists and could be augmented as needed by locals that possess the best information about trail conditions. Users submitting application data wouldn't need internet signal to map trails and conditions; this could be done offline using GPS signal. Data could then be uploaded once an internet connection is established. While this is the same process as national trail mapping apps, creating a localized application for the expansive Mon Forest could be instructive and useful.

By starting small and picking a single ranger district, a technical agency could work out the bugs on the digital side while local organizations refine the accuracy of the trail information and locations. Hopefully, local and state marketing agencies would embrace the project. A key factor will also be getting the US Forest Service to play a major role throughout development and endorse the final product.

Like all forest-wide projects in the Mon, the difficulty comes with size: creating anything for one-million acres of land is cumbersome. This is a project that should be piloted in a singular county or community, one with a diverse group of partners who can shoulder the workload and the cost, if a singular funding source cannot be identified.



Not all gaging equipment may be useful for anglers and boaters and its placement may be more specifically put in place for emergency management purposes. It is important for the public to understand that a singular gage doesn't meet every user need, and gages and multiple gages can't be placed everywhere.

UNITED STATES GEOLOGIC SURVEY GAGES

SUMMARY

In the fishing and paddling listening sessions, central to the discussion was the importance of understanding and interpreting water levels and gaging on forest streams. Anglers and paddlers alike use the online dashboards, but many feel they are difficult to navigate and cumbersome. Some recreationalists would like to see gaging equipment located on more streams to provide greater information to them prior to making long trips to the area.

Conversations with the USGS staff that monitor and serve West Virginia stated that eight to ten new gages had been added in recent years in the Mon Forest Region. However, not all gaging equipment may be useful for anglers and boaters and its placement may be more specifically put in place for emergency management purposes. It is important for the public to understand that a singular gage doesn't meet every user need, and gages and multiple gages can't be placed everywhere. Placement and funding for gaging is driven by the State Gaging Council, on which WV Rivers serves as a voting member.

The USGS staff believes there are still several small streams within the Mon Forest where gages could be placed if funding could be defined. However, the larger issue at hand is that vast majority of users don't understand how to use the USGS dashboards, this includes many persons at the county, city, and non-profit level of emergency management. Education is needed across the state to improve use of the gaging equipment by all users recreational and emergency management.

ACTION ITEM: Engage the State Gaging Council in creating a plan for identifying locations and funding for additional locations for gages within Mon Forest.

Action Item: Engage USGS in developing and/or promoting workshops via WV Public Lands and other networks that will help to educate anglers, boaters, and emergency management personnel in how to use the USGS dashboards. WV Rivers membership and

partnerships have a deep reach. Prioritizing this type of training on a regular basis should have an impact on long-term culture of the general population of the membership.

ACTION ITEM: Engage with USGS, DOH, and community partners to develop an alternative gaging system at location in the Mon Forest. USGS in other parts of the country are using live cameras and painted elevation markings on bridge underpasses via internet feeds to assist in determining water levels.

NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES

SUMMARY

Non-Native Invasive Species (NNIS) are plants and animals that are not originally from the West Virginia landscape. Some of these species can be hazardous to the ecosystem and, once introduced, compete with native species or devour precious agricultural and forest products. Management of these species is complex and difficult. Listening sessions participants consistently expressed NNIS as a major concern. Thus, WV Rivers and Public Lands partners should consider how they as organizations can take a greater leadership role in this critical issue that affects not only the Mon Forest but the entire state.

Concerns about non-native invasive species in the Mon Forest and West Virginia were voiced repeatedly throughout the Listening Sessions. As WV Rivers presented its Interim findings, this concern was validated by the environmental community, state agencies, and the US Forest Service.

The underlying concern held by most persons—though not all—is that the framework by which our state addresses non-native invasive species is too loosely organized to be effective. Some believe that, while certain agencies are heavily focused on the effects of pests on crops, other agencies may be inconsistent in the management of their lands.



Fictionalize a Non-Native Invasive Species (NNIS) alongside the WV Rivers candy darter and use the two of them to teach the public about NNIS and sensitive species.

This may be an issue in the event of crisis management, appropriating funding, and delegating human resources.

Moreover, from an outsider's perspective, it is difficult to identify who is in charge. Where does one engage and with whom? What agency? Is there a place for volunteers, small organizations? Internet searches and browsing state agencies do not provide easy answers.

NNIS management is a problem without simple solutions. Neither the management/eradication of NNIS nor creating a more progressive bureaucratic process will be easy. However, it isn't an issue that WV Rivers or West Virginians for Public Lands should shy away from. In fact, the difficulty of the problem is a primary reason that the organizations should carve out a space at the leadership table.

ACTION ITEM: Dedicate a staff member(s) to participate in Rivers and Gorges Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area meetings.

Contact: Tucker Turtle
Rivers and Gorges Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area
riversgorgescwpma@gmail.com

ACTION ITEM: Create space for NNIS awareness and updates in all future WV Rivers Communications. Normalize an ongoing, public conversation about NNIS. Teach the public how it affects waterways and what an average resident or visitor can do to prevent spread of NNIS.

Fictionalize a NNIS species alongside the WV Rivers candy darter and use the two of them to teach the public about NNIS and sensitive species.

ACTION ITEM: Forge grant-funded partnerships with like-minded organizations that put an NNIS emphasis on the Mon Forest. The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, and Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area should all have an interest in partnering to support NNIS awareness, identification, and best practices. Several of these organizations currently have ongoing NNIS projects in the Mon. For example, AFNHA has organized the Garlic Mustard Challenge for many years.

While this effort could look like collaborative marketing campaigns that support each organization's advocacy efforts, it could also be cooperative work with USFS to improve interpretation on NNIS throughout campsites, fishing locations, etc in the forest.

Cooperative work with the US Forest Service could take the form of:

- Additional interpretive signage
- Placing volunteer or paid interpretive guides at user hotspots
- Creating educational programs to train existing USFS seasonal guides about NNIS

ACTION ITEM: It will be difficult to effect a change in the structure of intra-agency cooperation on NNIS management. However, an investigation into how other states operate their NNIS programs is warranted and perhaps best executed by an organization(s) outside of state government. Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Colorado were all mentioned as states with progressive models for dealing with NNIS.

In West Virginia, each state agency creates its own framework for managing invasive species. This may work as well for each agency as it can take on the work it wants or needs as it sees fit. States around the country have programs and legislation that take more progressive and seemingly centralized approaches to addressing the problem of managing pests in the landscape.

Numerous states identify an Office of NNIS and staff responsible for coordination efforts. While it isn't difficult to identify the office or person in charge in West Virginia, it does take more effort than a simple internet search (requires an email or phone call). Creating a highly visible office of NNIS with a healthy budget for marketing and education would bring West Virginia on par with many of our neighboring states. More importantly, it would provide the public with an avenue for directing questions and understanding this complex problem.





MINORITIES AND RECREATION IN THE FOREST

SUMMARY

Throughout the listening sessions minority voices demonstrated the limitations in recreation and travel planning throughout the region. West Virginia is a state with a small racial minority, hovering around 3% that is predominately African American. Those communities are mostly located in the larger towns, southern coal field counties, and the Eastern panhandle. The viewpoints of racial minorities in recreation and travel were unheard in these listening sessions and should be investigated further, perhaps in a singular focused listening session. There are, however, larger minority groups that did actively participate in sessions and voiced concerns about travel, tourism, and access to recreation in the Forest.

Every Listening Session began with the question of “access”, “How do you access your recreational activity in the Mon Forest?” This question eventually led to contact with WV on the Go. It is a West Virginia based non-profit organization that advocates for accessible tourism for those with disabilities, works with WV businesses to improve their facilities to meet the American Disabilities Act (ADA) standards and remove architectural barriers, and promotes the mountain state as a place where those with disabilities can safely seek adventure experiences.

WV on the Go helped WV Rivers organize and execute a specific listening session that brought together statewide and local leaders in disability services. It was a session that proved informative on the topic. There remains work to be done on public lands statewide not just in the Mon Forest to provide access to outdoor recreational experiences for those with disabilities and their recreational crafts and devices. The ADA outdoor recreational craft industry is continually improving upon designs and products that provide superior experiences for their consumers and public land managers need to be aware of changing designs and be responsive when funding provides.

While in general government facilities are ADA compliant by law, many tourist attractions throughout the region do not meet ADA standards. This is problematic in a variety of ways; it is inconvenient to the user if not disrespectful depending on the venue and circumstance. It also prevents tourist venues from realizing their full economic potential. Disabled Americans purchase power is large. It includes an array of Americans, people who are in their prime earning years traveling with families and retired persons who are now spending their wealth.

Accessibility goes well beyond ambulatory challenges facing many recreationalists but includes the blind, deaf, along with other sensory and cognitive disabilities that West Virginia businesses and tourist destination should take into consideration when business planning and educating their staff.

WV on the Go has provided WV Rivers with a wealth of ADA resources for organizations and businesses located in the appendix.

ACTION ITEM: Be an advocate in your community for evaluation accessibility of recreation and tourism sites—includes private businesses--See Appendix for additional information.

ACTION ITEM: Organize a WV for Public Lands Forum on Disabilities and Outdoor Recreation in WV.

LGBTQ RECREATORS

As recreation writer Mikah Meyer said in a High Country News article, “Nature doesn’t care if you’re gay.” However, LGBTQ hikers and recreators in the listening sessions expressed concern about West Virginia trail experiences and the potential for discrimination. These should be taken seriously. The number of queer Americans has doubled in the last ten years; 7.1% of Americans now identify as members of the queer community. The greatest increase is among Generation Z adults aged 18-25, 20% of whom now identify as queer. Moreover, most LGBTQ youth in West Virginia report being victimized for their identity at some point.

Time spent in the woods has been proven effective for treating depression, and the Mon forest offers no shortage of recreational opportunities. For the queer community, finding a safe place to “be” can be of primary importance; if that place is out in nature, with a supportive group, so much the better. Also, organizing LGBTQ-specific events/hikes/paddles/etc creates a safe space and is likely to be better attended (by the queer community) than a regular event.

“Nature doesn’t care if you’re gay.”

~ Mikah Meyer, Journalist and professional road tripper



It’s important to consider the existing queer community in West Virginia as much as potential visitors (heads-in-beds). Investing in the former will pave the way for the latter and, as the internet has shown us, travelers take online reviews seriously. West Virginia needs to welcome queer folks so that they can come, have a positive experience, and pass that on to others. It was noted in listening sessions that queer travelers visiting the Mon Forest often feel the need to carefully plan their vacations, the places in which they make stops, where they choose to recreate while in West Virginia.

ACTION ITEM: Identify allies in the state and community. Statewide LGBTQ support groups (e.g. Fairness WV) and nonprofits should be contacted and offered a seat in the discussion. LGBTQ-owned businesses, as well LGBTQ-friendly ones/allies, should also be identified.

ACTION ITEM: Organize hikes for LGBTQ and LGBTQ youth (and their families). People are more likely to step into a potentially stressful situation when they’re with a supportive group. Organizations like The Venture Out Project lead day hikes and overnight excursions for the queer community, and may be able to offer advice.

ACTION ITEM: Coordinate outdoor events around Pride Month (June). If LGBTQ-friendly businesses—like outfitters, restaurants, and inns—can be identified, they stand to benefit from LGBTQ travel during Pride month if an outdoor event is organized.

ACTION ITEM: Provide gender-neutral bathroom options; also, provide an optional private bathroom for anyone who might want to use it. This goes hand in hand with developing an official, stated policy that allows transgender people to use the correct bathroom.

Action Item: Use social media to show that the Mon forest and affiliates are supportive of the LGBTQ community.

Potential Allies in WV

- WVU LGBTQ Center
- West Virginia Human Rights Campaign
- Fairness West Virginia
- WV Gay & Lesbian Community Center

Potential National Allies

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Venture Out Project | Out There Adventures |
| Wild Diversity | Outventures |
| Queer Nature | |
| Diversify Outdoors | |

Persons of Color and Forest Recreation

Participation by persons of color in the listening sessions was limited and the issue of race as a factor in choice of travel and recreation in the forest didn't surface during discussions. However, it is an issue that deserves further investigation as a measure of equity and equality for persons of color, and as a point of cultural understanding and economic vitality for West Virginia communities. In a state where minority population remains at 3% and a region that is vastly rural, it is important that effort is made to make all visitors feel safe and welcome in their travel and recreational endeavors.

West Virginia is a state that while born of the Civil War was very much a slave state in many if not all its counties. Reconciling that history, the racial history that followed in subsequent decades, and how it affects modern recreation culture and the traveling public in the region should be further investigated and honestly brought to light.

Native American People and the Forest

The viewpoints of Native American people did not arise in the listening sessions, but this concern was brought up in a one-on-one conversation with Montanans for Healthy Rivers. This organization represents a broad group of interests concerned in the conservation of waterways in Montana. In recent years the organization has placed great effort to be inclusive to Native American people and their work in river conservation. While the Mon Forest and West Virginia differ considerably from Montana in that no tribal organizations or lands are federally recognized in the state, there should be greater effort to include their viewpoints in aspects of public lands planning. The USFS has consulted with Native American cultural anthropologists on Native American issues in past years. As non-profit organizations in the region continue their advocacy, planning, and interpretive work, they should strive for stronger relationships and connections with Native American organizations. See appendix for listing of contacts and resources organizations.





BRIDGE BILL

In recent decades, numerous states across the country have found the value in establishing public bridges as access points for outdoor recreation. These states have placed into law provisions that require a review process for all new bridge construction and reconstruction. The review process is part of the initial bridge design that looks at incorporating recreation design access into consideration as a forethought.

These laws, called bridge bills, were discussed as part of West Virginia University's Bridge Initiative in 2021. Bridge bill legislation has been pursued in Virginia, Oregon, Washington, and Montana in addition to other states. In some states, funding and improvements are made to existing structures as part of programs.

The bridge bill was also discussed in the fishing focus group, where a West Virginia expat living in Montana stated the bill had been extremely beneficial for outdoor recreation in Montana and he felt West Virginia would benefit greatly from the legislation as well.

ACTION ITEM: Develop a coalition to pursue a West Virginia Bridge Bill at the legislature. A potential vehicle for this legislation is the forthcoming WV TRAIL Caucus, as a Bridge Bill would benefit the outdoor economy and access to water recreation. Additional Key Partners include American Whitewater and West Virginia University Mountain Hydrology Lab.

American Whitewater has experience in writing legislation and shepherding these bills to the finish line. The Hydrology Lab has a variety of research that is pertinent to water and recreation that may be useful.

FUNDING RECREATION IN THE FOREST

SUMMARY

The state of West Virginia is a haven for recreation for both residents and visitors. If our state is to remain attractive in the highly competitive market for outdoor recreation experiences, it will need to reevaluate all state programs that fund these activities. These programs will need reprioritized and better streamlined. The governor and legislature must also take additional steps to make strategic investments into new recreation funding that will help communities rebuild around outdoor recreation and tourism. Outdoor recreation and tourism are the low-hanging fruit for diversifying the local economy.

Recreation Funding Programs

Throughout the listening sessions participants expressed frustrations with state recreation funding. These frustrations were echoed by leaders of non-profit organizations, municipal and county governments, in addition to participants from state and federal agencies. The problems are multi-faceted and don't simply lie within slow moving state bureaucracy. The funding issues also lie in lack of community preparedness to administer grants once awarded. It has also been pointed out that some state grant programs have not evolved to meet the needs of recreation and tourism in a competitive marketing environment.

Recreational Trails Program

Recreational Trails Program is a program that has created tremendous good for our state and participants in the listening sessions reinforced this statement with personal stories of trails that have changed the dynamics in their communities. These trails have aided in the greater economic opportunity for small businesses and exercise opportunities for residents.

These participants also expressed a great deal of frustration with the granting and administrative process tied to this program. This frustration was echoed by nearly every non-profit, municipal, county, and federal recipient of the funding. Likewise, engineering and construction firms voiced aggravation with the timeline of many projects and the effect it has on business planning.



Numerous organizations called out the need for the state to re-evaluate its Land and Water Conservation Fund program (LWCF). In recent years many states across the nation have structured their LWCF program to fund large scale projects. These projects have become community changing projects that drive further tourism and investment in their communities.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Numerous organizations called out the need for the state to re-evaluate its Land and Water Conservation Fund program (LWCF). The LWCF program is a federal program, administered by the National Park Service at the federal level and the West Virginia Development Office at the state level.

As West Virginia commits to creating an outdoor recreation economy, it needs to reconsider the priorities of the LWCF program. For decades the WV program has focused on smaller community projects, however, in recent years many states across the nation have structured their LWCF program to fund large scale projects. These projects have become community changing projects that drive further tourism and investment in their communities. Senator Manchin's support for this program through the Great American Outdoors Act has solidified that LWCF will provide recreational opportunities across the nation for the foreseeable future. Listening Session participants were firm in their desire to see these funds have a larger economic impact in their communities.

NEW State Recreation Funding

West Virginia University's Bridge Initiative suggested the state consider new recreational funding packages patterned after successful programs such as Utah Governor's Office of Economic Development. Listening Session participants agreed that this would be a wonderful funding addition to help seize upon the current energy that is building around outdoor recreation in the state. However, there was an almost absolute consensus, that the backlog of funding issues with the Recreational Trail Program and priorities with LWCF program should be addressed first before any new programs and bureaucratic processes be put in place.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE UTAH GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RECREATIONAL FUNDING PACKAGE

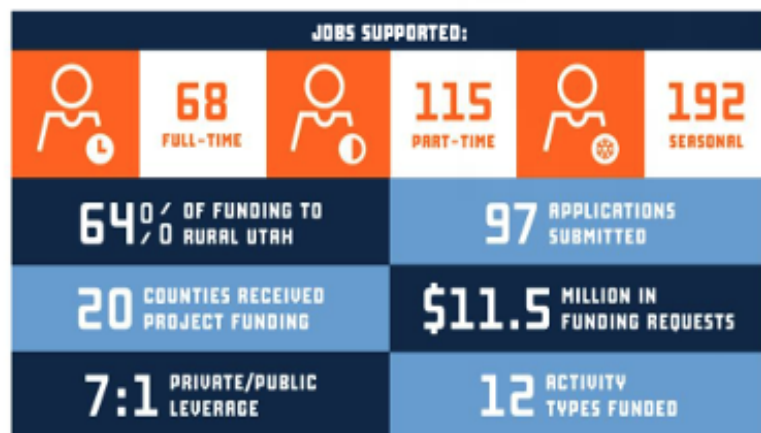
2020
ANNUAL REPORT

UTAH OFFICE
OF OUTDOOR
RECREATION

RECREATION
UTAH OUTDOOR RECREATION

2020 FUNDING STATS

59 PROJECTS IN 2020



40 NEW INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS



80.6
NEW MILES OF TRAIL FUNDED

\$6,031,396 AWARDED TO PROJECTS VALUING \$43 MILLION

2015-2020 FUNDING STATS

ACTIVITIES FUNDED





ACTION ITEM: WV Rivers and Public Lands Partners should join WV Trail Statewide Trail Advocacy and Legislative Caucus Support Committees. These committees will seek to engage with the WV Division of Highways on streamlining bureaucratic hurdles at the agency and helping local communities become better prepared to receive and administer grants. It will also seek to engage with the WV Department of Commerce in opening discussion about reshaping the use of Land and Water Conservation Funds in the state of WV.

ACTION ITEM: West Virginians for Public Lands should invite staff from the Utah Office of Economic Development to speak at a future Public Lands meeting on their funding program, spending time on the mechanism on how it generates cash flow, how funds are awarded, and its successes. Public Lands staff should also look for other states that have successful programs that fund recreation and invite them to present to the West Virginians for Public Lands.

MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

PADDLE WV 1-2-3

This campaign would market the Class 1-2-3 streams across all of West Virginia. These are underutilized streams that are periodic in their availability for boating. West Virginia has the greatest concentration of runnable whitewater in the country, much of that being class 1,2,3. However, this is an untapped market. The campaign would create a website and collateral marketing pieces to promote these streams and their communities.

Potential partners: West Virginia Division of Tourism, Mon Forest Towns, West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, US Forest Service, Appalachian Forest Heritage Area.

Home page

Organization/Sponsor About Page

Stream pages- 30 streams or different runs of the same stream, scrollable google or USGS maps, text, photo gallery.

Sponsor outfitter pages - 12 pages or spots for pay-in to the site. (Advertising spaces)

Intergrated Instagram Photogallery

Donation Page—Place that integrates the sponsoring organization's donation platforms.

Interpretive signs

Layout and fabrication creation of 18" x 24" pedestal interpretive signs. (30 signs)

Collateral Brochure- Design and printing of 100,000 trifold brochures.

Estimated \$52,000 startup cost to launch project. (Signage design and layout being the largest cost). *Projected Cost by a West Virginia Advertising Firm





TROUT TRAIL

This project would create a statewide marketing effort to encourage trout fishing through a passport program like the National Park Service and State Park passport programs. It would seek to help promote interest fishing while educating anglers and laypersons about water quality, fish habitat, and potentially raise money for the sponsoring organization.

Home Page

Organization/Sponsor About Page-1 Page

Stream Pages-30 Brief descriptions of the trout streams, including google or USGS maps that are scrollable

Outfitter Pages-12- Just a guess on the number, but a place for outfitters and tackle shops to be linked. Might be stand along pages or perhaps they are all located on a single page

Intergrated Instagram Photogallery

Donation Page—Place that integrates the sponsoring organization's donations platform

Interpretive signs

Layout and fabrication creation of 18" x 24" pedestal interpretive signs.

Phone Application Passport—Potentially the most critical piece would work like a digital passport like the National Park Service or State Park Passports. Trout anglers would use their phones to scan a QR code while out on the stream (or take a picture of it if in a location with poor signal—but obviously seek to place the signs where you have good signal).

The QR would "Stamp" their Trout Trail Passport, once their digital passport is stamped, they are prompted within the app to donate to the sponsoring organization. The sponsoring organization could potentially gamify the passport to encourage participation. Anglers could earn badges or create a rewards program to bait-and-tackle shops.

Collateral Brochure: Design and printing of 100,000 trifold brochures. Brochures should be placed in truck stops gas stations as well as interstate rest areas. Fishing has seen a resurgence in interest since the first wave of Covid.

Estimated \$62,000 startup cost to launch project. Application monthly maintenance Fees = \$500-\$3,000/month depending on number of overall users

(Signage design and layout being the largest cost). * Projected Cost by a West Virginia Advertising Firm.

WV RIVERS ANGLERS CONFERENCE

A conference would be held in the Monongahela Forest Region to bring anglers to a central location and introduce them to WV Rivers Coalition through a weekend of fishing vendors, flyfishing lessons, water and fish biology sessions, and fun (music and food).

Potential partners: Trout Unlimited, West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, US Forest Service, West Virginia Division of Tourism, private businesses.

THE WV PUBLIC LANDS PODCAST

Create regular podcast that features the issues, people, and policies that shape the Mountain State's vast public landscape. There are several public lands podcasts in the online digital stores, but none that focus on a particular state's lands. Most have a broader context of national public policy. If properly planned, funded, and launched, this could be a persuasive tool to highlight important issues and help drive visitation to the region.

Potential partners: West Virginia Division of Tourism, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, various non-profit organizations.





THE TRAIL MAINTENANCE CLEARINGHOUSE

Create an online platform and manage the dissemination of information about trail workdays. Currently, no forum or organization serves as a clearinghouse for trail maintenance. Throughout the focus groups, participants expressed interest in workdays across the state. However, they find it challenging to locate them.

Potential Partners: Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area, WV TRAIL , WV Scenic Trails Association, Appalachian Conservation Corps.

APPENDIX

WV Rivers Film Festival Tour--Films to consider for screenings

Who Owns Water

50 Minutes

"WATER WARS. Let's have a whiskey and I'll tell you something different."

It's a conflict once unthinkable in the deep green South. Three states are locked in battle over the diminishing fresh water that saw Atlanta go from a small town to the largest growing city in the US. Who's in control? It depends on who you talk to. In this stunningly-shot, award-winning documentary film, brothers Michael and David Hanson return to the source of their childhood river and paddle it to the Gulf of Mexico to take you deep into the Water Wars. Everything comes down to one question. Who Owns Water? Screener available in 2K Surround Sound Digital Cinema Projection format! For screening opportunities contact David Hanson dhanson11@gmail.com

Where the Yellowstone Goes

89-minutes

Where the Yellowstone Goes follows a 30-day drift boat journey down the longest "undammed" river in the lower 48. Intimate portraits of locals in both booming cities and dusty, dwindling towns along the Yellowstone River, illustrate the history and controversies surrounding this enigmatic watershed leading to questions about its future. Connect with colorful characters, get lost in the hypnotic cast of a fly rod, and experience silhouetted moments of fireside stories on this heartfelt river adventure.

- + Choice of DVD or Blu-ray screener
- + One-time license for public screening
- + THREE retail ready DVDs (giveaways)
- + TWO 24" x 36" Official Movie Posters
- + TEN 11" x 17" Marketing Posters
- + TEN 11" x 17" Marketing Posters
- + A comprehensive marketing package

Cost: \$150 to license

<http://www.wheretheyellowstonegoes.com/>

UPRIVER

60-Minutes

UPRIVER is a 'watershed film' that explores one of the Nation's most active river conservation movements. Within Oregon's Willamette River system, the film focuses on people from all walks of life who are coming together to revive the health of this large river and the life it supports. UPRIVER is a 1-hour film, and is currently available for local screening events, academic use, or individual use. Look at our Membership options to find a package fits your needs.

Visit www.freshwatersillustrated.org/upriver for information on scheduling screening.

Waterbear Network

Waterbear is a free site that offers an array of environmentally focused films. They are almost exclusively documentary films ranging in topic and length, it is a great resource and may be useful for WV Rivers efforts.

Potential Locations

Thomas, WV

Purple Fiddle

thepurplefiddle@gmail.com

304-463-4040

Marlinton, WV

Pocahontas County Opera House

304.799.6645

www.pocahontasoperahouse.org

Elkins, WV

Old Brick Playhouse

304.637.9090

theoldbrickplayhouse.org/

Lewisburg, WV

Lewis Theatre

304.645.6038

www.trilliumperformingarts.org

Randolph County Community Arts Center

304.637.2355

www.randolpharts.org

Carnegie Theatre

304.645.7917

www.carnegiehallwv.org

NATIVE AMERICAN REGIONAL RESOURCES

West Virginia University Program for Native American Studies

The program provides classroom and experiential learning opportunities for students, in addition to a variety of on-campus programs. There may be opportunities for non-profit organizations, faculty, students to foster relationships improve cultural and environmental understanding of the Native People that inhabited the lands of the Mon Forest region.

Contact: Bonnie Brown, NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Phone: 304-293-4626

BonnieM.Brown@mail.wvu.edu

River Rat Consulting, LLC

Nekole Alligood is a cultural anthropologist and member of the Delaware Nation and has consulted on projects in the Mon Forest in prior years and may have interest in future engagements.

Contact: Nekole Alligood

Phone: (405) 933-7643

OUTDOOR ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION PROVIDED BY WV ON THE GO

Questions and Considerations that towns across the Mon Region should ask.

Does Each town have?

- Have an Accessibility Improvement Town Council appointed?
- Have an ADA Coordinator?
- Have they completed an ADA Accessibility Self-Assessment? www.ADAchecklist.org
- Have they created an inventory of existing ADA Accessible Features within the community?
- Public Accessible Parking
- Public Accessible Restroom Location

(including in private businesses with restrooms open to public use) Noting specifically, if has/does not have ADA compliant Accessible

1) Access to All Goods and Services provided to the public including...

2) Parking,

3) Route to Entrance

4) Entrance,

5) Route to All main elements within establishment,

6) Restrooms/Changing/Fitting Rooms/Bathing/Swimming Facilities,

7) Access to All Goods and Services Provided to the Public,

8) Checkout Area

- Local Government Services/Buildings
- Parks
- Pools
- Trails
- Water Access Points: River/Lake Access, Fishing Areas, Marinas
- Outfitter / Rental Activities
- Sports Facilities: Gyms, Tennis/Basketball, etc
- Have they created ADA Necessary Improvements Plan?
- Prioritizing Necessary Improvements
- Planning / Funding Improvements

- Have plans been put through US Access Board shown to intend PWD users for feedback, recommendations, and approval prior to implementation.
- Implemented Necessary Improvements?
- Followed up on Improvements?
- Documented Improvements?
- Publicized improvements to potential intended use?
- Have they added the improvements to Community Accessibility Features Map etc showing potential users how to find the improvements?
- Received Feedback from all types of users stating what worked well, doesn't work / should be further improved?
- Have they taken that feedback and used it to update the future Necessary Accessibility Improvement Plan?
-

Additionally, there is a responsibility of the Towns to make private business and nonprofits of the need and to be responsive to ADA compliance. This includes many tourist facilities that can go unthought of to those without disabilities.

- Businesses/Nonprofits
- Gas Stations
- Foodie:Restaurants/Bars/Wineries
- All Retail
- Art Galleries

WV Disability Advocacy Groups / Assisted Living / Adaptive Sports Programs etc

WVU Centers For Excellence in Disabilities

<https://www.cedwvu.org>

Accessible Recreation Guide to WV 2019

Northern WV Council on Independent Living

<http://nwvcil.org>

West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind

Melanie Hesse

<http://wvsdb2.state.k12.wv.us/>

(304) 822-4800

wvsdb@k12.wv.us

mhesse@k12.wv.us

Appalachian Wounded Warriors Elkins

aww304@gmail.com

www.appalachianwoundedwarriors.org

Appalachian Wounded Warriors,
625 Point Mountain Rd,
Valley Head, WV 26294,
304-642-1255

Wounded Warriors In The Field LTD

<https://www.warriorsinthefield.org/about-us/>

PO BOX 1183,
Elkins, WV 26241
(304) 704-8108

CAMC Para-athletic Program

CAMC Medical Rehab. 2 - South General Division,
501 Morris St. Charleston,
West Virginia 25325 304-388-9865,

The CAMC Foundation sponsors statewide sporting competitions for athletes of all ages with physical disabilities through its Para-Athletic program, which is the only organized, sanctioned sporting program for the physically challenged in West Virginia. The program offers year round competitions in track and field, marksman, swimming, basketball, tennis, archery and golf.

Challenged Athletes of West Virginia

People with a wide range of disabilities participate in skiing, cycling, and snowboarding with their family or friends. Through this program, adaptive equipment and instruction are available for just about every disability group. All lessons are one-on-one and are flexible based on the needs of each skier.

P.O. Box 10
Snowshoe, WV 26209
304-572-6708

www.cawvsports.org
cwoody@snowshoemountain.com

Charleston, WV Sled Hockey

<https://www.facebook.com/Charleston-Sled-Hockey-1403100999700337>

charlestonwvsledhockey@gmail.com

West Virginia Hunter Education Association

P.O. Box 925 Lumberport, WV
26386 304-584-4444
www.wvhuntered.com

The West Virginia Special Needs Hunter Education Course is open to the public regardless of ability or disability. Captioned videos, interpreters and other adaptive equipment are used to open the doors to anyone who wants to enjoy the outdoors, regardless of physical limitations.

Wheelin' Sportsmen

5196 Dawn Street Cross Lanes,
WV 25313
304-776-1496

Wheelin' Sportsmen is dedicated to providing all people with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors. The organization is dedicated to the education and entertainment of outdoor enthusiasts with disabilities and their outdoor partners who want to become more involved in outdoor activities. For more information about recreation and travel in West Virginia, please call or visit"

Mountain State Kayak Anglers - <https://www.facebook.com/mskawv/>, <https://www.mskawv.com/>

Fly Fishing:

Project Healing Waters <https://projecthealingwaters.org/>

Programs rely on Fly Fishers International (FFI), Trout Unlimited (TU), and independent fly fishing clubs to conduct our programs at the DOD and VA facilities across the region

Regional Coordinator - Bubba Holt bubba.holt@projecthealingwaters.org

Chapters:

Beckley, WV: Beckley VAMC, Southern WV Chapter of Trout Unlimited - Mike Davis - mike.davis@projecthealingwaters.org
Clarksburg, WV: Clarksburg VAMC, Mountaineer Chapter TU #153 - Brandon Rudisill - brandon.rudisill@projecthealingwaters.org
Huntington, WV: Huntington VAMC, Kanawha Valley Chapter of TU - Jonathan Saxton - jonathan.saxton@projecthealingwaters.org
Martinsburg, WV: Martinsburg VAMC: Winchester, VA Chapter TU #638 - Dakota Clouser - Dakota.Clouser@projecthealingwaters.org
Morgantown, WV: Louis A Johnson Morgantown VAMC, P. Pendleton Kennedy Chapter TU - Jack Bell - jack.bell@projecthealingwaters.org
Wheeling, WV: Wheeling Vet Center, Upper Ohio Valley Chapter TU - Russ Schlenker - russ.schlenker@projecthealingwaters.org
Charleston, WV: Charleston VA O/P Clinic, Ernie Nester Chapter of TU - Brian Bolyard - brian.bolyard@projecthealingwaters.org
Parkersburg, WV: Parkersburg Vet Center, Blennerhasset Chapter TU - Sarah Holt - Sarah.Holt@projecthealingwaters.org

WV Wildwater Association <http://www.wvwa.net/index.shtml> , <https://wwwaforum.proboards.com/>

Adaptive Device Groups and Out-of-State Adventure groups

Raft/Kayak/Canoe Fishing

TEAM RIVER RUNNER, INC.-

Rockville, MD, 20853,

info@teamriverrunner.org

teamriverrunner.org

(703) 532-6070

(camping, canoeing, fishing, kayaking paddle boarding, rafting)

HandiCraft Adaptive Whitewater - www.HandiCraftAdaptive.com

THREE RIVERS ADAPTIVE SPORTS -

Pittsburgh, PA, 15238

trasevents@gmail.com

traspa.org

(412) 848-8896

(canoing, cycling, kayaking, swimming, waterskiing)

ADVENTURE AMPUTEE CAMP INC

Falls Church, VA 22042,

adventureamputeecamp@gmail.com

adventureamputeecamp.org

(cycling, kayaking, paddle boarding, rafting, scuba)

LIVE WATER FOUNDATION

Annapolis, MD, 21403

hello@livewater.org

livewater.org

(443) 569-2771

(canoing, kayaking, paddle boarding for clean water youth/disabled programs)

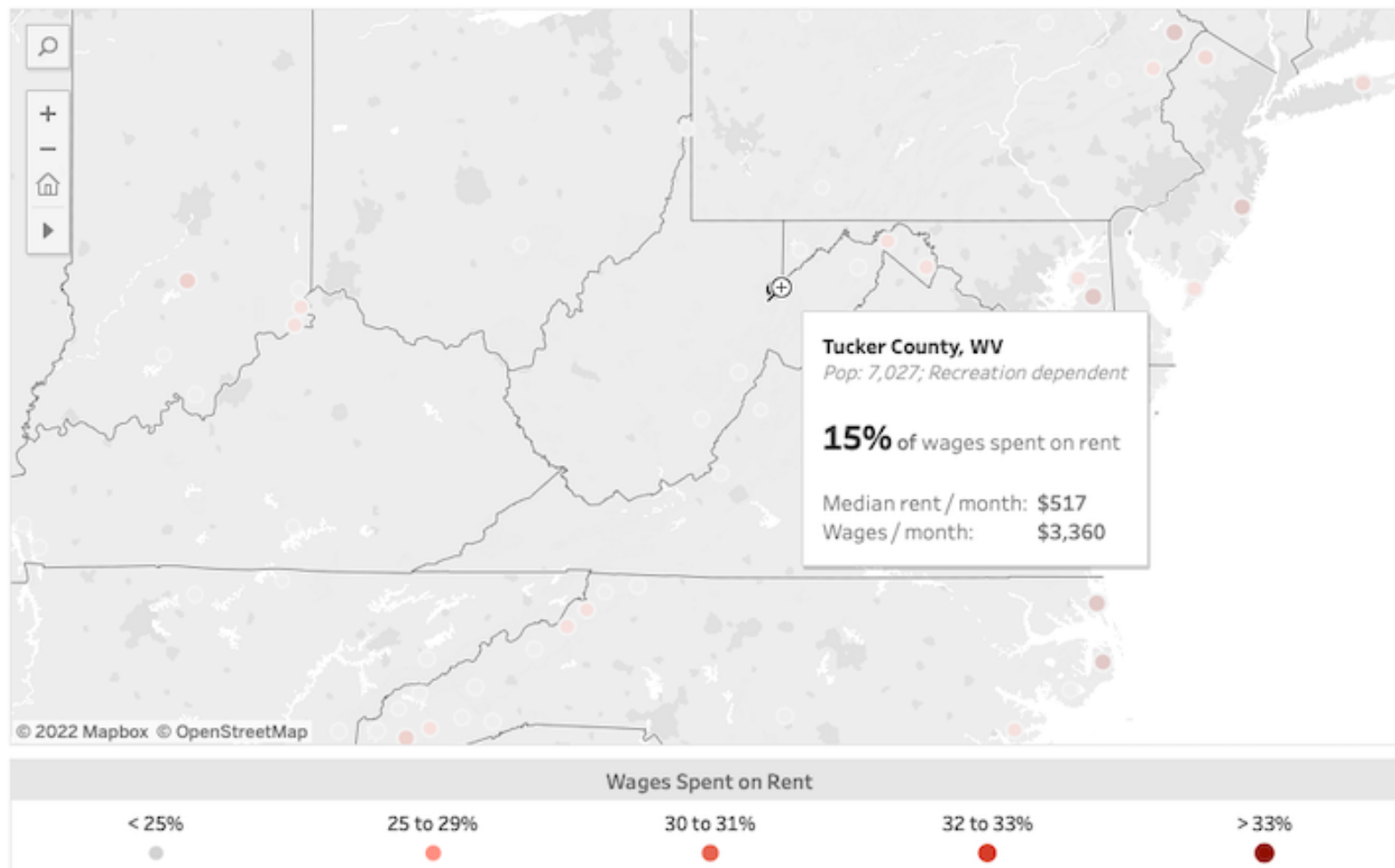
INCOME SPENT ON RENT IN MAJOR WEST VIRGINIA RECREATION DEPENDENT COUNTIES TUCKER COUNTY

<https://headwaterseconomics.org/equity/housing-affordability-recreation-counties/>

Housing Affordability in Recreation Counties



View data for rental costs or mortgage costs: Rentals



Data Sources: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts 2019; Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019. Reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

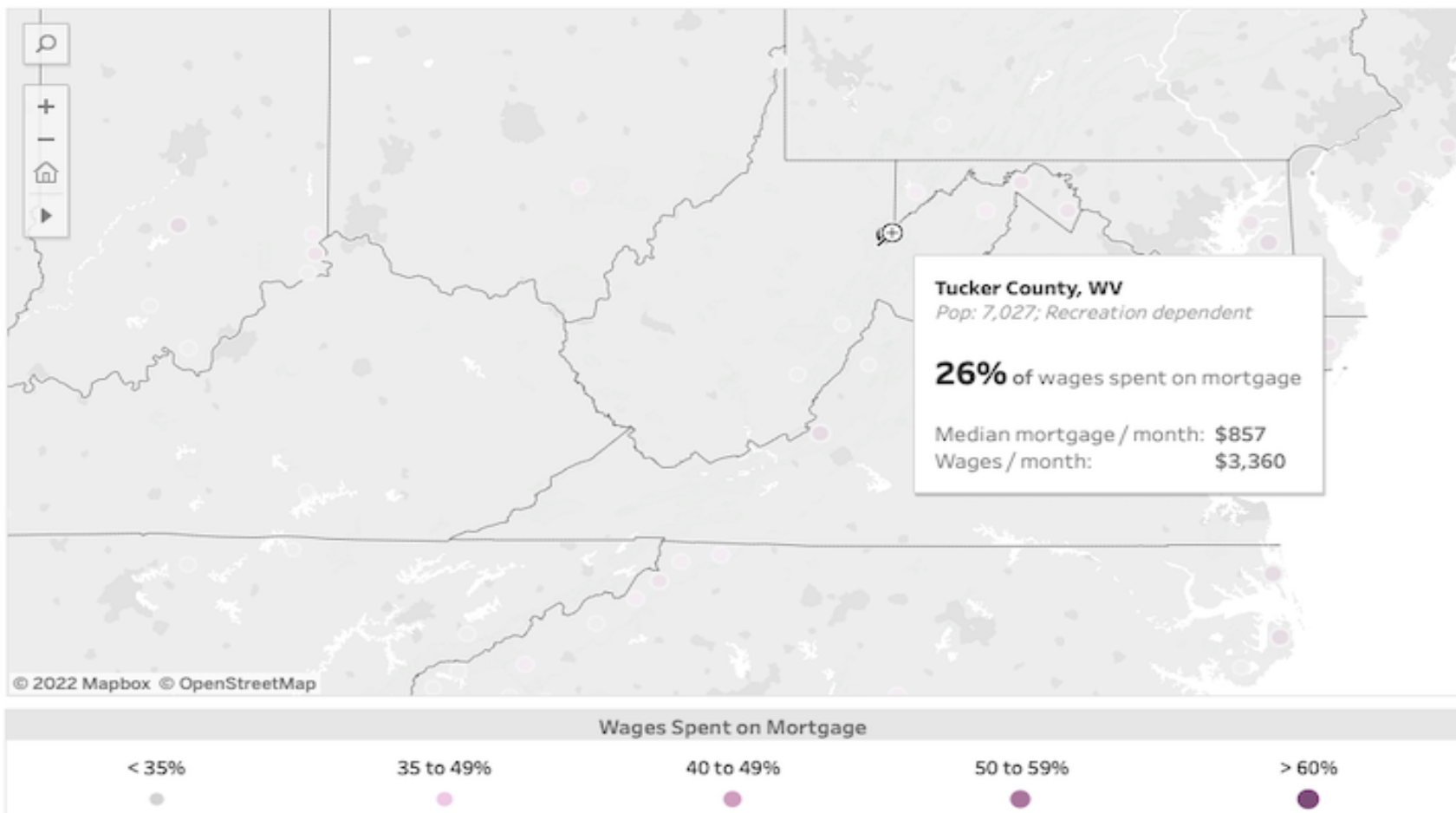
INCOME SPENT ON MORTGAGES IN MAJOR WEST VIRGINIA RECREATION DEPENDENT COUNTIES TUCKER COUNTY

<https://headwaterseconomics.org/equity/housing-affordability-recreation-counties/>

Housing Affordability in Recreation Counties



View data for rental costs or mortgage costs: Mortgages



Data Sources: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts 2019; Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019. Reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

INCOME SPENT ON RENT IN MAJOR WEST VIRGINIA RECREATION DEPENDENT COUNTIES POCAHONTAS COUNTY

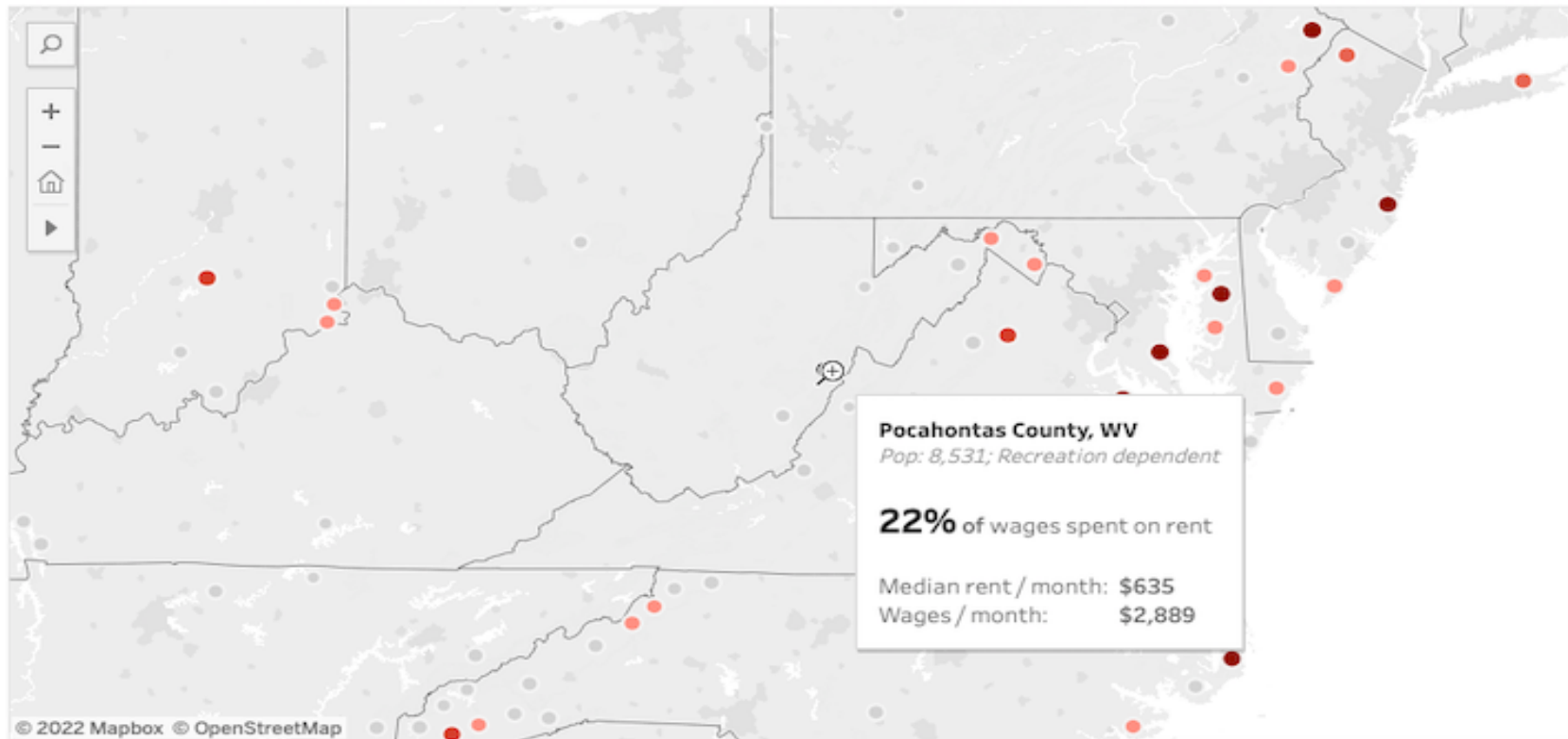
<https://headwaterseconomics.org/equity/housing-affordability-recreation-counties/>

Housing Affordability in Recreation Counties



View data for rental costs or mortgage costs:

Rentals



Data Sources: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts 2019; Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019. Reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

INCOME SPENT ON MORTGAGES IN MAJOR WEST VIRGINIA RECREATION DEPENDENT COUNTIES POCAHONTAS COUNTY

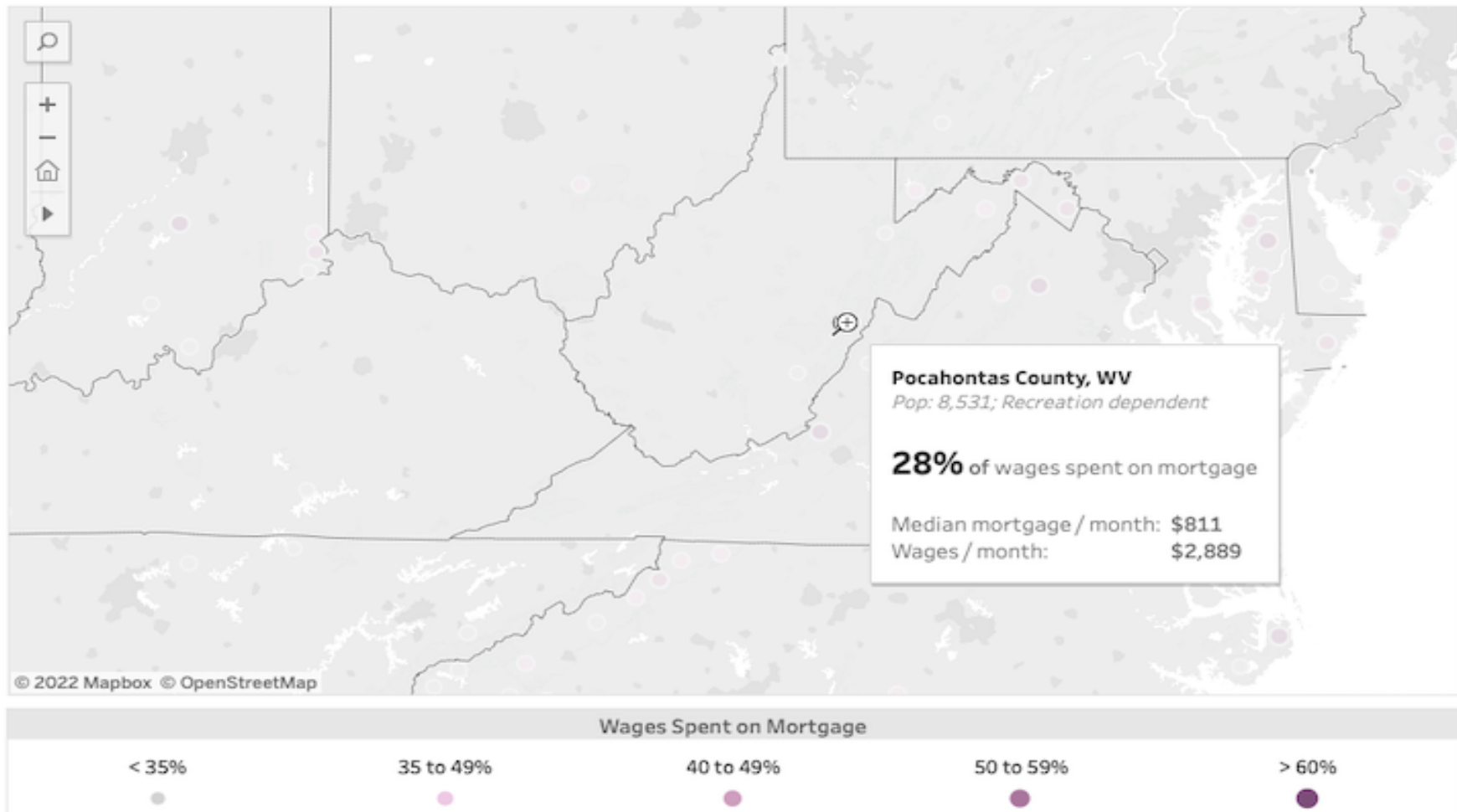
<https://headwaterseconomics.org/equity/housing-affordability-recreation-counties/>

Housing Affordability in Recreation Counties



View data for rental costs or mortgage costs:

Mortgages



Data Sources: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts 2019; Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019. Reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

INCOME SPENT ON RENT IN MAJOR WEST VIRGINIA RECREATION DEPENDENT COUNTIES GREENBRIER COUNTY

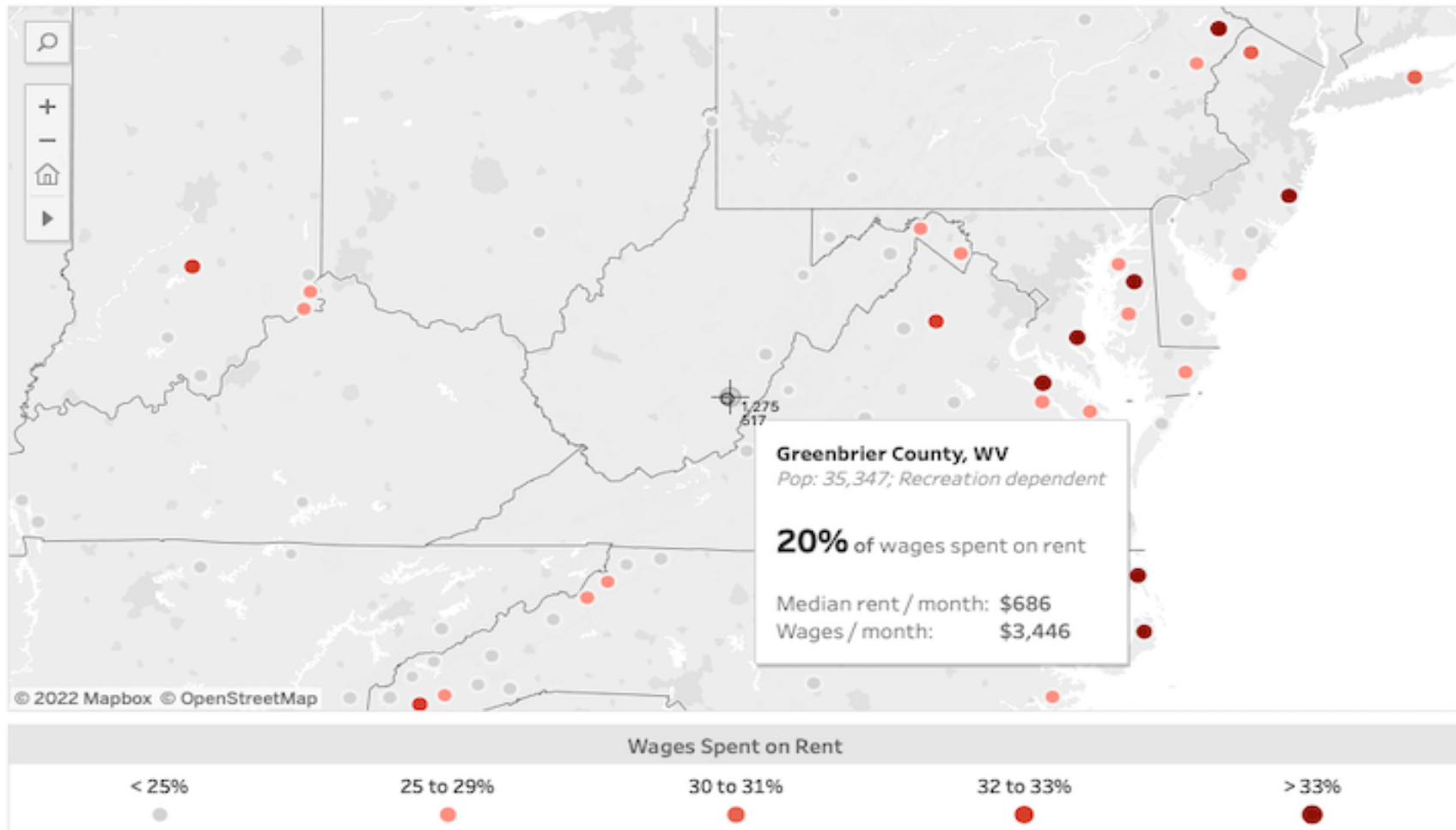
<https://headwaterseconomics.org/equity/housing-affordability-recreation-counties/>

Housing Affordability in Recreation Counties



View data for rental costs or mortgage costs:

Rentals



Data Sources: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts 2019; Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019. Reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

INCOME SPENT ON MORTGAGES IN MAJOR WEST VIRGINIA RECREATION DEPENDENT COUNTIES GREENBRIER COUNTY

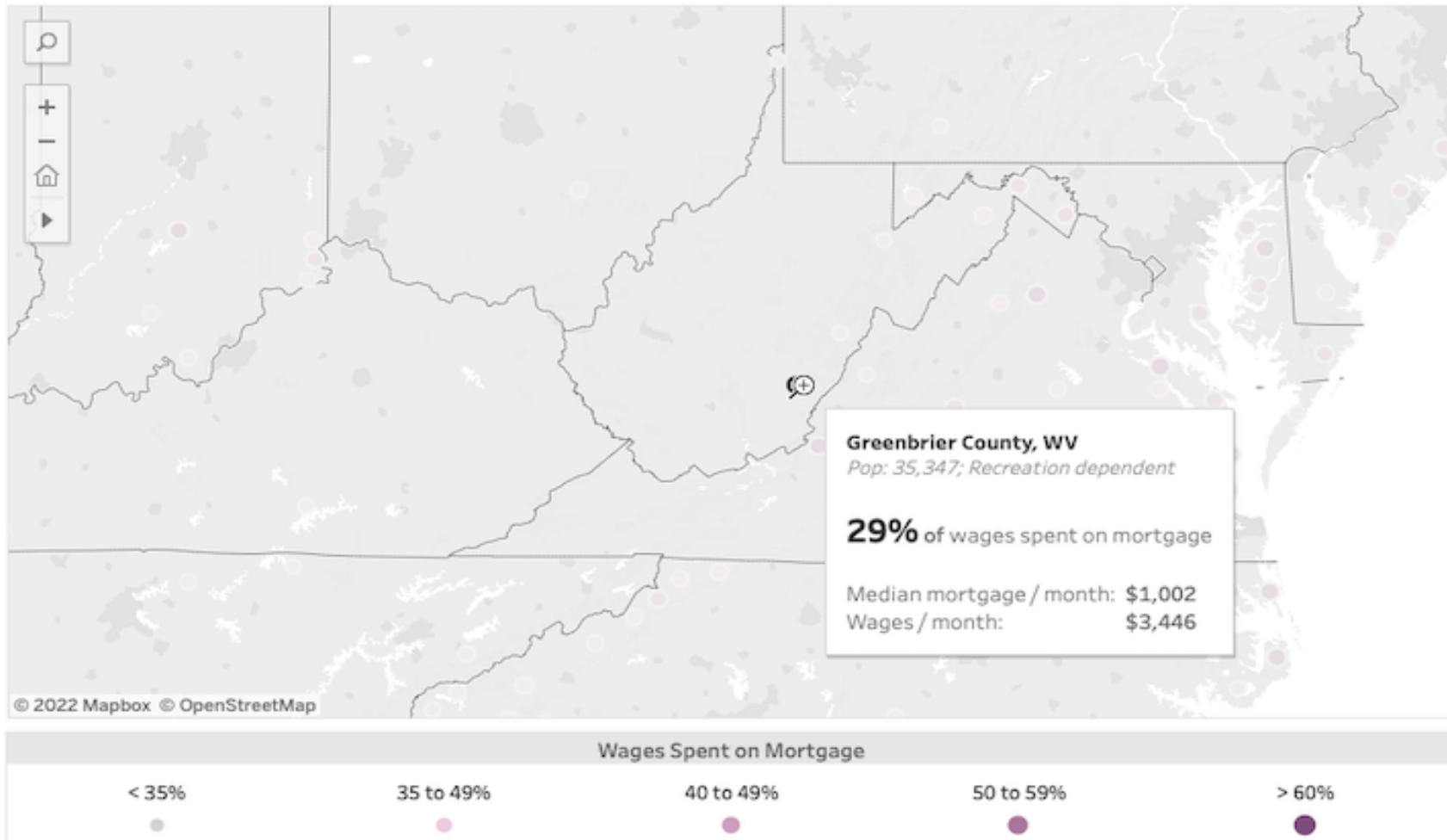
<https://headwaterseconomics.org/equity/housing-affordability-recreation-counties/>

Housing Affordability in Recreation Counties



View data for rental costs or mortgage costs:

Mortgages



Data Sources: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts 2019; Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2019. Reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System, headwaterseconomics.org/eps.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT PARTICIPATED OR ASSISTED IN DISSIMINATING INFORMATION

Acorn Hill Strategies
 American Rivers
 American Whitewater
 Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area
 Blackwater Bicycle Association
 Capon Springs and Farms
 Challenged Athletes of West Virginia
 Charles Town Horsemen's Benevolent
 Protective Association
 Charleston Sled Hockey
 Creek Yakkers
 Christians for the Mountains
 Conservation Legacy
 Appalachian Conservation Corp.
 Eastern WV Community and TechCollege
 Eastern WV Workforce Opp Regional Center
 Elkins-Randolph Convention & Visitors
 Bureau
 Elk River Inn & Touring Center
 Embark Fund
 Friends of Blackwater
 Friends of the Cheat
 Grant County Convention & Visitors Bureau
 Green Rivers
 Greenbrier Convention & Visitors Bureau
 Grow Ohio Valley
 Hampshire County Devp. Authority &
 Convention & Visitors Bureau
 Hardy County Convention & Visitors Bureau
 Highland Outdoor Magazine
 Highlands Trail Foundation

Kayak West Virginia
 Mineral County Convention & Visitors Bureau
 Mon Forest Towns
 Mon River Trails
 Mon Outdoor Volunteers
 Montanans for Healthy Rivers
 Moorefield Examiner
 Morgantown Area Paddlers
 National Center for Resource
 Development
 Natural Resource Conservation Service
 National Park Service New River NP
 National Park Service Rivers, Trails, Con. Asst.
 New River Bikes
 Northern Center for Independent Living
 Pendleton County Convention & Visitors
 Bureau
 Pendleton County EDA
 Piney Creek Watershed
 Pocahontas County Convention & Visitors
 Bureau
 Pocahontas County Convention & Visitors
 Bureau
 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
 Richwood Chamber of Commerce
 South Branch Inn
 Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards
 Southern West Virginia Kayak Anglers
 Summersville Convention & Visitors Bureau
 The Nature Conservancy
 Trout Unlimited

Tucker County Convention &
 Visitors Bureau
 Tucker County Trail Advocate
 US Forest Service
 US Geologic Survey
 Virginia Wilderness Coaliti
 Webster County Convention & Visitors
 Bureau
 Wester County High School
 Wild and Scenic Rivers Association
 Whitegrass Touring Center
 WV On on the Go
 WV Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and
 Anglers
 WV Dept. of Natural Resources
 WV Division of Forestry
 WV Forestry Association
 WV Highlands Conservancy
 WV Hospitality Travel Association
 WV Kayak Anglers
 WV Land Trust
 WV Native Plant Society
 WV Scenic Trail Association
 WV Sierra Club
 WV Tourism Office
 WVU Mountain Hydrology Lab
 WVU Extension Service—Forestry Extension
 WVUWELL

DATES OF VIRTUAL WILD AND WONDERFUL LISTENING SESSIONS

Paddling in the Mon	May 27, 2021
Recreational Biking	June 10, 2021
Horseback Riding	July 7, 2021
Hiking, Camping, Backpacking	July 8, 2021
Fishing in the Mon Forest	July 13, 2021
Hunting in the Mon Forest	July 14, 2021
Tucker County Residents and WV Rivers Board	July 17 2021 (in-person)
Birdwatching, Native Plants, Foraging, Invasive Species	August 24, 2021
Access(ibility) in the Mon	September 1, 2021
Trail Running	September 9, 2021
Discussion with Greenbrier District Forest Ranger	October 1, 2021
Trail Management Groups	October 27, 2021



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