



Rural Development
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Recreation Economy at USDA Economic Development Resources for Rural Communities

Together, America Prospers

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Background

USDA's Forest Service (FS), Rural Development (RD), and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) have developed this resource guide for rural communities to identify resources that develop the recreation economy.

The Council on Rural Community Innovation and Economic Development was authorized to be formed in the 2018 Farm Bill, as successor to the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity. A report, Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity Report (PDF, 5.4 MB), was issued identifying the following Calls to Action:

1. Achieving e-connectivity for Rural America
2. Improving Quality of Life
3. Supporting a Rural Work Force
4. Harnessing Technological Innovation
5. Developing the Rural Economy

In recognition of the need for **Developing the Rural Economy** the council called to action federal agencies to infuse rural areas with stronger businesses and agricultural economies to empower Rural America. This includes promoting innovative farm technologies, energy security, recreation, agritourism and sustainable forest management. The purpose of this collaborative USDA resource guide is to answer the Call to Action and offer Rural America resources to support developing their rural recreation economy.

Growing and maintaining a healthy recreation sector that benefits residents over the long term requires balancing natural resource management, conservation efforts, infrastructure investment, business development and many other factors. It also requires active stakeholder engagement, a robust understanding of potential challenges and opportunities, collaboration among various levels of government and landowners and a strong plan for the region's future. These efforts present unparalleled

economic opportunities—to revitalize main street, preserve cultural heritage, support entrepreneurship and small business growth, reinvest in communities and more.

According to the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, understanding the economic value of national forests and the importance of strategic partnerships to efficiently use existing resources, directs the Secretary of Agriculture to increase the role of volunteers and partners in National Forest System trail management. The importance of strategic partnerships, coordination and tracking their impact is also highlighted in the revised 2012 Forest Service Planning Rule, the 2016 Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act and the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience (NATIVE) Act.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service November 2016 report, "[Federal Outdoor Recreation Trends: Effects on Economic Opportunities](#)" states that "outdoor recreation is an important driver of economic activity in rural communities". The report shows that the number of U.S. participants in 50 nature-based outdoor recreation activities increased 7.1 percent between 1999-2009. Activities like wildlife viewing and photographing nature are among the fastest growing, and off-highway vehicle driving realized a 34 percent increase in participation. The report forecasts that interest in outdoor recreation will continue over the next 30 years.

Recreation Economy

USDA has enrolled a record number of private working lands in conservation programs and implemented new strategies, such as landscape-scale efforts, to restore our forests and clean our water supply. Through economic development investments, USDA is also supporting the creation of private-sector jobs, protecting and rehabilitating our forests and wetlands and providing increased opportunities for outdoor recreation and enhanced tourism opportunities. America's 193 million acres of public forests and grasslands supply drinking water for 60 million Americans, support more than 200,000 full- and

part-time jobs and contribute more than \$13 billion to local communities each year. At the same time, new conservation markets are enhancing the value of our nation's farmlands, while also supporting conservation practices, improving farmers' bottom line and ensuring a cleaner planet for future generations.

Outdoor recreation is an economic powerhouse in the United States; each year generating \$646 billion in consumer spending and 6.1 million direct jobs. In many rural places, hunting, fishing and wildlife watching have boosted rural tourism, spurred business growth and contributed to strong land-value gains. The brightest prospects, though, still lie ahead. Rural communities fortunate enough to have other amenities to complement their natural resource base are in the best position to reap new economic benefits from this booming industry.

The national forests and grasslands provide the greatest diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities in the world, connecting people with nature in an unmatched variety of settings and activities. Opportunities include hiking, biking, horseback riding, driving off-highway vehicles, picnicking, camping, hunting, fishing, navigating waterways, viewing wildlife and scenery and exploring historic places. Visitors can glide through powder at world-class alpine resorts and challenge themselves on primitive cross-country ski or snowmobile routes.

Outdoor recreation is fun—and so much more! It provides physical challenges, requires the development of life-long skills, provokes interest and inquiry and inspires wonder and awe of the natural world, creating the next generation of America's public land stewards. It contributes greatly to the physical, mental and spiritual health of individuals, bonds family and friends, instills pride in heritage and provides economic benefits to communities, regions and the nation. Indeed, outdoor recreation is an essential part of our American culture.

Trails and greenways create opportunities in construction and maintenance, rentals (for example, bicycles, kayaks and canoes), services (such as, shuttle buses and guided tours), historic preservation, restaurants and lodging. Today, community leaders and planners are including access to public lands as an important part of their overall strategy for economic revitalization to build and strengthen local businesses, as a healthful approach for community engagement, and to enhance quality of life.



Factors to Consider in Building the Recreation Economy

Rural communities should consider the following factors when developing and implementing a regional plan that supports or incorporates the recreation economy:

- **Connect local and regional communities and economic development planning and natural resource planning.** A successful recreation economy requires the integration of policies and projects taking place both within forests and natural areas and in adjacent communities. Conducting a community inventory can help identify both natural and human resources available to support a local recreation economy.
- **Identify critical issues.** Public concerns, natural resource management challenges, assets, opportunities and threats should all be identified through collaborative stakeholder involvement.
- **Meet legal and regulatory requirements.** There are numerous federal, state and local laws and regulations regarding the use of natural resources. Notably, the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act which established the President's Council on Environmental Quality. It requires environmental assessments and environmental impact statements for any project receiving federal funding.
- **Implement best available practices.** It is both a legal requirement and professional imperative to duly consider the best available science and expertise in planning and implementation.
- **Incorporate "SMART" goals and strategies.** A SMART goal is one that is specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time-based. The clear objectives and direction laid out by SMART goals and strategies are most likely to result in meaningful progress.
- **Be inclusive.** Any economic or community development plan should involve actions that gather stakeholders, government agencies, educational institutions, community-based organizations, natural resource managers, environmental and other nonprofit groups and the private sector.
- **Be clearly assigned.** Assign the plan's recommended actions to specific responsible parties and hold those parties accountable for implementing their items. Responsible parties should periodically evaluate and report to the public and relevant leadership on progress

and accomplishments to date, factors affecting the plan's implementation and changes pending or made to the approved plan.

- **Be responsibly budgeted.** Specify plan implementation costs and identify funding sources. In this way the plan is a tool to prepare and justify annual budgets, allocate budgets, guide annual work priorities and facilitate the scheduling and sequencing of projects.

Some communities might want to consider applying the "Triple Bottom Line" (TBL) approach to evaluate projects proposed for the local recreation economy. TBL refers to reviewing the economic impacts, environmental impacts and social impacts of a company or a project. The goal is to earn financial profits but also improves people's lives and the planet. The TBL approach to business planning and financing asks the user to consider a range of factors on how to conduct and grow successful businesses and add value to their surrounding community. It may also help identify niche businesses that might be overlooked when profit is the only consideration.

Some examples of issues to consider, using TBL standards, when identifying a new corporate partner or a grant or loan candidate in a recreation economy are:

- Numbers and the impacts of the end users
- How will the impacts be mitigated to support long-term sustainability of the environment?
- Benefits for the local community and businesses
- Working with socially- and environmentally-responsible suppliers
- Whether the business will hire local employees (perhaps those with disabilities or other underemployed groups) and pay employees a living wage
- How will day-to-day operations impact the natural environment?
- Will the business or project use a portion of its income (or capacity) to invest back into the community and/or the natural or cultural resources?
- Will the project enhance community involvement and engagement?

U.S. Forest Service

The U.S. Forest Service's (FS) mission is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. FS is a multi-faceted agency that manages and protects 154 national forests and 20 grasslands in 43 states and Puerto Rico. FS consists of an elite wild land firefighting team, the world's largest forestry research organization and experts who provide technical and financial help to a variety of stakeholders to help protect and manage privately owned forests and associated range and watershed lands.

Headquarters and Agency Leadership

The Washington office is led by the chief, who reports to the undersecretary for natural resources and environment. The chief's staff provides broad policy and direction for the agency, works with the president's administration to develop a budget to submit to Congress, provides information to Congress on accomplishments and monitors the activities of the agency.

Regions and Regional Foresters

FS has nine geographic regions that encompass broad areas. A regional forester oversees each region. Regional office staff coordinate activities between national forests and grasslands, monitor activities on those lands to ensure quality operations, provide guidance for forest plans and allocate budgets to the forests.

National Forests/Grasslands and Forest Supervisors

A forest supervisor directs the work of district rangers on an individual national forest/grassland, and reports to the regional forester. Forest supervisors are responsible for coordinating activities between districts, allocating the budget and providing technical support to each district. Each national forest has several ranger districts.

Ranger districts and District Rangers

FS consists of more than 600 ranger districts that are each staffed with 10 to 100 people depending on size. Districts vary in size from 50,000 acres to more than 1 million acres. A district ranger leads activities at the district level and reports to the forest supervisor. The district ranger directs many on-the-ground activities, including trail construction and maintenance, operation of campgrounds and management of vegetation and wildlife habitat.

District Rangers often have the closest connection to local communities and on-the-ground activities.

How does FS interact with the public?

FS interacts with the public through public meetings and workshops, public comment periods, targeted outreach efforts to federally-recognized tribes, youth, new audiences, permittees and neighboring landowners and coordination with state governments and other entities. The local FS office also provides guidance on special use permit authorization (for a permit, lease or easement), both for private and commercial purposes.

FS Data Available to Assist with Recreation Planning:

The [FS Geodata Clearinghouse](#) provides a mapping data set on natural resources and local user use in any region of the country.

The FS [National Visitor Use Monitoring Program](#):

The NVUM program produces estimates of the volume of recreation visitation to National Forests and Grasslands and produces descriptive information about that visitation, including activity participation, demographics, visit duration, measures of satisfaction, and trip spending connected to the visit. The information is updated from 2005.

How to contact FS Staff?

Visit the [Forest Service's National website](#) to find FS staff in the closest ranger district. All national forests/grasslands also have their own website, with a list of key staff and contacts. Another possible avenue for collaboration is the Office of Cooperative Forestry (within the branch of State and Private Forestry) which works with states, private landowners and other partners to promote healthy forests and livable communities throughout the United States. For more information, and regional offices and contacts, visit the [Cooperative Forestry office](#).

USDA Rural Development

Rural Development's (RD) mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all rural Americans. That mission touches every facet of rural America throughout the country. RD has more than 40 loan, grant and technical assistance programs to create opportunities in housing, business, and infrastructure. RD serves as a catalyst to improve conditions in rural America by increasing the flow of capital through leveraged partnerships that help make prosperity and better living a reality in rural America.

Rural Housing Service (RHS)

The Rural Housing Service offers a variety of programs to build or improve housing and essential community facilities in rural areas. We offer loans, grants and loan guarantees for single- and multi-family housing, child care centers, fire and police stations, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, schools, first responder vehicles and equipment, housing for farm laborers and much more. RHS also provides technical assistance loans and grants in partnership with nonprofit organizations, Native American and Alaskan native tribes, state and federal government agencies and local communities.

Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS)

The Rural Business-Cooperative Service offers programs to support business development and job training opportunities for rural residents. RBS programs help provide the capital, technical support, educational opportunities and entrepreneurial skills that can help rural residents start and grow businesses or access jobs in agricultural markets and in the bio-based economy.

Rural Utilities Service (RUS)

The Rural Utilities Service administers programs that provide critical infrastructure or infrastructure improvements to rural communities, including water and waste treatment, electric power and telecommunications services. All of these services play a critical role in helping to expand economic opportunities and improve the quality of life for rural residents.



Rural Development Innovation Center (IC)

The Innovation Center (IC) explores new and better ways of delivering programs to best serve rural America. The center is equipped with specialized expertise across its three divisions of data analytics, regulations management and partnerships that work together to provide tools, services and inspiration to drive data-driven, forward-thinking, action across Rural Development.

How to contact RD staff?

RD delivers programs through a network of more than 400 area offices and 47 state offices, a customer service center and finance office in St. Louis, Missouri, and its headquarters in Washington, D.C. Visit RD's [Contact Us](#) section of the website for national, state and local contacts. At the [state level](#), RD staff may provide assistance with planning, financing and training projects. Innovation Center staff can also provide assistance with planning, financing and training resources for project development.

National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Land Grant Universities

The National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA), part of USDA's research, education and economics mission area, uses an integrated approach to ensure scientific discoveries reach the people who can put them to use. Through partnerships with the Land-Grant University System and government, private and nonprofit organizations, NIFA delivers research, education and extension programs that provide solutions to those who need them.

The 1862 Morrill Act created the Land-Grant University System to provide individuals in every state opportunities to receive education in agriculture, science, military science and engineering. Land-grant universities provide affordable educational opportunities for those lacking extensive financial resources.

Each of the 50 States is home to a land-grant university. The District of Columbia and six U.S. territories also have land-grant institutions. The 1890 Morrill Act extended the Land-Grant System to include 18 separate land-grant institutions for African-American students. Further, in 1994, 29 tribal colleges and universities became land-grant institutions. This number has since expanded to 32. [Access NIFA's map of all land-grant colleges and universities.](#)

Cooperative Extension System

The 1914 Smith-Lever Act expanded the mission of the Land-Grant University System, creating the Cooperative Extension System. The Extension System has broad resources to help with planning associated with the recreational economy. A national network of extension professionals has worked to bring resources to a single website for easy cross-state sharing. Visit the online network, [National Extension Tourism \(NET\)](#), for a multitude of resources.

Regional Rural Development Centers

There are four [Regional Rural Development Centers](#) that link the important work done at extension centers within their respective 12-13 state regions. These centers help connect initiatives to expertise within the region to provide specific technical assistance. For example, extension staff throughout the nation coordinate with USDA Rural Development regarding broadband, community capacity building and regional economic development planning with communities across the nation.

A few examples of the extension's work with the recreation economy are below. Communities considering economic development options may find additional resources by reaching out to their local Extension Service and/or their respective regional Rural Development centers for help.

- [Vermont Tourism Research Center](#), the University of Vermont
- West Virginia University Extension Service [Rural Tourism Development](#)
- North Carolina State University [Tourism Extension Program](#)
- University of Tennessee Extension, Center for Profitable Agriculture [Agritourism Program](#)
- University of California Cooperative Extension [Agritourism Conversations](#)
- [Oregon State Extension Tourism](#)
- [University of Minnesota Tourism Center](#)
- [Michigan State University Tourism Extension](#)



How USDA Agencies Partner to Provide Recreation Economy Assistance

In order to sustainably manage the National Forest System, while bringing economic opportunities to forest-adjacent communities, FS, RD and NIFA/land-grant universities have many opportunities to partner. Here are some examples:

Planning/Partnership

In 2012, FS updated its land management planning requirements with a new planning rule. Because of the importance of sustainably managing the National Forest System with the help of the public and other stakeholders, this rule emphasizes FS's responsibility to engage with the public and to work more closely with state, local and tribal governments when national forest managers amend or revise their land management plans. Economic impact analysis and planning is an important component of the planning process. Since RD, NIFA and land-grant universities have the expertise and vested interest in economic development, the agencies can coordinate and collaborate at various stages of planning and implementation processes. For example, planning efforts that at the outset involve land managers, economic development authorities, RD, NIFA, land-grant universities and Cooperative Extension may also bring technical assistance to the table to support coordination and implementation.

Financing for Infrastructure and Business Development

RD has a loan portfolio of about \$225 billion that is financing infrastructure and business development projects. RD has staff in every state to provide grants, loans and loan guarantees that help rural communities become stronger and more vibrant. RD is an agency that continues to create job opportunities in rural America through investments in rural businesses and cooperatives. At the same time, RD provides loans, grants and loan guarantees to support reliable and necessary services such as water, energy, housing, broadband, schools and hospitals. Collectively, these investments support families that call rural areas home. RD is focused on leveraging the strengths of rural areas, building new markets to increase regional competitiveness and continuing to expand investment opportunities that create prosperous, sustainable communities. When rural America thrives, all of America thrives.

Highlighted Recreation Economy Resources at USDA

USDA programs can support technical assistance, infrastructure, business development and conservation / easement projects.

| Program | Agency | Eligible Applicants | Authorized Purposes | Typical Funding Amount |
|--|--------|--|---|---|
| <u>Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program</u> | RHS | Lenders: Banks and credit unions Borrowers: Public bodies, community-based nonprofit corporations, Federally recognized Tribes. | Improve, develop, or finance essential community facilities for rural communities in rural areas and cities and towns of fewer than 50,000. Example: This program can be used to develop museums, public restrooms, and multi-use trails in recreation areas. | \$100,000-\$5 million |
| <u>Water and Waste Loans and Grants</u> | RUS | State and local government entities, private nonprofits, Federally recognized Tribes. | Build, repair and improve public water systems and waste collection and treatment systems in rural areas and cities and towns of fewer than 10,000. Example: This program has been used in a historic mining town and tourist destination to build a wastewater treatment plan and new water systems. | Long-term, low-interest loans. Grants may be available to keep user costs reasonable. |
| <u>Rural Business Development Grants</u> | RBS | Towns, state agencies, nonprofit corporations, authorities, Federally recognized Tribes, rural cooperatives. | Targeted technical assistance, training and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas. Feasibility studies or economic impact studies for a recreation activity may be eligible. Example: This program can help small towns develop an economic impact analysis to evaluate the area's capacity to become a recreational destination. | \$10,000-\$500,000 |
| <u>Rural Cooperative Development Grant</u> | RBS | Nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher learning. | Provide support to centers for cooperatives. Eligible work plans can include trail development/maintenance, feasibility studies, marketing, lodging development, business development, strategic planning. Example: Nonprofit organizations can use this program to develop a business plan for a cooperative focused on recreational activities such as rock climbing, guided tours, mountain biking, skiing, and hiking. | Maximum-\$200,000 |
| <u>Community Connect Grants</u> | RUS | Most state and local governments, Federally recognized Tribes, nonprofits, for-profit corporations. | Helps fund broadband deployment into rural communities as anchor sites for rural communities. Example: Rural libraries and tribal computing centers can use this program to provide internet service and computer access to their residents. | Minimum: \$50,000 Maximum: \$1 million Amounts are published in Notices of Funding Availability and may vary. |

| Program | Agency | Eligible Applicants | Authorized Purposes | Typical Funding Amount |
|---|--------|--|--|---|
| <u>Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans and Loan Guarantees</u> | RUS | State and local government entities, Federally recognized Tribes, nonprofits, for-profit businesses. | Financing to construct, maintain, improve and expand telephone service and broadband in rural areas. Example: Rural broadband providers can use this program to expand services into remote and underserved areas. | Refer to the rules for loan and terms and conditions. |
| <u>ReConnect Program Grants and Loans</u> | RUS | State and local government entities, Federally recognized Tribes, nonprofits, for-profit businesses. | Financing to construct, maintain, improve and expand telephone service and broadband in rural areas. Example: Broadband e-Connectivity can help individuals access wireless internet while participating in outdoor activities like hiking a trail or touring a rural community. | Availability may vary for 100 percent loan, 50 percent loan / 50 percent grant, or 100 percent grant. Given the varying closing dates for each funding type, applicants will be limited to ONE application for this Funding Opportunity Announcement. |
| <u>Business and Industry Guaranteed Loans</u> | RBS | Lenders: Banks and credit unions Borrowers: For-profit businesses, nonprofits, cooperatives, Federally recognized Tribes, public bodies, individuals. | Business conversion, enlargement, repair, modernization or development; purchase and development of land, easements, rights-of-way, buildings, or facilities. Example: Lodges and hotels can use this program to upgrade facilities and improve visitor experience. | \$1 million-\$25 million |
| <u>Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants</u> | RBS | Former RUS borrowers, nonprofit utilities, current RUS borrowers. | Funds business incubators, community development assistance to nonprofits and public bodies, start-up venture costs and business expansion. Example: This program can provide zero percent loans to utility companies that can be relet to businesses to support creating and retaining employment. | Grants: Up to \$300,000 Loans: Up to \$1 million |
| <u>Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program</u> | RBS | Organizations eligible to become Microenterprise Development Organizations including nonprofits, Federally recognized Tribes, higher education institutions | Microloans for microenterprise startups and growth through rural microloan revolving funds. Example: This program can provide loans to small rural businesses, such as restaurants, dry cleaners, or automotive repair shops. | \$50,000-\$500,000 |
| <u>Intermediary Relending Program</u> | RBS | Nonprofits, cooperatives, Federally recognized Tribes, public agencies | Provides 1 percent low-interest loans to local intermediaries that re-lend to businesses and for community development projects in rural communities. Example: This program can provide funding to intermediary providers who relend the funds in rural communities. | Up to \$2 million for the first financing; \$1 million at a time thereafter; total aggregate debt may not exceed \$15 million. |

Additional Resources

- U.S. Forest Service, the Northern Border Regional Commission and the [Environmental Protection Agency's Recreation Economy for Rural Economies](#) guide. Provides planning assistance to communities interested in boosting their economies by capitalizing on outdoor recreation opportunities.
- [e-Connectivity @ USDA Broadband Resources for Rural America](#) -This toolkit presents USDA resources that support e-Connectivity and aims to help customers navigate the agencies within our Department to find the opportunity that best fulfills their need. From grants and loans, to partnerships and in-person consultations, USDA can support a wide variety of project types for a diversity of customers.
- The U.S. Forest Service [Tribal Partnership Resource Guide](#).
- [Collaborating for Prosperity with American Indians and Alaska Natives](#) is a guide by USDA Rural Development's Innovation Center featuring numerous programs available to tribes, tribal families, children, and communities.
- Listing of [Rural Development's Summary of Major Programs](#)
- A regional [community planning curriculum](#), developed in partnership with Rural Development and the Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University, is also available.
- [Alaska Community Tourism Handbook](#)
- [U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program](#)
- Environmental Protection Agency: Environmental Projects for Rural Economies Grant is a planning assistance program to help communities develop strategies and an action plan to revitalize their Main Streets through outdoor recreation - <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/recreation-economy-rural-communities>
- Environmental Protection Agency: Local Foods, Local Places helps cities and towns across the country protect the environment and human health by engaging with local partners to reinvest in existing neighborhoods as they develop local food systems. In 2019, the program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), EPA, and the Northern Border Regional Commission.: [Local Foods Local Places Program](#)
- [Headwaters Economics Profile System](#)
- Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation: [Jobs and Income Report](#)
- [Food and Nutrition Service Grants Information](#)



Planning for a Recreation Economy

Success Stories

Monogahela National Forest (MNF) Shared Regional Economic Vision

Using the principles of ecotourism, the Monongahela National Forest (MNF), in partnership with West Virginia University and RD, is bringing diverse stakeholders together to create a shared recreation vision for each county and the greater region surrounding the MNF. In 2018, project partners established a steering committee, conducted visioning and action planning meetings in 11 gateway communities, developed a Mon Forest Towns partnership agreement, developed an ARC GIS online recreation economies asset map and created a regional identity. They furthermore conducted community assessments, trained Certified Interpretive Guides, completed an application to become an International Mountain Bike Association Ride Center, and submitted funding proposals for mountain bike trail development and maintenance and gateway community signage. Additional capacity building and project implementation funding is being requested to sustain the project in addition to developing collaborative alliances with the Wayne National Forest and George Washington / Jefferson National Forest to support recreation economy development in Central Appalachia.

Oakridge, Oregon—Transition from Timber Empire to Mountain Bike Capital

Historically dependent on the timber industry, the communities of Oakridge and Westfir identified the increasing popularity of its trails by mountain bikers as a saving grace to their economies when approximately 1,600 jobs were lost following the closure of local sawmills. Through partnerships with the Forest Service, trail groups, bicyclists, hikers and equestrians and the community at large, the [Oakridge-Westfir Community Trails Plan](#) was developed in 2008. USDA Rural Development supported regional infrastructure and business development through its Water and Waste Disposal Loan Program, Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program and Intermediary Relending Program. The community has successfully marketed the location to a specific type of recreation, helping small businesses supporting this industry thrive, as well as attracting an increasing number of new residents and tourists. For example, one major mountain bike event alone generated more than \$1 million in visitor spending. In 2011, the International Mountain Bicycling Association designated Oakridge as one of its first Silver-Level Ride Centers; Oakridge achieved gold status in 2015. Through local leadership and partnerships with volunteer groups, the region is planning to keep stewarding existing trails and connecting the trail systems with nearby recreation areas.

Rural Jobs Accelerator in Southwest Virginia

The Appalachian Spring initiative in Southwest Virginia (SWVA) established two goals to impact the region: to brand SWVA as an international outdoor recreation destination and create an outdoor recreation industry. Through this 3-year project, the region has developed stakeholder groups committed to making improvements in eight key outdoor recreation anchor areas, developed plans to connect communities to their natural assets, developed a regional destination brand and supported more than 130 entrepreneurs. Appalachian Spring worked with eight communities to revitalize their downtowns into outdoor recreation gateways. Partnerships with local planning districts, state and federal agencies, individual communities and other nonprofits have been essential to its success.

Regional Food Production in Forest County, Pennsylvania

Forest County, Pennsylvania, received technical assistance through EPA's [Local Food Local Places](#) in 2015 to develop a plan to renovate the Marienville Depot and make it a regional trail hub with a micro-retail business incubator and a rail-to-trail connected to the Marienville Area Library. Since then, with a grant from Lumber Heritage, the community completed a conceptual drawing of the trail hub and has applied for grants to construct a walking trail, trail connector and a parking lot and station. Jenks Township and other community members have committed financial and in-kind contributions to the project. The county is developing a façade improvement grant program for downtown Tionesta, and a community kitchen at the Forest Folk School. The rail corridor was purchased by private developer Headwaters Group of Dubois, promising additional economic development opportunities. For a full list of awarded projects please click [here](#).

Farmers Market Promotion Program in Montana

Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) in Helena, Montana, which received \$100,000 to enhance the Abundant Montana Directory listings and their accessibility, developed a public calendar system for local food events, created a local food marketing campaign, researched and collaborated on agritourism, and developed an online agritourism resource. For a list of similar awarded projects please click [here](#).

Increasing Community Livability Through Recreation and Economic Development

The [Federal Lands Livability Initiative](#) was launched in 2013 to improve the livability of gateway communities—places adjacent to public lands that attract visitors and residents looking for unique recreational and cultural experiences. The Conservation Fund, a national nonprofit organization focused on ensuring that conservation works for America's communities, collaborated with the Federal Lands Livability Workgroup, comprised of the Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service and other land management agencies to engage four pilot communities in Colorado, Michigan, Oregon and South Carolina. In Sweet Home, Oregon, recommendations on how to strengthen livability led to several action plans and on-the-ground results. The community expanded the existing bus transit system used by workers, college students and senior citizens to provide weekend transit service from the city to summer recreation areas. In addition, the Forest Service and more than 30 private and public groups signed a declaration of cooperation to create the South Santiam Community Forest Corridor, a community recreation destination with a network of trails as well as maintain the working forest landscape. The group is also working with local tribes to protect the privately-owned Cascadia Cave that has early Native American wall paintings and has been used as a gathering place for thousands of years. The region is also seeking to meet the needs of all residents and visitors through additional economic opportunities to address the community's high rate of under-resourced people. Ten percent of Sweet Home's population relies on social services, and a sizable number of youth are homeless.

Planning for a Recreation Economy

Success Stories

Regional Planning— Northern Neck, Virginia

Through a regional planning effort, Eastern Virginia's Northern Neck, an Economic Development Administration-designated Economic Development District, developed a 5-year regional economic development plan. Building entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism, improving infrastructure and jobs skills were the main goals identified in the plan. Since then, through funding obtained from USDA RD's [Rural Business Development Grant](#) (RBDG), the region has established the VA Watermen Heritage Tour Program to assist watermen and women improve their entrepreneurial skills and encourage business development. The [Northern Neck Artisan Trail](#) was also established in partnership with the Artisan Center of Virginia to form strategic alliances with artisans, venues, galleries and retailers across the state. They also seek to connect points of interest, restaurants and accommodation locations in the related communities to boost regional tourism. Through USDA and other partner funding, the region is implementing downtown revitalization projects in Montross and Colonia Beach to create cultural hubs in downtown areas. Since 2013, the Northern Neck region has leveraged more than \$17 million in federal, state and private resources to implement its vision, and has seen a 2.7 percent increase in tourism-related employment.

Partnering with Higher Education to Develop Certification Program—Hawaii Ecotourism Association

To promote sustainable tourism, the [Hawaii Ecotourism Association \(HEA\)](#), a nonprofit, collaborated with the University of Hawaii at Manoa to develop a sustainable tour certification program. In 2016, the Hawaii Tourism Authority recognized HEA's success and funded efforts to triple the number of operators in the certification program. HEA began including tours of agricultural operations in the program because agritourism is important across the state to help agriculture producers increase the profitability of their operations. Additionally, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is considering ways to improve ecotourism standards to help ensure sustainability as a long-term outcome. Alaska and Hawaii are the only states in the U.S. with certification programs for businesses in the tourism sector.

Green Mountain, Vermont National Forest

When the Green Mountain National Forest was revising its Forest Plan in 2002, the University of Vermont Extension assisted with the planning process by facilitating opportunities for public input. To ground the discussions in science, a series of meetings on different topics were organized where leading scientists presented the latest research and addressed questions from the public. The topics of wildlife, acid deposition and silviculture were selected because they were especially controversial aspects of the Forest Plan. Research on the impacts of the public meetings indicate that participants gained a better understanding of the subject matter discussed and some shifts in perspective occurred. Direct interaction with scientists appeared to be a key component of participant learning. Given the need for credible science in policy and planning processes, this research has important implications for management of stakeholder engagement. (More information is available in the journal article: *Chase, L.C., K. Norris, and C. Ginger. 2008. Does science matter? Resource planning in the Green Mountain National Forest. Society and Natural Resources 21(4):345-353.*)

Local, State, Federal Partnerships in Cherokee National Forest, Tennessee

Surrounded by 360 degrees of mountain views, Unicoi County, Tennessee is known as the “Valley Beautiful.” It is host to the Cherokee National Forest, the Appalachian Trail and whitewater paddling. Not too long ago, the community was divided about the possibility of additional conservation of the largest unprotected tract of land in the Southern Appalachians; 9,800 acres of scenic wilderness known as [Rocky Fork](#). With the assistance of the Conservation Fund and its [Balancing Nature and Commerce](#) training and technical assistance, local leaders embraced a new course, realizing how Rocky Fork’s natural assets could lead to additional economic opportunities by establishing the region as a nature-based recreation and tourism destination. Along the way, the community and the Cherokee National Forest transformed their relationship, recognizing their shared interest in cultivating success for the region. The results included FS’s action to work with the county on revitalizing a popular mountain overlook, improving access to recreational facilities and natural features and sponsoring community events including running and mountain bike races on public lands. Simultaneously, the county encouraged entrepreneurship, with early successes including a farmer’s market, a welcome center that houses the [Tanasi Artisan Center](#) where local artists sell their wares and a community kitchen for aspiring businesses. In October 2012, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslem and Senator Lamar Alexander announced that the final 2,000 acres of the Rocky Fork property would become Tennessee’s newest state park, further coupling conservation with additional economic opportunity for the community.

Western Juniper Alliance in Oregon

Over the last 100 years, a lack of management has turned the native Western Juniper into an aggressive invasive that threatens the health and well-being of Oregon’s rangelands and the communities and wildlife that depend on them. From an ecological perspective, there is strong agreement that this invasive tree needs to be removed from public and private lands. But harvesting Juniper also has tremendous potential to create jobs and provide new economic opportunities to the timber and wood products industries throughout the state. In July 2013, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber launched the Western Juniper Alliance (WJA), a collaborative effort managed by Sustainable Northwest. WJA has coordinated with over 50 government partners, business leaders and other organizations to create jobs in Juniper supply and market chains in rural communities. With the help of RD business grants, this collaborative effort has turned a challenge into an opportunity for restoration and economic growth. USDA funding supported initial founding and organizing, market and supply chain development, product testing and network coordination. WJA now sustains restoration, manufacturing and retail businesses employing more than 70 full time and seasonal staff. By using Juniper, these businesses are improving grazing conditions, discouraging the spread of invasive weeds, increasing water supplies, decreasing wildfire risks and restoring habitat for sensitive species, all while creating local jobs.

Business Development in The Recreation Economy Sector

Success Stories

Motivating Entrepreneurship Through Contest “Get On The Trail” Pennsylvania

Motivating Entrepreneurship Through Contest “Get On The Trail” Pennsylvania
In order to encourage and accelerate small business opportunities for business owners and entrepreneurs, the Oil Region Alliance (ORA) of Venango County, kicked off a “Get on the Trail Business Plan Contest” in May 2015. Following the kick off, ORA provided two training seminars and coordinated a “Best Business Plan” contest in partnership with Clarion University. Prize-winners received cash awards and marketing technical assistance through this initiative. Within the first year of operation, a \$55,000 investment to implement this project leveraged \$205,000 in private investment, \$16,000 in public investment, created seven jobs, retained 18 jobs and assisted nine businesses.

A Region Inventing Itself— Saint-Raymond, Quebec

Once dominated by the timber industry, the Saint-Raymond region of Quebec is busy reinventing itself as an adventure and ecotourism-based economy—but on its own terms. Founded in 2002, Vallée-Bras-du-Nord is a cooperative of land owners (providing rights of access), local businesses (offering tourism services), and workers (employed in the tourism industry). All three of the co-op’s membership classes share a desire for sound management and quality development as the region creates the infrastructure for mountain biking, hiking, snowshoeing, canoeing, kayaking, backcountry skiing and camping. The region is one hour north of Quebec City, and about five hours from Boston.

More than \$5 million has been invested in building trails, developing hospitality infrastructure, acquiring equipment and staging events. In the process of building infrastructure, the co-op has put community members back to work. Every year they hire a dozen at-risk youth and offer them a few months of work in what the co-op calls “a different kind of school”—the great outdoors. The youth build and maintain the [trail system](#). Co-op members believe this approach helps the participants adapt to adverse conditions, develop patience, tolerance, discipline, teamwork, determination and perseverance.

Using Technology to Promote Tourism— Washington State Insider App

Using Technology to Promote Tourism—Washington State Insider App
The power of the road trip is alive and well, thanks to a group of students and new technology from a mobile marketing entrepreneur in Washington State. Calling it “[ProjectWA](#),” this group of eighth-graders designed a way to reward people for seeking out and sharing information on historic places around the state. The Washington State Insider app created by the Lopez Island students offers discounted admission to the Washington State History Museum as its user reward. The app went live in June 2016 with nearly 100 sites. Within a month, it had been downloaded nearly 2,000 times, generating significant media attention across the state for both ProjectWA and the off-the-beaten-path rural sites it was designed to promote.

America's First and Only Skier-Owned Mountain—Mad River Glen, Vermont

Mad River Glen became one of Vermont's first major ski areas back in 1948 when a single chair carried skiers to the top of General Stark Mountain. Ranked by Ski Magazine as the most challenging terrain in the east, its motto boasts, "Ski it if you can." In 1995, skiers came together to remain independent and preserve a brand of skiing that exists nowhere else, forming the [Mad River Glen Cooperative](#) to preserve low skier density, the natural terrain and forests and the friendly community atmosphere. About 1,800 skiers are member-owners of the Mad River Glen Cooperative. Nearly \$4 million has been invested in capital projects, with another \$500,000 planned for the coming five years.

Promoting Horizontal Linkages to Support Tourism—Virginia

The [Artisans Center of Virginia](#) and ['Round the Mountain](#), Southwest Virginia's Artisan Network, are using the internet to support the region's vibrant artisan community, local shops, and food producers found along its scenic roads and mountain vistas. According to a benchmark 2016 study, artisan visitor spending totaled more than \$250 million, with the average visitor spending \$260 per-person, per trip. In the same study, the Virginia Tourism Corporation indicated nearly 700,000 travelers had visited Virginia's artisan attractions and businesses. Together, the Artisans Center and 'Round the Mountain are coordinating efforts to connect, brand, promote, and celebrate these artisan assets - both online, and through workshops, training, and exhibits. A similar initiative—the [Crooked Road](#)—was created in support of the Heritage Music Trail, a network that promotes old-time string bands, a cappella gospel, blues, and bluegrass musicians across Southwest Virginia.

Analyzing The Economic Value Of Restoration Activities—Central Idaho

Using USDA Rural Development funds, [Salmon Valley Stewardship](#) (SVS) conducted an analysis of the economic value of restoration activities in Central Idaho. The assessment encompassed 137 projects undertaken between 2008 and 2013 in the Upper Salmon River Region, along with 14 conservation agreements on working ranches in Custer and Lemhi counties. The study found that local workers and companies earned more than \$17.2 million of \$39.6 million spent on restoration and mining reclamation. It also concluded that, on average, restoration activities directly supported 47 jobs, and that regional industry realized an average annual growth of about 14 percent.

Using initial findings from the study, SVC produced a form to track economic impacts of the emerging restoration and stewardship segments. This form is used by federal and state agencies, county governments, and nonprofit organizations. The Idaho Departments of Labor and Commerce have committed to analyzing the data and producing annual reports. SVS also created a restoration services directory to help raise awareness of emerging restoration-sector businesses in the region. Finally, the firm created a guide describing how the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management impact business interests tied to public land access, sharing case studies of successful examples from other regions, and offering initial recommendations for citizen involvement.



Infrastructure Development to Support the Recreation Economy

Success Stories

Local Partnerships Driving Recreation Success—Marquette Michigan

Marquette, Michigan, in Marquette County is on the southern shores of Lake Superior. Historically known for mining and shipping iron ore, today Marquette is flourishing as one of Michigan's premier recreation-based economies. Marquette was listed as one of CBS's 10 best places to retire in 2012, one of the 10 top mountain bike towns in the U.S. according to the Active Times in 2013, and the 8th best small city (out of 1,300) in America according to Nerdwallet in 2015. With 10 miles of paved trail, Marquette received a silver Bicycle Friendly Community Award from the League of American Bicyclists in 2014. Besides its natural beauty, water-front location and four distinct seasons, which maximize year-round appeal, the area has benefited from a core group of knowledgeable, creative, dedicated and passionate advocates who executed a clear vision for their area. The formation of a recreation authority to manage the Iron Ore Heritage Trail, and ongoing collaboration with Travel Marquette, has been critical. Visually distinctive signage along the trail describes the mining heritage of the area and adds unique character to the user experience, contributing to a sense of place among residents and visitors alike. Building relationships with local people and businesses, and actively seeking and showcasing [ecotourism destinations](#), have also contributed to Marquette's continuing success.

Diversifying Economy Through Tourism—Town of Thomas, West Virginia

The remote, rural town of [Thomas](#) in West Virginia, a coal-dependent economy since the 1880s, is using tourism to diversify its economy. New Historic Thomas was formed as a nonprofit community group to revitalize the town by preserving its unique history, cultural heritage and resources. The nonprofit began to focus on developing cultural amenities that would complement outdoor recreation opportunities. The cornerstone of the recreational trail opportunities adjacent to Thomas is the [Blackwater Canyon Trail](#). A partnership with the U.S. Forest Service's Cheat-Potomac District was established to further development the recreational use of the former rail grade along the Blackwater River. FS is continuing to work with private owners to conduct trail maintenance and promote recreational assets which benefit Thomas and can attract considerable numbers of recreational trail users.

Conservation/Easement Initiatives

Success Stories

Public Private Partnership for Restoration

USDA and the Coca-Cola Company's ground-breaking partnership achieved an ambitious milestone and is on track to double that commitment by 2018. Through a [partnership](#) between FS, the National Forest Foundation, Coca-Cola and other federal and local partners, and a total investment of \$4.5 million, restoration of damaged watersheds and meadowlands returned more than a billion liters of water to the National Forest System which provides drinking water to more than 60 million Americans. This project also restored 1,200 acres of land and restored and maintained more than 70 miles of trail.

Dry Forest Investment Zone in Oregon And Northern California

The Dry Forest Zone project was a 5-year initiative to support forest stewardship and economic development in Eastern Oregon and Northern California. With support from RD and the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, a core team of four organizations collectively leveraged their strengths and networks to take innovations in community-based forestry "to scale." A regional nonprofit organization, two community-based organizations and an applied research group led the project. The project has supported at least 72 full-time equivalent jobs, directly treated 8,843 public and private acres, analyzed 214,350 acres, increased planning efforts on more than 4 million acres, and implemented several policies and programs that support sustainable forest stewardship. By working at all levels from local to national, the team not only affected changes at a local level.



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