

FEBRUARY, 2010

National Coal Heritage Area



National Coal Heritage Area, West Virginia: Trail Plan for Greenways and Blueways EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



www.CoalHeritage.org



Welcome to the first National Coal Heritage Area Trail Plan for Greenways & Blueways!

We are pleased to present this trail assessment and plan for the National Coal Heritage Area, covering the thirteen West Virginia counties that are in the National Coal Heritage Area (NCHA). We undertook this project as a way to assess the current inventory of trails available within the area and to gain information from the community about sites for potential trails and linkages.

While the National Coal Heritage Area's primary focus is on preservation of historic resources and development of cultural heritage tourism, we know that cultural heritage tourists also appreciate opportunities to explore the landscape through hiking/biking activities and to get to know small towns through walking tours and in-town interpretive trails.

Through our partnership with the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA), all of the current trails within the region - both motorized and non-motorized - were identified and mapped. A series of public meetings were held to gain information from the communities, and to identify potential trail corridors and linkages between existing trails and between trails and communities. Rich discussions and significant input from community members resulted in a map locating existing trails and proposed / potential trails to be considered for development.

These maps and this report will be used as a tool for the NCHA Authority and other public agencies and community groups in creating plans for the expansion of existing trails and the development of new ones.

It is our hope that this plan and the resource information within will create new energy around hiking and biking and encourage community groups, with technical assistance and support of the National Coal Heritage Area Authority, to include trails as a part of their efforts to expand the tourism offerings in their area and to enhance the quality of life for residents.

Special thanks go to Peggy Pings of the National Park Service RTCA Program, members of the steering committee who provided valuable guidance, and to Joshua and Candice Chastain of Cornerstone GIS for their outstanding technical work. Also thanks go to Debby Spencer of WMTH Corporation, who brought her considerable knowledge of trail development to the task of writing and designing the final document. We also appreciate the assistance of the many public land managers throughout the region and State Trails Coordinator, Bill Robinson, who provided us with information regarding existing trails.

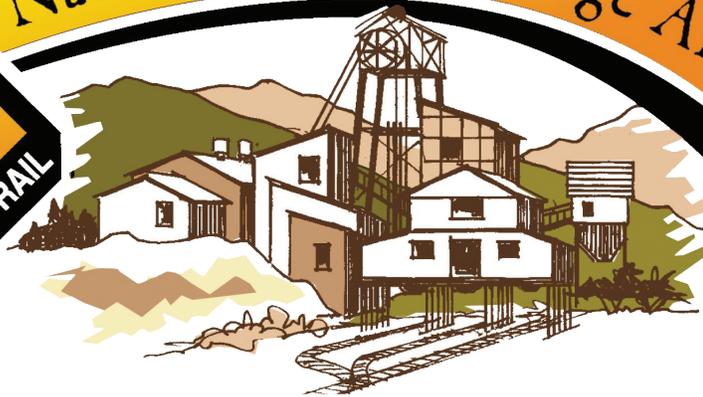
The plan could not have been completed without the input of all of the community members who attended the meetings and filled out trail survey forms indicating potential trail corridors that could be developed. These folks all have a passion, as well as great ideas, for improving their communities and are the ones we will depend on in implementing the recommendations in this plan.

We look forward to working with our friends and partners throughout the National Coal Heritage Area to expand the offering of trails in the region as we all continue to add activities for tourists to engage in, and to make all of our communities a better place to live, work, and play.

Christy Bailey, Executive Director
National Coal Heritage Area Authority
Beckley, West Virginia



National Coal Heritage Area



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National Coal Heritage Area, West Virginia: Trail Plan for Greenways and Blueways.

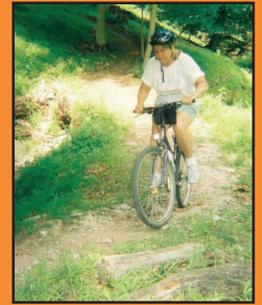
HISTORY

In 1996, Congress passed the National Coal Heritage Area Act which recognizes southern West Virginia as a unique cultural region "where coal mining has played a significant role in our nation's history." The mission of the National Coal Heritage Area is to preserve, protect, and interpret lands, structures and communities associated with the coal mining heritage of West Virginia within the counties of Boone, Cabell, Fayette, Logan, Lincoln, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Raleigh, Summers, Wayne, Wyoming and the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek Watersheds in Kanawha County.

In 2002, the West Virginia Legislature created the National Coal Heritage Area Authority (NCHAA) as an economic development entity to manage the National Coal Heritage Area (NCHA) and to help build the tourism industry in southern West Virginia.

The NCHA Authority "is a public corporation and a government instrumentality existing for the purposes of providing direction to and assistance with state and federal historic preservation, economic development, and tourism projects in the National Coal Heritage Area and aiding in the development and implementation of integrated cultural, historical, and land resource management policies and programs in order to retain, enhance, and interpret the significant values of the lands, waters and structures in the National Coal Heritage Area."

The National Coal Heritage Area Authority depends on a strong network of partner organizations at the local, state and federal level.



The goal of the Trail Plan is to identify opportunities for community and regional linkages via hiking, biking, equestrian, all terrain vehicles (ATV) trails, recreation areas, and scenic byways.

The Trail Plan and companion Maps of Existing and Proposed Trails are meant to be used as a tool to support and stimulate community-based efforts on trail projects. These documents can be found at www.CoalHeritage.org.



The National Coal Heritage Area in West Virginia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRAIL PLAN

A Steering Committee and Advisory Committee were formed to help guide the process, provide input, and to expand the reach of the project. An in-depth study was conducted between 2006-2009 to identify both existing and potential trails throughout southern West Virginia, and to identify successes, challenges, and solutions.

Six public input and mapping workshops were held with over 80 people in attendance. A survey of over 200 trail users, elected officials and public land managers was conducted to determine current use of trails, types of trails used, the condition of trails, and what kinds of trails were needed. The following recommendations came forth from the workshops, meetings, surveys as well as a review of other regional plans.



PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Recommendations listed below are ideas, and are not aimed solely at the National Coal Heritage Area Authority and their staff for implementation. The ideas can be implemented by the entire community, which includes individuals, local, state, and federal governments, nonprofit organizations and civic groups. These and other recommendations are further explained in Chapter 6 of the document.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

- Expand the reach of the NCHA by establishing and staffing 1-2 Field Offices scattered throughout the region. These offices would provide technical assistance related to trails, heritage / sustainable tourism & community development.
- Form an NCHA Trails Committee.
 - Staff this committee with a paid NCHA employee, to serve as NCHA Trails Coordinator.
 - Assist with the organization and coordination of local trail-focused groups within NCHA, focused on their smaller piece of the bigger vision.
 - Use VISTA volunteers to organize & work with Trail Clubs.
 - Identify the Vision, Mission, Goals of the Trails Committee.
 - Develop an Action Plan, based on the Trail Plan. What do you want to accomplish, and how will you accomplish it?



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COMMUNICATIONS

- Create a comprehensive stakeholder contacts database.
- Create a workable and sustainable communication system. Consider interactive websites, blogs, popular social networking sites, e-newsletters, phone trees, face-to-face meetings, conference calls, webinars, etc.
- Take an active role in encouraging and assisting communities to apply for trail grants.
- Coordinate with the WV State Trail Coordinator.
- Coordinate with WV Scenic Trail Association (WVSTA) and other regional trail groups.
- Host quarterly progress meetings of all trail-related groups and efforts, to share information, provide opportunities for mentoring, and cultivating working relationships.

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE & CAPACITY BUILDING

- Assign an NCHA staff member to help communities, upon request, to create trails. This may include building local interest and support for the trail, finding funding, inventorying existing trails to determine maintenance needs, improving trailheads, developing maps, providing recommendations for signage, and coordinating the building of new or extended trails.
- Participate with existing organizational structures in your community or region. These could include: EZ-EC, WV Hub, RC & D, Chambers of Commerce, CVBs, Regional Planning & Development Councils, Family Resource Networks (FRN), and watershed groups.

TRAIL CLUBS - USER GROUPS

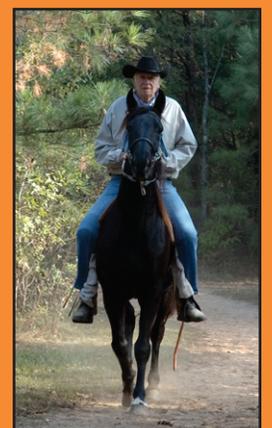
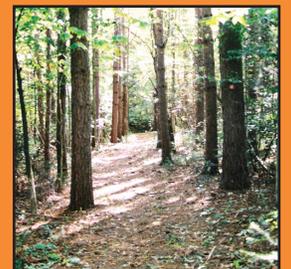
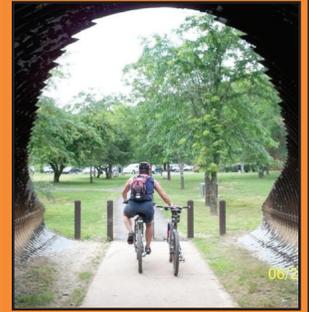
- Inventory the trail clubs and trail user groups.
- Support the development of Trail Clubs, to help keep the momentum going. Members can organize social events, use the trail together, help with maintenance, promotion, and fundraising.

VOLUNTEERS

- Recruit volunteers. Use Volunteerwv.org to post notices.
- Utilize National Service Programs.
- Develop / expand a Volun"tour"ism / Volunteer Vacations initiative.

TRAINING

- Participate in trail building training opportunities.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW OF THE TRAILS WITHIN NCHA

There are 275 trails totaling 2,231.70 miles of trails within the NCHA 13-county study area.

- Only 59 of these trails (totaling 258.5 miles) are overseen and managed by cities, counties, towns, private groups and or private organizations.)
- The remaining 219 trails totaling 1,835.9 miles are overseen, managed and, or most cases, maintained by state and federal agencies including the WV State Parks, WV Division of Forestry, WV Fish & Wildlife Resources, National Park Service, National Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority.

All 13 counties offer day hikes and multi-use trails; 6 counties offer motorized trails for all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes; and 4 counties have access to a water trail.



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT: Going from Ideas to Open for Business

MAPPING

- Buy GPS units, equip, and train a group of volunteers to gather GPS tracks for the trails.
- Make all GPS and GIS data accessible to the general public and the maps themselves posted on the www.coalheritage.org website.

PRIVATE LANDS

- Develop a plan / methodology to develop & maintain new trails on private land.
- Develop working relationships with members of the WV Land & Mineral Owners Association, WV Surface Owners Rights Organization, and any other land ownership groups. These organizations can help you understand common concerns, and allows an opportunity to develop social ties with this critical community.

ACCESSIBILITY

- Develop 1-2 mile long handicapped-accessible trails in every community. This is a high priority need.
- Engage the disabled community in your trail planning work. The Center for Excellence in Disabilities is a good place to start.

FUNDING

- Develop a resource guide for funding trail projects.
- Create the "NCHA Trail Partners Program," a small grants program to seed community trail projects and clubs.

TRAIL AND GREENWAY DEVELOPMENT

- Based on the Trail Survey and Workshop results, identify those individuals or communities that are interested in getting started with trails of any kind. Make contact, and start the project.
- Develop trails that link communities and natural and cultural resources.
- Locate trailheads so they are more obvious and easy to find.
- Plan for amenities at the trailheads: trash cans, bathroom facilities, parking.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROMOTING AND USING THE TRAILS

PUBLIC RELATIONS & MARKETING

- Identify your marketable trail-related facilities and trailheads & make information about them accessible to the general public.
- Create and maintain an active website and social networking sites about trails and trail-related events.
- Update the NCHA website to include a map of the region, documents and publications, news stories, funding information, updates on numerous projects underway, etc.
- Apply for National Recreation Trail designation, for trails with quality design.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS - TRAIL RELATED BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

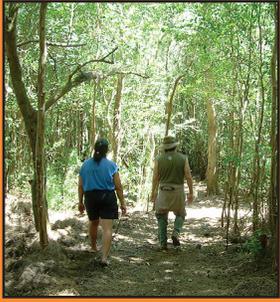
- Establish a Trail Towns program. <http://www.trailtowns.org/>
- Provide business information and maps at trailhead kiosks.

PROGRAMS - EVENTS - INTERPRETATION

- Create additional events to promote local use of trails, and to tell the story of our region.
- Create a directory of local trail-related events in southern WV, and keep it updated and accessible to the public.
- Combine heritage tourism events with trail events.
- Host an event for National Trails Day, always the 1st Saturday in June.
- Encourage walking programs, in partnership with County Health Departments and other groups.
- Expand the Volksmarching program in the NCHA region, and encourage membership.
- Explore opportunities for adding interpretation that tells the coal heritage story along existing trails and in developing new trails.

TRAIL MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE/SAFETY

- Create an Adopt-A-Trail Program
- Adopt and teach the "Leave No Trace" and "Tread Lightly" concepts.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TRAIL TYPES

This section lists some actions to take for specific trail types.

LAND TRAILS: MOTORIZED

- Support the creation of additional miles of sustainably-designed motorized public trails.

LAND TRAILS: NON-MOTORIZED

- Create trails/paths around new developments such as a subdivision or shopping center.
- Support the establishment of long-distance hiking trails through the NCHA region. These include the Great Eastern Trail and Mary Draper Ingles Trail.

RAIL-TRAILS

- Inventory, map, and analyze the abandoned or unused rail corridors in the NCHA Region for possible conversion for trail.
- Partner with the WV Brownfields Program for rail-trail projects.

ROADSIDE TRAILS

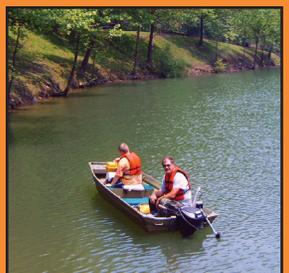
- Work with the WV Cycling Foundation to identify and map popular road routes in the NCHA.
- Participate on the "WV Bicycle Pedestrian Network" of the WV Trail Coordinator.

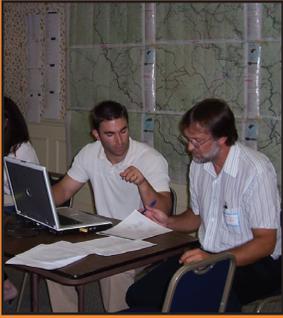
WATER TRAILS

- Support community efforts to create water trails.
- Provide more public access points along the rivers, for both fishing and paddling.

SCENIC BYWAYS

- Support the development of additional Byways and Backways.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Much appreciation and congratulations goes out to all the Workshop attendees and Survey participants, for making the Plan your own! Thank you!



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Photo credits: NPS Rivers & Trails Program and numerous public websites.

The complete Plan can be found online at www.trailsrus.com/nchatrails or
www.CoalHeritage.org



National Coal Heritage Area



Rivers & Trails Program



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