

CHAPTER FOUR: Overview & Benefits of Trails

An inventory of all the trails within the NCHA study area reveals that there are 294 trails totaling 2,231.70 miles of trails. A complete list of trails thus far identified in alphabetical order are provided in APPENDIX E. 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 235 trails totaling 1,835.9 miles are overseen, managed and, in most cases, maintained by state and federal agencies including the West Virginia State Parks, West Virginia State Forest, West Virginia Fish & Wildlife Resources, National Park Service, National Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and West Virginia's Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority.

As noted in the chart below, all thirteen counties offer day hikes and multi-use trails; six offer motorized trails for all-terrain vehicles and dirtbikes; and four of the counties have access to a water trail.

OVERVIEW OF THE NUMBER OF TRAILS AVAILABLE WITHIN THE 13 COUNTY NCHA AREA			
NON-MOTORIZED	279	1,103.8	All 13 counties offer day hikes and multi-use trails
MOTORIZED (off road)	7	541.3	Six of the 13 counties offer OHV trails for ATV and dirtbikes
Scenic Byways/ Backways	6	521	Four of the 13 counties offer scenic byways or backways
Water Trails	2	105.6	Four of the 13 counties offer water trails. Walhonde Trail & the Elkhorn Creek Fishing Trail
TOTAL	294	2,231.70	
Off-Road Trails Only	286	1,645.10	

WATER TRAILS

A **water trail** is a route on a stream, river or lake that provides paddlers or motorboaters with a recreational, scenic, historical or educational opportunity. There are designated put-ins and take-outs, and self-guided informational maps. Many water trails offer land-side camping or docking facilities with visitor services nearby. The West Virginia Recreational Trails Advisory Board has developed criteria for designation and funding.

The **Walhonde Water Trail** which travels 88 miles along the Big Coal, Little Coal, and Coal Rivers through the counties of Kanawha, Lincoln and Boone and the **Elkhorn Creek Fishing Trail** in McDowell County are the only recognized water trails within the NCHA Study area.

DRIVING TOURS INCLUDE SCENIC BYWAYS AND BACKWAYS

Scenic Byways are paved roads that have interesting characteristics that fit into "a distinctive collection of American roads, their stories and treasured places", based on their archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic qualities. Scenic Backways are unpaved back roads that have interesting characteristics based on their archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities. The NCHA Study area offer some of both. Included are the following:

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- **Country Roads Scenic Byway**, a 139 mile driving tour through the counties of Boone, Logan and Mingo
- **Midland Trail National Scenic Byway** – A 138 mile driving tour through the counties of Cabell, Fayette, Kanawha
- **Paint Creek Scenic Trail Byway** – A 42 mile driving tour through the counties of Fayette, Kanawha and Raleigh
- **Lower Greenbrier River Byway** – An 18 mile driving tour through Summers County
- **Farm Heritage Road Backway** – A 27 mile driving tour through Summers County
- **Coal Heritage Trail National Scenic Byway** – A 157 mile driving tour through the counties of Mercer, McDowell, Wyoming, Raleigh, and Fayette

The Coal Heritage Trail and Midland Trail also have the designation of being one of the few **nationally designated trails**. These are trails that have applied for and received national designation such as National Scenic Trail, Wild & Scenic River designations or National Scenic Byway.

MOTORIZED AND NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS

Motorized trails accommodate off-highway vehicles (OHV's) including, but not limited to, all-terrain vehicles (ATV's), dirt bikes or four-wheel drive vehicles. Some motorized trails also allow non-motorized trail use. There are seven recognized motorized trails within the NCHA study area. Six of the trails are part of the Hatfield McCoy Trail System which includes:

- **Buffalo Mountain Trail System** – A 86.3 mile trail system in Mingo County
- **Bearwallow Trail System** – A 67 mile trail system in Logan County
- **Indian Ridge Trail System** – A 63 mile trail system in McDowell County
- **Little Coal Trail System** – A 54.5 mile trail system in Boone County
- **Pinnacle Creek Trail System** – A 71.6 mile trail system in Wyoming County
- **Rockhouse Trail System** – An 89.3 mile trail system in Logan and Mingo Counties

The trails above are managed by the **Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority** which was created in 1993 by the West Virginia Legislature for this purpose. The other motorized trail is the **Burning Rock Trail System** in Raleigh County. It is a 100 mile trail system that is privately owned and operated.

Non-motorized trails in West Virginia are typically single-track through mountainous terrain, allowing one or more of the following: walking, running, hiking, mountain biking, or horseback riding. It could also be a community path or jogging track. **Non-motorized trails** are further broken down into rail-trails, day hikes and/or multi-use trails.



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RAIL-TRAILS

A **rail-trail** tends to be a non-motorized multi-use trail on abandoned rail corridors converted for public trail use. The rail-trails in the NCHA study area include the 7 mile White Oak Rail-Trail, the 3.4 mile Thurmond-Minden Rail-Trail, the 1.8 mile Hawks Nest Rail-Trail, all of which are located in Fayette County. There is also the Beckley Rail-Trail in Raleigh County and the Brush Creek Falls Rail-Trail in Mercer County.

A website featuring a list of **West Virginia Rail-Trails** at <http://www.wvrtc.org/trails/index.html> also noted that the Kaymoor Trail, the Glade Creek Trail and the Southside Junction to Brooklyn Trail as all being Rail-Trails although the NPS New River Gorge National River list of hiking trails did not reference them this way. All three of these trails are also located in Fayette County.

ROADSIDE TRAILS

A **roadside trail** is a trail which runs parallel to a road usually for foot and bicycle traffic, but can also be a bike lane or "Share the Road" with motorized vehicles. The road side trails in the region include the Midland Trail Bikeway in Fayette, the Millers Fork/Beech Fork Loop for both pedestrians and bicyclists in Wayne County, the Mullens Historic Walking Tour in Wyoming County, and the 30-mile Lower Greenbrier Driving Tour in Summers County specifically for bicycling.

BREAKDOWN OF TYPES OF TRAILS AND MILES BY COUNTY						
COUNTIES	MOTORIZED	BYWAY & BACKWAYS	WATER TRAILS	RAIL-TRAIL	ROADSIDE	DAY HIKES/MULTI-USE
Boone	(1) 54.5	(2) 296	(1) 48	0	0	(1) 1
Cabell	0	(1) 138	0	0	0	(11) 76.1
Fayette	0	(3) 633	0	(3) 12.2	(1) 1.7	(40) 101
Kanawha	0	(2) 180	(1) 48	(1) 1	0	(41) 58.8
Lincoln	0	0	(1) 48	0	0	(6) 10.4
Logan	(2) 156	(1) 139	0	0	0	(12) 21.2
McDowell	(1) 121	(1) 157	(1) 17.6	0	0	(12) 9
Mercer	0	(1) 157	0	(1) 1.9	0	(18) 70.9
Mingo	(2) 176	(1) 139	0	0	0	(4) 4
Raleigh	(1) 100	(2) 199	0	(1) 4	0	(23) 30.2
Summers	0	(2) 45	0	0	(1) 30.7	(28) 67.8
Wayne	0	0	0	0	(1) 23.4	(26) 60.1
Wyoming	(1) 71.6	(1) 157	0	0	(1) 0.5	(14) 27.1

Please Note: Rail-Trails, day hikes and/or multi-use trails are all non-motorized trails.

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OVERVIEW OF TRAILS DESIGNATED FOR DAY HIKES AND/OR MULTI-USE

There are 128 trails totaling 245.6 miles within the 13-county NCHA study area that have been designated specifically for day hiking. There are an additional 114 trails totaling 291 miles that are for multi-use which includes day hiking. Of the total 242 trails, six of them meet the American Disabilities Act guidelines for accessible trails. They are as follows:

- **Beechfork State Park's Physical Fitness Trail** in Cabell County
- **Glenwood Park Trail** in Mercer County
- **Spotted Salamander Trail** in Kanawha State Forest
- **Dunbar Parks and Recreation's Wine Cellar Nature Trail** in Kanawha County
- **Twin Oaks Trail** at Twin Falls State Park in Wyoming County
- NPS New River Gorge National River's **Sandstone Falls Boardwalk** in Summers County

Both the Spotted Salamander Trail and the Wine Cellar Nature Trail also offer interpretive displays and Glenwood Park Trail and the Physical Fitness Trail both offer fitness stops to engage the user in some extra physical activities such as stretching and bending.

There are also **eight multi-use trails** that are open to both day hiking and cross country skiing. Seven of the trails are located in Summers County. The other trail is located in Kanawha State Forest in Kanawha County. The names of these trails are provided in *CHAPTER FOUR: Inventory of Existing Trails by County*.

Below is an overview of the day hiking and/or multi-use non-motorized trails within the NCHA study area. Kanawha County has the greatest number of trails but the counties of Fayette, Cabell, Mercer, Summers and Wayne actually have more miles of trails.

TRAILS DESIGNATED FOR DAY HIKING IN NCHA STUDY AREA					
COUNTY	QUANTITY	TOTAL MILES	LONGEST	SHORTEST	AVERAGE
Boone	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Cabell	11.0	76.1	22.4	0.3	11.4
Fayette	40.0	101.0	10.0	0.1	5.1
Kanawha	41.0	58.8	9.0	0.3	4.7
Lincoln	6.0	10.4	7.0	0.3	3.7
Logan	12.0	21.2	6.0	0.5	3.3
McDowell	12.0	9.0	1.0	0.5	0.8
Mercer	18.0	70.9	9.4	0.2	4.8
Mingo	4.0	4.0	2.5	0.2	1.4
Raleigh	23.0	30.2	4.6	0.3	2.5
Summers	28.0	67.8	7.2	0.2	3.7
Wayne	26.0	60.1	18.1	0.5	9.3
Wyoming	14.0	27.1	3.5	0.3	1.9
TOTAL	236.0	536.6	100.7	4.7	53.3
AVERAGE	18.2	41.3	7.6	0.4	4.1

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The longest day hiking trail is the Camp Arrowhead trail in Cabell County which is 22.4 miles long. The shortest trails are the Canyon Rim Boardwalk and the Kates Fall Trail. Both trails are just .1 miles long and are located within the NPS New River Gorge National River Trail System.

In conversations with park managers at numerous parks, the comments were not that more trails are needed. They discussed the need for funding to improve and better maintain the trails they already have.

RECOMMENDATION: On-site reviews of all the day hike/multi-use trails within the NCHA study area should be conducted and a priority list of maintenance needs developed.

INVENTORY OF EQUESTRIAN TRAILS IN NCHA STUDY AREA

There is only one designated equestrian trail noted on any of the state or federal park websites within the NCHA 13-county study area that is not part of a multi-use trail system. It is 10 miles long and is located within Camp Creek State Park in Mercer County and includes a 1-mile Horse By-Pass Trail connecting one area to another. The rest of the trails range from the shortest which is just 0.4 miles long and the longest of 6 miles.

TRAILS THAT ALLOW HORSEBACK RIDING IN NCHA STUDY AREA					
COUNTY	QUANTITY	TOTAL MILES	LONGEST	SHORTEST	AVERAGE
Boone	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cabell	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Fayette	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Kanawha	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Lincoln	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Logan	12.0	21.2	6.0	0.5	3.3
McDowell	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mercer	5.0	20.8	10.0	1.3	5.7
Mingo	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Raleigh	10.0	10.0	2.1	0.4	1.3
Summers	4.0	9.8	5.3	0.4	2.9
Wayne	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Wyoming	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
TOTAL	31.0	61.8	23.4	2.6	13.2
AVERAGE		15.5	5.9	0.7	3.3

A recent survey by the Virginia Horse Council asked 822 horseback riders what they felt were the ideal length of trails for a day ride and for what they would prefer when taking multiple day trail rides. Out of approximately 695 respondents, over one-third (35.8%) indicated that 10-15 miles would be ideal for day trips. A nearly equal number (35.7%) indicated 5-10 miles would be ideal. See *Virginia Equestrian Trail Tourism Survey* at www.virginiahorsecouncil.org/trails.html.

Over 50% responded that the minimal length for an equestrian trail was 5 -10 miles. Anything less was not worth the time loading their horses into a trailer and transporting them to a trail. A majority of 26.4% agreed on the ideal trail length of 20-30 miles for multiple day trail rides. Trails of 15-20 miles were a close runner up (22.8%).

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Of the 697 respondents, 691 (or 99.6%) identified that they took trips within the State of Virginia. However, 555 (or 79.6%) respondents identified they also took out of state riding trips. One would seriously doubt any of these riders are riding the trails in West Virginia's NCHA study area since very few of these trails which allow horseback riding actually meet the minimum requirements for length. In fact, only 4 of the 31 trails noted for equestrian use in the NCHA study area actually meet the minimum recommended length for a day trip.

Riders who responded to the survey also expressed they often have concerns about water access for the horses on the trail (77.4%); length of trail (78.1%); quality of riding facility (70.4%); lack of effective signage (65.6%); lack of maps (63.4%); and vehicle safety (60.4%). Riders also indicated that they are more concerned about finding a safe place to stay for their horse than for themselves.

Riders were then asked what were the most important features or amenities for an equestrian trail. Over 660 people answered this question, offering 2351 responses that fell into 66 distinct categories. Their top preferences are listed below in order of importance.

Water, Bathroom, Diverse/Variety Trails - overall safety (horses, trailers), Ample Parking, Adequate parking for trailers, Attractive scenery, Shade, Loop options, Adequate markings, Available Maps, Adequate footing for people/horses, Cleared trails, Long trails, Limited vehicular/bike traffic

Equestrian Trails in West Virginia: Situation Analysis

Only 4 of the 31 trails noted for equestrian use in the NCHA study area actually meet the minimum recommended length for a day trip. Only the 6-mile Wilderness Trail at Chief Logan State Park in Logan County, the 5-mile Bear Wallow Trail and the 10-mile Turkey Loop Trail at Camp Creek State Park in Mercer County and the 5.3 mile River Trail at Pipestem Resort State Park in Summers County even meet the minimal length. The other 27 noted equestrian trails range between 0.4 miles and 3 miles in length. In fact, over half are less than 1 mile long.

RECOMMENDATION: A group of interested equestrian riders in the area along with horse clubs and state and national equestrian organizations should be sought out and asked to help critique the existing trails to determine which ones actually are suitable for horseback riding. It should also be determined if there is a need or desire for additional trails. If so, this group could identify existing trails that might be extended to an optimum length for horseback riding and/or assist in locating potential areas in which to establish additional equestrian trails that provide amenities that meet the needs of both the horse and its rider.



Currently in the "Works": There are plans and funding appropriated to add 30 to 50 miles of equestrian trails at Camp Creek State Park in Mercer County.

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INVENTORY OF MOUNTAIN BIKING TRAILS IN NCHA STUDY AREA

There are no designated mountain biking trails within the NCHA 13-county study area that are not part of a multi-use trail system. Of the 94 multi-use trails that allow mountain biking, only seven have lengths of 5 miles or more. In fact, over 65% are 2 miles or less in length which is a very short bike ride for most riders.

TOTAL NUMBER AND MILES OF TRAILS IN EACH COUNTY THAT ALLOW MOUNTAIN BIKING IN NCHA STUDY AREA					
COUNTY	QUANTITY	TOTAL MILES	LONGEST	SHORTEST	AVERAGE
Boone	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cabell	5.0	10.4	4.6	0.5	2.1
Fayette	9.0	43.1	10.0	0.2	4.8
Kanawha	24.0	40.8	5.0	0.3	1.7
Lincoln	No Trails	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Logan	12.0	18.2	6.0	0.5	1.5
McDowell	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Mercer	11.0	39.0	10.0	1.3	3.5
Mingo	2.0	1.8	1.3	0.5	0.9
Raleigh	15.0	26.8	5.5	0.4	1.7
Summers	7.0	18.7	7.2	0.3	2.7
Wayne	6.0	9.6	4.5	0.8	1.6
Wyoming	2.0	6.3	3.3	3.0	3.2
TOTAL	94.0	215.7	58.4	8.8	24.7
AVERAGE	8.5	19.6	5.3	0.8	2.2

It is not suggested that these multi-use trails within the NCHA study no longer be designated for mountain bikers. The beginner cross country riders enjoy relatively wide, smooth, short trails which most of these appear to be. But as their skill levels improve, riders will quickly lose interest in these basic trails and look for dedicated bike paths that are more challenging. Avid cross country riders seek trails that let them cover 10 to 100 miles. Desirable trails feature several connecting loops with natural obstacles. Right now there does not appear to be many, if any that would meet these criteria.

RECOMMENDATION: A group of interested mountain bikers in the area along with possible members of IMBA or other mountain biking clubs or organizations should be sought out and asked to help critique the existing trails to determine which ones might be improved or expanded upon to add elements to make the trails more inviting to those who enjoy mountain biking.

A phone interview with IBMA staff at the Boulder Colorado office agreed that a 2-mile trail was really not long enough to be classified as a mountain biking trail unless possibly it was a looped trail system in which one could ride the trail multiple times. And even so, this short of a trail would probably only interest a mountain biker if the trail was challenging or offered different elements that might make it worth repeating the trail more than one time in order to hone one's skill or master a particular portion of the trail. Some favorite locations in the NCHA region are: Chief Logan State Park, Twin Falls State Park, Lake Stephens. These trails while short are linked together and the National Park Service is planning a stacked loop trail system with IMBA.

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkId=259&projectId=28775>.

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BECOMING THE BEST OF THE BEST: MOUNTAIN BIKER'S "EPIC" TRAILS

"As mountain biking evolves, the 'best in mountain biking' continues to get better" notes the IMBA website. To this end, the IMBA staff are continually reviewing trails throughout the world to find the best of the best which are known as "Epic" trails.

There are forty-six trails that have been identified across the country as epic trails by members of the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA). A few of those located fairly close to West Virginia include the **Southern Traverse Trail** in Harrisonburg VA (http://www.imba.com/epics/harrisonburg_va.html), the **Roth Rock Ride** in State College PA (http://www.imba.com/epics/state_college_pa.html), the **Tanasi Trails** in Ocoee TN (<http://www.imba.com/epics/tanasi.html>) and the **Forks Area Trail System** in Sumter National Forest (http://www.imba.com/epics/forks_area_trail_system.html), SC. There are only two identified epic trails in West Virginia. They are the **Gauley Headwaters Trail** in Slatyfork, WV and the **Spruce-Knob Seneca Rock Trail** in Seneca WV. For a complete list of all the epic trails, visit the website http://www.imba.com/epics/rays_indoor_bike_park.html

TWO EPIC TRAILS IN WEST VIRGINIA

The **Gauley Headwaters Epic Trail** in Slatyfork, WV is 37 miles in length with an elevation level of 2,700 to 4,200 and offering technical rocky singletrack, long descents and water crossings. The **Monongahela National Forest's Spruce Knob Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area** in eastern West Virginia offers anywhere from 10 to 50 miles of mountain biking trails depending on the route one chooses (*The trails include both singletrack and doubletrack and are technically challenging with extensive rock gardens, hike-a-bike sections and wet slippery conditions. Elevation levels start at 2,000 feet and climb to as high as 4,800 in sections.*) Descriptions of both trails are provided on the following websites:

http://www.imba.com/epics/slatyfork_wv.html and
http://www.imba.com/epics/spruce_knob_seneca_rocks.html



Gauley Headwaters Epic Trail

Not all trails can be Epic trails but it is good for one to visit some of the trails which mountain bikers consider to be excellent in order to help improve and develop trails of your own that will attract many levels of users.



Spruce Knob Seneca Rocks Recreation Area

RECOMMENDATION: Visit an Epic trail or other trails recognized by mountain bikers as being "good trails" to gain better understanding of how the trails in your area might be improved to better appeal to those who like to ride trails.

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) was founded in 1988 by a group of California mountain bike clubs concerned about the closure of trails to cyclists. These pioneering clubs believed that mountain biker-education programs and innovative trail management solutions should be developed and promoted.

IMBA's mission has always been to protect, create, and enhance quality trail experiences for mountain bikers worldwide. ... actively promote responsible mountain biking, support volunteer trailwork, assist land managers with trail management issues, and improve relations among trail user groups.

IMBA members annually contribute more than one million hours to trailwork projects on public land. To date, these volunteers have created more than 5,000 (8,000 km) miles of new trails worldwide.

IMBA continues to bring out the best in mountain biking through education, trail construction, volunteer support, management advice, cash and grants for trail improvement, and worldwide leadership.

Taken from IMBA's official website at:

imba.com/about/history.htm

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WHY DEVELOP DEDICATED MOUNTAIN BIKING TRAILS?

Dedicated bike trails, if properly developed, can bring new revenue into communities.

The following section is an excerpt from a Fall 2009 trails study conducted for the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority of Virginia.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BIKING

Sixty million Americans (18 years and older) bicycle each year. Whether they are bicycling for family recreation, transportation, or competition, the American bicyclist spends money, creates jobs and supports local economies.

- Bicycling contributes \$133 billion to the U.S. economy
- Supports nearly 1.1 million jobs across the U.S.
- Generates 17.7 billion in annual federal and state tax revenue
- Produces 53.1 billion annually in retail sales and services
- \$6.2 billion in bicycling gear sales and services
- \$46.9 billion in bicycling trip-related expenditures
- Provides sustainable growth in rural communities

Bringing this a little closer to home, the South Atlantic States (DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, and WV) is home to more than 10 million bicyclists who contribute more than \$11.3 billion to the regional economy, generating more than \$1.6 billion in annual state and federal tax revenues and over \$9.6 billion in retail sales and services.

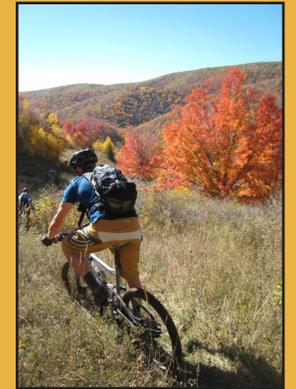
ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF OFF-ROAD BICYCLE TRAILS



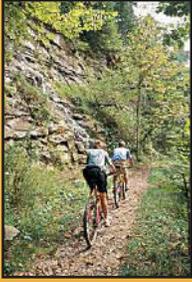
Definition: A bicycle trail is one that tends to wind through the woods and across the land on softer surfaces such as gravel or dirt and is used primarily with mountain bikes rather than street bikes.

All across the country, bicycle and pedestrian trails are bringing new dollars and economic growth to the communities in which they pass attracting and revitalizing businesses and downtown areas, creating jobs and increasing public revenue. They also have a positive effect on nearby properties as home buyers and business owners realize the benefits.

According to a 2006 study by the Outdoor Industry Foundation, one in five Americans 16 years and older mountain bike. It also reported that there are as many people who mountain bike as there are those who watch or feed birds. And the National Golf Foundation in 2006 reported that there are more mountain bikers than golfers (50 million bikers to 29 million golfers). It is much less expensive to maintain miles and miles of trails than it is to maintain one golf course. (The Active Outdoor... 2006)



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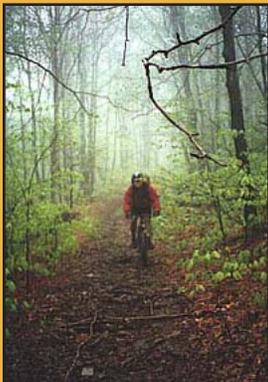
RAIL-TRAILS MEAN BUSINESS FOR COMMUNITIES*

The downtown area of Dunedin, Florida was suffering a 35 percent storefront vacancy rate in the early 1990's until the Pinellas Trail came into town. Now, storefront occupancy is 100 percent and business is booming.

Peak-season hotel rooms along Wisconsin's Eroy-Sparta State Park Trail are booked up to a year in advance.

A study of the trail revealed that the average visitor travels 228 miles to experience it. After biking the Youghiogheny River Trail in southwestern Pennsylvania, Robert Bennis and his wife purchased a rundown trailside building and converted it into the River's Edge Café which now serves over 1000 meals a day.

** Excerpt taken from a National Bicycle and Pedestrian Clearinghouse Brief, September, 1995.*



THE VIRGINIA CREEPER TRAIL HAS BROUGHT MONEY AND JOBS TO SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

The Virginia Creeper Trail (VCT) in Southwestern Virginia is one of the most renowned bike trails in the United States. Although this 34 mile rail-trail is open to both foot travel and horseback riding, it is most popular with bicyclists. In fact, the Virginia Creeper Trail has become to mountain bikers what the Hatfield – McCoy Trails have become to off-highway vehicle enthusiasts. It is THE place to come to ride. There are very few mountain bikers who have not heard about the Virginia Creeper Trail and many others from across the East who have actually experienced it.



Background: Once a rail line for the Norfolk & Western connecting White Top to Abingdon, the rail was abandoned in 1977. The eastern section of the railbed through Virginia was purchased by the USDA Forest Service and became part of the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, the western section was purchased by Damascus from funding received from Virginia Commission for Outdoor Recreation. The trail opened in 1984 with trailheads located in Abingdon and Whitetop Station ending at the North Carolina state line.

Please Note: Efforts have been made to continue the Virginia Creeper Trail into North Carolina but that portion of rail reverted back to the original landowners who are unwilling to relinquish ownership. There is a valuable lesson to be learned: acquire the corridor as soon as it is abandoned.



MAP OF THE VIRGINIA CREEPER TRAIL

The Town of Damascus has become known as Trail Town U.S.A. It is the halfway point on the Virginia Creeper Trail. Also, the Appalachian Trail, the Transcontinental Bike Route, the Iron Mountain Trail, and the Daniel Boone Trail all intersect in Damascus.

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ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE VIRGINIA CREEPER TRAIL



In a 2004 study of the Creeper Trail (*Virginia Creeper, 2005*), it was estimated that a total of 130,172 people used the trail with 47% of them locals and the other 53% coming from outside the area. Local users (those working or living within Washington or Grayson County) traveled on average 7.8 miles with an average travel time of 15 minutes while the non-local users traveled on average 260 miles with an average travel time of 4.6 hours drawing people from as far away as Knoxville TN, Charlotte NC, Asheville WV, Charlottesville SC, Roanoke VA & Washington DC, with nearly 23% reporting that they visited five times or more each year. 72% of the Virginia Creeper Trail users were in the area for the primary purpose of visiting the trail with over 75% of the non-locals planning to bike.

- The estimated total economic impact of the Virginia Creeper Trail to the State of Virginia is \$2.5 million with over \$1.5 million dollars spent in the local economy (Washington and Grayson counties).
- An estimated 27.4 jobs were created due to the increased visitors to the area.
- A week long festival know to honor hikers known s "Trail Days" brings approximately 25,000 visitors to Damascus in May of each year raises the town's population of 900 by nearly 300%

Other comparable trails noted in a 1995 study by Siderelis and Moore had similar findings:

Trail Name	In 1995	Adjusted to 2003 dollars
• Lafayette/Moraga Trail	\$1.9 million	\$2.3 million
• Heritage Trail	\$4 million	\$5 million
• St. Mark's Trail	\$8.5 million	\$10.6 million

What has been the economic impact of all of this to the community?

Business Tax Revenues: In 2003, business license fees collected were \$23,000. In 2005, this number grew to \$45,000. And in 2008, when most towns were experiencing a downturn and businesses were closing, Damascus experienced an increase to \$52,000 for a 56% increase in just five years. Even today this number continues to grow. Revenues for 2009 have already surpassed \$55,000.

Restaurant/Lodging Tax Revenues: Meal and lodging tax revenues have also seen a continual increase in the past few years from \$42,000 in 2001/2002 to \$80,000 in 2003/2004 and to \$104,150 in 2007/2008. This is a 60% increase in just six years.

Tourism-related Businesses that have opened: Damascus, a town of 9,000 has seven (7) bike rentals and shuttle services, twenty-one (21) lodging facilities within the corporate limits including an RV Park, an additional 19 lodging facilities within 2 to 17 miles of the town plus seven (7) restaurants.

Please Note: There are no chain hotels or restaurants in Damascus. In fact, all are Mom & Pop businesses. This is great for the small entrepreneurs and insures that the money made within the community actually stays in the community, something those in the NCHA region may want to keep in mind as their areas begin to develop.



CHAPTER FOUR: Overview & Benefits of Trails

A STACKED LOOP TRAIL SYSTEM IS BECOMING VERY POPULAR

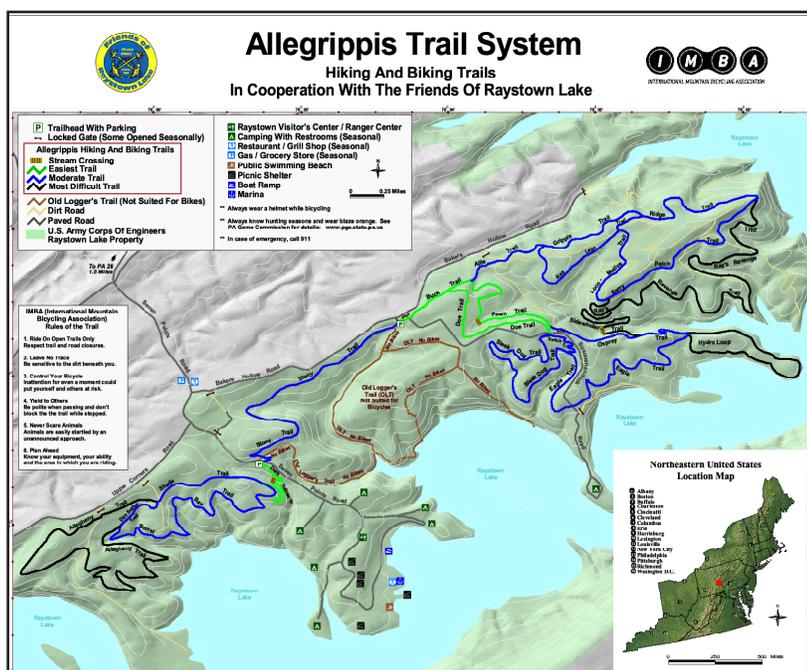
The following information was taken from the website
<http://raystown.nab.usace.army.mil/Activities/agt.htm>



The Allegrippis Trail System, managed by the Friends of Raystown Lake in Huntingdon County PA, is a popular 30+ mile single track trail system designed by mountain bikers, primarily for mountain bikers, but with opportunities available for hiking and other nature based outdoor recreation. The Allegrippis Trail System was designed in a stacked loop format, which means that small trail loops exist close to the access point with trail spurs joining onto those loops to create longer, more difficult trail opportunities. Similar stacked looped bike trails are recommended for the NCHA project area.

This trail construction project is a multi-partner project being coordinated by the Friends of Raystown Lake.* It's considered a model trail system by IMBA with future consideration of becoming an IMBA Ride Center.

A stacked, looped trail system is preferred by horseback riders, ATV and dirtbike riders, mountain bikers and often hikers. The New River has lots of trails that allow bikes and link together for longer rides. The NPS at New River are planning a stacked loop trail system for the near future.



A popular stacked looped trail system in Huntingdon, PA.

"When the project started, it was a 'build it and they will come' proposition. Now there's a bike shop in town, and the Raystown Mountain Bike Association, which didn't exist 18 months ago, has more than "500" active members," said Frank Maguire IMBA Mid-Atlantic Region Director. "Interest in the Allegrippis is already spreading beyond the regional level. This is going to have a huge impact on the economy in the area."

"To date, more than 100 volunteers have donated more than 2,300 volunteer hours toward the construction and maintenance of the Allegrippis Trail System," said Ron Rabena, President FORL. "The end result is a unique trail system that will benefit the region and community for years to come, including an additional estimated \$1.2 million in annual revenue into Huntingdon County."

CHAPTER FOUR: Overview & Benefits of Trails

OTHER TRAIL SYSTEM SUCCESS STORIES

ATV TRAIL SYSTEM

In 2006, the economic impact of the Hatfield-McCoy ATV Trail System located within six NCHA counties in the southern region of West Virginia exceeded \$7.7 million dollars generating over \$2.7 million in income, creating over 146 jobs and \$622,752 in tax revenues.

http://trailsheaven.com/about/hatfield_mccoy_trail_economic_impact_report.aspx

The Town of Gilbert which serves as the trailhead to one of the six Hatfield-McCoy Trail Systems has a population of 400 people. Yet, in 10 short years since their trail opened, the town now boasts 130 lodging rooms and building more, two car washes, four pharmacies, seven restaurants, a movie theater and a full service campground.

HORSE TRAIL SYSTEM

In the Fall of 2006, Knott County Kentucky held their first annual horse trail ride which attracted 500 people and 250 horses. In 2008, the event attracted over 5,000 riders from as far away as Utah and Texas resulting in a \$649,700.00 economic impact on the region. At the 2009 event, the number of riders and horses doubled creating an economic impact of well over \$1 million dollars.

<http://trailsrus.com/swvirginia/finalreport/volume2/equestrian.pdf>

WILDLIFE VIEWING AND BIRDING

Canadian Texas began marketing birdwatching in their community. Within five years, 160 new jobs were created including 12 B&B's, four new restaurants, renovation of 29 commercial buildings (16 of which were historic buildings) plus a 28% increase in sales tax. Phone interview with previous economic development director of Canadian Texas, July 14, 2009. <http://trailsrus.com/swvirginia/finalreport/volume2/wildlife.pdf>

CANOE TRAIL

The Elkhorn Creek in Frankfort Kentucky attracts 400 boaters while the Meramec River in Missouri has been known to have as many as 8,000 on the river in a given weekend. Restaurants, shuttle services, canoe rentals, campgrounds, hotels, cabins, outfitter stores and more have opened in both locations. *(Telephone interviews with outfitters, July 2009)*

LONG DISTANCE TRAILS

There are a number of examples of long distance trails creating positive economic impact for those communities along the routes.

The Great Allegheny Passage is a 132-mile rail-turned-trail from that has become a main thoroughfare for trail users seeking a wilder experience. Attracting both national and international visitors, the Passage generated over \$12 million in direct spending in 2007, up from \$7.3 million in 2002. Towns all along the trail serve as centers of commerce for trail users seeking food and other supplies. <http://atatrail.org/about/reports.cfm>. The 2175 mile Appalachian Trail hikers user study can be found at: <http://nps.gov/appa/parkgmt/publicinvolvement.htm>.

For sources and more information on this subject visit:
<http://www.trailsrus.com/swvirginia/finalreport/vol2.htm>
References also provided in Appendix G, pages 189-190.

