

## Chapter 1 CREATING A DESTINATION

Because of the insight of Virginia legislators, Southwest Virginia now has the potential to become part of a three-state initiative in which the Appalachian coalfields (one of the poorest areas in the United States) are being turned into trails that bring tremendous money to communities that desperately need it.

West Virginia was first to take action by forming the Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority in 1997 and, in 2000, opened their first trail. The Hatfield-McCoy ATV Trail System now offers over 500 miles of multi-use trails. In 2008, over 27,000 people from throughout the United States paid a \$50 membership fee to ride the Hatfield-McCoy trails. 90% of these riders were from outside the state of West Virginia. This number has continued to grow every year and is anticipated to exceed 30,000 in 2009, an 800% increase since its inception. West Virginia has become an international destination for ATV riders.

### **Case Study: The Town of Gilbert WV**

*In 2000, prior to the trails opening, the Town of Gilbert WV with a population of 400 had 16 lodging rooms, a couple of small restaurants, a gas station and a grocery store that barely kept its doors open. Within eight years of the trails opening, Gilbert WV, which serves as one of the trailhead communities, offers 130 lodging rooms, numerous restaurants, a cinema, a grocery store, four pharmacies, an ambulance service with a fleet of 14 ambulances, two car washes, a large campground, a conference center and two auto repair shops.*

An economic impact study in 2006 revealed that over \$622,000 was being generated just in sales tax alone due to the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System in West Virginia. In recent interviews, it is estimated that the average rider stays 3 days in the area, spends \$645 per stay and often comes back multiple times throughout the year generating in excess of \$19 million dollars for the local economies. See *Volume 2: Economic Impact* for more on this.

Kentucky has had similar results with the development of the Black Mountain Trail System near Evarts Kentucky. An Economic Impact Study revealed that in 2006 they had approximately 30,000 riders use their trails spending on average \$202.79 per day and bringing in over \$6 million dollars to the region. Visitors came from Canada, New York, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Michigan, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Georgia, Alabama, California with one group coming from as far away as Spain to ride the trails.

### *National Trends in OHV Use*

*Based on USDA Forest Service research, in the 2004 season nearly 1-in-4 Americans (23.8 percent) age 16 and older participated one or more times in OHV recreation.*

*A more conservative estimate using alternate methodology arrives at an estimate of 39.7 million OHV participants, 18.6 percent of the population, or almost 1-in-5 people age 16 and older.*

*According to the same study, OHV visits to national forests grew from 5 million in 1975 to 51 million in 2005, an increase of 92%.*

*The number of off-highway vehicles grew from 400,000 in the early 1990s to more than 8 million by 2003.*

### *Case Study: Evarts Kentucky*

As of 2006, Evarts, Kentucky which serves as one of the trailheads for the Black Mountain Trail System, had 3 Franchise-named ATV shops and 2 local ATV shops open, 14 new log cabins built, 2 new RV campgrounds, 31 rental homes and apartments, 3 new restaurants, 2 new car washes and 61.5 new jobs created.

**From our findings, Southwest Virginia could surpass the results of the other two states under the guidance and direction of the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority (SRRA). One reason is that SW Virginia has a greater base infrastructure from which to start. The other reason is that SRRA has the foresight to look at all existing and potential trails and are developing a plan to best capitalize on each venue and not limit themselves to just one.**

*In 2007, the number of OHV participants grew to 42,991,200.00. The popularity of the sport has outpaced the development of appropriate trails for OHV use.*

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