EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Buckhorn Lake Trail Study

In 2013, the Team of Vaughn & Melton Engineering, Carol R. Johnson Associates Landscape Architects, Managed Adventure Systems and We Make Things Happen Corporation were selected by the State of Kentucky to conduct a feasibility study and develop a conceptual plan for a non-motorized trail system for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding connecting Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park with the community of Buckhorn and the Trace Branch Campground.   The primary goal of this project was *"to develop a network of interconnecting trails that will connect Eastern Kentucky communities, state parks, federal recreation properties and forest lands"* that, in the end, *"will create additional jobs and stimulate economic growth and development through adventure tourism related opportunities"*.   In other words, the purpose of the study was not to design a system of trails, but to develop a plan that would create a destination trail system to bring both money and job opportunities to the area.   The trails themselves would become the attraction.

FINDINGS

The Team conducted the study and developed a conceptual plan over an eight month period during 2013. The study concluded that the Buckhorn Study Area possess the required land area, natural features, potential attractors and most importantly the community support for the development of a destination trail system. By utilizing old timber, coal and fire break roads, and incorporating existing trails developed by Perry County Fiscal Court, the creation of a linear trail connecting the City of Buckhorn and Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park in Perry County to the Trace Branch Campground in Leslie County could serve as the "BACKBONE" for such a destination trail system.

BUILDING THE "BACKBONE" OF THE TRAIL SYSTEM

The 24.7 mile conceptual "backbone" trail connects all three of the primary sites: Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park, City of Buckhorn, Trace Branch Campground with Eagle's Landing Campground added as a logical additional primary site. All primary access points, major trailheads, and amenities were also identified.   **It is the recommendation of the Team that this linear trail serve as the "backbone" to a network of other interconnecting looped trails.**

For the purpose of this report, the **"backbone"** was divided into five sections described as the **Buckhorn**, the **Lakeview**, the **Fire Break**, the **Coal Fields**, and the **Trace Branch**.
- The **Buckhorn** section (Backbone A) is a 5 mile trail that begins in the City of Buckhorn and ends at Eagle's Landing Campground.   As trailheads, the City of Buckhorn offers a general store, restaurant, gas station, and USACE full-service campground.   Eagle's

Landing Campground offers both primitive and full-service camping, handicapped accessible restroom facilities/shower house, playground and adequate parking.

- The **Lakeview** section (Backbone B) connects to the **Buckhorn** section at Eagle's Landing Campground and extends to Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park primarily utilizing an existing waterline construction road. This 5.9 mile trail parallels Buckhorn Lake providing trail users the opportunity to experience the lakeshore environment of the trail study area.

- The **Fire Break** section (Backbone C) travels 5.9 miles through the lost community of Bowlingtown connecting Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park to the **Coal Fields** region via a scenic ridge top fire break road. Along the way, trail users will see the remains of homesteads and pass near the sites of the Frontier Nursing Stable and a WWII era plane crash.

- The **Coal Fields** section (Backbone D) connects two coal reclamation sites and is very accessible from KY 28. Unlike the other areas, the Coal Fields region includes large level areas suitable for staging major events as well as potential elk restoration.

- The **Trace Branch** section (Backbone E) is 4.4 miles and extends from the Coal Fields to Trace Branch Campground through heavy forested ridges and valley. A number of natural springs, small waterfalls, numerous ferns and other undergrowth are found along this route.

COST TO BUILD BACKBONE

The study recommends that Class 3: Developed/Improved Native Surface Trail be the design class for the majority of this trail system with Class 4: Highly Developed Trail being appropriate in a few areas. Some sections will require new construction or heavy rehabilitation while others will need only light rehab or no upgrade at all. Below is a chart that provides the length of each trail, the trail termini, and the estimated cost to construct.

Backbone Trails	Length in Miles	From Point to Point	Cost to construct
Backbone A	5	From City of Buckhorn to Eagle's Landing Campground	$1,858,020.00
Backbone B	5.9	From Eagle's Landing Campground to State Park Trailhead	$340,876.00
Backbone C	5.9	From State Park Trailhead to Events Trailhead	$212,603.00
Backbone D	3.4	From Events Trailhead to Coal Field Trailhead	$144,781.00
Backbone E	4.4	From Coal Field Trailhead to Trace Branch Campground	$151,092.00
Total	24.6	From City of Buckhorn to Trace Branch Campground	$2,707,372.00*

Note: Not included in the cost above are possible upgrades such as aggregate surface.

"BACKBONE" TRAIL MAP

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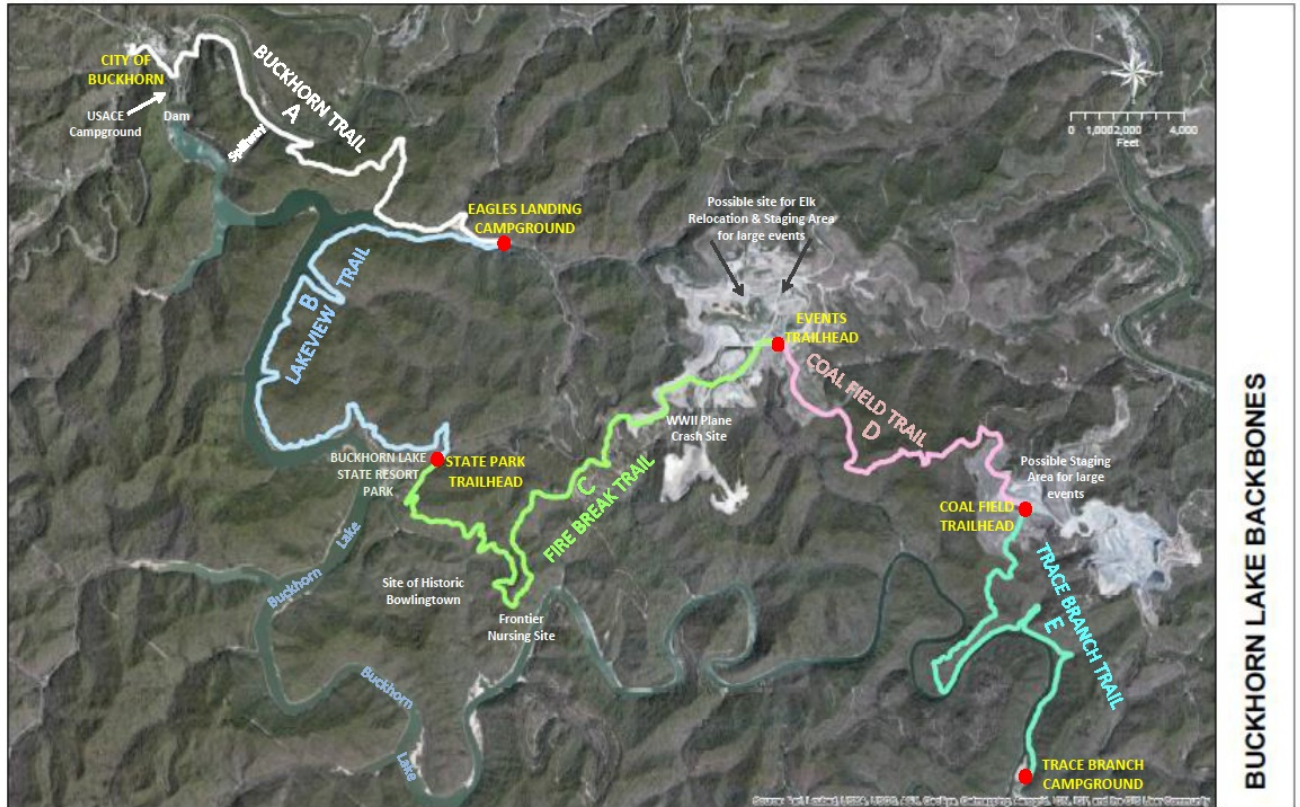
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CREATING A DESTINATION TRAIL SYSTEM

A multi-use trail system for hikers, bikers and horseback riders could become the attractor the area needs to entice tourists to come to the area and stay multiple days but there are three important determining factors to consider.

#1: **First and foremost, there must be willing landowners.** There is no trail without land owner cooperation.   In the study area, there is no single parcel of land that offers enough acreage to create a trail system of sufficient length to attract visitors for multiple day stays.   In preliminary discussions with many of the landowners along the proposed "backbone" routes, **all seemed willing to allow trail access through their properties as long as they were not individually responsible for maintaining the trail nor liable if someone were to get hurt using the trail.** However, with nearly 40 land owners along the route, property approval will be critical.

#2: **Equestrian trails need to be long enough to entice a person to want to trailer their horses to the area.** As a general rule, a horse trail needs to be a minimum of 20 to 25 miles in length to attract overnight stays. For mountain bikes, a length of 8 to 10 miles can suffice to attract riders from other regions to try out the trails but depending on the challenge level, may not be enough to entice them to come back again.   **The proposed backbone trail is 24.7 miles long which, in itself should be adequate length for either activity which brings us to the third point**.

#3: A linear trail from the City of Buckhorn to Trace Branch Campground might be intriguing to some users.   The length of the route would indeed entice them to stay multiple days. They could spend one night at Eagle's Landing Campground and another night at Trace Branch.   But to return to their starting point, they would have to travel the same route they just took which is not very appealing to most riders.   One must remember that *"trails are not like highway systems where the purpose of the route is to get from point A to point B often the shortest way possible. The purpose for a trail is the adventure between A and B without there ever needing to be a B. It is all about the adventure on the trail and what one might experience along the way".* [1]

It is recommended that a series of other trails be developed that come off the Backbone Trails to create an interconnecting looped trail system.   With the above points in mind, the chart on the following page provides an overview of possible secondary trails that might be developed. The Team feels these additional trails would be necessary for the area to truly become a destination trail system.   An overall map of a conceptual trail system is provided on page 5.

MILEAGE CHART OF THE PROPOSED
BUCKHORN "DESTINATION" TRAIL SYSTEM

Potential Secondary Trails	Length in Miles	From Point to Point
Plane Crash Loop	1.9	Plane Crash Trailhead northeast along Plane Crash Loop to Fire Break Trailhead southwest back to Plane Crash Trailhead.
Elk View Loop	3.2	Elk View Trailhead south on Elk View Loop that connects with Fire Break Trail north back to Elk View Trailhead.
Eagle Watch Trail	1.5	From Eagle Watch Trailhead to Boat-In Campground.
Bowlingtown Historic Loop Trail	7.0	From Bowlingtown Trailhead to Frontier Nursing Trailhead
Eagle To Park Connector	3.7	Eagle Landing Trailhead southeast then southwest to State Park Trailhead.
Emergency Access Only*	0.7	These trails will only be used in emergency situations.
Forest Land Connector	4.1	From Eagle Landing Trailhead to Forest Land Trailhead
Scenic Overlook Trails	15.8	Looped trails connecting Eagle Landing Trailhead to State Park Trailhead.
Nature Trail Connector	2.8	From Nature Trail Trailhead to Nature Loop Trailhead
Special Event Loop Trails	10.6	Looped trails on the ICG/Arch Coal Reclamation site.
Secondary Total	51.3	
Backbones Total	24.6	
Grand Total	**75.9**	

Emergency access to Scenic View Trails, Eagle to Park Trail, Forest Land Trails and Backbone B & C.

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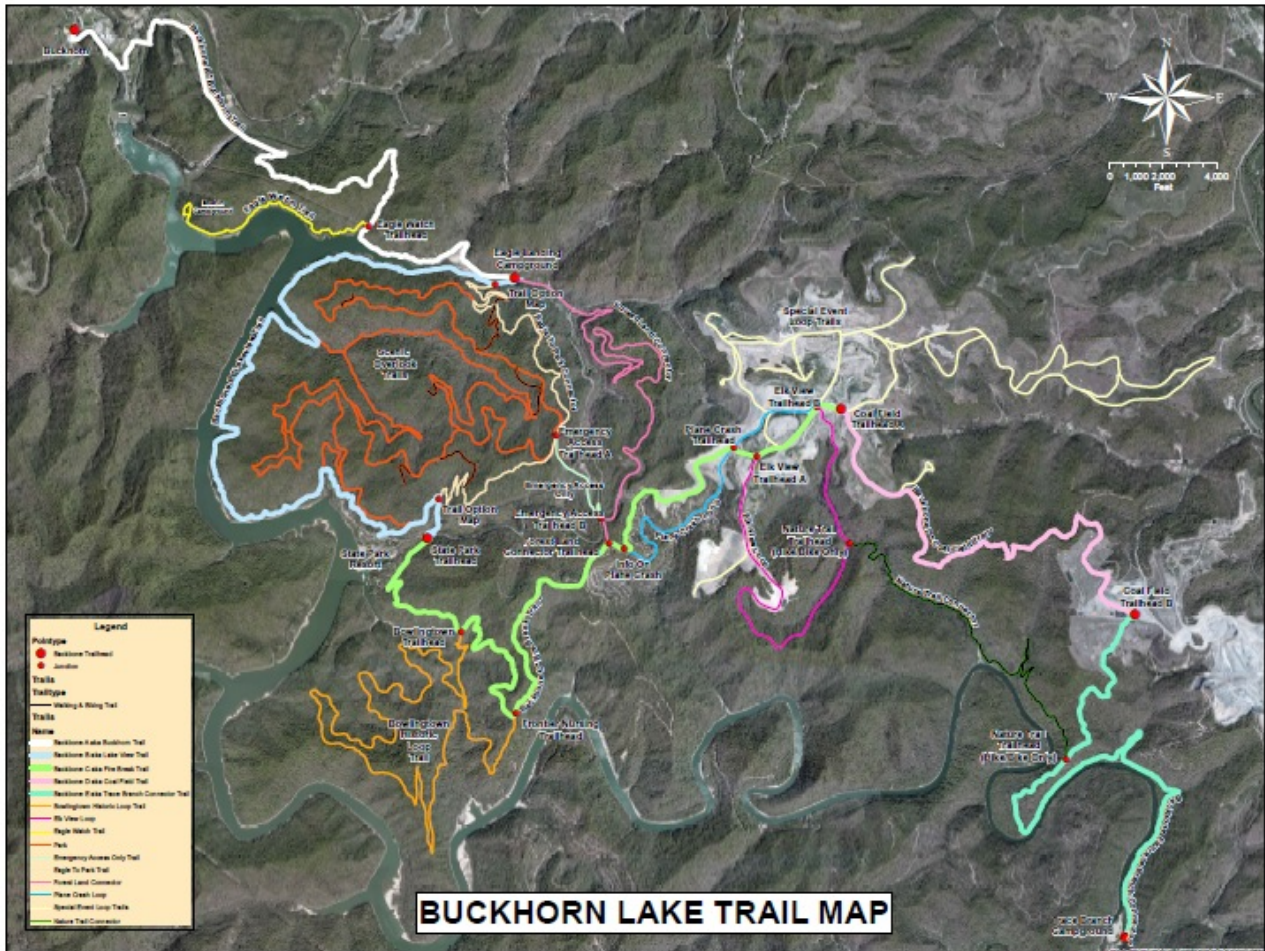
BUCKHORN LAKE TRAIL MAP

SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC IMPACT POTENTIAL

The Perry County Fiscal Court has already made tremendous strides toward establishing the **Lakeview Trail** connecting Eagle's Landing Campground to Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park. By extending the trails to include portions of the **Fire Break Trail** and the **Forest Land Connector Trail** and focusing on the equestrian market, a looped trail of significant length will be created to attract riders. By doing so, the Eagle's Landing Campground has the potential to significantly increase its bookings and help to create nearly a $400,000 economic impact in the area through the purchase of gas, food, and supplies.

As the trails gain popularity, other ancillary businesses will open including, but not limited to, tack shops, feed stores, farriers, large animal veterinarians, stable facilities, and additional lodging options such as B&B's and cabins that may include stalls for horses. Other potential offerings could include guide service, horse camps, and riding schools.

The flat terrain around the **Coal Field** region could become the staging area for a multi-day trail ride similar to the one held in neighboring Knott County. *The Knott County trail event attracts over 10,000 riders annually who, in turn, spend upwards of $2.5 million dollars in the region.* If properly managed and marketed, Perry County could experience similar results. Holding such an event would also have significant impact in sales at the local convenience stores and gas stations in both Chavies and Buckhorn, the restaurant at Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park, and the Dairy Bar on Hwy 28.

This reclaimed coal site would also provide **ideal habitat for elk**. By reintroducing elk in this area, Buckhorn Lake State Resort Park could provide elk tours within a few miles of the resort rather than the hour commute they currently must take to see elk, providing greater opportunities and extended seasons. Local entrepreneurs may want to offer a combination of overnight stays with elk tours, elk tours by horseback, or guided nature hikes that include an opportunity to see elk roaming free.

Once the herd becomes established, there will be the **opportunity to draw hunters to the area** who not only spend time in the area during the hunt but will spend on average three or more days prior to the hunt scouting and an additional number of days returning to the area with family and friends to relive the experience. Hunters alone create a $3 million dollar economic impact on the region by spending money at local hotels, campgrounds, restaurants, gas station, and stores. This figure does not reflect the number of jobs created by elk hunting including, but not limited to, elk processing service, taxidermy, gun & archery shops, field equipment supply stores, guide service and other related businesses.

CONCLUSION

The study finds this to be a feasible trail project that, once implemented, **could become the catalyst the area needs to bring more dollars and jobs to the area.**