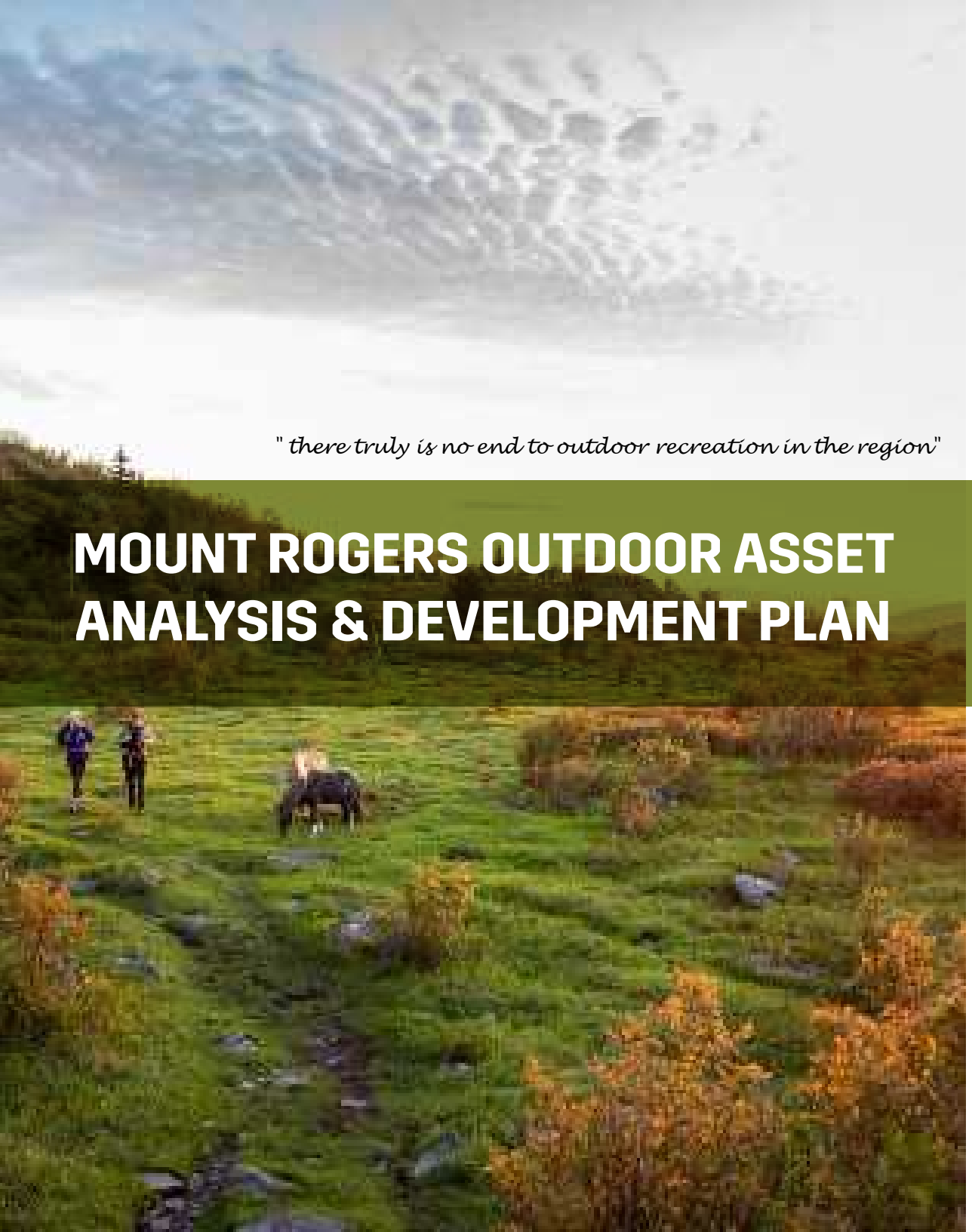


" there truly is no end to outdoor recreation in the region"

MOUNT ROGERS OUTDOOR ASSET ANALYSIS & DEVELOPMENT PLAN

MOUNT ROGERS

Virginia's High Point

Friends of SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA SW VA

VT | CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

HILL STUDIO

ARNETT MULDROW & ASSOCIATES

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INTRODUCTION



Outdoor recreation is a tourism asset and an amenity that improves the quality of life for residents. This has downstream benefits on residents' mental and physical health, improving pride of place, community vibrancy, and economic development. For that reason, communities and residents of the Mount Rogers region have come together in 2021 to reflect on the region's outdoor assets. The goals of this planning process are to:

Assess and incorporate the work of past local and regional plans to develop a comprehensive, implementable plan that will ultimately improve the outdoor experience for both residents and tourists alike, while better connecting both groups to the region's outdoor assets.

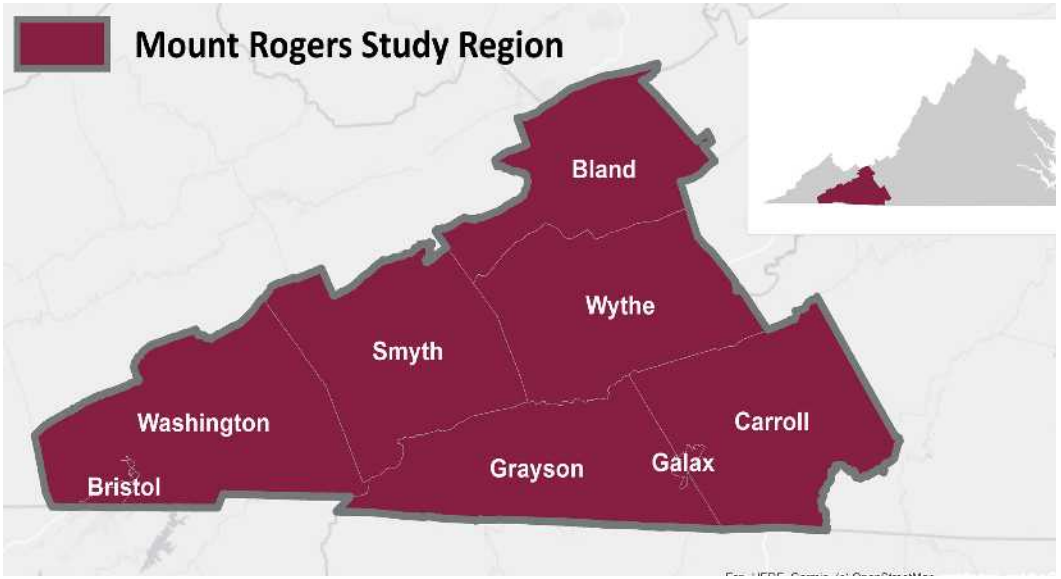
Build the collaborative capacity of stakeholders in the region to better connect and leverage existing assets for greater economic and social impact in the region. Specific focus will be given to leveraging existing assets to support connections among gateway/downtown communities and business development (current and future businesses). The final plan will identify the readiness and capacity of localities, their potential assets, and the potential economic impact of said assets.

Provide planning and economic expertise to help detail and prioritize actionable steps for developing the region's outdoors. The final document developed through this planning process will include implementation recommendations for: efforts that can be undertaken within 6 months, 1 year, and 10 years; projects with particularly high economic impacts or returns on investment for the region; and details regarding funding, suggested steps and possible regional partners. Furthermore, this study will illustrate the investment and funding needed to build a comprehensive outdoor tourism economy in the Mount Rogers Region.

Building on a market and business development framework plan done in 2017 by Arnett Muldrow, the following report is the plan-to-date. It provides a regional overview that highlights regional assets and gaps, an analysis of national and regional markets, and proposes strategic areas and next steps for further exploration. The research team—comprised of experts from Virginia Tech's Center for Economic and Community Engagement, Arnett Muldrow & Associates, and Hill Studios—drew from existing data and planning documents, and conducted 24 interviews with town, county and state government leaders.

THE MOUNT ROGERS REGION

This Regional Overview provides a snapshot of the Mt. Rogers' demographics, summaries of existing development efforts, strategic priorities, and stakeholders. It also includes a description and analysis of the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The study area covers six counties and two cities: Bland County, Carroll County, Grayson County, Smyth County, Washington County, Wythe County, Bristol City, and Galax City.



Demographics

Any business in the study area cannot rely on visitor traffic alone. Outside of lodging, each business sees a significant portion of its market coming from local consumers. Visitors and residents together contribute to the success of regional businesses, and that success in turn leads to job creation. To understand local trends, we first present an overview of regional demographics. The following data is from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year estimates and the 2020 Decennial Census.

Population

In 2021, the total population in the Mount Rogers region was 187,695 individuals. Over the past five years, the region has seen a slight decline of 1.3% (2,420 people) -a trend not uncommon to Southwest Virginia and Appalachian communities. As data from the COVID-19 pandemic becomes available, there is potential for some impact on population change from the shifts in real estate market, migration, and the "zoom boom" phenomenon. The magnitude of these trends is currently uncertain.

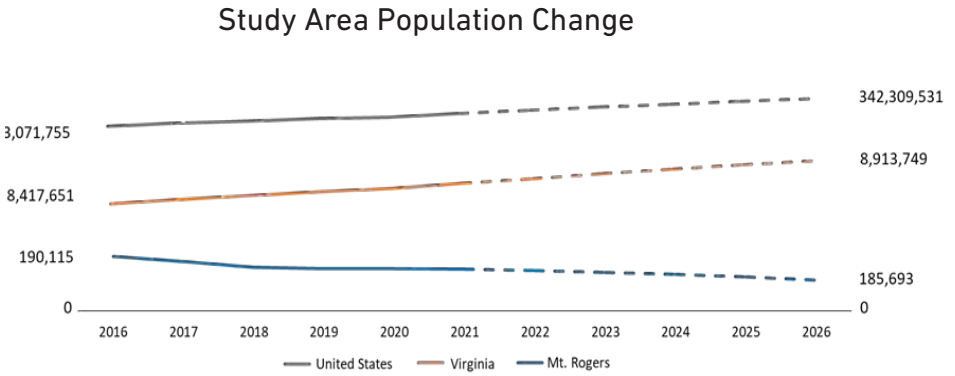


Figure 1: Study Area Population 2020 Change, ACS 5-Year Estimates

Age

Mount Rogers has a median age of 45.6 years in 2020. The two largest segments are ages 35 to 55 (32.5%) and 65 and older (30.4%). This trend mirrors the trends outlined in the 2016 Stronger Economies Together (SET) Economic Development Plan that shows a significant decline in percentage of population in the 20-39 age ranges, with older age ranges increasing.

Income

Median household income in the Mount Rogers region is $46,800, with the largest income segment being $50k-$75k (12.50%). The region has an unemployment rate of 5.2% compared to 5.0% for Virginia and 6.7% for the United States.

On the other hand, 42.6% of the population 16 years and older are not in the labor force. This could be due to many factors including the increasing age within the region, the desirability of the area for retirees, as well as the presence of a discouraged workforce.

The 2020 median housing unit value in Mount Rogers is $120,213. Although, 25.0% of residents experience a housing cost burden in the region, 27.4% of Virginian residents dedicate over 30% of their income overall.

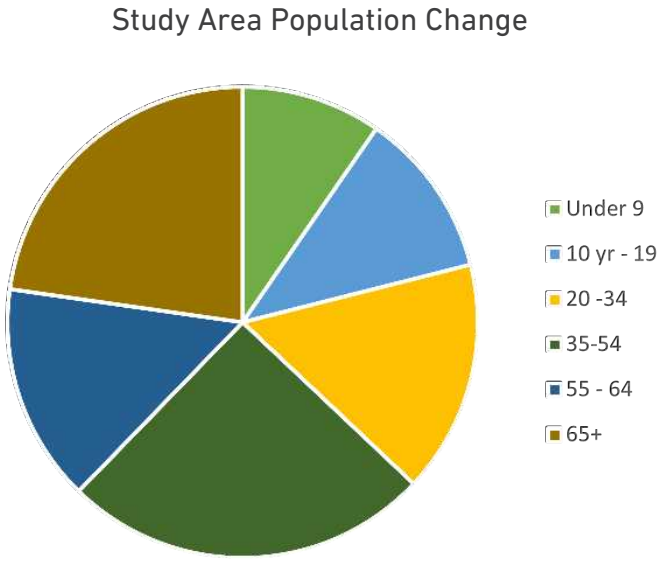


Figure 2: Study Area Age Distribution, ACS 5-Year Estimates

EXISTING DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

A strong basis for this research and report was existing development and planning efforts in this space. In Phase One of this process, we expanded on a 2017 outdoor economic framework by Arnett Muldrow that covered over 50% of the Mount Rogers region. To do this, we reviewed 24 town, county, and regional plans; and interviewed 20 town, county, and regional officials. Interviewees included town managers, county administrators, tourism and economic development directors, and park officials. We gathered additional structured feedback on the implementation of the 2017 plan from destination representatives, regional tourism and economic development officials, gateway community leadership, local businesses, and the Stronger Economies Together (SET) tourism cluster committee. Topics of discussion primarily included business development and opportunities for outdoor-recreation-based economic development within the study area. Participants also discussed methods to target and grow the user market and how to position the region as a recreation destination.

Researchers then updated the findings from the previous framework by analyzing the changing socio-economic landscape of the region using current economic data. From these activities the team was able to develop a regional overview, SWOT analysis, and preliminary goals and strategies for improving tourism in the region.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

From this process, three key development strategies emerged:

Product Organization & Tracking

Focused on building a communication network to connect the region's assets, as well as provide ongoing inventory and user tracking.

Business and Economic Development

Outlines actions to create an enhanced business environment where outdoor and visitor businesses can grow and be successful.

Partnerships

Each regional partner has its own strengths and limitations regarding capacity and resources, therefore each stakeholder must play a role in implementation in order for it to be successful.

STAKEHOLDERS

- **Aaron Sizemore**, Mount Rogers Planning District Commission
- **Gavin Blevins,** Mount Rogers Planning District Commission
- **Becky Nave**, Virginia Tourism Commission
- **Cameron Burton**, Bland County, Director of Community and Social Services
- **Eric Workman**, Bland County Administrator
- **Michael Watson**, Carroll County Administrator
- **Keith Barker**, Galax County Administrator
- **Emily Brown**, Galax Director of Tourism
- **Bill Shepley,** Grayson County Administrator
- **Tracy Cornett,** Grayson Director of Tourism and Economic Development
- **Shawn Utt,** Smyth County Administrator
- **Amanda Livingston,** Smyth County Tourism Director
- **Elizabeth Sweeney,** Wythe Public Information Officer
- **Tonya Triplett,** Abington Director of Economic Development and Tourism/ Assistant Town Manager
- **Sarah Gillespie**, Smyth County Chamber
- **John Clark,** Chilhowie Town Manager
- **Cecile Rosenbaum**, Glade Spring Town Manager
- **Bill Rush**, Marion Town Manager
- **Ken Heath**, Town of Marion
- **Jason Childers,** Rural Retreat Town Manager
- **Brian Martin,** Saltville Town Manager
- **Deana Kelley,** Wytheville Public Information and Tourism
- **Sharon Buchanan**, State Parks
- **Amy Atwood,** State Parks
- **Sam Sweeny**, NRV Trail State Park
- **David Edwards,** Galax Department of Forestry Service
- **Randy Fleming,** Abingdon Department of Forestry Service
- **Catherine Fox,** Blue Ridge Mountains



ASSET AND GAP ANALYSIS

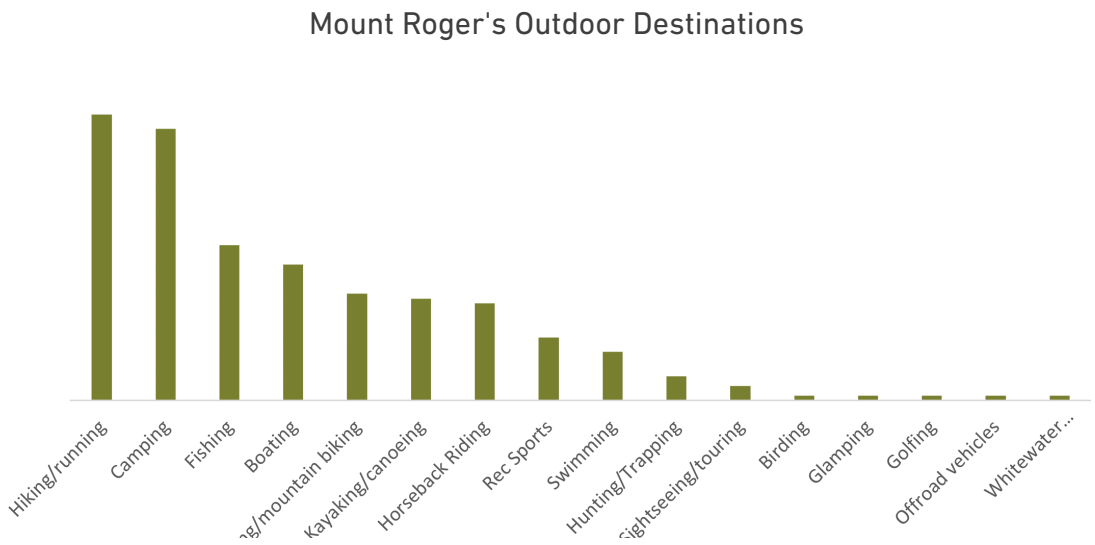
This section provides a summary of the key assets and gaps in the Mt. Rogers Outdoor Economy. Data sources included Census, 2017 Outdoor Economic Framework, numerous strategic planning documents, most recent county and town comprehensive plans, and interviews with government representatives. Following this summary, we provide a snapshot of assets for each locality. Readers are encouraged to update these lists using the framework provided in the Appendix.

Outdoor Tourism Assets

In addition to asset data and trends by town and county, the research team compiled a comprehensive list of outdoor tourism assets and destinations. The outdoor assets inventoried represent the destinations that visitors and residents of the Mt. Rogers seek out. The team also inventoried assets that support outdoor tourism in the region, such as outdoor outfitters, guide services, and lodging establishments (direct supporting assets); and dining, entertainment venues, and more (indirect supporting assets). The following infographic summarizes the findings from the outdoor asset and recreation inventory analysis.



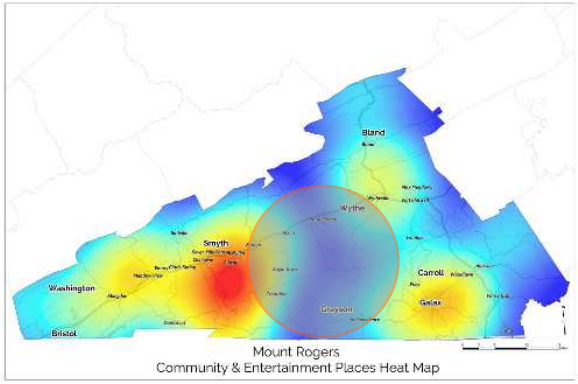
Hiking and running were the most accessible recreation activities among 117 total outdoor destinations inventoried. In other words, 59 out of the total 117 destinations inventoried allowed visitors to engage in hiking and running. Hiking and running were followed by camping, with 56 destinations supporting visitor camping, and boating, with 28 destinations to go boating. Biking and mountain biking were an emerging activity in the region, with 22 destinations supporting this activity at the time of this research. Some less common activities in the region included off-road vehicles, with 1 destination identified at the time of this research, glamping (1 destination), and hunting/trapping (5 destinations). The strategies and implementation actions for supporting and expanding outdoor tourism and recreation, such as trail extensions, will likely lead to an increase in destinations for these recreation activities, particularly for hiking and biking. The following chart shows number of outdoor destinations within the region by type of activity.



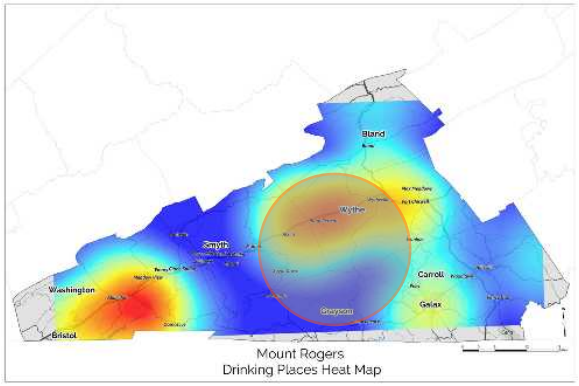
The asset inventory analysis revealed a geographic discrepancy in the various types of outdoor assets and supporting assets. It is important to note that the analysis does not control for total population, population density, or geographic size of localities.

Friends of Southwest Virginia and county tourism agencies within the Mount Rogers region provide inventory of existing assets related to tourism and outdoor recreation which can be used in geographic cluster analyses to locate areas with a higher concentration of related activities. The six maps shown to the right contain various categories of uses relative to tourism including outdoor recreation assets, direct supporting activities, and indirect supporting activities.

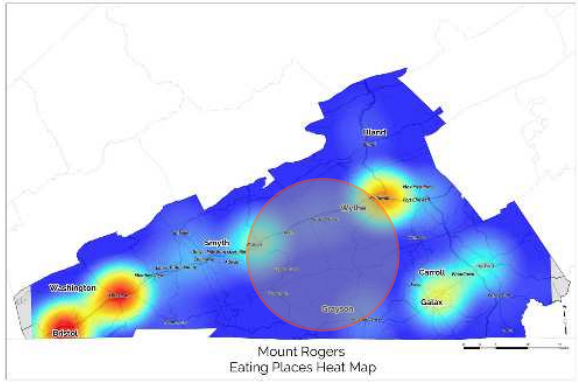
- Outdoor recreation assets include activities such as campgrounds, hiking, overlooks, mountain biking, fishing, kayaking, parks, and wildlife areas such bird-watching as well as emerging activities such as off-roading, zip-lining, paintball, rock-climbing, etc.
- Direct supporters for tourism included businesses such as hotels, BnBs, guide services, and outfitters which provide additional opportunities for visitors to enhance their experience, while adding to the local economy.
- Indirect tourism supporters included businesses that also support visitors to the region in a more general sense. These included places to eat such as restaurants as well as places to drink including breweries, wineries, and distilleries. The assets in this inventory also included event venues such as amphitheaters, community centers, and farmers markets.



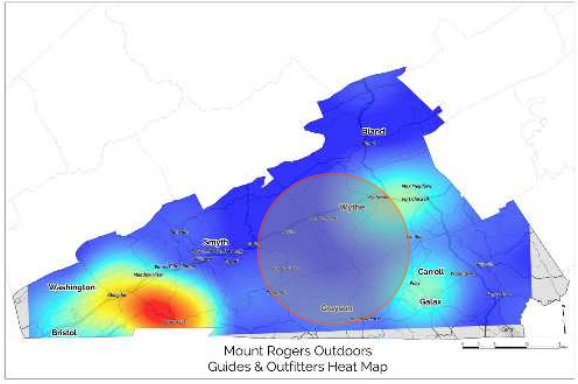
Mount Rogers
Community & Entertainment Places Heat Map



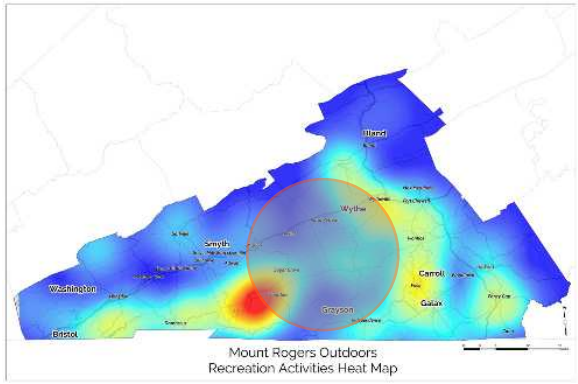
Mount Rogers
Drinking Places Heat Map



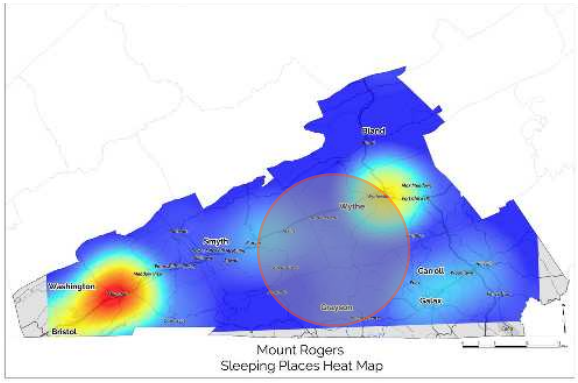
Mount Rogers
Eating Places Heat Map



Mount Rogers Outdoors
Guides & Outfitters Heat Map



Mount Rogers Outdoors
Recreation Activities Heat Map



Mount Rogers
Sleeping Places Heat Map

At the time of this research, the City of Galax had access to the greatest number of outdoor destination assets. Galax was followed by Abingdon, Troutdale, and Wytheville, which had 10 destination access points each within their boundaries. This aligns with the geographic concentrations and gaps seen in existing outdoor assets. The geographic concentrations of these assets found during the analysis also align with the geographic mapping of outdoor assets in the Mt. Rogers region. This disparity in access to outdoor assets can be seen in the Figure 4 on the prevous page. The mapping of outdoor assets confirmed concentrations of outdoor recreation opportunities in Grayson and Smyth counties, Galax, and Abingdon.

Supporting Attractions

At the time of this research, there was a visible difference in the number of both direct support assets (guide services, outfitters, and hotels/lodging) and indirect support assets (dining, entertainment) by locality.

The asset inventory showed that Abingdon had the greatest number of direct support assets, including guide services, outdoor outfitters, and hotel and lodging, with 25 assets identified. Of these, 18 were hotel/lodging establishments. Wytheville and Bristol also had greater concentrations of direct outdoor support assets, with 21 and 20 establishments, respectively. The asset inventory analysis confirms gaps and a need for additional lodging in the region. The following table details direct supporting assets by type for each Mt. Rogers community.

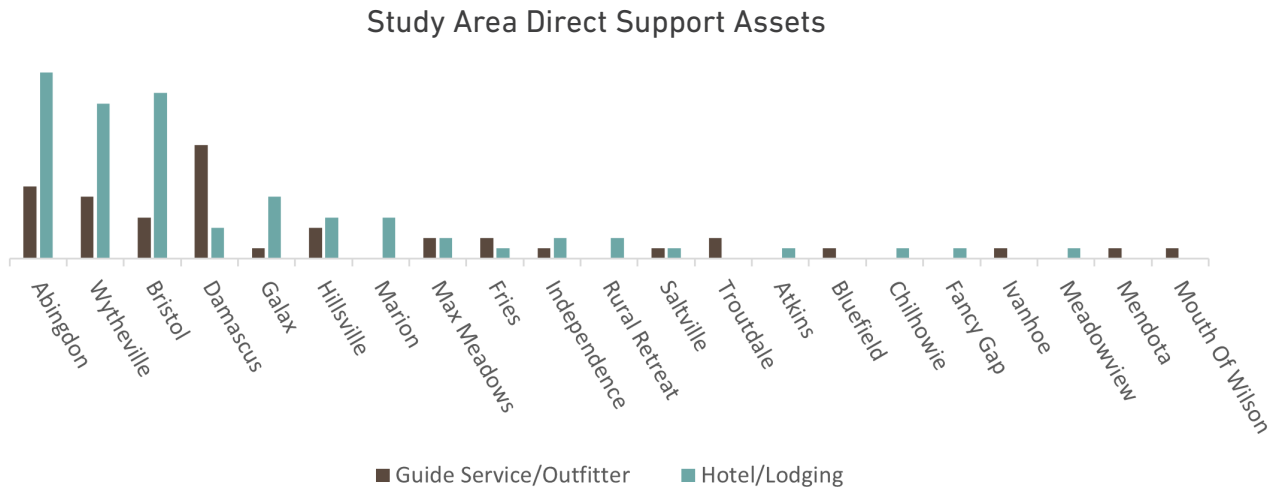


Figure 5: Direct Support Assets by Type by Community, Outdoor Asset Analysis

Bristol and Abingdon also had the highest concentrations of indirect supporting assets (dining, entertainment, and more), with 73 and 64 establishments/venues of this type, respectively. Wytheville and Galax followed, with 56 and 46 dining, entertainment, and other establishments/venues, respectively. Other findings include:

- Rural Retreat and Smyth County were home to the only distilleries in the region, at the time of this study.
- Several communities host farmers' markets, including but not limited to: Abingdon, Bland County, Galax, Glade Springs, Hillsville, Independence, Marion, and Wytheville.
- Bristol and Abingdon had the greatest concentration of restaurants/dining in the region, with 69 and 55 establishments identified at the time of the study, respectively. Several communities, including Whitetop, Troutdale, and Dugspur, lacked restaurant establishments at the time of this report.

Figure 8 (located on page 11) demonstrates the concentration of dining, brewery/winery/distillery, and entertainment/community establishments, respectively. The maps also indicate growing concentrations of indirect supporting assets in Wytheville/Wythe County, Galax, and Smyth County areas.



Overall, the findings from the asset inventory analysis reflect the opportunity for additional strategic development and expansion of outdoor destinations and the assets that support outdoor recreation such as lodging, breweries, outdoor outfitters, and more.

Infrastructure Support

Transportation and Trail Infrastructure

The research team found that shuttle services are valuable assets that support visitors' and residents' access to outdoor destinations in the region. At the time of this research, the region hosted about 10 shuttle services, most of which operate under outdoor outfitter businesses and bike rental shops. The majority were clustered around the Damascus area. This most likely reflects the presence of the Appalachian Trail access points and Virginia Creeper Trail in this area.

The Mt. Rogers region is also well-served by the interstate system. Interstates 77 (north-south) and 81 (east-west) cut through the Mount Rogers region and connect its communities. Nonetheless, there is opportunity to better leverage the interstate traffic volumes to draw visitors and increase connectivity.

Finally, analysis of park/trail master plan documents and qualitative input from regional stakeholders indicated a need to improve and update trail infrastructure, including weathered signage, bathroom facilities, and water stations to support visitation and future growth of trails and parks. Some trails in the region are better served than others.



Infrastructure Support

Soft Infrastructure

Soft infrastructure includes the services and/or structures that support the health, culture, economy, and social aspects of a community, such as schools, community organizations, social networks, and more. This section analyzes the existing organizational, entrepreneurial, and educational infrastructure within the Mt. Rogers region.

Communities in the Mt. Rogers region have access to a network of initiatives and organizations that support development and outdoor tourism. Regional initiatives including Friends of Southwest Virginia, the Crooked Road Trail, Play Outside in Southwest Virginia, the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center and Market Place, and Round the Mountain Artisan Network have focused on bringing in visitors to experience the heritage and culture of Southwest Virginia. In recent years, these entities have also increased their focus on outdoors and linking cultural assets with outdoor tourism.

The region also has a growing system of business and entrepreneurship infrastructure and support. For instance, the Town of Marion hosts a successful "Pop Up Marion" program to create opportunities for entrepreneurs. Blue Ridge Crossroads Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and Virginia Highlands SBDC also serve growing small businesses and provide resources for entrepreneurs in the region. These networks are valuable resources for growing outdoor-tourism related business and local ventures in the region. However, the research team found that there may be knowledge gaps between existing businesses and the providers of business support resources. There is opportunity to address the need for improved collaboration and communication channels.

The education system and presence of higher education institutions in the region may also indirectly support outdoor tourism in the region. Regional institutions such as Emory & Henry College and Virginia Highlands Community College provide the area with access to a talent pool and access to younger population market segments for promotion of recreational opportunities. Historically, there have been challenges in retaining younger populations after graduation. With collaboration, Mount Rogers partners have the opportunity to develop additional strategies of initiatives to retain younger graduate populations within the area.

DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

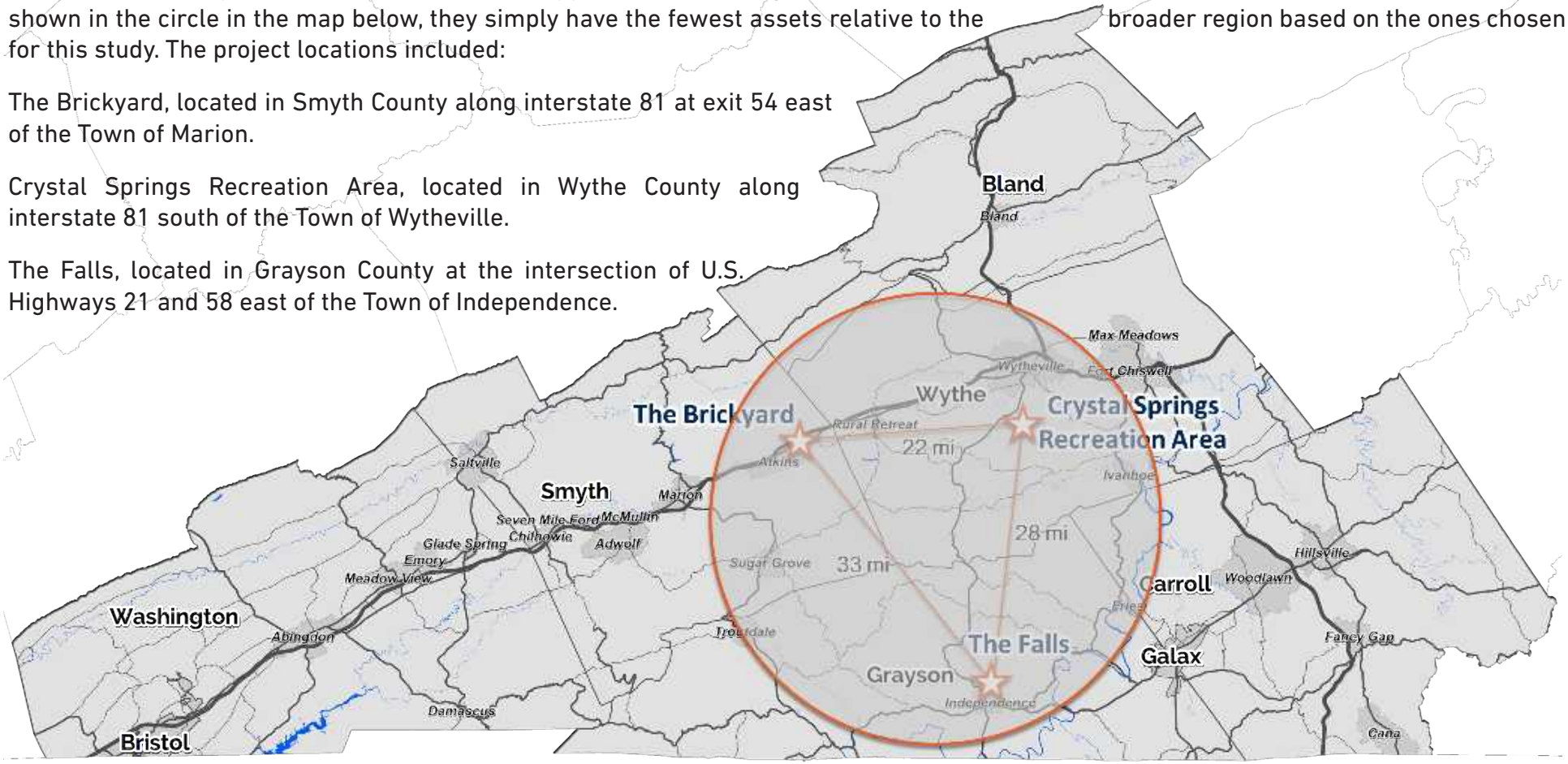
Project Locations

Understanding the asset locations were important in locating the geographic gaps where there may be a greater opportunity to link existing assets in Mount Rogers. However, this is not to suggest that there are no recreational opportunities in the "coldest" blue areas of the heatmap shown in the circle in the map below, they simply have the fewest assets relative to the broader region based on the ones chosen for this study. The project locations included:

The Brickyard, located in Smyth County along interstate 81 at exit 54 east of the Town of Marion.

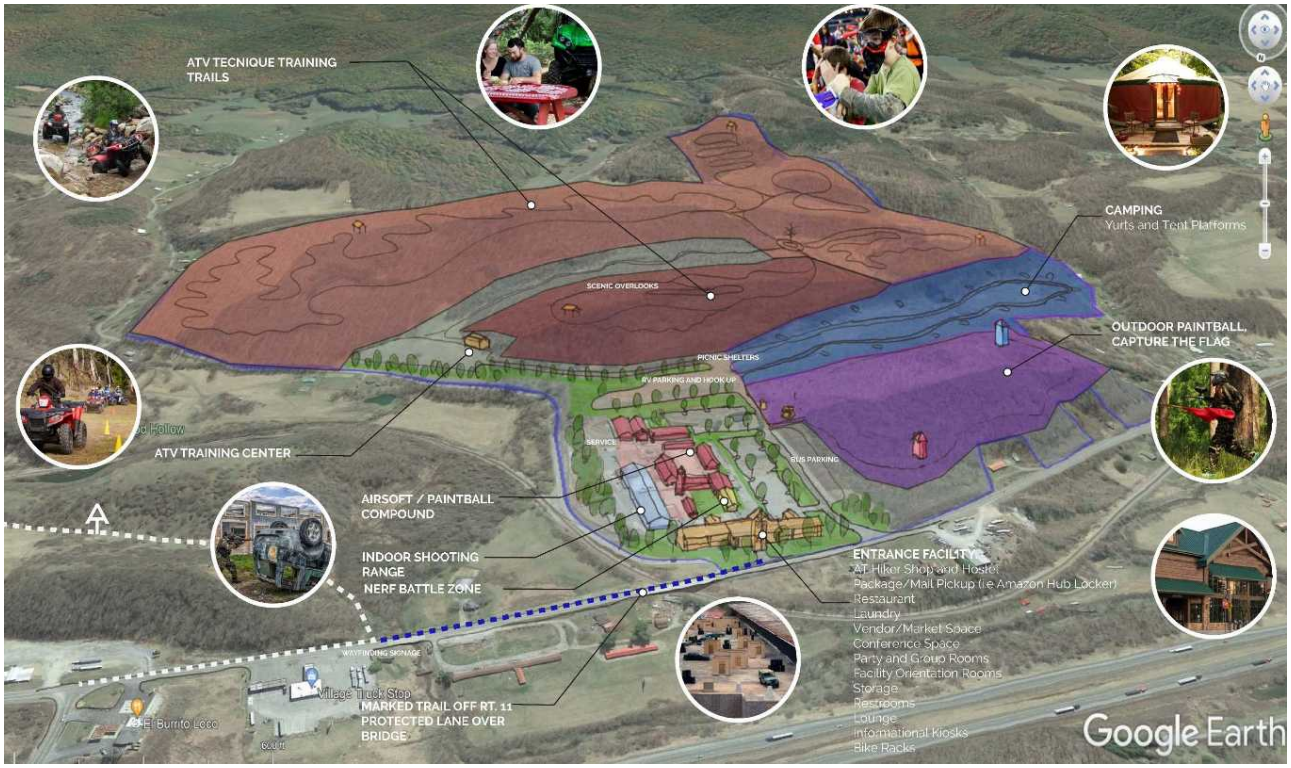
Crystal Springs Recreation Area, located in Wythe County along interstate 81 south of the Town of Wytheville.

The Falls, located in Grayson County at the intersection of U.S. Highways 21 and 58 east of the Town of Independence.



The Brickyard

The Brickyard is a development concept proposed along interstate 81 in Smyth County at exit 54 where the world-renowned Appalachian Trail crosses on a property adjacent to the site. More than 50,000 vehicles pass by this exit daily along with thousands of hikers on the A.T. each year. The proposed concept utilizes the existing industrial site by reimagining it as a haven for hikers and a new attraction for locals and visitors alike. Some of the proposed uses include indoor and outdoor paintball courses and ATV training courses as well as R.V., yurt, and primitive camping experiences. In addition to these recreation opportunities, a new entrance facility is proposed to include an outfitter shop, small market and restaurant, event/gathering spaces, and lounge as well as necessary amenities for the A.T. hikers including package pick-up/drop-off, laundry, and showers. This multi-faceted facility is great for families and people of all ages who seek adventure.



CASE STUDY:
PAINTBALL EXPLOSION PARK & PRO SHOP

DESCRIPTION

This business has many similarities to the concept at The Brickyard in that it has multiple indoor and outdoor spaces for use as well as a restaurant, bar, and retail shop. It does not contain camping or other amenities specific to hiking and other outdoor recreation activities as that is unique to this site due to the adjacent Appalachian Trail.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The park is able to accommodate various private groups and events to generate a full schedule of bookings that keeps over twenty people employed in part-time and full-time roles. These groups include birthday/bachelor parties, corporate retreats, and youth/school groups.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Outreach and gaining popularity is one challenge for any new business of this magnitude. Seasonality also has a major impact on these types of activities which drastically decline in the winter months.

OUTCOMES

The park has been able to add over ten new permanent outdoor structures and indoor arena maps to its experience over the last ten years it has been

OTHER EXAMPLES

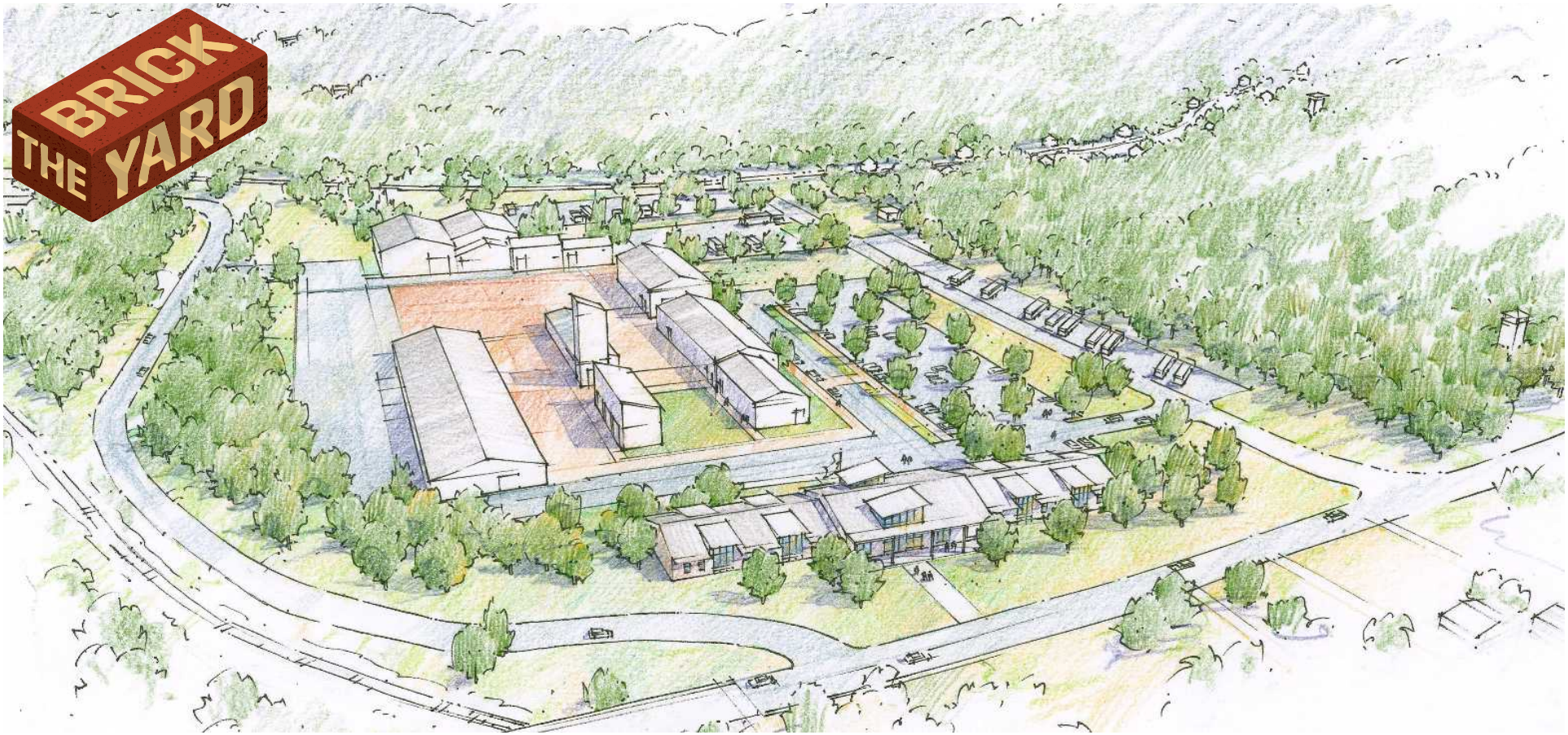
Bethel Battlefield Paintball Park, Splat Brothers Paintball Park, Gladiator Paintball Park, ATV Safety Program by Boy Scouts of America, Mines and Meadows ATV Resort

https://www.pbbomb.com/; https://eastdundee.net/

The Brickyard

The proposed adventure park is adjacent to interstate 81 as well as route 11 which are both heavily used roads. Appalachian Trail hikers have to walk slightly more than a third of a mile or approximately 2,000 feet along route 11 and under interstate 81 to connect to the rest of the trail. The park is approximately 1,000 feet along route 11, the graphic to the right shows the relationship from the A.T to the site as well as an example of another local A.T. safety barrier along a U.S. Highway such as the one in nearby Giles County. The shoulder can be divided from the road via concrete traffic barriers with fencing along road portions with bridges.





Aerial perspective of new use at the former brickyard site adjacent to interstate 81 and the Appalachian Trail

Crystal Springs Recreation Area

Crystal Springs Recreation Area is located in Wythe County, a few miles south of the Town of Wytheville. With incredible access off interstate 81, the proposed improvements will further enhance the visitor experience by offering new activities for outdoor thrill seekers. The current use of the site includes hiking and mountain biking trails which are proposed to expand to greater reaches on the property and offer more riding opportunities with various difficulty levels. In addition, the plan proposes that zip-lining be offered so visitors can experience the plethora of scenic beauty as they zip through the trees and atop the canopies. The entrance of the site is also posed to receive some enhancements as a technical skills track and pump track for bikers in addition to some group retreat/event space utilizes some of the existing



Aerial concept showing the proposed enhancements for the



Aerial concept showing the proposed enhancements for the gateway into the recreation area

CASE STUDY: WILDERNESS ADVENTURE AT EAGLE LANDING

DESCRIPTION

This beautiful retreat center & adventure camp in southwest Virginia offers group lodging and camping as well as zip-lining, canoeing, climbing, and tubing. They also have music festivals, special events, and summer camps during the warmer months.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

A multi-faceted approach is the fundamental key towards success. Various activities for various groups paired with events such as music festivals, has the ability to attract more visitors and extend outreach.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Location is a challenge as they are in a very remote area which is very different from Crystal Springs Recreation Area near the Town and interstate 81. They are able to overcome this challenge by promoting a full weekend of outdoor recreation activities and positioning their weekdays in the summer for youth camps.

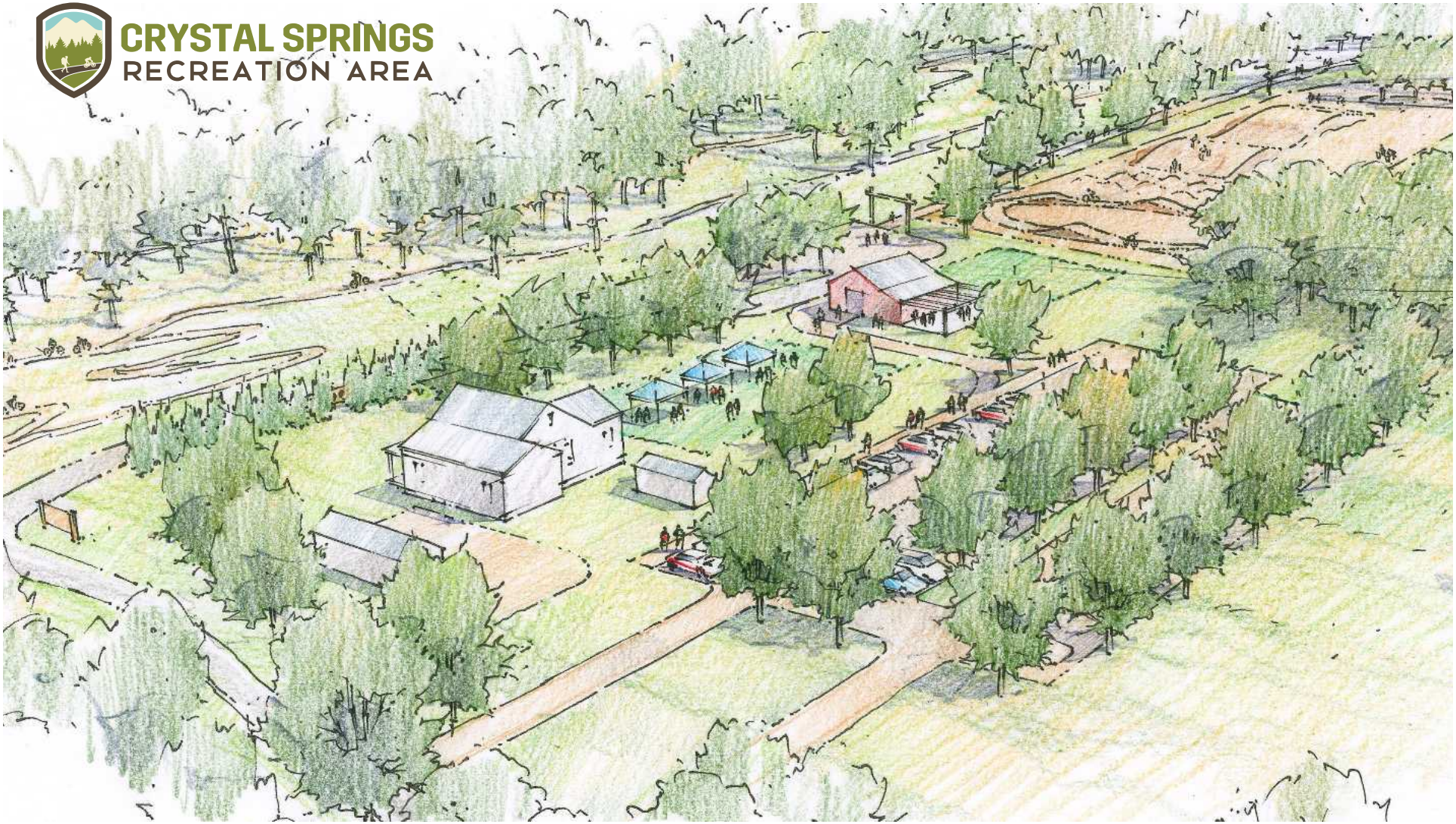
OUTCOMES

The adventure park has become a regional destination around the Roanoke area and extending out of the region. While it began as a summer camp over two decades ago, recently it has gained much of its popularity from the events hosted on the site.

OTHER EXAMPLES

Go Ape Freedom Park, Treetop Quest at Explore Park, Bryce Mountain Bike Resort, Mountain Bike Park at Explore Park, Spirit Mountain Bike Park

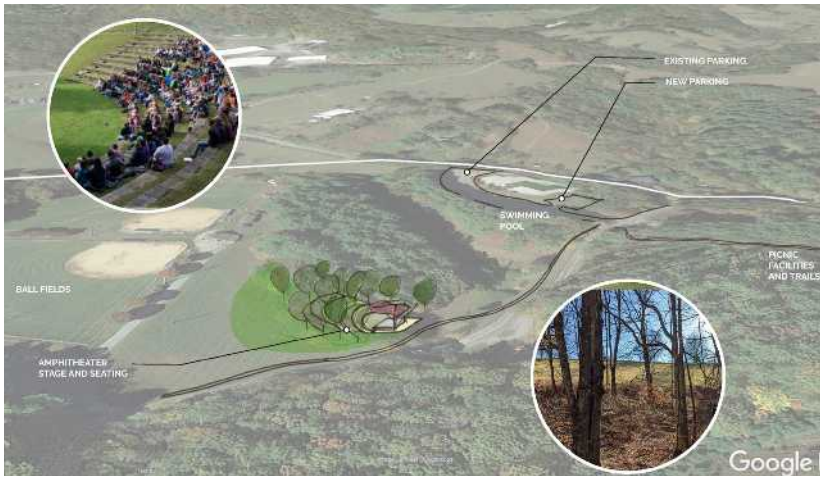
https://www.wilderness-adventure.comf; https://craigcountyva.gov/



Aerial perspective of proposed gateway at Crystal Springs Recreation Area near Wytheville

Independence Recreation Park

When it come to outdoor recreation, there are few sites that match the potential that the Independence Recreation Park (Grayson County, VA) offers for locals and visitors alike. The park provides various multi-purpose ball fields for baseball and softball as well as a swimming pool, playground, and connections to a greenway that links to the center of Independence with all of its shops and places to eat. The proposed plans will add to this experience by creating more trails and linkages throughout the site for hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing/bouldering, and community events located at an amphitheater as shown to the right. The entire site plan can be seen below showcasing its unique, multi-faceted recreational and community event opportunities perfect for growing recreational-based tourism and economic development in Southwest Virginia





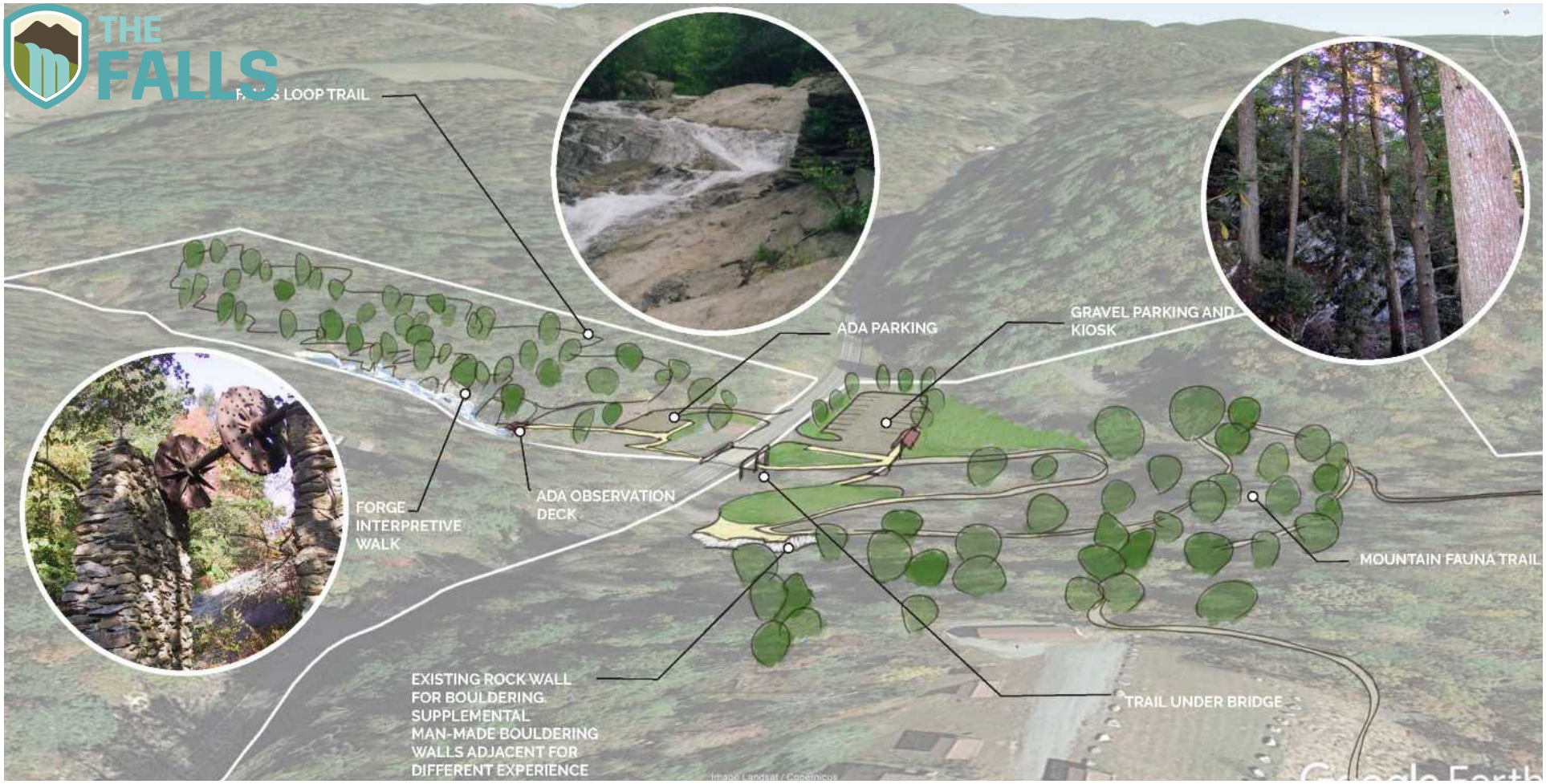
Aerial concept of proposed improvements at Independence Recreation Park

The Falls

In addition, there is a breathtaking waterfall along Peach Bottom Creek where a historic power turbine was once located. The plan also proposes a parking lot across from the existing parking lot at the Falls, to provide a safer entrance as well as ADA parking with an observation deck for those who cannot traverse the steep trail to the top of this scenic waterfall. While some websites or news articles refer to The Falls as Powerhouse Falls, others refer to them as Peach Bottom Falls. Referring to them as The Falls in Independence may be the best approach for now.



Photo source: https://lets-see-america.com/powerhouse-falls/



Aerial concept of proposed improvements at The Falls in Independence

The 2017 outdoor recreation economic development framework built on existing market opportunities and stakeholder input. It focused on the need to establish connectivity between the regional outdoor assets and communities, as well as creating an ongoing mechanism to track visitors and gauge the economic impact of outdoor recreation and its users.

Strategic Areas

This document is an updated version of the original proposed strategies. It presents a platform for the partners in the Mount Rogers region to follow to create a healthy business environment and grow outdoor recreation business opportunities that are unique to Mount Rogers. Strategies and corresponding action steps are organized by three core strategic areas that have been identified through community engagement and market research:

- Product Organization & Tracking
- Business Development
- Partnerships

Each strategy is accompanied by sub-areas and action steps. These suggested actions may be undertaken by Mt. Rogers' organizations, as well as grassroots community-based groups, in the short-, medium-, and long term.



Area One: Product Organization & Tracking

A robust understanding of outdoor recreation assets, including those that need cultivation and connection, is critical to building a healthy environment for both secondary and tertiary outdoor recreation assets. This requires continual assessment or assets, and collaboration between partner organizations. By working together, regional stakeholders may begin to collectively track users, their needs, and their impacts. The actions below focus on building a communication network to strengthen the connection between assets as well as provide ongoing inventory and user tracking.

Maintain the Asset Inventory as a living, interactive tool for tourism professionals and visitors.

This plan pooled existing asset inventories prepared by MRPDC, Friends of Southwest Virginia, and others. The current inventory is an interactive and informative tool that all area destinations, partners, and businesses may have access to. The inventory can be expanded to enhance understanding of existing assets, including contact information, pertinent web addresses, hours of operation, events, seasonality notes, and more. Community-based organizations should be empowered to add their own assets to the inventory. Partners may also consider using the inventory and accompanying GIS files to create their own itineraries and marketing tools. Ideally, a holistic inventory would be converted to a clickable database hosted on a mutually-agreed-upon website(s).

Action Step 1.1: Identify lead partner to coordinate updates

Identify lead partner(s) to coordinate regular updates to the asset inventory. This entity would guide engagement with other Mt. Rogers organizations and businesses to gather updates and changes to the inventory data.

Action Step 1.2: Identify most-accessible hosting platform

Collaborate to determine the best platform for hosting an editable version of asset inventories for ease of access for organizations making updates. The hosting organization should have operational funds dedicated to hosting the tool, and dedicating minimal staff time to updates.

Action Step 1.3: Launch the inventory as an interactive web-based tool

Encourage consensus to identify the website(s) to host an online interactive asset inventory tool, geared at visitors. One potential option could be the VisitSWVA.org website.

Action Step 1.4: Share the asset inventory to existing convenings

Identify events and upcoming engagements where asset inventory can be shared and celebrated, and opportunities given to get new inputs. These events can include takeaway materials such as "How-To" manuals for partners and small businesses on how to load information into the database, access to branding, and more.

Action Step 1.5: Collaborate with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (VDCR) in their Virginia Outdoors Plan Mapper.

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation developed the VOP Mapper developed as a companion tool of the comprehensive Virginia Outdoors Plan. It provides data on recreation resources statewide including trails, trailheads, blueways, public lands and lakes, etc. Though the mapper is better suited for planning and inventorying rather than marketing, it includes appropriate and relevant data for the Mount Rogers area. Mt. Rogers partners can help to ensure that individuals employed in the outdoor recreation industry, especially retail outfitters and guides, and other partners in the region have easy access to the VOP Mapper and the Outdoor Plan. Data and findings from the mapper and plan can help organizations seeking funding and grant opportunities. http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/vop

- Identity lead contact at VDCR and discuss ways to promote consistent communication between the two groups. The goal is to ensure that recreation resources in the Mt. Rogers area are up to date and represented on the VOP Mapper tool.
- Together with the revised asset inventory, raise awareness of the VOP Mapper tool among Mt. Rogers partners, outdoor destination offices, and recreation personnel.
- Collaborate with one or more partner organizations on a joint grant to secure funding, using the VOP as a guide.

Foster a culture of continuous data monitoring, tracking, evaluating, assessing, and celebrating progress.

It is critical that partners engage with communities and businesses in the region to co-develop a visitor/user tracking system that is consistent across localities. Zip Code tracking is a way of collecting data on where visitors come from helps tourism professionals understand their market and helps to estimate the economic impact of an attraction.

Action Step 1.6: Invite businesses to share customer information

Identify recreation outfitters and other high-traffic retailers that are open to sharing the best methods for capturing customer information. For example, invite a sub-set of outdoor recreation businesses that use cloud-based merchant payment methods (i.e. Square or PayPal) to participate in sharing zip code data with a central, trusted convener. Taking 1-2 years of data, map visitor travel. Discuss with business sub-group as the basis of ongoing implementation planning.

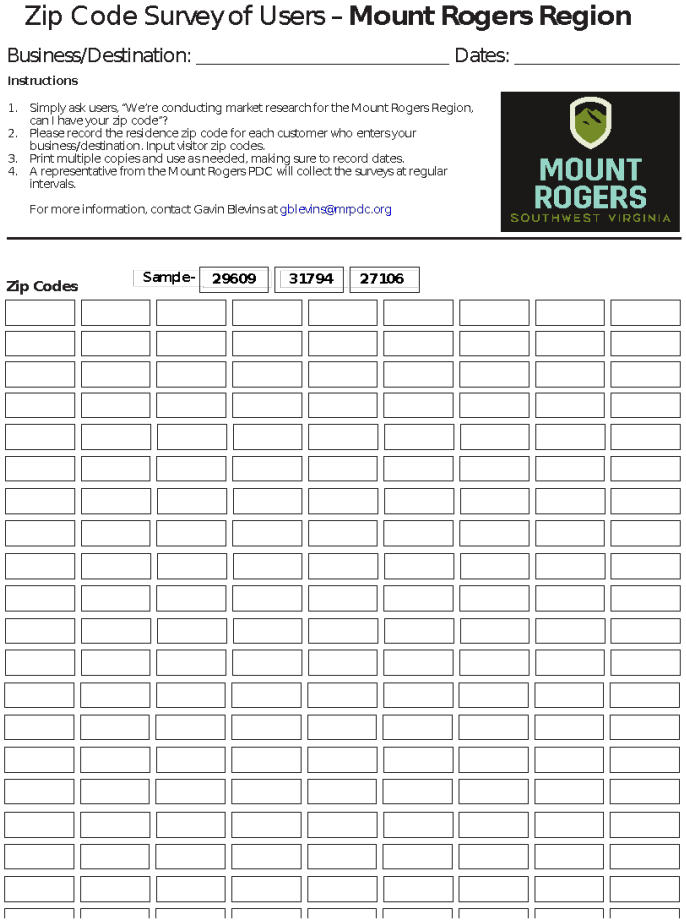
Action Step 1.7: Pilot zip code survey

Consider a pilot of zip code surveys to select primary assets (trailhead parking lots, museums), or convening assets (visitor centers, downtown informational kiosks).

Action Step 1.8: Design and implement a visitor intercept survey for at least one key event or attraction annually.

To demonstrate the connectedness of the region, including how unique events and attractions can benefit not just the locality in which they are located, but the broader region, Mount Rogers partners could collaborate to develop an electronic visitor survey to be deployed at key attractions or events (beginning with just one or two). By collecting a few pieces of key data, local tourism marketing organizations and businesses will be able to build ground-up models of economic impact and better understand characteristics of their markets. Intercept surveys are very easy to implement with energetic volunteers.

In addition to tracking outdoor recreation's shifts and impacts on the local economy, the survey can help to create visitor profiles and define target markets. Local colleges and universities may serve as resources to administer the survey and assist with data analysis. Local institutions, such as Virginia Highlands Community College or Virginia Tech, often have the capacity and/or resources to support survey implementation or train local institutions to do so.



Zip Code Survey of Users – **Mount Rogers Region**

Business/Destination: _____ Dates: _____

Instructions

1. Simply ask users, "We're conducting market research for the Mount Rogers Region, can I have your zip code"?
2. Please record the residence zip code for each customer who enters your business/destination. Input visitor zip codes.
3. Print multiple copies and use as needed, making sure to record dates.
4. A representative from the Mount Rogers PDC will collect the surveys at regular intervals.

For more information, contact Gavin Blevins at gblevins@mrpdc.org

MOUNT ROGERS SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

Zip Codes | Sample- 29609 | 31794 | 27106

Celebrate and incorporate the outdoor recreation economy into county, downtown, and community development planning processes:

- Localities tend to focus on and be more aware of localized outdoor tourism assets and challenges, and so may not actively connect to, or see the benefit of regional outdoor opportunities.
- Increased and more consistent flow of communication between localities, regional organizations, and other partners can help fill knowledge gaps.
- Separate localities or organizations may have limited-capacity to initiate this communication. Therefore, there is an opportunity to contract higher education institutions, larger regional entities, or other regional organizations to set up more consistent bidirectional communication channels, which lead to opportunities for collaboration.

Action Step 1.9: Present the collaborative vision

Using this outdoor recreation plan and accompanying toolkits, present this collaborative vision to existing governmental, business, non-profit, community, and economic networks.

Action Step 1.10: Identify missing partners

Identify partners to lead outreach to higher education partners, regional entities, and other organizations to determine opportunities for strengthening mutual communication channels.

Action Step 1.11: Host a recurrent regional celebratory event

Explore the potential for the development of a recurrent regional event, such as a forum, roundtable, or focus group, to serve as a space to discuss common opportunities, challenges, and strategies for the region. Additional partners, such as higher education institutions, may aid Mt. Rogers partner organizations in developing and/or facilitating such events.

Advance the development of experience-based itineraries.

There are several examples of existing weekend itineraries to inform the development and promotion of itineraries for outdoor recreation in the Mount Rogers region. Regional itineraries could include biking on the Creeper Trail and a visit to the Damascus Brewery in Damascus, dinner and a show at the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, camping at the New River Trail State Park with dinner at the Galax Smokehouse, visiting the Blue Ridge Discovery Center before hiking Mt. Rogers trails with the family, or a relaxing weekend at the Bolling Wilson Hotel and local dining in Wytheville—for example. Both the asset inventory and accompanying marketing products divide categories of activities by type, from family-friendly to adventure seeker.

Action Step 1.12: Develop college-level studio courses

Create white paper/proposal to share with key stakeholder at Emory and Henry College to encourage the development of a studio class centered around outdoor assets and adventure. Students could be tasked with using the asset inventory to create inventories according to anticipated user types, supporting localities and organizations.

Action Step 1.13: Host itinerary workshops

Host workshops that empower individual organizations and businesses to create their own itineraries that their customers would love. Particularly, including assets in multiple localities will create rounded experiences for customers and visitors. Share and celebrate these itineraries among businesses and outfitters to encourage more assets to be added and more unique adventures to be created. Page 38, "Messaging", is a perfect example of how to integrate itinerary workshops with messaging.

Action Step 1.14: Regular "van tours"

Mount Rogers partners may consider coordinating to organize "van tours," annually or biannually, as a way to strengthen connections and networks and enhance stakeholders' awareness of community conditions and outdoor recreation assets. Each day-long tour can highlight a specific theme, and should cover multiple localities. Topics and/or destinations can rotate each successive tour. Van-tour participants may vary based on selected destination but should include Economic Development Authority (EDA) or Economic Development Department leaders, municipal Parks & Recreation Department leaders, destination leaders (for example, Appalachian Trail Conservancy leadership) from localities within the region, business representatives, community leaders, and higher education institution partners as space allows.

Area Two: Business and Economic Development

The previous section focuses on creating connectivity between the outdoor recreation assets and business and building data sets to track users and their impact. Meanwhile, this section outlines actions to create a thriving, supportive business environment where outdoor and visitor businesses can grow and be successful. It is divided into three sections: talent, sites and buildings, and business attraction and retention.

Support and grow the outdoor and hospitality industry workforce

Hospitality training was identified as a critical need among stakeholders. Several participants noted that front-line tourism workers may have gaps in understanding of regional offerings and require additional training on hospitality and customer service. Mount Rogers partners may collaborate to promote hospitality education and training opportunities to help foster community pride and awareness of Mount Rogers' offerings. Having citizens engaged, excited, and informed about the opportunities available is essential to any tourism strategy. Visitors will not be impressed or inclined to return if they have less than ideal encounters and interactions with local citizens. It is important that local citizens and service sector employees be ambassadors for the place.

The SET Economic Development Plan also identified hospitality education training as a need and primary goal for the Planning District Region. The SET plan suggests a hospitality training program that includes training a representative from each individual community, establishing tourism ambassadors, and creating a web-based program for tourism workers. At the time of this work, VTC and partners have started efforts to develop this program.

Action Step 2.1: Continue to coordinate Hospitality Training of existing workforce with VTC.

Hospitality education training for service sector employees could include the following:

- Customer service skills
- Sales techniques and product presentation
- Communication skills
- Courtesy and etiquette
- Understanding customer behaviors
- Knowledge of local, regional, and state tourism attractions

Action Step 2.2: Continue to incorporate outdoor recreation curriculum into community colleges.

Mount Rogers recreation partners should continue to work with Virginia Highlands and Wytheville Community Colleges to expand existing business development support and training for outdoor recreation and tourism. This could include outdoor-recreation specific training such as operation of guide services and/or outfitters, marketing to active users, and more. Southwest Virginia Community College (SWCC) in Richlands provides programming that may serve as a model. Particularly, the "Adventure Tourism and Outdoor Recreation" curriculum focuses on entrepreneurial development in the tourism and recreation industries. The program is geared towards small business, including course work in business management, marketing, communications, tech, and recreation. http://sw.edu/ator/outdoor-adventure-programs

Action Step 2.3: Encourage the continued training, certification, and promotion of area guides.

Stakeholders indicated a need for outdoor guides. However, there already exists a wide range of guide services, including specialized guides who can lead users on kayaking events as well as general-knowledge guides who can tour visitors around various gateway communities. The certification of guides, especially in areas related to safety, ensures a quality visitor experience. Existing guides should be encouraged to adopt and share industry-relevant certifications. The presence of certified guides should be included in any marketing campaigns.

Understand, maintain, and advance sites and buildings.

Action Step 2.4: Maintain and enhance an interactive inventory of developable buildings.

The MRPDC created a list of vacant buildings in each gateway community that could support outdoor recreation-based businesses. Partner organizations may consider working with MRPDC to update the list to include square footage, buildout needs, rental rates and sales pricing, typical utility costs, and notes on building conditions. It should include contact information for each property and should be provided as an interactive inventory on the MRPDC website. It should also be provided to all regional real estate professionals and chambers.

Action Step 2.5: Identify, highlight, and promote current meeting facilities and event spaces.

Meeting facilities are valuable for small business owners, entrepreneurs, and other business leaders who may not have need for single-use business facilities. To use a collective inventory to accomplish this, partners could collaborate to identify a lead organization or team to build a simple inventory of existing meeting space across the region, including information like size, programming, purpose, and availability. This lead would work with facility owners and stakeholders to determine additional need, if any, for new space. If additional needs are identified, a lead organization and/or team may conduct a feasibility study for facilities with potential. Partners can support distribution of the inventory to all area partners, outdoor clubs and organizations, lodging establishments, and tourism destinations.

Action Step 2.6: Enhance existing lodging opportunities targeting the outdoor enthusiast.

Aside from accommodations in Damascus and Marion, there are few lodging opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts or travelers who want a unique lodging experience, not simply a place to stay along the interstate. Some gateway communities have a greater need for lodging than others, and Mount Rogers partners may support localities in developing more creative lodging options.

- Support the Town of Independence in targeting a new owner for the Davis Bourne Inn.
- Encourage private citizens through outreach to provide lodging on AirBNB.com or other services (for instance, several rooms in Damascus and Marion are currently listed on this site)
- Work with regional partners to identify potential sites for additional campground or RV parks.
- Working with property owners in Glade and Saltville to provide rooms such as cabins or hostels to be available when the Salt Trail is completed.

Promote business retention and expansion.

Action Step 2.7: Create a formalized recruitment team to target businesses across the region.

Not all individual communities in the Mount Rogers region have the capacity or resources to pursue economic development or recruit businesses, but together and with regional organizations, communities have the opportunity to pool resources. The research team recommends convening a business recruitment team to pursue economic development with a more grassroots approach. This team would effectively function as a high-level ambassador group for the entire region. Each member would be well-versed on all the plans and projects that are underway within the region, as well as the region's overall value proposition for outdoor adventure. Its responsibilities would include:

- Having a working knowledge of all regional assets, market positions, competitive advantages, and incentives.
- Providing tours/entertaining prospective business owners and investors.
- Participating as a collective delegation in Richmond when needed to represent the values and needs of the region.
- Participating in delegation as needed to visit prospects or engage potential partners outside of the region (for example – participating in or organizing a joint outdoor recreation/ economic development conference with Western North Carolina tourism entities).

The recruitment team is intended to be nimble, and likely would not meet on a regular basis. Rather, would act reactively and members would assemble as needed to accomplish any of the ambassadorial tasks above. Members of the recruitment team may include representatives from each gateway community, business owners who have invested in the region, destinations, tourism and economic development partners, and other similar actors. The Mount Rogers Regional Partnership currently employs a Economic Development Manager to assist communities with their economic development and community development project. The business recreutment team could benefit from including these larger entites into active conversations.

Action Step 2.8: Target outdoor businesses and businesses that complement the experience.

Mount Rogers partners should consider particapting in the The SWVA Busines Advisory Board and similar entities in an effort to recruit outdoor recreation-based businesses such as outfitters, sporting goods, tack shops, gunsmiths, etc. Partners may also support targeting of new businesses that complement the outdoor experience, including breweries, restaurants, local craft, gift stores, and more.

Foster entrepreneurship.

Action Step 2.9: Engage with the business and start-up community to identify growth-potential businesses in the region and better understand their needs.

Explore previous successful entrepreneurship programs, such as start-up competitions, for best practices and potential strategies for matching start-ups with space and business support.

Action Step 2.10: Consider entrepreneurship/ start-up competitions/incubator/ start-up support to help identify up-and-coming entrepreneurs in the region.

Focus on entrepreneurs interested in starting outdoor-recreation-related businesses, or those that support existing outdoor recreation businesses. Suggest that new businesses query the existing inventory and maps to identify gaps in the market. Consider pop-up shops at local festivals, downtowns for budding entrepreneurs, including high school and college students.

Area Three: Partnerships

Governments, organizations and businesses in Mount Rogers have built strong partnerships over time, whether it be with statewide entities like DHCD or VTC, or fellow Mount Rogers entities. Stakeholders interviewed realize the importance of partnerships and that many of the most successful partnerships are more grassroots in nature.

For this plan to be successful, each stakeholder must play a role in implementation. Meanwhile, implementation processes should not be overly structured, as it will limit flexibility and creativity. Each partner, including state agencies, local governments, non-profit destinations, private businesses, and local entrepreneurs, has its own strengths and limitations regarding capacity and resources.

Build capacity and share knowledge via informal associations and citizen committees.

Action Step 3.1: Encourage adoption of new tools among existing groups.

Identify and tap into existing organizations (such as Chambers of Commerce, RALLY groups) to share the branding, marketing, asset inventory and other tools to encourage adoption.

Action Step 3.2: Create a formal marketing team/promotions committee to collective market the study area.

This team would include representatives from each gateway community, anchor destination, and select private businesses. Representatives should be selected based on their marketing interest, and not simply to have a seat at the table. This entity would likely operate separate from the existing SET Tourism Cluster committee. Ultimately, this marketing/promotions committee would lead implementation of the marketing strategies of both the SET plan and the Mount Rogers connectivity plan. It would meet regularly, and identify and complete marketing tasks, such as building cooperative marketing tools and funding resources.

Action Step 3.3: Foster an informal association of private businesses to network and market.

The Mount Rogers region is large and comprised of many communities. Therefore, partners may consider an alternative approach to developing a business or merchant's organization, particularly since many businesses in the region are small-scale entrepreneurs. Unlike other traditional merchant groups, like the Damascus Business Group, this group would meet quarterly at rotating locations throughout the region. These meetings could be informal workshops to train and learn from their peers, share success stories, and discuss co-marketing opportunities across private businesses.

Action Step 3.4: Create a similar informal association of regional lodging establishments.

Partners may help to convene a lodging and tourism sector group, similar to the business group, with the participation of each county's tourism office. The goal of this group would be to identify and implement cooperative marketing activities, including a regional lodging guide, cost-sharing for billboards, ads, and more.

Action Step 3.5: Create a similar informal association of Mount Rogers trail organizations.

The outdoor trails running throughout the Mount Rogers region, and the organizations that manage them, continue to expand. During interviews, stakeholders expressed a desire to connect certain trails and better collaborate with state and federal for access to resources. If created, this outdoor trail and park group would serve to implement cooperative marketing and development activities, access more funding for trail maintenance and development, and share best practices for operating as trail organizations.

Foster the creation and utilization of shared spaces.

Action Step 3.6: Identify and develop location to create shared space for outdoor business startups.

Partners may consider encouraging the development of a space, similar yet more informal than a traditional business incubator, as a location where regional startups can find low-cost or free rent for a brief period of time. The space, which several stakeholders proposed to call Mount Rogers adVenture Cetner, would connect entrepreneurs with key area partners, community colleges, SBDCs, and other valuable networks. Each site development plan includes the potential for shared space to suit needs of regional groups and entrepreneurs.

Action Step 3.7: Gauge interest in incubator or start-up hubs.

Connect with entrepreneurship and talent stakeholders and other key networks to gauge interest, potential, and site opportunities for incubator space or a start-up hub in the region. Explore existing site inventories or property leads to assess availability of sites.

Action Step 3.8: Consider a site inventory for a start-up hub.

Explore the option of collaborating with a partner or consultant entity to complete a formalized site inventory and/or feasibility study to thoroughly assess the potential for a start-up hub. Grants and other funding options may be available to support this work.

Action Step 3.9: Coordinate and partner to seek funding for planning and marketing projects.

Relevant regional organizations involved in marketing efforts, such as Friends of SWVA, Round the Mountain, and others should coordinate and maintain consistent contact with other partners with funding expertise to expand funding opportunities. For instance, MRPDC and its staff serve as a resource for identifying creative funding for financing future planning efforts, economic development and marketing projects. This could include the usual grant funding from DHCD, Tobacco Commission, etc., but also non-traditional mechanisms such as crowdsourcing and venture financing.

Action Step 3.10: Communication with MRPDC.

Maintain timely and consistent communication with the MRPDC to stay up to date on existing funding opportunities. Consider identifying a platform where Mount Rogers partners and other relevant entities, such as small businesses, can access relevant funding resources and information.

Action Step 3.11: Identify and submit joint proposals for funding.

Reach out to networks to identify successful case studies or best practices for other creative funding opportunities such as angel investing, revolving loan funds, and more.

Action Step 3.12: Regional and national adventure groups.

Bring in regional or national adventure groups to network and cross promote. This could include adventure clubs linked to the region's key user groups, regional conservation groups, and/or local and regional marketing organizations. For example, there is a valuable opportunity for Independence and Grayson to collectively market with Sparta and Alleghany County, NC. The two communities are just 15 minutes apart and have a mutual connection to the New River and its activity.



CONNECTIVITY PLAN

The Connectivity Plan for the Mount Rogers Outdoor Asset Analysis and Development Plan seeks to align local communication efforts and leverage existing regional marketing. The plan assesses the existing branding efforts within the region to create strategies for "bottom-up" marketing. With Friends of Southwest Virginia and other regional entities successfully promoting tourism and outdoor recreation within the region, many localities have lacked organizational capacities to implement their localized branding, or otherwise tap into the regional marketing messaging.

More specifically, the Connectivity Plan:

- Creates graphic marketing strategies and brand extension based on the economic recommendations of this plan, building off the unique SWVA, Mount Rogers, and local community identities. This plan does not create new branding, but rather aligns the regional hierarchy of branding into localized communication roles and tactics.
- Establishes a regional wayfinding typology that is adaptable to local resources and the established brands of individual communities. Some have fully implemented brand systems including wayfinding. Others have established solid brand strategies but have yet to create signage that directs visitors and locals to key cultural and recreation assets. A few have no established brand identity. The wayfinding strategy creates a platform for all to be part of a regional network.



Existing Brand Systems

The Mount Rogers region includes six counties, two independent cities, and numerous towns. Most have unique, individual brand identities and promotional materials aimed at communicating to residents while promoting outdoor recreation and tourism. There are also two distinct regional identities and marketing systems for SWVA and Mount Rogers.

Many of these systems, including the two regional identities, were designed to provide a platform for visual and strategic connectivity, while maintaining the individual and unique identities of each place.

Regional Brands

Friends of Southwest Virginia promotes the SWVA brand and "A Different Side of Virginia" marketing message. While the SWVA brand covers a much larger region of 19 counties, the main logo incorporates an image of Mount Rogers and positions the unique recreational assets of SWVA region within the state. The Mount Rogers planning district area brand identity further communicates the smaller region's unique assets as one of SWVA's eight anchor areas as "Virginia's High Point".

Destinations such as Crooked Road Music Heritage Trail, Round the Mountain Artisan Network, and the Appalachian Trail further solidify the distinctive recreation and cultural assets. Like the Mount Rogers brand, these have been designed to visually connect to the SWVA brand identity.



A different side of Virginia











Local Brands

The brand hierarchy continues with marketing brands for the five different counties within the Mount Rogers area, as well as twelve individual communities. Unlike the regional brands that are designed as a more unified system, these local identities rightfully present the unique character and personality of each place. While these brands do vary in design, common themes include:

- Mountain topography and natural landscape, most specifically with the county brands in Smyth, Wythe, Carroll, and Grayson.
- Outdoor recreation assets incorporated into the brands of Damascus, Fries, and Saltville.
- Cultural assets suggested by the music-focused brand of Galax, or the arts and activity-based brand of Marion.
- Graphics and tag lines based on the unique names of places like Wytheville and Independence.
- Discovery focused visitor-based brands of Bristol, Hillsville, and Abingdon.

Implementation of these brands also varies from community to community, from simple application on local websites, to brand extension to local events, to marketing strategies including banners, advertising, social media, and merchandising. Some communities have incorporated their branding into signage, from the comprehensive wayfinding system in Bristol, to the gateway signage in Chilhowie. Several other communities do not have an established brand or marketing identity. There has been little success within the region of localities connecting to and leveraging the regional brand equity of SWVA.

Brand Alignment Strategies

Marketing strategies of this Connectivity Plan are based the economic and product development recommendations of this plan, as, well as the marketing needs communicated to the team during the stakeholder process. Some strategies build on the previous 2015 Mount Rogers Outdoor Recreation Economic Framework plan. All strategies are based on the premise that the brand of the locality or destination is the most important to establish it as a unique place, with a secondary focus on connecting to the larger region, peer communities and outdoor assets.

Messaging – The Mount Rogers Experience

Each community should independently market its distinct identity while incorporating a regional messaging framework that positions how it uniquely contributes to the Mount Rogers Experience. This includes the key user groups such as:

- Outdoor Enthusiasts who enjoy hiking, cycling, fishing, scenic driving, bird watching, etc.
- Extreme Adventurers such as Appalachian Trail hikers, boulderers, mountain bikers and others who take their recreation activity to higher levels.
- Heritage Tourists who love the rich history of this part of Virginia, particularly as it is interpreted in our downtowns and historic sites.
- Agritourists who visit nature-based businesses, wineries, family farms, and ecological sites.

These themes are described in the following Brand Statement. A brand statement is a broad market position narrative that stitches together the unique assets and activities in the region. It is an elevator speech of sorts, and each element can be used independently to promote different themes and communities.

BRAND STATEMENT

Welcome to Mount Rogers, Virginia's High Point.

Known for having the Commonwealth's tallest mountain and most of its highest peaks, our natural riches provide a world-class recreation experience second to none. With our federally designated National Recreation Area, three state parks, nationally known recreation trails, and small towns full of rich history and culture, Mount Rogers offers activities for all - from the outdoor enthusiast to the extreme adventurer, the nature lover to the heritage tourist. All can enjoy The Mount Rogers Experience.

It begins with a wealth of activities for the outdoor enthusiast. Within the six counties that make up the region, outdoor lovers can bike with the family along the Virginia Creeper Trail, land that trophy trout in the South Fork Holston River, hike the New River Trail, or paddle board one of our many lakes and rivers. Others can view unspoiled nature driving the Blue Ridge Parkway, or view the rare birds at the Beaver Dam Birding and Wildlife Trail There truly is no end to the outdoor experience in the region

Mount Rogers also provides great adventures. Through-hike the Appalachian Trail and stop to refresh in Damascus -Trail Town USA. Climb the formidable boulders in Grayson Highlands or enjoy horseback riding at Kimberling Creek Trail in Bland. Attack premier single-track mountain biking trails throughout the region, or hunt that prized deer in one of our great natural preserves. The Mount Rogers Experience is one that is exhilarating, where thrill-seekers can push their limits.

We also have wonderful agritourism destinations. Enjoy a tasting at Blacksnake, Southwest Virginia's only meadery. Sample the award-winning wines of Davis Valley Winery or Abingdon Vineyards. Or learn about herbs and lavender at Beagle Ridge. Mount Rogers has numerous nature-based businesses and destinations that respect the land and focus on sustaining our region for future generations.

Mount Rogers has rich culture and heritage, which ties natural resources and outdoor adventures to our communities. From the Museum of Middle Appalachians in Saltville to the Birthplace of Country Music in Bristol, Mount Rogers is an anchor of Southwest Virginia's cultural heritage defined by diverse people, rural craft, mountain music, and natural history.

All of this comes together in our greatest asset, our towns. From Wytheville to Bristol, Damascus to Hillsville, each community in the region contributes in its own unique way to the Mount Rogers Experience. These places have our locally owned shops, restaurants, and events that make them destinations for both visitors and locals alike. Most importantly, they are where your Mount Rogers adventure begins. These are the places that make us special and unique. These are the Basecamps of Mount Rogers.

Basecamps of Mount Rogers

The Mount Rogers National Recreation area receives over one million visitors each year, and each community in the region contributes in its own unique way to the experience. These communities are the anchors of Mount Rogers, and rather than being gateways to the recreation and natural assets of Southwest Virginia, they are the places where the Mount Rogers Experience truly begins. By actively marketing these communities as the "Basecamps of Mount Rogers", it allows the towns, businesses, and destinations to be part of a larger network.

The Basecamps logo is an extension of the Mount Rogers brand created in 2016, which was one of the brand expansions for the eight anchor areas of SWVA. The logo shares colors, typeface, and the shield icon of its parent SWVA brand, all intended to provide connectivity throughout the region. The Basecamps logo can be used as secondary identities on websites, signage, advertising, and any other promotional material that seeks to connect the community to the region.

The shield icons to the right are a further brand extension of the SWVA and Mount Rogers identity, identifying unique activities that can only be enjoyed in the Mount Rogers area (Emory & Henry, Barter Theater, Backbone Rock, Museum of Middle Appalachia).

BASECAMPS OF MOUNT ROGERS

BASECAMPS OF MOUNT ROGERS

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BASECAMPS OF MOUNT ROGERS

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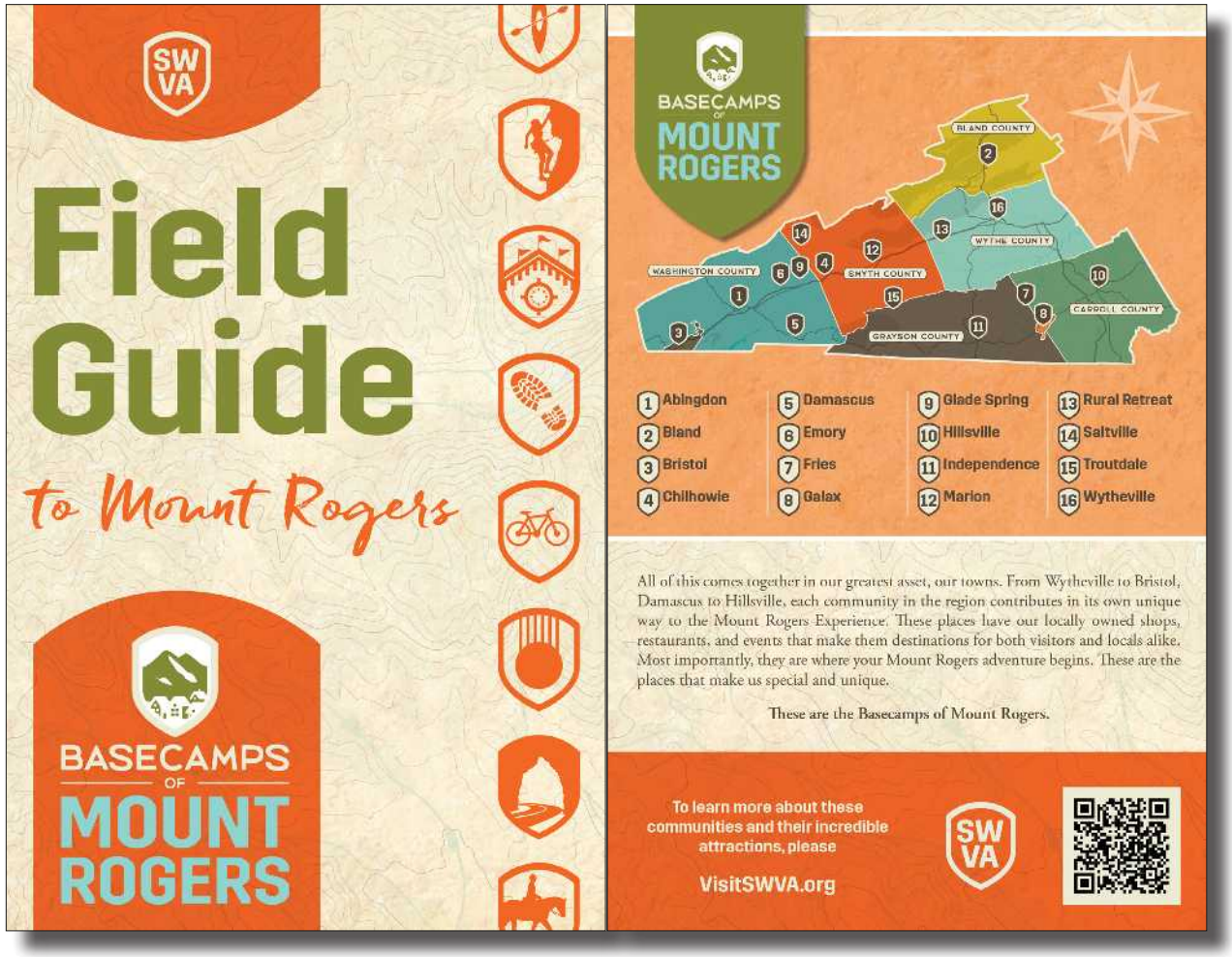


The Basecamps of Mount Rogers poster below is a tool to build awareness throughout the region of the different communities. It presents the Basecamps market position, identifies each community and county in the region, and provides a QR code to push the user to the Mount Rogers section of VisitSWVA.org website for information about the communities and destinations. The poster can be placed on kiosks in communities, on town and destination websites, and social media.



Field Guide to Mount Rogers

The Field Guide to Mount Rogers is designed to be a marketing brochure in the style of a field guide. It expands the messaging to the depth of activities in the region, once again tying them back to the Basecamp communities. The brochure has individual pages for the different themes of activity in the region (outdoor enthusiast, extreme adventurer, heritage tourist, agritourist). Each page includes the relevant paragraph from the Mount Rogers Experience brand narrative and ends with the information from the poster mentioned above, once again pushing out the user to the SWVA Mount Rogers page and its trip planner.



Outdoor Enthusiast



Appalachian Trail

The Mount Rogers Experience begins with a wealth of activities for the outdoor enthusiast. Within the six counties that make up the region, outdoor lovers can bike with the family along the Virginia Creeper Trail, land that trophy trout in the South Fork Holston River, hike the New River Trail, or paddleboard one of our many lakes and rivers. Others can view unspoiled nature driving the Blue Ridge Parkway, or seeing the rare birds at the Beaver Dam Birding and Wildlife Trail. There truly is no end to the outdoor experience in the region.

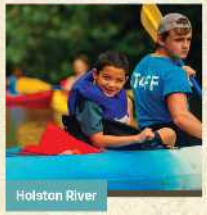
VisitSWVA.org



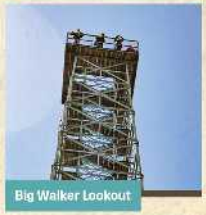
Hungry Mother State Park



Grayson Highlands State Park



Holston River



Big Walker Lookout



Virginia



Outdoor Adventure



Clinch River

Mount Rogers also provides great adventures. Through-hike the Appalachian Trail and stop to refresh in Damascus - Trail Town USA. Brave the demanding bouldering in Grayson Highlands or horseback riding at Kimberling Creek Trail in Bland. Attack premier single-track mountain biking trails throughout the region, or hunt that prized deer in one of our great natural preserves. The Mount Rogers Experience is one that is exhilarating, where thrill-seekers can push their limits.

Agritourism

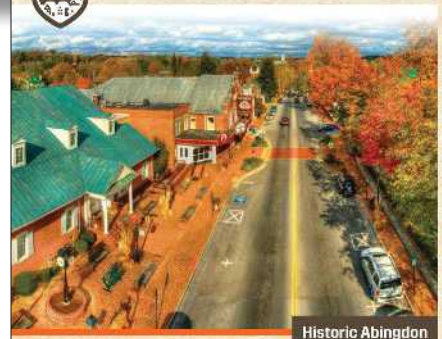


Abingdon Vineyards

We also have wonderful agritourism destinations. Enjoy a tasting at Blacksnake, Southwest Virginia's only meadery. Sample the award winning wines of Davis Valley Winery or Abingdon Vineyards. Learn about herbs and lavender at Beagle Ridge. Mount Rogers' has numerous nature-based businesses and destinations that respect the land, and focus on sustaining our region for future generations.

VisitSWVA.org

Heritage & Culture



Historic Abingdon

Mount Rogers has rich culture and heritage, which ties natural resources and outdoor adventures to our communities. From the Museum of Middle Appalachians in Saltville, to the Birthplace of Country Music in Bristol, Mount Rogers is an anchor of Southwest Virginia's cultural heritage defined by diverse people, rural craft, mountain music, and natural history.

VisitSWVA.org



Museum of the Middle Appalachians

Saltville



The Lincoln Theater

Marion



Emory & Henry University

Emory

Merchandising

Friends of Southwest Virginia has done an exceptional job of implementing the SWVA brand, including creating merchandise such as t-shirts, hats, stickers, pint glasses, water bottles, etc. The basecamp communities can do the same thing, using their individual brand as the primary logo, then adding the Basecamps or the Mount Rogers shield logo to the merchandise. The Mount Rogers and SWVA brand are intended to be "open source" and Friends should work with the communities and businesses to appropriately utilize the brand.









CASE STUDY:
Certified SC Grown





DESCRIPTION

Certified SC Grown is a collaborative branding program between the South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA) and South Carolina farmers and producers. The program promotes locally grown and produced goods through its easily identifiable logo.

IMPLEMENTATION & FUNDING

The SCDA launched the program in 2007 to promote locally grown products after a consumer survey suggested that South Carolina residents desired to buy local products and would buy more if they knew which products were local. Original funding for the program was from a state appropriation and approximately $1-3 million a year has been invested since. Participants must apply to program, and then can use its branding.

OUTCOMES

On is 10-year anniversary, the program had 2,000 members, 500 retail stores, and 300 restaurants participating In 2018, sales across Certified SC Grown categories were $176.3 million higher than they were in 2010. Total potential economic impact of Certified SC Grown initiative is estimated at $273.5 million annually and 1,615 jobs.

https://certifiedsc.com/; https://agriculture.sc.gov/

Mount Rogers Triathlon

The Mount Rogers Triathlon is a concept to have a unique endurance event that connects the communities and recreation resources throughout the region. Rather than a conventional tri (swimming, biking, running), it would be activities for the extreme adventurer such as trail running, mountain biking, bouldering, kayaking, etc. The three legs of the event would change each year both in activity, as well as community.

MOUNT ROGERS
TRIATHALON
Just do. There is no try.



Mount Rogers Pathfinder

Pathfinder is a broad concept that seeks to tie local businesses and destinations to the region. The idea is an ambassador program whereby businesses can place stickers on their windows to let users know that the business understands the region and can cooperatively connect users to other businesses and destinations throughout Mount Rogers. Like a "shop local" program, this initiative would be informal, with no certification or membership. There would be the potential to tie it to a Mount Rogers passport/ rewards program.

MOUNT ROGERS
PATHFINDER

PATHFINDER

Coordinated Positioning of the Mount Rogers Experience

Each Basecamp community is unique in its offerings, but also in the way it relates to the Mount Rogers region. Each place has multiple assets and destinations that should be promoted, but when marketing is used to connect to the larger region, there is the potential to highlight its key (not only) contribution to the Mount Rogers Experience. This will allow the communities to focus on their own uniqueness, but also cooperatively present a regional experience.

- Abingdon: Mount Rogers' Main Street with its architecture, cultural assets, Barter theater, etc.
- Bland: Mount Rogers' Wilderness with its unspoiled nature, rural character, and Native American Heritage.
- Bristol: Mount Rogers' Entertainment Center with Birthplace of Country Music, NASCAR, breweries, etc.
- Chilhowie: The Front Door to Mount Rogers as the primary entrance to the National Recreation Area on I-81.
- Damascus: Trail Town with its seven trails and multiple recreation activities that converge in town.
- Emory: Mount Rogers' College Town with Emory & Henry and a traditional college town environment.
- Fries: River Town of Mount Rogers as Fries has the best and closest access to the New River right in downtown.
- Galax: Basecamp for Bluegrass with its rich Old Time and Bluegrass heritage including the Fiddler's Convention.
- Hillsville: Mount Rogers' Market Town with its unique history, connection to NC and great farmers market.
- Glade Spring: Hometown for Mount Rogers with its stereotypical small-town square and local businesses.
- Independence: The Other Side of Mount Rogers and its proximity to NC, playing off of SWVA's "Different Side" tagline.
- Marion: The Coolest Town in Mount Rogers tied to its current tag line, great activities and events.
- Rural Retreat: Mount Rogers' Railroad town with its historic depot that is the anchor of activity in the community.
- Saltville: The Natural History Destination with its unique salt mining history and Museum of Middle Appalachia.
- Troutdale: The Heart of Mount Rogers as the community closest to the center of the region
- Wytheville: The Crossroads at Mount Rogers with the intersection of I-77 and I-81 and main entry to region.

Mount Rogers Outpost

This strategy is a concept to encourage the private development of non-traditional lodging such as campsites, short-term rental, treehouses, hostels, etc., those lodging establishments that may be more desirable to the outdoor recreation market. The network of private lodging establishments would share booking, develop itineraries, and tie the outdoor recreation destinations to the communities and businesses that make up the region. A similar network called "Hamlet to Huts" was created in the Adirondack region of Upstate New York.

MOUNT ROGERS
OUTPOST
LODGING & ADVENTURE NETWORK

CASE STUDY:
Adirondack Hamlets to Huts





DESCRIPTION

Adirondack Hamlets to Huts is an initiative to create a network of lodging that connects outdoor recreation users in the Adirondacks Park to lodging options in nearby communities in upstate New York. The organization's Trails Center was opened in an empty storefront in downtown Saranac Lake to serve as an office, provide education and trails resources, and sell essential goods and AHH branded merchandise.

IMPLEMENTATION & FUNDING

The initative was originally funded through a 3-Year Grant from New York State, after which a non-profit was established to manage the initiative. Building relationships with existing lodging establishments and recreational users has been key to success.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Establishing the network has been a long process;, and at times it is frustrating that things aren't moving more quickly. Technology has also been a challenge, particularly in creating a reservation system and linking with existing lodging. Time and effort spent meeting grant requirements (report, etc) has lead to the desire to diversify funding (grant, fees, memberships, merchandise, donations).

OUTCOMES

10 groups were launched in 2021, with the vision for 20-40 daily bookings during peak season.

https://adkh2h.org/; https://adirondacktrailsandlodging.org/consultant-team.html

Social Media Strategy

Friends of Southwest Virginia and county tourism agencies within the Mount Rogers region do an excellent job of social media, posting pictures, promoting businesses, and cross-promoting using the #swva hashtag. This should be expanded to present the unique Mount Rogers Experience, with local businesses, destinations and communities being encouraged to post on Instagram, Facebook and others utilizing the hashtags #swva, #mountrogers, #mtrogersbasecamp, etc in addition to their specific hashtags. This will expand the reach of regional social media output while connecting local businesses and destinations to the outdoor recreation experience.

Advertising

One method to enhance the social media footprint while marketing destinations and businesses is through advertising. Graphic-intensive ads with a social media-friendly format can be used to promote Basecamps of Mount Rogers and tie them to outdoor activity. These ads can promote the individual communities and theme, following the same hierarchical format mentioned previously where the community takes precedence to the regional identities. These ads can be deployed primarily via social media, but also within state and regional tourism guides, publications like Blue Ridge Outdoors, etc.

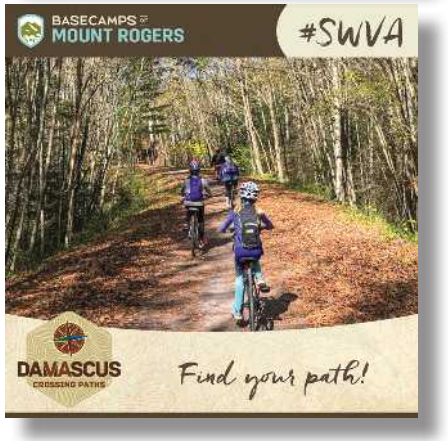












North Carolina Strategy

With I-77 and I-81 intersecting in Wytheville, the Mount Rogers region has exceptional access and a large geography from which it can pull visitors from. While North Carolina is a huge potential market for the outdoor recreation the area provides, many communities on the south side of the mountain not only have immediate access to the residents from Winston-Salem to Charlotte to Asheville, but they also have the opportunity to connect to the outdoor experiences of Western North Carolina. Communities like Galax, Hillsville, Independence and Fries should consider collectively marketing to the North Carolina market.



Consider future designation as a National Park

Mount Rogers was designated a National Recreation Area in 1966. As such it has a certain level of protection in order to preserve and enhance recreational opportunities. The New River Gorge in West Virginia is the United States most recently designated National Park. Similar to Mount Rogers, it was designated as a National River previously. Mount Rogers could consider a similar path, and lobby to elevate its designation to National Park, which would in turn increase its protection while also raising its prominence as a destination.

CASE STUDY:
New River Gorge





DESCRIPTION

The New River Gorge National Park and Preserve in West Virginia became the 63rd National Park in December 2020 when it was redesignated from a National River. New River Gorge covers 70,000 acres, 10% is a National Park and 90% is a National Preserve, which allows hunting.

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Years of advocacy and coalition-building between local governments, tourism agencies, businesses, outdoor users and elected officials were behind the eventual Act of Congress to designate the area as a National Park and Preserve.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Pushback from local hunters concerned about losing access to the land required coordination and compromise, resulting in the creative solution to designated both a National Park and a Preserve that would allow hunting on designated lands. The effort required multiple attempts at legislation. Since the desingation, there has been some concern over sufficient funding and amenities (parking, lodging, etc) to meet increased demand.

OUTCOMES

National publicity boosted recognition and tourism in the area, resulting in both increased visitors (up 30% over 2019) and sales.

https://nrgrda.org/; https://www.nps.gov/neri/index.htm

Wayfinding

The most effective way to connect regional outdoor recreation assets to individual communities is with a comprehensive wayfinding system that directs visitors and locals to the different cultural and recreational assets that exist in the region. This is no small task considering the capital investment required to implement signage, but also the different community brands and their varied application throughout the region.

This connectivity plan is not intended to be a wayfinding plan, where a destination hierarchy is established, a sign schedule is created showing individual sign locations and content, cost projections and phasing strategies are made. Rather it is a strategic platform for each community to utilize signage that connects them to larger region. Our focus here is the design of a sign typology that meets MUTCD and VDOT standards, that can be implemented over time whenever each community is ready.

Design Focus

The most important design consideration with wayfinding is consistency. This also presents a challenge in implementation across the region given the varied capacity of each locality. Our focus here is to create an integrated and open-source system that allows for the incorporation of local identities, the Mount Rogers brand, and in certain instances, the SWVA brand. The sign typology established here aims to:

- Establish a cohesiveness in design with colors and typography that connects to the established Mount Rogers brand, and therefore the SWVA brand.
- Create a hierarchy of communication where the brand identity of the community has the highest priority and most prominence, followed by that of the Mount Rogers brand.
- Allow for those communities with established wayfinding to incorporate the Mount Rogers brand into their existing signage, if possible and if desired.
- Create a platform for those communities who have yet to create their own brand identity have Mount Rogers area branded signage.
- Meet the standards of Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) for highway signage.

- Create a sign typology that includes examples for:
  - Gateway Signs: These signs are often located at the entryway to communities or other destinations to notify the motorist of their arrival. They can be monument signage or pole-mounted gateways.
  - Vehicular Directional: These signs provide information for the motorist at key decision points and are designed for both high and low speed traffic.
  - Pedestrian Directional: Often in downtown environments, these smaller-scale signs provide information for pedestrians to get to walkable destinations within the district.
  - Kiosks: These signs provide a greater deal of information for the pedestrian or trail user including maps, destination information, interpretive info, and sometimes print brochures.
  - Trail signage: Signage specifically for outdoor recreation trails including gateways, trail markers,
  - Specialty signage: Any other special signage such as parking, roadway stenciling, etc.

Existing Wayfinding

The existing signage within the Mount Rogers region generally includes green Department of Transportation (DOT) signs directing motorists to municipalities or alternate routes, Brown DOT signs pointing toward recreational assets or destinations, Historic Byway & Trail signs such as the Crooked Road, and State Route & traffic signs. These signs are not part of the regional wayfinding system.

The area also includes community and destination signage that varies widely by the locality. For example, while Bristol and Wytheville both have a comprehensive wayfinding system with local branding, some communities have no wayfinding at all. Most communities have some sort of gateway signage. Some of these are very attractive and branded. Others are typical community gateways at municipal limits that announce entry and show local civic organizations. Many communities have established sign typologies through previous branding projects but have yet to implement wayfinding. Others, like Saltville, have attractive, unbranded directional signage that does not meet VDOT or MUTCD standards. The Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards are the federal guidelines for safe and functional wayfinding.



Examples of existing gateway signage in region

Finally, the regional SWVA and Mount Rogers brands have been incorporated into some gateway signage such as the entrance to the SWVA Cultural Center and Marketplace, as well as the pole-mounted branded gateway sign in Chilhowie.

Overall, there is inconsistency or lack of signage within the region. This is not uncommon, particularly is smaller towns with limited resources. However, given the unique shared recreation and cultural assets that tie the Mount Rogers communities together, this signage strategy creates a platform for a consistent wayfinding system throughout the region that highlights the individual character and assets of each place.







Examples of existing directional signage in region (Source: Frazier & Associates)







Examples of existing directional signage in region

Coordinated Wayfinding System

Based on the design focus of this plan as well as the existing signage within the region, the following design concepts present a coordinated wayfinding design for the Mount Rogers area.

Color Palette

The color palette for the wayfinding system is based on the regional identities of the SWVA and Mount Rogers existing brands. While community identities should be incorporated into local signage, colors and typeface will be the unifying elements of the connected system.

PANTONE 166 CP
R:242 G:98 B:34
C:0 M:76 Y:100 K:0

PANTONE 7747 CP
R:127 G:136 B:42
C:19 M:0 Y:86 K:48

PANTONE 7546 CP
R:29 G:56 B:76
C:73 M:45 Y:24 K:66

PANTONE 5493 CP
R:112 G:175 B:185
C:47 M:4 Y:16 K:16

PANTONE Warm Gray 11 CP
R:85 G:71 B:65
C:26 M:36 Y:38 K:68

Typography

The wayfinding concepts shown here features four separate fonts. FHWA Series C and D are approved for use in vehicular wayfinding by the MUTCD and should be utilized for destination content on directional signage. These signs are intended for viewing by people in motorized vehicles along public roadways.

The second typeface is Trim and has been utilized in the SWVA and Mount Rogers brand systems. It should be used for community names on the tops of signs when they do not have an established typeface or logo. Trim can also be utilized for parking signage, destination markers, gateways, and trail signage.

The final typeface represents a secondary font from the SWVA system and can be used as highlight secondary text for things like “Welcome to” or local tag lines.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
123456789 !@#$%^&*(){}|:”<>?

Trim - SemiBold

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
123456789 !@#$%^&*(){}|:”<>?

FHWA Series C

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
123456789 !@#$%^&*(){}|:”<>?

FHWA Series D

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
123456789 !@#$%^&*(){}|:”<>?

Freeland

Directional Arrows

The arrows below are often used for motorist-oriented signage in a wayfinding system that meets MUTCD standards. These standards also require destinations to be listed in order of direction first:

- Straight ahead
- Left (veer)
- Left (turn)
- Right (Veer)
- Right (turn)

Destinations sharing the same directional arrows should be listed from top to bottom in order of distance from the sign location.



Illustrative Sign Typology

The full typology shown here illustrates the design focus mentioned previously as well as the MUTCD-based standards. The typology includes (from left to right on both the top and bottom rows):

- Vehicular Trailblazers: Directional signage with information for motorists at key decision points. The four signs illustrate how the Mount Rogers and community brands can be incorporated. For example, Saltville has its own unique brand that can be included in the top of the trailblazer. Troutdale on the other hand has no established brand but still can be incorporated into the system.
- Pole-mounted Gateway Signs: Examples are shown for both Troutdale and Chilhowie and would be located at entrances to the community or character district. These signs notify the motorists of their arrival. The Chilhowie sign is a redesign of the community's existing gateway sign which is a great example of a community that already incorporates the SWVA and Mount Rogers regional brand.
- Pedestrian Directional: These small pedestrian-scaled signs would be located most likely in the downtown district of the community and provide directional information to walkers and bikers. They often include distance markers (in minutes) to the destination.
- Destination Gateway: These signs could be used at entrances to key destinations, and have the potential to add additional information like park hours, activity icons, etc.
- Trail Signage: These small signs would be geared to hiker or biker and can provide information such as distance and direction, as well as information signs.
- Regional Gateway: This sign for the Mount Rogers region is more significant in size and stature than the previous gateways and would be located at the entry to the region or the National Recreation Area.

In addition to the community and destination hierarchy, the design of these signs also illustrate how the Basecamps of Mount Rogers designation can be brought in on directional and gateway signage. The overall design includes local stone, as well as reclaimed wood paneling, similar to the gateway signage at the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center and Marketplace.



Coordinated wayfinding typology concepts

Finally, the images below illustrate how the Mount Rogers brand can be incorporated into existing wayfinding in Bristol and Wytheville.



Concepts for incorporating Mount Rogers regional brand into existing signage.

Wayfinding Destinations, Ranking and Sign Schedule

Based on stipulations in the MUTCD, proposed wayfinding concepts should first determine the public destinations that would be included in the system. In a previous section of this Outdoor Asset Analysis & Development Plan a list of the outdoor recreation and associated destinations was established. A comprehensive wayfinding system would incorporate signage for public destinations such as downtowns districts, recreational assets, tourist destinations, etc. Private and for-profit businesses (such as a hotel or brewery) are not eligible for inclusion in a local wayfinding system. These uses however could be included Tourism Oriented Destination Signs (TODS) often seen near interstate interchanges and along highways.

Destination Ranking

Once the eligible destinations have been identified, they should be ranked into two or three separate tiers of importance. These tiers are based on local or regional significance, seasonality, accessibility, parking availability, etc. This further help refine how to structure a sign schedule for implementation. Higher ranked destinations should be on directional trailblazers located at prominent decision points. Lower tiered destinations should be included on relevant signs where panel space permits. Destination ranking is important to determine which locations will be included on a sign, particularly since a vehicular trailblazer is limited to just three locations.

Route Mapping

The next step will be to identify the primary and secondary routes people travel, ultimately determining where signs will be located. VDOT traffic figures as well as local understanding of traffic patterns should be used to identify primary traffic routes. These routes will be the core of the wayfinding plan as they will establish the key decision points for motorists. Routes are often classified as primary, circulator, or destination. Primary Routes are those that bring most of the traffic into the community. There are often more Circulator Routes as they connect the primary routes to the more destination-dense areas of the community. Destination Routes are those roads that connect to destinations that aren't located directly on a primary or circulatory route.

To be considered for inclusion into a community wayfinding system, a destination should conform to these categories:

- Recreational destinations including boating access, campgrounds, hiking/biking trails and routes, equestrian facilities, golf courses, National/State/Regional Parks and Forests, Parks and Recreation facilities, etc.
- Character districts such as downtowns or historic districts
- Cultural and institutional such as museums, theaters, libraries, government buildings, colleges, hospitals
- Architectural or Historic Significance
- Commercial destinations such as Farmers Markets, industrial parks, shopping districts
- Transportation destinations including parking areas, airports, historic corridors, etc.
- Visitor services such as visitor information centers.

It is very important to note that not all of destinations would be represented on directional signage. Many destinations may require a gateway entry sign (historic districts) or monument signs (certain government buildings). Others may be incorporated into visitor mapping, kiosks and brochures. Some destinations (libraries, visitors centers, hospitals, airports) would be included by using standard icon signage attached to the wayfinding sign.

Sign Locations

After destinations have been identified, ranked and a route network has been determined, sign locations can be assigned to key decision points. These decision points are determined by combining the route map with the destination map. Any intersection where a decision must be made or a motorist needs to be reassured of their direction should be considered for a sign.

Sign Schedule

The final step in creating a wayfinding plan is to populate a sign schedule. This usually occurs as a spreadsheet with all of the signs, location information and content. From the earliest phases of the plan, this spreadsheet would provide a constant overview of all signage in the system and will be a primary tool for implementation. Each sign should be numbered, classified by type (gateway, high speed trailblazer, low speed trailblazer, etc), list all destination content, and arrow direction. Their approximate physical location would also be listed as well as any relevant notes about the specific sign type.

Sign Specifications

- No more than 3 destinations per sign
- 6" capital letters for speed limits above 25mph (MUTCD 2D.06:03)
- 4" capital letters for seed limits 25mph and under (MUTCD 2D.06:03)
- Panel height will vary based on number of destinations, directional changes.
- The base of the sign should be no less than 7' from the ground level. (MUTCD 2A.18:05)
- Breakaway posts and decorative post features should be constructed of MUTCD-specific, VDOT-approved materials including decorative slip jacket, if used
- MUTCD Standards for vehicular directional signage requires destinations be listed in order of direction first - straight, left, right
- Destinations sharing the same directional arrows should be listed from top to bottom in order of distance from the sign locations (MUTCD 2D.37)
- It is important to note that shades of red, yellow, orange, purple, fluorescent yellow-green or pink may not be used as vehicular sign backgrounds, as these colors may resemble regulatory signage and may confuse and endanger motorists. (MUTCD 2D.50:18)

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation would include everything from planning, to cost estimates, phasing, permitting, and finally, fabrication and installation. The sign concepts and planning guidance above are intended to be a platform for a larger Mount Rogers system to be implemented over time. Implementation recommendations below focus on planning and partnerships, and are listed in order of priority.

This wayfinding assessment done as part of the Mount Rogers plan and lays the foundation for a larger, focused collaborative wayfinding program for the region. Key implementation steps include:

- Form a Wayfinding Technical Committee to lead the regional collaboration between communities, destinations and partners, as well as managing the implementation of the system. It should include representatives from key destinations, localities, and VDOT. It should be a small implementation committee that has an understanding of mapping, technical knowledge, and sign standards.
- Conduct the inventory of signs. Establish a simple inventory of existing wayfinding signage (directional, gateways, brown destinations signs, etc.). This can help determine signs that need to be replaced, removed, or redesigned. This photographic inventory can be geocoded and mapped.
- Map and rank destinations. The wayfinding technical committee should complete the inventory of qualifying destinations using the asset inventory created in this plan. The destinations should be qualified based on the guidance of this report, and then ranked to determine which destinations will be signed. This will serve as the basis for the sign schedule.
- Establish Travel Routes on the planning map identifying Primary, Circulator, and Destination routes to the qualifying destinations.
- Identify Locations for New Signage. Using guidance from this wayfinding assessment, identify sigh locations for wayfinding within the Mount Rogers region. Signs need to be located per MUTCD as well as local, state, and manufacturing recommendations.
- Create a Sign Schedule in spreadsheet format that provides location, content, arrows, etc of each new sign, including signs that could potentially be removed or consolidated based on new signage.
    - Schedule will be based on location of destination, primary routes, and circulation patterns, and can be determined based on system design, placement criteria, such as proximity from intersections, existing access points, etc.
    - Sign schedule would include high and low speed trailblazers, gateway signage, specialty and trail signage that was conceptually designed in this plan.
    - All sign locations, designs, permitting and installation will require approval and coordination with VDOT.
- Share Final Proposed Signage with municipalities and destination partners to determine localized design, partnership opportunities, management, and cost sharing.
- Establish Cost Estimates and Phasing Strategy for the implementation of the sign system. Depending on the complexity of the sign designs, individual wayfinding directional signs can range in cost from $2,500 to over $8,000. Therefore, comprehensive wayfinding programs are typically implemented across numerous budget years. Upon the determination of sign locations and creation of a sign schedule:

  - Estimate costs of the total wayfinding system based on total number of signs, sign type, and project cost per sign.
  - Identify potential local and outside funding streams for wayfinding implementation including planning, design, fabrication, installation, and maintenance

- Create an Implementation Work Plan for fabrication and implementation of the signage system. Engage a vendor to make specific material and location recommendations. This vendor would verify that all engineering drawings meet local, state, and federal guidelines and secure permits from VDOT for each sign location.
  - Implementation would include the adoption of a plan, coordination with VDOT, approval of management/maintenance policy, preparation of bid packages, RFQ/RFP, permitting, fabrication and installation.
  - Depending on sign locations, jurisdictions, and phasing, intergovernmental agreements between the counties, towns, and city within the region may be necessary.
  - Final permitting, fabrication and installation must be approved by VDOT based on MUTCD standards.
- Manufacture and Install Signage based on MUTCD and VDOT standards, including required permitting.

The complexities due to the size of the region, multiple jurisdictions, independent destinations, post implementation management, etc will make a regional wayfinding program a challenge. It is therefore critical that the Wayfinding Technical Committee take the lead in a top-down collaborative process and implementation strategy. This plan creates a foundation for a region-wide wayfinding strategy, and the report lays out the steps to take moving forward to create a collaborative system.

CASE STUDY:
Yadkin Valley





DESCRIPTION

In 2012, the Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor Partnership rolled out a regional wayfinding and branding system for its 129-mile corridor that encompasses four counties (Surry, Wilkes, Yadkin and parts of Caldwell County) in Northwestern North Carolina. The Partnership is a coalition of local and state government agencies, tourism agencies, and regional businesses and destinations. The comprehensive wayfinding program promotes Yadkin Valley as a tourism destination, highlighting its recreational opportunities, cultural heritage, wineries and other destinations. The wayfinding program includes a regional identity, logos, coordinated signage, information kiosks, banners, printed materials and digital applications including a website and mobile app.

IMPLEMENTATION & FUNDING

Funding for the Yadkin Valley Heritage Corridor Partnership includes grants from the Golden Leaf Foundation and from the N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, as well as contributions from participating counties. Federal Highway Administration grants were awarded in two counties to implement the wayfinding program.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Implementation depended upon available funding and resources in communities, and therefore the program was not all rolled out at once.

OUTCOMES

The effort resulted in a coordinated regional brand and wayfinding system that promotes Yadkin Valley as a tourism destination.

https://goyadkinvalley.com/; https://yadkinchamber.org/

Strategic Area Implementation Board

Product Organization and Tracking

Strategies	Actions	Priority	Timeframe	Partners	Progress
Product Organization and Tracking	Maintain the Asset Inventory as a living, interactive tool for tourism professionals and visitors	High	Ongoing		
	Identify lead partner to coordinate updates	High	2022	FSWVA*	
	Identify most-accessible hosting platform	High	2022	TOAC, FSWVA	
	Launch the inventory as an interactive web-based tool	High	2022-2023	TOAC	
	Share the asset inventory to existing convenings	High	2023	TOAC, County, VTC, FSWVA, CoC	
	Collaborate with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (VDCR) in their Virginia Outdoors Plan Mapper.	Med	2023-2025	County Tourism, TOAC	
	Maintain and update a list of outdoor-tourism-related developable projects, RFPs, etc., including status of projects, project material (I.e. details of Salt Trail work and progress)	High	2023-2024	MRRR, MRPDC	
	Foster a culture of continuous data monitoring, tracking, evaluating, assessing, and celebrating progress.	High	Ongoing	FSWVA	
	Invite businesses to share customer information	High	2022-2023	Chambers, SBDC	
	Pilot zip code survey	High	2023	Outfitters, LGs	
	Design and implement a visitor intercept survey for at least one key event or attraction annually	High	2023	County Tourism	
	Present the collaborative vision	Med	Ongoing	TOAC, FSWVA	
	Identify missing partners	High	2022	TOAC, FSWVA	
	Host a recurrent regional celebratory event	Med	2024	TOAC, Freinds of	
	Advance the development of experience-based itineraries	High	Ongoing		
	Develop college-level studio courses	Med	2023-2024	Colleges, SBDC	
	Host itinerary workshops	High	2023	TOAC, Colleges	
	Regular “van tours”	Med	2022-2024	County	

Business and Economic Development

Strategies	Actions	Priority	Timeframe	Partners	Progress
Business and Economic Development	Support and grow the outdoor and hospitality industry workforce	Med		VTC, CoC, SBDC	
	Continue to coordinate Hospitality Training of existing workforce with VTC.	Med	2023	VTC, Businesses, CoC	
	Continue to incorporate outdoor recreation curriculum into community colleges.	Low	2024	TOAC, CoC, LGs	
	Encourage the continued training, certification, and promotion of area guides. Inventory existing guide services to understand safety protocols?	Med	2023-2025	County tourism, EDAs/IDAs	
	Understand, maintain, and advance sites and buildings	High	Ongoing	EDAs/IDAs, VA Main St. (& chapters), MRRP	
	Maintain and enhance an interactive inventory of developable buildings	High	2023/2024	Opp Appalachia	
	Identify, highlight, and promote current meeting facilities and event spaces.	Med	2023-	LGs	
	Enhance existing lodging opportunities targeting the outdoor enthusiast	High	2023	CoC, TOAC, EDAs/IDAs	
	Promote business retention and expansion	Med	Ongoing	EDAs/IDAs, MRRP	
	Create a formalized recruitment team to target businesses across the region	Med	2024	EDAs/IDAs*	
	Target outdoor businesses and businesses that complement the experience	High	2023/2024	EDAs/IDAs*, CC, SBDC, MRRP	
	Foster entrepreneurship	High	Ongoing		
	Engage with the business and start-up community to identify growth-potential businesses in the region and better understand their needs	High	2022	EDAs/IDAs, Businesses	
	Consider entrepreneur/start-up competitions, potential for incubator, or other entrepreneur support to identify up-and-coming entrepreneurs in the region (approach local businesses such as a local brewery or outdoor outfitter to partner)	Med	2023	Opportunity SWVA, Opp Appalachia, EDAs/IDAs, SBDC	

Partnerships

Strategies	Actions	Priority	Timeframe	Partners	Progress
Partnerships	Build capacity and share knowledge via informal associations and citizen committees	High		FSWVA	
	Convene former Steering Committee members, FSWVA, and other interested relevant	High	2022	FSWVA, TOAC	
	Encourage adoption of new tools among existing groups	Med	2023	FSWVA*	
	Create a formal marketing team/promotions committee to collectively market the study area	High	2022-2023	County tourism, EDAs/IDAs	
	Foster an informal association of private businesses to network and market	Med	2023	CC, EDAs/IDAs	
	Create a similar informal association of regional lodging establishments	Med	2023-2024	VTC, County Tourism	
	Create a network of Mount Rogers trail organizations, invite organizations to annual convening event	Med	2023/2024	County Tourism, TOAC, MRPDC	
	Foster the creation and utilization of shared spaces	Med	2024/2025		
	Identify and develop location to create shared space for outdoor business startups	Low	2026	EDAs/IDAs	
	Gauge interest in incubator or start-up hubs	Med	2024-2025	EDAs/IDAs, SBDC	
	Consider a site inventory for a start-up hub	Med	2025	EDAs/IDAs	
	Coordinate and partner to seek funding for planning and marketing projects	High	2023	EDAs/IDAs, CC, TOAC	
	Communication with MRPDC	High	2022		
	Identify and submit joint proposals for funding	Med	2024/2025	EDAs/IDAs*, CC	
	Regional and national adventure groups	Med	2024	County Tourism	

Marketing

Strategies	Actions	Priority	Timeframe	Partners	Progress
Marketing	The Mount Rogers Experience – Messaging for Region	High	Ongoing	FSWVA, TOAC, LGs, County Tourism	
	Coordinating overall REGIONAL message with communities, businesses, destinations	High	Ongoing	FSWVA, TOAC, LGs, County Tourism	
	Sharing plan and strategies with lead and other partner agencies	High	Ongoing	FSWVA, TOAC, LGs, County Tourism	
	Basecamps of Mount Rogers Initiative	High	2022	LGs, FSWVA, MRPDC	
	Implementing Base Camps initiative in planning, marketing, community signage, etc.	High	2022	LGs, FSWVA,	
	Field Guide to Mount Rogers Brochure	Med	2023	County Tourism, FSWVA, VTC	
	Merchandising	Med	2022	LGs, FSWVA	
	Open-sourced merchandising effort where Friends and Communities manage usage of Mt Rogers and Basecamps marketing in local businesses and destinations	Med	2022	LGs, FSWVA	
	Mount Rogers Triathlon regional	Med	2023-2024	LGs, County	
	Rotating regional event led by county tourism with three different participating communities per year	Med	2023-2024	LGs, County	
	Mount Rogers Pathfinder regional ambassador initiative	Low	2024	FSWVA, Local	
	Coordinated Positioning of the Mount Rogers Experience	High	Ongoing	LGs, County Tourism, TOAC	
	Mount Rogers Outpost non-traditional lodging initiative	Med	2025	FSWVA,	
	Coordinated Social Media hashtags for Mount Rogers	High	Ongoing	TOAC, Local	
	Advertising	Med	2022 -	LGs, FSWVA	
	North Carolina outdoor advertising	Med	2025 -	LGs, County	
	Consider future designation as National Park	Low	2027	FSWVA, TOAC,	

Wayfinding

Strategies	Actions	Priority	Timeframe	Partners	Progress
Wayfinding	Form wayfinding technical committee (WTC)	High	2022	FSWVA, TOAC, LGs, County Tourism	
	WTC would utilize local government planning, transportation & GIS expertise to establish plan, leading to localized implementation when plan is complete	High	2022	FSWVA, TOAC, LGs, County Tourism	
	Conduct sign inventory	Med	2023	FSWVA, TOAC, LGs, County Tourism	
	Documenting existing directional signage			LGs, FSWVA, MRPDC	
	Map and rank destinations that would be included in a system	Med	2024	LGs, FSWVA,	
	Establish travel routes	Med	2024	County Tourism, FSWVA, VTC	
	Create sign schedule and plan that meets MUTCD and VDOT standards of design, fabrication, location, etc.	Med	2024	LGs, FSWVA	
	Share signage plan with partners and funding agencies	High	2024	LGs, FSWVA	
	Establish cost estimates and phasing strategy	Varies	2025	LGs, County	
	Local capacity to fund, implement, and install signage will vary by community			LGs, County	
	Create implementation work plan		2025	FSWVA, Local	
	Manufacture and install signage	Varies	2025	LGs, County Tourism, TOAC	

Abbreviation Key	
CoC	Chambers of Commerce
FSWVA	Friends of Southwest Virginia
WTC	Wayfinding Technical Committee
MRPDC	Mount Rogers Planning District Commission
MRRP	Mount Rogers Regional Partnership
LGs	Local Governments
EDAs/IDAs	Local Economic Development Authorities/ Industrial Development Authorities
SBDC	Blue Ridge Crossroads Small Business Development Center
USFS	U.S. Forestry Service
NPS	U.S. National Park Service
VTC	Virginia Tourism Corporation
TOAC	Tourism and Outdoor recreation Action Coalition

APPENDICES

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Todd Wolford, Downtown Wytheville

Survey Tools and Interview Guides

Interviews:

Town and County Assets and Trends

1. If you were to describe your county/town's top tourism assets, what would they be? What are your specifically "outdoor tourism assets"?

2. In the last five years, what activities related to outdoor tourism have occurred in your county/town? [For instance, development of new outdoor attractions, any general tourism businesses opening, or beautification activities of parks?]

3. Are there plans for any future development in your county/town?

4. If you were to invest in outdoor tourism assets in the coming five years, what would be your county/town's three greatest priorities?

5. When thinking about the Mount Rogers regions, what would you say are the top five greatest outdoor assets of the region?

6. Do they have any updated tourism data?

Project Selection Criteria

Local capacity: an organization's or department's potential to arrange their human, financial and other resources to effect positive change in the communities and clients they serve.

Local sparkplug: an individual in the community who is capable of spearheading a project; including having the passion and drive to see a project through implementation.

Regional cluster expander: a project that extends beyond a single location to connect multiple counties, towns, organizations, departments or businesses within the Mount Rogers region.

Tourism magnet: a project that appeals and attracts visitors to the area.

Local benefit: a project that gives an advantage or profit to the community where it is located (ex. employment (local labor) and business opportunities (provision of goods and services), etc.)

Unique attraction: a project that is the only one of its kind; unlike anything else.

Fundable grants/tax credits: a project that qualifies for funding opportunities and/or tax credits that can help support its success and fruition.

Economic impact: a project that produces a positive ROI and leads to an increase in wealth/ reduction in poverty, improved standards of living, health, education and infrastructure and technology.

Additional Data

This report is a culmination of work by many different groups interested in the development of outdoor recreation assets in the region for tourism and public health purposes. Workshops, businesses surveys, and other stakeholder's engagement helped to refine this plan and begin building the region's implementation capacity. Specifically, for each of these strategic areas, the following has been done:

Product Organization & Tracking: The research team has updated an inventory of outdoor assets and will work with the Steering Committee to identify where this inventory will be stored and how it will be updated. A workshop in November was conducted to train and begin implementation of data gathering activities that will support the maintenance of an up-to-date outdoor asset inventory and help the region in understanding the effects of its outdoor assets.

Business Development: A business survey was created to vet and prioritize strategies meant to support outdoor tourism development.
Target Marketing: A workshop was held in September to review, prioritize, and begin implementation of target marketing strategies.

Partnerships: During this fall, stakeholders were engaged to gauge interest in forming on-going groups to support regional collaboration.

Infrastructure Development: October's kick-off meeting solicited feedback on the list of outdoor sites/infrastructure with potential for development. A later workshop was used to review, prioritize and brainstorm possible sites for development.

Strengths, Needs, Opportunities and Challenges

The original 2017 outdoor economic framework collected input from various stakeholders to identify the strengths, needs, opportunities, and challenges in the Mount Rogers region. Destination representatives, regional tourism and economic development officials, gateway community leadership, local businesses, and the Stronger Economies Together (SET) tourism cluster committee participated. Stakeholders discussed business development and opportunities for outdoor-recreation-based economic development within the study area. Participants also discussed methods to target and grow the user market and how to position the region as a recreation destination. Researchers updated the findings from the previous framework by reviewing 24 town, county, and regional plans and interviewing 20 town, county, and regional officials. Interviewees included town managers, county administrators, tourism and economic development directors, and park officials.

Since 2017, regional tourism has changed in Mt. Rogers and reinforced certain priorities. Multiple town revitalization efforts, new businesses, and new cultural and heritage festivals have altered the region's tourism offerings and bolstered its desirability as a high-quality location with a low cost of living. Despite new and improved tourism assets and infrastructure, the region still needs greater communication and connectivity amongst its localities and assets. Gaps in collaboration amongst localities and organizations in the region present a barrier to creating a comprehensive and effective effort for increasing tourism in the region. The disparities in visitation and usage between various outdoor activities and attractions is one manifestation of this lack of regional cohesion. Strategies such as wayfinding serve as opportunities to improve this cohesion. The region also requires additional infrastructure and programmatic funding to support tourism-related activities, businesses, and initiatives that preserve the region's natural beauty. A synopsis of the stakeholder input, consultant observations, and findings from local planning documents is shown below:

Strengths:

- Mount Rogers provides visitors with unique outdoor experiences that are tied to the culture and history of the region.
- Regional initiatives including Friends of Southwest Virginia, the Crooked Road Trail, Play Outside in Southwest Virginia, the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center and Market Place, and Round the Mountain Artisan Network have focused on bringing in visitors to experience the heritage and culture of Southwest Virginia. In recent years, these entities have also increased their focus on outdoors and linking cultural assets with outdoor tourism.

- The area enjoys an excellent location:
  - Charlotte, Roanoke, Knoxville, Tri-Cities, and Asheville are located within a two-hour drivetime.
  - Interstates 77 (north-south) and 81 (east-west) cut through the Mount Rogers region and connect many of the unique towns and tourism assets.
  - Several major metropolitan areas including Atlanta, Raleigh, Columbia, Richmond, and Nashville are just a day's drive away.
- Southwest Virginia has made strides to improve infrastructure, especially regarding high-speed internet, broadband, and access to natural gas. Southwest Virginia has made strides to improve infrastructure, especially regarding high-speed internet, broadband, and access to natural gas. These improvements will make the entire region desirable for visitors and new residents and entrepreneurs. With respect to tourism infrastructure, the region has developed or is developing :
  - Grayson Visitor's Center
  - Town of Independence Farmer's Market and Stage Area—Town of Independence
  - Peach Bottom Falls Park—Grayson County
  - Splash Pad at Steele Creek Park—Bristol
  - Amphitheater renovations—Bristol
  - Re-development of Bristol Train Station—Bristol
  - Hungry Mother Zipline—Smyth County
  - Appalachian Trail Community Program—Troutville, Abingdon, Marion/Smyth County, Damascus, Bland County
  - Appalachian Trail Center—Damascus
  - Crystal Springs Recreation Area—Wytheville, Wythe County
  - Crystal Spring Greenway connectivity to High Road Point
  - Campground at Baron Spring—Wythe County
  - Agriculture Center—Wytheville
  - Urban Pathway, which connects Creeper Trail to Muster Grounds—Abingdon
  - New sports complex—Abingdon
  - Opening of Eupepsia Spa—Bland County
  - Revitalization of the Wolf Creek Indian Village—Bland County
  - Country Store with Grayson Highlands hiker shuttle service—Troutdale
  - Blue Ridge Discovery Center—Smyth County
  - New Back of the Dragon Welcome Center—Tazewell

Many areas in the region have been experiencing an increase in establishments such as breweries and wineries, which could be major assets to entice visitors to stop in town.

There is a wide variety of dining opportunities for visitors and residents in the region. Specifically, Abingdon has been voted the Best Small-Town Food Scene for 2019 and 2020.

Communities in Mount Rogers each have their own unique identity and contribution to the region including trails, history, and music. For this study, we paid particular attention to: Abingdon, Chilhowie, Damascus, Glade Spring, Independence, Marion, Rural Retreat, Saltville, Troutdale, and Wytheville.

Communities are revitalizing their downtowns. Each community interviewed has a vision and plan for a vibrant downtown.

There are a variety of special events that complement the unique character and outdoor assets of the region's communities. These include the Bristol Rhythm & Roots Festival, the Old Fiddler's' Convention, the Virginia Highlands Festival, the Cumberplunge, and many other seasonal and holiday events.

Localities within the Mt. Rogers region have been gaining recognition for their recreational and competitive biking opportunities. For instance, Abingdon is currently exploring potential partnerships with the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA).

The region, its communities, outdoor destinations, and private businesses benefit from great partners such as the DHCD, VTC, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and Friends of Southwest Virginia that are focused on improving the region.

• The region offers a range of recreational and tourist activities that appeal to families as well as adult visitors. For example, Smyth County, Tazewell, and the Back of the Dragon trail are destinations for motorcyclists. Meanwhile, Wolf Creek Indian Village in Bland County and White Blaze Outdoors excursions in Abingdon are examples of more family-friendly destinations and activities.

• Partners provide various business support and development resources including:

  - Town of Marion "Pop Up Marion" program
  - Mount Rogers PDC Business Planning contest
  - Support from Opportunity SWVA and the Entrepreneurial Business Challenges
  - People Incorporated, Chambers of Commerce, etc.
  - Blue Ridge Crossroads Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and Virginia Highlands SBDC.

- There are higher education institutions in the Mount Rogers region including Emory & Henry College, Virginia Highlands Community College, the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center and Wytheville Community College. The region is also in proximity to institutions such as Virginia Tech, Radford University, University of Virginia's College at Wise, Norton Community Hospital, and Mountain View Regional Hospital. These institutions provide the area with access to a talent pool and access to younger population market segments for promotion of recreational opportunities.
- The region enjoys a high quality of life for a low cost of living.

Needs:

- Increase the number of lodging facilities including improved variety, quality, and location.
- Abingdon, Damascus, Marion, and Wytheville have clusters and variety of lodging products, but the remainder of the region has limited supply. There is a need for greater quantity and quality of lodging in communities including Independence, Saltville, Bland County, and Troutdale.
- Increase the number and size of meeting spaces for events, retreats, meetings, and gatherings.
- Hire tour guides who understand the regional offerings, both general and specialized.
- Better connectivity with creative economy (music, art) and outdoor tourism assets.
- Businesses that cater to outdoor recreation activities such as equipment, outfitters, etc.:
    - Horseback riding support services
    - Mountain biking
    - Hiking
    - Canoeing, kayaking, and other water sports
    - Hire a regional event coordinator who can be the knowledge base for area events, but also coordinate efforts between destinations and communities.
- Increase regional coordination and collaboration efforts:
    - Build a regional understanding of recreational assets and the strong connection between recreation and culture as it relates to business economy.
    - Create a method of tracking users across the region with the ability to share collective data.
    - Connect existing businesses within the region to establish that regional “critical mass” of business.
    - Better utilize existing branding and marketing resources from Friends of SWVA and Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation.
    - Increase funding and development of cohesive marketing efforts for existing outdoor and quality of life assets
- Improve wayfinding in the area.
- Replace signs placed beyond the “decision point” for motorists.
- Make community and recreational destination signage consistent.
- Replace weathered trail signage.
- Improve access to seed money/initial operating funding for businesses. Businesses must be able to stay afloat for three years before they are established.
- Standardize hospitality training and workforce development specifically to support outdoor recreation business and tourism.
- Increase awareness and understanding among recreation-based businesses and other tourism businesses that their market also includes service to residents

Opportunities:

- Independence, Hillsville, the City of Galax, and other towns along the VA-NC border can serve as gateways to Mount Rogers from the Charlotte metro area and the rest of North Carolina.
- Pool marketing resources to promote the region and private businesses. This is a common practice with merchants' associations and Chambers of Commerce and could be applied to Mount Rogers businesses.
- Several creative business opportunities may exist outside of traditional downtown business:
  - Survival training
  - Agritourism and nature-based tourism – "Pick your own" establishments, foraging, bird watching, photography, geology and ecology education, etc.
  - Artisan establishments
- Connect projects, new start-up businesses, and other activities to the regional identity.
- Mirror Marion's award-winning Pop-Up business program in other gateway communities.
- Potential to cooperatively package experiences between destinations and communities.
- Connecting the Salt Trail loop to downtown Glade Spring will not only connect Saltville to Glade, but also open cooperative marketing and itinerary development between Damascus, Glade, and Saltville.
- There are opportunities to expand other trails in the region including extensions in Washington County, expansion of Laurel Mountain Trail, and growth of the biking network in Bristol.
- More entrepreneurial development curriculum in high schools and enhanced at local community colleges.
- Offer offseason events, including wintertime adventure races and other activities.
- Develop seasonal adventure competitions such as biathlons and ultramarathons, long distance bike races, and trail running.
- Add Crooked Road-style digital kiosks to stores or at destinations throughout region. These kiosks could interpret and promote the outdoor resources within the region.
- Enhance park offerings through additional land acquisitions
- Consider Pitch Lodging Incubation and the creation of a strategy to grow popup lodging solutions.
- Partner with "Venture-UP" Entrepreneurial Challenge, or a similar effort, to implement an outdoor entrepreneur challenge.
- Establish tourism business development zones in localities within the region as allowed by state statutes, offering business tax credits and deductions to tourism-related and outdoor businesses.
- Establish a Communication Council to identify and implement regional initiatives.
- Develop primary and secondary themes for visitor experience.
- The potential legalization of marijuana presents market opportunities.
- Create a regional event calendar.
- Improve sports fields and attract youth athletic tournaments.
- Harness biking trends momentum for investment in the promotion of gravel biking. The growth of gravel biking in Norton, VA and the success of the "Gravelachia" event are examples of this.



Figure 6: Mural in Downtown Chilhowie

Challenges

Geography and infrastructure challenges

- The topography of the region creates physical separations among Mount Rogers communities, which impacts their access to different types of opportunities.
- Lack of adequate infrastructure such as water, sewer, access to internet, gas, etc. throughout the region.
- Preservation of natural resources. There are several threats to the region's natural resources including mass deforestation for Christmas tree production.
- Experiences are not dispersed well throughout the region. Usage exceeds capacity for some natural attractions while others are underutilized.

Collaboration challenges

- There is a lack of knowledge between destinations and business owners of other regional offerings such as events, businesses, destinations, etc. This is a fairly common issue in most communities, made more complex due to the size of the study area.
- Lack of coordination among private businesses, local organizations, and local governments, which prevents access to important resources.
- Outdoor recreation clustering has been unintentional and spontaneous, often resulting in unconnected developments driven by grant dollars. Additionally, the unexpected transition from traditional regional industries to emerging industries with loss of traditional jobs has led to increases in unemployment and negative impacts on people's sense of community.

Market Challenges

- There is competition from similar recreational opportunities available in North Carolina and other surrounding areas.
- The rural area has a limited market, making it difficult to gain investment in outdoor and tourism focused businesses.
- Lack of people to sustain businesses. There is a lack of critical mass of existing businesses as well as a general lack of connectivity between them.
- In some areas, maintenance of "small town" feel competes with efforts to attract and retain larger big-brand or chain businesses.

Seasonality of businesses

- The lack of off-season customer traffic creates a challenge for entrepreneurs to have stable year-round income.
- Many business owners and operators enjoy the seasonality of business and leave the region for the winter. These owners have no intention of remaining open in winter.
- There is a lack of indoor venues for activity during the winter months. There are limited poor-weather options for in-season gatherings and events.
- Businesses mentioned a lack of personal funding and grant resources to devote to marketing. This is a common issue in any small town or rural setting.
- Prevalence of drug use and addiction in the region.
- Aging population and the migration of younger generations out of the region.
- The increase in travel expenditures reflects growth in tourism opportunities. Improving commercial and retail opportunities for local county residents and out-of-town visitors would allow the counties to keep those expenditures within the County.

Market Trends

This section provides an overview of national outdoor tourism trends including recent impacts of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. It examines regional market trends and consumer segments to better understand how outdoor tourism trends relate to the regional demand for outdoor tourism by tourists and residents.

National Outdoor Tourism Trends

National trends can help us understand opportunities to grow outdoor recreation uses and businesses in the future. Local businesses can adjust their merchandising based on these trends as well as local observation. In 2019, just over half of Americans ages 6 and older participated in outdoor recreation at least once, the highest participation rate in five years (Outdoor Participation Report, 2020). This trend grew during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the increased popularity of outdoor activities due to social distancing. Additionally, participation rates for adult households with children (57%) were much higher than participation rates for adults without children (44%). Family and youth participants continued to drive participation growth, playing a critical role in the success of the outdoor industry (Outdoor Participation Report, 2020). The following data comes from the most recent "Federal Outdoor Recreation Trends: Effects on Economic Opportunities" report and shows changes in specific outdoor recreation activity, projected through the year 2030. This data does not include COVID-19 pandemic impacts.

Outdoor recreation activity groups & associated activity composites w/ projected change in visitor days			
Activity Group	Modeled Activity Composite	Activities Included in Modeled Activity Composite	Projected Change in Visitor Days 2008-2030
Visiting Developed Sites			
Developed site use		Family gathering; picnicking; developed camping	26.6%
Visiting interpretive sites		Visiting nature centers, zoos, historic sites, and prehistoric sites	34.1%
Viewing & Photographing Nature			
Birding		View or photograph birds	32.5%
Viewing		View/ photograph natural scenery, flowers, birds, other wildlife; gather mushrooms, berries, etc.	23.9%
Backcountry Activities			
Challenge activities		Caving; mountain climbing; rock climbing	30.5%
Day hiking		Day hiking	31.7%
Equestrian		Horseback riding on trails	33.5%
Visiting primitive areas		Backpacking; primitive camping; visiting wilderness	22.6%
Motorized Activities			
Motorized off-road use		Off-road driving	17.3%
Motorized water use		Motorboating; waterskiing; personal watercraft use	12.1%
Hunting and Fishing			
Hunting		Big game; small game; migratory birds	39.5%
Fishing		Anadromous; coldwater; warmwater; saltwater	28.6%
Non-motorized Water Activities			
Swimming		Swimming in lakes, streams; snorkeling; surfing; scuba diving; visit a beach; visit waterside besides beach; windsurfing	31.7%
Floating		Canoeing; kayaking; rafting	22.1%

Figure 15: National Outdoor Recreation Trends
This data is adapted from "Federal Outdoor Recreation Trends: Effects on Economic Opportunities" National Center for Natural Resources Economic Research (NCNRER) NCNRER Working Paper Number 1 – October

The 2020 Outdoor Foundation Participation Report states that the most popular outdoor activities by participation rate include leisurely and low impact activities.

Activity	Number of Participants	Percent of Participants
Running, Jogging, and Trail Running	61.0 million	20.2% of Americans
Freshwater, Saltwater, and Fly Fishing	50.2 million	16.6% of Americans
Hiking	49.7 million	16.4% of Americans
Road Biking, Mountain Biking, and BMX	48.9 million	16.1% of Americans
Car, Backyard, Backpacking and RV Camping	41.8 million	13.8% of Americans

Furthermore, according to the 2020 Outdoor Foundation Participation Report, the following activities have seen strong participation since 2016.

Activity	2016 Participation Rate	2019 Participation Rate
Bicycling (Road/Mountain/BMX)	15.5%	16.1%
Camping (Car/Backyard/Backpacking/RV)	13.7%	13.8%
Fishing (Fly/Salt/Fresh)	15.9%	16.6%
Hiking	14.2%	16.4%
Running, Jogging, and Trail Running	17.7%	20.2%

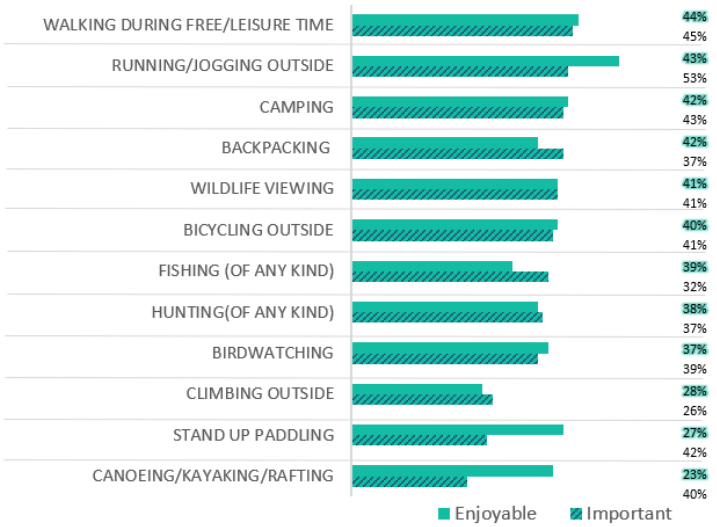
Figure 16: National Participation in select Outdoor Recreation activities.

The Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation's November 2020 report found that there were an estimated 17 million consumers who either began boating and/or fishing this past season or came back to the sport after previous lapses in activity. Approximately 57% of reactivated anglers are female. Hispanic anglers, new anglers, and boating participants increased by 15%.
The Outdoor Industry Association and Naxion Research Consulting commissioned a one-time special report to understand the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on current and future outdoor participation. People spent their free time during the pandemic based on what was available to do close to home and alone or with others in their household. Individuals who started an outdoor activity during the pandemic provided reasons such as desire to remain healthy, to exercise, and spend time outside of the house. More than 60% of those who started or resumed walking, bicycling, fishing, or running/jogging intend to continue once restrictions are lifted. Screen time has historically been a barrier to spending time outside, but the pandemic has created screen fatigue, which can be leveraged to get more people outdoors.
The pandemic has attracted more diverse outdoor participants, presenting an opportunity for long-term diversity among the outdoor participant base. Compared to those who participated in outdoor activities in 2019, new participants are more likely to be:

- female (58% in 2020 vs. 49% in 2019)
- younger (average age in 2020 is 45 vs. 54 in 2019)
- slightly more ethnically diverse (34% in 2020 vs. 29% in 2019)
- living in urban areas (36% in 2020 vs. 29% in 2019)
- in a lower income bracket (41% with income of $100K+ in 2020 vs. 46% with income of $100K+ in 2019).

Walking was the most reported new activity (The New Outdoor Participant, 2021). One-quarter of new participants report that they picked up running/jogging and/or bicycling. Birdwatching and fishing form a third tier of new or resumed activities.

New participants were said to value the following outdoor and non-outdoor activities during COVID.



(The New Outdoor Participant, 2021)

Respondents stated that as pandemic restrictions lift, helping make outdoor activities more social could help maintain higher levels of participation. In fact, about 40 percent of respondents took up new outdoor activities to spend time with others.

Regional Market Segments

The market segmentation study provides a better understanding of the makeup of the regional market. This study examines the size and characteristics of various social and population clusters based on their demographic groupings including age, gender, income, education, occupation, and ethnic group. Each cluster group has varying levels of demand for certain products and enjoys different recreational activities.

All data is generated from ESRI Tapestry groups.
Primary Trade Area Segmentation Observations

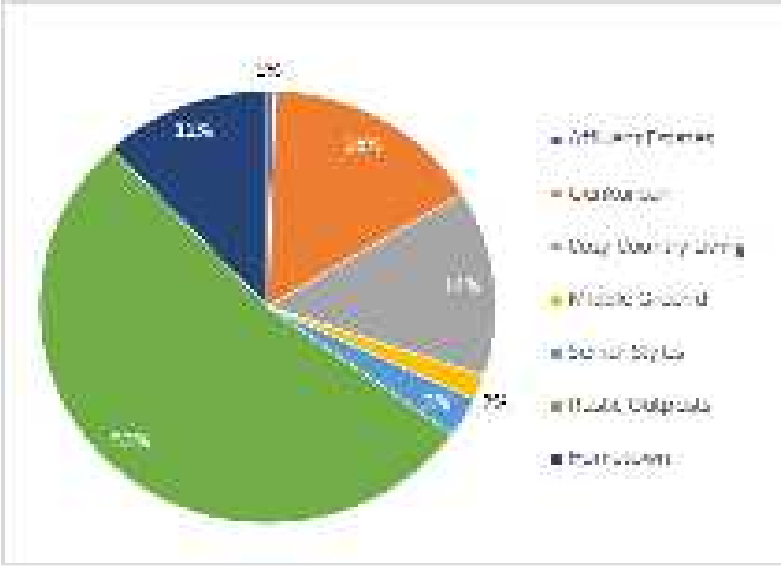


Figure 3: Study Area Life Stage Categories

The largest segments include “Rustic Outpost” (53%), “GenXurban” (16%), and “Cozy Country Living” (14%). These segments are generally older to middle-aged generations that are mindful of their spending.

“Rustic Outpost” is further characterized by having service-based jobs. They are more likely to work in manufacturing or agriculture. This group also greatly values the outdoors.

Residents fall into segments such as “Hometown” and “Senior Styles.” “Hometown” is a group comprised of young people that stayed close to home and are often part of a close-knit community. “Senior Styles” are elderly people that have retired and live on their own or only with their partner.

The region overall should strive for a mix of businesses that appeal to all these segments, rather than targeting just one. Still, in order to be successful year-round, individual businesses should keep in mind the prevalent segments that exist.

A detailed description of all segments that make up the Mount Rogers study area market can be found at ESRI Tapestry. The following information details the top four market segments in the region:

1. Rustic Outposts (53%)

- Country life with older families in older homes.
- Depend on manufacturing, retail, and healthcare, with pockets of mining and agricultural jobs.
- Low labor force participation in skilled and service occupations. Own affordable, older single-family or mobile homes; vehicle ownership is necessary.
- Residents live within their means, shop at discount stores, and maintain their own vehicles (bought used) and homes.
- Outdoor enthusiasts, who grow their own vegetables, love their pets, and enjoy hunting and fishing.
- Pay bills in person; use the yellow pages; read newspapers, magazines, and mail-order books.

2. GenXurban (16%)

- Gen X in middle age and composed of families with fewer kids and a mortgage.
- Second-largest Tapestry group, composed of Gen X married couples, and a growing population of retirees.
- About a fifth of residents are 65 or older; about a fourth of households have retirement income.
- Own older single-family homes in urban areas, with 1 or 2 vehicles.
- Live and work in the same county, creating shorter commute times.
- Invest wisely, well insured, comfortable banking online or in person.
- News enthusiasts (read a daily newspaper, watch news on TV, and go online for news).
- Enjoy reading, renting movies, playing board games and cards, doing crossword puzzles, going to museums and rock concerts, dining out, and walking for exercise.

3. Cozy Country Living (14%)

- Empty nesters in rural settings.
- Largest Tapestry group, almost half of households located in the Midwest.
- Homeowners with pets, residing in single-family dwellings in rural areas; almost 30% have 3 or more vehicles and, therefore, auto loans.
- Politically conservative and believe in the importance of buying American.
- Own domestic trucks, motorcycles, and ATVs/UTVs.
- Prefer to eat at home, shop at discount retail stores (especially Walmart), bank in person, and spend little time online.
- Own every tool and piece of equipment available to maintain their homes, vehicles, vegetable gardens, and lawns.
- Listen to country music; watch auto racing on TV; and enjoy outdoor activities, such as fishing, hunting, camping, boating, and bird watching.

4. Hometown (12%)

- Growing up and staying close to home; single householders.
- Close-knit urban communities of young singles (many with children).
- Owners of old, single-family houses, or renters in small multiunit buildings.
- Religion is the cornerstone of many of these communities.
- Visit discount stores and clip coupons.
- Purchase used vehicles to get to and from nearby jobs.
- A breakdown by locality is listed on the next page.

Table 1: Market Segmentation by Locality

	Bland	Carroll	Wythe	Smyth	Galax	Grayson	Washington	Bristol
Affluent Estates							1.80%	
GenXurban			15.80%	3.90%			30.20%	44.20%
Cozy Country Living		4.20%	27.10%	10.60%	25.10%	6.60%	19.60%	3.70%
Middle Ground			2.80%	2.50%	10.10%		2.40%	
Senior Styles			6%			3.80%	3%	9.40%
Rustic Outposts	100%	91.30%	41.50%	67.50%	31.70%	83.80%	35.50%	
Hometown		4.50%	6.80%	15.50%	33.20%	5.80%	7.60%	42.70%

Town and County Assets and Trends

Bland County

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Visit BLAND CO, VA

Market Data

- Population: 6,380
- Retail trade: $9.2 million GRP
- 82% of retail sales are from outside the county
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Preserve and improve nature and recreation assets
- Enhance environmental stewardship through ordinance enforcement
- Leverage vacant land in Planned Growth Districts for development
- _____

Business Development

- Rocky Gap shopping redevelopment
- _____

Assets

- Scenic roads and byways
- Jefferson National Forest
- Appalachian Trail (56 miles)
- Frederico Morini Signature Bicycle Trail System
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Carroll County

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Pick · Play · Stay
Carroll County Tourism

Market Data

- Population: 29,800
- Retail trade: $51.4 million GRP
- 80% of retail sales are from outside the county
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Agriculture preservation
- Agritourism
- _____

Business Development

- Complete Streets initiative to improve connectivity
- Natural gas lines in downtown areas
- Promotion of mixed-use developments
- _____

Assets

- Southwest Virginia Farmers Market
- Town of Hillsville Farmer's Market
- Carroll County Agricultural Fair
- Hillsville Gunshow and Flea Market
- Hillsville Courthouse Massacre play
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Grayson County

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 15,740
- Retail trade: $13.8 million GRP
- 71% of retail sales are from outside the county
- Agriculture is main economic driver
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Utilize existing historic, natural, and cultural resources
- Grayson County Visitors Center
- _____

Business Development

- Blue Ridge Crossroads Commerce Park (BRCEDA)
- Grayson County Industrial Park
- Wildwood Commerce Park
- _____

Assets

- The Arts Council of the Twin Cities
- Woven Mountain River Bends (part of Round the Mountain)
- Arts and Cultural Center of Grayson
- Blueridge Music Center
- Grayson Highlands State Park

Town and County Assets and Trends

Smyth County

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 40,770
- Retail trade: $60.4 million GRP
- 80% of retail sales are from outside the county
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Develop vacant land near interchange
- Diversifying retail to keep more money in the county
- _____

Business Development

- Unique downtown experience
- Seven Mile Ford: a general store, a restaurant, and farm machinery sales
- _____

Assets

- Hungry Mother State Park
- Downtown improvement in Saltville, Marion, and Chilhowie
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Washington County

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 54,070
- Retail trade: $173.3 million GRP
- 77% of retail sales are from outside the county
- Tourism spending: $110 million
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Economic development study and plan pending
- Oak Park and Highlands Business Park vacancies
- _____

Business Development

- Historic Meadowville Town Square
- _____

Assets

- Downtown
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Wythe County

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Wythe County TOURISM

Market Data

- Population: 28,840
- Retail trade: $116.5 million GRP
- 83% of retail sales are from outside the county
- 6.3% increase in travel expenditures
- Tourism spending: $127 million in 2012
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Capitalize on nature and recreation assets
- Revise ordinance enforcement to promote environmental sustainability
- Leverage vacant land in Planned Growth Districts for development
- _____

Business Development

- Rocky Gap shopping redevelopment
- _____

Assets

- Scenic roads and byways
- Jefferson National Forest
- Appalachian Trail (56 miles)
- Frederico Morini Signature Bicycle Trail System
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Abington

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- In 2018, lodging and meals taxes contributed between $3.8 and $4.0 million dollars annually
- 3.6% increase in tourism spending between 2017 and 2018
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Capitalize on nature and recreation assets
- Revise ordinance enforcement to promote environmental sustainability
- Leverage vacant land in Planned Growth Districts for development
- _____

Downtown Inventory

- Abingdon Main Street Alliance – Main St. USA
- Other main commercial areas:
  - East and Main Streets
  - Courthouse Hill
  - Abingdon's gateway entrance corridors at Porterfield Highway, and I-81 Exits 19, 17, and

Assets

- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

City of Bristol

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 16,910
- Retail trade: $84.6 million GRP
- 80% of retail sales are from outside the county
- Tourism spending: $110 million
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Extension of the Beaver Creek trail
- Connections between Downtown and Sugar Hollow Park
- Proposed Mendota Trail
- Corvette Trail and Greenway development
- Narrow retail gap with miscellaneous outdoor retail

Downtown Inventory

- Downtown is a 5-by-5 block neighborhood with a mix of restaurants, niche retailers, cultural attractions, and other services for attracting visitors and residents; Studio Brew brewery, Birthplace of Country Music Museum, Sessions Hotel, TriSummit Bank, WCYB, Cameo Theatre

Assets

- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Chilhowie

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 6,938
- Retail trade: $9.82 million GRP
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Ideal location along I-81
- Connect visitor center to downtown to promote connectivity
- Consider an alternate location for the Farmer's Market in central downtown and identify a venue for live music and the Apple Festival events

Downtown Inventory

- Two outdoor outfitters
- One mercantile/ice cream/sandwich shop
- Three independent restaurants
- Three fast-food restaurants
- Three gas and convenience stores
- Potential for recreation-based businesses in

Assets

- Smyth County Visitor Center (adjacent to downtown)
- Apple Festival
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Damascus

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 4,212
- Retail trade: $6.99 million in GRP
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Highest concentration of outdoor recreation businesses in the study area
- Grow access to outdoor recreation and associated businesses, given strategic location
- Recruit businesses that connect to active recreation lifestyles

Downtown Inventory

- Ten outdoor outfitters for Creeper Trail, AT, etc.
- Dining and shopping: brewery, fishing equipment, gunsmith, and various restaurants
- Wide variety of lodging: hostels, B&B, cabins, and a boutique hotel
- Six vacancies identified with potential for

Assets

- Strategic location along the Creeper Trail and Appalachian Trail
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

City of Galax

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 6,520
- Retail trade: $55 million GRP
- 83% of retail sales are from outside the county
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Strengthen relationships with other localities and organizations involved with MRPDC to increase opportunities in marketing, promotion and others
- Old Fiddler's Convention
- Vaughan Plant redevelopment could become a notable destination and complements

Downtown Inventory

- Downtown Galax is listed on both the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places
- Rex Theater, Old Fire Station, Colonial Theater, Alderman Building, Old Waugh Department Store, Farmer's Market, Galax Municipal Building, other

Assets

- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Glade Spring

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 6,301
- Retail trade: $20.8 million in GRP
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Emory and Henry students to attend downtown events, patronize downtown businesses, and engage in more outdoor recreation opportunities
- Studio course/curriculum for business and mass communications students
- Connect to other towns and trails

Downtown Inventory

- Brewery, restaurant, and café
- Town Square Center for the Arts
- Meeting space for weekly concerts
- Future indoor farmer's market/mercantile/event venue
- _____

Assets

- Town Square Center for the Arts
- Farmer's Market
- Downtown revitalization planning spurred new businesses and positive momentum
- Emory and Henry College
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Independence

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 6,135
- Retail trade: $9.44 million in GRP
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Southern gateway into Mount Rogers Region and Grayson Highlands State Park
- North Carolina Gateway
- Connections to the New River with boating, fishing, floating, and outdoor outfitters
- Upgrade and improve gravel trails for bikers
- _____

Downtown Inventory

- Four outdoor recreation stores: sculpting artisan, leather goods store, outdoor outfitter, gunsmith
- Three restaurants: downtown deli and restaurant, mexican restaurant, barbecue restaurant
- One budget hotel with 28 rooms
- 1908 Historic Courthouse with a visitors center,

Assets

- Timber Farmer's Market
- Peach Bottom Trail park, located near Peach Bottom Falls
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Marion

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

MARION VA
America's Coolest Hometown

Market Data

- Population: 13,669
- Retail trade: $46.2 million in GRP
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Potential for $2.1 million in sporting goods sales and $14.3 million in restaurant sales
- Complement outdoor recreation activity with family activities, including cultural events, theater, arts and crafts, and shopping
- Continued active downtown revitalization

Downtown Inventory

- One outdoor outfitter
- Numerous independent downtown restaurants
- Two gift/mercantile businesses
- Various lodging options including a downtown boutique hotel
- Historic downtown theater & drive-in theater

Assets

- Equidistance from Abingdon (south) and Wytheville (north) makes Marion the commerce and cultural center for the large rural area
- Concentration of visitor support businesses within the study area includes various lodging accommodations and restaurants

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Rural Retreat

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 3,516
- Retail trade: $5.5 million in GRP
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Dr. Pepper Pharmacy development
- Renovation of the historic train depot as a destination
- Development of a covered farmer's market venue downtown

Downtown Inventory

- Local winery and distillery
- Rural history museum
- Rural Retreat lake
- Two outfitters near downtown: fishing and

Assets

- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Saltville

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 5,547
- Retail trade: $7.46 million in GRP
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Historic tourism market
  - Cultural significance of salt mines
  - Museum of the Middle Appalachians
- Connect historic tourism experiences to outdoor visitors
- Immediate need for downtown dining
- _____

Downtown Inventory

- Wave Pool
- Museum of the Middle Appalachians
- Golf club
- Potential to support businesses and possible space for recreation-based businesses in vacancies along West Main Street

Assets

- Wayfinding strategy
- Salt Trail
- Salt Mines connection to Civil War
- Museum of the Middle Appalachians
- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Troutdale

Example Town and County Assets and Trends

Market Data

- Population: 1,441
- Retail trade: $2.0 million in GRP
- _____

What's missing?

Market Opportunity

- Gateway community for Mount Rogers
- Located on the path from Damascus to Marion, the study's two visitor anchors
- Market opportunity lies with capturing visitors along the scenic route
- _____

Buiness Development

- Seven vacant structures downtown
  - Old frame hotel structure
  - Old mercantile
- Most vacant structures require varying levels of repairs and rehabilitation to be viable
- _____

Assets

- _____

Town and County Assets and Trends

Town of Wytheville

Example Town and County Assets and Trends



Market Data

- Population: 15,273
- Retail trade: $79.4 million in GRP
- 80% of retail sales in Wythe County occur in Wytheville
- Retail industry sector provides 27% of total employment in the town
- _____

Market Opportunity

- Diversify retail market by pairing outdoor-related shopping opportunities and tourism rental
- Strategize ways that day travelers can extend their stay/plan stand-alone destination trips
- Expand business hours to better cater to younger populations and outdoor tourists

Downtown Inventory

- Retail stores in furniture, pharmacy, office supplies, a few restaurants, and a motel
- Ongoing efforts to secure funds for downtown revitalization; Downtown Revitalization Planning Funds from the U.S. DOH and DHCD
- Downtown Wytheville, Inc is an accredited

Assets

- _____


MOUNT ROGERS OUTDOOR ASSET ANALYSIS & DEVELOPMENT PLAN