



WEST VIRGINIA[®]

2021 STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

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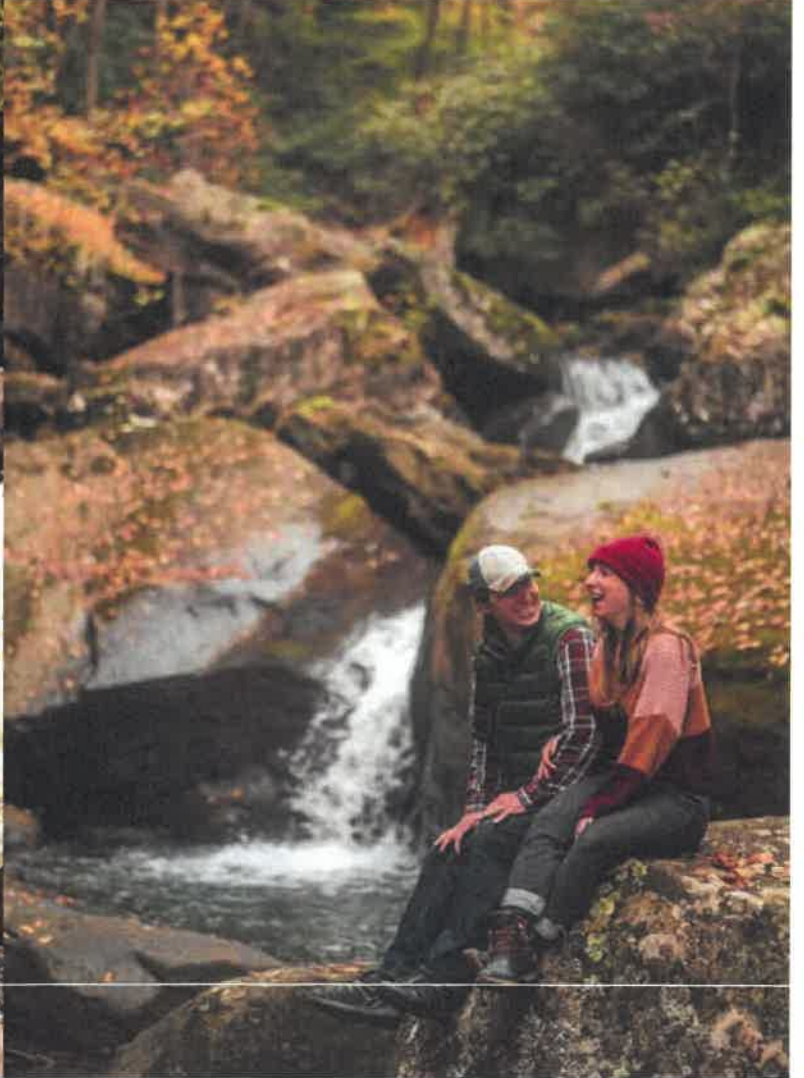
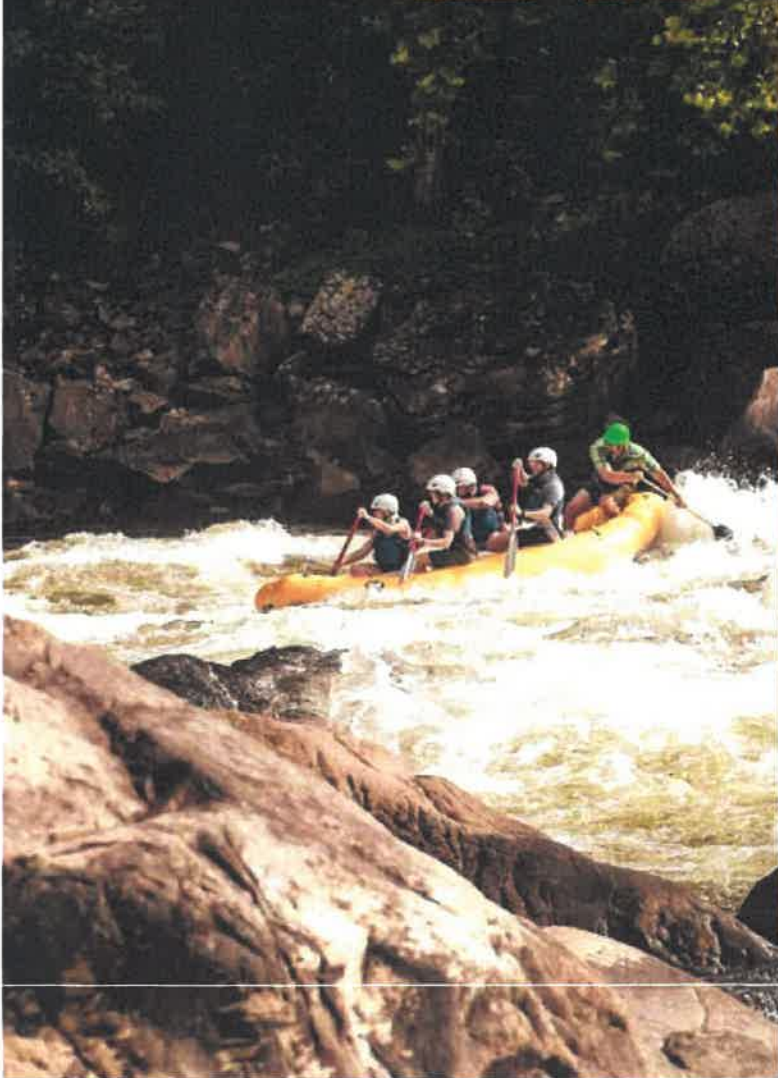
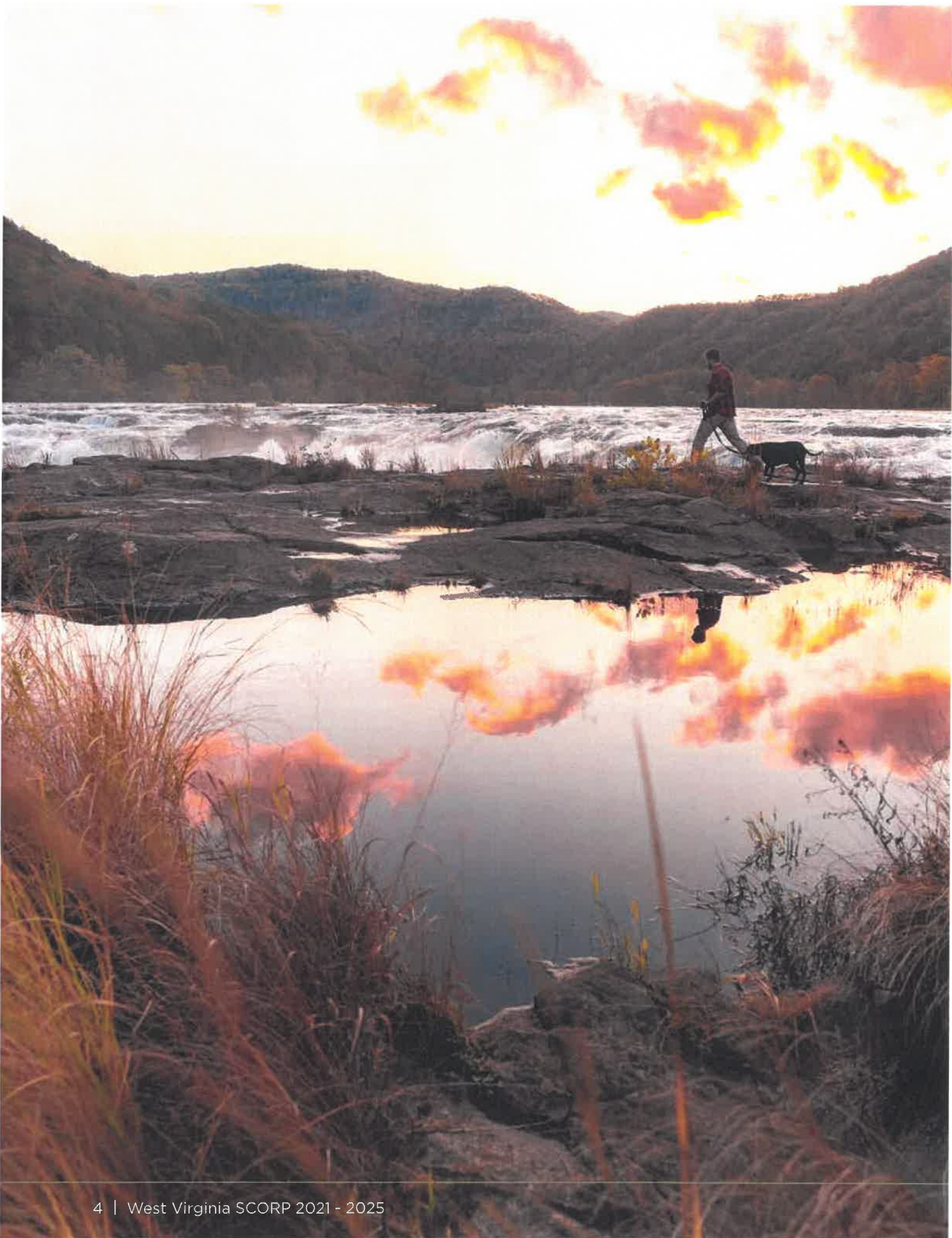


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GOVERNOR'S LETTER

April 29, 2021

Mr. Stan Austin
Regional Director

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
100 Alabama Street SW | 1924 Building
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Dear Mr. Austin,

As Governor of the State of West Virginia, I am pleased to be able to present to you the 2021 West Virginia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which is in compliance with the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965 and the National Park Service's LWCF program requirements. I further certify that this SCORP is in compliance with the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986.

As a lifelong resident, I am able to marvel and understand the natural beauty that the State of West Virginia has to offer. West Virginia's history, heritage, immense environment, and abundant public lands have created a state where all aspects of outdoor recreation can be enjoyed by each generation.

Outdoor recreation is a West Virginia mainstay, providing quality of life, prosperity, and health for our residents and communities. As such, this plan is designed to create awareness of issues and priorities, by accurately describing the status of our public outdoor recreational needs and their relationship to other health and community development programs and concerns. Preparation of this document engaged nearly 500 state residents, agency staff and organizations in a participatory process which began over a year ago. With better understanding of participants concerns, improvements and enhancements in outdoor recreation opportunities reflect what is needed for the state. During the 2021-2025 cycle, the SCORP will serve as a resource for the allocation of state and federal investments in addressing these needs.

I wish to thank you for consideration of this plan. Should you need any additional information, please contact John McGarrity of the Department of Economic Development staff at 304-558-2234 or by email at john.r.mcgarrity@wv.gov

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Justice". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Governor Jim Justice

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WELCOME TO WEST VIRGINIA

Almost Heaven, West Virginia — an unforgettable place, memorialized by an incomparable song. And, as the late John Denver well knew, a state rich with inspirational mountains and river valleys, charming small towns and communities, filled with generous residents, historic gems, and yes, even a country road or two (thousand) to take you home. According to his official website, when Mr. Denver visited China in 1992, he was astonished to find that “Country Roads,” as he was told, “is the most famous song written in the West.” It’s a song that expresses the heart of West Virginia — a longing to return to “the place I belong,” — a sentiment felt by residents and visitors alike, who experience the unique outdoor treasure known as Almost Heaven, West Virginia.

Although much of West Virginia’s industrial heritage is based on extraction industries, our mountains have always, and continue, to echo an abundance of outdoor tradition, from the heights of Spruce Knob, to the lowest point carved by the Potomac River near Harpers Ferry National Historic Park.

West Virginia’s reputation for having an abundance of outdoor recreation areas and opportunities has played a key role in visitation within and to the state during the recent pandemic, so much so that, as trends toward outdoor activities and away from crowded metropolitan areas continue to grow, regional visitors are finding West Virginia to be the perfect location to not only recreate, but to live.

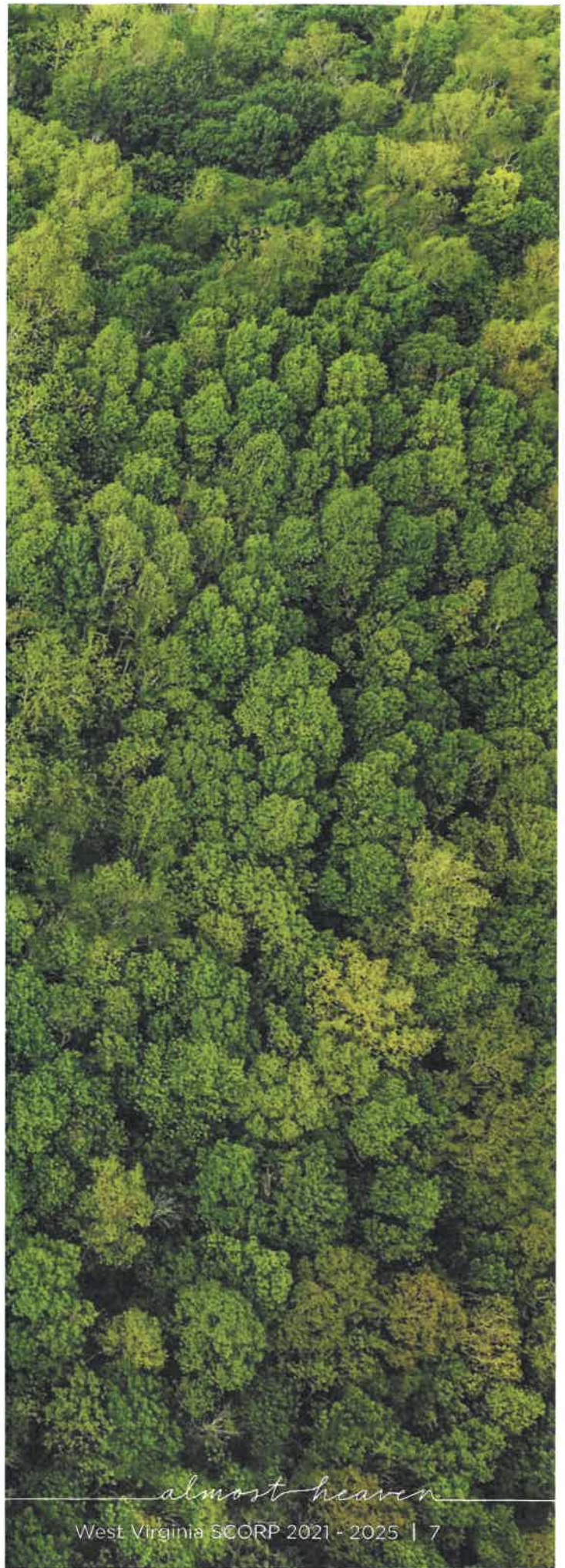
Even before COVID-19, and particularly over the last two years, visitation in West Virginia has been on the rise, with state leadership and strategic efforts focused on promoting our state’s array of outdoor recreational assets and charming small towns. West

Virginia has always been a premier destination in outdoor recreation both for residents and visitors alike. All levels of government within the state see the importance of investing in outdoor assets. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the excitement of West Virginia residents, and the increase in visitation only amplifies the need to continue to invest in outdoor recreation in the state.

A year of extreme hardship during 2020 has also turned into a year of hope realized by the residents of West Virginia and beyond, with the announcement that the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve has taken its place as the nation's 63rd national park. Designated as a National River in 1978 and cared for by the National Park Service, the New River Gorge has been a prime outdoor location, known for rock-climbing, hiking and whitewater rafting in Almost Heaven, West Virginia.

This new designation is expected to be a boom for the state's tourism industry with a projected 20 percent increase in visitation based on a study of previous monuments upgraded in status to a national park. For so many travelers, a national park designation is a stamp of approval, confirmation that destination is one of the nation's greatest place and a location you need to see.

The 7,021-acre park will focus on the New River Gorge, with its visitor center and trailheads, while the remaining 65,165 acres will be part of the national preserve to allow hunting and fishing. This new designation serves to emphasize the quality of outdoor recreation that the whole state of West Virginia has to offer.



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OVERVIEW OF SCORP, LWCF & GAOA

West Virginia's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2021-2025 (SCORP) is established on a framework designed to address the state's outdoor recreation needs, giving decision-makers and participants a set of priorities and suggested actions to guide them. The National Park Service (NPS) requires completion of the SCORP to maintain West Virginia's eligibility to participate in the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). West Virginia's SCORP serves as a roadmap for public outdoor recreation projects throughout the state, as well as a guide for LWCF applicants.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965 is a federally sponsored, grant-in-aid program made available to states through the National Park Service (NPS) for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas. This fund has had a significant impact on outdoor recreation throughout West Virginia. Eligible activities include but are not limited to capital repairs, replacement, or acquisition of natural areas or facilities (excluding routine maintenance) in support of outdoor recreational demands, such as, walking and driving for pleasure, hunting and shooting, camping, sightseeing, rock climbing, swimming and other water sports, fishing, picnicking, nature study, boating, horseback riding, bicycling, snowmobiling, skiing, and other outdoor sports and activities.

By statute, only units of state or local government, are eligible to receive the stateside reserve of these funds, made available as 50-50 matching share grants. While not expressly including public-private ventures or non-profit organizations (NPOs) in this service, the service is an inclusive process of participation, whereby people participate in the process of securing funds for public open space as a shared goal. An expressed objective of the NPS is maintenance of the integrity of the whole design, implementation, and upkeep phases of a project with its proposed participants.

Due to shifts in supply and demand over time, the LWCF Act requires that every state, every five years, reassess its supply and demand for public outdoor recreational needs in a policy plan presented as the SCORP. The SCORP acts as a policy umbrella for enabling a variety of different state and local recreational projects to address statewide supply and demand issues for the given period, as interpreted in the SCORP priority statements.

Prepared by the West Virginia Department of Economic Development (WVDED) and approved by the NPS, SCORP priorities support the screening process of LWCF grant applications submitted to the WVDED for review and approval by the NPS. SCORP approval by the NPS is essential for review and approval of any pending or future LWCF applications after April 30, 2021. The West Virginia SCORP presents a guideline for the principles on how the state plans to use LWCF by prioritizing public land and outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) of 2020 ensures permanent funding of the LWCF Act with federal apportionments to the states not seen in 40 years. West Virginia's share of the apportionment has increased from approximately \$1 million to \$3 million per year. It is anticipated that this increase in funding will allow the State of West Virginia to expand LWCF funds and West Virginia SCORP to focus on additional state-wide projects and initiatives to grow its outdoor recreation assets. A hoped-for expectation from a progressive rollout of the GAOA by the NPS will be a greater increase in outdoor recreational support for rural areas.

HOW SCORP & LWCF STAND TO GUIDE AND ENHANCE RECREATION IN WEST VIRGINIA

The state's LWCF program goal for the 2021-2025 period is to broaden and deepen the quality and number of opportunities for public outdoor recreation in support of West Virginians' expressed needs for increased socialization and physical activity, as expressed in the 2021-2025 WV-SCORP's theme of, "Recreation within Reach."

The WV-SCORP's program goal translates into themed project priorities. Any LWCF project application must qualify its public purpose by stating how it is in agreement with the SCORP. The 2021-2025 themed projects are based on ways that conservation and outdoor recreation can help benefit the communities, residents, and visitors within the state of West Virginia. This approach allows West Virginia to support large scale development and conservation to capitalize on the recent growth and public interest in public land.

PAST SUCCESSES OF SCORP PROJECTS & LWCF FUNDS

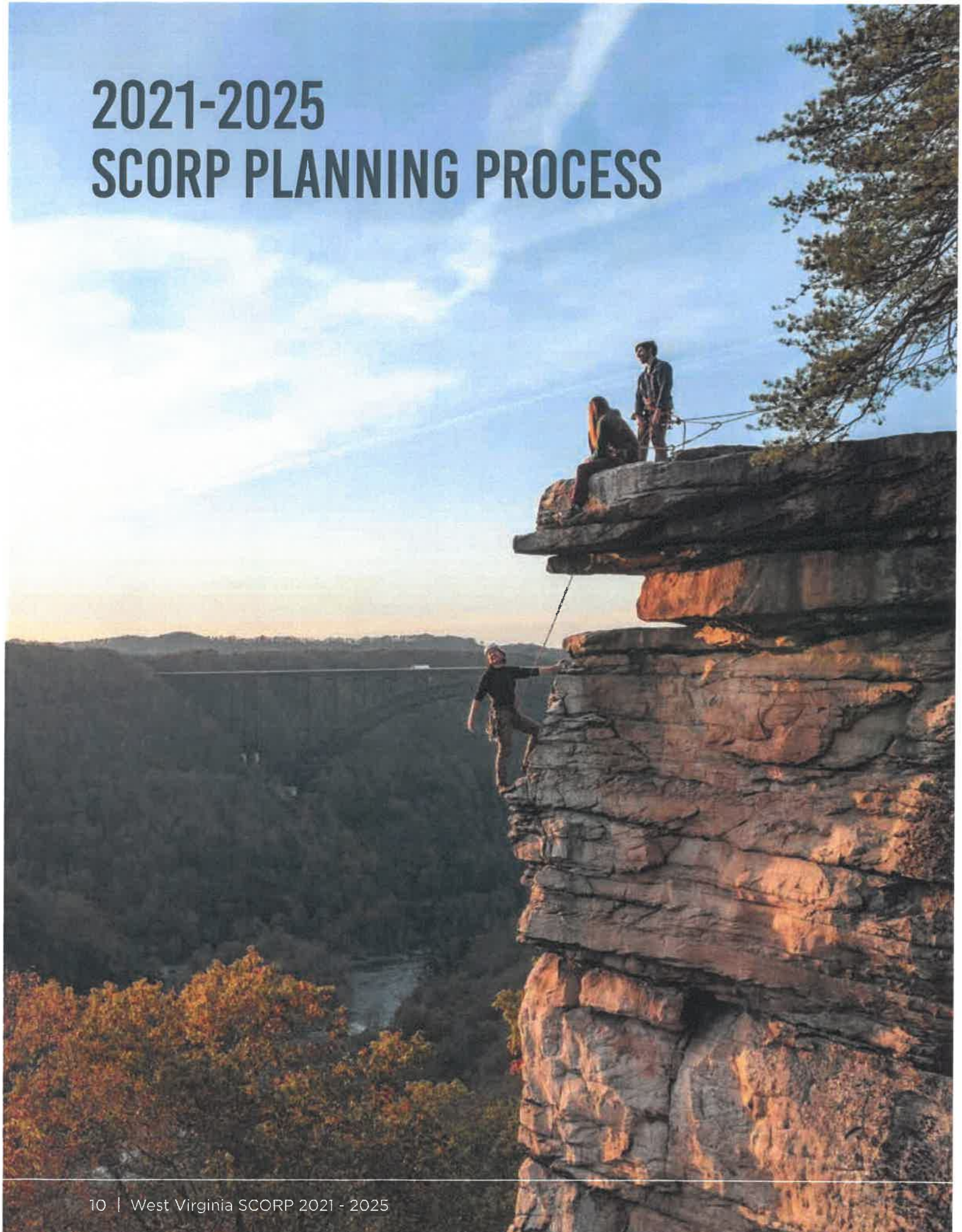
Since 1965 West Virginia has acquired or developed over 500 LWCF-assisted parks and playgrounds, having a capital value at least double the more than \$50 million provided by the National Park Service. Forty-two LWCF projects were awarded by the NPS during Fiscal 2015-2020, primarily dedicated to baseline park improvements for localities, following the same priorities from the preceding 2010-2014 fiscal cycle.

Successes include:

- Improvements to Lewisburg's Hollowell Park in Greenbrier County
- Fayette County's Beckwith Pool rehab
- Boulder Park development for the Town of Davis, West Virginia and the Tucker Community Foundation
- City of Nitro's Veterans Memorial Park in Kanawha County
- City of Buckhannon's North Buckhannon Park (Upshur County) built in a redeveloped floodplain area
- Sister towns of Montgomery and Smithers, West Virginia working on a 'trail towns' concept
- The City of Charles Town, West Virginia (Jefferson County) connecting current and prior LWCF projects into a stream-side linear park and trail through several neighborhoods

With the passing of GAOA and the prospect of additional funding, not only can the advancement of these projects be continued but additional larger scale projects can be added. Described later in this document, the trends for outdoor recreation and public interest point to the increase in more active outdoor recreation opportunities and the increase in public land.

2021-2025 SCORP PLANNING PROCESS

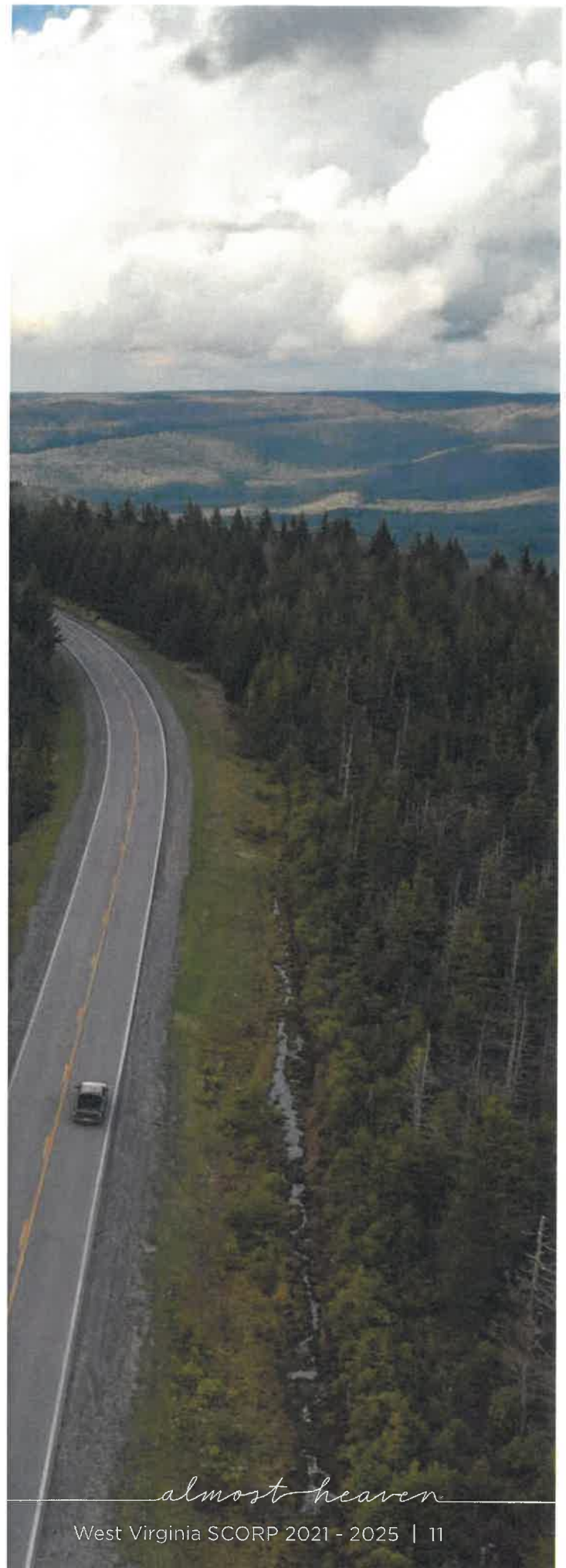


PARTIES INVOLVED

The outdoor recreation industry impacts many stakeholders throughout Almost Heaven, West Virginia. The SCORP was developed in collaboration with multiple government partners to provide a shared vision for conservation and recreation for the future of the state's outdoor recreation assets and resources. This collaboration demonstrates the importance of outdoor recreation and land conservation interest across the whole state. Special acknowledgment must be given to the following agencies for their efforts in writing this plan: West Virginia Department of Economic Development, West Virginia Department of Tourism, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, West Virginia State Parks, and West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection. The State of West Virginia is thankful for the groups and individuals who participated in developing this plan. The State of West Virginia hopes that these planning efforts will result in the continued growth in and improvements to outdoor recreation across all industries.

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

In 2019 West Virginia's residents' outdoor recreational preferences were measured by a beta test survey of approximately 200 residents, later followed by a phone survey of 500 residents across all regions of the state, conducted by Responsive Management, Inc. of Harrisonburg, Virginia (See Appendix I, Report Summary and copy of the Survey Instrument). Subjective and objective values were Likert-scaled, then ranked by aspect ratios of their individual 'likes to dislikes' values according to five gender and demographic characteristics. Besides divisions for male and female responses, age feedback was divided by Millennials (18-34), Generation-Xers (35-54), and Boomers (55-over). While not an exclusive basis for the WV-SCORP's policy recommendations, these survey results offer valuable insights into support for these policies.



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SURVEY RESULTS/RESPONSES

The value of public parks, in a state with nearly 80 percent forest cover, was the first measure residents were asked to rate by ranking twelve subjective park characteristics as surveyed by the West Virginia Department of Economic Development in their 2019 sampling of resident's interests. These characteristics are: adventure, escape, fresh air, views, openness, play value, exercise, relaxation, security, inspirational value, community, and a sense of freedom (See Figure 1, Park Values). Fresh air drew the highest number of responses with relaxation and a sense of freedom being the other two consistent, first-order priorities across all five demographics.

Consensus on views, openness, security, exercise, and adventure represented the middle tally of values, while community, escape, inspiration, and play values drew fewer responses. Given the small differences between individual replies, the aggregated orders of priority are a better indicator of actual interests. Significantly, dividing park values into categories of active and passive recreational values revealed a higher consensus for passive park values (fresh air, relaxation, sense of freedom, views, openness, and security) than active park values (exercise, adventure, escape, play). While a different 'post-pandemic' survey could produce different results, the results of this survey appear to represent the values of an older adult generation, which aptly describes a major characteristic of the state's population. In Figure 2, the surveyed recreational values with the most consensus between age groups were arrayed in a 'high-medium-low' spectrum to show how the most agreed-upon interests shifted between generations.

The values most wanted from an outdoor experience in West Virginia were consistent between gender responses for priorities of fresh air, relaxation, a sense of freedom, and views—the first order of park values—but changed as people got older. Here, interests in adventure and community (socialization) leveled-out by middle age, with interests unsurprisingly rising in security and decreasing in exercise among seniors.

Significantly missing from this survey were values for youth (Generation-'Z') which were omitted due to parental concerns from third-party contact. However, the expressed interests of Millennials for exercise and adventure in their outdoor experience taken from youth and parent comments received during the course of SCORP meetings held. Generation Z should not be excluded from the planning for new park facilities due to the overall community's ability to attract future residents.



**FIGURE 1: Q75 - Q86
PARK VALUES**
Mean ratings of how important each aspect is regarding residents' experiences or feelings when using parks in their area, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important.

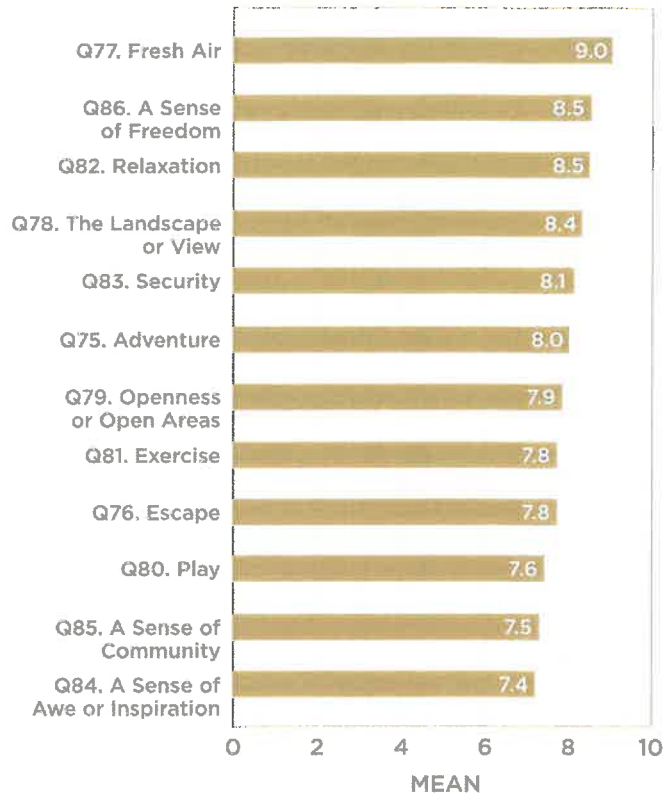
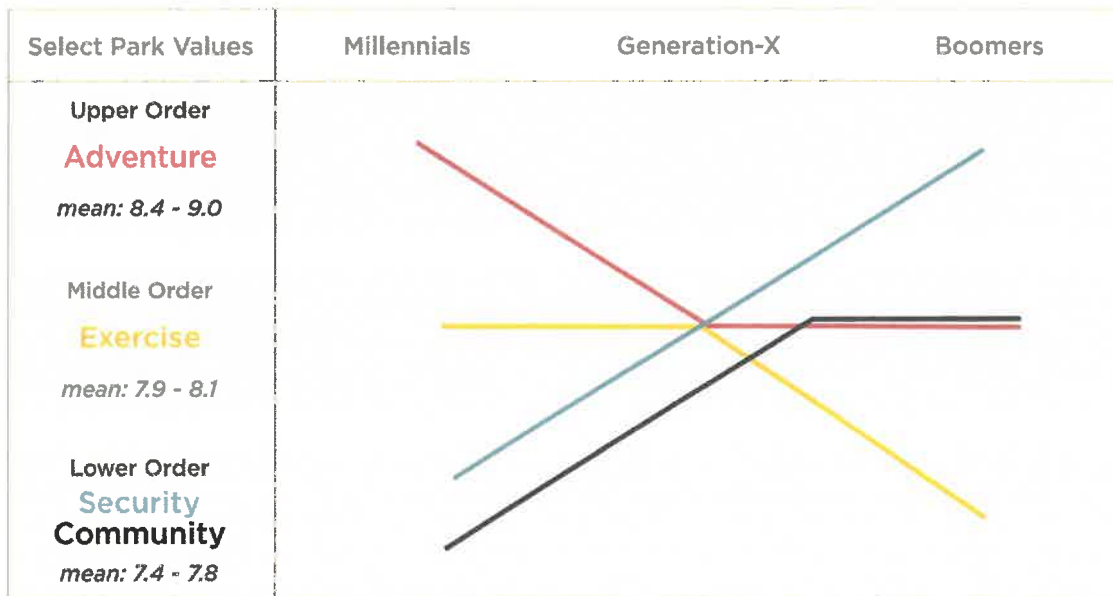


FIGURE 2
Recreational values with the most consensus between age groups arrayed in a 'high-medium-low' spectrum to show how the most agreed-upon interests shifted between generations

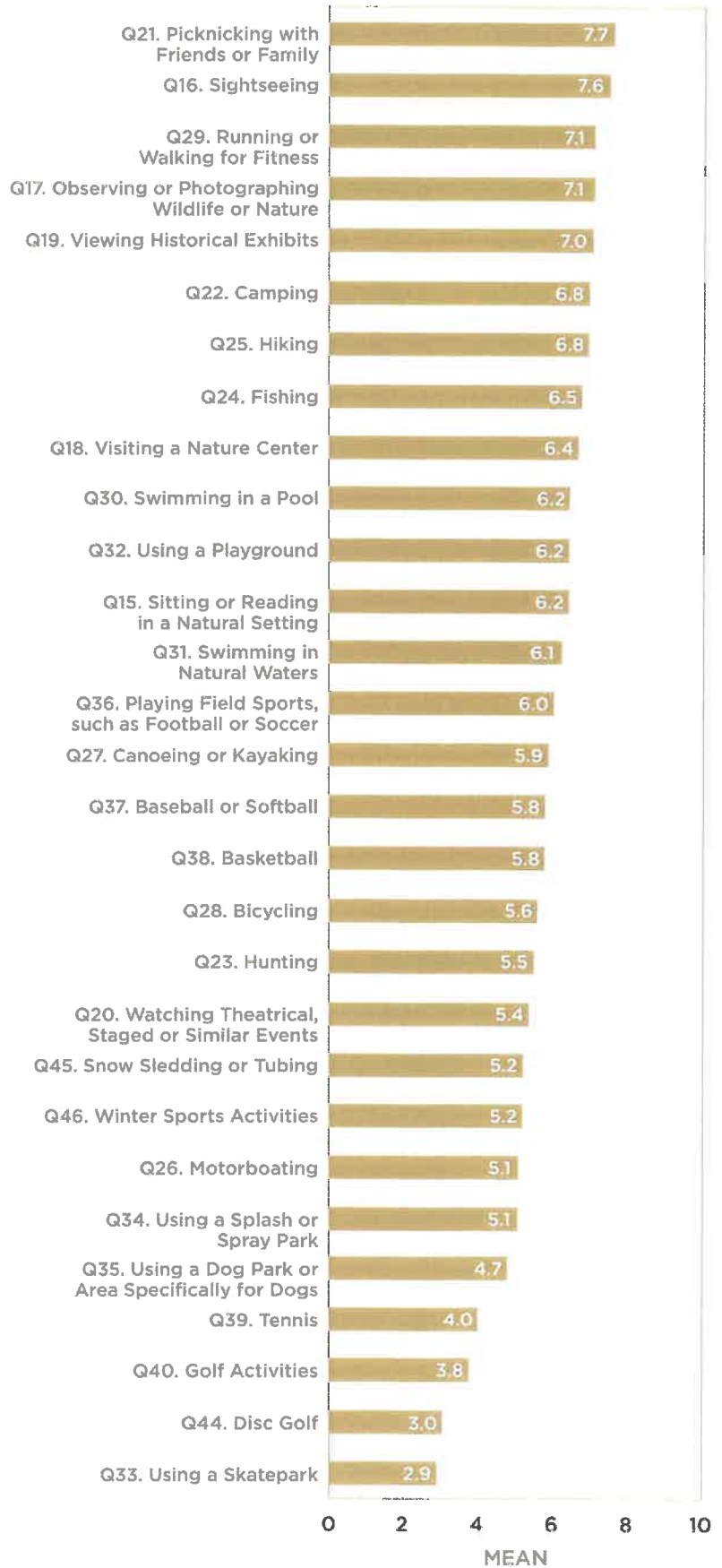


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Activity Preferences

Value shifts from active to passive recreational interests may be expected as people age. The state’s 2019 SCORP survey suggested as much by walking and hiking activities rating second rather than first in interests behind socialization activities, such as community gatherings and picnicking (See Figure 3, Park Activity Priorities). Specific comments received evidence from Generation-Z to active Boomer demographics suggest that new trails and improved trail maintenance are worthwhile additions to public land development. In practice, both active and passive outdoor recreational interests serve important health outcomes, as the mental health outcomes from either active or passive activities that take place outdoors is arguably as valuable as the physical health benefits alone. Based upon these trends, the different options between choosing an active over a passive project is less between a choice of alternatives than the pairing of objectives—choosing a mix of facility improvements addressing both active and passive recreational choices for a particular park within a given community’s ability to pay.

FIGURE 3: Q15 - Q46
PARK ACTIVITY PRIORITIES
 Mean ratings of how important each activity is to residents’ park use in their area, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important.



Amenity Priorities

Resident opinions on specific park facility improvement issues reflected much wider variations across gender and age breakdowns than respondents made to the aspirational park value questions (See Appendix II, Stratified Recreational Preferences by Age Group).

Consistent with findings from the 2015-2020 WV-SCORP survey, as noted in the Responsive Management Study residents were more concerned with small park amenities than larger facility improvements or additions. An overwhelming 75 percent of residents surveyed felt no additional park offerings were needed for their local park. Results showed expressed improvements were greater handicapped accessibility and demands for 'other' non-park activities nearby such as restaurants, convenience stores, and hotels or other lodging alternatives. These findings were consistent across both urban and rural and ARC-defined distressed and non-distressed areas surveyed (See Figures 4 and 5, Urban/Rural and Distressed/Non-distressed Area Park Comparisons).

FIGURE 4: Q51
URBAN/RURAL PARK COMPARISON
 Are there any other activities that you would like to see made available or supported at parks in your area?

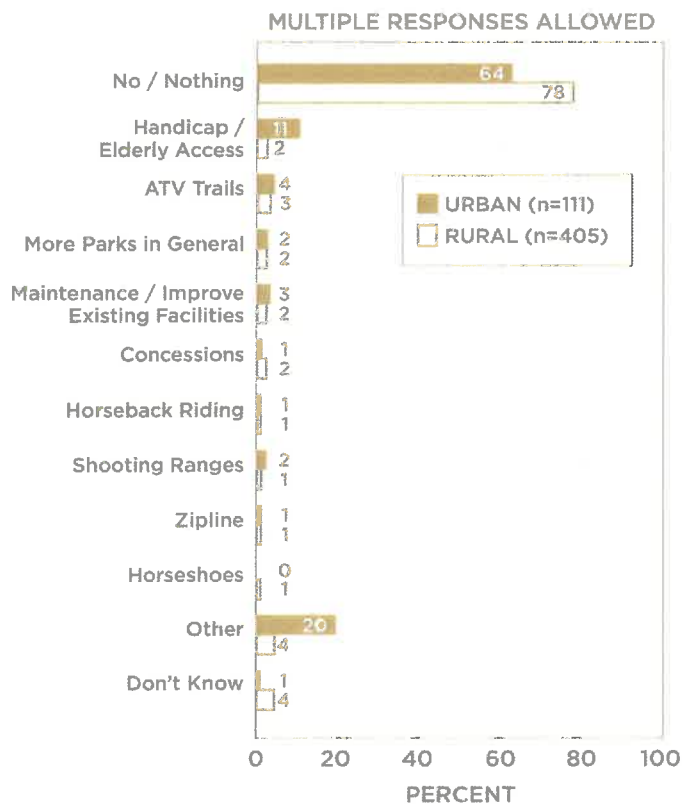
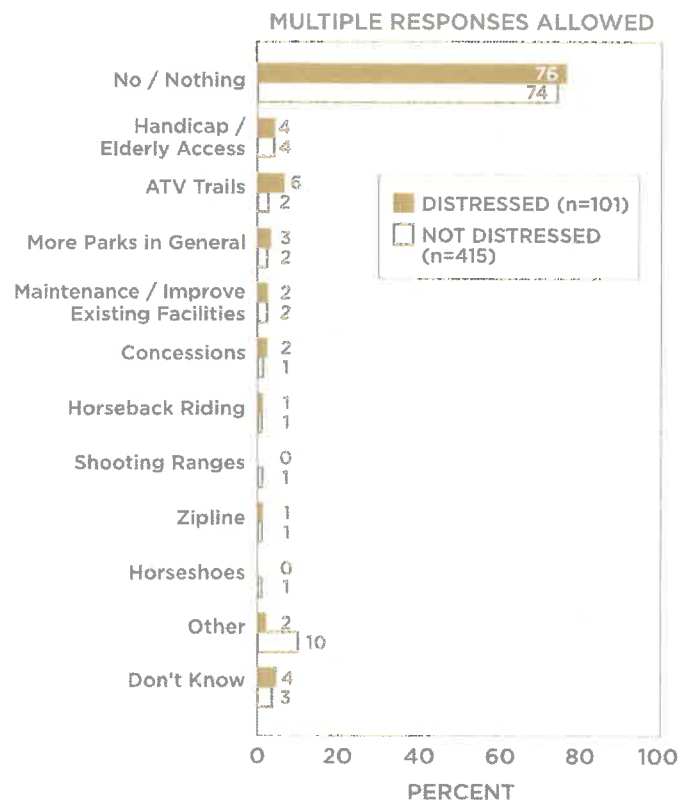


FIGURE 5: Q51
DISTRESSED/NON-DISTRESSED AREA PARK COMPARISON
 Are there any other activities that you would like to see made available or supported at parks in your area?





Among census-defined rural areas and Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) defined distressed or at-risk area residents, slight interests were noted for additional parks.

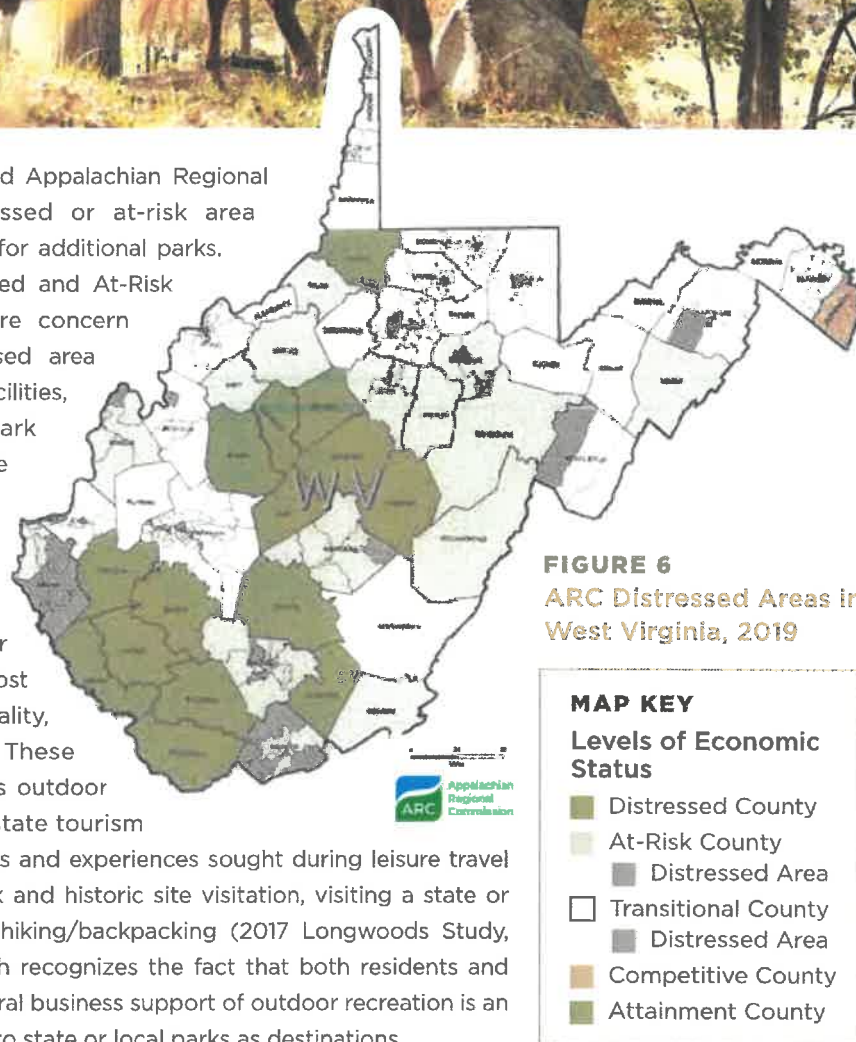
(See Figure 6, Map of ARC Distressed and At-Risk Areas) Rural residents showed more concern for ADA improvements and distressed area residents wanting more picnicking facilities,

better wayfinding, and more non-park small business support—elsewhere noted as restaurants, grocery and convenience stores, and overnight accommodations.

Urban area residents had broader interests in some improvements to a variety of outdoor recreational improvements, but most especially for ‘other’ non-park, hospitality, and accommodation businesses.

These broader recreational interests besides outdoor recreation itself are consistent with state tourism studies indicating the top five activities and experiences sought during leisure travel to the state being shopping, landmark and historic site visitation, visiting a state or national state park, fine dining, and hiking/backpacking (2017 Longwoods Study, WV Division of Tourism).

This research recognizes the fact that both residents and visitors are consumers, and that collateral business support of outdoor recreation is an important part of enhancing visitation to state or local parks as destinations.



Residents’ park experience and amenity priorities were consolidated into a 52-item list that was stratified into ‘high-medium-low’ priority classes and Likert-scaled on a ‘likes-to-dislikes’ zero-based scale comparison by demographic breakdown of ‘overall; male-female gender; and age by Millennial, Generation-X, or Boomer (see Appendix II, Generational Activity Preferences). Across all demographics, having accessibility to restrooms and trash removal received the highest interest, while other amenities were shaded areas, trail maintenance, and playgrounds. Security concerns were strongest among women, Boomers, and Generation-Xers, while par-three golf and driving ranges were particular interests noted among men. As might be expected, Millennials expressed the most interest in active recreational pursuits while Boomers preferred more passive outdoor activities. Women and Generation-Xers showed the most support for recreational activities of all types, registering more ‘likes’ to ‘dislikes’ for 40 or more of the 52 activities or improvements surveyed. This finding would be especially important for communities trying to garner support or decision-making on particular park or playground improvements.

Regional Variations

Regionally-based community development efforts in West Virginia are administered across the state's eleven Regional Planning and Development Councils (RPDC's) representing county and municipal units of local government (See Figure 7, Map of West Virginia RPDC's). Regional park priorities displayed slight variations on overall statewide patterns. For the 2019 SCORP residents survey, responses from Regions 10 and 11 in the state's Northern Panhandle were consolidated into a single 'Region 10'. In rough order of priority, regional recreational interests mimicked statewide response patterns (See Figure 8, Regional Activity Priorities). The greatest overall interest in recreational activities came from Region 7 in the North Central area of the state, particularly for picnicking and fishing, but also due to the extent of hiking opportunities in the Monongahela National Forest near Elkins, West Virginia. Trail-related interests in walking, running, and hiking were strongest in Region 2 area bordering Ohio and Kentucky, while motorized, off-road trail interests were the most evident in Regions 1 and 2, defining the Southwest Coalfields. Off-road ATV sports in this most rugged area of the state are driven by the large and growing 1,000-mile Hatfield-McCoy Trail System, which as noted has further stimulated 'trail town' areawide growth as well as expressed, national attention for this particular outdoor recreational interest. New and future trail and 'trail town' development benefits from the state's scenic byways system which approximately runs 'east-west' to connect with the roughly 'north-south' orientation of the state's mountain ranges and major highways (See Figure 9, Major State Trails and Byways).

FIGURE 7
West Virginia Regional Planning
& Development Councils

MAP KEY

- Regional Councils
- County Border

Congressional Districts

- District 1
- District 2
- District 3

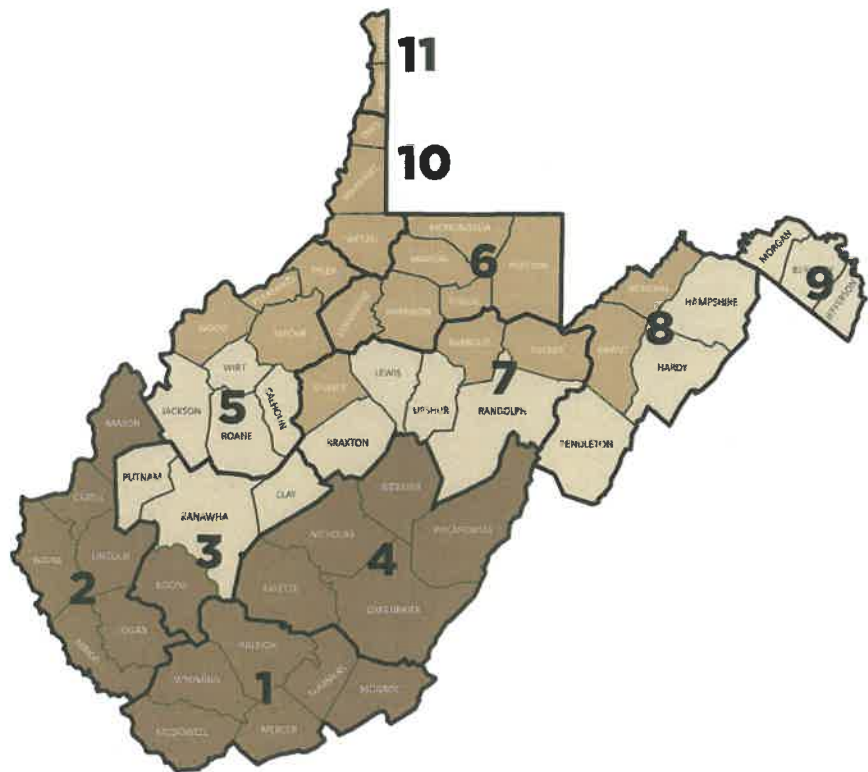


FIGURE 8: Q15 - Q46

Mean ratings of how important each activity is to residents' park use in their area, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important.

ACTIVITY	REGION									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Q21. Picnicking with Family or Friends	7.6	7.8	7.9	8.0	7.1	7.1	8.7	7.0	7.7	8.3
Q16. Sightseeing	7.1	7.8	8.0	8.5	7.3	7.7	8.0	7.2	6.9	7.8
Q29. Running or Walking for Fitness	7.0	8.1	7.3	6.8	7.1	7.0	6.6	6.6	6.3	6.9
Q17. Observing or Photographing Wildlife or Nature	6.5	7.3	7.2	7.4	6.8	7.3	7.8	6.9	6.4	6.9
Q19. Viewing Historical Exhibits	7.3	7.4	6.3	7.1	7.2	7.4	7.7	6.4	5.8	6.9
Q22. Camping	6.8	7.0	6.9	7.1	6.5	6.8	7.3	5.8	6.7	6.6
Q25. Hiking	6.2	7.6	6.7	7.3	6.5	7.0	6.6	5.9	6.3	7.0
Q24. Fishing	6.4	7.2	6.4	7.4	6.7	5.7	7.7	7.3	5.1	6.3
Q18. Visiting a nature center	6.5	6.4	6.2	6.7	6.4	6.8	7.4	6.2	5.7	6.5
Q30. Swimming in a Pool	6.5	6.7	6.6	6.2	6.1	5.4	6.2	5.7	6.0	6.8
Q32. Using a Playground	6.1	6.2	6.7	6.5	6.8	6.1	6.7	5.1	5.8	5.8
Q15. Sitting or Reading in a Natural Setting	6.0	6.6	6.7	7.2	5.7	5.6	5.9	6.0	5.7	7.1
Q31. Swimming in Natural Waters	6.1	6.0	6.0	7.0	5.1	5.6	7.4	5.8	6.7	6.7
Q36. Playing Field Sports, such as Football or Soccer	6.7	5.5	6.9	4.9	5.2	5.9	6.3	4.6	7.0	5.0
Q27. Canoeing or Kayaking	5.6	6.7	6.3	6.3	4.4	5.8	5.7	5.3	6.3	5.9
Q37. Baseball or Softball	6.3	5.9	6.6	5.4	5.6	6.1	6.1	4.3	5.7	4.8
Q38. Basketball	6.3	6.4	6.5	5.3	5.0	6.0	6.2	4.2	5.6	4.4
Q28. Bicycling	5.4	6.3	5.7	6.2	5.4	5.9	5.2	4.8	5.0	5.6
Q23. Hunting	4.6	6.6	4.8	6.3	5.6	5.5	6.9	6.5	3.5	5.9
Q20. Watching Theatrical, Staged, or Similar Events	5.8	6.4	5.5	5.2	5.3	5.2	5.4	4.5	4.5	5.5
Q45. Snow Sledding or Tubing	4.4	5.3	5.1	4.6	4.6	5.5	6.7	5.4	5.4	5.7
Q46. Winter Sports Activities	4.7	5.4	4.7	4.9	4.4	5.6	6.2	5.0	5.2	5.8
Q26. Motorboating	5.8	6.2	5.8	4.5	4.7	3.6	5.4	4.1	4.4	5.7
Q34. Using a Splash or Spray Park	5.4	5.4	5.1	4.3	4.3	5.3	5.7	4.1	5.2	5.0
Q35. Using a Dog Park or Area Specifically for Dogs	5.7	5.5	5.2	3.7	3.3	4.9	5.7	4.5	4.1	3.3
Q39. Tennis	4.7	4.3	4.1	3.1	3.9	4.9	3.8	3.4	4.5	2.9
Q40. Golf activities	3.5	3.9	4.0	3.7	4.4	3.7	4.1	2.0	3.7	4.4
Q44. Disc Golf	2.3	3.6	3.1	3.2	2.6	2.9	3.3	1.8	3.9	2.1
Q33. Using a Skatemark	3.6	3.7	2.2	2.8	1.9	3.2	3.2	2.9	2.4	3.2

FIGURE 9
Major State
Trails and
Byways

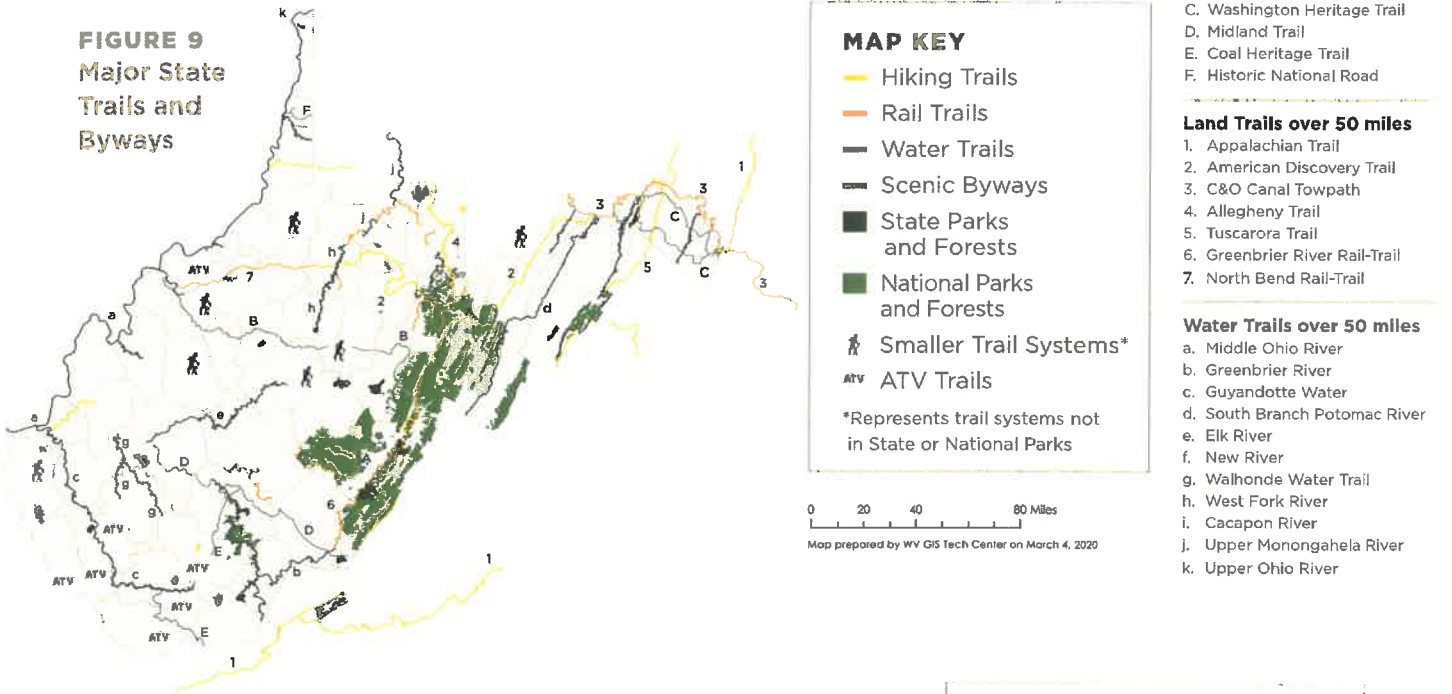
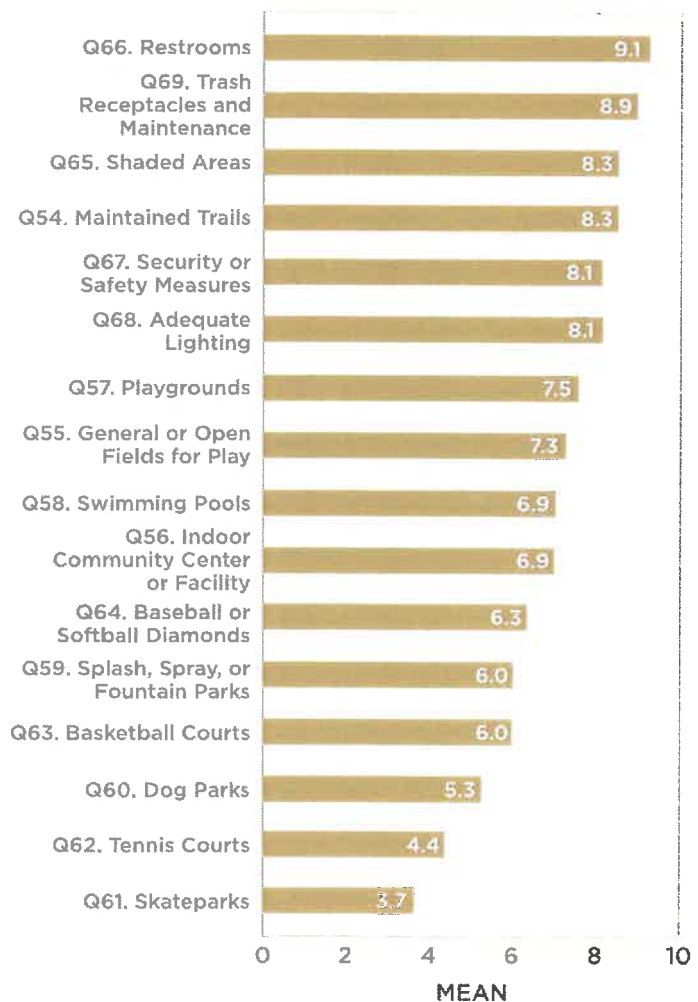


FIGURE 10: Q54 - Q69
REGIONAL AMENITY IMPROVEMENTS
Mean ratings of how important each facility or amenity is to residents' park use in their area, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important.

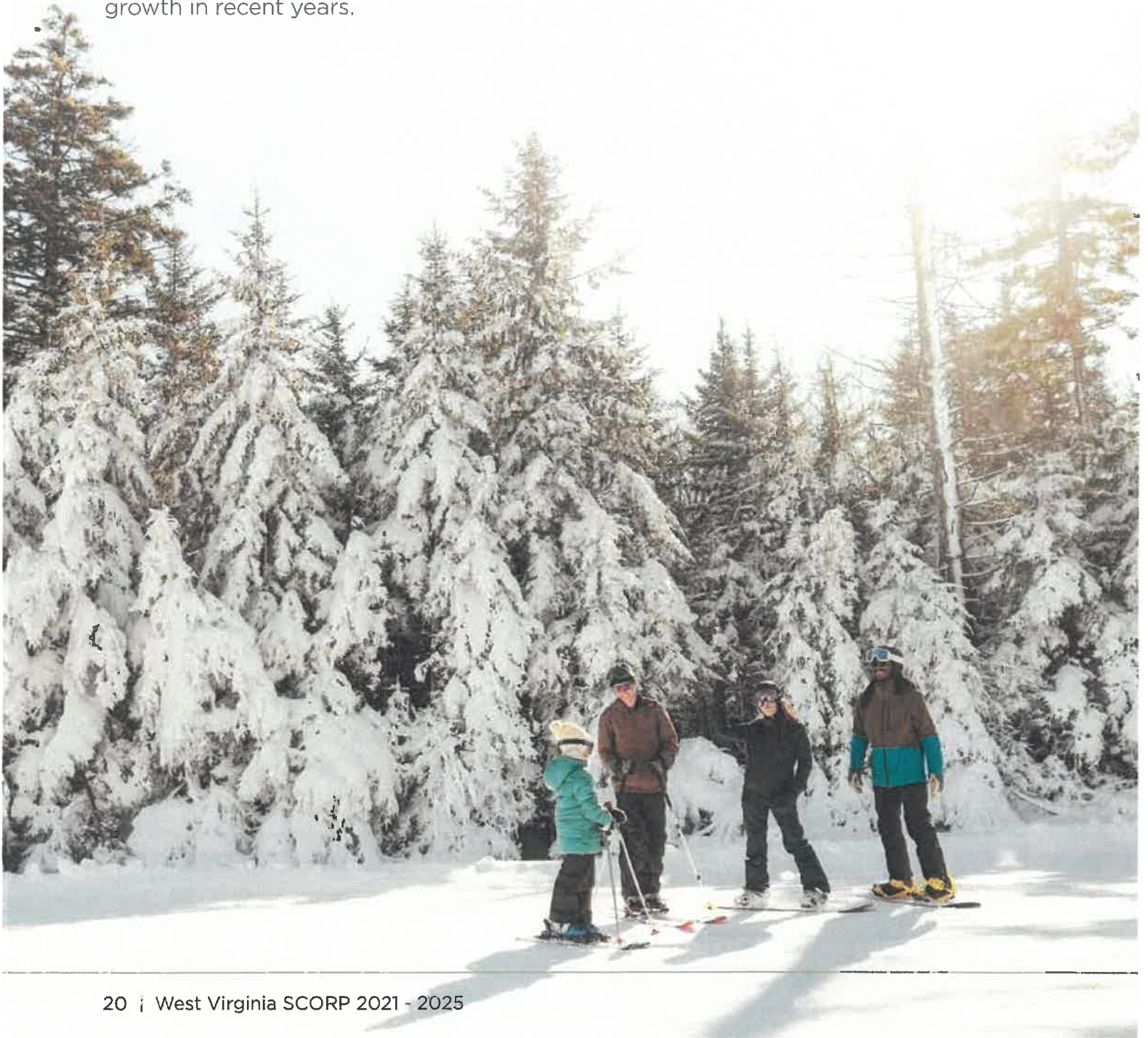
In terms of expressed needs for amenity improvements, the state's region with the oldest LWCF-assisted parks, Regions 10 and 11 in the Northern Panhandle [surveyed here as 'Region 10'], as well as the two regions with the greatest number of ARC-defined distressed counties (Regions 1 and 2), expressed the most specific interests; in Region 10 that interest was the highest for additional picnicking facilities, while in Regions 1 and 2, demands were highest for restrooms, trail and general maintenance, security improvements, and new playgrounds (See Figure 10, Regional Amenity Improvements).



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RECENT GROWTH OVERVIEW

West Virginia's rich natural offerings provide for a vibrant and growing outdoor recreation economy. The West Virginia Department of Tourism, works closely with its counter parts in state government to provide the support needed for this outdoor recreation economy to reach its fullest potential. The funding provided by the LWCF greatly supports this agency-wide mission, which become more prevalent due to growth in recent years.



TOURISM & ECONOMIC IMPACT

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, West Virginia's tourism economy was booming. From 2016 to 2018, traveler spending in West Virginia grew by 9.9 percent. This reversed a multi-year trend of decline and put West Virginia on the map as one of the fast-growing tourism destinations in the nation—outpacing the national growth rate by 58 percent.

In West Virginia outdoor recreation has and continues to be a vital pillar to this industry. According to the 2017 Outdoor Industry Report, outdoor recreation generates **\$9 billion** in consumer spending annually, resulting in \$660 million in state and local tax revenue. In addition, the industry supports more than 91,000 jobs, of which earn **\$2.4 billion** in wages each year.

When comparing the growth of West Virginia's tourism industry to the overall economic impact of outdoor recreation in the state, it is evident these two sectors go hand and hand, and together, present a tremendous opportunity for long-term growth and development.

SUPPLY & DEMAND

West Virginia's borders are within 600 miles of 60 percent of the United States population. This allows the state to be a sought-out travel destination for near urban East Coast and Great Lake city markets. The vast mountain landscapes draw tourism for both first time visitors and returners. Not only are travelers interested in West Virginia's outdoor recreation, but the residents are also heavily attracted to the outdoors. Research suggests nearly three quarters of West Virginia residents' participants in outdoor recreation each year. The same report also noted more than twice the percentage of outdoor industry jobs in West Virginia compared to other Southeastern states.

The state is well known for its national scenic trails, national forests, national historic parks, national rivers, national heritage sites, and now for the nation's newest national park. The state also boasts 35 state parks, 9 state forests, three state rail trails, and more than 70 wildlife management areas. Winter attractions found throughout the state offer a variety of skiing and snowboarding venues that complement a wide variety of other entertainment, hospitality and cultural attractions, drawing more than nine times the state's 1.8 million population to the state every year (See Figures 11 and 12, Tourism Satisfaction and Attractions).

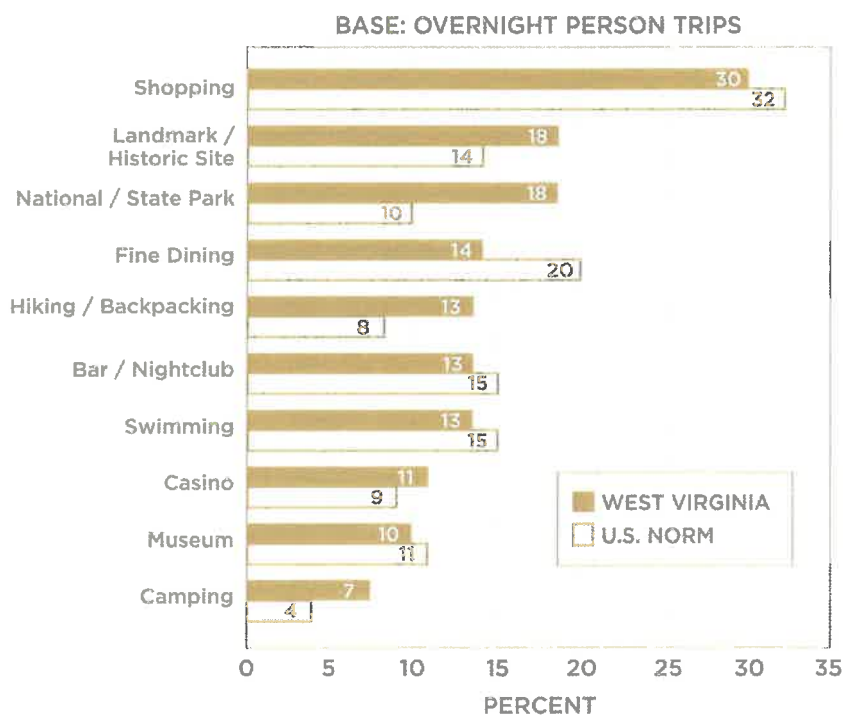
The state's LWCF program has complemented this tourism interest with acquisition or facility improvements to more than half of the state's parks and forests. Since 1965, 75 of more than 500 LWCF project grants have been awarded to the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (See Appendix III, State Park Inventory). Included in these improvements are a wide variety of outdoor recreational opportunities for hiking and backpacking, hunting and fishing, camping, golfing, mountain biking and a diversity of winter sports. Growth in the number of town or city local parks, county parks and school parks has further broadened and deepened public accessibility to more close-to-home recreational opportunities for picnicking, exercise, playground, sport, water access or quiet outdoor enjoyment.

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FIGURE 11
Tourism Satisfaction and Attractions

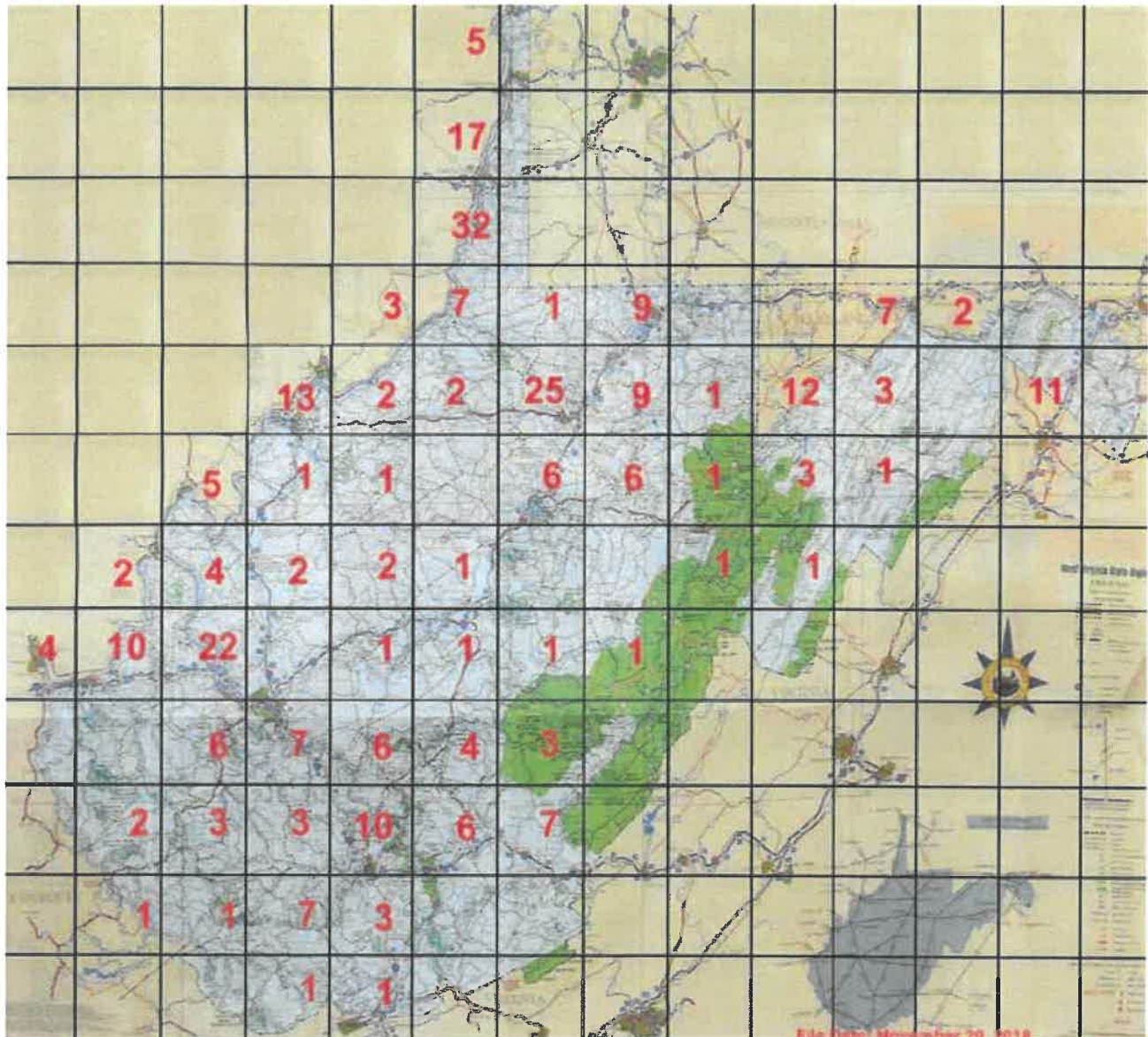
	Overall Trip Experience	★★★★★☆☆☆☆	74%
	Friendliness of People	★★★★★☆☆☆☆	71%
	Safety and Security	★★★★★☆☆☆☆	66%
	Quality of Accommodations	★★★★★☆☆☆☆	63%
	Quality of Food	★★★★★☆☆☆☆	61%
	Cleanliness	★★★★★☆☆☆☆	58%
	Sightseeing and Attractions	★★★★★☆☆☆☆	55%
	Value for Money	★★★★★☆☆☆☆	54%
	Music/Nightlife/Entertainment	★★★★☆☆☆☆☆☆	34%

FIGURE 12
Tourism Satisfaction and Attractions



While LWCF accounts would show 54 of 55 West Virginia counties having at least one state, county, school or city park benefiting from these funds, a 55-year distribution of park grants is heavily skewed towards the state's urbanized areas. In many rural areas, the nearest state park serves as that area's local park (see Figure 13, Equity Map). On the equity map shown, each square in the matrix equals 400 square miles of land area. The number of mostly rural areas having three or fewer LWCF grants represents roughly 60 percent of all state lands.

FIGURE 13
Equity Map



TOP RECREATION ACTIVITIES

In 2019 the West Virginia Department of Economic Development commissioned Responsive Management of Harrisonburg, Virginia to conduct a study on outdoor recreation in West Virginia. The research shows the values shift from active to passive recreational interests as people age. The state's 2019 SCORP survey the older generations tops interests are social activities such as community gatherings and picnicking. Camping and hiking follow as some of the next highest outdoor recreation activities. The younger generations showed that they favor the more active or adventure activities. The more active outdoor activities included rock-climbing, mountain biking, and whitewater paddling. 2017 Outdoor Industry Association's (OIA) research compliments what the state's research has shown. The OIA shows that most of West Virginia residents participate in outdoor recreation each year with particular interests in ATV riding and fishing.

From Generation-Z to active Boomer, demographics suggest that new trails and improved trail maintenance are worthwhile additions to a park's development. Both active and passive outdoor recreational interests serve important health benefits. The mental health benefits from the social passive outdoor activities is as valuable as the physical health benefits from the more active outdoor activities. Based upon these trends, the different options between choosing an active over a passive project is less between a choice between alternatives than the pairing of objectives—choosing a mix of facility improvements addressing both active and passive recreational choices for a particular park within a given community's ability to pay.

The state of West Virginia understands the importance of the LWCF. The ability to protect state and local land by preserving, conserving, and developing will strengthen the health and vitality of the American people. West Virginia has boundless quality outdoor recreation resources. Funding these needs can be a challenge. State and local government agencies struggle to meet the drastic increase of citizen and visitor demands because of the lack of funding and an increase in demand. The SCORP is now more than even an important document for the state of West Virginia. SCORP allows West Virginia to qualify for federal funding for the needed conservation and outdoor recreation projects. Federal funding provides an opportunity to address the outdoor supply and demand. West Virginia's SCORP will support and benefit the small local governments, non-profits, local communities, outdoor recreation users, and the state government.

Uniquely-WV Recreation Facts

- Nearly 1.7 million acres of state and federal public land
- Over 1,500 miles of hiking trails
- 560 miles of rail trails
- 1,000 miles of ATV trails as a part of the Hatfield McCoy Trail System
- 14 flatwater river trails
- Highest density of whitewater runs in the country with more than 2,000 miles
- International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Silver-Level Ride Center
- Over 4,000 climbing routes

*Robert Burns, Past Director,
Tucker Community
Foundation*



EXTERNAL FACTORS



COVID-19

The United States' tourism industry has seen unprecedented impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and just like the rest of the nation, West Virginia has also been greatly impacted. Oxford Economics' "COVID-19 Impact on Tax Revenue Generated by the Hotel Industry" report for the American Hotel & Lodging Association which was released on June 12, 2020, reported that West Virginia suffered a loss of \$223.3 million in total state and local tax revenue from the hotel industry as a result of COVID-19 with occupancy taxes alone down \$24.7 million. Of course, these losses have a trickle-down effect to local parks and recreational boards funded by county occupancy taxes.

While the lasting impacts of COVID-19 continue to unfold, these studies have also shed light into key consumer trends that have put West Virginia on the map as a potential post-COVID travel destination. National trends are showing more people seeking open spaces and outdoor activities instead of urban areas to safely recreate during the pandemic. The Outdoor Industry Association found that urban communities flocked to low barrier to entry outdoor recreation, including, running, day hiking, cycling, fishing, and camping amid COVID restrictions. These findings are in line with research conducted by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, and Penn State University, that demonstrated people are going outdoors alone and more often.

West Virginia has seen identical trends, with day-use visitation at parks at an all-time high, likely due to the desire of residents and visitors alike to seek out opportunities for outdoor recreation close to home. Residents seeking outdoor recreation in state parks normally represent 63 percent of state park visitors, while 37 percent have been guests traveling from out-of-state. During the last four months of 2020, resident visitation jumped to 71 percent of the total annual attendance due largely to COVID-19. Attendance and use of our state parks, state forests, state rail trails, and wildlife management numbers are currently 12-20 percent above all-time highs. Cabin facilities and campgrounds at state parks and forests are near capacity, and web traffic to pages related to outdoor activities, responsible travel, and crowd-free activities are at an all-time high. This provides a needed boost to top-of-mind awareness for outdoor recreation.

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OUTDOOR RECREATION TRENDS



GROWTH IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

In March of 2020, people began seeing stay at home orders across the country. Day-to-day life began to change drastically, as well as outdoor recreation. In 2020, according to the Outdoor Industry Association, 34 percent of people said they could not participate in outdoor activities due to the pandemic. Outdoor recreation did fair better than team sport participants, with 69 percent saying they could not participate due to the pandemic. Restrictions on indoor gatherings and group size, led to people flocking to the outdoors nationwide. The activities that saw the largest growth in participation were running, cycling, and hiking. Hiking rose 8.4 percent in April, May, and June of 2020 versus 2019. Other activities that also saw increases were camping, paddle sports, and birdwatching. Sales across all outdoor activities saw record increases during the pandemic. There were times during the pandemic where multiple retailers were sold out. The activity that saw the largest increase in sales was bicycling. Commuter bikes, leisure bikes, fitness bikes, toddler bikes, and electric bikes saw a dramatic increase in sales compared to previous years. These trends were sustained through the end of 2020.

COVID-19 has changed many aspects of outdoor recreation and will continue to shape it in the future. West Virginia is in a position to come out on top with the national change in outdoor recreation. West Virginia is a four-season destination that offers outdoor recreation activities for travelers and residents alike. More people are driving instead of flying for their travel - and over 60 percent of the United States population is within a 600 mile radius of West Virginia's borders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted how people participate in outdoor recreation. The question is are these new habits here to stay? In addition, are new habits going to be formed? The National Parks and Recreation Association (NPR) has released its top trend for the year 2021. One prediction is that urban areas will rethink and reclaim public spaces, as to how they can be utilized for urban parks. This comes as no surprise with the number of people staying local and visiting state parks and forests. Another predicted trend is that agencies will orient towards the health benefits of outdoor recreation. Studies have shown the multiple physical and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation. Additionally, the NPR predicts that technology will play a bigger role. They believe that some agencies will begin to track the movement and location of park patrons to better understand how the population uses their park systems. The State of West Virginia can look at these predictions and adapt them for the best use towards the patrons that will be visiting the state's outdoor recreational assets.



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SHIFT FOR RECREATION

In January 2020, the Outdoor Foundation released the 2019 Outdoor Participation Report. The report states that in 2018 a little more than half of the US population participated in outdoor recreation at least once. That means 151.8 million Americans participated in at least one outdoor activity in 2018. Since 2016 outdoor participation rates have grown an average of 1.7 percent. In 2018 participants went on a collective 10.2 billion outdoor outings, a 6.5 percent drop over the past three years. Female outdoor participation rates increased by an average of 1.7 percent over the last three years. The average participant had a mean age of 36.2, tended to be educated with a higher-than-average household income. Participants largely preferred low commitment and close-to-home outdoor recreation activities.

The 2013 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report found 90 percent of adults who regularly recreate outdoors were introduced to outdoor activities between the ages of 5 and 18. In 2018 kids went on 15 percent fewer annual outings than they did in 2012. The decline in frequency is worrisome for outdoor recreation overall because youth participation is a strong indicator for future activity. Kids who are active outdoors are twice as likely to be active when they become adults. This shows the importance of having quality outdoor recreation opportunities for youth industry wide.

The majority of participants tended to travel between 1 mile and 10 miles for their outdoor activities. The most popular activity by participation rate was running, jogging, trail running at 19.2 percent. Next was freshwater, saltwater, and fly fishing at 16.4 percent. The third most popular activities were road biking, mountain biking, BMX at 15.9 percent. This shows outdoor recreation on a steady rise over the past few years.

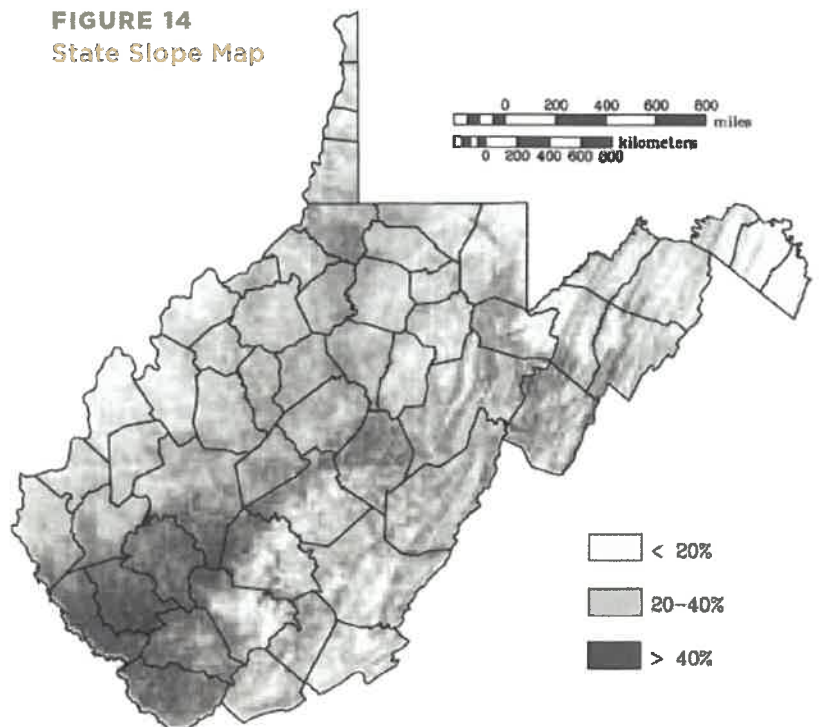
WEST VIRGINIA'S STORY

Physical Attributes

In addition to its Almost Heaven moniker, West Virginia has also earned the nickname, the Mountain State — and for a good reason. As the only state completely covered by the Appalachian Mountain region, West Virginia owes its distinct conservation and outdoor recreational features to its border along the Eastern Continental Divide, separating the Chesapeake Bay watershed to the East, from the Allegheny Plateau and Mississippi basin to the West. The highest point in West Virginia is Spruce Knob sitting at 4,863 feet above seas level. Additionally, at 1,500 feet, the state enjoys having the highest mean elevation of any state East of the Mississippi River. Within West Virginia's Monongahela National Forest, Roaring Plains Wilderness Area contains the highest plateau to be found in the East. These geographic distinctions have spurred tourism and outdoor recreation in a wide variety of outdoor activities including climbing, hiking, mountain biking, skiing, rafting, kayaking, motorized trail sports, hunting, fishing, and associated wildlife recreation. Taken altogether, the state's natural environment forms the perfect base for its appeal as an amenity-filled region for residents in the Eastern and Middle-Atlantic states.

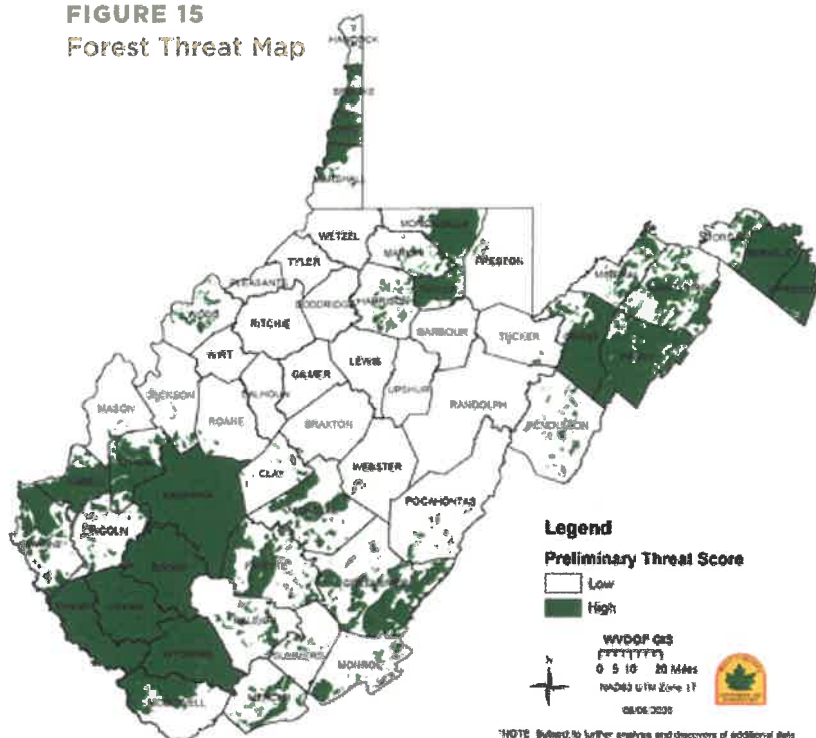
West Virginia's distinct topography is at the core of its natural appeal. Sixty percent of the state's land area has slopes greater than 20 percent, with the Southwest Coalfields and portions of the state's eastern mountains having slopes equal or exceeding grades of 40 percent (see Figure 14,, State Slope Map). This supports a wide range of weather, from warm summers to cold winters, due to higher amounts of rainfall and snow experienced in the mountains. The four distinct seasons create numerous opportunities for outdoor recreation, from activities as varied as whitewater rafting to downhill skiing. The state's land resources are equally distinct. Although heavily logged during the early 1900s, the state's reforestation has resulted in nearly the least landscape change of any state. At nearly 80 percent, West Virginia is the third most-forested state behind Maine and New Hampshire. Almost Heaven's lush geography and varied climate plays host to a wide array of plant and animal species, along with aquatic, terrestrial, and subterranean habitat. This has strengthened a number of public and private conservation efforts in support of reducing stressors from hardscapes and habitat fragmentation, along with climate-related stresses associated with wildfire, drought, flooding, non-native invasive plants, insect and disease losses and predation in state forest lands (see Figure 15 Forest Threat Map).

FIGURE 14
State Slope Map



Among the stresses on the state’s land and water assets, flooding is the most prevalent. West Virginia’s steep terrain heightens the flooding hazards from increased runoff. From 2005 to 2014, sixteen FEMA flooding disaster declarations were recorded in the state. With this increased runoff comes stream loading of nutrients, bacteria, chemicals, sediment, and trash. Lands within a 100-year floodplain can be found within 95 percent of West Virginia’s municipalities; when combined with steep slopes and poor soil conditions, the availability of buildable tracts are diminished. However, the redevelopment and protection of floodplains as public park space has helped protect drinking water and recreational uses, along with critical wetland and riparian habitats for priority plant and wildlife species, while boosting community social values from lands otherwise considered unsuitable for development.

**FIGURE 15
Forest Threat Map**



Travel Regions

The state of West Virginia has nine distinct travel regions from rolling hills to deep gorges and canyons, that offer unique recreation experiences. They include: the Eastern Panhandle, Hatfield-McCoy Mountains, Metro Valley, Mountain Lakes, Mountaineer Country, New-River-Greenbrier Valley, Potomac Highlands, and the Northern Panhandle. Each region has its own renowned landmarks and outdoor activities. West Virginia provides diverse outdoor experiences for all levels and activities within the state. West Virginia residents and visitors can travel to each region and do something different each time. The unique geography allows West Virginia to be a four-season state where outdoor recreation can thrive year-round.

Demographics

When a population increases it creates one set of planning issues and demands, while a population decline can create a very different set of issues. West Virginia is predominantly a state of small towns and rural areas with few of its metropolitan areas exceeding 50,000 population. The state’s overall demographic trend is currently one of natural decrease (deaths exceeding births—see Figure 16, below). Social impacts with this trend include an aging population, lack of physical activity, industry job losses, and reliance on fixed incomes. Decreasing populations or sustained small communities experience critical mass problems from not having enough population to adequately support infrastructure, public services, and other community needs. In terms of the LWCF program, most urban counties and larger communities have regular park budgets. Whereas towns with less than 1,500 population and most rural counties have progressively fewer resources. West Virginia has 61 towns having less than 500 residents, only 44 percent had dedicated park or recreation budgets, with only 13 percent having previously received LWCF assistance (see Figure 17).

Alternatively, West Virginia is seeing population growth in areas across the state. The projected growth locations include the Monongahela Country towards Pittsburgh, the Eastern Panhandle region towards the Metro Washington D.C. area, and the Southeastern Greenbrier Valley area near the Virginia border. (See Figure 18, State Projected Population Growth Map) The population increase will raise capacity issues and demands for new or expanded outdoor recreational facilities. Younger West Virginians will play a larger role in the state’s population and economic trends while also searching for a post-pandemic, “new normal” have considered the state’s economic slowdown as an opportunity to stabilize the state’s smaller communities with small-scaled attractions.

FIGURE 16
West Virginia Growth Rate

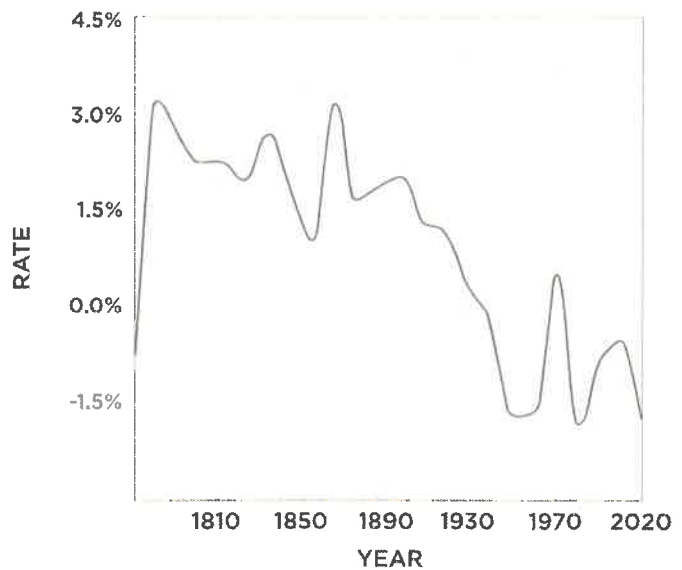
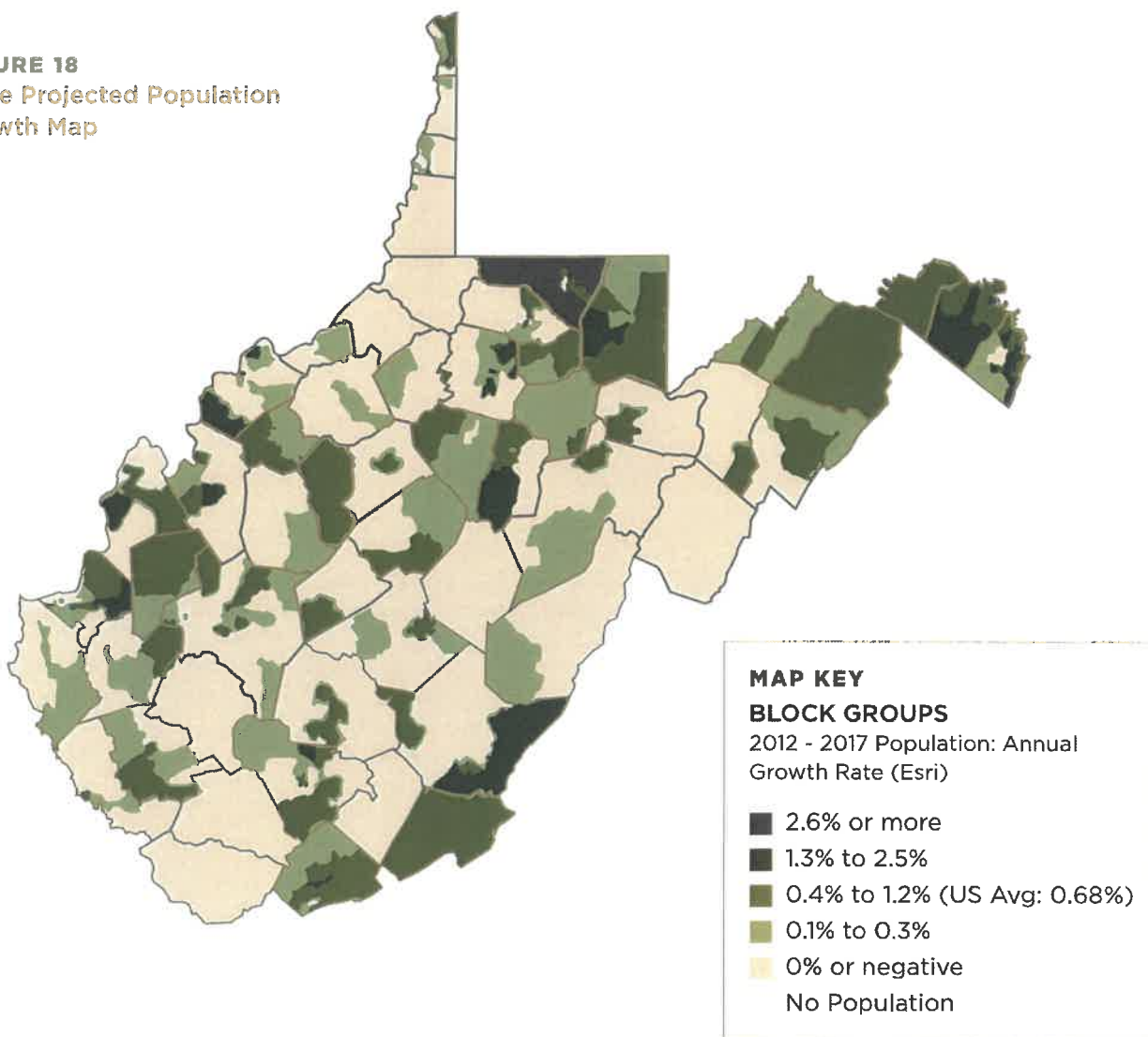


FIGURE 17
LWCF Participation in WV. 1965-2020

	Towns < 1500#	Towns 1500-10K#	Towns >10K#	Urban Counties	Rural Counties
# Places	139	69	14	20	33
Median Age	45	42	40.7	45	46.1
% ARC-Distressed	54%	29%	14%	20%	39%
% with Park Budget	57%	90%	100%	75%	58%
% LWCF-Assisted	28%	67%	100%	75%	36%

Thinking that more people feel comfortable visiting a rural area, smaller developments in a more rural area are thought of as an opportunity for a richer outdoor experience, fewer crowds, smaller destinations, less traffic, and a more affordable outdoor trip. Due to the pandemic, the nation has seen a rise in remote workers. People moving to areas with a lower cost of living and opportunities for outdoor recreation experience. With the new trends of national migration this allows West Virginia to be well positioned to offset the state's declining population.

FIGURE 18
State Projected Population
Growth Map



Recreation Economy

West Virginia's economic base has been diversifying for several years from traditional mining and manufacturing to the addition of small business and tourism/leisure development. While the state's extraction industries remain an important part of the economy, state tourism, based on outdoor recreation, has the potential to broaden and deepen in the future (See Figure 19, state map of probable coal extraction and Figure 20, U.S. map of tourism GDP — Gross Domestic Product). The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis released data that shows the outdoor recreation economy accounted for \$459.8 billion of current-dollar gross domestic product for the nation in 2019. The trend for outdoor recreation and the economy has shown growth over the years and 2019 was no different.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis has found all four key aspects of outdoor recreation have increased:

- Inflation-adjusted GDP for the outdoor recreation economy grew by 1.3 percent.
- Real gross output for the outdoor recreation economy has increased by 1.4 percent.
- Outdoor recreation compensation increased by 3.9 percent.
- Employment in the outdoor recreation industry increased by 0.4 percent.

FIGURE 19
Future Coal Development Probability in West Virginia

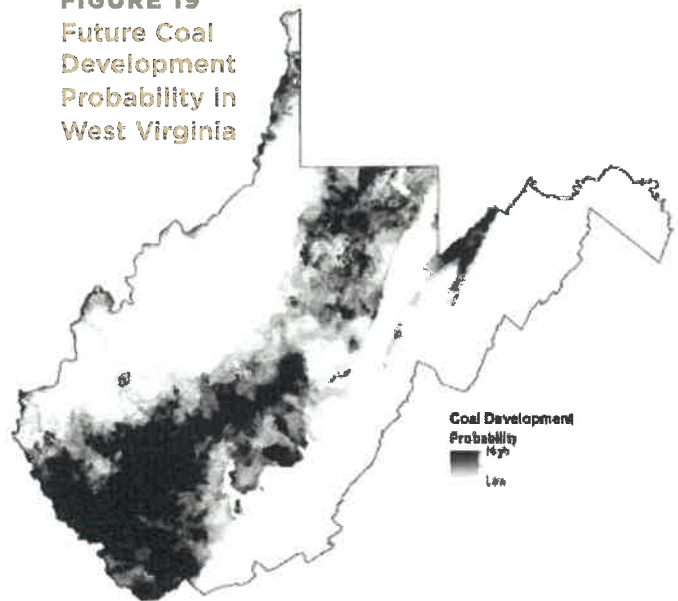
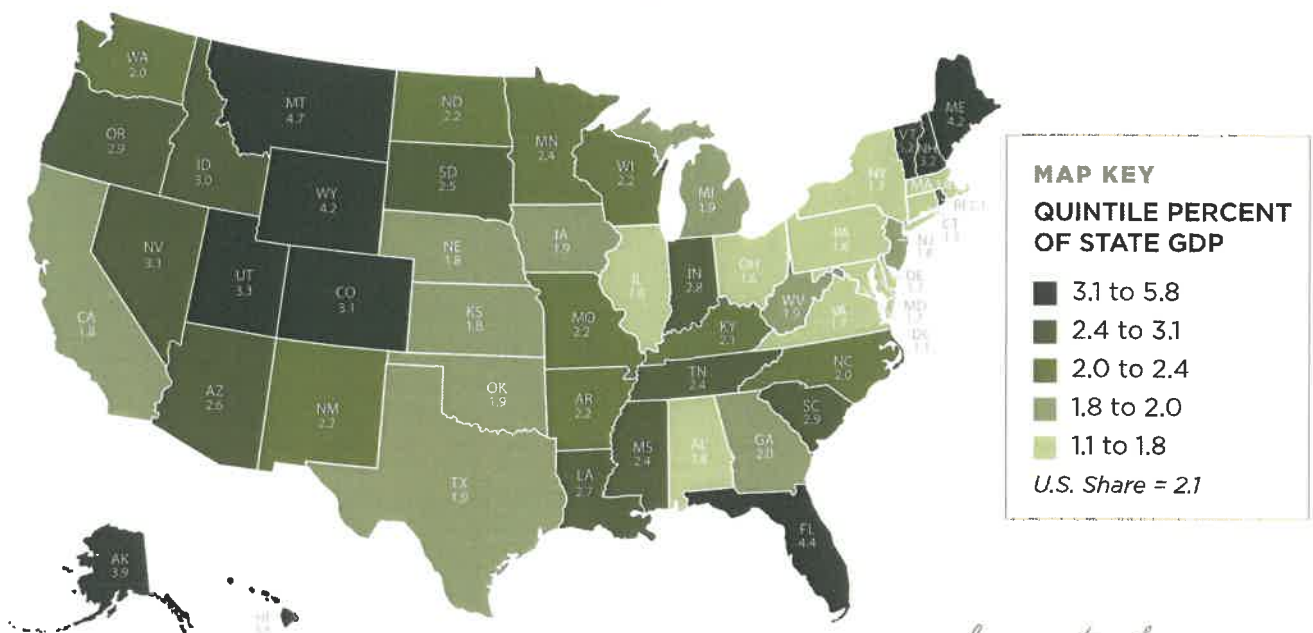


FIGURE 20
Outdoor Recreation Value Added: Percent of State GDP, 2019, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



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Figure 21 shows that West Virginia, coupled with the state's recent growth in tourism, stands to be a leader for outdoor recreation in the Mid-Atlantic region and surrounding areas.

Figure 22 shows the U.S. density map while Figure 23 shows the interstate connectivity in and around West Virginia. These factors have a great impact on economic value and total state domestic market travel. West Virginia's state park visitation consistently draws four-times the state's total population on a yearly basis. Now more than ever people are driven for more outdoor recreation experiences (Figure 24, next page).

FIGURE 21
Mid-Atlantic Outdoor
Recreation Value Added:
Percent of State GDP

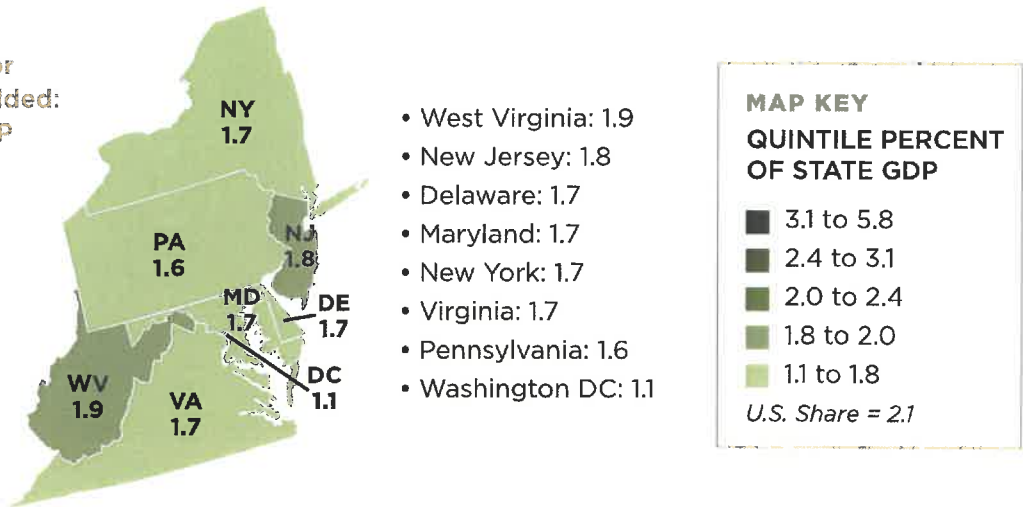


FIGURE 22
U.S. Density Map

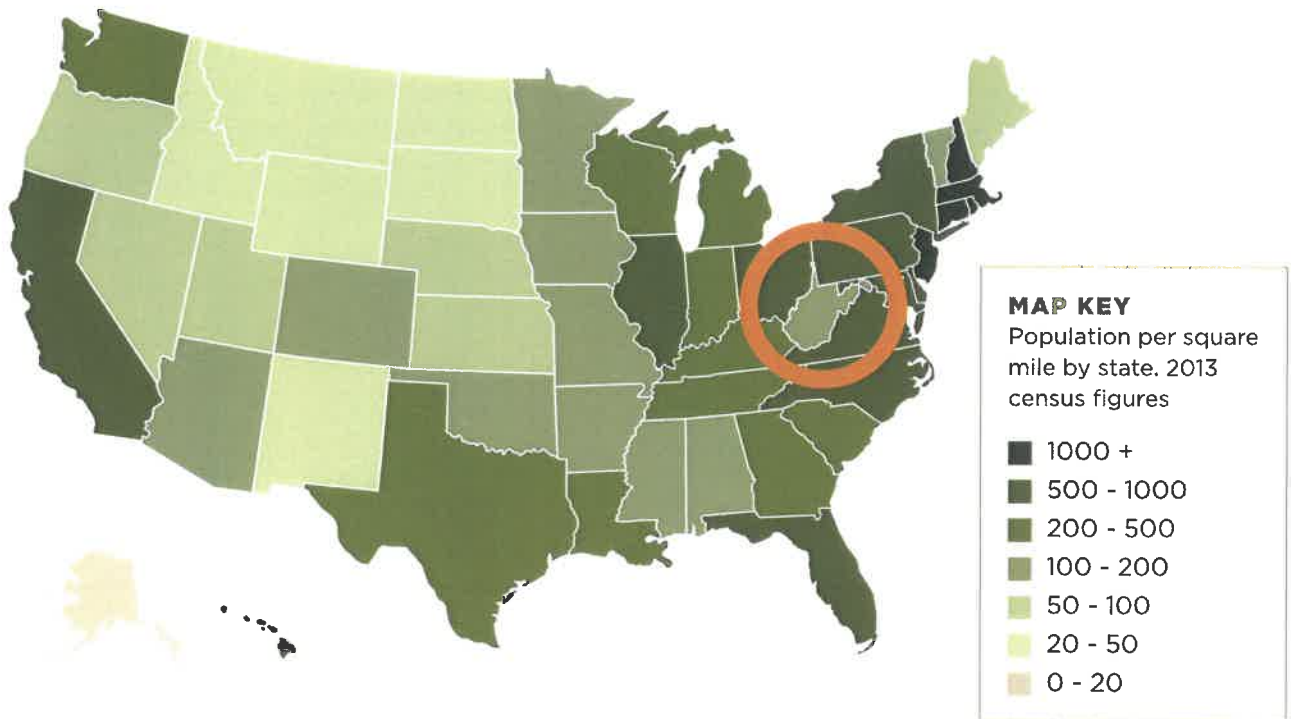


FIGURE 23
 Interstate Connectivity In and
 Around West Virginia

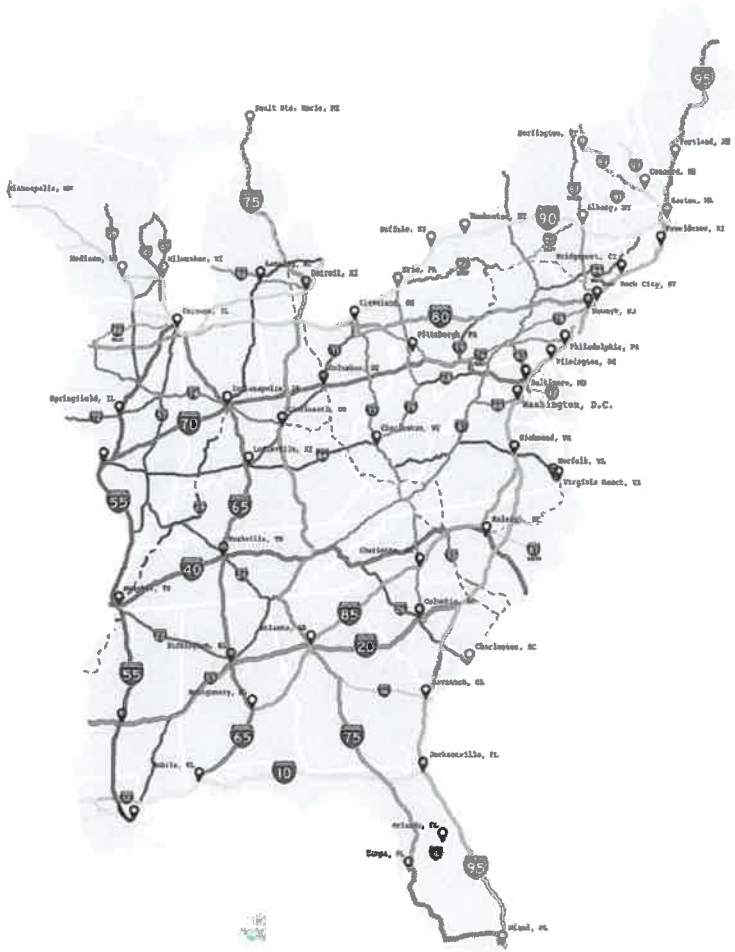


FIGURE 24
 West Virginia
 Public Lands

MAP KEY

- National Forests
- Wildlife Management Areas
- State Forests
- State Parks
- National Park Service
- National Wildlife Refuge
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Recreation Areas
- County/City Parks



0 20 40
 Miles
 1:700,000

Provided by:
 WV Division of Natural Resources
 Wildlife Resources Section, GIS
 Elkins, WV 26241
 February 22, 2021

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WEST VIRGINIA'S ASSETS

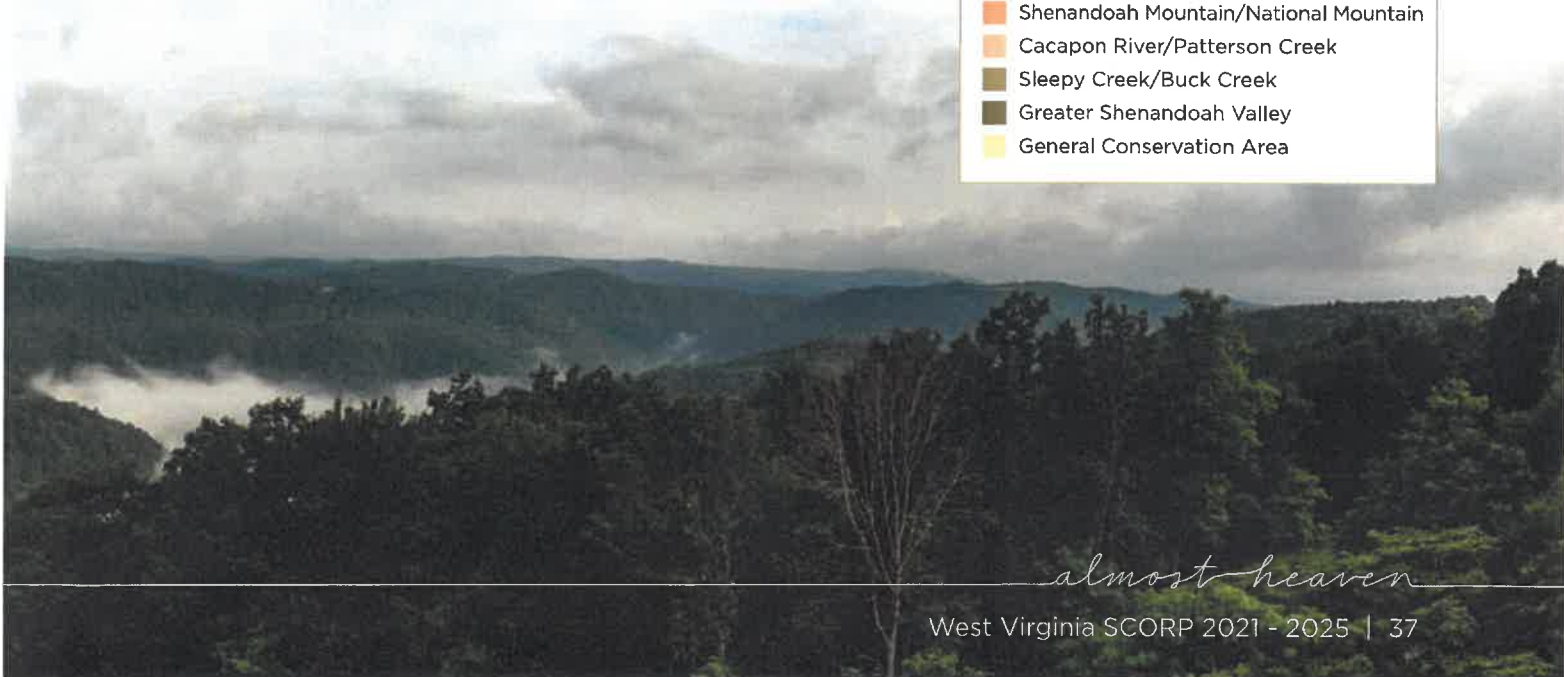
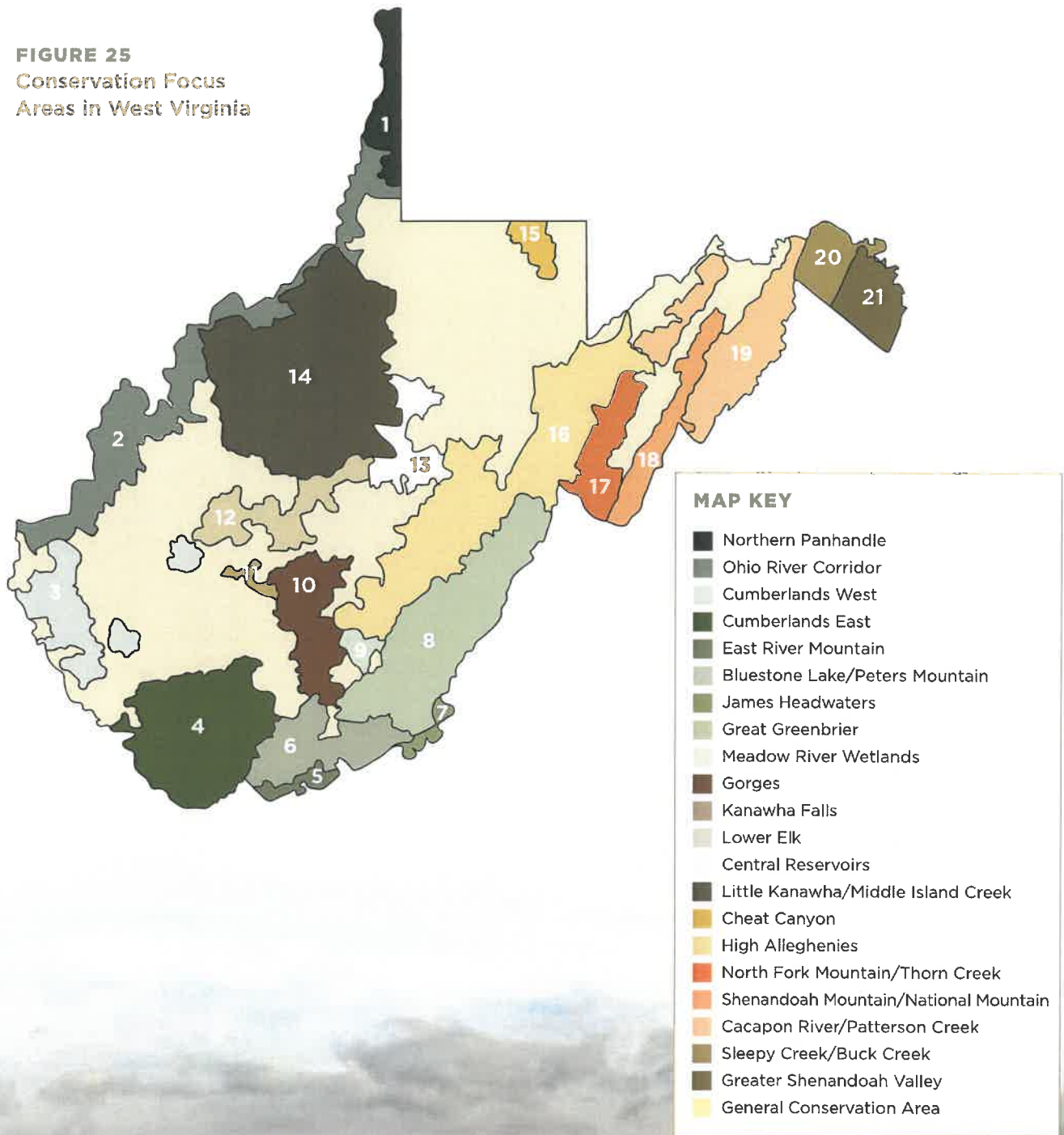
West Virginia's public lands not only relate to tourism, but often serve as community parks in many regions of the state. The state is home to more than 57 species of amphibians and reptiles, 70 wild mammals, 178 types of fish and nearly 300 different birds. Wildlife management areas provide publicly managed acreage for hunting and fishing, drawing many anglers and hunters to West Virginia. West Virginia is an epicenter for exceptional and rare bird sightings. In addition to its own resident raptors and songbirds, the Mountain State is along key routes for neotropical migration. That makes it a top wildlife viewing destination for both residents and travelers. The abundance of wildlife is vast across the wilderness of the Mountain State. Many outdoor recreation activities can be provided through local wildlife facilities and events.

Special Environmental Areas/Hidden Gems

The 2015 West Virginia State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) identifies Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and their habitats. It identifies 21 Conservation Focus Areas across West Virginia (See Figure 25, Conservation Focus Areas in West Virginia) where there are concentrations of SGCN and wildlife habitat, as well as distinctive stresses and conservation opportunities. Working with the Nature Conservancy and partners across the state, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources is drafting Action Plans for those Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs) to identify priority species, their habitats and stresses, conservation actions to alleviate those stresses, maintain habitat connectivity and boost climate resilience. The CFA Action Plans also identify public agency, non-profit and community partners in each CFA who can assist landowners with conservation actions. Protecting natural habitat can benefit communities by safeguarding drinking water source and aquifer recharge areas, floodplains, forests, and farmlands and the products they provide. Public lands and related projects that protect important habitat can provide vital recreational resources for community wellbeing, tourism, and economic development while also contributing to the conservation of West Virginia's natural heritage.



FIGURE 25
Conservation Focus
Areas in West Virginia



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Wetland Protection Priorities in West Virginia

Across West Virginia, wetlands can be found in every county. In West Virginia wetlands account for less than one percent of the total land area although provides a home to 23% of native plant species and 44% of its rare plants. Wetlands are home to specially adapted animals such as migratory birds, fish, mammals, amphibians, and insects. West Virginia's wetlands have a vital functions and crucial benefits for the ecosystem. Their benefits include but are not limited to water quality, flood control, wildlife habitat, wetland plant species rarity and public outdoor recreation.

The updated state wetlands plan plays an integral part in West Virginia's recreational plans. For more information, a complete text of the West Virginia State Wetlands Priorities can be found in the Appendix IV West Virginia Wetlands Plan. West Virginia wetlands have been scored statewide for their functions and values. More than half of the top-scoring 5 percent of wetlands are already protected on public lands or by conservation easements. Currently, there are 1,610 remaining wetlands that score in the top 5 percent statewide but are not yet protected. These wetlands meet the threshold criteria of the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan of 1991. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service they are vegetated, unprotected, and provide benefits in terms of wildlife, fisheries, water supply, flood and erosion protection, and outdoor recreation. Priority wetlands for conservation have been identified in 53 of West Virginia's 55 counties. Protecting these areas will bring critical benefits to nearly the whole state. Wetland mapping can be dated back to the early 1980's. Over the years there have been variations in maps from general areas to specific sites. This only justifies the importance of the LWCF for field review and the necessity for further continuation of wetland protection and management.

Over the past five years, increased assessments within Conservation Focus Areas have helped identify over 40,000 wetlands. The largest and most vulnerable being the High Alleghenies CFA region. The High Alleghenies contain the state's extant stands of Red Spruce, heather grass barrens and the state's largest wetlands (as noted in CFA-16 for the state's high Alleghenies area). Water quality is particularly important in this area as most of the state's highest quality water—designated as 'Tier-3'—is to be found in this region (See Figure 26, Conservation Focus Areas - Wetlands). Iron and aluminum contaminants —shown in red are critical problems for the state fish, the

Brook Trout, which call the Tier-3 streams their habitat. These areas and their endangered habitats are also most sensitive to drought, in which greater rain evaporation contributes to warmer than dryer conditions.

While this region contains the greatest number of forest blocks in the state, their distribution is uneven and unconnected for species diversity. The lack of abundance limits the protection of drinking water sources. This situation creates opportunities for additional conservation with recreation acquisitions of public lands to help mitigate development pressure. A second area of environmental concern and potential conservation acquisitions for low-impact recreational growth is the ridge and valley ecoregion bordering the Potomac River in the state's Eastern Panhandle. The accelerated urbanization from the Metro D.C. area is a stressor for the biosphere extension of the Alleghenies CFA to the state's eastern boundary with Maryland (See Figure 27).

FIGURE 26
Conservation Focus Areas - Wetlands

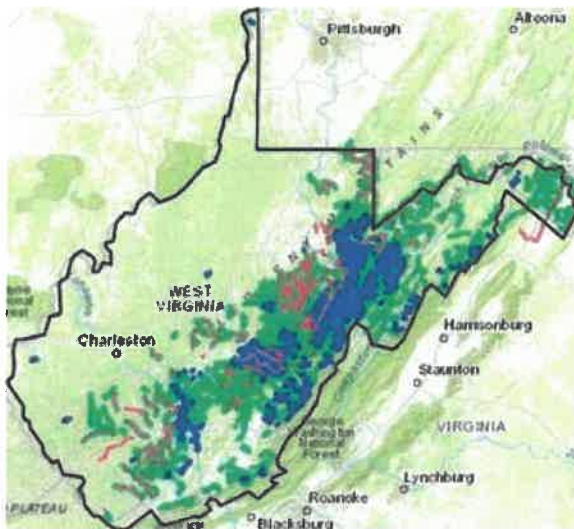
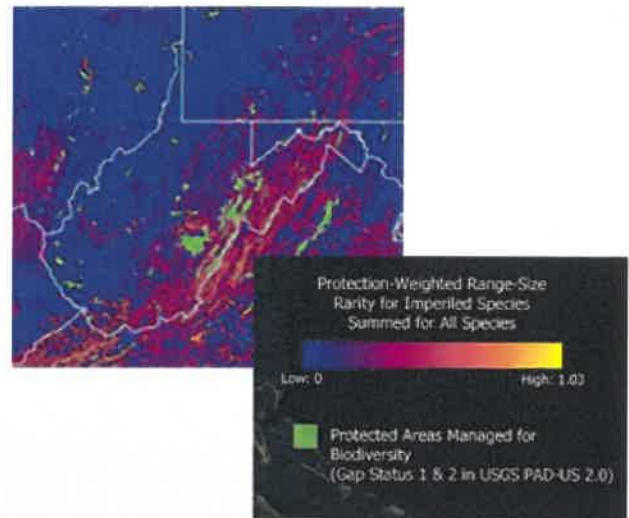
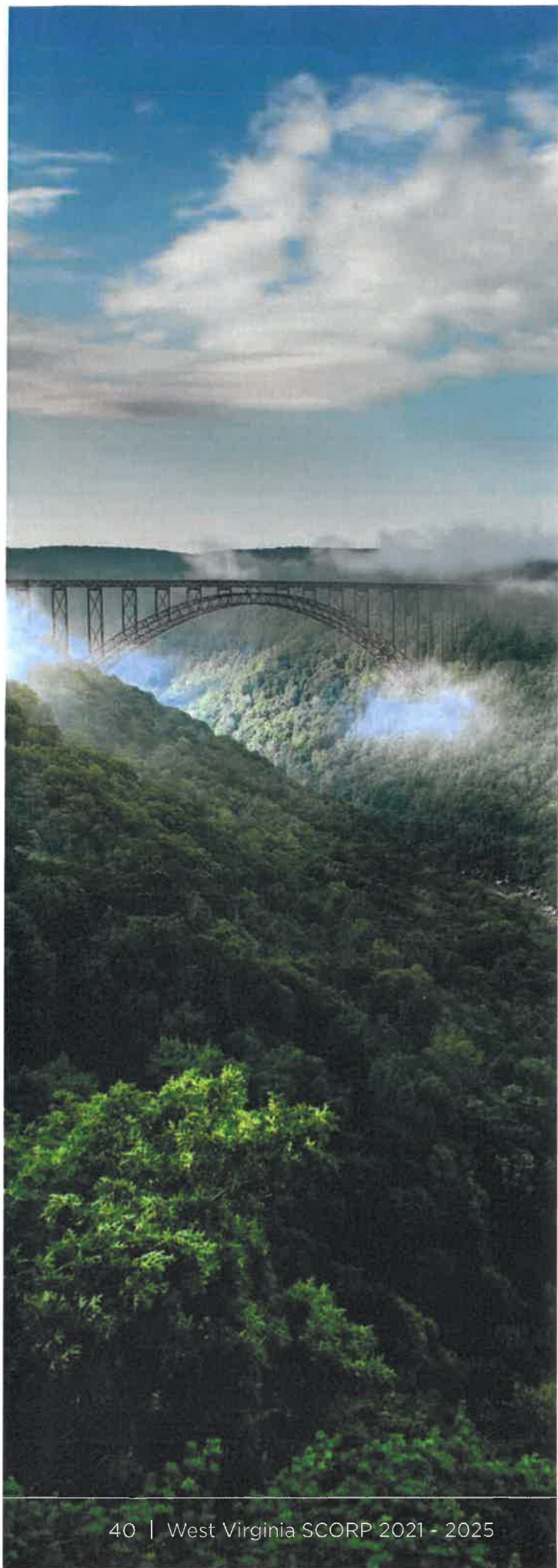


FIGURE 27
State Biodiversity Threat Map





National Parks and Public Lands

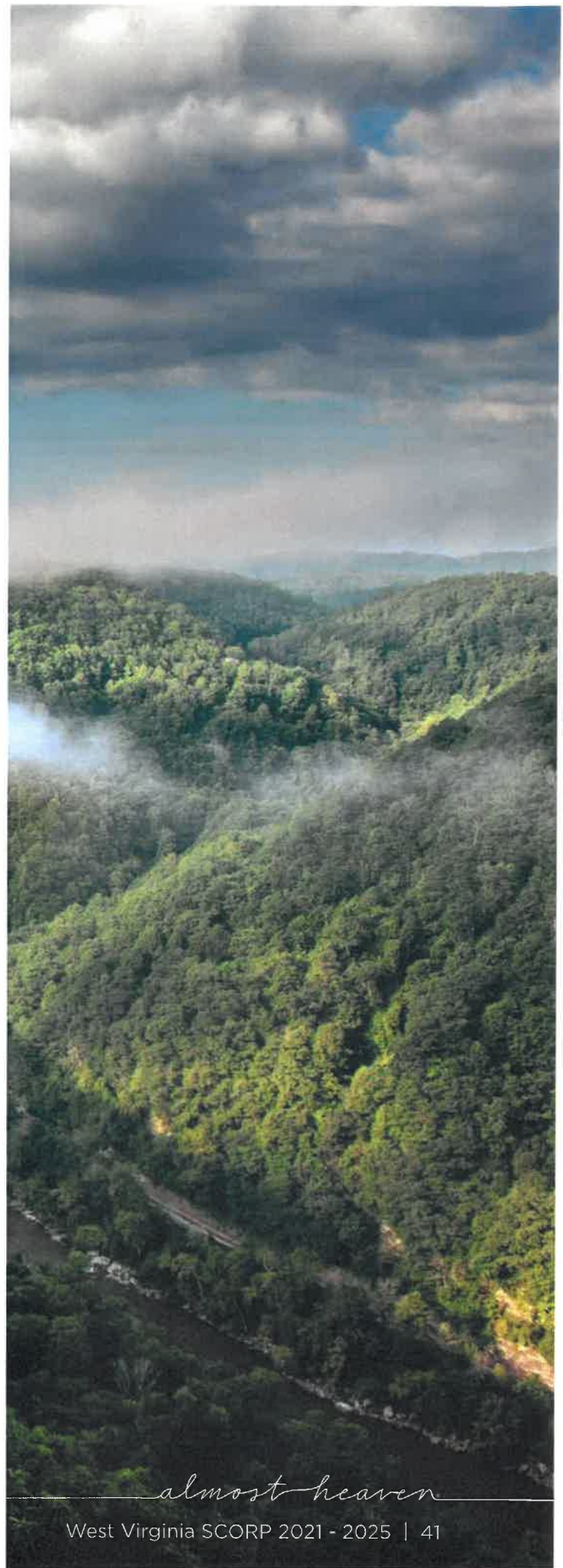
Rolling hills. Ancient rivers. Deep forests. When you look at West Virginia, it's no wonder "Almost Heaven" comes to mind. The State of West Virginia and the National Park Service have a deep history of preserving the natural and cultural resources for current residents and future generations to enjoy. Our state encompasses over 1 million acres of national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, scenic rivers, trails and other public lands — all national treasures that speak to the heritage and quality of life for each and every West Virginian. The National Park System offer incredible opportunities to experience history, explore the state's natural beauty and venture to amazing places. West Virginia sees over 1 million visitors to our federally managed land.

For residents and visitors alike, a visit to any of these national parks and recreation areas leaves lasting memories and a longing to return:

- Appalachian National Scenic Trail
- Bluestone National Scenic River
- Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park
- Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- Gauley River National Recreation Area
- George Washington and Jefferson National Forests
- Harpers Ferry National Historical Park
- Monongahela National Forest
- National Coal Heritage Area
- New River Gorge National Park and Preserve
- Ohio River Islands Refuge
- Wheeling National Heritage Area

This section would not be complete without an additional mention of the National Park Service's newest addition - the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve has taken its place as the nation's 63rd national park. Designated as a national river in 1978 and cared for by the National Park Service, the New River Gorge has been a prime outdoor location, known for rock-climbing, hiking and whitewater rafting in Almost Heaven, West Virginia. The 7,021-acre park will focus on the New River Gorge, with its visitor center and trailheads, while the remaining 65,165 acres will be part of the national preserve to allow hunting and fishing.

The new designation only confirms how special of a place the New River Gorge is. The area is already a prime destination for the outdoor community. The New River Gorge area is a one stop destination for anyone seeking outdoor adventure home to multiple outdoor recreation activities like hiking, whitewater paddling, climbing, hunting, and fishing and their supported outdoor recreational businesses. For years, residents and visitors have been experiencing the beautiful public land the area has to offer. The new designation will now bring new travelers to the area to experience the wonder it has to offer. The future looks bright from locals to new visitors that will bring substantial growth for the local community and the state.



almost heaven



State Parks & Forests

The state parks and forests of West Virginia represent the very backbone of conservation and tourism. The overall system is composed of 35 state parks, nine state forests and three state rail trails and is visited by an average of 7 million guests annually. Park natural and historic areas must be protected and preserved, and their facilities maintained, renovated, and modernized in order to keep up with resident and visitor demands. Funding such as that created by LWCF matching grants, are greatly important to carrying out these responsibilities. LWCF funding has been, in fact a major contributor to the growth, development and expansion of the West Virginia State Parks system.

THE MISSION OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION SECTION, AS DETAILED IN THE WEST VIRGINIA CODE CHAPTER §20 5-3, IS TO:

“Promote conservation by preserving and protecting natural areas of unique or exceptional scenic, scientific, cultural, archaeological, or historical significance and to provide outdoor recreational opportunities for the citizens of this State and its visitors.”

The Parks and Recreation Section has very successfully met the mandates of this legislated mission throughout its 92-year history. With its protection and preservation of over 164,000 acres of easily accessible public land, the Parks and Recreation Section (Park System) promotes conservation with its mere existence. Fully 150,000 acres or 92% of the land within the park system remain undeveloped wild lands.



The protection of these wildland green spaces, and largely undisturbed ecosystems, is vitally important to the state and nation. State park lands are set aside in their most natural condition for the benefit of the public now and for generations to come. This preservation has enormous ecological, scientific, and cultural benefits. Equally as important is the noteworthy contribution to the quality of life for the citizens of the state. State parks, forests, and rail trails contribute significantly to the physical and mental health of their users.

Additionally, the upper watersheds of many of West Virginia's rivers and streams are within the Parks and Recreation Section's responsibility, helping to ensure healthy water supplies for the citizens within and outside the state's borders. Hiking trails, park and forest roads meander quietly through natural areas providing tranquil settings for mental and physical health and enrichment of visitors. Moreover, this prime real estate adds significantly to the land values of surrounding privately owned lands, which contribute to the tax base of county governments.

In terms of the legislated mission to provide recreation, agency management efforts afford nearly:



13,000 acres of developed lands which are enjoyed by residents and visitors



Facilities include:
798 lodge rooms,
358 cabins,
1,546 campsites,
152 picnic shelters and
559 playground units



The Park System staff maintains more than 2.5 million square feet of indoor space in nearly 1,500 buildings with an average age of over 50 years



More than 700 miles of hiking trails are provided across 47 areas

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While city and county park activities have been trending from active towards passive outdoor recreational interests, within state parks, forests, and other public lands, the state is experiencing demands for more innovative and challenging activities. Recreational activities include not only traditional camping, picnicking, and hiking, but also range from intense pursuits such as downhill skiing and rock climbing, to more relaxed activities like golf and marinas. The West Virginia Park System has incredibly diverse revenue producing features in comparison to other state park systems. This diversity includes, the management of town and train operations at Cass; an island and sternwheel boat operation at Blennerhassett Island; a ski area at Canaan Valley; and zipline operations at Pipestem Resort State Park, as a partial list of features which separate West Virginia's state parks from national norms.

Every West Virginia state park and forest area contributes to the value of the state and the excellence and complexity of the system. Unique West Virginia treasures such as Blackwater Falls, Babcock Glade Creek Grist Mill, Twin Falls Resort's Pioneer Farm, and the Droop Mountain Battlefield Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) era lookout tower are iconic representations of West Virginia. Exceptional scenic overlooks are to be seen at areas such as Hawks Nest State Park, Cacapon Resort State Park, Pipestem Resort State Park, Babcock State Park, Lost River State Park, Coopers Rock State Forest, and Carnifex Ferry Battlefield State Park. The preservation of the impressive virgin forest at Cathedral State Park and the representation of 18th century life at Prickett's Fort State Park, while at the same time parks' operation of Stonewall Resort State Park, Canaan Valley Resort State Park, and Pipestem Resort State Park further represents the diversity of this entire system.

In order to bring fresh understanding to the role of West Virginia State Parks as an economic generator in West Virginia, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) commissioned an economic impact study in FY 2016. A key finding of this study is that the total economic impact of the system annually ranges

A Lasting Impression /

It is the diversity of this system that leaves a lasting impression on both West Virginians and visitors alike. According to the West Virginia State Parks Marketing Research Study, conducted by the Institute for Service Research, 73.4 percent of visitors to West Virginia State Parks have a strong desire to return. Data shows that 'positive word-of-mouth' and 'memories of past trips' are the two leading information sources that influence visitors' decisions to visit our state parks. This speaks highly to the efforts of the Parks and Recreation Section to live up to their legislative mandate, and concurs with marketing and advertising research completed by the West Virginia Department of Tourism, showing that visitors to the state experience a longing to return.



between \$160.5 million and \$189.5 million. Economic impact is a measure of new money infused into the state's economy that likely would not have been generated in the absence of the state park system. In other words, for every dollar of general tax revenue provided to the West Virginia State Parks, \$13.15 on average was generated in new money that would not be present except for the operation of state parks and forests. Economic impacts were also calculated for each park location. As an example, Blackwater Falls attracted 855,085 visitors, spending \$25.6 million in West Virginia during their visits, with an estimated contribution to the economy of \$20.5 million in economic impact. In terms of visitor spending, locations stimulating the largest amounts of spending in the study were Blackwater Falls, Pipestem, and Stonewall State Parks. With regarding to economic impact, these three locations also produced the highest levels.

Being an economic generator also carries with it great responsibility. And, state parks and forests staff, the West Virginia Legislature, and the Governor of West Virginia all recognize and embrace that challenge. The 2018 Legislative Performance Review Audit recommended an additional \$3 million be budgeted annually to the section for major repairs and equipment replacement to address deferred maintenance.

Bond financed development programs are making an important impact to the system. The Cacapon Resort State Park Lodge expansion and existing lodge renovation, funded with excess Lottery monies, have continued to progress with an anticipated public opening of the new wing occurring in October 2020. A second excess Lottery fund bond program valued at \$60 million is ongoing. This program was specifically set up for repairs and upgrades throughout the system including lodge and cabin updates and redecoration, improved



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accessibility, water and wastewater treatment upgrades, recreational projects, technology upgrades, infrastructure repairs, bathhouse improvements and other similar improvements. This investment will provide immediate and long-term positive returns including higher guest satisfaction, greater guest safety, revenue enhanced production, and improved regulatory compliance. By the end of FY2020, significant progress has been made toward the completion of these projects. Major bond funded renovations to state park lodges are scheduled for FY2021. It should be noted that an additional \$100+ million in renovation, maintenance, modernization, equipment, and project funding has been identified by DNR beyond the current bond funding levels. Future LWCF funding could be a huge contributor to this continuing need.



Fiscal Year 2020 saw many notable improvements. Perhaps the most significant was the renovation of almost every cabin across the system. These bond projects varied in size and scope, depending upon need, but largely included: Complete renovation of kitchens and bathrooms, new furniture, electric upgrades, porch additions, insulation, new HVAC, roofing, flooring, and decor features.

The Park System committed significant resources last year to trail construction, maintenance, and repairs across the state. Hiking continues to be the number one reason guests make their first visit to a state park. Trail maintenance coordinators were hired in areas which demonstrated special need. As a part of this emphasis on trails, the Park System is expanding mountain bike opportunities and partnering with local communities, foundations, and entities such as the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) to bring more bike riding opportunities to park guests and local residents.

Significant paving work has been completed on roadways across the Park System by the West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDEHD). Other noteworthy individual projects completed in FY2020 included: Construction of a new group camp bathhouse at Tomlinson Run State Park in partnership with the Hancock County Commission, renovation of the Main Bathhouse at Berkeley Springs, construction of two new rental cabins at the Stonewall Resort, construction of camper cabins at Camp Creek and Little Beaver, utility upgrades to campsites at various parks, construction of a maintenance shop for the North Bend Rail Trail and significant Wi-Fi expansion across the system.

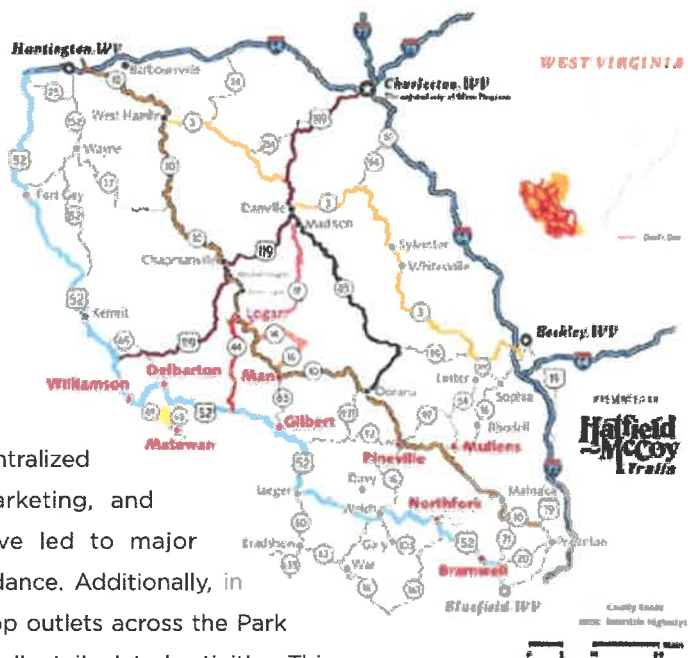


In addition to improvements, construction of a new trail system to serve the pilot legislated mandate to offer off road motorized riding at Cabwaylingo State Forest was completed by state parks business partner the Hatfield McCoy Regional Recreation Authority (See figure 28, Hatfield-McCoy Trails map). These new trails and associated facilities will open to the public in the spring of 2021. West Virginia continues to add new opportunities to enjoy its natural beauty, including the Elk River Trail, added to the West Virginia State Park System in late 2020 with the other two rail trails, allowing visitors to explore new areas of West Virginia’s outdoor recreation for generations to come.

Critical to the mission of providing recreation to the public, the system must provide services, facilities, and programs to all people in a safe and accepting environment. Most of the items identified in the original systemwide ADA assessment are complete, while additional and ever evolving needs remain and require funding. The excess lottery bonds will address many Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) needs.

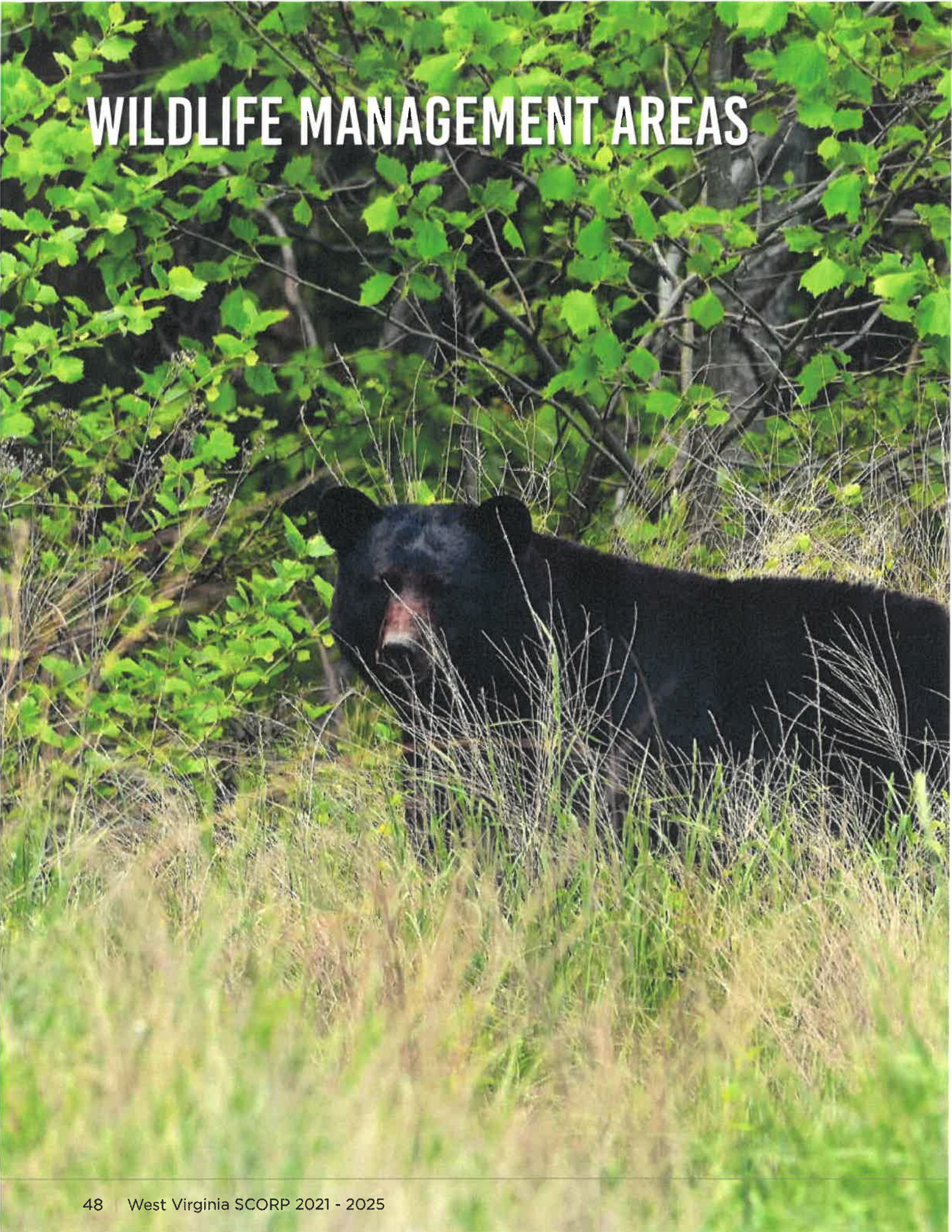
The Parks and Recreation Section and the West Virginia Department of Tourism have also initiated major technological improvements in state parks over the last few years which include, centralized reservation systems, a call center, targeted marketing, and internet reservations. These improvements have led to major increases in business, occupancy, and park attendance. Additionally, in FY2020 Parks centralized the operation of gift shop outlets across the Park System and hired a full-time manager to coordinate all retail related activities. This decision was based upon the recommendation of professional consulting and is designed to build upon the already robust retail business within West Virginia State Parks.

FIGURE 28
Hatfield-McCoy Trail Map



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WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS



Abundance of Wildlife

The statewide Wildlife Management Program is designed to conserve and manage high-quality habitats for a variety of wildlife species and to improve public access to enjoy these resources. West Virginia is home to over 70 Wildlife Management Areas (WMA). WMA's are located in almost every county of the state and provide publicly managed acreage for hunting and fishing, drawing many anglers and hunters to West Virginia. The rugged mountains cut with river valleys and woodlands provide excellent habitat for over 300 bird species. The diverse terrain and species draw many people to the state for the outdoor activity of birding. There are nearly 430,000 acres of state-managed WMA land that is publicly accessible. The state also provides various opportunities to discover, connect and appreciate the local flora and fauna.

Wildlife-focused Recreation Opportunities

Over 78,000 acres in new wildlife management areas have been acquired in the last three years. Included in the new land is the West Virginia's Division of Natural Resources (DNR) reintroduction of elk to the mountain state. Prior to the Civil War and the Industrial Revolution Elk were common in Appalachia. The herd is about 80 elk spanning over 35,000 acres between Tomblin and Laurel Lake Wildlife Management Areas. An additional project is the construction of a new nature center at the Forks of Coal State Natural Area. West Virginia is home to Cranberry Glades Botanical Area; the network of bogs features plant life that is typically found in northern climates such as those in Canada. West Virginia's DNR plans to create around two dozen handicap accessible trails on WMA land over the next decade.

Local Parks and Public Lands

Since 1965 West Virginia has acquired or developed over 500 LWCF-assisted parks and playgrounds having a capital value at least double the more than \$50 million provided by the National Park Service. Forty-two LWCF projects were awarded by the NPS during Fiscal 2015-2020, primarily dedicated to baseline park improvements for localities, following the same priorities from the preceding 2010-2014 fiscal cycle. Improvements to both Hollowell Field and Beckwith pool are examples of the 2010-2014 priorities (See Figures 29 and 30).

FIGURE 29
Hollowell Field



FIGURE 30
Beckwith Pool



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The First Congressional District received the most LWCF awards (18) due to greater population and more localities are located in Northern West Virginia than elsewhere in the state. Also significant with respect to LWCF statutory requirements for 50 percent non-federal match, median incomes in this district are higher enabling communities' ability to pay. By contrast, Second and Third District localities are more representative of ARC-defined Distressed or At-Risk counties, making a greater case in seeking LWCF assistance. Nevertheless, almost 70 percent of new LWCF-assisted park facilities developed during 2015-2020 were developed in Central and Southern West Virginia. A representative of a previous finished project is the City of Lewisburg's lighting improvements to their Hollowell Field and Fayette County's Beckwith Pool rehabilitation.

Representation of LWCF — funded new facilities include the City of Nitro's Veterans Memorial Park and the Town of Davis's Boulder Park that adjoins a WVDEDT Recreational Trail project through the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge (See Figures 31 and 32).

FIGURE 31
City of Nitro Veterans Memorial Park

FIGURE 32
Town of Davis's Boulder Park



LWCF park projects in two reclaimed floodplain areas included playground facilities in the City of Elkins' Glendale Park and picnic and playground improvements for the City of Buckhannon's North Park (See Figure 33).



FIGURE 33
Elkins' Glendale Park

Interest over the past five years in state bicycle and hiking trail development has spurred greater planning and trail development projects with the West Virginia Division of Highway's Recreational Trails (RT) program in conjunction with the West Virginia Department of Environmental Affairs' Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Pilot Program's focus on community economic revitalization. While neither RT nor AML funds are eligible matches for LWCF applications, they may fund separate but related outdoor recreation developments having LWCF eligibility. One such project is an ongoing 'trail town' AML reclamation project by and between the City of Montgomery and adjoining Town of Smithers, West Virginia. Additionally, with other communities in the Upper Kanawha Valley are actively developing a larger tourism and outdoor recreation strategy to boost ecotourism and trail development with anchor facilities and connections to the New River Gorge National Park (See Figure 34).

Beginning with the Fiscal 2021 funding cycle, state DHUD CDBG Block Grant funds are now an eligible match towards LWCF projects and may enable other small communities meeting HUD's low- to-moderate income requirements to acquire additional financial support for their green infrastructure projects.

Federal-side apportionments of LWCF funds are altogether different with \$9.5 billion-worth of deferred maintenance work nationwide at federal parks, which in West Virginia include the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, Gauley River National Recreation Area, Bluestone National Scenic River, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, the headquarters building for the Appalachian Trail, and the Harpers Ferry Center which produces interpretive exhibits for NPS units nationwide.



FIGURE 34
City of Montgomery

Community/Social Benefits

With additional educational programs and workforce training, citizens can learn the additional benefits of the public spaces within their community. Through the proper educational initiative, West Virginia can help preserve natural and cultural resources. The same space or its extension can double as outdoor classrooms for interpretive trails or the commemoration of cultural or historical developments of local significance. Not having such spaces for public use is to miss an important difference for life quality and communal value added to an area's overall attractiveness as a place to live, work and play.

Health Benefits

Overweight and obesity rates among children and adults have been a concern across the nation and within the state of West Virginia. Anyone who is either overweight or obese increases their risk of developing preventable chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and strokes. Besides providing an outlet for necessary physical activity, park areas provide important venues for positive mental health renewal. Socialization needs for parents, family members, relatives, friends, groups, and the community at large are served well by outdoor spaces that can support picnics, reunions, graduations, memorials, holidays, religious services, festivals, or weddings.

Studies have shown a combination of physical activity and being in nature can significantly reduce the risk of preventable physical and mental diseases. It recommended that the average adult participates in at least 30 to 60 minutes of regular, moderately intense physical activity to see the significant benefits for both mental and physical health. People who partake in regular physical activity tend to schedule fewer doctor or health visits. Additional funding for public spaces can provide easier access for the people not only to enjoy the outdoors but also to take advantage of the numerous benefits of outdoor recreation.

Environmental Benefits

With 80% of West Virginia covered in forested land, it is no wonder why people come to enjoy the scenic landscapes and utilize the recreational assets. West Virginia's land conservation should be viewed as a vital factor in improving the overall economic prosperity, health, and quality of life throughout the state. The location of park or conservation areas can help protect natural ecosystems that provide multiple benefits to the communities that utilize outdoor recreation. Established trails systems and outdoor facilities protect important habitats and provide green spaces for both people and wildlife. Conservation of mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes, and other ecosystems help prevent soil erosion, flooding, and destruction of unique habitats. Funding can provide proper land management for recreational while provide restoration to ecosystems and the benefits they provide. Plant species such as trees are effective in improving air quality, and regulate temperature acting as natural air conditioners. Trees and other green spaces assist with stormwater, flooding, and erosion. Appropriate management of public spaces can help defend against invasive species and protect native West Virginia wildlife. Local wildlife drives popular outdoor recreation activities such as fishing, hunting, and bird watching.

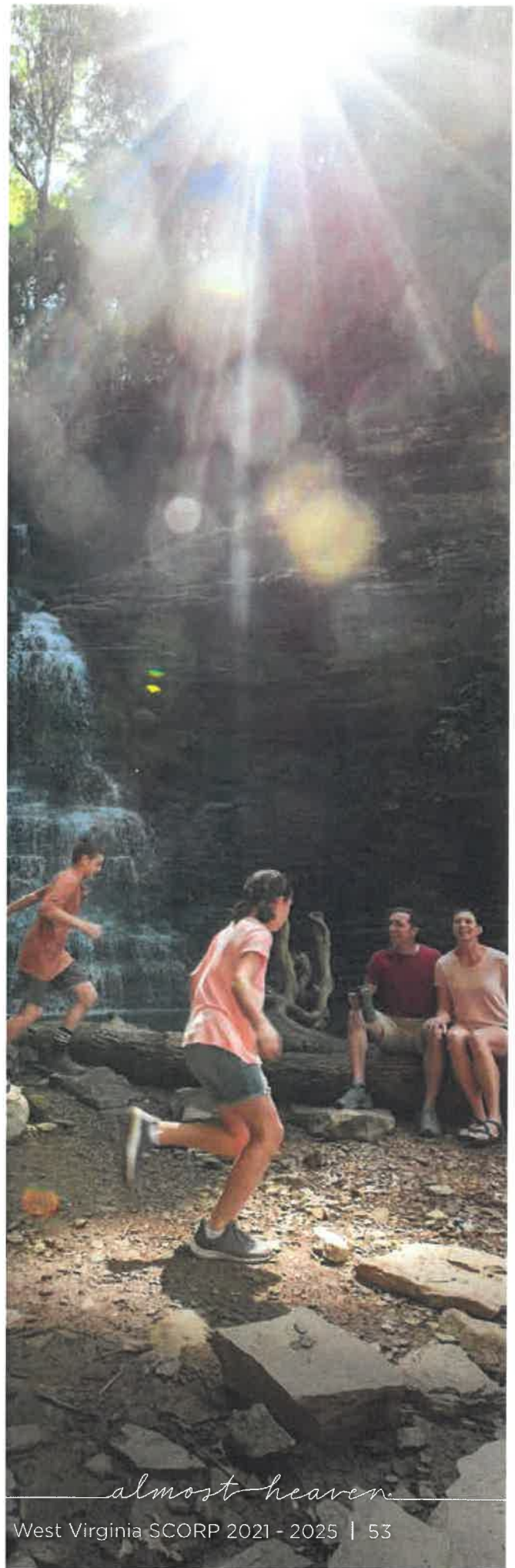
Economic Benefits

The outdoor recreation industry significantly contributes to the West Virginia economy. Outdoor recreation can be found throughout the state from small local shops to high-end resort. Throughout the year outdoor recreation drives tourism dollars, increases the tax base, and creates jobs. The size and location of public land can help drive the areas economic development. The desire of public land can impact the growth of public amenities such as local businesses and community services surrounds it. It can furnish public amenities to surrounding businesses and community services or functions (such as schools, hospitals, clinics, etc.). Investing in outdoor recreation assets can encourage the development of hospitality and community-based businesses such as restaurants and hotels. Planned outdoor recreation events around public areas can be economic drivers for local areas. Bridge Day at The New River Gorge National Park and Preserve is one of many examples within West Virginia. Public land and outdoor recreation opportunities can provide many economic values to any community.

In 2020, the Pennsylvania Land Trust published a study on the economic benefits of trails from around the country, demonstrating the community-wide benefits of trails and greenspaces. Not only do trails increase nearby property value, but they also make communities more attractive for both residential and business means. By providing low or no-cost recreation opportunities to families, medical costs are often reduced with the increase in physical activity. Similarly, these alternative means of transportation result in a reduction of fuel costs for short-distance trips.

Areawide Benefits

Given the growing interest in state and local tourism development, it is the upmost importance to connect communities through public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities. Having communities connected through outdoor recreation assets can bring residents and visitors to new areas. Having well-planned, connective networks can accommodate and benefit people varying all ages and abilities. A connective network allows accessibility to populations who usually do not have the opportunities to enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation. A connective network brings health, community, social, environmental, and economic benefits to all those who enjoy any part of West Virginia.



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2021-2025 PRIORITIES

POLICY PLAN

For over 50 years, West Virginia's federally assisted, public outdoor recreation estate has benefited more than 157 units of state and local government. There have been more than 500 park acquisition and development projects. Increasing that number of close-to-home public recreational opportunities is necessary since the number of local governments exceeds 200, predominantly in rural areas. An increase to accessible public land can increase positive social factors and health benefits. Healthy lifestyles can help drive down health and behavior risks which are great costs to the state. The state's older population, slow outward-migration, and natural decrease in population all point to less spending, and a shrinking tax base can greatly impact the state's overall health.

A bright spot in these years-long demographic trends is the state's growth as an amenity region for East Coast and Great Lakes residents looking for get-away, mountain outdoor experiences. Supporting this trend is the U.S. Travel Association's 2019 U.S. Travel and Tourism Overview that states 80 percent of all U.S. domestic travel exists for the pursuit of leisure activities. This opportunity has a multi-faceted impacted on economic development, community health, and public infrastructure.

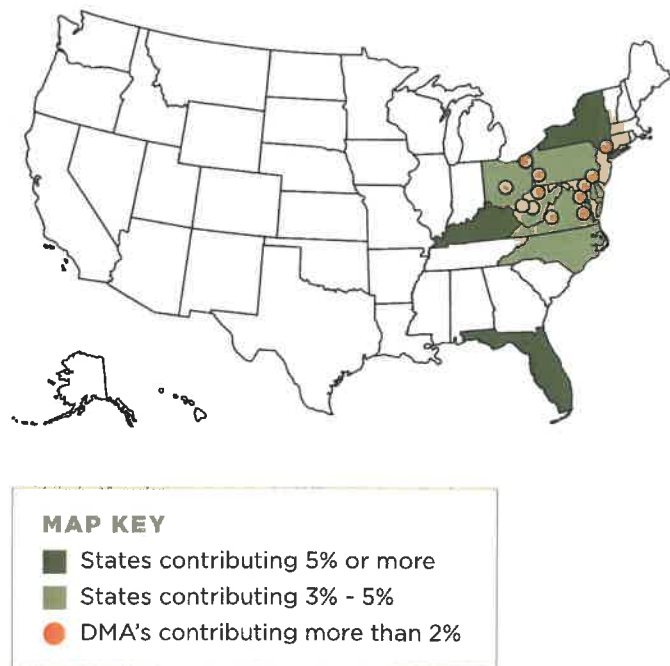
For West Virginia to prosper both as a local haven and travel destination, there must a group effort by and between business, community and non-profit representatives working together to develop more sustainable communities featuring improved outdoor recreational experiences. The payoff may not occur right away; however, any 'no action' alternative is a sure bet for negative demographic trends to continue. As noted previously, towns having less than 1,500 residents may have 'critical mass' problems where the given population is not large enough to adequately support infrastructure, public services, and other community needs. The LWCF can help fund a variety of different projects that boost development of smaller communities land acquisition for state parks and state forest can help draw travelers to smaller communities and provide revenue for other businesses like restaurants and stores. Multiuse trails used for hiking and biking are a great way to help build a sense community. The ability to have an interconnective trail system between communities can boost small communities expose for the states own residents. Additional funds must be considered for the maintenance and infrastructure for established parks. The more up-to-date and well-kept parks can great increase the desirability of an area. Areas with great parks amenities are more likely to draw permanent residents. The LWCF can help contribute to the growth to small communities so hopefully one day will have large enough populations to support public land growth on their own.

The updating of West Virginia's outdoor recreation policy plan comes at an unprecedented period of global cultural and public health events having significant economic impacts. At no other time in recent memory have effects from a pandemic, recession and group interests combined to force everyone to reevaluate status quo to 'new normal' ways of supporting each other and their communities throughout the state. Pent-up demands and urgings for people to use and enjoy an outdoor experience raises the need for, and capacity of, public places close to home to be able to both socialize and exercise in a low-density environment. Making more and better outdoor experiences help local businesses thrive as well, as new or improved park and recreational facilities provide an amenity core to draw more people to or thru a given community.

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West Virginia's innate land and water resources make a compelling environmental asset that combined with its low population density creates a draw for both resident and visitor alike, particularly the opportunities for trail sports, camping, whitewater, and off-roading in the Mid-Atlantic states (See Figure 35, Visitor Origins Map). One literally has to go hundreds of miles to find a lower density area in which to recreate. The current pandemic circumstance creates opportunities for new investments to be made or old investments to be rethought, albeit carefully to avoid disturbing the land conservation values that support native residents and attract would-be visitors. Given the number of communities in the state that have not previously benefited from the LWCF program, postponing to an indefinite future a more aggressive effort to combine business, community and conservation interests is not an acceptable response, particularly with today's needs for more physical activity and business development opportunities.

FIGURE 35
Visitor Origins Map



SCORP SYNOPSIS: THE OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS (OPSP)

LWCF public spaces matching share grants are based upon a competitive application process, starting from a West Virginia Department of Economic Development (WVDED) invitation to units of state and all local governments and others interested [see typical announcement in appendix]. The announcement is usually yearly once the WVDED confirms notice of its LWCF apportionment from the National Park Service (NPS). Projects are screened by the WVDED for recommendation to the NPS which makes the awards. A 'second round' WVDED application cycle is possible in a given federal fiscal year if the state's LWCF fund balance exceeds its apportionment and the NPS has sufficient time to review and award project proposals before September 30th, the end of the federal fiscal year.

Timelines

Timing is everything with the development and submission of a LWCF application. **Call the WVDED first and early rather than late** (304.558.2234 or 304.545.3146) to determine eligibility of the applicant and project and also to generalize ideas, steps, financial plans, review criteria, suggestions and any particular areas of concern. Four months is given for project planning, but LWCF applicants are encouraged to plan year-round to avoid having incomplete or ill-timed projects being submitted. Vetted applications are more competitive applications, as amended.

Zero to Four Months (deadline). This is the time to get plans, resources, support and deliverables secured. Technical assistance is available from the WVDED and is particularly encouraged for first-time applicants, new staff not familiar with the LWCF program, or old staff not up-to date on NPS program changes. The WVDED encourages the submission of trial application prior to a submission deadline for vetting purposes—trial applications received prior to deadline make for more competitive projects, as amended (see application checklist in appendix). **Call early and often for questions.**

Four Months plus Two Weeks. This is time for the WVDED to complete error and omission reviews on the applications received. Major application errors and omissions (E&O) include lack of detailed budgets, lack of documented match, lack of State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) clearance or other environmental assessment, missing or incomplete UASFLA*-qualified land appraisals on land acquisitions [*Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions], missing or incomplete project or budget narratives, missing or incomplete plans and plats. Two weeks to resolve E&O matters may be inadequate before the WVDED has to submit complete applications to the NPS, hence the emphasis on starting early rather than late. **72-hour turn-arounds may be necessary on requests.**

Four Months plus Ninety Days. WVDED project ratings (See Rating Projects Section) start from complete project applications meeting state SCORP priorities and NPS review criteria. Incomplete project proposals may be the basis for submission in a subsequent funding cycle at an applicant's discretion. This period is reserved for the WVDED to complete on-site inspections of projects to go to the NPS, NPS initial reviews and file instructions to the WVDED for www.grants.gov submission, before further NPS review. NPS project awards conclude this period.

Four Months plus 120 Days. Federal and state-local contract documents and financial records are set-up for execution. Project periods are typically 36 months but may be extended to five years by amendment for extenuating circumstances for cause subject to NPS review and approval. Grantees are encouraged to start early rather than late on their projects as the time value of money diminishes the face value of the grant with late starts and slow finishes.

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WV-SCORP GOAL AND PRIORITIES: 2021-2025 PERIOD

The outdoor industry in West Virginia has suffered great setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, out of the pandemic, an opportunity has arisen that will allow West Virginia to broaden and enhance its outdoor recreation offerings, which in return stands to revitalize the state's population, communities and economy. The goals and priorities outlined below are general and are meant to build momentum and collaboration around outdoor recreation efforts in the state. Implementation of the goals and priorities can be undertaken by a wide spectrum of public, nonprofit, and private stakeholders, beyond just the LWCF program. Such a more comprehensive approach will help to strengthen outdoor recreation opportunities in the state and increase resources for the LWCF program, thereby bringing outdoor recreation closer to more residents and communities. This goal is expressed in the 2021-2025 WV-SCORP's theme of, "Recreation within Reach."



2021-2025 STATE OUTDOOR RECREATION GOALS



• COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- Increase access to quality outdoor recreation for all the state communities and visitors.
- Collaborate efforts between community groups and health providers to increase outdoor recreation.
- Provide guidance and development on statewide trail planning initiatives.
- Encourage and facilitate social gatherings and physical activity options to appeal to all ages that promotes health via outdoor recreation.
- Implement plans to meet and increase ADA specifications to ensure accessibilities to various outdoor recreation opportunities.



• EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

- Develop and promote local parks, recreational facilities, and trails for regional and statewide connectivity.
- Engage residents in educational opportunities to promote the values of outdoor recreation.
- Develop and promote technology and online resources (GIS mapping, apps, websites, social media, etc.) that help promote and connect people to the outdoors and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Utilize and support existing programs and increase collaboration between outdoor recreation stakeholders.
- Increase awareness of outdoor recreation programs and funding.



• CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

- Acquire, renovate, expand, and/or develop state or local parks, and public outdoor recreation sites with new projects or acquisitions.
- Acquire, renovate, and/or develop local and state outdoor recreation facilities throughout the state.
- Provide funding assistance for the maintenance of, renovation or addition to, local or state parks, forests, or wildlife management areas and, natural areas.
- Preserve unique historic and environmental areas and locations.
- Identify and restore wetlands and wildlife habitats that contribute to large-scale conservation of wetlands and recreation opportunities.



• ECONOMIC VITALITY

- Develop and promote outdoor recreational opportunities that are associated with tourism.
- Improve outdoor recreation infrastructure and parks.
- Work in partnership with local communities and state government to ensure sustainable outdoor recreation development, funding, and infrastructure.
- Ensure adequate funds are available for current and future projects.

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2021-2025 LWCF PRIORITIES

By statute, LWCF funding is limited to the following purposes: 1) acquiring lands and waters for public outdoor recreation, and 2) developing basic outdoor recreation facilities to serve the general public. Following the general goals outlined above, the specific SCORP priorities for the West Virginia LWCF program are the following:



Acquire and/or develop local basic park and playground facilities in rural, non-metro areas of the state to increase access across the state to quality outdoor recreation. Simple park developments, built within a community's ability to maintain, that facilitate social gatherings, encourage physical activity options for all ages, or increase economic vitality by enhancing local outdoor recreation and tourism assets are encouraged. Basic facilities proposed can include shelters, walks, restrooms, shade and play areas, benches, trash receptacles, and signage.



Provide funding assistance for the maintenance of, or addition to, local or state parks, forests, or wildlife management areas when such assistance is needed to restore or maintain services beyond the present. Capital repairs represent the largest demand and most difficult to fundraise to sustain a high quality outdoor recreational attraction. Many if not most LWCF applications are expected to fit this priority as a significant number of state and local park facilities are near or past their physical or functionally useful life.



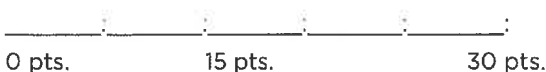
Continue to develop, renovate, or expand state or local parks with new facilities and/or land acquisitions. Proposed activities should demonstrate how the new facilities and/or land acquisitions will improve community health and wellness, develop and promote outdoor recreation assets associated with tourism and new resident attraction, or encourage conservation and stewardship of natural areas that contribute to outdoor recreation.

Rating Projects

The WV-SCORP's program goal translates into themed project priorities. The scaling of project applications starts from having a complete application by NPS guidelines. Incomplete applications are not rated. Follow-up error and omission matters are time-sensitive and typically have no more than a week to be resolved following an application due date. Anything left incomplete or unresolved to NPS satisfaction in the follow-up process can end a project's consideration for that funding cycle.

Relationship to WV-SCORP Priorities (see preceding paragraphs) - Maximum 30 points

(see Likert scale below)



30 pts. - Better than expected

15 pts. - Expected

0 pts. - Less than expected or not observed

Site and Project Suitability

Criteria include public access and ownership, ADA compliance, plans available, other services proximate, UASFLA-qualified appraisal and review completed on land acquisition proposals, completed environmental reviews.

- +5 pts. Site and project plans to scale with application
- +5 pts. ADA access includes accessibility to project vicinity from park entrance
- +5 pts. Material cost estimates shown by unit prices and material quantities
- +5 pts. Land acquisition includes development
- +10 pts. Land acquisition includes completed review appraisal from state
- +10 pts. Value-added park developments that adjoin or are near existing historic sites, restaurants or other tourism draws, schools or former school sites, hospitals or clinics, and floodplains or other underutilized natural areas to stimulate or rejuvenate a community's visitation or increased physical activity opportunities

Demographics

Criteria includes age range suitability for LWCF-eligible project; evidence of public consensus; evidence of trend analysis or justification for project demand. Ratings based on stratification of SCORP resident survey responses to particular recreational activities or facilities (See Appendix ##); niche interests not elsewhere supported need evidence of expressed support for that activity; support facility improvements without a constituency need evidence of park usage or attendance to establish need.

- +15 pts. Project's purpose within upper third of state residents' facility preferences
- +10 pts. Project's purpose within middle third of state residents' facility preferences
- +5 pts. Project's purpose within lower third of state residents' facility preferences
- +5 pts. Niche qualification of project purpose not elsewhere classified
- 15 pts. No evidence of park user data or engagement

Infrastructure

Criteria includes the age and condition of existing parks or public spaces, or the absence of any parks to justify the need for one; descriptions of recent park improvements, park programming of activities for residents or visitors, or efforts to develop new parks.

- +10 pts. Project within ARC-defined distressed or at-risk area
- +10 pts. Project for new park development or most recent LWCF grant prior to 1990
- +10 pts. Project's park area free of other LWCF problems: ADA access, groundskeeping, conversions, lack of capital repairs or replacement of physically or functionally obsolete facilities
- 10 pts. Deduction for existing, active LWCF project grant or LWCF grant completed within previous three years
- 15 pts. Evidence of unresolved LWCF public land conversion on park project site

Government Finances

Criteria includes evidence of the project sponsor's capacity to operate and maintain the proposed park improvements by review of the past five years of general budget support or other evidence of local capacity to budget park maintenance; evidence of park capital improvements budgeted in the last five years; evidence of cash or cash equivalents on hand for park maintenance; detailed project budget; local capacity to insure park improvements in a floodplain.

- +10 pts. Operations & maintenance budget for parks evident from past five years
- +10 pts. 50 percent match evident from source documentation and governing body resolution
- +10 pts. Evidence of current reserve, levy, or other special revenue budget funds evident for park support
- 15 pts. No park budget history or plans to suggest operations and maintenance capacity necessary to sustain park or playground operation

Citizens Engagement

Citizens participation is commonly restricted to superficial activities in the design development of a project. However, the lack of public support may make a project's usefulness unproductive or dissatisfying to its would-be users if planned without purposeful engagement. Among state non-profit organizations surveyed by the West Virginia Nonprofit Association, 25 percent said they did not have a vision compelling enough to unify a governing board, staff and would-be donors that could facilitate decision-making. The same problem could be said of many small communities. Worthwhile participation for a decision-based outcome to pursue a federal construction grant is layered into "parts" that should roughly include evidence in a given application of the following participatory elements:

◦ Basic Information

When and how is the end product proposed or its alternative/s described, and which parts of the whole generate the most interest among residents as consumers? What is the experience/s wanted as a guide? Any stories to relate? State LWCF apportionments exist primarily to support public open space acquisitions and development, however the WVDED, as liaison agency for the NPS, can oversee park and natural areas impact studies of statewide importance and relevance to the WV-SCORP by and for other units of state government.

◦ Argument

The basic question is one of 'agree or disagree,' but successful responses can go further to nuance whether a given project is, 'better with..., or better without..., ' some part or another or what priorities at what costs are there for the different project pieces, up to the limits of a community's ability to pay?

◦ Commitment

At this point the governing body should be the most active participant in trying to prompt interest in a given project while residents offer their passive response (these roles may be reversed), but at this point a consensus should emerge where leaders and residents see some combination of individual project pieces becoming a whole project. Passiveness about a given project should then translate to enthusiasm. This step, if successful, leads to the last "part" below.

◦ Co-Production

"Next Steps" should involve some organization and division of labor between officials and resident supporters or others based on their motivation, knowledge, or skills to aid an application effort. Specific parts to consider involve getting cost estimates, designing the layout, writing the proposal, working on a financial plan or donors, and promoting interest and support for the project through social media or word-of-mouth relationships. The WVDED encourages the use of the state's Regional Planning and Development Council staff to help in the organization of a project proposal.

Project Amendments/Multiple Projects

To accommodate bid overruns for an existing scope of work or extra work on the same project site up to 25 percent of the given LWCF grant award, the WVDED Community Development Director may authorize submission of a project amendment to the NPS for a LWCF award increase without a separate OPSP review, up to the limits of the state's unobligated LWCF fund balance at the time of project amendment. Award increases in excess of 25 percent would require an OPSP review conducted during an announced LWCF funding cycle.

Units of state or local government may submit more than one LWCF application at different funding levels to improve their competitive position or phase part of a comprehensive park development plan; however, each project must be functionally complete and not dependent on subsequent phases or stages to become operational. No more than two active LWCF projects for the same grantee will be entertained in each funding cycle, and the grantee must be able to demonstrate a financial capacity to operate both projects, if funded.

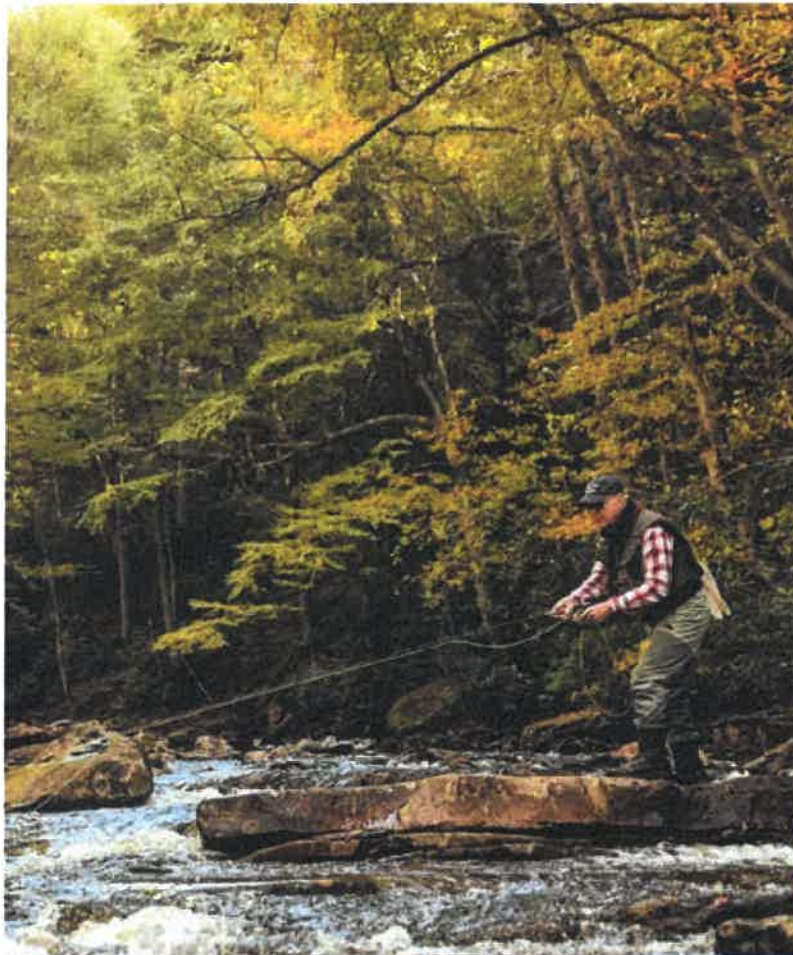
Planning Projects

State LWCF apportionments exist primarily to support public open space acquisitions and development; however, the WVDED, as liaison agency for the NPS, can oversee park and natural areas impact studies of statewide importance and relevance to the WV-SCORP by and for other units of state government. Studies including the economic impact or management of park developments or the protection of natural, ecological or recreational resources of statewide importance can be prepared in consultation with the NPS, provided they do not duplicate other research efforts and can provide the necessary, 50 percent matching share required. Site specific master plans, capital improvements plans, project design development plans, tourism or other marketing studies are not eligible for assistance.



RESOURCES

- <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58a60299ff7c508c3c05f2e1/t/5e38327a26acc86be0261dd6/1580741242496/West+Virginia+fact+sheet+1.29.20.pdf>
- <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/index.htm>
- <https://wvrivers.org/our-programs/public-lands/lwcf/>
- <https://wvcad.org/infrastructure/land-and-water-conservation-fund#:~:text=LWCF%20Program%20Funding,with%20an%20average%20of%20%24520%2C000.>
- <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/planningprojects.htm>
- <https://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/lwcf/manual/lwcf.pdf>
- https://dhhr.wv.gov/hpcd/data_reports/pages/fast-facts.aspx#:~:text=The%20prevalence%20of%20obesity%20in,2nd%20highest%20in%20the%20U.S.
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6466442/>
- https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/OIA_RecEcoState_WV.pdf
- <https://wvtourism.com/information-and-press/tourism-partners/industry-resources/research-reports/>
- https://wvtourism.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/WVTO-2019-Annual-Report_Web.pdf
- <https://c.na122.content.force.com/servlet/servlet.EmailAttachmentDownload?q=AyHMY27YfDLyGj8JICR%2FeHaDuvvdJXdDhYyPmpdbzRQo9SILFDjTOuyqiFOaeiEWWDV556Kc9dTrICbxNkk%2Fw%3D%3D>
- <https://outdoorindustry.org/article/increase-outdoor-activities-due-covid-19/>
- <https://outdoorindustry.org/article/healthy-communities-trails-make-healthy-communities-ways-think/>
- <https://Int.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GeneralPublic-CoronaSurvey-FINAL.pdf>
- <https://www.bea.gov/news/2020/outdoor-recreation-satellite-account-us-and-states-2019>
- <https://lwcfcoalition.org/lwcf-programs>
- https://outdoorindustry.org/article/increase-outdoor-activities-due-covid-19/file:///C:/Users/E106104/Downloads/19_OIA_008_Participation_Report_final.pdf
- <https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/2019-outdoor-participation-report/>
- <https://www.fs.usda.gov/ccrc/topics/recreation>
- https://dep.wv.gov/WWE/watershed/wetland/Documents/Wetlands_information_20190301.pdf
- <http://www.wvgis.wvu.edu/data/dataset.php?ID=413>
- https://mapwv.gov/trails/reports/WV_Trails_Inventory_Overview_Report_20201008.pdf



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