

Appendix A: Trails & Tourism Case Studies



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These case studies were completed to inform a planning project titled *Connect Cascade Locks: A Recreational Trails Plan for Economic Development*. The Port of Cascade Locks was the client for this project.

Front cover photo: Oakridge, Oregon, wayfinding sign by Sarah Bronstein

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TRAILS & TOURISM: INTRODUCTION

The scenic beauty and recreational opportunities of Oregon attract millions of visitors to the state every year. The state's recreation industry has blossomed into a powerful economic force: the Outdoor Industry Foundation estimates that outdoor enthusiasts support 73,000 jobs statewide and contribute \$4.6 billion in revenue from retail sales and services.¹ These economic impacts affect not only larger recreation hubs like Bend and Hood River, but also smaller towns where travelers enjoy access to retail, restaurants and lodging as well as nearby trails or parks. Many rural communities in Oregon and across the U.S.



Visitors camp during the annual Trail Days festival in Damascus, Virginia. Damascus calls itself "Trail Town, USA," and "the friendliest town on the Appalachian Trail."

have made a name for themselves as destinations of stunning natural beauty with easy access to outdoor adventures. This report tells the stories of a few of these towns.

Rural communities near public lands or waterways have a unique opportunity to capitalize on Oregon residents and visitors looking to experience natural beauty. Recreational travelers may be

going on a day hike, looking for a place to stay during a bike tour, or launching a boat for a river trip. All of these trail users are potential customers at restaurants, grocery stores, gear shops, hotels and other local businesses. Often, however, there is little connection made between rural downtowns and the trails or recreational opportunities around them. In order to strengthen trail-based tourism as an economic development strategy, rural communities must make a conscious effort to develop and market existing trail resources as a destination, provide a downtown retail core that serves trail user needs, and make clear connections between the two.

Communities should also consider how recreational tourism fits in with other economic strategies. While tourism dollars rarely provide the primary revenue for a community, successful towns can use trail-based tourism as a buffer from economic shocks or downturns. Moreover, recreation resources and an accompanying visitor-friendly downtown can increase the overall quality of life in a community, which may attract new industries or employers.

Trail-based tourism is not without its challenges. In the Pacific Northwest, the long rainy winter brings with it a slow season that communities must address creatively to mitigate the seasonal nature of many recreation-oriented jobs. In addition, small towns do not have the revenue

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or planning capacity for larger infrastructure projects. The development of new trails and amenities often requires outside funding and resources to augment local efforts. Small communities often rely heavily on volunteer committees and community non-profits, whose members may have a mixed assortment of technical expertise. For all these reasons, communities must learn from each other. Other trail towns have worked around these challenges; while every community has its own story, many lessons are transferable.

These case studies can provide lessons and inspiration for planners, community trail groups, business owners and entrepreneurs looking to build upon trail recreation as an economic opportunity.

Despite these challenges, trails also offer benefits to nearby residents. A study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found earnings per capita to be higher in counties with high levels of outdoor recreation activity than those without such activity; those counties also had lower poverty rates and higher property values.² In developing new trails and trail-oriented business opportunities, rural communities can improve both the visitor experience and local prosperity and quality of life.

This case studies document is part of a larger planning effort by the community fo Cascade

Locks, Oregon, called *Connect Cascade Locks: A Recreational Trails Plan for Economic Development*. The towns featured here were chosen for their similarities to Cascade Locks. Like Cascade Locks, these towns have small populations and enjoy close proximity to trails, rivers or other natural attractions. For most of the communities, trail-based tourism is one facet of the town's larger economic development goals; for a few, trails and outdoor recreation are a primary strategy. Although they each provide unique stories, common themes emerge for Cascade Locks and other rural communities looking to expand their outdoor recreation economies. These cases can provide lessons and inspiration for planners, community trail groups, business owners and entrepreneurs looking to build upon their regional trails system.

Components of Trail-Based Economic Development

Several components emerged as central themes from literature reviews and within the case study communities themselves. Communities seeking to enhance trail-based economic development all addressed these components in some form during the planning, development and implementation of community trails plans:

- Trail Development
- Business Development
- Marketing and Events
- Stewardship



TRAILS & TOURISM: INTRODUCTION

Trail Development

All communities studied either built entirely new trail systems or developed connections and amenities within existing trail networks. Often, even towns with access to sizeable trail networks identified trail connections to town as an important strategy to increase trail-user spending in town. This meant either building new trail segments to bring trailheads into town, or developing signs,



Hiker-Biker campgrounds offer travelers a low-budget lodging alternative and reinforce a welcoming message for trail users.

information kiosks, public restrooms or camping to make existing trailheads more inviting and easier to find. Some communities also identified public access to natural resources

as a high priority. In the case of The Dalles, Ore., the city built an entirely new waterfront trail to provide public access to the river.

Business Development

In order to attract trail users into the downtown during their trip, merchants must provide goods and services that trail users want. Although some towns saw new businesses arise to serve the needs of trail users, in many cases existing businesses found ways to draw in new customers by catering to this demographic. Some used simple improvements such as posting a sign welcoming hikers and bikers, providing discounts

for trail users, or using decorations and product titles that reference the trail user experience. More involved strategies included hosting special events for outdoor enthusiasts or offering infrastructure such as bike parking, tools, or shuttle service to trailheads. New businesses that catered specifically to trail users included gear rental shops, shuttle and guide services, and hostels.

Marketing and Events

Building a well-integrated trails network is not enough: communities must also advertise their trails and services to attract visitors. Some towns relied heavily on websites and print media. Others developed annual events that draw returning visitors. Many cited the importance of attracting visitors from nearby metropolitan areas as well as reaching out to national trail or recreation organizations for exposure.

Stewardship

Once communities build trails, it takes dedicated volunteers to keep them maintained from year to year. Communities all received aid from formal trail organizations that either managed crews or coordinated smaller groups. An important component of stewardship also includes youth involvement. By educating children, trail groups create the next generation of trail stewards and trail users. In many cases, community college or high school groups contributed to local trails through class projects.

TRAILS & TOURISM: INTRODUCTION

By developing these components, each town has made strides towards building trail-based tourism into their economy. It is important to note, however, that for many towns trails are not the only economic development strategy. In some cases, trail development was not seen as an economic development strategy at all, but simply a livability improvement for residents. These downtown revitalization efforts often attract visitors even as they improve the town for residents. Developing trail connections and trail-related businesses can build local pride,

provide access to natural resources, improve public health, and provide new jobs and business opportunities.



Even nontraditional partners can help make trail users feel welcome through simple signs, as shown at this church in Damascus, Virginia.

Ten Lessons for Trail Towns

Several key lessons emerged from the communities in these case studies for rural towns looking to advance a recreational trail-based economic development strategy.

- **Form a trail stewardship group.**

Trail plans need a local organization to see them to fruition. A non-profit or public agency committee can apply for grants and partner more easily with outside groups.

- **Tackle big projects one piece at a time.**

Build trail projects little by little instead of attempting to build the full project at once. Provide volunteers and donors with meaningful work and short term successes, and regularly recognize their contributions.

- **Apply for a multitude of grants.**

Many grants accept soft matches (staff time) so don't be discouraged by high match requirements. There are grants for a variety of projects from trail construction to land acquisition to rural entrepreneurship training.

- **Develop clearly identifiable trails.**

Trails must be easy to find, well named and marked, and connect with the downtown business district via signed loops or trailheads.

- **Leverage local cultural assets.**

Displays of local art and history make trails more interesting and more attractive.

- **Events enliven the shoulder season.**

In the winter months, events draw the attention of outsiders, provide the excuse to make a splash about the town, and can attract the participation of outside talent such as musicians, vendors, and cooks.

- **Supply a variety of lodging.**

Trail users span the gamut from low- to high-income, traveling individually or in large groups, and will demand a wide variety of accommodations.

- **Schools make great partners.**

Whether through trades and arts courses or as part of an after school program, trail maintenance and development should be a part of the local school curriculum. This way students develop a sense of ownership for trails, while enhancing the trails for all users.

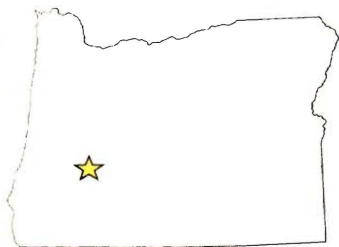
- **Get the business community on board.**

Approach private land owners or business owners by demonstrating the positive externalities of trails, including inflated property value and increased business.

- **Livable towns are destinations too.**

The aspects of a community that make it a great place to live also make it a great place to visit. Plan trails with residents in mind and the visitors will come.

OAKRIDGE, OREGON



2010 Population: 3,205

Elevation: 1,200 – 1,700 feet

Area: 2.0 sq mi

Nearby Trails and Parks:

Waldo Lake Wilderness, Three Sisters Wilderness, Diamond Peak Wilderness, Pacific Crest Trail, Willamette National Forest, West Cascades National Scenic Byway

Recreation Opportunities:

Hiking, backpacking, camping
Mountain biking
Horseback riding
Fishing and hunting
Skiing/snowshoeing and snowmobiling
Road bike riding
Trail running, rock climbing
Bird watching
Hot springs

Overview

Although trail-based tourism is often one of several economic development strategies employed by rural communities, for Oakridge it has become their primary strategy. The town of Oakridge, Oregon, lies 40 miles east of Eugene in the western foothills of the Cascade Mountains. Once a lumber mecca, Oakridge has now carved out a name for itself nationally as a mountain bike destination. Surrounded by 512 miles of wilderness and national forest trails, including the nearby Pacific Crest Trail, residents have made a concerted effort in the

last six years to rebrand their town as the “Mountain Biking Capital of the Northwest.” The old main street is reviving, with several new local businesses opening in the last few years. Through the focused efforts of the regional Chamber of Commerce, entrepreneurs, and a non-profit citizens group, Oakridge is building recognition for its exceptional trail network and increasingly popular mountain biking festival.

History

From the 1940s to the 1990s, Oakridge was primarily a timber town, employing hundreds at the Pope and Talbot Mill. The sign welcoming drivers to town called Oakridge “the Heart of the Timberland Empire.” In the mid-1990s, the timber mill shut down and left the community impoverished and largely unemployed. The city bought the mill property in 1999, tearing down the buildings in a gesture that left no doubt in residents’ minds: the timber economy was not



A sign directs Oakridge visitors to the historic uptown business district, where revitalization is taking place.

(Photo: Sarah Bronstein)

OAKRIDGE, OREGON

coming back, and the town would have to chart a new way forward.

Since the 1970s, Oakridge had been known as a recreation destination, but the City of Oakridge had never focused on outdoor recreation as an economic development strategy. In 2004 the city received a two-year grant from the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation

Assistance Program to develop a community trails plan. The Oakridge-Westfir Chamber of Commerce assembled a committee of trail users, National Forest Service employees, and community members to develop the Oakridge-Westfir Community Trails Plan, which was adopted by the city council in 2007. The Chamber was chosen to guide the project because of the economic benefit of trails to the community.

Written into the trails plan is the strategy for its success. The plan is not a binding document, and it explicitly states that implementation is dependent on stakeholder support, outside funding, and local volunteer energy. In

order to ensure that the prioritized projects and recommendations in the adopted plan came to fruition, a community group formed a 501(c)(3) non-profit, the Greater Oakridge Area Trail Stewards (GOATS), to make the plan a reality.

The group began by courting the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA), which designated Oakridge as a ride center. Designated IMBA ride centers receive promotional assistance from IMBA to their national membership. The relationship with IMBA also bred better trail maintenance, as IMBA trail experts came to Oakridge to hold trail building workshops and train residents in new techniques to control erosion and increase trail longevity. More importantly, it built on the momentum of the plan. Having an outside organization recognize the value and potential of Oakridge as a mountain biking destination gave the community even more energy and confidence.

With the ride center designation to bolster their case, GOATS hired a lobbyist that specialized in recreation and rural communities. The lobbyist went to Washington, D.C. where he won the group a \$400,000 appropriation from the National Parks Service to build and improve wayfinding, trails and information kiosks for three of the trails in the plan. This proved to be both a victory and a challenge. The money was enough to fund many of the improvements recommended in the trails plan, including an



A well-signed hose at an Oakridge trailhead allows mountain bikers to wash their bikes after rides.

(Photo: Sarah Bronstein)



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information kiosk, public restrooms and a bike wash station in downtown. However, although many of the desired improvements were on city land, the national funding triggered a lengthy but mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment. The GOATS hired the National Forest Service to conduct the assessment; as of March, 2012, the planning process was 80% complete, and Forest Service Staff estimated that implementation would begin in earnest in June of 2012.

This lesson in the long-term nature of federal projects has led GOATS to pursue more local avenues for funding and implementation where they can move with more agility and see results sooner. Building on their positive relationship with the Forest Service and their increasing community support, GOATS has begun a local fundraising campaign to pay the Forest Service \$4,000 to conduct a site evaluation for a two mile trail segment that will connect the city to a prominent overlook. The trail itself will be built by volunteers, drawn from a large base of official and unofficial trail maintenance groups.

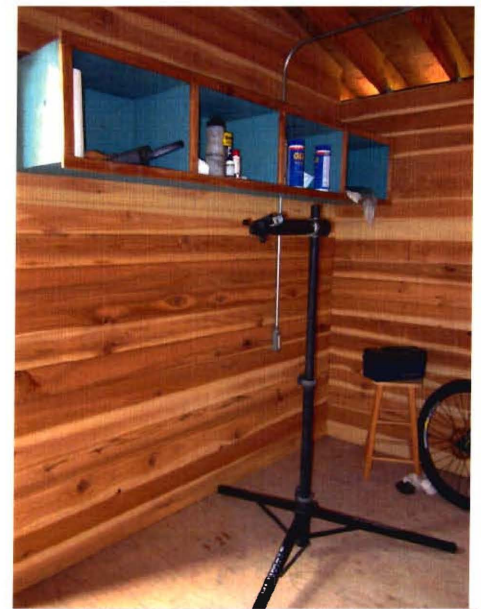
Trail-Related Businesses

Oregon Adventures is run by Randy Dreiling, who is the head of the Oakridge-Westfir Chamber of Commerce, a past city council member, and the lead organizer of Mountain Bike Oregon. Oregon Adventures runs a private guide service, and shuttle service to trailheads. With the increasing popularity of downhill riding, shuttle services

have taken a prominent place in the mountain bike community, delivering adrenaline junkies to the top of trails for a fast downhill ride. Since the company's small beginnings they have grown to serve thousands of riders every year, and plan to expand into road riding events in the future.

Willamette Mountain Mercantile offers bike, ski, and outdoor gear sales, rentals and repairs. They also function as a general store, selling Carhartt-brand clothing, cast iron cookware and other goods. The store's diverse stock and services are intended to keep them afloat through the winter months by catering to local needs and winter sports enthusiasts.

Lynda Kamerrer and Gary Carl opened The Oakridge Hostel and Guest House three years ago. The couple renovated an older building in uptown, adding shared bathrooms, showers and bunk beds. The hostel model has proven to be popular among international travelers, larger groups, and older, wealthier travelers.



The Oakridge Hostel offers secure indoor bike storage, a workstand, and a drying room for wet clothes.

(Photo: Sarah Bronstein)

OAKRIDGE, OREGON



Bike parking in front of the pub acts as an invitation to cyclists. The year the pub opened, nine other new businesses launched along the same street.

(Photo: Sarah Bronstein)

The hostel offers secure indoor bike parking, a bike wash station, and discounts for travelers who arrive at the hostel by bike. To boost business in the shoulder season, they started hosting events. They now run Over the Top, an out and back overnight ride between Oakridge and the nearby town of Blue River. They also host the Annual Oakridge Ukulele Festival in August and Mushroom Days in late fall. Kamerrer says the events have helped her to dream big and believe that "it is possible for great things to happen here, in Oakridge!"

The Brewers Union Local 180, Oakridge's only brewpub, is a favorite of

locals and visitors alike. Unlike other recreation based businesses, the pub stays busy even through the winter months. They offer bike parking outside, and inside the walls are papered with forest service maps. Within the year the pub opened, nine new businesses launched along the same street, suggesting that the private investment of one venture inspired the

confidence of other entrepreneurs. Ben Beamer, a member of GOATS and a co-founder of the brewery, claims that without mountain biking, there would be no Brewers Union.

Marketing and Events

The Oakridge Hostel held its first Over the Top Ride, a two day road ride, in 2011. The hostel partnered with the town of Blue River to have groups start and finish in both towns, allowing both towns to gain from the start line crowds, the overnight revenue and the finish line activity.

Mountain Bike Oregon has blossomed into a national phenomenon, a three day, 300-participant festival in downtown Oakridge held in July and August. The festival sells out early in the summer and has attracted a growing number of vendors and exhibitors every year. The event has also expanded its beer garden to include a number of northwest breweries. Organizer Dreiling calls the beer garden "a beer festival inside of a mountain bike festival." While the participants are there, they stay in local hotels and eat local food.

During a Bicycle Tourism Studio Workshop run by Travel Oregon, residents of Oakridge hatched the idea for the We Speak Program, an educational program designed to make visitors feel welcome by training employees at local businesses to "speak" the language of various recreational activities. Every year a representative from the

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Chamber of Commerce holds a training session for employees about recreational activities, trailhead locations and local contacts, and participants are given brochures and maps to hand out to visitors.

The City of Oakridge and the Oakridge-Westfir Chamber of Commerce have fully embraced mountain biking as the new brand for their community, changing the Oakridge city slogan to reflect its new identity. At first the City chose the more general "Center for Oregon Recreation," but soon changed the tagline to "Mountain Biking Capital of the Northwest." Both the City and the Chamber include trail information on their websites, which feature prominent photos of mountain biking. The Chamber has also published a visitor's guide with local activities, trail descriptions, a recreation map, camping locations and a business directory.



The Oakridge Hostel and Guest House offers dorms or private rooms, and gives discounts to tourists who arrive by bicycle.

(Photo: Sarah Bronstein)

Stewardship

A large number of trails groups perform maintenance on regional trails, including the High Cascade Forest

Volunteers (HCFV), The Disciples of Dirt, Oregon Equestrian Trails, GOATS, and the Scorpions. The HCFV have become the clearing house for up-to-date trail maintenance information, using a database of trail work to coordinate trail maintenance between all the groups. Every time a group does work on a trail segment, they report it to the HCFV, and records show that work crews cover about 125 miles of trail every year.

The mountain biking community also works to get local kids excited about trails and mountain biking through Take a Kid Mountain Biking Day, organized by GOATS as a chapter of IMBA.

Lessons Learned

- **Form a stewardship group.**

Trail plans need a local organization to see them to fruition. GOATS's 501(c)(3) status enabled them to seek outside funding and more easily coordinate with other existing local and outside groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and IMBA.

- **Investment attracts investment.**

The brew pub spawned a revitalization of the old downtown, as other entrepreneurs gained confidence to take the plunge. Similarly, grant

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funding follows grant funding: winning one makes community groups or public agencies more competitive for future grants.

- **Events enliven the shoulder season.**

In the winter months, events draw the attention of outsiders, provide the excuse to make a splash about the town, and can attract the participation of outside talent such as musicians, vendors, and cooks.

- **Implement the plan in small portions.**

By acquiring federal funding for multiple projects, the GOATS unknowingly committed to a federal Environmental Impact Assessment process that took many years to complete. They now look for local fundraising opportunities for short trail segments in the trails plan.

For More Information:

City of Oakridge: www.ci.oakridge.or.us

Mountain Bike Oregon: www.mtbikeoregon.com

Oakridge-Westfir Chamber of Commerce: www.oakridgechamber.com

(Fall, 2011). "Oakridge—A work in Progress."

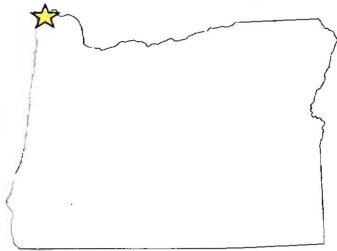
State of the Re:Union, National Public Radio.



The Westfir covered bridge leads to an old lumber mill site, which has been transformed into a developed trailhead and portal for the West Cascades National Scenic Byway.

(Photo: Sarah Bronstein)

ASTORIA, OREGON



2010 Population: 9,477

Elevation: 23 feet

Area: 4.5 sq mi

Trails and Parks: Astoria Riverwalk, Clatsop State Forest, Oregon Coast National Scenic Byway, Fort Stevens State Park

Recreation Opportunities:

Walking, jogging

Biking

Cultural tourism

Introduction

Located where the mouth of the Columbia River reaches the Pacific Ocean, Astoria has become a popular tourist destination in Oregon. But the thriving river town has not always been a destination. Over the last two decades, the city has dedicated time and money to planning a waterfront that would be the focal point of the town. The strategy was simple: make Astoria a great place to live, and it will also become a great place to visit! The city has successfully preserved its working waterfront, supporting the existing industries during the development of new businesses, all while paying careful attention to historic details and community input.

History

Founded in 1811, Astoria was known as a working class town with a rich history of fur trading, river navigation, fishing, canneries, and timber. The town grew in size due to the



The City of Astoria's waterfront development plan was simple but powerful: by making the downtown waterfront a great place for residents to work and play, they naturally created a place that others want to visit.

(Photo: City of Astoria)

success of industries that harvested its bountiful natural resources. However, by 1978 Astoria faced steep economic decline. The timber and fishing industries were decreasing, cannery work had been outsourced to developing countries and hundreds of residents were unemployed. By 1983 the number of seafood industry employees in the town had been reduced from 1,100 to 250.

ASTORIA, OREGON

As businesses and jobs left the town, residents began to also move away. Astoria needed a new vision and development strategy to revitalize the community.

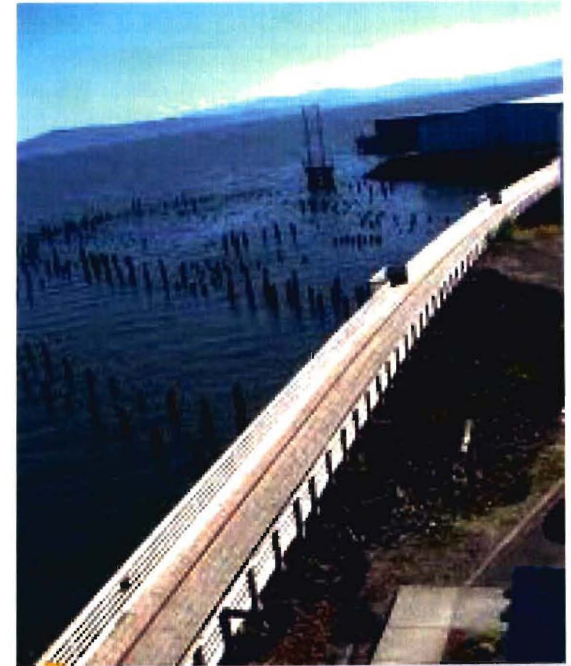
Trail Development

In order to reverse declining economic trends, the city decided to revitalize the waterfront and focus on increasing tourism and redevelopment along the Columbia. The first small project, First People's Places Park, received so much positive response from the community that soon businesses partnered with the city to construct a second park, the 6th Street River Park, as well as a viewing area.

There was clearly momentum to pursue riverfront development. In order to make a strategic effort to align waterfront development with community needs, the city then embarked on a waterfront planning study, also known as the Murase Plan, in 1990. Thanks to extensive public input, the plan focused on a vision for a working waterfront that would serve as an amenity for local residents and retain the character and history of the town. City of Astoria planner Rosemary Johnson felt that the success of the plan was due in part to the public perception that "If it is good enough for the locals then other people will come visit."

The Murase Plan identified a multi-use riverfront trail alongside the Columbia River as a priority

for Astoria's revitalization. Many of the working industries, including fishing boats, marinas and canning factories, were located adjacent to the river. A trail would attract visitors along the shore of the Columbia and provide them with close-up views of the city's founding industries. The first two blocks of the trail were constructed in 1991, primarily through grant funding. Small public-private partnerships were pursued in areas where the trail traveled alongside a business, particularly by hotels. Knowing that their visitors were likely to use this amenity, the hotels shared the cost of trail construction, and later maintenance, along their property.



The Astoria Riverfront Vision Plan seeks to balance the needs of locals and visitors while preserving physical and visual access to the river.

(Photo: Astoria Daily Photo)

ASTORIA, OREGON

The construction of the waterfront path catalyzed other projects to make Astoria more attractive to visitors and residents alike. In 1994, the city committed to cleaning the Astoria Plywood Mill, a brownfield site on the east end of town. On the west end of town, the city worked with cruise liners to develop a moorage area to bring tourists from the cruise ships into the city's downtown.

By 1996, the majority of the trail had been constructed, but the riverfront remained an uninviting place. The trail was overgrown with

weeds and attracted litter and crime. To rebuild public confidence in the concept of the riverfront path as a local asset, the city launched a riverfront cleanup campaign in 1997. Hundreds of community members participated. Johnson cites the riverfront clean-up as the

nexus of the revitalization of the riverfront: "The clean-up gave residents a physical connection ... and they became stewards for the path. Their involvement gave them a sense of ownership ... and built community support behind the development of the waterfront."

Once the trail had been completed and the clean-up had occurred, the city began acquiring the abandoned rail line that lay adjacent to the riverfront trail. It obtained the full rail line and simultaneously purchased a historic trolley to run the length of the trail. The trolley, operated by volunteers, is a large tourist draw in the summer months and increases the distance a visitor can travel on the riverfront trail. At this point, Astoria saw a shift in the businesses located near the river. Businesses cleaned up riverfront entrances and oriented themselves towards the river, where the foot traffic had become a business opportunity.

New Business Development

Astoria's waterfront was wildly successful, and the predictions of the residents were true: by making the river a beautiful, attractive place for locals, they also created a destination for visitors. The city began to attract outside businesses to the area, particularly along the riverfront. With this success came new challenges. As the real estate market grew, condos and hotel developers began approaching the planning commission with proposed projects



The Plywood Millpond, declared a brownfield site in 1994, was cleaned up by the city and state, then sold to a private developer.

(Photo: Astoria Daily Photo)

ASTORIA, OREGON

and designs along the waterfront. Without specific codes or design guidelines to address these projects, the city worried that the waterfront would become too commercialized, reducing public access and views to the river. This provided the impetus for the 2009 Astoria Riverfront Vision Plan.

The intention of the plan was to guide private development along the waterfront trail while preserving the historic character of the river, protecting public access and pedestrian safety, and developing waterfront activities and events. Residents raised concerns over the potential loss of views, historic character or public access due to dense private development along the water. The consulting firm leading the planning process asked the public to identify concerns and opportunities for waterfront development, as well as current access points and public use of the trail. Key issues identified as 'opportunities and constraints'

included physical and visual access to the river, the scale and character of development and the balance of private property rights with a common community vision. The plan was finalized and adopted by the City Council in November of 2009, and the City is now amending the development code to implement the plan goals and strategically direct future development along the river.

Additionally, the town has become focused on the redevelopment of downtown. The city recently purchased new flower planters and garbage cans for the downtown area as well as bicycle racks and locker facilities. The Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA) is developing a historic district crest to use on street signs and another committee is developing a wayfinding and signage plan to guide visitors from the riverfront path to downtown.



Many adjacent businesses orient towards the Astoria Riverwalk trail, catering to the passing foot traffic.

(Photo: Astoria Daily Photo)

ASTORIA, OREGON

Economic and Marketing Successes

Johnson considers the riverfront trail and redevelopment as a crucial element in the successful rebirth of Astoria's economy. Hotels use the trail as a marketing tool and a guest amenity. Businesses orient themselves to the riverwalk to draw in patrons. The city schedules frequent events on the waterfront and uses the trail for parades and fun runs. The trolley continues summer operations and businesses can request a stop in front of their establishment.

Since the mid-1990s Astoria has received various national awards for its riverfront plan and historic preservation efforts, and media coverage in *The New York Times*, *Good Morning America* and *Budget Travel* has given the town national exposure. Tourism continues to increase and local businesses have profited from this growth. The Fort George Brewery, which now distributes beer throughout Oregon, recently expanded to a canning operation. Multiple hotels have been restored and reopened including The Commodore and Hotel Elliot. A local farmers market has become so popular that it is now held bi-weekly. A young group of artists have also established themselves in the community. They host art shows and public events that enrich the social fabric of the town.

Future Trail Development

Astoria continues to expand the riverfront path, including a recent connection to the Port

of Astoria on the west side of town and the Alderbrook district on the east. In the future the City hopes to develop additional boat launch sites. Astoria is also working in partnership with the City of Warrenton, which recently adopted its own trail plan to connect the two trail networks and cities.

Since the mid-1990s Astoria has received various national awards for its riverfront plan and historic preservation efforts; media coverage in The New York Times, Good Morning America and Budget Travel has given the town national exposure.

Lessons Learned

- **Livable towns are destinations too.**
Ensure that the plan is in the interest of the locals. The elements of a waterfront that make it a great amenity for locals also make a great place to visit; this can be achieved without sacrificing the space and alienating residents.
- **Acquire land when it is available.**
Purchasing land or land rights ahead of time preserves land for future public amenities. Once a trail is completed, land values may increase substantially and it could be difficult or costly to acquire adjacent land.
- **Tackle big projects in small pieces.**

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Build projects little by little instead of attempting to build the entire project at once. Ensure the cost of the project is appropriate for the size of the city.

- **Apply for a multitude of grants.**
Many grants accept staff time as a soft match. Do not be discouraged if the match is a large sum of money. Grants can cover a variety of expenses, from multi-use path construction to streetscape improvements such as bicycle racks, garbage cans or flower planters.
- **Seek historic designation.**

Astoria obtained a National Register Historic District designation for areas of downtown. This designation was important in securing low interest loans to improve businesses which no longer had to make costly ADA upgrades. In addition to allowing for more flexibility in adhering to the zoning code, historic designations enriched the history and fabric of the town and became a tourist draw.

- **Build public-private partnerships.**
Approach private land owners by demonstrating the positive externalities that the project will create, not just for the public but also to increase their property value.

For More Information:

City of Astoria - www.astoria.or.us

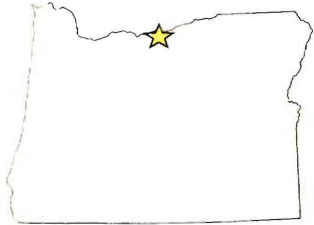
Chamber of Commerce - www.oldoregon.com



The Fort George Brewery, which now distributes beer throughout Oregon, recently expanded to a canning operation.

(Photo: Brewpublic.com)

THE DALLES, OREGON



2010 Population: 13,620

Elevation: 109 feet

Area: 8.45 sq mi

Trails and Parks: Riverfront Trail, Mt. Hood National Forest, Horsethief Lake State Park, Columbia Hills State Park, Deschutes River State Recreation Area, Deschutes River Trail

Recreation Opportunities:

Windsurfing, kite boarding

Mountain biking

Hiking, camping

Fly fishing, nature watching

Skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling

Kayaking

Overview

The Dalles' riverfront trail winds along the south side of the Columbia River, stretching from The Gorge Discovery Center to The Dalles Dam Visitor Center. The trail is a beloved asset to the community, and the nearly completed development of the trail has been a lengthy but rewarding process, requiring perseverance and cooperation from public and private partners. This trail has dramatically changed the town's relationship to its riverfront and is popular with locals and visitors alike. It has spurred new tourism opportunities, as well as the development of contiguous amenities, including a pocket park. While many small, inexpensive investments can be made to improve outdoor recreation in rural communities, The Dalles'

waterfront trail provides a valuable vision for how a small community can leverage local and outside resources to accomplish ambitious long term goals.

History

The Dalles, a small town on the banks of the Columbia River, has grown into a hub in the Columbia River Gorge for high-tech companies such as Google, offering employment opportunities and city amenities in a beautiful setting. While The Dalles lies along the southern banks

of the Columbia River, first the railroad and then Interstate 84 rendered the river inaccessible from downtown. With the exception of a privately operated marina, residents and visitors had to travel seven miles up or downstream to Celilo or Rowena State Parks to reach the Columbia River. In 1988 the National Park Service granted the City and County funding to develop a riverfront master plan. The grant funded a National Park



A view of the rolling hills of eastern Oregon from The Dalles.

(Photo: City Data)

THE DALLES, OREGON



The nine mile riverfront trail in The Dalles is a popular amenity for visitors and tourists alike.

(Photo: Portland Family Adventures)

Service staff member for one year to develop The Dalles Riverfront Plan with the assistance of various agencies and the public. The master plan, completed in 1989, envisioned the future development of the riverfront coordinated with increased local access to the Columbia River. The highest priority recommendation made by the plan's

advisory committee was the development of a waterfront trail.

Once the plan was adopted, a core group of 20 individuals committed to bringing the plan to fruition. The group formed a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization called The Riverfront Trail at The Dalles, and became the community catalyst for building a riverfront path.

The first segment of the riverfront path was built by the US Forest Service on county land near the Discovery Center. This segment traveled from the Discovery Center, an interpretive center, to the downtown area of The Dalles. The City then received a grant to construct another segment

of path. Bit by bit the riverfront path was built. Throughout the 1990s the City and the County continued to search for capital funding.

The Dalles was able to acquire \$1.2 million of federal appropriations money from the National Scenic Area Act to match state, federal and private grants for path construction. Having this initial budget provided leverage for the city to acquire additional matching funds. The city was also awarded a capacity-building grant from the Meyer Trust, allowing the City to hire a staff person for four years to work solely on the construction of the riverfront path. Thanks to the focused energy of a dedicated staff position, the city coordinated and built the majority of the path during these four years.

The development of The Dalles' riverfront path did not require any right-of-way purchases. The majority of the path right-of-way crossed land owned by the City, the State, the Port or the Army Corps of Engineers. The Port has allowed the City to build on Port property with the stipulation that the path be realigned in the future to make way for any needed industrial waterfront development. A small section was owned by private landowners, including a multi-use development called Lone Pine and a Shiloh Inn. Thanks to trusting partnerships, these private landowners understand the benefits of their direct access to the path. The developer of Lone Pine donated some of his land for the path's

THE DALLES, OREGON

right-of-way, and The Shiloh Inn now markets the path to their customers as a convenient way to reach downtown and to view the river.

Although land acquisition was not costly, building trail connections to downtown was another matter. The path was separated from the City by both the highway and a railroad line. The City received an easement to build a tunnel under the railroad track, but only if the project contractor adhered to strict and costly construction requirements: the rail road tracks could not shift more than a half an inch throughout tunnel construction. Unable to halt train traffic during construction, the contractor had to accept all liability for the \$1 million dollar trains traveling overhead throughout the project. The contracting firm was able to meet this requirement, but due to the high liability costs, the 100-foot railroad tunnel ultimately cost \$1.2 million.

In 2010, The Riverfront Trail at The Dalles applied for the latest round of Transportation Enhancement grant money and was awarded funding for the final piece of path construction. However, by this time the matching funds from the initial federal grant had been exhausted, and the City did not have the necessary ten percent funding match for the \$1.5 million grant. Unable to find the money from the public budget, the City turned to the community.

Many of the major businesses in town had seen

the development of the path occur over the past few years and wanted to continue supporting the development and construction of the path. These major businesses came together to



The Dalles Riverfront Trail project has received strong community support because of residents' desire to reconnect with the Columbia River. This connection provides a sense of place and civic pride.

(Photo: Terry Richard, The Oregonian)

raise the needed funding. Four weeks later, the private sector had successfully raised the ten percent match. Dan Durow, a planner for the city, claimed he had never seen this level of support for a public project from the private sector; it was a confirmation of the community's enthusiastic support for the riverfront path. With

THE DALLES, OREGON

the funds from the Transportation Enhancement grant, the final 2.5 miles of path will be constructed by 2013, completing the entire planned 9-mile path system.

In retrospect, no one realized that the path would take nearly 25 years to complete. However, despite the long fundraising and construction process, the community non-profit maintained the momentum to see the project to completion. Today, 23 members continue to serve on the board. With the final 1.5 miles scheduled to be completed by 2013, the next steps are to establish a maintenance plan, guide development along the path, and continue increasing connectivity and access between the river and the downtown.

The Dalles Parks and Recreation department currently maintains the path, but the County, City and non-profit are working on building a budget

When the city came up short on matching funds for a grant, The Dalles' business community raised the money to complete the trail. Planner Dan Durow claimed he had never seen this level of support for a public project from the private sector.

for repaving and structural repairs. Recently the non-profit held a fundraising campaign and raised \$5,000 with a simple letter, indicating once again the strength of support from community donors.

Trail Amenities and Business Development

The Kiwanis Club has seized the opportunity to build a pocket park along the path. The park, located on a beautiful natural inlet, includes a parking lot, a restroom, and picnic area, and sees heavy use by community members and visitors. In the summer, kayak and bike rentals are available in the Riverfront Park at The Kayak Shack. Concession stands or food options may also develop along the river in the future. The City continues to add trailheads along the riverfront path, and may soon develop more parking.

The development of trail amenities has come hand in hand with new tourism opportunities. A new dock under construction at the end of the Union Street tunnel will allow tour boats to stop in The Dalles and passengers to walk into town. The City is also building a festival area near the riverfront path that will accommodate large events.

Lessons Learned

- **Worthy projects take time.**

Large infrastructure projects like waterfront trails take significant time to build, but have big pay-offs. Understand the commitment it takes to get a big project built.

- **Leverage the river as a local asset.**

THE DALLES, OREGON

The project has received strong community support because of residents' desire to become reconnected to the river. The connection provides a sense of place and civic pride.

- **Recreational trails can also serve transportation needs.**

The riverfront path is not just for recreation; it also serves as an alternative commute route to the industrial and commercial employment centers along the path. Use of the path as a multimodal corridor is important to highlight in grant requests and may increase grant eligibility.

- **It is possible to work with the railroads.**

Meeting the requirements of the railroad was difficult and expensive, but with heroic measures and perseverance it was possible for the city to build a tunnel for the riverfront path under the tracks.

- **Form a non-profit trail group.**

The formation of the non-profit was a catalyst for completion of the riverfront path. It tied responsibility for project deliverables to individuals and allowed the community to seek out grant funding.

- **Partner with key leaders.**

Partnerships with agencies and the community have been crucial in the successful development of the path. Agencies have

built sections of path and the community has committed funding to construct the path. It is important to identify the 'movers and the shakers' in the community and engage them in the development of the project.

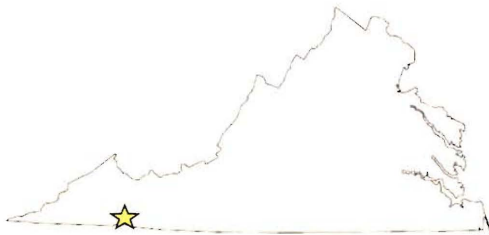
For More Information:

The Riverfront Trail Organization - <http://www.nwprd.org/rivertrail/>

The City of The Dalles - <http://www.ci.the-dalles.or.u>

The Columbia Gorge Discovery Center - www.gorgediscovery.org/

DAMASCUS, VIRGINIA



2010 Population: 814

Elevation: 1,952 ft.

Area: 0.8 sq. miles

Nearby Trails and

Parks: Virginia Creeper Trail, Appalachian Trail, The Daniel Boone Heritage Trail, The Crooked Road: Virginia's

Heritage Music Trail, The Iron Mountain Trail, U.S. Bicycle Route 76, Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area, Jefferson National Forest

Recreational opportunities:

Hiking, backpacking
Bicycling, bike camping
Horseback riding
Cultural tourism
Bird watching
Fishing
Rock climbing

Overview

The town of Damascus is located in the heart of Appalachia in Southwest Virginia, a few miles north of the Tennessee border. Known as the "friendliest town on the Appalachian Trail," Damascus lies near the base of Whitetop Mountain and Mount Rogers, the two highest mountains in Virginia. The town's proximity to the Virginia Creeper Trail, known as one of the most successful rail-trails in the U.S., is considered one of its most valuable assets, attracting approximately 150,000 tourists

per year. Damascus is also a gateway to the Appalachian Trail, U.S. Bicycle Route 76, the Daniel Boone Heritage Trail, the Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, and the Iron Mountain Trail. They have successfully marketed their town as Trail Town, USA.

History

The town of Damascus began as the epicenter of the Virginia lumber industry, harvesting the abundant virgin forests of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Timber production flourished unabated for a quarter of a century until the US Forest Service was created to conserve and restore forest resources. In the last quarter of the 19th century, Washington County, Virginia produced more lumber than the entire state of Pennsylvania; most of this lumber came out of Damascus, exported by rail along the Virginia Creeper Railroad line.

In 1900, the 35-mile Virginia-Carolina Railroad reached Damascus after 15 years of construction. Once completed, the railroad stretched 75 miles from Abingdon Virginia to Elkland, North Carolina, carrying timber, iron ore, passengers and supplies. Damascus' location at the juncture of three states positioned it well for interstate trade. Along with railroad came new towns, businesses and jobs throughout the region. The Virginia-Carolina railroad remained in operation until it was decommissioned due to flooding in 1977.

DAMASCUS, VIRGINIA



The Virginia Creeper Trail attracts 150,000 visitors per year.

(Photo: Randy Johnson)

Once the railroad had been abandoned, the City of Abingdon, the Town of Damascus, and the US Forest Service secured the western portion of the railroad route for a recreational trail. Today, the two towns, along with the National Park Service, own and manage the right-of-way known as the Virginia Creeper Trail that runs from Abingdon to Whitetop, Virginia, through

Mount Rogers National Recreation Area and Jefferson National Forest.

Trail Development

Damascus benefits from many recreational assets, including The Daniel Boone Heritage Trail; The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail; The Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail; U.S. Bicycle Route 76; and The Appalachian Trail. There is rock climbing nearby at Backbone Rock and premiere trout fishing at Whitetop Laurel Creek. Damascus is also a gateway to Jefferson and Cherokee National Forests which encompass Virginia's two tallest mountains, Mt. Rogers and Whitetop Mountain.

The crown jewel of the region is the Virginia Creeper trail, a 34 mile shared multi-use trail running from Abingdon, Virginia to Whitetop Station. Damascus lies at the trail's midpoint. The Virginia Creeper Trail has a significant economic impact on Damascus, and the community recognizes the importance of the Creeper Trail for economic development. Annually, recreational visits generate \$2.5 million in spending along the trail. Of this amount, about \$1.2 million is attributed to non-local visitors in Washington and Grayson counties.³

The Virginia Creeper Trail acted as a catalyst for regional coordination. The three trail owners created an advisory board to coordinate maintenance and development among the multiple jurisdictions and community members along the trail. They are also in the process of forming a Tourism Advisory Board.

With the help of several stakeholder groups, the Washington County Library system has designed a library and tourism center in Damascus. The building is designed to look like the old Damascus railroad depot. Serving as an information hub for trail users, the library provides information about the forest service, trails, and history of the area. Additional amenities include storage units for travelers, a display by local artists and craftsmen and Wi-Fi access.

DAMASCUS, VIRGINIA

Business Development

In a recent economic impact study,⁴ researchers from Virginia Tech reported that the majority of Damascus businesses surveyed attributed over 60% of their income to trail-user spending. Restaurants, cafes and bed & breakfasts estimated that over three quarters of their revenue was attributable to the Creeper Trail. Sixteen out of nineteen respondents said locating their business in Damascus was strongly or very strongly influenced by the Creeper Trail. Many also specified that the quality of life influenced their location choice.

Prior to 1991, there were no bike shuttle or rental services in Damascus. Today, the town has six local bike rental and repair shops and hiking outfitters. SunDog Outfitters and Adventure Damascus Bicycle Rental are the two largest in the Mount Rogers Recreation Area. Many of the outdoor gear shops offer shuttle services that transport bikers to the top of Whitetop Mountain. They also provide trip-planning assistance by arranging lodging and suggesting trail routes and dining options, as well as offering package vacations. Adventure Damascus hosts cycling, birding and canoeing tours. There are a few restaurants and cafes in downtown, including the Creeper Trail Café and MoJoe's Trailside

Coffeehouse.

The town provides a variety of lodging options to accommodate all types of trail users. The Creeper Trail Hostel offers vacation rental units for families and large groups. Twenty other bed and breakfasts and vacation rentals in Damascus provide a range of prices and accommodations.

Recent community development block grants have helped Damascus restore some of its derelict downtown commercial building stock. In 2002, Damascus bought and renovated the Old Mill Inn, a historic building that was converted into a lodging, dining and conference facility to attract meetings and provide an entertainment venue. The Old Mill Restaurant closed in 2008, was auctioned several times, and reopened in 2011 under new ownership. Fred Leonard, the current owner, moved to Damascus after he fell in love with the town. Today, the Old



Adventure Damascus and other surveyed businesses report that nearly two thirds of their revenue comes from trail user spending.

(Photo: Adventure Damascus Bike Shop)

DAMASCUS, VIRGINIA

Mill employs 30 people and offers “casual fine dining,” as well as a 12 room inn and conference space.

Events and Marketing

The annual Trail Days festival has helped to strengthen Damascus’ brand of Trail Town, USA. In May, 2011, Damascus celebrated their 25th annual Trail Days festival, attracting upwards of 20,000 visitors for workshops, food, gear vendors and entertainment. At this anniversary celebration they were officially designated an Appalachian Trail Community by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), in recognition of their promotion of the trail as a community asset. This designation is a marketing tool for the city, and makes Damascus eligible for trail planning and development assistance from the ATC.

The town struggles with the wildly fluctuating seasonal trail industry, but the Old Mill managers have begun booking conferences in winter to boost activity in the off season.

With the Virginia Tourism Corporation, The City of Damascus and Washington County are working on a countywide strategy to connect tourism-related industries in the region. Their goal is to compile a comprehensive marketing resource for regional stakeholders. The 2009 Washington County Area Tourism Plan also suggests the development of a regional map of trails and tourism services.



In May, 2011, Damascus celebrated their 25th annual Trail Days festival, attracting upwards of 20,000 visitors for workshops, food, outdoor gear vendors and entertainment.

(Photo: Rick McCharles, BestHike.com)

Stewardship

The Virginia Creeper Trail Club is a non-profit whose purpose is to maintain and promote the Creeper Trail corridor and to develop and conduct education programs. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy also organizes local volunteer groups to perform trail maintenance. Local Forest

DAMASCUS, VIRGINIA

Service and State Park agencies also perform some trail maintenance.

Lessons Learned

- **Different trail users have different needs.**
It's important to appeal to the full range of hikers, bicyclists and travelers from the casual to the "hardcore" by providing a variety of lodging accommodations.
- **Offer package vacations.**
Businesses such as guide services can partner with restaurants and hotels to offer package trips that make trip planning easy for the visitor and support multiple local businesses.
- **Leverage local cultural assets.**
Virginia has a rich culture of music and craft, and Damascus has proudly promoted this local character through interpretive signage and craft displays at the information center.
- **Make the town as attractive as the trail.**
Respondents to a trail user survey identified a need for better pedestrian facilities, more overnight accommodations, and more outdoor seating options at restaurants. While many trail users pass through Damascus, relatively few spend the night there.
- **Address trail user conflicts.**
When a trail becomes "too popular," different types of trail users can come into conflict with one another, especially along a multi-use trail.

For More Information:

Bowker, J., Bergstrom, J., and Gill, J. (2004). The Virginia Creeper Trail: An Assessment of User Demographics, Preferences, and Economics. Prepared for the Virginia Department of Conservation.

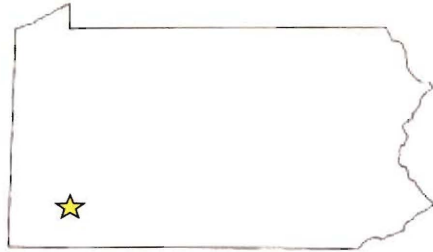
City of Damascus: www.damascus.org

Cox, S. et. al. (2011). Economic Development Studio at Virginia Tech. Building Connectivity through Recreation Trails: A Closer Look at New River Trail State park and the Virginia Creeper trail. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Prepared for New River State Park and the Virginia Creeper Trail Club.

The Virginia Creeper Trail Club: www.vacreepertrail.org



CONNELLVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA



2010 Population: 7,637

Elevation: 920 feet

Area: 2.3 sq mi

Trails and Parks: The Youghiogheny River Trail, The Great Allegheny Passage rail trail, Ohiopyle State Park, Laurel Ridge State Park, Forbes State Forest.

Recreation Opportunities:

- Biking
- Hiking
- Boating
- Fishing, hunting
- Skiing, snowshoeing
- Cultural/Historic tourism

Overview

Although the businesses in Connellsville did not open expressly to serve tourists, they have reaped the benefits of a now well-established stream of trail users looking for a rest stop. The City of Connellsville, Penn., is located approximately 50 miles south of Pittsburgh on the Youghiogheny River Trail. This trail is part of the Great Allegheny Passage, a 150-mile rail trail from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Maryland. An additional 180-mile trail connects Cumberland to Washington, DC. Bisected by the Youghiogheny River, Connellsville is located in the Laurel Highlands, a tri-county area with numerous recreational opportunities. Two popular visitor destinations in the area include Frank Lloyd



An archway welcomes trail users to Connellsville along the Great Allegheny Passage Trail (GAP).

(Photo: Yough River Trail Council)

Wright's architectural masterpiece Fallingwater and Ohiopyle State Park, both about 15 miles outside of Connellsville.

History

Connellsville was founded at the end of the 18th century, and through the first half of the 20th century it was a center of the coal mining industry. As this industry declined, several railroads in the area were abandoned, and in

CONNELLSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

the late 1970s and early 1980s the first sections of the trail that eventually became the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) Trail were developed in the Laurel Highlands, including the section traveling through Connellsville.

In the past few decades, the population of Connellsville has been declining, but there is increasing interest in and activity around drawing in more visitors from the GAP Trail and redeveloping the downtown to be more



High school students volunteered with the Yough River Trail Council to build a visitors center in an old caboose.

(Photo: Yough River Trail Council)

welcoming and attractive to trail users.

Trail Development

The initial sections of the GAP Trail north and south of Connellsville were not well connected to town until the late 1980s. In 1989, the town and the Yough River Trail Council (YRTC), a local volunteer group, worked with the state DOT to improve crossings on two rail bridges. These \$1 million projects brought the trail through town.



An economic impact study by the Allegheny Trail Alliance estimated the GAP generates about 750,000 annual trips and \$40 million in annual spending.

(Photo: Bicycle Times Magazine)

Today, the community recognizes the importance of the GAP Trail as a national and international destination. An economic impact study by the Allegheny Trail Alliance (ATA) estimated the trail draws about 750,000 annual trips and generates about \$40 million in annual spending. In an attempt to capitalize on the trail traffic, Connellsville has developed plans to create better connections between the GAP Trail and the traditional downtown business district, which

CONNELLVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

is located on the opposite side of the river. The city has developed a loop trail through the town center. In addition to the recreational trail connections, the town's Cultural Trust developed a Heritage Trail, a two-mile self-guided tour highlighting historic sites through town.

The community identified wayfinding and trailhead amenities, as well as improved trailhead parking, as top priorities. The YRTC led an effort to install a visitor information center in an old train caboose, post prominent signage near the trailheads and near trail shelters that direct people to various businesses in town, and install restroom and water fountain facilities.

Connellsville offers a variety of lodging types to cyclists entering town from the trail to encourage overnight business. The ATA study estimated that overnight visitors outspend day visitors at \$98 per day on average, including lodging. Currently the town has two bed and breakfasts and two hotels, but the city's Redevelopment Authority director indicated there is a need for more free or low-cost lodging, such as a hostel. In a remarkable partnership between the Connellsville Area School Board and the YRTC, students from the Connellsville Area Career and Technical Center constructed two three-sided "Adirondack Shelters" and welded grills to be installed at the north trailhead for the GAP Trail. The shelters, which sleep 6 to 8, provide free camping.

Business Development

One of the challenges Connellsville trail promoters have faced since the GAP Trail was first developed was convincing existing business owners that the trail could bring customers rather than derelicts. Over time, some businesses have embraced the idea that the trail brings in new customers, and they are more willing to work with and sponsor the various organizations that encourage trail development and use.

Trail users have proven to be a reliable, although seasonal, customer base for the town. The ATA study estimated that many businesses receive about 25% of their revenue from trail users. Connellsville's bike shop, C&J Bikes Unlimited, has been in business for 25 years and offers bike sales, rentals, and repairs. Bike rentals provide a convenient option for travelers arriving by Amtrak train in Connellsville to ride on the GAP Trail.



Connellsville holds a weekly summer farmers market, as well as a Geranium Festival.

(Photo: The Student Conservation Association)

CONNELLSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

Local restaurants and shops have not explicitly branded themselves as trail businesses, though they do cater to trail users. For example, a 24-hour grocery store is located near the shelters and information kiosk at the north trail gateway, and Sheetz, a regional gas station chain, carries common bicycling supplies. However, many downtown shops and restaurants have begun targeting their marketing at trailheads and are shown on maps posted at the trailheads.

Marketing and Events

Connellsville is marketed as a trail town through several local and regional venues. The Allegheny Trail Alliance (ATA) and a related state-funded Trail Towns program work to promote all the towns along the GAP Trail through brochures and online information. The Laurel Highlands Visitor Association also distributes information about Connellsville. The Yough River Trail Council, the local branch of the Regional Trail Corporation, partners with local businesses who sponsor the trailhead information kiosks and visitors center.

The town hosts several local events, including a Farmers and Art Market and a Geranium Festival (Connellsville promotes itself as the Geranium Capital of the Universe). The Yough River Trail Council organizes and promotes several rides and other trail events every year. It also developed relationships with groups such as the local branch of the Army Reserve, who regularly



In a partnership between the Connellsville Area School Board and the Yough River Trail Council, students from the Connellsville Area Career and Technical Center constructed two "Adirondack Shelters" (above) at a GAP trailhead.

(Photo: Yough River Trail Council)

use the trail for exercises and then spend time and money in town.

Stewardship

The Yough River Trail Council is the primary organization promoting trail stewardship in Connellsville. This is an all-volunteer group

CONNELLVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

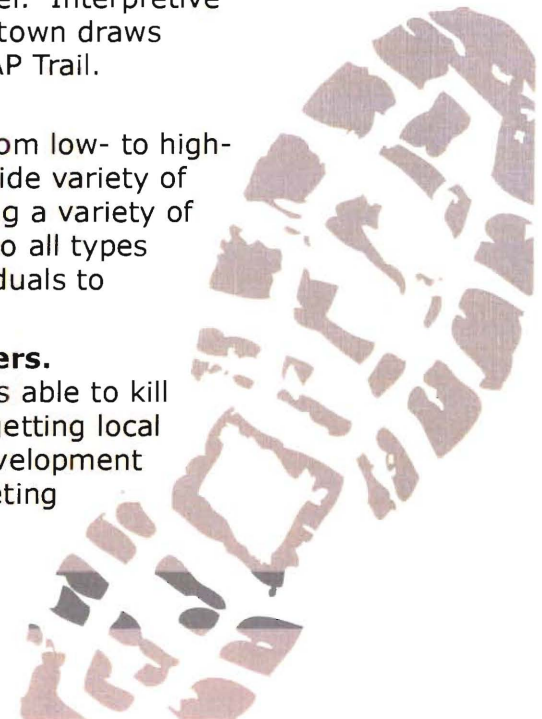
operating under the umbrella of the non-profit Regional Trail Council. The board for this group organizes events and fundraising, maintains regular contact with a wide variety of regional and local organizations such as the Garden, Lions and Rotary clubs, and oversees volunteer activities. Some of the stewardship activities include sign and art projects completed by high school art students, shelter and visitor center construction by vocational students, Eagle Scout fence building projects, and coordination with law enforcement for people completing community service hours. The council also makes a point of recruiting volunteers with specific skill sets, such as retired maintenance workers to keep the trail in good condition or event planners to organize rides and fundraisers.

The president of the Council emphasized the importance of giving people tasks that will produce tangible results quickly and generate a sense of pride and investment. For example, high school art students took ownership of the signs they created and have a personal stake in preventing vandalism. Long term projects should be broken into short term tasks, so people do not get discouraged by slow progress. Additionally, sponsors should be able to see what their money paid for.

Connellsville has taken advantage of a rich history to create points of interest that tie the trail and the town together. Interpretive signs along loops through town draw people into town from the GAP Trail.

Lessons Learned

- **Develop clearly identifiable trails.**
Trails must be easy to find, well named and marked, and connect with the downtown business district. Connellsville developed signed loop routes that guide riders through the downtown.
- **Incorporate history into signs.**
Connellsville has taken advantage of a rich history to create points of interest that tie the trail and the town together. Interpretive signage along loops through town draws people into town from the GAP Trail.
- **Supply lodging variety.**
Trail users span the gamut from low- to high-income, and will demand a wide variety of accommodations. By providing a variety of lodging, Connellsville caters to all types of visitors, from young individuals to families to retirees.
- **Schools make great partners.**
The Regional Trail Council was able to kill two birds with one stone by getting local schools involved with trail development and maintenance. By completing



CONNELLSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

trails projects through trades and arts courses, students developed a sense of stewardship for the GAP Trail while enhancing the trail for all users.

- **Value volunteers.**

Provide volunteers and donors with meaningful work and short term successes, and regularly recognize their contributions.

For more information:

City of Connellsville: www.connellsville.org

Connellsville Cultural Trust: www.connellsvilleculturaltrust.org

Yough River Trail Council: www.regionaltrailcorp.com/yough_river_trail/

Allegheny Trail Alliance: www.atatrail.org

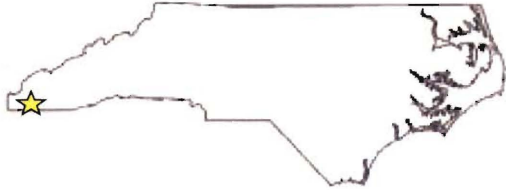
Trail Towns Program: www.trailtowns.org



By completing trails projects through trades and arts courses, students developed a sense of stewardship for the GAP Trail, while enhancing the trail for all users.

(Photo: Ted Kovall)

HAYESVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA



2010 Population: 311

Elevation: 2000 feet

Area: 0.44 sq mi

Trails and Parks:

Jackrabbit Trail System,
Blue Ridge Mountains,
Tsali Recreation Area,
Nantahala national

Forest, Lake Chatuge

Recreation Opportunities:

Hiking, camping, backpacking
Mountain biking
Horseback riding
Whitewater rafting
Fishing, hunting
RV camping
Golfing
Bird watching
Zip line canopy tours

Overview

Hayesville, North Carolina is the county seat of Clay County, located in the southwest corner of North Carolina and bordering Georgia. The surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains, Hiwassee River Basin, and Lake Chatuge offer stunning views and over 500 miles of shoreline. Recreation opportunities within Hayesville and the surrounding natural areas abound, including 600 miles of hiking and equestrian trails and 55 miles of mountain biking trails. The nearest urban centers to Hayesville, approximately two hours away, include Atlanta,

Georgia; Chattanooga and Knoxville, Tennessee; Greenville, South Carolina; and Asheville, North Carolina.

Residents of Hayesville are proud of their cultural heritage and value the rural lifestyle that their small, picturesque town affords. The town centers around a historic brick courthouse and sustains a vibrant artist community, including the Licklog Players, a well-known theater troupe that performs in Hayesville's Peacock Theater. Because of its proximity to Atlanta, Hayesville was a popular vacation and retirement destination. However, when the building industry halted it left Hayesville in the lurch.

Over the past two decades, the citizens of Hayesville have decided to emphasize downtown development, events and recreational tourism as their main economic strategies.



Hayesville's dedicated volunteers demonstrate that in a small town, a few motivated citizens can make a big difference.

(Photo: Clay County Progress)

HAYESVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

History

Hayesville is a small mountain town in rural North Carolina that has been struggling economically for decades. The town traditionally relied on agriculture. In the recent past, Hayesville's economy received a brief boost from service industries catering to vacationers and retirees, but was left devastated in the wake of the housing market crash. Now, civic-minded locals are finding ways to diversify their economy and spark more interest in the area. A group of citizens formed the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association (CCCRA), becoming the main economic driver for Hayesville. Capitalizing on Hayesville's beautiful location, the organization has focused on increasing tourism and new business investments through revitalizing downtown and building trail infrastructure. An eight-year effort led to the opening of the 15-mile Jackrabbit Hiking and Biking Trails last year, and CCCRA continues to obtain funding to build more trails in and around town.

Partnerships

Partnerships are an important aspect of Hayesville's economic strategy. Besides the Clay County government, the Chamber of Commerce helps promote outdoor recreation opportunities for the town. The most active partners, however, are grassroots organizations such as the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association (CCCRA), the Southern Appalachian Bicycle



CCCRA Volunteers pose after the construction of the Jackrabbit trailhead kiosk. The organization formed after one resident decided to clean and paint awnings in downtown Hayesville.

(Photo: Southern Appalachian Bicycle Association)

Association (SABA), and Mountain High Hikers. These organizations have been bolstering local resources by building new trails and recruiting volunteers. Mountain High Hikers leads hikes of all skill levels in the Southern Appalachian Mountains every week, actively maintains hiking trails, and helps build new trails. The bicycle association collaborates with the CCCRA,

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local schools, and the USFS to teach children about safe cycling, organize bike rides, build mountain bike trails, and engage volunteers. In 2009, a member of SABA attended North Carolina's Mountain Bike Leadership Summit to build partnerships and share knowledge for the expansion and enhancement of mountain biking opportunities throughout the state.

The mission of the CCCRA is "to serve as a catalyst to bring forth a cooperative, creative spirit within Clay County, North Carolina, that enables us to reclaim and preserve our unique mountain heritage and natural resources, create new jobs and provide opportunities, and to encourage economic growth and prosperity-today and tomorrow." With the help of HandMade in America, the CCCRA formed in 1998, after the town gathered to discuss what could be done to help offset the economic decline in Clay County and attract new businesses. The CCCRA recognizes that the scenic beauty of Clay County is its greatest natural resource, and seeks to maintain it as a part of the county's character while encouraging economic development. There is some tension regarding the CCCRA because its members are a mix of locals and newcomers, and some people view the organization as an avenue for outsiders to affect change. However, the organization works closely with the local government and local partners and has an impressive list of achievements within the community.

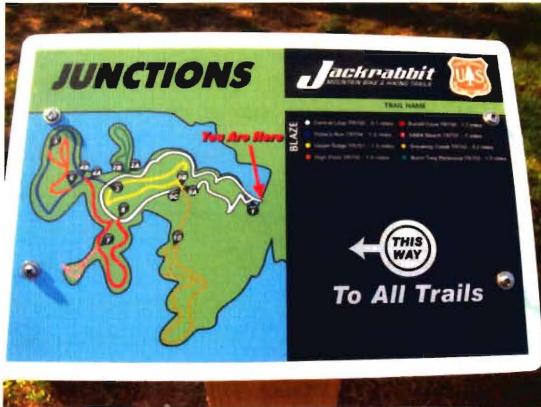
The 2010 Clay County Comprehensive Plan promotes regional partnerships in order to foster inter-city tourism, or "loop tourism." The region around Clay County has a shared cultural heritage and overlapping events, as well as similar outdoor recreation opportunities. Rather than competing with other towns and counties in the area, the region has become stronger by working together. Tapping into the larger region gives the county an advertising boost, too. Potential loop tourism opportunities for Clay County include outdoor recreation, arts and music, Cherokee heritage, cultural heritage, and events.

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Trails and Infrastructure Development

Despite a small municipal budget (\$330,000 in 2007), Hayesville has an ambitious plan to build physical infrastructure within the town as well as establish the organizational capacity to sustain economic and community development. The local government has not been the primary driver of economic development in Hayesville, although the government does partner with CCCRA. As

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Trails within the Jackrabbit system are color coded with blazes. Maps include this information as well as trail segment lengths.

(Photo: mtbgreg1 via Singletracks.com)

a grassroots effort, CCCRA represents the interests of both long-term residents and newcomers.

Downtown redevelopment began in earnest in 1996, when local resident Glen Love took it upon himself to clean and paint the awnings on storefronts in downtown. He supported the operation with personal funding and equipment, and his actions became the

catalyst for civic involvement, which led to the formation of the CCCRA. Since then, the CCCRA has acquired grant funding to transform a vacant lot into a downtown park, install lighting in the downtown square, paint the central gazebo, replace diseased street trees along Main Street, build a community playground, and install an "Historic Hayesville" information kiosk in the town square. The CCCRA raised the funds to renovate the exterior of the Clay County Courthouse by selling commemorative bricks in the square. The CCCRA also works with local high school students to commission art projects.

Recently, university students partnered with the CCCRA to lead a community planning and visioning project to create a master plan for downtown. The CCCRA also secures volunteers for regular litter removal and landscaping projects.

In April of 2012, volunteers with the CCCRA and the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition began work on a 0.34-mile Hayesville Connector Walking Trail (CWT). The North Carolina Department of Natural Resources awarded the CCCRA a \$33,250 matching grant to help fund the trail. The trail will circumnavigate the town and connect the downtown history museum to Spike Buck Mound, an historically important Cherokee site. The CCCRA is hoping that the connector trail will bring in tourists and teach them about the history of the town.

Not all of CCCRA's infrastructure improvements take place downtown. Since 2001, they have been working with SABA and the US Forest Service to create the 15-mile Jackrabbit Trails system on a peninsula in Lake Chatuge in the Nantahala National Forest, a prime local opportunity for mountain biking, hiking, and horseback riding. The effort soon expanded to include Clay County Health and School Departments and various local business and community organizations. All of these organizations have common goals

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to promote fitness, environmental conservation and green tourism through outdoor recreation. The regional impact of this trail system was also recognized by neighboring counties in Georgia, which pitched in to fund the trail system alongside Clay County. The International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) helped break ground in 2005. Local volunteers helped phase the trail system in over the next several years, and in April of 2011 the trail officially opened. Over 15,000 people had used the trail before it opened!

Clay County made a clear connection between the development of their trail system and community health. After the opening of the Jackrabbit Trails, Clay County was awarded a grant from Eat Smart Move More North Carolina to build a skills trail at the trailhead to encourage physical activity through mountain biking. With the opening of Jackrabbit Trails, students in SABA's Pathways summer program no longer have to travel outside of the region to participate in extracurricular mountain biking activities.

Business Development

Efforts to rejuvenate downtown and attract tourists through outdoor recreation opportunities have led to many new developments and successes in Hayesville. Two run-down auto service stations near the town entrance have been remodeled into a restaurant and a furniture retailer, enhancing the impact of the entrance

to town. A new coffee shop, bookstore, butcher shop, and several service businesses moved into the downtown square in 2006.

Marketing and Events

Hayesville hosts many celebrations and events throughout the year. Most of the events in Hayesville are initiated by the CCCRA. Every July, hundreds of visitors come for the annual Car-B-Q, which showcases antique cars, barbeque, and live music. The event is funded by local banks and businesses, with regional newspapers and radio stations providing free publicity. Another event the CCCRA orchestrates is Lies and Pies, which is a pie bake-off and storytelling competition. The town also puts on a chili cook-off and a 4th of July parade, and decorates the streets for Christmas. These myriad events celebrate Hayesville while attracting tourists and engaging newcomers in local activities.

The town also hosts outdoor recreation-oriented events. SABA hosted its second annual SABA Century Bicycle Ride, "It's Not Your Grandma's Century," in May of 2012. The ride, which draws hundreds of cyclists, has three different routes that all start and end in Hayesville.

Hayesville's grassroots effort to attract tourists, build partnerships, and revitalize civic infrastructure fits nicely into the small rural identity of Hayesville. The former president of the CCCRA Rob Tiger commented that

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new mountain bike trails are “the kind of development that we’re interested in. We’re not going to succeed if the approach is to lure traditional industries. We have to think [on a] smaller scale.” The CCCRA is currently working on developing a marketing strategy for the Hayesville Connector Walking Trail and Cherokee exhibit. These small-scale, volunteer-led efforts are having a positive economic impact on Hayesville.

Lessons Learned

- **Capitalize on your assets**

Former CCCRA president Rob Tiger commented that new mountain bike trails are “the kind of development that we’re interested in. We’re not going to succeed if the approach is to lure traditional industries. We have to think [on a] smaller scale.”

Hayesville is surrounded by the natural beauty of lakes, mountains, and valleys. The location draws a talented community of artists as well as retirees, tourists, and vacation-homeowners. Hayesville’s history is also a defining factor for the town’s identity. As part of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, relatively isolated Hayesville has long fostered a unique culture. This imparts a shared sense of community among the townspeople.

- **Market to nearby metropolitan areas.**

Many people buy second homes in Hayesville or seek to retire there, and most come from nearby Atlanta or other metropolitan areas. Rural communities that have access nearby cities should target them when advertising vacation opportunities, events and trails.

- **Build on momentum.**

The people of Hayesville took advantage of the initiative created by Handmade in America to develop economic revitalization strategies. Local banks, regional tourism authorities, media outlets, and other businesses work eagerly with the CCCRA because they have proven they can get things done.

- **Welcome newcomers.**

Newcomers are welcomed into the community and encouraged to engage in civic activities.

- **Small groups can have a big impact.**

The community development projects spearheaded by CCCRA and carried forth by volunteers are having a tangible economic impact on Hayesville. The CCCRA started with a small group of people dedicated to making change in their community, and is now the primary driver of economic development in Hayesville.

For more information:

City of Hayesville: <http://www.hayesville.org/>
Clay County Communities Revitalization
Association: <http://www.cccra.net/>

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Clay County Comprehensive Plan: <http://claycountycomp.wordpress.com/cccp-final-plan/>

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Southern Appalachian Bicycle Association:
<http://www.sabacycling.com/index.htm>



After the opening of the Jackrabbit Trails, Clay County was awarded a grant to build a skills trail at the Jackrabbit trailhead to encourage physical activity through mountain biking.

(Photo: Southern Appalachian Bicycle Association)

OTHER INSPIRATION

Bakersville, North Carolina **2010 Population: 464**

Bakersville is a small mountain town that historically relied on agriculture and manufacturing as its economic base. In the 1980s and 90s, the county lost 3,400 manufacturing jobs, devastating the economy. Some jobs were recovered through a surge in the mining industry in the 1990s, but the pace of economic recovery was slow and Main Street remained empty. With a spark from HandMade in America's Small Towns Project, civic-minded townspeople galvanized to boost the local economy, forming the Bakersville Improvement Group (BIG). The Bakersville Improvement Group's signature event is the annual Rhododendron Festival, which attracts 2,000 to 3,000 visitors annually.

In 1998 a physical disaster struck Bakersville, and the economy took another hit. A flood wiped out all of the stores downtown and the state declared that sections of the commercial district were within the floodplain and could not be redeveloped. The town decided to turn this into an opportunity by creating a creek walk, hoping to unify the community, spark activity downtown, and revitalize the floodplain area. The creek walk is handicap-accessible and provides access to recreational fishing spots. The local residents believed this amenity would enhance the civic fabric of the town, support local artists, and



At the Bicycle Inn in Bakersville, each room is named and decorated to commemorate a famous cyclist.

(Photo: Claude Monnier, North Carolina Bike Club)

attract tourists. The BIG partnered with state and national organizations and wrote grants in order to fund the trail. They also organized a fundraising campaign for lighting for the creek walk, selling commemorative plaques to local citizens for \$1000. The creek walk has drawn four new business to Bakersville.

OTHER INSPIRATION

Big Stone Gap, Virginia **2010 Population: 5643**

Big Stone Gap was historically a mining town, until the 1980s when the mining industry faltered and unemployment rose to 20 percent. Since tourism was the fastest growing industry in Virginia in the mid-90s, the town decided to pursue a sustainable ecotourism strategy to boost investment and support local businesses.



Big Stone Gap draws traffic from the Crooked Road Heritage Music Trail and the Roaring Branch Trail, a birding route (above).

(Photo: Southwest Virginia, www.myswva.org)

The town lies along or near the Stone Mountain Trail, the Crooked Road Heritage Music Trail, and Roaring Branch Trail, a popular birding route.

The locals partnered with the Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority (HATA), Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Mountain Empire Community College and its Small Business Development Center to attract investment and foster local entrepreneurs. The Virginia Cooperative Extension ran

workshops on starting a business, and the Small Business Center at the community college agreed to review business plans. A nearby lending firm provided a special loan for ecotourism entrepreneurs. After many years of dependence on outsiders for employment, the town began building the financial literacy to become economically independent.

Marketing efforts, including package vacations and new amenities and businesses have made an impact on the number of tourists coming to the area. In particular, HATA's marketing efforts have garnered over 50,000 requests for more information. New businesses that support hiking, biking, kayaking, rafting, and camping are thriving, and Big Stone Gap is seeing a growing bed and breakfast market. The county's unemployment rate was down to 4.6% in 2005.⁵

OTHER INSPIRATION

Otago Central Rail Trail, New Zealand

The result of a partnership between the Department of Conservation and the Otago Central Rail Trust, the 150km Otago Central Rail Trail was established along Central Otago's historic railway foundations in February of 2000. The trail takes approximately 6 days to walk or 4 days to cycle, and can also be traveled in segments. People use the trail for wildlife viewing, visiting historical sites, and participating in competitive events. There are



The 150km Otago Central Rail Trail was established along Central Otago's historic railroad.

(Photo: Adventure South)

14 kiosks along the trail, which provide maps, photographs, and interpretive material. The trail is also equipped with directional signs and 12 toilet facilities. Businesses offer accommodation, restaurants, and other goods and services in communities adjacent to the trail. One can also find opportunities for fishing, camping, visiting museums, browsing art galleries, golfing, curling, and wine tasting along the Otago Central Rail Trail.

In order to fund trail maintenance, the Otago Central Rail Trust sells a \$10 Passport to tourists. The passport contains an interpretive map of the trail with spaces to imprint self-inking stamps found at the trail's 14 kiosks.

In order to support trail maintenance, the Trust sells a \$10 Passport for tourists to document their accomplishments on the Otago Trail. The passport contains a map of the trail with locations of the shelter-kiosks. Each location has a story printed on the Passport pages, along with a space to imprint a self-inking stamp found at the kiosk. This is a fun, interactive way for visitors to commemorate their journeys and learn about and support the historic trail.

The Trust has conducted surveys, in 2005 and 2008, on the effect of the trail on local businesses. The most recent survey found that almost one third of responding businesses

OTHER INSPIRATION

stated that the trail was very important in their decision to start their business in the area. The majority of businesses felt that over 20% of their customer activity was due to the presence of the trail.⁶ A large percentage of respondents claimed that their businesses are growing. The Otago Central Rail Trail has positively contributed to the adjacent communities by supporting more services and facilities and fostering greater pride in the community.

For more information:

Otago Central Rail Trail - <http://www.otagocentralrailtrail.co.nz/passport.html#>



A trailhead sign tells trail users the distance to other stops and towns along the trail, and points them to nearby parking.

(Photo: Ulanwp via Wikimedia Commons)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

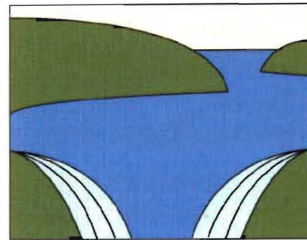
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