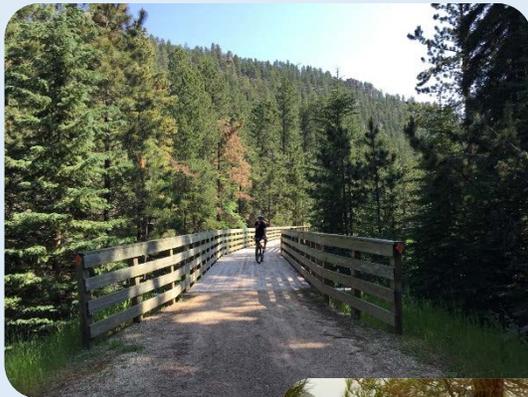


Recreation Economy Resource Guide

*For USDA Forest Service, Rural Development and
National Institute for Food and Agriculture Field Staff*



*Photos courtesy Christine Sorensen, USDA Rural Development,
Lance Cheung, USDA Photography and USDA Forest Service.*



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BACKGROUND

USDA’s 2014-2018 Strategic Plan emphasizes rural economic development and forest conservation. Restoring watershed and forest health is central to USDA’s efforts in our national forests and grasslands. Watersheds and forests also serve as important economic drivers for adjacent rural communities. Jobs and businesses in natural resources management, stewardship and restoration, agri-tourism, hospitality, renewable energy and other sectors that strengthen the distinctive character and vibrancy of the surrounding area offer opportunities for these nearby communities.

Growing and maintaining a healthy recreation sector that benefits local residents over the long term requires balancing natural resource management, conservation efforts, infrastructure investment, business development, and many other factors. It also necessitates active stakeholder engagement, a robust understanding of potential challenges and opportunities, collaboration among various levels of government and landowners and a strong plan for the region’s future. These efforts present unparalleled economic opportunities—to revitalize main street, preserve cultural heritage, support entrepreneurship and small business growth, reinvest in communities and more.



The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, understanding the economic value of national forests and the importance of strategic partnerships to efficiently use of existing resources to support recreation economy, directs the Secretary of Agriculture to increase the role of volunteers and partners in National Forest System trail management. The importance of strategic partnership and coordination and tracking impact is also highlighted in the revised 2012 Forest Service Planning Rule, the 2016 Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act and 2016 Native Tourism Act.

USDA’s Forest Service (FS), Rural Development (RD), and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) have developed this resource guide for field staff use to improve the coordination of delivery of assistance.

PURPOSE

This guide will help FS, RD and NIFA employees in the field:

- Understand agency roles in supporting recreational economy
- Leverage each other’s expertise and planning, financing and training programs
- Cross-promote success stories and best practices.

RECREATIONAL ECONOMY FACT SHEET

Building recreation economy is one of USDA's top priorities. USDA has enrolled a record number of private working lands in conservation programs and implemented new strategies—such as landscape-scale efforts—to restore our forests and clean our water supply. Through economic development investments, USDA is also supporting the creation of private-sector jobs protecting and rehabilitating our forests and wetlands, and providing increased opportunities for outdoor recreation.

America's 193 million acres of public forests and grasslands supply drinking water for 60 million Americans, support approximately 200,000 full and part time jobs and contribute more than \$13 billion to local communities each year. At the same time, new conservation markets are enhancing the value of our nation's farmlands, while also supporting conservation practices, improving farmers' bottom line and ensuring a cleaner planet for our next generation.

Outdoor recreation is an economic powerhouse in the United States; each year generating \$646 billion in consumer spending and 6.1 million direct jobs. In many rural places, hunting, fishing and wildlife watching have boosted rural tourism, spurred business growth and contributed to strong land value gains. The brightest prospects, though, still lie ahead. Rural communities fortunate enough to have other amenities to complement their natural resource base are in the best position to reap new economic benefits from this booming industry.

The National Forests and grasslands provide the greatest diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities in the world, connecting people with nature in an unmatched variety of settings and activities. Opportunities include hiking, biking, horse riding, driving off-highway vehicles, picnicking, camping, hunting, fishing, navigating waterways, viewing wildlife and scenery and exploring historic places. Visitors can glide through powder at world class alpine resorts and challenge themselves on primitive cross-country ski or snowmobile routes.

Outdoor recreation is fun—and so much more. It provides physical challenges, requires development of life-long skills, provokes interest and inquiry and inspires wonder and awe of the natural world. It contributes greatly to the physical, mental, and spiritual health of individuals, bonds family and friends, instills pride in heritage and provides economic benefits to communities, regions and the nation. Indeed, outdoor recreation is an essential part of our American culture.

Trails and greenways create opportunities in construction and maintenance, rentals (e.g., bicycles, kayaks and canoes), services (e.g., shuttle buses and guided tours), historic preservation, restaurants and lodging. Today, community leaders and planners are using trails as important parts of their overall strategies for economic revitalization to build and strengthen local businesses.



U.S. FOREST SERVICE FACT SHEET

The U.S. Forest Service's (FS) mission is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. FS is a multi-faceted agency that manages and protects 154 national forests and 20 grasslands in 43 States and Puerto Rico. FS consists of an elite wildland firefighting team, the world's largest forestry research organization and experts who provide technical and financial help to a variety of stakeholders to help protect and manage privately owned forests and associated range and watershed lands. FS is divided into four levels.

Headquarters

The Washington Office is led by the Chief, who reports to the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment. The Chief's staff provides broad policy and direction for the agency, works with the President's Administration to develop a budget to submit to Congress, provides information to Congress on accomplishments and monitors activities of the agency.

Region

FS has nine geographic regions that encompass broad areas. A regional forester oversees each region. Regional office staff coordinate activities between national forests and grasslands, monitor activities on those lands to ensure quality operations, provide guidance for forest plans and allocate budgets to the forests.

Forest Supervisors

Each National Forest has several ranger districts. A forest supervisor directs the work of district rangers and reports to the regional forester. Forest supervisors are responsible for coordinating activities between districts, allocating the budget and providing technical support to each district.

District Ranger

FS consists of more than 600 ranger districts that are each staffed with 10 to 100 people depending on size. Districts vary in size from 50,000 acres to more than 1 million acres. A district ranger leads activities at the district level and reports to the Forest Supervisor. The district ranger directs many on-the-ground activities, including trail construction and maintenance, operation of campgrounds and management of vegetation and wildlife habitat.

How does FS interact with the public?

FS interacts with the public through public meetings and workshops; public comment periods; targeted outreach efforts to Federally recognized Tribes, youth, new audiences, permittees and neighboring landowners; and coordination with State governments and other entities. The local FS office also provides guidance on special use permit authorization (for a permit, lease or easement), both for private and commercial purposes.

How to contact FS Staff

Visit the [Forest Service's website](#) to find FS staff in the closest ranger district. Another possible avenue for collaboration is the office of Cooperative Forestry (within the branch of State and Private Forestry) which works with States, private landowners and other partners to promote healthy forests and livable communities throughout the United States. For more information, and regional offices and contacts, visit the [Cooperative Forestry office](#).



USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT FACT SHEET

Rural Development's (RD) mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all rural Americans. That mission touches every facet of rural America throughout the country. RD has more than 40 loan, grant and technical assistance programs to create opportunities in housing, business, and infrastructure. RD serves as a catalyst to improve conditions in rural America by increasing the flow of capital through leveraged partnerships that help make prosperity and better living a reality in rural America.

Rural Development's programs are administered by three agencies:

Rural Housing Service (RHS)

The Rural Housing Service offers a variety of programs to build or improve housing and essential community facilities in rural areas. We offer loans, grants and loan guarantees for single- and multi-family housing, child care centers, fire and police stations, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, schools, first responder vehicles and equipment, housing for farm laborers and much more. RHS also provides technical assistance loans and grants in partnership with nonprofit organizations, Native American and Alaska Native Tribes, State and Federal government agencies, and local communities.

Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS)

The Rural Business-Cooperative Service offers programs to support business development and job training opportunities for rural residents. RBS programs help provide the capital, technical support, educational opportunities and entrepreneurial skills that can help rural residents start and grow businesses or access jobs in agricultural markets and in the bio-based economy.

Rural Utilities Service (RUS)

The Rural Utilities Service administers programs that provide much-needed infrastructure or infrastructure improvements to rural communities, including water and waste treatment, electric power and telecommunications services. All of these services play a critical role in helping to expand economic opportunities and improve the quality of life for rural residents.

How to contact RD staff

RD delivers programs through a network of more than 400 area offices and 47 State offices, a customer service center and finance office in St. Louis, Missouri, and its headquarters in Washington, D.C. Visit RD's website for [national, State and local office contacts](#). [Community Economic Development Leads](#) in each State provide assistance with planning, financing and training projects.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (NIFA) LAND GRANT UNIVERSITIES FACT SHEET

The National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA), part of USDA’s Research, Education and Economics mission area, uses an integrated approach to ensure scientific discoveries reach the people who can put them to use. Through partnerships with the Land Grant University System and government, private and nonprofit organizations, NIFA delivers research, education and extension programs that provide solutions to those who need them.

The 1862 Morrill Act created the Land Grant University system to provide individuals in every State opportunities to receive education in agriculture, science, military science and engineering. Land grant universities provide affordable educational opportunities for those lacking extensive financial resources.

Each of the 50 States is home to a Land Grant University. The District of Columbia and 6 U.S. territories also have Land Grant institutions. The 1890 Morrill Act extended the Land Grant system to include 18 separate land grant institution for African-American students. Further, in 1994, 29 Tribal colleges and universities became Land Grant Institutions. This number has since expanded to 32. [Access NIFA’s map of all land grant colleges and universities.](#)

Cooperative Extension System

The 1914 Smith-Lever Act expanded the mission of the land grant university system, creating the Cooperative Extension System. The Extension System has broad resources to help with planning associated with the recreational economy. A national network of Extension professionals has worked to bring resources to a single website for easy cross-State sharing. Visit the online network, [National Extension Tourism \(NET\)](#), for a multitude of resources.

Regional Rural Development Centers

There are four [Regional Rural Development Centers](#) that link the important work done at extension centers within their respective 12-13 State regions. These centers help connect initiatives to expertise within the region to provide specific technical assistance. For example, through the [Stronger Economies Together](#) initiative, the Southern Regional Development Center serves as the conduit for Land Grant Universities in partnership with USDA Rural Development to provide regional economic development technical assistance to communities across the nation.

A few examples of Extension’s work with the recreation economy are below. Communities considering economic development options may find additional resources by reaching out to their [local Extension Service and/or their respective Regional Rural Development Centers](#) for help.

- [Nature Tourism Development](#), Texas A&M University
- [Vermont Tourism Research Center](#), the University of Vermont
- West Virginia University Extension Service [Community Resources and Economic Development](#)
- North Carolina State University [Tourism Extension Program](#)
- University of Tennessee Extension, Center for Profitable Agriculture [Agritourism Program](#)
- University of California Cooperative Extension [Agritourism Conversations](#)
- [National Extension Tourism](#).

AREAS FOR COLLABORATION FOR FS, RD, NIFA/LAND GRANT UNIVERSITIES

In order to sustainably manage the National Forest System, while bringing economic opportunities to forest-adjacent communities, FS, RD and NIFA/Land Grant Universities have many opportunities to partner. Here are examples:

Planning

In 2012, FS updated its land management planning requirements with a new Planning Rule. Because of the importance of sustainably managing the National Forest System with the help of the public and other stakeholders, this rule emphasizes FS's responsibility to engage with the public and to work more closely with State, local and Tribal governments when national forest managers amend or revise their land management plans. Economic impact analysis and planning is an important component of the planning process. Since RD, NIFA and Land Grant Universities have the expertise and vested interest in economic development, the agencies can coordinate and collaborate at various stages of planning and implementation processes. For example, land management planning efforts can be coordinated with overlapping regional economic development planning technical assistance efforts that RD and NIFA/Land Grant Universities provide. Partnerships built early in this manner can also support coordination efforts at the implementation stage.

Financing for Infrastructure and Business Development

RD has a loan portfolio of almost \$216 billion that is financing infrastructure and business development projects. RD has staff in every State to provide grants, loans, and loan guarantees that help rural communities become stronger and more vibrant. RD is an agency that continues to create job opportunities in rural America through investments in rural businesses and cooperatives. At the same time, RD provides loans, grants and loan guarantees to support reliable and necessary services such as water, energy, housing, broadband, schools and hospitals. Collectively, these investments support families that call rural areas home. RD is focused on leveraging the strengths of rural areas, building new markets to increase regional competitiveness and continuing to expand investment opportunities that create prosperous, sustainable communities.

Training and Outreach

The agencies can continuously collaborate to cross-promote best practices and success stories that have supported the growth of recreation economy through webinars, toolkits, success stories, and other promotion avenues.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN BUILDING RECREATION ECONOMY

The following factors should be considered when supporting communities in developing and implementing a regional plan that supports or incorporates recreational economy:

- **Connect local and regional community and economic development planning and natural resource planning.** A successful recreation economy requires the integration of policies and projects taking place both within forests and natural areas and in adjacent communities.
- **Identify critical issues.** Public concerns, natural resource management challenges, assets, opportunities and threats should all be identified through collaborative stakeholder involvement.
- **Meet legal and regulatory requirements.** There are numerous Federal, State and local laws and regulations regarding use of natural resources. Notably, the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act established the President's Council on Environmental Quality and the requirement for environmental assessments and environmental impact statements for any project receiving Federal funding.
- **Implement best available practices.** It is both a legal requirement and professional imperative to duly consider the best available science and expertise in the planning process and plan implementation.
- **Incorporate "SMART" goals and strategies.** A SMART goal is one that is specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time-based. The clear objectives and direction laid out by SMART goals and strategies are most likely to result in meaningful progress.

- **Be inclusive.** Any economic or community development plan should involve actions that convene stakeholders, government agencies, educational institutions, community-based organizations, natural resource managers, environmental and other nonprofit groups and the private sector.
- **Be clearly assigned.** Assign the plan’s recommended actions to specific responsible parties, and hold those parties accountable for implementing their items. Responsible parties should periodically evaluate and report to the public and relevant leadership on progress and accomplishments to date, factors affecting the plan’s implementation and changes pending or made to the approved plan.
- **Be responsibly budgeted.** Specify plan implementation costs and identify funding sources. In this way the plan is a tool to prepare and justify annual budgets, allocate budgets, guide annual work priorities and facilitate the scheduling and sequencing of projects.

The “[Triple Bottom Line](#)” (TBL) approach helps all parties think not just about economically sustainable businesses, but also businesses that strive for environmental and social sustainability. (Sustainability experts coined the term, which originates from the accounting sector. Bottom line refers to profits or losses, usually recorded at the very bottom line on a statement of revenue and expenses.) The TBL approach to business planning and financing asks the user to consider a range of factors on how to conduct and grow successful businesses and add value to their surrounding community. It may also help identify niche businesses that might be overlooked when profit is the only consideration.

Some examples of issues to consider, using TBL standards, when identifying a loan candidate in a recreation economy-linked are:

- Numbers and impacts of the end users
- Benefits for the local community and businesses
- Working with socially and environmentally responsible suppliers
- Whether the business will hire local employees(perhaps those with disabilities or other underemployed groups) and pay employees a living wage
- How day to day operations will impact the natural environment (will they recycle or use renewable energy? How will they dispose of waste and water?)
- Whether the business plans to use a portion of its income to invest back into the community and/or natural or cultural resources.

While there is no universal method for measuring TBL standards, FS, RD, and NIFA field staff are encouraged to consider the factors mentioned above when identifying potential business opportunities.

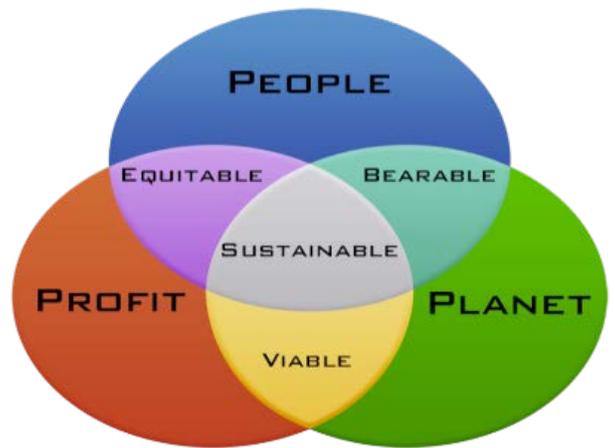


Figure 1: Triple Bottom Line—Balance Between Nature, People and Economic Impacts

FINANCING SOURCES SUPPORTING RECREATIONAL ECONOMY

This section lists RD and FS programs that can support technical assistance, infrastructure and business development as well as conservation/easement projects. FS, RD and NIFA field staff are encouraged to use this list to explore cross collaboration opportunities under each of these programs or to provide guidance to community partners on available support resources.

FINANCING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

RD technical assistance resources can be used for regional economic development planning, conducting project development feasibility studies, developing training programs or sustainably managing infrastructure.

Program	Agency	Eligible Applicants	Authorized Purposes	Typical Funding Amount
<u>Stronger Economies Together (SET)</u>	RD	Two or more counties with 70% land area or 51% population in rural areas.	Technical assistance for regional economic development planning.	Technical assistance
<u>Local Food Local Places (LFLP)</u>	RD and partner agencies	Agricultural businesses, Agricultural cooperatives, Producer networks, Producer associations, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) networks, Community Supported Agricultural associations, Local government, Non-profit organizations, Producer network, Public benefit corporations, Tribal Governments, Regional farmers authorities	Technical assistance to create walkable, healthy, economically vibrant neighborhoods through the development of local food systems and natural resource amenities. Helps gateway communities to national forests revitalize and attract visitors to their downtowns.	Two types of projects are offered: Planning Grants: \$25,000-\$100,000 Implementation Grants: \$100,000-\$500,000
<u>Community Facilities Loans and Grants</u>	RHS	Public bodies, community-based nonprofit corporations, Federally recognized Tribes.	Improve, develop, or finance essential community facilities for rural communities in rural areas and cities and towns of 20,000 or less.	Grants: \$15,000-\$50,000 Loans: \$100,000-\$5 million
<u>Water and Waste Loans and Grants</u>	RUS	State and local government entities, private nonprofits, Federally recognized Tribes.	Build, repair and improve public water systems and waste collection and treatment systems in rural areas and cities	Long-term, low-interest loans. Grants may be available to keep user costs reasonable.

			and towns of 10,000 or less.	
Rural Business Development Grants	RBS	Towns, State agencies, nonprofit corporations, authorities, Federally recognized Tribes, rural cooperatives.	Targeted technical assistance, training and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas.	\$10,000-\$500,000
Rural Cooperative Development Grant	RBS	Nonprofit organizations, institutes for higher learning (universities).	Provide support to centers for cooperatives. Eligible work plans can include trail development/maintenance, feasibility studies, marketing, lodging development, business development, strategic planning.	Maximum-\$200,000

FINANCING CONSERVATION, EASEMENT AND CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

Both RD and FS have support programs for conservation and easement programs.

Program	Agency	Eligible Applicants	Authorized Purposes	Typical Funding Amount
Rural Business Development Grants	RBS	Towns, State agencies, nonprofit corporations, authorities, Federally recognized Tribes, rural cooperatives.	Targeted technical assistance, training and other activities leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas.	\$10,000-\$500,000

FINANCING INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

RD has loan and grant programs that can be used to support rural infrastructure projects such as broadband, water and waste, and community facilities.

Program	Agency	Eligible Applicants	Authorized Purposes	Typical Funding Amount
Community Facilities Loans and Grants	RHS	Public bodies, community-based nonprofit corporations, Federally recognized Tribes.	Improve, develop, or finance essential community facilities for rural communities in rural areas and	Grants: \$15,000-\$50,000 Loans: \$100,000-

			cities and towns of 20,000 or less.	\$5 million
Water and Waste Loans and Grants	RUS	State and local government entities, private nonprofits, Federally recognized Tribes.	Build, repair and improve public water systems and waste collection and treatment systems in rural areas and cities and towns of 10,000 or less.	Long-term, low-interest loans. Grants may be available to keep user costs reasonable.
Community Connect Grants	RUS	Most State and local governments, Federally recognized Tribes, nonprofits, for-profit corporations.	Helps fund broadband deployment into rural communities where it is not yet economically viable for private sector providers to deliver service.	Minimum: \$50,000 Maximum: \$1 million Amounts are published in Notices of Funding Availability and may vary.
Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans and Loan Guarantees	RUS	State and local government entities, Federally recognized Tribes, nonprofits, for-profit businesses.	Financing to construct, maintain, improve and expand telephone service and broadband in rural areas.	Refer to the rules for loan and terms and conditions.

FINANCING BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The following RD business programs support the creation of new businesses or longevity of existing ones.

PROGRAM	Agency	Eligible Applicants	Authorized Purposes	Typical Funding Amount
Business and Industry Guaranteed Loans	RBS	Lenders: Banks and credit unions Borrowers: For-profit businesses, nonprofits, cooperatives, Federally recognized Tribes, public bodies, individuals.	Business conversion, enlargement, repair, modernization or development; purchase and development of land, easements, rights-of-way, buildings or facilities.	\$1 million-\$25 million
Rural Business Development Grants	RBS	Towns, State agencies, nonprofit corporations, authorities, Federally	Targeted technical assistance, training and other activities	\$10,000-\$500,000



		recognized Tribes, rural cooperatives.	leading to the development or expansion of small and emerging private businesses in rural areas.	
<u>Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants</u>	RBS	Former RUS borrowers, nonprofit utilities, current RUS borrowers.	Funds business incubators, community development assistance to nonprofits and public bodies, start-up venture costs and business expansion.	Grants: Up to \$300,000 Loans: Up to \$1 million
<u>Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program</u>	RBS	Organizations eligible to become Microenterprise Development Organizations including nonprofits, Federally recognized Tribes, higher education institutions	Microloans for microenterprise startups and growth through rural microloan revolving funds.	\$50,000- \$500,000
<u>Intermediary Relending Program</u>	RBS	Nonprofits, cooperatives, Federally recognized Tribes, public agencies.	Provides 1% low-interest loans to local intermediaries that re-lend to businesses and for community development projects in rural communities.	Up to \$2 million for the first financing; \$1 million at a time thereafter; total aggregate debt may not exceed \$15 million.

SUCCESS STORIES: PLANNING FOR A RECREATION ECONOMY

OAKRIDGE, OREGON—TRANSITION FROM TIMBER EMPIRE TO MOUNTAIN BIKE CAPITAL

Historically dependent on the timber industry, the communities of Oakridge and Westfir identified the increasing popularity of its trails by mountain bikers as a saving grace to their economies when approximately 1,600 jobs were lost following the closure of local saw mills. Through partnerships with the Forest Service, trail groups, bicyclists, hikers and equestrians, and the community at large, the [Oakridge-Westfir Community Trails Plan](#) was developed in 2008. USDA Rural Development supported regional infrastructure and business development through its Water and Waste Disposal Loan Program, Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program and Intermediary Relending Program. The community has successfully marketed the location to a specific type of recreation, helping small businesses supporting this industry thrive, as well as attracting an increasing number of new residents and tourists. For example, one major mountain bike event alone generated more than \$1 million in visitor spending. In 2011, the International Mountain Bicycling Association designated Oakridge as one of its first Silver-Level Ride Centers; Oakridge achieved gold status in 2015. Through local leadership and partnerships with volunteer groups, the region is planning to keep stewarding existing trails and connecting the trail systems with nearby recreations areas.

RURAL JOBS ACCELERATOR IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

The Appalachian Spring initiative in Southwest Virginia (SWVA) established two goals to impact the region: to brand SWVA as an international outdoor recreation destination and create an outdoor recreation industry. Through this 3-year project, the region has developed stakeholder groups committed to making improvements in eight key outdoor recreation anchor areas, developed plans to connect communities to their natural assets, developed a regional destination brand, and supported more than 130 entrepreneurs. Appalachian Spring worked with eight communities to revitalize their downtowns into outdoor recreation gateways. Partnerships with local planning districts, State and Federal agencies, individual communities and other nonprofits have been essential to success.

LOCAL FOOD LOCAL PLACES IN FOREST COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

[Forest County, Pennsylvania](#), received technical assistance through [Local Food Local Places](#) in 2015 to develop a plan to renovate the Marienville Depot and make it a regional trail hub with a micro-retail business incubator and a rail trail connected to the Marienville library. Since then, with a grant from Lumber Heritage, the community completed a conceptual drawing of the trail hub and has applied for grants to construct a walking trail, trail connector and a parking lot and station. Jenks Township and community members have committed financial and in-kind contributions to the project. The county is developing a façade improvement grant program for downtown Tionesta, and a community kitchen at the Forest Folk School. The rail corridor was purchased by private developer Headwaters Group of Dubois, promising additional economic development opportunities. For a full list of awarded projects please click [here](#)

FARMERS MARKET PROMOTION PROGRAM IN MONTANA

[Alternative Energy Resources Organization \(AERO\)](#) in Helena, Montana, which received \$100,000 to enhance the Abundant Montana Directory listings and their accessibility, develop a public calendar system for local food events, create a local food marketing campaign, research and collaborate on agritourism, and develop an online agritourism resource. For a full list of awarded projects please click [here](#).

FEDERAL LANDS LIVABILITY INITIATIVE: INCREASING COMMUNITY LIVABILITY THROUGH RECREATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The [Federal Lands Livability Initiative](#) was launched in 2013 to improve the livability of gateway communities—places adjacent to public lands that attract visitors and residents looking for unique recreational and cultural experiences. The Conservation Fund, a national nonprofit organization focused on ensuring that conservation works for America's

communities, collaborated with the Federal Lands Livability Workgroup, comprised of the Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service and other land management agencies to engage four pilot communities in Colorado, Michigan, Oregon and South Carolina.

In Sweet Home, Oregon, recommendations on how to strengthen livability led to several action plans and on-the-ground results. The community expanded the existing bus transit system used by workers, college students and senior citizens to provide weekend transit service from the city to summer recreation areas. In addition, the Forest Service and more than 30 private and public groups signed a declaration of cooperation to create the South Santiam Community Forest Corridor, a community recreation destination with a network of trails as well as maintain the working forest landscape. The group is also working with local Tribes to protect the privately owned Cascadia Cave that has early Native American wall paintings and has been used as a gathering place for thousands of years. The region is also seeking to meet the needs of all residents and visitors through additional economic opportunities to address the community's high rate of under-resourced people. Ten percent of Sweet Home's population relies on social services, and a sizable number of youth are homeless.

STRONGER ECONOMIES TOGETHER REGIONS—NORTHERN NECK, VIRGINIA

Through [Stronger Economies Together](#), a USDA funded technical assistance program, Eastern Virginia's Northern Neck, an Economic Development Administration-designated Economic Development District, developed a 5-year regional economic development plan. Building entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism, improving infrastructure and jobs skills were the main goals identified in the plan. Since then, through funding obtained from RD's RBDG program, the region has established the VA Watermen Heritage Tour Program to assist watermen and women improve their entrepreneurial skills and encourage business development. The [Northern Neck Artisan Trail](#) was also established in partnership with the Artisan Center of Virginia to form strategic alliances with artisans, venues, galleries and retailers across the State, while connecting points of interest, restaurants, and accommodation locations in the related communities to boost regional tourism. Through USDA and other partner funding, the region is implementing downtown revitalization projects in Montross and Colonia Beach to create cultural hubs in downtown areas. Since 2013, the Northern Neck region has leveraged more than \$17 million in Federal, State and private resources to implement its vision, and has seen a 2.7 percent increase in tourism related employment.

PARTNERING WITH HIGHER EDUCATION TO DEVELOP CERTIFICATION PROGRAM—HAWAII ECOTOURISM ASSOCIATION

In 2013, to promote sustainable tourism, the [Hawaii Ecotourism Association \(HEA\)](#), a nonprofit, collaborated with the University of Hawaii at Manoa to develop a sustainable tour certification program. In 2016, the Hawaii Tourism Authority recognized HEA's success and funded efforts to triple the number of operators in the certification program. HEA began including tours of agricultural operations in the program because agritourism is important across the State to help ag producers increase the profitability of their operations. Additionally, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is considering ways to improving ecotourism standards to help ensure sustainability as a long-term outcome. Alaska and Hawaii are the only States in the U.S. with certification programs for businesses in the tourism sector.

PARTNERING WITH HIGHER EDUCATION TO MANAGE CONFLICT WITH SCIENCE—THE GREEN MOUNTAIN, VERMONT NATIONAL FOREST

When the Green Mountain National Forest was revising its Forest Plan in 2002, University of Vermont Extension assisted with the planning process by facilitating opportunities for public input. To ground the discussions in science, a series of meetings on different topics were organized where leading scientists presented the latest research and addressed questions from the public. The topics of wildlife, acid deposition, and silviculture were selected because they were especially controversial aspects of the Forest Plan. Research on the impacts of the public meetings indicate that participants gained a better understanding of the subject matter discussed and some shifts in perspective occurred. Direct interaction with scientists appeared to be a key component of participant learning. Given the need for credible science in policy and planning processes, this research has important implications for management of stakeholder engagement. (More information is available in the journal article: *Chase, L.C., K. Norris, and C. Ginger. 2008. Does science matter? Resource planning in the Green Mountain National Forest. Society and Natural Resources 21(4):345-353.*)

LOCAL, STATE, FEDERAL PARTNERSHIPS IN CHEROKEE NATIONAL FOREST, TENNESSEE

Surrounded by 360 degrees of mountain views, Unicoi County, Tennessee is known as the “Valley Beautiful.” It is host to the Cherokee National Forest, the Appalachian Trail and whitewater paddling. Not too long ago the community was divided about the possibility of additional conservation of the largest unprotected tract of land in the Southern Appalachians; 9,800 acres of scenic wilderness known as [Rocky Fork](#). With the assistance of the Conservation Fund and its [Balancing Nature and Commerce](#) training and technical assistance, local leaders embraced a new course, realizing how Rocky Fork’s natural assets could lead to additional economic opportunities by establishing the region as a nature-based recreation and tourism destination. Along the way, the community and the National Forest transformed their relationship, recognizing their shared interest in cultivating success for the region.

The results included FS’s action to work with the county on revitalizing a popular mountain overlook, improving access to recreational facilities and natural features and sponsoring community events including running and mountain bike races on public lands. Simultaneously, the county encouraged entrepreneurship, with early successes including a farmers market, a welcome center that houses the [Tanasi Artisan Center](#) where local artists sell their wares and a community kitchen for aspiring businesses. In October 2012, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslem and Senator Lamar Alexander announced that the final 2,000 acres of the Rocky Fork property would become Tennessee’s newest State park, further coupling conservation with additional economic opportunity for the community.

WESTERN JUNIPER ALLIANCE IN OREGON

Over the last 100 years, a lack of management has turned the native Western Juniper into an aggressive invasive that threatens the health and wellbeing of Oregon’s rangelands and the communities and wildlife that depend on them. From an ecological perspective, there is strong agreement that this invasive tree needs to be removed from public and private lands. But harvesting Juniper also has tremendous potential to create jobs and provide new economic opportunities to the timber and wood products industries throughout the State. In July 2013, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber launched the Western Juniper Alliance (WJA), a collaborative effort managed by Sustainable Northwest. WJA has coordinated with over 50 government partners, business leaders and other organizations to create jobs in Juniper supply and market chains in rural communities.

With the help of RD business grants, this collaborative effort has turned a challenge into an opportunity for restoration and economic growth. USDA funding supported initial founding and organizing, market and supply chain development, product testing and network coordination. WJA now sustains restoration, manufacturing and retail businesses employing more than 70 full time and seasonal staff. By using Juniper, these businesses are improving grazing conditions, discouraging the spread of invasive weeds, increasing water supplies, decreasing wildfire risks and restoring habitat for sensitive species, all while creating local jobs.

SUCCESS STORIES: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT THE RECREATION ECONOMY

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS DRIVING RECREATION SUCCESS—MARQUETTE MICHIGAN

Marquette, Michigan, in Marquette County is on the southern shores of Lake Superior. Historically known for mining and shipping iron ore, today Marquette is flourishing as one of Michigan’s premier recreation-based economies. Marquette was listed as one of CBS’s 10 best places to retire in 2012, one of the 10 top mountain bike towns in the U.S. according to the Active Times in 2013, and the 8th best small city (out of 1,300) in America according to Nerdwallet in 2015. With 10 miles of paved trail, Marquette received a silver Bicycle Friendly Community Award from the League of American Bicyclists in 2014.

Besides its natural beauty, water-front location, and four distinct seasons, which maximize year-round appeal, the area has benefited from a core group of knowledgeable, creative, dedicated and passionate advocates who executed a clear vision for their area. The formation of a recreation authority to manage the Iron Ore Heritage Trail, and ongoing collaboration with Travel Marquette, has been critical. Visually distinctive signage along the trail describes the mining heritage of the area and adds unique character to the user experience, contributing to a sense of place among residents and visitors alike. Building relationships with local people and businesses, and actively seeking and showcasing [ecotourism destinations](#), have also contributed to Marquette’s continuing success.

DIVERSIFYING ECONOMY THROUGH TOURISM—TOWN OF THOMAS, WEST VIRGINIA

The remote, rural town of Thomas in West Virginia, a coal-dependent economy since the 1880s, is using tourism to diversify its economy. New Historic Thomas was formed as a nonprofit community group to revitalize the town by preserving its unique history, cultural heritage and resources. The nonprofit began to focus on developing cultural amenities that would complement outdoor recreation opportunities. The cornerstone of the recreational trail opportunities adjacent to Thomas is the Blackwater Canyon Trail. A partnership with the U.S. Forest Service Cheat-Potomac District was established to further development and recreational use of the former rail grade along the Blackwater River. FS is continuing to work with private owners to conduct trail maintenance and promote recreational assets which benefit Thomas and have the ability to attract considerable numbers of recreational trail users.

SUCCESS STORIES: CONSERVATION/EASEMENT INITIATIVES

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP FOR RESTORATION

USDA and the Coca-Cola Company’s ground-breaking partnership achieved an ambitious milestone and is on track to double that commitment by 2018. Through a [partnership](#) between FS, the National Forest Foundation, Coca-Cola and other Federal and local partners, and a total investment of \$4.5 million, restoration of damaged watersheds and meadowlands returned more than a billion liters of water to the National Forest System which provides drinking water to more than 60 million Americans. This project also restored 1200 acres of land and restored and maintained more than 70 miles of trail.

DRY FOREST INVESTMENT ZONE IN OREGON AND NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

The Dry Forest Zone project was a 5-year initiative to support forest stewardship and economic development in eastern Oregon and northern California. With support from RD and the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, a core team of four organizations collectively leveraged their strengths and networks to take innovations in community-based forestry “to scale.” A regional nonprofit organization, two community-based organizations and an applied research group led the project. The project has supported at least 72 full-time equivalent jobs, directly treated 8,843 public and private acres, analyzed 214,350 acres, increased planning efforts on more than 4 million acres, and implemented a number of policies and programs that support sustainable forest stewardship. By working at all levels from local to national, the team not only effected changes at a local level but also transformed larger policy conditions.

SUCCESS STORIES: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN THE RECREATION ECONOMY SECTOR

MOTIVATING ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH CONTEST—“GET ON THE TRAIL” PENNSYLVANIA

In order to encourage and accelerate small business opportunities for business owners and entrepreneurs, the Oil Region Alliance (ORA) of Venango County, kicked off a [“Get on the Trail Business Plan Contest”](#) in May 2015. Following the kick off, ORA provided two training seminars and coordinated a “Best Business Plan” contest in partnership with Clarion University. Prize-winners received cash awards and marketing technical assistance through this initiative. Within the first year of operation, a \$55,000 investment to implement this project leveraged \$205,000 in private investment, \$16,000 in public investment, created 7 jobs, retained 18 jobs and assisted 9 businesses.

A REGION REINVENTING ITSELF—SAINT-RAYMOND REGION OF QUEBEC

The Saint-Raymond region of Quebec, once dominated by the timber industry, is busy reinventing itself as an adventure and ecotourism based economy—but on its own terms. Founded in 2002, [Vallée-Bras-du-Nord](#) is a cooperative of land owners (providing rights of access), local businesses (offering tourism services), and workers (employed in the tourism industry). All three of the co-op’s membership classes share a desire for sound management and quality development as the region creates the infrastructure for mountain biking, hiking, snowshoeing, canoeing, kayaking, back-country skiing and camping. The region is one hour north of Quebec City and about five hours from Boston.

More than \$5 million has been invested in building trails, developing hospitality infrastructure, acquiring equipment and staging events. In the process of building infrastructure, the co-op has put community members back to work. Every year they hire a dozen at-risk youth and offer them a few months of work in what the co-op calls “a different kind of school”—

the great outdoors. The youth build and maintain the [trail system](#). Co-op members believe this approach helps the participants adapt to adverse conditions, develop patience, tolerance, discipline, teamwork, determination and perseverance.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO PROMOTE TOURISM—WASHINGTON STATE INSIDER APP

The power of the road trip is alive and well, thanks to a group of students and new technology from a mobile marketing entrepreneur in Washington State. Calling it “[ProjectWA](#),” this group of eighth-graders designed a way to reward people for seeking out and sharing information on historic places around the State. The Washington State Insider app created by the Lopez Island students offers discounted admission to the Washington State History Museum as its user reward. The app went live in June 2016 with nearly 100 sites. Within a month, it had been downloaded nearly 2,000 times, generating significant media attention across the State for both ProjectWA and the off-the-beaten-path rural sites it was designed to promote.

AMERICA’S FIRST AND ONLY SKIER-OWNED MOUNTAIN—MAD RIVER GLEN, VERMONT

Mad River Glen became one of Vermont’s first major ski areas back in 1948 when a single chair carried skiers to the top of General Stark Mountain. Ranked by Ski Magazine as the most challenging terrain in the east, its moto boasts, “Ski it if you can.” In 1995, skiers came together to remain independent and preserve a brand of skiing that exists nowhere else, forming the [Mad River Glen Cooperative](#) to preserve low skier density, the natural terrain and forests and the friendly community atmosphere. About 1,800 skiers are member-owners of the Mad River Glen Cooperative. Nearly \$4 million has been invested in capital projects, with another \$500,000 planned for the coming five years.

PROMOTING HORIZONTAL LINKAGES TO SUPPORT TOURISM—VIRGINIA

The [Artisans Center of Virginia](#) and [Round the Mountain](#) Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Network are using the web to create a network of support to the artisan community, shops and local growers located along scenic roads and mountain vistas, to improve their economic outcomes. According to a 2016 study, artisan visitor spending totaled more than \$250 million, with the average visitor spending \$260 per person per trip. Further, the first Statewide benchmark study reports that nearly 700,000 travelers visit Virginia’s artisan attractions and businesses. The Artisans Center of Virginia and Round the Mountain Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Network are coordinating efforts to leverage this talent into a recognized and established industry that is connected, branded, promoted and celebrated online and through workshops, training and exhibits. Similarly, the [Crooked Road](#) has created the Heritage Music Trail, a network connecting musician artists across Southwest Virginia.

ECONOMIC VALUE OF RESTORATION ACTIVITIES IN CENTRAL IDAHO

With the help of USDA Rural Development funding, Salmon Valley Stewardship (SVS) conducted an analysis of the economic value of restoration activities in central Idaho. The assessment considered 137 restoration projects accomplished from 2008 to 2013 in the Upper Salmon River Region, as well as 14 conservation agreements in Custer and Lemhi County on working ranches. SVS found that local workers and companies earned more than \$17.2 million of the total \$39.6 million spent on restoration and mining reclamation. The study also concluded that restoration activities directly supported an average of 47 jobs and that the industry in the region has about 14 percent annual growth.

SVS took its initial study findings and produced a form that tracks economic impacts of the emerging restoration and stewardship segment. The form is used by Federal and State agencies, county governments and nonprofits, and the Idaho Departments of Labor and Commerce has committed to analyzing the data and providing annual reports. SVS also created a restoration services directory to help raise awareness of emerging restoration sector businesses in the region. Finally, the firm created a guide describing how the National Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management can affect business entities who rely on abundant public lands, case studies of successful examples from other regions and initial recommendations for a citizen involvement strategy.



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