



Adapt & Rise

Madison/Boone Resource
and Recreation Action Plan

SEPTEMBER 2023





USDA Rural Development

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The Conservation Fund

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Photography by Roger May unless otherwise noted. Roger is an Appalachian American photographer and writer based in Alum Creek, West Virginia. www.rogermayphotography.com



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VISION

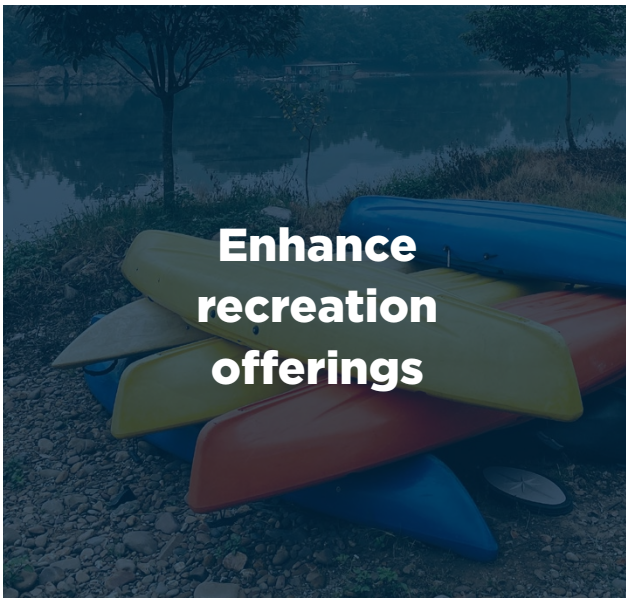
IN MADISON AND BOONE COUNTY:

Across our rural landscapes, towns and city, our community thrives through sustained collaboration that cultivates economic opportunity and community health, building from vibrant public spaces, natural resources, recreation options, pride in our history and culture, and the ability to adapt and rise.

GOALS

The vision for a community becomes reality through sustained and strategic effort across multiple organizations and individuals that is targeted to build on strengths, address gaps, and return value to the community.

Goals that are essential to achieving the vision across Boone County and in the county seat of Madison include:



ACTIONS

Goals are advanced through more specific action implementation addressing multiple items, and include the following:



A. ENHANCE RECREATION OFFERINGS

The improvement of recreation facilities and infrastructure emerged as a key theme across this project, with a focus on opportunities with a water connection. Making recreation convenient, free or low-cost, and easily accessible will allow more people to engage with recreation, with resulting health improvements. Building this infrastructure will provide a base for associated economic activity, for instance, through provision of rental equipment and visitor services such as lodging and food. Actions within this goal include:

1. Support river cleanups

River cleanups occur routinely across the Coal River watershed, and are a vital part of enhancing this recreation feature, familiarizing people with kayaking, and creating opportunities for social engagement. Continuing the cleanups and supporting them with event promotion, free trash removal from cleanup events, refreshments and T-shirts for volunteers, and periodic volunteer recognition should be undertaken through collaboration across organizations.

2. Add and enhance recreation activities & programming



Active recreation activities for adults are limited in the region, as are those that are not team-based recreation activities for youth. Trails and outdoor recreation areas can play a significant role in making it easy to kayak, hike, and bike, which can become lifetime recreation pursuits. New public lands will support these activities. Providing convenient kayak rental options at water access points and bike rental options would serve both community members and visitors. Increasing programming for all ages in community spaces would draw more people out and engage them with recreation infrastructure, and could draw on the community’s strengths and stories (such as the rivers and Miners March) and needs (such as an open house for technical training).



CATALYST ACTION

Catalyst actions are those with the greatest ability to positively impact the community and are a priority to resource and advance.

3. Add and enhance parks and recreation facilities and infrastructure



Recreation facilities are like any other infrastructure – additions, modernization, and updates are periodically required to respond to the needs of the public and keep facilities functional and safe. Maintenance and operations should be considered from design through construction to ensure facilities are able to be supported over the long-term. Recreation facilities and infrastructure within Boone County currently are predominantly city-, town- or County-owned, however the anticipated Little Coal River Wildlife Management Area will introduce a significant state presence to public land ownership and bring focus to wildlife-associated recreation activities.

High priority park and recreation updates identified during the project include: improvements to water access points (signage, ramps, online information), improvements to Madison City Park, updates to Junior Haddad Recreation Center, development of trails and trailhead access to the anticipated new public land of Rucker Branch Natural Area (Madison), and development of access, trails, and other wildlife-associated activities for the anticipated Little Coal River Wildlife Management Area (WV Division of Natural Resources). See Context, Natural Resources and Recreation (page 17) for details on these significant additions to public lands in the region. Concepts for potential trailhead development for the Rucker Branch Natural Area are depicted in Rendering A, while options for updates to the Junior Haddad Recreation Center are shown on Renderings B1 and B2. See Map 1: Madison/Danville for locations.

For more detail on implementation of actions A.2 and A.3, please see Table 2 and Implementation Detail on Actions A.2 and A.3.

Rendering A: Rucker Branch Natural Area Trailhead Concept

Mapping, water, and seating are essential at a trailhead. A bike repair station, elements of art, and interpretation can add value and keep users coming back.



Rendering B1: Junior Haddad Recreation Center Concept (Old River Road site)

Improving access for kayaks, providing a dedicated space for fishing, and adding signage would benefit this recreation area.



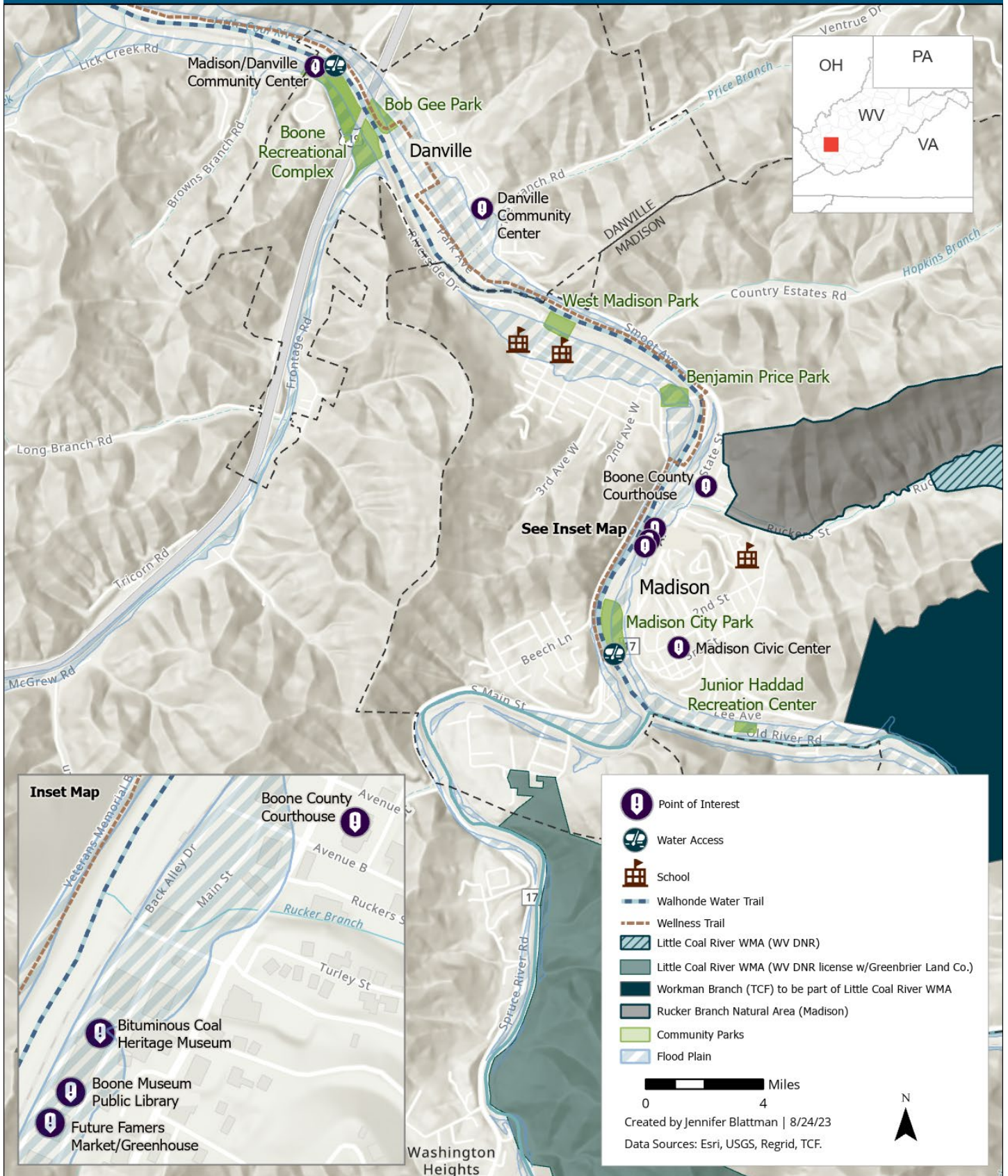
Rendering B2: Junior Haddad Recreation Center Concept (Old River Road site)

Updating the building to serve community meeting needs and adding the ability to rent kayaks and cabins would provide new recreation options.



Map 1. Madison/Danville Resource and Recreation Action Plan

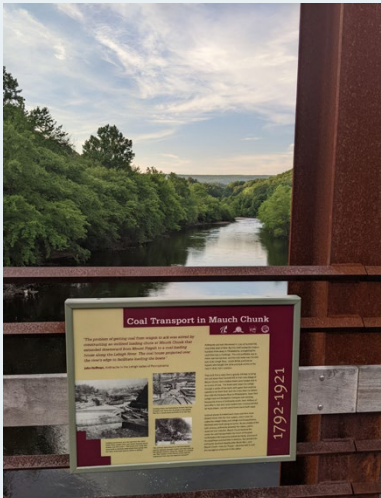
THE
CONSERVATION FUND



Signage

Signs can serve multiple purposes by providing wayfinding to locations, sharing maps to orient users, incorporating art to amplify messages and inspire, and providing content on the focus message.

Signs within parks or along trails should provide needed information (such as permitted uses or trail length and level of difficulty) while also offering fun and educational elements. Art elements can be used to activate space and draw users, while interpretative language can be used to share heritage and educational content.



Photos: @Susan Elks

B. ACTIVATE THE COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC SPACES:

Activating public spaces with increased amenities, programming, and events builds on itself, offering recreation, the potential for economic impact, and increased visibility and safety for the community as a whole. Activating the community more generally—with programming that is directed at youth, potential entrepreneurs and business operators, visitors, and community members—can address targeted needs and add potential for economic activity. Specific actions include:

1. Add and enhance events and programming

Developing new events and refining existing ones were strongly supported by the community. Events offer social engagement and economic opportunity, and can be combined with education, interpretation, and/or recreation options. The Boone Memorial Health Farmers Market and Greenhouse (anticipated opening 2024) will provide an option for programming and events on Madison’s Main Street (see Rendering C). While events are a significant lift in terms of staff and volunteer hours (and thus require careful consideration), a few new events, refinements to build out existing events, and current and comprehensive marketing around all events can have one-time and ongoing economic and social impact in the region.

Rendering C: Madison Main Street

The Boone Memorial Health Farmers Market will bring activity to Main Street and provide a venue for events.



2. Initiate a youth mentorship and shadowing program

Youth engagement rises as a consistent theme in the community, along with job opportunities. Ongoing opportunities for area youth to become aware of job options and career pathways is essential for the social fabric of the community as a whole and the economic future of area youth. Mentorship and other youth programming that encourages high school/GED completion should be a focus. Such a program will be necessary for a measurable impact.

3. Bring in entrepreneurial and small business start-up training



Building economic diversity and stability from the ground up requires dedication and technical knowledge across various topics, but returns tremendous value to a community. For small business start-ups or entrepreneurs, the nuts and bolts of business is often a need: training on business startup, financial matters, software needs, contracting processes, marketing and more. Bringing such training into the community - in a physical space or virtual setting that makes it easily accessible, convenient and affordable - can boost grassroots economic development.

Please see Table 2 and B.3 Implementation Detail for more information.

Bringing a product or service to the market successfully requires identifying...



...CUSTOMERS

who are in need of a product or service



...MARKET FORCES

and strategy involved in being profitable



...**WHAT** industry and customer trends and projections are of influence



...**HOW** to create, price, market, and distribute the product



...**HOW** to fund labor and operations costs

Entrepreneurs and small business operators can greatly benefit from training in the areas of client, product, and market discovery. For some entrepreneurs, a pathway of greatest simplicity to a market is most desired - they want to make the product, not bog down in marketing or transactions.

C. COMMUNICATE ON INFRASTRUCTURE, EVENTS, AND PROGRAMMING:

Providing clear, current, and comprehensive information on the places to go and activities available within the region to the public is essential to attracting attendees from the local community and bringing in visitors from out of the region. The public feels more comfortable when essential information (what, when, where) is easily available and supported with more details. Providing consistent information via multiple channels reaches the widest audience. Actions within this goal include:

1. Create a website for recreation activities and visitor services



A website and linked social media channels addressing public spaces, events, activities, recreation infrastructure, visitor services, and supporting businesses would be very beneficial, and should cover Boone County, new public lands, and be associated with the Coal River watershed. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, and other options connect across ages and interests, and could pre-date or go hand-in-hand with website development.

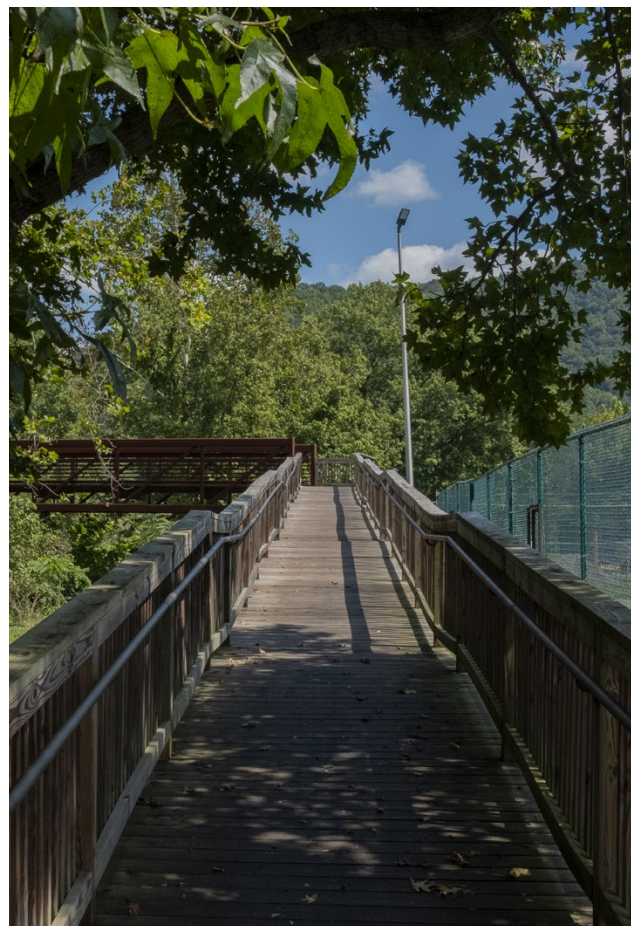
For more detail on implementation of action C.1, please see Table 2 and Implementation Detail on Action C.1.

2. Create a brochure for recreation activities and visitor services.

A printed brochure could compliment and amplify digital content when placed at key locations. Creation of a brochure, website, and social media channels at the same time helps ensure that information on available services and recreation activities is consistent, while allowing for more detail and links through a website and quick updates on social media.



Above: Inland Woods + Trails provides content on trail-based outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors, including maps, permitted activities and events, and amplifies their message through multiple social media channels (photo via woodsandtrails.org)



D. PLAN COUNTYWIDE FOR PARKS AND RECREATION



While this project advanced recreation discussion in Boone County, much work remains to address the entire county comprehensively, to include infrastructure, facilities, programming, operations and maintenance. A Park and Recreation Plan for Boone County and/or the Coal River watershed should examine optimal alignments and integration for land-and water-based trails and parks, with a focus on economic and health returns. Existing facilities, programming, and activities should be examined for potential improvements, and a guide for future operations and maintenance developed to ensure facilities can be supported into the future.

For more detail on implementation of Goal/Action D, please see Table 2 and Implementation Detail on D.

Garden Ideas

The above goals and actions do not capture every action that was identified during the project. Various other ideas were put forth that offer a more specific activity, or that may garner greater support over time or with increased capacity. Additionally, some of the ideas put forth may be incorporated or advanced through an action identified under Goals A – D; however that connection is not certain at this time. The adjacent listing represents these other “garden ideas” that have merit and should be periodically reviewed as individuals and organizations work to advance social/cultural, environmental, and economic health in the region.



- Walking audit of the Madison Wellness Trail to prioritize safety improvements
- Improved pedestrian connections between town, residents, and recreation options
- Limited tree removal for increased views of the river
- Public art in recreation areas or other community spaces
- Development of an arts center
- Madison City Park improvements
- Increased blight removal initiatives
- Façade incentive program
- Development/maintenance of a shrub and tree understory in power line rights of way
- Use of public recreation sites for bike, kayak and fishing rentals
- Development of an indoor market/co-op space (public space, private lease/use)

Photo: © Susan Elks



CONTEXT

The project has taken place in and around the City of Madison and Boone County, West Virginia, of which Madison is the county seat (see Map 1: Madison/Danville). Located in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains and along an important transportation corridor through the southern coalfields of West Virginia, Madison has been called the gateway to the coalfields. While the coal industry once dominated the economy and culture, many coal mines have closed or reduced employment through technological advances, with a precipitous impact on the economy and communities. As the region seeks to retain a connection to their heritage while adapting to provide for economic opportunity moving forward, various initiatives are of relevance (see Map 2: Regional Context).



Coal heritage remains important to residents of the area and could also serve as a reason for travelers to stop and engage. This heritage includes the stories of the many who work or worked in the coal mines and the families they supported, but also the broader story of the Coal Mine Wars. The Mine Wars reflect the industry's role in our nation's development and the evolution of labor rights in the United States. The Coal Heritage Museum is located on Main Street in Madison, and Madison and Boone County played a role in the Miners March to the Battle of Blair Mountain (1921), a significant labor uprising in United States history. This unique history calls for greater understanding and interpretation, offering opportunities to share and engage.



Health Initiatives

A current health-based effort with multiple implications underway is the Boone Memorial Heath (BMH) Farmers' Market and Greenhouse. The project is anticipated to break ground on a site adjacent to the Boone-Madison Public Library on Main Street in Madison in fall of 2023, with the opening scheduled for 2024. Operations will be managed by the BMH Foundation for Community Health, with significant potential to activate the Main Street in Madison and serve as a location for economic, health, and social activities.

The project includes an indoor-outdoor farmers' market structure and a permanent greenhouse, in addition to an outdoor stage and seating area. Plans call for a weekend farmers' market, open to the public, where local growers and producers will be invited to sell their products. The greenhouse will feature a variety of both hydroponic and non-hydroponic growing methods and will serve as an experiential learning site for adults and K-12 students. These features can positively impact the social determinants of health, with an emphasis on economic stability and food insecurity, and provide agricultural education while stimulating economic activity and agritourism.

Photo: © Bibiann Avelar



Economic Development

A success story in the region that provides a case study in thinking creatively about assets and building economic strength from within is the Appalachian Botanical Company. With a farm on a former strip mine site in Ashford and a production facility in Foster, Appalachian Botanical Co has been in operation since 2019. They produce lavender essential oil, mists, creams, sachets, and four varieties of honey from approximately 38 acres of lavender fields. The first harvest was in 2020, and expansion in Fayette County is anticipated with funding from an AMLER grant. The grant will support a lavender demonstration farm on 13 acres, with additional area reserved for development of an educational, vocational, and recreational center.

Natural Resources and Recreation

The waterways of the Coal River (Little Coal River, Big Coal River, and Coal River) have been and will continue to be a strong asset in the area (see Map 3: Boone County). Founded in 2004, the Coal River Group works to protect local water quality and improve stewardship of this resource, with a focus on getting people out fishing, paddling, and recreating on the rivers. Preserving history became another key area for Coal River Group, to build a sense of place and appreciation for the rivers.

The Coal River Group supports recreational use through seasonal kayak rentals and shuttle service, mapping and signage, and the annual Tour de Coal event. They also work through the WV DEP 319 grant program to repair and replace failing septic systems, directly improving water quality. The Coal River Group, along with many volunteers and entities such as Trash Your Kayak Cleanup Crew WV and the Adventure Tourism program at Boone Career and Technical Center, holds river and creek cleanups throughout the year to remove tires, trash, and other debris from the waterways.

A significant limitation in the region in the past has been the lack of public lands for recreation, particularly those with activities for all ages and for wildlife-associated recreation. However, this is poised to change significantly. Over the past several years The Conservation Fund partnered with Greenbrier Land Company, a private landowner in Boone County, on the permanent protection of a forested 3,250-acre property, a portion of which extends within the corporate boundary of the City of Madison.



At this time it is anticipated that ownership of this acreage will be split, with approximately 240 acres being transferred to the City of Madison (referred to in this plan as the Rucker Branch Natural Area), with the remaining acreage being transferred to the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WV DNR) to be managed as a Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

In separate action, WV DNR and Greenbrier Land Company came to agreement for the license to WV DNR on approximately 5,118 acres that is located to the south of Madison. It is anticipated at this time that WV DNR will collectively manage the 3,000 acres in ownership and the 5,118 acres under license as the Little Coal River WMA, creating a significant public land area to protect natural resources (including interior core forest, bird habitat, and water quality) while offering to community members and visitors a unique opportunity for wildlife-associated recreation and promoting a more active lifestyle.



A Path Forward

There is great need in this region, but also great promise from initiatives underway and yet to come. There is an opportunity to foster entrepreneurship at the local level, build an outdoor recreation economy within a broader shift to an asset-based economy, and lean into increasing public interest in unique outdoor, recreation, or cultural experiences, particularly in rural areas.

There is no one answer to economic revitalization. Community members and visitors have diverse interests and needs. Proactive planning and prioritization that builds from assets make the best use of limited staff and volunteer time and funds. Economic development strategy, and outdoor recreation-based economic development efforts, should seek to diversify the economic base and make it resilient and adaptable.

Madison and Boone County can build and benefit from multiple features and resources. These include their rich cultural heritage, creative and sustainable reuse of former mine lands, proximity to the state's capital, affordable housing within towns that are walkable, community parks, lands that are newly publicly accessible, strong water-based recreation options, and regional proximity to multiple outdoor recreation opportunities, including the recently designated New River Gorge National Park and Preserve.

While work remains to offer residents improved economic and social opportunities within these communities, and to attract visitors to heritage and recreation opportunities, existing features and initiatives underway provide a starting point and path forward.



At over 8,000 acres, the Little Coal River Wildlife Management Area will be a significant addition to public lands, offering residents and visitors new opportunities to be active and engage with the rich wildlife and natural resources of West Virginia.

Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge

The USDA Rural Development funding for this project, delivered through the Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge, is intended to help rural communities create actionable plans to collaboratively support recreation spaces, preserve cultural and historic structures, and improve quality of place in communities. Placemaking was a key guide for the effort, along with placekeeping, as the community worked to care for and improve their social, cultural, and economic fabric.

The Madison/Boone Resource and Recreation Action Plan has taken the initial steps, through its process and deliverables, to foster greater health and vitality in this rural community. Significant work remains to catalyze positive impact on the people, places, environment, and economy of this region, and the actions identified in this plan are intended to serve as a guide in that work.

The project specifically focused on identifying actions to:

- strengthen recreation options and community health,
- protect natural and cultural resources, and
- foster an emerging outdoor recreation economy and lasting economic opportunity.



PLACEMAKING

A collaborative engagement process that helps leaders from rural communities create quality places where people will want to live, work, visit and learn. By bringing together partners from public, private, philanthropic, community, and technology sectors, placemaking is a wrap-around approach to community and economic development that incorporates creativity, infrastructure initiatives, and vibrant public spaces.

USDA Rural Development



PLACEKEEPING

The active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there. It is not just preserving buildings but keeping the cultural memories associated with a locale alive, while supporting the ability of local people to maintain their way of life as they choose.

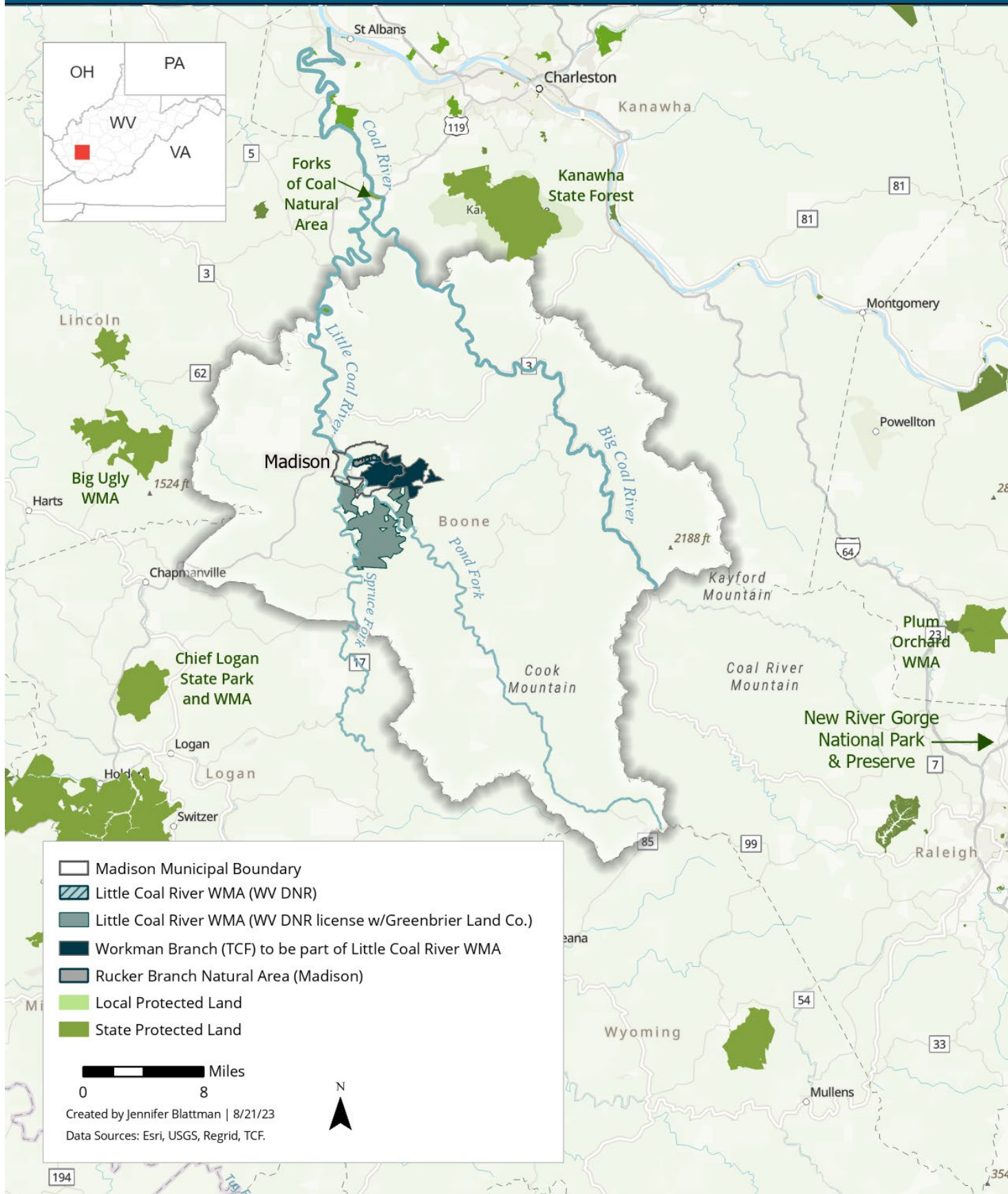
US Department of Arts and Culture

An additional focus for the project has been to conduct a process that is interactive, transparent, inclusive, and locally driven, and that provided content to grow expertise and capacity for future local implementation. While community engagement was not as robust as would have been preferred, the process repeatedly adapted to gather input and feedback from within the community. (See more details on engagement within the Process description.)

This Action Plan reflects the future vision as developed by project participants, and documents the actions to advance toward that vision.

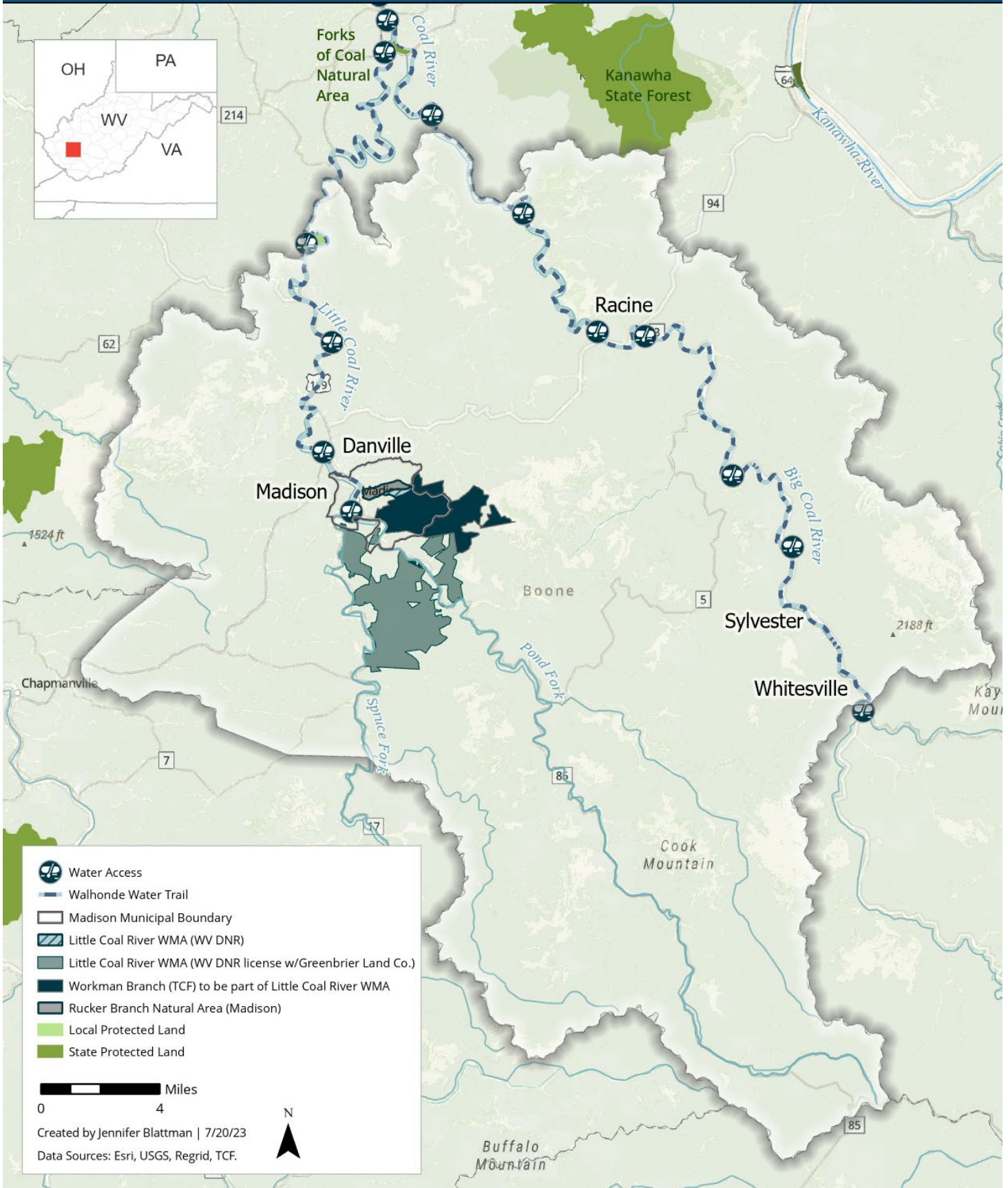
Map 2. Regional Context

Resource and Recreation Action Plan



Map 3. Boone County

Resource and Recreation Action Plan



PROCESS

The project was comprised of three components:

- a convening process to build capacity, identify a vision and solutions, and foster connections,
- this Action Plan to document results and provide a base for future action,
- and support for implementation.

Planning, training and technical assistance were delivered during the project through an on-site workshop, opportunities to attend training, and meetings of the Steering Team and project participants that included various technical content, exercises, and discussion. Beginning late in 2021 with informational interviews with stakeholders in the region, the project formally kicked off in April 2022 with a meeting of the Steering Team. Composed of 15 people representing various interests (county government, local government, private business, local and regional non-profits, academic community, state agencies, residents), members of the Steering Team have been involved throughout the project.

A multi-day workshop with presentations and group exercises was held in June 2022 with Steering Team members and additional participants, and incorporated a public open house. Following the June 2022 workshop, and based on interest expressed at the workshop, a Working Group was created to extend participation into the community, and subsequent gatherings extended an invitation to the Steering Team members, Working Group members, and other who expressed interest in the project.

Please see page 4 for the list of Steering Team and Working Group members.



Photos: @Susan Elks

Across the course of the project, one multi-day workshop, eight virtual meetings, and three in-person meetings were held, with two presentations to the Boone County Commission and one to the Madison City Council. A webpage was created to host project information for the duration of the project, and was updated to include the summer 2022 public survey results. Availability of the summer 2022 public survey was shared via a hard copy and digital postcard and social media, while the 2023 survey was shared through meetings and social media. Periodic coordination was also undertaken with Madison specifically on their Comprehensive Plan update, which was underway through this project (anticipated completion in fall of 2023).

In addition, project participants were provided the option to attend training of relevance, and multiple project participants were supported in attending the WV Trails Conference (October 2022) and/or Smith OEDC ACT Workshop (March 2023). The project also supported and promoted an evening of dance and community conversation in Madison in May 2023 in partnership with the WV Dance Company.

The project workshop and meetings provided opportunities for group exercises that identified community assets, strengths, and opportunities, as well as a guiding vision. These were supported with multiple online surveys, including a community baseline assessment survey in follow-up to the June workshop, which gathered approximately 35 responses, and polling on draft vision statements. Additionally, two public surveys were conducted (summer 2022 and summer 2023) regarding desired actions. The summer 2022 survey had over 120 respondents, while the summer 2023 survey had over 60 respondents. The input from these online surveys was considered alongside input from in-person and virtual meetings to create this plan. Please see the appendices for more detail on survey responses.

The various project gatherings and outside training opportunities were used to deliver training and technical content across diverse topics that influence and have implications for rural communities. Presentations and trainings were tailored to inform on asset-based economies and outdoor recreation, and multiple topics as noted below:

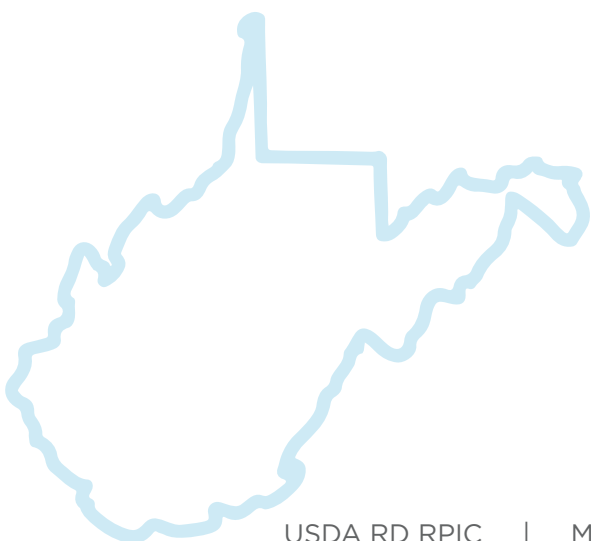
- Placemaking and placekeeping
- Arts and culture in economic development
- Asset based economic development
- Farmers markets
- Natural resources and working lands
- Trail planning and development
- Outdoor recreation economy trends
- Entrepreneurship on private lands
- Social determinants of health
- Economic development case studies
- Community branding and marketing
- Resources within West Virginia
- Project implementation
- Funding opportunities



Photo: © Jeana Bala

As part of the formal project process, direct implementation support took place across 2023. Support was provided to the City of Madison in preparing a park improvement grant application to AARP as part of their Community Challenge Grant (deadline April 2023), and to the American Water Charitable Foundation’s Water and Environment program for the Rucker Branch trailhead (deadline June 2023), which were unfortunately not funded. Both opportunities open periodically, and may be worth pursuing again in the future.

Support was also provided to Boone Memorial Health in completing an expression of interest for the Economic Recovery Corps Fellows program (deadline June 30, 2023). The application advanced through the first review, and a final response is still pending.



Madison/Boone Resource & Recreation Action Plan Schedule

<p>— APRIL 6, 2022 —</p> <p>Steering Team Kick-off Meeting (virtual)</p> <p>Introductions; Project and schedule review; Discussion of project and workshop goals; Survey upcoming</p>	<p>— MAY 19, 2022 —</p> <p>Steering Team Meeting #2 (in-person, Boone Career & Technical Center)</p> <p>Project status; Survey status; Workshop format, invitations, and speakers</p>	<p>— JUNE 20-22, 2022 —</p> <p>June Workshop (Multi-day in-person workshop for Steering Team and additional invitees, Public Open House, Madison)</p> <p>Presentations on multiple topics, exercises and displays; Public survey opened</p>	<p>— JULY 28, 2022</p> <p>Steering Team/ Working Group Meeting #3 (virtual)</p> <p>Recap of workshop; Review of community baseline and preliminary public survey results; Prep for Fall Workshop</p>
<p>— AUGUST 18, 2022 —</p> <p>Steering Team/ Working Group Meeting #4 (virtual)</p> <p>Prep for Fall Workshop; Vision statement; Preliminary project ID/ vetting; Public survey results; Gift card winner selection</p>	<p>— SEPTEMBER 2022 —</p> <p>September Workshop (cancelled)</p> <p>October 28, 2022 – project participants with availability attended WV Trails Conference</p>	<p>— OCTOBER 28, 2022 —</p> <p>WV Trails Conference</p> <p>Project participants with availability attended WV Trails Conference near Beckley, WV</p>	<p>— JANUARY 24, 2023</p> <p>Steering Team/ Working Group Meeting #5: (virtual)</p> <p>Status and schedule for 2023</p>
<p>— FEBRUARY 28, 2023 —</p> <p>Steering Team/ Working Group Meeting #6 (virtual)</p> <p>Presentations from Kane (PA) Area Development Center and WV Community Hub</p>	<p>— MARCH 23-24, 2023 —</p> <p>Smith OEDC Workshop (in-person)</p> <p>Project participants with availability attended Smith OEDC Advancing Community Trails Workshop</p>	<p>— MARCH 28, 2023 —</p> <p>Steering Team/ Working Group Meeting #7 (in-person)</p> <p>Presentations from USDA RD and Smithers WV on resources and implementation; Input opportunity for draft actions</p>	<p>— MAY 4, 2023</p> <p>Dance Performance (in-person)</p> <p><i>Suite West Virginia in Six Chapters: An evening of dance and community conversation.</i></p>
<p>— MAY 23, 2023 —</p> <p>Steering Team/ Working Group Meeting #8 (virtual)</p> <p>Presentation from ChandlerThinks on community branding and marketing; Promotion of action survey; Updates</p>	<p>— JUNE 27, 2023 —</p> <p>Steering Team/ Working Group Meeting #9 (virtual)</p> <p>Presentation from M. Miller Development Services on implementation; Promotion of action survey; Updates</p>	<p>— AUGUST 3 & 24, 2023 —</p> <p>Steering Team/ Working Group Meeting #10 (in-person), #11 (virtual)</p> <p>Presentation and discussion of draft plan</p>	<p>Presentations to Boone County Commission in March and August 2023; Presentation to Madison City Council in August 2023.</p> <p>Technical assistance provided for action implementation across spring and summer; project close-out September 2023.</p>

IMPLEMENT



A review of survey responses and other input throughout this project makes one thing clear: community members want action. They want to see visible improvements that offer social and economic opportunity, and that indicate care for public infrastructure – parks, streetscapes, and community spaces. The call for action was the strongest consensus within the project.

Such action will require time, energy, and funding. It will also require individuals and organizations to come together and work in the same direction. An Implementation Team, formed from the Steering Team and Working Group, would greatly benefit advancement of goals and actions, providing continuity of intentions and consistency of effort. An Implementation Team would meet periodically and call together partners to advance work and share status on efforts.

At times action will be focused around organizations that are currently involved in initiatives in the region (such as the Boone Career and Technical Center), and at times action will require reaching out to organizations with specific expertise that have not previously been engaged. Stewarding existing partnerships while also forming new partnerships and collaborations will be essential to advancing the project vision. Contracting for specific support, such as grant writing, should also be routinely considered to increase capacity in the region.

Table 1: Goals and Actions

A. Enhance recreation offerings

- Action A.1: Support river cleanups
- Action A.2: Add and enhance recreation activities and programming
- Action A.3: Add and enhance parks and recreation facilities and infrastructure

B. Activate the community and public spaces

- Action B.1: Add and enhance events and programming
- Action B.2: Initiate a youth mentorship and shadowing program
- Action B.3: Bring in entrepreneurial and small business training

C. Communicate on infrastructure, events and programming

- Action C.1: Create a website for recreation activities and visitor services
- Action C.2: Create a brochure for recreation activities and visitor services

D. Plan countywide for parks and recreation



Photo: @Susan Elks

There have been some difficult conversations during the project, particularly around what forms of recreation will best generate economic opportunity. The guideposts for outdoor recreation-based economic development should be whether recreation facilities and other public assets are flexible with their use, serve different ages and interests, serve community members and potentially visitors, support entrepreneurs and small businesses, and help address health conditions in the community. These guideposts will direct effort in a way that supports effectiveness and delivers results.

TABLE 2: CATALYST ACTIONS

Goal	#	Action	Parties/Partners	Timeline
Enhance Recreation Offerings	A.2	Add and enhance recreation activities and programming	City of Madison, Danville, Boone County, Coal River Group, WV Mine Wars Museum, Coal Heritage Area	Select two (activity or program) to advance in 2024, with at least one on the ground activity for the public
	<p>Notes: Steps to increase recreation activity options (such as making trail maps easily available, purchasing and installing a kayak rental “kiosk” at a key location, or investigating bike rental options through local government or the private sector) and steps to enhance recreation programming (such as developing historic interpretation signage and public art related to the Miners March along a trail, leading a topic-focused hike, or hosting a community fishing day/“test out a kayak” day) could be individually advanced, working with the partners relevant to the focus item and location.</p> <p>Programming could also highlight recreation economy job opportunities, within an existing recreation space. Such activities and programming should be developed with an eye toward activating these community recreation spaces, offering a social opportunity, exploring community heritage, and offering options for all ages. Funding options would be diverse and dependent on the specific focus, but include those related to recreation and community health.</p>			
Enhance Recreation Offerings	A.3	Add and enhance parks and recreation facilities and infrastructure	City of Madison, Boone County, WV DNR, Coal River Group	Focus on one Madison site to seek funding in 2024 for significant improvements, select a smaller project (such as signage) to fund and install in 2024, and routinely coordinate on WMA access improvements
	<p>Notes: Work to add and enhance recreation should ideally be informed by a comprehensive plan, however some needed improvements are clear at this point and could proceed, including improvements to the Junior Haddad Recreation Center, creating access to the anticipated Rucker Branch Natural Area, and creating access to the anticipated Little Coal River Wildlife Management Area.</p> <p>Water access is a focus in the region, and improvements such as signage, ramps, and online information would benefit resident and visitors. Over time, improvements should be informed by a comprehensive plan (Goal/Action D) to inform priority updates and ensures sufficient maintenance and operations. Funding options would be diverse and dependent on the specific focus, but include those related to recreation and community health.</p>			
Activate community and public spaces	B.3	Bring in entrepreneurial and small business start-up training	Public Libraries, Academic community (Boone Career and Technical Center, Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College), Boone Memorial Health, WV Community Development Hub	Pilot efforts in 2024 and build into routine program through 2025/2026
	<p>Notes: Turning specific attention to gathering entrepreneurial and business start-up training and making it easily and routinely accessible would support business ventures in the region, from initiation into stabilization and then growth. Such training is available through various sources, however putting it more routinely in the community and structuring a program around it would increase impact. Pilot efforts could include having a dedicated evening for a group viewing of an online course, building in time for the group discussion.</p> <p>The guidance of WV Community Development Hub should be sought for suggestions on quality content, and the local academic community and public libraries should be involved. Topics could include creating a website, financial software, using social media, contracting processes and more – all with a lens for start-ups and small business. In addition to the direct business outcomes, such trainings would help activate the spaces used for the training and provide a social outlet. While targeted at adults, such trainings could be open to high school students to provide a view toward future opportunities.</p>			

Goal	#	Action	Parties/Partners	Timeline
Communicate on infrastructure, events, and programming	C.1	Create a website for recreation activities and visitor services	Boone County Commission, Madison Redevelopment Authority, Coal River Group, private business	2024 to obtain funding and gather content
	<p>Notes: A likely vehicle for website creation and/or development of social media content is an outside consultant, hired initially for development of the website and then contracted for ongoing maintenance. With the potential value to a diverse group, the action could attract funding from a variety of sources. A team should be formed to investigate pulling funding together, and while that is underway also gather content to help inform creation of the website with respect to public spaces (parks, recreation areas), activities and events, and services to obtain food, lodging, and supplies.</p> <p>The branding (name, logo, colors, design guide) should be an early consideration, and funding could be built into the project to address branding first and then website and social media content development. Providing clear, comprehensive and current information on recreation activities and visitor services should be the primary guide for this action.</p>			
Plan countywide for parks and recreation	D	Plan countywide for parks and recreation	Boone County Commission, Coal River Group	2024 to obtain funding
	<p>Notes: Seek funding from government and foundation sources related to outdoor recreation-based economic development and community health options (such as WV REI, WV Center for Rural Health Development); form a coalition to oversee the project from health, economic, and recreation groups (such as Coal River Group and Boone Memorial Health); identify the lead fiscal agent; advertise a Request for Proposals (RFP) when funding is obtained.</p> <p>The RFP should note the parameters of the scope of work: investigate optimal trail corridors to create an integrated network of land and water-based trails for a variety of user types, examine existing recreation facilities and community needs, explore programming and activities to activate recreation areas, make recommendations for improvements across facilities, programming, maintenance and operations to ensure the recreation facilities and activities can be supported into the future. Such a plan could be focused on Boone County as a whole or on the Coal River watershed.</p>			


Drawdy Falls

Resourcing projects requires being in contact with established partners routinely, seeking new collaborators, and responding to the focus of the community and partners. Sharing success is also important. Improvements efforts at Drawdy Falls have attracted support from many organizations and individuals within the community over a period of years, while the West Virginia Department of Tourism and the National Coal Heritage Area are new partners in enhancing this well-known and loved natural feature.



Photo: © Robert Miller

IMPLEMENTATION DETAIL


A.1 - Add and enhance recreation activities and programming	
<p>What:</p> <p>Steps to increase recreation activity options and steps to enhance recreation programming should be advanced with the appropriate partners. Potential steps for activities include purchasing and installing a kayak rental “kiosk” at a key location or investigating bike rental options (private sector or government entity). Potential steps for programming include developing historic interpretation signage and public art along a trail related to the Miners March, hosting a community fishing day/“test a kayak” day, or highlighting recreation economy job opportunities in a recreation space.</p>	
<p>When/How:</p> <p>Select two (activity or program) to advance in 2024, with at least one on the ground activity for the public. Funding options would be diverse and dependent on the specific focus but include those related to recreation and community health.</p>	<p>Why/Impact:</p> <p>Such activities and programming should be developed with an eye toward activating these community recreation spaces, offering a social opportunity, exploring community heritage, and offering options for all ages.</p>
<p>Who:</p> <p>City of Madison, Danville, Boone County, Coal River Group, WV Mine Wars Museum, Coal Heritage Area</p>	<p>Metric:</p> <p>New opportunities/amenities at public parks in Madison and surrounding area by end of summer 2024; annual tracking thereafter.</p>

Rendering B2: Junior Haddad Recreation Center Concept (Old River Road site)



IMPLEMENTATION DETAIL

A.2 - Add and enhance parks and recreation facilities and infrastructure

<p>What:</p> <p>Work on recreation sites at a regional scale should ideally be informed by a comprehensive plan, however some needed improvements are clear now and could proceed, including improvements to the Junior Haddad Recreation Center, creating access to the anticipated Rucker Branch Natural Area, and creating access to the anticipated Little Coal River Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Over time, improvements should be informed by a plan (see Goal/Action D) to determine priority and ensure sufficient maintenance and operations.</p>	
<p>When/How:</p> <p>Pending requests for funding on local park/recreation areas will inform advancement, otherwise visible improvements to the Junior Haddad Recreation Center or Rucker Branch Trailhead area that would not create significant limitation to future build-out should take priority. Funding options would be diverse and dependent on the specific focus but include those related to recreation and community health. Coordination between WV DNR and local entities should be a priority to inform and develop access to the anticipated Little Coal River WMA as well as wildlife-associated activities on those lands.</p>	<p>Why/Impact:</p> <p>Recreation options that are easy to access are important for social, health, and economic outcomes in the region. Improvements would benefit resident and visitors.</p>
<p>Who:</p> <p>City of Madison, Boone County, WV DNR, Coal River Group</p>	<p>Metric:</p> <p>New opportunities/amenities at public parks in Madison and surrounding area by end of summer 2024; annual tracking thereafter.</p>

Rendering B1: Junior Haddad Recreation Center Concept (Old River Road site)



IMPLEMENTATION DETAIL

B.3 - Bring in entrepreneurial and small business start-up training

What:

Gathering entrepreneurial and business start-up training and making it easily and routinely accessible would support business ventures in the region, from initiation into stabilization and then growth. Such training is available through various sources, however putting it more routinely in the community and structuring a program around it would increase impact.



When/How:

Pilot efforts could include having a dedicated evening for a group viewing of an online course that also built in time for group discussion. The guidance of WV Community Development Hub should be sought for suggestions on quality content, and the local academic community and public libraries should be involved. Topics could include creating a website, financial software, using social media, contracting processes and more - all with a lens for start-ups and small business.

Why/Impact:

In addition to the direct business outcomes, such trainings would help activate the spaces used for the training and provide a social outlet. While targeted at adults, such trainings could be open to high school students to provide a view toward future opportunities.

Who:

Boone County, Public Libraries, Academic community (Boone Career and Technical Center, Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College), Boone Memorial Health, WV Community Development Hub, City of Madison

Metric:

New opportunities within Boone County related to these topics in 2024; annual tracking thereafter.

Supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses is critical to job creation and recirculation of revenue.



Local recirculation of revenue that comes from:



Independent Retailers
52.9%



Chain Retailers
13.6%

Source: U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, Report No. 444, December 2018
<https://advocacy.sba.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/rs444-Small-Business-GDP-1998-20141.pdf>



Small businesses:



account for 44% of U.S. economic activity

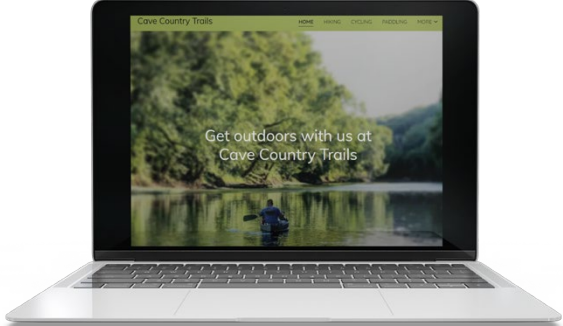



create 2/3 of net new jobs

Source: <http://www.civiceconomics.com/indie-impact.html>

IMPLEMENTATION DETAIL

C.1 - Create a website for recreation activities and visitor services

<p>What:</p> <p>A website and linked social media channels addressing public spaces, events, activities, recreation infrastructure, visitor services, and supporting businesses would be very beneficial, and should cover Boone County and be associated with the Coal River watershed. Providing information on places to go and activities is essential to attracting attendees from the local community and bringing in visitors from out of the region. The public feels more comfortable when essential information (what, when, where) is easily available and supported with more details, and providing consistent information via multiple channels reaches the widest audience</p>	
<p>When/How:</p> <p>A likely vehicle for creation of a website and social media content is an outside consultant, hired initially for development and then contracted for ongoing maintenance. With the potential value to a diverse group, the action could attract funding from a variety of sources. A team should be formed to investigate pulling funding together, and while that is underway also gather content to help inform creation of the website with respect to public spaces (parks, recreation areas), activities and events, and services to obtain food, lodging, and supplies. The branding (name, logo, colors, design guide) should be an early consideration, and funding could be built into the project to address branding first and then content development. Routine maintenance to keep content current is essential, as the public quickly gives up on sources of information that are inaccurate or out of date and moves on to spending their time and dollars in a place that does provide such information.</p>	<p>Why/Impact:</p> <p>Providing clear, comprehensive, and current information on recreation activities and visitors services is an essential part of competing for the attention of the public – community members and travelers – and should be the primary guide for this action. The economic benefits of public lands will remain elusive if the message of their availability and associated activities is non-existent or unclear.</p>
<p>Who:</p> <p>Boone County Commission, Madison Redevelopment Authority, Coal River Group, private business</p>	<p>Metric:</p> <p>Assemble funding for development of content and platforms (end of 2024), RFP process, retention of consultant, content live, routine updates.</p>



cavecountrytrails.com

Cave Country Trails shares content on hiking, cycling, paddling and amenities in town, linking people to recreation opportunities. The site includes starting information and links to more detail.

Social media extends the reach of the website information, and allows for messaging that is more responsive to current events and audience interaction.

IMPLEMENTATION DETAIL

D - Plan countywide for parks and recreation

What:

This project has advanced recreation planning in Boone County, however much work remains to address the entire county comprehensively, to include infrastructure, facilities, programming, operations and maintenance. Developing a Park and Recreation Plan for Boone County and the Coal River watershed would allow for better integration of water-based trails and land-based trails, investigate optimal trail alignments, examine existing facilities and recommend potential improvements, explore programming and activities, and provide a guide for future operations and maintenance.



When/How:

This effort should kick off by seeking funding from outdoor recreation-based economic development and community health options (such as WV REI, WV Center for Rural Health Development) in 2024. Early steps should include forming a coalition to oversee the identification of the fiscal agent. A Request for Proposals (RFP) should be advertised when funding and a oversight coalition and fiscal agent are in place. The RFP should note the parameters of the scope of work: investigate optimal trail corridors to create an integrated network of land and water-based trails for a variety of user types, examine existing recreation facilities and community needs, explore programming and activities to activate recreation areas, make recommendations for improvements across facilities, programming, and maintenance for sustainable operations. Such a plan could be focused on Boone County and/or the Coal River watershed.

Why/Impact:

A Park and Recreation Plan for Boone County and the Coal River watershed would allow for better integration of different recreation facility types and activities, ensuring best use of funding for improvements and supporting recreation that returns economic, environmental, and social value to the community. Such a plan would also provide a guide for future operations and maintenance to ensure ongoing support of facilities.

Who:

Boone County Commission, Coal River Group

Metric:

Assembling funding for plan development (end of 2024), RFP process, retention of consultant, draft and final plan, plan implementation.