

Alleghany Highlands Outdoor Recreation Plan



August 2023



Land Acknowledgement

The Alleghany Highlands of Virginia is distinguished as the mountainous region encompassing the two rivers that form the headwaters of the James River, formerly called the Powhatan River. “Alleghany” is allegedly an indigenous word synonymous with the term “endless.” This region’s mountains and valleys served as the traditional hunting and fishing grounds of numerous indigenous groups that made annual migrations to this special place. The outdoor recreation opportunities that participants are privileged to enjoy on these ancestral lands are owed to the stewardship of native people from generations past. Indigenous knowledge can be used to inform the planning and land use decisions that will determine the future of this region.



Contributions

Creation of this plan was made possible by the effort of a team composed of leaders committed to the betterment of their community. Their involvement in the planning process and willingness to work together made development of this plan possible.

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- 2. List of Outdoor Recreation Survey Questions**
- 3. Asset Inventory Lists**
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Summary

The Alleghany Highlands of Virginia is a region rich in natural assets and host to ample outdoor recreation opportunities. Alleghany County and the City of Covington serve as a base for outdoor experiences which feature destinations including Douthat State Park, Lake Moomaw, Falling Springs Falls, the Jackson River Scenic Trail, the Jackson River Sports Complex, the Alleghany Highlands Blueway, National Forest System trails, and Humpback Bridge. Coordinated investment in outdoor recreation will provide quality experiences, support business development, and promote the area as an outdoor destination.

This plan is intended to serve as a guide for the growth of outdoor recreation in the region and strengthening the impact of this sector on the local economy. Assistance from the Roanoke-Valley Alleghany Regional Commission was requested to prepare this plan, based on the need for the area's localities to collaborate to meet common goals for improvements in quality of life and diversification of economic opportunities. Alleghany County, the City of Covington, the Town of Clifton Forge, and the Town of Iron Gate joined together for this effort. The need for connectivity and collaboration to address outdoor recreation has been cited in multiple planning documents developed in years prior. The plan considers existing assets, events, and services. Gaps and opportunities have been assessed to develop a list of recommended projects that can be targeted for implementation.

A collective vision statement has been developed to communicate the achievements projected by this plan.

The Alleghany Highlands is an exceptional place to live and visit for outdoor recreation. Covington, Clifton Forge, and Iron Gate are linked by rivers and trails, providing a gateway for public land access. This unique destination features a variety of outdoor recreation activities, natural beauty, and a welcoming community.

Three goals have been identified in this plan to summarize the actions needed to achieve this vision:

- 1. Develop recreation assets to meet user expectations for a variety of outdoor activities.**
- 2. Attract and support businesses providing amenities for outdoor recreation.**
- 3. Advance the Alleghany Highlands regional brand used to promote the destination and provide area information.**

Introduction

In the Alleghany Highlands, several major accomplishments have been made over the past few years to enhance and promote outdoor recreation opportunities. These efforts have been made by individual entities to carry out specific, locally-based goals and these individual achievements are noteworthy on their own. However, there has not been a guiding strategy that has linked each of these efforts together. Outdoor recreation has been adopted into the area's tourism strategy and is bringing an increasing volume of visitors to the region. The purpose of this plan is to provide coordination between efforts, define common goals that can be advanced by working together, and prioritize future actions to be taken.

The process for developing this plan included the following steps:

1. Collect Data and Inventory Assets
2. Develop Community Vision
3. Identify and Prioritize Project Objectives
4. Produce Planning Document

This document describes the current condition of outdoor recreation in each land management area in the region and provides background information to offer context for the plan. Key results from the Outdoor Recreation Surveys are discussed, along with data from the inventory process. The vision for outdoor recreation in the region is shared, with objectives listed for each of the key goals.

Recommended funding sources are listed in the Appendix, both for the goal areas as well as for capacity building and technical assistance. This plan provides recommendations to address the region's need for collaboration and strategic action to be taken to advance outdoor recreation in the Alleghany Highlands.

Current Conditions

Alleghany County

Alleghany County manages the following outdoor recreation sites: Brentwood Park, Altamont Park, Winterberry Park, Rose Dale Park, Intervale Park, Sharon Park, Boiling Springs Park, and the Jackson River Scenic Trail. There are designated access points to the Jackson River at Winterberry Park, Rose Dale Park and Intervale Park as well as Sharon Park on the Cowpasture River. Additionally, Alleghany County maintains Field #1 at the Colonel Tom Dotson Sports Complex, a ballfield owned by Clifton Forge Little League.

The Jackson River Scenic Trail is composed of a gravel surface trail and four trailhead facilities. This trail serves as the course for multiple footraces, including the Jackson River Trail Marathon. An additional trail segment will be completed in the 2023, which will bring the total trail distance to 16 miles and add another trailhead. Intervale Park has a facility which is leased by Alleghany Outdoors, an outfitter which provides biking and paddling trips. This facility's location is advantageous in that there is both trailhead parking for the Jackson River Scenic Trail as well as a boat ramp for take-out on the Jackson River, making it a hub for visitors to the region.

Alleghany County has created outdoor recreation opportunities for hiking, biking, and paddling through site development. Parks managed by Alleghany County serve the local population residing outside of the municipal areas. Alleghany County Parks & Recreation staff support programs which include youth football, cheer, and soccer, special events such as fishing days, as well as indoor recreation activities.

City of Covington

The City of Covington serves as a center point in the Alleghany Highlands. The City's Parks and Recreation Department manages a total of 13 parks, two downtown public spaces, and two indoor recreation centers. The parks are listed as follows: Jackson River Sports Complex, Main Street Park, Fort Young Park, Rivermont Park, Jeter Watson Park, Hytower Park, Casey Field, Rivers Edge Skateboard Park, Nettleton Park, Teddy J Dressler Wayside Park, Reservoir Park, and Edgemont Park. Additionally, there are two public spaces managed as part of the parks department: the LOVE Pocket Park, located on W. Main Street; and the Covington C&O Depot, which houses the Alleghany Historical Society. There are five designated access points to the Jackson River within the park system.

The largest of these parks is the Jackson River Sport Complex. Construction of this facility marked a milestone for outdoor recreation tourism in the region, bringing visiting teams to the region for tournaments. The River Rock Amphitheater, a boat ramp, fishing pier, paved walking trail, playgrounds, tennis courts, athletic fields and golf driving range are located at the Sport Complex. Casey Field and Boodie Albert Stadium are also located in Covington, accommodating both baseball and football with a natural grass playing surface. This site has stadium seating to accommodate spectators and recently completed renovations have modernized the facility overall. Casey Field serves as the home field for the Covington Lumberjacks, a wooden bat league for college athletes.

Next to Covington's downtown, Main Street Park is another hub for recreation activity. The 701 steam locomotive that was operated by the C&O Railroad is preserved for display at the entrance to this park. The only municipal pool in the Alleghany Highlands is located at Main Street Park. Swimming lessons are offered at the pool and there is a high demand for reservations to rent the facility. Athletic

fields, a basketball court, and a playground are also located at Main Street Park. The Jackson River borders Main Street Park, and a boat launch is located at this site.

Overall, the parks are well distributed within the city limits, providing convenient access to green space for each of the neighborhoods. The City provides an abundance of programming and events for Allegheny Highlands residents. These activities offered include football, cheerleading, soccer, baseball, softball, cross country as well as traditional indoor sports. Partnerships with the community enable the City of Covington to either host, support, or coordinate a variety of events. An outdoor concert series and pool parties are held in the summer and annual events celebrate seasonal holidays.

Town of Clifton Forge

The Town of Clifton Forge is a cultural center in the Allegheny Highlands. The following parks are located in Clifton Forge: Booker T. Washington Park, Linden Park, Matthews Park, Memorial Park, and Roxbury Street Park. There is currently one access point to the Jackson River, located next to Verge Street. A trail system has been established within the Town which includes Hazel Run Trail, Fairmont Park Trail, Lover's Walk Trail, and Smith Creek Trail.

Smith Creek, a tributary of the Jackson River, bisects Clifton Forge and descends below the downtown historic district. Smith Creek Trail runs parallel to a segment of this stream and has a total length of 0.3 miles. This hardened trail surface was designed to meet current accessibility standards. At the southern terminus of the trail is the Masonic Amphitheater and Park. This facility, which is adjacent to the Historic Masonic Theatre, is managed in cooperation with the Town to serve as a venue for outdoor concerts and other events. Memorial Park, which served as the sporting facility for the former Clifton Forge High School, lies to the North of Smith Creek Trail. The Clifton Forge Armory, used as both

a gymnasium and a venue for community events, and the Clifton Forge Skate Park are adjacent to the ballfields at Memorial Park.

Improvements to existing parks have been a recent focus of community efforts. The open space adjacent to Smith Creek Trail has been enhanced with landscaping, signage, and features to create a “Sensory Trail.” A LOVEworks sign was erected at the Masonic Amphitheater, a branding project that was developed through a Virginia Tourism promotion. The Town has established the Clifton Forge Parks and Recreation Authority, structured as a public park authority, to support the community’s goals.

Town of Iron Gate

The Town of Iron Gate is situated on Highway 220 and serves as a Southern gateway to the Alleghany Highlands. The Iron Gate playground is centrally located in the community and amenities include a picnic shelter, basketball court, and concession stand. The Town of Iron Gate owns the Iron Gate River Park, located on the Cowpasture River Fork in Alleghany County, which is accessed by Fork Farm Road one mile away from the Town. To the south of Iron Gate, the Jackson River joins the Cowpasture River to form the Head of the James River. An access point to the James is located at the Lick Run Boat Launch at the Hwy 220 Bridge.

Virginia State Parks

Douthat State Park draws the greatest amount of visitor traffic to the Alleghany Highlands Region. This unit of the Virginia State Park System manages three park locations: Douthat State Park, Falling Springs Falls, and Green Pastures Recreation Area.

Within Douthat, there are four campgrounds and about 45 miles of trails within the park, with additional connectivity to the surrounding National Forest trails. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Douthat had a restaurant with an outdoor seating deck. This has re-opened as a camp store with a short-order grill. There are many cabins and three lodges available for rent at the park. The lodging facilities at Douthat are currently undergoing renovation.

Falling Springs Falls features an 80-foot waterfall. There is a viewing area adjacent to Highway 220, as well as an interpretive kiosk and small parking lot. There is a fence designed to exclude visitors from approaching the upper stream area. This overlook receives high visitation and is a popular site for photography.

Green Pastures Recreation Area was added to the Virginia State Park System in 2021 and is currently undergoing restoration. Historically, when park facilities were segregated, Douthat was “Whites Only” while Green Pastures served the Black population. Green Pastures was renamed Longdale Recreation Area when the parks were integrated. The park has historically been a popular site for family picnics and includes a small lake, fields, and trails. The park closed in 2017 and community support and advocacy resulted in the transfer of the site to Virginia State Parks.

George Washington & Jefferson National Forest

The Alleghany Highlands is surrounded by the James River and Warm Springs Ranger District of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest. Lake Moomaw, a reservoir over 2,500 acres in size formed by Gathright Dam, is a recreation area made up of sites at Fortney Branch, Coles Point, Bolar Flat and Campgrounds a Morris Hill, Bolar Mountain, and McClintic Point. The Low Moor Shooting Range is also located on the National Forest. Access points to the Jackson River managed by the Forest Service are located at Johnson Springs, Smith Bridge, Indian Draft, and Petticoat Junction. The Cowpasture River is accessed at the Evans Tract Boat Ramp (Walter Robinson Access Point). Rich Hole Wilderness and Rough Mountain Wilderness are located in the District.

Recreational use at Lake Moomaw has been impacted by backlogged maintenance issues and the Covid-19 pandemic. The Bolar Flats Marina closed in 2020 and this site, which is operated under a special use permit, has not been reopened. Boating access at Bolar Flats was impacted in 2022 by a damaged dock, which resulted in an extended closure of the facility. The wastewater treatment facility at Bolar Mountain is aging, which has resulted in closures to standard restroom facilities.

Three community groups are engaged in volunteer trail maintenance in the Alleghany Highlands on National Forest Trails. The Alleghany Highlands Trail Club maintains multi-use trails throughout the James River and Warm Springs Ranger District. The West Virginia Scenic Trails Association maintains the Allegheny Trail, a long-distance hiking trail that crosses both the Monongahela National Forest and the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest. The section of the Allegheny Trail in Alleghany County is co-located with the Great Eastern Trail. The Rich Hole Wilderness, part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, has trails that are maintained by the Virginia Wilderness Committee.

Background

Regional Context

Alleghany County and the City of Covington are located within the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Region. Tourism is becoming an increasing focus of the region's economic development goals, largely through the promotion of events and introduction of new programs. Addressing improvements to quality of life has been recognized as an approach for attracting talent and recruiting businesses to the region.

Alleghany County is shouldered by two nearby resorts in neighboring counties. In Greenbrier County and Bath County, The Greenbrier and the Omni Homestead Resorts, respectively, make a major contribution to tax revenues and employment. Outdoor recreation is a large driver to visitation to these destinations, which share similar geography to the Alleghany Highlands region. These counties share several geographic factors in common: distance to major metropolitan centers, slower than average population growth, and a high density of forested land.

As a member of Virginia's Western Highlands Travel Council, the Alleghany Highlands partners with Bath County, Craig County, and Highland County to promote regional tourism. The Alleghany Highlands is part of the Virginia Mountains Region, designated by the Virginia Tourism Corporation, along with Bath, Bedford, Botetourt, Craig, Highland, Franklin, and Roanoke Counties and the Cities of Roanoke and Salem.

Area Efforts

The Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce & Tourism (Chamber) serves as the unifying voice for businesses in the region and is an advocate for commerce. A joint role is served by the Chamber, which also acts as the destination marketing organization for the region. The Alleghany Highlands Visitor Center is operated by the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce & Tourism.

The Chamber hosts a series of annual events to attract visitors to the region: the Agony in the Alleghanies Gran Fondo, Jackson River Scenic Trail Marathon and the Lake Moomaw One Mile Swim. Additional activities supported by the Chamber include the Alleghany Highlands Triathlon, Middle Mountain Mama mountain bike race, outdoor music events, as well as various arts and cultural festivities.

Recently, a new campaign was launched titled “Work Remotely Live Uniquely” in order to attract professionals to relocate to the area. This initiative takes advantage of the region’s deployment of broadband internet service, enabling new residents to pursue remote working opportunities.

Previous Planning

Outdoor recreation has been identified as a strategy for regional success through previous planning efforts. An overview of these products will be summarized to outline the circumstances for this plan.

Alleghany County and Covington Comprehensive Plan

In 2019, a joint effort was conducted to produce the Alleghany County Comprehensive Plan and the Covington Comprehensive Plan. A combined strategy forms a unified implementation scheme for both localities in this plan and outdoor recreation is cited repeatedly in the plan. A key goal identified in the plan is “The Alleghany Highlands will become known as the recreation & cultural hub of Western Virginia.” The following objectives are listed in the plan that relate to outdoor recreation:

- Develop arts and cultural centers within the Alleghany Highlands into tourism destinations.
- Improve the health and vitality of the regional ecosystem.
- Improve the connectivity and usage of the regional park system.
- Develop outdoor recreation and eco-tourism related business opportunities.
- Attract and promote unique accommodations throughout the Alleghany Highlands.
- Cultivate asset-based economic development.
- Establish an urban trail network to connect residential and commercial areas with parks, schools, and the regional trail network, creating an active living environment.
- Create a positive sense of place for the Alleghany Highlands to attract population growth.

Clifton Forge Comprehensive Plan

The 2019 update to the Clifton Forge Comprehensive Plan contains a Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Chapter. The Downtown Covington and Clifton Forge Visioning & Strategic Plan (2011) is referenced, which offers recommendations for aesthetic improvements, green spaces, and access to the Jackson River. Among this plan and additional works cited in the Clifton Forge Comprehensive Plan, there are two themes that are consistently discussed:

- Connectivity with Douthat State Park and National Forest
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Connectivity

The Town of Clifton Forge contains a Tourism Zone, enacted in 2016 to provide incentives for new or expanding businesses. The Clifton Forge Tourism Zone largely overlaps with the Clifton Forge Commercial Historic District.

Virginia Outdoors Plan

The 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan serves as the current State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, which determines priorities for Land and Water Conservation Fund Grants. The Virginia Outdoors Plan identified the following the following as featured projects for the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Region:

- Promote and implement the James River Heritage Trail including the Upper James River Water Trail and the Alleghany Highlands Blueways.
- Implement the Alleghany Highlands Trails system.

According to the 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey, the Most-Needed Recreation Opportunities in the planning region, in order, are: Natural Areas, Trails, and Water Access.

Inventory

An inventory of recreation assets was conducted to identify features significant to outdoor recreation in the region. Although Allegheny County and Covington are the focus of this planning document, the inventory process was conducted without being constricted to this administrative boundary. Instead, a general area of interest was created based on typical trip distance for visits starting or ending in the communities of Covington, Clifton Forge, and Iron Gate. A complete asset inventory is included in the Appendix and a web map product is available as a supplement to this plan. The following highlights should be noted:

- There are 143,600+ acres of public land within Allegheny County and Covington. This makes up 49% of land area in this region.
- 37 local parks are managed by Allegheny County, the City of Covington, and the Towns of Clifton Forge and Iron Gate.
- There are 280 miles of unpaved roads in the region and 200 miles of trails.
- 28 blueway access points provide access to three rivers, the Jackson, Cowpasture, and James, as well as to Lake Moomaw and Douthat Lake.
- There are 11 campgrounds in the region.

Survey Data

A series of three outdoor recreation surveys were released to gather input from residents, visitors, and event Participants. The survey period opened in the summer of 2021 and closed at the end of October 2022. Data was assessed for survey responses from 533 residents, 308 visitors and event participants. Key findings are listed below and more extensive data with figures is included in the Appendix.

- The most popular facilities used by residents are: 1. Douthat State Park, 2. Jackson River Sports Complex, 3. National Forest, 4. Jackson River Scenic Trail, 5. Lake Moomaw, and 6. Jackson River
- 81 percent of residents that responded to the survey said that tourism and outdoor recreation is “Very Important” to the economy in the Alleghany Highlands.
- Hiking/Walking is the most popular activity among both residents and visitors.
- Paddlesports are among the top 4 activities for visitors to the region. Visitors indicated that they either spend less than one day or one to two days participating in paddlesports.
- Road Biking/Mountain Biking was the second most popular activity among visitors.
- May and June were the most popular months for visitors to come to the region.
- A majority of visitors spent one to two days in the area. Other visitors typically stayed three to six days.
- 34% of visitors that stayed overnight during their trip stayed in either Alleghany County, Covington, or Clifton Forge. The remaining respondents stayed outside the region.
- Event participants typically spent \$140 on lodging and meals, combined.

Vision and Goals

The following vision statement was developed for this plan:

“The Alleghany Highlands is an exceptional place to live and visit for outdoor recreation. Covington, Clifton Forge, and Iron Gate are linked by rivers and trails, providing a gateway for public land access. This unique destination features a variety of outdoor recreation activities, natural beauty, and a welcoming community.”

Three goals were developed based upon this vision:

- Develop recreation assets to meet user expectations for a variety of outdoor activities.
- Attract and support businesses providing amenities for outdoor recreation.
- Advance the Alleghany Highlands regional brand used to provide area information and promote the destination.



Four series of objectives were identified as strategies for implementing the goals in the plan.

Categories used to detail the objectives are described below:

ID: Each item has been given an identification code for ease of reference. The objectives are listed in order of prioritization, based on the guidance of the steering committee members.

Time Frame: The time frame is the estimated duration of time it may take to achieve a strategy once the effort has begun.

- Short Term: Implemented within 1-2 years
- Medium Term: Implemented in the next 2-5 years
- Long Term: Implemented in 5 Years or more
- Ongoing: Implementation is already occurring and will require continuous effort

Cost: The cost is the estimated amount of financial contribution towards the objective that will be required for implementation. A feasibility study or construction plan may be needed to provide a more accurate cost estimate.

- \$- Less than \$25,000
- \$\$- \$25,000 to \$100,000
- \$\$\$- \$100,000 to \$500,000
- \$\$\$\$- \$500,000 or more

Leadership: This item recommends a designated entity to take charge of the listed objective.

Goal #1: Develop recreation assets to meet user expectations for a variety of outdoor activities.

ID	Objective	Time Frame	Cost	Leadership
A1	Expand the viewing area at Falling Springs Falls	Long	\$\$\$\$	Douthat State Park
A2	Ensure continued upkeep, maintenance, renovation, and enhancement of local parks	Ongoing	\$\$\$\$	Regional
A3	Enhance Allegheny Highlands Blueway by developing additional sites, improving access points, and designating portages	Short	\$\$	Regional
A4	Reopen the Green Pastures Recreation area with an exhibit interpreting the history of the site	Medium	\$	Douthat State Park
A5	Study alternatives to Gathright Dam operations to incorporate recreational user interests	Long	\$\$	Regional
A6	Open a disc golf course	Medium	\$	Regional

ID	Objective	Time Frame	Cost	Leadership
B1	Develop Off-Highway Vehicle Riding Routes	Long	\$\$\$\$	Regional
B2	Enhance singletrack trail system through prioritization of trail work, incorporation of modern trail design, and new signage	Short	\$\$\$\$	Regional
B3	Develop the Clifton Forge Reservoir as a recreation site and connect the town to National Forest and Douthat State Park	Long	\$\$\$\$	Clifton Forge
B4	Connect the Gap in the Allegheny Trail (Great Eastern Trail)	Long	\$\$\$\$	Regional
B5	Develop a connector to link downtown Covington with the Jackson River Scenic Trail	Medium	\$\$	Covington
B6	Construct a crossing over the Jackson River at the Jackson River Sports Complex	Long	\$\$\$\$	Covington
B7	Convert the old rail line through Covington into a shared use path "Paper Trail"	Medium	\$\$\$\$	Covington
B8	Reopen the swinging bridge in Clifton Forge across the Jackson River to Verge Street	Short	\$	Clifton Forge
B9	Open the Clifton Forge underground area for public access	Long	\$\$\$\$	Clifton Forge
B10	Connect the trail system in Rockbridge County with North Mountain Trail and Green Pastures Recreation Area	Long	\$\$	Rockbridge Outdoors

Goal #2: Attract and support businesses providing amenities for outdoor recreation.

ID	Objective	Time Frame	Cost	Leadership
C1	Recruit developers to construct new lodging facilities	Short	\$\$\$	Chamber of Commerce & Tourism
C2	Educate business on expectations from outdoor recreation visitors for quality and experience	Long	\$	Chamber of Commerce & Tourism
C3	Partner with businesses to develop campgrounds with water and electric service	Short	\$\$\$	Regional
C4	Reopen the Bolar Marina with concessionaire for fuel, docking, and shopping	Medium	\$	US Forest Service
C5	Recruit a business to open a specialty outdoor retail store	Medium	\$\$	Chamber of Commerce & Tourism
C6	Provide commercial service for Blueway trips on Jackson River downstream of Dunlap Creek confluence	Short	\$\$	Alleghany Outdoors
C7	Offer assistance for development of new businesses serving outdoor recreation users	Short	\$\$	Regional

Goal #3: Advance the Alleghany Highlands regional brand used to provide area information and promote the destination.

ID	Objective	Time Frame	Cost	Leadership
D1	Create a communication plan and alert system for Gathright Dam Pulse Releases and high-water Events	Medium	\$\$	Regional
D2	Offer programs to area youth to introduce outdoor activities and provide environmental education	Short	\$	Alleghany Outdoors
D3	Provide maps and data for trails and unpaved road with up-to-date information of conditions, events, and closures	Short	\$\$	Regional
D4	Create interpretive resources that offer education about natural heritage and environment	Long	\$	Regional
D5	Provide stewardship information and designate areas for primitive dispersed camping	Long	\$	Regional
D6	Ensure continuous offering of events are provided to promote outdoor activities	Ongoing	\$\$	Regional

Discussion

A key strength identified in the Alleghany Highlands is the variety of outdoor recreation offerings within close proximity to the communities of Covington, Clifton Forge, and Iron Gate. Popular activities in the region include hiking, Paddlesports, fishing, swimming, hunting, camping, scenic driving, road cycling, and organized sports. Opportunities for expanding offerings include off-highway vehicle riding, mountain biking, archery, disc golf, and backpacking.

Construction of new outdoor recreation assets and renovation of existing assets to meet contemporary standards will demand financial resources to support development. Federal and State grants may be able to support certain projects, however a local or private match may need to be secured to leverage these funding opportunities. Asset managers will need to prioritize development of outdoor recreation assets among other infrastructure needs. Integrating a budget for outdoor asset development into capital improvement plans can spread project costs over an extended time period. Maintenance of additional facilities will also require funding to support investments in the long term.

The amenities desired to support outdoor recreation activities present an area of need for business development. The highest order need for this goal is the recruitment of developers to construct new lodging facilities. Potential areas to develop campgrounds could include the Pounding Mill property on Dolly Anne Drive, the Jackson River Sports Complex, as well as private lands. The Alleghany Highlands Regional Lodging Needs Assessment was completed in 2022 to document the demand for increased lodging, with the suggestion that the region could support a mid-range mid-size (75-300 room) hotel. Outdoor recreation visitation is factored into the lodging demand for the region. These visitors may prefer to stay in accommodations offering amenities tailored toward their preferred outdoor activity.

To support business development, staff time will need to be dedicated to this activity. Major activities would include conducting outreach with outdoor recreation businesses, providing connections for access to capital, assisting in site selection, supporting permitting and regulatory procedures, accommodating workforce development needs, and potentially coordinating the application of financial incentives. Development of outdoor businesses should be implemented in coordination with complementary business in lodging, retail, and dining.

The “Uniquely Allegheny” brand captures the messaging used to communicate the outdoor recreation opportunities offered in the Allegheny Highlands. Broader community adoption of this brand will advance this initiative to distribute information about the area and draw visitors and residents to participate in outdoor activities. Building community capacity will be key to the success of this effort. Coordinating opportunities for collaboration between agencies, nurturing positive relationships, and building local leadership will advance effective promotion of the region.

Conclusion

The Alleghany Highlands of Virginia carries an untapped potential for economic prosperity through outdoor recreation. Through implementation of the Outdoor Recreation Plan, the region can reach its full potential as an outdoor recreation destination. Community engagement will play a pivotal role in adoption of the plan and the long-term success of the identified goals. Federal and state grant funding, private investment, contributions from philanthropic organizations, and careful allocation of local resources will enable implementation of the plan. Close communication between stakeholders, effective project management, and continuous monitoring will ensure progress towards the collective vision. By intentionally addressing transportation, broadband, housing, environmental quality, and workforce development to balance needs alongside outdoor recreation in future planning efforts, community resilience can be ensured to secure the sustainable success of outdoor recreation in the Alleghany Highlands. Through targeted strategies and deliberate collaboration, the region can attract outdoor enthusiasts, invigorate the local business community, and strengthen the economic base of local governments.



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Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation. (2018). *Virginia Outdoors Plan: Bringing Virginia the Benefits of Outdoor Recreation*.

Further Reading

Additional study can support further knowledge and provide an approach to implementing the goals identified in the plan.

US Department of Agriculture. (2021, June) *The USDA Recreation Economy Resource Guide*.
https://www.rd.usda.gov/sites/default/files/usdard_recreational_economy508.pdf

The resource guide provides background, strategies, recommended programs, and success stories for building the recreation economy.

Outdoor Recreation Roundtable. (2021, January). *The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Economic Development Toolkit*. <https://recreationroundtable.org/programs/rural-development/>

The toolkit offers best practices for producing effective economic development through outdoor recreation.

Headwaters Economic. (2023, May) *The Amenity Trap: How High-amenity Communities can Avoid Being Loved to Death*. <https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2023HE-Amenity-Report-R3b-LOWRES.pdf>

This report addresses the challenges that affect outdoor recreation communities: housing, infrastructure and public services, fiscal policy, and natural disasters.