



# APPALACHIAN HEARTLAND INITIATIVE STRATEGIC MARKETING & ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY STUDY

**FINAL REPORT | JUNE 2020**

FOR THE:

**REGION 2 PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

400 Third Avenue • Huntington, WV 25701

[www.region2pdc.org](http://www.region2pdc.org)

FUNDED BY:

**APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION**

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**PROPOSING THE GATEWAY TO APPALACHIA WELCOME CENTER**



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# ABOUT THE PROJECT

In late 2018, the Region 2 Planning & Development Council completed the KYOVA Mobility Study for Interstate 64 Exit 8 and WV State Route 152 (WV152). This study presented two key findings:

1. A notable opportunity exists for the Exit 8 area to distinguish itself from other local interchanges with strong connections to natural resources and other outdoor adventure related to tourism. Improvements to WV152 will improve travel to these destinations as well as provide the opportunity for additional investment in the recreation industry.
2. Branding Exit 8 as a tourism/recreation corridor would support the development of a **new welcome center** at this location. Most welcome centers are located at major entry points into West Virginia or where there are major route crossings.

Parallel to these insights, the Wayne County Strategic Development Plan identifies WV152 tourism development as a primary economic driver for the county.

Following up on these recommendations, the Region 2 Planning & Development Council secured funding for this Appalachian Heartland Initiative Strategic Marketing & Economic Feasibility Study with a primary focus of working with the local stakeholders and assessing the region's attractions to answer this one question about the WV152 tourism corridor:

“Does the future growth of the WV152 Wayne-Cabell regional tourism attractions justify the investment of the proposed Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center to effectively engage the multitude of potential visitors that pass by daily on I-64?”



# WELCOME TO THE APPALACHIAN HEARTLAND



**CHRIS CHILES | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

*Tourism is a vital economic sector in West Virginia contributing \$4.3 billion in direct spending and creating over 45,000 jobs.*

Without this tourism-generated revenue, each household in West Virginia would have to pay nearly \$700 per year in state and local taxes. However, tourism is an extremely competitive economic sector, with every state aggressively marketing and improving their tourism product and services.

This is why our professional studies and regional stakeholders recommend developing a Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center along Interstate 64 near the Kentucky and Ohio borders, creating a new visitor-engagement model to be replicated at the state's vital interstate gateways to capture the tourism imagination of visitors that pass through our state.

The proposed Welcome Center location strategically connects Huntington's hip-urban attractions with nearby outdoor recreation and heritage destinations.

As the only state that is 100% in the Appalachian Region, West Virginia is perfectly positioned to take ownership of this brand by telling the state's compelling story at each major interstate gateway.

Sincerely,

**CHRIS CHILES**

Executive Director

Region 2 Planning & Development Council



# THE POTENTIAL



Within 250 miles of the Appalachian Heartland Region there are 8 major cities with a total regional population reaching over 8 million.

The vital US Interstate 64 east-west freeway that bisects West Virginia at Wayne-Cabell counties generates over 45,000 vehicles per day.

The existing WV152 corridor attractions draw over 550,000 visitors annually producing \$90 million in economic impact led by the popular Beech Fork Lake State Park, Cabwaylingo State Forest and East Lynn Lake.



New attractions include the expansion of the Hatfield-McCoy OHV Trails to Cabwaylingo State Forest, the \$5 million Heritage Farm Mill Creek Adventure Park, and the potential of the proposed Beech Fork Lake Lodge & Conference Center.

By 2025, the strategic **Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center** along I-64 Exit 8 will support the goal of the WV152 corridor attracting 775,000 visitors and earning \$130 million annually.





The **Appalachian Heartland Highway** along state route WV152 will collectively brand the heartland's fantastic outdoor recreation and compelling heritage attractions with the urban and college fun of the the City of Huntington to create a "must-stop" destination attracting 775,000 visitors to generate over \$130 million annually in tourism economic impact by 2025.

We will take full advantage of WV152's strategic I-64 Freeway Exit 8 location to develop the **Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center** which will become the West Virginia model for culturally-innovative visitor engagement to effectively promote local, regional and statewide multiday visitation.

## How We Get There

1. Solidify collaboration & **partnerships** to implement the destination vision.
2. Create I-64 **awareness** enticing travelers to stop & discover the Appalachian Heartland.
3. Generate local & regional **demand** focused on a 3-hour radius.
4. Increase tourism **investment** & visitor services along the tourism corridor.

# APPALACHIAN HEARTLAND COMMITTEE



## WAYNE COUNTY BUSINESS



### AUDY PERRY, JR. , EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Heritage Farm Museum & Village | New Mill Creek Adventure Park

"The variety of outdoor attractions within the WV152 corridor help to both diversify and strengthen the economy of the Appalachian Heartland region, with unique offerings for visitors that go beyond geographic and city boundaries to add deep value to the area as a whole."

## HUNTINGTON AREA CVB



### TYSON COMPTON, PRESIDENT

Huntington Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

"The WV152 corridor's outdoor attractions and activities uniquely complement the Huntington area's urban activities, where a young and active college population from Marshall University intermingles with the visitors to the region and all are able to take in a wide variety of experiences."

## MEMBERS

- **Bill Bisset,**  
President, Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce
- **Margaret Mary Layne,**  
CEO, Layne Consulting
- **Lauren Kemp,**  
Program Director, Unlimited Futures, Inc.
- **Jeffrey Lusk,**  
Exec. Director, Hatfield-McCoy Reg. Rec. Auth.
- **Geoff Flemming,**  
Exec. Director, Huntington Museum of Art
- **Brandon Dennison,**  
CEO, Coalfield Development Corporation
- **Carol Damron,**  
Wayne County Economic Development Authority
- **Carol Bailey,**  
Executive Director, United Way of the River Cities
- **Park Ferguson,**  
Executive Director, Wayne County Economic Development Authority
- **Kevin Brady,**  
Executive Director, Greater Huntington Parks & Recreation District



## FINDINGS

- **US Interstate 64 (I-64)** is the only east-west highway in the state and a major thoroughfare for cross-country traffic providing a fantastic opportunity for the Appalachian Heartland to capture the attention and visitation of a greater percentage of the 45,000 vehicles passing by on a daily basis (16 million vehicles annually).
- The West Virginia Tourism Office has identified upgrading visitor information centers as an important strategy to educate and service the tens of thousands of potential visitors that transit the state daily.
- I-64 Exit 8 has been identified by numerous studies as a prime location for a new **“east-west” welcome center (The Gateway to Appalachia)** as it serves as a primary intersection between downtown Huntington’s urban attractions, coupled with a fantastic range of heritage and outdoor recreational-tourism opportunities along WV152.
- The WV152 attractions provide an excellent range of heritage, art, shopping, restaurant and music scenes, and nature and outdoor recreation opportunities for a multiday vacation, very representative of WV’s tourism product.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



New tourism developments will continue to increase WV152 visitation and investment potential:

- 50 miles of Hatfield McCoy off-road vehicle trails opening in Cabwaylingo State Forest encouraging new investment in tourism facilities and services in the southern end of Wayne County.
- Future \$5 million expansion of the Heritage Farm Museum & Village to include the Mill Creek Adventure Park with direct connectivity to WV152 just 2 miles from Exit 8.
- Newly-opened ziplining course at the Rustic Ravines Resort with expansion underway for a restaurant / meeting facility. Rustic Ravines Resort recently received funding for an RV resort with 25 pull-thru ATV/RV sites, electrical service, city water, bathroom facilities, playground, and basketball court to serve customers of the new Hatfield-McCoy Trails at Cabwaylingo State Forest.
- The proposed Beech Fork Lodge and Conference Center on Beech Fork Lake just off WV152 in Lavalette, which is now under study will become more feasible with more WV152 attractions and aggressive marketing to increase tourism demand.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## CHALLENGES

- The current I-64 Eastbound Welcome Center is a “pull-off, pull-on” rest stop available to only one freeway direction, with a very limited “small-room, brochure-rack” presentation of the local, regional and state tourism attractions.
- Nearly all of the WV152 attractions rely heavily (80%) on the local and the 1-2 hour regional market. “People don’t know about us, and just aren’t stopping.”
- Seasonality is a major issue with nearly 70% of visitation and expenditure between April and September.
- There is no Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) that focuses specifically on WV152 promotion. The Wayne County government does not have a tourism promotion office or a chamber of commerce.
- Most WV152 attractions have limited current and out-of-state tourist reviews in top travel-planning websites such as Tripadvisor.
- On the busy I-64 freeway, the WV152 tourism corridor attraction signage to entice “pull-off” exploration is very limited.
- There are no tourist-oriented hotels or restaurants on WV152, with only a limited supply of cabins in the corridor. This leads to very minimal hotel occupancy taxes and very limited opportunities for multiday visitation.
- The proposed 75-room Beech Fork Lodge & Conference Center is important to providing WV152 accommodations, but has limited feasibility unless the corridor is better marketed, attracts more tourism investment, and the state helps to pay for a portion of the lodge’s development costs.

# WV152 TOURISM CORRIDOR EXISTING ATTRACTIONS

## NORTH



### HERITAGE FARM MUSEUM & VILLAGE

Heritage Farm Museum & Village is home to over 15 historic log structures, seven award-winning museums, 5 log cabin inns with modern amenities, a Barn Retreat Center, Artisan Center, meeting capacity for 500, and themed events throughout the year. HFMV is West Virginia's only Smithsonian Affiliate and National Geographic Traveler Prime Destination. An adventure park and nature center are under development, with a canopy ropes course open now.



### HUNTINGTON MUSEUM OF ART

Opened to the public in 1952, the HMA is the only nationally-accredited visual art museum of its size in the Tri-State region with a permanent art collection of more than 16,000 objects, ten exhibition spaces, an interactive education gallery, an art reference library of nearly 27,000 volumes, a 287-seat auditorium, a tropical and subtropical plant conservatory, a coral reef aquarium, and several hiking trails.



### 14th STREET WEST – CENTRAL CITY ANTIQUE DISTRICT

Central City is a heritage diamond in the rough whose old-town atmosphere of antique stores, farm-to-market grocery, and quaint cafes will soon be undergoing a thorough polishing. An extensive redevelopment and branding strategy has just been completed to evolve the district into a vibrant artistic, food and cultural-entertainment center.

## CENTRAL



### BEECH FORK STATE PARK

Beech Fork State Park is rated 11th of the state's most attended parks, with 275 campsites / 6 cabins, and an excellent range of boating / hiking / trail riding recreational activities and planned events. Facilities include a boat launch, kayak rentals, camper store, picnic shelters, a swimming pool, sport courts and fields, and a game room. In Fiscal Year 2019, there were more than 212,000 visitors to the State Park.



### BEECH FORK LAKE MARINA

The privately-managed Beech Fork Lake Marina is easily accessible to WV152 in the westernmost section of Beech Fork Lake. The marina offers docking for 275 boats, and has a 30-boat rental fleet which includes pontoon boats, a bass boat, fishing boats, canoes, and kayaks. The marina also includes supply / snack store, 2 hiking trails and a nearby swimming beach. In 2018, there was over 150,000 visitors to the marina, beach, and surrounding attractions.

# WV152 TOURISM CORRIDOR EXISTING ATTRACTIONS

## CENTRAL



### LAVALETTE GOLF COURSES

Probably some of the best value for money golf courses in West Virginia, the two neighboring golf courses (Creekside & Sugarwood) directly off of WV152 in Lavalette boast championship golf of over 6,500 yards for each course. The Creekside owner has interest in building accommodations and a possible conference center.



### HOLY CROSS MONASTERY

Located on 180 acres of mountain forest, the Holy Cross Monastery is an English-speaking monastery under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in the Diocese of Eastern America & New York. Holy Cross is a growing monastery consisting of more than two dozen monks, novices, candidates and layworkers. Day visitation and overnight stays are welcome.

## SOUTH



### EAST LYNN LAKE

The East Lynn Lake Recreation Area is an Army Corps of Engineers project offering 44 miles of shoreline. Recreational activities include boating, water skiing, canoeing and swimming. The East Fork Campground offers 167 sites with electrical and water hookups, amphitheater, playground, and basketball and volleyball courts. Several miles of hiking trails wind throughout the nearby hills.



### CABWAYLINGO STATE FOREST

Cabwaylingo State Forest is located on 8,123 heavily forested acres in southern West Virginia including 15 cabins and 2 campgrounds (8 rustic sites, 11 sites with power/water, 100-person group camp). Activities include biking, fishing, and hiking. The forest's popularity and participation will soon greatly improve with the opening of an additional 50-miles of off-road-vehicle trails with the Hatfield McCoy Trail System.



### RUSTIC RAVINES

Rustic Ravines is a cabin and recreation-oriented resort nestled in the hills near Cabwaylingo State Forest with 11 cabins; 2 yurts; access to 300 acres of trails; ATV rental & trails; zipline, canoeing, hiking; events and weddings. RR has extensive expansion plans including a saloon restaurant, RV resort, and mountain roller coaster.

# WV152 TOURISM CORRIDOR'S NEW TOURISM ATTRACTIONS

## NORTH



### ONGOING HERITAGE FARM VILLAGE ATTRACTIONS EXPANSION

Themed as the “Appalachian Backyard Adventure,” Heritage Farm is nearing completion of a netted playground near their petting zoo for more engagement with their youth market.

Complementing the tree-canopy theme and addressing the teen and older market, the “Skypark Canopy Adventure” is a *self-belay* ropes course amidst the lush forest canopy challenging all skill levels. Also nearing completion this year will be an interpretive nature center.

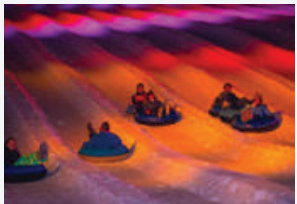


### NEW HERITAGE FARM MILL CREEK ADVENTURE PARK

The Heritage Farm Mill Creek Adventure Park will be located just down the road from the village and is in the final planning stages with construction anticipated to begin summer 2021. The \$5 million construction investment is projected to yield over \$7.5 million in one-time economic impact.

The adventure park boasts an indoor “soft top” design making it a year-round facility, very necessary to address the region’s seasonality. Winter adventure will include snow tubing, ice skating, and a snow playfield. Summer adventure will include a water park, mountain coasters and rock climbing.

Last, a very extensive wild animal park is also under feasibility consideration at Heritage Farms.



## CENTRAL



### PROPOSED BEECH FORK LAKE LODGE

The Beech Fork Lake Lodge & Conference Center has been under consideration for the last 15 years, with a recent feasibility study now being reviewed by state agencies. The estimated \$25m construction cost will have a \$37.5m economic impact creating nearly 270 jobs.

Projecting an opening in 2024, estimated visitor spending impacts for the lodge will be just over \$3 million annually by 2025. The lodge’s fantastic location in the middle of the WV152 tourism corridor will be an important component to promote multiday visitation and the spending at multiple area attractions.

Complementing Beech Fork Lake’s boating, beach and hiking attractions, nearby Lavalette just 15 minutes away boasts two excellent golf courses.



# WV152 TOURISM CORRIDOR'S NEW TOURISM ATTRACTIONS

## SOUTH



### NEW HATFIELD McCOY TRAIL SYSTEM CABWAYLINGO

By summer 2020, stimulating WV152's southern anchor, the new Hatfield McCoy Trail System will open 50-70 miles of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) trails in the Cabwaylingo State Forest some 45 miles from Exit 8.

Additionally, a new trail system is under study and consideration nearby at East Lynn Lake. By 2025, the combined trail systems are projected to generate over \$7m annually, and \$25m total for 5 years.

## SOUTH



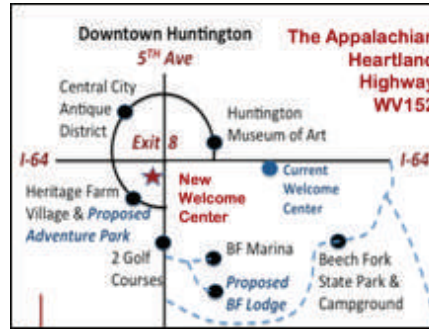
### NEW RUSTIC RAVINES RESORT ZIPLINE & RV RESORT

RRR recently-opened the "Big Zipper" zipline stretching a half-mile between two mountain ridges, with a restaurant saloon / meeting hall. In May 2020, RRR received a \$250,000 AML grant for a RV resort to build 25 pull-thru ATV/RV sites, electric service, city water, shower / bathroom facilities, playground, and basketball court. As the premier accommodations and visitor facilities in the southern end of WV152, Rustic Ravines will play an essential role in accommodating the future Hatfield McCoy ATV visitors.

# NEW ATTRACTIONS: INCORPORATING THE NEW 14TH STREET WEST

## A NEW CULTURAL DESTINATION ....

Northern attractions incorporated with the WV152 tourism corridor are known as the “Tip of the Pendant” bringing an urban flair of culture, shopping, restaurants, and music scene to complement the corridor’s outdoor recreational attractions.



14th Street W is presently the tri-state antiques hub with strong local appeal for antique enthusiasts but in the main has limited tourism attractiveness. It can be imagined once as a bustling ‘river to rails’ business, shopping and entertainment district, which now has aggressive redevelopment plans to capitalize on its history to become the City of Huntington’s cultural entrepreneurial hub focused on arts, shopping, food, education, coworking and entertainment opportunities.

### ANALYSIS

No hard data exists for 14th Street W visitation and expenditure. From interviews and business estimates, the district currently grosses \$1.75m in annual business revenues, with about 20% attributed to out-of-town visitors.

	ANNUAL EST. REVENUES	TOURISM 20% CONTRIBUTION	TOURISM 30% CONTRIBUTION	TOURISM 40% CONTRIBUTION
CURRENT - 2020	\$1,745,000	\$349,000		
REVITALIZATION PHASE I - 2023	\$4,500,000		\$1,350,000	
REVITALIZATION PHASE II - 2025	\$7,250,000			\$2,900,000

# NEW ATTRACTIONS: INCORPORATING THE NEW 14TH STREET WEST



Fortunately, the nearby Heritage Farm Museum & Village – one of Huntington’s top tourist attraction -- will soon add an adventure park and other engaging facilities that is projected to double visitation to 100,000 visitors per year. Only 15 minutes away, a revitalized 14th Street W will be an excellent additional attraction for a full day on WV152’s Northern Pendant. This should bring the Central City tourism expenditure to 30% by year 2023.

Additionally, the phased redevelopment of 14th Street W will proceed along with the development of the new **Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center** which will help solidify the WV152 tourism corridor as a multi-day destination and grow from the current estimate of 550,000 to 750,000 annual visitors by 2025. With effective WV152 marketing and improvement of capturing visitors passing by on nearby I-64, the tourism contribution to 14th Street W is projected to reach nearly \$3m by 2025.

## CURRENT INVENTORY

**ANTIQUES:** AAA Antiques, Adell's Antiques, Camelot Too, Hattie & Nans Antiques and Rare Books, Mark's Antiques , Meade's Film Exchange & Collectibles, The Coop Warehouse, Thistle Patch Vintage Garden and Antiques, Village Renew-all Antique Mall.

**RETAIL:** Cicada Books, The Wild Ramp, West End Floral & Gift.

**RESTAURANTS:** Central City Café, West Tenampa Mexican Restaurant, Gino's Pizza.



# ECONOMIC IMPACTS

WV152 MARKET DRIVERS - ESTIMATED VISITORS 2021-2025		
	2021 VISITORS	2025 VISITORS
BEECH FORK LAKE STATE PARK	220,000	240,000
CABWAYLINGO STATE FOREST	110,000	140,000
HUNTINGTON MUSEUM OF ART	55,000	70,000
HERITATE FARM ADVENTURE PK	30,000	65,000
HERITAGE FARM & VILLAGE	45,000	58,500
CENTRAL CITY CULTURAL DISTRICT	30,000	50,000
EAST LYNN LAKE CAMPGROUND	26,000	40,000
BEECH FORK LAKE LODGE		30,000
BEECH FORK LAKE MARINA	19,500	25,000
BEECH FORK LAKE BEACH	10,000	20,000
LAVALETTE GOLF COURSES	15,000	19,500
HAT-McCOY TRAILS CABWAYLINGO	3,000	7,500
HAT-McCOY TRAILS EAST LYNN		6,500
RUSTIC RAVINES	1,500	3,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>565,000</b>	<b>775,000</b>
	<b>5 YR GROWTH</b>	<b>37%</b>
	<b>ANNUAL GROWTH</b>	<b>7%</b>

WV152 NEW ATTRACTIONS ECONOMIC IMPACT (2021-2025)		
	2021 VISITORS	2025 VISITORS
EXISTING ATTRACTIONS	\$52,500,000	\$59,100,000
HATFIELD MCOY TRAILS CABWAY	\$2,880,000	\$3,360,000
HERITAGE FARM VILLAGE EXPANSION	\$400,000	\$575,000
CENTRAL CITY INVESTITURE	\$200,000	\$1,500,000
HERITAGE FARM ADVENTURE PARK		\$3,117,000
HATFIELD MCOY TRAILS EAST LYNN		\$3,360,000
BEECH FORK LAKE LODGE		\$3,040,000
WELCOME CENTER (+10%)		\$7,405,200
<b>TOTAL DIRECT SPENDING</b>	<b>\$55,980,000</b>	<b>\$81,457,200</b>
INDIRECT-TOTAL MULTIPLIER (1.60)	\$33,588,000	\$48,874,320
<b>TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT</b>	<b>\$89,568,000</b>	<b>\$130,331,520</b>

**Visitation:** Approximately 565,000 visitors are projected to visit the WV152 tourism-corridor attractions in 2021, up from 500,000 estimated in 2019, with the Beech Fork Lake State Park as the primary destination for day and overnight visitation.

Creation of a collaboratively-marketed regional destination, the opening of new tourism developments, and the promotional support of a new welcome center will accelerate visitor growth to a projected 775, 000 annual visitors by 2025.

**Spending:** WV152's existing tourism attractions are projected to grow at a modest rate of 3% annually. However, new tourism attractions in the development stages are expected to contribute substantially in the coming years. By 2025, total economic impact is projected to reach over \$130m. An important element to furthering this success is the addition of the **Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center** which is modestly projected to increase WV152 corridor visitation and spending by 10% annually.

# ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Total WV152 visitor spending when aggregated for all 5 years from 2021 to 2025 is projected to reach \$554 million. New construction of WV152's top tourism projects is projected to yield \$56m in one-time economic impact to the region.



**Conclusion:** The Beech Fork Lake Lodge & Conference Center study completed in December 2019 determined the lodge had limited economic feasibility due to the high development cost not being offset by a compelling inventory of area attractions creating the necessary demand. However, more consideration for the lodge is justified when considering the unique WV152 developments slated to come online over the next several years, supported by a compelling destination brand and aggressive regional marketing, a robust I-64 signage program and an engaging and educational **Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center** that will convert transit interest into visitation.

# THE HIGH CONCEPT: CREATING THE WEST VIRGINIA GATEWAY WELCOME CENTER MODEL

A compelling **Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center** accessible to both directions on I-64 near the Kentucky-Ohio borders is essential to furthering the economic momentum that is building for tourism investment along the WV152 tourism corridor and the 5-county western gateway to West Virginia.

This vision embraces the WV State Office of Tourism strategy focusing on *“Welcome Center upgrades to turn bathroom breaks into return visits”* by transforming current visitor centers from brochure distributors to interactive, travel-planning destinations at key highway locational gateways. Embracing this strategy is a foundational core to our WV152 strategic plan.

The Welcome Center’s goal is to daily capture a higher percentage of the 45,000 vehicles that daily pass through Wayne-Cabell counties traveling on I-64, the state’s most vital tourism artery, leading to a projected 600 more daily visitors.

The 5-county WV western gateway – **Cabell, Wayne, Logan, Lincoln & Mingo** -- earns over \$250m annually in visitor spending. Regional promotion will be a key priority for the Welcome Center promoting multiday visits to a growing menu of outdoor, city and rural-tourism opportunities.



# THE HIGH CONCEPT: CREATING THE WEST VIRGINIA GATEWAY WELCOME CENTER MODEL

## WELCOME CENTERS:

- ✓ Are an effective way to increase length of stay, which results in increased in-state expenditures.
- ✓ Set the stage for a visitor's experience, helping to establish a consumer's first impression of a state by providing essential tourist information and "sense of place" depth to enhance the visitor's experience.
- ✓ Influence route selection, attractions visited, and future return trips with new information collected.
- ✓ Users are more likely to have higher incomes, travel in large parties, and be on a pleasure trip.
- ✓ Key locational consideration should be a major transportation artery or gateway. Visitors to border welcome centers in Michigan were nearly 5x more likely to be residents of other states.
- ✓ Millennials can be "mobile absorbed" & bypass centers unless the centers are technologically interactive.
- ✓ An accessible service setting is the single most important aspect of choosing a welcome center location off the interstate.

## NOTED WELCOME CENTER IMPACTS:

- ✓ A Rhode Island study estimated \$35 in new tourism expenditures for every \$1 of operating budget [Oregon \$41, Louisiana \$20].
- ✓ Travelers who extended their visit to Indiana by one day or longer because of information obtained at a state welcome center spent an additional \$43 per day.
- ✓ The Tierney Study reported information obtained at state welcome centers resulted in a 25% increase in visitors' average daily expenditures.

# THE WELCOME CENTER CONCEPTUAL DESIGN



Extensive stakeholder engagement revealed embracing a “100% Appalachia” theme to be reflected in the **Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center** design and branding concepts. Design input focused on highlighting the state’s rural tranquility, friendliness, resilience, and innovation.

The retro-modern barn design yields brand connectivity with the hundreds of scenic barns throughout rural and scenic West Virginia. The bright, high-ceiled barn design maximizes the limited parcel footprint. Materials like timber and stone will be used that are reminiscent of West Virginia’s natural beauty, or materials like steel and glass that represent the important industrial history of the region.

The site plan chosen arranges the building to face the WV152 corridor entry from I-64 where most visitors will access the facility. This option utilizes earthwork and the construction of a retaining wall to grow the developable footprint of the site to 2 acres.

The retaining wall not only helps to create more usable space for outdoor activities, but the wall will serve as an excellent way to implement a gateway sign for the Welcome Center and also to the Appalachian Heartland Highway.

Dogwalks, picnic tables, a playground, grassland, and forest trails complete the complementary “stretch-your legs” exercise component for the center.

The estimated construction cost for the welcome center site development and building is approximately \$6.2m, while the interior costs for FFE (furniture, fixtures & equipment), interactive kiosks, offices, and a climbing wall are estimated to be just over \$900k, for a total cost of \$7.1m.

ESTIMATED WELCOME CENTER DEVELOPMENT COSTS	
CONSTRUCTION	\$3,375,000
SITE DEVELOPMENT	\$1,550,000
UTILITIES	\$120,000
SOFT COSTS	\$1,150,000
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$6,195,000</b>

Source: The Thrasher Group

ESTIMATED WELCOME CENTER INTERIOR COSTS	
FF&E / KIOSKS / EXHIBITS	\$915,000

Source: The Thrasher Group

# INTERIOR LAYOUT & FEATURES

## KEY FEATURES INCLUDE

- A. Electronic Guest Book** – An interactive, vertically oriented, touch-screen monitor for use by multiple users. Visitors could voluntarily add low-level personal info such as name, hometown and planned destination to an ever-growing list of visitors. A digital interface could allow visitors to upload messages and selfies. When in passive-mode, the monitor could display a US or World Map that pins the hometowns of visitors.
- B. Information Kiosks** - Interactive touch screen monitors for individual use. This feature could include calendars that feature WV152 attractions and events when in passive-mode, and interactive wayfinding maps and details for the attractions and events, as well as educational games with Appalachian facts and history questions.
- C/D. Wayfinding Maps** - Interactive, wall-mounted touch-screen monitor that features attractions along WV 152, including markets, food, retail outlets, etc. A program could allow visitors to select multiple destinations and have directions forwarded to their smart phone.
- E. Outdoor Simulations** - A semi-immersive virtual experience on large, vertically oriented monitors. Controlled by separate stand-mounted touch screen devices, the viewer can experience a variety of different outdoor first-person simulations that are available at nearby WV 152 attractions i.e. Mountain biking, kayaking, fishing, zip lining, and ATV riding.
- F. Climbing Wall** - An artificial rock wall approximately twelve feet in height to engage families with a belay system and retractable floor pads to prevent climbing when an attendant is not available for supervision.
- G. Selfie Feature** – A compelling photographic feature of Appalachian interest to use as a social-media backdrop.
- H. Artwork / Artifacts** – Locally-produced paintings, sculptures, quilts, pottery or other items produced by local artisans could be on display in the Welcome Center to bring attention to the rich artistic heritage of the region. Additionally, museum type exhibits of significant Appalachian interest could educate about historic individuals, coal, timber, agriculture, railroads, etc.
- I. Wall Time-line** - A wall-mounted display with historic time-lines of regional highlights from geological changes, or early settlers to recent history.

# INTERIOR LAYOUT & FEATURES

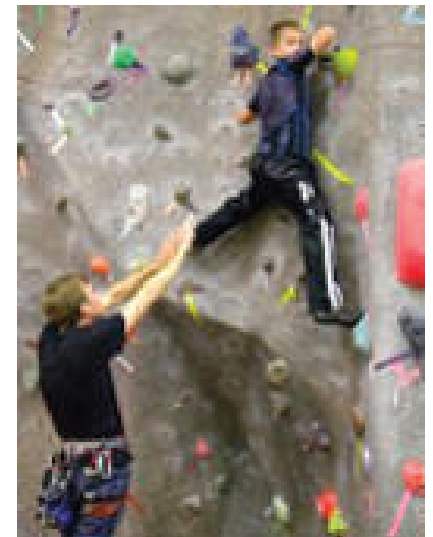
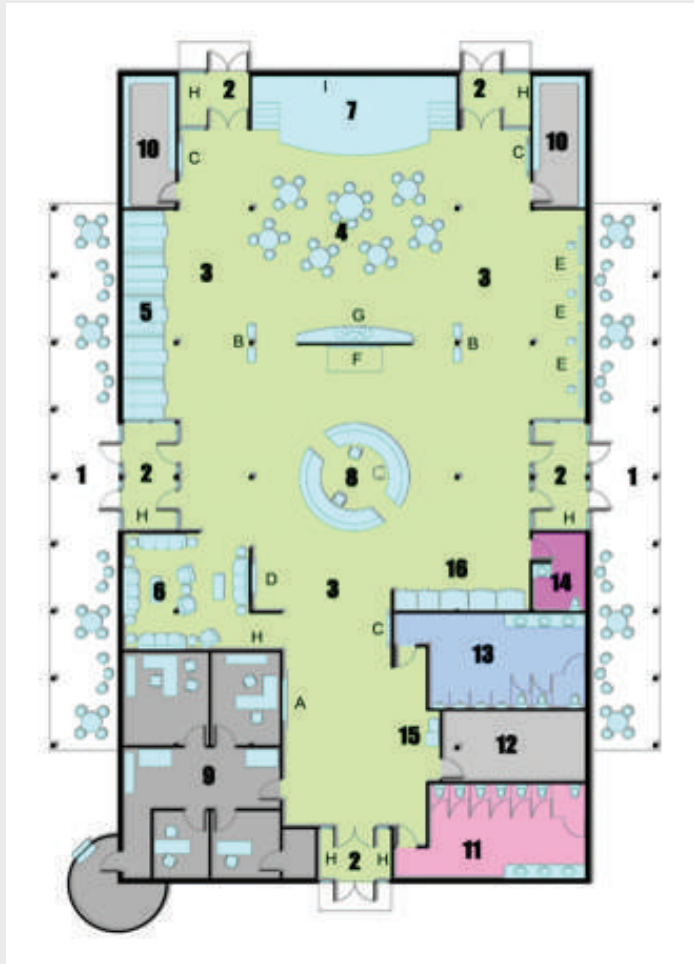
## KEY ELEMENTS:

### SPACES:

1. Covered Porch
2. Entry Vestibule
3. Public Area
4. Table Sitting
5. Booth Sitting
6. Lounge Sitting
7. Performance Stage
8. Information Desk
9. Offices / Work
10. Storage Rooms
11. Women's Restroom
12. Janitor / Mech
13. Men's Restroom
14. Family Restroom
15. Drinking Fountains
16. Vending Machines

### EXHIBITS / DISPLAYS:

- A. Guest Book
- B. Info Kiosks
- C. Way Finding Maps
- D. Local / Rt. 152 Maps
- E. Outdoor Simulations
- F. Climbing Wall
- G. Selfie Feature
- H. Artwork / Artifacts
- I. Timeline



INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGY & ENGAGEMENT WILL BE ESSENTIAL

# HOW WE GET THERE



## STRATEGY

1. Solidify collaboration & **partnerships** to implement the destination vision.
2. Create I-64 **awareness** enticing travelers to stop & discover the Appalachian Heartland.
3. Generate local & regional **demand** focused on a 3-hour radius.
4. Increase tourism **investment** & visitor services along the tourism corridor.



# 1. SOLIDIFY COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPLEMENT THE DESTINATION VISION



- A. Create the Appalachian Heartland Destination Development & Marketing Committee under the HACVB
- B. Engage the West Virginia Tourism Office | WV Department of Highways | Regional & Federal Programs
- C. Expand Collaborative Partnership with Marshall University to Develop the Visitor Economy
- D. Explore a Collaborative Partnership with Mountwest Technical College Addressing Business Skill Development & Welcome Center Internships
- E. Establish Regional 5-County Tourism Development Collaboration

# CREATE THE APPALACHIAN HEARTLAND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT & MARKETING COMMITTEE UNDER THE HACVB WITH BOARD REPRESENTATION



As noted in the economic impact analysis, the City of Huntington and Cabell County will be a prime beneficiary of a vibrant WV152 tourism corridor that not only provides excellent outdoor-adventure options to complement the city's urban-hip destination mix, but also economically as many corridor visitors will lodge and spend in the city due to its availability and breadth of accommodations, restaurants, entertainment, shopping and services.

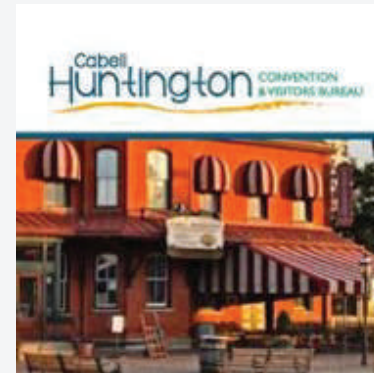
Thus, for the initial phase of corridor development, the AHH Steering Committee should become an integral part of the HACVB, with formalized board representation dedicated to the Appalachian Heartland destination development and marketing.

This committee should have active membership and participation of all the WV152 corridor attractions, business leaders and government officials. Initial focus should be on developing an annual plan addressing welcome center lobbying, fundraising and grant writing, corridor collateral materials, wayfinding, and internet marketing.

Suggested committee leaders would be Mr. Audy Perry Jr from the Heritage Farms Museum & Village and Margaret Mary Layne of Layne Consulting who have been leaders in this study and are already HACVB Board Members.

## ACTION:

1. Create a HACVB Appalachian Heartland Destination Development & Marketing Committee (AHDDMC).
2. Recruitment of committee members; creation of subcommittees.
3. Identify current HACVB funding for committee activities.
4. Create a WV152 attractions landing page on the HACVB website.
5. Development of a 6-month HACVB collaboration action plan.



# ENGAGE THE WEST VIRGINIA TOURISM OFFICE | WV DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS | REGIONAL & FEDERAL PROGRAMS



The Region 2 Planning & Development Council, the Appalachian Heartland Committee and the HACVB have already established an excellent relationship with the WVTO and Department of Highways in gaining support for the Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center.

A key selling point of this project is to become WV's pilot model transitioning the outdated welcome centers from brochure-distribution rest stops to cultural-heritage engagement zones focused on getting the state's abundant highway-transit visitors to explore Appalachian Heartland attractions.

Additionally, via the HACVB, the Appalachian Heartland Committee should become actively engaged in the WVTO industry-assistance programs, including: Collaborative Marketing & Public Relations, Social Media / Blogging, Economic Development, Photography & Film Assistance, Research / Reports, Industry Trainings, Regional Meetings and Industry Connectivity.

Similar partnership liaisons with WV government agencies should also include the Department of Highways (responsible for welcome center development / highway signage), and the West Virginia Development Office (infrastructure grants for parks and recreation; sustainability grants for revitalization of low-income communities).

Regional funding opportunities include the Appalachian Regional Commission POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) for projects are regional, strategic, and transformational in their approach to the economic revitalization of coal-impacted communities. [LINK](#). Where applicable, Brownfield Grants should be explored. Federal opportunities also include USDA Rural Business Development Grants. [LINK](#).

## ACTION:

1. Subcommittee focused on WVTO collaborative marketing programs, trade shows and grant opportunities.
2. Subcommittee for the Department of Highways to promote acceptance of the Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center project.
3. Monitoring and submitting to other potential governmental grant programs.



# PARTNER WITH MARSHALL UNIVERSITY TO PROMOTE TO THE HEARTLAND VISITOR MARKET & ADDRESS CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT



Marshall University's students, staff, alumni, and sports fans not only provide a fantastic source market for Appalachian Heartland attractions, but the university's expertise and student-internship manpower in business, marketing, entrepreneurship, management, biology, botany, photography and journalism can provide excellent foundational support for the Appalachian Heartland Committee and be an important "on the ground" conduit connecting the City of Huntington tourism focal points with WV152 corridor attractions. [LINK](#)



## ACTION:

1. Marshall University business, economic development or community services professor invited to join the HACVB Appalachian Heartland Committee.
2. Immediate Focus: marketing the WV152 Appalachian Heartland to the MU extended family (students, employees, alumni, families).
3. Long-term focus: Heartland hotel & restaurant marketing, rural economic development, business planning.

# EXPLORE A COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH MOUNTWEST COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE ADDRESSING BUSINESS SKILL DEVELOPMENT & WELCOME CENTER INTERNSHIPS



Actually located just off of WV152 just up the hill from the proposed [Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center](#) site, the Mountwest Community & Technical College can be a great partner for business skill development for WV152 entrepreneurs, specifically in the program fields of hospitality & culinary management, entrepreneurship, business management, accounting, event management, occupational development and history.

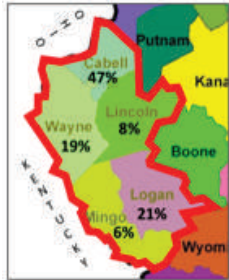
The opportune location of the campus to the welcome center should provide ample opportunity for collaboration with particular focus on student internships and operational training. [LINK](#)



## ACTION:

1. Initial discussions with MCTC leadership for appropriate representation on the HACVB Appalachian Heartland Committee.
2. Brainstorming session for Fall Semester 2020 collaboration.
3. Review programs developed for the Hatfield McCoy Trail System by the Southern WV Community & Technical College Entrepreneurship & Business Coaching Center.

# ESTABLISH REGIONAL 5-COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATION USING HATFIELD MCCOY AS FOCAL POINT



Neighboring counties of Lincoln, Logan, and Mingo are now gaining tourism momentum, especially with the success of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System. The 2020 opening of HMTS in Cabwaylingo State Forest will now truly connect the counties via a collectively managed and marketed trail system.

Initial focus should begin with regional marketing through this Hatfield McCoy nexus, ensuring the HACVB Appalachian Heartland WV152 website is included with the Cabwaylingo HMTS promotions.

[LINK](#)

In conjunction with Marshall University and Mountwest Community & Technical School, HMTS should be supported to extend their tourism investment programs and training to southern WV152 to develop the lodging and restaurant facilities necessary to professionally accommodate the anticipated new market of OHV visitors.

## ACTION:

1. HMTS representative on the the HACVB Appalachian Heartland Committee.
2. Focal marketing meetings with HMTS.
3. Biannual 5-county regional marketing meetings focused on collaborative marketing.
4. Solicit University of West Virginia Extension Service to develop a regional tourism development and marketing study.



## 2. CREATE I-64 AWARENESS ENTICING TRAVELERS TO STOP & DISCOVER THE APPALACHIAN HEARTLAND



- A.** Implement Extensive I-64 Official Signage & Roadside Art Creative Engagement
- B.** Design Attractive Exit 8 Interchange Landscaping & Potential Mountainside Signage
- C.** Add Compelling Appalachian Heartland Wayfinding Along WV152

# IMPLEMENT EXTENSIVE I-64 OFFICIAL SIGNAGE & ROADSIDE ART CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT



Similar to Tamarack, the Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center should have extensive official highway signage in both directions, but should be especially predominant every mile on I-64 eastbound from the Kentucky border.

This initial I-64 eight-mile “Appalachian Gateway Gallery” should be one long WV tourism promotion to Exit 8 taking ownership of the state’s 100% Appalachia almost heaven geography and wonderfully-wild mountain culture applying roadside art as creative engagement, particularly emphasizing the barn theming of the welcome center.



## ACTION:

1. Understand the WV Department of Highways signage requirements and potential areas of creative engagement on state-owned frontage.
2. Identify potential sites of privately-owned frontage for creative engagement.
3. Enlist the artist community for creative roadside marketing conceptualization.
4. Present a portfolio to DoH for discussion and appropriate approvals.
5. Develop a similar campaign for the Westbound I-64 / pre-Huntington Highway.
6. Explore similar opportunities on US-35 Ohio to I-64 via Putnam, and US-52 South from Ohio to I-64.



# ADD COMPELLING APPALACHIAN HEARTLAND WAYFINDING & BEAUTIFICATION ALONG WV152



Once off the highway, compelling and comfort-providing wayfinding signage will be a foundational element of the WV152 Appalachian Heartland brand, complementing West Huntington and Wayne County existing signage.

Importantly, wayfinding should be a top initial priority in conjunction with “WV152 Corridor Guide Marketing”, i.e. maps, brochure, guidebook, passport, coupon book to promote the corridor brand.

## ACTION:

1. The branding exercise will deliver a wayfinding signage template.
2. Determine WV152 optimal locations for turn, mileage and messaging signage.

# DESIGN ATTRACTIVE EXIT 8 INTERCHANGE LANDSCAPING & POTENTIAL MOUNTAINSIDE SIGNAGE

As the Welcome Center will be off the highway with limited visibility, the surrounding exit geography has great potential for Gateway artistic ambiance and signage for Appalachian Heartland theming.



## ACTION:

1. Research statewide models of creative interstate interchange landscaping.
2. Discuss with landowners the potential of using frontage land for creative advertising.
3. Extend landscaping themes from the interchange throughout WV152.

### 3. GENERATE LOCAL & REGIONAL DEMAND FOCUSED ON A 3-HOUR RADIUS.



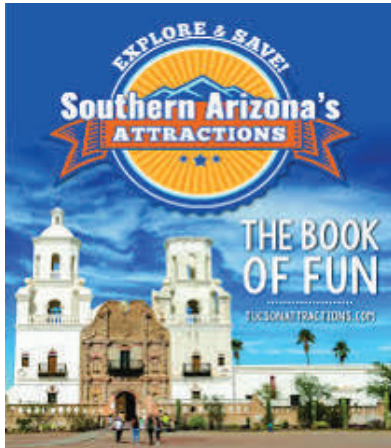
- A. Establish Marketing & Operational Funding
- B. Develop an Authentic & Compelling Brand
- C. Create & Distribute Collateral Marketing Materials
- D. Expand HACVB Website to Include an Appalachian Heartland Landing Page
- E. Professionally Populate Social Media / Story Telling With Compelling Content

# ESTABLISH MARKETING & OPERATIONAL FUNDING FOR THE HACVB COMMITTEE



One of the top priorities for the new HACVB Appalachian Heartland Committee will be identifying seed funding to begin immediate marketing programs.

An initial goal of \$20,000 could possibly be immediately raised between the Cabell-Wayne counties and the HACVB. Additional sources may include economic development grants (such as ARC POWER), tourism attraction taxing at lodging and attractions, or membership fee contributions from WV152 top attractions.



## ACTION:

1. Explore immediate funding from HACVB, Cabell & Wayne Counties.
2. Identify potential lodging tax revenues for marketing.
3. Research outside grant funding and WVTO collaborative partnerships.
4. Consider a WV152 Heartland Attraction Pass sold at the HACVB.

# DEVELOP AN AUTHENTIC & COMPELLING BRAND



Branding develops the motivational message and mental images of what to expect from a destination compelling visitation and transmitting a level of comfort and professionalism ultimately focused on loyalty and repeat travel. There are many areas that are used to develop a destination brand including advertising, events, customer service, promotional merchandise, reputation, and logo.



## ACTION:

1. Create a branding subcommittee on the HACVB Appalachian Heartland Committee. Generate input from all HACVB members.
2. Meet with WVTO to review destination branding input and potential for sponsored marketing consultation.
3. Identify funding for destination branding consultant.

# CASE STUDY: WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY EXTENSION FOR BRANDING & MARKETING



The WVU Extension Rural Tourism Specialist provides participatory research, planning, and training programs with support of a transdisciplinary team of WVU faculty and students. Partnerships with Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Resources, Landscape Architecture, Natural Resources Analysis Center, Graphic Design, Public Administration, Business and Economics and other Colleges and Departments at WVU provide a depth of knowledge and expertise strategically targeted to support the development of a sustainable tourism economy in West Virginia.

## **PROGRAMS:**

**VOICES OF CHANGE:** Case studies of tourism development in West Virginia discussing the successes and challenges of tourism development in each 3 communities.

**SHARING TUCKER:** The WVU Rural Tourism Design Team co-created branding, planning, and storytelling to share, protect and connect Tucker County culture for visitors and residents. [recommended]

**TOURISM FIRST IMPRESSIONS:** The Tourism First Impressions program is designed to help a destination learn about existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of the first-time visitor.

**DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS STUDIES:** Assesses the state of West Virginia's competitiveness as a tourism destination in relation to other competing and neighboring destinations.

**MON FOREST TOWNS:** This program connects towns within and near the Monongahela National Forest to improve quality of life for residents and visitors.

# CASE STUDY: WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY EXTENSION FOR BRANDING & MARKETING



## ACTION:

Similar to their “Sharing Tucker County” project, WVU Extension could be engaged in formulating WV152 branding and marketing program with the focus on:

- Identifying and designing a cultural identity for each community in the county
- Developing integrative adventure & cultural tourism itineraries
- Seamless collateral, electronic and social media marketing
- Wayfinding exhibit design

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<https://extension.wvu.edu/community-business-safety/tourism-hospitality>

# CREATE & DISTRIBUTE COLLATERAL MARKETING MATERIALS



Presently, there are no materials collectively promoting the WV152 tourism corridor attractions. With a primary initial focus on capturing the I-64 transit vacationer and also visitors already staying in the City of Huntington for VFR, business or leisure, the following collateral materials are recommended: tourist map, brochure, passport, visitor guide, coupon book and posters.

An important key is map / brochure distribution to Huntington hotels, restaurants, and gas stations and also including the focal locations at Marshall University. At the present I-64 mile 10 eastbound welcome center, an Appalachian Heartland Corner needs to be established with a compelling poster (eventually video), the corridor guide and map, and all individual attraction brochures. The welcome center rangers also need to be educated in corridor promotion.



## ACTION:

1. For the short term, engage Marshall University graphic design student or an inexpensive online freelancer to create a prototype map and several brochures themed toward prospective market: outdoor adventure, family recreation, retiree heritage.
2. Include in the marketing and branding consultation the production of collateral materials.
3. Maximize the WV152 brochure & marketing presentation at the current I-64 eastbound welcome center.
4. Connect with Ashland KY for WV152 landing page on website.



# EXPAND HACVB WEBSITE TO INCLUDE AN APPALACHIAN HEARTLAND LANDING PAGE



While WV152 attractions can be found on the HACVB website, they are individually but not collectively presented. A specific link to the “Appalachian Heartland Tri-State Playground” should be added leading to a landing page with an interactive map solely focused promoting the tourism corridor with links to each of the WV152 attractions.



## ACTION:

1. Work with the HACVB webmaster to create the landing page and link.
2. Include in the marketing and branding consultation the production of collateral materials.

# PROFESSIONALLY POPULATE SOCIAL MEDIA / STORY TELLING WITH COMPELLING CONTENT



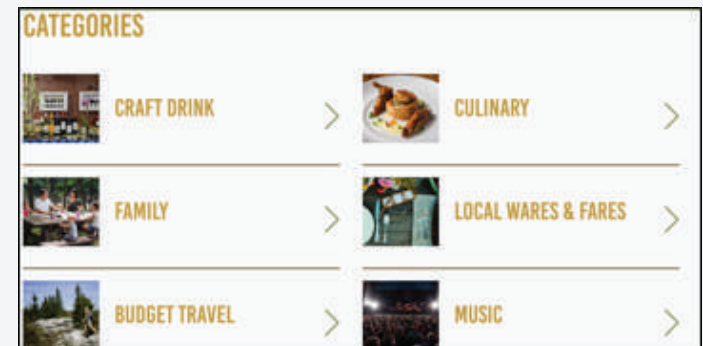
Social-media content and visual development reflecting the many travel experiences along the tourism corridor is paramount, particularly focused on specific market segments (family, outdoor enthusiast, heritage enthusiast, senior, casual recreationist).

The WVTO Explorers Blog is a great place to start with a multi-destination tour blog creating specific itineraries for each market segment. Webcams at Beech Fork and East Lynn lakes and Heritage Farm will also be important to promote the primary destinations.

An excellent project for Marshall University student interns would be to create, maintain, promote and engage with key User Generated Content (USG) social-media travel sites. These sites are essential to creating awareness during the travel research stage as some 68% of millennials found ideas for their most recent trip on Facebook, and the same is true for 60% of millennials on Instagram. Budget should be allocated for promotional advertising. Also very important is for each AHH attraction to also commit to these social-media entities.

## ACTION:

1. Enlist WVTO (or MU / MWCTC) training to engage each attraction to establish and maintain their own Facebook and Instagram page with specific focus on creating content in the form of photos, video and blogs.
2. Hire a dedicated outdoor adventurer blogger to thoroughly cover all the compelling WV152 recreational attractions.
3. Work with the Wayne County historian to develop a summary blog of the Top 10 historical sites and summary stories for WV152.



## 4. INCREASE TOURISM INVESTMENT & VISITOR SERVICES ALONG THE TOURISM CORRIDOR.



- A.** Encourage Local Heartlanders to Develop Entrepreneurial Tourism
- B.** Avidly Support Hatfield McCoy Trail System Area Development & Tourism Support Infrastructure
- C.** Support Heritage Farm Mill Creek Adventure Park & Village Expansion
- D.** Continue Lobbying Efforts for the Beech Fork Lodge & Conference Center
- E.** Spotlight the Rustic Ravines Resort RV Park & Future Expansion
- F.** Connect WV152 Tourism with the West Huntington Central City (14th St West) Redevelopment

# ENCOURAGE LOCAL HEARTLANDERS TO DEVELOP ENTREPRENEURIAL TOURISM BUSINESSES



• Twelvepole Creek Paddling



• Hiking, Rock Climbing, Survival Skills



• Lavalette Golf Packages | Events | Golf Spa Resort



• Rural Road Cycling Tours



• Horse Trails & Guided Tours



• Agritourism | Fruit Picking | Farm Stays



• Vacation Rentals / Homestays



• ATV Rentals & Guided Tours



• Rural Brewery with Farm to Table Food, Events & Music Festivals



# CASE STUDY: TOURISM ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT AT SOUTHERN WV COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE



The SWVCTC Entrepreneurship and Business Coaching Center has worked closely with the Hatfield McCoy Trail Systems inclusive of WV152's regional counties of Boone, Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, McDowell, Mercer, Mingo, Wayne, and Wyoming in southern West Virginia.

The Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority and Natural Capital Investment Fund were awarded an ARC Power grant for their Growing Small Businesses in Hatfield McCoy Trail Communities Initiative.

The Initiative is a comprehensive program to assist entrepreneurs in southern West Virginia trail communities by providing business advisory services and access to capital to help entrepreneurs grow their enterprises to meet the demand for increased visitor services, ensuring that communities and businesses maximize the economic potential of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System.



## ACTIONS:

The Huntington Area Development Council should begin immediate conversations with Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority and SWVCTC Entrepreneurship Center to develop an engagement program in the communities surrounding the new Hatfield McCoy Cabwaylingo Trail System in southern Wayne County.

Of primary concern at Cabwaylingo is the lack of nearby accommodations, camping facilities, tour services, restaurants and convenience amenities which should provide a full spectrum of entrepreneurial opportunity. Specific focus should be given to the lessons learned and success stories for business identification and startup for serving the trail-riding visitor base developed at the existing trail-system communities.

Collaboration should be explored with Mountwest Community & Technical College to provide similar programs to businesses on the north end of the WV152 tourism corridor.



FOR MORE INFORMATION: <https://southernwvbusiness.com/#about>

# POTENTIAL WV152 TOURISM CORRIDOR INVESTMENTS



## Potential USACE Beech Fork Lake Marina Campground

As the Beech Fork State Park Campground on the eastern side of the lake is extremely successful and often at capacity on busy summer weekends, an excellent new campground location adjacent to the Beech Fork Marina which has close and easy access to WV152. Since the necessary infrastructure is near the site and the buildout for a campground is limited, this attraction could be developed on a short time frame.

**ACTION:** Engage USACE for tourism development opportunities along the lake.



## Additional Cabins, Lodge and Attractions at Beech Fork Lake State Park

The 6 cabins at Beech Fork State Park are extremely popular and can be reserved throughout the year. There is ample space along the southern shoreline that would attract boat owners that can moor in front of their cabin. The state park's many amenities, trails and events make it the Appalachian Heartland's most popular destination and an opportune location for additional attractions (possibly funded and operated by private businesses).

**ACTION:** BFSP presentation of future plans to the HACVB Appalachian Heartland Committee, brainstorming session on identifying the most applicable new developments, engagement of tourism professionals for economic feasibility and operational structures.



## Continue Lobbying Efforts for the Beech Fork Lodge & Conference Center

The proposed 75-room lodge at Beech Fork Lake would provide desperately-needed accommodations with an excellent location in the central part of WV152. With the ever-increasing development of new attractions and focused destination marketing, this site becomes much more feasible. Of recommended importance for financial feasibility, WV should dedicate access, infrastructure and foundational support for the project to attract a commercial developer and hotel operator.

**ACTION:** Continue working with Wayne County legislative representatives to lobby for dedicated state funding for access, infrastructure and preliminary site development.



## WV152 Recreational Cycling Routes Connected with Huntington PATH Trail System, Possibly Using a Portion for Rails to Trails

The City of Huntington has a robust bicycling community with a recreational PATH system throughout the city. The WV152 road shoulder could be expanded to include a cycling lane that would connect with many branches of rural roads for scenic cycling, particularly loops to the east then north to connect with Marshall University. A rails to trails possibility exists for the Norfolk Southern Railway (Norfolk & Western, N&W) Twelvetpole Line running alongside many sections of WV152 from Genoa to Kenova at the Ohio River (other sections have been converted to roadway).

**ACTION:** Engage Huntington cycling groups to do a full inspection and recommendation for rail-to-trail potential.

# AVIDLY SUPPORT NEW TOURISM ATTRACTIONS TO BECOME PROFITABLE



## Avidly Support Heritage Farm Mill Creek Adventure Park & Village Expansion

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Heritage Farms Museum & Village is a top Huntington attraction at the northern section of the WV152 tourism corridor with aggressive expansion plans for a new Mill Creek Adventure Park and new attractions at the existing Heritage Farm (canopy ropes course, nature center & trails). Additionally, a wildlife park is also under consideration eventually creating the critical mass for a day-long visit.

The HF premier location will be greatly improved with a new WV152 bypass road connecting the attraction with the Appalachian Heartland corridor in close proximity to the welcome center and I-64 Exit 8. The new adventure park and village expansion will double HF attendance creating excellent exposure for Appalachian Heartland multi-day visitation and investment in support facilities.

### ACTION:

- Avid support for new connecting roadway from WV152 to Heritage Farm site on Rt 9 and other infrastructure needed from county and state funding.
- Explore new commercial opportunities created by the WV152-Rt9 Bypass Road, possibly a tourism village along the WV152 frontage and cabin / lodge accommodations in the interior of the hillside forest.



## Avidly Support Hatfield McCoy Trail System Area Development & Tourism Support Infrastructure at the southern anchor of WV152

---

Hatfield McCoy Trail System opening at Cabwaylingo State Forest will provide an immediate need for camping, lodging, ATV rentals, food and visitor services in this remote southern section of WV152. Wayne County economic development should develop a close partnership with HMTS to adopt the promotional, training and funding programs already established at other HMTS destinations.

Additionally, concerted lobbying should be integrated with HMTS to support trail expansion proposed at East Lynn Lake, with ultimate connectivity to Cabwaylingo and trails to the east.

### ACTION:

- The Huntington Area Development Council to take the lead in identifying and promoting the essential business support needed.
- Homestay interest should be solicited from homeowners near Cabwaylingo; sites reviewed for appropriateness; upgrades necessary for tourists (particularly for hygiene); business training; hospitality training; internet marketing training.

# AVIDLY SUPPORT NEW TOURISM ATTRACTIONS TO BECOME PROFITABLE



## Connect WV152 Tourism with the West Huntington Central City (14th St West) Redevelopment

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The Huntington Central City Antique District (14th Street West) is now nearing completion of a market study for a complete redevelopment into a cultural-shopping-dining-entertainment-entrepreneurial center that will provide a fantastic Ohio River anchor that will complement Appalachian Heartland's outdoor recreation and heritage attractions. Success for the new 14th St W will be greatly improved by connecting with the tourism corridor destination branding to create awareness leading to visitation. The district could also become a successful stop for coach bus tours transiting through I-64.

While somewhat removed from WV152, the shopping-dining-entertainment destination will be essential to providing an area of interest for visitors to the region.

### ACTION:

- Avid promotion of the destination in all WV152 marketing materials. Cross marketing at WV152 attractions.



## Avidly Support Rustic Ravines Resort Expansion

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The continuing success and expansion of the 300-acre Rustic Ravines Resort is key to attracting similar recreational-retreat-event investments to the Appalachian Heartland. The resort recently opened a half-mile zip line attraction and has received funding approval to add a RV park along WV152 providing which will provide excellent support to the new Hatfield McCoy Cabwaylingo trail visitors.

### ACTION:

- Avidly support RR's continuing expansion with particular emphasis on becoming the leader for WV152 southern anchor tourism marketing.

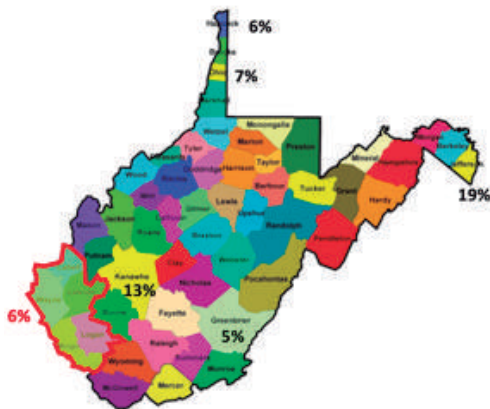




**APPENDIX 1:**  
**ECONOMIC**  
**ANALYSIS**

# WEST VIRGINIA TOURISM TOP TOURISM EXPENDITURE COUNTIES

## WV TOP 5 TOURISM SPENDING COUNTIES



## WV STATEWIDE COMPARISON

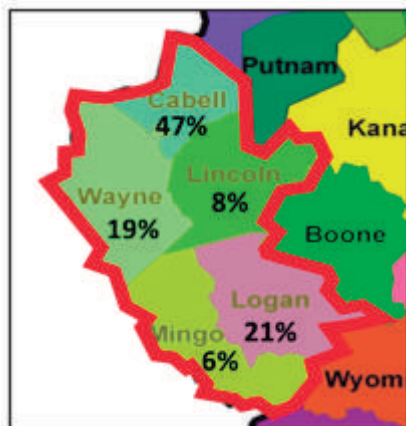
The state's top 5 counties earn nearly 50% of the WV tourism expenditures. The Cabell-Wayne-Logan-Mingo-Lincoln collective region of 5 counties combined would rank #5 comparatively in tourism expenditure, earning 6% of the state's tourism spending.

### WV Top 5 Tourism Impact Counties (2016-2018)

County	2016	2017	2018	CAGR	% of State
Jefferson	\$805	\$796	\$843	1.5%	19%
Kanawha	\$566	\$571	\$580	0.9%	13%
Ohio	\$287	\$318	\$334	5.2%	7%
Hancock	\$304	\$304	\$285	-2.1%	6%
<b>Wayne 5 County Region</b>	<b>\$241</b>	<b>\$243</b>	<b>\$253</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>6%</b>
Greenbrier	\$199	\$211	\$228	4.5%	5%
Source: West Virginia Tourism Office, Dean Runyan Associates					<b>55%</b>

## 5-COUNTY REGIONAL TOURISM EXPENDITURE

### CABELL-WAYNE EARN 66% OF REGIONAL EXPENDITURE



### REGIONAL DIRECT EXPENDITURE AT \$252m

In 2018, the 5-county, western tourism region earned \$252 million in direct tourism spending, equating to over 5% of the state's total tourism spending. Some 2,470 jobs are held with over 3% contributed to state tourism revenues.

Regional Impact	(\$m)	%
Cabell	\$118	47%
Logan	\$52	21%
Wayne	\$47	19%
Mingo	\$21	8%
Lincoln	\$14	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$252</b>	<b>100%</b>
5.5% of state total		

# 5-COUNTY REGIONAL TOURISM EXPENDITURE

**REGIONAL 5-COUNTY TOURISM** is dominated by Cabell County / Huntington with the prime tri-state I-64 location along with Marshall University and urban attractions.

## 5 County Regional Tourism Impact (2016-2018)

Category	2016	2017	2018	CAGR
Direct Spending (\$Millions)	\$241	\$243	\$253	1.6%
% of State	5.8%	5.7%	5.6%	
Employment (Jobs)	2,500	2,440	2,470	-0.4%
% of State	5.6%	5.4%	5.4%	
State Gov.t Revenue (\$000)	\$16,350	\$16,234	\$16,714	0.7%
% of State	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%	
Source: West Virginia Tourism Office, Dean Runyan Associates				

**CABELL COUNTY** contributes nearly 50% of the regional tourism receipts, although growth has flatlined over the last 3 years.

## Cabell County Tourism Impact (2016-2018)

Category	2016	2017	2018	CAGR
Direct Spending (\$Millions)	120	115	118	-0.6%
% of State	2.9%	2.7%	2.6%	
Employment (Jobs)	1,450	1,420	1,420	-0.7%
% of State	3.2%	3.2%	3.1%	
State Gov.t Revenue (\$000)	8,400	8,100	8,200	-0.8%
% of State	1.60	1.57%	1.53%	
Source: West Virginia Tourism Office, Dean Runyan Associates				

**WAYNE COUNTY TOURISM IMPACT** contributes 16% of the regional tourism receipts, posting the second highest growth for the region.

## Wayne County (Generated\*) Tourism Impact (2016-2018)

Category	2016	2017	2018	CAGR
Direct Spending (\$Millions)	42	45	47	3.5%
% of State	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%	
Employment (Jobs)	370	370	380	0.9%
% of State	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	
State Gov.t Revenue (\$000)	2,014	2,065	2,115	1.6%
% of State	0.38%	0.40%	0.40%	
Source: West Virginia Tourism Office, Dean Runyan Associates				

# 5-COUNTY REGIONAL TOURISM EXPENDITURE

**MINGO COUNTY** contributes 8% of the regional tourism receipts, although recent growth has been slow.

## Mingo County Tourism Impact (2016-2018)

Category	2016	2017	2018	CAGR
Direct Spending (\$Millions)	\$20	\$21	\$21	1.5%
% of State	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	
Employment (Jobs)	210	200	210	0.0%
% of State	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	
State Gov.t Revenue (\$000)	\$1,465	\$1,494	\$1,495	0.7%
% of State	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	

Source: West Virginia Tourism Office, Dean Runyan Associates

**LOGAN COUNTY** contributes 21% of the regional tourism receipts and also posting the top growth for the region.

## Logan County Tourism Impact (2016-2018)

Category	2016	2017	2018	CAGR
Direct Spending (\$Millions)	\$45	\$47	\$52	4.9%
% of State	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	
Employment (Jobs)	340	320	340	0.0%
% of State	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%	
State Gov.t Revenue (\$000)	\$3,451	\$3,532	\$3,834	3.6%
% of State	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	

Source: West Virginia Tourism Office, Dean Runyan Associates

**LINCOLN COUNTY** contributes 6% of the regional tourism receipts, reporting slight growth over the last 3 years.

## Lincoln County Tourism Impact (2016-2018)

Category	2016	2017	2018	CAGR
Direct Spending (\$Millions)	14	15	15	2.8%
% of State	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	
Employment (Jobs)	130	130	120	-2.6%
% of State	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	
State Gov.t Revenue (\$000)	1,020	1,043	1,070	1.6%
% of State	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	

Source: West Virginia Tourism Office, Dean Runyan Associates

# WV152 FOCUS: WAYNE COUNTY TOURISM EXPENDITURE

## WAYNE COUNTY TOURISM IMPACT BY CATEGORY

No direct data exists for Wayne County visitor spending by category. West Virginia State Park visitor spending profile was applied capturing a similar profile to WV152 outdoor leisure and recreation visitor revealing food and transportation as top expenditure categories. Note again that much of this spending will be in the Cabell / Huntington tourism hub.

### Wayne Tourist Spending by Category (2018)

Category	Amount	% of Ttl
Food Service	\$13,772,848	29%
Local Trans & Gas	\$12,274,442	26%
Accommodations	\$7,267,269	15%
Retail Sales	\$6,755,313	14%
Attractions	\$3,983,262	8%
Food Stores	\$2,946,865	6%
	\$47,000,000	100%

## WAYNE COUNTY TOURISM IMPACT

The West Virginia Travel Impact Report identifies modest growth of 3.5% over the last 3 years in the Wayne County tourism sector, reaching \$47 million in 2018 visitor spending creating 380 jobs.

*Wayne County Generated:* Note that much of this spending will be in the tourism hub of adjacent Cabell County and the City of Huntington as Wayne has limited tourism amenities such as lodging, restaurants, retail and entertainment.

### Wayne County (Generated\*) Tourism Impact (2016-2018)

Category	2016	2017	2018	CAGR
Direct Spending (\$Millions)	42	45	47	3.5%
% of State	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%	
Employment (Jobs)	370	370	380	0.9%
% of State	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	
State Gov.t Revenue (\$000)	2,014	2,065	2,115	1.6%
% of State	0.38%	0.40%	0.40%	

Source: West Virginia Tourism Office, Dean Runyan Associates

## WAYNE SPENDING / EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS - 2019

IMPLAN analysis of Wayne county's 2019 total tourism impact estimated of \$49 million equates to over 630 employed and nearly \$18 million in payroll regionally.

### Wayne Estimated Spending Impacts (2019)

Impact	Employment	Labor Income	Output
Direct	499.4	\$12,140,066	\$30,658,185
Indirect	56.1	\$2,536,929	\$8,481,752
Induced	77.3	\$3,024,896	\$9,830,951
<b>Total</b>	<b>632.9</b>	<b>\$17,701,891</b>	<b>\$48,970,888</b>
		<b>Multiplier</b>	<b>1.60</b>

## NOMINAL GROWTH FORECASTED IMPACTS - 2025

Using a nominal 3% growth rate from recent past local and state tourism performance yields a 2025 tourism economy of \$59.6 million generating 770 jobs with a \$21.5 million payroll.

### Wayne Estimated Spending Impacts (2025)

Impact	Employment	Labor Income	Output
Direct	607.6	\$14,770,246	\$37,300,369
Indirect	68.2	\$3,086,562	\$10,319,348
Induced	94.1	\$3,680,249	\$11,960,855
<b>Total</b>	<b>770.0</b>	<b>\$21,537,058</b>	<b>\$59,580,573</b>
		<b>Multiplier</b>	<b>1.60</b>

# WV152 FOCUS: NEW PROJECT IMPACT

## WV152 NEW PROJECT VISITOR EXPENDITURE IMPACT

Projects proposed for the upcoming 5 years hold excellent potential to improve the offering of the WV152 tourism corridor, particularly in the outdoor and adventure segments, potentially adding \$10 million of spending impact by 2025.

In the north, the Heritage Farm Mill Creek Adventure Park will be just miles for Exit 8, with a proposed \$5m road connecting Heritage Farms directly to WV152. The road and new tourism development will encourage nearby WV152 and hillside frontage for a “Gateway to Appalachia Village” very close to the Welcome Center and busy I-64.

Near the middle of the WV152 corridor, the proposed 75-room Beech Fork Lake Lodge & Conference center would bring much needed room capacity to WV152 to encourage multi-day vacations to visit all attractions.

At the southern end of WV152, the Hatfield McCoy Cabwaylingo State Forest Trail system opening in April 2020 will jumpstart tourism all along the corridor with the potential to open a trail system near East Lynn Lake by 2023.

### New Project Visitor Spending Impacts (2021-2025)

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Hatfield McCoy	\$2,880,000	\$3,360,000	\$3,360,000	\$3,360,000	\$3,360,000
PROPOSED					
HF Adventure	\$400,000	\$448,000	\$520,000	\$544,000	\$575,000
Hat-Mc E Lynn			\$1,920,000	\$3,360,000	\$3,360,000
BF Lake Lodge				\$2,400,000	\$3,040,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,280,00</b>	<b>\$3,808,00</b>	<b>\$5,800,00</b>	<b>\$9,664,00</b>	<b>\$10,355,00</b>

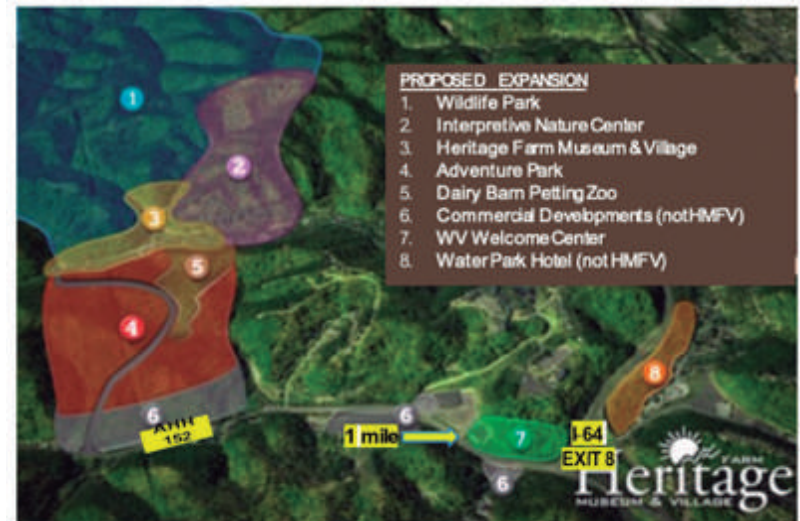
\*Visitation provided by Operator / Multiplier 1.60

## HERITAGE FARM EXPANSION PLANS

The Heritage Farm Mill Creek Adventure Park is in the final planning stages with construction anticipated to begin summer 2021. The \$5 million construction investment is projected to yield over \$7.5 million of economic impact. The indoor “soft top” design will make this a year-round facility, very necessary to address the region’s seasonality. Winter adventure will include snow tubing, ice skating, and a snow playfield. Summer adventure will include a water park, mountain coasters and rock climbing.

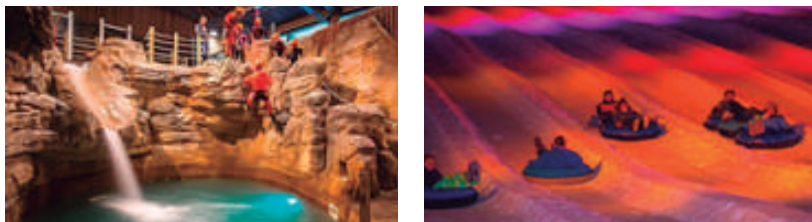
### HF Adventure Park Construction (One-time Impacts)

Impact	Employment	Labor Income	Output
Direct	31.7	\$1,740,701	\$5,000,000
Indirect	6.2	\$325,307	\$1,148,012
Induced	10.9	\$426,195	\$1,385,553
<b>Total</b>	<b>48.8</b>	<b>\$2,492,203</b>	<b>\$7,533,566</b>
		Multiplier	1.51



# WV152 FOCUS: NEW PROJECT IMPACT

## HERITAGE FARM ADVENTURE PARK SPENDING



Heritage Farm Mill Creek Adventure Park Visitor Spending (2021 - 2025)

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
HF Adventure	\$400,000	\$448,000	\$520,000	\$544,000	\$575,000

The spending projections for the HF Mill Creek Adventure Park are anticipated to grow to \$575,000 by 2025.

## NEW HERITAGE FARM EXPERIENCES



Themed as the “Appalachian Backyard Adventure,” Heritage Farm is nearing completion of a netted playground near their petting zoo for more engagement with their youth market. Addressing the teen and older market, the Skypark Canopy Adventure will be a “self-belay” ropes course amidst the lush forest canopy challenging all skill levels, with construction beginning summer 2020. Also nearing completion this year will be an interpretive nature center. Last, a very extensive wild animal park is also under feasibility consideration.

## BEECH FORK LAKE LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER



Beech Fork Lodge Construction (One-time Impacts)

Impact	Employment	Labor Income	Output
Direct	180.6	\$9,690,516	\$25,190,397
Indirect	28.6	\$1,467,674	\$4,856,809
Induced	58.9	\$2,301,327	\$7,481,066
Total	268.1	\$13,459,517	\$37,528,271
		Multiplier	1.49

The Beech Fork Lake Lodge has been under consideration for the last 15 years, with a recent feasibility study now being reviewed by state agencies. The projected \$25 million construction cost will have a \$37.5m economic impact creating nearly 270 jobs.

## BEECH FORK LAKE LODGE VISITOR SPENDING

Beech Fork Lodge & Conference Center Visitor Spending (2021-2025)

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
BF Lake Lodge				\$2,400,000	\$3,040,000

Projecting an opening in 2024, estimated visitor spending impacts for the lodge will be just over \$3 million by 2025. As the lodge is in the middle heartland of WV152, it is anticipated that multi-day vacations will spread visitor spending throughout the corridor. Not only does Beech Lake have an active boat-rental marina and swimming beach, but nearby Fork has two excellent golf courses.

# WV152 FOCUS: NEW PROJECT IMPACT

## HATFIELD MCCOY TRAIL SYSTEM CABWAYLINGO SF



The Hatfield McCoy Trail System also refurbishes or builds welcome centers at their major trailheads, which can further promote WV152 attractions.



<i>Hatfield McCoy Trail System Visitor Spending (2021 - 2025)</i>					
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Hat-Mc Cabway	\$2,880,000	\$3,360,000	\$3,360,000	\$3,360,000	\$3,360,000
Hat-Mc E Lynn			\$1,920,000	\$3,360,000	\$3,360,000

In early 2020, stimulating WV152's southern anchor, the new Hatfield McCoy Trail System will open 50-70 miles of Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) trails in the Cabwaylingo State Forest some 45 miles from Exit 8. Additionally, a new system is under study and consideration nearby at East Lynn Lake. By 2025, the combined trail systems are projected to generate over \$7m annually, and \$25m total for 5 years.

The HMTS Cabwaylingo attraction is expected to provide an important economic stimulus to the WV152 southern anchor as the region has limited accommodations and other tourism amenities. Notably: Cabwaylingo SF (14 cabins / 11 electrical camp sites / 8 rustic camp sites), Rustic Ravines ( 9 cabins), and Pioneer Motel (25 rooms).

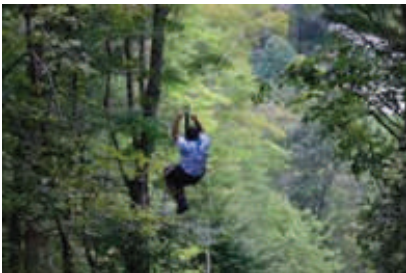


# WV152 FOCUS: NEW PROJECT IMPACT

## RUSTIC RAVINES "BIG ZIPPER" HALF-MILE ZIP LINE



Surrounded by 50,000 acres of private and public ATV trails, the Rustic Ravines resort is a prime southern WV152 destination for outdoor sports including kayaking, archery, fishing, and hunting. The 9-cabin, 300-acre complex includes a variety of large and small lodges and yurts, with excellent outdoor event facilities. Under construction is a saloon-restaurant event center. New projects under consideration include an RV/ATV campground along AHH152 and an adventure park.



The new "Big Zipper" zipline is a half-inch stainless steel cable stretching across the Rustic Ravines valley a half-mile between two mountain ridges. The cable is approximately 300 feet above the valley floor, and riders can reach speeds upwards of 60 mph.

# WV152 FOCUS: IMPACT OF THE GATEWAY TO APPALACHIA WELCOME CENTER

## WELCOME CENTER CONSTRUCTION IMPACT



The initial modeling cost breakdown for the site development and construction of the Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center is just over \$ 7 million with an extended impact of nearly \$11 million and 77 jobs to the economy.

<b>WELCOME CENTER DEVELOPMENT COSTS</b>	
CONSTRUCTION	\$4,290,000
SITE DEVELOPMENT	\$1,550,000
UTILITIES	\$120,000
SOFT COSTS	\$1,150,000
<b>TOTAL COST</b>	<b>\$7,110,000</b>
Source: The Thrasher Group	

*Welcome Center Construction (One-time Impacts)*

<b>Impact</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Labor Income</b>	<b>Output</b>
Direct	50.2	\$2,890,784	\$7,105,216
Indirect	9.3	\$471,442	\$1,410,017
Induced	17.7	\$693,476	\$2,254,360
<b>Total</b>	<b>77.2</b>	<b>\$4,055,702</b>	<b>\$10,769,593</b>
		<b>Multiplier</b>	<b>1.52</b>

# WV152 FOCUS: IMPACT OF THE GATEWAY TO APPALACHIA WELCOME CENTER

## WELCOME CENTER IMPACT TO THE TOURISM ECONOMY

Research reveals new or revitalized welcome centers can attract an additional 10 – 30% visitation based upon many factors, most importantly adjacent high levels of daily vehicular traffic, integral location, ease of access, awareness via professional highway signage, and compelling presentation and staffing.

Using a conservative 10% increased visitation impact, by 2025, the Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center is projected to contribute nearly \$7m annually to the regional and statewide tourism economy.

<i>Welcome Center Visitor Spending Economic Impact (2021 - 2025)</i>					
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Baseline Existing (+3%)	\$52,488,800	\$54,063,464	\$55,685,368	\$57,355,929	\$59,076,607
New Projects	\$3,280,000	\$3,808,000	\$8,200,000	\$10,304,000	\$10,527,000
Projected Tourism Impact	\$55,770,821	\$57,873,486	\$63,887,391	\$67,661,953	\$69,605,632
<b>Welcome Center (+10%)</b>		<b>\$5,787,349</b>	<b>\$6,388,739</b>	<b>\$6,766,195</b>	<b>\$6,960,563</b>
Total Spending Impact	\$55,770,821	\$63,660,835	\$70,276,130	\$74,428,148	\$76,566,195
					<b>Multiplier 1.60</b>

## AGGREGATE WV152 TOURISM IMPACT 2021 - 2025

When aggregating the total tourism spending impact of the baseline current tourism attractions growing at a nominal 3% per year; adding the new projects of Hatfield McCoy Cabwaylingo and East Lynn Trail Systems, the Heritage Farm Mill Creek Adventure Park, and the Beech Fork Lake Lodge; and lastly including the “pull off & get on” WV152 impact of the welcome center, an aggregate 5-year total for the total tourism impact for the region will reach just over \$340 million of direct impact, and over \$545 million for total impact.

<i>Aggregate Tourism Impact (2021-2025)</i>	
Baseline Existing Tourism	\$279,000,000
New Projects	\$36,000,000
Welcome Center	\$26,000,000
Direct Total	\$341,000,000
Multiplier (1.60)	\$204,600,000
<b>Aggregate Total</b>	<b>\$545,600,000</b>



**APPENDIX 2:**  
**WEST VIRGINIA**  
**TOURISM**  
**OFFICE**

# WEST VIRGINIA TOURISM OVERVIEW

## WEST VIRGINIA TOURISM OFFICE SUMMARY

The West Virginia Tourism Office (WVTO) is an agency under the West Virginia Department of Commerce designed to promote West Virginia as a world-class travel destination and support the tourism partners by finding ways to increase the industry's overall economic impact. As such, the Tourism Office offers industry partners a wide variety of promotion and development services.

Following is a synopsis of the most relevant tourism data from the West Virginia Office of Tourism:

## WEST VIRGINIA TOURISM VISITATION AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OVERVIEW -- 2018

VISITATION:	TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>62.3 million person trips in 2018, <b>NOTE only 25% overnight</b> – 75% day trips</li> <li>2.7 nights average length of stay</li> <li>\$449 average spending per visitor (overnight)</li> <li>87% are returning visitors</li> <li>53% of visitors with household income less than \$50,000</li> <li>45% visit for family; 42% marketable including: 10% tour; 9% outdoors; 6% casino / gaming</li> <li>City Origins: 11% Washington, DC; 6% Pittsburgh, PA; 4% Cleveland, OH; 4% NYC</li> <li>State Origins: 21% WV, 13% OH, 12% VA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$4.3b direct visitor spending</li> <li>\$519m state and local taxes</li> <li>45,000 supported jobs</li> <li>For every dollar spent on tourism advertising, the state yields \$8 Return On Investment in state and local tax revenue and \$106 in direct traveler spending.</li> <li>Without this tourism generated revenue, each household in West Virginia would have to pay an additional \$690 per year in state and local taxes.</li> </ul>

## OVERNIGHT EXPENDITURE BY CATEGORY

Direct visitor spending for 2018 reached \$4.3 billion, a 6% increase over 2017. Over one third of the expenditure was dedicated to lodging.

## WEST VIRGINIA OVERNIGHT VISITOR DIRECT SPENDING -- 2017

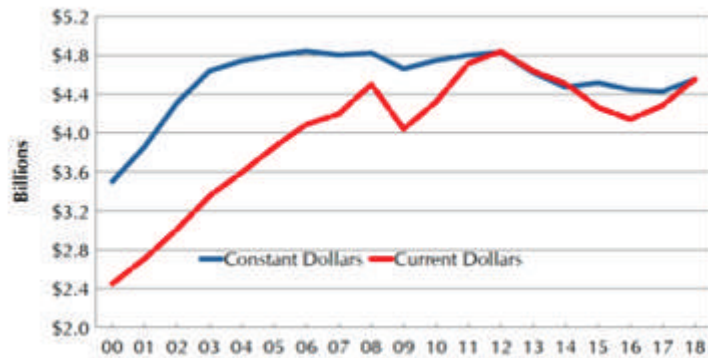
LODGING	FOOD & BEV	RETAIL	RECREATION	TRANSPORTATION
\$893m	\$578m	\$348m	\$324m	\$309m
36%	24%	14%	13%	13%

# WEST VIRGINIA TOURISM OVERVIEW

## WEST VIRGINIA TOTAL VISITOR SPENDING EXCEEDS \$4.5b

Tourism in West Virginia experienced rapid growth until 2012, declining until 2016, and then posting positive growth for the last several years. The research shows traveler spending in West Virginia grew at a compound annual growth rate of 3.2% between 2016 to 2018, totaling \$4.55 billion and employing 45,400 people in 2018.

West Virginia Visitor Spending Adjusted for Inflation, 2000-2018p



West Virginia Tourism Impact (2016-2018)

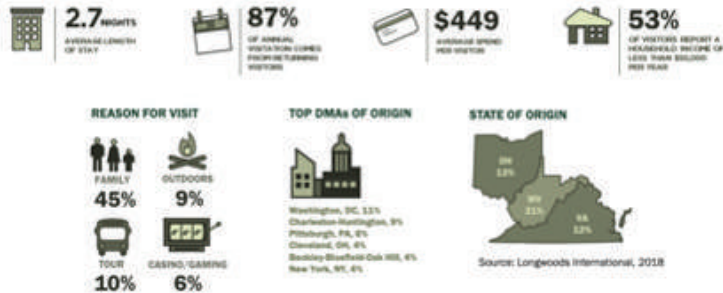
Category	2016	2017	2018	CAGR
Direct Spending (\$Million)	\$4,142	\$4,277	\$4,554	3.2%
Employment (Jobs)	44,900	44,800	45,400	0.4%
Local Govt. Revenue (\$000)	\$ 474,500	\$ 467,200	\$ 481,200	0.5%
State Govt. Revenue (\$000)	\$ 526,200	\$ 517,200	\$ 534,500	0.5%
Source: West Virginia Tourism Office, Dean Runyan Associates				
CAGR: Compound Annual Growth Rate from 2016 to 2018				

## LIMITED GROWTH

For employment and government revenues between 2016 - 2018 the state experienced limited growth of less than 1% annually. Total state tourism employment exceeds 45,000, with total state and local tax collection exceeding \$1b. Increased funding towards creative and aggressive marketing campaigns were showing positive results for 2019.

# WEST VIRGINIA TOURISM OVERVIEW

## Traveler Profile



## Revenue Reporting: Hotel Occupancy

- Hotel occupancy data was positive every month in 2018 with double the previous year's increases according to a national survey of hotels and motels.
- The average daily rate grew slightly, reversing a trend of decline.
- Higher demand and room rates combined created a projected revenue increase of 13.5%.

	2016	2017	2018
Occupancy	-10.28%	5.87%	10.77%
Average Daily Rate	-3.94%	-0.61%	2.04%
Revenue Per Available Room	-13.81%	5.23%	13.03%
Supply (rooms available)	2.64%	1.23%	0.40%
Demand (rooms sold)	-7.91%	7.18%	11.21%
Total Revenue	-11.54%	6.53%	13.49%

Source: Smith Travel Research

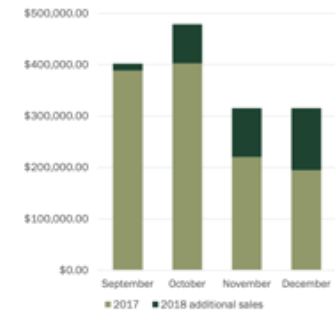
## Revenue Reporting: Economic Impact

- Traveler spending in West Virginia grew in 2017 after four years of steady decline, and that growth was on track to continue in 2018.
- West Virginia's growth rate of 3.9% was 30% higher than the national rate of 3.0%.
- Travel spending excluding gaming grew even more at 5.0%.



## Revenue Reporting: State Parks Sales

- State Park online sales showed strong growth going into the second year of its new central reservation platform, which went live in mid-August 2017.
- Online sales increased 25% September-December compared to same period in 2017.
- December online sales were up 63% year-over-year thanks to promotions and email marketing.



# WEST VIRGINIA TOURISM OVERVIEW

## VISITOR PROFILE: VFR THE TOP TRAVEL MOTIVATION

Reviewing the 2018 statewide visitor profiles, Visiting Friends & Relatives is by far the primary motivation for travel to WV (42%), with some 40% of visitation is for leisure activities, and 15% for business purposes.

WV TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS - 2018	
Visiting Friends & Relatives	42%
Touring	10%
Outdoors	9%
Special Event	7%
Casino	7%
City Trip	5%
Business Trip	6%
Business - Leisure	4%
Conference / Convention	3%
Resort	3%
Golf	1%

Source: WV Office of Tourism

An important strategy for WV152 and Huntington tourism is to actively engage the regional resident population as:

1. A majority of the attraction visitation is from residents (70-80%);
2. Many non-residents in the area visiting friends & relatives will desire to experience the region's unique offerings, particularly in outdoor recreation.

WV VISITOR ORIGINS - 2018	
West Virginia	20%
Ohio	12%
Virginia	11%
Pennsylvania	8%
Maryland	6%
North Carolina	6%

Source: WV Office of Tourism

West Virginia is fortunate to be bordered by 5 states with the largest population centers north and east.



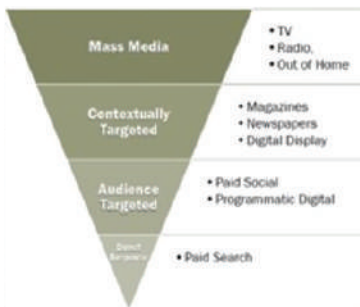
# WEST VIRGINIA TOURISM OVERVIEW

## MARKETING

The WV Tourism Office launched a new research-based state advertising campaign in April 2018. "Take Me Home, Country Roads" John Denver's classic anthem that christened the state "almost heaven" serves as the creative and emotional centerpiece of the campaign. Acquiring the rights to use the song was a major milestone in 2017. Research suggests hearing the song makes West Virginia seem more appealing to consumers as a destination.

*almost heaven*

## WVTO ALMOST HEAVEN MARKETING CAMPAIGN



## WV MARKETING TARGET CITY MARKETS

Washington, DC; Pittsburgh, PA; Harrisburg-Lancaster, PA; Columbus, OH; Cleveland, OH; Roanoke, VA; Richmond, VA; Charlotte, NC



# WORKING WITH WVTO

## TOP PRIORITY: WORKING WITH THE WVTO

The West Virginia Tourism Office offers excellent opportunities for destinations and businesses to leverage their marketing funds, to develop new skills, and to expand their industry networks.

## GOALS

Increase awareness of the West Virginia brand, products and partners

- Create a positive shift in travelers' attitudes and perceptions
- Provide measurable advertising outcomes for every dollar spent
- Leverage state resources and partner budgets to maximize industry's overall economic impact.

FOLLOWING ARE THEIR KEY PROGRAMS:

## COOPERATIVE ADVERTISING PROGRAM

The WVTO cooperative advertising program is designed to improve the fragmented messaging found within the tourism industry by offering partners the opportunity to leverage state resources and brand identity to advertise their individual destinations, attractions and events. The program offers a mix of regional and local advertising opportunities and will leverage marketing dollars from the Tourism Office and the participating travel industry partner(s). The program will be a dollar for dollar match partnership that offers a variety of investment tiers.

## TRAINING

The WVTO launched monthly industry training webinars on topics relevant to the marketing needs of partners.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

The WVTO assists existing tourism businesses to thrive in West Virginia and also works closely with the West Virginia Development Office to recruit new tourism assets to the Mountain State. The WVTO has close partnerships with the Development Office, Small Business Development Center, Economic Development Authority, Division of Highways and other government organizations that can help address destination development needs.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSISTANCE

The WVTO offers a variety of promotion services to industry partners, events and fairs & festivals across West Virginia:

- Access to a robust library of photos and b-roll footage;
- Assistance with story pitches to travel writers and journalists
- Blog posts to be featured on website and social media;
- Social media promotion
- Custom travel itineraries for trade shows and promotion;
- Local event support.

# WORKING WITH WVTO

## WELCOME CENTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOURISM BUSINESSES

The WV Office of Tourism's eight state welcome centers are located on the borders of West Virginia to assist travelers throughout the state. During business hours, Welcome Center staff provide itineraries and brochures and place reservations at West Virginia hotels, motels, state parks and bed & breakfasts. Following are Welcome Center services offered to WV tourism businesses:

- **Brochure Distribution:** Free, but dependent upon space availability and other restrictions.
- **Advertising:** Advertising space is available at the Division of Tourism Welcome Centers in the form of duratrans (back-lit-photo advertising) from \$300--\$600 annually.
- **Reservations (Discounted hotel rates):** Businesses provide the Welcome Center with their "best" hotel rate to encourage the visitor to reserve an overnight stay.
- **Exhibit Space:** Use any of the Welcome Centers to set up table and exhibit for the day. Enjoy talking to the traveling public about your facility, event or activity.



### ADVERTISING ASSISTANCE

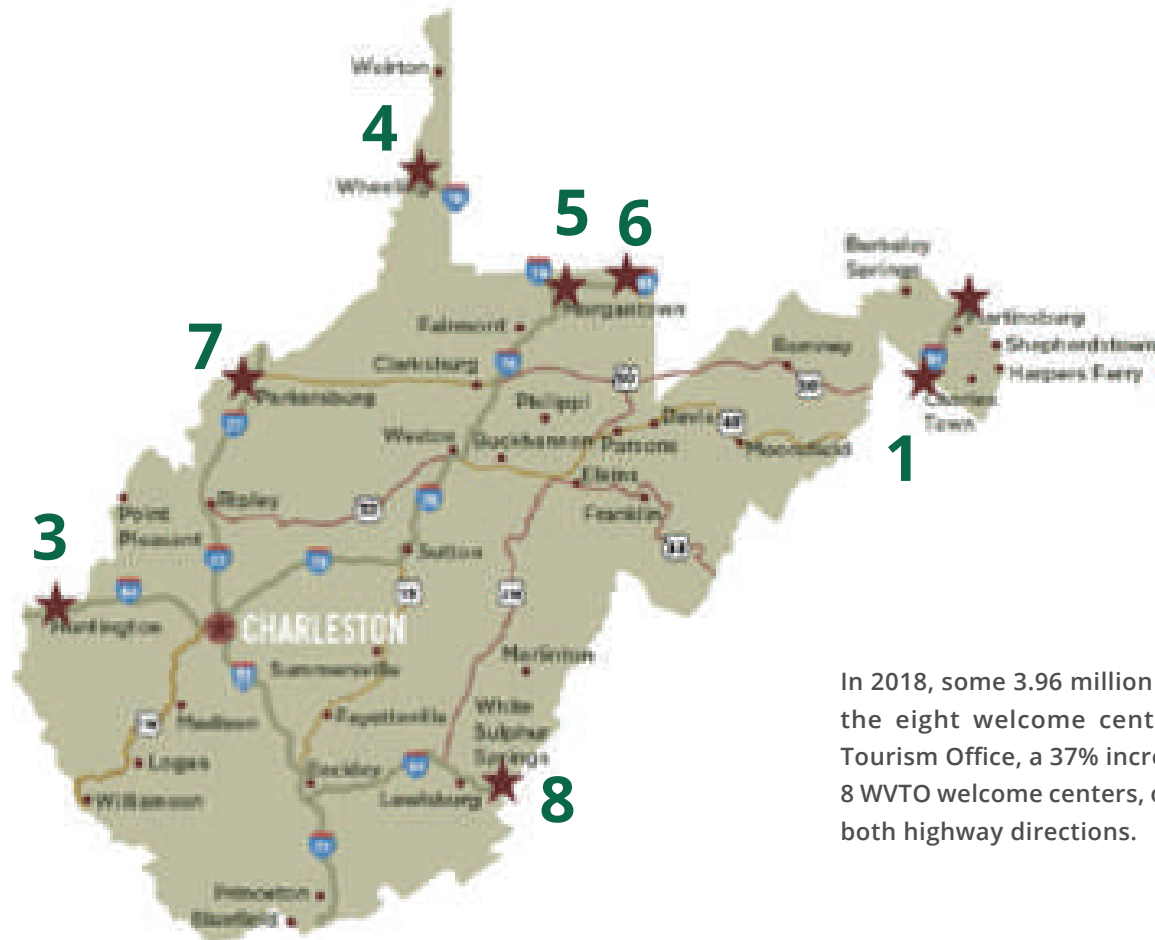
#### Matching Advertising Partnership Program

Application cycles for the Tourism Matching Advertising Partnership Program (MAPPP) have closed. The Tourism Office is now offering partners advertising assistance through a new cooperative advertising program model. [Learn more](#) about the dollar-for-dollar match and current advertising opportunities available.

<https://wvtourism.com/industry-information/>

# WVTO WELCOME CENTERS

“Welcome Center upgrades are necessary to turn bathroom breaks into return visits.” – WVTO Annual Report 2018



In 2018, some 3.96 million visitors came through the eight welcome centers managed by the Tourism Office, a 37% increase from 2017. Of the 8 WVTO welcome centers, only 2 are accessible to both highway directions.

# WVTO WELCOME CENTERS



1. I--81 Southbound | Falling Water 66,300 vpd



4. I--70 Westbound Wheeling 43,390 vpd



7. I--77 Northbound & Southbound Williamstown 23,250 vpd



2. I--81 Northbound Inwood 43,750 vpd



5. I--79 Southbound Morgantown 32,310 vpd



8. I--63 Westbound White Sulphur Springs 8,010 vpd



3. I--64 Eastbound Huntington 43,460 vpd



6. I--68 Westbound Hazelton 26,490 vpd



\* I--77 Northbound & Southbound Princeton  
\* Not listed as a WVTO Welcome Center



**APPENDIX 3:**  
**BRANDING &**  
**WAYFINDING**

# BRANDING EXAMPLE

## THE BRAND IMAGE

Destinations benefit from having a specific brand to distinguish their product from the competition. This branding theme can be implemented in the form of logos, wayfinding signage, informational kiosks, tourism brochures and maps, webpages, mobile applications and more.

Visitors to the area will begin to associate this brand with their experiences in the region. This brand will be useful for marketing the region and could be incorporated into licensed merchandise for sale by various vendors.



The creation of a logo that is identifiable to the Appalachian Heartland Highway is a logical first step to help designate this region as a tourism area of interest. While some logos simply state a name or region others will tell a story and create excitement through graphic design. Once a logo has been created the fonts, colors and graphics can be incorporated into other branding initiatives as shown in the examples on the opposite page.

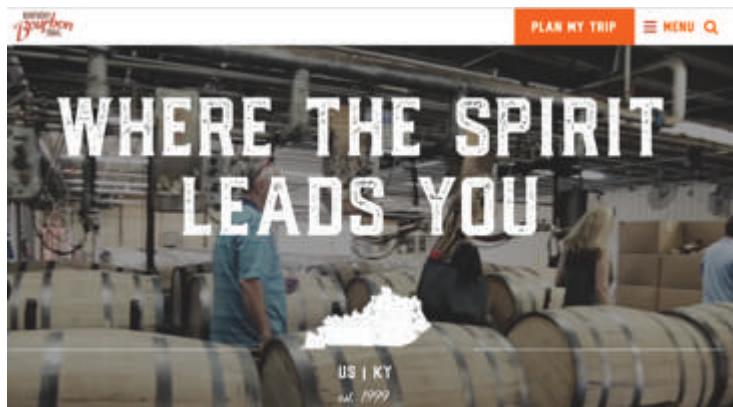
## ADVERTISING EXAMPLE



# BRANDING EXAMPLE

## WEBPAGE EXAMPLE

A branding slogan or tagline is essential to creating a mental image of the destination experience. This example of wordplay connecting the spirit of alcohol to the spirit of adventure is a fantastic example for travel.



## BROCHURE MAP EXAMPLE

For themed trails, scenic drives, and tourism corridors, a brochure map is essential for trip planning, spatial navigation and visiting multiple attractions. The backside can be used for destination narrative storytelling and attraction advertising to pay for the map production and distribution.





# WAYFINDING

Wayfinding signage is an important component of any tourism brand. Gateway signs are a significant way to identify to visitors that they have officially entered a specific and “connected” region of tourism interest.

## GATEWAY EXAMPLE

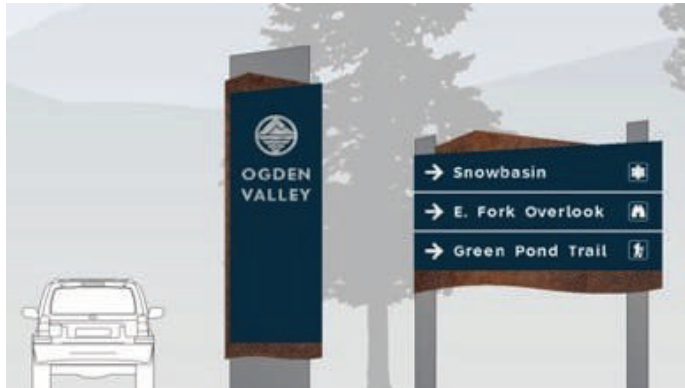


While the **Gateway to Appalachia Welcome Center** will serve as the notification on the northern end of the corridor, a series of gateway signs or totems could be implemented at other key points of entry. Wayfinding signs help to reinforce visitors who are traveling to specific destinations but they are also a great way of generating interest for destinations that visitors may not know about yet to inspire return visitation.



# WAYFINDING

## WAYFINDING EXAMPLE



This signage should incorporate the developed brand and utilize architectural themes that resemble the chosen design intent for the Welcome Center. While using local materials for this signage would be preferred, there are several manufactured materials that could be utilized to mimic natural and local materials but are cheaper in cost and are potentially longer lasting.



# WV152 WAYFINDING

## GATEWAY EXAMPLE

A series of wayfinding signage concepts has been developed to demonstrate how wayfinding could be incorporated with the conceptual building designs that were created for this report. The signage shown below is preliminary in nature and should be developed in coordination with the branding efforts and final designs for the Appalachian Heartland Highway Welcome Center. The signage concepts use materials that are complementary to the conceptual Welcome Center structure and show how a consistent brand and design intent could be carried throughout the corridor.



## TOTEM EXAMPLE:

Similar to signage used at entry points to National Forest or Parks, multiple totems could be placed at different entry points throughout the corridor. Totems are a way to mark or designate an area while taking up significantly less space than traditional gateway signs. They are usually ten to twelve feet in height or more and contain letters that are easily legible when driving between 35-50 mph.



# WV152 WAYFINDING & BEAUTIFICATION

## KIOSK EXAMPLE

Outdoor kiosks are a great way to provide information about the region or place graphic maps with points of interest highlighted. While some of this should be covered by exhibits on the interior of the Welcome Center, having an outdoor exhibit provides additional information for those that choose to spend their road break outdoors or for those that stop after business hours. These kiosks could be incorporated in other areas throughout the region to provide information to those who approach the corridor from somewhere other than I-64.



## WV152 MEDIAN AND ROADWAY BEAUTIFICATION

Roadway beautification with a specialized theme and plant selection should begin at the I-64 Exit 8 interchange and extend initially to the Welcome Center truly creating a “gateway” impression on the traveler. Over time after testing and modification, these thematic landscapes should be reproduced throughout the scenic areas and gateways of WV152. Low growing, low maintenance and salt tolerant plant material are recommended.

## ROAD BEAUTIFICATION EXAMPLES



Installation of best management practices such as rain gardens and bioswales in the medians will help to control stormwater runoff while adding animal habitat and contributing to the beautification of the manmade environment. Maintenance agreements for such plantings or stormwater facilities would need to be undertaken by local municipalities or volunteer groups as such partnerships would likely be required to perform these projects on state owned highways.



# WV152 CREATIVE ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

## BARN ART

Following the Welcome Center agri-tourism barn design, WV152 and tourism corridor's throughout West Virginia have fantastic blank canvases to create the Appalachian unique sense of place theming.



## CONTINUING WITH THE HUNTINGTON QUILTS

The Central City Antique District on the northern end of WV152 began a quilt-themed artistic beautification program. This theme can extend perfectly down the corridor.



# WV152 CREATIVE ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

## ROADSIDE ART

America is world famous for road-trip tourism which has inspired many destinations with very limited attractions to become famous with their artistic ingenuity turning dilapidated structures into roadside art perfect for selfies and encouraging “stop & spend” visitation.

