

## **INTRODUCTION: VISION, MISSION & GOALS**

### **TRAILS FROM THE PAST**

Trails have long played an important role in the history of human interaction with the land in West Virginia. From the earliest Native American exploration of the region to the evolution of today's burgeoning tourist trade, trails have been an instrumental element in connecting and developing different areas of the state.

The first native explorers carved out hunting and warring paths, following the tracks created by the region's abundant wildlife. With travel often impeded by streams and rivers, the native people constructed bark canoes and dugouts to transform these water "barriers" into routes as vital as trails on land. European colonists expanded the land trails or "traces" into horse paths and wagon roads. Transportation projects such as the 19<sup>th</sup> century Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike later developed these paths into a fledgling cross-country transportation network. The railroads subsequently followed many of these very routes when laying thousands of miles of track throughout West Virginia.

### **TRAILS TO THE FUTURE**

We now stand at the threshold of a new and exciting time for trails in West Virginia. The 1997 West Virginia Tourism Leisure Travel Report indicated that leisure travelers' direct spending on travel and tourism-related activities in West Virginia totaled \$1.1 billion in 1996. These travelers listed hiking, biking and park visitation as two of the top six activities that bring them to West Virginia. With tourism representing an ever-increasing portion of the state economy, trails are now developing into the backbone of the West Virginia outdoor recreation industry.

The old paths and traces of native warriors and pioneers are being developed into trail networks that allow visitors to enjoy the natural beauty of West Virginia's wilderness and pastoral countryside. Railroad lines that formerly hauled countless tons of coal and timber now serve as some of the most highly rated rail-trails in the nation. Just as the highway system serves to link the commercial and industrial centers of the state, trails connect West Virginia's many compelling scenic and recreational attractions.

Indeed, trails serve urban and rural communities throughout the state, acting as linear parks and providing cost-effective recreational facilities for urban, suburban and rural areas. Through cooperative development and promotional efforts, our trail system can become an even more lucrative asset that will draw increasing numbers of visitors while preserving the environment and maintaining the quality of life cherished by West Virginia residents.

## **Mission of the Statewide Trail Plan**

The mission of the Statewide Trail Plan is to:

- foster the continued growth of the trail system in West Virginia
- inventory and promote the state's existing trails
- identify trail needs and opportunities, including enhanced accessibility concerns
- promote trail project planning, funding and construction by local, regional, state and federal agencies and private organizations
- support cooperative trail development efforts between individual trail groups
- promote the social, environmental, psychological and economic benefits of trail resources on West Virginia's quality of life

## **Goals of the Statewide Trail Plan**

The goals of the Statewide Trail Plan include:

- addressing accessibility issues
- identifying funding and maintenance sources
- identifying and addressing specific trail needs and issues
- advertising and promoting trails as attractions
- creating programs that involve trails in economic development
- obtaining trail-user, tourist and public input
- acting as a consensus document, to be used as a guide in future projects
- encouraging the development of trails that link natural, cultural, historic and recreational areas
- addressing alternative transportation issues, including the need for urban and community greenways