

APPENDIX G: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AT REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

Regional Workshops

The Statewide Trail Plan Committee had 12 workshops throughout West Virginia to gather public opinions and perceptions about significant trail problems, opportunities and potential future actions. Information gained in these workshops provided the basis for West Virginia Trail Plan and the West Virginia Trail Map.

Workshop Organization

Each of the workshops was organized in a uniform manner:

1. An informal information gathering and networking session prior to the workshop gathered and mapped information about current, developing and proposed trails.
2. A presentation by the West Virginia Trails Coalition gave background information about trails in the state and the state trails planning process.
3. Local trail groups provided updates on projects.
4. Groups discussed trails issues, opportunities and potential actions for trails. Discussion group participants were asked the following:

-What are the key trails in West Virginia?

-What are significant issues related to trail development and management?

-What trails are missing in your area? What does your region need? Does your region need more / better trails such as equestrian, all-terrain vehicles, hiking, biking, water trails, etc.? Are your trails used for tourism or alternative transportation?

-How are trail groups and governments developing partnerships? What are your stumbling blocks?

-What are priority issues and which are the top five?

-What are potential solutions to top issues?

-What is working in West Virginia and other states?

-How can we build stepping stones instead of stumbling blocks?

-What are innovative ways to solve problems?

-Prioritize solutions and identify the top five priority solutions. What solutions are unique, doable and should be recommended in the plan?

Analyzing the Findings

The findings from each workshop were typed, analyzed and categorized. Mapping was digitized for the West Virginia Trail Map of Existing / Proposed Trails portion of the West Virginia Trail Plan.

Summary of Key Issues

The following trail issues were most frequently cited during regional workshops:

Awareness of Trails: Residents and visitors lack knowledge about trail opportunities in West Virginia, especially opportunities in rural areas. Promotions targeting trail users and visitors are lacking in several regions of the state.

Lack of Commitment: There is a lack of interest and commitment to trails in West Virginia. Elected officials do not consider trails a priority. There is a lack of vision in state government about the diverse

benefits of trail use. There should be a stronger link between trails and economic development opportunities in the state.

Creating New Trails: West Virginia needs trails for all types and levels of users. Trails are not being considered during community and highway planning. More people would use trails if they were more easily accessible. People need better expertise on developing trails.

Trails Can Help with Economic Development: The state needs more cooperative private and public effort to link trails and trail-related projects. Trails organizations and tourism-related businesses, such as outfitters, lodging and transportation, should work more closely to jointly promote their activities.

Improving Quality of Life: More promotion is needed to educate people about the physical, cultural and educational benefits of trails.

Respecting and Working with Private Landowners: Trail-related organizations should cultivate more opportunities to partner with willing private landowners. A variety of private landowner issues should be addressed including landowner liability, private property rights and the high cost of liability insurance for nonprofit groups and landowners.

Trails Should be Safe: Some trails are not safe or are not being used safely. In some areas, people are afraid to leave their cars for fear of being vandalized. Remote areas are sometimes party spots.

Keeping Trails Usable: Many existing trails are poorly maintained due to insufficient funding for operations and maintenance. Some areas suffer from overuse and damage. Lack of attention to maintenance will inhibit efforts to attract visitors in the future.

Marketing the Benefits of Trails: The diverse benefits of trails are not being adequately promoted to residents of and visitors to West Virginia.

Mixing Different Types of Users on Trails: Different user groups sometimes have conflicts on trails. Trail managers and users should ensure safe and enjoyable experiences for all users.

People Working in Partnership: Public and private sectors can help to improve trails in the state by working together. More community involvement is needed to develop, promote and manage trails. More volunteer programs are needed to recruit, train and support volunteers to develop and maintain trails.

Linking Trails Together: Many trails in the state remain isolated and improved links between towns and countryside via trails are needed. Many people do not use trails because they are not accessible.

Places to Rest: Many existing trails lack adequate rest areas, rest rooms, drinking water, campsites and nearby lodging. More trailheads are needed.

Getting Good Information: More comprehensive information about trails in West Virginia is needed. People have difficulty finding trails and planning excursions because of insufficient information, mapping and signage.

Summary of Potential Actions

Workshop participants identified the following potential actions to address trail issues.

Raise the Awareness of Trails: A wide range of actions can raise awareness of the value and benefits of trails including events, public outreach programs, fact sheets and more prominent signage.

Look for Opportunities to Coordinate Activities: A state trail program can bring together trail organizations, trail users, agencies, businesses and would foster coordinated efforts and improved planning.

Trails Can Help to Meet Transportation Needs: Trail planning can be considered highway planning. Trails could be built along highways; bridges could be designed to provide room for bicycles and pedestrians.

Promote the Economic Benefits of Trails: Communities can be educated on the economic impact of trails and trail-related businesses.

Look for Cooperative Ways to Maintain Trails: Volunteer trail maintenance programs can address maintenance backlogs and future needs. Adopt-A-Trail programs can mobilize grassroots efforts to maintain trails.

Look for Ways to Minimize Trail Conflicts: Safety education and training and sound trail design would help reduce conflicts. Interest in motorized trails is growing in West Virginia, stimulated by projects such as the Hatfield-McCoy Recreation Area. Feelings are mixed – some participants felt that motorized trails should be encouraged in appropriate locations; others felt that specific areas should be maintained for non-motorized users.

Partnerships Can Help Make Trails Happen: Creative partnerships between an active public, local businesses and government agencies would better support trails and trail-related businesses. Innovative funding options for trails should be pursued including incentive programs, small business support and loan programs, and ecotourism projects.

Connect Existing Trails: Communities can benefit by linking existing public and community areas with trails. Trails could link important places in towns, such as business districts, libraries, schools and community centers.

Work with Private Landowners: A trail network in West Virginia requires a network of landowners to reach its potential. Trail groups can partner with private landowners to meet landowner concerns with liability and vandalism. Private landowners should be involved early in trail development efforts.

Information Sharing Should be Encouraged: Existing trails-related information can be shared. Much information already exists, including potential funding sources, successful approaches to implementing trails and successful state programs across the U.S.