



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 28, 2021

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New River Gorge Regional Development Authority

Leads Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Strategy Session

Beckley, W.Va. (May 28, 2021) – Local leaders vying to attract more visitors and bolster the New River Gorge outdoor recreation economy came together to strategize on how to move forward on much-needed trails and other recreation opportunities.

Jina Belcher, executive director of the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, and Danny Twilley, assistant dean of the Brad & Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative at West Virginia University, led the discussion focusing on mapping, funding and feasibility issues facing expansion of the trail opportunities in the region.

Belcher said one of NRGDA's top priorities is to develop a comprehensive outdoor recreation infrastructure strategy in the Fayette, Nicholas, Raleigh and Summers counties and have all stakeholders working together on planning, funding, execution, operation, management and oversight of the trail and outdoor recreation system.

"Today's meeting was a significant step forward in developing the comprehensive strategy we need," said Belcher. "Working together, and in a coordinated effort, will be much more effective and meaningful in achieving both our short- and long-term objectives. The new national park designation, availability of funding, and resources provided by the WVU Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative make this prime time for us."

Belcher said "we dove deep into technical planning by reviewing county and regional maps, existing, in progress, and proposed trails in the four-county region," which includes the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve. "Our next step is to bring together our Congressional delegation, state leaders, and

fundors to present our revised strategy and priorities. We saw many common themes in addressing our goals, and now we need to strategically address the opportunities and challenges ahead of us.”

In addition to NRGRDA and WVU OEDC, organizations represented at the meeting were City of Beckley, Piney Creek Watershed Association, Mountain State Trail Alliance, Fayette Trails Coalition, City of Hinton, City of Richwood, Raleigh County Parks and Rec, National Coal Heritage Area Authority, Active SWV, WVU Tech Adventure School, New River Association of Climbers, and the WV Community Development Hub.

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About New River Gorge Regional Development Authority: The New River Gorge Regional Development Authority’s (NRGRDA) mission is to initiate, facilitate and support the economic and community development efforts within the counties of Fayette, Nicholas, Raleigh, and Summers located in this region of southern West Virginia. NRGRDA stimulates the regional economy through business expansion and retention efforts, including an extensive portfolio of financial services; the management of sites for new companies locating to our region; and serving as a point of access for local service providers which offer a variety of technical assistance for business owners.