



OPINION-EDITORIAL FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 5, 2021

CONTACT: Jina Belcher

jbelcher@nrgrda.org

304-888-1149 (Cell)

NRGRDA Focuses on Outdoor Economy:

Opportunities Stemming from the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve

By Jina Belcher

U.S. Senators Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito joined local leaders in unveiling the new signage May 5 for the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve and later joined a roundtable at Adventures on the Gorge to discuss priority regional community and economic development needs to grow the outdoor economy. Gayle Manchin, the newly confirmed Federal Co-Chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission also attended.

Organizations and stakeholders in the New River Gorge region are grateful for the hard-working and forward thinking members of the West Virginia Congressional delegation, as well as the many talented and influential local partners who are enthusiastically embracing the new outdoor economic opportunities that are organically developing as a result of the new national park designation.

While this designation represents decades of hard work worth celebrating, organizations like NRGRDA realize that these accolades also represent a short window of opportunity to capitalize on resources available to further impact regional and economic growth. The New River Gorge Regional Development Authority's (NRGRDA) board and staff have been allocating time and resources to the tall task ahead of us welcoming Mountain State, national and even international opportunities to the New River Gorge region.

NRGRDA is the fulcrum for planning, funding, executing, and measuring the impact of initiatives to meet the needs of the region's growing outdoor industry and is committed to ensuring that

local governments, businesses, and residents take full advantage of the economic possibilities offered by the new national park.

NRGRDA is dedicated and committed to the following 5 outdoor industry priorities:

- Advocating for a dedicated liaison to facilitate conversations and share resources between the National Park Service and local stakeholders/businesses;
- Securing technical assistance funding to support existing and new outdoor industry businesses as well as potential pivot businesses;
- Developing a comprehensive outdoor recreation infrastructure plan and identifying construction and implementation funding;
- Prioritizing and identifying water/sewer/broadband project funding for Gateway Communities serving the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve;
- Strategizing incentives and local resources for new housing development and related utilities.

NRGRDA's greatest strength is its ability to leverage every resource – federal, state, local, foundations, and private sector – to build a robust outdoor economy in southern West Virginia that will not only continue to attract tourists from all over the world but will entice long-term investment and new business attraction to further accelerate the existing outdoor industry present within the region. NRGRDA is committed to ensuring strong partnerships with federal, state, and local organizations that work collaboratively to strengthen the regional opportunities available. This is a pivotal time in West Virginia and the New River Gorge region is in a prime position to diversify and grow Southern WV.

Jina Belcher is a graduate of Concord University and executive director of the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority. She, her husband, and daughter enjoy the regional outdoor opportunities as often as possible.

#

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.