



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**NRGRDA Convenes July 21 Meeting to Discuss New River Gorge Infrastructure,  
Seeking Solutions and Funding to Address Critical Priorities**

**Hinton, W.Va. (July 22, 2022)** – The New River Gorge Regional Development Authority (NRGRDA) convened a July 21 meeting at the Summers County Courthouse in Hinton to prioritize regional environmental concerns and seek solutions among the broad-based federal, state, and local officials in attendance.

Jina Belcher, NRGRDA executive director, said the meeting to discuss infrastructure priorities throughout the communities adjacent to the nation's newest national park was driven by the availability of Adam Ortiz, Director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Region III. "Mr. Ortiz's visit to Summers County offered a ripe opportunity to convene key stakeholders to delve into barriers to implementation of infrastructure projects and explore reworking existing tools so that the unprecedented amount of infrastructure funding is more easily accessed."

NRGRDA staff and Ortiz were part of a group of 29 individuals from the following federal, state, local, non-profit, and private sector:

- U.S. Senator Joe Manchin (Ben Spurlock);
- U.S. Senator Shelley Moore Capito (Todd Gunter);
- Chris Brazell, Appalachian Regional Commission Program Manager;
- National Park Service;

- West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection;
- WVU Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative;
- Marshall University;
- Summers County Commission;
- Raleigh County Commission;
- City of Beckley;
- Region 1 and 4 Planning & Development Councils;
- Greenbrier Environmental;
- Mountaineer Gas;
- Steptoe & Johnson; and
- Dig Deep Appalachian Water Project.

Belcher said “NRGRDA has the relationships and credibility to convene key players such as EPA, ARC, NPS and other funding agencies to learn about and address significant opportunities. The volume and size of proposed projects and needs in the New River Gorge are astronomical, requiring no less than a quarter billion dollars of improvements before we can expect to attract new manufacturers, including outdoor manufacturers, and truly grow the region’s economy.”

She added that infrastructure in the nation’s newest national park is paramount. “Economic development and sustainable tourism must be preceded by infrastructure maintenance and upgrades at the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, including water quality.”,

Leaders of EPA and ARC shared that the two federal agencies are working collaboratively to develop joint programs to address local and regional needs. They praised the New River Gorge local governments and organizations for communicating priorities to state and federal agencies and pledged to keep an open dialogue.

Belcher said it is imperative local regional planning and development councils and economic development authorities proactively collaborate. “Time and time again, we see organizations providing technical assistance best succeed when they are engaged in local conversations and work alongside community leaders to identify and prioritize projects.”

The NRGRDA executive director praised the West Virginia Congressional delegation and state leaders for listening carefully, offering suggested solutions, and actively helping with funding from multiple sources to address the New River Gorge region’s priorities. “We need large sums of money to spend on single projects that will allow us to drive impact,” emphasized Belcher. “We also need streamlined systems to capital stack resources in unique and effective ways.”

The EPA regional leader’s visit concluded with a tour of one of NRGRDA’s property redevelopment projects -- the Hinton Ice House – which is under way. NRGRDA’s Director of Strategic Redevelopment Andrew Davis led the tour of the property

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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.

The West Virginia Hive is the entrepreneurship program of the NRGRDA and the administrator of the Country Roads Angel Network (CRAN). More can be found at <https://nrgrda.org/>