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Town of Fayetteville Designated as Partner Community in 2022 Recreation Economy for Rural Communities Initiative

Fayetteville, W.Va. (August 24, 2022) – The Town of Fayetteville was the only West Virginia community among 25 selected nationally for a prestigious federal interagency partnership to support outdoor recreation initiatives.

On August 17, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) to announce the selection of 25 small and rural communities from across the country to identify strategies to grow their outdoor recreation economies and revitalize Main Streets through the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (RERC) program.

The Town of Fayetteville and its partners propose to plan for and leverage the increased visitation to the region that is resulting from the establishment of the New River Gorge National Park nearby, engage in inclusive community tourism development and planning, increase local access to outdoor recreation, and cultivate a culture of wellness in the community.

Andy Davis of the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority (NRGRDA) submitted a letter dated November 10, 2021, supporting the Town of Fayetteville’s successful proposal:

“Technical assistance provided by this program creates great potential to position the gateway community of Fayetteville to capitalize on the newly designated New River Gorge National Park and Preserve. In order to identify more opportunities to tie Fayetteville’s residential neighborhoods and downtown corridors into National Park Lands a collaborative and inclusive planning approach will be required. We recognize the benefits a strong recreational economy can have on the health and

wellbeing of our community. It is in this spirit that we lend our support to this funding proposal. We are committed to doing our part (NRGRDA) by working with the community and local government officials on land preservation and recreation-based economic initiatives. Accordingly, we support the drive to attract residents, expand business opportunities, ultimately rebuild our local tax base, and directly benefit the region.”

In the interagency announcement, federal and non-profit leaders stressed the importance and benefits of supporting outdoor recreation:

ARC Federal Co-Chair Gayle Manchin and Beckley native said, “The travel and tourism industry in Appalachia is among the region's fastest-growing employment sectors, generating more than \$4.5 billion in local tax revenue and employing more than 577,000 Appalachians. The Recreation Economy for Rural Communities program builds on our region’s economic development potential by investing in Appalachia’s local heritage and natural assets, which will lead to more vibrant downtowns and expanded growth for outdoor recreation industries. We congratulate the 12 Appalachian communities chosen to be part of the RERC program.”

Vicki Arroyo, EPA Associate Administrator for Policy, said, "Outdoor recreation activities can bring new investment to local economies, encourage people to revitalize existing downtowns and conserve natural resources, and lead to improved quality of life for residents and visitors. This assistance will help rural areas explore ways that outdoor recreation can strengthen their communities, create jobs, and boost access to the outdoors for everyone.”

“The economic impact of outdoor recreation near our national forests and grasslands is vital to support health and prosperity in rural America,” said Forest Service Chief Randy Moore. “Efforts to reinvigorate main streets through the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities program is an important step to help communities realize all the benefits that adjacent national forests and grasslands make possible.”

“Communities in the Northern Border region are increasingly investing in outdoor recreation in ways that strengthen their local economies,” said Chris Saunders, Federal Co-Chair of the NBRC. “The work made possible through this federal partnership will ultimately lead to investments that not only bring new visitors and tourists into rural New England and New York, but also improve the recreation opportunities and quality of life of local residents.”

“The Recreation Economy for Rural Communities program is exactly what rural America needs to harness the high demand for outdoor recreation and develop sustainable economies that benefit locals and visitors alike,” said Jessica Turner, President, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable. “The \$689 billion outdoor recreation economy benefits greatly from continued government investment in programs like these that work on the ground and positively impact people, place and planet.”

RERC is a planning assistance program jointly administered by the EPA, the USDA Forest Service, NBRC, and ARC that helps rural communities leverage outdoor recreation to revitalize their Main Streets, leading to improved environmental protection and public health outcomes. Communities are encouraged to pursue activities that foster environmentally friendly community development and

revitalization through the conservation and sustainable use of public or private forests or other natural resources.

The communities are planning to undertake a variety of revitalization projects which include:

- building new trail systems;
- improving access and walkability along Main Streets;
- increasing access to outdoor activities for all residents and visitors;
- strengthening outdoor recreation businesses;
- adapting to the climate impacts that affect coastal resources, wildfires, and winter recreation opportunities;
- cleaning up and repurposing vacant buildings; and
- creating new parks and recreation amenities.

A federal planning team will work with each community over the course of four to six months, with a two-day facilitated community workshop as the focal point. Participants will work together to develop strategies and an action plan to grow their local outdoor recreation economies. Some workshops are currently underway. Communities were chosen following a comprehensive interagency review process from a pool of more than 100 applicants.

More than 160 million Americans over the age of six participated in outdoor recreation in 2020, according to the 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report, and sales figures across the industry broke records as Americans flocked to the outdoors in search of safe, family-friendly opportunities during the pandemic. These activities -- which include camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, RVing, boating, running, swimming, baseball, winter sports, and many others – can bring new investment and jobs to local economies, benefit health and wellness, raise awareness in conservation of forests and other natural resources, and improve the quality of life for residents and visitors.

In 2020, outdoor recreation activities generated 4.3 million quality, high paying jobs across a wide variety of industries, accounting for three percent of all employment in the United States. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis calculated the economic output of outdoor recreation in 2020 to be \$689 billion, surpassing industries such as mining, utilities, farming and ranching, and chemical products manufacturing.

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