



## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

August 29, 2022

## **CONTACTS**

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### **Jina Belcher of NRGRDA a Featured Panelist on Outdoor RIVERS Coalition**

## **ARC Federal Co-Chair Gayle Manchin to Moderate Aug. 31 Panel on Multi-State Collaboration in Appalachia**

**Lewisburg, W.Va. (August 25, 2022)** – Multi-state collaboration across Appalachia’s outdoor economy industry will be the focus of a 3 p.m. August 31 panel at the annual Business Summit hosted at The Greenbrier by the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce.

The Appalachian Regional Commission’s (ARC) Federal Co-Chair Gayle Manchin will moderate the panel, which will bring together national and local leaders, as well as experts from across the region’s outdoor industries. 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 570,000 Appalachians.

“More than ever, now is the time for us to come together as one, united Appalachia to take advantage of the growing interest in our region’s rich culture, beautiful landscapes, and outdoor recreation opportunities,” said Federal Co-Chair Manchin. “At ARC, we believe that big, transformational changes can happen in our communities when we collaborate on this shared goal, and I’m looking forward to exchanging ideas on how we can work together across state lines to produce a more robust and sustainable outdoor economy in Appalachia.”

Manchin will also offer insight on ARC's new [Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies \(ARISE\)](#) funding opportunity, which makes available \$73.5 million to drive large-scale, regional economic transformation through multi-state collaborative projects across Appalachia.

Jina Belcher, Executive Director of the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority, is one of the event's featured panelists and will share West Virginia's efforts to lead the Outdoor Recreation Industry and Vibrant Economies Strategies (Outdoor RIVERS), a project that works to enhance the assets within the Central Appalachian region's most rural and coal-impacted communities. The Outdoor RIVERS project recently received a \$250,000 planning grant from ARC and served as a model for ARISE. In partnership with the Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative at West Virginia University, NRGRDA serves as the project's strategic lead.

Belcher said the eight-state Outdoor RIVERS project includes successful organizations in Central Appalachia's states of West Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia, Tennessee, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. "Over the next several years, the project will result in advancing a collaborative industry cluster through the development of a ready workforce, investment into critical infrastructure, maximizing the area's cultural and natural assets, and an increase in capacity of the local communities," said Belcher. "The success of this project will be measured by quantifying new job creation, new capital investment, new businesses created, technical assistance deployed, and a database of existing and new shovel-ready projects impacting the outdoor economy."

Belcher said the project will also leverage the recent redesignation of the New River Gorge National River to a National Park and Preserve as the nation's newest outdoor asset, located in the heart of Central Appalachia. "Working together, the coalition members are committed to creating an outdoor economy that amplifies Appalachia's assets and creates the outdoor capital of the East Coast," said Belcher.

Other panelists include:

- Courtney Haynes, Coal Communities Coordinator, Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce
- Dr. Danny Twilley, Assistant Vice President of Economic, Community and Asset Development, Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative at West Virginia University
- Sara Chester, Co-Executive Director, The Industrial Commons
- Molly Hemstree, Co-Executive Director

- Brad Collett, Director, Tennessee RiverLine
- Hannah Kirby, Funding Strategist & Grants Manager, Tennessee RiverLine.

**EVENT:**

Wednesday, August 31

3:00 – 4:00 p.m.

The Greenbrier  
Colonial Hall  
101 W Main Street  
White Sulphur Springs, WV 24986

**Spokespersons available for interviews include:**

- Gayle Manchin, Appalachian Regional Commission Federal Co-Chair
- Jina Belcher, New River Gorge Regional Development Authority Executive Director

Members of the press should confirm participation for the event with Ashley Hill (ahill@arc.gov).

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**About the Appalachian Regional Commission:** The Appalachian Regional Commission is an economic development agency of the federal government and 13 state governments focusing on 423 counties across the Appalachian Region. ARC's mission is to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia to help the Region achieve socioeconomic parity with the nation. Learn more about the agency at <https://www.arc.gov/>

**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/>