



Community
Centered
MOUNTAIN
BIKING



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Acknowledgments

PROJECT TEAM

Brett Hollern: Vice President, Pennsylvania Environmental Council

Amy Camp: Founder, Cycle Forward

Alicia Broudy: Project Coordinator, Cycle Forward

Julie Judkins: Co-Founder | Consultant, Just-Trails

Zhenya Nalywayko: Program Manager, Pennsylvania Environmental Council (Report Design)

STEERING COMMITTEE

Special thanks to the Steering Committee for advising on the process, report, and agenda.

Kelly Pack: National Park Service - Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (NPS-RTCA)

Davitt Woodwell: WGI Outdoors

Danny Twilley: Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative, WVU

Corey Lilly: Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative, WVU

Anthony Duncan: International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA)

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The North Central Appalachian region is on and within the lands of many Indigenous Communities, Peoples, and Tribes. By recognizing the continued presence of Indigenous Communities in the region who have survived attempted genocide and broken promises, and who still hold ties to the land spiritually and culturally, we acknowledge this complex history and commit to continued learning toward the healing that can be done. As part of a community-driven project, we hope to understand the histories, names, territories, and lands on which we live and recreate.

Cover Photo Credit: IMBA

Executive Summary

SUMMIT PREMISE & PURPOSE

Project Background

On April 30, 2024, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) brought communities together from a five-state region (PA/WV/MD/OH/NY) for the North Central Appalachia Mountain Bike Summit - what is believed to be the first Summit of its kind in the North Central Appalachia region. PEC's purpose in hosting the summit was to create a dialogue on how communities - and the region - can better prepare for increases in mountain biking (MTB) as well as to facilitate trail activation efforts. Getting people out onto trails, after all, is the most expedient way to both celebrate and capitalize on them as regional assets.

This area, consisting of what is approximately within a half-day's drive of Pittsburgh, has a growing number of outdoor hubs, mountain bike trails, and the potential for world class trail systems. Planning for increases in MTB is crucial to ensuring that the region's infrastructure can meet the needs of visitors and residents alike without compromising community character and quality of life. The opportunity to connect a region that hasn't been entirely connected in the past, brought 42 participants (including staff and consultants) together to discuss the sustainable growth of mountain biking in a way that centers community needs and deepens our connections and access to the mountains we all share.

The Summit built upon recent research and reports on the growth of mountain biking, including a pivotal recommendation that emphasized the importance of assessing community "readiness," ensuring that initiatives are not thrust upon communities without cultural understanding, interest, planning, and consideration. **By proactively anticipating the potential impacts of MTB activities, communities can effectively plan for them, leveraging the positive outcomes of trail development and ensuring they are significant assets to local residents.**

A pre-summit report, "[Preparing for Sustainable Mountain Biking Growth in North Central Appalachia](#)," was developed and is referenced within this report. This report covers:

- The Origin and Evolution of Mountain Biking,
- The Opportunity: Mountain Biking in North Central Appalachia, economic, social, and environmental benefits,
- The Region as a Destination - Pathways between Community and Destination Trails,

- Challenges and Strategies for Communities in managing growth, and
- Planning, Technical Assistance, & Resources

Summit Summary & Recommendations

This report summarizes the Summit's panel discussions, small group discussions, community input, examples, resources, and recommendations for next steps. The [Steering Committee](#) provided guidance for the key questions discussed during small groups at the Summit and were virtually shared through a survey discussed at the Summit. The Steering Committee also provided input on recommendations.

Recommendations are informed by the pre-report, participant and panelist feedback, steering committee advice, and survey input, responding to challenges described and next steps for PEC and greater partners and communities. The recommendations are as follows and are further detailed in the report.

1. [Establish a network structure through a coalition or alliance](#)
2. [Create a strategic, community-driven vision to guide MTB investments](#)
3. [Identify gaps through mapping and prioritize infrastructure projects](#)
4. [Engage communities and activate MTB trails](#)
5. [Secure long term sustainable funding for trail developments and maintenance](#)

The summit aimed to assess community readiness and willingness for MTB growth, focusing on preserving community character and addressing local needs. While the recommendations reflect feedback from the Summit, Survey, and Steering Committee input, the [Conclusion](#) section of this report offers additional questions to consider that may help communities anticipate and prepare for MTB increases, such as local policy protection, resident engagement programs, cultural integration efforts, and infrastructure readiness.

While the origin of this work to coalesce around MTB trails across a broad region had its start in Pittsburgh, the intent is not to center Pittsburgh or even Pennsylvania. Technically, the region under consideration includes the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) designated subregions of Northern and North Central Appalachia, but the term "North Central Appalachia" is being used for purposes of this work. The intent is to hold the boundaries softly, and support multi-state collaboration using MTB as the thread in an effort to build trust and support growth among communities within a half-day's drive.

Summit Summary

AGENDA

Despite it only being a half-day event, the Summit was a valuable forum of discussion and input shared. Participants had the opportunity to hear from two panels, discuss key questions in small groups, and share resources.

“Close-to-Home” Memories

Introductions included a prompt for participants to share a formative cycling memory. Their responses generated laughter, inspiration, and feelings of connection. Interestingly, the activity elicited primarily “close-to-home” memories: learning to cycle in our childhood driveways, biking across farm fields, and riding neighborhood streets and sidewalks. If we are to “meet people where they are,” trails and cycling infrastructure are needed in communities, not just in natural areas.

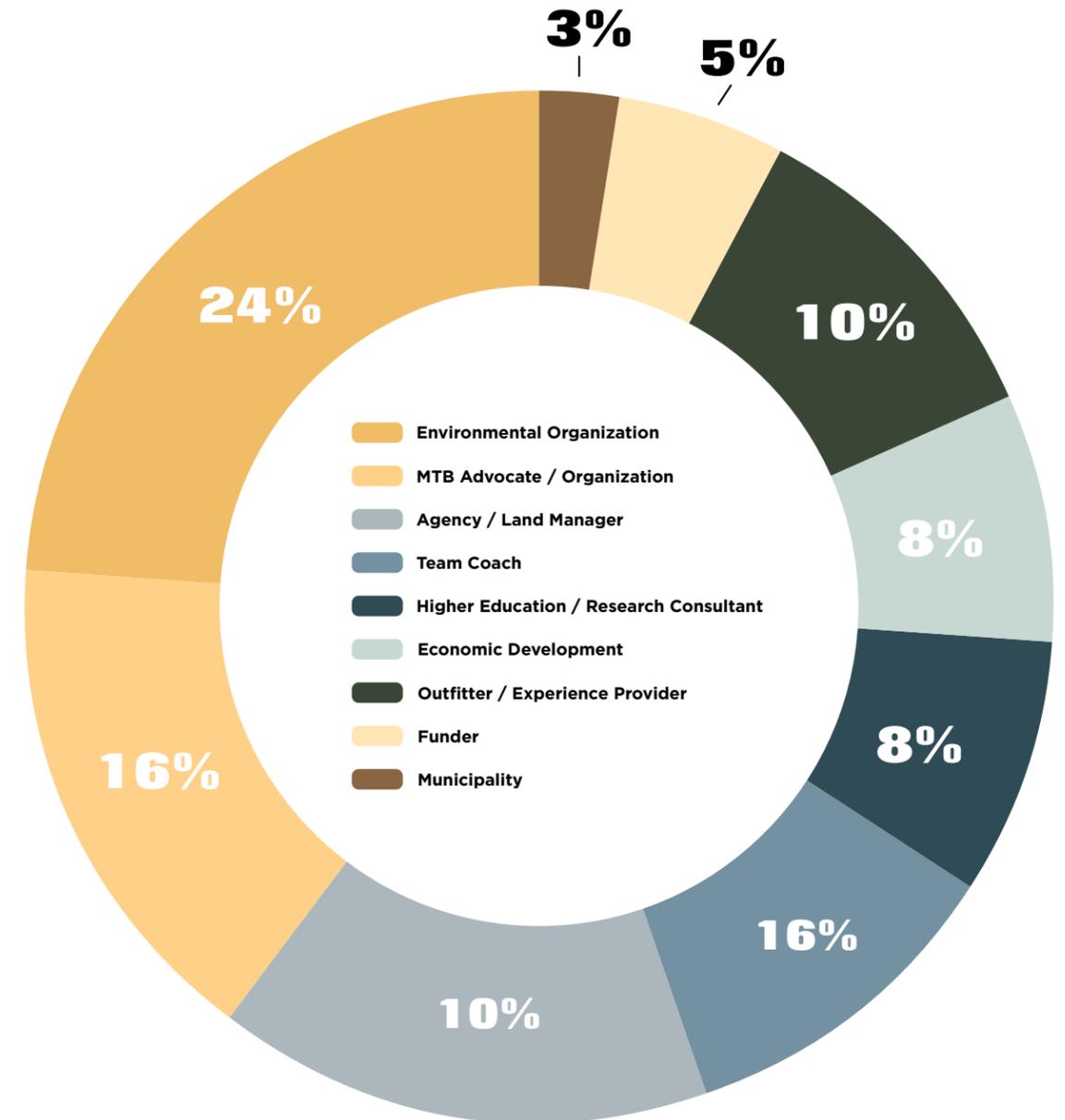


Image: Path to Progression Panelists with moderator Julie Judkins.

SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS

The collective expertise within the room was the most valuable part of the Summit experience! While invitations were sent to create a representation of the region from diverse geographic areas, there was a heavy amount of participation from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. The make-up of roles are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Summit Participants



PANELS

Following some context setting by the project team, two panels dove into key questions and models for consideration. Expert panelists provided examples, lessons learned, and recommendations for the Summit theme and considerations. Panelist comments, advice, and responses inform the [recommendations](#).

Panel 1 - From Research to Renewal: Igniting Local Economies for Lasting Impact

Panelists (full bios are listed in the [Appendix](#)):



Ta Enos, PA Wilds Center



Anthony Duncan, International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA)



Danny Twilley, Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative, West Virginia University



Jessie Powers, Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (Baileys Trail System)

This panel reflected the central question of the summit: how can we advocate for sustainable increases in mountain biking in a way that centers community needs? The panelists shared their experiences in balancing aspirations to leverage the outdoor economy with local desires to maintain community character and quality of life measures. The group considered the potential impacts of increased trail use and visitation, the opportunities, and what it means to live in a vibrant, outdoor community. Overall, the discussion focused on a **Community-Centered Approach**. Trail and tourism efforts must prioritize the needs of communities and land managers to avoid negative impacts. Key points shared included:

What are some examples of things that have ‘gone wrong’ when trail and tourism efforts haven’t been focused on community and land manager needs?

- The PA Wilds project started as a marketing initiative without adequate groundwork, highlighting the importance of genuine partnerships and local collaboration.
- The Baileys Trail System original goal was to connect colleges to trails but they lacked early engagement and connected only moderate to difficult trails, which wasn’t accessible to community groups.
- Groups with good intentions tend to address land managers with problems as opposed to finding ways to work together. By convening trail advocacy groups earlier on, they can understand different needs and create the means to meet communities and specific user groups where they are.

What are examples of successful projects that have managed to maintain community character and improve quality of life for local residents?

- IMBA’s work with the Navajo Nation highlighted the importance of integrating cultural significance and finding common ground with intergenerational groups, for example creating 1-mile tracks to introduce youth to MTB.
- Pocket parks in Knoxville, TN, transformed spaces into community assets, focusing on overall community needs rather than specific user groups. Pocket parks connecting to Knoxville’s greater trail system, as an [Urban Wilderness](#).
- Another example, [Jakes Rocks Overlook and Mountain Bike Trail](#), was developed through grassroots efforts and community involvement, showcasing the significance of local engagement and action.

How can we use data and research to inform decisions about trail projects?

- IMBA’s approach involves using data to inform trail designations, conduct gap analysis, and assess socioeconomic factors for community programming needs.
- Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative emphasizes data-driven strategies to identify trail deserts, assess trail types and quality, and secure funding for beginner-friendly trails.

What are additional strategies we can consider?

- Adopting zoning policies that prioritize local wealth creation over big-box developments.
- The success of trail projects often hinges on **collaborative planning**, grassroots efforts, and genuine partnerships with communities.
- Projects in **culturally significant** areas require sensitivity to local traditions and values, emphasizing the importance of finding common ground between different generations and stakeholders.
- Sustainable trail and tourism initiatives require **ongoing community engagement, adaptive planning, and a commitment** from all partners engaged.

***The strategies suggested here, as well as those listed from Panel 2 are integrated into the report recommendations.**



Credit: IMBA

Panel 2 - Path of Progression for Local Riders

Panelists (please see full bios and pictures in the [Agenda](#) - or in [Appendix](#)):



Alyssa Crawford, Venture Outdoors



Monica Garrison, Black Girls Do Bike



Mike Kuhn, National Interscholastic Cycling Association



Corey Lilly, Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative, West Virginia University



Christine Iksic, Three Rivers Outdoor Company

This panel built off ‘centering communities’ that the first panel outlined. Not all mountain bike trails and systems serve the same audiences. Some are purpose built as destination trail systems, while others are intended as places for local residents to ride and build skills. Exploring what a “path of progression” can look like for local and regional residents, the “path” may include going from using beginner trails to more advanced tracks. It may also include going from close-to-home trails to ones further afield - and finding ways to have diverse needs met. Not entirely about skill-building and trail access, this topic covered building confidence among youth, women, and genderqueer riders, as well as how local trail advocacy can sometimes progress from informal, grassroots efforts to more advanced advocacy to sustain high quality trails over time.

Figure 2. Path of Progression Framework

PATH OF PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK

These components allow for a path of progression in mountain biking skill and experience:

TRAIL CULTURE

Emphasizing inclusivity, marketing, and branding to foster a welcoming environment for all riders.

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Collaborating with local businesses to support and enhance the cycling community.



INFRASTRUCTURE & ACCESS

Creating diverse trail types for all skill levels and prioritizing trails close to communities ensures equitable access. This includes clear digital and physical wayfinding.

PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORT

Implementing community programs tailored to local needs and demographics.

How might we address access challenges and build confidence for increased participation?

- Improve signage and trail infrastructure to enhance accessibility, as seen in Bentonville.
- Shift program models to urban parks accessible by public transportation, as demonstrated in Frick Park in Pittsburgh.
- Successful programs aim to foster confidence, relationships, and skills among non-traditional riders. Examples include collaborations with organizations like Little Bellas to provide mentorship and support, as well as creating community trail systems with progression pathways akin to rock climbing gyms.
- Partner with local bike shops and organizations to organize weekly meetup rides and provide bikes for those in need.
- Collaborate with national organizations like Outride and Free Bikes for Kidz to fund bikes for middle schoolers and integrate biking into school curriculums. Success in fostering participation and progression relies heavily on collaboration between local organizations, businesses, and national initiatives.
- Recognize the importance of urban parks and public transportation in expanding access to cycling for diverse demographics, particularly youth.
- Emphasize the importance of creating inclusive and welcoming environments where all riders feel empowered to participate and progress.



Credit: Cycle Forward



Credit: Cycle Forward

Film Screening

The film **SHIFT** was shown during registration and again at lunch. The half hour documentary is about a group of indigenous youth who spent 10 years converting traditional trails around their hometown of Carcross, Yukon into a world-class mountain biking destination, transforming their community and themselves along the way. The film also addresses the personal and community level agency that comes along with embracing and planning for change.

Quotes from SHIFT:

“Change is going to happen. You can be a part of it or change will just run you over,” Danny Cresswell, Carcross/Tagish First Nation

“We’re trying to build a mountain bike destination here in Carcross, but we’re doing it in a really community-based grassroots way using the youth and getting them back onto the land,” Jane Koepke, Singletrack to Success Founder

“I love seeing people coming to my community to ride my trails that I helped build with local youth around town.” Shane Wally, Trail Crew Leader

Quote from a Summit Participant:

“There is a need for planning and ongoing maintenance for trails. The most optimistic thing I saw with regards to the need for this was the movie that had a strong focus on paying young kids to build the trails – those kids are going to grow up taking ownership of those trails. That part was brilliant.”

KEY QUESTIONS

Four key questions were posed to Summit participants and were also shared via a QR code. The questions centered on four broad categories: **Vision, Ways of Working Together, Barriers, and Strategies**. While the Summit purpose was to address community “readiness” for increases in mountain biking, the participants focused on trail development and other infrastructure needs. Below are summaries of the discussions and survey data deployed with the same questions.

Vision: What does a vibrant outdoor community look like?

A vibrant outdoor community is characterized by its inclusivity, accessibility, sustainability, and commitment to enhancing quality of life for all residents. Such a community is authentic, welcoming, clean, safe, bike-ped friendly, has things to do, and includes joyful people who have the opportunity to build wealth and whose health and wellness needs can be met locally.

By fostering a welcoming environment, promoting economic development, preserving local culture, and prioritizing environmental stewardship, communities can thrive as hubs for outdoor recreation and communal engagement. Livable and thriving communities with a high quality of life for everyone are **accessible, inclusive, and have a commitment to stewardship**.

Some amenities that were noted include affordable housing, quality schools, high-speed internet, trail-serving businesses, art, wayfinding, access to jobs, and infrastructure.

Ways of Working: What are the ways we can work together across this multi-state region to support balance in growth and planning?

Participants agreed: We cannot work in proverbial silos. This can be especially challenging for a multi-state initiative, as each state has different leadership and priorities, resources, funding sources, and so on. In order to move the project forward, there is a need for greater collaboration. This involves improved and consistent communication, regular meetings and touchpoints, and likely the creation of some coalition or alliance.

With greater communication and collaboration, the group will have visibility into ongoing plans and projects so as to not duplicate efforts. This way, we can also explore opportunities for shared funding and resources across state lines. With alignment between the regions, we can expect improved advocacy for our shared interests.

Barriers: What are the barriers to implementing an outdoor/trail culture?

The inherent chicken-and-egg story was much discussed: What comes first? A vibrant outdoor culture and community or the establishment of infrastructure? One of the largest obstacles for infrastructure is funding: the lack of funds within the community, the knowledge needed to access the funds, and the capacity to manage funds across the region. Discussion also highlighted the challenge in understanding the needs and preferences of all the user groups, complicating efforts to tailor experiences and amenities accordingly.

The capacity limitations, insufficient on-ramps to access trails, and concerns about economic impacts and land use further complicate implementation efforts. Fear of gentrification, fragmented culture, inequities among different groups, safety concerns, user conflicts, and negative perceptions of trail users pose additional obstacles, as does a lack of education and outreach to non-mountain biking users. Lastly, conflicts over e-bikes, the perception of outdoor recreation as a solely leisure activity, and the need for clearer engagement from land agencies also hinder progress.

Addressing these barriers will require coordinated community engagement, communication, and planning to cultivate a thriving outdoor culture.

Strategies: What will it take to center community needs while planning for increased mountain biking?

Centering communities starts with clear communication and spending time upfront to understand the community's objectives and needs. Discussions focused on meeting the community where they are, both physically and in terms of their needs and preferences. Planning that includes considerations for maintenance from the outset, with the entire community involved and transparent processes, ensures sustainable trail development. Recognizing the diverse user groups and their unique requirements as well as fostering public-private partnerships to support local businesses will help alleviate the pitfalls of becoming an amenities trap.

Identifying community goals and interests, developing capacity for trail maintenance and programming, and ensuring inclusive and adaptive trails are crucial components. Municipal buy-in, supporting shared stewardship, and quantifying the economic impact of mountain biking can strengthen community-centered planning efforts.

Case Study: Northeast Kingdom Trails Capacity Report

Kingdom Trails in rural Vermont, one of the U.S.'s top MTB trail systems, has experienced surging mountain biking popularity and offers a roadmap for trail advocates to tackle arising challenges.

When area residents began feeling some of the pain points of increased MTB, the Kingdom Trails Association conducted the Kingdom Trails Network Capacity Study, published in 2021. The study takes a careful look at some of the growth-related issues the area was facing and offers solutions. Every area that seeks to capitalize on outdoor recreation can learn from this study and KTA's measured approach.

Access the report [here](#).



Credit: Kingdom Trails

KINGDOM TRAILS, VT A CASE STUDY

1994

A NETWORK OF TRAILS

The trail network became the [Kingdom Trails Association \(KTA\)](#), a nonprofit dedicated to managing trails to "foster the health of our local community, surrounding environment, and regional economy." The Board of Directors was made up of community leaders, business owners, trail users, and KTA landowners.

2019

CULTURE CLASH

Tensions between local landowners and bikers grew. Three landowners pulled their property out of the trail network, creating concern about the future of the trails.

Since 2012

EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

KTA's membership has grown an average of 15 percent each year. In 2020, membership totaled more than 140,000.

2020

CAPACITY STUDY

A [Capacity Study](#) helped KTA better understand the impact of the trails. The intent of the study was to "address issues and capacity of the Kingdom Trails network and enhance the network's positive impact on the host communities... Key project elements include data collection on existing levels of use and experience, engagement with the host communities, a network analysis that includes traffic and parking, and conceptual designs for potential improvements."

Since 2020

COURSE CORRECTIONS

To improve the user and host community experience, KTA:

- Created a landowner advisory committee to address issues
- Started writing grants on behalf of local communities
- Offered reduced annual memberships for local families
- Considered carbon credits and tax breaks for property owners
- Built new parking lots and trail links to reduce road traffic
- Started a shuttle service
- Began hosting a monthly public meeting



Recommendations

The following recommendations have been informed by the pre-summit research, participant and panelist feedback, steering committee advice, and survey input.

ESTABLISH A NETWORK STRUCTURE THROUGH A COALITION OR ALLIANCE

Enhance and support communication and planning. Crafting an inclusive process that actively engages a representative network of partners and communities within the region can unlock the collective opportunities, expertise, and influence essential for building support for community and destination MTB trails.

Challenges Addressed

This was the first Summit of its kind for the region; therefore there is no current structure for mountain biking in the North Central Appalachian region. By collaboratively defining and clarifying roles and responsibilities for partners and community organizations, the region can address underrepresentation in MTB, and enhance engagement with Tribes and Indigenous Communities.

Action Steps

- Conduct comprehensive community needs assessments and engagement sessions to understand local priorities and aspirations regarding outdoor recreation and mountain biking.
- Establish inclusive decision-making processes that involve diverse community representatives. Facilitate regular communication and coordination among agencies, land managers, non-profit organizations, businesses, and community groups.
- Develop partnership agreements (e.g., MOUs) to formalize collaboration frameworks and clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations.
- Use data to better understand the benefits, usage, and future planning requirements for mountain bike trails.
- Identify an educational entity to lead opportunities to raise awareness about the benefits of outdoor recreation and address misconceptions or concerns within the community.
- Support mechanisms for local, state, and federal advocacy of investments in outdoor recreation and MTB.



Credit: Discover NEPA

Models of Coalitions, Alliances, and Networks:

Move Forward Together Vermont is a project of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR) and the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC).

The Great State Trails Coalition is supporting 263 projects in 52 counties, representing an estimated \$511 million of construction and development of trails. NC DOT's Great Trails State Plan identifies future projects in 100 counties.

MADE X MTNS (made by mountains) Partnership in Western North Carolina, Building Outdoor Communities program builds capacity through technical assistance, training, connectivity, and education for communities seeking to advance their outdoor economy goals.

The Tennessee Outdoor Partnership (TOP) is a public/private collaborative dedicated to growing our economy and improving quality of life through conservation and access to Tennessee's great outdoors.

Colorado Outdoor Partnership has a focus on policy and planning. Organizations involved in the Colorado Outdoor Partnership represent the intersection of conservation and outdoor recreation and interests related to land, water, and wildlife in Colorado.

CREATE A STRATEGIC, COMMUNITY-DRIVEN VISION TO GUIDE MTB INVESTMENTS

Support a visioning process that will unify and sustain the region, foster a vibrant culture, build robust infrastructure, and steward places and spaces for community trails and destinations.

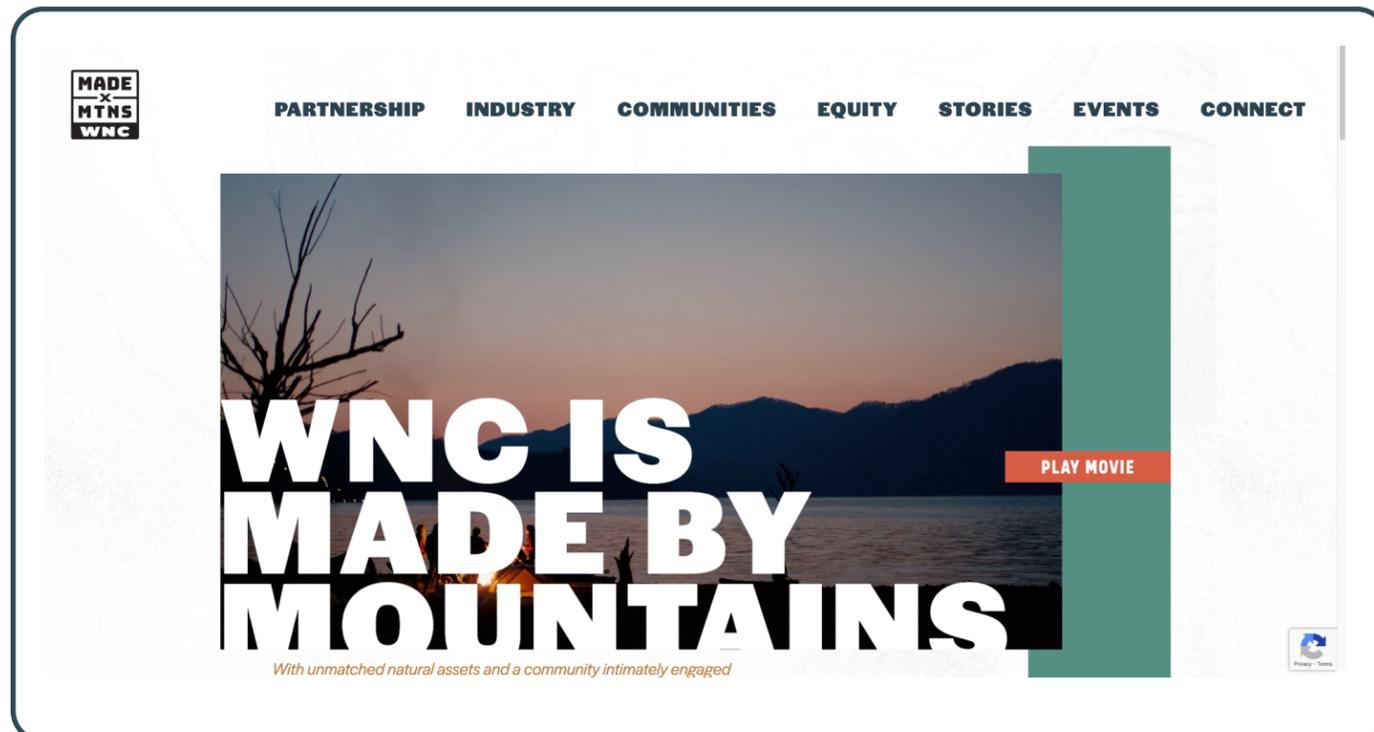
Challenges Addressed

Early engagement with the community, including conservation groups, land managers, riding communities, marginalized communities, and agencies, and especially Tribes and Indigenous Communities is essential to ensuring that community needs and environmental considerations are integrated into MTB development and initiatives. Addressing the underrepresentation of women, LGBTQIA+, young people, and people from diverse cultures and all abilities in MTB participation requires targeted efforts to increase inclusivity.

The vision can inspire the network to address infrastructure gaps, enhance trail networks, and create amenities to cater to diverse user needs and improve overall visitor experiences. Infrastructure development through community engagement lies at the heart of this effort, fostering inclusive decision-making that incorporates diverse perspectives and prioritizes community-driven priorities and aspirations.

Action Steps

- Initiate community needs assessments and engagement sessions to gather data and input from communities across the region, ensuring representation from all user groups. Consider surveys, focus groups, workshops (in-person and virtual), events and programs such as the Trust for Public Land's Park Listeners program.
- Conduct data collection on demographics, like population and recreation trends, gathering planning documents from regional, local, county, and municipalities.
- Host a broader, inclusive workshop to define values, principles, and complete a vision statement for the region.
- Create a classification system to establish a common language around trail types and quality of amenities and to help inform where access, quality, programming, and equity gaps exist.



Credit: MADE x MTNS

IDENTIFY GAPS THROUGH MAPPING AND PRIORITIZE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Identifying gaps and prioritizing key infrastructure projects can help build momentum and success. Mapping the trail network using geospatial data is essential for comprehending its extent, from existing trails to undeveloped segments. Mapping current visitation and trends can assist with understanding current use, opportunities, and over use. These gaps could be considered equity zones, as demonstrated in the Chattanooga example below.

Challenges Addressed

Mapping will enhance current understanding and the extent of the trail network and current visitation trends to address accessibility, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity. Infrastructure challenges were addressed time and time again in the Summit and by the advisory committee as priority areas to push forward.

Action Steps

- Identify gaps in community and destination mountain bike trails: Focus on priorities from the Summit, including accessibility, inclusivity, transportation options, adaptive access, and cultural sensitivity. Identify trail deserts and assess trail types and quality.
- Use mobility data from SafeGraph to explore visitation patterns.
- Inventory and assess plans including SCORPs of all states within the region, and identify alignments and priorities within them. See SCORP call out under the infrastructure action step.
- Map potential gaps and overlay with those identified from the existing Priority Trail Gap data for the entire region.
- Map regions with a history of environmental degradation, underinvestment in parks, and other public improvements, as well as areas with a greater need for the benefits of trails and parks. Chattanooga's POP example considers equity through the lenses of Environmental Justice, Socioeconomics and Demographics. They include the following data inputs, which identify areas of greatest overlap, and support focused prioritization for projects serving communities in these zones:
 - » **Environmental Justice:** Areas with high vulnerability to flooding, low tree canopy coverage, and high proximity to brownfields.

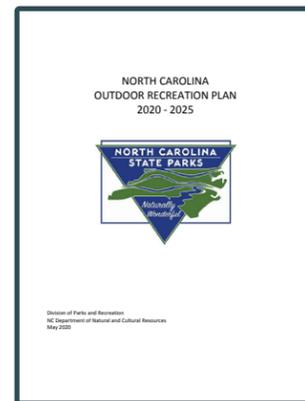
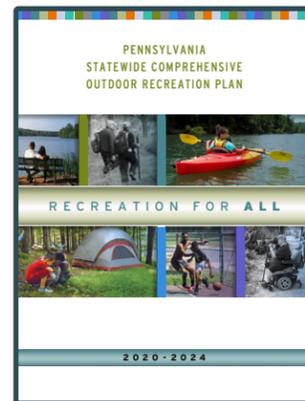
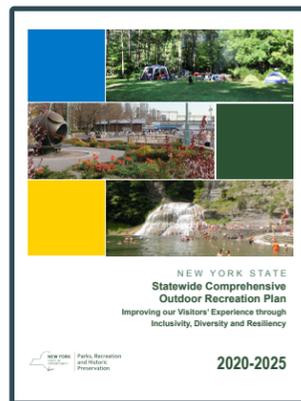
- » **Socioeconomics:** Areas with low rates of car ownership, low educational attainment, high crime index, high household poverty, high percentage of SNAP recipients, and high unemployment.
- » **Demographics:** Areas with high Diversity Index, high percentage of linguistically isolated populations, high percentage of seniors, high percentage of children, high percentage of people with disabilities, and high population density.
- Advance and prioritize 1-3 infrastructure projects.
 - » Prioritize a single MTB destination that supports community-centered principles for development.
 - » Identify and advance projects that fill gaps in the trail network and support sustainable trail development within a three-year timeframe.
 - » Add recreation units near major urban areas to decrease long-term demand on ecologically sensitive state parks and natural areas.
 - » Create information and management infrastructures for better understanding and coordination among federal, state, and local governments.
 - » Develop and prioritize trail projects that have sustainable maintenance plans, community support, and confirmed partnerships.
 - » Develop innovative and comprehensive planning efforts that examine underutilized/underdeveloped recreation opportunities in economically depressed areas.



Aligning with SCORP Plans

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) acts as a blueprint for all public outdoor recreation activities across urban and rural neighborhoods, cities, and regions within a state. Advancing trail networks by focusing on completing trail projects that fill gaps, complete long-distance trails, build connections with existing trails, and create connections within and between communities are listed within many plans. SCORPs vary from state to state, but several aligned priorities and challenges are listed below:

- Encourage collaboration between outdoor recreation stakeholders for completing trail gaps, furthering trail planning, creating connections, developing user information, and improving funding opportunities (OH SCORP)
- Encourage trail planning to evaluate economic benefits, transportation alternatives, health and wellness benefits, and build collaborations and partnerships to increase funding opportunities (OH SCORP)
- Encourage the expansion of universally accessible trail systems (NY SCORP)
- 79% of enthusiasts listed community or regional trail systems as the highest priority for facility investment over the next five years (PA SCORP)
- The dynamic of a large demand for maintaining and expanding recreational needs to be paired with the limited amount of regular funding for capital needs and limited bond success rates. There is a need for non-local funds to accomplish large capital projects within local parks and recreation (NC SCORP survey)
- Mountain biking trails ranked eighth out of the 50 listed recreational facilities that Ohioans want more of on public lands (OH SCORP)



ENGAGE COMMUNITIES AND ACTIVATE MTB TRAILS

Engaging communities to activate MTB Trails can support community health and grow stewardship. The City Parks Alliance report, **Active Parks, Healthy Cities: Recommendations from the National Study of Neighborhood Parks**, found that nothing increases activity and park use as much as programming, and for each activity added to a community park, use increased by 48%. By working with community-based partners to expand trail and outdoor activation and specific MTB programming, the region can reach new audiences and eliminate barriers to use. Delivery of participation and skill-building initiatives, particularly to under-represented groups including women, LGBTQIA+, young people and beginners/less skilled riders rose as a priority.

Challenges Addressed

Increase trail use and physical activity through programming and community-based partnerships.

Action Steps

- Create an engagement hub of information for easy access to information about trails, stewardship, and education materials. This can support education, awareness, & workforce development. Educating riders and promoting safe riding behaviors can mitigate risks to the environment and ensure the safety of riders and other trail users. Enhancing the knowledge, skills, and support for continuous stewardship (e.g., paid and volunteer workforce) is crucial to sustain and grow the network of trails across the region. Job creation was also discussed as a need in support of a growing localized economy.
- Create a toolkit and guide for communities with steps to help them activate trails in the region, support a balance of land use, housing and planning, and cultivate an inclusive trail culture.
- Support planning and programming in communities that create equitable sidewalks, bike lanes, transit connections, and community trails to destination trails.
- Design new trails for all physical abilities, languages, and other accessibility and safety accommodations.
- Explore opportunities to market North Central Appalachia as a Regional MTB Destination

SECURE LONG TERM SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR TRAIL DEVELOPMENT & MAINTENANCE

The absence of a long-term sustainable funding resource – for development, infrastructure, stewardship, education, and capacity – poses a significant challenge to meeting future trail development needs, including at the local community level. Efforts to secure sustainable funding sources and financial strategies are imperative to ensure the continued growth and maintenance of trail networks.

Challenges Addressed

As described in the Barriers Group of the Summit, one of the largest obstacles for infrastructure is funding: the lack of funds within the community, the knowledge needed to access the funds, and the capacity to manage funds across the region. With greater capacity, there could be greater understanding of the needs and preferences for all user groups, supporting efforts to tailor experiences and amenities accordingly.

Action Steps

- Record investment in major MTB infrastructure projects
- Identify shovel-ready projects and develop cost estimates to implement upon a 3-year timeframe
- Increase support and resources for trail maintenance and management
- Build capacity and support for stewardship clubs and groups
- Improve access to local trails and urban bike parks / pump tracks within or in close proximity to population centers
- Seek funding opportunities that prioritize collaborative projects and partnerships, emphasizing the collective impact and shared benefits of outdoor recreation initiatives
- Identify all funding opportunities and resources, consider a **financing blueprint**, or a regional multi-state grant such as **ARC's ARISE**

The summit emphasized the importance of community readiness for increased MTB activity, preserving community character, and landscapes while centering community needs.



Credit: IMBA

Conclusion

The summit set out to explore community readiness and willingness associated with increases in MTB. We wanted to explore growth in MTB while preserving community character, landscapes, and centering community needs. While the recommendations are informed by the Summit, more focus on preparing as a region to build and improve MTB facilities and networks is still needed.

Some additional questions for communities and planners to consider in anticipating and preparing for increases in MTB:

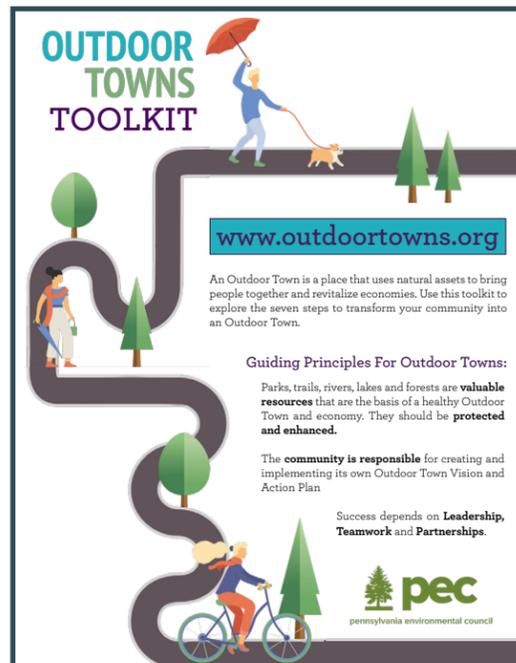
- Do local policies protect communities from some of the unintended consequences of the outdoor economy?
- What programs are in place to position local residents to capitalize on the opportunity (building local wealth) and feel connected to trails?
- What are steps to reduce a culture clash/fragmented culture?
- Is the infrastructure (housing stock, roadways, parking lots, water and sewer, etc.) capable of taking on more users and residents?

To ensure the recommendations reflect comprehensive community concerns and needs, consider utilizing tools like the [PEC's Outdoor Towns toolkit](#) (currently being updated) that includes an assessment and methods to engage communities in preparing for change.

Figure 3. Summit Participant Reaction Word Cloud



As summit participants departed, they were asked to write down a word that encapsulated their Summit experience. This word cloud highlights the most common responses, with the most frequent words shown in bold. We hope that this report and its recommendations leave you, too, with a sense of hope and connection.



Resources

These are some of the resources discussed at the Summit. It is a non-exhaustive list of the many resources available for community planning and MTB.

Technical Assistance programs:

- The International Mountain Bicycling Association: [Trail Solutions](#)
- Appalachian Regional Commission: [Recreation Economy for Rural Communities](#)
- National Park Service: [Rivers, Trails, Conservation Assistance](#)
- Department of Transportation: [Thriving Communities](#)

Federal Programs and Resources:

US Federal Highway Administration:

- [Recreational Trails Program](#)
- [Trails as Resilient Infrastructure](#)

US Economic Development Administration: [Travel, Tourism, & Outdoor Recreation](#)

US Forest Service:

- [Conservation Finance](#)
- [Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program](#)

Rails to Trails Conservancy: [Trail-Building Toolbox](#)

US Environmental Protection Agency:

- [The Smart School Siting Tool](#)
- [Smart Growth Self-Assessment for Rural Communities](#)
- [Tools and Key Resources for Sustainable Communities](#)

- [Cool & Connected: Nine Actions for Success](#)
- [Local Foods, Local Places Toolkit: A Guide to Help Communities Revitalize Using Local Food Systems](#)
- [Framework for Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy: A Tool for Small Cities and Towns](#)
- [Leveraging Opportunity Zones for Community Revitalization](#)

Appalachian Regional Commission:

- [Area Development Program](#)
- [ARISE Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies Program](#)
- [Investments Supporting Partnerships In Recovery Ecosystems \(INSPIRE\) Initiative](#)
- [Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization \(POWER\) Initiative](#)

Appendix

[Summit Agenda, Summit Panel Speakers and Bios](#)

Advancing Community- Centered & Sustainable Mountain Biking Growth in North Central Appalachia

**A Summary Report & Recommendations
Following an April 30, 2024 Summit**

DEVELOPED BY:

Cycle Forward and Just-Trails for The Pennsylvania Environmental Council

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