

PRESS RELEASE



CONTACT: Justin Thompson, Communications Manager
justin@mountainbizworks.org or (828) 253-2834 ext. 18

Mountain BizWorks and Growing Outdoors Partnership Receive \$1.35M from Appalachian Regional Commission's POWER Initiative

New grant for outdoor economic development is part of a nearly \$46.4 million award package to support Appalachian coal-impacted communities

Western North Carolina, September 23, 2021—Today, [Mountain BizWorks](#) and the [Growing Outdoors Partnership](#) were awarded \$1.35M by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to support outdoor-driven community and economic development in 25 Western North Carolina (WNC) counties and the Qualla Boundary. This award is part of a nearly \$46.4 million package supporting 57 projects across 184 coal-impacted counties through ARC's [POWER \(Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization\)](#) initiative. POWER targets federal resources to communities affected by job losses in coal mining, coal power plant operations, and coal-related supply chain industries.

“The downturn of the coal industry has impacted economies across Appalachia. That’s why ARC’s POWER initiative helps to leverage regional partnerships and collaborations to support efforts to create a more vibrant economic future for coal-impacted communities,” said ARC Federal Co-Chair Gayle Manchin. “Many of the projects we announced today will invest in educating and training the Appalachian workforce, nurturing entrepreneurship, and supporting infrastructure—including broadband access. These investments in our Appalachian coal-impacted communities are critical in leveling the economic playing field so our communities can thrive.”

\$1.64M in additional support for the project is being provided by other regional partners including Mountain BizWorks, the Dogwood Health Trust, Outdoor Gear Builders of

Press Release from Mountain BizWorks

WNC, Western Carolina University, and Appalachian State University. The three year project is expected to generate 325 jobs created and retained, as well as \$18.1M in new investment in the region's outdoor economy through three core pillars of work.

The first pillar, Building Outdoor Communities, will systematically assess, analyze, and design an outdoor economic development and investment approach for every county in WNC, as well as the Qualla Boundary. The second pillar, Outdoor Industry Expansion, will help companies capitalize on historic levels of demand for outdoor recreation through increased access to capital, peer mentorship, training, workforce development services, and other support to help them grow their businesses here in WNC. The third and final pillar, Increasing Market Access, will elevate WNC's profile nationally and internationally as the Outdoor Industry Hub of the East in order to help drive market access for our region's outdoor companies and rural communities.

"Over the past 8 years, the members of the regional Growing Outdoors Partnership initiative have helped empower critical economic progress for rural WNC communities," said Sophia Paulos, Board Chair of Mountain BizWorks and Graham County Economic Development Director. "This project represents a regional approach to outdoor-driven community and economic development that is uniquely tailored to our region, and unmatched anywhere in the world. We're tremendously grateful for this award which will help realize continued job creation, place-making, and community health benefits from one of WNC's most vital sectors."

Dogwood Health Trust is providing a \$900,000 matching investment to support the project in generating economic opportunities for rural communities and promoting the growth of a diverse and vibrant outdoor economy across their 18-county region in WNC.

"Providing a matching grant to attract the ARC POWER funds to our region is a great example of how Dogwood and partners like Mountain BizWorks can work collaboratively to bring more resources into WNC," said Dr. Susan Mims, Interim CEO of Dogwood Health Trust. "We are proud to play a role in supporting rural and diverse-owned businesses – in multiple outdoor-focused industries – that will increase access to economic opportunities that also support healthier lifestyles."

Since POWER launched in 2015, ARC has invested more than \$287.8 million in 362 projects across 353 coal-impacted counties. The nearly \$46.4 million awarded today is projected to create/retain over 9,187 jobs, attract nearly \$519.5 million in leveraged private investments, and be matched by \$59.2 million in additional public and private funds across the Region.

ARC is working with Chamberlin/Dunn LLC, a third-party research firm, to closely monitor, analyze, and evaluate these investments. A [new report](#), published in conjunction with the announcement, found that projects funded through POWER grants met or exceeded targets for jobs retained and/or created, businesses created, workers trained, and revenues increased. Chamberlin/Dunn is continuing to monitor POWER investments and make recommendations to ARC for ongoing programmatic efficiencies.

About the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)

The Appalachian Regional Commission (arc.gov) is an economic development partnership agency of the federal government and 13 state governments focusing on 420 counties across the Appalachian Region. ARC's mission is to innovate, partner, and invest to build community capacity and strengthen economic growth in Appalachia.

About Mountain BizWorks

Mountain BizWorks has been making business loans ranging from \$1,000 to \$350,000 to small businesses in Western North Carolina for over 30 years. They combine tailored small business lending, 1:1 coaching, and peer learning programs to help grow great businesses and expand economic opportunity. In 2018, Mountain BizWorks joined forces with others across the region to establish the Growing Outdoors Partnership, which is focused on elevating WNC's outdoor industry sector. This partnership enables the organization to expand its mission of helping entrepreneurs overcome obstacles, grow strategically, and create jobs in the outdoor sector. For more: mountainbizworks.org.

About Growing Outdoors Partnership

The Growing Outdoors Partnership is working to expand outdoor industry across NC's Appalachian region, including the counties of Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, McDowell, Macon, Madison, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Surry, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey, as well as the Qualla Boundary. More information about the Partnership and this project can be found at madexmtns.com/whywnc.

About Dogwood Health Trust

Dogwood Health Trust is a private foundation based in Asheville, North Carolina with the sole purpose of dramatically improving the health and well-being of all people and communities of 18 counties and the Qualla Boundary in Western North Carolina. Dogwood Health Trust focuses on innovative and equitable ways to address the many

Press Release from Mountain BizWorks

factors that contribute to overall health and wellness. With a focus on housing, education, economic opportunity and access to care and health resources, Dogwood Health Trust works to create a Western North Carolina where every generation can live, learn, earn and thrive, with dignity and opportunity for all, no exceptions. To learn more, please visit dht.org.

###