



Building Outdoor Communities Report

January 2024

Planning Process Summary

The Made By Mountains Partnership is working to expand the outdoor industry and economy across North Carolina's Appalachian region and catalyze rural development by building vibrant outdoor communities, growing outdoor businesses, and amplifying outdoor culture. Funding for this effort was provided by the Appalachian Regional Commission, Dogwood Health Trust, and Mountain BizWorks.

In September 2022, the Partnership launched the [Building Outdoor Communities Program](#) to support 25 communities and the Qualla Boundary (Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) to align key stakeholders, conduct comprehensive outdoor community and economy assessments, identify gaps, and develop implementation priorities that guide future development. Program partners include Appalachian State University's Center for Economic Research and Policy Analysis, West Virginia University's Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative and six Council of Governments of Western North Carolina.

Wilkes County's Community Working Group successfully participated in a 7-month planning process where participants implemented the Building Outdoor Communities Assessment Tool. Figure 1 highlights the core elements of the tool.

This report summarizes key themes that emerged during the 7-month planning process following by strategic recommendations to guide future development of a thriving, inclusive, and connected outdoor community.



Figure 1: The BOC Assessment Tool is made up of the outdoor economic ecosystem. For each core element, the Community Working Group completed a comprehensive assets and gaps assessment with a corresponding worksheet and survey.

Emerging Themes

Planning Process (Sept. 2022 – May 2023)	
Infrastructure	Realizing the Boros River District & connecting the county
Economy	Promoting outdoor business opportunities
Activation	Creating a one-stop-shop for outdoor events and action plan progress
Workforce & Education	Incentivizing camping entrepreneurs
Brand	Activating the Great State of Wilkes brand
Tourism	Integrating destination stewardship communications

Strategic Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Take incremental steps to bring the Boros River District to life using tactical urbanism and other creative placemaking strategies

- Build off successes of Cyclovia, closing roads to vehicular traffic, and create engaging events for pedestrians to take over the streets and learn more about the Boros River District
- Create temporary venues, art installations, parklets, fun seating etc. so the public can get a taste of what it would be like if the River District was activated
- Page 94 of the Great State of Wilkes Outdoor Action Plan recommends form-based planning and design guidelines for the Boros – See the links below for inspiration including how to incorporate green infrastructure & equitable development into these guidelines
- Take the Invest Appalachia Downtown Revitalization Playbook ‘Readiness Assessment’ – Refer to the link in the resources section below

Definitions:

- Tactical urbanism: is an approach to neighborhood building that uses short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions and policies to catalyze long-term change – Refer to the link in the resources section below
- Parklet: a small seating area or green space created as a public amenity on or alongside a sidewalk especially in a former roadside parking space. Parklets can be a form of tactical urbanism.

Recommendation 2: Build partnerships with adjacent counties to create consistent branding, wayfinding, interpretative signage, and education materials for state trails in development – Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, Yadkin River State Trail

- Analyze proposed trailheads and develop a placemaking strategy that aligns state trails and greenway connectors at specific nodes (potentially in the Boros) to stimulate local business spending and economic development

Recommendation 3: Position key greenway segments for the Great Trails State Fund and elevate their alignment with the Great Trails State Plan; similarly, position the Reddies River Park and river re-route for NC Land & Water Fund and NC Water Resources Development grants

- Develop a compelling narrative for grant applications that speaks to the connectivity potential of diverse outdoor assets and their impact on the outdoor economy and Main Street businesses

Recommendation 5: Identify corridors of opportunity to target community and economic development investment and create marketing campaigns and sell sheets that highlight existing businesses, available buildings and land, outdoor assets, and desired future land uses

- For example, U.S. 421 Scenic Byway, consider branding this corridor “Main St. to Mountains Scenic Drive” and create tailored itineraries for different segments of people coming to Wilkes for festivals, events, etc.
- For prospective businesses, this can be a sell sheet that depicts business opportunities along the corridors elevating connections to outdoor assets
- Consider creating a workshop for people interested in camping or glamping business opportunities and for existing business owners to understand the nuances of operating such a business especially during peak event seasons

Recommendation 6: Create a targeted outdoor economy workforce development campaign that garners local excitement for the outdoor action plan implementation underway and seeds entrepreneurship from within

- Think about strategic partnerships with local schools, community college, outdoor-oriented non-profits, outdoor businesses, and guide services to develop programming that’s captivating while showcasing the diverse professions that makeup the outdoor industry – Refer to the outdoor economy resources below

Recommendation 7: Commission a Great State of Wilkes Brand Activation strategy that integrates Outdoor NC and destination stewardship communications

- Transition the Great State of Wilkes planning website into an interactive implementation website that sustains public excitement and keeps key stakeholders and funders informed of progress made
- Ensure the brand is deployed consistently across community infrastructure – wayfinding signage, information kiosks, business storefronts, trailheads, banners, gateway signs, and also on digital platforms – website, facebook, instagram etc.
- Create a brand training workshop that educates community stakeholders and local businesses on impactful and consistent brand application techniques
- Showcase the brand at all public events, markets, and festivals and direct people to the website, social media platforms, trailheads, information kiosks, tailored itineraries, sell sheets, and corridors of opportunity
- Encourage the TDA to pursue Outdoor NC 2.0 programs including: Make it Your Nature, Accessible Outdoors, and Trail Town Designation and Visitor Guide to elevate Wilke’s commitment to destination stewardship

By taking strides to advance these recommendations in the outdoor economic ecosystem, the Community Working Group can position the county to attract and retain businesses and people, to embrace stewardship, inclusivity, and connectivity for enhanced quality and life, and to ultimately attract investment that manifests a vibrant outdoor community and economy.

Resources & Inspiration

Based on the emerging themes and strategic recommendations provided above, here are several resources and inspiration to guide future outdoor community and economy development.

The Boros River District Planning & Design Guidelines

- [Form-Based Code Institute](#)
 - SmartCode – model transect-based planning & zoning guidelines based on geographies from rural to urban
- [Form-Based Codes: A Step-By-Step Guide for Communities](#)
- [Integrating Green Infrastructure into Federal Regulatory Programs](#)
- [Light Imprint for Walkable Green Infrastructure](#)
- [Partnership for Southern Equity: Just Communities](#)
- [UNC School of Government – Development Finance Initiative:](#)
 - They offer real estate development feasibility study support
- [LEED for Neighborhood Development](#)

- Guidelines for sustainable district planning
- [Fauquier County, VA – Marshall Form-Based Code](#)
- [Beaufort Boundary Street Redevelopment District](#)
- [Tactical Urbanism Interventions](#)
- [Public Art Walk: Triennale Brugge](#)
- [Invest Appalachia: Downtown Revitalization Playbook: Readiness Assessment](#)

Outdoor Infrastructure & River Park Development

- [NC DEQ – Express Permitting](#)
- [NC DEC – Water Resources Development Grant Program](#)
- [NC Land & Water Fund - Grants](#)

Outdoor Recreation Marketing & Projects

- [Singing River Trail](#)
- [Tennessee RiverLine](#)
- [Virginia Creeper Trail Guide](#)
- [Miami Valley Trails](#)
- [Chattahoochee RiverLands](#)
- [Rockingham County Blueway Guide](#)
- [PA Wilds](#)

Outdoor Economy & Workforce Development

- [Outdoor Recreation Roundtable: Workforce Hub](#)
- [Hipcamp](#)
- [12 creative ways to make extra money at your campground](#)
- [Outdoor Business Alliance: WNC](#)
- [Mountain BizWorks Waypoint Accelerator](#)
 - Outdoor entrepreneurship and innovation accelerator program

Destination Stewardship

- [Visit NC – Outdoor NC](#)
- [Leave No Trace](#)