



MFTP NEWSLETTER

Volume 3 | December 2021

Nick Schrader, Editor

CONNECTING TOWNS WITHIN AND NEAR THE MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST, WEST VIRGINIA

Mon Forest Towns Forge a Path Forward

As the Mon Forest Towns Partnership nears the end of another exciting and productive year, we'd like to take the time to highlight successes, projects, and the future of this exciting initiative. The hard work and dedication of the rural communities and partners to the Mon Forest Towns partnership continues to show the resilience of the region in yet another difficult year addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. This past year, filled with its own challenges, gave rise to many exciting achievements, including overarching direction for the partnership in the year to come. The strides made to outline a shared vision for the partnership in a

newly adopted Strategic Plan top the list of achievements.

This plan effectively formalizes the work that has been taking place since the key signing of a Memorandum of Understanding over a year ago. Other achievements include mountain bike trail design and the implementation Mower Basin Trail System within the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center, the execution of signage projects in multiple towns, an important step to marketing the Mon Forest Towns and providing visitors with direction and wayfinding, and the addition of a full-time marketing agency to assist in strategic planning and other marketing needs.

*Continuing to serve as gateways and hubs of activity for visitors and residents, the partnership views our **ten communities** through a lens of connectivity and hopes to seek future status as a nonprofit with aid from West Virginia University. The diverse amenities and activities across the ten communities continues to be one of the Mon Forest Towns' biggest assets with inclusive action to follow in the years to come. Maintaining an attitude based in collaboration will serve this recreation economy-focused partnership and ensure economic sustainability and resiliency in the face of shifting industry-focus in the Monongahela National Forest.*

Planning for Future Success: A Direction for Mon Forest Towns

For the next five years the Mon Forest Towns has a definitive direction. In October, 2021 a Strategic Plan outlining the mission, vision, **goals**, and objectives was adopted. As we continue to navigate this budding partnership together each town will have their own unique challenges and priority projects. From building capacity to maintaining the identity of the rich history and culture the Monongahela National Forest holds for so many. A venture that began in May 2017 to engage with towns that acted as gateways to the Forest, the partnership and branding took shape over the next year and the official partnership was launched in June 2019.

While the course of Mon Forest Towns' first two years looked different than those had envisioned with the introduction of COVID-19, progress has continued with a Marketing Committee being established in 2020 to develop and coordinate marketing activities and a Grants Committee in 2021 with to aid in identifying funding opportunities. Over \$460,000 has been awarded directly to the Mon Forest Towns, with another \$1.5 million being awarded to our partners aiding in development of the region. We look to continue this success in 2022 and beyond as the implementation of seven goals and objectives

will help guide the ten towns individually and collectively toward sustainable recreation and economic growth.

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Strategic Plan Goals

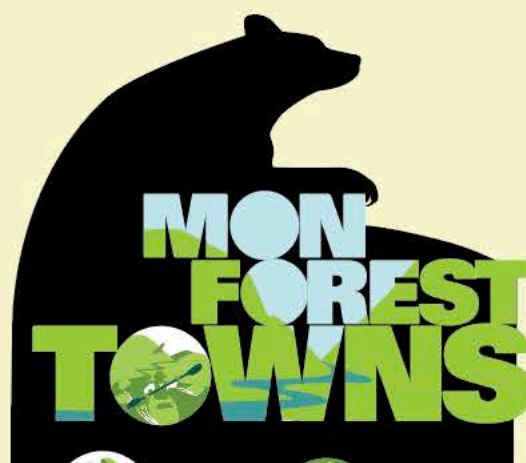
- 1** Improve community health and wellness through promotion of outdoor recreation activities and infrastructure improvement.
- 2** Develop an outdoor recreation entrepreneurial culture by supporting the creation and growth of local recreation and tourism-based businesses.
- 3** Promote the uniqueness of the Mon Forest Towns and recreation opportunities in the region through collaborative regional marketing.
- 4** Develop world-class trails and outdoor recreation opportunities in the Mon Forest Towns region.
- 5** Increase employment opportunities in recreation related fields to build a year-round recreation economy.
- 6** Create a downtown experience that recreationists would enjoy.
- 7** Develop a Sustainable Partnership Framework.

Marketing the Mon

As the goal to achieve an identity for the Mon Forest Towns takes shape, the next step to develop the towns' unique personality begins with the hiring of 84 Agency. The marketing firm's history of working with changemaking nonprofit organizations, the new vision and ideas they bring to the region, and approach to marketing all played important roles in the Marketing Committee's decision to offer them this partnership opportunity. The Committee recently met with the team from 84 Agency to begin the initial process of developing a Marketing Strategy, the agency's main objective, while also developing a relationship and identity for the Mon Forest Towns. Emphasis has been given to both the Mon Forest Towns as a whole and each town individually as goals to create a cohesive marketing strategy break ground.

Along with completing a marketing strategy for Mon Forest Towns, 84 Agency will also assist in the website design/maintenance, advertising, and further developing market reach. Future plans to monetize the Mon Forest Towns Brand are in planning stages with the help of the WVU MBA program and an updated style guide to assist communities in this process. As visibility continues to increase, the marketing committee and team hopes to provide quarterly highlight stories from the community. In addition, the WVU College of Media will be working in the Petersburg area in Spring 2022 to develop more stories for the website. These highlights will focus on achievements, news from the community, significant people, and service projects. Reach out to our team here if you have any stories you'd like to highlight!

**84
AGENCY**



John Herrod

Going for Gold: Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center

After reaching the elite Silver status with International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) in 2020, the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center sets its site on Gold. IMBA's Trail Solutions, has been enlisted to perform a gap analysis regarding the feasibility of a Gold-Level Ride Center designation for the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center (SHRC). The mountain bike collaboration has been set through the efforts of the Snowshoe Highlands Area Recreation Collaborative (SHARC). Partners involved in the transformation process and wanting to achieve Gold-Level status is the local IMBA association Pocahontas Trails, Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the USDA Forest Service, Snowshoe Mountain, and West Virginia University Extension Service.

This process has been an important part of our collaborative work to enhance communities through sustainable recreation on public lands.

The Snowshoe-Highlands Ride Center was designated a bronze level award by the IMBA in 2019 and received a silver-level designation in 2020. Since that time, the collaborative has begun developing a strategic plan for achieving the gold-level designation by 2025, which is largely dependent on the creation of bike-optimized, multiple-use single-track trails, which are currently absent on the landscape except for trails located at Snowshoe Mountain Resort and the Mower Basin Trail system. Achieving a Gold-Level designation will have a substantial impact on economic and business development across the region and will lead to a long-term increase in tourist activity.

Currently there are several trail systems that are designed, ready to be built or planned for future. These include:

- **Green Bank Observatory trail improvements and new trails designed; not funded**
- **Monday Lick Trails which are designed; not funded;**
- **Mower Basin Trail System – 8 miles built, additional trails designed and funded; future stacked trails planned, need designed and need funded;**
- **Snowshoe Mountain has trails designed, not funded; planned not funded**
- **Watoga State Park – trails designed, not funded**
- **Monongahela National Forest future trail development throughout the forest, not funded**
- **Additional state park and forest trail development opportunity, not funded**

Restoring for Recreation: Mower Basin Trail System

From strip mining land to ecological restoration to a recreation hub. The latest addition to the Ride Center, the Mower Basin Trail System, joins the most extensive mountain biking trail system in West Virginia with plans to connect an eight-mile trail (June 2022 groundbreaking) to Snowshoe Resort's trail system. Many steps were involved in making this trail system possible starting with improvements to access to the area. Ecological restoration started in 2011 with a pilot project to rehabilitate mine lands that were not productive habitat. Ten years later over 1,100 acres have been restored with over 550,000 trees planted. The goal of the restoration project was to get Cheat Mountain habitat functional again and provide an area for the public to see the value of restoration. Hunting, hiking and mountain biking have been the focus for

the last few years. Trails and access for the public is key to help the local economies of the area. **Recreation opportunities were created for visitors**, including twenty dispersed campsites within the area. Phase one of Mower Basin Trail System, with stacked loops, has been constructed and officially opened this last spring. Funding for the second phase of stacked loop trails at Mower Tract has been approved and the creation of more trails in the system are set to be complete before 2025. This will include a southern connection trail between Beaver Creek and Snowshoe Resort's extensive trail system. With the goal of reaching IMBA Gold-Level status by 2025, Mower Basin Trail System serves as a reminder of the possibilities that come with a collaborative-approach to recreation and tourism management.



Now there is more to learn about where you are in the Forest!

A Sign of Good Things to Come

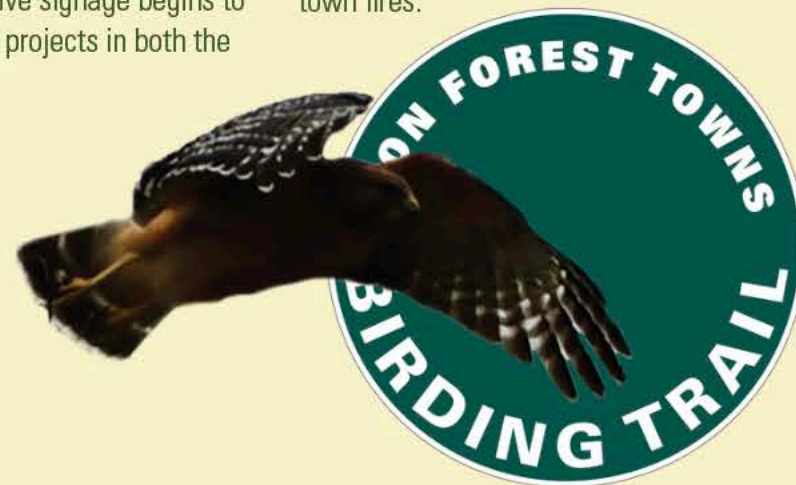
As we work our way into another year of the Mon Forest Towns partnership, tangible progress can be seen across the ten gateway communities of the Forest. Each of the ten communities have installed the iconic Mon Forest Towns gateway signs serving as a warm welcome to visitors. Wayfinding signage to help visitors get their bearings, have been designed with the goal to have them implemented in all ten towns in 2022, while town specific history and interpretive signage begins to take shape. Signage projects in both the

North and South Zone of the forest continue to be discussed and implemented with a **Birding Trail** and **Falls of Hills Creek** wayfinding signage highlighting future wayfinding in the South. Looking for a trip down memory lane? Take a trip to view Cowen's eight recently delivered signs set to be installed in Spring 2022. These signs highlight the town's history as a railroad hub and the resilience the community has shown in the face of several catastrophic town fires.



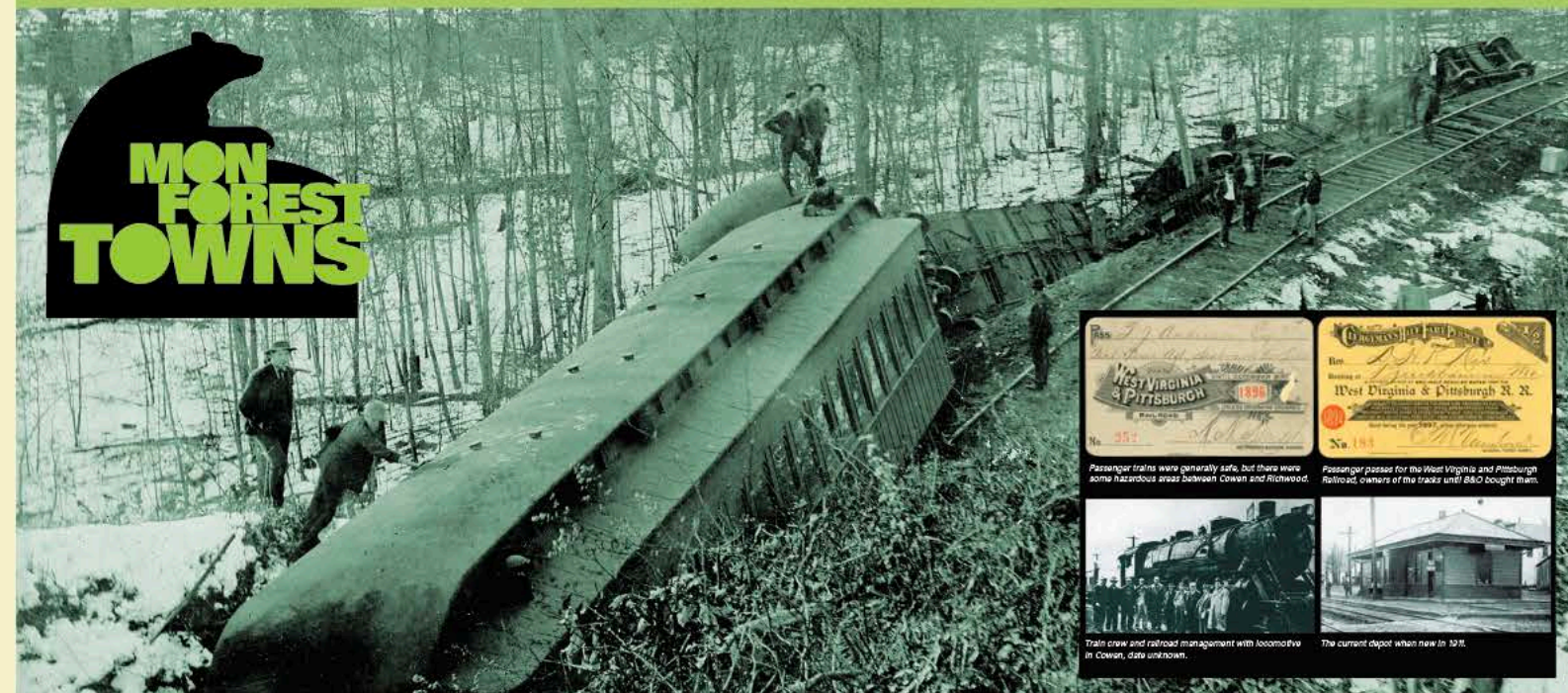
At the right are some of the eight interpretive signs for Cowen that will be installed in this sign structure system as soon as the winter ground allows. Cowen's town identity was designed by WVU student, Breellen Fleming, and the interpretive signs were designed by Skylar Spence and Eve Faulkes with the help of Cowen representatives, Kent Walker and Mark Romano.

Landing soon...



A SMALL TOWN KIND OF AMAZING
COWEN

B&O RAILROAD DEPOT



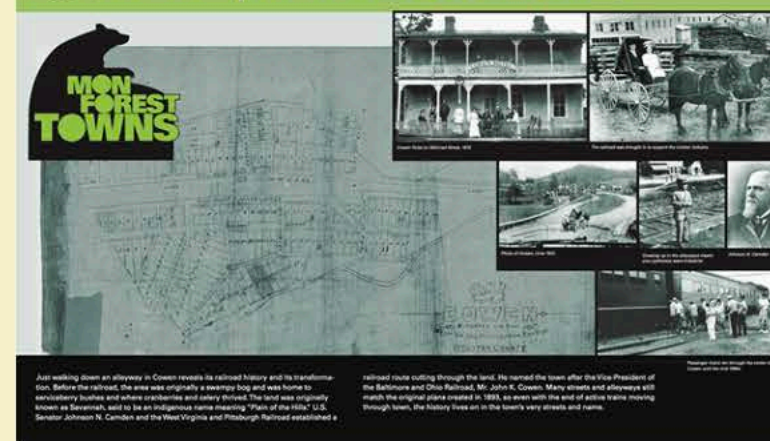
The Cowen B&O Railroad Depot was the center of community life beginning in 1893 until the last passenger train pulled away from the depot in 1956. The Cowen Fire of 1911 completely destroyed the building, but it was rebuilt in less than 30 days to serve as the only financial institution in town, allowing insurance claims to be telegraphed out and money for rebuilding to be wired into the town. Throughout the years everything from

sheep to automobiles, paychecks, movie film reels and houses came and went from the depot. Soldiers left for training and deployment from the depot in both world wars. The depot stands as a reminder of Cowen's rich railroad history and of the many lives touched by this community fixture.

A MON FOREST TOWN



PLAT AND ALLEYWAYS



TOWN PARK



ANCESTORS AND FRIENDS

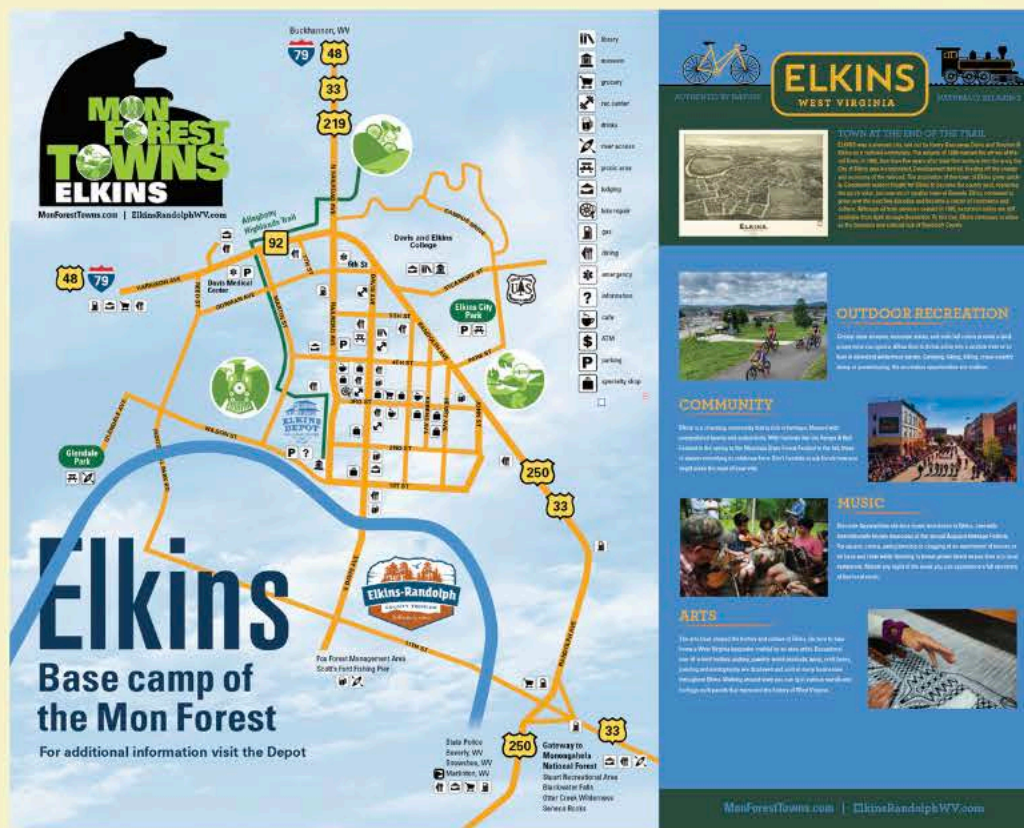


A Sign of Good Things to Come, continued

Elkins has installed Mon Forest Towns signs in the City of Elkins and the Forest. They are installing three signs highlighting downtown Elkins, located at Elkins City Hall, Elkins Depot Welcome Center, and soon to be on the corner of the Nathan Building that is home to TipTop Coffee. Signs that have been installed in the Forest are located at the Allegheny Trail, Mower Basin Trails, and Bear Heaven Campground. And the City of Elkins is in the process of installing three signs along the Allegheny Highlands Rail Trail located near Elkins, Gilman, and Kerens/Montrose.

The town of Davis installed Mon Forest Towns signs in November. The mountain bike kiosk was installed at Blackwater Bikes, with plans of attaching a mechanical repair kit and water station for bicyclists and planning to mount town signs on either side next year. To go along with signs, the Tucker Boulder Park had the third medium boulder delivered and installed in July with a re-grand opening event. This installation works in conjunction with signage as a community and visitor engagement piece.

34" w x 27"



With Richwood and Marlinton serving as the nearest hubs to the Falls of Hills Creek Trailhead, signage has been developed to encourage visitors to make a trip to one of the two Mon Forest Towns. These wayfinding signs are set to be installed at the trailhead parking lot in Spring 2022. The two-panel kiosk lot will feature wayfinding and background information for both Richwood and Marlinton to aid in visitor education of the area. Since the trailhead is positioned nearly in the middle of the two Mon Forest Towns, we hope the addition of signs to the trailhead parking lot will educate and encourage visitors to follow their heart to both towns. Stay tuned for more information on sign projects and reach out if you have future sign projects you'd like to propose!

The Elkins placements allowed us to develop a design template for horizontal and vertical spaces as well as make a second layout that matched the guidelines for signage on Monongahela Forest property.

The Davis kiosk is built and installed and bike repair stand is waiting.



34" w x 44 3/4" h

Welcome to the Monongahela National Forest. Find lodging, campgrounds, local fare, and supplies as you enjoy the best recreation and wilderness opportunities in the country.

Look for these signs as you travel through the forest and visit our Mon Forest Towns. Interactive maps of trails, amenities, and more information can be found on our website, www.monforesttowns.com.

MON FOREST TOWNS RICHWOOD

17 miles — 21 minutes

Explore Richwood

The largest town nearest to the pristine 25,000-acre Cranberry Wilderness, Richwood offers a diverse set of activities for your trip. From fishing, swimming, hiking, and boating along the Cherry River, to unique dining and shopping options, Richwood is a great place to spend time. Richwood also offers a variety of services, including a bike repair stand, a water station, and a bike rack.

Follow your Heart: Two Mon Forest Towns to Fall in Love With

Located within the Monongahela National Forest, Marlinton is a small town with a big heart. It offers a variety of services, including a bike repair stand, a water station, and a bike rack.

MON FOREST TOWNS MARLINTON

20 miles — 30 minutes

Discover Marlinton

A recreational paradise, Marlinton is a small town with a big heart. It offers a variety of services, including a bike repair stand, a water station, and a bike rack.

Falls of Hills Creek kiosk panels

Partnership Pathways: Capacity Building

The Mon Forest Towns Grants Committee is chaired by Doug Arbogast and includes representatives from the Regional Planning and Development Councils, Benedum Foundation, non-profit organizations, USDA Rural Development, AFNHA, and Economic Development Authorities. In 2021, the grants committee secured funding for a grants coordinator and managed the selection process to contract with a consultant that will assist the Mon Forest Towns Partnership with identifying and securing funding for priority projects. **Downstream Strategies** was selected to support the Partnership as grants coordinator. The grants coordinator will work with members of the grants committee and local capture teams that will strategically leverage their resources to pursue and secure grants. The grants committee meets monthly to review funding opportunities and make recommendations

to the board on grant activities. A proposal was submitted to the Just Transition Fund in October and awarded in December to support increasing the capacity of the Partnership and develop an organizational framework.

Another exciting update for the Town of Marlinton comes from the AmeriCorps VISTA Program. The town representatives, along with the help of "Marlinton Listens" **HubCAP** team, and the USFS have completed the application process for a Recreation Economy Coordinator position. As a result of the VISTA's service the Town of Marlinton will increase capacity to leverage partnerships and secure funding through grant writing to build a sustainable economy centered around recreation while promoting healthy lifestyles and creating economic opportunity for residents. Stay tuned for more updates!

Downstream Strategies

Ideas that sustain.



The Work Continues for AmeriCorps



*proposed tote bag
design by Skylar Spence*

Coming on board for the south zone is **Nick Schrader**, a graduate of Colorado State University with a BS in Human Dimensions of Natural Resources. Spending most of the past seven years in northern Colorado, he is excited to spend this next year serving the Mon Forest Towns partnership from Marlinton. He is an avid recreationist and advocate for change, most recently serving in the Office of Diversity & Inclusion for the Warner College of Natural Resources. His goals in the field of conservation relate to education, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Another year passes and more new faces become involved with the Mon Forest Towns partnership. We say goodbye to **Kristen Stanford** in the north zone, and **Emily Culp** in the south, who returned to Tennessee. One of the greatest avenues for building capacity, albeit short-term, has been through the utilization of AmeriCorps and the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area that continues to provide talent for this unique development experience.



Katelyn Dean is from Broadway, VA and recently graduated from Eastern Mennonite University with a BS in Biology and a minor in Criminology and Restorative Justice. Katelyn loves to hike, fish, forage, and enjoy the outdoors. She's excited to start working with the Mon Forest Towns Partnership and can't wait to continue exploring West Virginia. Katelyn will be serving the north zone this upcoming year from the Bartow office.



A few of Skylar's projects

Goodbye and Hello again!



Skylar Spence, WVU graphic design senior interning with Professor Eve Faulkes finished her 320 hours with us in May, having worked on many of the signage projects, swag design, and several photoshoots. She is now working as Junior Graphic Designer in Charleston for **84 Agency** who just got the MFTP PR contract!



Bumper sticker

MON FOREST TOWNS RICHWOOD

Welcome to Richwood
The City Merry on the Banks of the Cherry

Richwood is a quaint town with a rich history tied to the wealth of natural resources that are found here. While the timber industry has played a pivotal role throughout our history, Richwood has blossomed into a recreational paradise where visitors from the world over come to fish, mountain bike, hike, camp, and enjoy the rich mountain splendor. In town, you can experience great food, shopping venues filled with local artisan finds and antiques, historical murals, festivals, and lodging. All while enjoying the small town feel that makes everyone feel welcomed.

Richwood is a Mon Forest Town and serves as a gateway to the Monongahela National Forest. Mon Forest Towns are intrinsically connected to the Forest and to each other. They are places where visitors can eat delicious meals, purchase supplies, and find warm and cozy lodging for the night. They are also home to unique businesses, artisans, musicians, and others who draw inspiration from nature and our rich heritage.

Fantastic Food

Whether you need a quick meal on the go or want to spend the evening around the table enjoying local beer and inspired dishes, Richwood has you covered. Start your morning with a hearty breakfast with a cup of locally roasted coffee or espresso. Later in the day, you can choose between pulled pork nachos, chicken bacon ranch pizza, a classic hamburger, and so much more. But, be sure to save room for dessert. You won't want to miss the banana split, homemade pies, or delicious cheesecakes.

Lovely Lodging

Quaint, cozy, welcoming - these are just a few of the words used to describe a night's stay in one of Richwood's mountain lodges, cabins, or Airbnbs. From rustic cabins to Camp Splinter to the Four Seasons Lodge, you can find the perfect place to relax after your outdoor adventure. Guests can literally hike, fish, bird watch, or explore just outside their front door.

Famous Festivals

Richwood's "Feast of the Ramson" has been described as "the granddaddy of ALL Appalachian Ramp Feeds." Celebrated for its pungent aroma and the field River it brings to food, ramps are cherished in Richwood. Although we have added heritage crafts and mountain-style music to this festival, the star of the show has, and always will remain, that delicious mountain delicacy with a mystique all its own: THE RAMP.

The Cherry River Festival had its beginnings in 1937 as the Spud 'n Splinter Festival when the Cherry River Navy formed to support building a road to connect Richwood and Marlinton. To this day, the Cherry River Navy admirals lead the SS Clothespin, a parade float battleship, as part of the Cherry River Festival parade to commemorate the completion of this road. Held the last week in July, it is a week-long celebration when Richwooders return to Richwood to celebrate their roots.

Richwood's Scenic Mountain Triathlon has been held for over 26 years and is West Virginia's oldest triathlon. This Olympic qualifying State Championship race has become a favorite of triathletes and spectators alike. The entire race is held near Richwood in the Monongahela National Forest.

Richwood's Hometown Holiday Marketplace is a pop-up shopping venue that occurs every year on the 2nd Saturday in December. In addition to our local stores on Main Street, over 40 vendors set up for this special shopping extravaganza. Special events include cookies with Santa, wagon rides for traveling around town, and several raffles.

richwoodareachamberofcommerce.com monforesttowns.com

Survey Update WVU and Involvement

In partnership with the Mon Forest Towns with funding from Benedum Foundation and WVU, a team from WVU's Recreation, Parks and Tourism Resources Program and WVU Extension Service are working to gather information and gauge attitudes on recreation economic development in the Monongahela National Forest area. With hopes of contributing to the long-term success and sustainability of rural development through recreation economy in the region, the team has developed two surveys for distribution to the public: one aimed towards visitors, and the other towards the residents of the region. **The visitor survey** is intended to gather information from the tourists' perspective of recreation in and around the Monongahela National Forest area, with Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio and Washington, DC as the main target market. Using ten key characteristics

The resident survey is intended to know more about regional collaboration on recreation economy from residents who live in one of the eight counties (Grant, Tucker, Randolph, Greenbrier, Webster, Nicholas, Pendleton, and Pocahontas). The data gathered should help the team understand those opinions on the recreation economic development from both groups, with a goal of empowering and engaging residents' participation and involvement. The data obtained will also be used to strengthen the linkage between communities and public/private sectors in promoting sustainable community development around recreation.

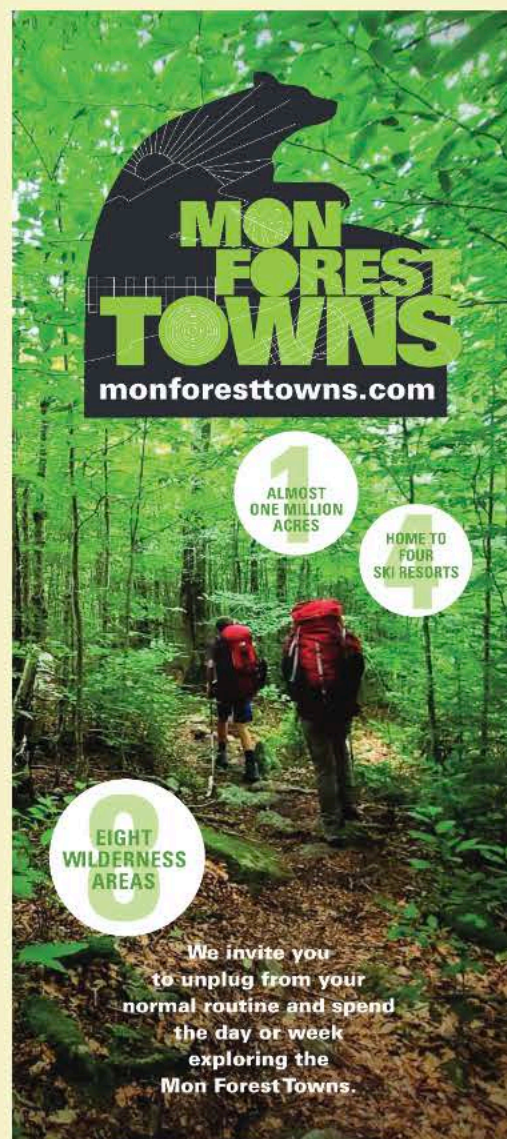


Promotional materials for the MFT Partnership



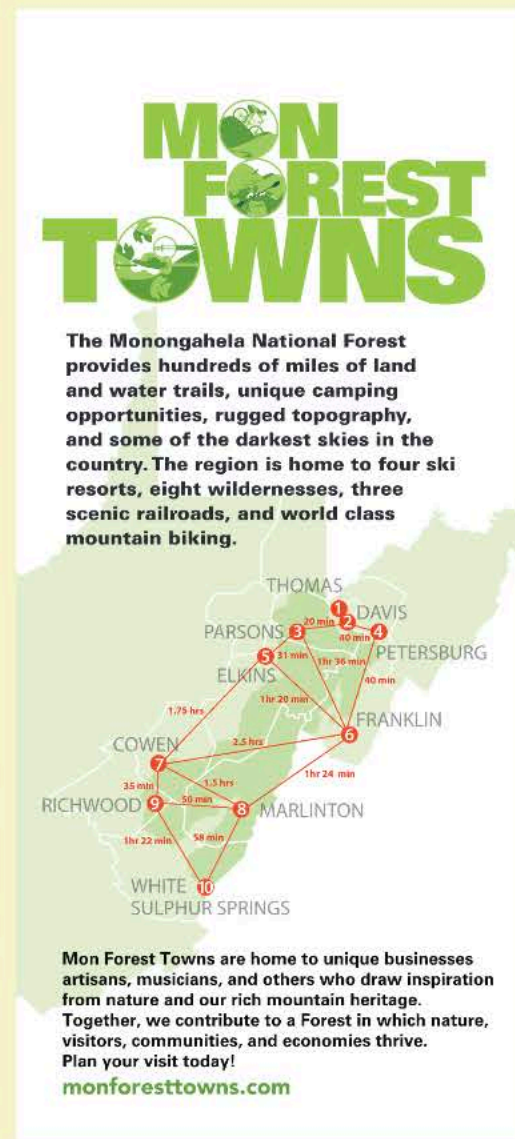
Mon Forest Towns Partnership banner, 7 ft tall

This year we were able to try out language and imagery that would set the right tone for our partnership in the Forest. This brought banners that could be set up at Centers in the north and south zones to advertise the towns. We also designed rack cards that could be available at CVBs and information centers in our towns or highway rest stops..



Round sticker, a bit of our swag

MFTP rack cards, front and back



Benedum signage grant

Cowen Interpretive signs
Davis Bike kiosk
Elkins City map and Forest signs
Franklin Pendleton County destinations
Marlinton Kiosk map signs
Parsons Map sign and wayfinding
Petersburg Wayfinding signage
Richwood Kiosk signs
Thomas Bike kiosk
White Sulphur Springs Billboard

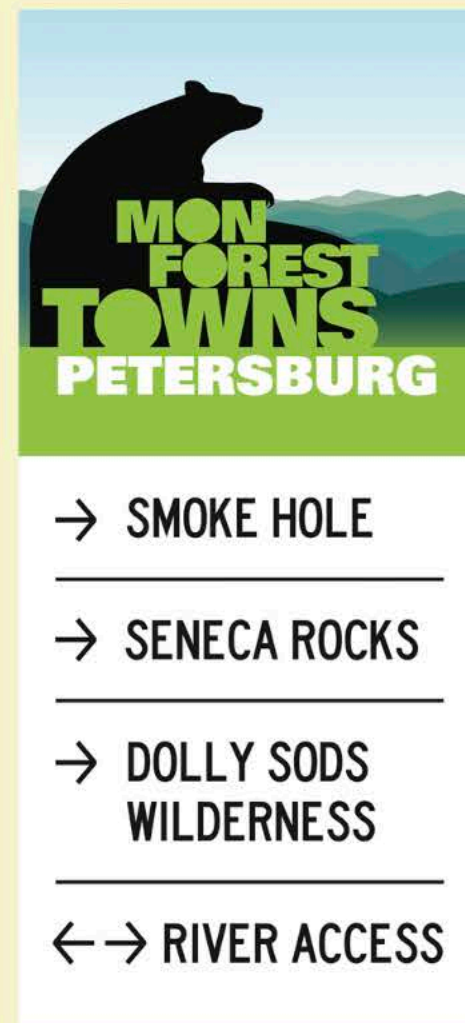
With Benedum funding our ten towns were able to decide what kind of signage needs met their particular situations. We found ways to accommodate towns with existing identities, signage tht had to comply with Department of Highways regualtions, and ways to alleviate confusion in directing tourists to destinations spread over large distances. These are almost complete, with some towns having to rethink priorities to meet regulations—the art of collaboration! The various ideas each town submitted also gave us a chance to work out many templates to use in adapting our design style for the

Franklin chose to show its location among Mon Forest destinations within the county.



We discovered we could have only four items per sign.

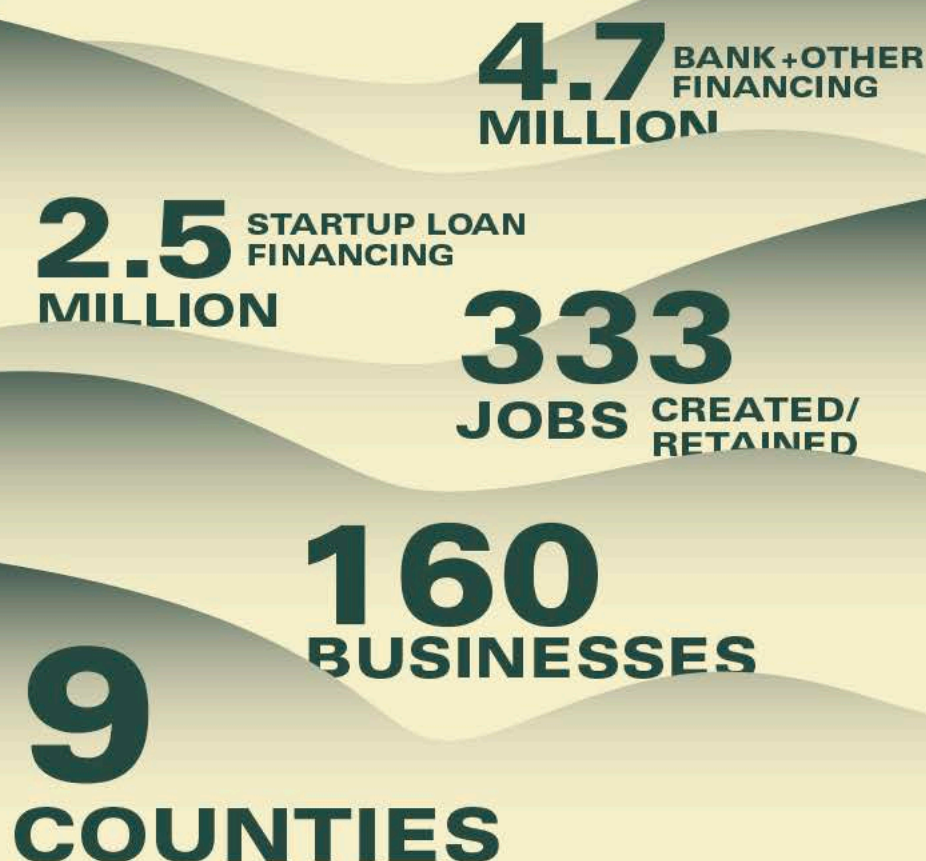
Parsons' signage accommodated the Tucker Culture logo in color and shape.



Community Investment Partners

In order to grow the recreational economy in the region, the **Woodlands Community Lenders and Partner Community Capital** (formerly Natural Capital Investment Fund) continued the Mon Forest Business Initiative in coordination with the Mon Forest Towns Partnership in 2021. This initiative directly supports recreation- and tourism-oriented small businesses. Two on-the-ground Business Advisors continued to work through the challenges presented by COVID-19 to assist entrepreneurs and small businesses in the region by providing one-on-one business advising, technical assistance, and loan capital and packaging.

In three years, the Mon Business Initiative has served over **160 businesses in 9 counties, that has created/retained 333 jobs.** Woodlands and Partner Community Capital have also **deployed \$2.5 million in loan financing to start-up and growing business that has been leveraged into an additional \$4.7 million in bank and other financing.** The Woodlands Community Lenders is also currently pursuing funds to secure an Executive Director for the Mon Forest Towns Partnership. Want to connect with a Business Advisor or have any burning questions for the Woodlands Development Group and Community Lenders? Reach out to Business Advisor, Marti Neustadt or Program Manager, Emily Wilson-Hauger. Contact Marti at mneustadt@wdgww.org and Emily at ewilson-hauger@wdgww.org.



Official Representatives for the Mon Forest Towns

Cowen Gerald Dornburg
Davis Andy Snyder
Elkins Taira Landavere
Franklin Ciara Warner Lambert
Marlinton Sam Felton
Parsons Dorothy Judy
Petersburg Bob McCalley
Richwood Chris Tinney
Thomas Erika Smith
White Sulphur Springs Bruce Bowling

**Liaison Representatives
 (Non-Voting Support Team)**
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 Doug Arbogast WVU Extension
 Emily Wilson-Hauger
 Jack Tribble USDA Forest Service

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