



Ready, Set, Thrive: Trail Communities Prospering through Partnerships

Carolina Thread Trail Forum

Experienced Placemaker Helping to Build Vibrant Communities

Amy Camp has been at the center of the trails movement for 14 years. She coaches and supports local leaders and communities in trail town development, strengthening heritage tourism, and accessing the outdoor recreation economy. She also offers nature-based experiences that foster growth and connection.

[Explore Services](#)[Create an Experience](#)

Meet Amy Camp

Amy Camp is a trail tourism expert, placemaker, and professional coach. She is the founder of Cycle Forward, a consulting agency that supports trail communities across the United States and Canada. Amy helps community leaders better connect to and fully leverage their trails.



CELEBRATING

10

YEARS

Partnerships & Thriving Communities

- **Partner (n.):** one associated with another especially in an action
- **Partnership** (business, P3, community):
 - a collaborative relationship between willing entities formed to address shared objectives
- **Thrive:** to grow or develop well or vigorously







Trail Towns: A Partnership of Communities

Trail Town Definition

A Trail Town is a community through which a trail passes that supports trail users with services, promotes the trail to its residents, and embraces the trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated.

--North Country Trail Association (adapted)



Image: Allegany County, Maryland



“To be a Trail Town is to make the decision to pay attention to trails.”





Rail Lines & Shopping Malls

Abandoned Rail Lines Created an Opening

- 1960s-80s: abandoned rail lines
- First rail-trail (1967)
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy formed (1986)
- By 1989, 200 known rail-trails in the U.S.





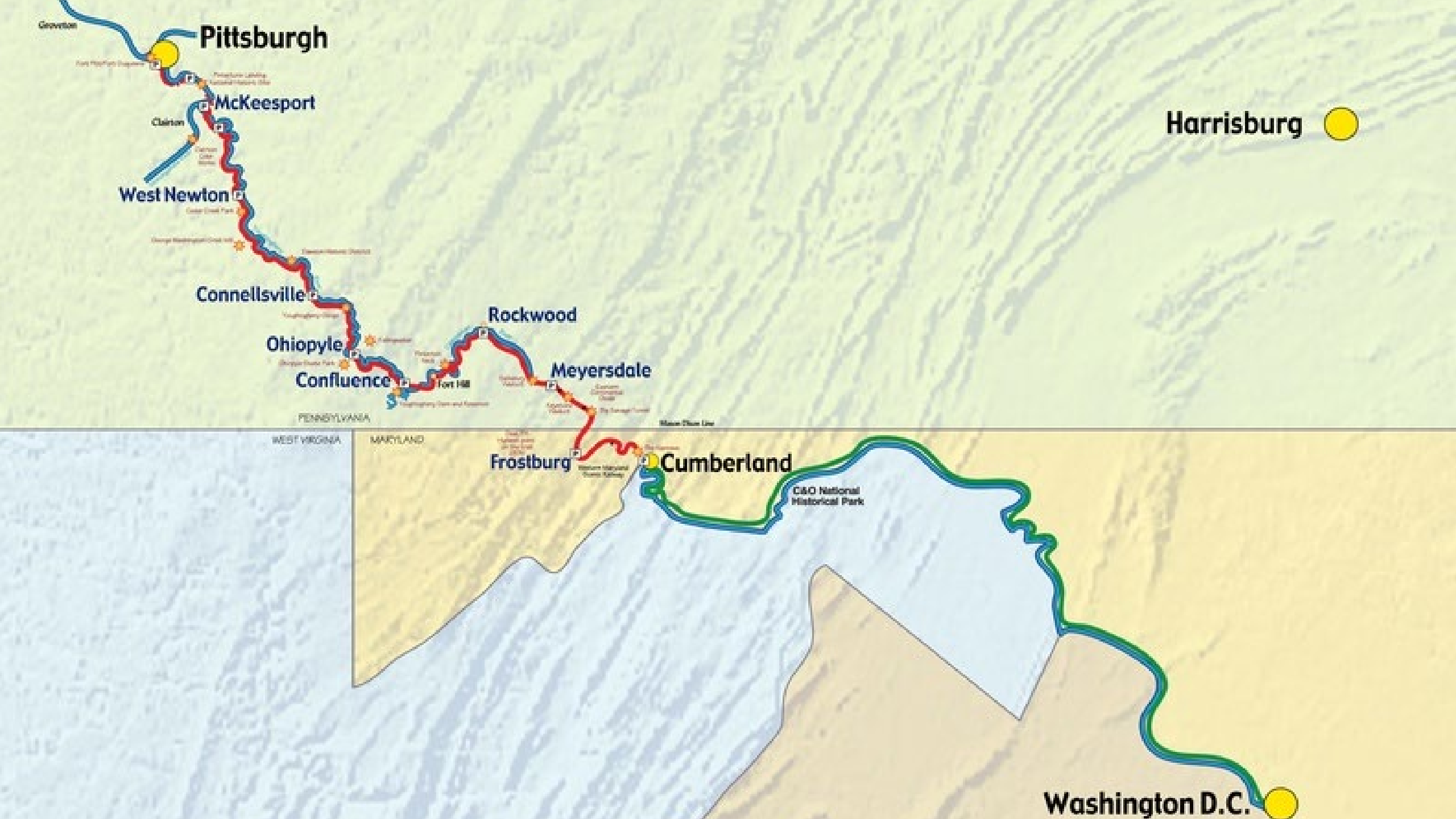
Rise of the Shopping Mall



Malls Decimated Main Streets

- Malls changed the consumer experience
- People changed the way they shopped
- Retailers relocated
- Downtown areas struggled
- National Main Street Center opens (1980)





Pittsburgh

McKeesport

West Newton

Connellsville

Ohiopyle

Confluence

Rockwood

Meyersdale

Frostburg

Cumberland

Harrisburg

Washington D.C.



Last train on the Western Maryland Railway, 1975.
Image Courtesy Paul g. Wiegman



Trail Town Program®, Est. 2007



A project of The Progress Fund
developed in conjunction with the
Great Allegheny Passage
Conservancy





Detour: Place Identity and Community Pain Points

Place Identity

Our identities form in relation
to our environment



Pain & Frustration in Post-industrial America



"NOT WHAT IT
USED TO BE"



Back to Trail Towns...

GAP Program Components

- Regional in nature
- Community assessments
- Economic & trail use research
- Business assistance
- Access to capital
- Brand development & marketing
- Infrastructure (signs, bike racks, public art)



A regional approach to rural economic development



GAP Direct Annual Economic Impact



2002:
\$7.2M

2008:
\$40M

2019:
\$74.7M

- ***“I don’t know where our town would be without this trail.”***
 - Connellsville Mayor Greg Lincoln
- ***“Our business breathes by the GAP trail.”***
 - Comfort Inn General Manager, Cheryl Babbitt



Don't p _ _ _ _
_ _ _ r _ _ g s in
one _ _ _ _ _.



Image: www.homesteadandgardens.com



A More Complete Trails Promise

- Experiences
- Memories
- Sense of place
- Connection & belonging
- Health & wellness
- Routes & access
- Community vibrancy
- Fun!

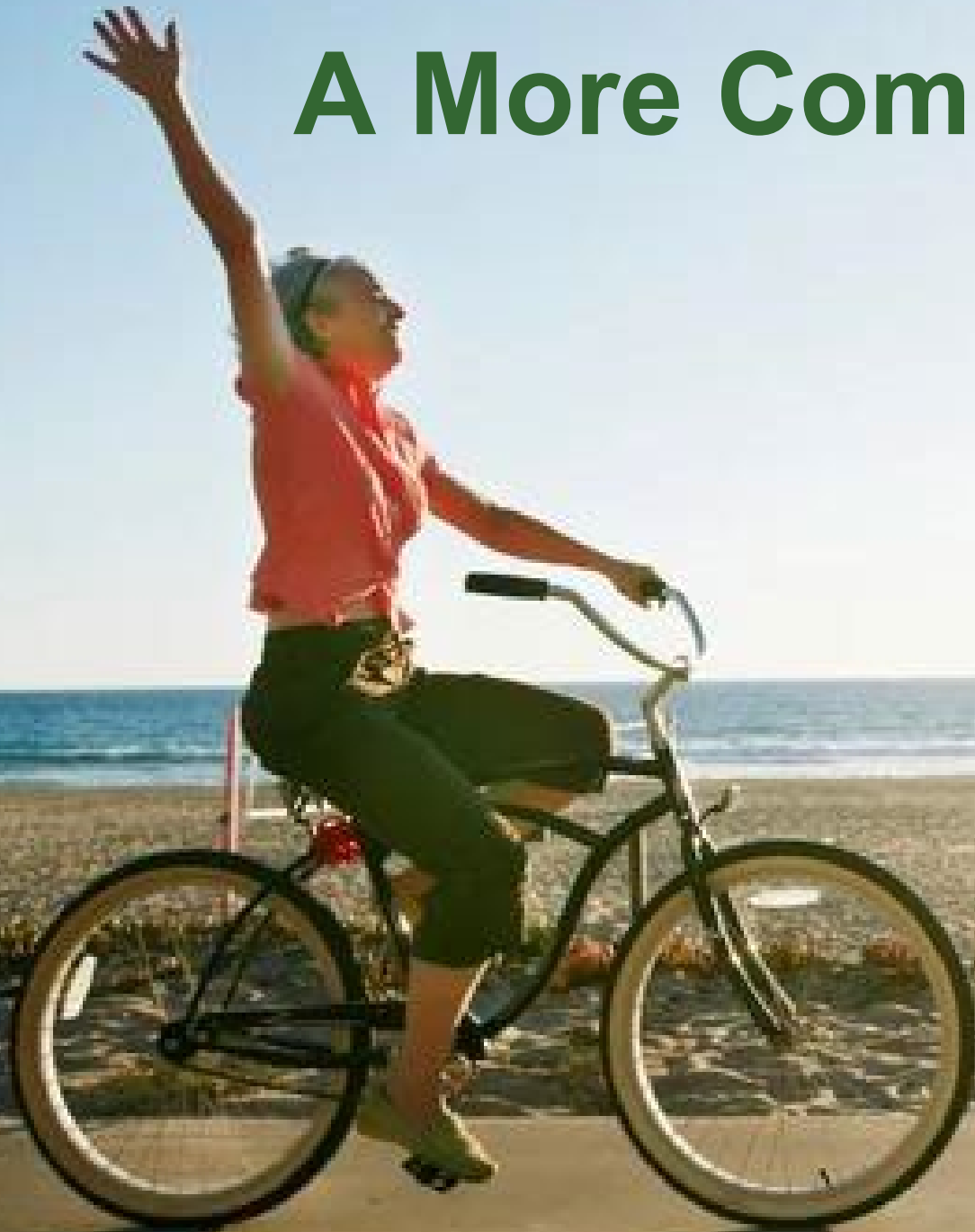


Image: Bike Radar



Image Courtesy David Mars,
Prairie Grass Trail, London, OH

Trails Change Lives



Image: Joy Riders,
Smithton, PA

A photograph of two people birdwatching in a lush green forest. In the foreground, a man with white hair and a beard, wearing a green bucket hat and a blue and white plaid shirt, is looking through binoculars. He has a blue backpack. Behind him, a woman wearing a light-colored hat and a white shirt is also looking in the same direction. The background is filled with dense green foliage and trees.

120 Minutes

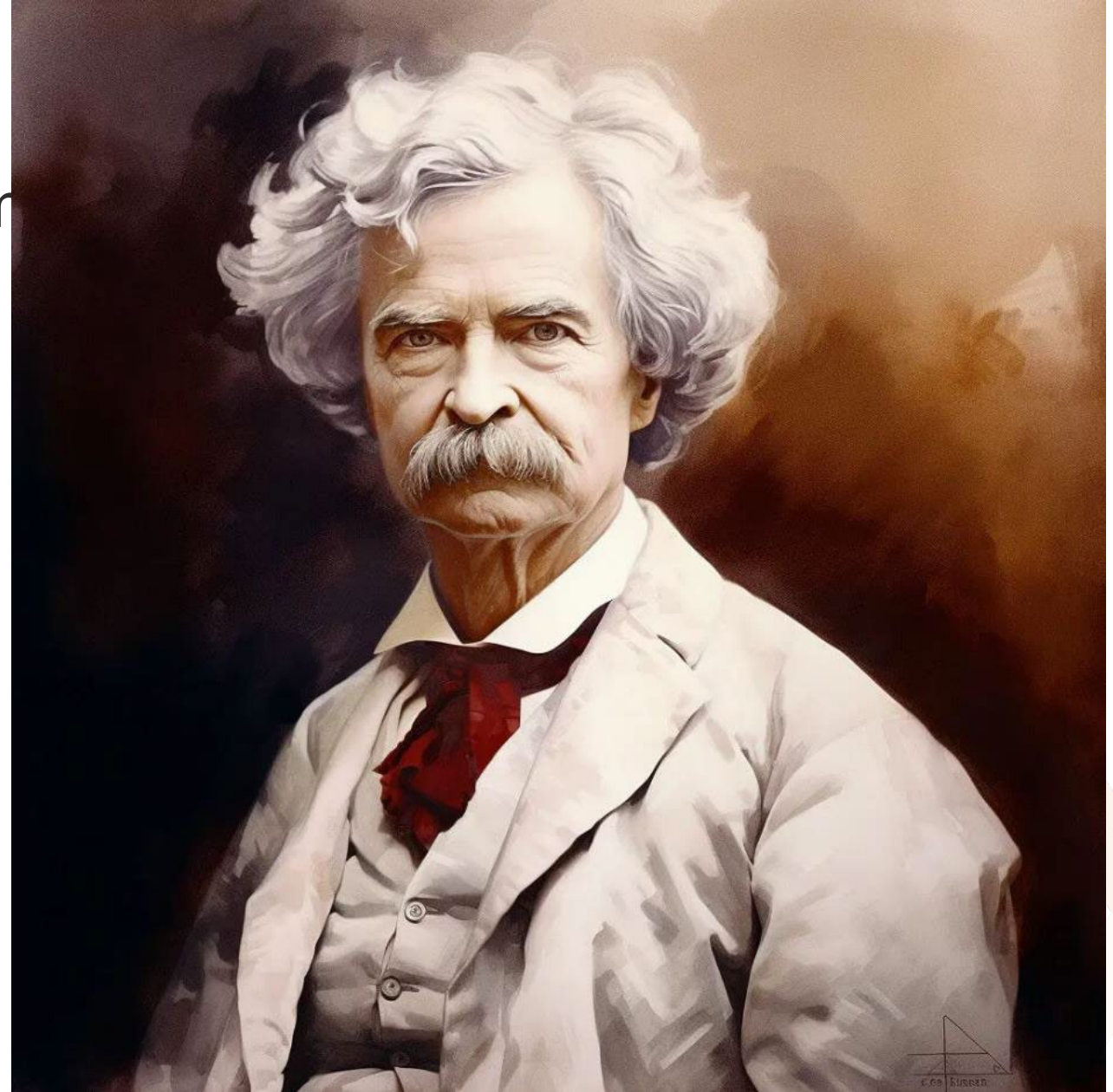
Time needed to reap health
and wellness benefits of being
outside

Source: Scientific Reports

Photo Credit: Daniel Schwen

“There is no such thing as a new idea. It is impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope. We give them a turn and they make new and curious combinations. We keep on turning and making new combinations indefinitely; but they are the same old pieces of colored glass that have been in use through all the ages. ”

— Mark Twain



Earliest Programs







**A presence in at
least 30 states as
well as Ontario**



Impact Along National Trails

NATIONAL TRAIL	LENGTH IN MILES (EST.)	COMMUNITIES
Appalachian Trail	2,200	55
Arizona Trail	800	19
Continental Divide Trail	3,100	20
C&O (Potomac Heritage)	185	11
Florida Trail	1,300	16
GAP (Potomac Heritage)	150	12
Ice Age Trail	1,000	19
North Country Trail	4,800	30
Pacific Crest Trail	<u>N/A</u>	<u>1</u>
Totals	13,535	183



What it Means to be a Trail Town



A Program & an Attitude

“Trail Towns” is a program model, but it’s also an attitude...a way of being that becomes part of the culture – places that are:

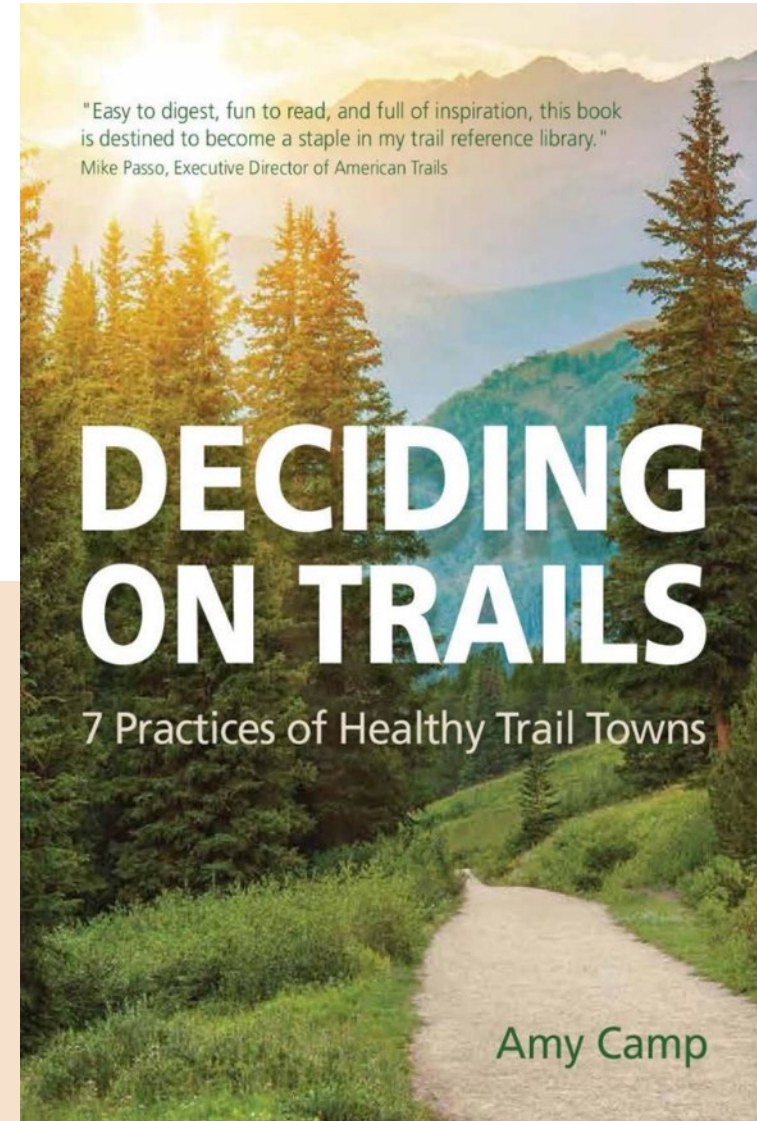
- Trail-friendly
- Trail-oriented
- Trail-enthusiastic



Deciding on Trails

7 Practices of Healthy Trail Towns

Available in paperback and Kindle versions at www.cycleforward.org



7 Practices

1. Adopt a shared vision
2. Physically connect trail to town
3. Extend an invitation
4. Cultivate a trail culture
5. Know your market
6. Share your story
7. Commit to quality trails



Cultivating a Trail Culture

“The Bedrock Practice”



Gushing Over the High Trestle Trail



AMY CAMP

OCT 13, 2023



5



Share





Virginia Creeper Trail

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF DAMASCUS, VA - ISSUE #3

Trail Town Tribune

JULY - 2020



"THE FRIENDLIEST TOWN ON THE TRAIL"

For more news and information, please visit our website at www.visitdamascus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).



“Damascus is the heart,
and each of the trails is like
an artery. One brings
economic prosperity, and
the other brings the cultural
aspect to our community.”

--Gavin Blevins, Town
Manager



Share Your Story

Story of Place



**“The universe
is made of
stories, not of
atoms.”**

**--Muriel
Rukeyser**



Ties Back to Place Identity

“To survive, you
must tell stories.”
--Umberto Eco



A Competitive Marketplace

- There are thousands of trails in the U.S. - more than 2,000 rail-trails alone
- What is your trail's (and your community's) value proposition?
- A compelling story comes into play.



A Few things about Stories



- Stories are always about energy (hearts and minds)
- The difference between “storyteller” and “story maker” is a shift in mindset
- Everybody sees the same story differently

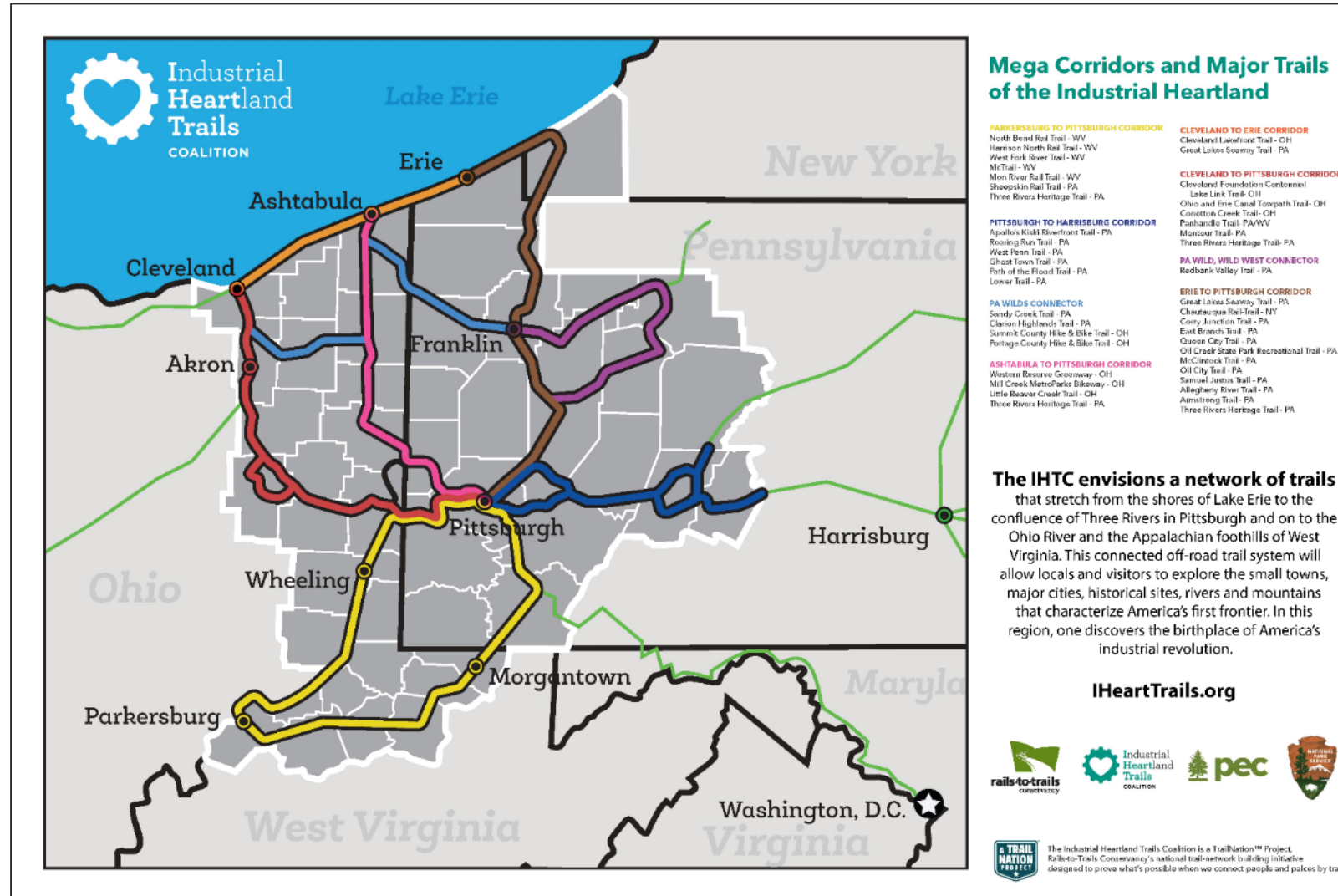
Courtesy Larysa Homans, ICF
Ukraine



An aerial photograph of a dry, sandy landscape. The ground is light brown and textured with small rocks and sparse, dry vegetation. A series of dark, parallel lines, likely tire tracks, run diagonally across the middle of the image. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the lower left portion of the image, containing the text "Other Best Practices" in a bold, green, sans-serif font.

Other Best Practices

Prioritize Trail Networks



COMMENTARY

Improving quality of life—not just business—is the best path to Midwestern rejuvenation

John C. Austin, Amanda Weinstein, Michael Hicks, and Emily Wornell

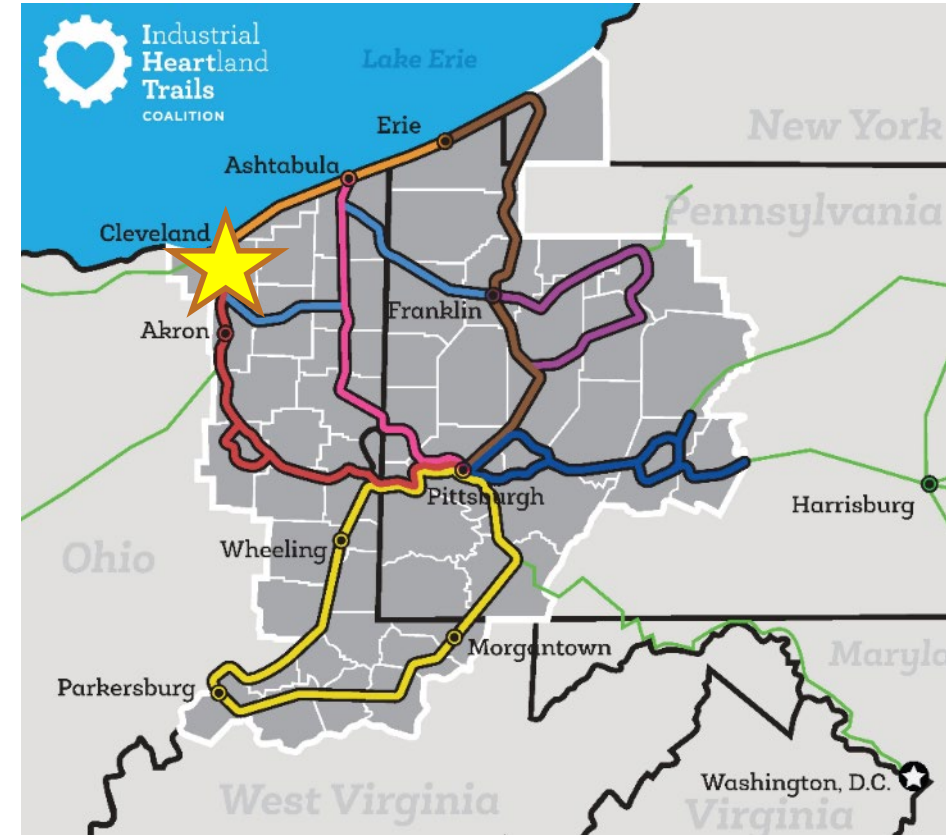
January 26, 2022



Never Give up on Needed Connections



Wendy Park Bridge: a project of
Cleveland MetroParks





Images courtesy Rails-to-Trails
Conservancy, Jason Cohn

Courtesy Rails-to-Trails Conservancy



Sustainable outdoor recreation assets serve rural communities by improving and catalyzing **economic opportunities and providing social, environmental, and health benefits** to communities and their residents.

The Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA), a **Council of Governments**, was created to utilize outdoor recreation assets in Appalachian Ohio to deliver ORCA Member Communities those benefits and diversify rural economies.

We work to secure investments for **sustainable development and management of outdoor recreation facilities** and customize solutions to meet needs and expand access to economic opportunities.

The Baileys Trail System (MTB): a project of the Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia

Build Local Wealth



Ensure that Trail Investments are Wins for Local Communities

→ York County Trail Towns broadband project





Connellsville Community Level Partnership

Connellsville Vintage Bike Exhibit

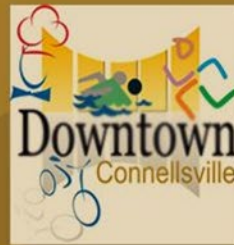
- Part of a nature-based placemaking effort
- Intent to draw visiting trail users into town and generate local enthusiasm
- 30 bikes in 20 locations



Bananas for Bikes

Connellsville Vintage
Bike Exhibit

July 1 - Oct 17



Bananas for Bikes
1960s Schwinn Fiesta



Connellsville Visitor
Information Center

This 1960s Schwinn Fiesta was picked out of the trash in 1988. The bike's owner says, "I love this bike! Finding a bike of this caliber was a gift from the Universe. It holds memories — I used to cruise around Pittsburgh's South Side on it. I'm so glad I kept it all these years."

We love the chrome fenders, wide handlebars, and the iconic Schwinn "S" on the seat. The bike's owner has been instrumental in regional trail development — including the Great Allegheny Passage.

Special thanks to Darla Cravotta for lending her bike to the exhibit.

Partners

- Fayette County Cultural Trust
- Fayette Co. Historical Society
- City of Connellsville
- Connellsville Garden Club
- GO Laurel Highlands (CVB)
- Chamber of Commerce
- Bicycle Heaven (an hour away)
- Chamber of Commerce
- Highlands Hospital
- Comfort Inn
- Small businesses
- Faith community









Trail Town Links

- All About Trail Towns group
- Blog sign up
- *Deciding on Trails* book




Community Transformation

Investing in trails contributes to more vibrant, delightful, visitor-ready communities





A photograph of a dense forest with many tall, thin trees. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and some fallen logs. A person is standing in the lower left corner, providing a sense of scale. The trees have light green foliage, suggesting spring. A white text box is in the upper right corner.

What are the threads
that weave you
together?