Strategic Riverfront Enhancement Plan
Alderson, West Virginia

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About the Authors

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About Downstream Strategies
Downstream Strategies is an environmental and economic development consulting firm located in Morgantown and Alderson, West Virginia. We are considered the go-to source for objective, data-based analyses, plans, and actions that strengthen economies, sustain healthy environments, and build resilient communities.

About the West Virginia Northern Brownfields Assistance Center
The West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Centers were created in 2005. The two Centers promote economic development and environmental and public health protection through innovative redevelopment of brownfield sites. The Centers also promote and coordinate the development of brownfield property by providing training and technical assistance, facilitating site preparation efforts, engaging community involvement, as well as by helping communities with grant writing and leveraging project funding.
ABOUT THIS PLAN

Alderson is a small community located in West Virginia’s Monroe and Greenbrier counties. Located on the scenic Greenbrier River, Alderson is ready to capitalize on the river frontage in its historic downtown.

Celebrated for its beauty and recreational opportunities, the Greenbrier River flows through the heart of downtown Alderson and serves as a focal point that shapes the town’s sense of community. As riverfront development gains traction as an effective tool for downtown revitalization and economic development, Alderson’s town leaders and planners see the river as the centerpiece for the town’s future.

This Strategic Riverfront Enhancement Plan will guide the development of Alderson’s riverfront.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

First settled in 1777, Alderson prospered as a prominent railroad town through the mid-twentieth century. Though the region’s economy has shifted over time, the picturesque landscape, amenities, and attractions in the Greenbrier Valley bring many tourists and visitors to the surrounding area.

Alderson has experienced a major upswing in community engagement over the last several years. Several new businesses have recently located in Alderson, and the town’s population is on the rise. Community leaders formed the Alderson Main Street Hub, a group of citizens in Alderson including businessmen and women, members of Alderson Main Street, and a city council member, who have been working actively with the town administration to plan for a brighter future for the community.

Among several recent accomplishments, the Town of Alderson completed a new comprehensive plan in 2016. The plan identifies many issues concerning the town’s revitalization, land use, and community services and outlines goals and objectives to promote prosperity and enhance quality of life for town residents.

A major finding of the comprehensive plan was the need to maintain and develop park facilities and programs to meet the recreational needs of town residents. The plan called for improving existing recreation facilities, including revitalizing the town park, as well as creating new parks and facilities. In addition, the plan recommends making the town more walkable with walking paths and trails and enhancing the Memorial Bridge for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Community leaders in Alderson recognized the key importance of parks and recreation spaces for the town, as well as the importance of the Greenbrier River to the town’s tourism and economic development potential. As a result, town leaders sought an inclusive, participatory process designed to put these key open space and recreation objectives into action.

To start the process, Alderson entered and won the 2016 “Buck for Bright Ideas” contest through the West Virginia Community Development Hub’s Innovation Acceleration Strategy program. This $5,000 award, coupled with an additional $8,000 from the West Virginia Development Office Flex-E Grant program, enabled town leaders to contract a professional planner and designer to lead a master plan-scale, coordinated effort to begin the enhancement and development of Alderson’s riverfront.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABOUT THIS PLAN** .................................................................................................................. III  
  Project background .................................................................................................................. iii

**PLANNING APPROACH** ........................................................................................................... 5

**PROJECT VISION** ................................................................................................................... 5

**KEY DESIGN CONCEPTS** ....................................................................................................... 6
  Signage .................................................................................................................................. 6
  Branding ................................................................................................................................. 6
  Riverfront access ..................................................................................................................... 9
  Riverfront Trails ...................................................................................................................... 10

**PRIORITY AREAS** .................................................................................................................. 11
  River park ............................................................................................................................. 12
  Memorial Pedestrian bridge ................................................................................................. 13
  Overlook ............................................................................................................................... 13
  Mini park ............................................................................................................................... 14
  Proposed new park .............................................................................................................. 16

**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN** ..................................................................................................... 17
  Phase I ................................................................................................................................... 17
  Phase II .................................................................................................................................. 18
  Phase III ................................................................................................................................ 19
PLANNING APPROACH

Community leaders in Alderson selected Downstream Strategies, an environmental and economic development consulting firm with an office in Alderson, to facilitate a planning and design process with town residents focused on enhancing Alderson’s riverfront.

In many small communities, the objectives outlined in development plans are never realized due to what can seem like insurmountable hurdles in securing funds and pursuing implementation. With this reality in mind, the Strategic Riverfront Enhancement Plan process was designed to deliver an implementation plan that includes further stakeholder involvement, feasibility studies, detailed designs for construction, and a funding strategy to guide the Town of Alderson as they implement their vision.

Community engagement was central to the design of the Strategic Riverfront Enhancement Planning process. As a result, the planning team conducted an inclusive, charrette-based process to establish a collective community vision for Alderson’s riverfront development. The team then married that vision with realistic implementation strategies based on the comprehensive plan, feedback from local leaders, and the team’s findings, and allowed residents to provide input into the design at various stages along the way.

The planning team used the following steps to structure their approach:

1. **Form task group:** First, the team formed a task group of individuals interested in river access, tourism development, and recreational planning. The task group consisted of representatives from Alderson Main Street, West Virginia HUB, interested residents, and the consultant.

2. **Coordinate with landowners:** Although the Town of Alderson owns much of the property in question, the team coordinated with some landowners of adjacent and relevant properties in order to maximize project impact.

3. **Conduct design workshop:** Employing a charrette process, the consultants led a public participatory design and decision-making workshop where the proposed access sites, park locations, riparian restoration areas, and circulation schemes were defined and analyzed for potential opportunities and challenges. The group brainstormed how local businesses and partners could be involved in improving and benefiting from the riverfront.

4. **Integrate feedback and build partnerships:** Using feedback from the design workshop, the task group amended the design concept and plan, making programmatic recommendations for partnerships with local businesses and other regional partners.

5. **Develop a draft of the plan:** The planning team completed the following elements:
   a. a Riverfront Master Plan illustrating pedestrian circulation through and around the riverfront, proposed and existing parks, river-related amenities, and proposed access points for the Greenbrier River;
   b. a wayfinding plan identifying several graphic design concepts and signage placement for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic;
   c. project-specific cut sheets which break the master plan into discrete project pieces with detailed designs, identified partners, cost estimates, and partners;
   d. a phased schedule and funding strategy for accomplishing each project; and
   e. recommendations for programming and partnerships.

6. **Present plan for final feedback:** The task group hosted a reception to present the SREP Implementation Plan to the public to solicit additional feedback. Results from that event have been integrated into this final plan.

PROJECT VISION

The Greenbrier River is an iconic focal point in Alderson. Yet despite the river’s prominence, existing river access in town is limited and inconvenient. Overall the river’s possibilities are greatly underdeveloped and underutilized. As a result, the planning team set out on this project with a vision to make the river easier for Alderson residents and visitors to enjoy.
The resulting Alderson Strategic Riverfront Enhancement Plan capitalizes on Alderson’s current community momentum to more fully utilize the Greenbrier River as a natural, cultural, and economic asset.

Throughout the planning process, community stakeholders voiced a common desire to create a sense of connection along the riverbank that guides users to the center of town.

Based on feedback from the Alderson residents and town leaders, the planning team established the following priorities for the Riverfront Enhancement Plan:

- enhance the ecological function of riparian zones to reduce erosion and beautify the downtown riverbanks;
- redesign river access for boating, swimming, and fishing;
- build and improve riverfront pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists; and
- install informational signage for wayfinding and public education.

Guided by these priorities, the project team designed improvements for five key locations in downtown Alderson. These recommended enhancement options are visualized through renderings to

Implementation of the plan will enhance the town’s sense of place, making Alderson more attractive for residents, visitors, and businesses alike.

**KEY DESIGN CONCEPTS**

The project team identified the following design concepts as key focal areas guiding Alderson’s riverfront redevelopment.

**SIGNAGE**

Though Alderson is a small town, it has three major gateways and straddles two counties (Greenbrier and Monroe) on each side the Greenbrier River. Through the planning process, the project team identified that navigation and wayfinding are issues of concern for visitors to town. As a result, a signage and wayfinding plan was developed as a component of the Strategic Riverfront Enhancement Plan to highlight and direct visitors to key features and assets around the town. In addition to simplifying navigation, the plan was designed to improve the flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic circulation through the center of town.

The following key signage features (shown in Figure 1 signage plan) will enhance navigation and wayfinding in the project area:

- **Interpretive signs:** These signs are placed throughout the town, highlighting assets and interesting facts about the Town of Alderson, including local history and ecology.
- **Community guides:** These banner signs will be affixed to the existing decorative light poles located throughout town and will direct passersby to key assets and features of Alderson.
- **Map kiosks:** The multi-sided kiosks envisioned in this design offer a variety of information to pedestrians and other trail users. Each kiosk will feature a map of downtown noting key points such as river access and boat launches, trail linkages, and other local points of interest. Kiosks will also list community efforts and provide space for a message board for upcoming local events and town activities.
- **Trail markers:** Trail markers will be strategically placed along the riverfront trail, serving as directional markers and wayfinding tools for trail users.

**Branding**

Though wayfinding signage is currently limited in Alderson, new signs have been recently installed for the Alderson Historic District. The signage features proposed in this plan have been designed to correspond with the visual theme of existing signage.

In addition, the styling and design of signage will incorporate lions—Alderson’s unofficial mascot—to correspond with the numerous lion statues featured around town. (Figure 2)
**Interpretive Signs**
- Will provide historic and mythical background relevant to the community

**Community Guides**
- Will be fixed to existing light posts

**Map Kiosks**
- Will be rethemed with new maps and reflect the color scheme of new signage

**Trail Markers**
- Will be installed along riverside trails

Proposed signage will coordinate with existing "Alderson Historic District" signage which was recently installed.
Alderson Riverfront Signage

**Community Guides**
will be fixed to existing light posts.

**Trail Markers**
will be installed along riverside trails

1. **1**
   - Boat Launch
   - Mini Park

2. **2**
   - River Access
   - Pedestrian Bridge
   - River Walk
   - Historic District

3. **3**
   - Mini Park
   - River Walk
   - Historic District

4. **4**
   - Mini Park
   - River Walk
   - Historic District

5. **5**
   - River Walk
   - River Park
   - Historic District

6. **6**
   - Memorial Park
   - Historic District

7. **7**
   - Memorial Park
   - Historic District
   - River Park

8. **8**
   - Welcome to Historic Alderson

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**Alderson Strategic Riverfront Enhancement Plan**
RIVERFRONT ACCESS

The beautiful Greenbrier River is a key recreation destination and focal point for enjoyment in Alderson and the surrounding region. Alderson’s riverfront location enhances the quality of life for residents and acts as an attraction for visitors to a certain extent, though it is largely underutilized. As a result, the planning process sought to build upon Alderson’s existing riverfront assets and enhance river access downtown.

There are currently two river access points in town. The Mini Park located on East Riverview Avenue sits along the river and features steps down to the river for swimming and fishing access. There is also a boat ramp located under the Howell Street bridge. Since both sites have limited parking, these locations are not currently equipped to maximize enjoyment of the riverfront.

Another existing asset is the Alderson Memorial Pedestrian Bridge. Built in 1913 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this rare concrete arch bridge offers gorgeous views of the Greenbrier River. The bridge is open for foot traffic only except during the annual Alderson Fourth of July Parade.

To improve river access, the planning team and stakeholders developed several strategies to enhance access and provide engagement opportunities for the community and visitors. These strategies include:

- enhancing and repairing riparian zones to reduce erosion and beautify the riverbank (Figure 3);
- development of a walking trail that connects both sides of the river;
- redesigning river access points; and
- connecting existing and planned town assets.

Figure 3 Riparian Enhancements

Proposed corrections to riparian buffer includes native trees to improve bank stabilization and native grasses, wildflowers to reduce erosion and improve aesthetics.
RIVERFRONT TRAILS
With ample riverfront availability and two downtown bridges, Alderson can greatly enhance trails and boardwalks along the Greenbrier River.

Walking paths currently exist along the Howell Street bridge, the Memorial Pedestrian Bridge, and the stretch of Railroad Avenue between the two bridges. Creating trail linkages on the northern side of the river would create a complete downtown trail loop, and additional trail additions along the river would further enhance Alderson’s riverfront. Developing these assets will then create opportunity for further downtown development.

Development of a unique and beautiful “Riverfront Trail” emerged as a priority among community members throughout the planning process. The community sees a walking trail as a powerful tool to begin bringing new growth to the community while also enhancing the quality of life for local residents. The Riverfront Trail would provide scenic, recreational, and contemplative opportunities to residents and visitors alike. Spanning both sides of the river, it would also provide a strong link reinforcing the sense of community in a town that can sometimes seem divided by both a river and a county line.

Sections of this trail already informally exist. Creating a designation in combination with improvements will create a coherent trail that circumnavigates the town, creating a trail that meets the stated goal of the community. The trail route will include sections of existing sidewalk and informal walking paths. The existing sidewalk will be designated as part of the trail with signage. The informal path will be enhanced to stem erosion issues, beautified with a variety of native plantings, and better delineated to concentrate use to the appropriate location and route.

Additionally, the Riverfront Trail will act as a link to spur other projects along the route, such as the nature trail, additional river access points, and a potential new park. The Riverfront Trail will provide users a focal point that encourages healthy life choices, engages the river, and spurs new development along its route.
PRIORITY AREAS
The following areas identified in Figure 5 were identified through the planning areas as key locations to prioritize for redevelopment.

FIGURE 5 MASTER PLAN
RIVER PARK

This proposed “River Park” would be located on the riverfront along West Riverview Avenue directly to the west of the Memorial Pedestrian Bridge.

The River Park project was prioritized by the community and design team due to its location and existing assets. Located in the center of town and adjacent to the Memorial Bridge, this park will serve a connector, icon, and stage point for future development.

Located just downstream from the Mini Park, the River Park will connect Alderson’s assets and access, from both the river—floating and boating—and the trail. Creating this node will intentionally direct users of the heavily-used Mini Park to the center of town, encouraging trail use and business patronage.

The River Park takes advantage of a historic abutment that once served as a building foundation. This abutment creates a hardened shoreline and the ability to more easily create a level surface for development. The level area will be reinforced with a concrete surface, and picnic tables and other park features will be installed to allow users to enjoy the riverfront and admire the historic bridge.

The Riverfront Park will also serve as an additional access point for boaters, floaters, fisherman, and other river users. Through this development, river users could easily float from the Mini Park to the River Park (less than a quarter mile upstream) and use the Riverfront Trail to walk back to Mini Park. The River Park will connect to the Riverfront Trail through two staircases: one that access the sidewalk and one that extends to the entrance of the bridge. These entrances will be highlighted by plantings and signage, directing users to the location and highlighting its preferred use.
MEMORIAL PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

As the icon of Alderson, the Memorial Pedestrian Bridge will be enhanced by several methods. Since it is a registered historic feature, it is not possible to affix new signs or creating new build-outs. As a result, the design team proposes to use temporary or movable features that will not conflict with its historical status.

The northern entrance on the Greenbrier County side will be enhanced by using planters, signage, and two ornamental trees. This will give focus to the bridge, creating an invitation and guide. On the bridge, planters will be utilized to hold additional ornamental trees, which will “green up” the bridge and create a visual cue for users. Interpretive signage will be affixed to these planters, highlighting historical and environmental information about the town and region.

OVERLOOK

The Town of Alderson wants to ensure access to the beauty of the trail and riverfront for all users, including those with disabilities. To accommodate limited-mobility users for whom stairs are challenge, the team designed the overlook space east of the Memorial Pedestrian Bridge along East Riverview Avenue as a handicapped-accessible space to enjoy the river.

The overlook provides a concrete platform that is connected to the Riverfront Trail, offering one of the best views of the Memorial Bridge, town, and river. Also housed at this site are several features, including a kiosk that will display a map of the Riverfront Trail, a bench for seating, a dog watering station, and an interpretive sign that highlights the existing “Lion of Alderson” sculpture. Additionally, the overlook will serve as a trail junction, connecting the existing sidewalk portion of the trail and the enhanced walking path to the Mini Park.
MINI PARK

The Mini Park on East Riverview Avenue is the most heavily-used asset in Alderson. This park and access point attracts a multitude of visitors for a variety of uses. The Mini Park has picnic tables and offers an attractive spot for a picnic. Concrete stairs lead to a popular swimming platform and boat launch. One of the most popular paddling and floating stretches of the Greenbrier River is from Fort Spring (about 6 ½ miles upstream) to the Mini Park. As a result, the Mini Park’s parking lot is often full on summer days with vehicles using the park as a boat launch or takeout.

The Mini Park has several existing challenges that need addressed. These challenges include limited parking, incompatible uses, boat access, and erosion.

Parking limits will be addressed by adding more parking spaces and designating a boat loading/unloading pull-off zone. The stairway and swimming platform is a great existing asset; however, managing boaters and swimmers in close proximity presents an issue. To mediate this multi-use-area challenge, the project team designed a separate boat launch and takeout structure. This launch and takeout will have a separate staircase that accommodates boats by including a centered ramp feature for sliding boats to and from the water’s edge. This proposed feature will also mediate the existing erosion issues that are caused by boaters, decreasing sediment load, improving safety, and creating a more attractive park feature. To compliment the launch, the team is proposing a single lane boat access lane for vehicles. This access road will allow users to back tier vehicles and/or trailers to the top of the ramp, providing a convenience that will encourage more use of the park and more visitors to Alderson.

The Mini Park will also serve a trailhead for the Riverfront Trail. A large kiosk will be maintained at the site that describes the trail, its features, and nodes of interest, and displays community events and announcements. This park is one the first—and most popular—assets visitors encounter in Alderson, so it is important to use this park as a marquee of the town. The project team wants to encourage users to continue their journey into town and experience the offerings of Alderson.
Mini Park Perspective

Strategic Riverfront Enhancement Plan

Alderson, WV
February 23, 2018

8 of 12

*Conceptual Purposes Only*
**PROPOSED NEW PARK**

The Town of Alderson recently purchased a historic parcel of land that used to house the Alderson Hotel. Due budget restrictions and a limited scope of work, the project team did not have the time to create specific concepts for the proposed park. However, the project team wanted to make sure this asset is integrated into the plan and set aside for future planning and development.
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This section outlines the tasks and steps needed to bring the Alderson Strategic Riverfront Enhancement Plan to fruition. The projects outlined in this plan have been broken into three consecutive phases with discreet tasks and assigned cost estimates.

PHASE I

The first phase of implementation will focus on initial improvements to existing assets along Alderson’s riverfront. These high-priority projects, outlined below, have an estimated cost of $82,000 and should be completed within one to three years.

River Park:

- Create a concrete riverview landing platform.
- Add seating on the concrete platform.
- Build a retaining wall behind the concrete platform.
- Install stone steps that extend down to the river.

Mini-Park:

- Install a wayfinding kiosk with river trail and town information.
- Build a boat ramp and stairway adjacent to existing stairs.

Other locations:

- Install community guide kiosks and maps at the Memorial Bridge and other key locations around town.
- Install a dog watering station at the overlook.
- Stabilize streambanks by planting native vegetation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Component</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost Estimate</th>
<th>Responsible Entity</th>
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<tr>
<td>River Park</td>
<td>Riverview landing</td>
<td>Concrete platform.</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>City of Alderson/Parks and Recreation Commission</td>
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<td>River Park</td>
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<td>Streambank and River Park planting plan.</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>City of Alderson/Parks and Recreation Commission</td>
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<td>Boat ramp</td>
<td>Stairway and boat ramp adjacent to existing stairs.</td>
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<td>Mini-Park</td>
<td>Planting and stabilization</td>
<td>Streambank and Mini-Park planting plan.</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>City of Alderson/Parks and Recreation Commission</td>
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<td>Wayfinding</td>
<td>Mini-Park kiosk</td>
<td>Kiosk with river trail and key town information installed at the Mini-Park.</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>FOLGR/Downstream/City of Alderson/Parks and Recreation Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wayfinding</td>
<td>Community Guide</td>
<td>Kiosk and map at the Memorial Bridge and other town assets.</td>
<td>$4,500</td>
<td>Main Street/City of Alderson</td>
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<td>Overlook</td>
<td>Watering station</td>
<td>Dog watering station at the overlook.</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>City of Alderson/Parks and Recreation Commission</td>
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**TOTAL Estimated Cost** $82,000
Phase II will continue to enhance existing assets but will also introduce the design and building of two new features: the East Riverside Trail and a new park. Outlined below, these medium-priority projects are projected to cost approximately $358,603 and should be completed within three to five years.

**Mini-Park:**
- Expand parking to accommodate increased traffic and improve access for users.
- Build a road connecting the boat ramp to Main Street.
- Create a designated area for unloading boats adjacent to the Mini-Park.

**River Park:**
- Add planters on the Greenbrier County side of the Memorial Bridge.
- Build a second staircase accessing the River Park platform.
- Build an ADA-compliant concrete viewing platform.
- Install a kiosk describing the Alderson Lion and other relevant historical facts.
- Install ADA-compliant seating.

**East Riverfront Trail (Phase 1):**
- Design, permit, and begin building the eastern Riverfront Trail.
- Begin streambank planting and restoration activities along the trail.

**Other locations:**
- Design a park around the historic Alderson Hotel property.
- Install community guides and lamp posts around town.

### TABLE 2 PHASE II IMPLEMENTATION

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<th>Description</th>
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<td>Road to boat ramp</td>
<td>Road connecting Main Street with boat ramp.</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
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<td>Boat unload area</td>
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<td>$10,000</td>
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<td>River Park</td>
<td>River access steps</td>
<td>Stone steps accessing the river.</td>
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<td>River Park</td>
<td>Bridge entry enhancements</td>
<td>Planters on the Greenbrier County side of the Memorial Bridge.</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
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### PHASE III

Development of the East Riverfront Trail will continue into Phase III. During this phase, the initial design for the West Riverfront Trail should also be completed. The following low-priority projects are estimated to cost $409,500 and should be completed within five to eight years.

**East Riverfront Trail (Phase 2):**

- Designate and enhance access for fishing along the trail.
- Continue streambank restoration and enhancement.
River Park:

- Install tree planters and additional signage.

Other locations:

- Begin designing the West Riverfront Trail in Monroe County.

**TABLE 3 PHASE III IMPLEMENTATION**

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<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost Estimate</th>
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<td>East Riverfront Trail</td>
<td>Fishing access</td>
<td>Designated fishing access enhancement.</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>City of Alderson/Consultants</td>
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<td>East Riverfront Trail</td>
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<td>$40,000</td>
<td>City of Alderson/Consultants</td>
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<td>East Riverfront Trail</td>
<td>Bank and floodplain restoration</td>
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<td>East Riverfront Trail</td>
<td>Riparian and floodplain planting</td>
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<td>$11,000</td>
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<td>West Riverfront Trail</td>
<td>Trail design</td>
<td>Design the Monroe County side of the West Riverfront Trail.</td>
<td>$8,500</td>
<td>Main Street</td>
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**TOTAL Estimated Cost** $409,500