



Marlinton Bike Tourism Action Plan

Prioritized Next Steps for Trail-Based Tourism Development and Marketing in Marlinton, West Virginia

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ABOUT DOWNSTREAM STRATEGIES

Downstream Strategies is an environmental and economic development consulting firm focused on strengthening economies, sustaining healthy environments, and building resilient communities across Central Appalachia. At Downstream Strategies, we don't just check boxes—we build futures.

Through our decades of work within the region, we are proud to be recognized as leaders in economic development, including strategic tourism asset development. We empower communities that have historically relied on natural resource extraction with data and resources to pursue new and sustainable avenues for prosperity. A key aspect of this work focuses on linking recreation assets directly to downtowns and businesses, where trail users can spend money in the local economy.

Cover photo: Snowshoe Mountain Resort (2018)

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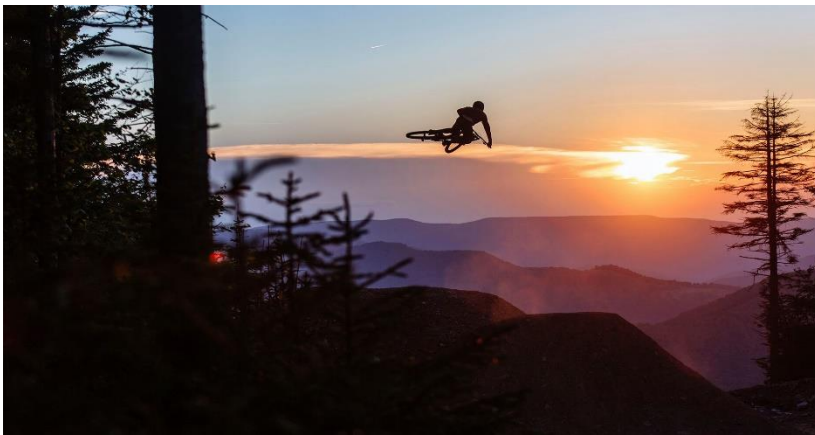
1. INTRODUCTION

Located on the banks of the Greenbrier River, Marlinton, West Virginia, has been a popular stop on the Greenbrier River Trail for decades. Today, local leaders and regional partners see mountain biking as key to the future of this scenic river community.

Marlinton is located within the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center, the first and only International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Ride Center in West Virginia. Regional partners within the Snowshoe Highlands Area Recreation Collaborative (SHARC) have chosen Marlinton as the future location for two new bike-optimized trail networks: the Monday Lick Contemporary Trail System and the Halfway Run Trail System.

Once completed, Marlinton is poised to become a key trail hub within the Ride Center and will see significant increases in non-local visitors (specifically, mountain bikers) coming to use those trails. Recent estimates from economists at West Virginia University (WVU) Extension project that Marlinton could see **over 18,000 mountain bikers annually** once the Monday Lick trails are built and the Ride Center achieves gold-level status. That could result in **\$2.5 million in annual visitor spending and support 34 new jobs in Marlinton**. This represents the biggest economic opportunity Marlinton has seen in over a century. The greater Ride Center could see up to 72,500 riders annually, resulting in \$24.2 million in total economic activity and 304 new jobs totaling \$7.8 million in wages in Pocahontas County (Eades, 2022).

As a result, the Town of Marlinton, the volunteer community development group Marlinton Listens, and other community partners have banded behind the region’s goals of growing mountain bike tourism and achieving gold-level status for the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center by 2025.



Mountain biker at Snowshoe Mountain (Kurt Schachner)

IMBA’s Ride Center designation recognizes the pinnacle of mountain biking communities, those considered to be the best places in the world for mountain biking. IMBA ranks Ride Centers according to bronze, silver, and gold-level designations. Currently ranked as silver, SHARC seeks to achieve gold-level Ride Center status by 2025.

1.1 About this report

To achieve this shared vision, the Town of Marlinton and Marlinton Listens enlisted Downstream Strategies to provide additional guidance on how Marlinton can further develop and market itself as a mountain biking destination.

This report summarizes Downstream Strategies’ findings and presents two action plans:

- **The Tourism Action Plan** assesses the town’s current bike tourism infrastructure, identifies gaps, and proposes recommendations for improvements that will help make Marlinton a more bike-friendly community.

- **The Marketing Action Plan** provides specific marketing and public relations recommendations to guide local leaders in promoting the town as a bike destination.

These action plans (each included in the subsequent chapters in this document) present clear priorities and outline the steps needed to accomplish them. The Tourism Action Plan specifically builds upon the priorities and recommendations established in the Pocahontas County Gap Analysis prepared by IMBA Trail Solutions for the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center in 2022. The action steps and recommendations are designed to help local leaders and volunteers focus their energy and resources on activities that will result in the biggest impact for tourism development in Marlinton.

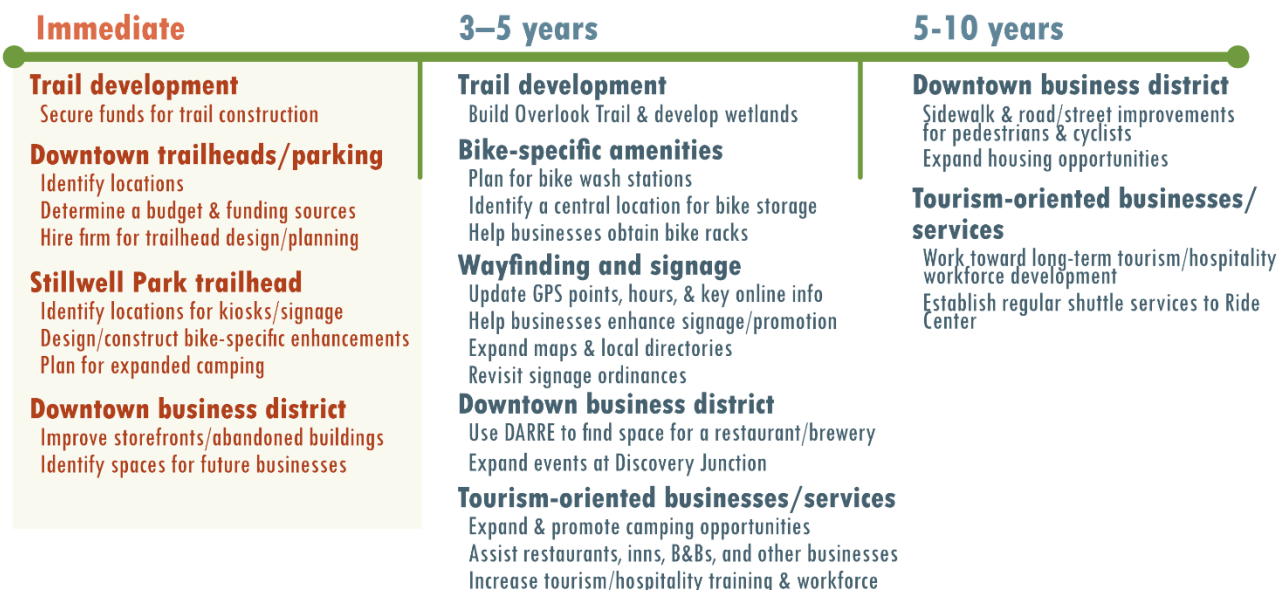
The ultimate goal of this report is to prepare Marlinton for significant increases in mountain bike tourism that should be expected once the new trail systems open in the coming years. In doing so, this report will help Marlinton contribute to the greater regional effort of achieving gold-level status for the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center by 2025.

1.2 Key findings

As regional partners work to secure construction funding for the new trail systems, the Marlinton Listens team and its partners have an important role to play in carrying out local improvements that will prepare Marlinton to be a key trail town within the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center.

From a bike tourism perspective, the most important next steps for Marlinton’s journey as a trail town are to:

- Assist regional partners in securing funds and constructing the new bike trail systems.
- Begin planning immediate for Marlinton’s two critical trailheads: one in downtown, and a second trailhead at Stillwell Park.
- Start work with technical assistance providers to identify paths forward for redeveloping downtown properties within the floodplain.



From a marketing perspective, Marlinton’s first priorities should be to:

- Create a brand for itself as a trail town.
- Develop a tourism-focused website focused on trip planning for non-local visitors.

- Engage professional photographer/videographer to provide high-quality visual content to use in Marlinton’s website, social media, and overall promotion.

1.3 Why mountain bike tourism?

Mountain biking tourism has emerged as a major growth industry for rural economies over the last decade.

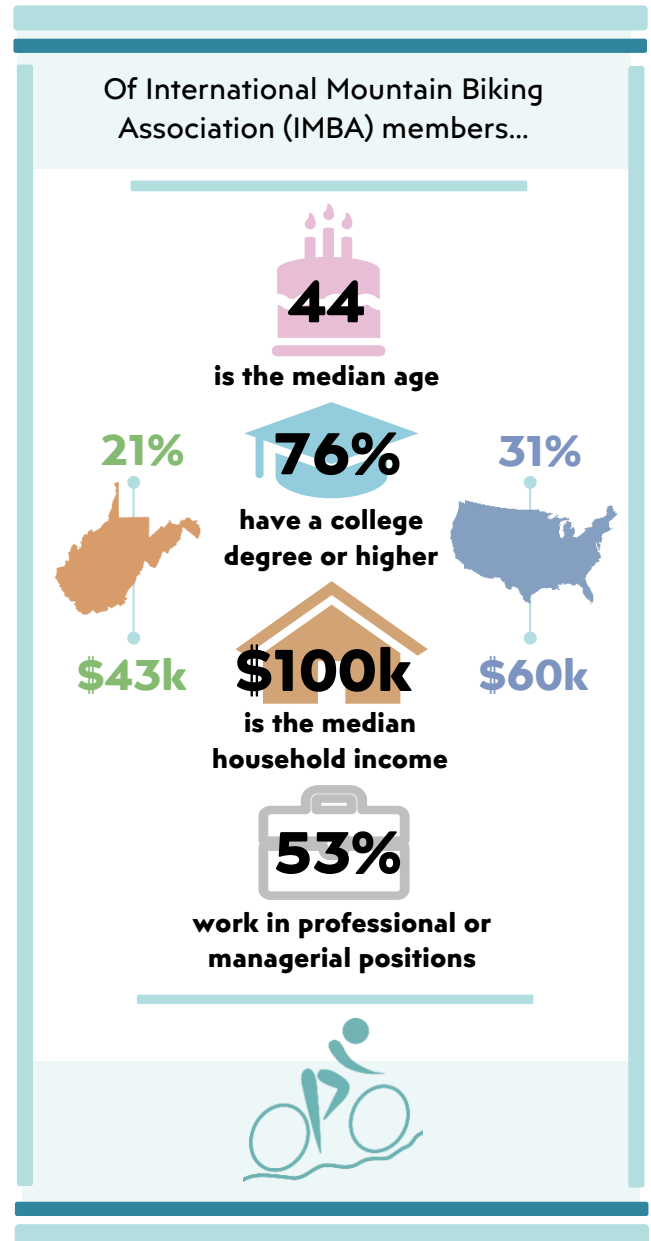
Approximately 50 million people—20% of Americans ages 16 and over—mountain bike in the United States every year (Eades and Arbogast, 2019). While mountain biking is an activity for all age groups, current data show that mountain bikers tend to be well-educated and well-paid young professionals. Market data show that mountain bikers use their expendable income to ride and explore new trails.

According to a 2015 Singletracks.com survey of mountain bikers across North America, the average mountain biker takes *two vacations* each year *specifically* to mountain bike. Half of these trips were within 250 miles of the riders’ home, though the average trip distance was 566 miles from home. (Barber, 2015)

Since mountain bike tourists spend just under five hours per day riding on a typical bike vacation, they have quite a bit of extra time to explore the area, eat and drink at local establishments, and spend money at local shops when they’re off the trails (Barber, 2015). This translates into significant visitor spending. The Singletracks.com survey found that riders spend an average of \$382 per trip (Barber, 2015). This figure closely matches observed mountain bike visitor spending in West Virginia, which the West Virginia University (WVU) Extension Service found to be \$143 per day or roughly \$387 per trip (Eades and Arbogast, 2019).

As a result, mountain bikers coming to ride the Monday Lick and Halfway Run trails will result in more overnight visitors staying in Marlinton, dining at local restaurants, and shopping at local businesses. This represents a *major opportunity* to plug Marlinton into Pocahontas County’s growing outdoor economy.

Figure 1 Mountain biker demographics



(Eades and Arbogast, 2019)

2. TOURISM ACTION PLAN

The Monday Lick and Halfway Run trails are poised to put Marlinton on the map as a trail destination. As a result, Marlinton should expect to see a significant increase in the number of mountain bikers coming to town once those trails open.

What improvements will Marlinton need to make to be ready for those visitors? And what can Marlinton leaders and businesses do to better serve mountain bikers and cyclists today?

This action plan examines Marlinton as a trail town, in terms of:

- its planned **trails**;
- its overall bike-related **infrastructure** (trail access, parking, streetscapes, signage and wayfinding, etc.); and
- its **tourism-oriented businesses** (lodging, dining, outdoor industry businesses, etc.).

The following chapter highlights *what Marlinton has* in comparison to *what bike tourists want* and explores key areas, services, and businesses within town that bike tourists will interact with on a typical visit.

Based on these insights, the report then examines IMBA Trail Solutions' recommendations for Marlinton from their 2022 Pocahontas County Gap Analysis completed for the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center. It concludes with a prioritized checklist of next steps that leaders in Marlinton can follow to accomplish IMBA's recommendations and, ultimately, make Marlinton a more bike-friendly community.

2.1 Trails

For decades, Marlinton has been a key location on the **Greenbrier River Trail**, a 78-mile former rail grade now used for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. This iconic and beloved long-distance trail bisects downtown Marlinton and will be a direct conduit to the two planned bike trail systems:

- The **Monday Lick Contemporary Trail System** will be a 27-mile network of bike-optimized singletrack trail, featuring stacked loops of varying length and difficulty appealing to mountain bikers of all skill levels. The Monday Lick Trail System has been designed to be a mecca for mountain bikers seeking purpose-built singletrack. The trails will be located on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) property 2.2 miles south of downtown Marlinton and accessible via the Greenbrier River Trail. While optimized for bicycles, these trails will also be enjoyable for hikers, anglers, and wildlife viewers and offer endless business opportunities.
- The **Halfway Run Trail System** will feature 10 additional miles of singletrack for beginner, intermediate, and advanced riders in the Monongahela National Forest, located roughly one mile north of downtown Marlinton and accessible via the Greenbrier River Trail. Building upon existing doubletrack trail, Halfway Run covers beginner-friendly terrain and will offer stacked loops perfect for novice to intermediate mountain biking.

As of early 2022, IMBA Trail Solutions has completed routing and flagging for both the Monday Lick and Halfway Run systems. IMBA Trail Solutions is working in partnership with USFS on seeking approval for the trails in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), since both projects will take place within the Monongahela National Forest. Trail design and environmental permitting has been completed for Monday Lick, which is now ready for construction. Project

partners are now seeking funds for construction of the Monday Lick Trail System, which is the first priority for immediate construction. The NEPA process for the Halfway Run Trail System is scheduled years out, making construction of this trail a longer-term priority.

What mountain bikers want: The Monday Lick and Halfway Run trail systems were designed to provide modern, purpose-built singletrack specifically for mountain biking, which has been identified as *the biggest gap* in the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center's trail offerings. Once completed, they are poised to become a major attraction that will draw significant numbers of mountain bikers to downtown Marlinton.

IMBA Priority (HIGHEST): In 2022, IMBA Trail Solutions ranked the construction of the Monday Lick and Halfway Run trails in Marlinton as *the highest priority project* for the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center to pursue as it seeks IMBA's gold-level Ride Center status. As a result, partners across the region recognize this construction project as critical to achieving the shared regional goal and vision for the Ride Center and are developing a funding strategy for implementation.

Another planned trail accessible directly from downtown Marlinton is the **Town Overlook Trail**. This short hiking trail will be accessible from near the Marlinton Train Depot on 4th Avenue. The trail will lead approximately 0.75 miles up the hillside to a scenic overlook featuring panoramic views of downtown Marlinton.

IMBA Trail Solutions completed routing and flagging for the trail in 2020. Pocahontas County Parks & Recreation has secured funding from the West Virginia Department of Transportation's (WVDOT's) Recreational Trails Program (RTP) to construct the trail and is awaiting the notice to proceed.



View from future Overlook Trail (City of Marlinton)

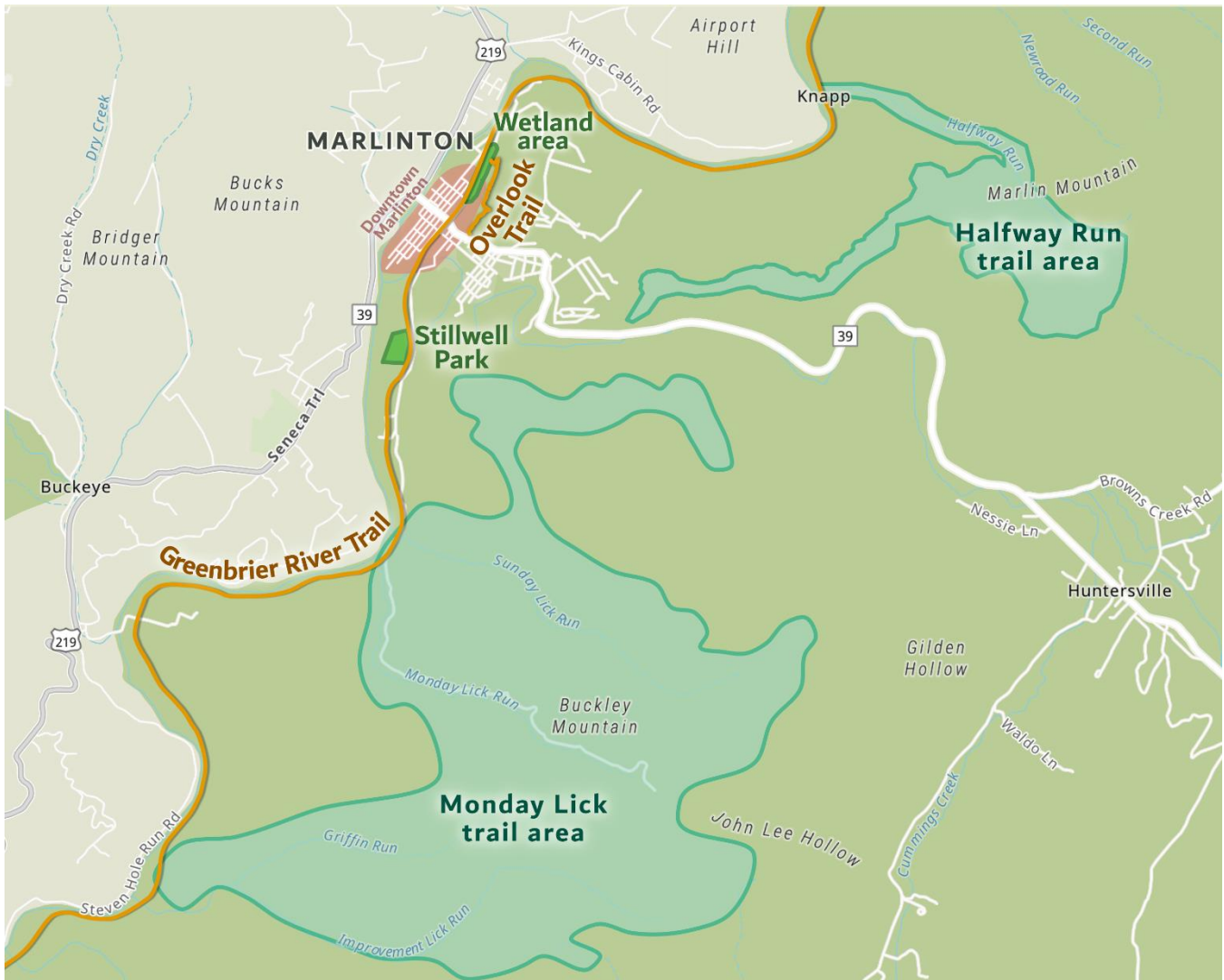
The Overlook Trail will connect to the **wetlands area** located just north of the Train Depot between 4th Avenue and the Greenbrier River Trail. Plans are underway to develop this area into a community park, which will then serve as the trailhead for the Overlook Trail. Plans include a walking trail

Action steps: Building the Monday Lick and Halfway Run trails is a major regional priority. Regional partners organized through SHRC and the Mon Forest Towns Partnership are currently working to secure major implementation funding to construct the Monday Lick trails. Local leaders should work with these entities to support grant writing and fundraising efforts for trail construction however they can.

One of the best ways Marlinton Listens can support this greater effort is by coordinating local, complementary improvements that will make Marlinton shine as a trail town. In terms of trail projects, this includes building out the Overlook Trail once RTP funds are released and developing the wetlands area in a community park with trails/boardwalk.

and/or boardwalk through the wetlands, picnic tables, park benches, and interpretive signage highlighting local history and watershed awareness.

Figure 2 Planned trails near downtown Marlinton



2.2 Bike-related infrastructure

One of the best ways to begin thinking about bike-specific tourism infrastructure is to put yourself in the shoes of a potential visitor. When a mountain biker sets out for a trip to a new trail system, they need to know information such as: *How do I get to the trails? Where do I park? Where can I change clothes or use the restroom before my ride? Where should I stop to grab coffee, a meal, or a beer while I'm in town?*

The following section examines the key infrastructure components that mountain bikers will interact with in Marlinton, looking at what mountain bikers will want and/or expect to find in a trail destination with what Marlinton currently has.

Figure 3 Bike-specific infrastructure assessment

Infrastructure	What visitors want	What Marlinton currently has	Opportunities
Trail access and parking	-Easy-to-find trailheads with ample parking, restrooms, maps, and signage	-Free parking throughout the downtown business district, close to the Greenbrier River Trail	-A signature trailhead area downtown with designated parking, kiosks, and signage for mountain bikers -An additional trailhead at Stillwell Park -Additional parking near CVB building
Bike-specific amenities	-Bike wash stations -Repair stations -Skills areas -Secure bike racks and storage areas	-Two full-service bike shops -Bike repair kiosk on the Greenbrier River Trail downtown -Bike racks scattered around downtown	-Bike wash stations at downtown and Stillwell Park trailheads -Bike wash station and shuttle point at parking lot -Skills area at Stillwell Park -A centrally located bike rack area downtown
Wayfinding and signage	-Clear directional signs for key locations -Maps of trails and downtown businesses	-Kiosk with signage mapping downtown businesses	Directional signage pointing out restaurants, trailheads, river access, and bike shops
Downtown business district	-Safe, bike- and pedestrian-friendly streets -Inviting storefronts and public spaces	-A walkable downtown on a beautiful river	-Downtown building renovations and storefront enhancements -Sidewalk improvements

2.2.1 Trailheads and parking areas

Trailhead access and parking is one of the most important aspects that leaders in Marlinton should focus on in preparation for mountain bike tourism.

The Monday Lick and Halfway Run trails have been designed specifically so that visitors will access each trail system directly from downtown Marlinton. This represents a tremendous opportunity for Marlinton, as research by Downstream Strategies and others has shown that trails directly connected to communities see the biggest economic benefit from trail tourism (Downstream Strategies, 2020).

IMBA Priority (Medium): Create a signature trailhead in downtown Marlinton with consistent signage and amenities matching the region by 2023.

Through their planning work conducted for the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center, IMBA Trail Solutions envisioned downtown Marlinton as a **“signature trailhead”** where visitors park downtown and take the Greenbrier River Trail south for 2.2 miles to the main Monday Lick trail entrance or north for one mile to the Halfway Run trailhead.

There are some basic expectations for what a trailhead should include. According to IMBA’s Destination Best Practices for Ride Centers, the following characteristics and features are essential for a trailhead:

1. Major trailheads **must have** defined parking, bathroom, water, and mountain bike–appropriate signs.
2. Trailheads should be accessible by bike to dining, food, and shopping venues. (IMBA, 2018)

Downtown trailhead

While the trail designs for Monday Lick and Halfway Run are largely complete, no design or planning has yet been conducted for Marlinton’s downtown trailhead. So far, downtown Marlinton has been pegged as the general location for a combined trailhead for the Monday Lick and Halfway Run trail systems, utilizing free parking throughout the downtown business district.

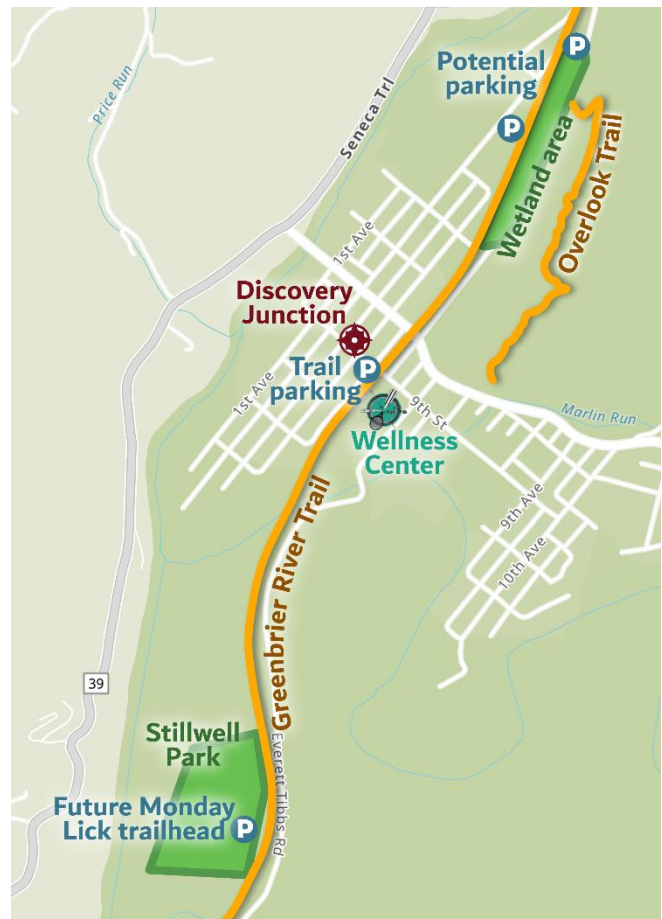
Parking is one of the central aspects for the future trailhead. As noted above, *defined parking* is a fundamental expectation for a major mountain bike trailhead. Local leaders should immediately start identifying specific areas downtown for trail user parking and complete additional planning to ensure that there is enough parking to accommodate future trail users without impacting local residents and businesses.

Designating a specific area for bike user parking will help all parties involved. Future visitors will expect to be able to plug in the “Monday Lick trailhead” into their smartphone mapping app and navigate straight to the parking lot. This makes it much easier for a first timer to navigate, rather than driving around downtown looking for parking.

Likewise, how would a local resident feel if they head to the bank or the Post Office and find all the parking places filled by out-of-state mountain bikers? This may not be an issue immediately, but it could become an issue down the road as the area becomes more well known. As a result, having designated trail user parking will help proactively address and alleviate community tensions that could arise once mountain bikers begin flooding into Marlinton.

There are several potential locations under consideration for a downtown parking area.

- There is an existing parking lot on 9th Street between 3rd Avenue and 4th Avenue. This lot’s location along the Greenbrier River Trail and proximity to public restrooms and facilities at the Wellness Center and Discovery Junction makes it well-positioned to serve visitors. Owned by the Board of Education, this lot is available for Greenbrier River Trail users but is primarily used by high school students.
- There are discussions of creating a new parking area north of Main Street near the Depot to serve the wetlands area, the planned Overlook Trail, and the Halfway Run trail. Given that the only public restrooms (at the Wellness Center and Discovery Junction) are on the other side of Main Street, dedicated restroom facilities would be needed to serve a new trailhead in this general area.
- An empty lot beside the Pocahontas CVB building could also be a prime spot for parking and bike-related amenities.



Beyond just parking, it's essential that the trailhead be set up with mountain bike visitors in mind—with restrooms, water, signage, maps, and the bike-specific amenities discussed in the next section. At the time of writing, Pocahontas Trails is in the process of applying for a trailhead and signage design and implementation grant from the Snowshoe Resort Community District. If successful, IMBA will complete the branding for trail-related infrastructure in the region, which can then be replicated in Marlinton.

Action steps: Marlinton leaders should identify a specific location as the official trailhead location, with designated parking, restrooms, water, kiosks, and signage.

Marlinton should begin conversations with local property owners to identify the best location and then work with its regional partners to get parking studies and trailhead designs completed for downtown Marlinton in conjunction with trail construction.

The goal should be to have trailheads and parking areas ready to go in time for the opening of the Monday Lick trails.

Parking in downtown Marlinton is generally considered more than enough to meet current needs. However, *future* parking needs may look very different as visitors discover Marlinton as a mountain bike destination. For instance, what would happen if the Monday Lick trails resulted in 30%, 50%, or 100% more visitors parking downtown every weekend? How would businesses feel if their customers were unable to find parking close by due to the number of tourists?

Several mountain bike areas that have grown into major destinations have learned this lesson the hard way in recent years. For example:

- Since 2020, **Tucker County**, West Virginia, has seen an unprecedented spike in outdoor recreation tourism. Downtown parking in Thomas and Davis, which had been considered adequate before the surge, is becoming an issue given the volume of visitors coming week after week (Downstream Strategies, 2021).
- Over the past few years, **Kingdom Trails** in northern Vermont has become one of the nation's most popular mountain bike destinations. While the trails now generate \$10 million per year in economic impact for the local area, the explosion in trail tourism has also caused negative impacts such as crowding, congestion, safety issues, and general pressure on their very small community. (Kingdom Trails, 2022)

Whereas both Tucker County and Kingdom Trails grew organically over time into major trail destinations, Marlinton has the distinct advantage of being able to plan upfront to anticipate its capacity needs as a future destination. As a result, it is crucial that local leaders plan now so that the town can accommodate future trail visitors in a way that minimizes impacts to local residents and businesses.

Stillwell Park Trailhead

In addition, IMBA Trail Solutions' Pocahontas County Gap Analysis calls for building an additional Monday Lick trailhead at Stillwell Park.

IMBA Priority (HIGH): Create a trailhead at Stillwell Park by 2025.

Stillwell Park is a 25-acre county park located on the Greenbrier River and the Greenbrier River Trail. It falls roughly halfway between downtown Marlinton and the entrance to the planned Monday Lick trails. The park features ample parking, ballfields, river access, a skate park, shelters, restrooms, and a nature trail, as well as a future mountain bike skills area. Camping is permitted onsite. With this combination of features, Stillwell Park is ideally suited to become a key base for mountain bikers in Marlinton.

Given the existing parking and facilities onsite, developing a trailhead at Stillwell Park should be relatively simple and focused on installing additional signage, maps, and kiosks for the Monday Lick trails. Leaders in Marlinton should work with Pocahontas Parks & Recreation to support these improvements.

2.2.2 Bike-specific amenities

Generally speaking, mountain bikers are fairly low maintenance: They tend to bring their own gear and equipment and come prepared to ride where services may be hard to reach. However, there are a few basic amenities that should be in place for Marlinton to serve increasing numbers of bike visitors.

Wash stations

Bike wash stations are important for areas that see high use from mountain bikers. Wash stations have two key functions. First, they allow bikers to keep their (often expensive) bikes clean and in good working order. Second, they help prevent the spread of invasive species that can be transported via bike tire and shoes. The downtown trailhead and Stillwell Park would both be ideal locations for bike wash stations so that visitors can wash their bikes before and after riding the Monday Lick and Halfway Run trails. Another potential location for a bike wash station is at a parking lot beside the Pocahontas County CVB office building. This will help prevent invasive species from being introduced to these fairly pristine sections of the Monongahela National Forest.

Repair stations

Marlinton is fortunate to have two bike shops already operating downtown, both of which offer full repair services as well as tools and gear for sale. However, given that mechanical issues don't always coincide with shop operating hours, having a repair station with basic bike tools is a welcome feature at any bike destination. Marlinton currently features a repair station downtown at a Greenbrier River Trail kiosk near Main Street.



Skills areas

Skills areas provide opportunities for mountain bikers to learn, practice, and master biking skills on a variety of features such as pump tracks, drops, steps, jumps, and other obstacles. As such, they are a valuable addition to a trail town and mountain bike destination.

IMBA Priority (Medium):
Implement Stillwell Park improvements by 2025.

Stillwell Park has been pegged as the location for a pump track and bike skills area, which will complement both the planned Monday Lick trailhead and the existing skate park pavilion onsite. Pocahontas County Parks & Recreation secured funding, has begun building an initial beginner

pump track, and has engaged IMBA Trail Solutions to design a beginner mountain bike trail at Stillwell Park.

Secure bike racks and storage

Today Marlinton has a number of bike racks spread across downtown, and it's not uncommon to see folks leave their bikes unlocked outside while they visit restaurants and shops. However, once Marlinton's new trails open, there will be significant numbers of mountain bikers coming to town, unlike ever before. Mountain bikers view their bikes as investments: It's not uncommon for a serious rider to spend anywhere from \$1,000–10,000 on a mountain bike. As a result, safety is a major concern for bike tourists when they travel. This means that Marlinton should start planning proactively to ensure that, once the trails open, there will be enough secure bike storage available downtown.

Action steps: Marlinton leaders can work proactively to:

- Plan for bike wash stations at the downtown trailhead and Stillwell Park.
- Support Pocahontas County Parks & Recreation with Stillwell Park improvements.
- Identify a central, highly visible location downtown to be a designated bike storage area with multiple racks.
- Work with businesses to help them obtain bike racks to place outside their buildings.

2.2.3 Wayfinding and signage

Trail economies are based on *trail towns*, with businesses where trail users can spend their money. For mountain bikers to eat and shop at local Marlinton businesses, they first need to know that those venues exist and then be able to find them.

Successful trail towns make it as easy as possible for visitors to discover and visit local restaurants, shops, and businesses. They use signage and wayfinding tools to steer visitors to those venues.

Wayfinding and signage have consistently emerged as issues throughout meetings and surveys held by Marlinton Listens. Some feel there are not enough signs, whereas others believe there are *too many* signs in downtown.

According to the 2019 Marlinton Listens survey, most respondents generally agreed that wayfinding signage exists, street signs are well placed, and that directional signs are properly located to get you to points of interest. However, respondents strongly disagreed that GPS and online directions are accurate, and some voiced concerns that visitors would not feel compelled to stop in downtown. (Culp et al., 2021)

Downstream Strategies reviewed these issues, approaching them as outsiders looking in.

Overall wayfinding and placement of signs: Downtown Marlinton is very small and compact, which makes it relatively easy to find most businesses in the central business district. The Greenbrier River Trail is not exactly well marked, but its location downtown does make it hard to miss. However, there are some things (such as where to access the river downtown) that would be more difficult for a visitor to find without stopping to ask for help.

Some businesses and venues (like the Old Clark Inn and the Pocahontas County Opera House) have paid for blue landmark signs from WVDOT located at intersections on Main Street. However, those

signs can be expensive, and having Route 39 (a Scenic Byway) routed along Marlinton’s Main Street (8th Street) has complicated signage approval in the past.

Coordinate Ride Center signage: The IMBA Trail Solutions Gap Analysis highlights the need for coordinated signage across the Ride Center, so that visitors at any given trail area recognize they are riding within the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center. Partners including Pocahontas Trails, Snowshoe Resort, and the Mon Forest Towns Partnership are pursuing funding for signage and branding across the entire Ride Center. Marlinton should stay looped into that and be ready to adapt and incorporate consistent signage standards.

GPS and online wayfinding: Many, if not most, mountain bikers heading to Marlinton will be coming from Snowshoe Resort, the epicenter and anchor feature of the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center. Most of these visitors will be navigating via smartphone GPS or car navigation, which should reliably direct them to Marlinton with little trouble. Those coming to the area via Interstate 64 (I-64) may likely have already passed through Marlinton on their way to Snowshoe.

Similarly, most visitors will be using their smartphones to identify businesses and trailheads, so keeping locations for key businesses and points of interest current is critically important.

There are places locally where the GPS is inaccurate. For example, Google Maps shows a “Red Spruce Knob” hiking area in the middle of downtown at the intersection of Main Street and 2nd Avenue. To address this, local leaders can suggest edits to the erroneous locations on Google and other navigation platforms. Likewise, businesses and organizations should keep their addresses, hours, and other operating information up to date on Facebook and Google.

Business signage: Signage outside tourism-oriented businesses can help attract pass-through traffic and make a positive impression on a visitor. For example, a visitor driving by Appalachian Sport for the first time may not realize that they offer rentals and shuttle services for bikes. Similarly, someone driving from Snowshoe to Marlinton might not guess that some of the unassuming-looking gas stations they pass sell local honey, cheeses, and specialty food items. Adding simple signs such as “Bike Rentals” and “Local Produce” go a long way in helping visitors readily identify stores with relevant offerings.

Visitors feeling compelled to stop downtown: Streetscaping, aesthetics, and business signage are key factors that influence the likelihood of attracting pass-through visitors to stop in downtown Marlinton. While Marlinton is small and fairly easy to navigate, appearances play a big role in helping encourage (or discourage) visitors from stopping, as discussed more in Section 2.3.4.

When it comes to luring trail visitors to downtown businesses, it is critical to promote any key points of interest—including trailheads, food and dining venues, bike shops, river access points, and local shops and galleries—on maps, kiosks, and other places with which visitors are likely to interact.

Some positive steps have been made. For example, the new Greenbrier River Trail kiosk near Main Street features a business directory map with other key touchpoints for visitors. Similarly, the new “Worth the Extra Mile” sign at the intersection of Routes 39 and 92 at Minnehaha Springs represents another good step in the right direction. Similar business directory maps should be installed at future trailheads and other key visitor locations.



(City of Marlinton)

Action steps: Updating GPS locations, business addresses and operating hours, and other online information is of key importance to reach modern visitors.

Continue to expand maps, directories, and other location signage to major tourism touchpoints, including trailheads, food and dining venues, bike shops, and river access locations.

Town leaders should also consider revisiting Marlinton’s signage ordinances to ensure that they are still relevant and targeted towards helping businesses better reach tourists and visitors.

2.2.4 Downtown business district

As a small, charming town with a walkable downtown business district set on a picturesque river, Marlinton has all the makings of a great trail town. However, there are things Marlinton can do to increase the appeal and aesthetics of its downtown business district—to benefit both visitors and residents alike.

Buildings, storefronts, and housing

In recent years, extensive community input has been gathered through surveys distributed in 2019 by the Mon Forest Towns Partnership and in 2021 by Marlinton Listens, and through the Town of Marlinton’s latest planning process for its 2019 Comprehensive Plan (Culp et al., 2021; Town of Marlinton, 2019; USFS, 2019).

A common theme emerging from both these community input processes was the need to address dilapidated buildings downtown. In the 2021 Marlinton Listens survey, residents identified abandoned and dilapidated structures as the biggest obstacle/drawback to growing recreation tourism in Marlinton (Culp et al., 2021). This clearly makes downtown buildings a direct concern for mountain bike tourism in Marlinton. Littering and poor trash collection also negatively affect the streetscape and overall aesthetic of the downtown area.

Related to this issue, anecdotal feedback from local leaders and business owners indicates that there is very little retail or commercial space available (for rent or purchase) in Marlinton. Similarly, they noted Marlinton has a limited supply of housing available for those interested in moving to Marlinton to start a business or work in the outdoor economy. The Pocahontas CVB is bringing together stakeholders to begin looking for ways to address housing issues in the community. As discussed further in Section 2.3, availability of both business space and housing will be critical to attracting new businesses to serve Marlinton’s trail economy.

Action steps: Marlinton should take advantage of technical assistance offered through the Downtown Appalachia: Revitalizing Recreation Economies (DARRE) program. Launched in 2021, the DARRE program will provide specialized assistance and resources to Marlinton and other communities specifically focused on downtown improvements needed to support the region’s new outdoor economy. These services can include building inventories, redevelopment assistance, market assessments, and more—all of which will directly help Marlinton improve buildings and repurpose them for new businesses.

Sidewalks and pedestrian/cyclist accessibility

Another issue commonly cited in the Marlinton Comprehensive Plan and recent surveys is that of sidewalks in downtown Marlinton. The Comprehensive Plan cites 85 potential tripping hazards in town, with an estimated cost of \$5,500 to remediate (Town of Marlinton, 2019).

Sidewalk accessibility poses a major quality of life issue for residents, though it is more of an aesthetic issue for the generally able-bodied mountain tourist. One such opportunity that could benefit residents and visitors alike is creating a sidewalk path from the Marlinton Greenbrier River Bridge to Walgreens, which would expand easy nonmotorized access to a range of shops. That said, aesthetics and inviting streetscapes are an important part of making a good impression on visitors, so enhancing sidewalks ranks as a mid-term priority for Marlinton from a strictly tourism perspective.

Longer term, Marlinton leaders may want to think about additional road and street improvements to accommodate bicyclists, such as adding bike lanes, “sharrows” (share-the-road arrows), and additional lighting.

2.3 Tourism-oriented businesses

The third and final aspect of trail town amenities Marlinton visitors interact with are tourism-oriented businesses—including lodging, dining, outdoor industry businesses, and others.

The following table compares the tourism-related businesses Marlinton currently has with what mountain bike visitors want, based on their documented consumer preferences and success stories from comparable trail towns.

Figure 4 Existing and preferred tourism infrastructure

Sector	What visitors want	What Marlinton currently has	Opportunities
Lodging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -High-end campgrounds -Short-term rentals (cabins, houses, etc.) -Bike-friendly inns and hotels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Limited camping and motel options -Growing number of short-term rentals -Several B&Bs and inns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Expanded camping at Stillwell Park -Opportunities for new entrepreneurs
Food and dining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unique, local venues -Coffee shops and cafés -Breweries and craft beer -Food trucks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Coffee shop (1) -Local restaurants (4) -Fast food (3) -Bar/pub (3) -Ice cream (4) -Grocery (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bakery and/or breakfast venue -More diverse restaurant offerings -Brewery
Recreation-focused businesses and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Outdoor gear and bike shops -Outfitters with rentals -Guide and shuttle services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bike shops (2) -Bike rentals (3) -Bike shuttles (2) -Outdoor gear store (1) -Boat rentals (1) -Guided fly fishing (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Expand bike rental opportunities -Expand guide and shuttle services
Other aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shops and stores -Arts venues -Cultural activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Discovery Junction -Pocahontas County Opera House -Pocahontas County Artisans Co-op -Local shops (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Expand events, particularly at Discovery Junction

2.3.1 Lodging

- **Current venues:** Several inns and bed-and-breakfasts (B&Bs), a growing number of short-term rentals (including cabins), and limited options for camping and motels
- **What bike tourists want:** High-end campgrounds, short-term rentals, and other lodging accessible to the trails
- **Business opportunities:** Expanded camping at Stillwell Park, and opportunities for new entrepreneurs to buy existing inns. Cleaning and management services for cabins, Airbnbs, and other short-term rentals also represent a strong business opportunity.

Marlinton has long been a popular spot for vacation homes and “camps” on the Greenbrier River. As a result, for a town of its size, Marlinton has strong existing lodging options, including several popular inns and B&Bs. (Several of these inns and B&Bs are currently for sale, which presents an opportunity to recruit new entrepreneurs to the area.)

The area also has a number of well-rated short-term rentals (including cabins). Some downtown listings already cater to bike tourists by offering onsite bike storage, which sets a great example for other hosts and venues to follow suite.

However, options for large groups are more limited. The Marlinton Motor Inn in nearby Edray is the only motel in the immediate area. In the short term, visitors seeking higher-end hotel-style lodging will likely stay at Snowshoe Resort. Once the Monday Lick trails open and trail usage grows, the area could likely support an additional hotel in the mid-to-long term.

However, a more immediate opportunity to pursue should be expanding camping options in Marlinton. Some camping is available close to town. Though it is primarily known for its day-use activities, Stillwell Park currently offers overnight camping. Given its river and trail frontage, its proximity to Monday Lick, and the planned onsite mountain bike skills area, Stillwell Park would be a very desirable camping location for mountain bikers coming to ride the Monday Lick trails. With a few simple enhancements to formalize tent/car camping sites, Stillwell Park could see increased visitors and revenue from overnight mountain bike guests.

Action steps: Lodging: Expanded camping options will help transform Stillwell Park into a major hub for mountain bikers. Designate campsites with basic features (parking, a site pad area, and a fire pit, etc.) and ensure Pocahontas County Parks & Recreation has the resources it needs to manage this new revenue stream.

Marlinton’s inns and B&Bs are a staple to its lodging options, yet several key venues are currently for sale. Local leaders should work with regional partners (such as Woodlands Development Group, Partner Community Capital, and others) to recruit entrepreneurs for these key businesses to ensure those stay open for the next generation of Marlinton visitors.

2.3.2 Food and dining

- **Current venues:** Two small grocery stores; several small, local restaurants, mostly featuring traditional American fare
- **What bike tourists want:** Non-chain coffee shops, cafés, restaurants, and craft breweries
- **Business opportunities:** Bakery, restaurants with more diverse fare, and a brewery

Marlinton boasts several popular restaurants in its downtown that align with trail user consumer preferences: The Dirtbean is a great example of a restaurant oriented to trail users, offering high-end coffee beverages as well as a full menu for breakfast and lunch, including options for food sensitivities. The opening of an ice cream shop and the Old Mountain Tavern also show positive trends of new businesses well-suited to serve increasing trail tourism.

IMBA Priorities (Medium): Incentivize and encourage a brewery and more diverse restaurants in downtown by 2025.

Once trail visitors start pouring in, however, Marlinton *will* need additional food and dining venues to accommodate trail users.

How many food and dining options does a trail town need to support a tourism economy? The following table compares the number of establishments in several of the nation’s top destinations for mountain bike tourism. While these communities are all located in different states, each is an example of a small, rural community that has successfully rebooted its local economy through mountain bike tourism.

Figure 5 Dining establishments in top national mountain bike tourism destinations

			Number of establishments				
Trail area	Population	Annual trail visitors	Coffee shop	Fast food	Local cafés, bakeries, restaurants, diners	Local brewery	Description of trail destination
East Burke, VT and nearby communities	4,000	94,000	2	0	18	1	100+ miles of singletrack at Kingdom Trails, all on private land
Anniston, AL	22,000	28,000	3	20	16	0	IMBA Ride Center destination with 25+ miles of purpose-built singletrack for mountain biking
Copper Harbor, MI	100	20,000+	0	0	8	1	IMBA Ride Center destination with 35+ miles of purpose-built singletrack for mountain biking
Cuyuna, MN and nearby communities	3,000	185,000	1	2	11	1	IMBA Ride Center destination with 25+ miles of purpose-built singletrack for mountain biking

Source: Downstream Strategies case study research, 2020

This table shows that Marlinton is not far off, though additional venues will be needed to serve high volumes of future trail visitors. A few opportunities stand out:

- **Additional restaurants:** Looking at the trends, modern trail visitors look for dining venues with unique local offerings and diverse options. Marlinton has a few strong options, but even the best restaurants can grow tiring if you eat there every day. IMBA Trail Solutions’ Gap Analysis prioritizes additional restaurants with diverse offerings as a medium priority. As a result, new restaurants and food trucks present an opportunity for Marlinton, particularly those with distinctive offerings beyond traditional American fare.

- **Brewery:** The rise of craft beer has mirrored the growing popularity of cycling in recent years, and it's often said that bikes and beer go hand-in-hand. IMBA Trail Solutions' Gap Analysis identifies a brewery/pub as a medium priority. A brewery and/or other additional brew pubs downtown featuring a variety of high-end, craft brews on tap and outdoor seating would be a strong market opportunity for downtown Marlinton.
- **Bakery:** A bakery and/or additional breakfast dining venues would be a niche business opportunity that would complement Marlinton's existing dining options and be well received by both visitors and locals alike.

Action steps: Dining: Once trail visitors start coming to Marlinton, downtown *will* be a desirable location for new restaurant startups. Marlinton leaders should start now to smooth the way for future opportunities by addressing issues faced by restaurants in town. These include:

Work with the DARRE program to prepare modern, affordable downtown spaces for future restaurant venues to locate. Once these spaces exist, Marlinton will be in a position to advertise available space to interested entrepreneurs.

Supporting Marlinton's existing, well-liked restaurants is a win-win opportunity for local tourism. Help existing restaurants access available resources (such as tourism training through the Pocahontas County CVB, business support and access to capital through Partner Community Capital and the WV Women's Business Center, etc.) to help them grow their business, expand their offerings, address their needs, and better serve visitors.

Workforce issues are often a major limiting factor in rural tourism communities, and unfortunately there is no known silver bullet. Knowing that Marlinton *will* see an increased need for tourism and hospitality workers, leaders should start early in looking for creative solutions to this major issue. For example, there could be possibilities to partner with and/or learn from Snowshoe Resort in attracting workers via visa programs.

2.3.3 Recreation-focused

- **Current venues:** Two bike shops, an outdoor outfitter, guided fly fishing, and growing shuttle services
- **What bike tourists want:** Outdoor gear and bike shops, outfitters with rentals, and guide and shuttle services
- **Business opportunities:** Expanded bike rentals, shuttles, and guide services

Marlinton features a small but growing slate of outfitters and recreation-oriented businesses.

Two businesses have been long-term staples: Since 1989, Appalachian Sport has served as Marlinton's all-purpose outfitter and outdoor gear shop, featuring a large hunting selection and offering shuttles and rentals for both bikes and boats. The Dirtbean, Marlinton's first bike shop/coffee shop/restaurant, opened in 2005 and has been serving trail users ever since.

However, the last few years have seen a flurry of new recreation-focused businesses opening in Marlinton. Greenbrier Bikes opened in 2021, bringing a second full-service bike shop to Marlinton. In addition, the new Greenbrier River Shuttles offers paid car shuttle service for Greenbrier River Trail and Greenbrier River users, shuttling customers' cars to Cass, Marlinton, and Seebert. Greenbrier River Shuttles is working on expanding services to the Gauley Basin trail system; if the required

special-use authorization is secured, the shuttle service can also reach the prospective Monday Lick trails.

IMBA has identified expanded bike shop services as a high priority for Marlinton. This recommendation focuses particularly on bike rental opportunities, which will be in higher demand once the Monday Lick and Halfway Run trails open.

IMBA Priority (High): Incentivize and encourage existing bike shops to expand their services and equipment (especially rentals) by 2023.

IMBA Priorities (Low): Incentivize and encourage a shuttle service from Marlinton to Tea Creek trail system by 2025. Consider a “bike bus” connecting the major hubs of Marlinton, Tea Creek, Snowshoe, Greenbank, Durbin, and the Mower Tract by 2035.

With a second full-service bike shop now open, Marlinton is in a good position to address this need. Recent supply chain issues and widespread bike shortages currently present obstacles to expanding rental fleets in the short-term. However, the main need will be to increase rental capacity by the time the new trails open in several years, which will allow some time to build these fleets gradually.

Longer term, IMBA identified opportunities for expanded shuttle services to transport bikers between the key hubs within the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center. While this is a fairly low priority, there should be a strong market opportunity for that service as overall visitation increases.

The Dirtbean: The Dirtbean offers a great example of a tourism-oriented business catering to mountain bikers. Offering high-end coffee, beer, wine, and healthy food options combined with a full-service bike shop, this business has been ahead of the curve in delivering what bike tourists are looking for in Marlinton. As such, learning from the Dirtbean’s experience navigating relevant issues (such as finding a suitable, affordable location, finding and retaining workers, navigating national supply chain issues, and even designing signage in accordance with the local sign ordinance) could be very valuable for Marlinton leaders as they seek to smooth the way for additional tourism-focused businesses.



Action steps: Recreation-focused businesses: Growing recreation-oriented businesses will be essential for Marlinton’s future as a trail town, and they represent key allies and proponents for recreation. As a result, local leaders should make it a priority to maintain a close dialogue with these existing businesses to understand their challenges and needs and help them grow their business and expand their offerings.

Similar to the recommendations for Marlinton restaurants, local leaders should work to help Marlinton’s existing bike shops, outfitters, and recreation-oriented businesses access available resources to help them grow their business and expand their operations. For example, given the strain many businesses have experienced during the pandemic, bike shops may need access to capital in order to grow their bike rental fleets.

2.3.4 Other things to do

- **Current venues:** Discovery Junction, Pocahontas County Opera House, Pocahontas County Artisans Co-op, and several popular events throughout the year
- **What bike tourists want:** Shops, live music, arts/cultural activities, and other things to do
- **Business opportunities:** Expanded events at Discovery Junction, additional downtown shops

No matter how good the trails are, trail visitors *always* look for other things to do locally when they're not on their bikes. This lesson has been well-documented by the Hatfield-McCoy Trails in southern West Virginia: More than two decades in, trail riders still clamor for more things to do in the trail towns to fill their time when they're not riding (Lusk, 2018).

Marlinton hosts a number of well-received events each year, including Pioneer Days, the Great Greenbrier River Race, the Greenbrier River Trail Marathon, the Pocahontas County Fall Harvest Festival and Roadkill Cook-off, events at the Pocahontas County Opera House, Allegheny Echoes, and more. First Fridays have taken off as a weekly community event with live music at Discovery Junction, Marlinton's new outdoor pavilion and events space.

Marlinton also features the popular Pocahontas County Artisans Co-op at the Train Depot, which features arts and crafts made by local artisans, as well as several shops downtown.

Overall, Marlinton's existing slate of events, activities, and offerings gives it a good head-start and positions it well to serve trail visitors. As Marlinton prepares for major trail construction, locals should take advantage of the great progress underway at Discovery Junction by planning fun community events with live music and entertainment. They should also begin thinking about ways to accommodate increased volumes of people at First Fridays and other events. (Similar to the earlier parking discussion, what would happen if attendance at First Fridays doubled, tripled, or quadrupled as visitation and trail usage takes off?) Such spikes may take a few years to play out, but again, Marlinton has the distinct advantage of having time to prepare and adequately plan for expected growth.

Action steps: Once the new trails open, there will be increased demand for additional shops and businesses downtown. But for new shops to open, there needs to be affordable, suitable space to rent in downtown buildings. Marlinton Listens leaders should engage with the DARRE program and the Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center to identify paths forward for Marlinton properties.

In addition, Marlinton Listens should continue its progress in boosting First Fridays and other events at Discovery Junction.

2.4 Tourism next steps

As regional partners work to secure construction funding for the new trail systems, the Marlinton Listens team and its partners have an important role to play in carrying out local improvements that will prepare Marlinton to be a key trail town within the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center.

This report presents action steps across several key categories of trail-related improvements, which are summarized in the checklist on the following pages.

Of all these action steps, there are two key areas local leaders should focus on immediately in order to accomplish the recommendations presented in IMBA’s Gap Analysis: **1) trailheads** and **2) downtown buildings**.

Trailhead areas

Marlinton’s top priority should be ensuring that it has new, full-capacity trailheads—one downtown and another at Stillwell Park—ready to serve trail users as soon as the Monday Lick trail system opens.

The IMBA Gap Analysis prioritizes completion of the downtown trailhead first. Priority steps include:

- Choose a location for the downtown trailhead.
 - Review available properties, considering proximity to the Greenbrier River Trail and existing amenities. (Potential options could include expanding the parking area adjacent to the Wellness Center and Discovery Junction south of Main Street, or creating a new area in conjunction with the Depot and wetlands area north of Main Street.)
 - Initiate conversations with property owners to secure access to the best location.
- Work with regional partners including SHARC, the Mon Forest Towns Partnership, IMBA Trail Solutions, Region 4 Planning & Development Council, and others to have parking studies and trailhead designs completed for this trailhead. Per IMBA standards, the trailhead must include ample designated parking, restrooms, water, kiosks, and signage.
- Work with regional partners to then implement the trailhead in time for the opening of the Monday Lick trail system.

For the Stillwell Park trailhead, local leaders should work with Pocahontas County Parks & Recreation to implement the following priority steps:

- Identify locations for kiosks and signage. The actual designs for the kiosks and signage will closely mirror those designed and implemented at the downtown trailhead.
- Work with IMBA Trail Solutions to design and implement the planned mountain bike–specific enhancements at Stillwell Park, including the next phase of pump track development and a mountain bike skills area.
- Enhance camping options and capability at Stillwell Park. Onsite camping would be the feather in the cap to make Stillwell Park and Marlinton a tremendous mountain bike hub for the Snowshoe Ride Center.

These tasks align with Objectives 4.3 (Work with other organizations and agencies to promote Marlinton as an outdoor recreation hub) and 4.4 (Develop and enhance recreation amenities throughout town) of Marlinton’s Comprehensive Plan.

Downtown buildings and properties

After trailheads and parking, downtown properties pose the next major priority area for Marlinton.

In order to develop as a trail town, downtown Marlinton will need additional retail space to house additional restaurants, shops, and other businesses. Three of IMBA’s highest priority objectives for Marlinton—expanding bike shop services, recruiting a brewery, and expanding restaurant options—will be limited unless further properties are developed that offer suitable space and reasonable rents. For example, the Dirtbean, Marlinton’s oldest bike shop, is now in its third location downtown and lacks room to expand its offerings (ranked as a high priority in the Gap Analysis). The owner cites rising rents and lack of options as key obstacles for her business.

As mentioned throughout this report, the limited availability of commercial, retail, and restaurant space poses a significant barrier to future business expansion. In addition to limited availability of properties, nearly all of downtown Marlinton lies in the floodplain. Federal funding opportunities for properties in the floodplain are extremely limited and require adherence to strict limitations. Any new buildings in the floodplain downtown (such as the one housing Alfredo’s and the Old Mountain Tavern) must be built well above street level. Compliance with U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain standards and ordinances makes it very difficult to develop new and historic properties alike.

As a result, the floodplain issue presents a serious obstacle for downtown redevelopment, and it is one that must be addressed immediately in order to identify ways to successfully develop downtown Marlinton as a trail town.

While there’s no easy answer to the floodplain issue, Marlinton has great resources available through its regional partners that can help address this issue head on. As one of eight communities served by the DARRE program, Marlinton has new access to technical assistance for its underutilized downtown properties. For Marlinton, this technical assistance can and should be used to identify paths forward for downtown development within the floodplain.

Priority steps include:

- Work with the West Virginia Community Development Hub, the Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center, and other partners to take advantage of resources available through the DARRE program, the BAD Buildings Program, and other brownfields redevelopment resources to:
 - Perform a floodplain analysis study to determine the exact standards downtown properties must meet in order to be redeveloped within the floodplain.
 - Inventory and prioritize key properties for redevelopment.
 - Match key business opportunities identified in this report with available properties.
 - Redevelop properties with key business needs in mind to suit future restaurants, breweries, shops, etc.
- Continue local progress in addressing dilapidated buildings and clearing lots for redevelopment.

Immediate	3–5 years	5-10 years
<p>Trail development Secure funds for trail construction</p> <p>Downtown trailheads/parking Identify locations Determine a budget & funding sources Hire firm for trailhead design/planning</p> <p>Stillwell Park trailhead Identify locations for kiosks/signage Design/construct bike-specific enhancements Plan for expanded camping</p> <p>Downtown business district Improve storefronts/abandoned buildings Identify spaces for future businesses</p>	<p>Trail development Build Overlook Trail & develop wetlands</p> <p>Bike-specific amenities Plan for bike wash stations Identify a central location for bike storage Help businesses obtain bike racks</p> <p>Wayfinding and signage Update GPS points, hours, & key online info Help businesses enhance signage/promotion Expand maps & local directories Revisit signage ordinances</p> <p>Downtown business district Use DARRE to find space for a restaurant/brewery Expand events at Discovery Junction</p> <p>Tourism-oriented businesses/services Expand & promote camping opportunities Assist restaurants, inns, B&Bs, and other businesses Increase tourism/hospitality training & workforce</p>	<p>Downtown business district Sidewalk & road/street improvements for pedestrians & cyclists Expand housing opportunities</p> <p>Tourism-oriented businesses/services Work toward long-term tourism/hospitality workforce development Establish regular shuttle services to Ride Center</p>

These tasks directly address Objective 1.3 (Address abandoned and dilapidated structures) and align with the overall objective of Goal 3 (Create and environment that attracts new businesses and strengthens existing businesses) of Marlinton's Comprehensive Plan.

The following action items are presented on in the following checklist.

2.4.1 Tourism checklist

Top priorities to start immediately

Trail development

- Work with the Mon Forest Towns, SHARC, DARRE, and other regional players to support grant writing and fundraising efforts for trail construction.

Downtown trailheads and parking areas

- Identify where the primary trailheads and parking areas should be.
- Work with Mon Forest Towns Partnership to determine a budget and funding sources for trailhead design and planning services.
- Solicit professional services for downtown trailhead design and planning.

Stillwell Park trailhead

- Identify locations for kiosks and signage. The actual designs for the kiosks and signage will closely mirror those designed and implemented at the downtown trailhead.
- Work with IMBA Trail Solutions to design and implement the planned mountain bike-specific enhancements at Stillwell Park, including the next phase of pump track development and a mountain bike skills area.
- Begin considering logistics and planning for expanded camping options at Stillwell Park.

Downtown business district

- Leverage available resources to make progress cleaning up storefronts, abandoned buildings, etc.
- Pursue floodplain analysis to determine exact parameters for downtown redevelopment.
- Work with partners to begin inventorying properties and identifying spaces for future restaurants and businesses downtown.

Mid-term priorities: 3–5-year window

Trail development

- Build out the Overlook Trail once RTP funds are released.
- Develop the wetlands area in a community park, with trails/boardwalk.

Bike-specific amenities

- Plan for bike wash stations at the downtown trailhead and Stillwell Park.
- Identify a central, highly visible location downtown to be a designated bike storage area with multiple racks.
- Work with businesses to help them obtain bike racks to place outside their buildings.

Wayfinding and signage

- Designate volunteers to review and update GPS locations, business addresses and operating hours, and other online information, which is of key importance to reach modern visitors.
- Help businesses enhance their signage and promotion.
- Continue to expand maps, directories, and other location signage to major tourism touchpoints, including trailheads, food and dining venues, bike shops, and river access locations.

- Revisit Marlinton’s signage ordinances to ensure that they are still relevant and targeted towards helping businesses better reach tourists and visitors.

Downtown business district

- Utilize DARRE program resources to ensure there are modern and affordable spaces downtown suitable for a potential restaurant and/or brewery.
- Continue to expand and enhance events at Discovery Junction.

Tourism-oriented businesses and services

- Expand and promote camping opportunities at Stillwell Park.
- Work with regional business development partners (Woodlands Development Group, Partner Community Capital, etc.) to recruit entrepreneurs to buy the inns and B&Bs for sale in the area.
- Help existing restaurants and businesses access available resources and capital to grow their business and expand their offerings.
- Begin a dialogue with regional partners (CVB, Region 4 Planning & Development Council, Snowshoe Resort, etc.) to think creatively about how to increase Marlinton's tourism and hospitality workforce.
- Make tourism and hospitality training a key part of the Marlinton’s business culture.

Long-term priorities: 5–10-year window

Downtown business district

- Pursue sidewalk and road/street improvements for both pedestrians and cyclists.
- Identify options for expanding housing opportunities for the growing recreation workforce.

Tourism-oriented businesses and services

- Work with regional partners on long-term tourism and hospitality workforce development.
- Work with entrepreneurs and regional partners to establish regular shuttle services to key locations across the Ride Center.

3. MARKETING ACTION PLAN

What can Marlinton do to better promote itself as a cycling destination and expand its reach to mountain bikers?

This action plan provides a road map for marketing actions Marlinton leaders should pursue to brand and promote Marlinton as a trail town. Recognizing the community and its volunteers have limited time and resources, the following marketing elements are prioritized by order of importance to direct local leaders in items to pursue first.

The final recommendations and checklist will guide local leaders through the process of implementing key marketing action items, as well as ways Marlinton can plug into and leverage the greater regional marketing efforts.

3.1 Immediate marketing priorities

When it comes to marketing, the options a community can pursue can be overwhelming. The following items reflect the most essential priorities for Marlinton to embrace in marketing itself as a trail town.

3.1.1 Brand creation

First, Marlinton needs to develop a brand for itself as a trail town. All subsequent materials and outputs in this action plan will need to be based on the brand that Marlinton comes up with, so developing this brand concept reflects the true starting point for Marlinton's marketing efforts.

There are several necessary components to this brand:

1. **The overall brand concept** for Marlinton as a trail town. This brand should capture the best of what Marlinton is as well as what it plans to become from a recreation and tourism perspective. Given the scale of planned trail development, Marlinton's brand should play on its strengths as a friendly small town with (soon-to-be) world-class trails linked *directly* to its downtown. It should also align with the overall brand of the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center and Pocahontas County Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB).
2. **A tag line** that captures that brand in one short sentence or phrase. While many towns and cities have official tag lines for governmental entities, this tag line should focus specifically on Marlinton from a tourism perspective. Relevant examples include:¹
 - a. Pocahontas County: "Nature's mountain playground"
 - b. Moab, Utah: Moab's public lands: "Our national treasures"
 - c. Stowe, Vermont: "The perfect winter wonderland awaits you"
 - d. Copper Harbor, Michigan: "Where the road ends, adventure begins"
3. **A logo** that visually captures the brand. Logos increase brand recognition and present a cohesive, professional image to target audiences.

Marlinton has incredible partners in the Pocahontas County CVB, SHARC, and the Mon Forest Towns Partnership who offer extensive expertise in marketing. The Marlinton Listens team should start by reaching out to these partners for advice, input, and assistance in developing the brand.

Then, if funding is available, a third-party marketing firm could be hired to compile a branding package that meets the town's needs. There are also many online fee-based services that can assist with aspects such as logo creation. (Examples include [fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com), [wix.com](https://www.wix.com), and [tailorbrands.com](https://www.tailorbrands.com).)

¹ Brand and website examples for Moab, Stowe, and Copper Harbor are included in Appendix B.

3.1.2 Website

Once the brand standard is created, Marlinton will need a tourism-focused website. Separate from the Town’s website, this website will be more akin to a CVB website. (Based on examples from other trail towns, this website might be oriented towards “Visit Marlinton” or “Bike Marlinton.”) The purpose of this website is to highlight Marlinton’s local recreation and tourism amenities and help potential visitors plan a trip to Marlinton.

Appendix B presents a few relevant examples of websites from trail towns across the nation that have maintained a well-organized, professional branding campaign for outdoor recreation tourism.

When it comes to websites, looks matter. A modern, professional-looking website is a fundamental requirement for any trail town seeking to attract visitors. Given that many Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center visitors come from out of state, the “Visit Marlinton” website may be their first impression of the town—and it could influence whether they decide to visit. As a result, the website needs to be professional, eye-catching, and up to date.

While there are many options for creating and managing your own website, professional website design and management is an expense generally worth the price (generally several thousand dollars). A website designer can craft a polished and easily navigable site that captures Marlinton’s desired brand in web format and will be able to walk local leaders through the process of creating the site, obtaining URLs (domain names), and maintaining the website over time.

Next steps include:

- Determine what web design and maintenance expertise exists in-house, within the Town and Marlinton Listens.
- Ask the CVB and other partners for recommendations on web designers and hosts. Look for firms with experience designing promotional websites for businesses and/or communities. Arrange interviews with a few firms and ask to see example websites.
- Be prepared to provide content (businesses and services to feature, etc.) and review drafts and materials to ensure the website captures Marlinton’s desired brand.

3.1.3 Photography and video

Just as appearances matter with websites, high-quality photos and videos are vital in attracting visitors in today’s digital world. Social media trends show that viewers are more drawn to eye-catching photos and videos than text-heavy webpages, so modern websites and social media platforms are designed around high-resolution imagery. Low-resolution photos come across on these platforms as fuzzy and amateurish, even to the untrained eye.

As a result, Marlinton should plan to invest in high-resolution, professional photography and videography which can be used across all aspects of its marketing materials. Marlinton Listens should seek recommendations on nearby photographers from the CVB and SHARC partners and look for one with drone capabilities to shoot aerial imagery. A budget of \$500–1,000 should be adequate to provide a range of high-resolution photos and basic drone footage of downtown Marlinton. Once the new bike trails are built, additional photos and video will be needed for promotion with the Ride Center.

3.2 Mid-to-long-term marketing priorities

Once Marlinton has accomplished the priority marketing tasks established in Section 3.1, it should consider pursuing the following marketing tasks as time, budget, and capacity allow.

3.2.1 Social media

Social media can be a very effective strategy to connect Marlinton’s brand with far-reaching audiences across the country. The following social media platforms are frequently used in conjunction with tourism promotion campaigns:

- **Facebook:** Facebook is one of the most used social media platforms in the world and could be a powerful tool for Marlinton to utilize for this campaign—particularly for promoting tourism-focused events. Setting up an organization or business page is easy and free. Step-by-step guides to setting up a Facebook business page are available at businessinsider.com/how-to-create-a-facebook-business-page.
- **Instagram:** Instagram is a social media platform specifically geared toward posting photos and videos. Hashtags (such as #mountainbiking, #flyfishing, etc.) can be used strategically to reach targeted user and interest groups (namely, mountain bikers) from around the country and the world. By creating a hashtag and promoting it on the website, across other social media campaigns, and on print material, a buzz could be created through Instagram by encouraging visitors or local businesses to post their local photos with #ExploreMarlinton, #Marlinton, #DiscoverMarlinton, or other memorable lines. Once the campaign is up and running, a photo contest, for instance, could be an engaging way to create hype about local hotspots and put Instagrammers to work marketing the town. To create an account, visit instagram.com.
- **YouTube:** A YouTube channel would be a fun and easy way to market videos about local attractions to gain traveler interest in Marlinton. A great example of this method is on Visit Boulder’s channel (youtube.com/c/visitboulder) which highlights travel guides, hiking trails, and seasonal events.

Before launching social accounts, Marlinton leaders should be aware that it takes a lot of work to build and maintain a social media presence. Effective social media accounts carefully curate their content in a way that comes across as effortless yet coordinated. Behind the scenes, that curation takes thorough planning and thought on what and when to post.

A social media platform should only be pursued if local partners are committed to following a regular posting schedule and keeping the channel up to date. Marlinton Listens and its partners should weigh the different social media platforms and decide which they feel ready to start with. They should also designate a specific entity or individual to serve as the social media manager.

Next, lay out a social media strategy to curate a schedule for posting specific types of content on each platform, being sure to consistently present Marlinton’s brand throughout. A tourism-focused presence for Marlinton that mirrors the branded logo, tagline, and website should be utilized across all chosen platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. There are several services that make keeping up with multiple platforms easier than ever, like hootsuite.com.

3.2.2 Digital ads

Digital ads—both through social media platforms and through web-based services—have become affordable and effective ways to reach targeted audiences online.

The most popular tool for web-based ads is through Google’s service Google Adwords. This service is easy to set up and monitor and works with any budget. The tool allows web marketers to choose

phrases that would drive targeted web traffic to their website. For example, terms such as “mountain biking West Virginia” would trigger an ad for Marlinton to pop up on the search results for potential visitors to click on. A list of key phrases that will drive the appropriate audiences to the site is important for this initiative. More information on Google Adwords is available at: ads.google.com/home/how-it-works/

In addition, Facebook and Instagram offer customized, targeted ad services that can be tailored to very specific audiences: For example, Marlinton could set up a Facebook ad (ex. “Marlinton, West Virginia: World-class singletrack in our backyard”) that would be seen by men ages 20–55 throughout the Mid-Atlantic with interests in mountain biking and cycling—in other words, the exact demographic for a modern mountain biker. This is a great way to drive traffic to a website or to a particular action on the site for a very modest budget. More information on Facebook ads is available at: facebook.com/business/ads

3.2.3 Print materials

Most mountain bikers and trail visitors today use smartphones to identify places to eat, shop, and stay in a town and navigate directly to each location. As a result, print materials are less dominant and necessary today than in years past.

As mentioned in the Tourism Action Plan, signage and kiosks for trail users are key elements to have stationed at every major touchpoint a bike tourist will visit. Paper flyers will not be a major grab for this audience, but paper maps—particularly those orienting visitors to the trails, downtown businesses, services, and key points of interest—are useful and boast practical, on-the-go features.

When it comes to print materials, Marlinton should:

- Check with the Pocahontas County CVB to learn what kinds of print materials are most used and well received for the county’s target audiences.
- At a bare minimum, plan on producing a visitor-oriented downtown map showing trailheads, restaurants, lodging, points of interest, and key services downtown.
- Hire a designer to help enhance the quality of the promotional materials.
- Distribute materials to trailheads, bike shops, downtown businesses, the Snowshoe Resort, races, and other bike-related and outdoor events around the state.

3.2.4 Other marketing strategies

Given the regional importance of the Monday Lick and Halfway Run trails for the Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center in its mission to obtain gold-level Ride Center status, Marlinton has a great opportunity to work with SHARC to promote the opening of the new trails once they are built. This represents a major advantage that most trail towns don’t have.

SHARC is already doing a great job getting coverage for the Ride Center in mountain bike publications, including a recent story in Blue Ridge Outdoors.² Once construction on the Monday Lick trails begins, Marlinton should be prepared to start working with SHARC to draft a communications strategy to announce the opening of the trails.

As mentioned, the Pocahontas County CVB is a key partner located right in Marlinton with tremendous experience in marketing local tourism. Marlinton may be able to engage in longer-term co-marketing opportunities with the CVB and should stay in close touch with the CVB to plan out a long-term strategy once the Monday Lick trails open.

² <https://www.blueridgeoutdoors.com/biking/west-virginia-goes-big-for-biking/>

Finally, Marlinton could consider billboards to promote the area on main thoroughfares throughout the state. Billboards in nearby cities and towns would benefit the tourism market in Marlinton by capturing travelers already in the area. All signage should include the branded logo and the website. Towns and cities to consider for signage locations:

- Elkins (Rt 219)
- Snowshoe (Rt 219)
- Lewisburg (I-64/Rt 219)
- Summersville (Rt 19/Rt 39)
- Flatwoods (I-79)
- Charleston (I-79/I-64)
- Morgantown (I-79)

Outdoor advertising providers in West Virginia include:

- WV Outdoor: wvoutdoor.com
- Lamar: lamar.com/Bridgeport
- Micro Outdoor: microoutdoor.com



<https://hoffmanyork.com/work/montana-office-tourism/finding-those-searching-big-sky>

3.3 Marketing next steps

The following checklist breaks down Marlinton’s recommended action steps for marketing.

IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST | MARKETING ACTION STEPS

Top priorities to start immediately

Brand creation

- Convene a local marketing team including officials from the Pocahontas County CVB and seek advice, input, and assistance from partners in developing the brand.
- Discuss whether budget allows hiring a marketing firm. If not, look for assistance from partners and/or pursue budget-friendly online service options.
- Develop a brand concept, logo, and tagline capturing Marlinton's desired image as a trail town.

Website

- Determine what web design and maintenance expertise exists in-house, the Town, and Marlinton Listens.
- Ask the CVB and other partners for recommendations on web designers and hosts. Look for firms with experience designing promotional websites for businesses and/or communities. Arrange interviews with a few firms and ask to see example websites.
- Be prepared to provide content (businesses and services to feature, etc.) and review drafts and materials to ensure the website captures Marlinton's desired brand.

Photography and video

- Seek recommendations on nearby photographers from the CVB and SHARC partners.
- Hire a photographer or purchase rights to existing photos of downtown Marlinton.
- Once the trails are built, partner with SHARC to obtain additional bike-specific photography and video.

Mid-term priorities

Social media

- Decide which platforms to focus on. Key options include Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.
- Designate entities and/or individuals to manage the social media accounts and maintain an active presence.
- Develop a social media strategy, including a routine schedule for posts and topics.
- Consider targeted ads, particularly to promote Marlinton events.

Digital ads

- Use web-based and social media ads to drive traffic to Marlinton's events.
- Once the Monday Lick trails open, launch a digital ad campaign to announce the opening and promote the new trails.
- Set the target audience for ads to match the demographics and interests of Marlinton's targeted user group: mountain bikers and outdoor recreation tourists.

Print materials

- Check with the Pocahontas County CVB to learn what kinds of print materials are most used and well-received for the county's target audiences.

- At a bare minimum, plan on producing a visitor-oriented downtown map showing trailheads, restaurants, lodging, points of interest, and key services downtown.
- Hire a designer to help enhance the quality of the promotional materials.
- Distribute materials to trailheads, bike shops, downtown businesses, the Snowshoe Resort, races, and other bike-related and outdoor events around the state.

Other marketing strategies

- Once construction on the Monday Lick trails begins, start working with SHARC to draft a communications strategy to announce the opening of the trails.
- Work with local tourism offices to include links to Marlinton's new web presence.
- Consider billboards to promote Marlinton on main thoroughfares throughout the state.
- Seek out co-marketing opportunities with partners in Pocahontas County.

4. RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Marlinton has access to a range of resources to help realize the construction of these trail systems and transform Marlinton into a model resort town.

4.1 Leverage investment and resources

When it comes to leveraging investment and financial resources, the River Cities have two key possibilities. They can help entrepreneurs identify, apply for, and receive loans or other forms of support. Alternatively, the cities can pursue funding to redevelop some of the properties themselves, which could then be sold or rented to interested entrepreneurs. The following resources can help the River Cities on both fronts.

4.1.1 Small business development

Many resources are available for entrepreneurs interested in starting small businesses in West Virginia.

- The **U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA's)** West Virginia District Office in Clarksburg provides prospective, new, and established persons in the small business community with financial, procurement, management, and technical assistance. The SBA provides training and counseling on starting and/or expanding businesses, assists bank and non-bank lenders in securing SBA loans for their small business customers, and provides trainings for small businesses on how to do business with the federal government. (SBA, 2020)
- The **West Virginia Small Business Development Center (SBDC)** is a statewide network that provides assistance in all 55 counties. SBDC helps small businesses from the concept phase to established enterprises and offers training in business planning and development, coaching, financing recommendations, and more. SBDC can help compile all the preliminary information and paperwork needed to open a business legally, including information on licensing, taxes, insurance, recordkeeping, and the forms needed for hiring employees. SBDC can also assist with evaluating a business idea for feasibility and projected success and can provide hands-on assistance in obtaining loans. SBDC has business coaches/managers based in Charleston and Summersville and periodically offers trainings and workshops in other locations. (WVSBDC, 2020)
- The **West Virginia Women's Business Center (WVWBC)** is a program within Partner Community Capital that works hand-in-hand with female entrepreneurs. WVWBC offers a range of curated services, including networking, mentoring, training, one-on-one advising, and assistance obtaining funding and financing. (WVWBC, 2022).
- The **Woodlands Development Group (WDG)** is an Elkins-based organization that offers small business support, loans, and coaching for businesses. In addition, WDG also works in housing development, neighborhood improvement, downtown redevelopment, and community facilities and planning.
- The **West Virginia State University Community & Economic Development Program** offers extension agents and services focused on community development and revitalization, regional and local economic development, and small business development. The program offers targeted support for small business development, retention, and expansion efforts with emphasis on artisan and the creative economy sectors. Services include incubation, mentoring, access to capital assistance, entrepreneur training, management strategies, marketing, counseling on collaborative development, business plan assessment and strategies for expansion.
- The **Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Corporation (GVEDC)** offers small business support in the areas of finance, employee and labor resources, environmental permitting,

zoning, state and local taxes, existing government programs, training, media coverage, and more. GVEDC offers a business coach to support small businesses free of charge and manages its own revolving and micro-loan programs. (GVEDC, 2020)

- The **West Virginia Hive Network** is a regional business accelerator located in Beckley, West Virginia. The Hive provides mentoring, coaching, technical assistance, and support tools to aspiring business owners. (West Virginia Hive, 2020)

In addition, training and mentoring opportunities specific to hospitality and outdoor recreation industries are recommended.

- **West Virginia University (WVU) Extension** offers a tourism specialist who coordinates the WVU Rural Tourism Design Team. The Team provides research, training, and technical assistance support for sustainable rural tourism development throughout West Virginia. Partnerships with Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Resources; Landscape Architecture; Graphic Design; Public Administration; and other colleges and departments at WVU provide a depth of knowledge and expertise strategically targeted to support the development of a sustainable tourism economy in West Virginia. (WVU Extension, 2020)
- **West Virginia Welcome**, designed by the West Virginia Hospitality Education and Training Program, is a collaboration between WVU's Hospitality and Tourism Program, West Virginia Department of Education's HEAT program, the West Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association, and the WVU Extension Service. The program offers introductory courses on hospitality, available as a 45-minute online video course and through two-hour classroom-style trainings. (WVU Extension, 2020)

4.1.2 Federal grant programs

There are several recurring federal programs that should be on the River Cities' radar:

- **AML Pilot Program:** Economic development projects near abandoned coal mines may qualify for federal Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Pilot Program grants, which are administered locally by the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection. In 2020, the Justice administration released \$25 million for projects through this program. Another \$25 million is expected in 2021.
- **POWER Grants:** The Appalachian Regional Commission's Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative targets federal resources to help communities and regions that have been affected by job losses in coal mining, coal power plant operations, and coal-related supply chain industries due to the changing economics of America's energy production. In 2020, the Appalachian Regional Commission announced \$43.3 million of funding for 51 projects to support economic diversification in Appalachia's coal-impacted communities. Additional funding for POWER is expected to be allocated in 2021.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Grants:** Dozens of USDA grant and loan programs are relevant to community revitalization and trail initiatives, including the Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program and the Rural Business Development Grant Program.
- **U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) CARES Grants:** The Economic Development Administration published an Addendum to its Fiscal Year 2020 Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Notice of Funding Opportunity, making an additional \$1.467 billion in CARES Act funding available to eligible grantees in communities impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. One of its goals is to fund projects that increase economic resilience and a community's ability to weather economic shock. The EDA is accepting

proposals on a rolling basis. While the future of this program is somewhat uncertain, it is likely that it will continue in some form in 2021.

- **Community Development Block Grants:** Public-private partnerships present additional opportunities for putting together funding solutions for innovative economic development projects. Public entities have access to recurring federal funding streams, like Community Development Block Grants, which have priorities and goals that are complementary to downtown tourism development efforts. These funding streams can and should be used as leverage or a match.

4.2 Case studies

Rural towns across the country have been confronted with similar issues as Marlinton. Here are a few examples of small communities that have enjoyed great success in building and maintaining trails, attracting visitors, and building a thriving recreation tourism-based economy.

4.2.1 Kingdom Trails, Vermont

Kingdom Trails is a private 100-mile trail system tucked in a corner of northeastern Vermont known as the Northeast Kingdom. Known as one of the preeminent mountain biking destinations in the country, Kingdom Trails' ownership structure sets it apart from other mountain bike destinations. Run by the nonprofit Kingdom Trails Association (KTA), the system's 100 miles of trails are located entirely on private land. KTA maintains individual use agreements with 97 private landowners who allow KTA to build and maintain trails on their properties.

Kingdom Trails had humble beginnings. In the early 1990s, as the logging industry declined and the local ski mountain went bankrupt, local mountain bikers began going door to door to their neighbors asking for permission to build trails on their properties. Two decades later, trail-based recreation has transformed the economies of the four towns, whose combined population falls under 4,000 people. Each year Kingdom Trails attracts 138,000 visitors (85% from outside the state), generating \$10 million for the local economy. Kingdom Trails now has paid staff including a maintenance crew.

Much of this impact is attributed to the trails' direct connection to communities. The village of East Burke (pop. 132) houses the Kingdom Trails Welcome Center, and several of the most popular trailheads are located right downtown, making it easy for mountain bikers to grab a meal and visit local shops after their ride. This has fueled the development of a local tourism industry and revived this once forgotten corner of New England.

While the trails are open for various types of non-motorized recreation, mountain biking is undeniably the biggest draw of non-local visitors and the real impetus behind Kingdom Trails' success. As a private trail system, all users must purchase either a season or day pass to use the trails. The trails are open for the summer season from roughly April or May (depending on weather) through the end of October. KTA closes the trails for the month of November to allow locals to hunt and reopens in the winter for cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and fat-biking on designated trails.

With tourism success often comes negative side effects, such as overcrowding, disrespectful trail and town use, and traffic congestion. In response to these issues, several landowners pulled out of Kingdom Trails in 2020, rescinding the use of their land for trails. To start taking steps to understand, resolve, and prevent these issues from creeping up in the future, Kingdom Trails embarked on its Kingdom Trails Network Capacity Study³ in 2020, a planning process to address issues and capacity in the network and enhance the network's positive impact on the area. Goals for the project include reducing congestion on trails and roads, improving trail-to-business connectivity,

³ The full study and more information are available at kingdomtrails.org.

managing growth, improving parking, and developing necessary infrastructure to accommodate high-use areas. (Kingdom Trails, 2022; Long, 2020)

4.2.2 Oakridge, Oregon

Tucked away in rural Oregon on the western foot of the Cascades, the town of Oakridge is surrounded by three national forests. Once known as “the Heart of the Timber Empire,” Oakridge struggled to reclaim identity and economic security in the wake of the collapse of the timber industry and the 1989 closure of the local timber mill.

However, like much of West Virginia, the 3,500-person town found new promise in mountain biking tourism. Now known as “the Mountain Biking Capital of the Northwest,” Oakridge was one of IMBA’s first Ride Centers and was awarded Gold Level status in 2015—one of just six in the world and four in the nation.

With 390 miles of winding singletrack through expansive old growth forest and mountain vistas, riders can spend days on the Ride Center’s trails. Many of these trails have been around for a century or more, originally built and used by Native Americans, prospectors, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and others. The region was further developed through federal, state, and local funding and matches along with productive partnerships that run the gamut of organizations. In 2014, a University of Oregon study determined that \$2.3–\$4.9 million of economic impacts were generated by mountain bike tourism; and those numbers are only on the rise, especially after the surge in the popularity of mountain biking 2020 saw.

Today, the trails are maintained (and actively expanded on) by a devoted multi-user trails group, the Greater Oakridge Area Trail Stewards (GOATS). Originally created to help implement the Oakridge-Westfir Community Trails Plan, the nonprofit grew to become the local voice and connection to funding and projects in Oakridge, prioritizing partnerships, volunteer trail maintenance, land management issues, and promotion of responsible trail use. The GOATS’ mission is to protect, create, and enhance quality trail experiences for mountain bikers in cooperation with other trail users in the Oakridge area. (Town of Oakridge, 2022; GOATS, 2022; Meltzer, 2014)

4.2.3 Cuyuna Lakes, Minnesota

Much like West Virginia, Minnesota’s Cuyuna Lakes region has faced the ups and downs of its industrial past: The Cuyuna Iron Range was one of the nation’s top iron producers until the 1960s when the industry collapsed. By the mid-1980s, the last of the area’s 30 mines closed for good. The surrounding communities of Crosby, Cuyuna, Ironton, Riverton, and Trommald—with a combined population of under 3,000—suffered immediate economic declines.

Taking a gamble on recreation as a possible means to revive the depressed local economy, local leaders invested in trails in the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area. Funded by federal and state grants matched by contributions from local businesses, local advocates were able to have trails professionally designed and constructed. The project resulted in 25 miles of purpose-built mountain bike trails built across 800 acres of the Recreation Area in 2010, which earned the area a designation as Bronze Level IMBA Ride Center.

Ten years later, Cuyuna Lakes is a thriving place. While the region still cherishes its mining past, recreation has rebooted the area’s economy. Five years after opening the Cuyuna Lakes Mountain Bike Trail System, the Recreation Area saw visitation soar from 80,000 annual visits in 2011 to 185,000 in 2016. The area added 132 jobs in the same timeframe, and trends are still on the rise. Property values and income generation also enjoyed a significant increase thanks to mountain bike tourism: Landlords in the Cuyuna Lakes area who once leased homes to residents for \$600 per month are now leasing them to bikers for \$600 *per week*. (Aamot, 2017; IMBA, 2014)

4.2.4 Copper Harbor, Michigan

Nearly at the very tip of Michigan on the coast of Lake Superior is the tiny town of Copper Harbor, with a mere 85 residents. Despite its small population, the town manages to attract tens of thousands of visitors ever year—mainly coming to take part in Copper Harbor’s world-class mountain biking trails.

So named for its time as major transport hub during the copper rush in the late 1800s, Copper Harbor looked to its own sustainable, natural assets as a path forward following the mining industry’s decline in the mid-1900s. In the 1990s, a group of volunteers began building trails by hand in cooperation with local landowners; that group evolved into the primary trail advocacy group for the area, the Copper Harbor Trails Club (CHTC). In 2012, the town’s now-39+ miles of singletrack (open for all forms of nonmotorized recreation) earned it a Silver Level Ride Center designation by IMBA. While most of the trail system is considered intermediate, CHTC works to build new and more accessible rides every season in order to capture a larger market and appeal to more bikers. Trail construction efforts are typically funded by donors, fundraising events, and grants and run between \$15,000–\$35,000 per mile.

While its strong outdoor recreation industry has breathed new life into Copper Harbor’s economy, some of the town’s long-time residents are worried about the potential for “overtourism” and the inability of the town to support a growing number of visitors. The town—actually just a “census-designated place”—still has no sidewalks, only a one-room schoolhouse, a single public three-stall restroom, a waning crew of volunteer emergency responders, and a lone building that fulfills the roles of township offices, post office, welcome center, and community hall.

With the popularity of its trails and massive annual events such as the Bell’s Beer Copper Harbor Trails Festival bringing in tens of thousands of visitors into a town that cannot accommodate them, Keweenaw County officials have begun to address the issues brought on by the town’s massive growth. In addition to the inadequate infrastructure of the town, CHTC also battled trail closures amidst liability concerns among local and county government entities in 2021 and into 2022.

Even the most successful adventure hubs must resolve issues and overcome setbacks. Despite these obstacles, the Copper Harbor community, CHTC, local businesses, and other local players value what outdoor recreation tourism has accomplished for the town and continue looking for innovative solutions to keep both residents and visitors happy. (CHTC, 2022; Diener-Stokes, 2019; House, 2021; Miller, 2022)

4.2.5 Crested Butte, Colorado

Regarded as the birthplace of mountain biking, the small town of Crested Butte in central Colorado features more than 450 miles of first-rate singletrack trails, and an additional 300 in the greater region. The 1,600-person isolated town sits at an elevation of 9,000 feet and is surrounded by the 1.7-million-acre Gunnison National Forest and the towering peaks of the Elk Mountains. Formerly built around the mining industry, Crested Butte has long been squarely a bike and ski resort town, fortified by many years of involved relationships with local government officials, land managers, private landowners, and conservation groups.

Attracting more and more adventure-seekers since the 1960s, visitation hit an all-time high (along with many other recreation-focused locales) during the pandemic-fueled outdoor recreation surge in 2020; though, the volume of the crowds started negatively impacting the landscape and the town’s infrastructure by 2015. The USFS had difficulty staying on top of the rapidly evolving needs of the trail areas, so the local bike club stepped in.






Crested Butte features the world's first mountain bike club, the Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association (CBMBA). With its full-time trail stewardship and maintenance crew, the Crested Butte Conservation Corps (CBCC), CMBA helps build, improve, maintain, and advocate for sustainable trails, conserve the landscape, and build community through volunteer work days, group rides, and other events. The CBCC was formalized in 2017 to help combat the effects of overuse and neglect visitors were leaving throughout the trails, including closing illegal and unsustainable roads, rehabilitating damage, rebuilding eroded trail sections, installing signage, clearing trash and illegal fire rings and campsites, and other efforts. After unprecedented numbers swarmed Crested Butte in 2020 and left the region wrought with overuse, 2021 saw the installation of designated sites and signage, new restrictions limiting camping to such sites, and more involved education for respectful visitation. (Bruntz, 2022; CBMBA, 2022)

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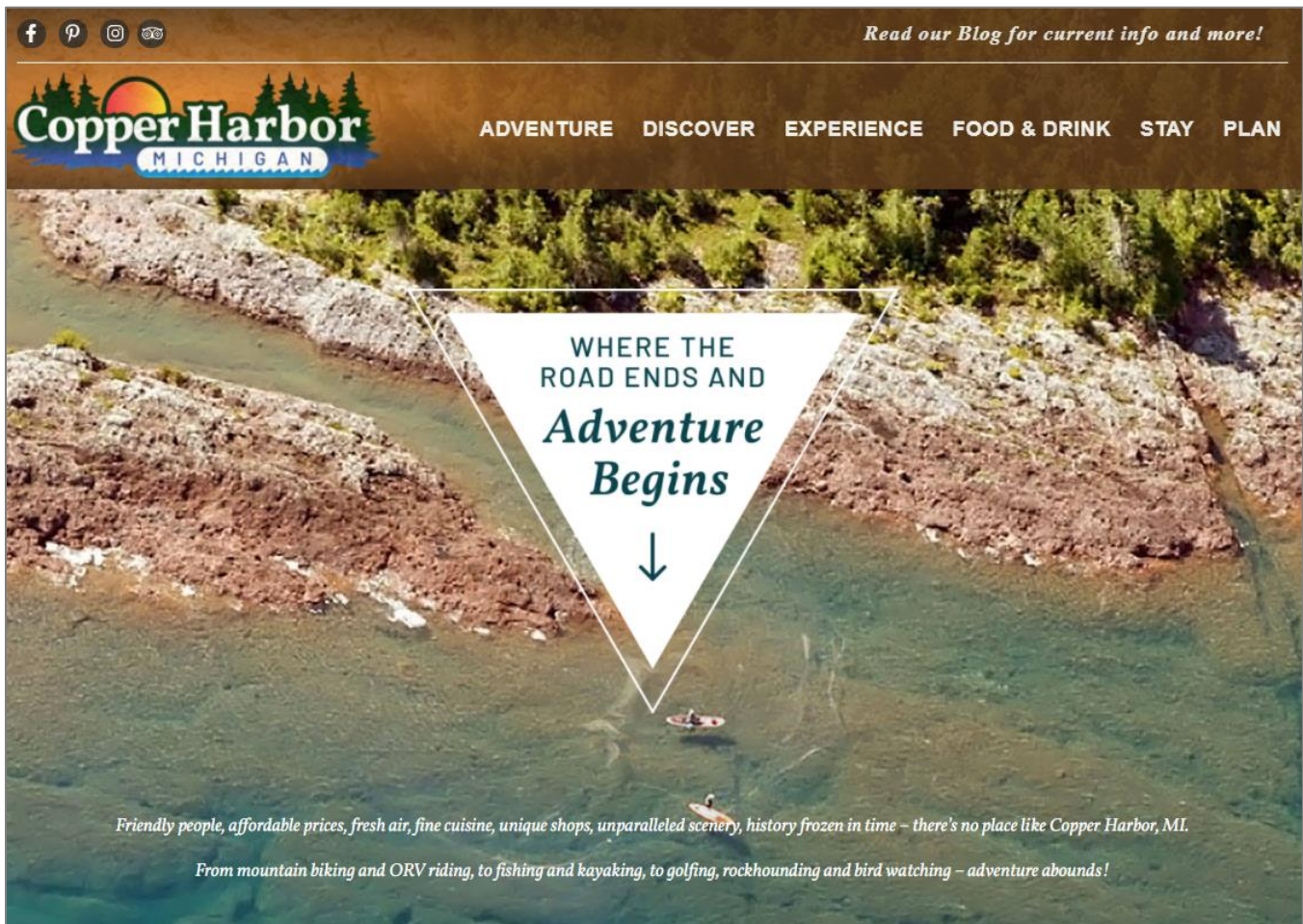
APPENDIX A: IMBA TRAIL SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MARLINTON

MARLINTON	 Land Manager or Primary Influencer Town of Marlinton, Pocahontas County	 Recommended Action	 Applicable Ride Center Criteria	 Priority	 Timeline
		Create a signature trailhead in downtown Marlinton with consistent signage and amenities matching the region	Trailhead amenities, Trailhead access by bike	Medium	2023
		Create a trailhead at Stillwell Park	Trailhead amenities, Trailhead access by bike	High	2025
		Incentivize and encourage existing bike shops to expand services and equipment (especially rentals)	Bike Shop – good & services, MTB guide services/outfitters, Bike rental	High	2023
		Incentivize and encourage a brewery in downtown	Brew pub	Medium	2025
		Incentivize and encourage more diverse restaurants in downtown	Quality/variety of restaurants	Medium	2025
		Incentivize and encourage a shuttle service from Marlinton to Tea Creek trail system	Shuttle/Uplift Options	Low	2025
		Consider a "bike bus" connecting the major hubs of Marlinton, Tea Creek, Snowshoe, Greenbank, Durbin, and Mower	Shuttle/Uplift Options	Low	2035
		Implement Stillwell Park improvements	Pump tracks, Progressive skills development area, Progressive dirt jump trail area, Bike Specific Singletrack – Beginner, Trailhead access by bike	Medium	2025

APPENDIX B: BRAND AND WEBSITE EXAMPLES

Marlinton should have a brand and website that showcase an outdoor recreation theme while providing easy access to available lodging, dining, points of interest, and local recreation opportunities. The following websites are examples of similar towns to Marlinton that are targeting similar tourism markets. Marlinton’s website should focus on the outdoor enthusiast traveling to the area to experience all that Pocahontas County and West Virginia have to offer. The website design is a very important aspect of the overall marketing plan and a cornerstone for successful tourism marketing. Here are five examples:

Copper Harbor, Michigan (<https://www.copperharbor.org/>)



Highlights: The logo features a nature theme; the website incorporates a social media presence; and the homepage focuses on recreational opportunities, food and drink options, and lodging. The site also offers a planning service. Adventure travel is featured front and center which is an important component in capturing outdoor enthusiasts.

Stowe, Vermont (<https://gostowe.com/>)

STOWE TRAVEL UPDATE | THINGS YOU'LL FIND ONLY IN STOWE

STAY PLAY DINE SHOP EVENTS PLAN BLOG DEALS

Stowe
VERMONT

WINTER IN STOWE, VERMONT

The perfect winter wonderland awaits you.

LEARN MORE >

BOOK NOW

ARRIVAL	DEPARTURE	ADULTS	CHILDREN
12/5/2021	12/8/2021	2	0

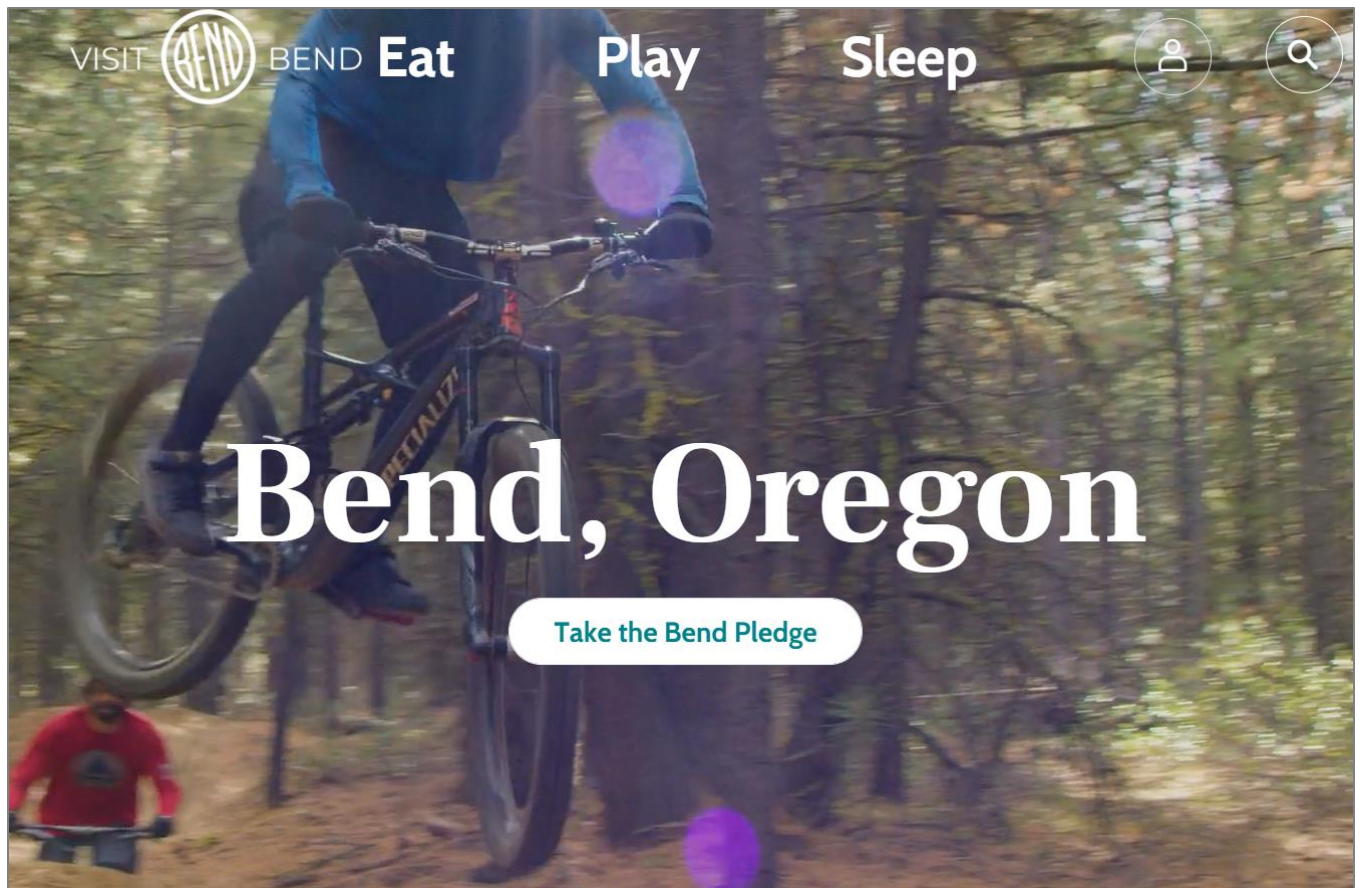
Highlights: Homepage focuses on visually stunning imagery which captures the website visitor's attention. Key navigation focuses on lodging, dining, shopping, and events which caters to the tourism market. This site also offers a planning tool.

Moab, Utah (<https://www.discovermoab.com/>)



Highlights: This site puts the area’s impressive landscape front and center with navigation to explore what the town offers to visitors, including information on attractions, lodging, and activities. Social media is also highlighted on the homepage.

Bend, Oregon (<https://www.visitbend.com/>)



Highlight: This site features videos on the homepage that target specific-interest groups. Also, it has a simple but clear navigation that caters to visitors.