



Tourism Business
Opportunity Assessment

Matewan, West Virginia

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report explores current and future opportunities for tourism business development in Matewan, West Virginia.

Using the context of the tourism value chain, this study:

- identifies marketable tourism products and attractions in the Matewan area,
- assesses the town's tourism capacity based on existing businesses and services,
- identifies gaps in Matewan's current tourism infrastructure, and
- outlines business-specific recommendations and next steps to develop and maintain a thriving tourism industry.

This study is one of a series of business opportunity assessments performed by Downstream Strategies for the Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center and the West Virginia Community Development Hub with regards to tourism development in specific West Virginia towns.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Nestled along the Tug Fork River, Matewan, West Virginia is steeped in history from the legendary Hatfield-McCoy feud and the West Virginia Mine Wars. In addition to cultural heritage tourism, Matewan serves as major access point for three trailheads within the Hatfield-McCoy Trails, making it a destination for trail riders as well.

The following recommendations to enhance Matewan's tourism products and services were identified in this report.

1. **Plan for increased tourism** in Matewan and the surrounding area.
2. **Promote Matewan's existing tourism opportunities.**
3. **Invest in downtown buildings and historic preservation.**

These items are outlined in full in the Recommendations section, followed by resources for achieving these goals and actionable next steps for the town to pursue.

ABOUT DOWNSTREAM STRATEGIES

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

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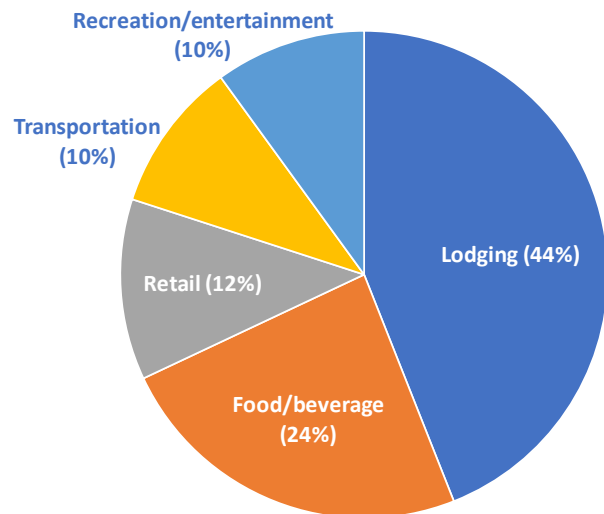
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TOURISM IN WEST VIRGINIA

Tourism is a growing industry in West Virginia. Trends at the statewide level show that increased investment in tourism development and promotion over the last five years have paid off (West Virginia Division of Tourism, 2016). Tourism added \$5.1 billion to the statewide economy in 2015. Nearly 16 million visitors stayed overnight in West Virginia in 2015. While 47% came to visit friends and relatives, 41% of overnight visitors came to the state on leisure trips influenced by marketing efforts (Longwoods Travel USA, 2015).

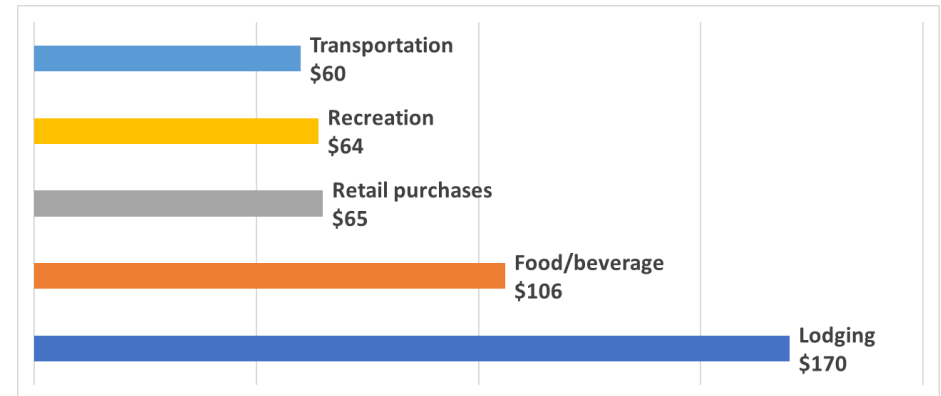
During their stays, visitors enjoy a range of activities such as shopping, dining, and visiting landmarks, parks, and historical sites. The average family/group spends \$465 over the course of their stay (Figure 2), which averages 2.7 nights in length (Longwoods Travel USA, 2015). This direct spending has a significant impact on local economies, and, as a result, many towns across the state are evaluating how they can leverage local resources such as natural assets and cultural heritage into tourism products.

FIGURE 1: TOTAL OVERNIGHT SPENDING BY SECTOR IN WEST VIRGINIA (2015)



Source: Longwoods Travel USA (2015).

FIGURE 2: AVERAGE PARTY EXPENDITURES ON OVERNIGHT TRIPS TO WEST VIRGINIA



Source: Longwoods Travel USA (2015).

The single greatest driver of tourism in West Virginia is **outdoor recreation** (Longwoods Travel USA, 2015). West Virginia's mountains and rivers offer some of the best opportunities for outdoor recreation in the nation. As a four-season destination within a day's drive for half of the country's population, outdoor recreation tourism in West Virginia is poised to grow.



Source: West Virginia Division of Tourism (2017).

Outdoor recreation generated \$9 billion in consumer spending in 2016, as well as \$2.4 billion in salaries and wages and \$660 million in state and local tax revenue. And with 91,000 direct jobs in the industry statewide,

outdoor recreation employs nearly twice as many West Virginians as the coal industry (Outdoor Recreation Association, 2017).¹

Cultural and heritage tourism also plays a significant role in attracting visitors to the state: 45% of overnight visitors in West Virginia came to experience historic places and cultural activities in 2015 (Longwoods Travel USA, 2015).

Across the United States, 78% of all leisure travelers (118 million adults) participate in cultural and/or heritage activities while traveling. Cultural and heritage travelers spend an average of \$994 per trip and contribute more than \$192 billion annually to the U.S. economy. As baby boomers retire, the amount of heritage tourism (and overall travel expenditures) is expected to rise. (Mandala Research, 2009)

Compared with other types of travelers, cultural and heritage travelers are more frequent travelers and are more likely to participate in culinary

activities, including visiting farmers' markets, attending food and wine festivals, and enjoying unique dining experiences. Table 1 shows the most common activities cited by cultural and heritage tourists.

TABLE 1: PREFERRED ACTIVITIES BY CULTURAL AND HERITAGE TOURISTS

Activity	Percent
Visiting historic sites	66%
Attending historic reenactments	64%
Visiting art museums and galleries	54%
Attending arts and craft fairs or festivals	45%
Attending professional dance performances	44%
Visiting state or national parks	41%
Shopping in museum stores	32%
Exploring urban neighborhoods	30%

Source: Mandala Research (2009).

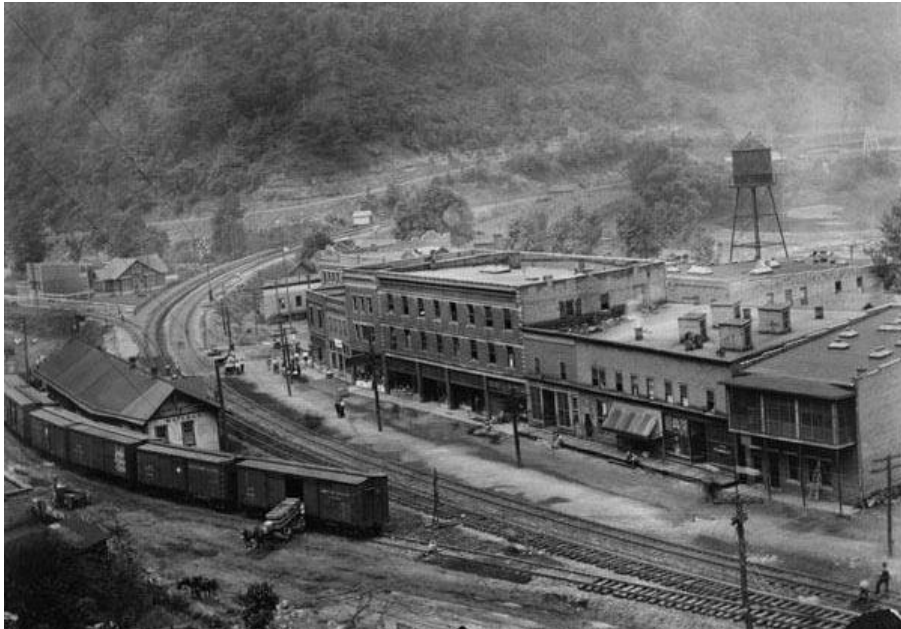
With its rich history and unique mountain culture, West Virginia offers plenty of cultural and heritage attractions—from historic sites and parks to fine art and traditional crafts.

¹ The coal industry employed 48,000 people in 2015, including jobs in mining, contracting, and processing facilities (West Virginia Coal Association, 2017).

COMMUNITY PROFILE: MATEWAN

Matewan is a town of under 500 people in Mingo County, West Virginia. The town sits along the Tug Fork River on West Virginia's border with Kentucky.

Matewan was settled in the 1790s. Early settlers survived through a mixture of farming, hunting, and harvesting forest resources and remained thoroughly isolated until the Norfolk & Western Railroad was built in the early 1890s. (Matewan, 2017)



Source: West Virginia Mine Wars Museum (2017).

Timbering was the first modern industry to come to the area beginning in the 19th century. During this period, a large influx of immigrants made their way to the area—predominantly from Western Europe. During the post-war era, mine mechanization and other economic changes led to a decline in population. Yet while the demographics of the area have changed over time, descendants of Matewan's early settlers can still be found in the area. (Matewan, 2017)

Matewan is the home to some of America's most colorful history. The town sits at the heart of the Hatfield-McCoy feud country and hosted the beginnings of a movement to reform fair working conditions and the right to unionize following the Mine Wars, Matewan Massacre, and Battle of Blair Mountain in the early parts of the twentieth century. The downtown Matewan Historic District, designated as a National Historic Landmark, recognizes Matewan's significant role in the early days of labor organization in America. Matewan is now home to the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum. (Matewan, 2017)

Table 2 shows the most common occupations held by Matewan residents.

TABLE 2: MOST COMMON OCCUPATIONS HELD IN MATEWAN

Occupation	Percent
Service occupations	31%
Sales and office occupations	19%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance	18%
Management, business, science, and arts	18%
Production, transportation, and material moving	14%

Source: U.S. Census (2015).

TOURISM VALUE CHAIN

The tourism value chain refers to the system of tourism-related products and services that enhance a town's or region's overall economy.

Tourism products comprise the specific destinations, attractions, and/or activities that visitors want to experience. Examples include trail systems, scenic rivers, ski resorts, historic parks, and cultural festivals.

Having a strong tourism product is essential in attracting visitors to a destination; however, it takes a number of supporting services to develop and sustain a tourism industry. When visitors travel to experience a tourist product, they likely interact with several different services within the community. For instance, a family embarking on a weekend river float trip would likely eat at a restaurant, buy fuel and snacks at a gas station, stay overnight at a hotel or campground, and perhaps rent a kayak or purchase gear at a local outfitter.

As a result, tourism development requires investment in basic infrastructure of tourism-supporting services that will serve and attract visitors. These standard tourism services include:

- **Lodging** – hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, cabins, campgrounds
- **Food and beverage** – restaurants, grocery stores, food providers
- **Outfitters, tour and guide services** – gear shops, rentals, shuttle services
- **Shopping and entertainment** – retail shopping and other activities

These standard services enhance a tourist destination from a visitor's point of view and stimulate the overall economy by providing tax revenue and by creating and supporting local jobs.

In addition to these primary tourism-related services, other associated services play a vital role in sustaining a viable infrastructure for tourism. For instance, a resort destination planning to attract large numbers of visitors each year will require an adequately-sized water and sewage treatment plant, waste management, and good roads in order to operate. Local banks and insurance will be needed to serve the primary tourism services. These businesses will expect access to broadband internet, nearby emergency services, and schools for the children of their employees.

The associated and supporting services to the tourism infrastructure include:

- **Infrastructure** – buildings, water, wastewater, waste management
- **Transportation** – roads, railroads, bus service, gas stations
- **Telecommunications** – cell service and internet
- **Emergency and health services** - fire, police, ambulance, hospitals, pharmacies
- **Schools and training opportunities**

Most of these supporting services rely on the management or involvement of the town administration and/or local governing agencies. Involvement and buy-in from local and county leadership is therefore essential to the success of tourism development.

COMMUNITY TOURISM ASSESSMENT

TOURISM PRODUCTS OVERVIEW

The following marketable tourism products currently lie within Matewan and its immediate vicinity.

Matewan is a key access point for the **Hatfield-McCoy Trails**. The Hatfield-McCoy Trails consist of over 600 miles of trails for all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and utility task vehicles (UTVs), spanning six counties in southern West Virginia. As one of the largest off-highway vehicle trail systems in the world, Hatfield-McCoy Trails is open year-round and offers trails for every skill level. The Devil Anse Trailhead in downtown Matewan connects with the Buffalo Mountain Trailhead and the Rockhouse Trailhead, providing convenient access to over 300 miles of trail. (HMRRRA, 2017)

Matewan is also the headquarters and key access point for the **Real McCoy Trails**, a trail network for dual sport motorbikes. This private trail system includes both primitive and paved trails in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Virginia. The owners of the Real McCoy Trails also offer guided Hatfield-McCoy feud site motorbike tours. (Real McCoy Trails, 2017)

Matewan is centrally located among a variety of historic sites, making the region popular for **motorcycle and driving tours**. It is located with 10 miles of several major **Hatfield-McCoy feud sites**, several of which are just across the Tug Fork River in Kentucky. Matewan was also the site of the infamous **Battle of Matewan** (also known as the Matewan Massacre), a major event in the West Virginia Mine Wars in which union and non-union forces clashed on May 19, 1920. (Matewan, 2017)

The **West Virginia Mine Wars Museum** preserves and interprets artifacts and historical records of the local communities affected by the West Virginia Mine Wars. The award-winning museum highlights the Battle of Matewan and the following labor uprising that would come to be known as the Battle of Blair Mountain—the largest labor uprising ever in the United States. Located in a downtown building that still bears the scars of bullet holes from the Matewan Massacre shootout, the museum houses the

largest exhibited collection of Mine Wars artifacts, oral histories, digitized film reels, maps, and historic photos. The museum's gift shop sells affiliated memorabilia and art created by a local artisan group. (West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, 2017).

Another site in the Downtown Matewan Historic District is the **Matewan Depot Replica Museum and Welcome Center**. A replica of the train depot that stood across the railroad tracks from downtown Matewan until the 1960s, the Depot now houses the town's main visitors center with a museum and gift shop. A third museum, the Appalachian Lost and Found, will be opening within the next year.



Source: Matewan Depot (2017).

The **Tug Fork River** flows through downtown Matewan. Visitors can enjoy the river by foot or bicycle and admire the etched mural along the town's floodwall or take to the river by boat. Hatfield & McCoy Airboat Tours operate from a dock directly adjacent to downtown Matewan. Kayaks are also available to rent at the Real McCoy Trails, which will enable visitors to access Matewan's 50+ geocaches that are accessible only by water. (Matewan, 2017)

Special events include the Matewan Heritage Day (May), Hatfield-McCoy Marathon (June), and the Magnolia Fair (August).

Key tourism activities include ATV/UTV riding, dirt biking, airboat tours, kayaking, motorcycling, geocaching, biking, and historic sightseeing.

TOURISM PRODUCTS ASSESSMENT

Matewan has strong existing tourism products in place. Though trail riding is currently the main driver of local tourism, Matewan supports a good mix of outdoor recreation and cultural heritage products. Building from this solid tourism base, Matewan is well positioned to further hone and expand its tourism offerings.

PRODUCT GAPS AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED

Given the success of local trail-riding opportunities, Matewan should seek to diversify its outdoor recreation products in order to further capitalize on the recreation market.



Source: Joe Vagott (2017).

Feedback from the Hatfield-McCoy Trails shows that trail riders seek expanded recreation opportunities to enhance their experiences in the region. By creating additional hiking, walking, and biking trails, Matewan could diversify its recreation opportunities for both visitors and residents alike. Given Matewan's solid tourism base, Matewan would also be a viable location for ecotourism developments such as zip line canopy tours.

In addition, Matewan could further develop recreation opportunities on the Tug Fork River. Matewan currently offers geocaches, including more than 50 that are only accessible by boat. While kayaks are currently available to rent from the Real McCoy Trails, boat rental opportunities could be expanded and better marketed. Matewan could also explore the creation of a designated water trail on the Tug Fork River to expand opportunities for river recreation and tourism.

In addition to recreation, cultural heritage tourism offers promising opportunities. In 2009, the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) was directed by Congress to conduct a Special Resource Study of the sites and resources in Matewan associated with the Battle of Matewan. The study will help determine whether the study area would meet criteria for congressional designation as a unit of the National Park System. Though originally scheduled for completion by 2013, the study has experienced administrative delays and is still in progress. (NPS, 2017)

While this pending NPS study could open doors for expanded tourism, Matewan can pursue cultural and heritage tourism development regardless of the study's outcome. The downtown Matewan Historic District offers a good place start. Designated as a National Historic Landmark, Matewan's downtown features a number of historic buildings—many of which have fallen into disrepair. Several entrepreneurs in town are slowly redeveloping historic buildings to be occupied with new businesses. Investment in these buildings should be prioritized to spur both heritage tourism and economic development opportunities.

In addition, Matewan’s ties to the Hatfield-McCoy feud and the West Virginia Mine Wars gives Matewan a unique position to capitalize on local history. By pursuing opportunities in heritage interpretation such as replicas of historic sites and frontier heritage museums as well as dinner-theater shows to showcase local culture and history, Matewan could increase tourism by attracting bus tour groups.

TOURISM SERVICES

Table 3 and Table 4 summarize the primary and supporting tourism services available in Matewan:

TABLE 3: PRIMARY TOURISM SERVICES

Service type	Description	Assessment
Lodging/accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matewan House B&B • Blue Goose Inn • Hatfield and McCoy Inn/Resort • Outback ATV Cabins • Boar’s Nest ATV Lodge • Sully’s Cabins • Town of Matewan RV Parking 	<p>GAPS: Demand is highly seasonal. Low occupancy during the winter.</p> <p>STRENGTH: Most lodging venues run at full occupancy during peak summer and fall weekends.</p>
Food/dining	<p>Restaurants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wingo's Grill • Mi Pueblito Mexican Restaurant • Giovanni’s Pizza (north of town) • Fast food options across the river in Kentucky • Blue Goose Saloon (bar and grill) opening in next few months. <p>Groceries: No grocery store in Matewan.</p>	<p>GAPS: No grocery store in town. Of the town's two restaurants, only one is open seven days per week. Both have reduced hours in winter.</p>
Tours/services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airboat tours • Historic downtown walking tours • Kayak rentals at the Real McCoy Trails • Geocaching (on foot and by boat) 	<p>GAPS: Need more tour/guide/shuttle services and rentals for ATV/UTV/dirt bikes, kayaks, and bicycles.</p> <p>STRENGTH: Matewan has a number of strong tourism products from which to draw.</p>
Shopping/entertainment		<p>GAPS: Virtually no retail.</p>

TABLE 4: SUPPORTING TOURISM SERVICES

Service type	Description	Assessment
Infrastructure	<p>Buildings: Matewan has a number of vacant properties in its historic downtown that could house new businesses. Some storefront spaces could easily be occupied; however, some spaces will require more significant renovations to address eroding foundations and other major issues.</p> <p>Water/wastewater: Matewan needs a new sewer plant. The town is currently working on grant funding to make the needed improvements and expand its facility.</p>	<p>STRENGTH: The availability of historic buildings will be an asset for Matewan’s business development moving forward.</p>
Transportation	<p>Matewan is located at the juncture of West Virginia Route 49, which follows the winding Tug Fork River, and West Virginia Route 65, which connects to the King Coal Highway (U.S. Route 52). Parking is currently a major issue in Matewan. Current parking is barely enough to meet existing needs.</p>	<p>GAPS: Though Matewan lies relatively close to the King Coal Highway, its distance from this major thoroughfare reduces the amount of through-traffic the town receives. Matewan will also need to address parking to facilitate tourism growth.</p>
Telecommunications	<p>Basic internet is available downtown. Cell coverage is inconsistent. Most of downtown receives coverage from Verizon providers, but AT&T customers get no service in Matewan or the surrounding area. There are currently two internet expansion efforts underway in the area.</p>	<p>GAPS: Limited cell and internet service are barriers to tourism development.</p>
Emergency/health services	<p>Small doctor’s office in Matewan. Nearest hospital is about 30 minutes away in Williamson.</p>	<p>GAPS: Residents travel to Williamson for most medical needs.</p>
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matewan PK-8 • Mingo Central High School (8 miles north of town) 	

TOURISM SERVICE ASSESSMENT

Service gaps and business opportunities

Lodging: The entire region of southern West Virginia serving the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System is deficient in lodging accommodations and has an unmet demand for campgrounds, cabins, and home rentals (Lusk, 2017). Most trail riders (43%) stay in the area two or three days while visiting the Hatfield-McCoy Trails. Most stay in a cabin/lodge (68%) or at a campground (27%). Approximately 23% stay in a hotel or motel (Pardue and Shand, 2014).

Matewan's largest service gap for accommodations is its deficiency in full-service campground hook-up sites for the Buffalo Mountain Trailhead. The Hatfield-McCoy Recreation Regional Authority (HMRRA) cites campgrounds as the number one need for most trail towns, as roughly one-third of the 39,000 Hatfield-McCoy trail riders in 2016 were "toy haulers" who tow their ATVs and UTVs behind their campers or RVs (Lusk, 2017). There are currently no campgrounds in the Matewan area, and as a result many trail riders prefer to stay at the campgrounds in Gilbert, 25 miles east of Matewan.

Given the rising number of visitors since the opening of the Hatfield-McCoy Devil Anse Trailhead, Matewan faces a need for more lodging during the peak summer and fall seasons.

Demand for lodging in Matewan is strong but highly seasonal. Several lodging establishments in town reported 100% occupancy during key summer and fall weekends—often turning away potential customers—but average closer to 25% occupancy the rest of the year. This seasonality makes it difficult for many lodging businesses to stay afloat.

While most trail riders prefer campgrounds, cabins, and private home rentals, history tourists seek more traditional-style hotels for their overnight accommodations and stay mostly at the Matewan B&B. The Tug Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) notes that the lack of a traditional hotel/motel in the area is a turnoff for some visitors seeking a brand-name establishment, and local accommodations note a rising demand for two-

bedroom suites. However, given that trail tourism currently makes up an estimated 95% or more of Matewan's tourism market, Matewan should prioritize meeting the lodging needs of Hatfield-McCoy trail riders in the short term, including two key areas:

- **Campgrounds:** Given the new Buffalo Mountain Trailhead, Matewan is ideally situated for the development of a full-service campground.

Campgrounds, which can range in offerings from tent/recreational vehicle (RV) camping to cabins, often require minimal infrastructure compared to traditional hotels/motels, which can be cost-prohibitive as start-ups. Campgrounds often offer a higher rate of return on investment than cabins because the initial capital is greatly reduced. The campground aesthetic often appeals to outdoor enthusiasts coming to take part in outdoor sports in the area.

Given that ATV, UTV, and other motorized recreation enthusiasts exhibit greater preference for higher-end camping facilities, Matewan should prioritize camping facilities with full hook-ups for campers and RVs, including electricity, water, sewer, and, increasingly, cable or Wi-Fi access.

- **Home or cabin rentals:** With the tremendous growth of websites such as Airbnb, VRBO, and HomeAway, home vacation rentals are becoming an increasingly popular source of visitor accommodations worldwide. Though current tourism and visitation levels are unlikely to sustain growth in traditional hotels/motels, home and cabin rentals could offer a viable potential for gradual, incremental growth in in-town lodging. Rather than renting out individual rooms in the style of a hotel or bed and breakfast, whole-house vacation rentals are popular with trail riders and outdoor groups and are feasible in places

like Matewan that have available housing stock and relatively low real estate prices.

Food/dining: Matewan offers two main dining options: Wingo’s Grill and Mi Pueblito Mexican Restaurant. While Mi Pueblito is open seven days per week, Wingo’s is only open on weekends. This limits the restaurant selection and availability for tourists and Matewan residents considerably. Given that most Hatfield-McCoy trail riders spend two-to-three days per visit, visitors frequently want to see more restaurants in Matewan. Additional dining options would make Matewan a more attractive destination for tourists.

Some new eating establishments are currently in the works. The Blue Goose Inn is planning to open the Blue Goose Saloon bar and grill, estimated to open by the end of 2017. This restaurant will be open year-round to serve both tourists and locals alike. The owner also has long-term plans to open a coffee shop in a downtown storefront. Feedback from the Matewan CVB indicated some existing interest in town for a bakery.

Building on the town’s historical assets, vintage-style establishments, such as a classic diner or old-fashioned ice cream parlor, could do well in Matewan. The Bramwell Corner Shop has fared extremely well with this model, serving ice cream sodas and meals to Hatfield-McCoy riders at their antique soda shop and diner in Bramwell, West Virginia. With the coming addition of the 1920s-themed Blue Goose Saloon, another vintage dining establishment would help Matewan develop its brand as a historic downtown.

Any dining establishment is likely to do well in Matewan; however, prospective entrepreneurs should bear in mind the seasonal nature of the tourism market, which will likely bring a high degree of volatility. While Matewan has downtown buildings that could potentially house restaurants, the costs to renovate historic buildings in town vary widely. Given the seasonality of Matewan’s tourism market, food trucks and seasonal food stands offer potential for meeting the demand for increased dining

options during the peak tourism seasons. Food trucks and food stands are smaller in scale and less capital-intensive as than traditional restaurants, and food trucks offer the added benefit of being mobile. The flexibility and mobility of a food truck would allow the proprietor to potentially serve different Hatfield-McCoy trailheads and adapt to the seasonal nature of Matewan’s tourism market.

Tours and outfitters: There are currently several tour and rental service providers in town. Several individuals offer feud site driving tours, and the new Matewan CVB offers downtown tours and weekend “ghost tours.” Kayaks are available for rent at the Real McCoy Trails. Yet most local business owners acknowledge that the town’s existing tour and guide services are under-developed and insufficient to meet the market demand. Visitors have difficulty finding out about available tours and guide services and, given poor signage in the area, have trouble finding many notable locations through self-guided tours.

While Matewan has an enviable selection of tourism products for such a small town, the town is missing a major opportunity to tap into the market for tours, guide, and outfitter services. Given Matewan’s existing tourism attractions, Matewan should prioritize investments in the following business opportunities:

- rental and shuttle services for kayaks, ATVs, UTVs, and motorcycles;
- guided history tours of downtown Matewan, Hatfield-McCoy feud sites, and Mine War sites;
- guided fishing, kayaking, ATV, and motorcycle trips; and
- an outdoor gear and outfitter shop.

Matewan has significant potential to develop a network of rental, tour, and guide services. Given the fledgling stage of the town’s tour service market, Matewan would benefit from establishing a central service hub to connect visitors with activities and service providers.



Source: Matewan CVB (2017).

This service hub would provide visitors with up-to-date information on available tours and activities in Matewan and serve as a central booking location for all activities. This service hub could offer a business framework for finding and contracting guides, licensing tour providers, maintaining necessary insurance coverage, and providing collective marketing for all supported activities. This collaborative would have the local connections to link residents with fitting opportunities to supplement their income, such as helping the local towing business take on work shuttling kayaks or ATVs in their spare time.

While this enterprise could be run as a for-profit business, incorporating as a nonprofit organization would open the door to grant funding, which

would likely be necessary for getting started without significant private investment. The local owners of the Hatfield-McCoy Country Supply have identified the need for this service within Matewan. Another natural collaborator for such an effort would be the newly-established Matewan CVB, now housed in the Matewan Depot Replica Museum and Welcome Center.

Retail shopping and entertainment: Tourists visiting Matewan seek more activities and things to do (based on conversations with the Matewan CVB and Tug Valley CVB). Even though trail riders currently make up the vast majority of tourists in Matewan, these riders seek other activities and modes of entertainment to enjoy when they want a break from riding the trails.

In addition to investment in dining options and tour services, Matewan should seek to enhance its shopping and entertainment options. Two new additions will be opening in Matewan with the next few months: The Appalachian Artisans Shop will offer traditional arts and crafts for sale, and Appalachian Lost and Found is opening an innovative museum featuring historical objects found through metal detecting in the region. The owners of the Blue Goose Inn, who also own the old theater downtown, have long-term plans to offer concerts in the existing theater space, which will be attached to the Blue Goose Saloon.

Building on the town's interest in historic preservation, businesses such as country or general stores would fare well in Matewan. Such stores could be open year-round or seasonally to take advantage of the seasonal tourist market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With a unique blend of adventure and cultural heritage tourism offerings, Matewan stands positioned to see steady tourism increases in the coming years. As one local business owner described it, Matewan is like a jigsaw puzzle: It has all the pieces needed to make a thriving tourism destination, but those pieces are not yet connected. The following sections of this report offer recommendations, resources, and next steps for building upon Matewan's existing assets to help the town develop as a tourism destination.

1. PLAN FOR INCREASED TOURISM

With developments in a few key areas, Matewan could greatly enhance its tourism offerings and thereby attract increased numbers of visitors. Based on the trends and demands of customers in the current tourism market, Matewan should pursue the creation of the following tourism services:

- food and dining establishments;
- campgrounds, cabins, and home rentals;
- tours and recreational activities, including:
 - rentals and shuttle services for kayaks, ATVs, UTVs, and motor bikes;
 - guided history tours of downtown Matewan and nearby historic sites;
 - guided fishing, kayaking, ATV, and motorcycle trips; and
 - an outdoor gear and outfitter shop.

There is indeed a need for increased lodging accommodations; however, increased restaurant options, tours, and added activities and things to do will provide a much more enriching experience for visitors and should be first priority for development. These additions will help make Matewan a more attractive year-round destination and may help offset the seasonality of current tourism.

In anticipation of increased numbers of visitors, Matewan should also plan for adequate parking to accommodate an increased number of cars downtown. The existing parking available downtown will not be sufficient to accommodate increased numbers of tourists, especially given the predominance of trail tourists, who often drive trucks with campers or RVs and thus require more square footage of parking space than drivers of compact cars. Existing space downtown is limited due to the floodwall; as a result, the town should prioritize identifying potential sites for parking expansion in the short term.

Matewan should also seek to establish firm visitor counts to provide baseline data on current tourism in order to enhance market studies and development initiatives going forward.

2. PROMOTE TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES IN MATEWAN

With a new visitor-focused town website, Matewan is making steps in the right direction to position itself as a tourism destination. A few additional steps will strengthen Matewan's marketing presence.

First, Matewan should focus on getting the new Matewan CVB up and running. Located in the town's Welcome Center at the Matewan Depot, the CVB will be the ideal entity to coordinate Matewan's marketing and



Source: Mine Wars Museum (2017).

branding strategy. The CVB will need a website or will need to establish a presence on Matewan's town website.

Next, Matewan should prioritize the creation of a central hub for managing and booking tourism services such as guided tours, gear rentals, and shuttle services. This service hub would provide an innovative, collaborative framework for establishing a formal network of tourism services for Matewan visitors.

Matewan should also address the seasonal nature of the town's existing tourism market and take measures to increase Matewan's tourism in the slower winter and spring months. While investment in the proposed business opportunities will make Matewan more attractive as an off-season destination, potential strategies include targeted marketing campaigns (such as weekday and/or off-season discounts for trail riders for local lodging, tours, and restaurants) and the creation of special events in the winter and spring. Finally, Matewan should improve signage to help visitors find and identify key landmarks and tourism services in and around Matewan.

3. INVEST IN DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Matewan's historic buildings are promising assets for downtown development. The town's history and charm will set Matewan apart from other destinations. Though many buildings are currently vacant, the buildings have character and, if restored and occupied, could easily spur development in town.

Some local property owners have been acquiring buildings for several years and are actively restoring historic buildings downtown. These investments are a positive step in the right direction, but much more downtown revitalization is needed.

The building improvements needed in downtown Matewan vary widely. In some cases, minimal improvements would make storefront spaces presentable. One potential strategy for occupying storefronts, incentivizing retail business formation, and improving downtown buildings could be to mirror the success of Nelsonville, Ohio (pop. 5,000), a historic coal-mining

community that subsidizes downtown storefront rent for artist-retailers. Over a period of five years, artists cleaned up downtown storefronts, brought the town's downtown square back into economic productivity, and increased downtown occupancy rates from 25% to 85% (Lambe, 2008). Some building owners in Matewan are already providing reduced rents for downtown storefront spaces to encourage small business development. Matewan should build upon these opportunities to connect prospective entrepreneurs with potential storefront spaces and facilitate innovative solutions to the town's building and business creation needs.



Source: Matewan CVB (2017).

While some locations may only require minimal improvements, others require significant investments of time and money to be retrofitted for modern use. Matewan's historic main street buildings are currently suffering from water damage from the nearby Norfolk Southern Railway line. Runoff from the railroad is eroding the foundations of these historic structures that are currently being redeveloped. Historic buildings are one of Matewan's best assets; as a result, the town should prioritize the preservation and restoration of its historic structures. The West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center offers several programs that would help Matewan address its downtown building needs. These programs are outlined in the following sections.

RESOURCES

Matewan will need targeted assistance in many areas as it seeks to attract and develop new tourism-related businesses and services.

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

First-time entrepreneurs in rural communities often start at a disadvantage. In West Virginia, as in much of rural America, those coming from geographically isolated, economically depressed areas may not have been exposed to thriving local businesses. Without experienced local mentors, they may find themselves lacking the basic understanding of management, accounting, and marketing principles needed to start and run a successful business.

As a result, training and technical assistance are vital for supporting business development. To encourage new businesses to form in Matewan, the town should develop a local education and training infrastructure to provide advice and encouragement to budding entrepreneurs.

Many resources are available.

- **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, 2017)
- **The West Virginia Small Business Development Center (WVSBDC)** is a statewide network that provides assistance in all 55 counties. WVSBDC helps small businesses from the concept phase to established enterprises and offers training in business planning and development, coaching, financing recommendations, and more. WVSBDC can help compile 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. WVSBDC can also assist with evaluating a business idea for feasibility and projected success and can provide hands-on assistance in obtaining loans. (WVSBDC, 2017)

- Based in Williamson, the **Mingo County Redevelopment Authority** promotes and encourages the economic and civic welfare of Mingo County. Focused on developing, attracting, and retaining businesses, industries, and commerce within the county, the Mingo County Redevelopment Authority offers business assistance with regards to tax credits, exemptions, financing, and other development tools offered by the State of West Virginia and its affiliates. (MCRA, 2017)
- The **Southern Workforce Development** program through the Southern West Virginia Community & Technical College offers continuing education and business development services in Mingo County (Southern Workforce Development, 2017).
- **The 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, 2017)
- **HubCAP**, the West Virginia Community Development Hub's Communities of Achievement Program, offers support for communities as they take their community development efforts to the next level. The Hub's staff serve as coaches, connecting the community with capacity-building resources needed to achieve the town's goals. (HubCAP, 2017)

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, 2017)
- **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 45-minute online video courses and through two-hour classroom-style trainings. (WVU Extension, 2017)

MARKETING AND FINANCING

Matewan's existing tourism products need to be marketed more effectively in order to increase visitation. Matewan should identify potential marketing partners that would be willing to collaborate. Some potential partners include:

- West Virginia Division of Tourism,
- Tug Valley Chamber of Commerce,
- National Coal Heritage Area Authority,
- HMRRA,
- Hatfield McCoy CVB,
- MotorcycleRoads.com,
- OpenRoadJourney.com,
- EdelweissBike.com,
- MotorcycleTours.com,
- SundayMorningRides.com, and

- Harley Davidson Ride Planner (Fogerty, 2015).

Matewan could follow the example of Wytheville, Virginia, which has successfully marketed its "Claw of the Dragon" motorcycle route (Wytheville CVB, 2017).

BUILDING REDEVELOPMENT

A wide variety of resources are available to help address abandoned, dilapidated, and brownfields buildings in Matewan.

- **West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Centers** promote economic development and environmental and public health protection through innovative redevelopment of brownfield sites. The Centers promote and coordinate the development of brownfield properties by providing training and technical assistance, facilitating site preparation efforts, engaging community involvement, and helping communities with grant writing and leveraging project funding. (WVBAC, 2017)
- The **BAD (Brownfield, Abandoned, Dilapidated) Buildings Program** is a statewide initiative run through the Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center. The program provides technical assistance and site analysis tools to enhance abandoned and dilapidated building programs. Failure to address BAD buildings imposes severe social and economic costs on neighborhoods. This program helps to identify, prioritize, and redevelop such buildings. The BAD Buildings Model and resources support West Virginia communities with limited local capacity and no abandoned/dilapidated buildings program. The program works with communities, generally at no cost, to create a complete building inventory and prepare a comprehensive redevelopment plan based on inventory findings. Applications for technical assistance provided through the program are accepted annually. (WVBAC, 2017)
- **Preservation Alliance of West Virginia** serves as the statewide grassroots organization dedicated to historic preservation in our Mountain State. With a commitment to preserve our unique

cultural heritage, PAWV and its members support and promote historic preservation through education and outreach, advocacy, technical assistance, and heritage tourism development. (PAWV, 2017)

- The West Virginia Division of Culture and History's **State Historic Preservation Office** administers both state and federal historic preservation programs in West Virginia. The office aids federal and state agencies, local governments, and the public in identifying and preserving the physical historic and prehistoric resources of West Virginia and also provides information and assistance for the state and federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit program. (WVDOC, 2017)

TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

- **HMRRA** is a public corporation founded in 1996 to manage the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System's off-road trails on private property in nine southern West Virginia coal counties. HMRRA currently manages 630 miles of ATV trails with seven unique trail systems located in five counties. The Hatfield-McCoy Trail System is the largest tourism project in the coalfield counties of southern West Virginia. Upon completion of its current trail development plan, HMRRA will have 11 trail systems in nine counties. (HMRRA, 2017)
- **Ashland Resort** is the largest campground in the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System and the only camping facility with an "A" guest rating in West Virginia. Located in the community of Ashland (McDowell County), Ashland Resort built their resort from the

ground up and have a wealth of knowledge about creating tourism services needed for the region. (Ashland Resort, 2017)

In addition to ATV trails, Matewan has the potential to develop recreation opportunities on the Tug Fork River. Fishing is popular on the river, and kayaking is gaining popularity as an activity in Matewan. Matewan could follow in the lead of other West Virginia watersheds and create a designated water trail on the Tug Fork River; however, the local community would need to be engaged in spearheading river cleanup work and building interest in river improvements

- **The Coal River Group (CRG)** manages the Coal River Water Trail, one of the premier water trails in southern West Virginia. The CRG maintains its own boat-rental business and livery service, Coal River Canoe & Kayak, at the nonprofit's headquarters in Tornado, West Virginia. Through a recent grant from the West Virginia Development Office, the CRG will provide mentoring and coaching to entrepreneurs interested in starting river recreation-based businesses. The CRG will offer expertise based on its experience in the watershed and can help connect promising individuals with further training and assistance programs available in the state. (CRG, 2017)
- The National Park Service's **Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program** supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects such as rail trail and water trail creation. (RTCA, 2017)

NEXT STEPS

Tourism products

- Develop land- and water-based trails in Matewan.
 - Identify land for potential trail development.
 - Gauge community interest in river improvements.
 - Identify key leaders who might be interested in spearheading trail efforts.
 - Establish cleanups and look into Tug Fork River Water Trail.
 - Research other known water trails in West Virginia.
 - Contact the CRG and other watershed organizations for guidance moving forward.

Tourism services

- Promote business opportunities for:
 - food and dining establishments;
 - campgrounds, cabins, and home rentals; and
 - tours and recreational activities including:
 - rentals and shuttle services for kayaks, ATVs, UTVs, and motorcycles;
 - guided history tours of downtown Matewan, Hatfield-McCoy feud sites, and Mine Wars sites;
 - guided fishing, kayaking, ATV, and motorcycle trips; and
 - an outdoor gear and outfitter shop.
- Link business opportunities with potential buildings/storefront spaces downtown.
- Create an organization to act as a central tourism service hub.
 - Establish a core committee of town leaders.
 - Identify an existing entity to serve as a fiscal sponsor.
 - Apply for incorporation through the IRS and begin applying for grants through the fiscal sponsor.

- Look into getting an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer to assist in developing the enterprise.
- Establish a web presence for the Matewan CVB.
- Coordinate with available small business development resources to determine how to best connect Matewan residents with business development training opportunities.
- Facilitate mentorship, marketing, and hands-on, ongoing business support to ensure the viability of new business initiatives.

Infrastructure and basic services

- Conduct a parking study and begin identifying potential parcels for downtown parking expansion
- Work with the Mingo County Commission on cell service expansion initiatives.
- Connect with Preservation Alliance and the State Historic Preservation Office to identify historic preservation opportunities in Matewan.
- Consider working with the Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center BAD Buildings and Downtown Appalachia programs to:
 - prioritize buildings for development,
 - use market data (including the findings in this report) to attract investment, and
 - pair the revised building inventory with potential new businesses outlined in this report.

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