



Growing Tourism in Grafton and Taylor County

Taylor County, West Virginia

Kasey Osborne

Sara Cottingham

Kendra Hatcher

Marc Glass



December 2021

**911 Greenbag Road
Morgantown, WV 26508
downstreamstrategies.com**

Tourism Assessment

Grafton, West Virginia

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Cover photo: Grafton, photographed by J.P. Miller.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About this report

Since 2020, Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia, has been the focus of the All Aboard Brownfields Redevelopment Initiative led by the Northern Brownfields Assistance Center (NBAC). The goal of this project is to help attract new business, lodging, and recreational opportunities to riverfront main streets in Grafton and other rural communities by redeveloping industrial legacy sites.

As the project's lead consultants, Downstream Strategies has partnered with NBAC to interview stakeholders and engage in facilitated stakeholder discussions in Taylor County to discuss the project and brownfield redevelopment in the community.

Through this work, the need to develop and support recreation and tourism-related businesses and services as an economic development tool emerged as a common theme. In particular, the community voiced interest in further exploring how to:

- develop supportive infrastructure, such as trails and river/lake access points;
- promote historical resources;
- develop overnight accommodations; and
- reuse and restore high priority properties.

This report explores basic opportunities for expanding recreation-based tourism in Grafton and Taylor County. The document provides:

- a basic market analysis for recreation-based tourism in the general area, including profiles of targeted user groups relevant to Grafton and Taylor County;
- an assessment of Grafton's existing tourism infrastructure, comparing what visitors look for in a town with what Grafton currently has in place;
- opportunities and recommendations to help Grafton and Taylor County attract more visitors to its downtown; and
- a contemporary inventory and prioritization of brownfield properties targeted for redevelopment.

This document offers initial findings that All Aboard Grafton, NBAC, Downstream Strategies, and other community stakeholders will use to shape the course of this three-year project.

Key findings

- Grafton and Taylor County are steeped in history and are the gateway to one of West Virginia's most popular state parks.
- Tygart Lake State Park and Valley Falls State Park saw a combined 400,000 visitors in 2021. In addition, Grafton lies within a 45-minute drive from 250,566 people in the nearby cities including Morgantown, Fairmont, Bridgeport, and Clarksburg. This puts Grafton within easy reach of potential visitors.
- To serve future trail tourists, Grafton and Taylor County should prioritize business development that caters to the documented consumer preferences of their desired visitors: overnight visitors including lake and river users, motorized trail riders, mountain bikers, and heritage tourists.
- Specific priorities should be to:
 - **Give people a reason to stop in Grafton and other Taylor County communities** by offering downtown attractions, such as restaurants or shops.

- **Clean up downtown buildings and streetscapes** by pursuing redevelopment and finding compatible uses for vacant spaces.
- **Expand and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities** to make the area an even stronger destination.
- **Increase connectivity** within Grafton and to nearby recreational opportunities in Taylor County.
- **Build capacity and collaboration** to undertake redevelopment and other necessary improvements.

About Downstream Strategies

Downstream Strategies is an environmental and economic development consulting firm with offices in Morgantown, Berkeley Springs, Davis, and Lewisburg, West Virginia.

As a company committed to the environmental and economic vitality of Appalachia's communities, Downstream Strategies takes an integrated, holistic approach to brownfields redevelopment. We offer specialized services across every phase of brownfields redevelopment, from economic assessment and market feasibility to environmental due diligence and construction.

Since 2020, Downstream Strategies has served as the lead technical consultant and Licensed Remediation Specialist (LRS) for several grant-funded brownfields projects for the NBAC's All Aboard Brownfields Redevelopment Initiative. This report was completed by Downstream Strategies' Redevelopment Planning Team in 2021 funded by NBAC's FY2020 EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant.

This report was funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through a Brownfields Assessment Grant for Hazardous Substances for the All Aboard Brownfields Redevelopment Initiative in 2020 (BF-96379101).

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, Grafton, Taylor County, West Virginia, has been the focus of All Aboard Brownfields Redevelopment Initiative led by the Northern Brownfields Assistance Center (NBAC). The goal of this project is to support local stakeholders in their efforts to attract new business, lodging, and recreational opportunities to riverfront main streets in Grafton and other rural communities by redeveloping industrial legacy sites.

As the project’s lead consultants, Downstream Strategies, LLC (Downstream Strategies) has partnered with NBAC to facilitate stakeholder interviews and hold a public meeting in Grafton to discuss the project and brownfield redevelopment in the community and in Taylor County as a whole.

Through this work, the need to develop and support recreation and tourism-related businesses and services emerged as a common theme. In particular, the community voiced interest in further exploring how to:

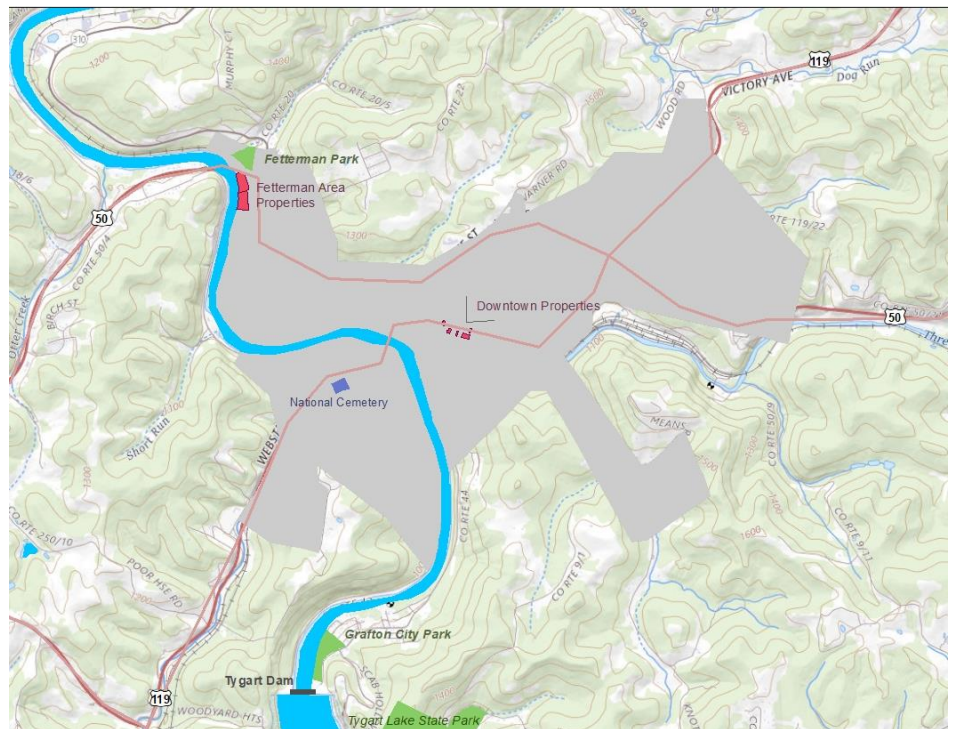
- develop supportive infrastructure, such as trails and river/lake access points;
- promote historical resources;
- develop overnight accommodations; and
- reuse and restore high priority properties.

The outreach process also highlighted that, in Grafton, there are two distinct areas of focus. The downtown area, and specifically Main Street, contain most of the high priority properties. These include:

- B&O Passenger Station
- The Willard Hotel
- Manos Theater
- Cohen Building
- Elks Building and Parking Lot
- Preiss (Sweeney) Building, 33 W. Main Street
- M&M Bank Building
- Joliffe Building

The other area of interest is the Fetterman area, on the west side of Grafton, which contains:

- Former DOH Garage in Fetterman
- Former Packaging Corporation of America (PCA) Factory in Fetterman
- Former Hazel Atlas/WV Plastics/Baby World Site in Fetterman



The public meeting—known as the Grafton Informational Gathering (GIG)—was held on June 10, 2021 and was also attended by Taylor County residents outside of Grafton who were interested in

community redevelopment, particularly from Thornton, located approximately five miles to the east of Grafton.

In order to support the goals of the project and the interests of the community, this document will explore basic opportunities for expanding recreation-based tourism-related businesses in Grafton and in Taylor County generally. The relevance of this planning to the Brownfields program is to understand how the redevelopment goals of the community align with local economic, infrastructure, social and environmental conditions. Planning activities, such as this report, can help communities determine which reuses are feasible for particular brownfield sites, and as part of larger redevelopment plans.

Target area

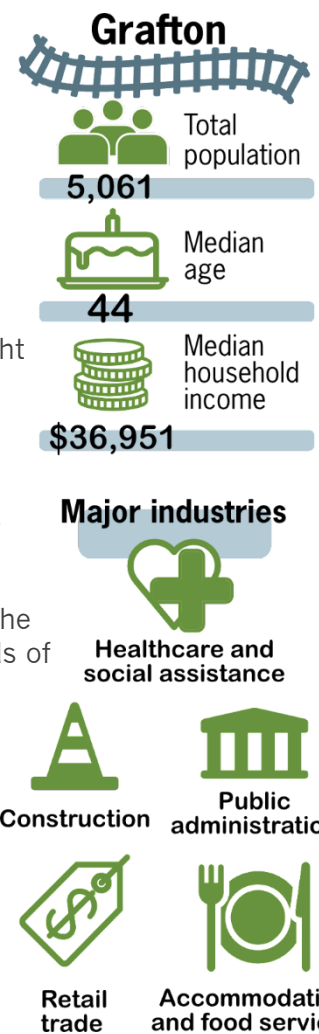
This report focuses largely on the Grafton area given the current inventory of brownfield sites as part of project. However, many of the assets highlighted in this report are located outside of Grafton in Taylor County. The recommendations for developing and supporting recreation-based tourism economy can and should be extrapolated to other communities in Taylor County.

2. ABOUT GRAFTON

Grafton is a city of 5,061 residents in Taylor County, West Virginia. First settled in the 1700s by Irish immigrants, Grafton rose to prominence in the 19th century as a major station on the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad. The town was officially chartered as Grafton in 1856, named after civil engineer John Grafton who designed the B&O Railroad route. (City of Grafton, 2021)

Grafton became a strategic hold during the Civil War, as both sides sought to use the railroad for their benefit. In 1861, a scuffle in Fetterman, now part of Grafton, saw the first death of a Civil War soldier. Following the Civil War, the city developed into a major retail and industrial center in north-central West Virginia. In the 1930s, a dam was constructed on the Tygart Valley River just outside of Grafton, creating Tygart Lake, which is now home to Tygart Lake State Park. By the 1950s, Grafton entered a period of continued economic decline, as major industrial employers including the Carr China Plant and the Hazel Atlas Glass Plant, closed. The 1980s dealt another economic blow when the railroad relocated hundreds of jobs to Florida.

Today Grafton is the county seat of Taylor County. Grafton residents make up nearly one-third of the county’s total population (16,864). Both the city and the county have experienced steady decreases in population in recent years. More than half of Taylor County businesses (204 firms) and employees (1,752) are located within Grafton (ESRI ArcGIS Business Analyst, 2021). Top employers in Taylor County



Source: American Community Survey, 2019; WorkForce West Virginia, 2020

include Arch Coal, Taylor County Board of Education, Grafton City Hospital, WalMart, and Rex-Hide Industries, Inc. (WorkForce West Virginia, 2020).



In 2018, travel to Taylor County **generated \$12.5 million in direct spending and \$3.3 million in earnings, supported 150 jobs, and yielded \$111,000 and \$825,000 revenue** to local and state governments, respectively. (Dean Runyan Associates, 2019)

2.1 Grafton's strengths

Grafton has three key assets in favor: its location, its nearby destinations, and its history.

2.1.1 Proximity to population centers

Though Grafton itself is a small city, it is located 16 miles from the U.S. Interstate 79 (I-79) corridor and within a 40-minute drive to larger cities including Bridgeport, Clarksburg, Morgantown, and Fairmont. Overall, it is within 45 minutes from 250,566 people (American Community Survey, 2019). This places Grafton within easy commuting distance to the greater Morgantown-Fairmont combined statistical area (CSA), which is home to nearly 200,000 people and large employers including West Virginia University (WVU), WVU Medicine, Mon Health, WVU Research Corporation, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Fairmont State University, several energy and utility service companies, and other top regional employers (WorkForce West Virginia, 2020).

Many Grafton and Taylor County residents already take advantage of this proximity to other cities: More than 63% of Taylor County residents commute to another West Virginia county for work, and their average travel time to work is 29 minutes (American Community Survey, 2019).

Grafton’s—and much of Taylor county’s—proximity to the Morgantown-Fairmont CSA presents a significant opportunity for the city to position itself as a small, affordable town within easy commuting distance to the larger, rapidly growing urban area. For example, Morgantown’s population grew 7.3% between 2010 and 2019, and since 2020, that city has experienced a real estate boom that has drastically limited the inventory and increased home sale prices. Likewise, with its growing healthcare and aviation industry, Bridgeport grew at a rate of 8.9% during the same nine-year period. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019)

As homebuyers find themselves priced out of cities like Bridgeport and Morgantown, neighboring towns with more affordable homes and short commute times are growing increasingly popular.

Median home list price (as of August 2021):

- Morgantown - \$215,000
- Bridgeport - \$300,000
- Grafton - \$105,000 (Rocket Homes, 2021)

2.1.2 Gateway to Tygart Lake State Park

Grafton is the gateway community to Tygart Lake State Park, which features a 10-mile long, 1,750-acre lake, marina, hiking trails, both luxury lodging and primitive camping options, and a newly opened Adventure Lake. In 2021, the park saw 330,000 visitors—nearly a 62% increase from 2019—making it the fifth-most-visited park in West Virginia, even beating out hugely popular Canaan Valley and Tomlinson Run. Grafton is also located just ten miles from Valley Falls State Park, which sees approximately 70,000 visitors per year. (West Virginia State Parks, 2021) As a result, **nearly 400,000 state park visitors came to the Grafton area in 2021**—and those figures are only increasing.

While relatively few of these visitors currently venture into downtown Grafton, this high volume of tourism traffic within a 10-mile radius presents a tremendous opportunity for Grafton. If Grafton and other Taylor County communities can increase the number of state park visitors who come into downtown and spend money at local businesses, the city could see sizeable benefits by tapping into the state’s growing outdoor economy.

Outdoor recreation and natural areas like state parks and forests are experiencing a dramatic rejuvenation in interest among Americans nationwide, particularly after the COVID-related shutdowns. In the past four years, West Virginia tripled its tourism marketing budget and spent more than \$150 million in

major upgrades to every state park and forest. This investment is paying off significantly: West Virginia state parks are on track to see a record-breaking 10 million visitors in 2021 and camping revenue has increased by 154% over the past four years (Young, 2021).



2.1.3 History

Grafton is a city steeped in history, from the Revolutionary War soldier who first purchased the land on which Grafton sits to the city's emergence as a railroad town centered around the B&O Railroad. Grafton holds several unique state, national, and even international claims in which the community takes great pride. For instance, Grafton is the site of the first Union death in the Civil War, two national cemeteries, the longest ongoing Memorial Day observance in the nation, and the origin of Mother's Day which is now celebrated worldwide. Grafton also boasts stately, historic buildings such as the Willard Hotel and B&O Station that evoke Grafton's past as an influential American community. (City of Grafton, 2021)

3. TOURISM 101

Tourism and outdoor recreation have been growing industries in recent years across the nation, but that steady rise surged in 2020 amid COVID-related lockdowns. Today, the outdoor recreation industry boasts \$788 billion in output, supports 5.2 million jobs, and makes up 2.1% of the national GDP—more than the oil, gas, and mining industries combined (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2021).

An estimated 265 million Americans, or 80% of the population, participated in outdoor recreation during the pandemic, 87 million (33%) of whom were first timers. Forty-five million of these nascent recreationists are expected to be long-term customers (Furlong and Diamond, 2021). Overall, total outdoor participation among all groups has climbed by 2.2% in the past year (to 52.9%), which is the largest annual increase recorded since the Outdoor Industry Association began tracking the numbers (SGB Media, 2021).

In West Virginia, the outdoor recreation economy brings in 65+ million visitors, 16.6 million overnight trips, and 49.8 million day-trips; supports 23,000 direct jobs and 45,000 supported jobs; generates \$700 million in wages and salaries; contributes \$1.5 billion in value added; yields \$534.5 million in tax revenue; and comprises 1.9% of the state GDP, making it one of the top thriving industries in the state (West Virginia Tourism Office, 2020; Outdoor Industry Association, 2021).

3.1 Tourism value chain

Given the rise of the outdoor economy, rural communities across the nation and beyond seek to develop local tourism economies to boost economic development. Yet many West Virginia communities new to tourism often wonder: where do we begin?

Every tourism economy is made up of two basic ingredients. First, you need a tourism attraction, or product, that will attract visitors. This can include things like a park, trail system, lake, festival, or any other destination, attraction, or activity that draws people to the area.

While a region needs a tourism product to attract visitors, it also needs a system of supporting services to retain the visitors who come to the tourism attraction, ultimately developing and sustaining a tourism industry. 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.



The recipe for a **tourism economy** is built on **tourism attractions plus tourism infrastructure**. Together, tourism products and tourism infrastructure represent what is sometimes referred to as the **tourism value chain**—the composite of all tourism-related products and services in a specific region, particularly as they contribute to the economy.

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, short-term rentals, 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
- Wayfaring – signage to direct visitors to amenities

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.

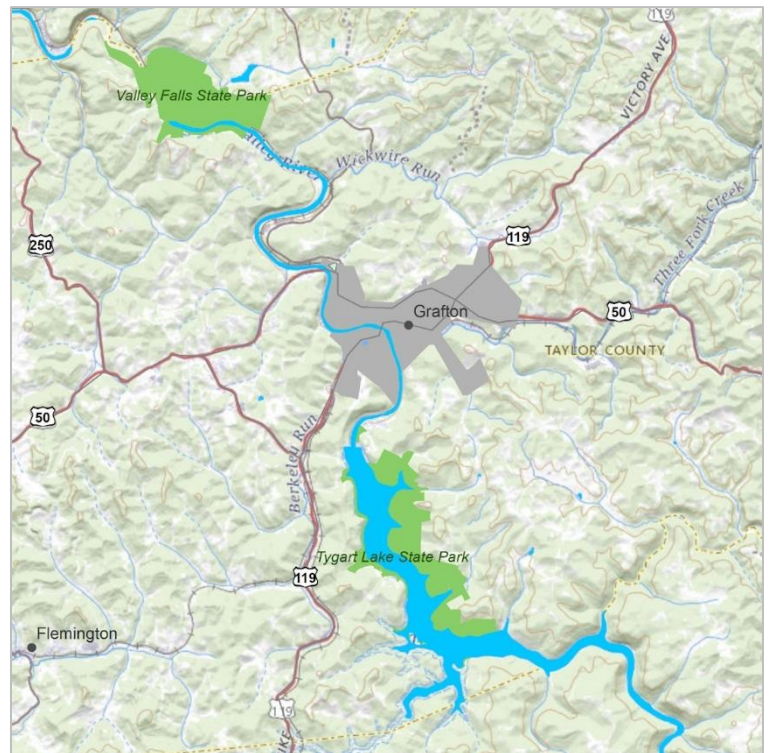
4. TOURISM ATTRACTIONS

Tygart Lake State Park, Taylor County’s main tourism attraction, is just three miles away from Grafton. The lake, its new Adventure Park, the river, and nearby Valley Falls State Park attract 400,000 visitors right next door to Grafton each year—a huge opportunity for the city and the county. In addition to Taylor County’s natural assets, Grafton also possesses various cultural attractions, from historical landmarks to special events. While these might not be primary tourism drivers in the Grafton area, they are attractions for those interested in local culture and history and can be enhanced to draw in more visitors.

4.1 Natural attractions and activities

Tygart Lake State Park is one of the most popular state parks in West Virginia, drawing in hundreds of thousands of tourists annually. The Park features Tygart Lake, the new Tygart Lake Adventure Park, a marina, lodge, cabins, campgrounds, and restaurant, all updated as of 2021.

Watersport opportunities abound on the lake, including motorboating, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, waterskiing, swimming, and scuba diving. The Tygart Lake Marina provides boat docking, pontoon and fishing boat rentals, gasoline, and concessions. The marina also has a “Princess” Tour Boat for simple daily trips, weddings, parties, and other events. Because Tygart Lake is a flood control storage reservoir, it is partially drained during the off season, so some of these activities (such as the marina)

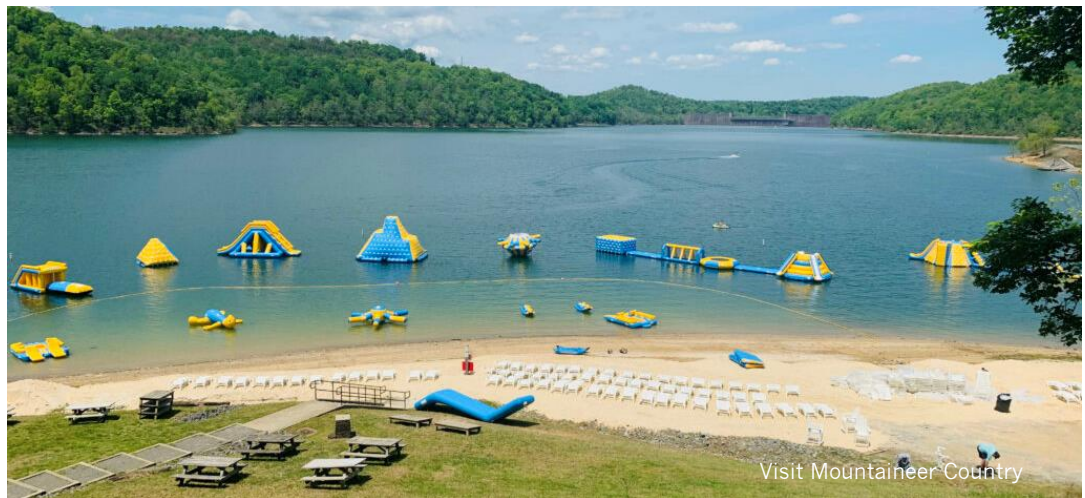


are not available between mid-September and mid-May each year. (Tygart Marina, 2021).

Tygart Lake is considered a top spot for smallmouth bass fishing in the region—securing a spot in the 2012 list of Bassmaster Magazine’s top 100 bass fishing lakes in the nation—and provides ample opportunities for walleye and a variety of deepwater fish (Clauson-Wicker, 2021; Bassmaster, 2012). In addition to bass and walleye, catfish, perch, bluegill, crappie, catfish, and muskellunge are also common catches. Although the lake has 30 miles of accessible shoreline, much of it is steep and difficult to hike, so many fishermen opt to fish by boat. The lake is open for fishing year-round. (Sundstrom, 2021)

One of the most recent additions to the lake is the **Tygart Lake Adventure Park**, a family-friendly water park featuring an assortment of more than 20 commercial-grade inflatable lake toys, including slides, a floating trampoline, a 14-foot “iceberg,” and other activities, plus a sandy beach complete with lounge chairs (Tygart Adventures, 2021). Modeled after water parks at other popular state parks, the Adventure Park opened in May 2021. It is the result of a public-private partnership between West Virginia State Parks and ACE Adventure Resorts and is a project from the West Virginia Governor’s Office aimed to improve state parks in order to increase tourism (Cadigan, 2021).

Tygart Lake has three boat launches, one at its northern end near the dam, several ramps at the marina, and another at Pleasant Creek at its southwestern end. There are also several unofficial access points along the lake and river.



Tygart Valley River is a 135-mile-long tributary of the Monongahela River, which flows from Pocahontas County through Randolph, Barbour, Taylor, and Marion counties before it joins the Monongahela River at Fairmont. The river flows through the Grafton area and extends into Tygart Lake at the Tygart Lake State Park. Sections of the river are conducive for more adventurous runs of rapids, whereas other lengths are tranquil with stable water flows suitable for canoeing and lazy floats.

North (and downstream) of the lake, the Tygart Valley River includes fast-flowing whitewater sections and a series of waterfalls known as Valley Falls. The river’s year-long strong flow has led people to dub it “the last water in West Virginia,” and recreationists flock to it when other rivers are too low to use, particularly those seeking whitewater runs at the falls. The extra water during spring and fall helps make Valley Falls popular among whitewater boaters and also prolongs the river’s use for

activities that do not require much depth, such as kayaking and paddleboarding (West Virginia Tourism, 2020; Dunham, 2021).

Just 10 miles northwest of Grafton, **Valley Falls State Park** is located in both Taylor and Marion counties. Valley Falls is a 1,145-acre day-use park that features a half-mile long series of four cascades along the Tygart Valley River. Located on the site of a historic gristmill, Valley Falls State Park has many family-oriented picnic and recreational areas, hiking trails, and historical landmarks, in addition to fishing and whitewater kayaking opportunities on the Tygart Valley River. Valley Falls State Park is also a popular mountain biking destination with 18 miles of mostly doubletrack and limited singletrack trails along challenging, mountainous terrain with 1,400 feet of ascent (Whelan, 2021). The West Virginia Enduro Series, an annual mountain biking competition that includes multiple race stages across different parks, holds one of its races at Valley Falls; in 2021, Valley Falls hosted the final stages of the series.



Valley Falls, Jeff Macklin

Table 1: Estimated state park economic impacts in 2015

Rank	Total party days/nights	Day user spending	Overnight user spending	Resident spending	Non-resident spending	Total visitor spending	Economic significance	Economic impact
Tygart Lake State Park	251,216	\$5,936,144	\$1,436,740	\$3,882,879	\$3,490,005	\$7,372,884	\$6,193,223	\$4,579,707
Valley Falls State Park	77,503	\$1,922,136	\$0	\$1,116,155	\$805,981	\$1,922,136	\$1,729,922	\$1,210,083

Source: Magnini and Uysal (2015)

Expected to launch in 2024, the **Mountaineer Trail Network** will be a collection of the best trails in northern West Virginia for biking and boating. West Virginia’s first non-motorized multi-county trail authority, the Mountaineer Trail Network Recreation Authority, seeks to develop northern West Virginia as one of the nation’s top trail destinations—filled with world-class trail systems and local dining, lodging, and other amenities in unique towns spread across an entire region—and provides a framework for marketing the area to a much wider audience of potential visitors. Taylor County is one of 15 counties within the Mountaineer Trail Network’s service area; as a result, the county stands to benefit from the Network’s regional marketing and tourism development activities in the coming years.



Valley Falls, Marion County CVB

Pleasant Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a 3,030-acre WMA just southwest of Tygart Lake. With wetlands and woodlands, recreationists can hunt waterfowl, upland birds, big and small game, and fish a number of trophy fish species. The WMA provides 40 campsites, picnic tables, and a rifle range.

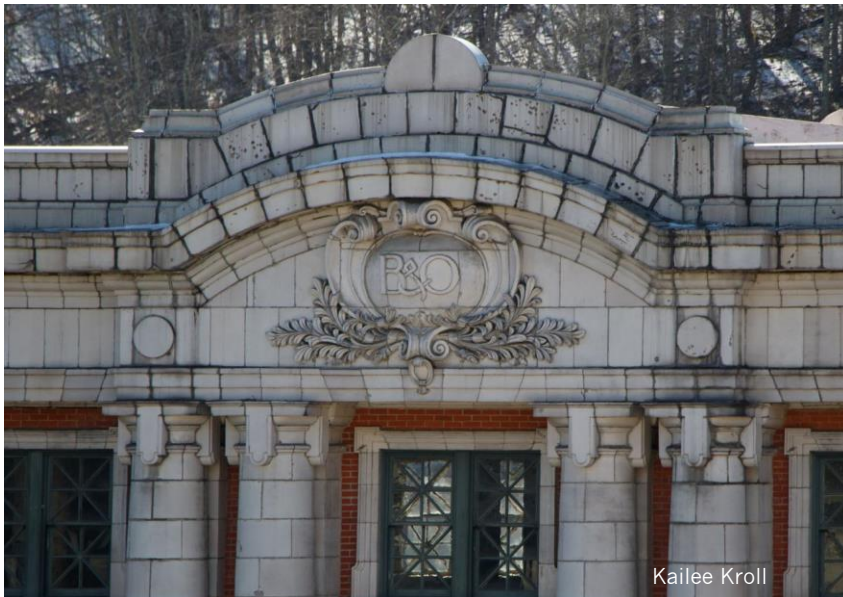
Pruntytown State Farm Wildlife Management Area is a 1,764-acre WMA located near Pruntytown and is managed as a beef cattle farm by the West Virginia Department of Agriculture. The WMA has a mix of rolling pastures, woods, and slopes and provides a range of upland bird and small and big game hunting opportunities. Camping is not allowed at the WMA.

4.2 Cultural attractions and activities

Taylor County is the site of West Virginia’s only two national cemeteries, **Grafton National Cemetery** and **West Virginia National Cemetery**, and is known for having the longest ongoing observance of **Memorial Day**, giving the city the nickname “Memorial City.” Grafton’s Memorial Day celebration, called the Spirit of Grafton festival, occupies the city for Memorial Day weekend. A Taylor County native, **Thornsbury Bailey Brown**, was the first Union soldier to be killed in the Civil War during a skirmish in Grafton.



Grafton also holds the honor of being the first place to celebrate **Mother’s Day**. In 1908, Grafton native Anna Jarvis organized a Mother’s Day observance at Andrews Methodist Episcopal Church, which is now the **International Mother’s Day Shrine**. The **Anna Jarvis Birthplace Museum**, also located in Taylor County, features additional historical memorabilia. Each year, the long-running Mother’s Day Founder Festival is held in the city.



Pointing to Grafton’s origins as a railroad town, the **Historic B&O Passenger Station** has been a landmark structure in the city since it was built in the 1880s. To accommodate the increased rail traffic, the Willard Hotel was built adjacent to the station in 1911. While rail service ended in 1971, many renovation efforts have been completed on the station in recent years.

5. TARGET MARKET AUDIENCE

All visitors are good for the local economy, but what types are the most impactful?

Many recent studies across the country are demonstrating the influence that non-local visitors—those who travel away from home and stay overnight at a destination—have on recreation and tourism economies. Recent studies of the Great Allegheny Passage trail in Pennsylvania and Maryland have found that overnight trail visitors *spend six times more per day* than the average day visitor (The Progress Fund, 2016). For example, studies by Downstream Strategies have found that a typical day user spends under \$20 per day, whereas an overnight visitor (such as a mountain bike tourist) spends over \$140 per day (Downstream Strategies, 2021).

As Taylor County seeks to build tourism, its goal is to increase the number of visitors (especially non-local, overnight visitors) who come each year.

Based on existing and potential tourism attractions in Taylor County, there are several key user groups to try to grow tourism in the area:

- motorized lake users,
- non-motorized river and lake users,
- ATV/motorized vehicles,
- cyclists, and
- heritage/cultural tourists.

Understanding these user groups—including their demographics, their consumer spending patterns, and market preferences—can help leaders in Grafton and Taylor County better cater to (and develop increased opportunities for) these specific audiences.

The following table summarizes basic demographics and consumer preferences for targeted tourism user groups.

Table 2: Demographics and consumer preferences of user groups

User group	Age range	Locality	Lodging preference	Dining preference	Other spending
Motorized boater	40+	West Virginia and western Pennsylvania	Many own second homes or stay in campers around Tygart Lake	Unknown	Fees associated with marina/docking?
Motorized trail riders	35–64	From West Virginia and nearby states	High-end cabins or lodges, with campgrounds and hotels/motels a distance second and third choice	Riders typically dine out for dinner. Non-riding family members may seek additional meals out	Riders often bring along their family members who seek other shopping and things to do
Cyclists	30–50	From cities within 250–500 miles	Documented preference for higher-end camping or rentals with Wi-Fi and other amenities	High preference for upscale coffee shops and local, non-chain restaurants	Likely to visit bike shops, outdoor stores, and other local businesses in the area
Heritage tourists	50+	From West Virginia and nearby states	Likely to spend one or two nights at a local bed and breakfast, hotel, or cabin	Restaurants, cafes, and coffee shops	Likely to visit downtown shops

Note: While these visitor spending estimates were informed by a number of different sources, they were ultimately based on best professional judgement by Downstream Strategies staff.

5.1 Motorized lake users

Motorized boating is one of the most popular activities at Tygart Lake State Park. As a user group, motorized boaters are a high-spending group: In fact, boating and fishing generate the most economic value for all outdoor recreation categories, followed by RVing and shooting sports. In 2016, the average angler spent \$130 per fishing trip (ASA, 2018).

In 2020, more than 310,000 powerboats were sold across the nation—the most in 13 years and up 12% from 2019 sales (NMMA, 2020). In 2018 over half (52.3%) of boaters had an annual household income of less than \$75,000, and one-third of them had incomes of less than \$50,000, putting many boaters within the typical median income range for most West Virginians and those in Taylor County (RTI International, 2020).

Additionally, virtually all (95%) of these boats are considered “small” (that is, 26’ or shorter), meaning they can be trailered by vehicle from home or other locations not directly on the water,



opening up the opportunities for landlocked states such as West Virginia. In West Virginia, boating makes up nearly 2% of the economy, supports more than 22,500 jobs, and generates \$1.5 billion to the GDP. (NMMA, 2021)

At Tygart Lake, approximately 60% of visitors are estimated to be non-local, overnight visitors. The majority of these non-local visitors come from northern West Virginia and western Pennsylvania, and many own property on and around the lake where they stay during their visits. Yet very few of these visitors are believed to visit downtown Grafton during their stays in the area. (VMCCVB, 2021)

5.2 Non-motorized lake users

Many others use Tygart Lake and the Tygart Valley River beyond motorboat owners. Families and individuals enjoy the beachfront setting, swimming opportunities, watersports (e.g., waterskiing, jet skiing, tubing, etc.), kayaking, canoeing, and other pastimes. For the most part, these activities run the gamut of population groups. Recent organized efforts by local outfitters have seen thousands of people on float trips, with participation rates increasing each year. The Tygart Valley River is also used by whitewater kayakers, particularly when water levels at other nearby rivers are too low.

Kayak angling in particular is an increasingly popular form of recreation in West Virginia. With the lake and river flowing through Taylor County, kayak angling and other fishing activities can be a niche vehicle for tourism that befits the area. Kayak angling tournaments are already held at Tygart Lake by West Virginia Kayak Anglers with an estimated 100 participants, but the potential for more involvement is large. Studies by Downstream Strategies show that participants at kayak angling

tournaments on the New, Bluestone, and Greenbrier rivers each year spend an estimated \$80 per day (Downstream Strategies, 2020).



5.3 Motorized trail users

Motorized trail riders are visitors who come to ride off-highway vehicles on trails, often on Jeeps, Hummers, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motocross bikes, or other off-road vehicles (ORVs). The area around Grafton has plenty of trails on private property and gravel roads for motorized trail riders to enjoy, though there is currently no formal sanctioned trail system for ORVs.

The hugely successful Hatfield-McCoy Trails in southwestern West Virginia demonstrate how much of an impact this user group can have on a local economy. According to data from Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority (HMRRA), 91% of the trail system's total 56,000 visitors each year come from outside West Virginia. The majority of these visitors are middle-aged, travel in large groups, and roughly 60% report spending two or three days riding per trip (CBER, 2020). Motorized vehicle users are also a very high-spending group. Given the length of their stays, the size of their parties, and the gear-intensive nature of the sport, motorized trail tourists generate significant revenue for trail towns: Surveyed non-local respondents in 2019 spent \$1,156 per trip, and 81% of surveyed respondents make multiple trips per year to the Hatfield-McCoy Trails (CBER, 2020). These numbers reflect an established and thriving system, but Grafton and Taylor County can begin taking steps to formalize and capitalize on this industry.



5.4 Cyclists

Cyclists include road, mountain, and gravel riders seeking out opportunities for overnight bike trips. National surveys have found that bicycling tourists are predominantly young professionals in their

30s and 40s with high expendable incomes, and they take an average of two trips per year to bike. The average cycling tourist spends \$143 per day on a bike trip, which tends to be two or three nights in duration. Of cyclists, mountain bikers spend the most: The average mountain biking tourist spends \$382 per day on a bike trip, which are also usually two or three nights long (Barber, 2015). This number holds true in West Virginia: Surveys from West Virginia mountain bike races and events found attendees spend roughly \$387 per trip (Eades and Arbogast, 2019).

While both groups sometimes camp, they often stay in cabins and short-term rentals, and they purchase half of all their (hearty) meals in higher-end local restaurants (Barber, 2015). While West Virginia is renowned for extremely difficult, technical mountain biking trails, analysis by Downstream Strategies has found that the most successful mountain biking destinations feature trails for all levels of riders (Downstream Strategies, 2019).

Taylor County already has some cycling routes and trail areas. In nearby Valley Falls State Park, mountain biking trails are typically considered highly technical and difficult, though there are some routes more suitable for beginners that parallel the river (Whelan, 2021). The hiking trails at Tygart Lake State Park are advertised as compatible with biking, though anecdotal evidence suggests most visitors do not opt to bike them. The Adventure Club has held triathlon and cycling series, though: the Tour of Taylor County Bike Race started in 2018 and has evolved into the West Virginia State Championship Road Race in 2020. The route takes cyclists along 47 miles of scenic roadways in Grafton. (Skinner, 2020)



Taylor County bike race, Adventure Club FB

5.5 Heritage tourists

Heritage and cultural tourism accounts for 28% of overnight visitors to West Virginia (Longwoods International, 2019). Heritage tourism is a notable sector in West Virginia considering the state is a panorama of American history.

Recent studies have linked heritage tourists to significant visitor spending. According to a recent study of the state's top cultural destinations, 52% of surveyed heritage tourists traveled from more

than 50 miles away from the destination, and about one-third traveled from more than 200 miles away. The study estimated that a historic site visit averaged a one-night hotel stay and generated about \$271. (PAWV, 2018; Craig, 2019)

Grafton and Taylor County have several unique cultural and historical attractions that visitors either come specifically for or view as pleasant side destinations. With additional investment and resources (such as a state and/or federal historic site designations), some of these assets could potentially be further developed into larger attractions geared for non-local heritage tourists.



6. TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

How does Grafton's tourism infrastructure compare with the consumer preferences of its target market audience? And how can Grafton and Taylor County better position itself to reach increased numbers of visitors?

The table on the following page outlines Grafton's infrastructure and how it stacks up with these documented consumer preferences.

6.1 Lodging

Lodging options are extremely limited in Grafton and the surrounding area and are generally concentrated within Tygart Lake State Park. Tygart Lake State Park has a main lodge with 20 rooms, 11 cabins of various configurations, and 38 campsites. Until recently, the Tygart Lake State Park did not have an online system for making reservations. Once the park implemented online booking, reservation numbers increased dramatically. This instance shows what any potential lodging option should seek to prioritize: an active online presence and convenient booking ability.

Outside of the state park, there are several short-term rentals around the outskirts of the park, but these tend to have limited availability and/or varied price points. The budget Crislip Motor Lodge was the only conventional multi-room motel option in Grafton with about 25 rooms available, but it was recently bought at auction and is currently closed under different ownership.

While Tygart Lake State Park does generate significant numbers of non-local visitors, many (if not most) of those visitors are believed to own property (camps, cabins, etc.) near or around the lake. As a result, it is unlikely that Grafton's current level of visitation could support a chain hotel. However, other types of lodging present viable market opportunities for entrepreneurs in Grafton.

Short-term rentals offer a private experience for travelers and are an accessible means of generating income for residents and tax revenue for the local government. Many local and regional but out-of-state individuals (such as those from southwestern Pennsylvania) own property around Tygart Lake. Some of these are charming cabins and other such buildings suitable for a lakefront property aesthetic, which makes them prime short-term rental properties. The popularity of short-term rental

In West Virginia, the most popular overnight accommodations are the homes of friends and relatives (26%), followed by a motel (25%), other hotel (21%), resort hotel (17%), campground/trailer park/RV park (8%), a country inn or lodge (7%), and other options (7%) (Longwoods International, 2019).

platforms such as Airbnb, VRBO, and HomeAway has made these types of accommodations the first choice for many travelers. Grafton currently has a handful of short-term rentals, but the city’s available housing stock, relatively low real estate prices, and proximity to tourism attractions make the prospect of short-term rentals a real possibility for homeowners and entrepreneurs.

Bed and breakfast inns and **small boutique hotels** are increasingly popular in the downtown areas of otherwise rural destinations, though they require more capital investment and a fairly steady volume of visitors in order to be financially viable. These independent accommodations can have just a few rooms and, because they are so small, typically strive to make an exceptional experience for the guests. Boutique hotels are particularly compatible with historic towns, as repurposing vacant historic buildings can be an excellent approach to addressing a community need while reinvigorating historic interest through inspiring various hotel design elements.

Table 3: State-level impacts of recreation and tourism in West Virginia

Service type	What visitors want	What Grafton has	Assessment
Lodging/ accommodation	High-end campgrounds (electric, water/sewer hookups for RVs, Wi-Fi) Short-term rentals (cabins, houses, etc.)	Tygart Lake State Park offers: -Lodge (20 rooms) -Cabin (11 cabins) -Campsites (36 campsites) Family Fishing and Camping (82 RV sites, 3 cabins) Lakeside Resort Campground (52 acres)	STRENGTHS: Major lodging improvements have recently been completed at Tygart Lake State Park, which have significantly enhanced their lodging options. GAPS: Grafton has very limited lodging options, with virtually all of them on the state park grounds. OPPORTUNITIES: Low-cost housing and unique properties set a stage for popular short-term rentals.
Food/dining	Local non-chain coffee shops, cafés, food trucks, micro-breweries	Bar/restaurants/cafes (19) Coffee shops (1) Fast food/franchises (6) Groceries (3) Farmers’ markets (2)	STRENGTHS: Grafton has a number of existing restaurants and a coffee shop. GAPS: Existing restaurants’ limited operating hours, poor visibility, and offerings pose barriers to attracting a non-local audience. OPPORTUNITIES: A signature restaurant venue or brewery could give visitors from other places a reason to come to downtown Grafton.
Recreation-focused businesses and services	Outdoor gear shops, rental/guide/shuttle/repair services	Tygart Lake Cruises The Adventure Club Lakeside by Hardcore Hunters Bite Me Bait & Tackle Hardcore Hunters	STRENGTHS: The two outfitters in the Tygart Lake area are seeing growing participation rates and expanding their outdoor recreation offerings. A variety of water sport gear is available for rent. There are two local sporting goods/hunting and fishing stores.
Other aspects	Shops, arts and cultural activities, and other things to do	Arts and Treasures Bite Me Bait & Tackle Black Bear Customs LLC Gallery 62 West Gypsy Wagon Haddix’s Bargain Barn Hardcore Hunters Prim and Proper Furnishings and Crafts Roberts’ New and Used Somethin’ Country The Flower Market The Rustic Barn	GAPS: Grafton lacks a robust local retail sector. STRENGTHS: Grafton has a handful of unique and handmade crafts/furniture/gifts-oriented shops, which are popular among visitors. Gallery 62 West is a community arts organization that has a gallery, art classes, and other resources.

6.2 Dining

Grafton is home to a number of restaurants, including predominantly chain fast food restaurants and basic American pub fare. It is also home to a coffee shop, Olde Town Coffee & Donut Shop.

While some of these restaurants are popular, many locals acknowledge that dining options in Grafton are very limited in terms of both operating hours and variety. Initial review of dining venues in Grafton shows that many restaurants do not have sufficient promotion, signage, or storefront appeal, appearing to be closed to passersby. While these may not be major stumbling blocks for local residents, they present major impediments to attracting visitors from outside the community.

On the whole, outdoor recreation visitors look for unique, non-chain, and typically higher-end dining options when visiting an area. This can be a hard sell in an area like Grafton, where 23.5% of households live at or below the federal poverty guidelines. According to local feedback, many restaurant startups have found it difficult to stay in business in Grafton.

As a result, for a mid-to-higher-end restaurant to be viable in Grafton, it would have to draw in a steady clientele from outside the area while still appealing to a local audience.

For example, the Mountain State’s growing craft brewing scene has shown that people will (and do) travel to other towns to visit breweries, as well as unique venues serving craft beverages and local offerings. There are currently 28 craft breweries in West Virginia, compared to just five a decade

The Whistle Punk Grill and Taphouse opened with the hope that it would be a catalyst of revitalization for struggling Richwood, West Virginia and give non-locals a reason to come and spend time and money in the town. The restaurant pays homage to Richwood as well: It sits in a former bakery that was built in 1923 and takes its name from Richwood’s logging past.

Upon opening the Whistle Punk, the owners were told they were crazy for opening a restaurant in Richwood, West Virginia. Instead, the Whistle Punk has since transformed Richwood into a dining destination, with individuals driving from all over the state (and out of state) to try their locally sourced and inventive culinary creations. The restaurant serves an assortment of unique fare in addition to standbys such as hamburgers and salads; it also has many local craft beers and wines available.

A new business startup is never risk-free, but places like Richwood make the concept more approachable, making it possible to “afford to fail.” Richwood—much like Grafton—is in a central location to larger population centers but with none of the cost, making it more accessible for aspiring entrepreneurs to take a chance on turning the town around (Mills, 2020; Combs, 2018)



ago, and many are generating a niche tourism following to small towns across the state (Brewers Association, 2021).

Given Grafton’s and Taylor County’s access to larger urban markets in Bridgeport, Fairmont, and Morgantown as well as the high volume of state park visitors passing through the area, a mid-to-higher-end establishment with strong market appeal (such as a brewery or craft-beer-oriented restaurant) could give people reason to stop in downtown Grafton or in other Taylor County communities.

For an interested entrepreneur, a food truck on the shores of Tygart Lake could serve to draw some appeal for tourists already at the lake. Food trucks are trendy, mobile, and require less capital and commitment than starting a traditional brick-and-mortar restaurant.

6.3 Outdoor recreation

Outdoor recreation in the Grafton area is heavily dependent on Tygart Lake State Park. The lake and river have seen increasing utilization and promotion in recent years, which helps draw attention and more visitors to the area. With Valley Falls, Tygart Lake, and Tygart Valley River in their backyard, the city has great potential to capitalize on these water assets; some local organizations have already begun to coordinate aquatic outings for residents and visitors alike.



However, Tygart Lake’s water levels are highly variable, making it a somewhat unreliable venue for certain activities such as motorboating and the Adventure Park. Tygart Lake features 18 miles of trails, but they are not particularly popular among cyclists, nor do they connect to Valley Falls, Grafton, or Grafton’s downtown area, leaving hikers who might otherwise meander into town cut off from the city.

Two outfitters operate in the Grafton area: the Taylor County Adventure Club and Lakeside by Hardcore Hunters Inc.

The **Taylor County Adventure Club** began in 2016 as a way to help residents and visitors take advantage of the Tygart Lake and Tygart Valley River. The group is a collaboration between many local entities, such as All Aboard Grafton, WVU Extension Service, the City of Grafton, and others. With each year since its inception, the Adventure Club has explored new organized outdoor recreation opportunities for community members, from rafting, kayaking, and canoeing, to fishing, hunting, and biking; it also facilitated the development of ACE Tygart Lake Adventure Park. The group currently sponsors an assortment of events both on and off the water, with some of the most popular being lazy river tubing tours, triathlons, ziplining, and cycling events. The lazy river tours have especially attracted families of all ages; 200 participants tried it in the trial year, the next year saw 1,500 people, and that doubled to 3,000 in the third year. The Adventure Club currently has about 75 tubes available for the float, but kayaks

“We started the Adventure Club because no one was doing a lot to take advantage of Tygart River and the lake. There are no parks and recreation commissions in this county. We realized the area has a great opportunity for recreation tourism.”

- Bryan Smith, Taylor County Adventure Club Executive Director

and stand-up paddleboards are also available. (Clason-Wicker, 2021; Bridgeport CVB, 2021; WVU iServe, 2018)

In 2019, Hardcore Hunters, the local sporting goods shop, started offering kayak, tube, and stand-up paddleboard rents. Following this initial success, Hardcore Hunters launched **Lakeside**, its new subsidiary company, and opened another location for Lakeside right on Tygart Lake. Lakeside is a fully licensed outfitter and provides rentals in addition to lake, camping, and boating supplies, fishing equipment, and concessions. The owner's hope is for Lakeside to continue to expand and build a family-oriented resource close to the lake. (Skinner, 2021)

There are a number of things that could be done to expand outdoor recreation access and amenities in Grafton and Taylor County. They boil down to:

1. Better promoting existing attractions.
2. Expanding and enhancing local outdoor recreation offerings.

First and foremost, increased promotion can help draw more people to the events, attractions, and recreation opportunities that already exist in the area.

In 2019, Taylor County's convention and visitors bureau (CVB) merged with the Visit Mountaineer Country CVB, which now serves Monongalia, Preston, and Taylor counties. The CVB's assistance in marketing the Adventure Club lazy river float trip helped the event increase fifteenfold in size, from 200 attendees in 2016 to 3,000 attendees in 2019. Whether it's marketing through the CVB or simply an enhanced social media presence, increased visibility can help draw more people to take part in what the area has to offer, such as:

- attending the Adventure Club's events;
- Renting pull-behind inflatables, tubes, paddleboards, and kayaks from Lakeside;
- competing in a local fishing tournament;
- attending First Fridays in Grafton; and
- visiting the nearby parks.



Ultimately, however, the key to attracting more non-local visitors to the area will be to expand and diversify the area's recreation offerings in order to address the seasonality of Tygart Lake.

Tygart Lake State Park is by far the biggest driver of visitors to Taylor County, and the lake is the park's primary attraction. However, the lake's water levels fluctuate significantly due to dam releases by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which manages the dam. When the water levels drop, the lake's shoreline can recede rapidly, which can leave docks grounded and limit motorboating opportunities.

The best way to address this situation is to diversify recreation offerings in the area, so that visitors can enjoy other activities on days when the lake is too low for powerboats. This means creating additional opportunities for non-motorized activities such as kayaking, canoeing, stand-up paddleboarding, biking, hiking, and more. In particular, Grafton and Taylor County leaders should:

- **Increase river and lake access for non-motorized boats.** The river has three existing boat launch areas with more unofficial put-ins commonly used by the general public. The Department of Natural Resources is also developing a boat launch at a former Department of Health site. Once access is improved, local leaders should make maps and informational materials and potentially pursue a water trail designation to help increase river and lake use among non-local visitors.
- **Improve park walkability and parking.** Particularly in the more forested areas, Tygart Lake State Park is not easy to navigate through on foot. The roads have no walkable shoulders, leaving pedestrians contending with park traffic. Parking areas are also limited. Sufficient parking space becomes increasingly important if the park begins incorporating off-season activities such as cross country skiing.
- **Connect park trails to city park trails in downtown Grafton and trails in Valley Falls.** Many people find themselves at the lake without stepping foot in Grafton. Promoting pedestrian and bike travel between Grafton’s city park, Tygart Lake State Park, and Valley Falls State Park will promote greater visitation to all locations, particularly Grafton’s downtown businesses.
- **Expand (and promote) cycling opportunities in the area.** Given that bike races have been held in Taylor County in the past, there is opportunity to promote the area as a cycling destination among road, gravel, and mountain bikers. In particular, the new Mountaineer Trail Network Recreation Authority and VMCCVB present potential partners for promoting cycling opportunities in the area.

More unconventional outdoor entertainment options can include things like ziplining. Gliding across the sky with a zipline is a good recreational match for the expansive, scenic lake. Zipline canopy tours are increasingly popular among adventurous families. (Halsted, 2021)

6.4 Other things to do

A critical, and often overlooked, aspect of any trail town is having other things to do when visitors want down-time, or when the weather keeps them off the trails or water. In choosing a destination, most visitors look for a vibrant downtown with inviting streetscapes and safe, well-lit sidewalks connecting an assortment of restaurants, bars, shops, and other businesses.

Grafton’s cultural and heritage attractions provide a great starting point in terms of complementary activities for outdoor recreation tourists. However, Grafton’s downtown currently does not attract many of the visitors coming to the state parks located just miles away. Most travelers going to Tygart Lake State Park follow the main route, which bypasses downtown, and there is very little visible signage that lures visitors into downtown. Existing downtown parking options are poor and present special difficulty to travelers with boats, campers, or RVs in tow.

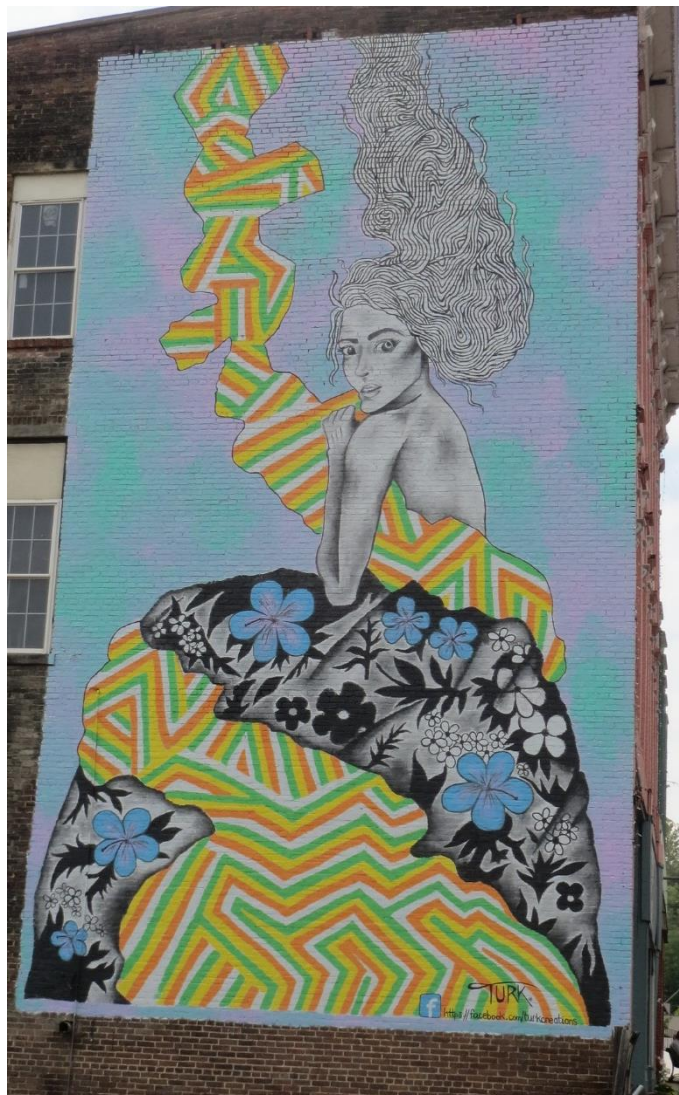
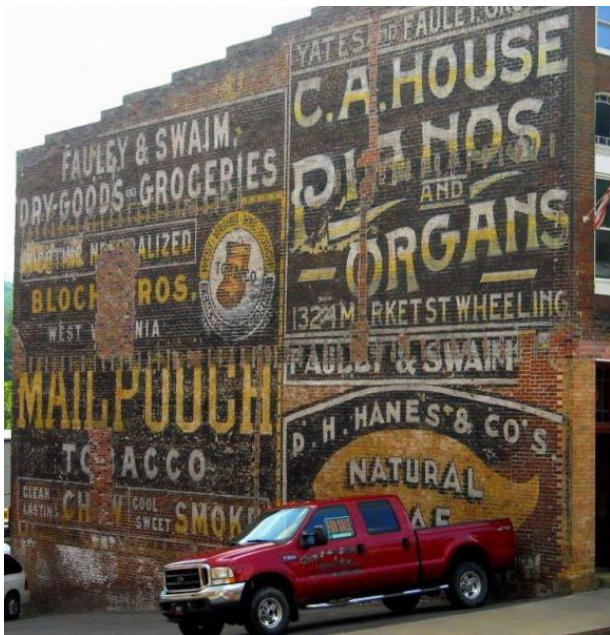
In order to attract visitors to downtown, leaders in Grafton and Taylor County should focus on making their communities attractive and accessible to visitors. A few simple improvements can help make downtowns more inviting to locals and non-local visitors alike.

- **Downtown streetscapes:** A town’s curb appeal makes a strong first impression. Addressing dilapidated buildings (see the Next Steps section for more) and improving aesthetics by

enhancing building facades, sidewalks, landscaping, public art, and streetlights can help make a city feel safe and inviting.

- **Business improvements:** Downtown businesses should strive to have inviting exteriors, clearly visible operating hours, and (for restaurants) a menu posted outside.
- **Signage and wayfinding:** While locals may know where to eat in town, visitors often need more help finding their way around a new place. Clear directional signage should point visitors towards restaurants, shopping, cultural sites, and river access points.
- **Parking:** Since non-local visitors reach Grafton by car, accessible parking is a necessary component to making downtown visitor-friendly.
- **Pedestrian and bicycle access:** Inviting and pedestrian-friendly streets have been shown to reinvigorate downtowns, increase private investment, and foster a healthy business environment. Sidewalks, bike paths, seating, street lighting, and bike parking help make streets more accessible for those on foot and on bike.

In addition to the town's unique heritage tourism assets, Grafton is home to a growing arts scene. The city features three murals and is home to the Taylor County Arts Council's Gallery 62 West, which holds art classes and events and displays art exhibits by community members. In addition, some shops offer handmade furniture, crafts, and gifts, which will appeal to non-local visitors.



First Fridays, Artstock, the Annual Chalk Walk, and other community events both attract visitors and give residents something to collaborate on and take pride in. They are an opportunity for local businesses and entrepreneurs to offer goods and services, sponsor events, and network with each other, which lead to further revitalization efforts. Expanding the city’s creative offerings and making these shops open when visitors and residents alike are likely to be in town will help develop the appeal of Grafton’s downtown businesses. Additional events like fairs and festivals, a recurring educational circuit, or other heritage-themed activities that raise awareness about Grafton’s history could provide further community building and tourism draws.

For example, Grafton’s distinction of having West Virginia’s only two national cemeteries can be popularized with events like guided walking and lantern tours through the graveyards. Cemetery or “tombstone” tourism is a growing movement among travelers, as they are significant cultural sites that hold relics of a community’s past. National cemeteries in particular carry special importance as the burial sites of American soldiers, which can engage history buffs and others interested in regional and American history.

Grafton should seek to utilize their existing historical assets by improving their condition, supplementing their advertisement, and plugging into or modeling larger initiatives in the region such as the Civil War Trail or the National Coal Heritage Area in southern West Virginia.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Grafton’s and Taylor County’s location gives it great access to large markets and population centers: Over 250,000 people live within a 45-minute drive, and 330,000+ people drove just past Grafton to Tygart Lake State Park in 2021.

Despite its proximity to these markets, Grafton is not currently attracting visitors to its main street. Downtown Grafton is only three miles from the lake, yet very few state park visitors actually go into the city.

So, what can Grafton do to attract more visitors to its downtown? What can other communities in Taylor County do to attract visitors?

1. **Give people a reason to stop.** Grafton already has close access to a larger urban population and existing pass-through traffic. This gives Grafton access to a captive market of potential visitors. The key, however, is that the town must offer a compelling reason for those travelers to stop in Grafton instead of continuing on to other towns. A simple place to start would be through downtown development. An in-demand market venue—such as a mid-to-high-end brewery and/or local restaurant—could give travelers powerful incentive to come to Grafton for a meal. For an interested entrepreneur, the affordability and availability of real estate in Grafton would help the financial viability of such a startup.
2. **Clean up downtown buildings and streetscapes.** Addressing blight and dilapidated buildings will be a critical part of Grafton’s downtown revitalization. Through the City’s partnership with the Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center (NBAC) and its EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant, Taylor County has a unique opportunity to begin addressing this key issue. The brownfields program opens up possibilities such as redeveloping blighted and brownfield properties to create additional space for community needs (such as parking) or engaging property owners to activate idle properties to pair with economic opportunities, as described in this report. Local leaders should prioritize efforts to improve streetscapes and overall downtown aesthetics. This should include helping existing property owners and businesses like restaurants improve their curb appeal to increase their appeal to a non-local audience.

3. **Expand and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities.** Tygart Lake State Park is by far the strongest tourism attraction in Taylor County. Local leaders can help leverage and strengthen this great asset by expanding recreation opportunities—particularly to offset the seasonality of the lake. Investing in additional infrastructure for kayaking, cycling, and hiking will provide additional activities for visitors when the lake is too low for powerboats and will help attract even more visitors to the area.
4. **Increase connectivity** within Grafton and to other communities and recreation opportunities in Taylor County. For example, downtown Grafton is less than three miles from Tygart River Dam and Grafton City Park, which is located at the base of the dam, but the only safe way to travel between the two is by car. Providing a dedicated trail or marked routes along the road can increase traffic downtown, provide another recreational opportunity to visitors, and enhance the livability of Grafton. This could also include providing linkages via the river by improving and increasing access and boat launches.
5. **Build capacity and collaboration.** The recommendations and opportunities outlined in this report all require basic community capacity to implement. All Aboard Grafton, Grafton’s signature community development initiative, has made tremendous strides, yet many local officials attest that overall community engagement is low in Grafton, and the City faces very real capacity and resource limitations. While there is no easy fix, other rural communities have found that collaboration and partnership with other county and regional entities can provide an important starting place.

8. BROWNFIELD PRIORITIES

As part of the All Aboard Brownfields Redevelopment Initiative, Downstream Strategies and NBAC have held numerous stakeholder meetings, conducted interviews with individuals and groups, and hosted a community-wide public meeting. From these meetings and interviews, several common themes emerged, which were the framework for developing this report. These included:

- development and support of recreation and tourism-related businesses and services, including supportive infrastructure (trails, water access);
- promotion of historical resources;
- development of overnight accommodations; and
- reuse and restoration of high priority properties.

These meetings have also highlighted specific priorities for the Brownfield program in Grafton and Taylor County.

8.1 Downtown redevelopment

Downtown contains the iconic B&O Passenger Station and the Willard Hotel. Virtually everyone who has participated in the brownfields outreach process believes that reuse of these buildings is a key component to thriving downtown Grafton. Given the size and current condition, finding someone to take on redevelopment of these structures remains difficult.

The intensive extraction and transportation of regional resources that once supported construction of these grand buildings is no longer. Nonetheless, the Willard Hotel and B&O Passenger Station are icons of Grafton’s identity and magnificent historical and infrastructure resources in themselves. Given their stature, scale, and restoration needs, redevelopment will require both significant investment as well as a vibrant economy to support their on-going operation.

In Grafton, there are a number of other properties that would be suited for reuse as restaurants, small-scale lodging, events space, or other retail business. By developing other properties and increasing the overall vitality of downtown, these large historic structures become more attractive for redevelopment.

An “anchor” business can bolster the existing tourist economy and natural assets in Grafton and Taylor County. For example, visitors are keen on seeking out non-chain dining options with local atmosphere. Local breweries have popped up in many smaller towns and have become a destination themselves that have supported additional growth in the surrounding community.

Through the Brownfield program, site feasibility studies could be performed to determine whether a specific building could be redeveloped as a specific business. This can include a site-specific market analysis and a business proforma to describe the anticipated costs and potential revenue for a business, such as a restaurant.

Another problem noted by participants during meetings is that it can be difficult to navigate and park in downtown Grafton while towing a boat or driving in an RV. A parking study could provide potential options for parking to accommodate larger vehicles and provide to traffic pattern for ingress and egress.

8.2 Redevelopment of the Fetterman area

The Fetterman area is also ripe for redevelopment and has been identified as a key area by the community, including the volunteer group All Aboard Grafton. The area being referred to includes the former Packaging Corporation of America and Hazel Atlas Glass Factory located on the Tygart Valley River on the west side of Grafton, near the Castle Creek Playground and park, and adjacent to a planned West Virginia Division of Natural Resources boat launch. These sites are large, mostly flat parcels, which provides space for development. Ideas for reuse of the property by community members include event space, a sports complex or recreational center, or a brewery. A general site plan has even been created for reuse as a recreation area and boat launch.

Additional planning reports could include a feasibility study on any (or multiple) proposed reuse options for these properties. A report outlining the economic potential of this area could be used as a tool to propose to investors or provide a resource to apply for funding to obtain and redevelop this area.

8.3 Developing Connections

Finally, feasibility analysis can also explore issues like trail connectivity, such as the potential to connect the Lake, downtown, and Fetterman by trail. Connecting the dam to recreational opportunities within Grafton, such as the Fetterman area park, not only increase livability but provide another recreational opportunity for visitors to experience Grafton.

If connective multi-use paths or water trails are developed, the need arises for supporting businesses that provide rentals (i.e., bikes or watercraft) and retail sales (dining, shopping, angler shops).

Given the private ownership along the river from downtown to Grafton City Park, development of a dedicated trail may be challenging. However, a thorough review of surrounding properties may identify potential trail options. Identifying and highlighting a route along roads, at least for bicycles, is one option that could be implemented almost immediately. A road cycling route connecting Tygart Lake State Park, through downtown, and to Valley Falls State Park, could be developed and made available via online mapping programs. Cycling routes all over Taylor County could be highlighted and shared as well, to encourage cycling visitors.

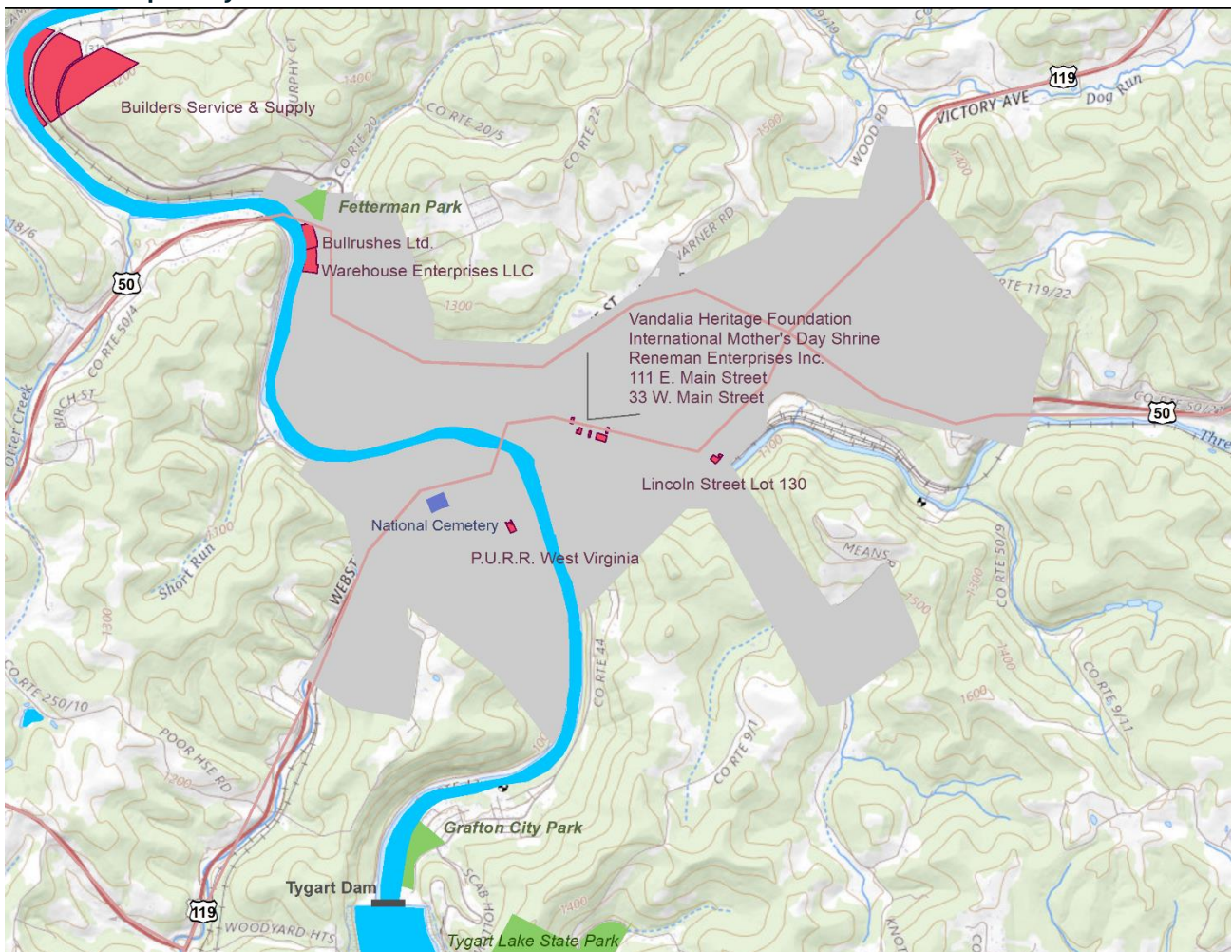
8.4 Marketing

As has been highlighted many times in this report, Taylor County has many desirable recreational opportunities. This is a draw for not only tourists but makes Taylor County and Grafton a more desirable place to live.

A professional marketing campaign can be expensive, but the county and the city should take every available opportunity to highlight all the attributes of the County and City. While state parks such as Tygart Lake and Valley Falls may be easy to research online, the County and City can highlight the lesser-known activities, such as gravel bike riding, but hosting information about routes and events on city and county websites.

The County and City could even host information on economic development opportunities, such as listing properties and including proformas or feasibility studies developed as part of this grant.

Brownfield priority sites in Grafton



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