



Extension



# Connecting Downtowns and Trails

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# Introduction

New England's natural resources are some of the states' greatest assets. Our local economies grow when our forests, trails, waters, are well taken care of, used by residents and visitors, and linked to our downtowns. Insights learned from over 80 community-visioning processes – conducted by UNH Cooperative Extension in New Hampshire over the past 20 years – suggest that over half of all towns believe they are not leveraging their trails and natural amenities to foster vibrant communities. In response, many communities have formed volunteer trail committees, and are making efforts to map and publicize their trails. Similar themes and patterns have been noted in other New England states and across the entire country. While specific recommendations vary from town to town, the following lessons may be applicable to economies aiming for creating economic vibrancy via natural assets.

With support from a Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (NERCRD) grant, we formed a multistate, collaborative knowledge sharing network to explore the connections between downtowns and trails. Over the course of a year, Extension colleagues from across the country met and shared ongoing work on economic development approaches in downtowns and with a connection to natural assets. In May 2018, the team traveled on a train-the-trainer trip to assess Kentucky's Trail Town program. During the trip, the group visited and assessed four different Trail Towns. Through our meetings with community leaders, volunteers, tourism professionals and other Extension staff, we learned about the social, natural, leadership, and built conditions that were required for a trail town to be established. This information brief, aimed at community and economic development professionals, shares some of our findings.



## Key Findings

**Understanding trail users and customers.** At community and business levels, knowing the target market is key. Communities and businesses can research and work to accommodate the needs of their trail users.

**Collaborations and partnerships.** Collaborations are important, including support from local leaders, volunteers and businesses combined with investment from external partners.

**Connecting trails and downtowns.** The connection between the downtown and a trail does not need to be walkable, it just needs to be clear and marked. Trail users may drive or bike a distance to the town.

**Understanding economic impacts.** There is opportunity to study the economic impact of Trail Towns and better understanding economic impacts can help with decision making and management.

# Background

This information brief will provide insights from our collaborative knowledge, research and experience in programming that attempts to connect downtowns with trails and natural spaces for economic vibrancy.

The team's ultimate goal was to identify programs and resources that can help New England communities better connect their downtowns with surrounding trails and natural amenities. Although there does not appear to be a single program in the region designed explicitly for this, there are likely aspects of multiple programs from New Hampshire, Connecticut and Vermont and other regions that could help communities capitalize on fostering vibrant downtowns through trails.

## Downtown Redevelopment

Cities and towns in New England often have a similar development pattern including a town center that was the historic area of commerce for the community. This may be a town square, village center, downtown or main street. These are areas of commerce that may include local businesses, government buildings, churches, libraries, housing and outdoor areas for people to gather. Downtowns are valued for being the historic center of commerce and a symbol of the community's vitality.

Some downtown areas have seen a loss of commerce and disinvestment due to development moving out beyond the historic commercial base. There may be empty storefronts, lack of facade and building maintenance and lack of community activities. Communities see the downtown as an economic center and the heart of the community so there is often work to be done to maintain, enhance and revitalize the center. These efforts may include improving the physical characteristics through renovation and streetscape improvements, retaining and recruiting businesses and creating vibrancy through community events to attract residents and visitors.

In addition to valuing their historic town center, communities in New England value their natural features. This has led to preservation and use of beautiful lands and waterways. Communities often develop trails in these areas to give residents and visitors an opportunity to enjoy the natural beauty. In recent years, community leaders who are focused on enhancing their downtowns have noted that the trails and natural areas are used by residents and visitors. They see the potential links between the trails and the downtowns. Leaders are looking to capture trail users as a new market for their downtown as part of their revitalization efforts.





## The Economic Benefits of Trails

Trails and natural spaces provide us with many benefits and services. Some of which are quantifiable (such as spending on recreation) and others, such as water purification and flood control as well as cultural and spiritual benefits, as less easily quantified but nonetheless important. These “ecosystem services” which are essentially benefits humans receive from nature, all contribute to community well being and quality of life. The Outdoor Industry Association (2017) reports the following economic impact of the outdoor recreation economy in the US:

- Accounts for \$887 billion in annual U.S. consumer spending
- Supports nearly 7.6 million jobs across the U.S.
- Generates \$124.5 billion in annual federal, state and local tax revenue
- Adds \$524.8 billion in active outdoor recreation trip and travel expenditures
- According to U.S. Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the outdoor recreation economy grew 3.8 percent in 2016 in comparison to the overall U.S. economy’s 2.8 percent growth. BEA estimates that outdoor recreation accounted for 2 percent of the overall U.S. Gross Domestic Product in 2016, contributing \$373.7 billion to the economy (BEA, 2018).



Regionally, in the state of Vermont, a recent study of Mad River Valley emphasized the importance of trail tourism, specifically in terms of mountain biking (SE Group, 2014). Further, the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council (2016) examined four trail network in the state, estimating that these networks alone generated nearly \$30 million in economic impact from out-of-state visitors. Trail tourism is particularly beneficial for economic impact when it attracts non-local visitors. Kingdom Trails, one of the four trail networks examined in the Vermont Trails and Greenways study, is a prime example of destination trail



tourism. Local trail users and non-local visitors alike visit businesses including restaurants, breweries, coffee shops, and ice cream shops. Non-local visitors further support the economy through use of overnight accommodation. Beyond recreation, research has shown that homes near trails also command higher property values, the presence of trails can entice new residents to move to or stay in a location, and trails also encourage physical fitness.


















## Assessing Downtowns and Trails

The purpose of the downtowns and trails characteristics are to assess the connectivity between a downtown and nearby trails and assess amenities in the downtown that are useful to trail users. The characteristics used to conduct the downtowns and trails community assessments are research-based and are adapted from multiple sources. The downtowns and trails characteristics are adapted from a list of characteristics used to conduct a general downtown assessment through the First Impressions program. The downtown characteristics have been adapted from multiple states' First Impressions programs and the National Civic League's Civic index and are based on what makes a downtown vibrant for a resident, visitor, or business owner, and are based on the built environment.



Building on the downtown characteristics, the downtowns and trails characteristics (shown below) were adapted from multiple trail town guides, including the Trail Town Program in Pennsylvania and Michigan's Trail Town Program. Because there are a number of characteristics, for our community assessments we focused on six characteristics that were critical to assess.

## Downtowns and Trails Characteristics

Critical to Assess:		Additional Important Assets:	
	Trailhead		Community Art
	Pathway		Displays & Signage
	Downtown Entrance		Landscaping
	Overnight Accommodations		Lighting
	Water Fountains & Restrooms		Natural Feature
	Business		Park
			Point of Interest
			Public Facility
			Seating
			Sidewalks & Crosswalks
			Streets & Transportation
			Waste & Recycling
			Other



# Assessing the Kentucky Trail Town Program

## Method

In May 2018, the research team traveled to Kentucky through a Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development grant. The purpose of the visit to Kentucky was to assess the Kentucky Trail Town Program with the overarching goal of identifying the conditions necessary to connect trails with downtowns for economic development, including natural, built, economic and social/leadership.

After several months of research and regional team meetings, Dr. Jayoung Koo of University of Kentucky Extension arranged for the research team to meet with community volunteers and leaders in each of the four communities visited: Berea, Livingston, Morehead, and Olive Hill.

The communities were selected from the list of designated Trail Towns in Kentucky for their unique characteristics related to types of trails they featured (i.e. water vs. horse vs. bike vs. walking) and for their varying demographics and leadership structures.

The assessment entailed visiting each community for half a day or a full day. The team assessed the downtown for trail user amenities, the connection between the downtown and the trail, and the trailhead. Team members met with community volunteers and leaders from each community to learn more about the Kentucky Trail Town program, including how it started in each community, challenges and successes, and how the program has impacted the community.



## Case Studies

- Berea
- Livingston
- Morehead
- Olive Hill



## Overview of the Kentucky Trail Town Program

The Kentucky Department of Travel, Office of Adventure Tourism initiated the Kentucky Trail Town program at the state level in 2012. As of 2017, 17 out of approximately 30 community applications have been certified as Kentucky Trail Towns and are being promoted through the state's web-site (see <https://www.kentuckytourism.com/outdoors/trail-towns/>).

The Kentucky Trail Town program certification process emphasizes host communities that support the trail user experience through visible and appropriate resources, services, and amenities. Most certified Kentucky Trail Towns are established near renowned national or state level recreational trails, along rivers or major bicycling routes. Sixteen out of the 17 Kentucky Trail Towns are located in the Appalachian region of Kentucky, including in and around the Daniel Boone National Forest which includes the Sheltowee Trace National Recreation Trail.

## Strengths

Kentucky Trail Towns vary in geographical location, size, demographics, and the types and numbers of trails they are promoting to adventure tourists. Kentucky Trail Town communities have voluntarily dedicated considerable effort toward achieving their certifications. Some have embraced the initiative and continue to improve the user environment with trailhead development, connector trails to the established trail(s), wayfinding systems, increased available services or amenities, and others. A handful of Kentucky Trail Towns identified and established their own network of local to regional trail systems, which include on and off-road cycling routes, equestrian routes, water trails or also multi-use trails.

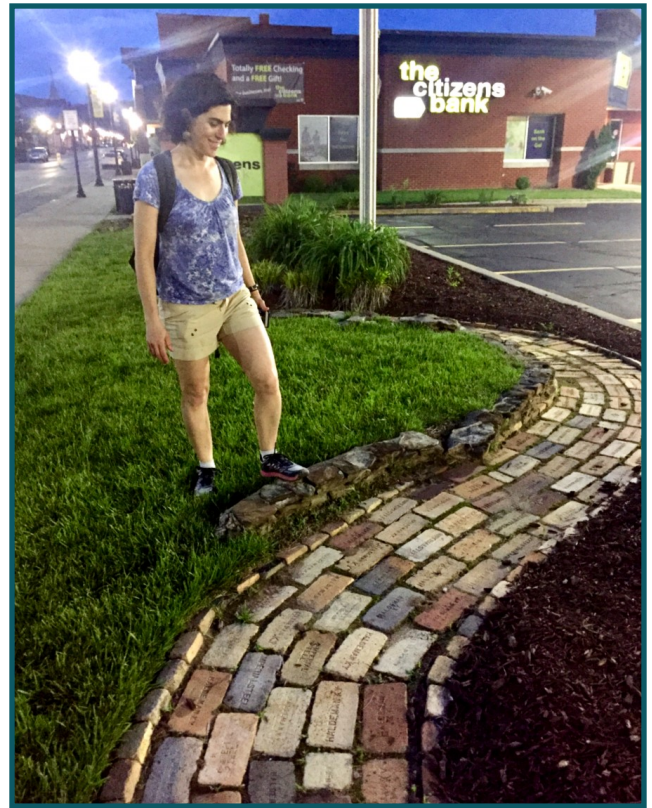
## Challenges

The state program is operated with limited staff and funds. The Trail Town initiative could be financially constraining on communities, especially smaller ones, to provide amenities and services near their major trailheads, core areas of town or near the entrances of trails. Partnership with the private sector (businesses) is essential and crucial for longer-term economic vibrancy. Business operations need to align with trail-user needs, particularly during peak and off-season periods.

Kentucky Trail Towns should continue to address user-friendliness efforts to support stronger centers of economic, cultural and recreational activities near trailheads in downtown, the core areas of town or near the entrances of trails. Narrowing the physical or psychological gaps between the trail and the core areas of town is important to enhance strong gateway experiences.

## Implications

As a community-based practice, Kentucky Trail Town host communities have closely addressed and implemented recommended features such as visible trail amenities, features, and services in their towns to provide explicit environmental cues of hospitality for trail users. For long-term success, the host communities need to plan holistically in advance yet develop projects into short-term and long-term practices and implementation phases which can be more easily achieved. This is in order to sustain a continuous relationship between all participating parties and facilitate buy-in by the communities' residents.





## Kentucky Trail Town Case Studies

### Berea

About 45 minutes south of Lexington off of I-75, Berea has a population of 13,561. Berea was designated as a Trail Town in 2015. Berea's downtown is vibrant – there are shops, attractive landscaping and buildings and people are enjoying these amenities. Berea is separated into three distinct areas: an area where you enter Berea with a few shops and restaurants with some vacant buildings; the artisan village, with many art galleries, outdoor art, and shops; and downtown Berea that has several shops, restaurants, and the historic Boone Tavern Hotel. The three areas are



separate from each other and not easily walkable. There is a focus on tourism through arts and culture. There are many trail-related signs around the downtown area and the artisan village, and there are trailheads outside of the downtown areas that are accessible by car or bike. Also located in Berea is Berea College, and the Trail Town efforts are largely led by faculty members at Berea College, along with some community members. There is also a partnership with municipal government. Student volunteers also play a large role with the Trail Town efforts through implementing festivals and were also key to conducting the necessary assessments to obtain the Trail Town certification. The Trail Town is catered to bicyclists, as Berea is located on a number of bike routes, such as the TransAmerica bicycle trail. The Trail Town program also has a focus on health and helping residents get more active by visiting the trails.

### Livingston

About an hour south of Lexington off of I-75, Livingston has a population of 226. Livingston is the first eastern Kentucky Trail Town designated in 2013. The town is economically distressed due to decline in population largely because of the loss of the railroad. Some buildings are in need of facade improvements and there are vacancies. Livingston's Main Street is modest, with some amenities for trail users like a diner, ice cream shop,



visitor center, and canoe/kayak rentals by the Rockcastle River. The downtown is largely walkable. An old school on Main Street was revitalized as a visitor center by community volunteers. There are campgrounds that provide overnight accommodations and in the future, a desire to add overnight accommodations to the visitor center downtown. There are several Trail Town signs in the downtown area, as well as a trailhead on Main Street but the trail begins a bit further down the road. A Kentucky Trail Town sign that diverts visitors from the highway to downtown Livingston. According to the Livingston mayor, traffic counts have increased since the highway sign was put up. Livingston considers the Trail Town program to be a catalyst to revitalize their downtown. Largely, the Trail Town efforts are led by the mayor with support from community volunteers. The Trail Town program in Livingston focuses on river users as the downtown is located beside the Rockcastle River, where visitors can canoe, kayak and tube. There is also a focus on bike users, as the Redbud Ride begins in London, Kentucky, travels through nearby areas, including Livingston.



## Morehead

Home to Morehead State University and many outdoor recreation attractions, Morehead, Kentucky (pop. 6,845) features the Shelton Trace National Recreation Trail that was re-routed through the downtown. Morehead is located approximately one hour east of Lexington and easily accessible from Interstate 64. Designated as the third Trail Town in 2014, Morehead's model of management combines tourism professionals from Morehead Tourism with active volunteers and collaborators from across the community in an active and engaged task force. Of particular interest is the fact that the local hospital is represented on the task force, highlighting the emphasis on trails and health. Morehead Tourism staffs a welcome center in the middle of the downtown that offers information, souvenirs and restrooms for visitors.

Morehead State University also plays a central role in the Trail Town's activity. While not as strongly connected to the Task Force as Berea College is to the Berea Trail Town Task Force, the campus of Morehead State is intertwined with the trails and features an equipment rental center where visitors can check out gear for their next adventure. Cave Run Lake, a US Army Corps run dam and reservoir is also a local attraction several miles out of town that features trails, swimming, and boating. Downtown Morehead features a mix of businesses that can accommodate trail users such as a bike shop, café/bookstore, and several restaurants. Some of the businesses had limited hours, though, and there were not any traditional overnight accommodations in the downtown core.



## Olive Hill

Drive further east along I-64 and one will encounter another trail town, Olive Hill, KY. With a population of just over 1,000, Olive Hill is a smaller and more rural trail town that features horse and water trails. Olive Hill is also on the way to popular tourist destination - Carter Caves.



Olive Hill's Trail Town Task Force is completely volunteer run and the Trail Town designation process was largely spearheaded by a passionate community volunteer. Because of the town's niche as a horse trail town, the downtown features some horse friendly infrastructure such as hitching posts, a show ring, camping area and watering areas. The community was recently able to build a public restroom near the horse infrastructure. Tygart's Creek flows through the downtown and provides opportunities for kayakers and canoeists to easily launch their boats.

Olive Hill's proximity to a waterway is an opportunity and a challenge as rather frequent flooding has impacted the community and made it challenging to keep businesses in the downtown core. The downtown did feature a couple of restaurants, however few other trail related businesses were present during our visit.



# Findings

## Lessons Learned

### 1. Each Kentucky Trail Town is different.

Each town varies in size, history, physical characteristics, and level of vibrancy. Some have more commercial enterprises and others have a modest downtown with a town hall, library, and post office. Some towns are focused on arts and culture, while others are a strong recreation community. Some Trail Towns are located in a college town or old railroad community. The town may be nestled in the hills or flanked by a river. This makes each experience unique and interesting.



Trails and trail users are also different in each town. Trails may be for walkers, hikers, riders, kayakers or multiple users. This adds to the interest of the Trail Towns. The program is not designed to link one long trail from town to town. Some trail towns are simple: a town and its own trail system. Trail Towns can benefit from being along the route of existing regional trails such as the Trans-America Trail for biking or Sheltowee Trace for hiking.

### 2. The connection between the downtown and trail does not need to be walkable.

In Kentucky, there are successful examples of trail users driving or biking short distances to town to purchase goods and services, where there is clear signage.

### 3. Visitors are important to communities.

While the Kentucky Trail Town program is focused on trail users, the visitor does not actually need to use the trail to have an economic benefit. People are exploring Trail Towns without even using the trails. The designation indicates Trail Towns are communities worth exploring. Visitors may explore the downtown or make purchases at shops or restaurants contributing to vibrancy and the economy.

**4. The Trail Town needs to understand trail users and customers.** Restaurants and shops will need to understand and cater to trail users' needs and interests. Deliberate efforts need to be made to understand and provide for the visitor market. Data can be collected through interviews and surveys done by professionals and/or volunteers.

### 5. Passionate, committed leaders and volunteers play a significant role.

As with other community change, developing future leaders and succession planning are important to maintaining the momentum of a program and the long-term sustainability, and this was demonstrated in the Kentucky Trail Towns visited.

Broad community support and volunteers are necessary to initiate and sustain the Kentucky Trail Town program. Volunteers can work on trail improvements, promotion, signage, and host events.

## 6. Collaboration and partnerships are essential.

Local, regional, state and federal government are key partners. These partnerships may bring funding, connections, technical assistance and credibility to the effort. The government role should be defined and it may be different for each level of government and in each community. Local government will likely have a regulatory role. Linking with the local and/or state tourism office can be beneficial to receive wide promotion of the program. Elected officials may assist with project support.



Colleges and universities in a Trail Town offer a variety of support. There may be opportunities to connect with academics for research related to the downtown and trails. Students may be engaged in the program through internships and capstone projects. The downtown may also enjoy a level of stability due to the college and the trail town designation may add to the vibrancy of the town.

## 7. The network of Kentucky Trail Towns is valuable.

The Kentucky program brings the trail communities together where they can share experiences and best practices. This collaboration works to strengthen the program for individual communities.

## Opportunities for Future Study

The following have been identified as areas where informational gaps exist and further research would be useful:

- There is opportunity to study the economic impacts of Trail Towns and better understanding economic impacts can help with decision making and management.
- Signage is important so visitors can find towns and trails. The Kentucky Trail Town signage along the highway may have an added benefit of signifying that a town is worth a visit as traffic has increased in some towns. The use and impacts of signage should be studied further.
- Towns in Kentucky receive certification from the state to participate in the Trail Town program. The impact of certification on the program and individual communities is unclear. Further study is required for another state to consider this program component.
- More study is needed to understand whether there is a greater impact to be a trail town along a regional, state or national trail network versus a town that is connected to just its own trails.
- A study on the needs of different trails users would be informative. Restrooms, Wi-Fi, ATMs and showers are cited as important features but it is not clear how this differs by type of trail and type of trail user. Further information is needed on the need, use of, and location of lodging to accommodate visitors.





# Connecting Downtowns and Trails in New England

The following section details the work that New England states (New Hampshire, Connecticut, Vermont) are implementing to connect downtowns and trails. Recently, New Hampshire has piloted a Downtowns and Trails program that links trails with main street to strengthen the local economy. The program utilizes downtown assessments, interviews with stakeholders, and intercept surveys with trail users to determine priorities and take action. In Connecticut, there is the Connecticut Trail Census, a volunteer-based data collection and education program that encourages data informed trail building and maintenance, the Connecticut Greenways Council which coordinates stakeholders in implementing greenways, and the Connecticut Greenways Trail Symposium which provides education about trails and community connections. In Vermont, research has been conducted on the economic impacts of trail systems in Vermont, such as the Kingdom Trails, finding that these trails have resulted in direct expenditures positively impacting downtown East Burke and neighboring towns.

## New Hampshire

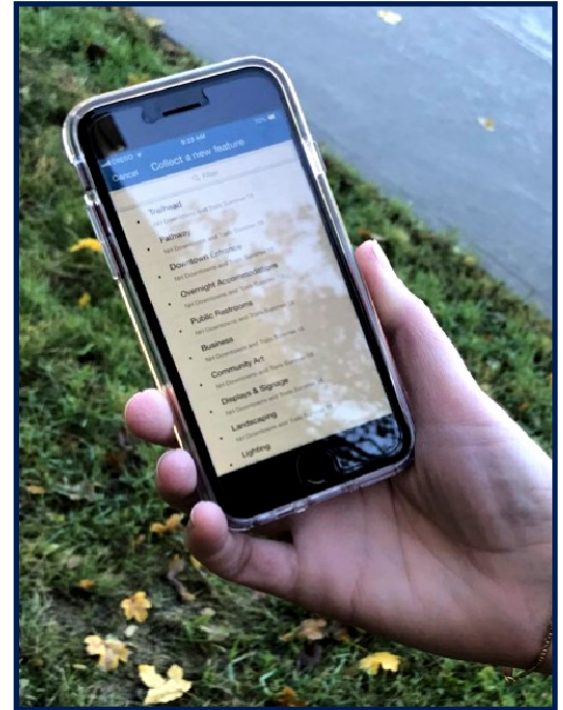
New Hampshire's foray into Downtowns and Trails began with spatial analysis that was inspired by the First Impressions program. Using the downtowns and trails characteristics, students and Extension Educators have assessed nearly 20 towns using the Collector for ArcGIS mobile data collection application. The assessment has focused on levels of readiness when it comes to the natural and built conditions of downtowns and trails.

## Downtowns and Trails Pilot Program in Bristol NH

During the summer of 2018, New Hampshire launched an official pilot program Downtowns and Trails in Bristol, NH. The following are components of the Downtowns and Trails pilot program.

1. Reviewing the importance of, and opportunities for, linking downtowns and trails with community task force.
2. Assessing the downtown area, linkage area and appropriate trails using Collector of ArcGIS.
3. Developing and training volunteers to complete interviews with businesses, residents, and community leaders on their interest in this initiative.
4. Developing and training volunteers to administer an intercept survey for those using the trails to determine their interest and use of downtown.
5. Engaging the larger community to gather information and learn about the results of the assessment. This will help determine community support and interest going forward. This engagement may take the form of a community forum and/or discussions, posters, social media etc. to gather information from different groups in town.

In addition to implementing the program and providing important data for the community, which culminated with a community forum and action group formation in February 2019, we are also critically assessing the program. We have been analyzing steps, data, and outcomes and have received feedback from the Bristol community along the way to better deliver the programming. The full Downtowns & Trails Program will launch in summer 2019.



## Connecticut

Connecticut has a wide variety of non-motorized blue blazed hiking trails, greenways, and multi-use paths that accommodate bicycles, pedestrians, and equestrian use. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) estimates that there are over 2,000 miles of multi-use trails within Connecticut State Parks and Forests alone (and likely over 3,000 miles including those not in the park system). Connecticut is the only state in the nation with an entirely state funded recreational trails building program. This program is overseen by the Connecticut Greenways Council. A “greenway” is defined by state statute as a corridor of open space that may protect natural resources, preserve scenic landscapes and historical resources or offer opportunities for recreation or non-motorized transportation, may connect existing protected areas and provide access to the outdoors, may be located along a defining natural feature, such as a waterway, along a man-made corridor, including an unused right-of-way, traditional trail routes or historic barge canals or may be a greenspace along a highway or around a village. (Connecticut General Statutes section 23-100)



## Programs

- **Connecticut Trail Census (CTTC)** is an innovative, statewide volunteer-based data collection and education program implemented as a pilot from 2016-2018 on 16 multi-use (bicycle, pedestrian, equestrian) trail sites across the state. The program was developed as a partnership program between the University of Connecticut, the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments, the Connecticut Greenways Council, and local trail advocacy organizations. The CTTC promotes active citizen participation in monitoring and advocacy of trails and encourages data informed trail building and maintenance programs by identifying patterns and trends in user data. The Trail Census includes trail use counts recorded by infrared pedestrian counters, trail user intercept surveys administered by trained volunteers, and public education programs. The data collected includes user demographic information, purpose and type of use, spending, and user amenity preferences. The project is statewide and serves community leaders and decision makers including local elected officials, planners, economic development professionals, trail advocates, trail maintenance professionals, environmental, health and outdoor activity advocates, as well as the general public. Visit <https://cttrailcensus.uconn.edu/>
- **Connecticut Greenways Council** - Members of the Connecticut Greenways Council are appointed by the Governor and the General Assembly to advise and assist in coordinating state agencies, municipalities, regional planning organizations and private citizens in voluntarily planning and implementing a system of greenways; providing assistance in the technical aspects of planning, designing and implementing greenways, including advice on securing grants; and establishing criteria for designation of greenways. There are currently 86 designated greenways in Connecticut.
- **Connecticut Trail Symposium** The Connecticut Greenways Council, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the University of Connecticut Extension also support an annual trail symposium that provides workshops and presentations for community leaders, trail advocates, planners, economic development staff, and the general public to learn about trail and community connections. This year's theme for the trail symposium was equity and inclusion.



## Vermont

Rural communities that are dependent on manufacturing, mining, energy, and timber are witnessing population declines while amenity-rich communities are growing, particularly those with a desirable physical environment and a positive small town atmosphere. This trend is apparent in communities in Vermont with access to high quality outdoor recreation. Rural communities that have successfully branded themselves as hubs for nature-based tourism have much to share with less prosperous communities seeking to develop their economies around outdoor recreation.

### The Northeast Kingdom

The northeastern corner of Vermont, known as the Northeast Kingdom, is the most rural part of the state, with much of the land owned by timber and paper companies. During the past few decades, declines in the regional forestry and paper industries have resulted in the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the state. However, the natural environment provides opportunities to capitalize on outdoor recreation for community and economic development.

In the early 1990's, the Northeast Kingdom town of East Burke, was suffering economically. Burke Mountain, a ski area, brought in tourists during the winter, but the community needed additional income during the other seasons. The community decided to try a novel approach to tourism development at that time:

mountain biking. Kingdom Trail Association (KTA), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, was established in 1994 by a group of visionary residents and business leaders in the area. Their goal was "to encourage recreational use of the Northeast Kingdom that is ecologically sensitive and promotes the natural beauty of the region." Working with private landowners, KTA developed a trail system connecting private lands with year-round recreational opportunities, which has grown to include mountain biking, fat biking, hiking, running, Nordic skiing, and snowshoeing.



### Lessons Learned

Community members recount that in the first few years after the establishment of KTA, many of the visitors stayed overnight at inexpensive campgrounds and did not spend much money at restaurants and other establishments in East Burke. However, over time, the number of visitors grew and accommodations, restaurants, and other tourism amenities also evolved, bringing in mountain bikers of all ages and income levels.

In 2016, the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council commissioned an economic and fiscal impact assessment of four trail systems in Vermont, including KTA. The report estimated a total of nearly \$8 million in direct expenditures annually as a result of KTA visits, including lodging, food and drink, gifts/souvenirs, transportation, admission fees, and equipment. These expenditures are centered on East Burke's downtown area, but the impacts are distributed throughout the region and have had positive benefits in nearby towns. Kingdom Trail Association demonstrates that outdoor recreation opportunities have the potential to transform a downtown, an economy, and a community. This experience can serve as a case study with important implications for communities interested in developing recreation economies.

## Parting Thoughts and Next Steps

While this information brief shared insights from our collaborative research, there are many avenues for future inquiry and further learning. We shared our findings from Kentucky and then shared examples of programming and research efforts that connect the economy and trails in New England. We hope these insights and findings will be useful to other community and economic development professionals. As our new program and other efforts continue, we hope to learn more about the costs and benefits of this approach to nature based economic development as well as continue to critically analyze the opportunities and challenges of connecting downtowns & trails. We look forward to hearing from others across the region, nation and globe who are working to create economic vibrancy through nature. Please be in touch!

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## Photo Credits

All of the photos in this brief were taken by Extension Staff with the exception of the one on page 15, which is courtesy of Kingdom Trails Association.

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