

**2021 ARC POWER Grant Award- ORCA**  
(Continuation of 2019 ARC POWER Award - Rural Action)

# EXPANSION OF ASSET-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN 7 SOUTHEAST OHIO COUNTIES



**Applicant: Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA)**

**Partners:** Wayne National Forest, Buckeye Trail Association, Hocking Athens Perry Community Action, Rural Action, ACEnet, Ohio's Winding Road, Athens County Economic Development Council, Athens County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Athens Bicycle Club

## 2019 ARC POWER Project Highlights

In 2019, a collaborative core group of regional stakeholders, with lead applicant Rural Action, developed the ARC POWER Trails, Towns, and Tourism project to bolster an emerging tourism sector that celebrates our area's natural, cultural, and entrepreneurial assets. The project began its focus on developing natural assets to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities in a 5-county region, while building local wealth and leveraging regional investment. This pilot project utilized the Baileys Trail System--a planned 88-mile (31 miles complete, summer 2021) mountain bike optimized trail system and connected public infrastructure, which between 2017-2020 secured investments that total nearly \$6 million. The Buckeye Trail also leveraged significant investment to the Village of Shawnee, which confirmed the replicable nature of sustainable outdoor recreation development as a successful rural economic development strategy.

While the 2019 POWER grant concludes this year, the collaborative group of proactive leaders submitted a new 2021 ARC POWER project application to deepen and expand this critical work. The Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA), a council of governments created to sustainably develop outdoor recreation opportunities across jurisdictional boundaries in a way



Lillian Cahill, Appalachian Conservation Corps crew member, constructing the Baileys Trail System, November 2020.

that creates sustainable and equitable economic opportunities, serves as lead applicant for the 2021 ARC POWER proposal. The project, Gateway Communities and Sustainable Recreation: An Asset-based Approach to Building Resilient Communities and Transitioning Appalachian Economies, utilizes outdoor recreation tourism to diversify the region's coal-based economy. Outdoor recreation accounts for 2.1% (\$459.8 billion) of 2019 G.D.P.

54.25 FTE jobs created & 25 new business starts (as of 2/22)

31 miles of Baileys Trail System constructed by Summer 2021

Two Baileys trailheads, directly connecting 3 rural communities

Buckeye Trail connector to the Village of Shawnee

34 high school internships

21 Appalachian Conservation Corps placements of local young adults (2019 - 2020)

Entrepreneurial support: website development, branding, & loan assistance 185 Businesses & 95 Participants

Professional tourism commercial by ACCVB, to be released in markets statewide

Ohio Hill Country partnership with Tourism Ohio for statewide marketing campaign of region

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## 2021 ARC POWER Project Scope

### **Gateway Communities and Sustainable Recreation:** An asset-based approach to building resilient communities and transitioning Appalachian economies

The Gateway Communities and Sustainable Recreation project will build on the work of the 2019 POWER grant by expanding to include 7 counties across Southeast Ohio. The project scope will concentrate investments in natural and cultural assets, fostering small business expansion as well as jobs creation and retention, thus catalyzing further private and public investment. Successes associated with sustainable development of outdoor recreation assets like the Buckeye Trail and the Baileys Trail System equips rural Ohio with economic development opportunities to build local wealth and leverage additional infrastructure improvements.

ORCA provides a new level of functionality to this collaborative effort by serving local governments in proven development strategy implementation, operation of recreation assets as social enterprises, and securing impact investments. As lead applicant, ORCA will continue to work with the current group of expert partners and others to ensure holistic benefits of outdoor recreation are realized in the 7-county project area.



**Benton's on the Baileys, a short-term vacation rental in Athens County, is one of the many new and thriving businesses that have sprung up around the project's recreation assets.**

- Key partners: Wayne National Forest, Buckeye Trail Association, Rural Action, ACEnet, Ohio's Winding Road, Athens County Economic Development Council, Athens County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Athens Bicycle Club, Hocking Athens Perry Community Action
- Project area: Athens, Perry, Morgan, Hocking, Meigs, Vinton, and Washington counties
- Application supported by: ORCA member governmental jurisdictions, Hocking County, Perry County Commissioners, Senators Brown and Portman, and former Congressman Steve Stivers

- 7-county recreation asset assessment
- 7-county Ohio's Winding Road destination signage
- Ohio recreation economy conference
- Regional entrepreneur support
- Regional internships in 7 counties
- Wayne National Forest trail enhancements
- Buckeye Trail Association Trail Town program expansion
- Ohio's Winding Road regional marketing development
- Athens County Economic Development Council Opportunity Zone Prospectus
- Athens County Convention & Visitors Bureau marketing support
- Athens Bicycle Club volunteer maintenance & youth engagement
- Additional ORCA Staff & Summer youth employment opportunities with trail systems

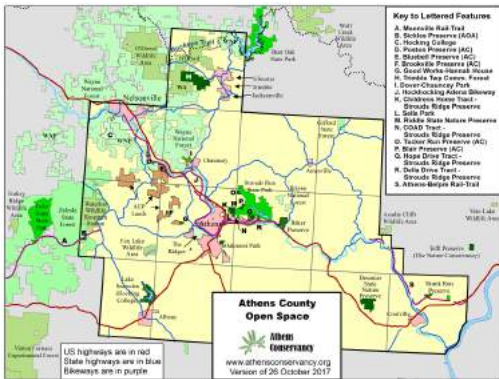
The 2021 ARC POWER project 7-county area includes Ohio's only persistent poverty county and adjacent counties still suffering from the downturn in the coal economy. For decades, communities throughout this region have witnessed the steady decline of once-bustling town centers. These counties are rural and ill-equipped for traditional economic development due to factors like population size and natural topography. A lack of investment and slump in tax revenues culminate in local governments that don't have the resources to provide appropriate infrastructure and services.

However, these resilient communities have worked for decades to preserve natural and cultural assets, and are now in a critical position to implement a strategic regional economic development effort through the Gateway Communities and Sustainable Recreation project. This project will enable seven counties to collaboratively and sustainably diversify our rural economy, expand local governments' capacity to solve seemingly intractable problems, increase regional investment, and improve quality of life for Ohioans.

## SE OH 7-County Land & Recreation



## Athens County Public Lands



Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Morgan, Perry, Vinton and Washington counties are ripe for the expansion of outdoor recreation assets. Natural assets in the 7-county area are plentiful and often span jurisdictional boundaries. This multi-jurisdictional project will connect elected officials, agencies, and community stakeholders to create a development strategy that leverages significant regional investment and will provide opportunities for Ohioans to create local wealth, while enhancing health and quality of life benefits. By advancing an existing regional brand in Ohio's Winding Road, ORCA and project partners will offer additional promotional capacity and outreach under a collective marketing umbrella to increase Ohio tourism. Utilizing natural assets in Southeast Ohio builds upon Ohio's investment in State Parks and other public lands.

## WHY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

The new U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis data show that the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 2.1% (\$459.8 billion) of current-dollar gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019. However, national outdoor recreation-related economic trends do not correlate to Ohio, which only derives 1.5%, comparing unfavorably with neighboring states Indiana (2.5%), Kentucky (1.7%), and West Virginia (1.6%). This deficit is not for lack of natural assets, and therefore presents an opportunity to connect the Appalachian Ohio landscape with millions of outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

A few of Southeast Ohio's natural assets in the 7-county service area include: Wayne National Forest, the Baileys Trail System, Buckeye Trail/North Country National Scenic Trail, Burr Oak State Park, Hocking Hills State Park, Lake Logan State Park, Jesse Owens State Park, Belpre Waterfront Park, Forked Run State Park, Zaleski State Forest, Lake Hope State Park, Moonville Rail Trail, Racoon Creek, and the Hocking, Muskingum, Little Muskingum, and Ohio Rivers.

## Southeast Ohio State Parks

