



WEST VIRGINIA

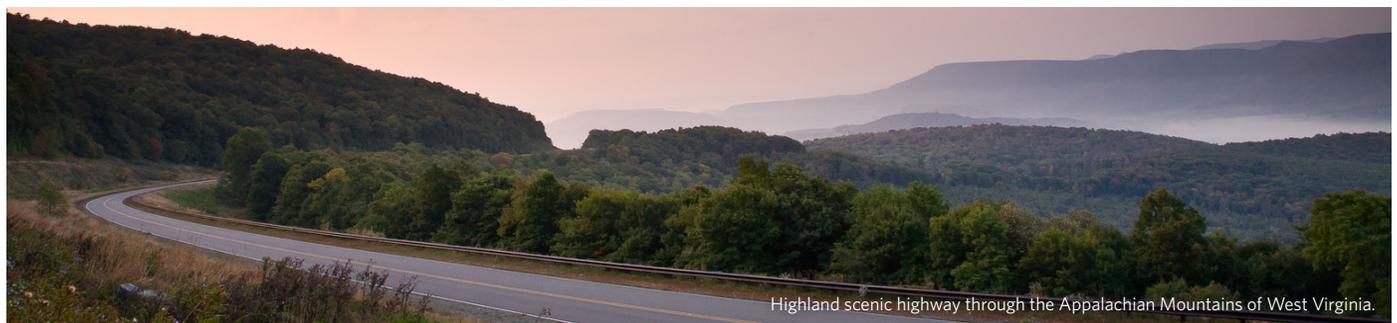
From New River Gorge and the Monongahela Forest to Harpers Ferry and Seneca Rocks, conserved lands and waters are integral to West Virginia's identity and civic pride. Conserving the state's natural beauty also makes West Virginia stronger.¹ Studies have shown that providing conservation funding for farmers, protecting public lands, and expanding access to parks and open space improves local economies and community health.²

Conservation supports productive farms, ranches, and forests—and the communities that depend on them. Conservation protects the land, water, soil, and pollinator resources that are crucial to the farms and forests that fuel the state's \$909 million agricultural economy and \$3 billion forestry economy.³

- West Virginia is the third most heavily forested state in the U.S. Nearly 80% of West Virginia is covered in forests, and 98% of the state's forests are classified as commercial forestland.⁴ Renewable forest products generate over \$3 billion per year in economic output and support over 16,300 jobs.⁵ Voluntary conservation easements can protect forest resources while allowing logging and supporting local economies.
- In a state that lost nearly 1.7 million acres of farmland between 1964 and 2012, publicly-funded voluntary conservation programs can help to protect agricultural livelihoods.⁶ Conservation easements and other conservation programs can help keep prime farmland in production and provide funding for farmers to take marginal lands out of production. Since 1995, West Virginia farmers have leveraged \$78.5 million in conservation funding through the USDA.⁷

Conservation can continue to boost West Virginia's economy— attracting workers and employers, creating jobs, and fostering vibrant communities. Outdoor recreation in West Virginia directly supports 91,000 jobs—nearly twice as many as the coal industry (49,000). Outdoor recreation generates \$9 billion in consumer spending, \$2.4 billion in wages and salaries, and \$660 million in state and local tax revenue.⁸

- West Virginia's local parks and recreation agencies generate nearly \$209 million in economic activity each year and support nearly 2,200 jobs.⁹ State parks and forests generate over \$213 million in economic activity and support over 3,200 jobs,¹⁰ and West Virginia's national parks host 1.7 million people per year, generate \$84 million dollars in economic output, and support over 1,080 jobs.¹¹
- 85% of Americans say that high-quality parks and recreation opportunities are important in choosing where to live.¹² Three-quarters of corporate executives report that quality-of-life amenities, like parks, are important in choosing where to locate.¹³ Studies from Headwaters Economics have demonstrated the importance of public land in attracting businesses and jobs.¹⁴
- Conservation protects habitat that is critical for hunting and fishing. In a recent poll, 96% of West Virginians said that opportunities for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation improve their quality of life.¹⁵ Over 300,000 people fish, nearly 250,000 people hunt, and 850,000 participate in wildlife watching in West Virginia each year. Together these activities generate nearly \$1.2 billion in annual spending in the state.¹⁶



Highland scenic highway through the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia.

1. United Health Foundation, "America's Health Rankings."; 2. Headwaters Economics, "Protected Lands and Economics: A Summary of Research and Careful Analysis on the Economic Impact of Protected Federal Lands"; Kuo, "How Might Contact with Nature Promote Human Health?"; 3. USDA ERS, "USDA ERS - State Fact Sheets."; 4. Morin and Forester, "Forests of West Virginia, 2015."; 5. Gazal et al., "An Assessment of the Economic Importance of the Forest Products Industry to WV's Economy."; 6. "West Virginia Farmland Protection."; 7. Environmental Working Group (EWG), "EWG's Farm Subsidy Database."; 8. Outdoor Industry Association, "Outdoor Industry Association: West Virginia."; 9. National Recreation and Park Association, "The Economic Impact of Local Parks | Research | National Recreation and Park Association."; 10. Magnini and Uysal, "The Economic Significance and Impacts of West Virginia's State Parks and Forests."; 11. National Park Service, "Visitor Spending Effects - Economic Contributions of National Park Visitor Spending - Social Science (U.S. National Park Service)--Economic Contributions to State Economies."; 12. National Recreation and Park Association, "Americans Engagement with Parks Survey | Research | National Recreation and Park Association."; 13. Gambale, "31st Annual Survey of Corporate Executives."; 14. Headwaters Economics, "Protected Lands and Economics: A Summary of Research and Careful Analysis on the Economic Impact of Protected Federal Lands."; 15. "West Virginia Public Lands Poll - WV Rivers."; 16. US Census Bureau, "2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation--West Virginia."



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Increasing access to parks and open space can help improve community health.

- **A huge amount of scientific research now links access to close-to-home parks and green space with improved physical and mental health.**¹⁷ Rates of many chronic diseases are very high in West Virginia. Cardiovascular disease affects 11.5% of West Virginians;¹⁸ diabetes affects 12.7%;¹⁹ and depression affects 17.8% of seniors.²⁰ One large-scale study showed that living within 0.6 miles of green space is linked to lower rates of 15 major diseases, including heart disease (15% lower), diabetes (20% lower), and depression (25% lower).²¹ Right now, cardiovascular disease costs the U.S. economy \$330 billion per year, diabetes costs \$327 billion, and depression costs \$210 billion. Spending time in nature can also reduce symptoms of attention-deficit disorder, which affects 11.9% of West Virginia children, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which affects many veterans.²²



Rafters on Cheat River in West Virginia.

Land and water conservation protects water and air quality, avoiding costs and protecting health.

- **Avoiding costs for cities and private utilities.** Conservation, particularly forest conservation, helps provide cleaner water and air. Protected watersheds can provide as much as a 10-fold savings in treating drinking water,²³ and nationwide forests provide \$6.8 billion dollars in air pollution removal each year.²⁴ Studies have calculated that for every \$1 invested in conservation \$4 to \$11 is returned in natural goods and services like clean water.²⁵
- **Preventing flooding.** Many areas in West Virginia are vulnerable to floods. Protecting wetlands and riparian areas can be a cost-effective way to minimize damage caused by flooding.²⁶

The Land and Water Conservation Fund in West Virginia

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has invested over \$241 million in West Virginia's forests, parks, and open spaces—from Monongahela National Forest to the Gauley National Recreation Area.²⁷ The LWCF's State Assistance Program has supported over 470 local projects, including community parks across the state.²⁸ The Forest Legacy Program, funded through the LWCF, helps private forest owners protect working forest lands—supporting timber jobs while protecting water and air quality, wildlife habitat, and recreation opportunities.

Gauley River National Recreation Area and New River Gorge National River. All public access points along West Virginia's Lower and Middle Gauley River, which is used by over 50,000 people annually, were made possible by LWCF funding. LWCF has also protected over 2,000 rock climbing routes and the remnants of 19th and 20th century mining towns in the New River Gorge. These historic sites protect unique West Virginia heritage. Roughly 1.2 million visitors enjoy these two parks annually, bringing \$53 million to the local economy and directly supporting more than 700 jobs.²⁹

17. Kuo, "Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Components of a Healthy Human Habitat"; Kuo and Sullivan, "Environment and Crime in the Inner City"; American Public Health Association, "Improving Health and Wellness through Access to Nature (Policy Statement)"; Gentry et al., "Improving Human Health by Increasing Access to Natural Areas: Linking Research to Action at Scale"; Bell et al., "Greenspace and Quality of Life: A Critical Literature Review"; 18. Kaiser Family Foundation, "Percent of Adults with Cardiovascular Disease."; 19. CDC, "U.S. Diabetes Surveillance System."; 20. United Health Foundation, "America's Health Rankings."; 21. Maas et al., "Morbidity Is Related to a Green Living Environment."; 22. CDC, "State-Based Prevalence Data of Parent Reported ADHD Diagnosis by a Health Care Provider"; Anwar, "Nature Is Proving to Be Awesome Medicine for PTSD."; 23. The Trust for Public Land, "The Economic Benefits and Fiscal Impact of Parks and Open Space in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, New York."; 24. Nowak et al., "Tree and Forest Effects on Air Quality and Human Health in the United States."; 25. The Trust for Public Land, "The Economic Benefits of Great Outdoors Colorado and the Conservation Trust Fund: Fact Sheet"; The Trust for Public Land, "Vermont's Return on Investment in Land Conservation"; The Trust for Public Land, "Return on the Investment From the Land & Water Conservation Fund."; 26. Chou, "As Nation's Flood Risks Grow, Protecting Wetlands Is More Important Than Ever."; 27. LWCF Coalition, "SaveLWCF: Land and Water Conservation Fund State Spotlights."; 28. National Recreation and Park Association, "Land and Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program: State Fact Sheets."; 29. LWCF Coalition, "SaveLWCF: Land and Water Conservation Fund State Spotlights."