Cycle Forward

Leading with Trails

Kansas Trail Exchange Day 2026

Cycle Forward

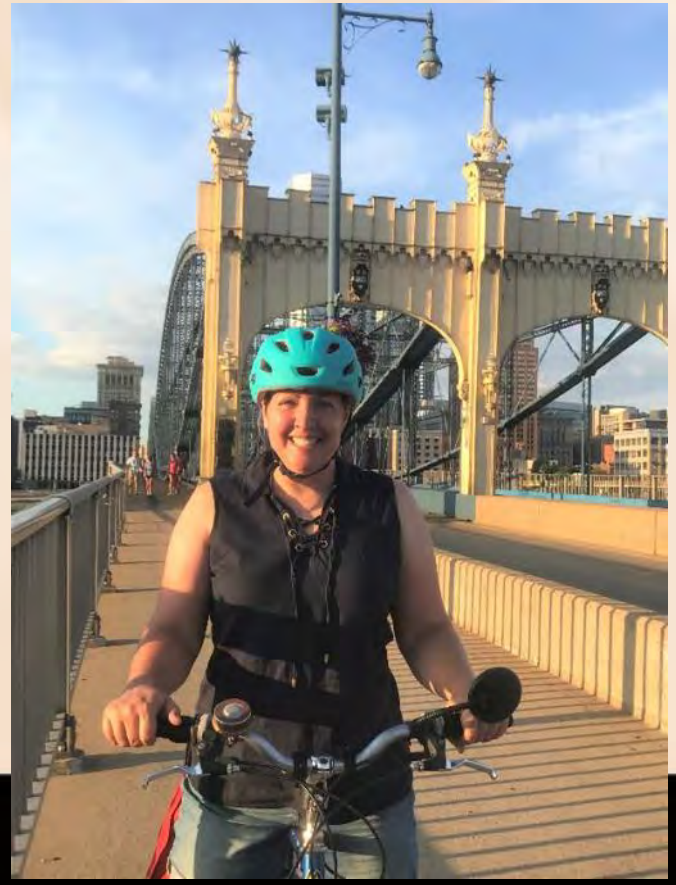
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Trail Tourism & Placemaking Outdoor Experiences Events & Speaking Writing

Experienced Placemaker Helping to Build Vibrant Communities

Amy Camp has been at the center of the trails movement for 14 years. She coaches and supports local leaders and communities in trail town development, strengthening heritage tourism, and accessing the outdoor recreation economy. She also offers nature-based experiences that foster growth and connection.

Explore Services Create an Experience





Meet Amy Camp

Amy Camp is a trail tourism expert, placemaker, and professional coach. She is the founder of Cycle Forward, a consulting agency that supports trail communities across the United States and Canada. Amy helps community leaders better connect to and fully leverage their trails.


axy Days
RV Park





Walking an Iconic Rail Trail



From Rails to Trails Documentary



Mary T. Watts

GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE

Interactive Map About Updates Shop Donate

WHERE TO GO THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU GO SUPPORT THE GAP



Walking the GAP





Part of the Family of Things…



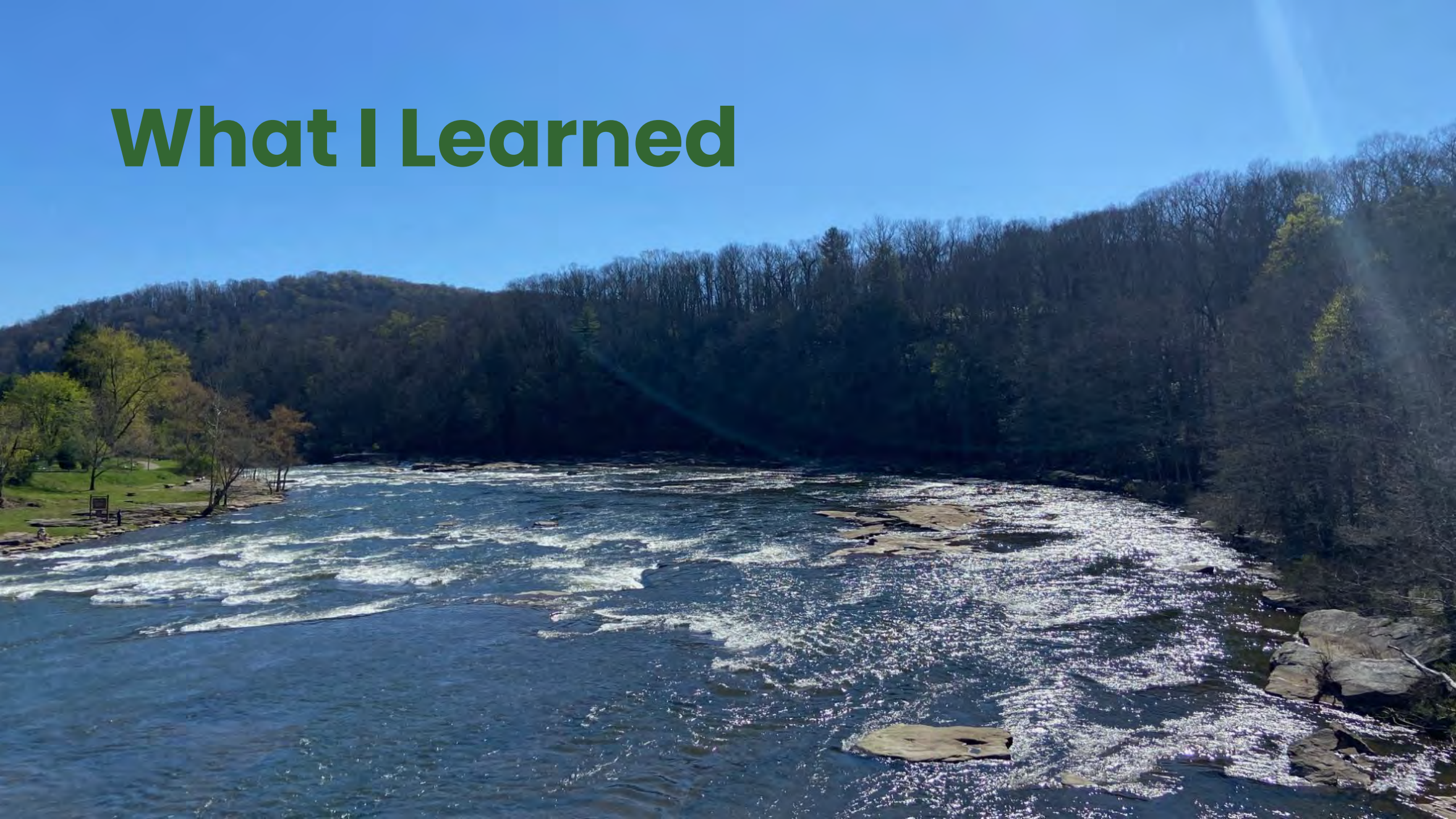


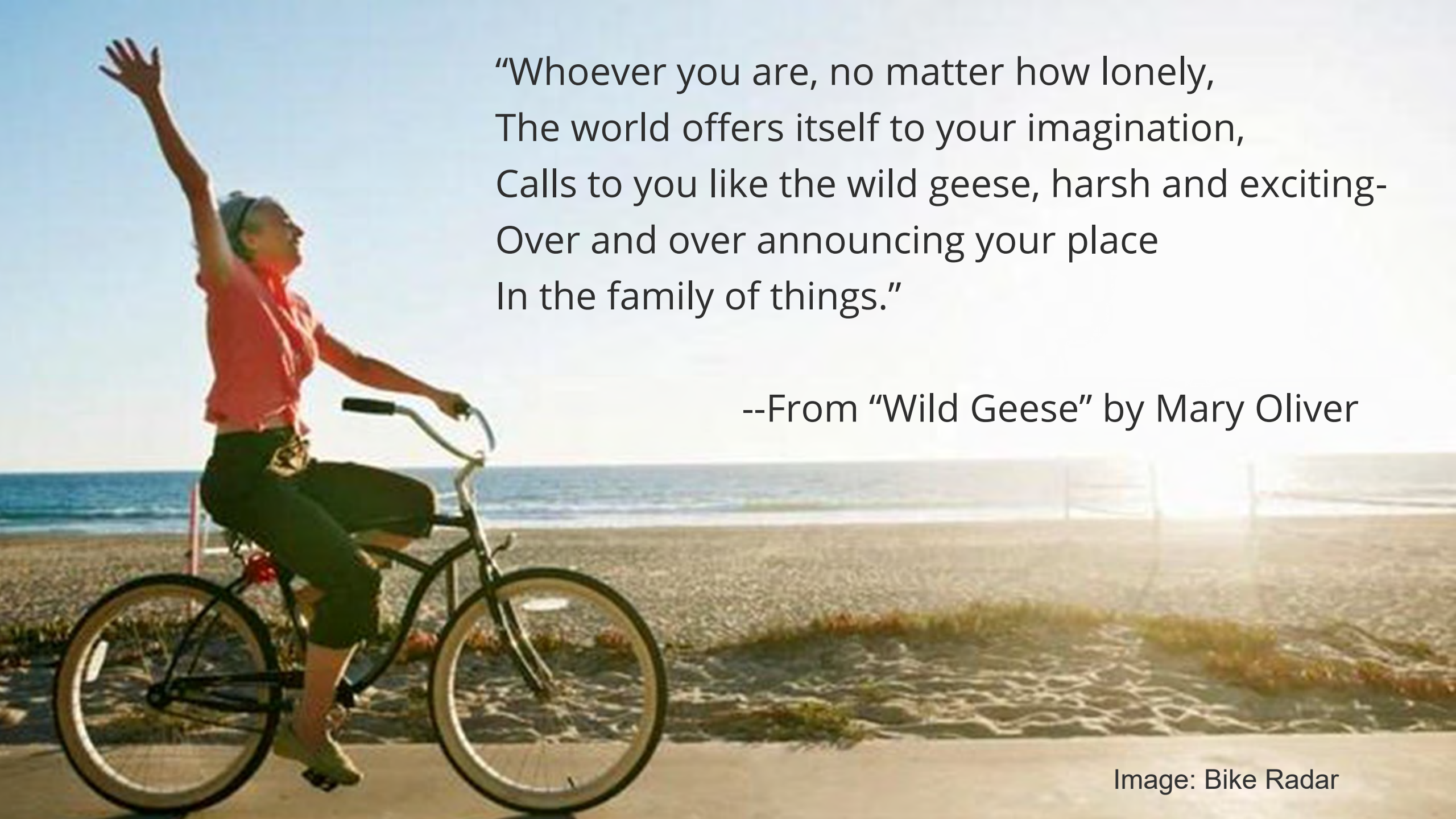
...and the Trail Economy





What I Learned





“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
The world offers itself to your imagination,
Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting-
Over and over announcing your place
In the family of things.”

--From “Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver

Image: Bike Radar

In the Next Hour, We'll Cover:

- → What it means to be a Trail Town
- → History of the Trail Town approach
- → 3 things you can do to leverage trails
- → Loads of examples!



Table Talk Topic #1

- What does “Leading with Trails” mean to you?
- Why is this important in your community?



About Trail Towns

Trail Town Definition

A Trail Town is a community through which a trail passes that supports trail users with services, promotes the trail to its residents, and embraces the trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated.

--North Country Trail Association (adapted)







Image: Lynne Harty





"To be a Trail Town is to make the decision to pay attention to trails."

Another Framing...

Any community or group of communities intentionally working to connect with and leverage their outdoor assets.



Both a Program and a Mindset

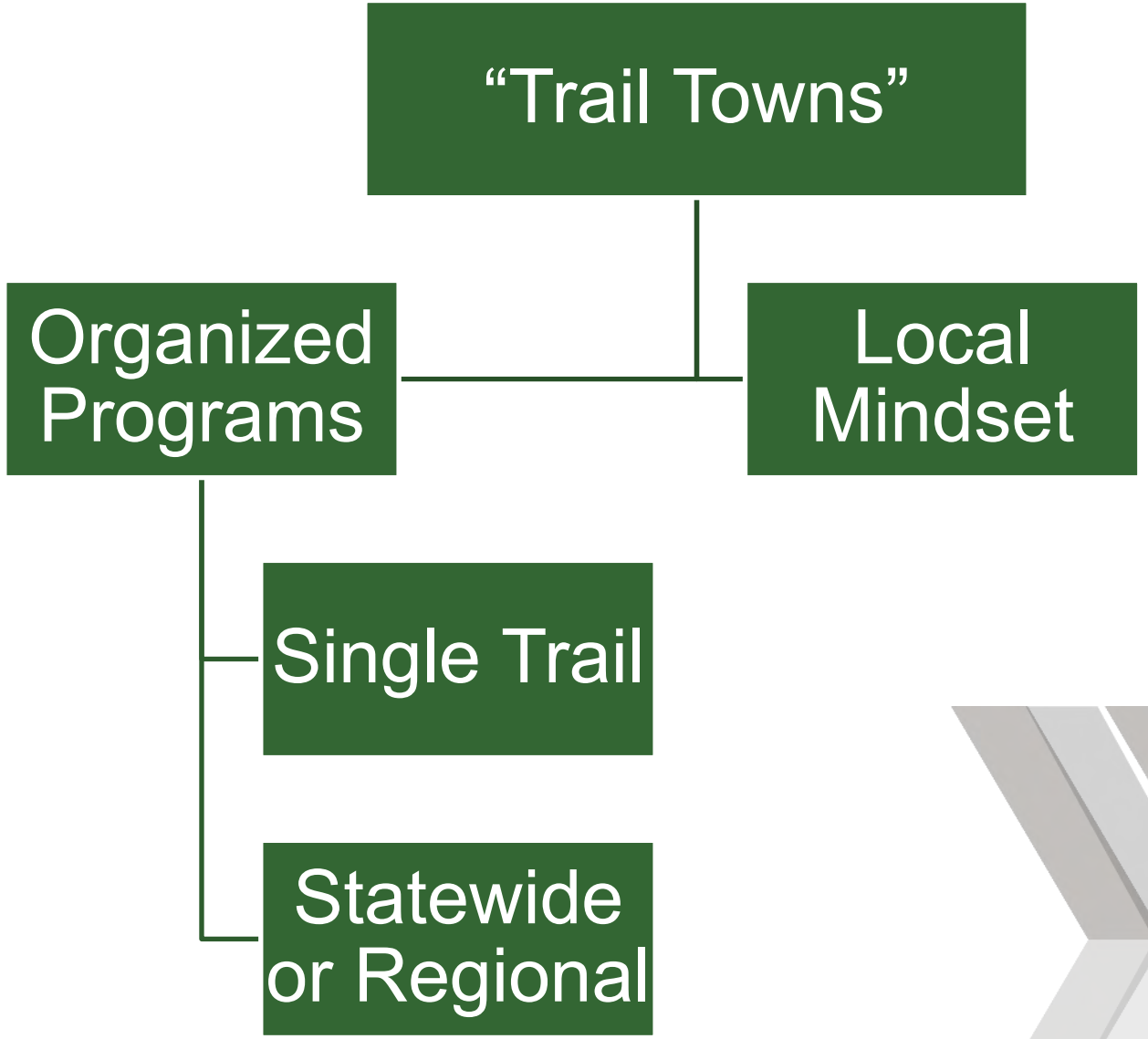



Communities can look, act, and feel like a Trail Town without being part of a larger initiative.

Trail Towns…

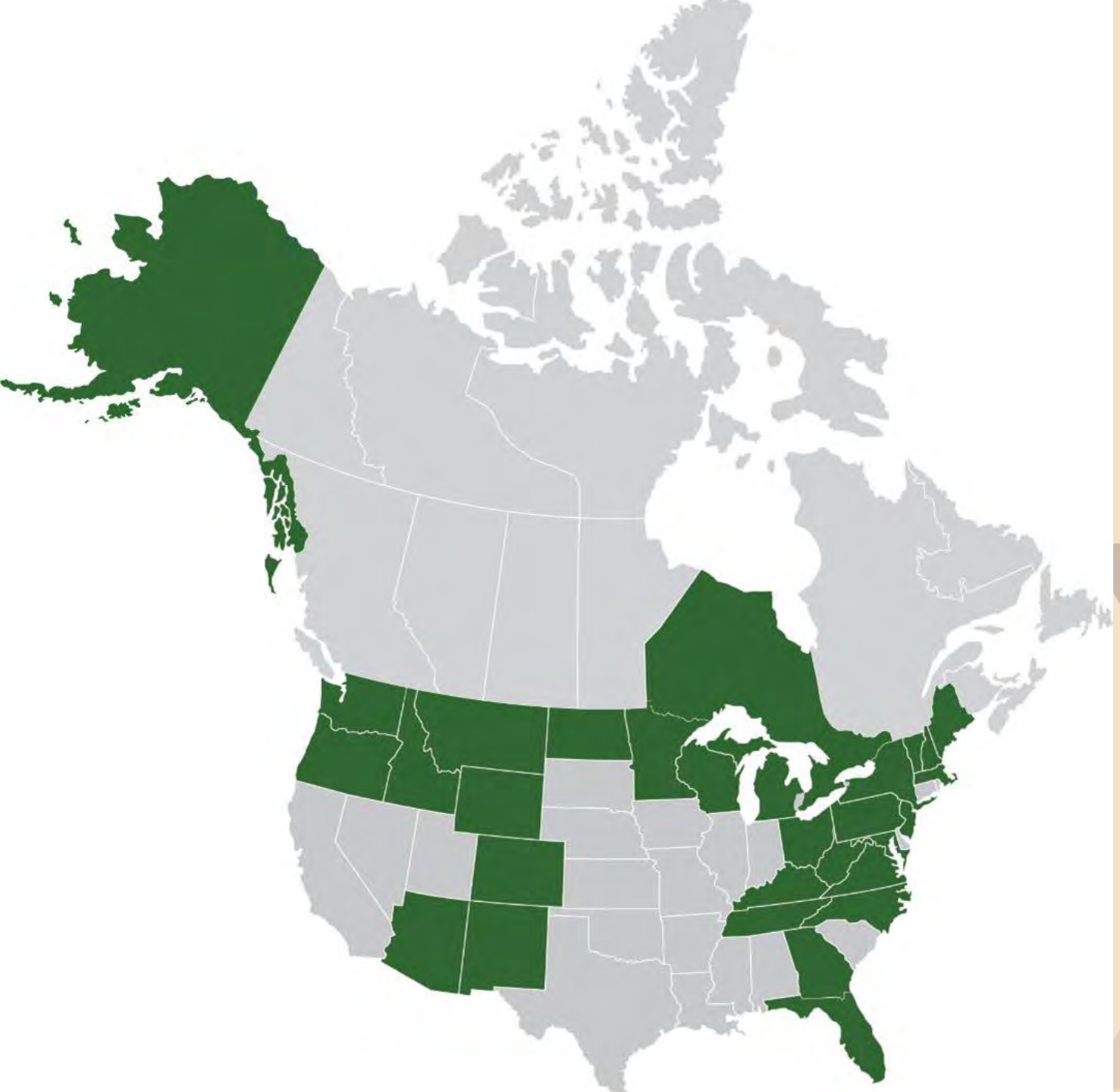


- → Are trail-oriented
- → Invest in trail infrastructure
  - Connecting trails, bike racks, bike lanes, etc.
- → Have trail-serving businesses
- → Celebrate trails and foster a culture where trails are a part of daily life


“Trail Towns”
Organized Programs
Local Mindset
Single Trail
Statewide or Regional

20 Years of Organized Programs!





A presence in at least 33 states as well as Ontario, CA

Kansas will be shaded in future presentations!

“Design and Purpose”

“Having a Trail Town Program creates a sense of design and purpose in terms of connecting with trails.”

--Kimm Wright, Pinhoti Experience Foundation

Trail Town Impact Study

- → Learn more about 19 programs around the U.S. and Canada!
- → Programs have driven millions of dollars in investments across 33 states
- → Most plan to run their programs indefinitely
- → All programs reported improved economic health in participating communities



Earliest Programs

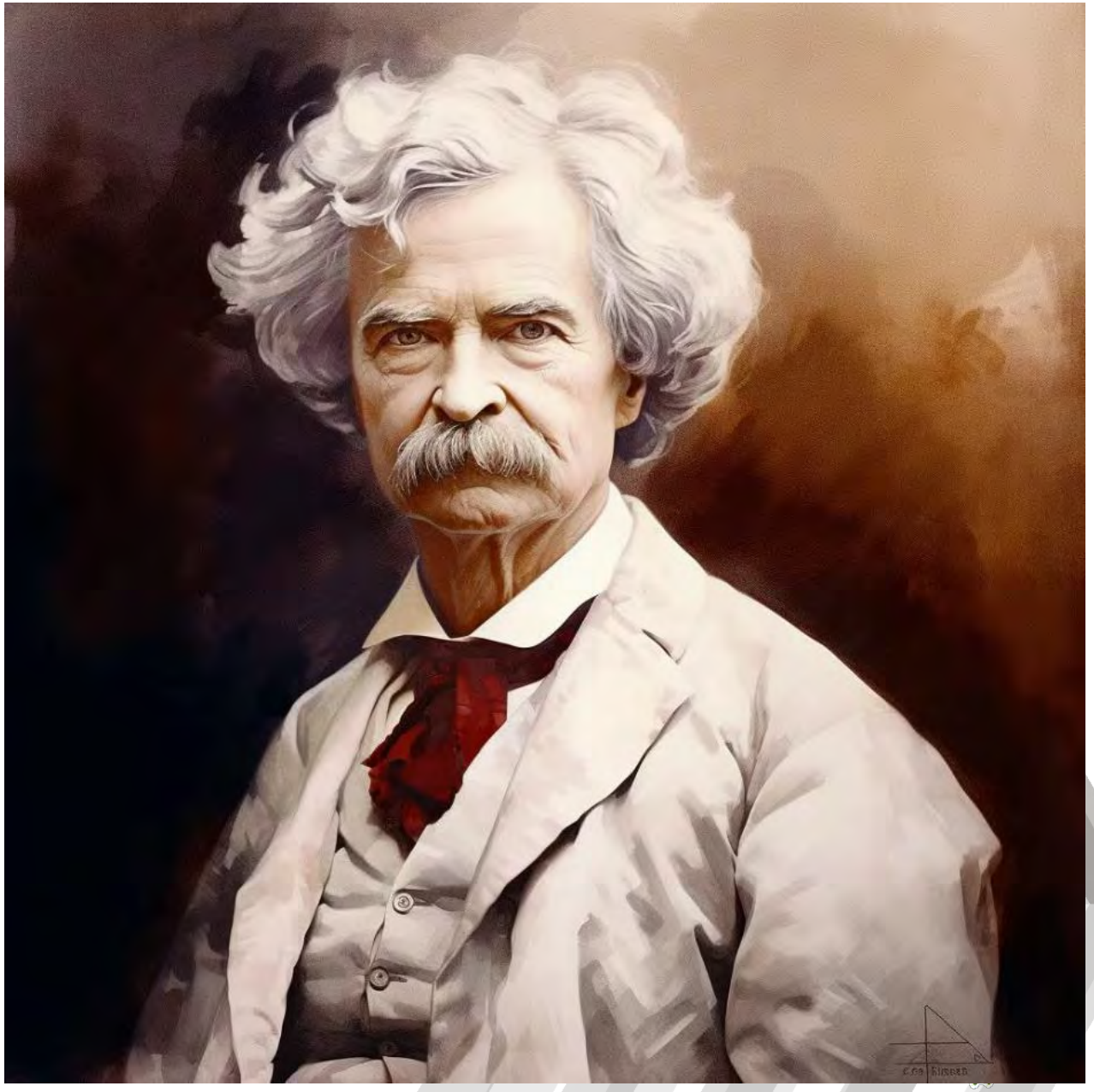






“There is no such thing as a new idea. It is impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope. We give them a turn and they make new and curious combinations. We keep on turning and making new combinations indefinitely; but they are the same old pieces of colored glass that have been in use through all the ages. ”

– Mark Twain




Pittsburgh
McKeesport
Clairton
West Newton
Connellsville
Ohiopyle
Confluence
Fort Hill
Rockwood
Meyersdale
Frostburg
Cumberland
C&O National Historical Park
Washington D.C.
PENNSYLVANIA
WEST VIRGINIA
MARYLAND
86 Pittsburgh
70 McKeesport
52 West Newton
27 Connellsville
9 Ohiopyle
1 Confluence
20 Rockwood
32 Meyersdale
48 Frostburg
63 Cumberland
248 Washington

Origins in Divestment & Missed Economic Opportunities







GAP Program Components

- → Regional in nature
- → Community assessments
- → Economic & trail use research
- → Business assistance
- → Access to capital
- → Brand development & marketing
- → Infrastructure (signs, bike racks, public art)

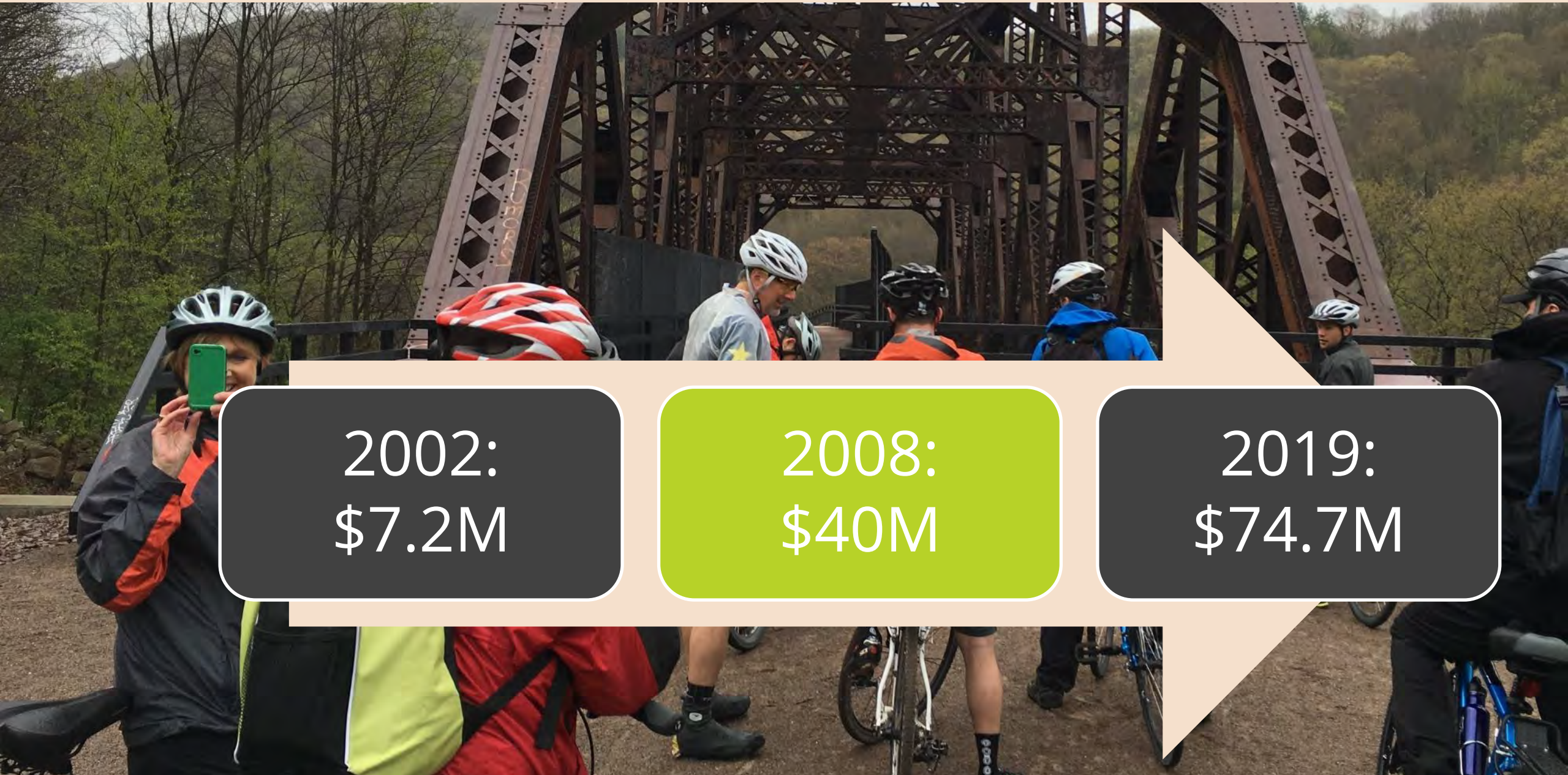


A regional approach to rural economic development





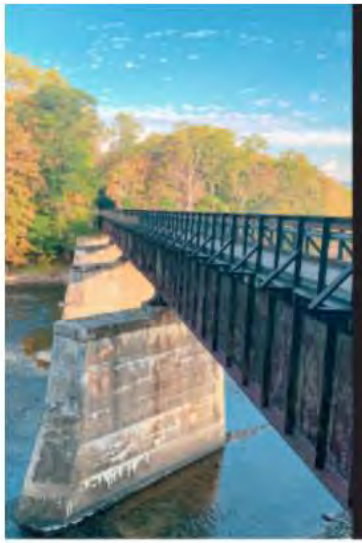
GAP Direct Annual Economic Impact



2002:
$7.2M

2008:
$40M

2019:
$74.7M



Great Allegheny Passage

Economic Impact Report

November 2021

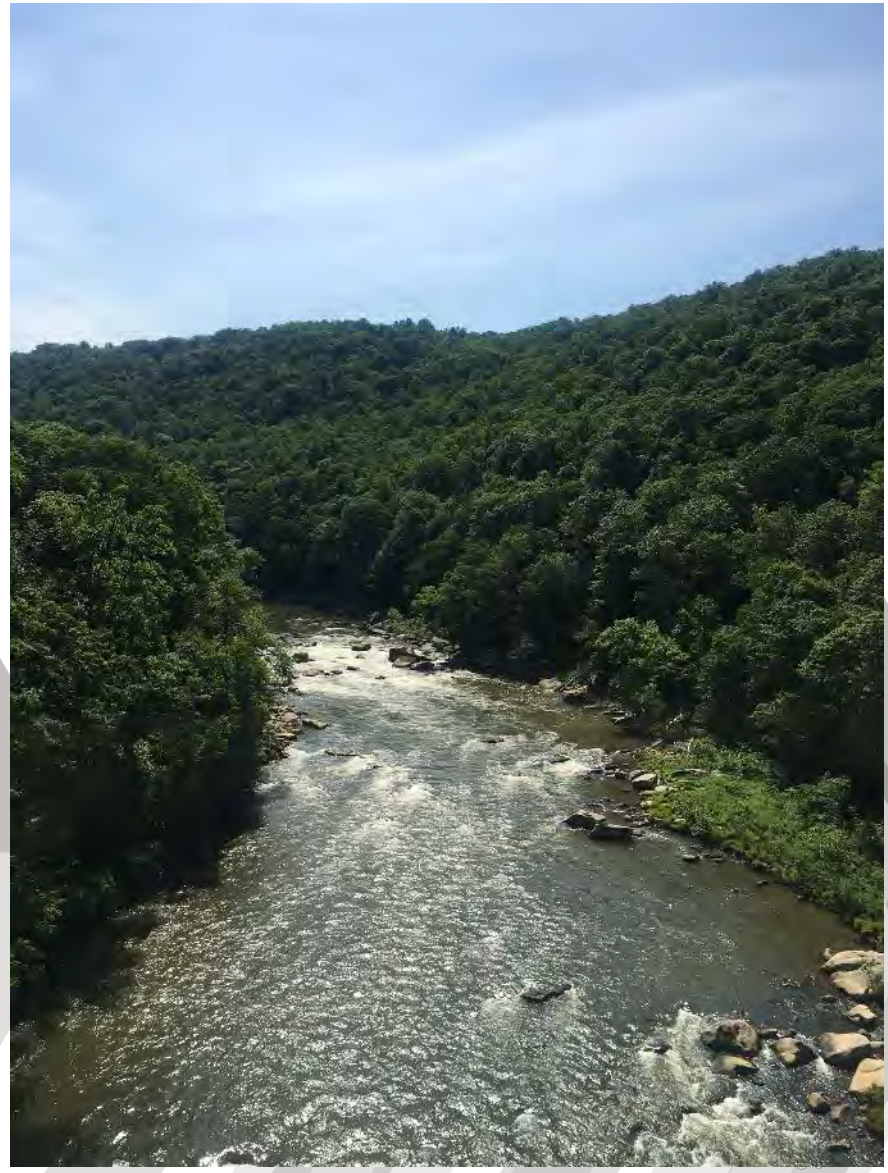
FOURTH ECONOMY

GREAT ALLEGHENY PASSAGE CONSERVANCY

GENERAL

Tourism on GAP Drives $121 Million in Annual Economic Impact, Estimates Fourth Economy

By Bryan Perry | November 29, 2021



“I don’t know where our town would be without this trail.”

Pop. 6,700

--Connellsville Mayor Greg Lincoln

CONNELLSVILLE
PENNSYLVANIA



“Our business breathes by the GAP trail.”

--Cheryl Babbit, Comfort Inn General Manager, Connellsville, PA





Don’t p_ _ a_ _

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one _ _ _ _ _ _.



Image: www.homesteadandgardens.com

There's More to the "Why"



- "A system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest is hopelessly lopsided."

--Aldo Leopold

A More Complete Trails Promise

- → Experiences
- → Memories
- → Sense of place
- → Connection & belonging
- → Health & wellness
- → Routes & access, connectivity
- → Community vibrancy
- → Land conservation
- → Fun!





Image Courtesy David Mars,
Prairie Grass Trail, London, OH



Image: Joy Riders, Smithton, PA


“This trail is the best thing that’s ever happened to this town.”

7 Practices of Healthy Trail Towns

1. Adopt a shared vision
2. Physically connect trail to town
3. Extend an invitation
4. Cultivate a trail culture
5. Know your market
6. Share your story
7. Commit to quality trails



Table Talk Topic #2

→ Which best practices would position your community to become more trail oriented?

→ What are some initial steps, people who should be involved?



Three Things You Can Do

1. Cultivate a Trail Culture

“The Bedrock Practice”



Madrid, IA

Pop. 2,800





High Trestle Trail Bridge - Madrid, Iowa



Travelers Rest, SC

Pop. 9,000





"Rabbits are kind of what we do here"

Damascus, VA

Pop. 800





Image: Lynne Harty





CYCLE FORWARD |
cycleforward.org

Put a Bike on It




Create
your own
Path



2. Extend an Invitation



A Trail User's Dilemma

- → Visiting trail users face a decision about coming into town.
- → Cues at the trail access can signal that your community is trail friendly and worth visiting.



“Welcoming Cues” = Invitations

“Before a visiting trail user ever interacts with a member of your community, they pick up on the physical cues and signs of ‘welcome’ that your town puts in place. They are picking up on the personality of your community. The same goes for local residents. They, too, can be made to feel welcome to trails.”

--*Deciding on Trails*

What Invitations do You See?





Making the Invitation with:

- → Art
- → Wayfinding and directional signage
- → Interpretive signage
- → An actual welcome sign or gateway moment
- → Seating, shade, water
- → A welcome center or greeters
- → Bike lanes, sidewalks, and connector trails
- → Temporary projects: sidewalk chalk, yard signs, creative placemaking demonstration projects


It's a
10 minute walk
to our Under Ground
Trail Tunnel
walkabout.
TOWN OF OXFORD


Short walk to
cross the lock




FREE
BOTTLED
WATER
FOR THIRSTY
BIKERS AND HIKERS



Chalking Up Connellsville





Artist: Taney Basinger

“Bananas for Bikes”





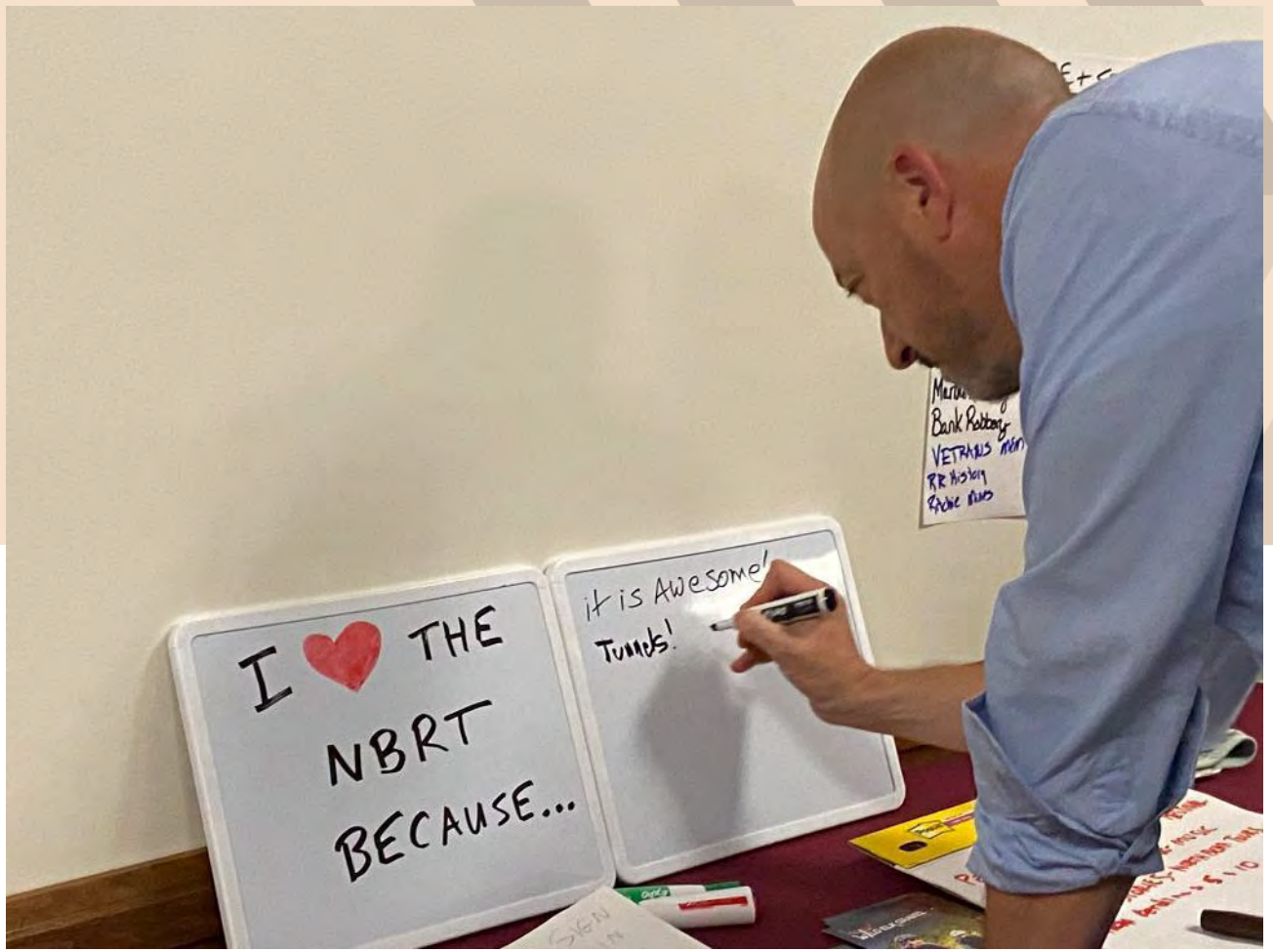






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cycleforward.org

3. Include Everyone



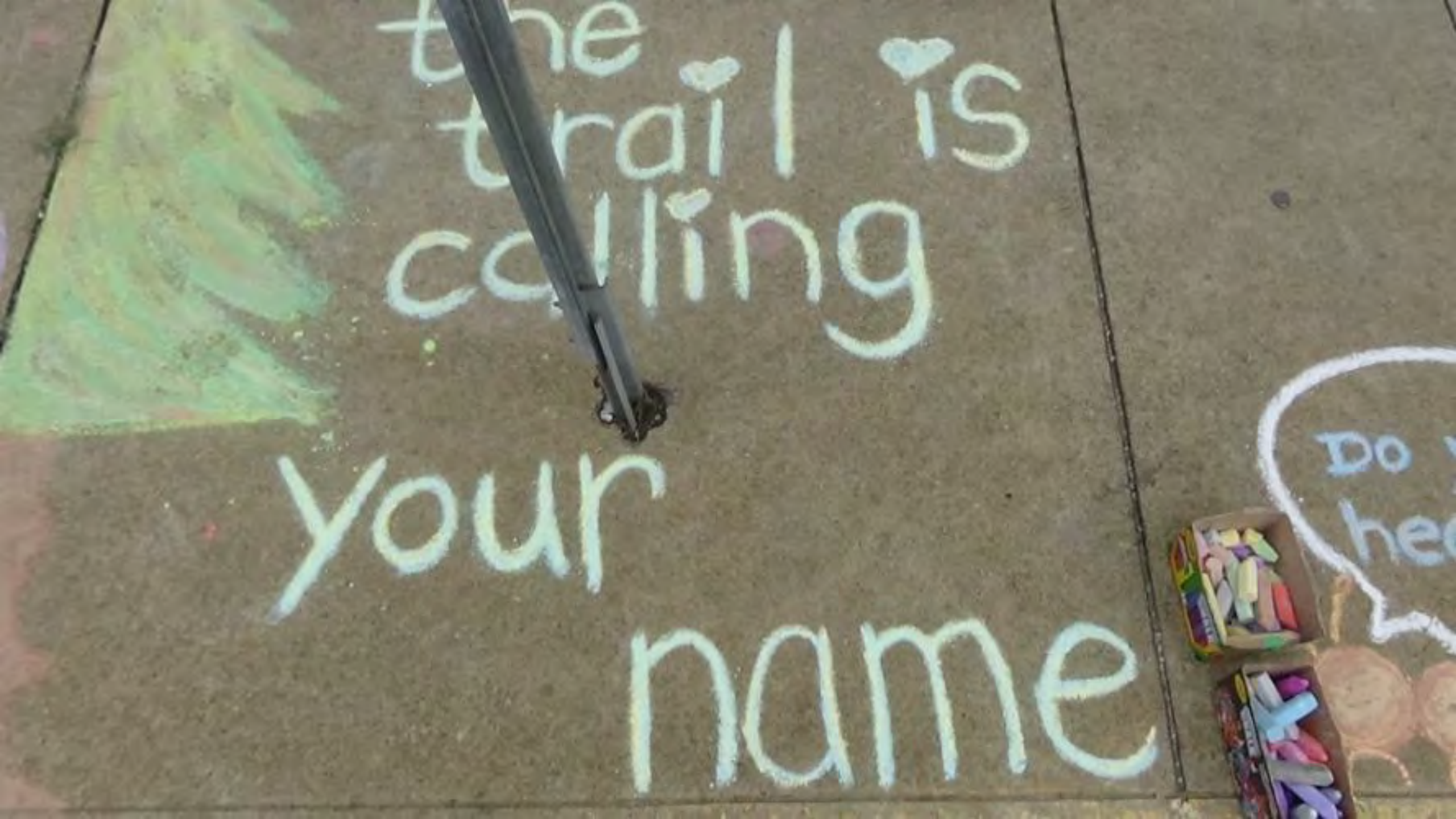

the trail is calling your name










Image: Lisa Ann Yount

Leading with Trails involves Purpose and Design



- → Trail use does not mean automatic business patronage.
- → We have to orient our communities to trails, invest in them, and activate them.
- → There’s room for everyone in this work.

There’s a place for you in the family of things!

Thank you!

Amy Camp
Cycle Forward
www.cycleforward.org

Cycle Forward
Nature-Based Coaching and Consulting