



# Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area

PO Box 1206 ~ Elkins, WV 26241 ~ 304-636-6182  
[www.appalachianforestnha.org](http://www.appalachianforestnha.org) ~ [info@afnha.org](mailto:info@afnha.org)

**For Immediate Release**

## **AFNHA Awarded Benedum Grant to Grow Tourism**

ELKINS, West Virginia (September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021) —

The Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area (AFNHA), has been awarded a \$150,000 grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation to expand regional activities promoting the creative economy in the Appalachian Forest region. Working in partnership with Eastern WV Community and Technical College, this 2-year project will expand work of the Potomac Highlands Creative Economy group to grow tourism and improve communities in region. AFNHA will continue to coordinate partner networking and support tourism attraction development and recovery from COVID impacts, while Eastern WV Community and Technical College (Eastern) will take lead on providing trainings and technical assistance focusing on business development and the growth of agriculture in the Potomac Highlands region.

“We are very excited to continue and grow the work that Eastern began some years ago,” says Lukas Ray, Communications and Partnerships Manager with AFNHA. “The future is bright for tourism and community development in the Appalachian Forest region of West Virginia, and we look forward to working with the Benedum Foundation to make this happen! A big thanks goes out to the many who worked to create and implement these programs and efforts that AFNHA is now pleased to lead. “

AFNHA will work to grow the Potomac Highlands Creative Economy group to include all 18 counties within the National Heritage Area, aiming at expanding partnerships and growing networking opportunities for all communities. The regional project will develop and implement tourism enhancements for sites and attractions, resulting in enhanced tourism products, services, and experiences for customers or visitors. The program is designed to complement existing efforts while exploring new opportunities for supporting tourism and creative economy growth. In addition to regular meetings and periodic training opportunities, the project will sponsor a Tourism Summit in the summer of 2022.

The Potomac Highlands Creative Economy group meets monthly and is open to tourism attractions, businesses, and service providers. For more information or to get involved, contact Lukas Ray at [afnha@afnha.org](mailto:afnha@afnha.org) or 304-636-6182. For more about AFNHA see [www.appalachianforestnha.org](http://www.appalachianforestnha.org).

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## ABOUT

### About AFNHA

Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area conserves, interprets and promotes forest heritage to enhance landscapes and communities in the highlands of West Virginia and Maryland. AFNHA works with partners to accomplish this through conservation, cultural heritage enhancement, sharing stories and experiences, encouraging tourism, and community development. For more information see [www.appalachianforestnha.org](http://www.appalachianforestnha.org) or call 304-636-6182

### About Eastern

Eastern's mission is to provide accessible and affordable educational opportunities for academic, technical, workforce training and life-long learning for the Potomac Highlands regional community. Eastern's vision is to enrich the Potomac Highlands regional community through a range of innovative programs and services. For more information see [www.easternwv.edu](http://www.easternwv.edu) or call 304-434-8000.

## MEDIA INQUIRIES

Phyllis Baxter, AFNHA Executive Director  
(304) 642-7427 (cell)  
[phyllisb@afnha.org](mailto:phyllisb@afnha.org)

Lukas Ray, AFNHA Communications Manager  
(304) 940-4485 (cell)  
[lukas@afnha.org](mailto:lukas@afnha.org)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit AFNHA's news site (<https://www.appalachianforestnha.org/whats-new>) to stay up to date with AFNHA's activities, events, and organizational monthly newsletters.