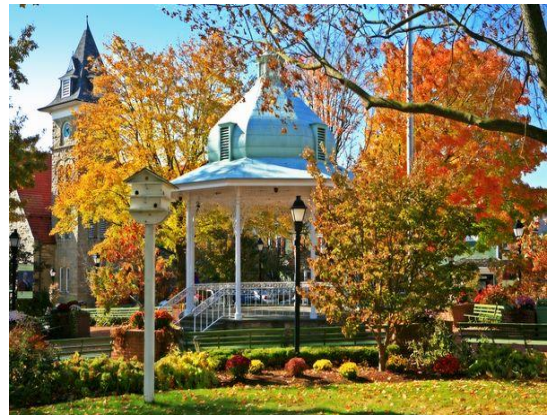




# **A Gateway Community NEEDS ASSESSMENT**



**Developed by  
McCollom Development Strategies for**



This assessment instrument is a modified, customized version of a trail town assessment created by the Allegheny Trail Alliance and is used with permission.

## Introduction

The number of people experiencing the outdoors increases each year. Twenty and thirty-year olds are flocking to land and water trails regularly. Baby boomers, leading longer and healthier lifestyles, are seeking outdoor experiences in record numbers. More and more residents and businesses locate where they and their employees have access to trails, rivers, public parks and forests.

In 2009, the Land and Water Conservation Fund reported: *Two of the fastest growing sectors of the economy, retirees and people working in knowledge-based industries, often have a choice of where to live. Increasingly, they are selecting communities surrounded by public lands and natural amenities.* Extensive research continues to validate this statement.

The Outdoor Industry Foundation estimates that outdoor recreation—hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing and similar activities—contribute \$730 BILLION annually to the U.S. economy and supports 6.5 million jobs across the country and active outdoor recreation employs **FIVE TIMES MORE** Americans than Wal-Mart, the world’s largest private employer.

A study by the National Parks and Conservation Association found that \$13 billion flows annually into gateway towns creating 250,000 private sector jobs. Similarly, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service study found that the 40 million yearly visitors to national wildlife refuges generate more than \$1.7 Billion in annual sales for local communities, while generating 27,000 jobs. State lands and parks play a similarly important role, helping to boost land values.

**VISITORS NEED SERVICES.** They are looking for restaurants, lodging and supplies. They are enjoying nature but are also interested in welcoming communities that can make their journey a pleasant one.

To launch a Gateway Community, a core group of volunteers dedicated to a healthy community and representatives from nearby public parks and forests join together to craft an action plan. The Plan prioritizes projects that ensure the community is prepared to offer the services and amenities desired by visitors attracted by the opportunities for outdoor recreation in nearby public parks and the parks and forests communicate nearby towns, services and attractions.

The goal of a Gateway Community is to be a welcoming stop for visitors to experience an authentic community with a strong heritage and a solid conservation ethic and to offer services and attractions that encourages visitors to linger as they experience of the Commonwealth’s Parks and Forests.

# Gateway Community NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## TOWN CHECKLIST

<b>Overall Impressions:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Is there a gateway point to enter/leave town (e.g. a piece of art; mural; sign)?		
Do business hours match customers' needs (e.g. open on weekends)?		
Are downtown businesses clustered in a compact area?		
Are customers greeted warmly when they walk through the door?		
Are window displays appealing and inviting?		
Are there window displays that show off the community's pride in its heritage?		
Does the town provide a unique experience? Describe:		
<b>Accommodating to Visitors:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Are there publicly-accessible restrooms in the businesses?		
Are there handicapped-accessible restrooms in the community?		
Do businesses offer information on the town/region?		
Is there a tourism information or visitor center?		
Can employees answer questions about the town or region?		
Do employees answer questions in a friendly manner?		
Do shops carry souvenirs, especially related to the town/region?		
Are employees conversant on the nearby amenities offered by the state parks and forests?		
Do any of the businesses offer discounts or incentives to campers/hikers?		
Are there any tourism packages that include outdoor amenities offered?		
Is there adequate parking? Signs to parking?		
Are there places for outdoor seating, such as benches and parks?		
Bicycle and/or pedestrian friendly?		
<b>Business Signs and Storefronts:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Are businesses' signs clearly visible and well-designed?		
Do signs clearly state what is being sold?		
Do businesses clearly indicate that they are open?		
Are business hours posted on the front door or window?		
Are businesses open on Saturday and Sunday?		
Does the business feel distinct or special?		
Is a walk through town a pleasant experience?		
Are buildings close to sidewalks?		
Are historic buildings restored and recognized?		
Are store windows lit at night?		
Are there street banners in the business district?		

<b>Signs/Information to Park and Forest:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>		
Is there adequate signage for motorists to find the state park/district forest from town?				
Is there adequate signage from the park leading to the town?				
Is there adequate signage from forest leading to the town?				
Is there information available in the town about the state park or forest?				
Is there a regional map available making the connection between park/forest and town?				
<b>Services:</b>				
<b>Food:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Open Weekends?</b>	<b>Open Weekdays?</b>
Outdoor vending machines				
Grocery or portable food				
Coffee shop				
Ice cream				
Candy shop				
Family style restaurant				
Farm to table restaurant				
Informal café with wait service				
Bar or tavern				
Craft brewery or distillery				
Ethnic or regional cuisine				
Restaurant with liquor service				
Restaurants that offer outdoor seating				
Do restaurants serve local food?				
<b>Lodging:</b>				
Hotel or Inn				
Bed and Breakfast				
Motel				
Hostel				
Nearby camping				
Air B & B or other type of lodging				
Secure bicycle storage at lodging properties				
<b>Services and Amenities:</b>				
Convenience/quick stop store				
Drug Store				
Police or law enforcement				
24 hour ATM				
Bookstore				
Laundromat				

	Yes	No	Open Weekends?	Open Weekdays?
Emergency medical service				
Family medical service				
Access to public email service (e.g. at the library)				
Library, local historical society office and/or museum				
Is the library or local historical society open on the weekends?				
Is there cell phone reception in town?				
Are there places to charge electronic devices?				
Are there places to purchase camping supplies?				
Depending on the park/forest, are there outfitters in the community?				
Is there a place to refill water bottles?				
<b>Marketing/Communications/ Promotions:</b>			<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Does the town use special events to encourage people to come to town? Note events:				
Do businesses use special promotional tactics to invite people in (e.g. free ice cream?)				
Are the state parks and forests linked to any events in town or the surrounding area?				
Does the town promote their connection to the park/forest? If so, how?				
Do the marketing materials welcome outdoor recreation enthusiasts?				
Do the websites promote the connection to the state park/forest?				

## PARK AND FOREST CHECKLIST

<b>Information and Signage</b>	Yes	No
Is there an attractive, well-placed information directory of nearby amenities and services in the region at the state park and forest?		
Are there directional signs to town?		
Is there a map to the nearby towns and other regional attractions at the entrance to the park?		
Is there available information about the town, nearby services and other attractions that can be "taken away" (e.g. a brochure)?		
Is information about the town or attractions available in cabins, yurts, cottages, and as part of camper check-in packages?		
Are front end staff conversant about the town and nearby amenities and activities?		
Are there signs to emergency facilities?		
Is there information about the town and/or region on the park/forest website?		

	Yes	No
Is the park/forest active in the local chamber or regional tourism office?		
Does the park/forest host community days or open houses for the general public? For community leaders?		
Does the park or friends group engage with local businesses, the chamber or the tourism office for events or programs?		
Does the community know what might be available at the park or forest?		
Are there interpretive signs in the park or forest to provide an education experience for the visitor?		
Does the park/forest offer any programs to engage the public/visitor? If so, describe:		
Are there any non-motorized methods of access to the park or forest from the town? If so, how are they accommodated (for examples, bike racks for trail users).		
<b>General Access Between Park/Forest and Town:</b>	<b>Approximate mileage</b>	
What is the distance between the town and the park?		
What is the distance between town and the forest?		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Is it easy for visitors to find the town from the park?		
Describe any issues:		
Is it easy for visitors to find Ligonier from Forbes State Forest?		
Describe any issues:		
Do electronic map searches from the park to the town provide a safe route to the town?		
Do electronic map searches from the town to the park/forest provide a safe route to the trail head, point of interest, or park/forest office?		
<b>Friends Groups</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Is there a friends group at the park or forest?		
Are community leaders represented on the friends group?		
Does the friends group advertise through local channels to promote events and activities at the park/forest?		
Has the friends group completed the PPF barriers checklist to address any real or perceived barriers from preventing visitation?		
Does the friends group have a web or social media presence?		
If there isn't a friends group, can a friends group be formed?		