

Susan O'Neill, Chair

Charlotte Davis, Executive Director

Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 645 – Maryland Trails Advisory Committee and the Maryland Office of Trails –
Establishment (Great Maryland Trails Act)
February 16, 2024

The Rural Maryland Council supports Senate Bill 645 – Maryland Trails Advisory Committee and the Maryland Office of Trails – Establishment (Great Maryland Trails Act). This bill will establish the Maryland Office of Trails in the Department of Transportation to develop and maintain the Maryland Trails Network. In addition to all things related to oversee the office as well as collaborate with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee and establishing the Maryland Trails Advisory Commission.

Trail networks can have significant economic impacts on rural communities, generating revenue, supporting local businesses, and enhancing property values. A November 2021 Economic Impact Report for the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) – one of the country’s most popular and celebrated long-distance biking and hiking paths from Cumberland, Maryland to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, shows a total economic impact of **\$121 million** in 2019 from direct, indirect, and induced impacts in the GAP region. <https://gaptrail.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2021-Great-Allegheny-Passage-Economic-Impact-Report-Spreads.pdf>.

The U.S. Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Economic Analysis released data in 2022 that showed outdoor recreation generates **\$1.1 trillion** in economic output (2.2% GDP), 4.98 million jobs and comprises 3.2 of U.S. employees. [Outdoor recreation contributes over \\$1 Trillion to the U.S. economy - Outdoor Recreation Roundtable](#)

Key economic benefits associated with trail networks in rural areas include:

- *Tourism and Recreation:* Tourism is a primary economic driver in rural areas. Trail networks attract tourists and outdoor enthusiasts, leading to increased spending on accommodations, dining, retail, and recreational activities.
- *Job Creation:* Developing and maintaining trail networks requires labor, which creates employment opportunities in sectors such as trail construction, maintenance, guiding services, hospitality and retail.
- *Small Business Growth:* Trails spur development of small businesses catering to the needs of trail users such as outdoor outfitters, cafes, bed and breakfast and tour operators.
- *Property Values:* Properties located near well maintained trails often experience an increase in value due to their proximity to recreational amenities and scenic views.
- *Community Revitalization:* Trails may contribute to population growth and community vitality by attracting residents.
- *Healthcare Cost Reduction:* Access to outdoor recreation through trail networks promotes physical activity and active lifestyles, which can lead to improved public health.

Overall, trail networks in rural areas can stimulate economic growth, diversify local economies, and enhance the quality of life for residents, making them valuable assets for sustainable development and community well-being. The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of Senate Bill 645 – Maryland Trails Advisory Committee and the Maryland Office of Trails – Establishment (Great Maryland Trails Act).