

Chapter 5 PURPOSE, GOALS, OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES

PURPOSE

The following legislative summary was provided in both HB 1496 and SB 790 in 2008 to describe the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority. *“Establishes an authority for Southwest Virginia to create a multi-purpose regional recreational area similar to, and potentially adjoining, such areas in West Virginia and Kentucky. The recreational area might consist of various trails and other amenities on private open-space lands where members of the public could, for example, hunt, fish, boat, camp, ride motorcycles or all-terrain vehicles, ride mountain bikes, or ride horses. The Southwest Regional Recreation Authority would have various powers to manage the area by raising funds, employing staff, and adopting rules punishable by civil penalties. Landowners participating in the recreation area would be afforded a limited liability for persons engaging in recreational activities on their property.”*

The legislation passed and was signed into law by the Virginia General Assembly on May 24th, 2008 thus creating the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority. *See Appendix A for the legislation in its entirety.*

SRRA Primary Objectives once funding is in place to hire full-time staff:

1. Facilitate recreational trails development in each of the seven counties and the City of Norton that will create economic opportunities for local businesses.
2. Seek easements on large tracts of private land to create public trails.
3. Work with public land holders to assist in the development of trails on public lands that have economic potential for local communities.
4. Provide assistance to the communities to both identify and write grants to help further the development, expansion, maintenance and marketing of the trails within the seven county/ City of Norton project area.

PROPOSED MISSION STATEMENT

SRRA Mission Statement: To enhance Southwest Virginia’s economy by expanding tourism opportunities for motorized and non-motorized off-road trail activities including, but not limited to, hiking, cycling, horseback riding, canoeing and off -highway vehicle riding.

SRRA Enhanced Mission Statement:

To create a positive economic impact for Southwest Virginia by expanding the tourism opportunities of off-road trail activities pertaining to non-motorized and motorized vehicle use. Such activities include, but are not limited to pedestrian, bicycles, mountain bicycles, horses, canoeing all-terrain vehicles and off-highway vehicle use.

To expand these recreational trail related tourism opportunities, the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority will work to: increase land access for trail activities, reduce landowner liability, and promote trail education (safety, environment, compatibility, etc.) The SRRA will also act as the state body that will work to develop multiuse shared trail systems that cross multiple county lines.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Increase land access for recreational trails across the Spearhead Trails Region of Buchanan, Scott, Lee, Russell, Dickenson, Tazewell, Wise and the City of Norton.

Objective 1.1 Develop trail systems that may cross multiple property lines, county lines and, also state lines adopting into the program existing public trails while, at the same time, expanding the trail system to include existing, proposed and potential trails that might be opened to the public.

Objective 1.2 Establish user agreements with landowners for use of the trails.

See Appendix D for examples of user agreements.

General enabling language exists under Chapter 645 15.2-6018 and 15.2-6021 of Virginia Law provides SRRA the ability to promulgate regulations and other duties necessary for the desired management duties and structure.

Strategy 1.2.1 Develop, manage, maintain, and provide enforcement for the Spearhead Trail System at the capacity necessary to protect the landowners, the users and those hired to protect.

o Reduce landowner liability for recreational trail use on private property through easement agreements and implementation of VA Code Section 29.1-509 .
(See Appendix I for this legislation)

o Provide enforcement on designated Spearhead Trails areas.

Recommendation: Request Legislation giving SRRA Rangers full police powers. Currently SRRA are authorized only Conservator of the Peace powers.

Strategy 1.2.2 Develop criteria for trail projects to be adopted into the Spearhead Trail System.

Strategy 1.2.3 Develop a SRRA Program for enforcement on trails.

o Work with State and Local Police on development.

Objective 1.3 Secure Funding for Southwest Regional Recreation Authority

o To hire necessary staff to meet the needs and demands required in developing a seven county trail system.

o To purchase adequate liability insurance to cover all trails adopted into the Spearhead Trail System.

o To cover staff expenses, mapping, equipment, funding for enforcement authority, etc.

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Strategy 1.3.1 Research and pursue funding avenues through general budget as a line item and other areas (such as the proposed titling of ATVs & OHVs)

Strategy 1.3.2 Identify and serve as a resource for funding sources

Objective 1.4 Maintain awareness of recreational trail-related legislation and develop a plan of action for passage or opposition.

Strategy 1.4.1 Determine SRRA stance on legislation through discussion, research, and appropriate exchange of information.

Strategy 1.4.2 Once stance is determined, develop and implement a legislative plan of action to gather support or opposition to pending legislation as individuals, user groups, organizations, etc.

Objective 1.5 The SRRA will also promote recreational trail opportunities.

Strategy 1.5.1 Serve as a clearinghouse for information to user groups;

Strategy 1.5.2 Inventory and make available to the public information on existing trails;

Strategy 1.5.3 Form partnerships with federal and state agencies, local communities and private landowners.

Goal 2: Promote trail education to user groups and the general public.

Objective 2.1 Create a webpage that acts a reference for all trail-related education to include, but not limited to, safety, laws, environment, compatibility, etc.

Strategy 2.1.1 SRRA Board to submit information such as links and references that deal with trail education aspects as it pertains to their particular user group area, agency, or organization.

Objective 2.2 Develop relationships with local, state, and national groups and organizations that have a focus in recreational trail safety, environment, and compatibility issues.

Objective 2.3 Serve as a clearinghouse and as a contact for trail education resources.

Goal 3: Promote existing recreational trail opportunities to the people of Virginia and to those outside the state.

Objective 3.1 Serve as a clearinghouse for information to recreational trail user groups in Virginia.

Objective 3.2 Inventory and make existing trail information available to the public.

Strategy 3.2.1 Expand upon the preliminary website created by WMTH Corporation.

Strategy 3.2.2 Marketing Materials

- o Pending allocation of monies, discuss development of SRRA promotional materials (brochure, posters, direct mail, catalog, etc.)

Objective 3.3 Form partnerships with federal and state agencies and local communities.

Strategy 3.3.1 Guest Speakers/Informational Sessions

- o Invite federal and state agencies, organizations or any group involved with recreational trails to speak with the board about their roles and projects.

Strategy 3.3.2 Community Familiarization Trips

- o When applicable, hold SRRA board meetings around the region to view trail projects firsthand.

Objective 3.4 Obtain memorandum of understanding (MOV) between state, towns, clubs, counties, etc. and SRRA so there is a clear understanding between all concerned as to what is expected from those entities (trail creation, operational funding, assistance in maintenance, etc.) and what they, in turn, expect from SRRA, such as maintenance, policing, marketing, grant writing, etc.

Goal 4: Work with legislators and when legislation is required, find a sponsor to introduce a bill to address the need. The following may need legislative action:

Objective 4.1: Seek state and federal funding for SRRA

Objective 4.2: Adjust Virginia Code to authorize SRRA Rangers full police powers. Currently SRRA Rangers are authorized on Conservator of the Peace powers.

Objective 4.3: Determine if it will require legislative to allow counties, cities and or towns to pass local ordinances allowing off-highway vehicles to drive on specific road. Examples of ordinances passed in other communities are available in *Appendix G*.

Objective 4.4: Legislation may also be needed to allow OHV's to cross roads, bridges, railroads, streams etc. within the seven county/one city area. Such legislation has already been passed for a particular highway in Buchanan County. See *Appendix H*. It is recommended that legislation now be written that would make it permissible for other counties, cities and/or towns within SRRA area to pass similar local ordinances rather than having to have special legislation passed for each situation.

Objective 4.5: Address limitations due to environmental concerns when, in fact, many of the trails are already in existence and previously used as coal roads, gas roads, and timber roads; trails are being located on private property; and/or trails are on land already disturbed due to timber and coal extraction.