

2021-2023
ANNUAL REPORT



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ELK RIVER TRAIL FOUNDATION, INC.

(Foundation) was formed as a non-profit corporation on February 26, 2020, and obtained its 501(c)3 designation in May 2020. The Foundation adopted the Elk River Trail and partnered with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (“DNR”) to support the new rails-to-trails project in central West Virginia. In 2022, the Foundation became the “designated entity” for the Elk River Water Trail, a state-designated flatwater trail.

OUR MISSION is to preserve, protect, and enhance the Elk River rail and water trails for public recreation, community health and well-being, conservation, ecology, education, economic development, and cultural enrichment.

ELK RIVER TRAIL FOUNDATION, INC.

3836 Indian Creek Road, Elkview, WV 25071
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THIS ANNUAL REPORT covers activities during the three-year period 2021 through 2023. Despite the intervening pandemic, the Foundation has continued to operate with great success. We continue to be thrilled at how important outdoor recreation has become to our communities. The trails have provided people with the opportunity to escape from the stresses of life and a place to exercise for a healthier lifestyle.

They are providing an economic boost to our communities. We are proud of what we have been able to accomplish to support our trails and our communities and look forward to continuing our work to meet our goals. We owe a special debt of gratitude to those who have volunteered and to the donors who have made it possible for us to achieve the results described below.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our current board of directors is comprised of individuals with a broad range of talents from all areas along the trails.

Michelle Bodkins	Clay County Clerk's Office; former apartment/office manager, Central Appalachian Empowerment Zone	Fran King	Owner, King's Trucking and Wrecker Service and former President, Clay County Commission
Jeremy Cantrell	Owner of Shepherd's View air BnB; representative on Elk Conservation District	Dave Knight	Owner, Yak House Rentals (bikes and kayaks) and Knight Insurance; Clendenin City Councilman; Chair of 25045 – A New Clendenin, Inc.
Barry Curry	Retired Project Manager, WV Department of Environmental Protection	Matt Lyons	Emergency Manager and Fire Chief at Chemours Chemical Plant; Director, Metro 911 and Kanawha, Putnam Emergency Planning Committee; Master Sergeant, WV Air National Guard;
Mitch DeBoard	President of Clay County Business Development Authority and Buffalo Creek Watershed Association	Elizabeth Salvo	Owner, Bigfoot Braxxie's Bikes and Coon Creek Cove Farm
Lori Dittman	Owner, Elk River Paddle and Yak; Teacher at Braxton County Middle School; Delegate, WV House of Delegates, 63rd District (Braxton County)	Kay Summers	Mayor of Clendenin; Retired Senior Vice President of McJunkin-Redman
Terrell Ellis	President and CEO of Advantage Valley and president/owner of Terrell Ellis & Associates	Jeff Skidmore	Retired WV State Policeman; Business Owner, and former Mayor of Gassaway
Dr. Rick Ferris	Associate Professor of Business and Digital Marketing Program Director, University of Charleston; faculty advisor for UC's outdoor recreation club; board member 25045 – A New Clendenin, Inc.	Kenneth Tawney	Attorney, Jackson Kelly PLLC; board member, 25045 – A New Clendenin, Inc. and WV Trails, Inc.; USDA - Rural Development, Rural Partners Network Steering Committee
Matt Holbert	Owner, Clendenin Brewing Company, Bricks and Barrels Restaurant, Axes and Ales Restaurant, Rollin' Smoke BBQ, and Uncork and Create; Solutions Architect with Peraton; former engineer with National Security Agency	Clinton Cochran <i>ex officio</i>	WV DNR, State Parks, District Park Manager (includes Elk River Trail)
		Chelsea Ruby <i>ex officio</i>	WV Tourism Commissioner

OFFICERS & EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Kenneth Tawney	President	Dr. Rick Ferris	Secretary
Mitch DeBoard	Vice President	Matt Holbert	Treasurer

WE WISH TO RECOGNIZE and thank those volunteers who have served and rotated off the board during this report period, including:

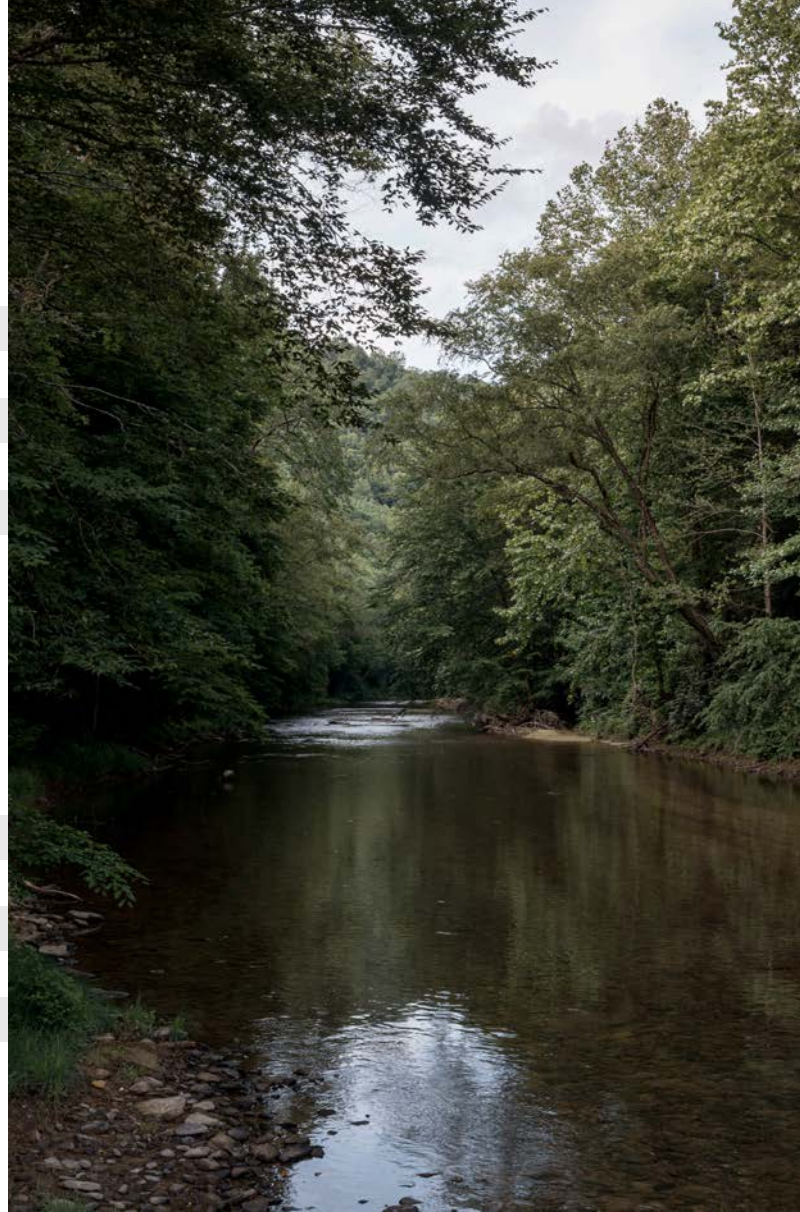
- **Connie Lupardus** of Clay
- **Michael Shamblin** of Clay
- **George Workman** of Clay
- **Michelle Martin** of South Charleston
- **Deborah Saulsgiver** of Clay
- **Andrew Smith** of Sutton/Gassaway
- **Sam England** of Weston
- **Christena Ross** of Pinch/Charleston
- **Josh Shamblin** of Clay

They share responsibility for our successes, and many of them continue to volunteer and to serve on committees.

THE FOUNDATION operates through committees under the direction of the Board of Directors. The primary committees are:

- **Trail Town Committee** – Chaired by Terrell Ellis
- **Rail Trail Committee** – Chaired by Matt Lyons
- **Water Trail Committee** – Chaired by Barry Curry
- **Grant Committee** – Chair position currently open
- **Website/Social Media** – Chaired by Matt Holbert

The non-board-member volunteers who serve and have in the past served on these committees are equally as important to the achievements of our organization, and we hesitate to name them for fear of missing someone.



RAIL & WATER TRAIL UPDATE

THERE ARE NOW 73 MILES of rail trail open from the Gassaway Trailhead in the Town of Gassaway to the Hartland Trailhead (near Clay) in Clay County, and another 3.5 miles are completed from Queen Shoals to the Town of Clendenin. Work continues to complete the roughly 20-miles section of the trail between Hartland and Queen Shoals and a short section through the Town of Clendenin. Enhancements include restrooms, paved trail sections, bridge replacements, an upcoming rail-biking business and new public river access points. The Foundation does not take credit for all these improvements but wishes to memorialize them to show progress toward completion.

RESTROOMS

Restrooms have been installed at several locations along the Elk River Trail. There are plans to have ten restrooms along the trail, including two on the Buffalo Creek rails-with-trail section.



PAVED TRAIL SECTION

A one-mile section in the Town of Clendenin has been paved thanks to funding provided by the Kanawha County Commission. The construction of the Clendenin Trailhead is slated to commence in the spring of 2024. The Foundation worked with the Kanawha County Commission and the Town of Clendenin to pursue the WV Department of Transportation - Transportation Alternatives grant that was awarded to the Town of Clendenin in the amount of \$187,500.

RAIL & WATER TRAIL UPDATE *CONT.*

BRIDGE REPLACEMENT ON RAILS-WITH-TRAIL SECTION

The two bridges that were washed out on the 18 miles rails-with-trail section of the old Buffalo Creek and Gauley Railroad have now been replaced under the watchful eye of Project Manager and Foundation Vice President Mitch DeBoard.

PUBLIC RIVER ACCESS POINTS

The DNR completed its five new public river access points at Coonskin Park, Bream (Big Chimney), Blue Creek, Clendenin South (near the old Herbert Hoover High School site), and Clendenin North. The DNR's sites generally feature paved parking and paved ramp access to the river.

PRESERVING, PROTECTING & ENHANCING THE ELK RIVER RAIL & WATER TRAILS

THE FOUNDATION has engaged in several projects in pursuit of its goals to preserve, protect and enhance the rail and water trails. Those projects are described below.

DUNDON TRAILHEAD

TC Energy gave a substantial gift to the Foundation to help pay down the Foundation's debt on the land purchased at the Dundon Trailhead. The Foundation later successfully negotiated an agreement to sell that property to the DNR. The DNR plans to build a visitor's center there given its ideal location at the confluence of Buffalo Creek and Elk River near the center of the rail trail. It is also the point at which the rail trail and the rails-with-trail section converge.

The Foundation and DNR signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that memorialized agreements to pattern the Visitor's Center after the old country store and train depot that once occupied nearby property and to include a small museum incorporating original-growth lumber, including native chestnut boards, from the "red house" on the property. The MOU also captured DNR's intention to build a handicapped-accessible kayak and boat launch with a handicapped-accessible path to the launch.



RAIL BIKING BUSINESS ON RAILS-WITH-TRAIL SECTION

Rail Explorers, which already has operations in several states, has entered into an agreement with the WV Division of Multimodal Transportation Facilities (the owner of the rails-with-trails section) and a lease agreement with the Central Appalachian Empowerment Zone for a rail-biking business on the rails-with-trail section along Buffalo Creek. They anticipate hiring 20-25 people and attracting 30,000-50,000 visitors in their first year of operation.

QUEEN SHOALS TRAILHEAD

Using a generous grant from the Dr. O.M. Harper and Ruth A. Harper Foundation, the Foundation leveled an area and had gravel laid for a parking area on its property at the Queen Shoals Trailhead.



The Foundation also had metal doors installed to discourage break-ins and vandalism and restored electric service to the property. The Foundation is currently negotiating to rent the property for outdoor recreation-related businesses to provide a continuing source of revenue that can be used to pursue trail projects.

RIVER & TRAIL CLEAN-UP

In 2022, the Foundation, through the leadership primarily of Rebecca Metzger, sponsored and funded an Americorps team that was instrumental in covering 28 miles of trail and removing an estimated 8,000 pounds of trash from the trail and the riverbank. The Braxton County High School Future Business Leaders of America also cleaned a section of the trail as part of their club activities. A grant from WV American Water Co. allowed the Foundation to purchase shovels, trash pickers, rubber gloves and other equipment that can be used and re-used in river clean-up efforts. Three river clean-ups were scheduled in 2023, although two had to be canceled due to high water.



PRESERVING, PROTECTING & ENHANCING THE ELK RIVER RAIL & WATER TRAILS *CONT.*

LITTLE ITALY PROPERTY

With the help of Case Equipment Company and its local vendor, State Equipment, furnishing the equipment, Fran King and Danny McCoy cleared the brush on the Foundation's half acre at Little Italy and erected a memorial to recognize the generosity of Robert Sowa and his wife in donating the land to the Foundation. The property adjoins the rail trail on one side and provides easy access to the water trail on the opposite side.

BICYCLE REPAIR STATION

The Foundation bought and installed a bicycle repair station at the Ivydale Trailhead utilizing a grant from Cabela's/ Bass Pro Shops and the volunteerism of Fran King and Danny McCoy. Given its popularity, the Foundation is currently seeking funds to have bike repair stations installed at the other thirteen trailheads.



BENCHES

A grant from the Kanawha Coalition for Community Health Improvement allowed the Rail Trail Committee under the leadership of Rail Trail Committee Chair Matt Lyons and a host of volunteers to install five benches along the trail between Clendenin and Queen Shoals. The benches have been quite popular as resting stops for people using the trail. Jessica Gamponio Wright and the Elk River Walking Club of Clendenin helped choose the bench locations. A special thanks to Jessica, Rail Trail Committee chair Matt Lyons, Gary Vogelsong, Barry Curry, Dave Knight, John Casey, Romaine Casey, Brad Tilley, John Carpenter, Shawn Duncan, and Ken Tawney for installing the benches. With the help of private donations from anonymous donors, one of the benches bears a memorial to Dave Fields, the legendary running coach of the Wapiti Running Club in Clendenin, and another memorializes Chris "Kit" Martin, late husband of the Foundation's immediate past treasurer, Michelle Martin.



In addition, Chris Johnson's carpentry class at Clay County High School built wooden picnic tables that were installed along the trail in Clay County. Under the supervision of instructor Allen Hamrick and Michelle Samples, the summer school program students built wooden benches that were then hand-engraved, carved and sanded with bear and eagle designs. The craftsmanship of both are outstanding!

RIVER MILE MARKERS

The Water Trail Committee used funds from grants by TC Energy and a Stream Partners Grant from the WV Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to purchase mileage markers to place at one-mile intervals along the 101-mile Elk River Water Trail running from Sutton Dam in Sutton to Charleston. The signs have been installed on the Braxton County section through the efforts of committee chair Barry Curry, Michael Shamblin, Lois Cole, and Jon Dudley. The committee is continuing its work to have the markers installed on the remaining sections of the river. The mileage markers will improve safety for river-goers by permitting people to plan trips and to then know where they are along the river in relation to their goal. Further, mileage markers can be used in the event of an emergency to allow first responders to identify where a response is needed, especially along rural sections of the trail. Funds are also being sought for signs to install along the river to identify public access sites. Markers on the roadside can help to identify public access points, but those signs are not visible from the water and not all unimproved public access points are obvious from the river.



The Water Trail Committee's Barry Curry and Michael Shamblin also mapped, photographed and obtained GPS data for all known public river access sites along the Elk River Water Trail. The data are being incorporated into the Foundation's new web site to publicize their existence and to have the sites incorporated into a river trail map in order to help people plan trips on the river. Admittedly optimistic, the Foundation's ultimate goal is to have a public access site every five miles along the water trail.

PRESERVING, PROTECTING & ENHANCING THE ELK RIVER RAIL & WATER TRAILS *CONT.*

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The Website and Social Media Committee has been hard at work to update the Foundation's website, www.elkrivertrail.org, which should be released in early 2024. The new website will feature updated maps and updated information about the trailheads,

public water access sites, and amenities (restaurants, lodging, shopping, local attractions, etc.) in the area surrounding the trails. The Foundation now boasts 8,929 followers on its Facebook page.

PUBLIC RECREATION

MARATHON/HALF MARATHON/5K RACES

Ricky Campbell and his AP Timing Group have now sponsored two annual marathon/half marathon/5-k races on Elk River Trail along the Dundon-to-Ivydale section for the benefit of the Foundation. The first race had just over 100 runners register and about 90 runners from several states participated. The second race featured runners from twenty-two states, including runners from California, Arizona and Nevada. Registration had to be capped at 300 because of logistical issues, and most registrants participated even in the pouring rain on race day! The third annual race is now in the planning phase. The Foundation thanks the Central Appalachian Empowerment Zone and Clay County Little League for their support in handling the logistics of the races at the starting point/finish line. Special gratitude goes

to the Mountain State Wheelers and the Foundation volunteers who manned aid stations and rode safety inspection loops along the race route.

All finishers received a high-quality race shirt, finisher medal, tagged photos on race day, and refreshments post-race. In September 2023 the proceeds check from this year's race for \$2,250 was presented to the Foundation which will go directly to benefit/support the trail system.



COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELL-BEING

WALKING & BIKING CLUBS

Foundation committee member Jessica Gamponio Wright and her friends established the Clendenin Walking Club that features a weekly walk on the trail, including one on New Year's Day 2024. The club has as many as 20 walkers on some days!



In Braxton County, the Elk River Rail to Trail Group, sponsored by Bigfoot Braxxie's Bikes, schedules group bike rides, departing from the historic train depot at the trailhead in Gassaway. They start with coffee and doughnuts at 9 am, then "All Aboard" their bikes at 10 am for a ride southbound. Lunch is served back at the Depot at noon at no cost, FREE for all, with donations accepted for food.

HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBILITY

The Foundation was the recipient of three hand pedal bikes and one rickshaw, courtesy of the West Virginia Assistive Technology System, a project funded by a grant from the Christopher and Dana Reeves Foundation National Paralysis Resource Center. These bikes, designed for use by handicapped individuals, are housed at Bigfoot Braxxie's Bikes in Gassaway and can be rented free of charge.



COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELL-BEING CONT.

“ACTIVE PEOPLE, HEALTHY NATION” PROCLAMATION

In 2022, the four mayors of the Elk River trail towns or their representatives met with Foundation and American Heart Association representatives at the Dundon Trailhead and signed a proclamation dedicating their communities to fitness and providing access to outdoor areas to exercise. Clendenin Mayor Kay Summers, Clay Mayor Josh Shamblin, Gassaway Mayor Richie Roach and Sutton Mayor J.D. Hoover signed the proclamation signifying their support for creating activity-friendly activities within their communities.



The event was a collaboration between the Foundation and the American Heart Association to bring the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) “Active People, Healthy Nation” initiative to the Elk River area. According to the CDC, increased physical activity can improve health, quality of life, and reduce health care costs. Regular physical activity can help reduce the risk of at least 20 chronic diseases and conditions and provide effective treatment for many of these conditions. The initiative was spearheaded by Julie Thomm, Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development associated with an outdoor recreation economy has been a big focus of the Foundation during the report period. A \$25,000 grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation enabled the Foundation to partner with the Braxton County Development Authority to fund a \$75,000 study to determine what would be needed to develop a “trail town,” outdoor recreation and tourism-based economy in the four incorporated towns of Sutton, Gassaway, Clay and Clendenin and their surrounding areas.

The study developed key strategies to:

- Develop 70 new businesses over the next 10 years
- Construct key infrastructure to promote flow of people
- Market the trail system and trail towns
- Adopt local policies to attract visitors and small business development

The study predicted:

- Implementation was expected to cost just over \$4 million over 10 years
- Economic impact of \$250 million in new sales activity over next 15 years and \$390 million in regional economic activity over that period
- 195 full and part-time jobs across different sectors of the economy

The Foundation used the study to develop a \$1.7 million project and apply for a \$1,365,000 POWER grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to implement some of the trail town study recommendations. The application was one of the projects chosen to receive the support of the new Pioneer Trail Network operated through Glenville State University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development as one its signature projects. In October 2023, ARC announced that the grant had been awarded to the Foundation.

The grant will include funds to/for:

- Hire a project director and a “trail circuit rider” to oversee projects
- Retain a professional sign-making company to design and install wayfinding signs in all four trail towns
- Construct four handicap-accessible kayak launch sites
- Provide \$1,000 of architectural land planning design services to each qualified business owner for facade renovation and property improvements

CONSERVATION, ECOLOGY & EDUCATION

POLLINATOR PROJECTS

Thanks to board member Jeremy Cantrell, the Foundation partnered with Elk Conservation District and played a small role in a project that involved the Elk Conservation District, the WV Conservation Agency, and fifth grade students from Davis Elementary School in Gassaway planting a perennial flower bed along the rail trail in Gassaway. The Foundation looks forward to identifying additional sites for these pollinator fields.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT *CONT.*

Grant Funds Cont.

- Marketing campaign
- Facade mini-grants up to \$10,000 to remove or rehab blighted structures (\$125,000 each town)
- Technical assistance business support packages of \$5,000 for 20 small businesses (Foundation contracts directly with providers to provide technical assistance)
- Work with Advantage Valley to provide coaching and training for new and existing businesses
- Website improvements for the Foundation and the Trail Towns, brochures, digital marketing, cooperative advertising with WV Tourism

The Foundation is thankful for the partnerships with Advantage Valley, 25045 – A New Clendenin, Inc., and the Braxton County Commission that agreed to provide part of the 20% matching funds and services that made the grant possible. The Foundation is now working to commence implementation of the grant.

SUPPORTING ELK RIVER TRAIL FOUNDATION

If you wish to support the trails, you may do so by:

- Mailing a check payable to Elk River Trail Foundation to Treasurer, Elk River Trail Foundation, 177 Dewey Drive, Elkview, WV 25071
- Logging onto <https://www.ElkRiverTrails.org> and clicking on the donate button in the ribbon
- Creating a Facebook fundraiser and asking all your friends to donate at <https://www.facebook.com/fund/elkrivertail/>



ONCE AGAIN, THANK YOU
to all our supporters, volunteers & donors.
We can do nothing without you.

Hoping to see you on the trails this year,

Kenneth E. Tawney
Elk River Trail Foundation | President

FINANCIAL

GENERAL ACCOUNT

At year-end 2023, the Foundation had \$91,100.69 in its general fund, primarily due to the sale of the Dundon property. Of that amount, \$25,000 is being held for a contingent liability in the event it is needed to raze the “red house” under the agreement reached with the DNR. The Foundation and DNR are working with Appalachian Challenge Academy in Beckley, WV to have the house razed at no charge as part of their hands-on job training program.

The Foundation is currently being cautious in funds expenditure due to the nature of the ARC POWER grant discussed previously. It is a “reimbursable grant,” meaning that the Foundation must first pay funds for program expenditures and then be reimbursed, causing a potential cash flow issue if funds on hand are inadequate to pay current expenses.

During the reporting period, a major contributor of undedicated funds to the Foundation was the Chili ‘n on the Elk and Beer and Wine Festival held in Clendenin that has raised nearly \$14,000 for the Foundation. A special debt of gratitude is owed to the hard-working team that holds the Festival, including Carrie Sloan Myers and Matt Holbert. The Foundation has also had a particularly generous donor who does not wish to be identified. Additionally, significant funds were received from the Elk River Trail Marathon this year. Another surprising source of revenue has been the Facebook birthday challenges where people ask for donations to the Foundation instead of gifts. Without these undedicated funds, the Foundation would be hard-pressed to pay its vendors and service providers.

GRANT ACCOUNT

At year-end 2023, the Foundation had \$30,118.84 in its Grant Account. The funds held are:

Harper Foundation	Queen Shoals Property Improvement	\$28,393.00
WV American Water	River Clean-Up	\$1,142.95
Cabela’s/Bass Pro Shops	Bike Repair Stations	\$109.87
Other	Various	\$473.02

The Foundation has no liabilities other than the contingent liability related to the Dundon property mentioned above.





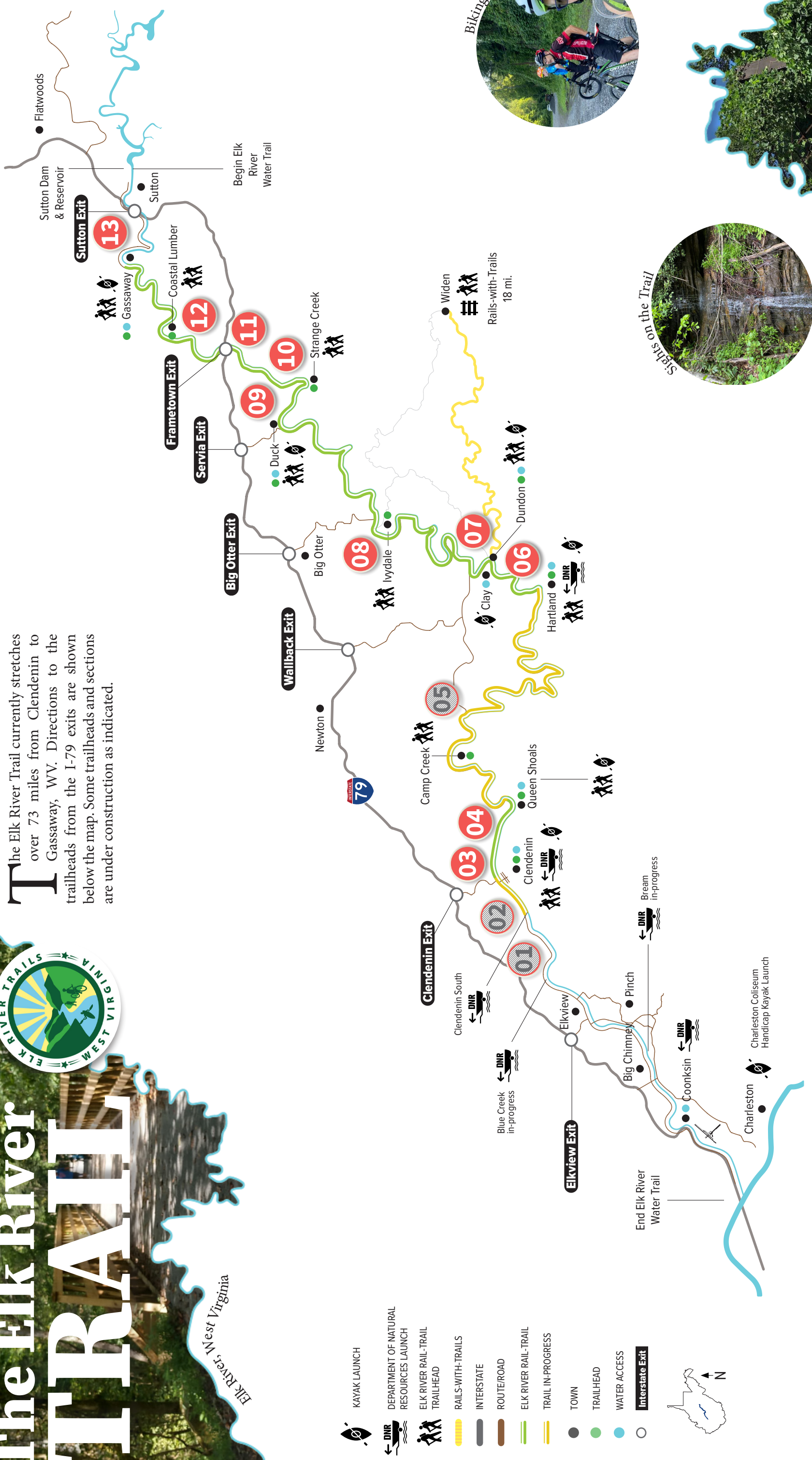
*Elk River Trail
Mileage/Distances Table
Elk River Trail Foundation, Inc.*

Trailhead Location (North to South)	Railroad Milepost Markers on Trail	Distance of Segment from Prior Trailhead (miles)	Distance from Gassaway (miles)	Status as of February 20, 2024
Gassaway	21.8	0	0	North end of trail Completed south
Coastal Lumber	28.6	6.8	6.8	Completed
Frametown	30.9	2.3	9.1	Completed
<i>RESTROOM</i>	<i>31.8</i>			
Strange Creek	37.1	6.2	15.3	Completed
Duck	40.3	3.2	18.5	Completed
<i>RESTROOM</i>	<i>45.1</i>			
Ivydale	50.3	10	28.5	Completed
<i>RESTROOM</i>	<i>57.3</i>			
Dundon	62.2	11.9	40.4	Completed
<i>RESTROOM</i>	<i>65.0</i>			
Hartland	67.2	5.0	45.4	Completed north Under construction south
Camp Creek - Procius	82.1	14.9	60.3	Under construction
Queen Shoals	89.9	7.8	68.1	Under construction north. Completed south to Clendenin
<i>RESTROOM</i>	<i>91.6</i>			
Clendenin North	92.9	3.0	71.1	Completed
Clendenin Trailhead	93.9	1.0	72.1	Completed and paved north to Clendenin North; under construction south
Brown Street	95.1	1.2	73.3	Under construction; south end of trail
Total main trail		73.3		
Buffalo Creek Rails-With Trail (Dundon to Widen)		18.0		Under construction
Middle Creek Spur		0.8		At Hartland Trailhead
<i>TOTAL ELK RIVER TRAIL</i>		<i>92.1</i>		

The Elk River TRAIL



The Elk River Trail currently stretches over 73 miles from Clendenin to Gassaway, WV. Directions to the trailheads from the I-79 exits are shown below the map. Some trailheads and sections are under construction as indicated.



01	1.2 mi.	02	1.0 mi.	03	3.0 mi.	04	7.8 mi.	05	14.9 mi.	06	5.0 mi.	07	11.9 mi.	08	10 mi.	09	3.2 mi.	10	6.2 mi.	11	2.3 mi.	12	6.8 mi.	13	
Brown St.	Clendenin South	Clendenin North	Queen Shoals	Procius	Hartland	Dundon	Ivydale	Duck	Strange Creek	Frametown	Coastal Lumber	Gassaway													

DISTANCE BETWEEN TRAILHEADS | TOTAL TRAIL 73.3 mi.

