



Appalachian Forest

NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

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Benedum Foundation Awards AFNHA Grant for Tourism Development

The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation has awarded a \$197,000 grant to Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area (AFNHA) to expand the successful Highlands Creative Economy initiative, using regional collaboration to enhance cultural heritage, natural, and human assets to grow tourism and benefit communities.

Highlands Creative Economy (HCE) is a partnership between Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area and Eastern West Virginia Community & Technical College (Eastern). The HCE program hosts a monthly networking meeting for tourism-related organizations, training events, workshops, and the annual Tourism Summit. Meetings are held on the 4th Thursday of every month at 10:00 a.m. on Zoom. This open forum gives county tourism leaders and local businesses a chance to discuss successes, issues, and solutions and to engage with guest speakers.

Initially supported by a major grant from the Benedum Foundation in 2021, the program expanded the work of the Potomac Highlands Creative Economy group, previously managed by Eastern, to include all 18 counties within the National Heritage Area in order to grow partnerships and networking opportunities for more communities. “This new grant cycle will expand the ongoing training and networking of our program with a new focus on identifying and developing best practices for regional attractions to promote our National Heritage Area as a wider tourist destination,” explained Ben Duvall-Irwin, AFNHA Communications Manager.

The 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 community development, conservation, celebrating cultural heritage, and creating opportunities for transformational experiences. To learn more, see www.appalachianforestnha.org.

Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College provides accessible and affordable educational opportunities for academic, technical, workforce training and life-long learning for the Potomac Highlands regional community. Eastern enriches the Potomac Highlands through a range of innovative programs and services that exemplify community college values and achieve the community college mission. For more information see www.easternwv.edu or call 304-434-8000.