

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 22, 2021

The Honorable Justin Maxson
Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Maxson:

We are writing in support of The Conservation Fund's (TCF) application for the Madison/Boone Resource and Recreation Action Plan project, for which they are seeking Fiscal Year 2021 funding via the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development's Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge (RPIC). This funding will allow TCF to work with the City of Madison and Boone County, as well as recreation and community health stakeholders, resource agencies, and other community leaders, to develop a vision and implementation steps to advance asset-based recreation and economic development in southern West Virginia.

We understand that through this project, TCF will engage with the local community and utilize on-site workshops to convene community members and key stakeholders to identify goals and develop action plans to benefit the region's economy and quality of life. The City of Madison and Boone County are actively working to recruit and expand new industries, including tourism, to improve the economy that was severely damaged by the decline of the coal industry. Southern West Virginia is home to the Little Coal and Big Coal Rivers, offering river-trail kayaking and fishing opportunities. The Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority continues to expand its national recognized trail network system. The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources is continuing public land investments through the new Forks of Coal State Natural Area and the long-range reintroduction of elk to the coalfields. Boone County, however, remains underserved in per-capita public land access and additional opportunities for wildlife-oriented recreation in and around the City of Madison and Boone County will be explored through this project. There is local interest in developing additional trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horse-riding, and potentially other outdoor recreation assets, that could draw new residents and businesses while also providing a healthier and more enjoyable place to live for current residents.

We appreciate your consideration of USDA-RD Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge funding for the Madison/Boone Resource and Recreation Action Plan project that will help southern West Virginia continue to develop and utilize its resource and recreation assets to strategically improve the social, cultural, and economic structure of the community.

Sincerely,



Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Carol D. Miller
Member of Congress