

Wild Rivers Coast: Trails Build Outdoor Recreation Experiences

THEME: While the Rural Tourism Studio Outdoor Recreation Action Team creates a Regional Trails Map—annotated to show not only trails, but other features of interest as well-- concurrent product development initiatives have expanded the quality and volume of trails in the Wild Rivers Coast region. The variety of projects offer several ways for community members interested in outdoor recreation to “go where their energy is” and build momentum, whether it be for promotion or product. Rather than being constrained by a step-by-step linear process, the region has demonstrated its capacity to be opportunistic and nimble in pursuit of its vision.

PROJECT IMPACT: Several regional trails-related projects have been launched in the past three years. First, after almost two years of work, the Wild Rivers Coast Scenic Bikeway officially opened in July 2015. Second, community members organized the Wild Rivers Coast Mountain Biking Association in 2014 to expand access to mountain biking, as much for local residents as for visitors. Under the Association’s sponsorship, a multi-use trails plan for the Lower Rogue River in the Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest was created. As a result, mountain biking, a priority activity in this trails plan (along with two other non-motorized trail projects in the region), garnered \$377,351 in investment from the 2016 State Recreational Trails Program (RTP) in Oregon. Finally, work is nearly complete on both digital and print versions of the Regional Trails Map, which will connect visitors to not only the trails, but also to the communities they traverse.

While each of these projects developed separately, with just a handful of overlapping stakeholders, they share the characteristic of being planned and supported regionally, even though the locations are community-specific.

PLACE: The Wild Rivers Coast region holds the most isolated of Oregon’s coastal communities in terms of distance from major population centers. From the southern part of Coos County at Bandon, it extends south through all of Curry County to the California border. Uniquely located between diverse coastal landscapes and true wilderness, the terrain varies from long flat beaches and sheltered harbors to churning rivers and dramatic promontories. This topography has helped shape the strongly independent communities.

As the traditional natural resource sectors of fishing and timber have declined, tourism has gained importance as a current source of employment and a driver of future growth in the region’s economy. But only recently has tourism become a true focus for a regional economic development strategy.

STORY: Just as the Wild Rivers Coast is a rugged and isolated region, its outdoor recreation activities are abundant, but have been disconnected and often difficult to access. The Outdoor Recreation Action Team was formed through the Rural Tourism Studio (RTS) to address this issue.

The team’s first meeting drew more than 30 people. Because many participants were new and had not attended the RTS, the first five or six months were spent sifting through the diverse project ideas that

had surfaced during the studio process. After researching several options in depth, the team selected a Regional Trails Map as the first priority project. The trail map will point the way to the region's assets and connect outdoor recreation opportunities with other points of interest, such as agritourism locations. A web-based version will include a "Build Your Own Adventure" interactive feature. As noted in the "Lessons Learned" section (below), developing this map was a more complicated project than many expected, but, as of October 2016, it's finally near completion.

During this long planning process, the group contracted to a core of less than 10 active members, which was a more manageable size. This is quite typical of RTS action teams. The broader energy around outdoor recreation did not, however, dissipate. Stakeholders gravitated toward other projects that were evolving quite independent of each other at the same time. According to Frank Burris, an OSU Extension Leader who was one of the few people involved in all three projects "There wasn't really a cause and effect between the projects: they were just co-evolved at the same time with different groups of people." Some projects attracted people interested in planning and others attracted people interested in getting their hands dirty with more physical projects.

- The 60-mile long Wild Rivers Coast Scenic Bikeway received its official designation in October 2015 after two years of work; community members held a celebratory ribbon cutting that attracted 70 people. Work on the bikeway started just prior to the Rural Tourism Studio launch. Several RTS attendees were involved in the process and were energized by this accomplishment
- The Wild Rivers Coast Mountain Biking Association (WRCMBA) began organizing in 2014, independent of the RTS and had 45 active members within a year. One of the main Bikeway proponents also participated in the RTS. Seeking close-to-home mountain biking opportunities, members have focused on maintaining existing but neglected trails along the Lower Rogue River. This has been a great outlet for people who are more interested in hands-on work outdoors rather than planning meetings. The group was formally chartered as a chapter of the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) in 2016. Current membership is approximately 65 people.
- In response to an unexpected opportunity for state funding through the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), a small group quickly pulled together grant applications early in 2016 that have yielded nearly \$400,000. These funds will go toward developing thirty miles of mountain-bike optimized single track trails in the Coos County Forest, new trail segments in the Brookings Azalea park, rebuilding the historic multi-use Lower Rogue River Trail, and trail building equipment for WRCMBA.
 - The RTP application required development of a Trails Concept Plan (@ \$10,000) in advance, including an inventory of trail assets and evaluation and identification of specific projects to improve the trail system.

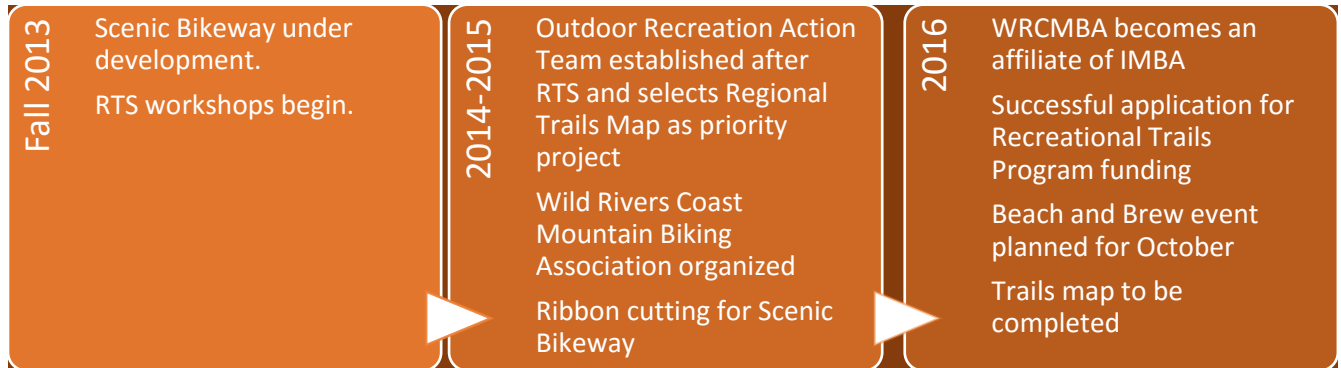
The formation of the IMBA chapter around the same time as the RTS led to stronger working relationships with the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest land managers. WRCMBA member Steve DiCicco explained how rather than approaching the Forest Service as a few riders who like to ride, "We launched the Wild Rivers Coast Mountain Biking Association so that we would be taken seriously. We built a relationship by offering our volunteer help." Burris further explained, "The Forest Service is coming around to an economic development role; a lot of different people have been talking with them

about this over a period of time. When we first started approaching them about trail development, the answer was ‘no money, no manpower, nothing we can do.’ So we put the manpower together. IMBA taught us how to build and maintain trails, and we offered our services to the Forest Service - ‘What can we maintain?’ And it didn’t have to be bike specific trails. We cleared the overgrown Lower Rogue Trail, which hadn’t been cleaned out in 5-8 years. They saw our commitment and knew, ‘These guys are serious!’”

In all this bustle of activity, the Outdoor Recreation Action Team (ORAT) has continued to make progress on the trail map. One of the challenges, according to ORAT convener Tyson Rasor, was deciding what the map should include and what should be left out. “Some areas are very sensitive from an environmental standpoint, and people were passionate about protecting them. There were concerns about potential vandalism in some locations, and a desire to hold back on listing tucked away “local” treasures, such as favorite surfing spots. Travel Oregon was helpful in recommending quality map-making consultants—a valuable addition based on experience in prior RTS communities.”

Now, the disparate outdoor recreation activities are converging on a new event: a Beach and Brew Fat Tire Ride planned for October 2016. This concept also emerged directly from RTS discussions, and now the community is ready to take it on. As Tylor Rasor notes, “The story is that our project successes are not just about the projects. They are about making connections that open the channel for people with leadership drive and ideas to find each other.”

TIMELINE



LESSONS LEARNED:

- To be successful in bringing agencies to the table as partners, local advocates must be well-organized, able to demonstrate how they are meeting a community need, and identify how the community can also provide something that addresses an agency need. Examples include the trail maintenance cited in the story, as well as a dive fill station to serve OSU Extension researchers and recreational divers.
- The trail map project has required a great deal of time, rather than money. It was helpful that the project budget included a stipend for the convener to support the process of inventorying and evaluating content, as well as to serve as a point person with the mapping consultants.

While the stipend budgeted for the coordinator did not cover full coordination costs, it helped sustain the energy needed to advance projects.

- As the pace of project activity quickened, it would have been good to structure more check-ins among outdoor recreation trail stakeholders. This was especially true for the Recreational Trails Program grant application; there was great support for the project but also a fair amount of confusion about the process, the context and who was doing what. Some people felt left behind. For example, stakeholders weren't clear about such basics as knowing who wrote the grant and what the final application said.
- Many types of capacities and capabilities supported all of these projects, including a part-time coach provided by Travel Oregon after the RTS workshops were complete; stipends for Action Team conveners, technical assistance from IMBA for developing the Wild Rivers Coast Mountain Biking Association, and flexible supplemental funding from the Wild Rivers Coast Alliance. These resources were all seen as valuable and necessary.

BUDGET: This section includes two separate budgets: revenue and expenses for the Regional Trails Map, and estimated total cost for the Regional Trails Program funded projects.

The Total budget for the **Regional Trails Map** project is \$19,000. Since the project has not yet been completed, these numbers may not reflect final costs.

Cash Revenue:	Cash
Travel Oregon Matching Grant for RTS	\$ 9,500
Local match (Wild Rivers Coast Alliance)	<u>\$ 9,500</u>
Total Revenue	\$19,000
Expenses	
Local Coordinator/Convener stipend for:	\$ 5,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Coordination and documenting Outdoor Recreation Action Team work</i> • <i>Collecting and mapping information about trails and attractions for Travel Oregon's ORB data base</i> • <i>Facilitating itinerary development with Google map coordinates</i> • <i>Educating and engaging partners to develop and promote trail systems</i> • <i>Developing a print and web-based map of outdoor recreation and agritourism opportunities</i> • <i>Contract for map production</i> 	
Map-making services and annual Google map membership	<u>\$14,000</u>
Total Expenses	\$19,000

The total budget for the newly funded Regional Trails Program projects is as follows:

Prerequisite investment for Regional Trails Plan	\$10,000
RTS Projects	
Coos County Forest Trail System (\$214,671 RTP grant; balance local match)	\$278,572
Lower Rogue River Trail restoration (\$142,608 RTP grant; balance local match)	\$183,714
WRCMBA trail building equipment (\$10,126 RTP grant; balance local match)	\$13,136

Azalea Park Trail extension, Brookings (\$10,000 RTP grant; balance local match)
Total:

\$16,380
\$501,802

TOOLS/RESOURCES:

- [Outdoor Recreation Action Team Convener job description](#)
- [“Local Biking Group Clears, Rides Trails”](#), Curry County Pilot, Dec 15 2015
- [Adventure Maps](#) Home page for mapmaking contractor

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