



ECONOMIC **RECOVERY** CORPS

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION



Advancing Rural PA's Outdoor Recreation Sector

Pennsylvania Wilds | Pennsylvania
Center for Entrepreneurship

Marc Wilken | MW Impact

Strengthening + inspiring communities in the Pennsylvania Wilds



Pennsylvania Wilds | Highly Rural Region

- 13-County Region in North Central PA
- Roughly the size of Massachusetts
- 2 million acres of public land (larger than Yellowstone National Park)
 - 29 state parks, 8 state forests
 - 2 National Wild & Scenic Rivers
 - International Dark Sky Park
 - Largest elk herd in the Northeast
- 25% of the state's land mass, but yet 4% of the state's population; severely distressed communities across the region



PWC | Stewarding a Brand and a Network

Place-Based Brand



Value Chain Network



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Value Chain vs. Supply Chain

VALUE CHAIN = COMMUNITY FOCUS

As defined by WealthWorks, a value chain is a network of people, businesses, organizations and agencies addressing a market opportunity to meet demand for specific products or services—advancing self-interest while building rooted local and regional wealth. Learn more about the principles behind a WealthWorks value chain [here](#).

SUPPLY CHAIN = INDIVIDUAL FOCUS

As defined by Investopedia, a supply chain is a network between a company and its suppliers to produce and distribute a specific product, and the supply chain represents the steps it takes to get the product or service to the customer.

Learn more about the journey of the Wilds Cooperative of PA Value Chain [here](#).

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Members | Wilds Cooperative of Pennsylvania

Industry-Sector Businesses

- Artisans
- Creative Industries & Media
- Retailers
- Food & Beverage
- Lodging
- Outfitters and Guide Services
- Agricultural Businesses

Resource Partners*

- State Park officials
- Chambers of Commerce
- SBDCs
- Educational institutions
- Lending institutions
- Technical assistance providers

**(can be non-profit and/or for-profit)*



Marketplace

Impact

- (3) brick-and-mortar shops, including 2 state parks
- 90% of products are local, including licensed products
- Market opportunity for an under resourced industry sector (artisans)
- Online store → [Shop the PA Wilds](#)



Marketplace

Next Phase/Evolution

- [Artisan Collaborative](#)
- [Mobile Platform to Advance Rural Tourism Economies](#)



Seed Funding & Business Development

PA Wilds Big Ideas Contest

- 3-year series across the 13-county region
- \$50,000 grand prize
- Wrap-around support and industry contacts



Business Accelerators | PACE Program

Resource guides customized by county



Next Phase | WCO evolved governance structure

- Strengthening member services
- Better benefits: Leveraging the network's buying power



Organizational and Program Funding

Federal



U.S. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION



Appalachian
Regional
Commission

State



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
& ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



pennsylvania
COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

Revenue Generating



Marketplace



PENNSYLVANIA
Parks & Forests
FOUNDATION

Creative Funding Strategies | Entrepreneurs

State Tax Credits

- Education Income Tax Credits → [Offseason cash flow assistance for outdoor rec businesses](#)
- Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credits → *potential for a dedicated PA Wilds Conservation Corps*

Crowdfunding | Sample Approaches

- Donation (trail maintenance) | [Patronicity](#)
- Microlending w/ 0% interest | [Kiva Oregon](#)
- Equity or Interest Loan | [Honeycomb Credit](#)
- Rewards | Credits
 - Nor'East Outdoors | [Patronicity](#)
 - Honey Badger Wheel | [Kickstarter](#)
 - Food and beverage tilt? | [NuMarket](#)





Catalytic Growth → Community Vibrancy

Deploying funds to a community project can serve as the “spark” a community needs to unlock other projects and accelerate growth and community vibrancy.

- *Ta Enos, CEO, Pennsylvania Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship*
- *Rob Riley, President, Northern Forest Center*

Community Investment Fund | Northern Forest Center

Success Story: [Lancaster, NH](#)

Population: 3,218

\$3.5 Million investment w/ accredited investors

Six quality downtown apartment rentals and expanded program and retail space for Lancaster's Root Seller Marketplace

Enhanced the vibrancy of Main Street Lancaster, contributing to the community's role as an economic hub in New Hampshire's North Country



"We at the Week's Medical Center are continually looking for medical professionals to staff our facility. In this rural area, our potential recruits are often challenged in their search for appropriate housing options, and it has become a barrier to securing new talent."

- Michael Lee, President, Weeks Medical Center

"A Star in the Forest" | Kane, PA

PA Wilds Media Lab & Laughing Owl Press



West Penn Energy | Six & Kane



Sonshine Factory





Why community-led investment matters?

Community Crowdfunding



Greater Resiliency for Small Businesses

50% of businesses that receive traditional capital fail after 5 years; **whereas less than 18% of those that use crowdfunding fail after 5 years**

- *Kathleen Minogue, Founder and CEO, [Crowdfund Better](#))*

Local success story: [Tionesta Market Village](#)

In 2013, community raised \$6k to complete the project. The village is still thriving today.



Healthy Entrepreneurial Ecosystem | Key Ingredients

- ❑ **Identifying and Cultivating Entrepreneurs:** Strategies for finding individuals passionate about business ideas and developing clear entrepreneurship pathways.
- ❑ **Overcoming Barriers to Growth:** Support mechanisms for aspiring entrepreneurs facing challenges due to adverse life experiences.
- ❑ **Business Development Training and Support:** Services dedicated to startup education, digital marketing programs, and streamlined referrals that connect entrepreneurs to resources while integrating feedback loops to guide future planning and support strategies.
- ❑ **Access to Capital:** Opportunities for small business lending, including microloans and alternative financing options for “unbankable businesses”.
- ❑ **Peer-to-Peer Networking:** Leadership and business summits that foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing, along with informal networks that connect businesses with peers and support organizations.
- ❑ **Mentorship and Coaching:** Sector-specific counseling and guidance for entrepreneurs.
- ❑ **Incubator Programs:** Support structures for small enterprises, Main Street businesses, and tech startups, including industry-focused training to address sector gaps.
- ❑ **Strategic Partnerships:** Strong collaborations between state, regional, and local CDFIs, nonprofits, and municipalities.
- ❑ **University and Community College Engagement:** Partnerships with faculty and students to provide research, technical assistance, and vocational training.
- ❑ **Youth Entrepreneurship Initiatives:** Programs focused on entrepreneurship and building community between students and existing entrepreneurs.
- ❑ **Supply Chain Networks:** Strengthening B2B connections among small businesses and between small businesses and larger corporations.
- ❑ **Tax Breaks and Incentives:** Targeted tax tools for local entrepreneurs (e.g. small and medium-sized enterprises), designed to support new businesses and drive growth, with a particular focus on business clustering: micro-manufacturing, innovation hubs, and Main Street corridors.
- ❑ **Statewide and Regional Marketing Initiatives:** Destination marketing and management programs that showcase unique experiences, promote buying local, and strengthen regional identity, culture, and heritage through strategic branding and pride of place collaborations—while integrating preservation and conservation best practices.
- ❑ **Diverse Funding Sources:** Building revenue-generating enterprises and leveraging resources from the EDA, USDA, CDFIs, community foundations, accredited investors, and crowdfunding, including outreach to local, regional, and out-of-state alumni networks.
- ❑ **Governance Models:** Exploring different organizational structures to effectively steward a state, region or county entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Cultivating a Culture Around the Outdoors

- Readiness / capacity assessments
- Identifying champions that can support outreach and help sustain the work long-term
- Detailing benefits of the outdoor rec economy and cross sector benefits (main street)
- Strategic planning: asset mapping and community engagement → mini grants for initial, "small wins" and/or capacity building (e.g. AmeriCorps)
- Market analysis, including surveying residents and visitors
- Community outings & tours (walking, hiking, biking & motorized sports) → helps to elevate the value proposition / vividness of outdoor rec tourism in the eyes of a local resident
- County or tri-county outdoor rec/main street task forces/coalitions: public officials, gov employees, community residents, business owners (including CEOs) + funders
- Youth access to the outdoors: free equipment and outdoor programs (grade school) and advisory groups to the task forces/coalitions(high school)
- Formal and informal partnership agreements that reflect a unified vision
- Visitor center that promotes tourism and champions the community (buy/sell local)
- Gear libraries for local residents
- Community events, including fundraisers, and community mini-grant programs
- Wayfinding signage
- Outdoor industry certification and degree programs
- "Nature's Playground": develop and test your outdoor gear here
- Outdoor impact research/reports on health to translate that into investments
- Trail maintenance: conservation corps/contractors (workforce development + entrepreneurship), volunteers, crowdfunding, and small mini-grants (national)
- Community branding and messaging, including businesses promoting the outdoor opportunities: "We are less than a mile away from X trail or state park."
- Pledge stewardship programs for residents and tourists + hospitality staff training
- Website to track successful outcomes from the planning process

Strategies inspired by literature review of:

- [EPA Recreation Economy for Rural Communities](#)
- [Colorado Rural Technical Assistance Program](#)
- [Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Rural Economic Development Toolkit](#)

State Support: statewide/regional marketing initiatives and community and economic development partnership/programs

- Office of Rural Prosperity (technical assistance and grant fund matching)
- Office of Outdoor Recreation
- Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Department of Community and Economic Development

PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship

Learn more about the PA Wilds Center [here](#)
and come visit!!

Marc Wilken
fellow@pawildscenter.org



*PWC and DCNR annual retreat at
Sinnemahoning State Park*

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Appendix | Additional Resources

Podcasts

- Daily Yonder | Rural Remix: [“Getaway”](#)
- Brookings Institute | [“Reimagine Rural”](#)
- Main Street America | [“Main Street Business Insights”](#)

Related, Innovative Initiatives

- Community Branding and Messaging: [Travel Oregon “We Speak” program](#)
- Storytelling: [PA Wilds Creative Makers Project](#)

Technical Assistance Providers | Outdoor Economy

- [Harbinger Consultancy](#)
- [Cycle Forward](#)

Technical Assistance Providers | Community Capital

- [Crowdfund Better](#)
- [National Coalition for Community Capital](#)