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SPRING/SUMMER 2021

# The Outdoor Economy's Role In West Virginia's Future



## Danny Twilley

The Brad & Alys Smith  
Outdoor Economic  
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Dr. Danny Twilley is the Assistant Dean for the Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative. Utilizing West Virginia University's intellectual and social capital to make West Virginia a more desirable place to live, work and play, Dr. Twilley oversees programs and initiatives based on talent attraction, outdoor-focused community development, outdoor recreation asset improvement and development, workforce development and research to tell the story of outdoor recreation in the state.

**Whether you are a West Virginian by birth or by choice, or someone who is visiting or has visited the Mountain State, we are all inspired by and connected through the state's natural beauty. Using that thread, I begin to imagine what is possible for West Virginia and its people by further leveraging its outdoor recreation resources for community prosperity. The Brad and Alys Smith Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative (OEDC) has an ambitious vision of advancing the state through its outdoor recreation assets, and this powerful vision will continue to evolve as the state grows over the coming decades.**

Best-selling author Simon Sinek, in his book *The Infinite Game*, encapsulates this idea by describing the finite game versus an infinite game. A "finite game" has defined rules, which are enforced, that players agree to follow until one player or team wins by outperforming the other competitor. Once the goal is reached, the game ends. In contrast, the "infinite game" has neither defined rules nor goals that cause the

game to end – the game continues to evolve by fulfilling what Sinek describes as a "Just Cause." In the OEDC's case, that Just Cause is to create prosperity without a finish line, honoring successes along a continual perpetuation of the "game." This way of thinking will allow West Virginia to grow in ways that we do not yet know and seek out new opportunities that we have yet to imagine.



The outdoor economy is well positioned to be an integral component in West Virginia's future as it can provide opportunities for locals and visitors to the state through sustainable economic development, education and workforce development, opportunities to enhance health and wellness, and further support conservation and stewardship efforts. The state possesses some of the greatest outdoor recreation assets in the entire country, and other states have shown we can leverage such assets for a prosperous future. In order to accomplish this ambitious and meaningful endeavor, the OEDC's outdoor economy work is currently laying the foundation to support and empower communities through collaborations in the following areas:

- **Talent Attraction** – With young talent valuing experiences and choosing where to live first and work second, we can help showcase how West Virginia has an unparalleled quality of life that provides





the ability to live an outdoor lifestyle while still having a fulfilling career. Our launching point for this work will be the remote worker incentive and retention program.

- **Outdoor Community Development** – By partnering with local leaders, non-profits, the state and others, we want to support and empower communities to leverage their outdoor recreation resources by providing organizational support and expertise.
- **Outdoor Recreation Asset Development** – Building off the state’s natural canvas, we will develop new and enhance existing assets by partnering with local, state and federal groups. In doing so, we will increase access and create a welcoming environment for beginners to experts alike.
- **Business, Entrepreneurship and Workforce Development** – Through recruiting talent, showcasing our vibrant communities and further enhancing the quality of life narrative, we can help support the recruitment and development of businesses and entrepreneurs while also ensuring these enterprises have the skilled workforce needed to start and expand.
- **Teaching and Research** – By leveraging the intellectual capital of West Virginia University, we will focus on using research that tells West Virginia’s story while highlighting areas for improvement. We firmly believe that WVU can be a national leader in teaching, research and service in developing the outdoor economy.

The essence of our approach to accomplishing this “Just Cause” is summed up in the last word of our office’s name – “Collaborative” – as we cannot do this work alone. We must leverage the collective power of the state; WVU’s intellectual and social capital; and the local communities, non-profits, federal agencies, industry organizations and numerous others to fulfill this ambitious vision. The OEDC is standing on the shoulders of giants who have been laying the foundation for our work for many years within the state and the university. The future is bright because of their tireless efforts.

The OEDC’s journey has been ignited by the generosity and vision of Brad and Alys Smith, and we are committed to supporting their goal of 55 counties strong. However, even with their tremendous gift, we must recognize the journey is just beginning for outdoor recreation’s role in the infinite game. Together we must collectively work to create a prosperous future for West Virginia. 