

Theme Promoting Tourism and Conservation

Intro Text

Jefferson County is the gateway to West Virginia from surrounding states and hosts the most visitors in the state of West Virginia. Proximity to the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, MD Metropolitan Areas and to the Eastern Seaboard offers a large market to target visitors interested in the many activities and attractions to found in the county. These activities include recreational, heritage and cultural tourism, local and regionally known restaurants, farmers' markets, flea markets, motor sports, horseracing, gambling, music, theater, festivals, and arts events. Many of the attractions that draw tourists to the County are located in areas where the combination of historic and geographic resources enhances the sense of place and provides an authentic rural experience.

4. Encourage the preservation of historical sites and leverage heritage and cultural tourism to foster local business growth and development.

Jefferson County has played a role in numerous milestones throughout the history of the United States. Nomadic Native American tribes hunted and lived in the Eastern Panhandle preceding colonization and the founding of the United States. The family of George Washington established 12 estates in the County, eight of which remain, and 75 members of the Washington family are buried in Charles Town cemeteries. In addition, several generals from the Revolutionary War resided here.

Harpers Ferry was established during the Presidency of George Washington as one of only two U.S. Federal armories. The Lewis and Clark expedition, funded under President Thomas Jefferson and which precipitated the westward expansion, was outfitted at the Harpers Ferry Armory. Later, prior to the Civil War, John Brown led an attack on Harpers Ferry in 1859 with hopes of securing a major munitions stockpile that would lead to a spontaneous uprising by slaves. The effort was unsuccessful and Brown and several of his associates were captured, tried, and convicted at the Jefferson County Courthouse in Charles Town. They were hanged a few blocks away on what is now South Samuel Street.

Harpers Ferry and the rest of Jefferson County were critical during the Civil War as they served as a main rail corridor between the eastern and western theatres of the War. The strategic value of the site led to the area changing hands between Union and Confederate forces many times during the war. Over 12,000 Union

troops garrisoned at Harpers Ferry surrendered while under attack from Confederate forces led by General Stonewall Jackson. This was the largest surrender of troops on American soil. Without that surrender, the bloodiest battle of the Civil War, Antietam, may have never occurred. The battlefield at Shepherdstown has been determined by the National Park Service to have played an important role in the end stages of the battle of Antietam. In addition, Jefferson County served as a staging area during the Shenandoah Valley campaign, which included battlefield sites at Summit Point and Middleway.

Harpers Ferry played a significant role in the African American community after the Civil War, with the establishment of what eventually became Storer College in 1865 as one of the first public institutions of education for former slaves. Harpers Ferry was also the site of the second meeting of the Niagara Movement in 1906, which led to the founding of the NAACP.

The treason trials for coal miners affiliated with the United Mine Workers' West Virginia Coal Mine Wars were held at the same courthouse where John Brown's treason trial was held about 70 years earlier. The acquittal of the mine workers in 1922 was the culmination of two decades of strikes, gunfights, assassinations, and violence over working conditions that occurred in the southern coal fields of West Virginia. More recently, Shepherdstown hosted the Israel-Syria peace accord discussions in late 1999 which brought more attention to Jefferson County.

In the mid 1940's, the Armory and numerous surrounding properties in Harpers Ferry were declared a National Monument. Over the ensuing years, Harpers Ferry became a National Historic Park, with numerous structures rebuilt and lands surrounding Harpers Ferry purchased and protected by the National Park Service. Today, the town of Harpers Ferry is surrounded by historic Civil War battlefield areas and numerous rehabilitated and rebuilt structures dating back to the Civil War era.

A significant problem confronting County tourism is transportation concerns. Most of the roads in the County's rural area are paved, but tend to have narrow widths and safety concerns associated with increasing motor vehicle traffic on the rural roads. Parking concerns persist in the municipalities and Harpers Ferry National Historic Park that dissuade visitors. Transportation issues are discussed further in the *Community Connections* theme.

5. Encourage land conservation programs to help preserve the rural character of Jefferson County.

During the input meetings and public surveys, county residents expressed a key interest in maintaining the rural economy and open space of Jefferson County. Both the preservation and the future of agriculture was framed as critical to the quality of life in the county. To maintain this rural landscape a viable rural economy must also be maintained. The rural economy includes innovative agriculture, horticulture, forestry, commercial and non-commercial equine industry, other forms of animal husbandry, tourism, rural based public and commercial recreation, ancillary rural business, and compatible rural institutional uses that have been the historical heart of the Jefferson County economy.

A key aspect of the County's rural economy is recognizing the changes in the regional and national marketplace that might affect agricultural activities at the local level. Farm operators have pointed to the need for value adding activities to keep pace with the agribusiness market. Several groups support these efforts in the county including the WVU Extension Service, the Eastern Panhandle Conservation District, the Jefferson County Development Authority, and the Farmland Protection Board. In order to meet the objectives regarding the rural character of Jefferson County, this plan endeavors to support all farms of any size.

Since the formation of the Farmland Preservation Program in 2000, 6,846 acres have been placed under farm preservation easements across Jefferson County. Funding for the program is from a portion of the transfer tax of real estate purchases meaning expansion of preservation activities is dependent upon new real estate activity. The Historic Landmarks Commission and the Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle also have multiple preservation easements on historic land in the county and serve as secondary monitoring bodies to Farmland Preservation Easements. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy has 2,023 acres under easement to protect the Appalachian Trail in the eastern part of the county.

Insert comments on short term rentals.

6. Balance the existing preservation of Jefferson County's natural resources with providing additional access to and utilization of outdoor recreational tourism.

The Old Standard Quarry is partially covered by a conservation easement to protect the view sheds on the property. During conversations with stakeholders, a potential trail on the property connecting Schoolhouse Ridge South and Murphy's Farm was identified as an opportunity to create a longer trail and safely direct walkers and bikers to see the quarry lake without interfering with future development of the property.

The County is home to a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities for visitors, such as fishing, hunting, hiking, bicycling, auto racing, a wide range of river activities, and other outdoor adventure activities. Two nearby national trails bring in a stream of hikers and bikers to the county. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail, a 2,198-mile long footpath extending from Maine to Georgia, with Harpers Ferry at the midpoint. Additionally, the Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Canal National Historical Park, a linear bicycle and walking trail extending from Washington, D.C. to Cumberland, MD is accessible from Jefferson County near Harpers Ferry and Shepherdstown. Outdoor recreation complements the County's natural, cultural, and built environments. It is anticipated that recreational tourism opportunities in Jefferson County will continue to expand in the coming years. This is particularly true in areas near the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, where the numerous outfitters and private outdoor recreation providers in the region are expanding their offerings to visitors and residents. The type and scale of new recreational development should be appropriate to the rural nature of Jefferson County.