



Rockfish Gateway Trail Narrative for Eastern Federal Lands Access Program (EFLAP)

Project Description

Where Good Nature Comes Naturally. Known for friendly people and a beautiful setting, hospitality and outdoor recreation have come naturally to Waynesboro since the early days. From the Widow Mary Teas opening her home as an inn to travelers in the late 1770s, to the “Spas of the Shenandoah Valley” fed by famous “Lithia Spring” water in the 1800s, to two of America’s best-known scenic drives today, Waynesboro continues to be a basecamp for adventure. More than 150 years after that first inn, in 1935, the national park system was established creating two renowned park systems in Waynesboro’s backyard, Shenandoah National Park (SNP) and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Visitors began traveling from metropolitan areas such as Washington, D.C., Richmond, and beyond to escape to the mountains for a few days. Today, that beloved tradition continues stronger than ever. Waynesboro’s ideal location at the convergence of these two celebrated park systems, the world-renowned Appalachian Trail (AT), two national forests, and an urban trout fishery, have made the city a hub for outdoor recreation.

The **Rockfish Gateway Trail** project seeks to engineer pedestrian and biking linkages from Sunset Park along Waynesboro’s East Main corridor to the Claudius Crozet Blue Ridge Tunnel and then further to Shenandoah National Park and the Appalachian Trail. Professionally designed, accessible trails connecting statewide outdoor recreational assets will not only serve Waynesboro’s citizens but visitors from across the region. Over the past two decades, Waynesboro Parks and Recreation has been actively designing, building, and promoting outdoor trails. The South River Greenway trail is a shining example of how trails can safely connect neighborhoods. We were strategically involved with Nelson County to see the Crozet Tunnel project become a reality. Connecting Shenandoah National Park and the Appalachian Trail to Waynesboro’s eastern entranceway will be a critical step in safely connecting the region’s outdoor recreational assets to help preserve and promote their impact on our local economy.

The desire to build more trail connections is strong in Waynesboro. In 2020, Waynesboro’s South River Greenway had 65,000 visitors while the Crozet Tunnel hosted over 139,000 hikers and bikers from across the state. In the 2018 Edition of the Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP), “visiting natural areas” and “walking for pleasure” ranked 2nd and 3rd on the list of top 10 outdoor recreational activities by participation. In Region 6 of the VOP, one of the featured projects is to develop connector trails to the Crozet Tunnel.

The **Rockfish Gateway Trail** will connect Sunset Park, Waynesboro’s newest park, whose core attractions include hiking and mountain bike trails across its 100+ acres to Shenandoah National Park. Passing underneath the C&O Railroad via a short tunnel, the trail will connect businesses along Waynesboro’s emerging eastern corridor. After a short scenic hike, the trail will intersect with the Crozet Tunnel (newly added to the National Register of Historic Places) greenway trail where visitors can take in the grandeur of this amazing engineering marvel or proceed to the tunnel’s western trailhead. Choosing

the second option, hikers will then cross Rte. 250 at the trailhead and meander through the forested trails around the Grey Pine Lodge, connecting to Skyline Drive in SNP near the Rockfish Gap ranger station. From here it is a quick spur trail to connect with the famed AT.

As construction of Shenandoah National Park neared completion in the 1930s, City leaders recognized the significance of Waynesboro's proximity to the park and erected two massive wooden arches on either side of town, designating Waynesboro "Gateway [to the] Shenandoah National Park." In a nod to the historic trade route across the Blue Ridge, our proximity to two celebrated national park systems, and the South River flowing through town, the Route 250 corridor from Rockfish Gap to downtown Waynesboro was recently coined Rockfish Gateway to recognize the importance of access and commerce in the area. The development of the **Rockfish Gateway Trail** will put Waynesboro in a unique place in American cultural geography, and position the city beautifully at a time when outdoor recreational opportunities have never been more important. Waynesboro's setting is indeed magical.

Phase 1: (current request) Preliminary Design & Engineering, Right-of-Way Acquisition, NEPA Document of the Rockfish Gateway Trail (Shenandoah National Park to Sunset Park)

Phase 2: Construction engineering & construction of Rockfish Gateway Trail section from SNP to Crozet Tunnel Western Portal Trailhead

Phase 3: Construction engineering & construction of Rockfish Gateway Trail section from Crozet Tunnel Greenway Trail to Sunset Park

Phase 4: Construction engineering & construction of spur trail from SNP to the AT

