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## **Formation of regional trails organization a ‘game-changer,’ officials say**

### ***Economic impact study recommends coordinated effort to develop trails network***

WENATCHEE — The Our Valley, Our Future community building initiative announced today the completion of two key Our Valley projects designed to boost outdoor recreation in the region.

A new trails-based recreation organization, Wenatchee Valley TREAD, is tasked with developing a regional trails network in the two-county region for all users. The formation of TREAD (Trails, Recreation, Education, Advocacy, Development) satisfies the Regional Trails Organization game-changer project in the Our Valley Action Plan released last November. It is first of the plan’s seven game-changers to be completed.

An Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact Study of Chelan and Douglas Counties — a specific action in the Our Valley Action Plan released last November — also is now finished, said Steve Maher, Our Valley coordinator, at a press conference held at the new Saddle Rock Trailhead in Wenatchee. The study includes findings on the state of outdoor recreation in the region today and ways to improve opportunities for residents and visitors.

Both Our Valley projects were led by the Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce.

To help Wenatchee Valley TREAD during its first several months, the Wenatchee Valley Chamber will provide administrative support and meeting space to the group.

“Wenatchee Valley TREAD will focus on coordinating trail activity among all users — non-motorized and motorized — in Our Valley,” said Jeff Ostenson, TREAD board chairman. “We truly believe this is a game changer for our community! We are excited to engage Our Valley in a conversation around the outcomes presented in the outdoor recreation economic impact study. Wenatchee Valley TREAD is the next logical step in our regions focus and development of outdoor recreation. We appreciate the support provided by the Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce, Our Valley Our Future, Port of Chelan County, Port of Douglas County, the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, and many other stakeholders who have been instrumental in the creation of the report and the establishment of Wenatchee Valley TREAD.”

“We rely on Our Valley’s natural assets to grow the local economy and enhance our quality of life,” said Shiloh Schauer, executive director of the Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce. “The outdoor recreation economic impact study will help community members and civic leaders better understand the

value — both economic and social — these assets provide us and how we can improve our recreational opportunities to support our love for the outdoors. WV TREAD will help us achieve the coordination, education, and strategic planning necessary to wisely reach our recreational potential. The Chamber is proud to partner with WV TREAD as they establish this new and dynamic organization in Our Valley.”

Maher said the original idea for TREAD came from residents during the visioning and planning work Our Valley, Our Future conducted in 2015 and 2016. One of key themes that arose from that outreach work was for the community to more fully capitalize on existing assets, including its natural assets. In an Our Valley, Our Future survey, residents chose the “outdoors and recreation” as the thing they value most about living in the region and listed it as the region’s second most important strength. In addition, enhancing outdoor recreation was the most popular idea offered up by residents to improve the community’s quality of life, according to the survey findings.

“These are two big wins for the entire region, thanks to a lot of synergy and collaboration, and it validates the Our Valley process,” Maher said. “The Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce did a masterful job in bringing together the outdoor recreation, conservation and business communities to coalesce around this project. After the Our Valley Action Plan was released last November, TREAD’s founding members realized the importance of the game-changer and pro-actively sought to engage other key partners. This is a great success story for grassroots, collaborative community building. Our Valley represents many community voices, and TREAD is a reflection of that.”

As an Our Valley game-changer, Wenatchee Valley TREAD is to “advocate, coordinate and develop a master plan for a comprehensive trails network in Chelan and Douglas counties.” It is to do so by collaborating with land owners and managers, trail users, conservation groups, public agencies, businesses and others.

TREAD plans to hold a community summit this fall to get feedback on the development of a regional trails master plan and a priority list.

TREAD, which will be seeking nonprofit status in the months ahead, unveiled its initial board of directors at today’s press conference. They include Jeff Ostenson (chair), Travis Hornby (vice chair), Bob Bugert (treasurer), John Sobba (secretary), Josh Jorgensen, Joel Rhyner, Jennifer Korfiatis, George Velazquez, and Matt Lyons.

Other key findings in the Chelan-Douglas economic impact study of outdoor recreation (for the complete study, visit <http://wenatchee.org>), include:

- Outdoor recreation across all seasons and for non-motorized and motorized — is growing steadily in economic importance, both directly in terms of participation and expenditures as well as indirectly, in terms of importance for attracting and retaining businesses and residents.
- Recreational activities attracting high participation rates among residents and visitors include hiking, biking and other trail-based activities, fishing, boating and snow sports. Recreational activities generating the most spending by consumers — in particular, by visitors — include downhill skiing and snowboarding, mountain biking, hunting and fishing.
- The region’s outdoor recreation and scenic beauty are key factors in residents’ quality of life. These attributes are strong incentives in attracting and retaining young adults, families and retirees. In addition, as issues with obesity and electronic screen time for children increase, Chelan and Douglas counties are ideally positioned, thanks to trails and other recreational assets, to enhance healthy activities for people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Outdoor recreation, coupled with the region’s central location in the state and its proximity to Seattle and Spokane, is a competitive tourism advantage that has yet to be fully exploited.
- While Chelan and Douglas counties have ample natural resources, there is a need for additional

investment in coordination (for example: planning and prioritizing recreation projects by a group like Wenatchee Valley TREAD), infrastructure (for example: trails and docks), information sources (for example: signage and mapping), and amenities (lodging, facilities, pedestrian-friendly areas, goods, and services that complete the recreation 'experience').

- Several critical investment decisions are contingent on increased collaboration between local, state and federal resource managers who control 57 percent of the land area in the two counties (more than 80 percent in Chelan County). Without this engagement and cooperation, it is unlikely the region can reach its full outdoor recreation potential.

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