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## **TOURISM INITIATIVE REVEALED BY RAHALL & ROCKEFELLER**

### ***Coalways Study Plots Course For Development***

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The completion of a major survey assessing southern West Virginia's coal mining heritage will greatly enhance efforts to develop the tourism potential of the region, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) and Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) said today in releasing what is commonly referred to as the "Coalways" study.

"This study provides us with a road map that can be used to plot the course of educational and tourism related developments involving southern West Virginia's unique cultural and historical resources associated with our coal mining heritage," Rahall said.

"Momentum and excitement are growing as people recognize the potential to promote economic development and tourism by creating a historic coal area in southern West Virginia," Rockefeller said. "While West Virginians view coal mining as just another part of everyday life, the history of the industry is a unique part of our Appalachian heritage, and others view the coalfields with curiosity and interest."

The study, entitled "The Coal Road: A Survey of Southern West Virginia Mining Tourism Potential," was conducted by the Marshall University Center for Regional Progress and was funded by an Economic Development Administration grant which Rahall and Rockefeller were instrumental in obtaining. Dr. Mack H. Gillenwater of Marshall's Geography Department was the project director.

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**"We are proposing an action plan aimed at preserving coal heritage sites within the framework of a comprehensive and coordinated tourism initiative," Gillenwater said.**

**Based on a review of the region, the study selected nine towns for potential tourist sites: Bramwell, Itmann, Kaymoor, Red Jacket, Coalwood, Kopperston, Holden, Gary and Slab Fork. "They are the most typical coal towns, and collectively, they represent all features of coal developments in southern West Virginia," the study notes. "There are, however, some unique features of each. Bramwell was a coal baron town, Kaymoor is extinct; Kopperston is the most recent; and Coalwood is the most original without much infusion of contemporary elements."**

**In addition to these towns, the study suggests that Charleston, Beckley and Bluefield be billed as "gateway cities" with "secondary service centers" at Madison, Logan, Mullens, Welch, Williamson and Oak Hill. The study also proposes linking the coal heritage towns, gateway cities and secondary service centers by designated highways referred to as the "Coal Road."**

**Implementation of the proposal is estimated to cost \$1.9 million, employ about 1,150 people, attract over 300,000 visitors a year and pump \$3.5 million into the regional economy.**

**A wide range of tourism related developments are contemplated, including a railroad tour between Bramwell and Matoaka, the establishment of a Pocahontas Coal Field Museum in Bluefield, the inclusion of a typical miner's dwelling and small company store in association with the Beckley Exhibition Mine at New River Park, a Matewan Massacre Museum, a railroad tour from Matewan to Red Jacket, a Coal Mining Equipment Exhibit at Coalwood, visitor access to a preparation plant near Gary, and a European Immigrant and Black Miners Hall of Fame and Museum at Welch.**

**"Implementation of these recommended tourist developments will help reverse the depreciating economy of the southern coal counties," the study concludes. "To be sure, economic opportunity exists in coal mining tourism in southern West Virginia, but it awaits implementation."**