

U.S. Congressman
Nick Rahall
WORKING FOR WEST VIRGINIANS

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WEST VIRGINIA HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION PROPOSED
Rahall Readies Legislation To Coordinate Tourism Initiatives

BECKLEY, WV -- The establishment of a Southern West Virginia Heritage Preservation Commission would be a catalyst in expanding the region's economy by providing for the coordinated development of federal, state and local coal heritage tourism initiatives, U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) said today. Rahall has prepared legislation to establish the Commission and will introduce it in the House of Representative in January.

"The goal I am pursuing is the coordinated development and promotion of outstanding natural, scenic, recreational, cultural and historic resources accessible by interstate highways and scenic roadways within southern West Virginia," Rahall said.

"As part of this effort, a number of local community leaders, the non-profit organization Coalways, Inc., and I have been working to develop what I call the Coal Heritage Initiative which is aimed at gaining the historic preservation of buildings, structures and sites with outstanding historical, cultural and architectural values relating to the coal mining heritage of southern West Virginia," he explained. "A Southern West Virginia Heritage Preservation Commission would provide the means to coordinate the various initiatives and proposals being advanced on the federal, state and local levels so that we can more effectively promote the region."

Rahall envisions the Commission would:

- * *Make loans and grants from federally appropriated or donated funds to preserve and enhance significant cultural, historical and architectural resources such as buildings, structures and facilities associated with southern West Virginia's coal heritage.*

- * *Coordinate governmental and private sector activities relating to historic preservation and economic revitalization.*

- * *Provide assistance in the preparation of loan and grant applications to federal agencies; and the development of guidelines for the preservation of coal heritage sites.*

- * *Designate a Southern West Virginia Coal Heritage Route linking historical, cultural, architectural, natural, scenic and recreational sites in southern West Virginia.*

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Rahall noted that many coal heritage structures and sites have national significance and demand preservation for educational purposes as well as their tourism potential. He added that historic preservation also comports well with efforts to take advantage of and enhance the many natural, scenic and recreational resources located in southern West Virginia; resources such as federally designated rivers under National Park Service administration, State parks and forests, and Army Corps of Engineers recreational lakes.

The legislation being drafted by Rahall would establish a 28 member Commission under the auspices of the U.S. Department of the Interior with participation from the counties of Mingo, Logan, McDowell, Wyoming, Raleigh, Mercer, Cabell, Wayne, Fayette, Summers and Boone. As currently proposed, Commission membership would be comprised of the following:

(1) Six members appointed from recommendations submitted by the Governor of West Virginia. Two members would represent the Division of Commerce while the Division of Natural Resources, the Division of Culture and History, the Division of Highways and the Office of Community and Industrial Development would each be represented by one member.

(2) 11 members appointed from recommendations submitted by the county commissioners of Mingo, Logan, McDowell, Wyoming, Raleigh, Mercer, Cabell, Wayne, Fayette, Summers and Boone of which one member would be appointed from the recommendations of each county from groups and individuals residing within each county representing historic preservation, tourism promotion or local chambers of commerce.

(3) Four members appointed from the non-profit organization Coalways, Inc.

(4) Two members appointed from the recommendations of public universities or colleges located within southern West Virginia.

(5) Two members appointed from recommendations submitted by organizations representing coal labor and coal management.

(6) Two members with knowledge and experience in the field of historic preservation appointed by the Secretary of the Interior from recommendations by the Director of the National Park Service.

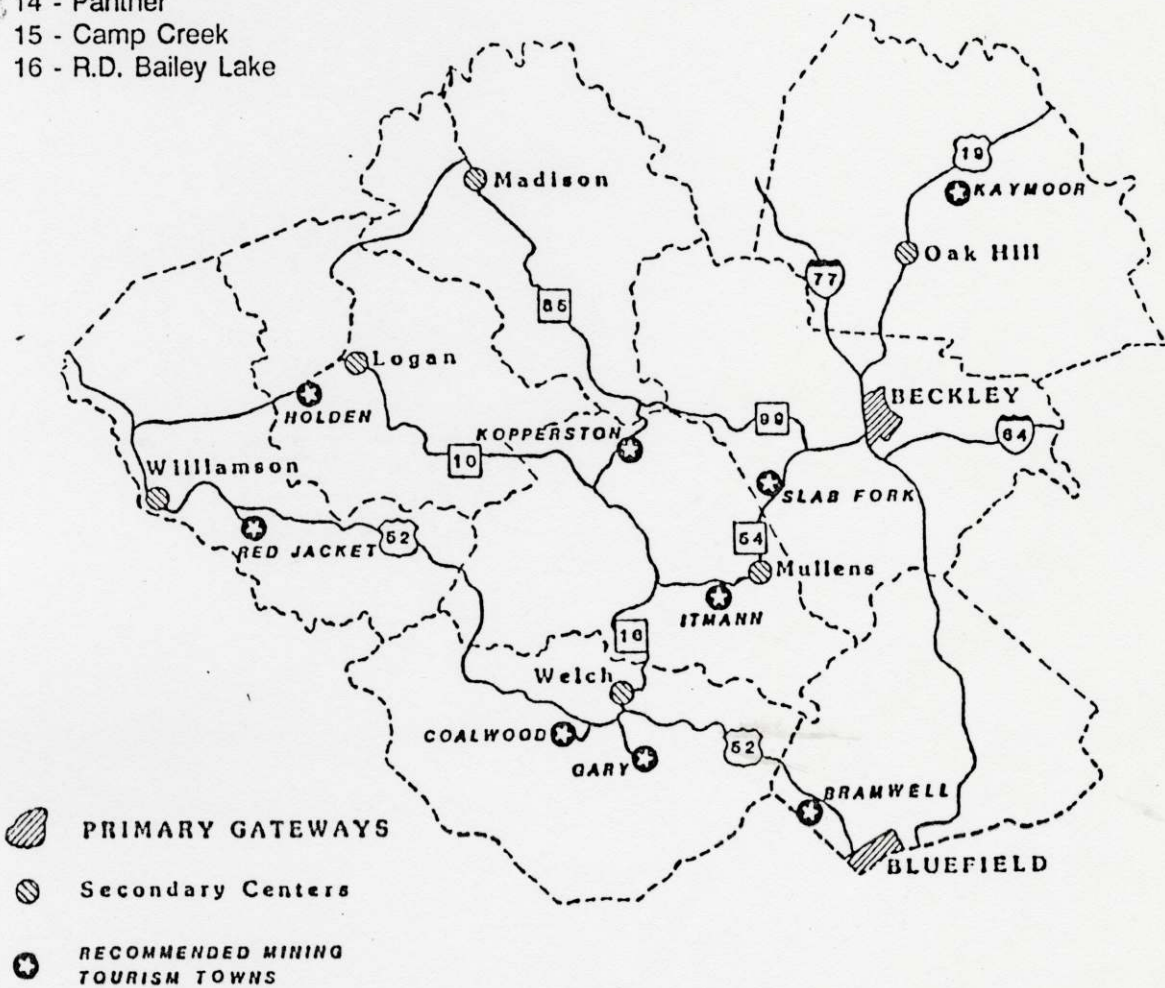
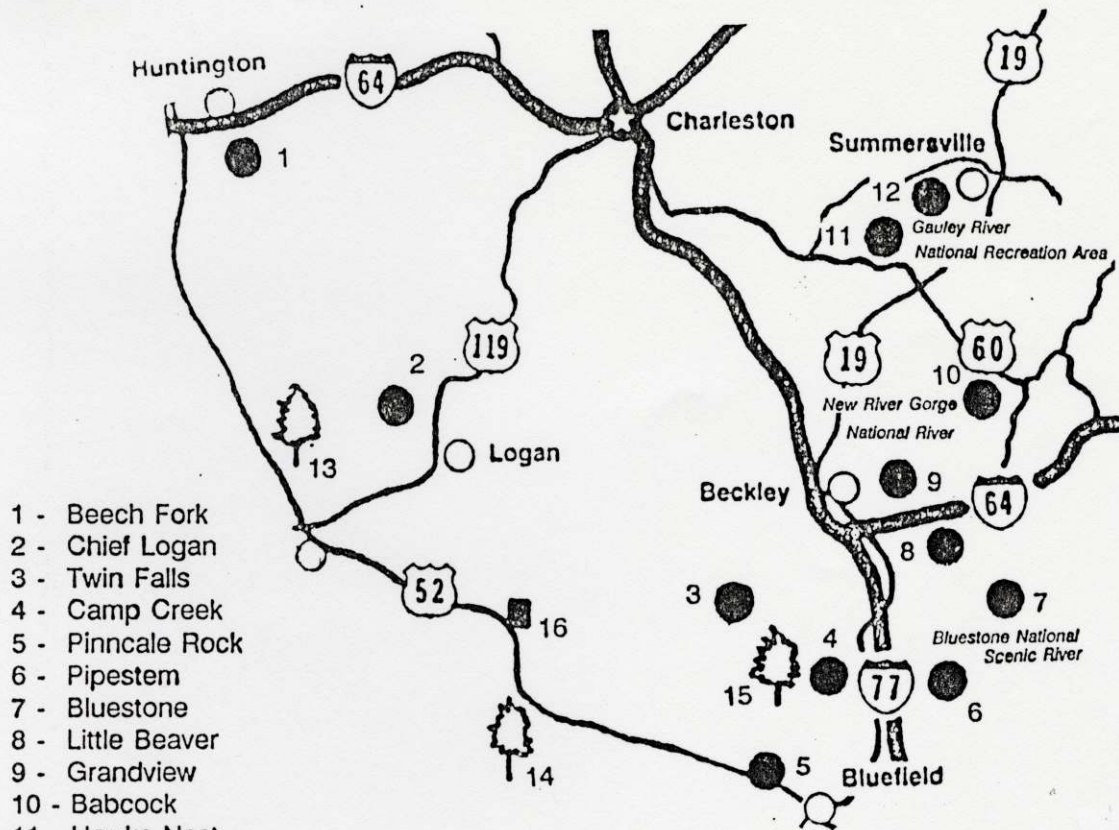
(7) The Director of the National Park Service.

One year ago, Rahall outlined a four-point *Recreation and Tourism Promotion Program for Southern West Virginia* to expand on his accomplishments in the area such as the establishment of a number of federally designated river park units, funding for the New River Parkway and the authorization to construct a National Park Service regional visitors facility at the I-64 Glade Creek Bridge. At the time, Rahall said that emphasis should also be placed on the development of cultural and historic resources involving coal heritage and the coordination of governmental-private sector initiatives in this area.

The four-point plan involves setting the framework for future actions through appropriate investigations such as the completed Coalways, Inc., study and the National Park Service Coal Heritage study required by Rahall enacted legislation. The studies would be followed by the designation of what Rahall calls Coal Heritage Sites as national historic sites or parks under the National Park System. The Southern West Virginia Heritage Preservation Commission would provide the means to recognize, preserve, enhance interpret and promote the coal mining heritage of southern West Virginia. Finally, Rahall believes that scenic roadways and a Coal Heritage Trail would provide the necessary linkage of both coal heritage and recreational areas in the region.

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SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA'S TOURISM POTENTIAL: Existing State Parks, Forests and National Park Units Augmented by Proposed Coal Heritage Sites



Mining tourism map source: "The Coal Road: Southern West Virginia Mining Tourism Potential"
Marshall University Center for Regional Progress