

# Coal Town to Tourist Town: West Virginia's New Elk River Trail System

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## West Virginia's Newest State Park

In 2019, West Virginia Governor Jim Justice announced the newest addition to the state park system – the Elk River Trail System (ERTS).

The ERTS extends over three West Virginia counties, including Braxton, Clay and Kanawha. The rail trail, which will be operated by the Division of Natural Resources – State Parks, offers hiking, biking and rail biking opportunities. The ERTS runs alongside the Elk River Water



Trail, recognized under state law as a designated water trail, and boasts beautiful scenery and multiple access points for a variety of day float options.

Current and future rail trail heads and access points include (north to south) Gassaway, Coastal Lumber, Frametown, Strange Creek, Duck, Ivydale, Dundon (Clay), Hartland, Queen Shoals, and Clendenin. Most trail access points include ample, convenient parking locations not far from major highways and amenities.

Several public water access points owned or operated by the DNR can be found in the following locations: Sutton Dam Tailwaters, Elk River Hotel, Elk River Camp and RV, First Energy, Sugar Creek Church, Coonskin Park, Frametown Bridge, Tate Creek, Duck, Mary Chilton Roadside Park, Elkhurst, King Shoals, Queen Shoals, Blue Creek, Clendenin, Bream (Big Chimney) and Mink Shoals. GPS coordinates for these locations can be found at [braxtonwv.org/things-to-do/elk-river-water-trail/map](http://braxtonwv.org/things-to-do/elk-river-water-trail/map). Additional privately-owned access points are being made available to the public, including sites near Ivydale and at Dundon, Clay Court House and Queen Shoals.

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## Activities

### Walking, Hiking and Running

The wide trails and compacted gravel surface are great for walking or running. Local college long-distance runners may be seen training on the trail. Many access points along the trail system allow for a variety of distances and sights to see. The first was held at Dundon/Clay in September. A marathon will be held at Dundon/Clay in 2022. (For more info, visit [wvmarathon.com](http://wvmarathon.com))

### Biking

The trail system is bike friendly, and the wide trail makes multi-use easy as there is plenty of room for walkers, runners and bikers going in both directions. The relatively smooth, flat surface makes bike riding easy even for your youngest riders. Don't forget your helmets for the safest ride and remember helmets are mandatory for anyone under age 15 under state law.

### Jitney and Rail Bike Rides

An 18-mile rails-with-trail spur line near Clay runs up Buffalo Creek to the old coal-mining town of Widen. This spur offers rail bike and jitney rides. The rail bikes can be pushed or pedaled up, then pedaled back down. Taking this trip offers new sights and lots of history including wreckage from a train derailment and breathtaking waterfalls. The fish also are rumored to be amazing along this stretch of trail. Trout have been regularly stocked in Buffalo Creek during the last several years.

### Canoeing, Kayaking, Paddle Boarding, Floating and Fishing

The water trail offers a different vantage point as it winds its way through the West Virginia terrain. If you are looking for a more active adventure, you may want to try paddle boarding or kayaking. Do you prefer a leisurely ride? Along the trail the fish are biting, and tubing is an relaxing water activity. The Elk River is known for its muskie and bass fishing and is one of the most bio-diverse river basins in the United States. With a multitude of water access points along the trail in all three counties, water enthusiasts can choose

from a broad range of trips to fit their schedule and ability levels. Don't forget your life jackets and a whistle for a safe trip worth remembering.

### Swimming

If you are using the rail trail and find that the flowing waters look too good to pass up, there are multiple swimming holes along the trail. From sand bars to rope swings, there are many options to cool off after an exhilarating walk or ride. Always be familiar with the depth of the water and the current you are swimming in.

### Horseback Riding

ERTS is a popular site for horse-back riding, which provides additional opportunities for small businesses to develop around equestrian activities such as horse stables for overnight accommodations.

## Trail Amenities

Whether you are looking for food, fun or rest, many new amenities have popped up along the trail corridor to suit your needs. Be sure to check out Clay Yak Rentals, Clendenin Brewing Company, Walker Creek Farms, Yak House Rentals, Elk River Hotel and so many more new businesses. Trail amenities can be found at [elkrivertail.org/map/elk-river-trail-map-arccgis/](http://elkrivertail.org/map/elk-river-trail-map-arccgis/).

If you and your family are looking for a fun, local adventure, the new Elk River Trail System State Park is the place to be. With walking, biking, floating, rail car rides and swimming holes, there's something for every age and ability. The trail is centrally located, and most access points are close to I-79 with ample parking. Support local economies by visiting the newest trail system in West Virginia

2022

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