WEST VIRGINIA CODE CHAPTER 20 ARTICLE 17

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§20-17-1. Legislative findings.

The West Virginia Legislature finds that outdoor recreation is an increasingly vital part of the state's economy and that outdoor recreation participants spend billions of dollars annually in the state and support a significant number of local jobs.

The Legislature further finds that well-managed areas for trail-oriented recreation in the state will increase outdoor recreational tourism, increasing revenue to the state and creating more jobs for West Virginia citizens.

The Legislature further finds that, with the cooperation of private landowners, there is an opportunity to provide citizens and recreational tourists with greater access to trail-oriented recreation by incorporating private property into recreational trail systems and areas throughout West Virginia to provide significant economic and recreational benefits to communities in the state.

The Legislature further finds that, under an appropriate contractual and management scheme, well-managed trail systems may exist on private property without diminishing the landowner's interest, control, or profitability in the land and without increasing the landowner's exposure to liability.

The Legislature further finds that creating and empowering multicounty trail network authorities, that can work with the landowners, county officials, community leaders, state and federal government agencies, recreational user groups, and other interested parties to expand trail systems will greatly assist in improving and linking recreational trail systems.

The Legislature further finds that it is in the best interests of the state to encourage private landowners to make land available for public use, through multicounty trail network authorities, for recreational purposes by limiting landowner liability for injury to persons entering thereon, by limiting landowner liability for injury to the property of persons entering thereon, and by limiting landowner liability to persons who may be injured or otherwise damaged by the acts or omissions of persons entering thereon.

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§20-17-2. Definitions.

Unless the context clearly requires a different meaning, the terms used in this article have the following meanings:

(1) "Adjacent county" means a nonparticipating county that directly borders any participating county in a multicounty trail network authority;

(2) "Authority" means a multicounty trail network authority created pursuant to this article;

(3) "Board" means the board of a multicounty trail network authority;

(4) "Contiguous counties" means a group of counties in which each county shares the border of at least one other county in the group;

(5) "Fee" means the amount of money asked in return for an invitation to enter or go upon a recreational area of a trail network, including a one-time fee for a particular event, amusement, occurrence, adventure, incident, experience, or occasion as set by an authority, which may differ in amount for different categories of participants;

(6) "Land" or "property" includes, but is not limited to, roads, water, watercourses, private ways, buildings, premises, structures, and machinery or equipment, when attached to the realty;

(7) "Owner" or "owner of land" means a person vested with title to real estate and those with the ability to exercise control over real estate and includes, but is not limited to, a tenant, lessee, licensee, holder of a dominant estate, or other lawful occupant;

(8) "Participant" means any person using a recreational area of a trail network for recreational purposes;

(9) "Person" means any public or private corporation, institution, association, society, firm, organization, or company organized or existing under the laws of this or any other state or country; the State of West Virginia; any state governmental agency; any political subdivision of the state or of its counties or municipalities; a sanitary district; a public service district; a drainage district; a conservation district; a watershed improvement district; a partnership, trust, or estate; a person or individual; a group of persons or individuals acting individually or as a group; any other legal entity; or any authorized agent, lessee, receiver, or trustee of any of the foregoing;

(10) "Participating county" means one of the three or more counties forming a multicounty trail network authority;

(11) "Recreational area" means the recreational trails and appurtenant facilities, including trail head centers, parking areas, camping facilities, picnic areas, recreational areas, historic or cultural interpretive sites, and other facilities or attractions that are a part of a

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multicounty trail network authority system; and

(12) "Recreational purposes" means:

(A) Any outdoor activity undertaken, or practice or instruction in any such activity, for the purpose of exercise, relaxation, or pleasure, including, but not limited to any one or any combination of the following noncommercial recreational activities: Hunting, fishing, swimming, boating, kayaking, camping, picnicking, hiking, rock climbing, bouldering, bicycling, horseback riding, spelunking, nature study, water skiing, winter sports, and visiting, viewing, or enjoying historical, archaeological, scenic, or scientific sites, aircraft, or ultralight operations on private airstrips or farms, or otherwise using land for purposes of the user;

(B) Parking on or traversing land, outside of the state road system, for the purpose of engaging in a recreational activity described in paragraph (A) of this subdivision; or

(C) Maintaining or making improvements on land, including, but not limited to, artificial improvements for the purpose of making the land accessible or usable for a recreational activity described in paragraph (A) of this subdivision.

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§20-17-3. Multicounty trail network authorities authorized; addition of counties; merger of existing authorities.

(a) For the purposes of this article, three or more contiguous counties may, upon approval of the county commission of each county desiring to participate, form a multicounty trail network authority. An authority established pursuant to this section is a public corporation and a joint development entity existing for the purpose of facilitating the development and operation of a system of recreational trails and areas throughout the participating counties. Such trails will be designated and made available for recreational purposes with significant portions of the trails system being located on private property throughout West Virginia, made available for use through lease, license, easement, or other appropriate legal form by a willing landowner.

(b) An adjacent county may join a multicounty trail network authority as a participating county upon approval of both the board of the authority and the county commission of the adjacent county wishing to become a participating county.

(c) Two or more existing authorities may merge and become a single authority encompassing the participating counties in each merging authority upon approval of the board of each authority. Upon merger of two or more authorities, the board of the newly created authority will be composed of all board members serving on the board of each merging authority at the time the merger takes place. Thereafter, the authority will fill any vacancies and appoint board members as required by §20-17-4 of this code. The board of the newly created authority shall adopt appropriate procedures and bylaws to ensure that the newly created authority complies with all requirements of this article.

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§20-17-4. Board; quorum; executive director; expenses; application of state Freedom of Information Act.

(a) The board is the governing body of an authority and the board shall exercise all the powers given the authority in this article. The county commission of each participating county shall appoint two members to the board, as follows:

(1) Each participating county shall appoint one member who represents and is associated with a corporation or individual landowner whose land is being used or is expected to be used in the future as part of the authority's recreational area. This member shall be appointed to a four-year term.

(2) Each participating county shall appoint one member who is an experienced instructor, guide, or participant in recreational activities in the county or an individual who represents and is associated with travel, tourism, economic development, land surveying, or relevant engineering efforts within the county. The initial appointment for this member shall be for a two-year term, but all subsequent appointments shall be for a four-year term.

(3) Any appointed member whose term has expired shall serve until his or her successor has been duly appointed and qualified. Any person appointed to fill a vacancy shall serve only for the unexpired term. Any appointed member is eligible for reappointment. Members of the board are not entitled to compensation for services performed as members but are entitled to reimbursement for all reasonable and necessary expenses actually incurred in the performance of their duties.

(b) Upon joining an existing authority as a participating county pursuant to §20-17-3 of this code, the newly participating county shall appoint board members only for the length of the unexpired terms of the authority's board members serving at the time the county joins the authority. Thereafter, the county shall appoint board members according to the regular appointment procedure provided in subsection (a) of this section.

(c) The board shall meet quarterly, unless a special meeting is called by its chairman. During the first meeting of each fiscal year beginning in an odd-numbered year, or as soon as feasible thereafter, the board shall elect a chairman, secretary, and treasurer from among its own members to serve for two-year terms.

(d) A majority of the members of the board constitutes a quorum and a quorum shall be present for the board to conduct business.

(e) The board may prescribe, amend, and repeal bylaws and rules governing the use of the trail system, safety standards for participants, and the manner in which the business of the authority is conducted.

(f) The board shall review and approve an annual budget. The fiscal year for an authority begins on July 1 and ends on the 30th day of the following June.

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(g) The board shall appoint an executive director to act as its chief executive officer, to serve at the will and pleasure of the board. The board, acting through its executive director, may employ any other personnel considered necessary and retain such temporary legal, engineering, financial, and other consultants or technicians as may be required for any special study or survey consistent with the provisions of this article. The executive director shall carry out plans to implement the provisions of this article and to exercise those powers enumerated in the bylaws. The executive director shall prepare an annual budget to be submitted to the board for its review and approval prior to the commencement of each fiscal year. The budget shall contain a detailed account of all planned and proposed revenue and expenditures for the authority for the upcoming fiscal year, including a detailed list of employees by title, salary, cost of projected benefits, and total compensation. Before August 15 of each year, the executive director shall provide to the board and the county commission for each participating county a detailed list of actual expenditures and revenue, by account and recipient name, for the previous fiscal year and a copy of the approved budget for the current fiscal year.

(h) All costs incidental to the administration of the authority, including office expenses, personal services expenses, and current expenses, shall be paid in accordance with guidelines issued by the board from funds accruing to the authority.

(i) All expenses incurred by an authority in carrying out the provisions of this article shall be payable solely from funds that have accrued to the authority pursuant to this article. An authority may not incur liability or an obligation above the amount of funds that have accrued to the authority pursuant to this article.

(j) A multicounty trail network authority and the board is a "public body" for purposes of the West Virginia Freedom of Information Act, as provided in §29B-1-1 et seq. of this code.

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§20-17-5. Financial review and oversight.

(a) An authority shall contract for and obtain an annual financial audit to be conducted by a private accounting firm in compliance with generally accepted government auditing standards. When complete, the audit shall be transmitted to the board, the president of the county commission of each participating county, and the Legislative Auditor. The cost of the audit shall be paid by the authority.

(b) If an authority receives any funds from the Legislature by appropriation or grant, the Legislative Auditor shall have the power and authority to examine the revenues, expenditures, and performance of the authority, and, for these purposes, shall have the power to inspect the properties, equipment, and facilities of the authority and to request, inspect, and obtain copies of any records of the authority. For each fiscal year in which the authority receives any funds from the Legislature by appropriation or grant, the executive director shall provide to the Legislative Auditor and Secretary of Revenue a detailed list of actual expenditures and revenue by account and recipient name for the previous fiscal year within 45 days of the close of that fiscal year.

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§20-17-6. Powers of an authority.

An authority, as a public corporation and joint development entity, may exercise all powers necessary or appropriate to carry out the purposes of this article, including, but not limited to, the power:

(1) To acquire, own, hold, and dispose of property, real and personal, tangible and intangible;

(2) To lease property, whether as lessee or lessor, and to acquire or grant through easement, license, or other appropriate legal form, the right to develop and use property and open it to the public;

(3) To mortgage or otherwise grant security interests in its property;

(4) To procure insurance against any losses in connection with its property, licenses, easements, operations, assets, or contracts, including hold-harmless agreements, in such amounts and from such insurers as the authority considers desirable;

(5) To maintain such sinking funds and reserves as the board determines appropriate for the purposes of meeting future monetary obligations and needs of the authority;

(6) To sue and be sued, implead and be impleaded, and complain and defend in any court;

(7) To contract for the provision of legal services by private counsel and, notwithstanding the provisions of §5-3-1 et seq. of this code, the counsel may, in addition to the provisions of other legal services, represent the authority in court, negotiate contracts and other agreements on behalf of the authority, render advice to the authority on any matter relating to the authority, prepare contracts and other agreements, and provide such other legal services as may be requested by the authority;

(8) To adopt, use, and alter at will a corporate seal;

(9) To make, amend, repeal, and adopt bylaws for the management and regulation of the authority's affairs;

(10) To appoint officers, agents, and employees and to contract for and engage the services of consultants;

(11) To make contracts of every kind and nature and to execute all instruments necessary or convenient for carrying out the purposes of this article, including contracts with any other governmental agency of this state or of the federal government or with any person, individual, partnership, or corporation;

(12) Without in any way limiting any other subdivision of this section, to accept grants and loans from, and enter into contracts and other transactions with, any federal agency;

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(13) To maintain an office at such place or places within the state as it may designate;

(14) To borrow money, to issue notes, to provide for the payment of notes, to provide for the rights of the holders of notes, and to purchase, hold, and dispose of any of its notes;

(15) To issue notes payable solely from the revenue or other funds available to the authority, which may be issued in such principal amounts as necessary to provide funds for any purpose under this article, including:

(A) The payment, funding, or refunding of the principal of, interest on, or redemption premiums on notes issued by it, whether the notes or interest to be funded or refunded have or have not become due; and

(B) The establishment or increase of reserves to secure or to pay notes, or the interest on the notes, and all other costs or expenses of the authority incident to and necessary or convenient to carry out its corporate purposes and powers. Notes may be additionally secured by a pledge of any revenues, funds, assets, or moneys of the authority from any source;

(16) To issue renewal notes, except that no renewal notes may be issued to mature more than 10 years from the date of issuance of the notes renewed;

(17) To apply the proceeds from the sale of renewal notes to the purchase, redemption, or payment of the notes to be refunded;

(18) To accept gifts or grants of property, funds, security interests, money, materials, labor, supplies, or services from the federal government or from any governmental unit or any person, firm, or corporation, and to take appropriate measures in procuring, accepting, or disposing of gifts or grants;

(19) To the extent permitted under its contracts with the holders of notes of the authority, to consent to any modification of the rate of interest, time of payment of any installment of principal or interest, security or any other term of any note, contract or agreement of any kind to which the authority is a party;

(20) To construct, reconstruct, improve, maintain, repair, operate, and manage the recreational areas at the locations within the participating counties as may be determined by the authority;

(21) To enter into an agreement with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources for natural resources police officers to provide law-enforcement services within the authority's recreational area and to reimburse the Division of Natural Resources for its costs therefor;

(22) To exercise all power and authority provided in this article necessary and convenient to plan, finance, construct, renovate, maintain, and operate or oversee the operation of the authority at such locations within the participating counties as may be determined by the

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authority;

(23) To exercise all of the powers which a corporation may lawfully exercise under the laws of this state;

(24) To develop, maintain, and operate or contract for the development, maintenance, and operation of the authority;

(25) To enter into contracts with landowners and other persons holding an interest in the land being used for its recreational facilities to hold those landowners and other persons harmless with respect to any claim in tort growing out of the use of the land for recreational purposes or growing out of the recreational activities operated or managed by the authority from any claim except a claim for damages proximately caused by the willful or malicious conduct of the landowner or any of his or her agents or employees;

(26) To assess and collect a reasonable fee from those persons who use the trails, parking facilities, visitor centers, or other facilities which are part of the recreational area and to retain and utilize that revenue for any purposes consistent with this article: Provided, That such fee does not constitute a "charge" or a "fee" within the meaning and for the purposes of §19-25-5 of this code: Provided, however, That the authority may not charge a fee for any user to enter or go upon any trail that is already open for use by the public without fee as of January 1, 2019;

(27) To enter into contracts or other appropriate legal arrangements with landowners under which land is made available for use as part of the recreational area;

(28) To directly operate and manage recreation activities and facilities within the recreational area;

(29) To promulgate and publish rules governing the use of the recreational area and the safety of participants, including rules designating particular trails or segments of trails within the recreational area for certain activities and limiting use of designated trails to such activities;

(30) To coordinate and conduct athletic races, competitions, or events within the recreational area, in cooperation with the county commissions of participating counties in which such events will take place; and

(31) To exercise such other and additional powers as may be necessary or appropriate to carry out the purposes of this article.

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§20-17-7. Requirements for trail users and prohibited acts; criminal penalties.

(a) An authority may require recreational users to wear protective helmets or use safety equipment that the authority determines to be appropriate for the recreational activity in which the user is engaged.

(b) Each trail user operating a bicycle or mountain bicycle shall obey all traffic laws, traffic-control devices, and signs within the recreational area, including those which restrict trails to certain types of bicycles or mountain bicycles.

(c) Each trail user shall at all times remain within and on a designated and marked trail while within the recreational area.

(d) A person may not ignite or maintain any fire within the recreational area except in a designated camp site.

(e) A person may not operate a motor vehicle within the recreational area unless the person is authorized to operate a motor vehicle in the area to perform maintenance services or emergency response.

(f) A person who violates any provision of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be fined not more than $100. Prosecution or conviction for the misdemeanor described in this subsection shall not prevent or disqualify any other civil or criminal remedies for the conduct prohibited by this section.

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§20-17-8. Limiting liability.

(a) An owner of land used by an authority owes no duty of care to keep his or her land safe for entry or use by others for recreational purposes, or to give any warning of a dangerous or hazardous condition, use, structure, activity, or wild animal on such land to persons entering or going upon the land for such purposes. The provisions of this section apply regardless of whether the person entering or going upon the leased land is permitted to enter the land or is a trespasser.

(b) Unless otherwise agreed in writing, an owner of land who grants a lease, easement, or license of land to an authority for recreational purposes does not, by giving a lease, easement or license: (1) Extend any assurance to any person using the land that the land is safe for any purpose; (2) confer upon those persons the legal status of a party to whom a duty of care is owed; or (3) assume responsibility for or incur liability for any injury to person or property or death caused by an act or omission of a person who enters upon the leased land. The provisions of this section apply whether the person entering or going upon the leased land is permitted to enter the land or is a trespasser.

(c) Nothing in this section limits in any way any liability which otherwise exists for deliberate, willful, or malicious infliction of injury to persons or property: Provided, That nothing herein limits in any way the obligation of a person entering upon or using the land of another for recreational purposes to exercise due care in his or her use of the land and in his or her activities thereon, so as to prevent the creation of hazards or the commission of waste by himself or herself.

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§20-17-9. Purchasing and bidding procedures; criminal penalties.

(a) Purchasing and bidding procedures; criminal penalties. —

(1) Whenever an authority proposes to purchase or contract for commodities or services reasonably anticipated to equal or exceed $25,000 in cost, the purchase or contract shall be based on competitive bidding. Where the purchase of particular commodities or services is reasonably anticipated to be less than $25,000, the executive director may, on behalf of the authority, solicit bids or price quotes in any manner that the executive director deems appropriate and the authority shall obtain its commodities or services by the lowest bid. In lieu of seeking bids or quotes for commodities or services in this price range, the authority may purchase those commodities and services pursuant to state prequalification agreements as provided in §5A-3-10e of this code.

(2) Where the cost for the purchase of commodities or services is reasonably anticipated to exceed $25,000, the executive director shall solicit sealed bids for such commodities or services: Provided, That the executive director may permit bids by electronic transmission to be accepted in lieu of sealed bids. Bids shall be solicited by public notice. The notice shall be published as a Class II legal advertisement in all participating counties in compliance with the provisions of §59-3-1 et seq. of this code and by such other means as the executive director deems appropriate. The notice shall state the general character of the work and general character of the materials to be furnished, the place where plans and specifications therefor may be examined, and the time and place for receiving bids. After all bids are received, the authority shall enter into a written contract with the lowest responsible bidder; however, the authority may reject any or all bids that fail to meet the specifications required by the authority or that exceed the authority's budget estimation for those commodities or services. If the executive director determines in writing that there is only one responsive and responsible bidder and that there has been sufficient public notice to attract competitive bids, he or she may negotiate the price for a noncompetitive award or the specifications for a noncompetitive award based solely on the original purpose of the solicitation.

(3) For any contract that exceeds $25,000 in total cost, the authority shall require the vendors to post a bond, with form and surety to be approved by the authority, in an amount equal to at least 50 percent of the contract price conditioned upon faithful performance and completion of the contract.

(4) The bidding requirements specified in this section do not apply to any leases for real property upon which the authority makes improvements for public access to the recreational area, information distribution, and welcome centers. This exemption does not apply to leases for offices, vehicle and heavy equipment storage, or administrative facilities.

(5) Any person who violates a provision of this subsection is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be confined in jail not less than 10 days nor more than one year, or fined not less than $10 nor more than $1,000, or both fined and confined.

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(b) Conflicts of interest in contracts prohibited. —

An authority or any of its board members, officers, employees, or agents may not enter into any contracts, agreements, or arrangements for purchases of services or commodities violating the requirements of §6B-2-5 or §61-10-15 of this code.

(c) Civil remedies. —

The county commission of a participating county in an authority may challenge the validity of any contract or purchase entered, solicited, or proposed by the authority in violation of this section by seeking declaratory or injunctive relief in the circuit court of the county of the challenging party. If the court finds by a preponderance of evidence that the provisions of those sections have been violated, the court may declare the contract or purchase to be void and may grant any injunctive relief necessary to correct the violations and protect the funds of the authority as a joint development entity.

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