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FEATURED

Grant funded outdoor rec program to help bolster local economy

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Jeff Simcoe biking the trail at Deep Creek Lake State Park.

Photo by Jess Daddio



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FROSTBURG — Outdoor recreation is one of the local region's most enticing industries, with over 317,000 acres of public land for residents to enjoy.

In an effort to research and further stimulate the local economy, Frostburg State University's Division of Regional Development and Engagement has developed a new program known as the Frostburg Outdoor Recreation Institute or FOREI.

The program, lead by newly selected Executive Director Jeffrey Simcoe, aims to attract businesses and manufacturers to Mountain Maryland in the tourism and recreation field.

Simcoe is from central Pennsylvania and has been surrounded by outdoor recreation his entire life — spending several years as a whitewater rafting guide and an employee of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

“We have a plethora of (recreation) opportunities here that we need to enhance,” said Simcoe.

According to Simcoe, the recreation user has become far more “sophisticated.” FOREI will help to accommodate those users and their preferences and allow local businesses to flourish in the meantime.

“We want to make sure that information is accurate and people can curate their own experiences,” Simcoe said.

FOREI will help to develop a more streamlined “industry cluster” so academic research and business opportunity can go hand-in-hand.

“Making sure that there's linkages between research and workforce development is key,” Simcoe said.

As the outdoor tourism industry recently surpassed \$1 trillion in revenue, FOREI will look to help this area capitalize on its popularity.

Simcoe hopes that the local economy will be diversified by new recreational offerings and increased retail sales at outfitters.

Not only will Simcoe and FOREI look to benefit the surrounding area, but it will provide more opportunities for students such as renting equipment and taking them to select recreational destinations.

“It gets (students) that exposure to outdoor recreation in the area,” Simcoe said.

Simcoe hopes that the program will help to attract more interest toward future employment in outdoor recreation, particularly in the local area.

“We want to keep the population here but we also want to attract more people here,” Simcoe said.

FOREI was developed by Jennifer Walsh, the acting vice president of FSU’s Division of Regional Development. The university received grant funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission to start the project last year.

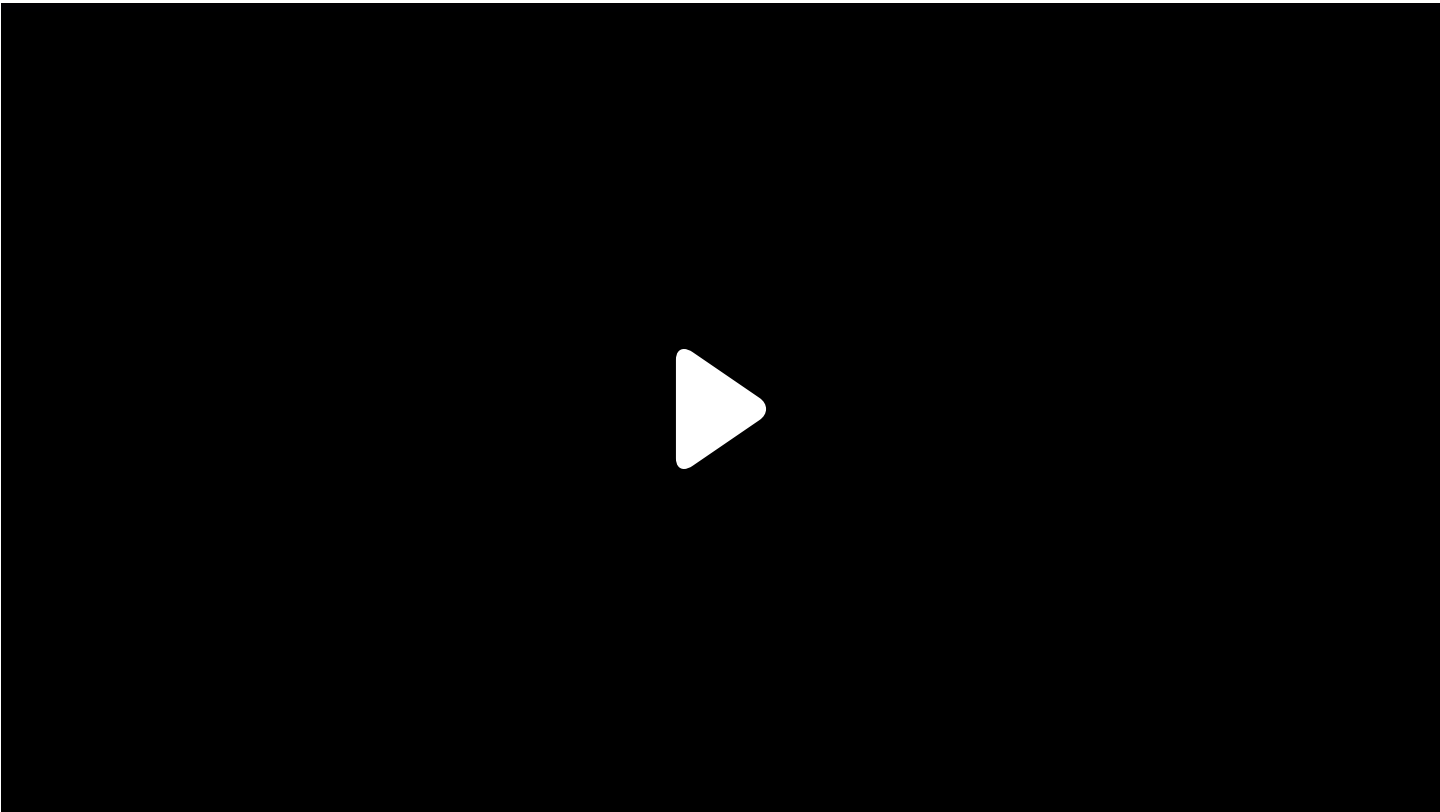
The ARC has been vital in helping provide grant funding to several other programs at FSU and across the entirety of Appalachia itself.

“Simcoe’s expertise in outdoor recreation will enable FOREI to align recreation assets, provide research, education and training,” the university said in a press release.

To learn more about the FOREI program, visit their website at <https://new.express.adobe.com/webpage/EmQXsp6YV9xUj>.

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