



The Wilds Are Working Initiative: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

INITIATIVE BASICS

What is the Wilds Are Working initiative?

The Wilds Are Working: Recreation and Technology in Rural PA campaign seeks to raise awareness about the PA Wilds being a great place for remote and non-remote workers to live, work, and play.



What does the Wilds Are Working initiative entail?

There are two components of the Wilds Are Working initiative, both of which deal with placemaking:

- The Wilds Are Working: A Lifestyle Experience for Remote Workers (or “A Remote Lifestyle Experience”) initiative → which incentivizes people who have jobs that allow them to live anywhere to test out living in the region for four weeks in hopes they will consider relocating and also positions PA Wilds communities as prime locations for the 21st century workforce.
- The Picture Yourself in the PA Wilds (or “Picture Yourself Here”) initiative → which is a visual storytelling component where host communities are tasked with making important connections between the nearby outdoor recreation assets and their downtown. This helps establish the communities as gateways to the PA Wilds. Communities can install window clings in storefronts downtown and/or produce a promotional video.

What are the goals of the Wilds Are Working initiative?

Many communities in the PA Wilds region have experienced decades of population decline and industry contraction. All this, coupled with an aging population and the unprecedented challenges seen during COVID, and the potential for a program designed to attract and retain young people and families to rural PA became clear.

The Wilds Are Working initiative showcases our region’s communities as well-suited to become long-term homes for workers with flexible jobs. It leverages PA Wilds brand power to reach a wide audience of people interested in living in the region. Selected individuals and their families are given a “test run” of life in the region, with the hopes that the experience can solidify their decision to relocate while also providing important feedback loops for the host communities.

While in the region, remote workers receive living stipends that can only be spent at locally-owned businesses, which stimulates the local economy. They are also paired with volunteer opportunities. Long term, the communities have a chance to grow their tax base. Last, but not least, this initiative offers a chance for communities to look inward and outward at how they greet and serve residents and the 21st century workforce.



COMMUNITY IMPLEMENTATION

How does the Wilds Are Working initiative support my community?

- Community promotions - Host Communities are positioned as a destination for 21st century workers who are passionate about the outdoors and rural way of life. This is an opportunity to captivate prospective residents and visitors alike while leveraging the PA Wilds brand.
- Infusion of cash into small businesses - Participating remote workers receive a stipend that can only be spent at small local businesses and their lodging with local businesses is also covered - continuing the tradition of trying to help people experience the PA Wilds while also supporting the region's entrepreneurs.
- Community feedback - Hosting remote workers creates opportunities for communities to assess their natural, cultural and entrepreneurial assets and receive important feedback from the participating remote workers that can inform future community actions. Not only did host communities learn more about their communities and what prospective remote workers saw, but they also heard from existing residents who were working remotely and may or may not have already made deep connections.
- Potential tax base benefits - Should the participating remote workers choose to relocate to the region as new residents, they would help grow the local tax base in the communities and potentially lead to filling other workforce and volunteer gaps. These visitors and prospective residents add to the vibrancy of our community and contribute to the wellbeing of our local economy.

Why is this initiative taking place in my community?

People in your community saw the potential of the initiative and decided to make sure your community could benefit from it. Community organizations in the PA Wilds are invited to apply each year, as funding allows, to become a Host Community. Through a formal application and interview process, the Community Lead Organization (CLO) must demonstrate the community's state of readiness to host remote workers.

Who are the remote workers?

The remote workers are selected by the CLOs and can be anyone who already has a job that provides flexibility as far as residency.

Do all of the remote workers come from cities?

No, remote workers from any community outside of the PA Wilds are eligible to apply.

Who selects the remote workers?

Remote workers are selected through a rigorous application process by members of the host community. See "Who administers the Wilds Are Working program?" under FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION.



FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION

How is the Wilds Are Working initiative funded?

The Wilds Are Working initiative is funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission through Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Central and Northern Pennsylvania (BFTP-CNP). An initiative of the PA Department of Community & Economic Development and funded by the Ben Franklin Technology Development Authority, BFTP-CNP has been providing investment capital, business support services and operational assistance to emerging tech-startups and small manufacturers for nearly 40 years.

Community Lead Organizations receive a small paid contract to support project implementation. However, they are also required to secure match funding in order to show local buy-in to the initiative. The CLOs are responsible for organizing a Welcome Committee that reviews applications, selects remote workers, arranges lodging accommodations and supports PA Wilds Center in getting local businesses signed up for the gift card program so that remote workers can spend their stipends locally.

Who administers the Wilds Are Working initiative?

The Wilds Are Working initiative is administered by the PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, Inc., a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose mission is to integrate conservation and economic development in a way that strengthens and inspires the communities of the Pennsylvania Wilds. PA Wilds Center contracts with administrative support and Community Lead Organizations in Host Communities for project management.

The Pennsylvania Wilds is a 13-county region that includes the counties of Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Forest, Jefferson, Lycoming, McKean, Potter, Tioga, Warren and northern Centre. The PA Wilds Center promotes the region as a premier outdoor recreation destination as a way to diversify local economies, inspire stewardship, attract investment, retain population and improve quality of life. The PA Wilds Center's core programs seek to help businesses leverage the PA Wilds brand and connect with new market opportunities, including: the Wilds Cooperative of PA, a network of over more than 500 place-based businesses and organizations, and the PA Wilds Conservation Shop, a retail outlet primarily featuring products sourced from the WCO. For more information on the PA Wilds Center, visit www.PAWildsCenter.org.

What is required to be a host community?

Communities within the PA Wilds Conservation Landscape, covering a 13-county region of Pennsylvania, may be eligible to host remote workers through this program. The following are requirements to be considered:

- Staff or volunteers that are able to dedicate time to project management, including program set up time (using a guided toolkit), application management, and more. (Community Lead Organization)
- A group of friendly and knowledgeable volunteers ready to host workers and help them make the most of their experience. (Welcome Committee)
- Suitable accommodations for long-term workers, that include full kitchens, Wi-Fi, and ample living space. These can include local vacation rentals and bed & breakfast properties.
- Community access to high-speed internet, both in residential and public areas (like coffee shops or coworking spaces).
- Mobile phone coverage for a variety of carriers.
- Ample opportunities for recreation, events, and activities within a reasonable proximity.



How many Host Communities can participate?

Funding is currently available through 2024. Two Host Communities will be selected each year.

Is there a general timeline for the initiative?

When funding is available:

- November/December - Host Community Application Form opens
- January/February - Community Interviews
- Early March - Host Communities selected and announced
- Early April - Applications open to the public
- May - Five remote workers are selected for each community
- July/August - Remote workers live in the communities

For more information:

- Where the public applies to participate each year - WildsAreWorking.com
- Host Communities are indefinitely promoted on our core visitor site - PAWilds.com/activity/work/
- Initiative info - PAWildsCenter.org/wilds-are-working

INITIATIVE INSPIRATION

What inspired the Wilds Are Working initiative?

Modeled after case studies emerging from across Appalachia and the nation, the Wilds Are Working is one of many initiatives that rural communities are implementing to incentivize and stimulate revitalization. Building on the movement, the Rural Outdoor Investment (ROI) Act looks to allocate \$50 million annually to fund infrastructure improvements and similar marketing campaigns to help towns across the country plan and build recreation-based economies.

What is “remote work”?

Remote work describes the activity of performing a job at a location outside of a traditional shared office setting. Often, remote work is completed at an employee’s home or in a coworking space.

How can remote work be a positive thing for PA Wilds communities?

The rise of remote work across the United States has allowed rural communities to welcome new residents seeking a different kind of lifestyle — that slower-paced lifestyle that can be found in the Pennsylvania Wilds. According to a January 2022 Pew Research Center survey, about 59% of U.S. workers who say their jobs can mainly be done remotely are working from home all or most of the time.



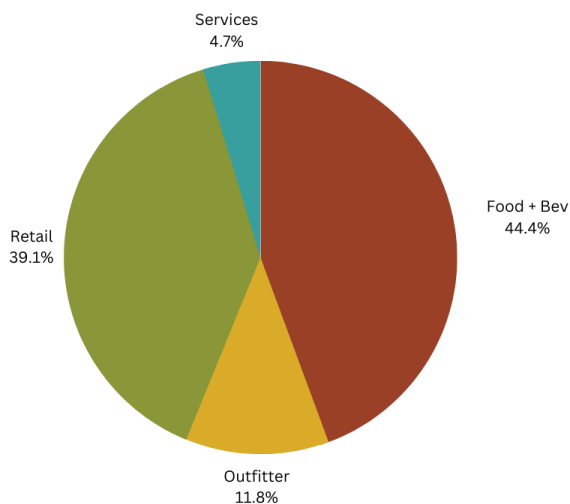
RESULTS TO DATE

What communities have hosted remote workers as part of the Wilds Are Working initiative so far?

In 2022, the Wilds Are Working was piloted in the communities of Bellefonte and Kane. Bellefonte hosted five remote workers in July 2022, and Kane hosted remote workers in late September/early October 2022. Communities selected for the 2023 iteration are Emporium (July) and Warren (August).

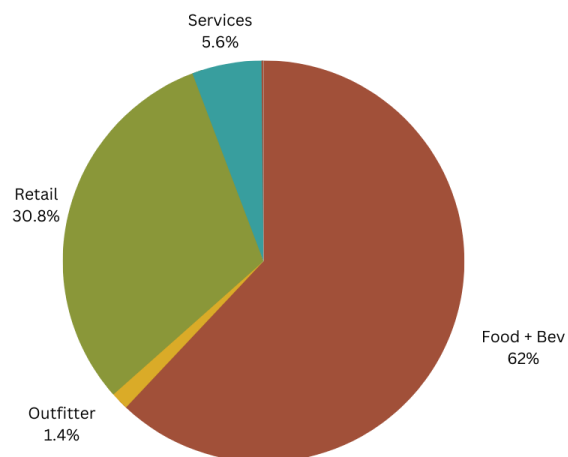
What have been the direct financial impacts?

Remote workers receive a stipend on a digital gift card that can only be used at participating small businesses in the region. This allows PA Wilds Center to track how the stipends are used in the communities. In 2022, more than \$30,000 has been invested in the two host communities through stipends and direct payments to local lodging facilities.



Bellefonte

- 4 weeks, 5 participants
- Yiftee cards: \$6,500
- Lodging: \$10,500



Kane

- 3 weeks, 6 participants
- Yiftee cards: \$5,885
- Lodging: \$10,700

Most of the stipends were spent on food and beverage in both communities, but a significant portion was also spent on retail. Service expenses include things like gym memberships and salon visits. Outfitter excursions were also a part of the experiences in both communities.

What did the pilot participants say?

Ten of the eleven remote workers who participated in the 2022 pilot program responded to the Post Pilot Survey.





According to survey results:

- 8/10 participants rated the experience as a 5/5, and 2/10 participants rated the experience 4/5
- 9/10 participants said they would relocate to the region, either to their host community or another community
- 9/10 participants said they traveled outside of their host community to experience more of the PA Wilds
- 10/10 participants said they would recommend the Wilds Are Working: A Remote Lifestyle Experience to colleagues and other remote workers
- 10/10 participants said they feel more informed about the PA Wilds
- 10/10 participants said they would come back to the PA Wilds for a trip
- 10/10 participants said they would recommend the PA Wilds to others as a destination

Check out comments from the remote workers in this program highlight video: https://youtu.be/OKpXdPr3_Fk

How are you keeping up with the remote workers to know if they relocate?

PA Wilds Center has developed relationships with the remote workers to allow for check-ins to see how things are going and whether they have relocated. One of the remote workers from 2022 has contacted us for a realtor in the region.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the Wilds Are Working: A Remote Lifestyle Experience, check out the following resources:

- Program website - <https://wildsareworking.com>
- Program details on Center website - <https://pawildscenter.org/wilds-are-working>
- PA Wilds Digital Gift Card - <https://app.yiftee.com/gift-card/pa-wilds-kane>