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IMBA UNVEILS WEST VIRGINIA'S FIRST OFFICIAL RIDE CENTER™

POCAHONTAS COUNTY, W. Va. – (August 12, 2019) – The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) announced this week the newest recipient of their IMBA Ride Center™ designation will be the **Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center** located in Pocahontas County, West Virginia.

“It is our pleasure to welcome Snowshoe Highlands as IMBA’s newest Ride Center, and first Ride Center in West Virginia. The IMBA Ride Center designation solidifies the enthusiasm for mountain biking in Snowshoe Highlands and recognizes it as one of today’s exceptional mountain bike destinations,” said Dave Wiens, IMBA Executive Director.

The Snowshoe Highlands Ride Center is being awarded the bronze designation by the International Mountain Bicycling Association, meaning that the area meets specific trail, services and mountain biking experience criteria that elevates the overall mountain biking experience above the average destination and offers a variety of single track riding for all levels of riding abilities.

WHAT IS AN IMBA RIDE CENTER?

The IMBA Ride Center designation recognizes the pinnacle of mountain biking communities. These are large-scale facilities with something for every rider, from a variety of riding experiences to a variety of ways to have fun off the bike.

IMBA Ride Centers feature extensive trail networks, masterfully designed for mountain bikers of every skill level and built by professional trail builders and local volunteers. From backcountry adventures to shuttle-served gravity trails, and from expert-only trails to family-friendly riding, mountain bikers can expect the best the sport has to offer at an IMBA Ride Center. Trails systems are integrated, well-designed, and embraced by the surrounding communities for the economic, tourism and other benefits they provide.

There are a total of 40 IMBA Ride Centers in the world. In the Mid Atlantic Region, there are five IMBA Ride Centers including the new Snowshoe Highlands IMBA Ride Center.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

“This project was made possible with a team of organizations working together,” said Cara Rose, Executive Director for the Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau. “The Monongahela National Forest, Snowshoe Mountain, Pocahontas Trails, West Virginia University Extension Service and the Pocahontas County CVB have been working on this project for more than two years.”

The Monongahela National Forest plays a significant role in the success of the Snowshoe Highlands IMBA Ride Center. With over three hundred miles of mountain biking trails in this area of the Forest, these public lands helped significantly to reach the bronze status. “The Forest Service has been working closely with our community partners over the last two years to develop recreational opportunities that will enhance the economy and quality of life for residents and

visitors. We are thrilled to be a part of the first IMBA Ride Center Designation in West Virginia,” said Shawn Cochran, Monongahela National Forest Supervisor.

Snowshoe Mountain is the central point of the IMBA Ride Center with a radius of about forty minutes drive time making up the Ride Center area. A significant portion of the trails included in the IMBA Ride Center are on Snowshoe property, both in their lift-accessed bike park and their 11,000 acre backcountry.

“Those of us who live here have always known that the mountain biking in our community is world-class, but this new Ride Center designation will help us spread the word,” said Ken Gaitor, Vice President of Mountain Operations for Snowshoe Mountain. “We feel confident that when folks visit our area and ride our trails, they’ll be hooked, and they’ll be planning plenty of return trips to ride them again.”

Snowshoe has a storied history with mountain biking, culminating with their selection as the host site for this year’s UCI MTB World Cup Finals (Sept. 6-8, 2019), the first UCI World Cup stop on U.S. soil since 2015. “This September, thousands of mountain bikers from all over the world will be coming to Snowshoe, and for many of them it will be their first time visiting West Virginia. We see it as a golden opportunity to put our best foot forward and turn them into repeat visitors,” said Gaitor.

The local IMBA chapter, Pocahontas Trails, teamed up with the project from the beginning. “Five years ago Pocahontas Trails became the first IMBA Chapter in West Virginia. From the start the community support has enabled us to promote, maintain and improve our local trails all while preserving the rugged character Pocahontas County, Snowshoe and Slatyfork is known for,” said Eric Lindberg, president of Pocahontas Trails, the local IMBA chapter. “We are thrilled to be part of the effort leading to the IMBA Ride Center designation—the first in West Virginia—the next big step in making this a destination mountain biking center and the growth opportunity this gives to the community.”

ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF MOUNTAIN BIKE TOURISM

Mountain biking and mountain biking facilities can bring an array of benefits to rural communities. They leverage communities’ natural assets to create places that are attractive to visitors, businesses, and both new and current residents. Specific, documented benefits include health benefits for local users, increased tourism and economic development opportunities, and benefits to the local environment

In the U.S., an estimated 50 million people (20% of Americans 16 and over) mountain bike. The most recent membership statistics from the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) show that their riders are young professionals who are well educated and affluent. The median age for members is 44 years old; 76% have a bachelor’s degree or higher (compared to 31% for the U.S. and 21% for WV); 53% reported work in professional/managerial positions; median household income is \$100,000 (compared to \$60,336 for the nation and \$43,469 for the state).

Tourism delivers an estimated \$94M to the economy in Pocahontas County, WV. “According to a 2017 survey, about fifteen percent of visitors to the county participate in mountain biking,” said Cara Rose, Executive Director. “We see this number growing with the new IMBA Ride Center designation and leveraging our trails and natural beauty to enhance the overall tourism economy through mountain biking recreation.”

Mountain biking can bring economic benefit to the entire State of West Virginia as well. “For years, our mountains have been home to world-class recreation, including skiing, biking, rafting, ATV rides and more. This designation puts West Virginia’s mountain biking trails among the best in the world. It also stands to increase visitation from the growing mountain biking community now and for years to come,” says Chelsea Ruby, Commissioner, West Virginia Tourism Office. “We can’t wait to bring more riders here to see and experience Almost Heaven.”

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE SNOWSHOE HIGHLANDS RIDE CENTER?

“The CVB, partners and Pocahontas County communities are invested in mountain biking and the recreation economy,” Rose goes on to say. “Reaching silver ride center status is within reach and working with our partners on strategic planning, community connectivity and improved guest services, the Ride Center establishes Nature’s Mountain Playground, the region and West Virginia as a premier mountain biking destination.”

“The Ride Center designation is as much about the process as it is the award, by helping community partners use the process as a guide and educational experience for creating amazing places to ride mountain bikes,” said Steve Kasacek, Trail Solutions Program Manager at IMBA.

SNOWSHOE HIGHLANDS RIDE CENTER WEBSITE

www.RideSnowshoeHighlands.com

MAP of Ride Center area: attached

PHOTOS

<https://platform.crowdriff.com/m/s-AzCrig8nSjTZ6ptT> <https://snowshoemountain.smugmug.com/Summer-Media-Kit/n-t7JGJw/i-cVT3PHH/A> <https://photo.snowshoemtn.com/Summer-2019/i-xKctS75/A>
<https://snowshoemountain.smugmug.com/Summer-Media-Kit/n-t7JGJw/i-Ljt5zg9/A>
<https://photo.snowshoemtn.com/2017-Slatyfork-Enduro/i-pbxD6T3/A>

ABOUT IMBA (INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN BICYCLING ASSOCIATION)

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit educational association established in 1988. Its mission is to create, enhance and protect great places to ride mountain bikes. It is focused on creating more trails close to home to grow the quantity and quality of mountain bike trail communities across the U.S., so everyone has access to close-to-home rides and iconic backcountry experiences. For more information please visit www.IMBA.com.

ABOUT POCAHONTAS COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

The Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau is the destination marketing organization for Pocahontas County, West Virginia. Pocahontas County is home to the Green Bank Observatory, Pearl S. Buck Birthplace, Monongahela National Forest, Snowshoe Mountain, five state parks, two state forests, eight rivers.

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ABOUT THE MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST The Monongahela National Forest is almost 1 million acres in size and spans 10 counties in West Virginia, making it the largest expanse of public land in the state. Rugged topography, intact forests, fast-moving mountain streams, and small communities interspersed with pastoral farmland combine to create a sense of seclusion and solitude. It also provides a stunning backdrop and hundreds of miles of trails that are open to biking. Established in 1920, the Monongahela National Forest is one of the most ecologically diverse areas in the United States. The highest elevations in the Mountain State are on the Monongahela, including Spruce Knob at 4,863 feet. The Monongahela National Forest is a working forest providing timber, clean water, grazing, minerals, and recreational opportunities for current and future generations. 304-636-1800

ABOUT SNOWSHOE MOUNTAIN RESORT

Snowshoe Mountain is the perfect year-round destination for adventure-filled vacations in West Virginia. Snowshoe covers a total area of 11,000 acres in the Appalachian Mountain Range, and includes the second highest point in the state at 4,848' elevation. Snowshoe was chosen as the Best Ski Resort in the region by the readers of Blue Ridge Outdoors. The Snowshoe Bike Park was recently named the #1 Bike Park in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic Regions by MTBParks.com, and will play host to the 2019 Mercedes Benz UCI MTB World Cup Finals. Snowshoe offers the most skiable terrain in the region, extensive lodging options, fully developed mountain biking trails, a popular golf course designed by Gary Player, wedding and convention areas, and a wide variety of outdoor activities. Snowshoe Mountain Resort is part of the Alterra Mountain Company, and is included on the Ikon Pass, the new standard in season passes. More details at www.snowshoemtn.com.

ABOUT POCAHONTAS TRAILS

Pocahontas Trails is the local IMBA chapter in Pocahontas County, West Virginia. Their goal is to improve and promote the mountain biking trails in Pocahontas County, WV by working with the community and other organizations to repair, design, and build trails. Their vision is to enhance trail sustainability, safety, and rider/hiker experience. For more information please visit www.pocahontastrails.com

ABOUT WVU EXTENSION SERVICE – RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT Sustainable rural tourism development is a complex process. The WVU Extension Rural Tourism Specialist provides participatory research, planning, and training programs with support of a transdisciplinary team of WVU faculty and students. Partnerships with Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Resources, Landscape Architecture, Natural Resources Analysis Center, Graphic Design, Public Administration, Business and Economics and other Colleges and Departments at WVU provide a depth of knowledge and expertise strategically targeted to support the development of a sustainable tourism economy in West Virginia.

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