

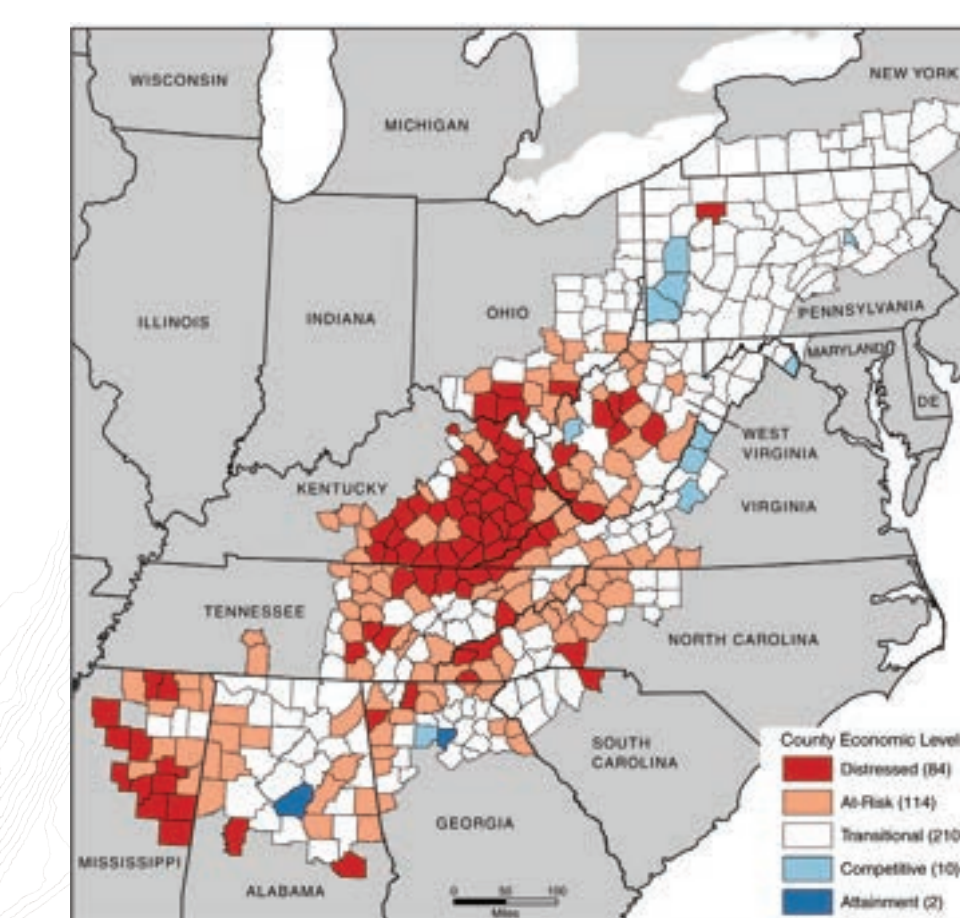
# BRIGHT Opportunities for Whitesburg Kentucky

PINE MOUNTAIN PLANNING COLLABORATIVE

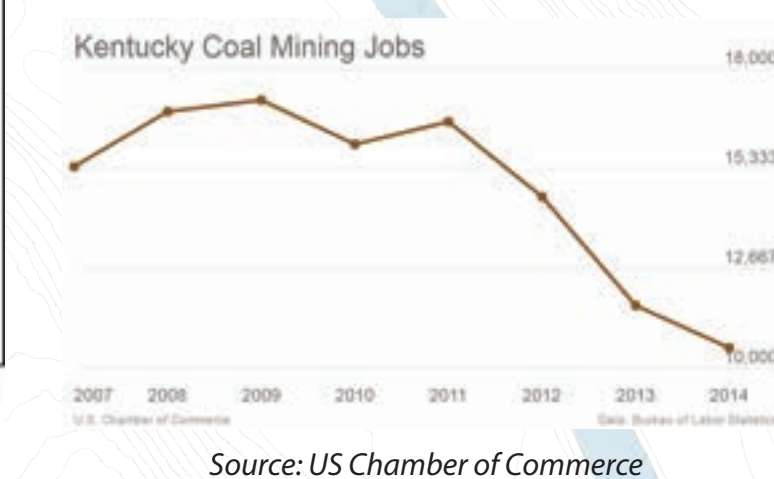
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## Regional Context



Well before the coal industry decline, Central Appalachia has struggled with persistent poverty. The Appalachian Regional Commission, a federal agency founded during Johnson's War on Poverty, tracks the level of economic distress across the region. Letcher County and most surrounding Eastern Kentucky coalfield counties are counted amongst the most distressed.



Source: US Chamber of Commerce



## Background

### Our Client

Since 1969, Appalshop has been enacting cultural organizing and place-based media, arts and education to document the life, celebrate the culture, and voice the concerns of people living in Appalachia and rural America. Appalshop is today helping to reimagine the region by bringing forth new and often unheard voices and visions from the people of this place and demonstrating the power of arts and culture to create meaningful social and economic change.

### The BRIGHT Program

This project is in partnership with the BRIGHT program, a convening and research initiative of the Environmental Law Institute. BRIGHT = Blight Revitalization Initiative for Green Healthy Towns. The program works with organizations and municipalities to identify corridors of blighted properties in struggling neighborhoods, towns and cities, and then to assess their potential for revitalization through sustainable, environmentally restorative development. The program process in initial, pilot locations will be documented and presented in a "Blight Revitalization Toolkit" to guide practitioners and citizens in future revitalization efforts.

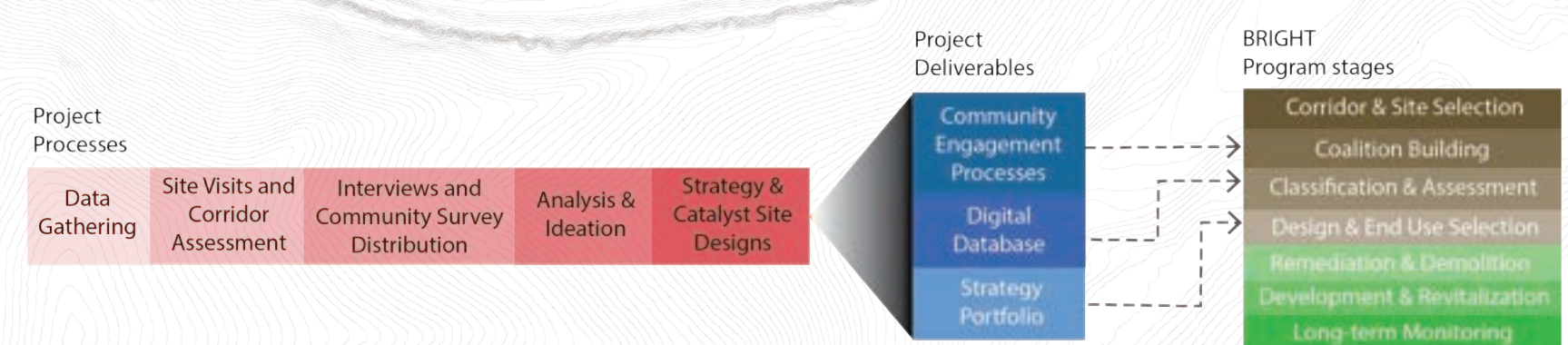
### Our Corridor

The study corridor encompasses a centrally located, 250 acre section of the city stretching from the pedestrian bridge west of downtown to Riverside Park. It includes the downtown commercial area, Farmers Market and festival pavilions, and residential neighborhoods. Appalshop's media center is located within the corridor as well. A former railway track that used to pass along East Main Street and through town provides a well-graded right-of-way. At the western edge of the study corridor and beyond to Hazard Road a paved multi-use trail occupies this right-of-way, but the trail ends abruptly at the start of East Main Street. The North Fork Kentucky River is crossed multiple times by vehicle and pedestrian bridges within the corridor's boundaries.

## Study Corridor



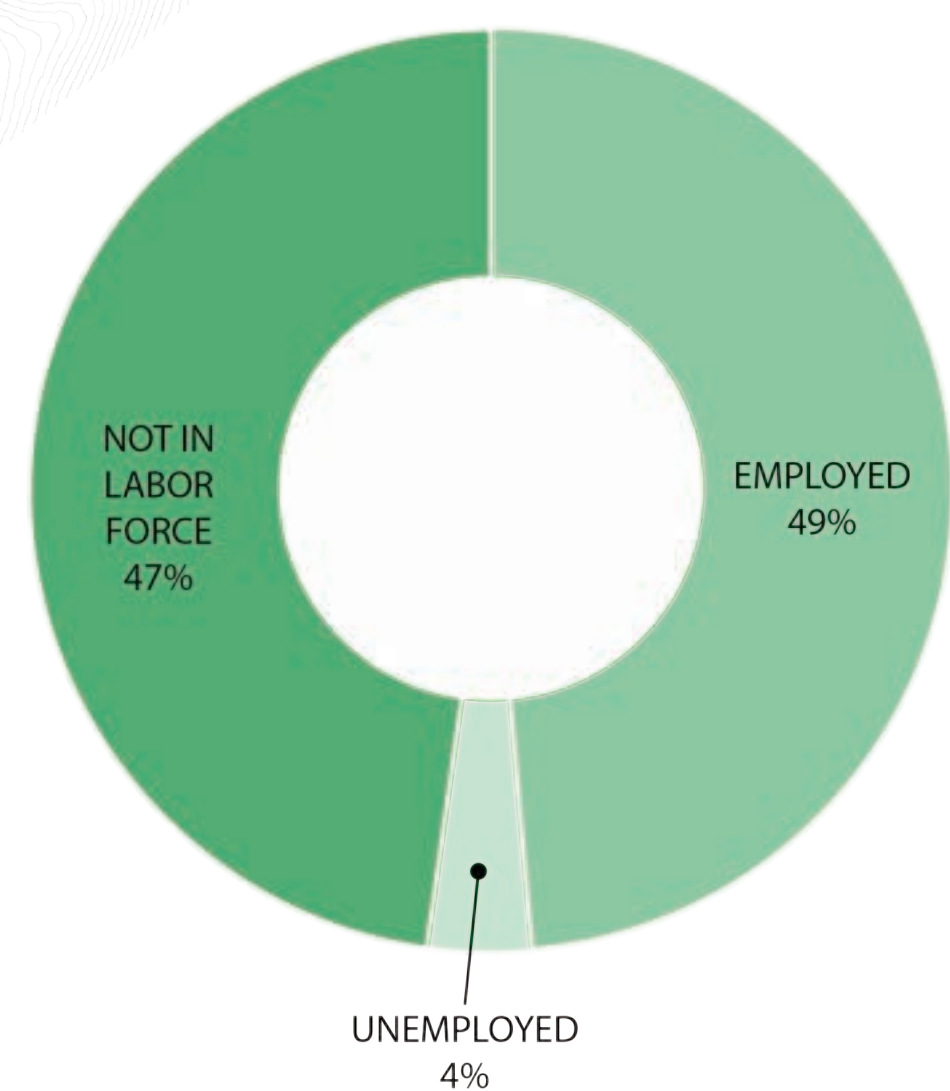
## Process



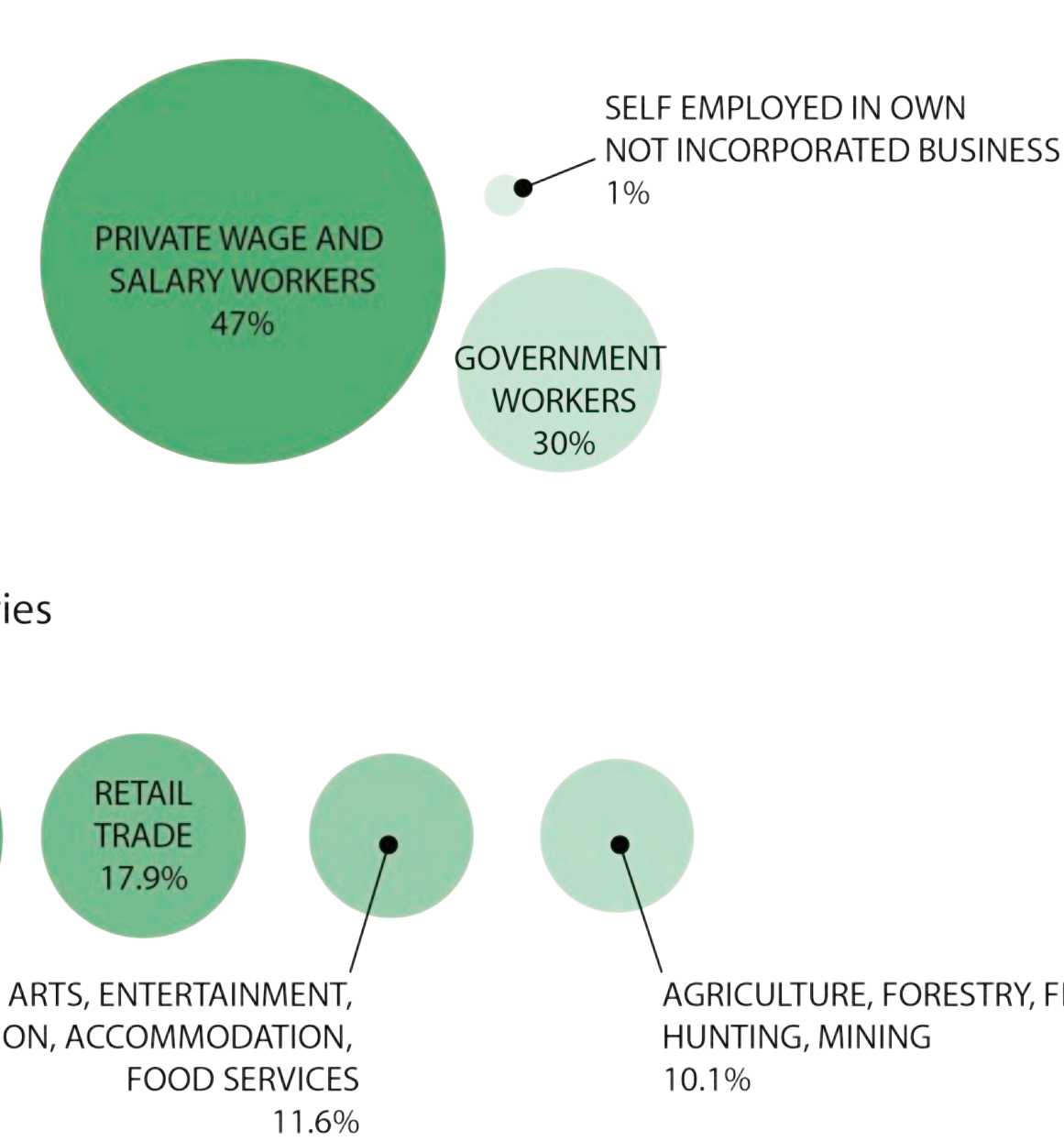
## Local Economy

Only half of Whitesburg's population is in the labor force. More than a quarter of those who are employed work for the government. Whitesburg is home to both Letcher County and Whitesburg's government buildings, which are large employers in the city. Almost 80 percent of employed residents are private wage and salary workers and only 1 percent owns their own business. This suggests that barriers exist to entrepreneurship in Whitesburg.

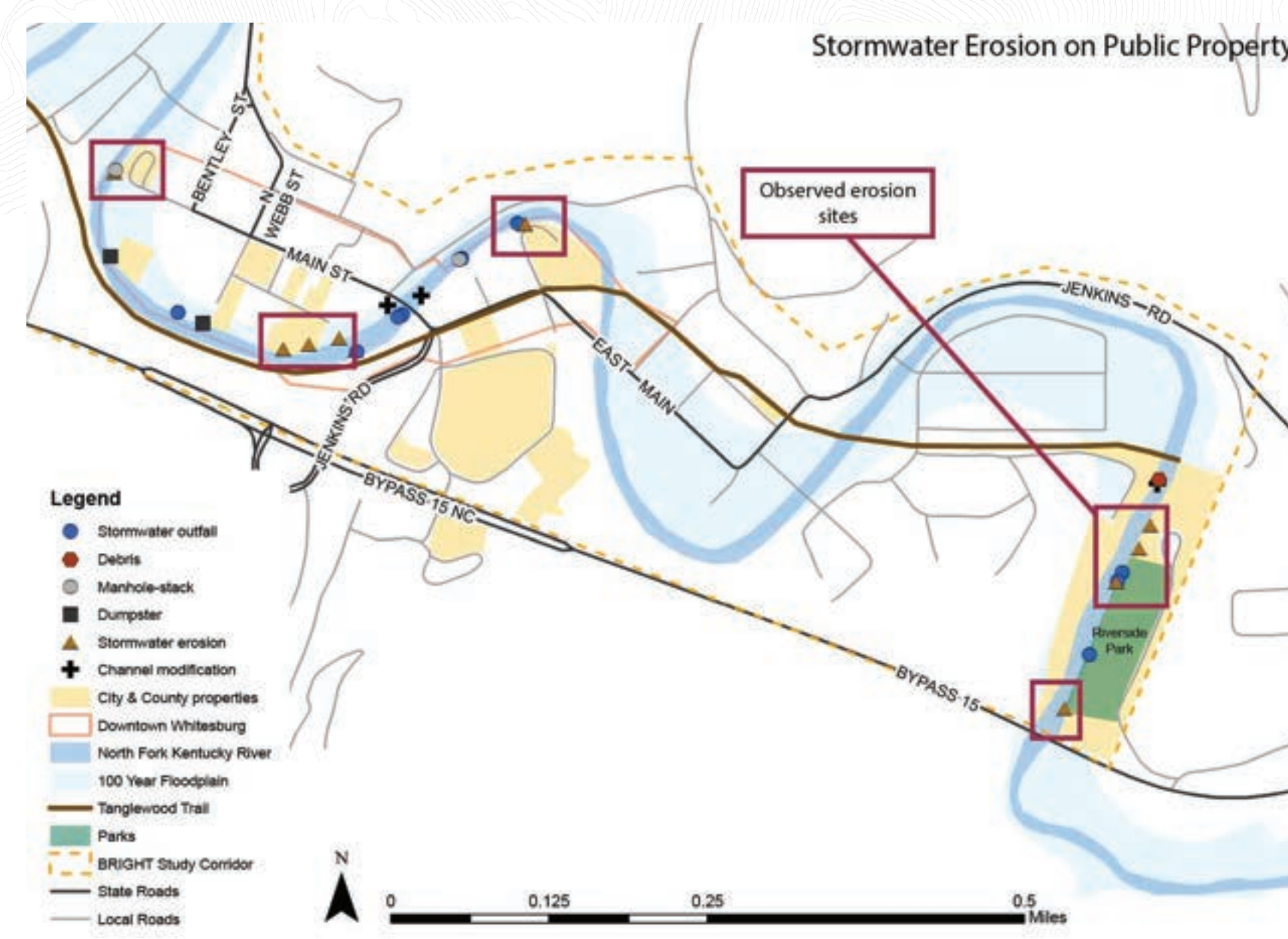
### Labor Force



### Class of Worker



## River



### Problem Statement

The Whitesburg community has shown a lack of trust in the North Fork Kentucky River due to longstanding poor quality. Multiple attempts have been made to raise water quality but addressing the multiple causes of nonpoint pollution have achieved limited results, so local water advocates want complementary approaches for improving the riverfront.

### Goals

- Improve riverfront quality and public perception of the North Fork Kentucky River
- Create more opportunities for positive experiences along the riverfront
- Remediate and prevent stormwater pollution and erosion

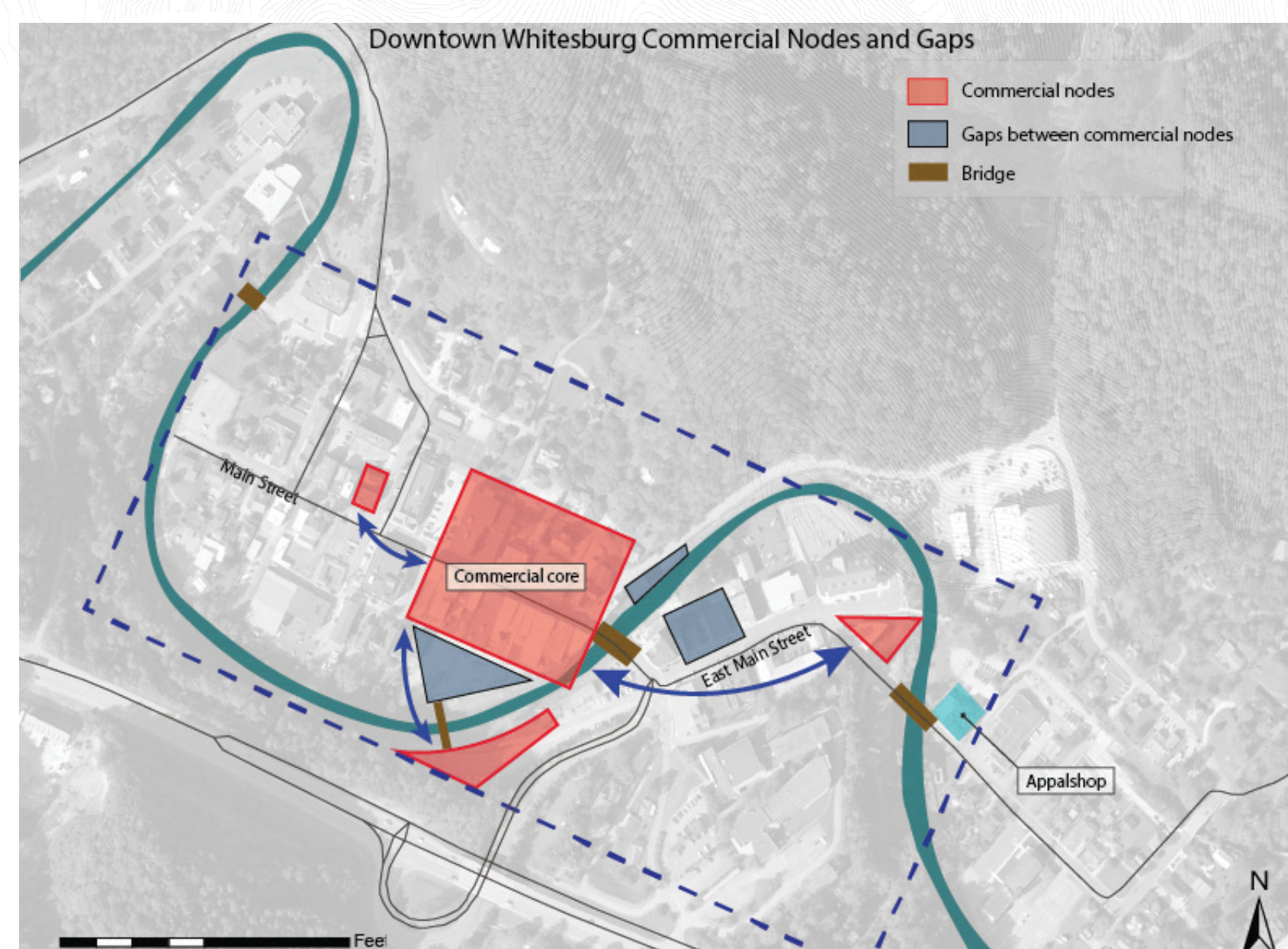
### Strategies

- Add public amenities and message boards along the river
- Extend river stewardship program
- Address stormwater erosion with a green infrastructure pilot project on public parking lot



Parking lot at West Main Street as opportunity for green infrastructure and event space

## Downtown



### Problem Statement

Downtown Whitesburg has a distinct historic character and culture, but has challenges with vacant buildings, commercial development, and pedestrian connectivity through the corridor.

### Goal

- Strengthen Downtown Whitesburg's role as a local and regional, cultural, and economic destination

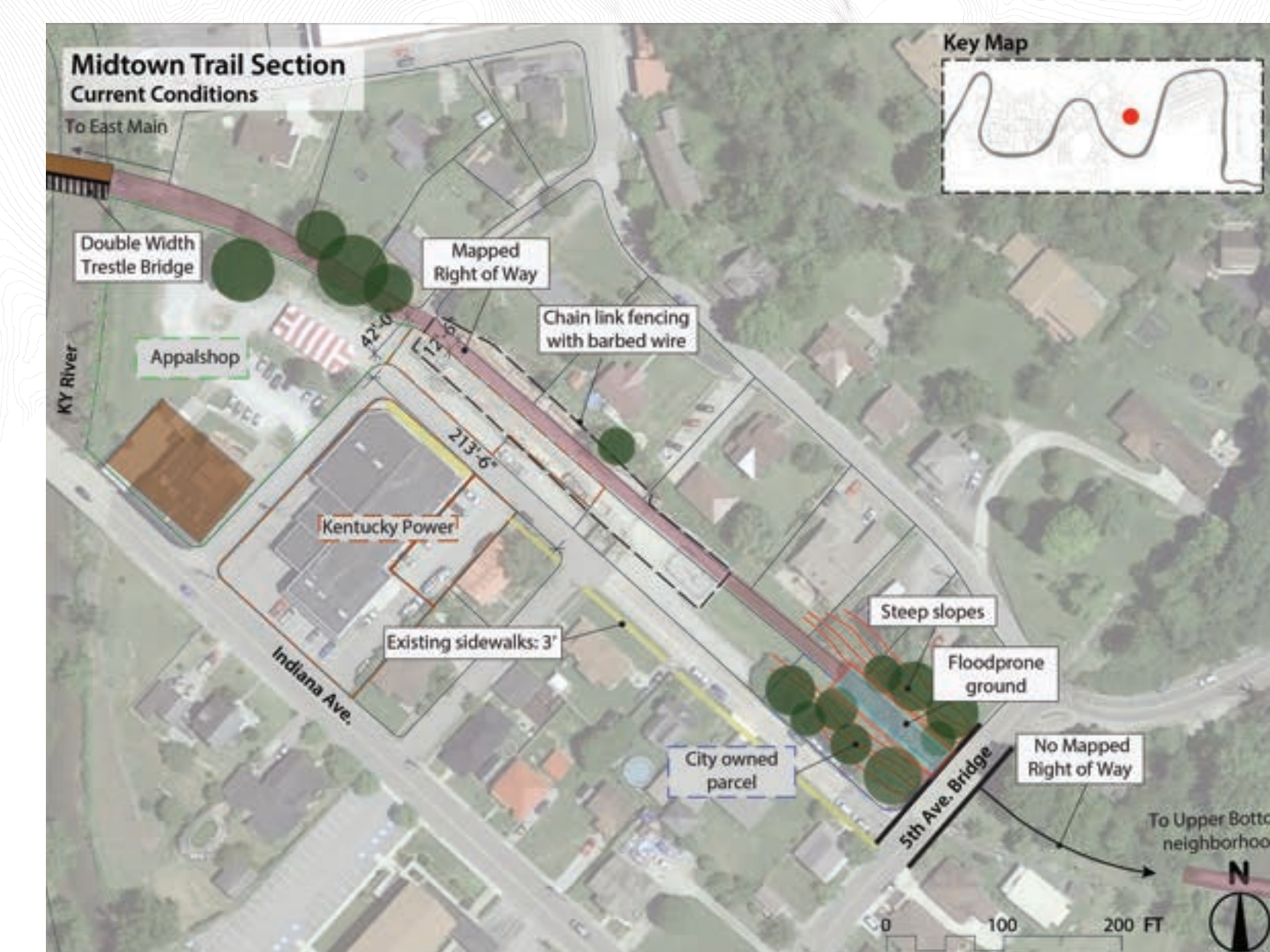
### Strategies

- Use historic preservation resources on federal and state level to support building rehabilitation.
- Consolidate commercial development resources on City website.
- Consider vacant building ordinance, escalating fee structure, or higher tax rates for vacant buildings.
- Organize historic vacant building tour.
- Invest in public infrastructure in Downtown commercial core to promote connectivity and sense of place.



Jenkins Road vacant building: from brownfield to riverfront destination

## Trail



### Problem Statement

Whitesburg's downtown trail offers a fantastic amenity for the community that has the potential to improve transportation, civic health, and quality of life. At present, however, it lacks definition, cohesion, and a distinct character.

### Goals

- Improve visibility and awareness of Whitesburg's existing trail.
- Improve connections between important local destinations in order to provide alternative transportation opportunities.
- Create a sense of place that speaks to Whitesburg's history, culture, and natural environment.
- Use trail development initiatives to enhance health and wellbeing.

### Strategies

- Implement wayfinding, interpretive signage, and public art opportunities
- Incentivize trail use for public health outcomes
- Raise awareness of the trail and its benefits through pop-up programming



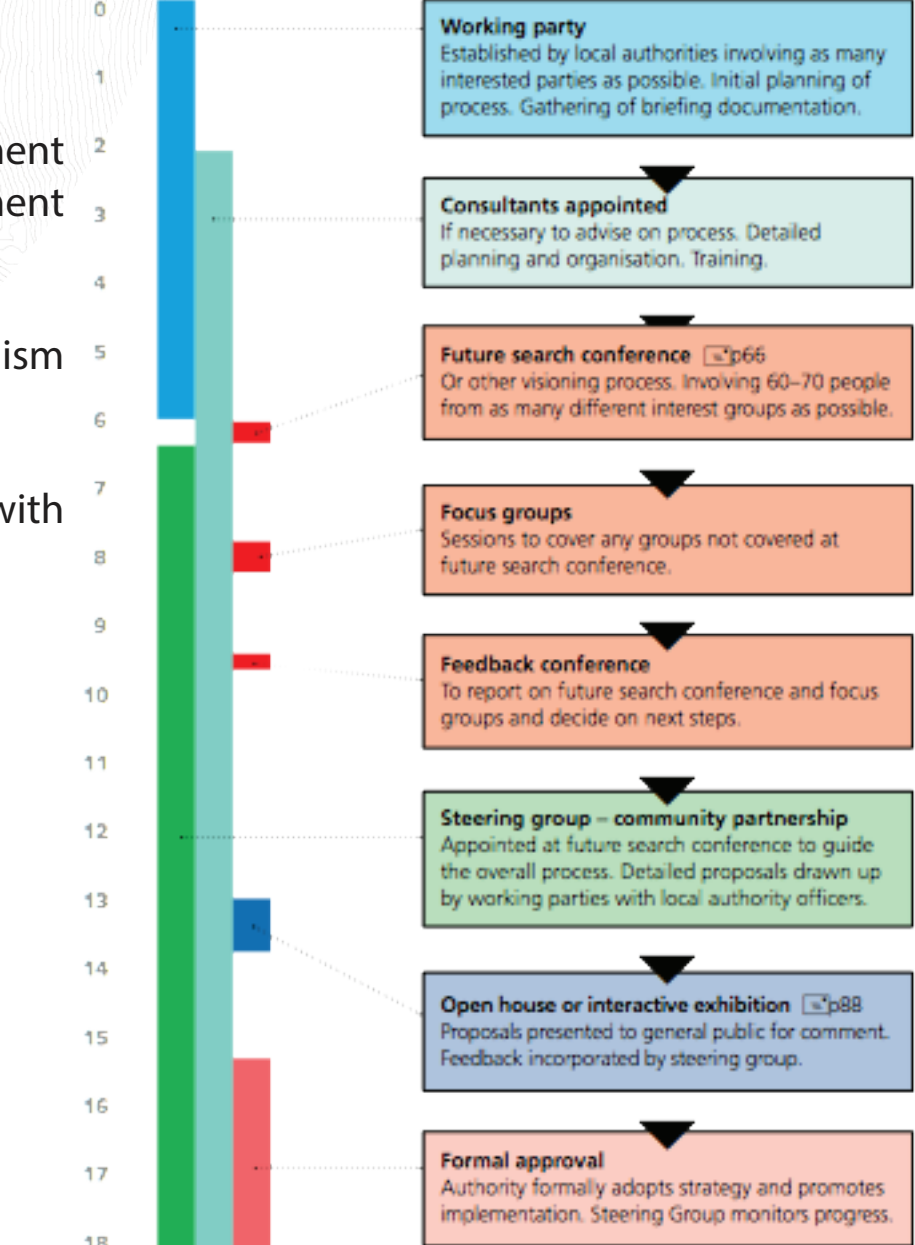
Reimagining of trail corridor under 5th Street bridge with boardwalk, native planting, and public art

## Community Engagement

### Recommendations

- Collaborative multi-stakeholder engagement structure for community redevelopment strategy planning
- Volunteer opportunities with tactical urbanism installations.
- Engage residents in final design phase with interactive art and engagement practices.

## Whole settlement strategy

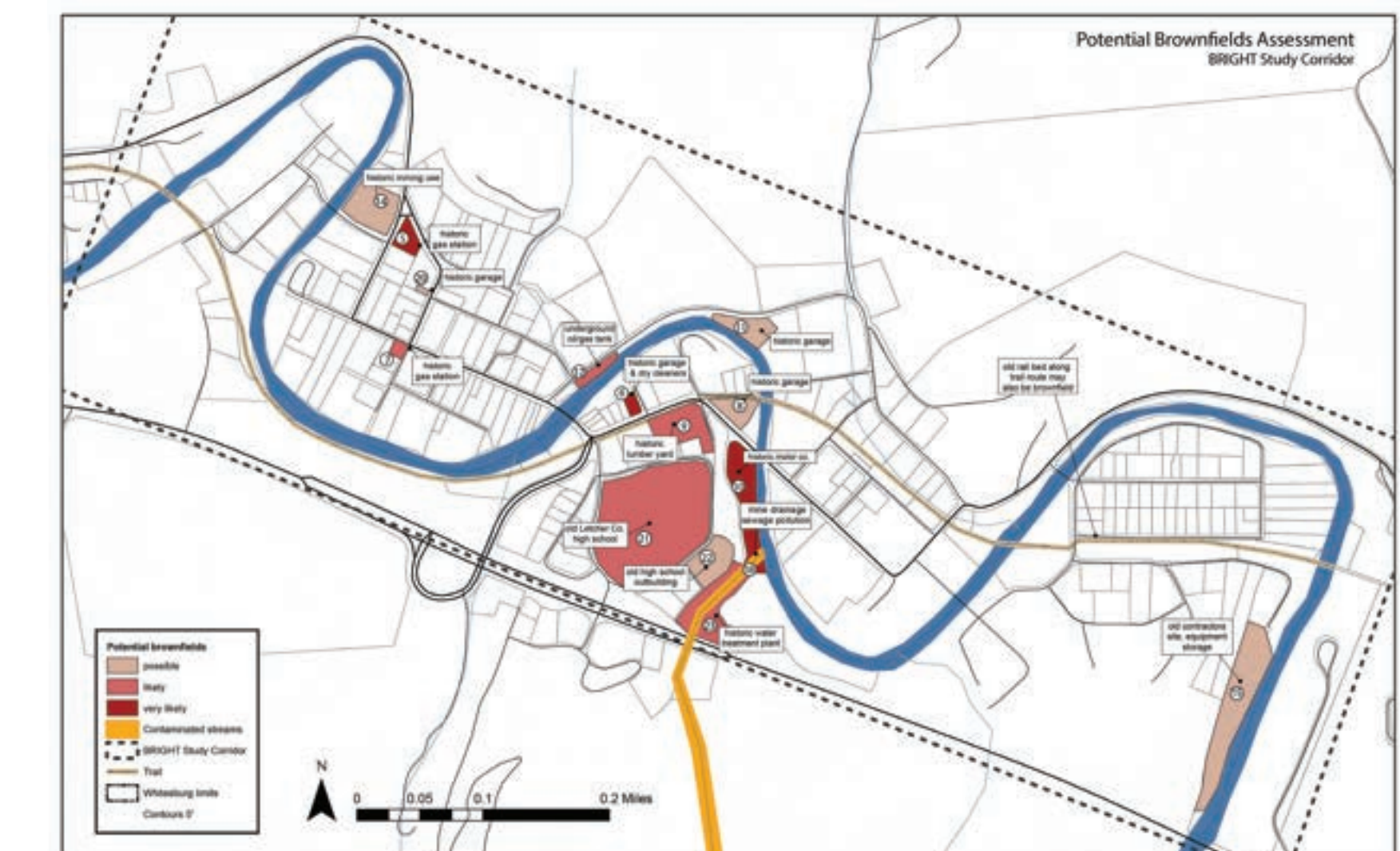


## Brownfields

This project initiated a comprehensive assessment of potential brownfields in Whitesburg, one of the key steps in the BRIGHT methodology. Methods used to identify potential brownfield sites within and around the BRIGHT corridor included working with local residents, consulting state resources, and checking historic land use maps. Longtime Whitesburg residents provided the majority of site information by noting previous uses and level of confidence in probably contamination on printed base maps prepared for the study.



Abandoned mine drainage in Letcher County (Source: Authors' Own)



- 15 potentially contaminated sites identified within BRIGHT study corridor
- Primary concerns: petroleum brownfields, underground storage tanks, and abandoned mine drainage affecting streams