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## ANNOUNCEMENT:

# LiKEN Secures Over \$3 Million from USDA Forest Service to Advance Regenerative Agroforestry and Community-Led Watershed Reclamation in Appalachia

The **Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)** is proud to announce the award of just over **\$3.1 million in funding from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service**, facilitated by the bipartisan Inflation Reduction Act. This award will fund three years of community-led development in 26 counties of eastern Kentucky and southern West Virginia. A key goal is to **increase household incomes from a wide range of non-timber forest products**. This initiative – **Community Wealth from Healthy Rivers and Forests** – puts local knowledge first to pave the way for a resilient future that honors the region's rich natural and cultural heritage.

The **Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)** is a non-profit organization acting as a collaborative hub where passionate individuals and groups come together to enhance local livelihoods, foster sustainable communities, and share invaluable knowledge and resources. LiKEN works across disciplines and sectors to address the complex challenges facing rural, Indigenous and underrepresented communities across North America. In Kentucky, LiKEN has offices in Martin, Harlan, Madison, and Fayette counties. In West Virginia, LiKEN is opening an office in Pendleton County.

**\$3.1**  
**MILLION**  
**TOTAL FUNDING**

  
**8+ NEW**  
**LiKENeers**

  
**NEW OFFICES**  
**IN KY AND WV**  


The US Forest Service is investing \$145 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding for forest health, management, and connecting landowners to emerging markets. This money is entirely dedicated to underserved and low-income communities. A large portion of this, \$116 million, is allocated to 20 Forest Landowner Support projects, including the initiative led by LiKEN, to foster equitable access to these vital markets.

***Appalachian agroforestry is a sleeping giant. The natural resources, cultural traditions, and knowledge are in place, but communities need access to essential support systems and markets to awaken their economic potential.***

- Betsy Taylor, Executive Director, LiKEN Knowledge

In this collaboration, watershed associations will drive community outreach in counties along the headwaters of two major rivers – the Tug Fork River straddling West Virginia and Kentucky, and the Kentucky River. LiKEN and its scholarly and technical partners will monitor whether regeneration of native hardwood forest and livelihoods will increase community wealth, combat flooding and forest fires, regenerate damaged headwaters, and decrease the cost of public water and sewage systems by improving source water. Working with partners, LiKEN will provide legal services to private landowners with tangled land titles. Without clear title to land, it is hard to qualify for financial help needed to improve forest health and production.

An important part of our work will involve creating meaningful learning activities for children and young adults. In listening to the communities we serve, we've identified a widespread wish for more things for young people to do. This project will start programs that teach about the beauty of nature while empowering young people to improve their environment in a fun way.

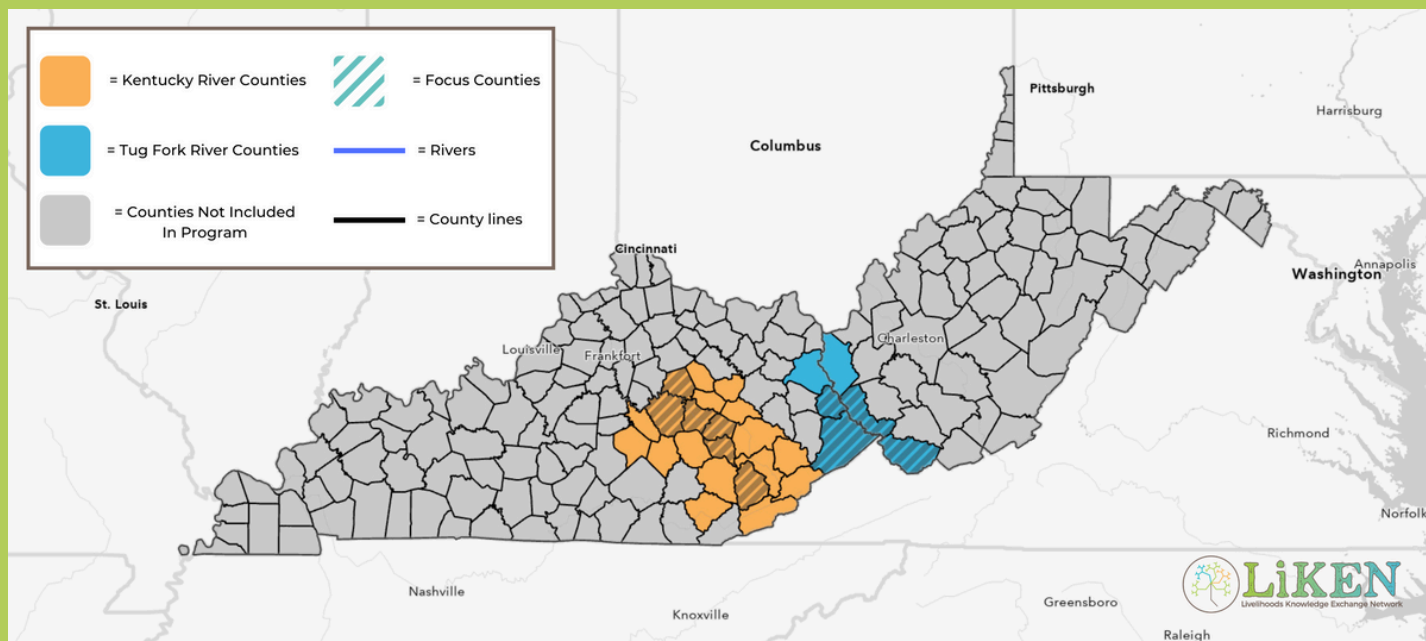
LiKEN has designed this project to address barriers to community wellbeing. In past listening projects, LiKENers found that many people in our service counties face “last mile gaps” in accessing financial, legal, and technical resources. While a support network for non-timber products is growing outside of Central Appalachia, it's lacking within historic coal counties. Despite these barriers, the region holds remarkable assets that create a strong foundation for economic innovation.

Central Appalachia's biodiversity and deep local knowledge provide invaluable resources for place-based ecological and economic regeneration. Traditional forest farming practices anticipated trends in global agroforestry. The region's unique biodiversity allows for value-added products like botanicals for food and medicine, salves, soaps, tinctures, and teas. There are growing markets for syrups from native trees and forest fruits like wild berries, pawpaws, and persimmons. Trapping, hunting, gathering, and fishing also provide income and nutrition.

This comprehensive approach will **improve local livelihoods** by turning land conservation and stewardship into economic opportunity. It will **strengthen community ties by building networks** of landowners, local governments, and community organizations. It will **empower individuals with the knowledge to make informed decisions** about their environment, a threefold model for development and resilience that is deeply interconnected with LiKEN's core values.



# COUNTIES SERVED



The Community Wealth from Healthy Rivers and Forests project will feature outreach to 26 Appalachian counties:

- **Along the Kentucky River:** Letcher, Leslie, Perry, Clay, Owsley, Breathitt, Knott, Wolfe, Lee, Estill, Powell, Garrard, Madison, Clark, Harlan, Knox, Jackson, Rockcastle, Lincoln, Menifee counties;
- **Along the Tug Fork River:** (WV) McDowell, Mingo, Wayne; (KY) Pike, Martin, Lawrence counties.

There will be more in-depth focus on 10 counties in particular:

- **Kentucky:** Leslie, Owsley, Lee, Estill, Madison, Clark, Pike, Martin
- **West Virginia:** McDowell, Mingo

## USDA Forest Service Inflation Act Funding

### 20 Landowner Support Projects

CHPP

LiKEN

The Kentucky Riverkeeper

Friends of the Tug Fork

## GRANT ALLOCATION & PARTNERSHIPS

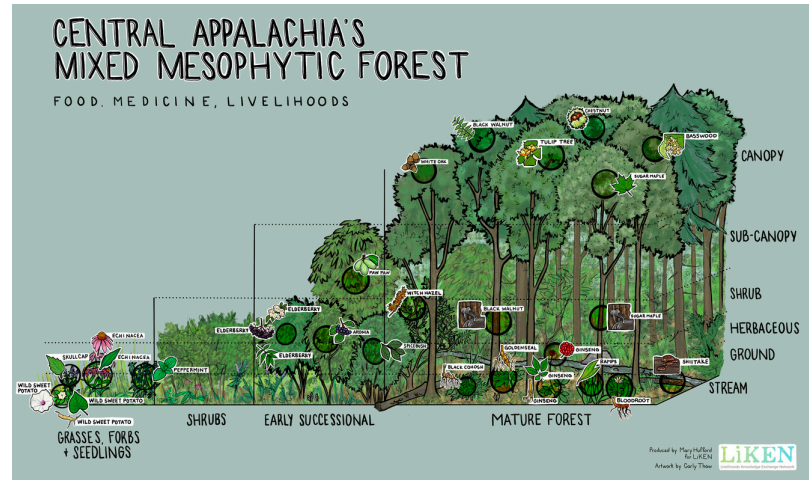
LiKEN will receive \$2 million directly from the USFS. From this amount, LiKEN will provide subawards to two watershed associations - the **Kentucky Riverkeeper** and the **Friends of the Tug Fork River**. These volunteer-led watershed associations will co-design the project with LiKEN. They will help to recruit landowners, gatherers, fishers, and hunters. They will catalyze festivals, cultural events, community outreach and education. LiKEN will also provide a subaward to the Appalachian Citizens' Law Center to assist in providing direct legal services.

The rest of the USFS funding for this project, a little over \$1 million, is provided as a subaward from the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation to LiKEN. This crucial support extends LiKEN's ongoing efforts to resolve the complex issue of heirs' property, a common challenge where land ownership is divided among family members across generations without a clear legal title. This often occurs when a landowner dies without a will, leading to their property being jointly inherited by their descendants. Over time, as families grow, this can make it incredibly difficult to manage, use, or sell the land.

***The benefits of a regenerated native forest multiply over time. Healthy forests and rivers help prevent floods, fight fires, sequester carbon, and clean water.***

-Deborah Thompson, Impact Director, LiKEN Knowledge

Central Appalachia's unique forests offer a bounty of valuable and useful crops. LiKEN's Community Wealth from Healthy Rivers and Forests project will strengthen communities by empowering local landowners to engage in emerging agroforestry markets.



With clear title landowners can gain individual or clearer collective control over their land. Clear titles empower families to make more unified decisions about their land and also open doors to myriad opportunities, including accessing financial services and ensuring the land can serve as a sustainable resource for future generations. LiKEN's Appalachian Heirs' Property Coalition works to turn a legal complexity into an opportunity for environmental stewardship and community development.

The grant will usher in an expansion for LiKEN, who will be hiring new team members from the communities they serve in eastern Kentucky and West Virginia. The new LiKENeers will include **six new Community Engagement Coordinators, an agroforester, and a grants manager**. These positions will enhance LiKEN's capacity to implement the project's ambitious goals, provide local jobs, streamline administrative processes, open new offices, and increase the nonprofit's impact in the counties they serve. Follow LiKEN online and subscribe to LiKEN's email list to keep up-to-date with the latest job opportunities and project updates.

***This initiative connects local leadership with technical experts, stakeholders, and emerging markets to create local livelihoods. Together we can bridge generations and nurture the places we love, co-creating spaces for recreation, meaning, beauty, and community.***

-Mary Hufford, Director, Stories of Place Program, LiKEN Knowledge

## OUR VALUES & APPROACH

This project sets out to foster community-led development. By integrating agroforestry, eco-tourism, and other sustainable industries, Community Wealth from Healthy Rivers and Forests will not only provide new economic opportunities but also ensure the long-term stewardship of the region's natural resources.

Our approach is participatory, engaging a broad coalition of stakeholders, including residents, community organizations, governmental agencies, and scholars, to co-create solutions that are rooted in local realities and aspirations. Through capacity building, collaborative planning, and the implementation of demonstration and action projects, the initiative seeks to showcase the tangible benefits of sustainable infrastructure.

# FAIR DATA FOR ALL!

Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)

A link-tank for policy-relevant research to steward place, culture, and land