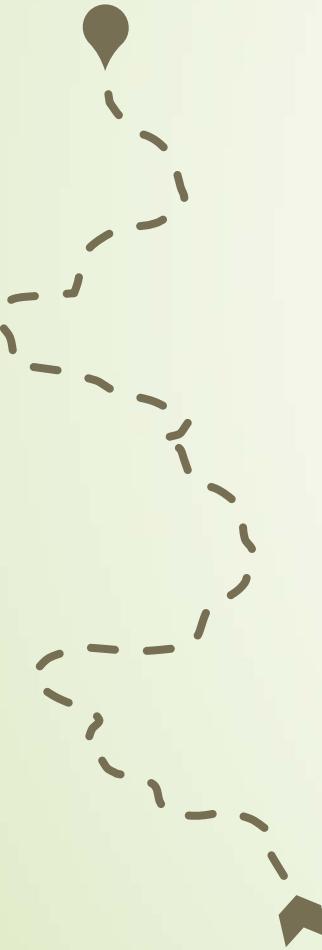


Trails, Tourism & Community Growth

South Dakota Governor's Conference on Tourism, January 22, 2026



About Us



Uriah Steber



Mike Mueller





Topics

- Bicycling in SD
- Trail Development
- Cycling Events

Takeaways

- Bicyclists are a visitor market of opportunity
- Trail development has many community benefits
- Cycling events attract visitors to rural locations

128 Years
Ago!



Source: South Dakota State Historical Society, Digital Archives

2023

SOUTH DAKOTA
STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR
RECREATION PLAN



Prepared by South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

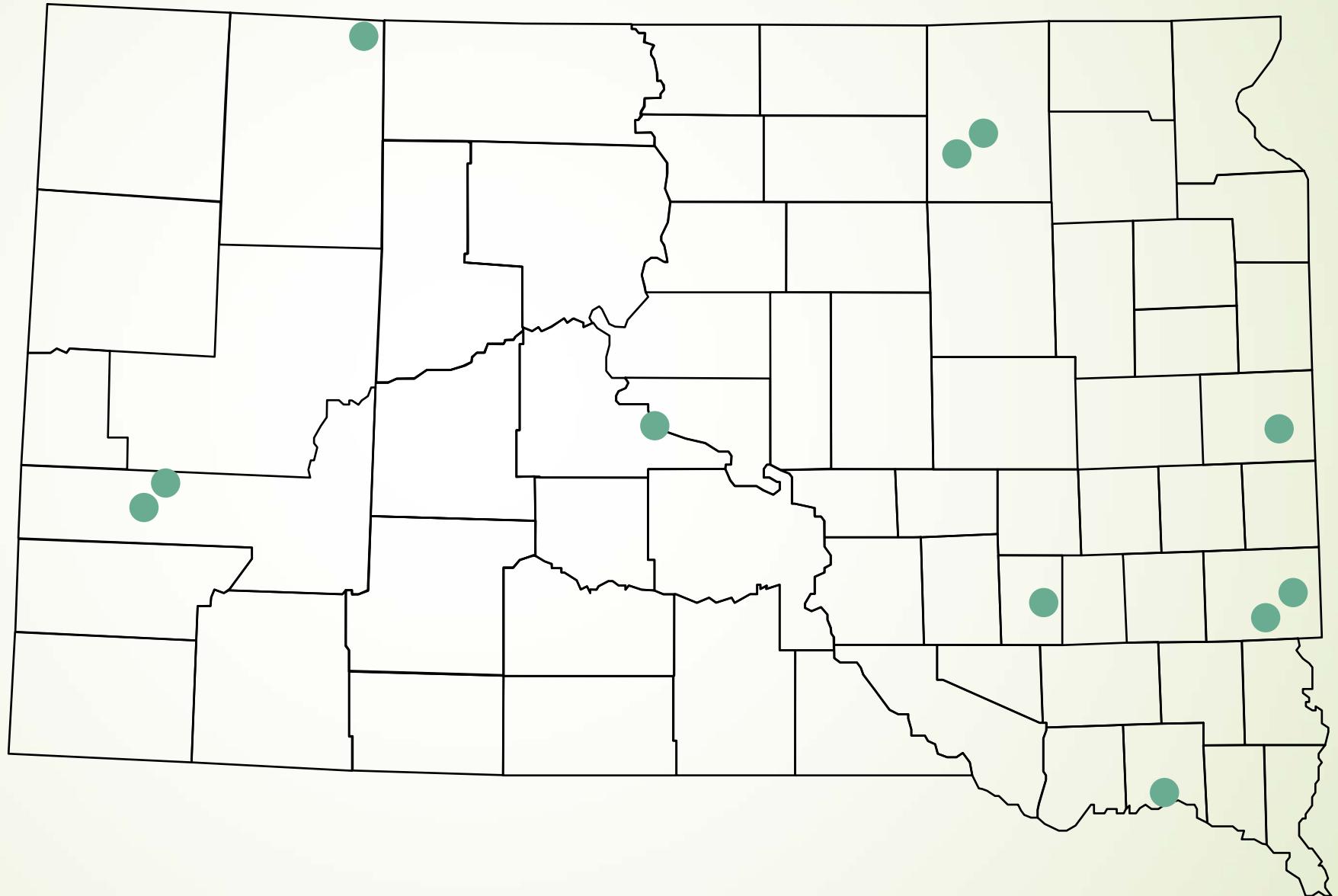
81% of South Dakotans reported using trails in the last 12 months.

How did they use them?

- ▶ 50.8% - walking on paved trail
- ▶ 40.3% - walking on natural surface trail/hiking
- ▶ 30.6% - biking on a paved road/trail
- ▶ 26.6% - biking on an unpaved trail

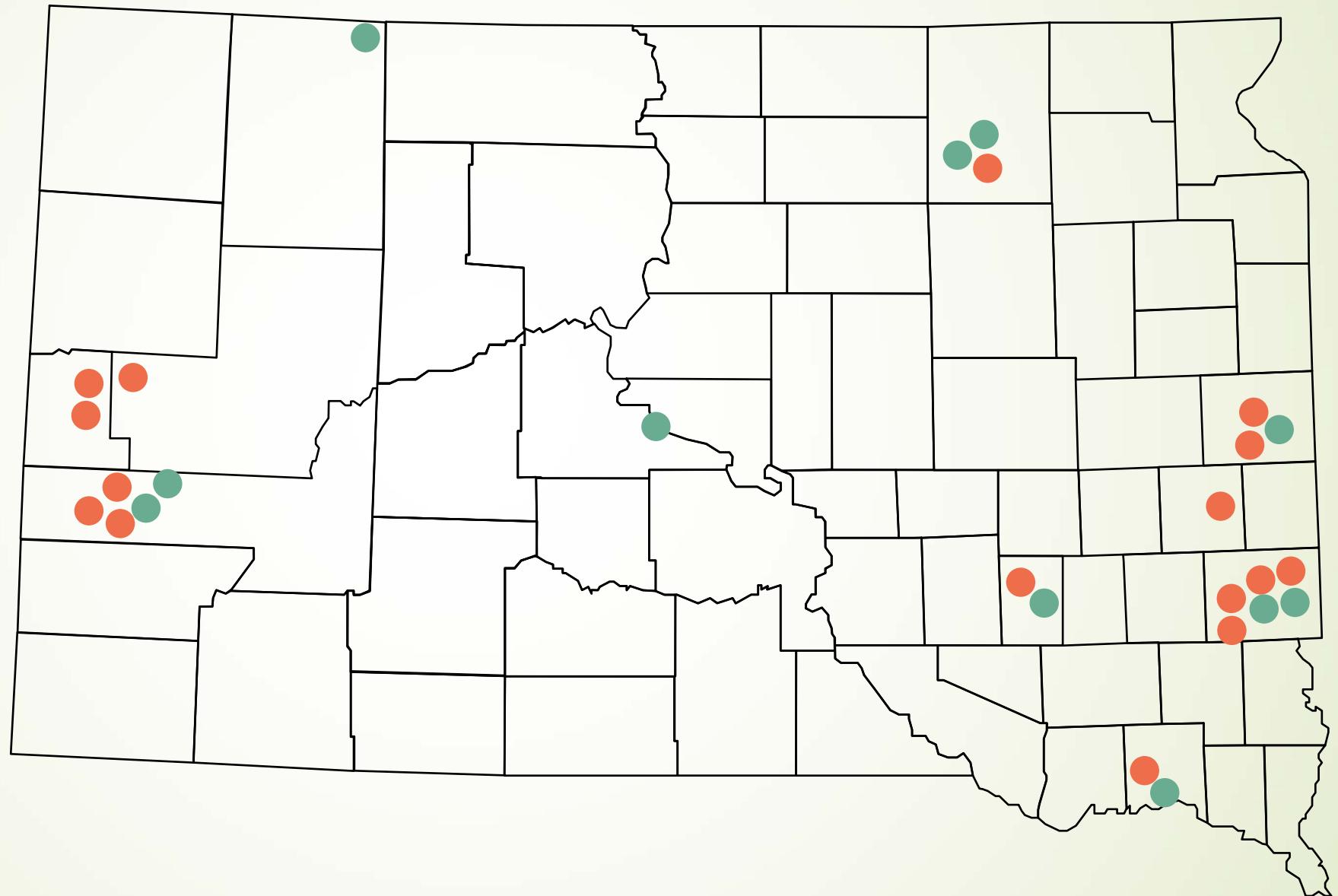
Bike Stuff!

● Bike Clubs



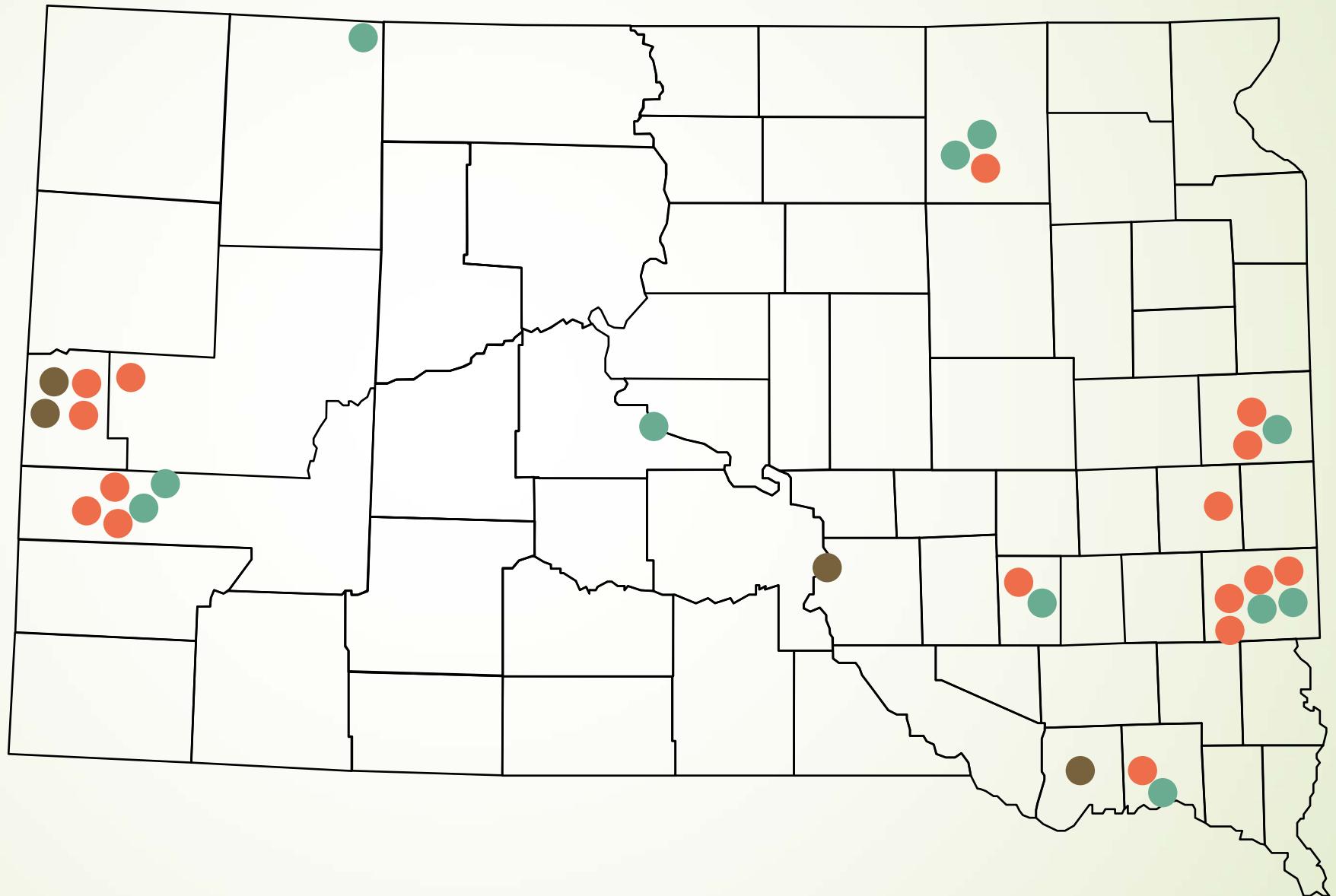
Bike Stuff!

- Bike Clubs
- Bike Shops



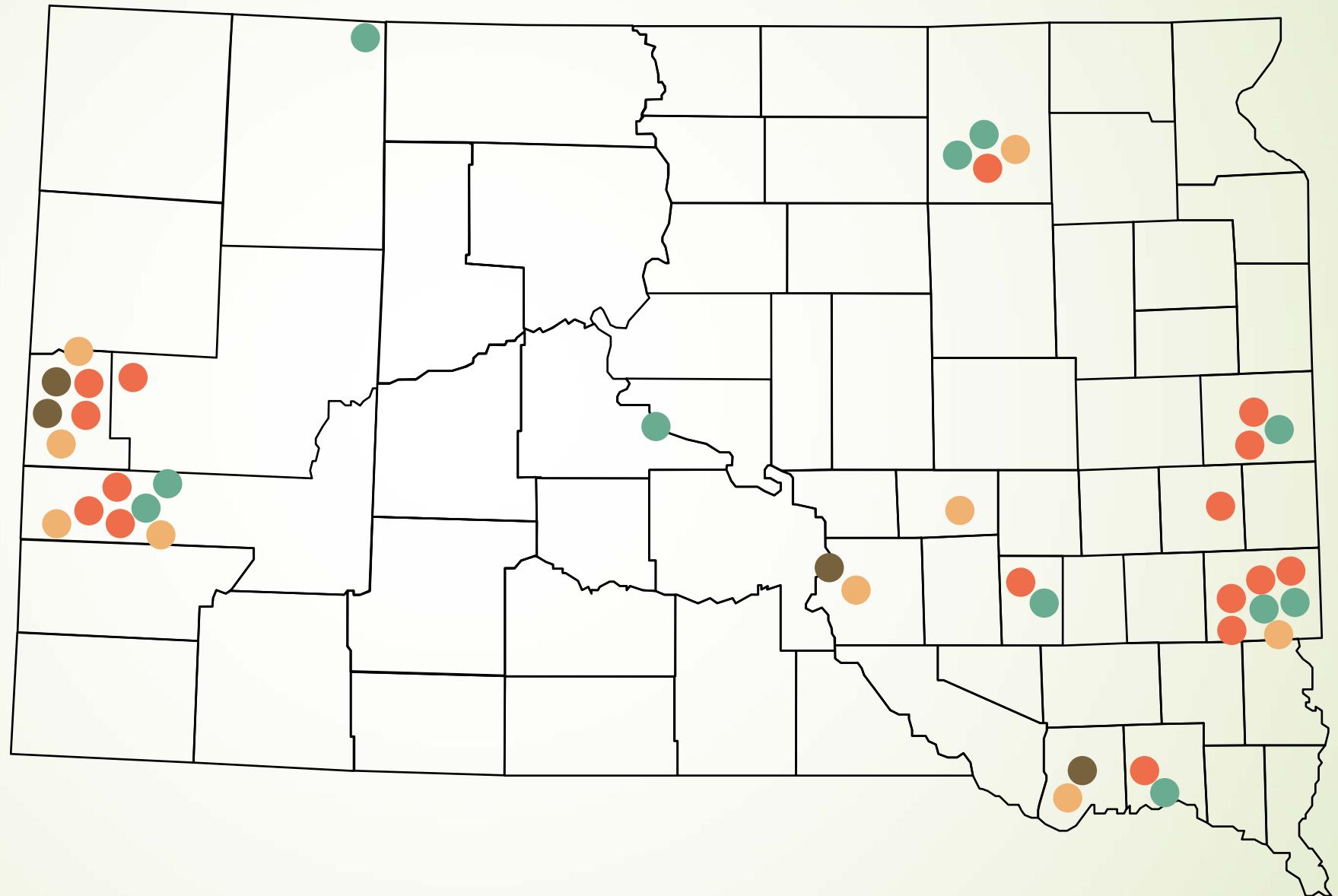
Bike Stuff!

- Bike Clubs
- Bike Shops
- Trail Orgs



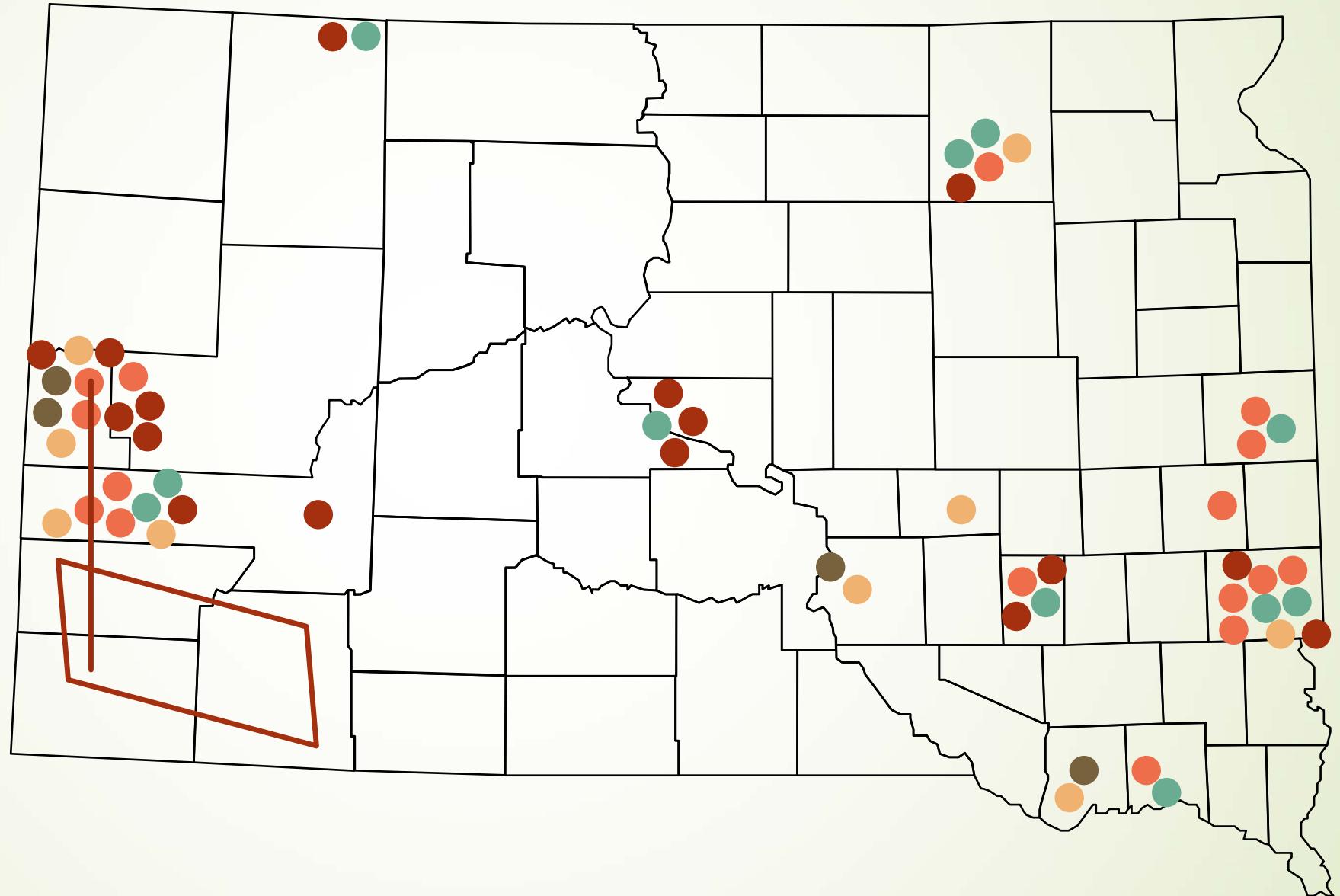
Bike Stuff!

- Bike Clubs
- Bike Shops
- Trail Orgs
- Trail Dev Projects '25



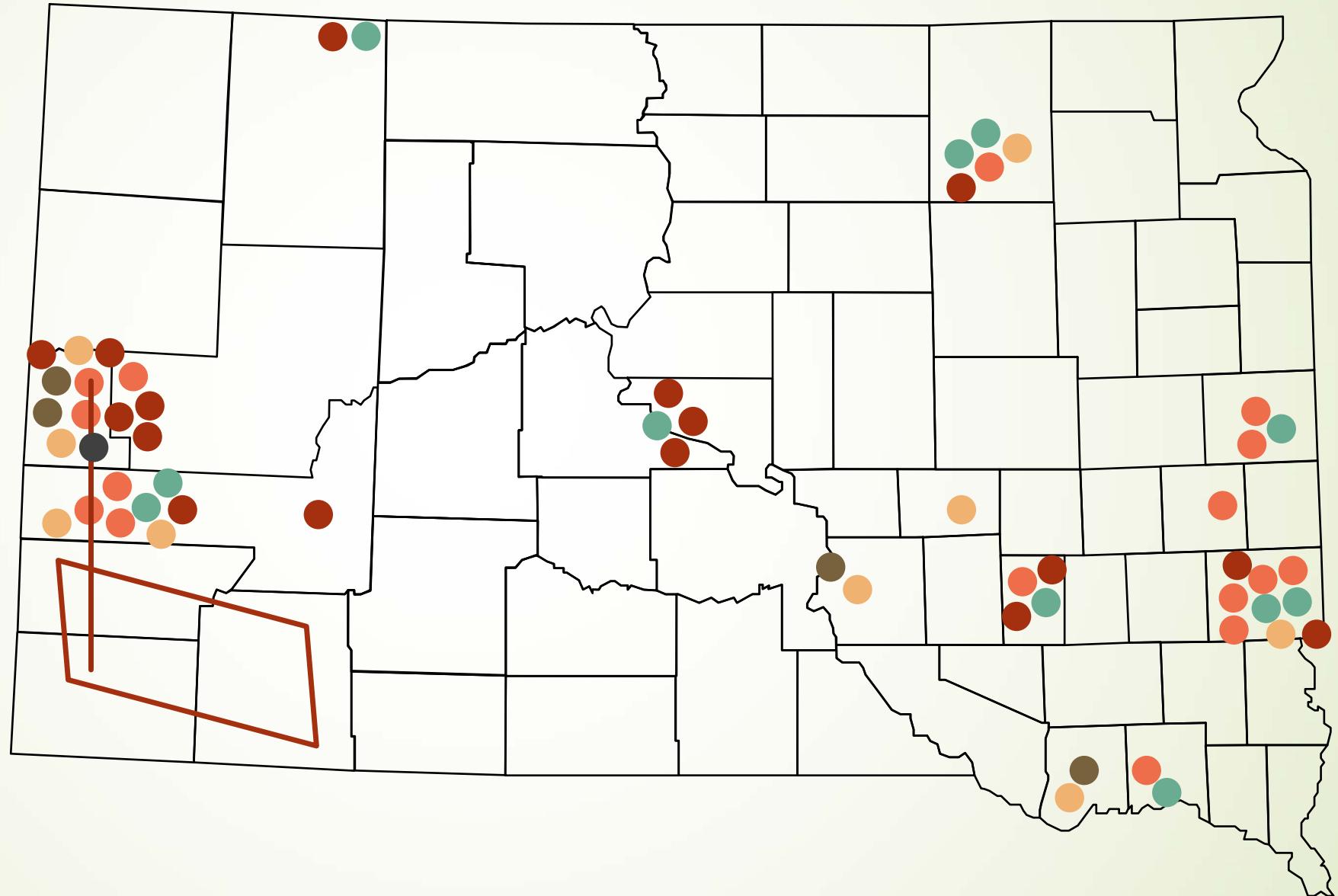
Bike Stuff!

- Bike Clubs
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- Trail Dev Projects '25
- Bike Events '25

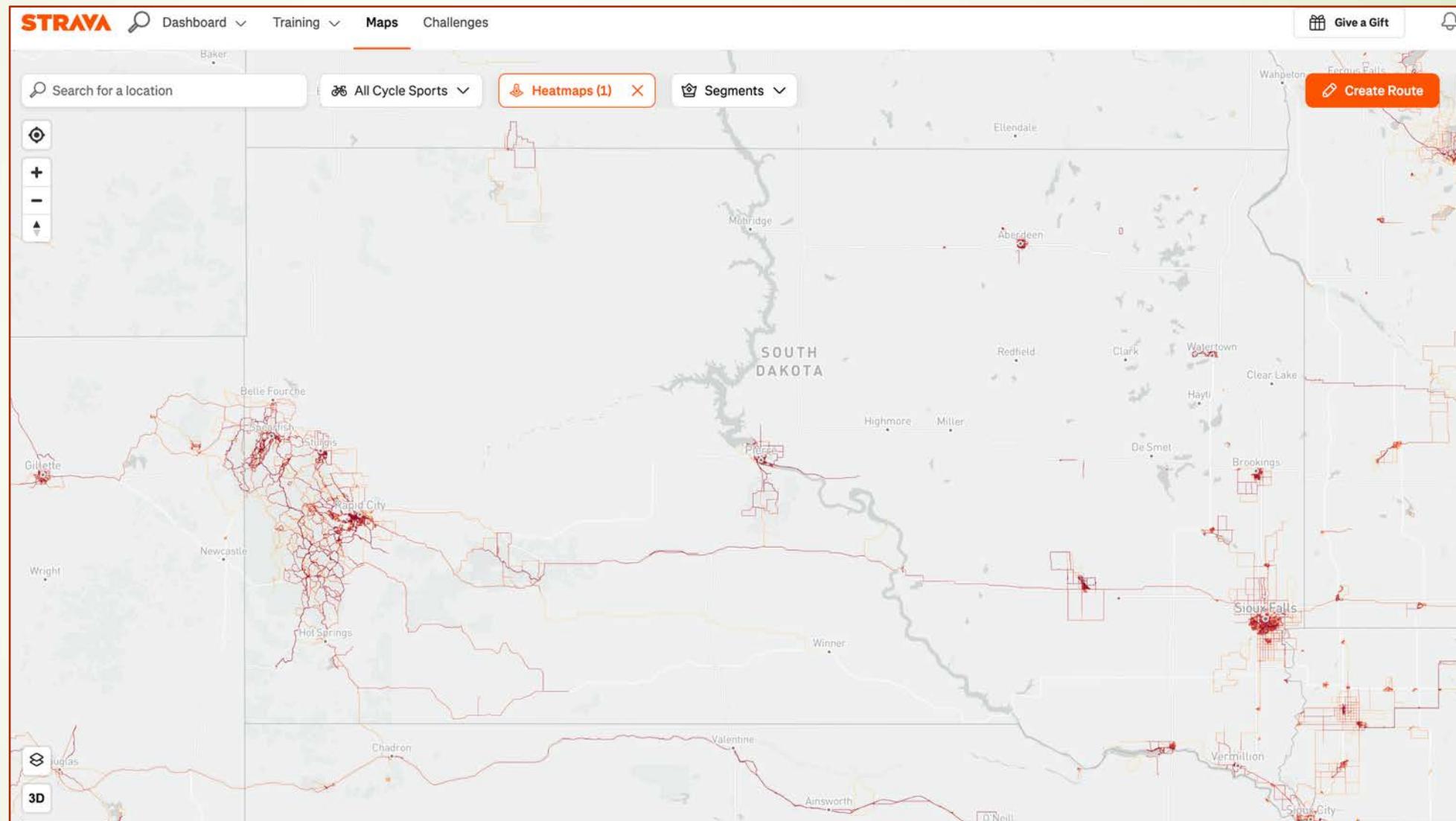


Bike Stuff!

- Bike Clubs
- Bike Shops
- Trail Orgs
- Trail Dev Projects '25
- Bike Events '25
- Youth Racing Team



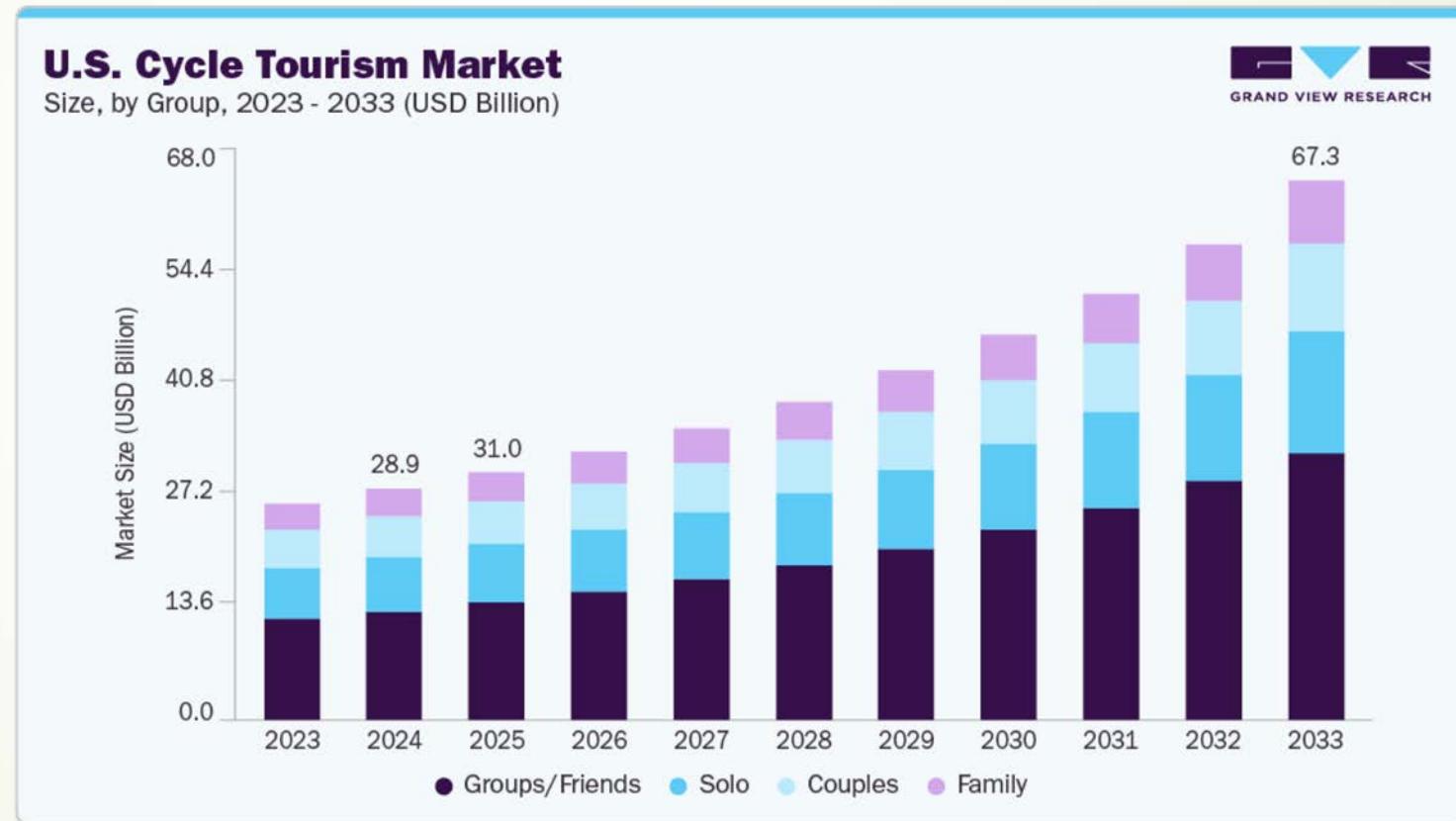
Strava Heat Map



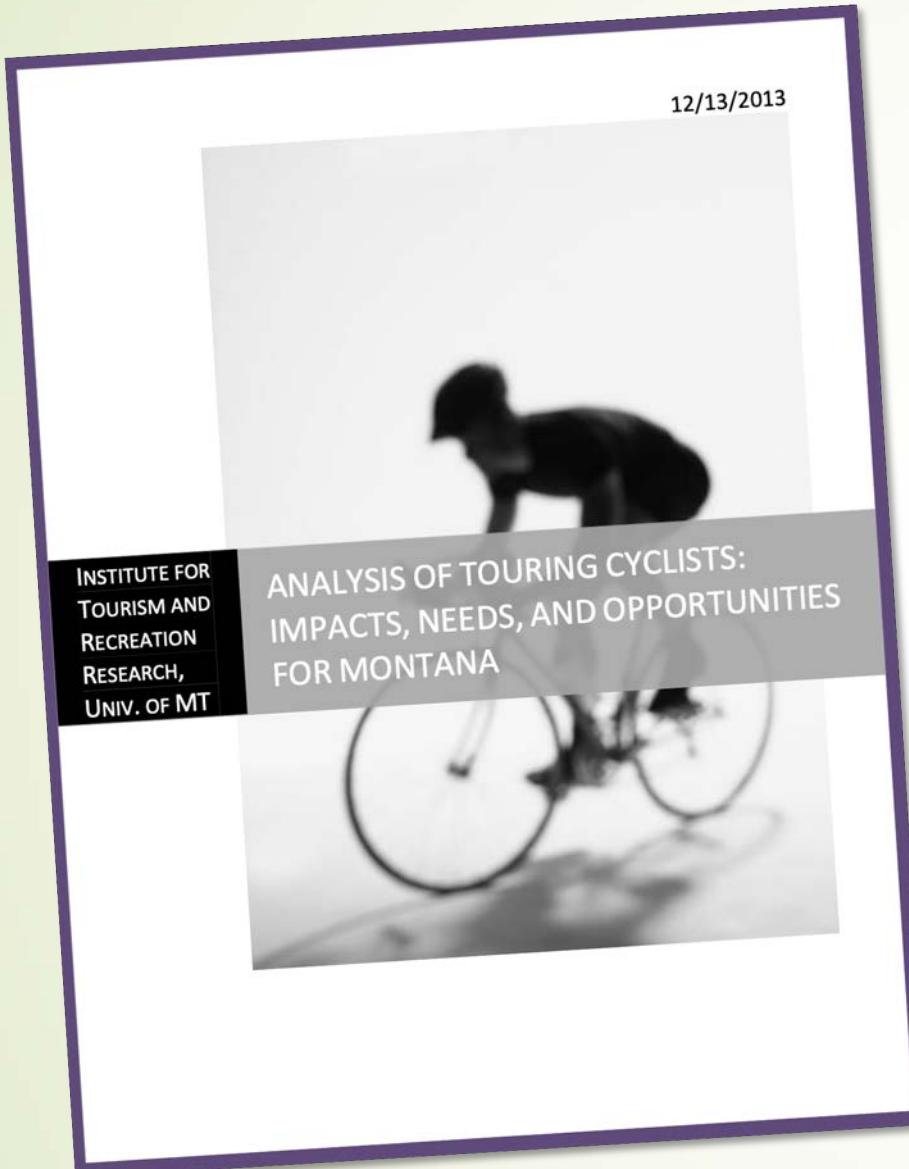
Market Size

What is the potential?

The U.S. cycle tourism market size was estimated at \$28.9 billion in 2024 and is expected to reach \$67.3 billion by 2033



Source: <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/us-cycle-tourism-market-report>



Who are these people?

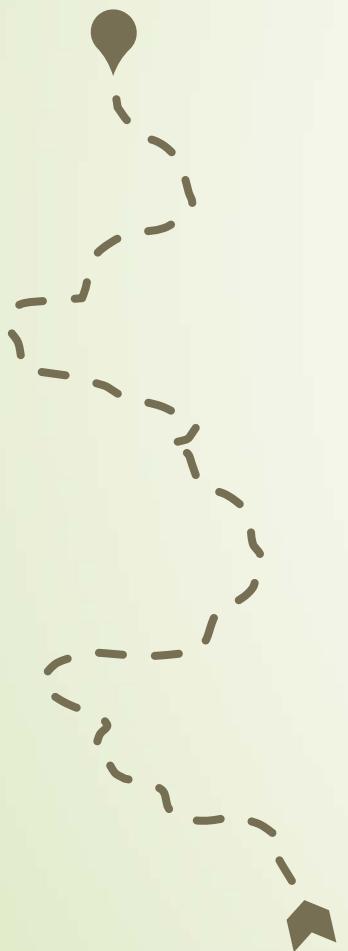
Bicycle travelers tend to be geotourists – interested in experiencing the distinctive characteristics of a place, including its culture, landscape, history, and the well-being of its residents. They tend to prefer to spend locally, make meaningful connections with locals, and explore off the beaten path.



BILLY G



2017



Trail Types

- Paved Recreation Paths
- Aggregate / Improved Paths
- Machine-built Natural Surface
- Hand-built Singletrack

Trail Networks: combined surfaces serving walkers, runners, cyclists, hikers, equestrians, winter users, etc.

Paved
Recreation

Accessible
Multi-use
Year-round



Aggregate /
Improved

Lower cost

Often
ADA-
compliant

Multi-season



Machine-built
natural surface

Durable
Optimized for
youth,
families, and
riders



Hand-built
Singletrack

Natural-
surface

Narrow

Immersive



Bike Parks, Skills Parks & Pump Tracks

Parks for Bikes!



Compact, high-impact cycling infrastructure for all ages

Why communities invest in them:

- Beginner- and family-friendly
- High use per square foot - often the busiest recreation feature in a park
- Fit into small spaces; low permitting complexity
- Perfect for youth programs, camps, and events
- Strong draw for both locals and visitors

Pump Track

Looping tracks where
riders use
momentum,
not pedaling



Skills Park

Progressive zones for learning balance, cornering, braking



Bike Park

Combinations
of pump
tracks, skills
areas, and
flow/jump
lines



Why Trails Matter

Trail Benefits



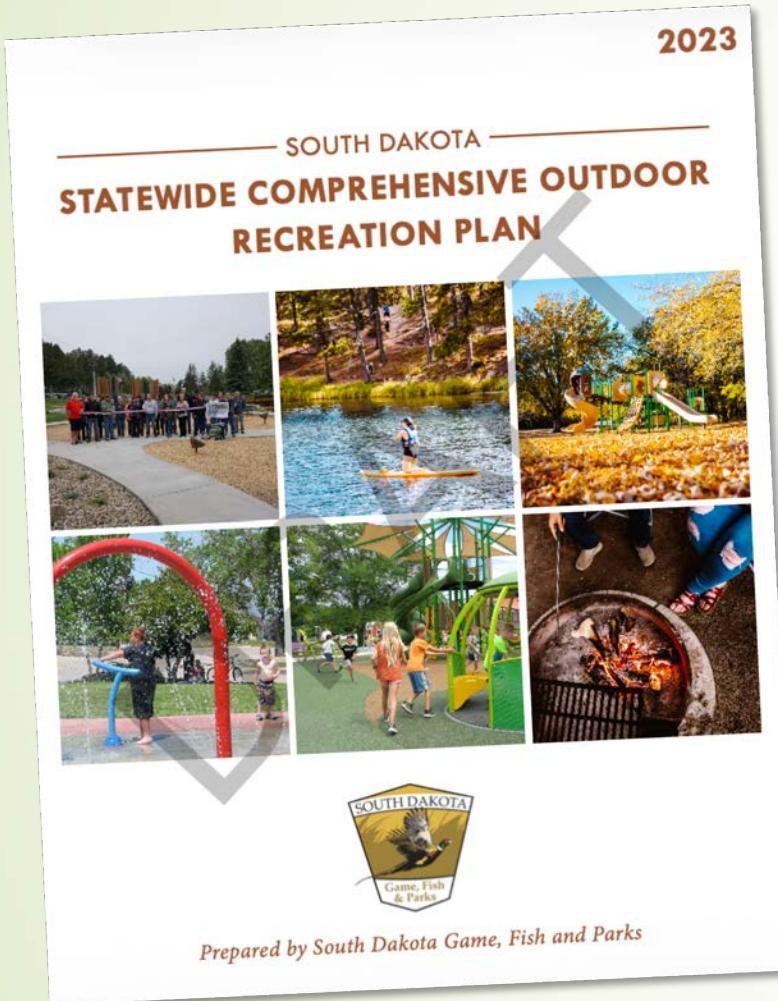
For residents:

- Everyday recreation
- Quality-of-life enhancement
- Mental and physical health benefits
- Higher property values & neighborhood appeal

For visitors:

- Unique, authentic outdoor experiences
- Platforms for events and tourism
- Spending at local businesses

Demand for More Trails in SD



South Dakotans clearly want more outdoor infrastructure:

- ▶ 40% identified a need for more paved trails
- ▶ 20% identified a need for more unpaved walking and biking trails

“The most needed recreation facility within South Dakota communities according to survey respondents are trails. The term ‘trails’ was mentioned 514 times throughout the survey results.”



Economic Benefits of Mountain Biking



Trail Use & Mountain Biking Growth in the US

- ▶ 8.7 million mountain bikers (ages 6+)
- ▶ Average rider takes ~5 trips per year
- ▶ Riders travel specifically to seek unique trail experiences
- ▶ MTB tourists spend more, stay longer, and choose small towns

Trail visitors are intentional travelers; they choose places because of trails.



Economic Benefits of Mountain Biking

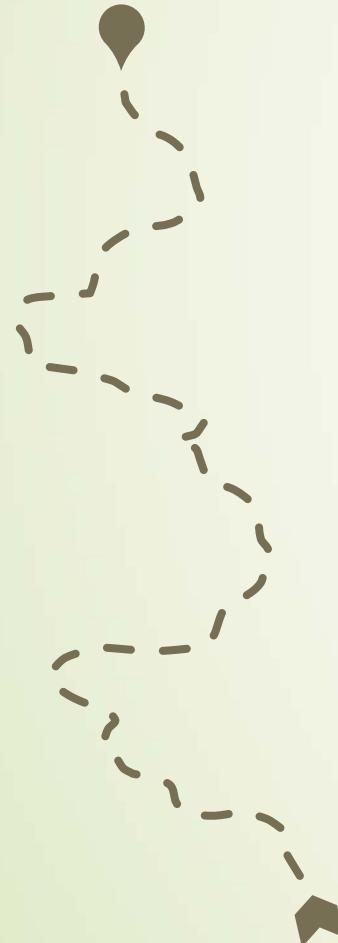


Economic Impact of Trail Visitors

Analysis of 13 trail destinations:

- ▶ \$416 average spending per nonlocal MTB visitor
- ▶ Spending categories: lodging, restaurants, groceries, shops, transportation, gear, entertainment
- ▶ Supported 1,522 –1,626 jobs per destination
- ▶ Created \$50.4M–\$54.1M in total labor income

Trails are proven economic engines, especially for rural communities.



Trails Are Community Infrastructure

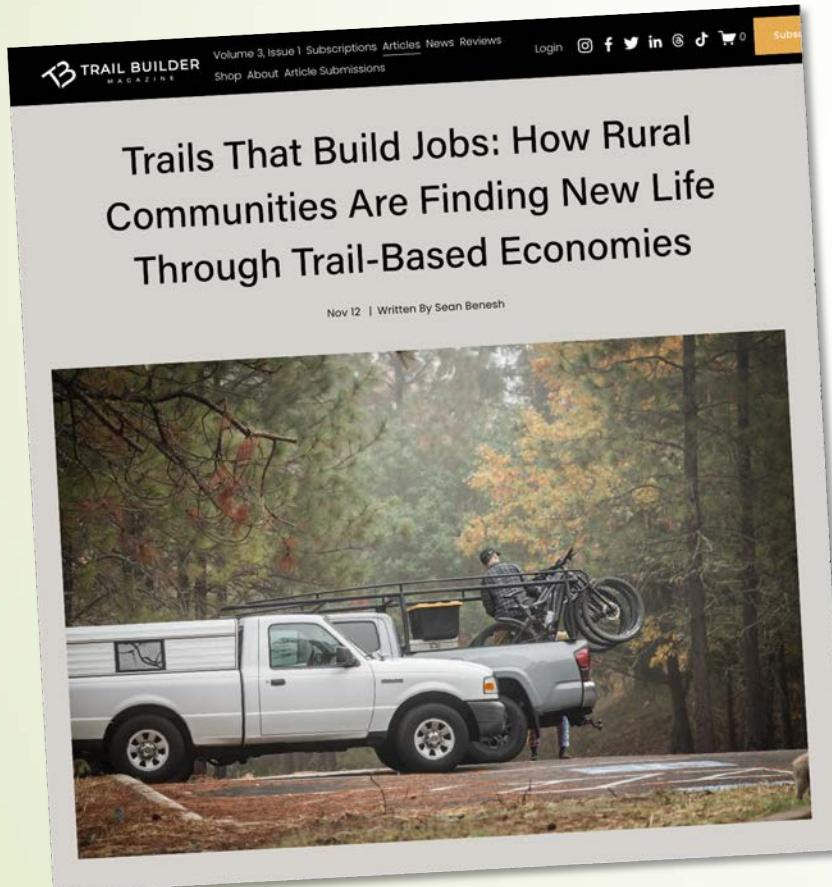
Trails offer long-term, compounding returns:

- Attract new residents
- Support local businesses
- Improve mental & physical health
- Enhance daily transportation & recreation
- Build community identity and pride

80% of outdoor enthusiasts say trail proximity influences where they travel and where they choose to live.

Trails Are Rural Economic Development

“Trails are emerging as one of the most reliable economic development tools for small, rural communities.”

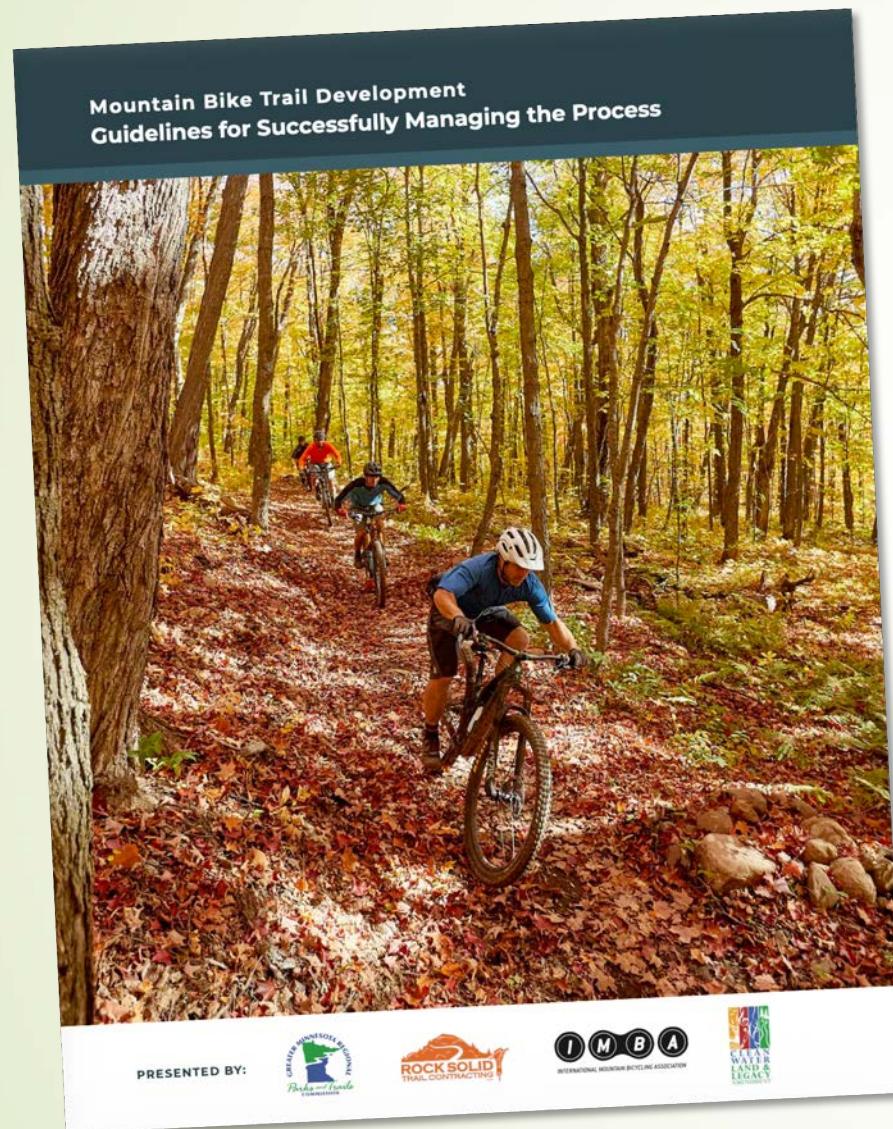


Trails:

- ▶ Bring visitors & event participants
- ▶ Fuel entrepreneurship
- ▶ Support hospitality & retail
- ▶ Diversify economies once dependent on extraction or agriculture
- ▶ Activate local volunteerism & community engagement

South Dakota Examples

- West Shore Trails (Fort Pierre)
Grassroots volunteer-built beginnings (not ideal, but shows demand)
- Spearfish Trails Coalition
Community nonprofit hiring professional planning → long-term strategy
- Chamberlain/Oacoma Trails Coalition
Community development leadership + targeted grants
- Falls Area Single Track (Sioux Falls)
MTB club + fundraising campaign + city partnership → IMBA x
Benchmark professional build
- Black Hills Bike Hub (Rapid City)
Regional advocacy + programming hub connecting multiple towns,
businesses, and riders



Your Trail Playbook

IMBA's Mountain Bike Trail Development:
Guidelines for Managing the Process

- ▶ Free, comprehensive guide
- ▶ Covers assessment → planning → design → construction → maintenance
- ▶ Used by communities nationwide

If you read one document, make it this one.

Core Principles of Trail Development

- Start with a clear vision & goals
- Engage a broad stakeholder group early
- Connect trails to existing assets (schools, parks, downtowns, riverfronts)
- Identify trail champions to carry momentum

Continued:

Core Principles of Trail Development

- Gather baseline economic & use data
- Leverage partnerships with agencies, nonprofits, land managers
- Plan for all ages & abilities
- Anticipate conflicts & long-term maintenance

Good process = sustainable, community-backed trails.

Resources



Massive library of webinars, guides, and DIY economic impact tools
AmericanTrails.org



National leaders in design, planning, trail accelerator grants
IMBA.com



Directory of vetted trail contractors + industry standards
TrailBuilders.org



Guidance on shared-use, etiquette, conflict reduction
TrailsAreCommonGround.org

Now What?



How to begin?

1. Start with what you have
 - Inventory your parks, ROW corridors, gravel roads, public lands
 - Early wins build momentum
2. Identify your champions
 - Local riders, walkers, parents, tourism staff, clubs, land managers
3. Build the coalition early
 - City + chamber + land managers + volunteers = long-term success



The math

Trails + Events = Tourism

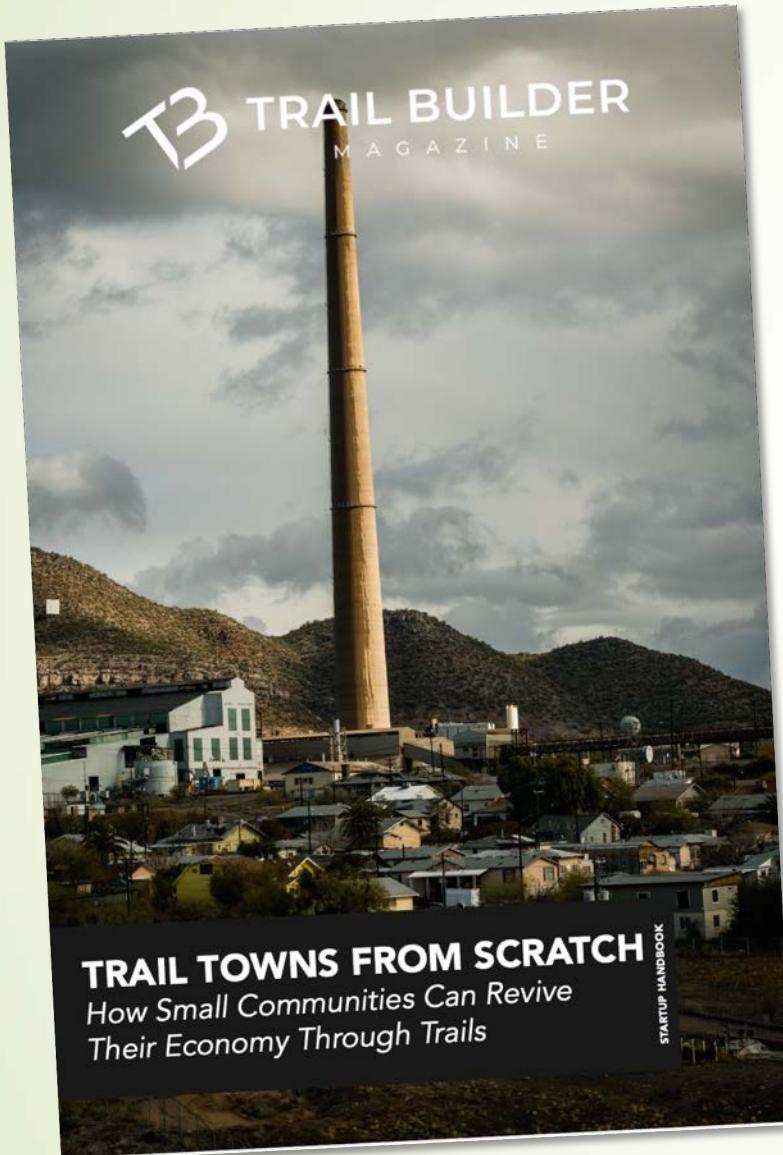
Every South Dakota community already has:

- Gravel roads
- Paved paths
- Parks and public lands
- Volunteers eager to help

These can instantly support:

- Gravel rides
- Family-friendly events
- Youth programming
- Tourism weekends
- Partnerships with local businesses

Events and trails work together; one builds demand for the other.



Start with what you have.

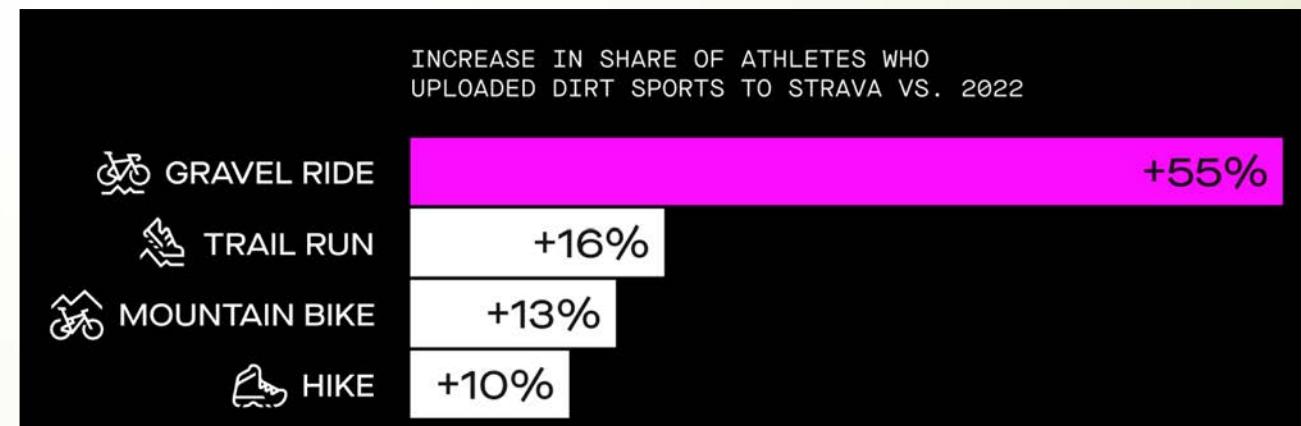
"This is the scrappy startup phase of trail building. Where the goal isn't perfection, it's momentum.

Build one route. Host one dig day. Hold one community meeting. Or put on a gravel race."





“Gravel riding is one of the fastest-growing sports on Strava, with a 55% increase in the share of athletes who've given it a shot.”



The spirit of
gravel!

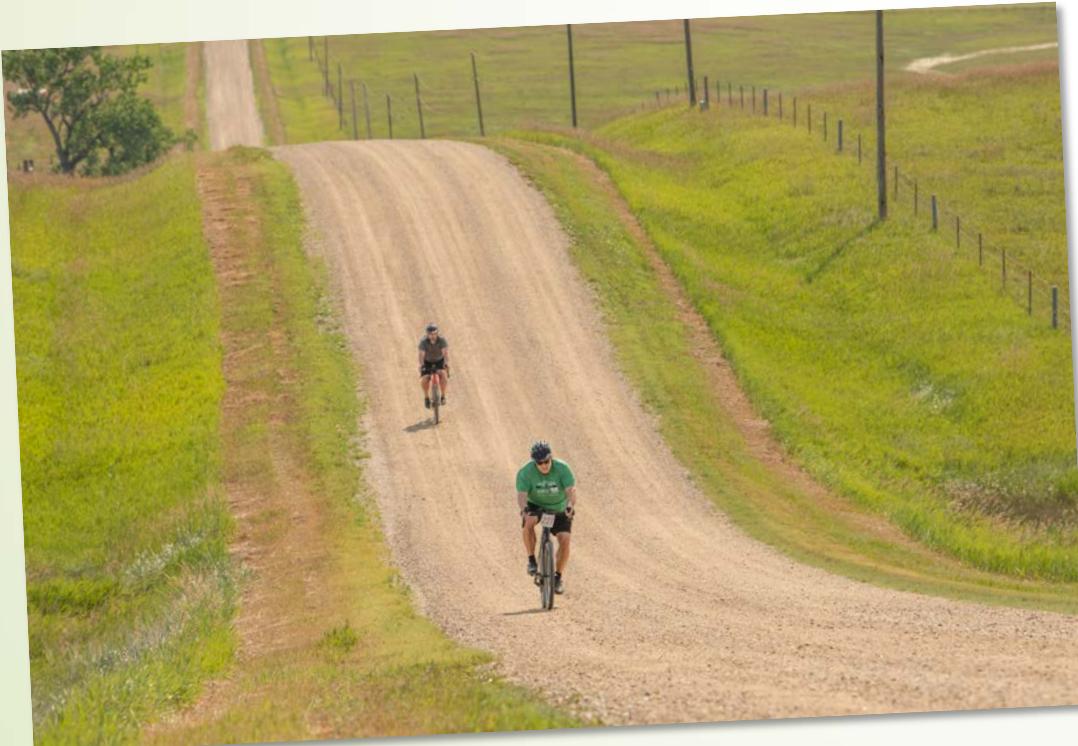
"Gravel events are one of the lowest-barrier, highest-impact ways to kickstart a tourism economy.

What you need is a route, a reason, and a welcoming vibe.

Your job is to give them a sense of place and maybe a plate of tamales or a local beer when they roll back into town."

TRAIL TOWNS FROM SCRATCH

How Small Communities Can Revive Their Economy Through Trails



General Elements of a Cycling Event

- Small range of route distances to choose
- Race or tour or both
- Aid stations
- Food and drink at finish
- Rider registration fee of \$50 - \$150



Rural West
River Events



Fort Pierre

Mid-July

31 / 53 / 71 miles

Fort Pierre
National Grassland



Lemmon

Mid-August

25 / 50 / 113 miles

Grand River
National Grassland



Wall

Late Sept.
(Natl Public Lands Day)

35 / 64 miles
(+ road-only routes)

Badlands National
Park & Buffalo Gap
National Grassland



Collaboration!



- Goal to cross-promote our events and celebrate our prairie and public lands
- Riders earn points on designated **STRAVA** segments at each event
- Rider's points multiply for riding in multiple events
- No change to each event format
- No additional cost or sign-up to participate

GTC partners



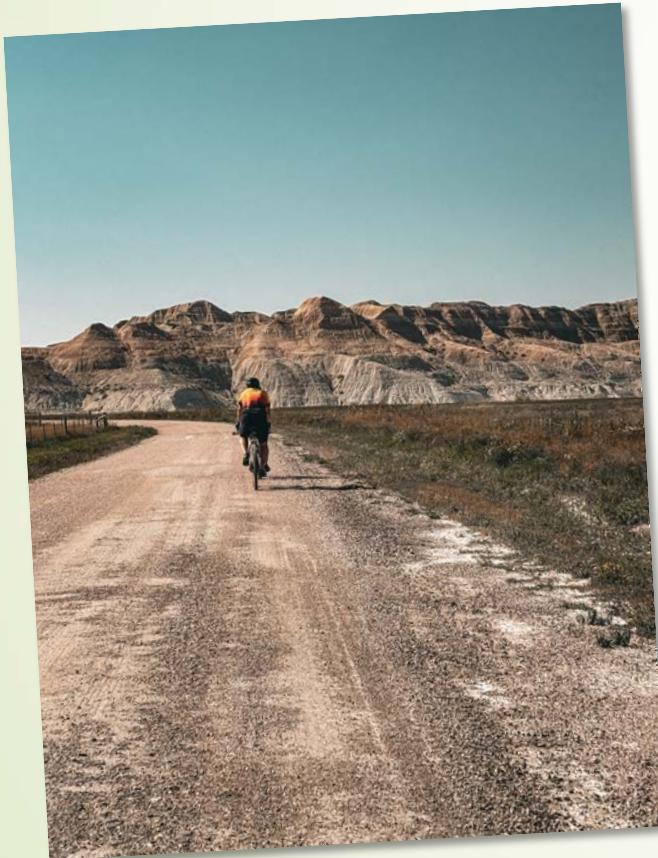
NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS JOINT VENTURE



South Dakota **GRASSLANDS INITIATIVE**



Outcomes



All three events had record high registrations

- Grassland Gravel, Ft Pierre: 49 (2 states)
- Thunderhawk Wide Open, Lemmon: 98 (7 states)
- Wheelin' to Wall, Wall: 145 (11 states)

239 unique riders registered for the 3 events



Ride!

Start with community activities



- Add a kids bike rodeo to an existing community event
- Invite a bike float in the homecoming parade
- Do a weekly bike bus in the fall to get kids to ride a bike to school
- Light up the night community family ride
- Get yours out of the garage and go for ice cream

Hit us up!



Uriah Steber

www.benchmark-trails.com

sodakcycling@gmail.com

Mike Mueller

www.oahewheelmen.com

mike.d.mueller@gmail.com



Happy trails
to you!

