

A Friendly Competition to the Top: Which States Can Elevate Outdoor Recreation the Highest?

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Outdoor Recreation

- ✦ Outdoor recreation is a growing sector that accounts for 2% of the nation's GDP at \$373.7 billion (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2018)
- ✦ Several states are creating outdoor recreation initiatives to support the outdoor recreation economy and its benefits to conservation, health, and quality of life
- ✦ New state entities rely on access to natural landscapes such as those managed by the National Park Service; a better understanding of their goals will inform any future NPS collaboration

Methods

- ✦ Qualitative research approach
- ✦ Purposive sampling of initiative leadership in eleven states
- ✦ Completed 22 semi-structured interviews
- ✦ Inductive coding to identify themes



"The outdoors and outdoor recreation and scenic beauty is the **number one reason** why people come to Oregon as visitors...It's the reason why people move here; it's the reason why people live here; it's kind of a core aspect and core ethos of the **state**."

Initial Results

- ✦ States recognize the center-stage role of outdoor recreation in the economy

"The industry itself...[has] realized that they are **bigger**, and more important, than maybe even they've realized."

"Other industries are really easy to put your arms around, like information technology, healthcare, or aerospace. But the outdoor recreation business...at over **\$20 billion** in Washington state, is **just as big** or comparable to a lot of those industries...but because it **depends on public land**, and because it is so varied – everything from birdwatching to, I don't know, dune buggies – that it's **hard to quantify**."

- ✦ States also realize there's more to it than just the economy

"It's the **one thing** that everybody agrees either improves your **life**, or it improves the **economy**, or it improves **community health**. Take your pick: you're going to find somebody who agrees there's at least one benefit that they're willing to get behind."

"We have this added extra layer of infrastructure that is vitally important. And that is **land, water, wildlife**."



"It's not enough to just pay attention to the outdoor industry businesses...but **we need to have a say in the world that affects those businesses**."

- ✦ State offices look to partner with other state agencies, nonprofits, private sector, and federal agencies to maximize their impact

"We're a 12 billion industry, and we have the largest office of outdoor recreation in the nation, and we have **three** people. Three people. When it comes to **partnership**, we have to work with pretty much everybody."

Conclusions

- ✦ Other states and potential partners will have a better understanding of how these initiatives seek to elevate the outdoor recreation industry
- ✦ Findings will better inform the National Park Service and other federal land management agencies on opportunities to collaborate or support shared goals