

COLLABORATIVE STATE AND FEDERAL PARTNERSHIPS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION:

A Nationwide Comparison of State Outdoor Recreation Initiatives



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A study jointly supported by the National Park Service and Utah State University, conducted by Brooke Sausser and Dr. Jordan Smith, in coordination with National Park Service Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Division. September 2017 - May 2018

Background and Introduction:

Outdoor recreation is a robust pillar of local, state, and national economies, and a critical component of residents' quality of life. The growing desire for greater availability and public access to outdoor recreation opportunities has presented a unique juncture for governors and state legislatures to take initiative to both capture and safeguard the full range of benefits provided by outdoor recreation.

To promote and enhance outdoor recreation as a key economic driver as well as a community amenity, eleven states are now dedicating resources and establishing innovative offices and initiatives to better coordinate stakeholder efforts spanning the recreation industry, tourism, transportation, health, park, public lands, and other interests. Utah, Colorado, and Washington were the first to create initiatives, followed by Maryland, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wyoming, while other states such as California have active proposals pending. These offices and initiatives have evolved somewhat differently, with the organizational structure and mission of each effort tailored to its purpose and context, varying from temporary task forces, councils, and commissions to more permanent offices or advisory positions.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore how these state-level outdoor recreation initiatives have evolved and now operate in these eleven states. Our goal is to better understand how these initiatives have emerged, how they vary or converge in key elements, and how they are organizationally structured to meet their objectives. The findings of this research will better inform the National Park Service and other federal land management agencies on opportunities to collaborate or align to support shared recreation and conservation goals at regional and state scales. Together, state initiatives and the stewards of their public lands can promote and enhance the economic, social, and environmental benefits of outdoor recreation.

Objectives:

As each state and its initiative vary widely, the objectives of this research include gaining a better understanding of the:

- Driving factors in the development and support of these outdoor recreation initiatives;
- Various ways these initiatives have been established and how they operate;

- Needs and interests these initiatives are addressing or responding to a variety of issues including economic growth, public health, access to public lands, and tourism;
- Roles and responsibilities, including coordination with other departments and offices;
- Types of interactions and collaborations these initiatives have with federal land management agencies and other partners; and
- Proven ways these initiatives have been successful in activating or supporting outdoor recreation and promoting social, economic, and environmental goals.

Process:

Through comprehensive interviews with leadership of the state-level initiatives, secondary research, and close coordination with NPS and current state offices staff, we hope to create a broad review of the lessons learned by individual state initiatives to compile best practices and develop strategies for engaging with external partners at the local, state, and federal levels.

Why is the NPS sponsoring the study?

- The National Park Service is a primary provider of parks and recreation opportunities in many states. It has responsibilities under the national Outdoor Recreation Act of 1963 to promote and facilitate outdoor recreation across the nation.
- Understanding the state-level initiatives will:
 - Reveal shared public, economic, conservation and recreation goals and interests;
 - Identify better opportunities for collaboration for the NPS and other partners;
 - Allow for the development of strategies to improve the NPS's collaboration and responsiveness to states' needs;
 - Expand the scope of the NPS's current networks and build the potential for relationships with nontraditional partners;
 - Provide useful information and lessons learned to improve public access and recreational opportunities; and
 - Align with the NPS's mission to extend the benefits of conservation and recreation beyond park boundaries.

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