

2024



**WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION**  
*Summit*

PROCEEDINGS



Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism  
and Hospitality Initiative (WORTH)



# WYOMING RECOGNIZES THE NEED FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

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Over the past few years, Wyoming has witnessed a surge in recreational activity, with more people engaging in outdoor pursuits than ever before (Outdoor Industry, 2023). Outdoor recreation in Wyoming is supported by recent state legislation establishing the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, which sustains a commitment to enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities statewide. Communities across diverse regions and user groups have rallied behind this initiative, demonstrating statewide support and excitement for the future of outdoor recreation.

At the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit (WORS) in April 2024, representation from numerous local, state, and federal agencies demonstrated investment in the state's outdoor future. Presentations and conversations at the WORS highlighted that the future of outdoor recreation in Wyoming relies on strong communities, the economic impact of development, and finding common ground.

## BUILDING ON MOMENTUM

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For three days in April 2024, the WORTH Initiative and Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation convened the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit to bring people together to discuss and share successes and challenges of outdoor recreation in Wyoming.

The 2024 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit was designed and developed to build off the momentum generated by the 2023 Emerging Issues Forum (“Outdoor Recreation: Building it the Way We Want It”). This forum set the stage for the WORS to establish itself as an annual event for the Wyoming outdoor recreation community that can adjust thematically to prioritize top issues for the community.



IN 2022, OUTDOOR RECREATION CONTRIBUTED

**\$2 BILLION**

(OVER 4%) OF WYOMING'S GDP AND SUPPORTED

**16,000 JOBS**



The first 2 days of WORS programming focused on general outdoor recreation sessions, while the third day was centered on Wyoming Search and Rescue content. Along with the growth of the outdoor recreation sector, program organizers supported the convening of Search and Rescue (SAR) stakeholders to help address growing concerns in the outdoors.



## NEED & RATIONALE

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Outdoor recreation is a huge economic driver in Wyoming, contributing \$2 billion (over 4%) of the state’s GDP and supporting over 16,000 jobs (BEA.gov, 2022). Wyoming is well-positioned to develop a diverse range of outdoor recreation opportunities. The state attracts a unique mix of outdoor recreationists, offering ample options for climbing, biking, and hiking, while also providing unmatched opportunities for motorized recreation, shooting sports, and hunting and fishing enthusiasts. Joining these groups together to find common ground through outdoor recreation development is an important step for the broader outdoor recreation landscape so that people can make connections with other users, communicate needs and desires for future outdoor recreation development, and discuss prevalent issues like crowding, dispersing users, data collection, and information-sharing.

The WORS aimed to provide:

1. | a space for representatives from various groups to come together and discuss issues within their communities;
2. | a platform for attendees to share stories of successes and challenges that come with outdoor recreation development in diverse communities, and
3. | an opportunity to share research projects and other studies with implications for Wyoming communities.



# EVENT STATISTICS

## Over 180 attendees

Federal and state agency representatives, local and state government officials, destination marketing organizations, business owners, advocacy groups, recreationists, Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Collaborative members, researchers, educators, and students.

## Over 50 speakers

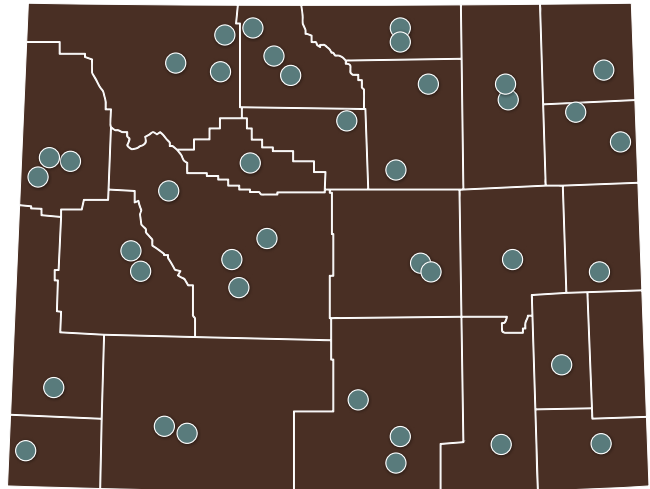
## 3 student presentations

from the University of Wyoming

### Topics from keynotes, panels, discussions, and case studies covered:

- Impact of the outdoor recreation economy
- State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- BLM updates
- Inclusive recreation
- Wyoming's Dark Sky status
- The gear manufacturing industry
- Community trail-building
- Data sharing and communication
- Invasive species impacts
- Public and private land access
- Volunteering on public land
- The economics of trail systems
- Recreationist and wildlife co-existence
- Adaptive trail design considerations
- Bridging the divide between user groups
- Avoiding the amenity trap
- Impact of motorized trail systems
- Updates on dispersed camping data
- Events to foster community growth
- The Great American Rail-Trail in Wyoming
- Buying in to outdoor recreation

### Attendees from across Wyoming:



**The post-event survey received 114 responses. 75% of those survey respondents were extremely or somewhat likely to recommend the forum to a friend.**

"I am so happy that I made it to this year's summit... This is a great way to network and collaborate with others from around the state. Thank you for all the hard work. It was a pleasure to attend." — FORUM PARTICIPANT



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

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The 2024 WORS emphasized the importance of strong community support for outdoor recreation projects. Additionally, WORS speakers and panelists highlighted Wyoming's status at the forefront of outdoor recreation and discussed the economic importance of the industry. Furthermore, participants considered the importance of finding commonalities between different user groups and bridging the perceived divide between different outdoor communities.

## The future of outdoor recreation in Wyoming relies on strong communities, the economic impact of development, and finding common ground.



### Community

Many outdoor recreation projects are executed at the community level, with passionate user groups and organizations leading the charge. Coming together as a community is often the first step in the outdoor recreation development process and provides the first piece of the puzzle. Bottom-up change is meaningful and effective, and listening to what different communities want is critical. Furthermore, bringing all voices to the table for increased inclusion and sense of belonging is key for developing the best outdoor recreation opportunities for a given area.

Many thanks to Common Outdoor Ground, the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives, Wyoming Pathways, the Epilepsy Foundation of Colorado and Wyoming, Dovetail Trail Consulting, the TREAD Agency, and the SE Group for their presentations.



### Economic Impact of Development

Outdoor recreation in Wyoming has had an unprecedented impact on the state's economy over the past few years. As the national outdoor recreation economy approaches the trillion-dollar mark, speakers looked at ways to consider outdoor recreation growth in Wyoming. While many acknowledge that growth is inevitable, there are ways to manage this growth sustainably and responsibly.

Many thanks to the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, Headwaters Economics, AllTrails, the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Business Alliance, and the Rails to Trails Conservancy for their presentations.





## Finding common ground

Too often, people who care about the outdoors are siloed into distinct groups that may traditionally oppose others. It's crucial to move past those perceived boundaries and to align according to interests, not positions. Often, people are not as different as they may seem and can share passion for the outdoors, which is how positive action can happen.

Many thanks to Leadership Wyoming, the Wyoming Wildlife Association, and Southwest Wyoming Off-Road Trails for their presentations.



## Insights for Wyoming communities

One of the main purposes of the summit is for individuals to learn and bring back that information to their communities. Many valuable insights were shared that were relative to other emerging outdoor recreation communities.

Many thanks to The Nature Conservancy, Wyoming State Parks, Natrona County Weed and Pest, the Wyoming Bureau of Land Management Offices, and the United States Forest Service for their presentations.

Presentations from the 2024 WORS are available on the WORTH website: <https://www.uwyo.edu/worth>



# SEARCH AND RESCUE CONFERENCE: TAKEAWAYS

The third day of the WORS served as the first annual Search and Rescue Conference (SARCON). With the increase of people in the outdoors and the subsequent increase in missions, the WORTH Initiative and the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation recognize the need to build capacity and provide support for Wyoming SAR teams. County sheriffs, SAR commanders, county commissioners, SAR volunteers, and representatives from the Wyoming Office of Homeland Security came to Casper to hear talks focused on issues facing the SAR community. The program included a fundraising talk from Teton County SAR, a panel discussion focused on a needs assessment for the SAR community, a panel discussion on specialized state assets, a panel discussion focused on inter-county and inter-state missions, and a presentation from University of Wyoming students that looked at ways to build capacity for Wyoming SAR teams.

Overall, the SARCON provided the Wyoming SAR community with the time and space to come together within the broader outdoor recreation landscape and lay the groundwork for future conferences.

## Over 120 attendees

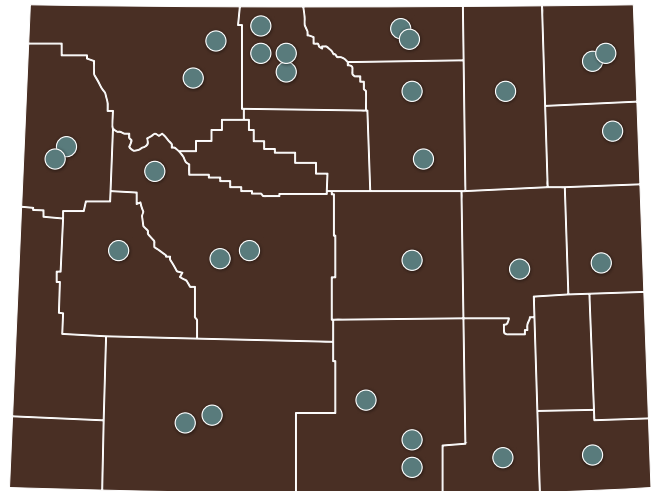
County sheriffs, SAR commanders, members of SAR squads, Wyoming Army National Guard, county commissioners, medical professionals, Wyoming Office of Homeland Security

## Over 20 speakers

## 1 student presentation

from the University of Wyoming

## Attendees from across Wyoming:



# FUTURE OF THE WORS + SARCON

Attendees and speakers alike were enthusiastic about the WORS and SARCON, stating that the outdoor recreation community needs a space to come together, air issues, celebrate and learn from success and challenges, and increase collaboration across the state. The SAR community was pleased to have the time and space to utilize some needed networking opportunities and is excited to make the SARCON an annual event in conjunction with the WORS.

Supported by the WORTH Initiative and the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, Wyoming's outdoor recreation community will continue to convene annually, bringing together members of the industry from across the state and region. Additionally, the program will continue to have a day focused on Wyoming Search and Rescue.

**The 2025 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit will take place May 1-3, 2025, at the Marion H. Rochelle Gateway Center in Laramie, Wyoming.**



**SAVE THE DATE**

**WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION**  
*Summit*

**MAY 1<sup>ST</sup> -3<sup>RD</sup>, 2025**

Marion H. Rochelle Gateway Center  
Laramie, Wyoming

**We heard you.** Based on survey and in-person feedback, the 2025 summit will...

- Provide improved time and space for networking and relationship building
- Involve more small group work and roundtable discussions
- Include more voices, particularly tribal and BIPOC communities
- Possible topics: business-focused sessions, grant-writing workshops, and guide trainings/certifications



To get on our mailing list for updates and registration information visit:  
<https://www.uwyo.edu/worth>

For questions, comments, and suggestions please contact:  
Taylor Kruger ([tkruger@uwyo.edu](mailto:tkruger@uwyo.edu))



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