



Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism  
and Hospitality Initiative (WORTH)

# WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION REPORT



2024

# OUTDOOR RECREATION: A GROWING ECONOMY IN WYOMING

IN 2022...

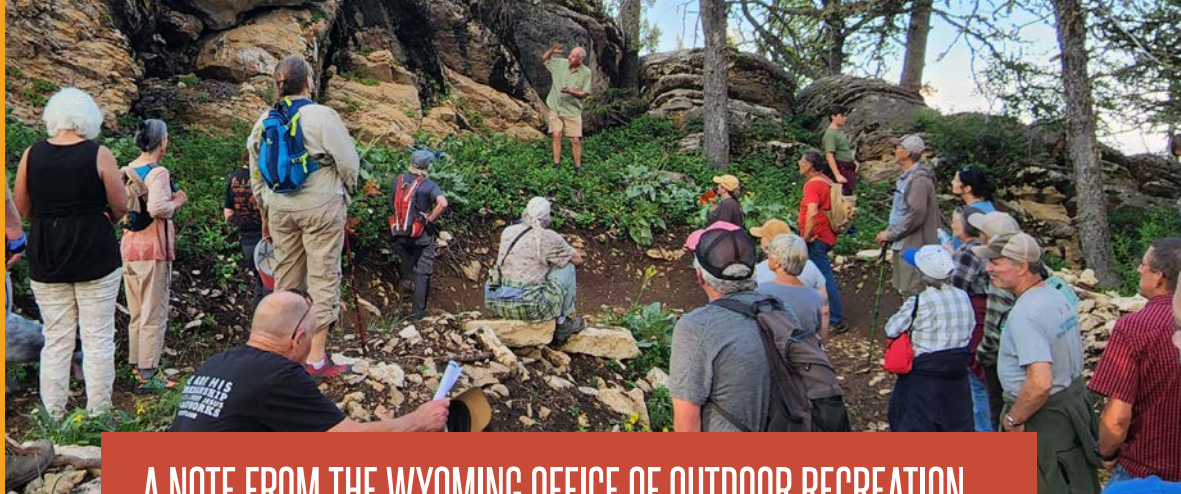
**Outdoor recreation's contribution to Wyoming's GDP increased 33%, from \$1.5 to \$2 billion.<sup>1</sup>**

Outdoor recreation contributes more to Wyoming's GDP (**4.1%**) than any other state in the country except Hawaii, Vermont, and Montana.<sup>2</sup>

Wyoming's **7.5 million** visitors spent **\$4.5 billion** dollars while traveling and recreating, generating **\$247 million** in travel-related tax revenue.<sup>3</sup>

**16,202 jobs** directly supported Wyoming's outdoor recreation industry<sup>4</sup>, **6% higher** than last year.<sup>5</sup>

*Top photo: Discovery Session geology hike on Bear Knuckle Trail. Photo credit Sheridan Community Land Trust.*



## A NOTE FROM THE WYOMING OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Wyoming really *is* like no other place on Earth. We are a headwaters state, where the Colorado, Columbia, and the Missouri rivers all get their start as mountain streams cascading into momentary pools before leaving Wyoming and heading on through the rest of the country. Wyoming has conserved vast, wide-open spaces, which host the country's longest big game migrations and draw millions of visitors each year to see the grandeur of our own backyards. We are also home to the nation's first national park, national monument, and national forest, adding to the evidence that some of the country's best ideas start in the parts of Wyoming that are still wild.

The Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation has been fortunate over the past year to focus on impactful work that keeps Wyoming on the cutting edge of the outdoor recreation sector and balances this development with a sincere love for the land. Just like those that came before us, we carry a responsibility for the landscapes we live in and with.

In 2023, the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Trust Fund passed into law. We also saw the first American Rescue Plan dollars hit the ground, funding outdoor recreation infrastructure that will drive a better future for the state. Thanks to these funds, Wyoming communities of all sizes will have access to grants that will help them build outdoor recreation facilities that best meet the needs of each community, its landscape, and its visitors. We also saw Wyoming's outdoor recreation economy exceed \$2.02 billion, making it the 4th fastest growing outdoor economy in the country.

We've got momentum, and so much more to celebrate on the horizon. As you enjoy this report, I would like to acknowledge all of the hard work done by partners across the state that makes this report meaningful. And a special thank you to the University of Wyoming's WORTH Initiative who—beyond authoring this report—has been an incredible collaborator as we grow the outdoor recreation sector in Wyoming.



Sincerely,

Patrick Harrington  
*Manager, Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation*

# OUTDOOR RECREATION CONTRIBUTIONS IN WYOMING

## DISTRIBUTION OF WYOMING'S 16,202 JOBS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION IN 2022<sup>6</sup>



## OUTDOOR RECREATION JOBS: ATTRACTING AND RETAINING THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST

The outdoor recreation industry relies on diverse economic sectors working together, each of which attract talented professionals to live, work, and play in Wyoming. Occupations in outdoor recreation range from operating lifts at the local ski resort or managing a gear store to guiding for hunting and angling trips. A broad retail and service economy is essential for fostering a vibrant outdoor recreation industry, attracting visitors, and retaining highly qualified workers.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF SELECTED OUTDOOR INDUSTRIES TO WYOMING'S GDP IN 2022



Snow Activities  
**\$102,037,000**



RVing  
**\$118,690,000**



Boating and Fishing  
**\$62,364,000**



Game Areas  
(inc. golf/tennis)  
**\$56,140,000**



Other related outdoor recreation and entertainment  
**\$222,169,000**

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022. <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/orsa1123-State.xlsx>

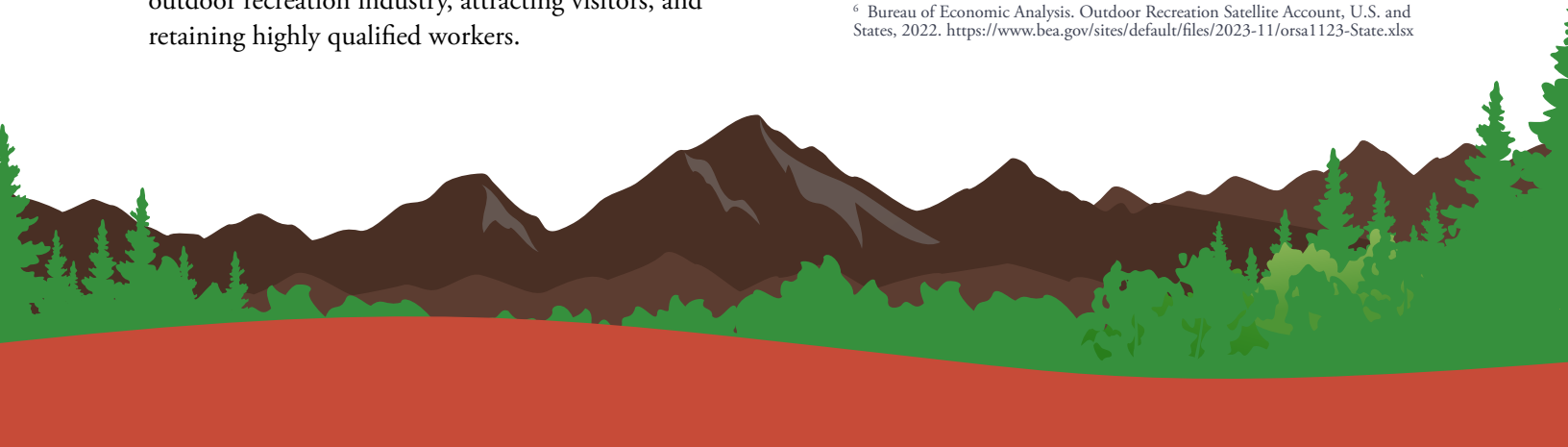
<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022. <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/orsa1123-State.xlsx>

<sup>3</sup> Wyoming Office of Tourism. <https://industry.travelwyoming.com>. See also Dean Runyon Associates, "The Economic Impact of Travel in Wyoming 2022." [https://ss-usa.s3.amazonaws.com/c/308476362/media/176964513b5ba1c0a56131267740335/Statewide Impact with Counties.pdf](https://ss-usa.s3.amazonaws.com/c/308476362/media/176964513b5ba1c0a56131267740335/Statewide%20Impact%20with%20Counties.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022. <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/orsa1123-State.xlsx>

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis. <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

<sup>6</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022. <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/orsa1123-State.xlsx>



# GROWING OUTDOOR RECREATION IN WYOMING

Supporting new development and infrastructure not only improves recreation areas—making them more accessible to a wider variety of visitors—it also helps protect the wild spaces surrounding them. In Wyoming, sustainable development is often guided by the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation’s eight regional collaboratives, which bring together a broad group of stakeholders “focused on defining grassroots projects and initiatives for outdoor recreation growth and development.”<sup>7</sup>

These pages highlight some outstanding recent projects from the collaboratives and other initiatives around Wyoming:

## Hawk Rest Pack Stock Bridge Replacement, Teton County:

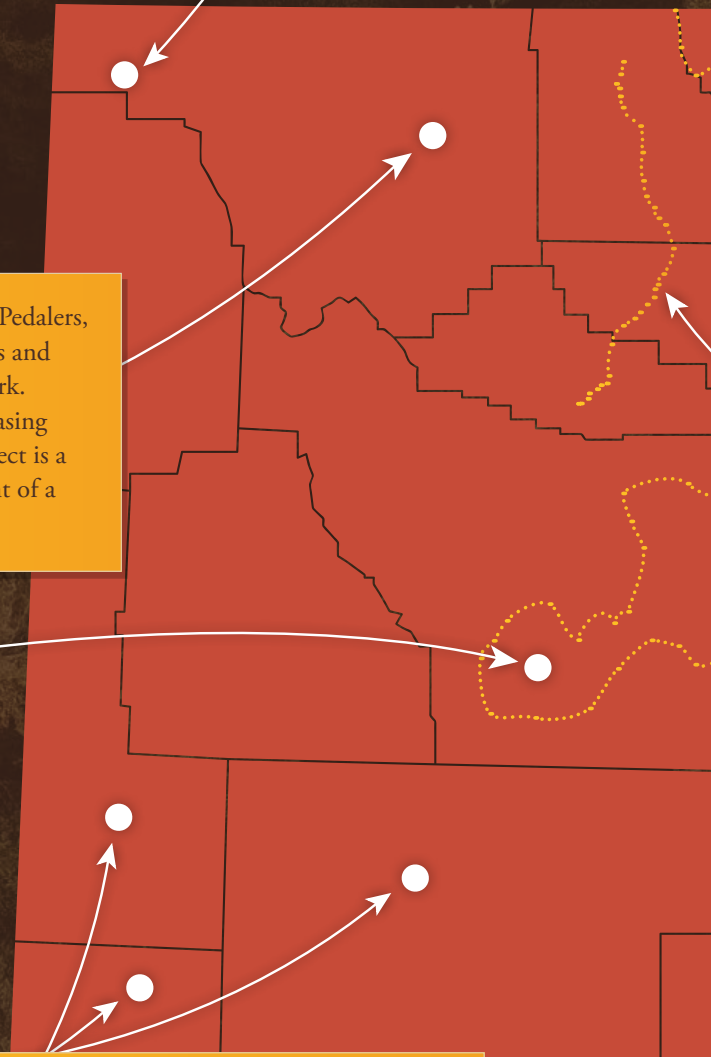
The Wyoming State Trails program and multiple partners completed the replacement of the 170 foot clear span Hawk Rest Pack Stock bridge. This bridge, located 28 miles into the Teton wilderness, ensures access for equestrians and hikers to 200,000 acres of wilderness and a significant area of Yellowstone National Park. The project site’s wilderness designation required the use of pack stock and a helicopter to complete the project and was recently awarded the Coalition for Recreational Trails Annual Achievement Award for Maintenance and Rehabilitation.

**Outlaw Trails Project, Cody:** Thanks to efforts from the Park County Pedalers, the recently approved Outlaw Trails project will legitimize existing trails and build new ones to create a cohesive, maintained, and sustainable network. The project is unique in its close proximity to the center of town, increasing access for users and making the area a destination for visitors. This project is a great example of a community collaboration leading to the development of a recreation area that benefits both motorized and non-motorized users.

**Giddy Up Trail, Lander:** Non-profit organization Wyoming Pathways just completed “Giddy Up” at Johnny Behind the Rocks, near Lander. This trail is the first downhill-optimized mountain bike trail on public lands in the region. Designed by a professional mountain biker and Lander native, this world-class trail attracts new visitors from the around the region, and is a great addition to a zone that already offers amenities for hikers, bikers, and horseback riders. Up to 30 miles of additional trails are planned.

## Off-Road Vehicle Trails, Southwest Wyoming:

Off-road vehicle (ORV) usage has grown in recent years, with 14,000 new users to Wyoming in 2021.<sup>12</sup> Southwest Wyoming Off-Road Trails (SWOT), in partnership with the Wyoming State Trails Program and Wyoming Department of Transportation, is working to “connect hundreds of miles of existing off-road trails with town streets and county roads,” allowing ORV users to access historic sites, accommodations, and retail offerings in local towns. The potential economic benefits of this project to surrounding communities are substantial.<sup>13</sup>



<sup>7</sup> “Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives.” Wyoming Outdoor Recreation. <https://wyooutdoorrecreation.wyo.gov/index.php/outdoor-recreation-collaboratives>

<sup>8</sup> “Park County Outdoor Recreation Collaborative.” Wyoming Outdoor Recreation. <https://wyooutdoorrecreation.wyo.gov/index.php/outdoor-recreation-collaboratives/park-county-outdoor-recreation-collaborative-pcocr>

<sup>9</sup> “Natrona County Outdoor Recreation Collaborative.” Wyoming Outdoor Recreation. <https://wyooutdoorrecreation.wyo.gov/index.php/outdoor-recreation-collaboratives/natrona-county-outdoor-recreation-collaborative-ncocr>

<sup>10</sup> Wyoming Backcountry Discovery Routes. <https://ridebdr.com/wyodr/>

<sup>11</sup> “Bighorn Basin Outdoor Recreation Collaborative.” Wyoming Outdoor Recreation. <https://wyooutdoorrecreation.wyo.gov/index.php/outdoor-recreation-collaboratives/bighorn-basin-outdoor-recreation-collaborative-bbocr>

**Wyoming Backcountry Discovery Route, Across Wyoming:**

WYBDR is a new, multiday, off-pavement ride for dual-sport and adventure motorcycles through the most dramatic and rugged landscapes in Wyoming. WYBDR is the eleventh route developed by Backcountry Discovery Routes and is their most remote route to date. The route highlights Wyoming's vast public lands, spanning three National Forests and three BLM districts. In its first year the WYBDR generated \$4.89 million in direct spending to communities along the route.<sup>10</sup>

**Red Grade Trails, Sheridan:**

Sheridan Community Land Trust (SCLT) has constructed 17 miles of the Red Grade Trails outside of Big Horn. This community trail system and the three other trail systems built by SCLT all provide places for community members and visitors to connect with land, history, nature, and the outdoors. SCLT trails serve as outdoor classrooms where people can learn in groups and on their own, fun places where friends and families get together in healthy ways and vital places of respite where people can get away from the daily grind and enjoy peace, quiet, and solitude.

**Adaptive Trails, Northeast Wyoming:**

The Bent Sprockets Club and the Northeast Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (NEWORC) received a \$20,000 grant in 2022 from the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Office to create adaptive trails at the Flying V trail system just outside of Newcastle. Adaptive trails are soft-surface trails designed for riders using hand crank or pedal assist bikes, or similar equipment, and allow users of all abilities to get out and enjoy Wyoming's outdoor opportunities.

**Bighorn River Blueway Trail Project,**

**Bighorn Basin:** Bighorn Basin Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (BBORC) is developing and building the Bighorn River Blueway Trail, which will cover a 95 mile stretch of the Bighorn River between Thermopolis and Lovell. The trail will offer wildlife watching, fishing, picnicking, boating, paddling, and camping.<sup>11</sup>

**Pilot Hill, Albany County:**

The Pilot Hill Area protects 7,100 acres of land that enhance the quality of life in southeastern Wyoming. Stretching from the edge of Laramie all the way to the Medicine Bow National Forest, Pilot Hill not only protects wildlife habitat and the Casper aquifer, a source of Laramie's drinking water, but also supports the physical and mental well-being of the community by providing access to more than 32 miles of non-motorized trails. This attracts new businesses and residents that will support a vibrant economy and dynamic workforce.

<sup>12</sup> "Council excited by new ORV trail system." Sublette Examiner. <https://subletteexaminer.com/article/council-excited-by-new-orv-trail-system?fbclid=IwAR3RquuhGPeluFoUcykjMusMzqpDbwiosAu7YUfhRjh8PDekK5jXSWdvzY>

<sup>13</sup> "Council excited by new ORV trail system." Sublette Examiner. <https://subletteexaminer.com/article/council-excited-by-new-orv-trail-system?fbclid=IwAR3RquuhGPeluFoUcykjMusMzqpDbwiosAu7YUfhRjh8PDekK5jXSWdvzY>

# WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION COLLABORATIVES

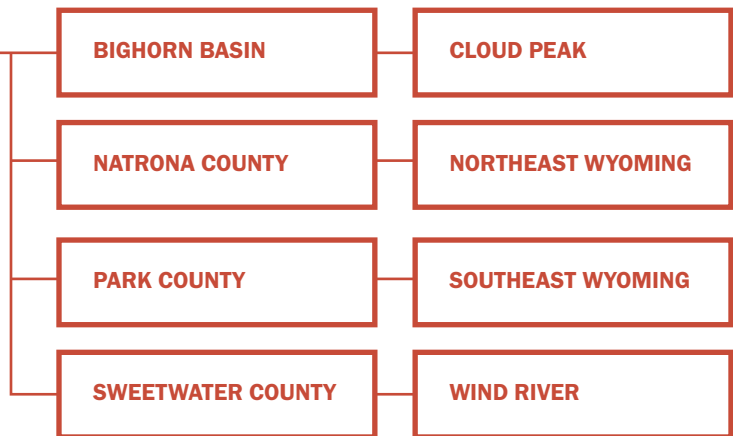
The Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation facilitates eight outdoor recreation collaboratives throughout the state. These collaboratives bring together diverse stakeholders, including local community members and state and federal agencies, to “support sustainable outdoor recreation growth.”<sup>14</sup> As demand for Wyoming’s outdoor recreation opportunities continues to grow, Wyoming’s Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives are working to implement solutions for infrastructure, accessibility, and sustainability for new and existing outdoor recreation opportunities.



## 14 COUNTIES REPRESENTED...

- Albany
- Big Horn
- Campbell
- Carbon
- Crook
- Fremont
- Hot Springs
- Johnson
- Natrona
- Park
- Sheridan
- Sweetwater
- Weston
- Washakie

## ...THROUGH 8 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVES

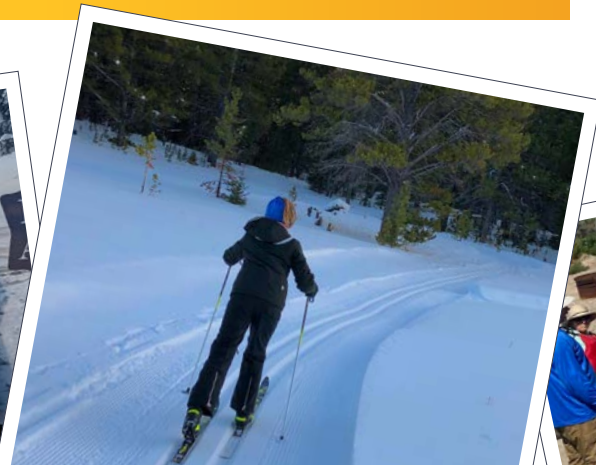


**300+** ORGANIZATIONS & INTEREST GROUPS REPRESENTED

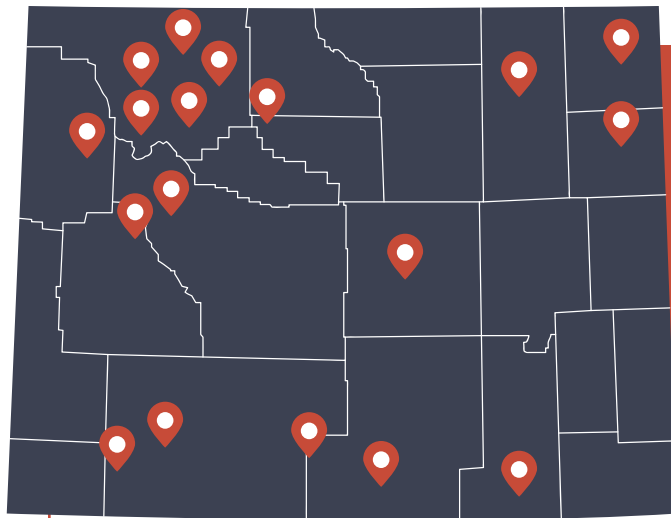
**500+** STATEWIDE PARTICIPANTS & COUNTING

 **128** PROJECTS DISCUSSED

 **38** GUEST SPEAKERS



<sup>14</sup> <https://wyooutdoorrecreation.wyo.gov/index.php/outdoor-recreation-collaboratives>



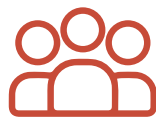
# 18 MEETING LOCATIONS

Basin, Casper, Cody, Dubois, Gillette, Green River, Lander, Laramie, Newcastle, Powell, Rawlins, Riverton, Rock Springs, Saratoga, Sundance, Ten Sleep, Thermopolis, and Worland



**9,580**

TOTAL GENERAL MEETING HOURS



**901**

TOTAL MEETING ATTENDANCE



**312**

TOTAL ADVISOR ATTENDANCE



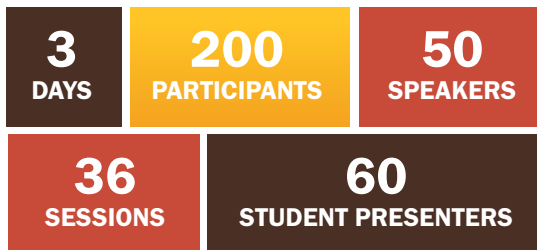


# AN EMERGING ISSUE FORUM ON OUTDOOR RECREATION

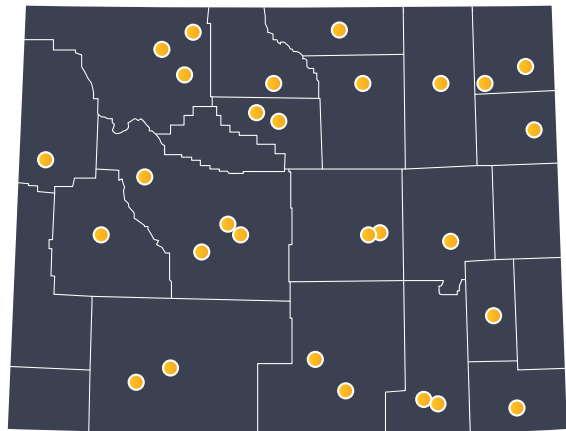
For three days in April 2023, the Ruckelshaus Institute, WORTH Initiative, and Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation convened “Outdoor Recreation: Building It The Way We Want It” to explore how Wyoming communities could maximize the benefits, while mitigating the impacts, of growing outdoor recreation. Attendees called it a watershed moment, the first attempt to bring together all the outdoor recreation stakeholders around the state.

**The biggest takeaway from the forum is that there is broad, measured support for outdoor recreation development. People are enthusiastic about what they have, but often concerned about what it might become. We have to figure out how to build it “the Wyoming way.”**

## BY THE NUMBERS:



## PARTICIPANTS TRAVELED FROM:



## ALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS WOULD RECOMMEND THE FORUM TO A FRIEND.

“Excellent job! It was a fantastic opportunity to hear different sides, make connections, conduct meaningful conversations, and explore the drivers in our community.” — *Forum participant*

“The networking was fantastic and the panels informative. Seeing most of this is still in the building phase there aren’t a lot of “answers” to be given. Groups coming together like this to share wins and losses is a great way to start finding those solutions.” — *Forum participant*

“I learned so much and connected with lots of valuable advocates and agencies.” — *Forum participant*

*Participants included federal and state agency representatives, local and state government officials, destination marketing organizations, business owners, advocacy groups, recreationists, landowners, researchers, educators, and students.*

## RECORDINGS AND FULL SUMMARY AT:

[uwo.edu/haub/ruckelshaus-institute/forums/rec-forum](http://uwo.edu/haub/ruckelshaus-institute/forums/rec-forum)





## THEMES: COMPLEXITY, COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY

**COMPLEXITY**

- People recreate in many different ways
- Outdoor recreation spans many jurisdictions and impacts many facets of Wyoming
- Outdoor recreation is just one of many uses of the land

**COLLABORATION**

- The Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives are an important tool and opportunity
- Grow the pie, don't divide it
- Relationships and partnership are key
- Bring all voices to the table

**COMMUNITY**

- People want recreation that fits their community
- Trust is built through transparency
- Recreational opportunities are a community resource in addition to a tourism asset

## NEXT STEPS: ANNUAL OUTDOOR RECREATION SUMMIT

The greatest need the forum revealed was an ongoing space for outdoor recreation interests to come together, air issues, celebrate and learn from success and challenges, and work cooperatively to “build it the way we want it.”

Inspired and driven by the forum’s success, the WORTH Initiative and Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation are excited to announce the first annual Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit!

*Registration is Open*

**WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION**  
*Summit*  
**APRIL 18-19<sup>TH</sup>**

**PLUS**  
**APRIL 20<sup>TH</sup>**  
**WYOMING**  
**SEARCH AND**  
**RESCUE**

Best Western in  
Casper, Wyoming

**TO REGISTER, VISIT:**  
[gopokes.formstack.com/forms/summit\\_2024](https://gopokes.formstack.com/forms/summit_2024)

**FOR QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND SUGGESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:**  
[tkruger@uwyo.edu](mailto:tkruger@uwyo.edu)

**TO VIEW MORE INFORMATION:**



# IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME: NAVIGATING GROWTH IN OUTDOOR RECREATION



Stunning natural beauty coupled with low population density put Wyoming on the outdoor recreationists' map during the pandemic, with record-breaking visitation to state and national parks and recreation areas from 2020-2022. While the revenue from this visitation has been beneficial, many Wyoming localities were unequipped to deal with influx of tourists, and their natural attractions suffered. Overrun communities around Wyoming are in the midst of what Headwaters Economics calls the “amenity trap,” or “the paradox of a place with natural attractions that make it a great place to live but also threaten it with being ‘loved to death’.”<sup>14</sup>

This is the reality for many rural communities that desire growth, but not at the expense of community members' quality of life or threats to the natural environment. Growing an outdoor recreation economy for the benefit of a community is possible, but it requires large-scale, strategic planning. More and more, the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure is playing a role in county and city planning, and this process involves different entities working together to help support community growth.

Laramie is a case in point. The City of Laramie and Albany County have developed the Laramie Growth Area Plan to “help define responsible growth in the rural-urban interface.”<sup>16</sup> With the growth in popularity of new recreation opportunities, such as Laramie's Pilot Hill recreation area, strategic planning in outdoor recreation development becomes especially important. The Pilot Hill Area offers non-motorized trails, wildlife watching, educational opportunities, and magnificent vistas of the Laramie foothills. Yet, Pilot Hill is more than a space for outdoor recreation; it protects a critical land parcel situated above the Casper Aquifer that provides clean water for the Laramie community.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the development of Pilot Hill as a recreation

## WORKING TOGETHER:

The acquisition of Pilot Hill in 2020 was a collaborative effort between Albany County, the Wyoming Office of State Lands, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Land Management, and the University of Wyoming. The area is managed by the non-profit Pilot Hill, Inc., in partnership with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

<sup>14</sup> Headwaters Economics: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/outdoor-recreation/amenity-trap/>

<sup>15</sup> Headwaters Economics: <https://headwaterseconomics.org/outdoor-recreation/amenity-trap/>

<sup>16</sup> “Laramie Growth Area Plan.” City of Laramie. <https://www.cityoflaramie.org/1215/Laramie-GROWTH-AREA-Plan#:~:text=Albany County and the City,in the rural-urban interface>



and wildlife habitat management area will help to shape growth according to best practices, allowing for sustainable development in the future.

Responsible community and outdoor recreation development do more than protect natural resources and provide health and wellness opportunities for locals. They are also recruitment and retention tools for attracting new residents and businesses. According to a recent article in *Outside Magazine*, Laramie is “the perfect affordable mountain town” offering residents and visitors adventure, culture, and quality restaurants.<sup>18</sup> Lauded by the author for its plentiful amenities, especially a vibrant downtown, youthful college town vibe, low cost of living, outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities, and gorgeous mountain views, Laramie “hits the sweet spot” for those desiring mountain town living.<sup>19</sup>

The *Outside Magazine* article paints Laramie as the ideal place to live and play. However, this kind of praise can be a double edged sword. On the one hand, highlighting Laramie’s positive attributes to readers of a popular online magazine with national reach could elevate both Laramie’s image and appeal as a desirable place to visit or even live. On the other hand, what if this focus on Laramie’s affordability encouraged large numbers of people to move west in a short stretch of time to escape rising costs elsewhere? Would the quality of life and superb amenities Laramie currently enjoys be sustained with a steep population increase, not to mention the natural resource, housing, and other challenges that come with it? Time will certainly tell. The “amenity trap” is a real issue for communities like Laramie who desire growth without overcrowding. Having plans in place, like the Laramie Growth Area Plan, will help to ease the transition if Laramie someday is faced with balancing rural-urban development.

“

For many places the influx of tourists and new visitors is creating profound problems. Housing has become unaffordable, forcing long-time residents out and contributing to labor shortages. Infrastructure, municipal finances, and community well-being can be overcome by a wave of unexpected growth and fraught public discourse.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Pilot Hill Recreation Area. <https://pilothonline.org>

<sup>18</sup> Averill, Graham. “The Most Affordable Mountain Town in the West.” *Outside Magazine*. Sept 26, 2023. <https://www.outsideonline.com/adventure-travel/destinations/north-america/most-affordable-mountain-town/?fbclid=IwAR3a6Z4oHED9WutdOYpFcgEl6ReKC5zblWruXlw8geykYWSvizReKBYVsm4>

<sup>19</sup> Averill, Graham. “The Most Affordable Mountain Town in the West.” *Outside Magazine*. Sept 26, 2023. <https://www.outsideonline.com/adventure-travel/destinations/north-america/most-affordable-mountain-town/?fbclid=IwAR3a6Z4oHED9WutdOYpFcgEl6ReKC5zblWruXlw8geykYWSvizReKBYVsm4>



Wyoming Outdoor  
Recreation, Tourism and  
Hospitality Initiative  
(WORTH)

## ABOUT THE WORTH INITIATIVE

The Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism, and Hospitality (WORTH) Initiative supports industries across the state through applied research, educational products, services, and extension.



### APPLIED RESEARCH

Delivering timely and relevant applied research for WORTH industries.



### EDUCATION & TRAINING

Supplying diverse workforce training products and services to students and industry professionals.



### EXTENSION & OUTREACH

Providing extension and outreach to the tourism industry across Wyoming.

This report was prepared by the WORTH Initiative in partnership with the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation. For more information about the WORTH Initiative, please visit: [www.uwyo.edu/worth](http://www.uwyo.edu/worth).

*Photos used with permission from Wyoming Office of Tourism and the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation.*

