

A person wearing a bright red puffy jacket, a red beanie, and dark pants is walking away from the camera on a dirt trail through a forest. They are holding a leash for a medium-sized, shaggy-haired dog. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and pine needles. Tall trees line the path, and sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a warm, golden glow. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

# Growing Outdoor Recreation for Pennsylvania

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CONCLUSIONS REPORT AND  
ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE



**“We are going to be the national leader in outdoor recreation.”**

Pennsylvania’s Office of Outdoor Recreation is a great example of how it all comes together, how outdoor recreation can lift up communities, create jobs and economic opportunity. It’s also just fun.

Outdoor recreation is an opportunity to depolarize our society. Not only are our outdoors important in creating jobs and economic opportunity, and health and wellbeing, they are a great way to get people to talk again, engage again, work together again, and I want more Pennsylvanians to have that opportunity.

I see a bright future ahead, and it’s all because of investment in outdoor recreation all across our great Commonwealth.

**Governor Josh Shapiro**

Announcing Pennsylvania’s Office of Outdoor Recreation  
August 2023, Connellsville, PA



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# Acknowledgements

**The vision for Pennsylvania’s Office of Outdoor Recreation** developed by the Growing Outdoor Recreation for Pennsylvania (GORP) engagement process and put forward in this conclusions report was the product of nearly a year’s worth of conversations, meetings, research, analysis, and collaboration. Many, many people and organizations made valuable contributions to this process without which the work would not have been successful. These contributions helped us understand the circumstances and needs of outdoor businesses, the plans and prospects of communities, and the hopes held by Pennsylvanians for ways outdoor recreation can improve their lives. We want to acknowledge all these contributions and express our thanks for them.

While all contributions to the GORP process are very much appreciated, substantial and significant contributions were made by individuals and organizations that deserve specific acknowledgement here. They include:

- **Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn** for the vision and investment to move this work forward and **the entire staff of Pennsylvania’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)** for their support and collegiality.
- **Leadership and staff at Pennsylvania’s departments of Community and Economic Development, Health, and Transportation** for their spirit of and commitment to collaboration.
- Members of the **Recreation Engagement Coalition and its Core Strategy Team** for the energy and ideas they shared to inform the GORP process.
- **Participants in GORP’s Regional Stakeholder Meetings** for their active and voluntary engagement.
- **Strategic Consulting Partners** who supported the GORP process with strategic planning and professional facilitation.

Finally, **Pennsylvania’s community of outdoor recreationists**—from the PA Wilds to center city Philadelphia, Pittsburgh to the Poconos—deserve our enduring thanks for empowering Pennsylvania’s outdoor economy and inspiring us to harness it for the prosperity of our communities, health of our people and environment, and competitiveness of our Commonwealth.

# Message from the Director



**“...we will not just create greater economic prosperity, we will improve the wellbeing, happiness, and sustainability of our communities.”**

In Pennsylvania we typically think of outdoor recreation as a pleasant outing to enjoy nature with friends and family. Outdoor recreation certainly is this.

Outdoor recreation is also an industry in Pennsylvania and a critical contributor to our economic competitiveness. From innovative manufacturers to nationally renowned creative professionals, outdoor businesses directly generate \$17 billion of economic productivity in Pennsylvania. Furthermore, businesses looking to grow cite our abundant and close-by outdoor recreation as a reason they choose Pennsylvania as the home for their futures.

We in Pennsylvania have a long history of leadership supporting outdoor recreation, and we are reinvigorating our industrial economy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With establishment of Pennsylvania’s Office of Outdoor Recreation and conclusion of the Growing Outdoor Recreation for Pennsylvania (GORP) stakeholder engagement process, Pennsylvania is turning outdoor recreation into a true economic development tool. In doing so, we will not just create greater economic prosperity, we will improve the wellbeing, happiness, and sustainability of our communities.

I am proud to share this conclusions report with you and hope that you see in it ways that outdoor recreation can help your community thrive, your economy grow, and your neighbors, friends, family, and guests reap the many benefits of outdoor recreation.

Sincerely and happiest of trails,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Nathan Reigner".

Nathan Reigner, PhD  
Pennsylvania’s Director of Outdoor Recreation

# Introduction



Pennsylvania’s lands and waters have long been used as an outdoor playground. Our heritage of stewardship and connection to our natural resources has resulted in millions of acres of forests and parks and thousands of miles of trails and waterways that are enjoyed for hikes, paddles, climbs, rides, hunts—and many more activities—in all seasons, close to home and far afield.

These outdoor activities and the natural resources that support them generate economic productivity, community prosperity, improved health and wellbeing, and environmental sustainability. They are the foundation for a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy that needs support and nurturing to capitalize on its full potential.

In 2021, Pennsylvania embarked on an effort to elevate the power and potential of outdoor recreation to the state’s economy and quality of life with the hiring of the state’s first Director of Outdoor Recreation. The director led a robust stakeholder process from fall 2022 through spring 2023 that involved more than 500 Pennsylvanians who are engaged in the outdoor recreation economy.

Feedback from those stakeholders, supported with research and collaboration with other states and organizations across the country, has helped to shape a vision for Pennsylvania’s new Office of Outdoor Recreation: building capacity within our outdoor industry; building capacity for community and economic development using the outdoors; and building capacity for inclusive and equitable wellbeing through the outdoors.

This document provides detail about how this vision formed, the Office’s mission and mode of operation, strategic goals the Office is charged with achieving for Pennsylvania, and actions the Office can take in its first years of work to help Pennsylvania unite, grow, and strengthen its outdoor economy.



# Pennsylvania's \$17 Billion Secret

Pennsylvanians have long appreciated and valued their natural resources for the life-sustaining benefits they provide, from early settlers living off the lands and waters, to modern day recreation enthusiasts who turn to nature for their health and wellbeing.

But only recently have we made the connection between the scenic and recreational values of our lands and waters and the economic prosperity and quality life they deliver us. Communities—from small towns to big cities—are capitalizing on the nature that put them on the map. Trail, river, and outdoor towns are building energy and breathing life back into areas struggling with declining populations and economies. Bigger cities are using rivers and trails as lures to attract businesses and people to their zip codes.

**In 2022, the outdoor industry delivered \$17 billion to Pennsylvania's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.**

This contribution is larger than that made by the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction industries combined. Beyond its direct industrial productivity, the outdoors is a critical component of 21<sup>st</sup> century economic competitiveness. It is more strongly correlated with population growth and full employment in small and medium-sized rural and industrial communities than tax incentives, regulatory relief, and low real estate and labor costs.

Unlike other resource-based industries that liquidate natural resources, development of our outdoor economy adds to our bank of natural capital while creating healthier people and communities. Outdoor recreation creates jobs that connect to people's passions and makes our Commonwealth a place where Pennsylvanians want to stay and to which new residents want to relocate.



## Benefits of Pennsylvania's Outdoor Economy

- a productive outdoor industry that provides goods and services used for outdoor recreation
- improved quality of life that attracts residents and businesses to the Commonwealth
- community prosperity that is built on sustainable use of natural assets
- savings in healthcare, safety, infrastructure, and environmental management that result from recreation participation and assets
- enhanced image of Pennsylvania as an active, attractive, and diversified state illustrated by a thriving outdoor sector



# Activating an Outdoor Economy

In 2013, Utah was the first state to create a position—via gubernatorial action then codified through legislation—dedicated to the outdoor recreation industry. Other states followed suit, and in 2018 and 2021, the number of offices of outdoor recreation doubled, diversifying their geographic distribution across the United States and expanding the range of issues they sought to address in their respective states.

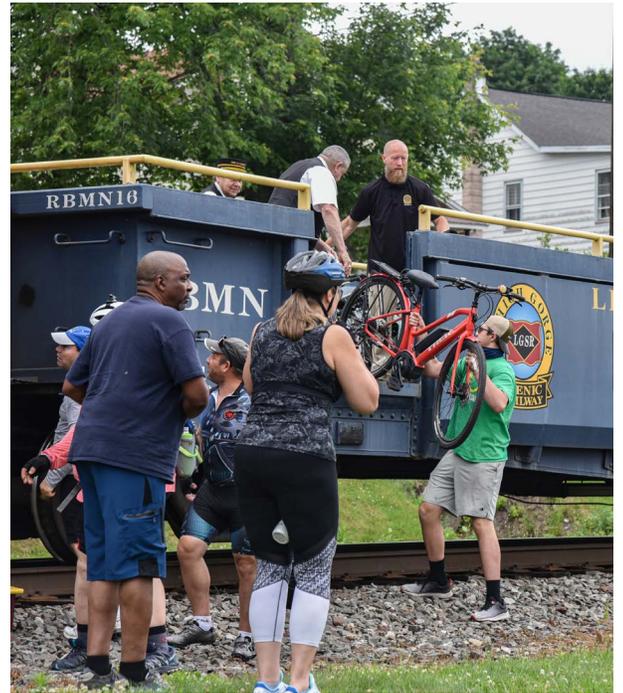
**Now standing at 20 nationwide, state offices of outdoor recreation act as strategic backbones for outdoor economies and government partners for outdoor industries.**

They draw together conservationists, businesses, economic developers, tourism promoters, public health advocates, and recreation users; advance policy supporting

and leveraging outdoor recreation; identify funding for recreation development; stimulate outdoor businesses; empower the outdoor workforce; and address inequities in outdoor inclusion and access. Offices of outdoor recreation accomplish these objectives with coordination, collaboration, and creativity, providing a remarkably high level of value at comparatively low cost.

## National Support

A network of organizations and resources has coalesced to support advancement of outdoor recreation as a tool for economic and community development, public health, and natural resource conservation. These organizations and resources help to coordinate private and public sector outdoor economy efforts, elevate policy and communication to support outdoor economies, and provide a support network for state-level activities.



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**OUTDOOR RECREATION,  
AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF OUR ECONOMIES  
THROUGH OUTDOOR  
RECREATION, IS  
UNIQUELY BIPARTISAN  
- EVERYONE CAN SEE  
A BRIGHTER FUTURE  
TOGETHER IN THE  
OUTDOORS.”**

**BRAD GARMON  
CHAIR OF THE  
CONFLUENCE OF STATES**

### **Confluence of States and the Confluence Accords**

To create unifying principles and standards, early state recreation offices formed the Confluence of States unified under the Confluence Accords. Members of the confluence pledge shared commitment to conservation and stewardship, education and workforce training, economic development, and public health and wellness through outdoor recreation. Established by a charter with specific membership criteria, the Confluence of States is further developing its organization and building out a policy platform and suite of resources as the number of state outdoor recreation offices grows. Pennsylvania has been welcomed as a member of the Confluence of States.

### **Outdoor Industry Association**

The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) is the membership-driven trade organization for the outdoor industry. In addition to representing outdoor manufacturers and retailers, OIA maintains active advocacy, research, and philanthropic programs.

These include a national policy platform, a state policy program and support for Thrive Outside community collective impact grants. Philadelphia is a Thrive Outside Community. Prior to creation of the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, OIA was the primary national provider of outdoor recreation economic impact data.

## Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) is the national coalition of outdoor recreation associations and organizations working to promote the growth of outdoor recreation and the outdoor recreation economy. ORR is an active and influential advocate at the national and state levels and, in collaboration with member OIA, is the primary advocate for state offices of outdoor recreation. Additionally, they produce and support best practice and knowledge sharing programs, including the Rural Development Toolkit that features our very own PA Wilds.

## Outdoor Recreation Learning Network

The National Governors Association (NGA) Outdoor Recreation Learning Network (ORLN) is a best-practice and resource sharing network to help states leverage their unique natural, cultural and historical resources to improve access to and help promote economic, social and environmental benefits. It includes states with and without offices of outdoor recreation. Establishment of the ORLN within the NGA is an illustration of the nationwide interest among governors in enhancing outdoor recreation's contribution to health, conservation, economies, and communities.

## Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account

The Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account (ORSA) is compiled by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. It provides annual state-level estimates of outdoor recreation's contribution to GDP, outdoor recreation jobs, and the wages these jobs generate. BEA data is comparable across states, years, and industries. Based on ORSA data, Pennsylvania has the 8<sup>th</sup> largest outdoor recreation economy in the country, which creates approximately 164,000 jobs and adds \$17 billion of value to Pennsylvania's economy. This accounts for approximately 1.8% of the Commonwealth's GDP (for comparison oil and gas extraction combined account for 1.3% of Pennsylvania's economy).



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**“AS OUTDOOR PARTICIPATION CONTINUES TO EXPAND, THE VALUE OF A STRONG OUTDOOR RECREATION ECOSYSTEM IS UNDENIABLE – IT SPURS ECONOMIC GROWTH, BRINGS NEW MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH BENEFITS, AND CREATES NEW JOBS AND CAREER PATHS.”**

**OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION**

## Pennsylvania's Outdoor Economy

Despite outdoor recreation's contribution to the state's economy, responsibilities for supporting outdoor recreation-based development and businesses are spread across Pennsylvania's government. Likewise, individual, community, and business beneficiaries of outdoor recreation are not comprehensively networked. Consequently, Pennsylvania's outdoor sector does not yet have the critical density of connection or integrated strategy necessary to deliver on its promise to support Pennsylvania's economic competitiveness.

Although Pennsylvania's outdoor economy has yet to be systematically developed, good groundwork has been laid by the Commonwealth and its partners, businesses, and communities. This record of early success includes founding and growth of homegrown outdoor brands, a network of trails and greenways plans and projects for community and economic development, diversified outdoor tourism initiatives, and an energized community of partners each contributing to outdoor economic development.

In 2021 Pennsylvania, through initiative of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), took a transformation step and committed to growing the Commonwealth's outdoor economy by hiring a Director of Outdoor Recreation. In addition to advising DCNR on the outdoor recreation industry and outdoor economic development, the director was charged with envisioning the mission, scope, and priorities of a Pennsylvania Office of Outdoor Recreation via an inclusive stakeholder engagement process.



### FAST FACTS:

**8th** largest outdoor recreation economy in the country

creates ~ **164,000** jobs

adds **\$17 billion** to Pennsylvania's economy

2022 Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce

# What is an outdoor economy?

An outdoor economy is made of two parts:

1. an outdoor industry that generates direct economic impacts; and
2. contribution to broad-based economic prosperity and community wellbeing made by outdoor recreation.





## The outdoor industry creates and delivers goods, services, and jobs that facilitate outdoor recreation, including:

- design, manufacture, distribution, sale, and care of outdoor gear, vehicles, and clothing
- provision of outdoor experiences by guides, outfitters, ski areas, mountain lodges, adventure centers, and the like
- hospitality and cultural services that enhance outdoor experiences and serve recreationists
- professional services to plan, build, and manage outdoor infrastructure and create content and media to educate people about, promote, and celebrate outdoor recreation.



## Outdoor recreation contributes to broad-based economic and community development through its connection to quality of life and talent attraction and retention. The outdoor economy powers economic and community development through a three-part system:

1

Conservation and development of outdoor recreation resources and infrastructure are the capital from which an outdoor economy can grow.

2

Local and visiting recreationists stimulate outdoor-related businesses and support community amenities that benefit recreationists and residents alike.

3

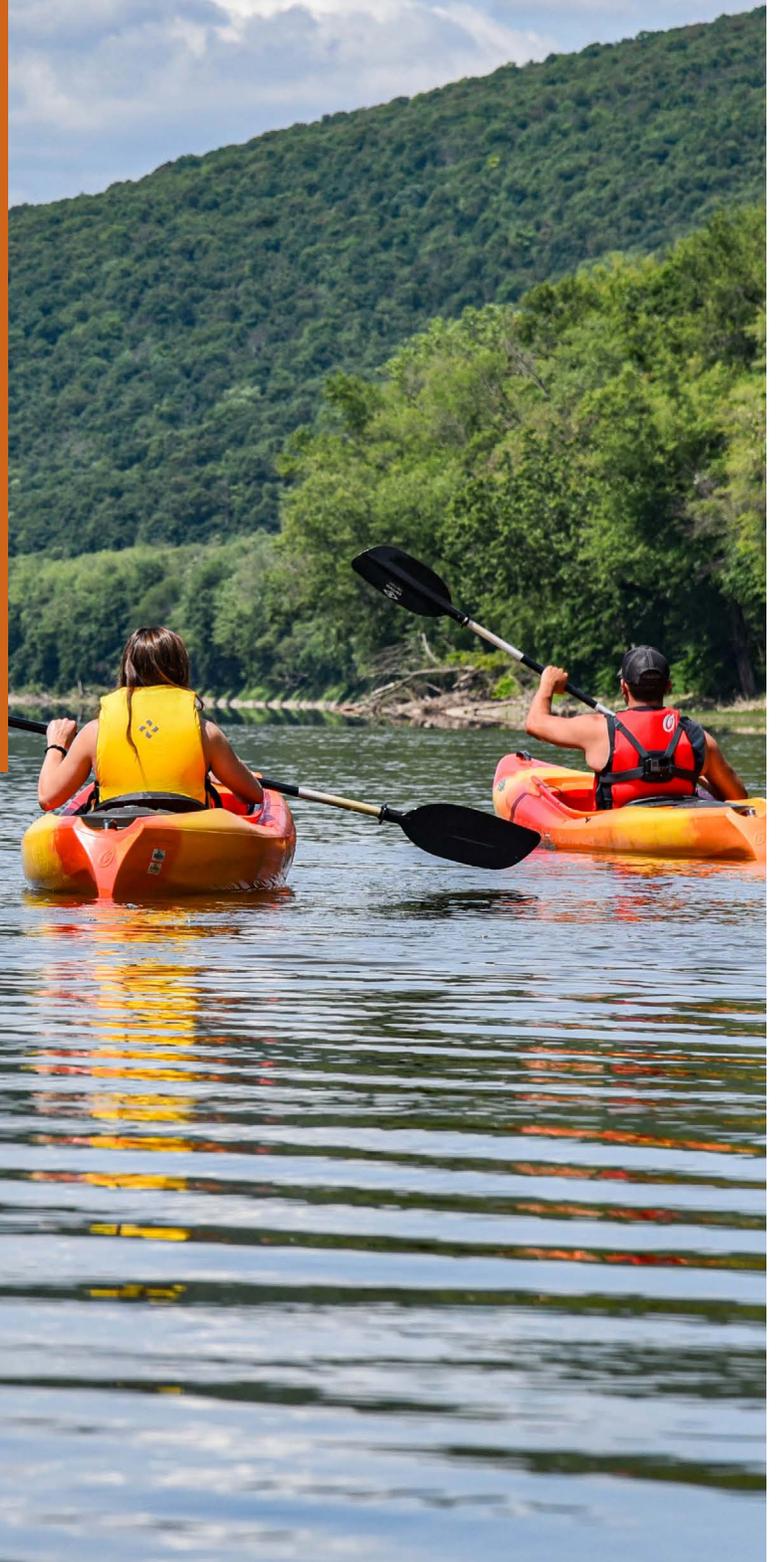
Broad-based community and economic development follow based on the high quality of life developed through outdoor-related economic activity and lifestyle opportunities.



## Stakeholder Engagement Process- Growing Outdoor Recreation for Pennsylvania

Shortly after hiring the Director of Outdoor Recreation, Growing Outdoor Recreation for Pennsylvania (GORP) launched as the Commonwealth's process to inform the development of its Office of Outdoor Recreation. The stakeholder process was designed to get ideas on how the office can help:

- support Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation industry
- leverage outdoor recreation for community and economic development and sustainability
- equitably enhance access to and participation in outdoor recreation for the benefit of all



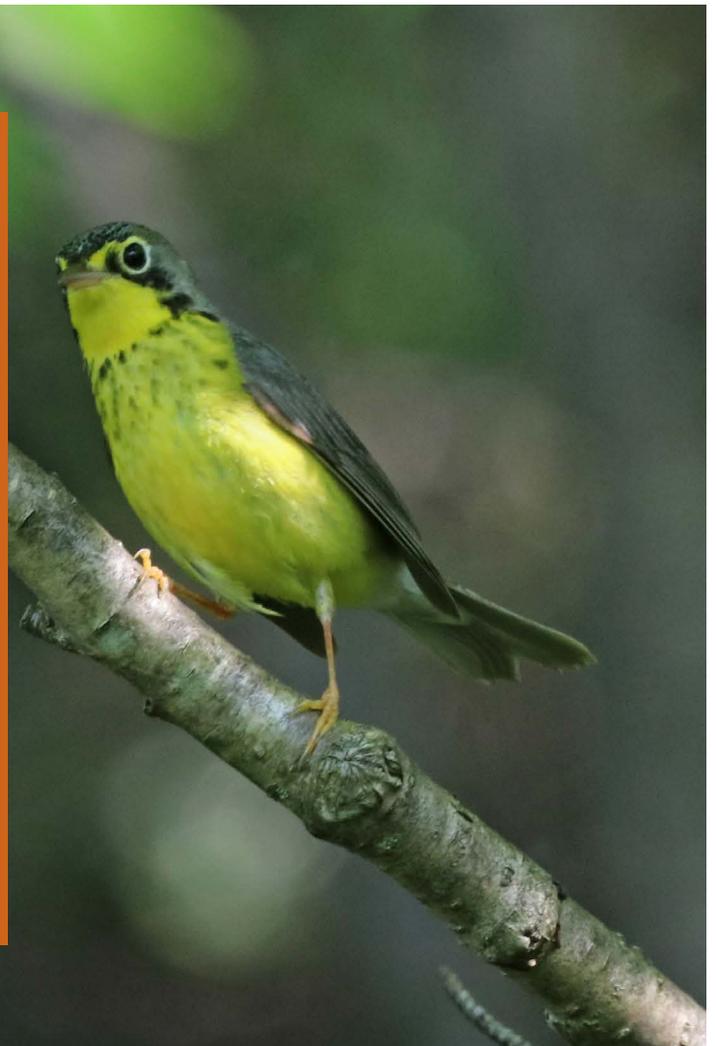
**The Recreation Engagement Coalition (REC) convened to serve as the primary stakeholder body to inform the GORP process** [see page 31 for list]. REC is comprised of 51 outdoor recreation-related leaders and experts drawn from business; economic and community development; health, equity and inclusion; resource management; recreation users; travel and tourism; foundations and funders; regional partnerships; and the arts, humanities, and cultural heritage. REC formed as the brain-trust to understand the scope, resources, and capabilities necessary for an effective outdoor recreation office in Pennsylvania.

**A Core Strategy Team (CST) met on a bi-weekly basis as a subset of the REC to help plan, organize and strategize around GORP.** The CST was comprised of staff from the departments of Conservation and Natural Resources, Community and Economic Development, and Health; the Pennsylvania Environmental Council; PA Parks and Forests Foundation; the York County Economic Alliance; and PA Economic Development Association.



The REC gathered for the first time at the Governor's Residence in Harrisburg in September 2022 to discuss the GORP process and what a successful outdoor economy in Pennsylvania would look like. The following month, the group met for a facilitated workshop at Shaver's Creek Environmental Center outside of State College. Over two days, coalition members organized around five themes based on their interests and experiences:

- Economic and recreation development
- Conservation and stewardship
- Health and wellness
- Knowledge, capacity building and professionalism
- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and access



**The workgroups helped to define the most important needs for growing outdoor recreation in Pennsylvania and set preliminary goals, objectives and actions.**

**The coalition concluded that the new director and Office should provide strategic leadership and a unified voice in the Commonwealth to identify and address the needs of those vested in outdoor recreation.** They determined that the Office should be primarily outwardly focused, bringing the voice of the outdoor industry into decision-making within state government to better support growth of the industry, communities seeking to leverage their outdoor economies, and the associated conservation of natural resources.

The Office should have a finger on the pulse of the needs of Pennsylvania's outdoor economy and serve as a matchmaker with resources and networks that can help entrepreneurs grow their businesses, communities activate their outdoor economies, and Pennsylvania leverage its outdoor opportunities for economic development.

It should serve as an ombudsman to provide often missing connections, strengthening the outdoor recreation industry and economic leveraging of outdoor recreation in the state.



**Over a series of group webinars and individual conversations in late fall 2022 and winter 2023, REC helped to shape a set of recommendations around three strategic focus areas they saw were underdeveloped in Commonwealth policy and programs:**

- **Building Capacity in the Outdoor Industry**
- **Building Community and Economic Development Capacity**
- **Building Capacity for Inclusive and Equitable Wellbeing through the Outdoors**

It was these strategies and a set of goals that formed the framework for feedback at nine regional stakeholder meetings in spring 2023.





## Regional Stakeholder Meetings

**To help determine what Pennsylvania’s outdoor economy needs from state and federal government, you must ask the people and organizations that are involved in and benefit from the outdoors.**

Armed with the framework of recommendations from the REC, the director and coalition members traveled the state in March and April to solicit feedback and ideas from a wide group of individuals and organizations.

**More than 500 Pennsylvanians attended half-day sessions in York, Philadelphia, Easton, Warren, Williamsport, Scranton, Pittsburgh, Johnstown, and Erie.**

At each meeting following an introductory orientation, participants heard from a panel of local leaders who were directly involved in the outdoor economy: manufacturers and retailers of outdoor gear, outdoor service providers, economic developers, municipal and county government officials, community and social service organizations, and recreation stewardship groups.

# What We Heard

**While the interests varied widely among the locations and participants, many similar needs surfaced:**

- Economic development needs to be directed by and in service to the interests of local communities.
- Outdoor businesses need greater visibility as productive and prosperous parts of Pennsylvania’s economy.
- Regulation and permitting processes for outdoor businesses within Pennsylvania are dispersed across government and often confusing and redundant.
- All Pennsylvanians need to both be and feel welcome in our outdoor recreation system.
- Local leaders in business, government, and the non-profit sector want to be better equipped to advocate for the outdoor economy and what it can do for their communities.
- Greater coordination and strategic collaboration are needed both among localities at the regional level and among national, state, and local levels.
- Pennsylvania’s outdoor recreation system needs to embrace change with a vision toward satisfying the future needs of a rapidly changing Commonwealth.

Participants were asked to provide immediate reactions to information that was shared through interactive polling. This polling tells a story of overwhelming stakeholder desire for greater attention paid to developing Pennsylvania's outdoor economy:

- **84%** of responding meeting attendees thought development of PA's outdoor economy has the highest potential to improve the health, wellbeing, sustainability, resilience, vitality, and economic development of their communities.
- **79%** of respondents have yet to really engage in developing their outdoor economies.
- **84%** of respondents want the help of a Pennsylvania Office of Outdoor Recreation to activate outdoor-based economic development in their communities.
- This initial feedback was corroborated by the stakeholders in an online survey they were encouraged to take after the meeting. Following the meetings, **93%** of responding stakeholders had a better understanding of what an outdoor economy is and how an office of outdoor recreation is needed to support the outdoor industry. This understanding was accompanied by the vast majority of stakeholders both knowing their communities would benefit from an office of outdoor recreation (**91%**) and intending to use its services (**88%**).



**84%** think development of PA's outdoor economy can improve their communities.

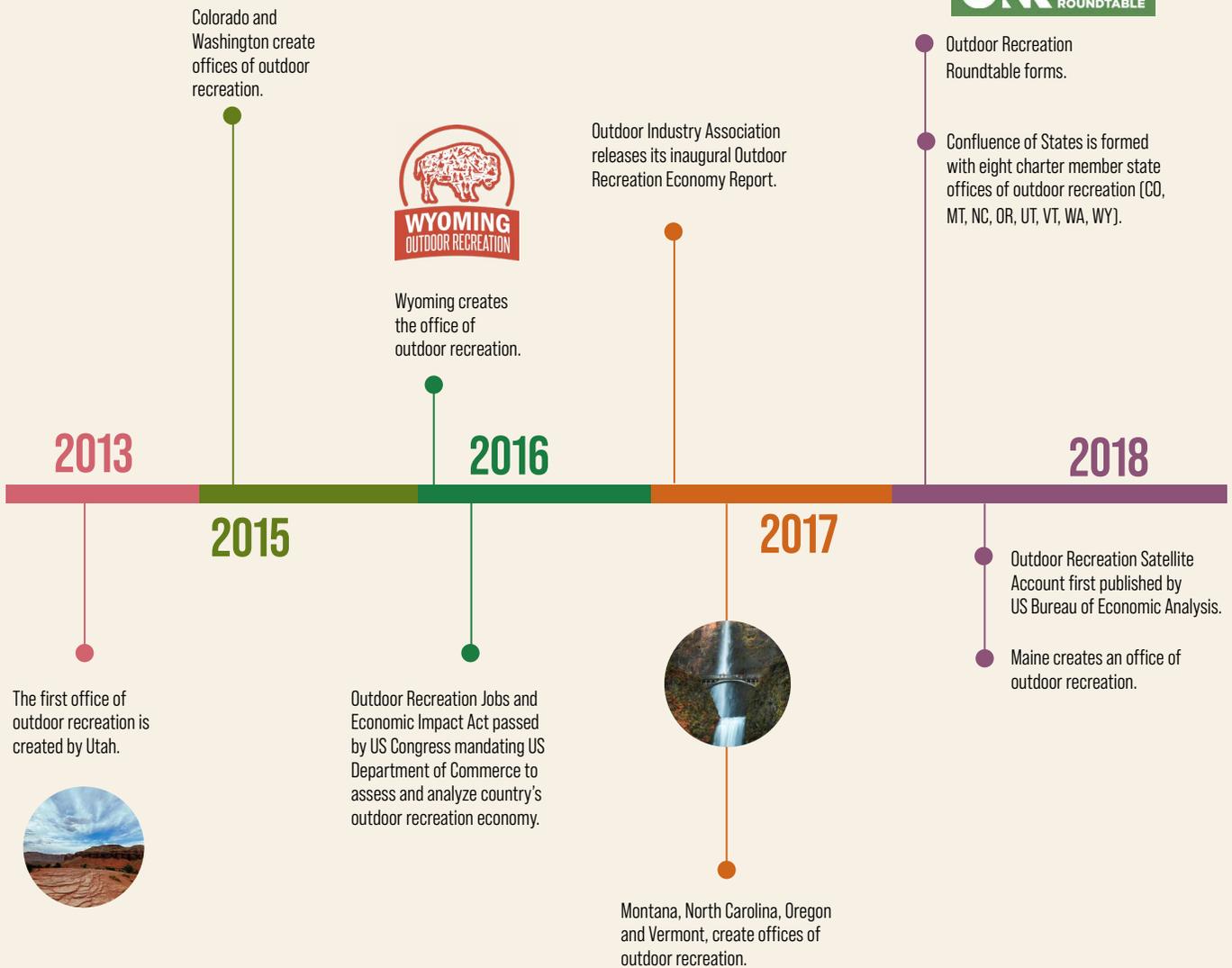


## Outdoor Recreation

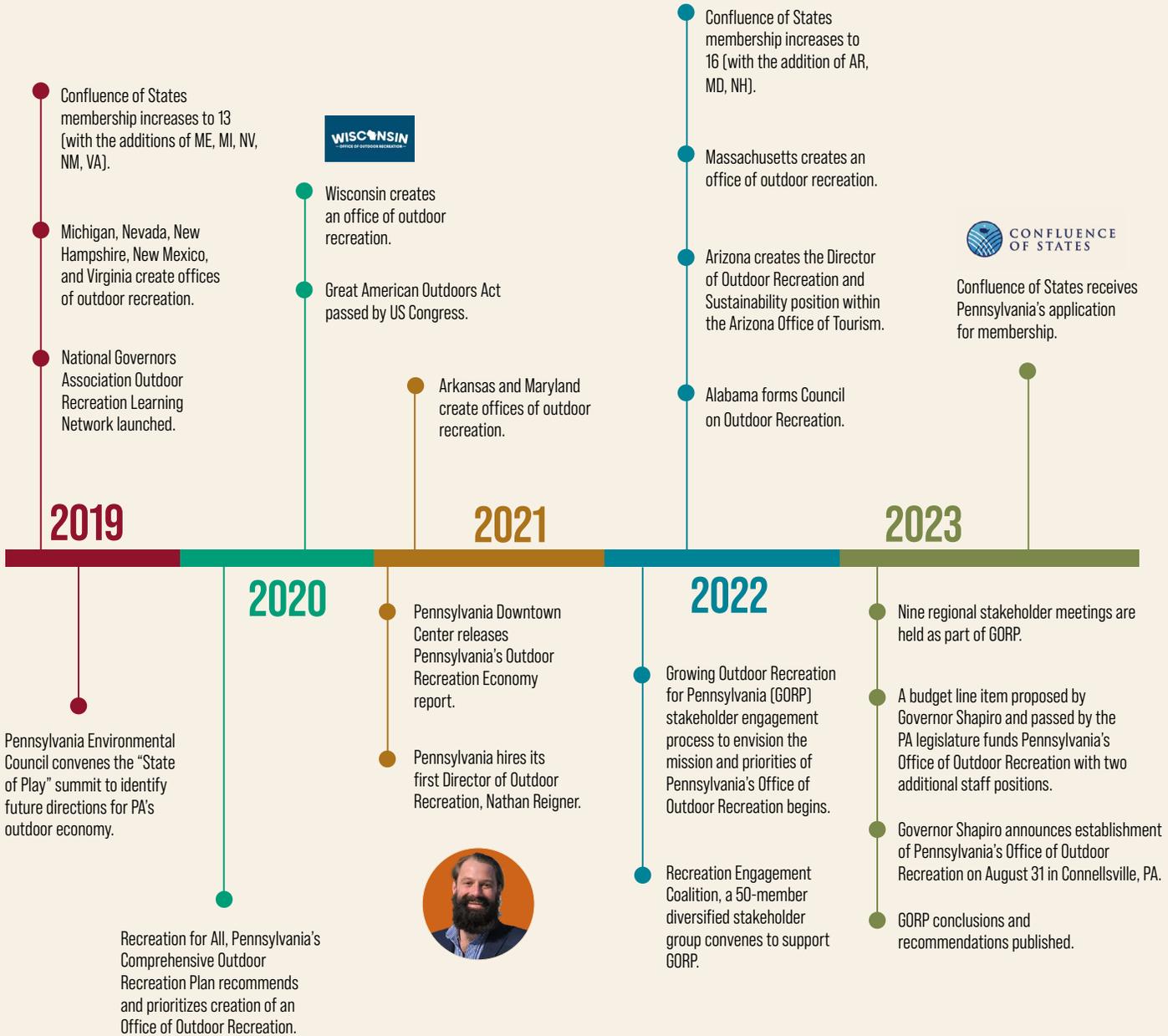
On August 31, 2023, Governor Josh Shapiro announced creation of Pennsylvania's Office of Outdoor Recreation. Housed within DCNR, the Office is a collaboration between its home department and the Department of Community and Economic Development, as well as other Commonwealth agencies including the departments of Transportation, Health, Labor and Industry, and others.

**The remainder of this report outlines the strategic vision for Pennsylvania's Office of Outdoor Recreation as developed by the GORP process.**

# A Decade of Momentum



# National Movement



# Pennsylvania Movement



# A Vision for Pennsylvania's Office of Outdoor Recreation

The Growing Outdoor Recreation for Pennsylvania stakeholder engagement process solidified a set of recommendations for the mission, foundational pillars, mode of operation, and strategic priority areas for Pennsylvania's Office of Outdoor Recreation.

## Mission

The mission of Pennsylvania's Office of Outdoor Recreation is to unite, grow, and strengthen Pennsylvania's outdoor economy to expand and ensure the benefits of outdoor recreation are realized by all Pennsylvanians as individuals, communities, and a Commonwealth.

We recognize that these benefits include direct economic productivity, vibrant and attractive communities, health and happiness, and environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

## Foundational Pillars

Foundational pillars hold up and empower the Office's work to unite, grow, and strengthen Pennsylvania's outdoor economy. In turn, Pennsylvania's Office of Outdoor Recreation is a leader in:

- Conservation and stewardship of the recreational resources and experiences that feed our outdoor economy
- Inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility for all Pennsylvanians to the outdoors and outdoor economy
- Economic and recreational development that invests in outdoor recreation as a primary and necessary component of the Commonwealth's economic infrastructure
- Health and wellbeing of individuals and communities through outdoor recreation places and participation
- Professional capacity and knowledge building to fully activate our outdoor economy



## Office Function

At its root, the Office of Outdoor Recreation serves as an ombudsman for Pennsylvania's outdoor industry, a matchmaker within our outdoor economy, an expert on and champion of outdoor recreation, and a visionary helping to elevate and move Pennsylvania's outdoor economy into the future.

Pennsylvania's Office of Outdoor Recreation will work as a coordinating and synergizing entity:

- bringing together state agencies, businesses, communities, and advocates
- representing Pennsylvania's needs in national policy and funding
- tracking and analyzing trends, legislation, policy, and economic impacts
- communicating the power of outdoor recreation to improve Pennsylvanians' lives

The Office's work will be partnership-based, directed at empowering organizations within and outside of government, and growing our collective capacity to activate the Commonwealth's outdoor economy.





## Strategic Priority Areas

Stakeholder input, analysis of existing organizations and programs within Pennsylvania, and review of efforts underway in states that have already established offices of outdoor recreation recommends three strategic priority areas of focus for the Office. These strategic priority areas address gaps in needed capacity within Pennsylvania's current outdoor economy and reinforce each other to connect the dots between natural resource conservation, outdoor recreation, and broad-based community and economic development.

Many of the potential action items in the following pages will be carried forward by partnerships and external initiatives guided and empowered, but not directly implemented, by the Office. The scope of work listed in the potential action items represent a wide range of ideas put forward through the GORP process, not all of which will be incorporated into the initial or ongoing workplans of the Office. They are presented comprehensively here to illustrate the breadth and diversity of ways Pennsylvania's outdoor economy can be supported by the Office.

## Strategic Priority: Build Capacity within Pennsylvania's Outdoor Industry

In comparison to other industries of its size and impact in Pennsylvania, the outdoor industry is underdeveloped, undercoordinated, and under recognized as a sector of our economy. The Office will help foster organization within the outdoor industry, understanding and empowering our outdoor workforce, and more effectively communicating its value to Pennsylvania's economic competitiveness, quality of life, and sense of place.

### ORGANIZE THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY

- Support the formation of an outdoor business alliance through which the outdoor industry can organize.
- Develop outdoor innovation hubs or clusters to achieve critical mass and synergy across production and value chains.
- Develop and maintain databases of Pennsylvania's outdoor businesses and foster communication and collaboration among them.
- Hold business pitch contests, incubator/hack events, and support 'leaps' in business growth.
- Identify gaps in Pennsylvania's outdoor industry and coordinate programs to support filling them.
- Expand access to capital and technical supports for outdoor businesses.
- Develop 'one-stop' and decision-tree resources to help outdoor businesses with permitting, regulations, access to entrepreneurship supports, and reduction of up-front barriers to participation in the outdoor economy.
- Support small business and local competitiveness in the outdoor economy.

### DEVELOP THE OUTDOOR WORKFORCE

- Conduct a study of Pennsylvania's current outdoor workforce, needs for the future, and pathways to satisfying workforce needs.
- Support outdoor industry apprenticeship and mentorship programs.
- Foster connections between outdoor employers and educational institutions to enhance both professionalization and equitable inclusion in the outdoor workforce.
- Expand outdoor recreation knowledge within related professions (e.g., economic development, planning and engineering, conservation, health care) through professional development, continuing education, and bootcamp modules.
- Elevate and stabilize compensation, benefits, working conditions, and professional status of outdoor workers, especially those in seasonal, service, and field-based positions.
- Leverage outdoor workforce as a tool for retaining and attracting competitive workers in both urban and rural areas.



“

I am very excited to see our state moving in this direction. Thank you for connecting with the user groups and outdoor community as a whole.

JOE FORTE, PALMERTON, EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA ALLIANCE OF CLIMBERS

## COMMUNICATE THE VALUE OF THE OUTDOORS

- Analyze and publicize the benefits of outdoor recreation, with particular focus on its positive economic impacts, as well as the returns generated by investment in Pennsylvania's outdoor economy.
- Develop toolkits to help local leaders communicate the benefits of and advocate for investments in outdoor-based economic development.
- Work with outdoor-specific and general media and content producers to showcase Pennsylvania's outdoor experiences and communities.
- Coordinate and promote publication of outdoor information resources (e.g., maps, guides, routes) to facilitate outdoor experiences.
- Collaborate with tourism promoters to market and manage the full diversity of Pennsylvania's outdoor experiences.
- Explore quality badge or signature experience programs to promote high quality experiences and incentivize best management practices.
- Cultivate and empower a network of outdoor influencers including local leaders and creative content producers.
- Track, encourage coordination and diversity among, and support large-scale outdoor recreation events.

“

We have to understand the benefit outdoor recreation has to our wellbeing, and then have to experience that feeling firsthand. Bringing that education to communities that don't have easy access to nature is important.”

DEVIN WINAND, SHANK'S MARE OUTFITTERS,  
HELLAM

## Strategic Priority: Build Community and Economic Development Capacity

Ready access to high-quality outdoor recreation and close connections between outdoor assets and community amenities are among the most essential ingredients for successful economic development. They are also the focus of unprecedented levels of interest and resources from government and non-governmental funding and policy institutions. While Pennsylvania communities are poised to realize economic and community benefits associated with the outdoor economy, many lack critical programmatic, technical, and human resource capacity. The Office will help to steer policy and funding downstream in ways that are relevant to Pennsylvania communities while expanding local and regional capacity to capitalize on funding and policy opportunities.

## STEER POLICY AND FUNDING FOR PENNSYLVANIA'S BENEFIT

- Engage national and Pennsylvania funding and policy partners to build better understanding of Pennsylvania's needs and circumstances.
- Represent Pennsylvania and our outdoor economy in national outdoor fora (e.g., Confluence, ORLN, OIA, ORR), including signing the Confluence Accords.
- Track, connect, and communicate lessons from strategic, large, or innovative outdoor development projects.



- Engage with and educate Pennsylvania’s federal and state legislators and Pennsylvania’s executive leadership on the positive impacts and development needs of the Commonwealth’s outdoor economy.
- Strengthen and grow policy, planning, data, and communication connections between economic development, outdoor recreation, and natural resource conservation.
- Map, encourage streamlining of, and facilitate access to pathways to outdoor-based community and economic development in Pennsylvania.
- Harmonize, expand, and document the success of outdoor-related placemaking programs (e.g., outdoor towns, trail town, river towns, nature-based place making).
- Help to address strategic barriers to sustainable recreation infrastructure and access including maintenance funding, stewardship, connectivity, and liability protection.
- Expand conventional understanding of outdoor economies to be inclusive of contemporary Pennsylvania needs and desires, especially for under-resourced and underserved communities.

#### **CAPITALIZE ON FUNDING AND POLICY OPPORTUNITIES**

- Engage local and regional outdoor, economic, and community developers to expand understanding of funding and policy opportunities at the national and state levels.
- Expand staffing and technical capacity in local and regional community and economic development structures to facilitate more full use of outdoor economy opportunities.
- Network community, economic, and recreation developers for plans and projects at regional and statewide levels.
- Encourage collaboration among outdoor, arts, cultural, health, and educational organizations in communities with joint projects, events, program, and communications.
- Collect and make publicly available localized data and case studies on outdoor economic impact, participation, and use.
- Support integration of outdoor and community development projects that connect outdoor assets (e.g., trails, water access, recreation areas) with community and economic assets (e.g., food and beverage, lodging, retail, downtowns).
- Encourage development of assets and services that are used and appreciated by both local residents and visitors.

“Provide resources to interested community members, leaders, and business representatives to help in raising awareness and access to funds/funding in each specific area.”

ANTHONY PERINO, ERIE, TOM RIDGE  
ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER FOUNDATION



“We need ways to make the outdoors accessible to all, regardless of economic status and inherent knowledge. We need to make the outdoors appealing to folks with little to no outdoor experience and instill a sense of confidence when first beginning to explore outdoor resources.”

SARAH HARRIS, WILKES BARRE,  
VISIT LUZERNE COUNTY

## Strategic Priority: Build Capacity for Inclusive and Equitable Wellbeing through the Outdoors

Engagement with the outdoors is good for all Pennsylvanians and Pennsylvania communities, however access to and comfort with the outdoors is not always inclusive or equitable. These exclusions result from inequitable distribution of resources (e.g., money, knowledge, transportation, time, technology), biases within our recreation system, and rich cultural diversification within the Commonwealth. These forces influence the ability of today’s Pennsylvanians and future generations to fully benefit from the outdoors. The Office should expand inclusivity and mitigate inequity in the outdoors with empowerment and analytical programs targeted at serving all Pennsylvanians now while preparing an inclusive and equitable recreation system for the future.

### EMPOWER ALL PENNSYLVANIANS TO BENEFIT FROM THE OUTDOORS

- Establish, direct, and promote an outdoor equity fund to increase participation in the outdoor economy by underserved communities.
- Facilitate statewide networks to connect and empower members of historically underserved populations and drive inclusivity in outdoor planning and development.
- Promote strategic coordination among health equity, environmental justice, and creative communities to address social and environmental issues in high-need Pennsylvania communities and improve quality of life in under-resourced and underserved communities.
- Develop and support programs that empower existing community leaders to expand their capacity for outdoor engagement.
- Expand universal access to the outdoors through asset, infrastructure, information, and program development.
- Promote connectivity among recreation assets (e.g., trails, greenspaces, water access) and communities, particularly those that are underserved.
- Support events, programs, and resources to expand diversity, emphasize inclusiveness, and address inequity in access to outdoor spaces and activities.
- Highlight and encourage development and use of inclusive outdoor opportunities.
- Document and communicate, through data and case studies, the connections between outdoor development and participation and individual and community wellbeing.

## PREPARE THE OUTDOORS FOR PENNSYLVANIA'S FUTURE

- Develop 'on-ramps' for individuals, including students, and organizations to develop toward leadership roles in Pennsylvania's future outdoor economy and recreation system.
- Analyze, communicate about, and advance mitigation strategies for undesirable consequences of outdoor economic development (e.g., cost of living increases, residential displacement, loss of local control and local business competitiveness, loss of public access to land and waters).
- Develop and elevate outdoor development approaches that are inclusive, innovative, and future-oriented.
- Build outdoor recreation and the outdoor economy into state, regional, and local long-term plans.
- Develop and establish ongoing collaborations to document and communicate the connections among outdoor recreation, environmental quality, and public health.
- Advance a long-term understanding of PA's outdoor needs and incorporate it into planning and development efforts.



## Ongoing Work of Pennsylvania's Office of Outdoor Recreation

In addition to its activities focused on accomplishment of the above strategic priority areas, the Office will conduct ongoing, operational work to build both the Office's and Commonwealth's capacity to unite, grow, and strengthen our outdoor economy. Elements of this ongoing operational work include:

- Serve as an ombuds office and initial point of contact within Commonwealth government for outdoor interests and issues.
- Track, aggregate, and communicate outdoor recreation and outdoor economy data.
- Track, inform, and coordinate outdoor recreation and outdoor economy-related policy and legislation.
- Track and analyze outdoor recreation trends for incorporation into policy, programming, and communications.
- Advise Pennsylvania's Governor and Commonwealth leadership on outdoor issues and opportunities.
- Communicate the benefits of outdoor recreation and power of the outdoor economy through presentations, articles, social media, interviews, etc.
- Convene annual outdoor economy gatherings including statewide outdoor economy summits, stakeholder listening sessions, and networking events.
- Convene thematic or geographic gatherings to address specific issues or advance opportunistic initiatives.
- Coordinate and facilitate communication among members of the outdoor economy ecosystem including outdoor recreation managers, developers, promoters, and users.
- Organize and conduct events that highlight Pennsylvania's outdoor opportunities and their benefits.
- Amplify communication around Pennsylvania's outdoor experiences and events.

# The Path Ahead – From Vision to Impact

**Pennsylvania’s Office of Outdoor Recreation has been established, and the GORP stakeholder process created a coherent and structured vision for its scope, mission, and priorities. Putting this vision into action and ultimately realizing its impact is the work that lies ahead. The next steps in this process lie both within the Commonwealth and nationally.**

Within the Commonwealth at the strategic level, the Office will advance programs and projects in the first years of its collaborative work to advance goals of each of the strategic priority areas. Envisioned initial early actions include:

- Development of an outdoor business alliance or advocacy organization to represent Pennsylvania’s outdoor industry and work in partnership with the Office of Outdoor Recreation.
- Systematic review of Commonwealth policies and programs for alignments between strategic priorities of the Office and those of Commonwealth agencies and programs.
- Study of Pennsylvania’s outdoor workforce to understand the current state of Pennsylvania’s outdoor jobs, needs for the future, and pathways for development.
- Comprehensive and localized outdoor economic impact study with plans for periodic updates.
- Engagement with statewide economic development strategy and planning to ensure that the contributions of the outdoors to economic and community development are fully activated.
- Expansion of regional and local capacity for outdoor-empowered economic development through pilot staffing, technical support, and resource sharing programs.
- Preparation of an outdoor equity fund to expand participation in Pennsylvania’s outdoor economy by under-represented and underserved communities.
- Identification of opportunities for outdoor recreation to contribute to long-term strategies and plans in the Commonwealth.

**“In our modern society people get bored and lose interest easily. There is no shortage of new experiences and activities the outdoors can provide. This is why it could be the solution for helping our communities re-discover the importance of outdoor recreation for both economic and health purposes.”**

**Eric Middleton  
Scranton, Lackawanna County**





It is important that the Office respond to the calls from nearly all stakeholders for frequent and direct engagement at the operational level. This engagement must be bi-directional, with the Office both seeking ever-better understandings of industry and community needs and communicating out about pathways toward a stronger and more productive outdoor economy in Pennsylvania. Initial engagement efforts of the Office may include:

- An outdoor economy summit that brings together businesses, government representatives, and partner organizations from across the Commonwealth.
- Development and implementation of an engagement strategy including social and traditional media, webinars, newsletters, and the like.
- Biennial community-based listening sessions to gather input about, source needs for, and assess the impact of Pennsylvania's outdoor economy.
- Tracking, analysis, and communication of data, trends, and emerging issues relevant to Pennsylvania's outdoor economy and its contribution to Commonwealth competitiveness.



The Office of Outdoor Recreation is also a tool for exerting leadership at the national level. National leadership in outdoor recreation begins with Pennsylvania's joining the Confluence of States and signing the Confluence Accords. This organization and their commitment to collaborative growth of outdoor economies will connect Pennsylvania with a national network of industry and government leaders, bringing additional resources to the Commonwealth and entering our voice into national policymaking and program development.

# Recreation Engagement Coalition

The following table lists members of the Recreation Engagement Coalition. This diverse group of outdoor leaders and professionals was asked to voluntarily participate in in-person and virtual workshops throughout the fall of 2022 and winter and spring of 2023. These workshops, in combination with the regional stakeholder meetings, formed the core of the GORP stakeholder engagement process and the foundation for the vision for Pennsylvania’s Office of Outdoor Recreation articulated in this report. We thank them sincerely.

Kendy Alvarez	Mayor, Lewisburg, PA	Mike Hermann	Purple Lizard Maps
Mariana Bergerson	US Fish and Wildlife Service, John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge	Meredith Hill*	PA Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources
Bradley Bechtel	PA Game Commission	Chris Kaag	IM ABLE Foundation
McKenzie Blair	Organic Snack Company	Bob Kirchner	St. Marys Area Snowmobile Association
Matt Blair	Organic Snack Company		
Curan Bonham	Richard King Mellon Foundation	Mary Kolessar	Discover NEPA
Mandy Book*	PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development	Brook Lenker	Keystone Trails Association
Nathan Boon	William Penn Foundation	Carrie Lepore*	PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development
Bryan Burhans	PA Game Commission	Randy LoBasso	AARP
Ann Butler	Youth representative	Andy Loza	WeConservePA
Silas Chamberlin*	York County Economic Alliance	Steve McKnight*	PA Economic Development Association
Brad Clemenson	Johnstown, PA		
Craig Colistra	Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation	Trish Meek	PA Dept. of Transportation
Jim Decker	Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry	Marci Mowery*	PA Parks and Forests Foundation
Ta Enos	PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship	Julie Pasi3n	Latino Outdoors Philadelphia
Jason Fink	Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce	Abbi Peters	PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship
Julie Fitzpatrick	PA Downtown Center	Lori Phillips	PA Ski Area Association
Sierra Fogal	Pocono Whitewater	David Saunders*	PA Dept. of Health
Neil Fowler*	PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development	Elaine Schaefer	Schuylkill River Greenways
Carla Fox	Public Lands	Rob Shipp	The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania
Kim Garris	PA Fish and Boat Commission	Marcus Shoffner	Outdoor Inclusion Coalition
Nick Gilson	Gilson Snow	Ed Stoddard	Happy Valley Adventure Bureau
Lamar Gore	US Fish and Wildlife Service, John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge	Michelle Tarquino	PA Dept. of Transportation
Chris Hennessey	Backcountry Hunters and Anglers	John Walliser*	PA Environmental Council
Tim Herd	PA Recreation and Park Society	Kim Wheeler	SEDA-COG
		Steve Wood	Public Lands
		Davitt Woodwell*	PA Environmental Council
		Laurie Zierer	PA Humanities Council

\*Individuals denoted with an asterisk (\*) were members of the REC’s Core Strategy Team, a small group of individuals who provided strategic guidance to the GORP process.



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