



Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism  
and Hospitality Initiative (WORTH)

# WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION REPORT



2023

# A NOTE FROM THE WYOMING OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION



More people are visiting and recreating in Wyoming's open spaces than ever before. Our state and national parks, ski areas, trailheads, campgrounds, forests, and prairies are busy.

That has created real economic benefits—catalogued in this report—in the form of increased spending at outdoor recreation related businesses, new visitors to our public lands, and sustainable growth in communities across Wyoming. Also, we've seen these benefits increase quality of life and health and wellness for Wyoming's citizens. Most importantly we understand that with careful research, design, development, and implementation, we can grow outdoor recreation while maintaining the spirit of Wyoming that its residents and visitors cherish.

I'd like to extend my gratitude to our collaborators at the University of Wyoming's Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism, and Hospitality (WORTH) Initiative and beyond. A special thanks to Dr. Dan McCoy, Dr. Mary Katherine Scott, and Jessica Perry, whose research, creative design, and thoughtfulness were instrumental in the development of this report and telling of this story.

Here at the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, we're proud that our office has been able to contribute to the state's economy by providing memorable recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities and experiences that help improve communities and enrich lives. We're confident that through grassroots community-driven development, we can grow this sector of the economy and provide positive impacts to the people of Wyoming and its visitors for generations to come.

Please enjoy this report and join us as we celebrate our collective accomplishments.



Sincerely,

Patrick Harrington  
*Manager, Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation*

Learn more at:  
<https://wyooutdoorrecreation.wyo.gov>

## OUR MISSION



### EDUCATE

Our goal is to **educate** visitors and residents on how to recreate responsibly.



### DISPERSE

We work to develop infrastructure to **disperse** people into Wyoming's smaller communities.



### CONCENTRATE

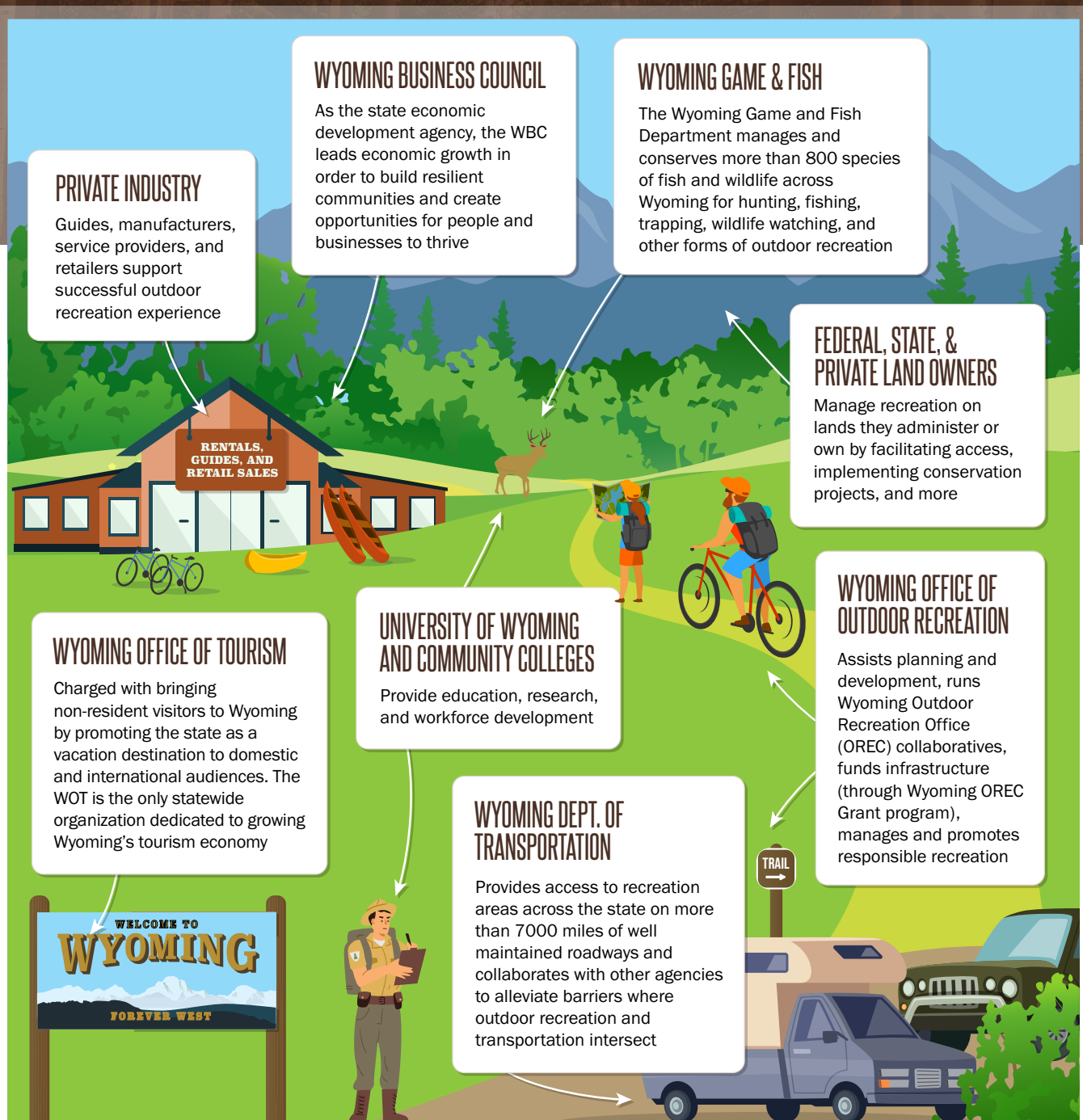
Our efforts **concentrate** outdoor users into areas with room to grow, minimizing impacts to wildlife, industry, and private land owners.



# WHAT IS OUTDOOR RECREATION? IT'S MORE THAN JUST A BIKE RIDE...

In the US, outdoor recreation includes activities pursued outdoors and for personal pleasure, often requiring some level of intentional physical exertion.<sup>1</sup> Camping, fishing, hiking, hunting, skiing, rock climbing, off-roading, wildlife watching...these are just some of the activities that draw Wyoming residents and non-residents alike to the beautiful greenspaces, trails, and other nature-based environments that make this state truly a spectacular place to explore.

## THE OUTDOOR RECREATION WORLD IS COMPLICATED AND INTERCONNECTED.

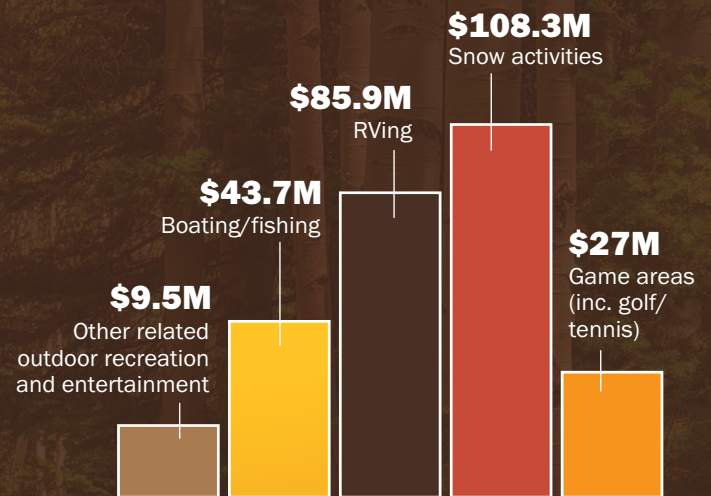


# OUTDOOR RECREATION: A GROWING ECONOMY IN WYOMING

Wyoming's outdoor recreation sector has become a major player in statewide economic growth and diversification.

In 2021, outdoor recreation in Wyoming contributed \$1.5 billion, or 3.6 percent, to the state's GDP, whereas recreation in neighboring states Colorado and Utah accounted for just 2.7 percent of their respective GDPs.<sup>5</sup> Visitors spent \$4.3 billion dollars while traveling and recreating in Wyoming, which produced \$259.2 million in travel-related tax revenue, a 60 percent increase from 2020 numbers. What's more, approximately 15,285 jobs directly supported Wyoming's outdoor recreation industry.<sup>5</sup>

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF SELECTED OUTDOOR INDUSTRIES TO WYOMING'S GDP IN 2021



## THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES IN WYOMING



Off-road vehicles and snowmobiling attract huge audiences and generate **\$255 million** and **\$365 million**, respectively, in economic activity for Wyoming each year.<sup>40, 41</sup>



Wyoming snowmobile users spend an average of **\$98 per day** and non-residents spend **\$160 per day**. Wyoming has **2,585** miles of snowmobile trails.<sup>6, 7</sup>



Almost half of the trails within Wyoming allow equestrian use. This contributes over **\$60 million** annually to the state's GDP.<sup>6, 10</sup>



There are **2,160** hiking trails in Wyoming contributing over **\$19 million** to the state's GDP. All trail users in Wyoming account for **\$404.9 million** in direct economic profit.<sup>6, 10</sup>



Wyoming is home to world-class rock climbing experiences. In Lander alone, rock climbing generates **\$4.5 million** in visitor expenditures and **51 jobs** annually.<sup>39</sup>



In 2020, hunting and fishing license sales generated **\$33.8 million**. Hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers bring around **\$1 billion** into the state each year.<sup>8, 9</sup>



A third of the trails in Wyoming allow for bicycle use. Bicycling contributes **\$2.2 million** to the state's annual GDP.<sup>6, 10</sup>



Wyoming attracts over **500,000** recreationists for wildlife viewing annually.<sup>12</sup>



Snow activities like skiing and snowshoeing contribute over **\$108 million** in estimated GDP.<sup>10</sup>



RVing contributed over **\$85 million** to the state's GDP in 2021. The state has approximately **370** RV parks and campgrounds.<sup>10, 11</sup>



“

The vast outdoor recreation opportunities in Wyoming, specifically in and around Teton County, are one of the reasons we are able to attract our workforce. We are then able to retain our highly skilled employees by offering competitive wages, employee housing availability, and opportunities for growth and development. ”

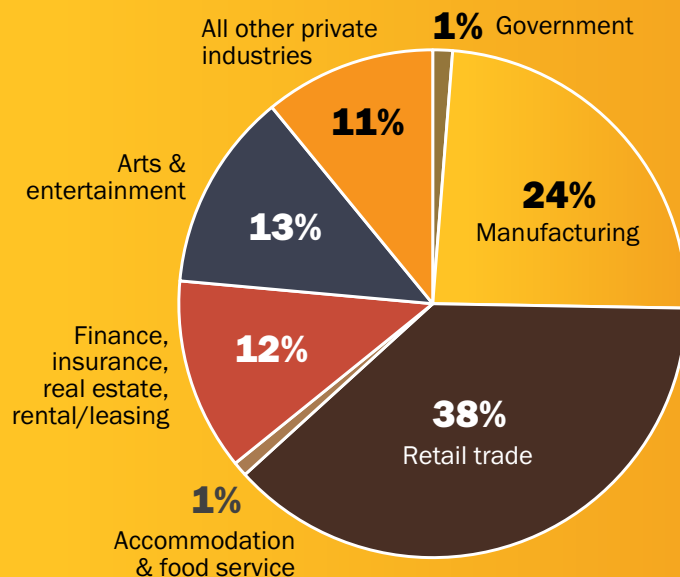
— Mary Kate Buckley, President,  
Jackson Hole Mountain Resort



## 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, to managing a gear store, or guiding for hunting and angling trips. A broad retail and service economy is essential for a vibrant outdoor recreation industry, attracting visitors, and retaining highly qualified workers.

### DISTRIBUTION OF WYOMING'S 15,286 JOBS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION IN 2021



# WYOMING: RECREATION LIKE NO OTHER



Wyoming is loved for its wide-open spaces, diverse wildlife, mountain landscapes, and other spectacular natural features. Some of the best outdoor recreation opportunities take advantage of unique geography and rely on collaboration between federal, state, and private land owners to maintain thousands of miles of scenic and recreational trails and waterways.

## DID YOU KNOW?



Wyoming is the 10th largest state and 48 percent is federal public land. The Bureau of Land Management manages 17.8 million acres and the US Forest Service manages 9.3 million acres of land. These lands hold approximately **9,605 miles of hiking trails**.<sup>7, 13</sup>



Wyoming has **173 natural hot springs**, the majority of which lie within Yellowstone.<sup>14, 15</sup> Others, like those in Saratoga, are popular sites to soak year round.



**Forests cover 17 percent or 10.5 million acres of Wyoming**, creating ample opportunities for hikers, campers, hunters, and other recreationists.<sup>16</sup>



Wyoming is home to the **FIRST** national park (Yellowstone), national monument (Devils Tower), and national forest (Shoshone) in the US.



Wyoming is home to a **large section of the Rocky Mountains**. For climbers, trail runners, mountain bikers, skiers and other thrill seekers, these mountains are second to none.<sup>17</sup>



Wyoming has over **108,000 miles of rivers**, of which 408 miles are designated as wild and scenic. These rivers are perfect for both amateur and advanced anglers, as well as wildlife watchers.<sup>18</sup>



Wyoming has the **largest, most intact sagebrush landscape** in the West and the largest herds of pronghorn. Bird-watchers, equestrians, hunters, and ORV drivers take advantage of what this landscape affords.



**Yellowstone National**

**Park:** Yellowstone National Park attracts an average of 4.1 million visitors annually generating \$498.8 million to local communities.<sup>19, 20</sup>

**Bighorns:** The nearly 192,000-acre Bighorn National Forest offers visitors awe-inspiring vistas and over 1,200 miles of trails to explore.<sup>27</sup>

**North Platte River:** A paradise for anglers, the North Platte River Basin covers 22,000 square miles, or 25 percent of Wyoming. It fills Seminole, Pathfinder, Glendo, Guernsey, and other reservoirs that attract watersport enthusiasts.<sup>22</sup>

**Devils Tower:** Devils Tower is the nation's first national monument and draws over 440,000 visitors annually, generating \$26 million to benefit nearby communities.<sup>26</sup>

**Grand Teton National**

**Park:** Around 3.3 million visitors come to Grand Teton National Park each year for a range of outdoor recreation activities. This park supports over 7,000 jobs in the local area.<sup>20, 21</sup>

**Wind River Range:**

The Wind River Mountains offer some of the best backpacking, fishing, climbing, and hunting. They are home to Gannett Peak, the highest point in Wyoming at 13,804 feet.<sup>24, 25</sup>

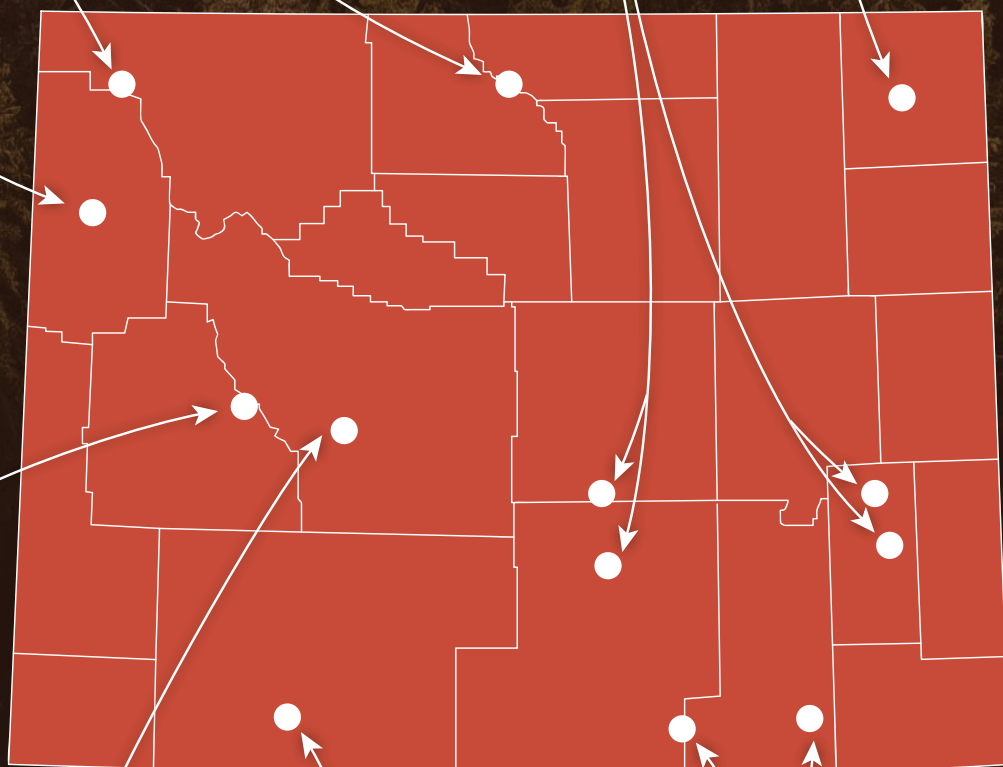
**Lander/Sinks Canyon:** Lander is home to the International Climber's Festival and the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). Just outside of Lander is Sinks Canyon, which offers world-class climbing routes and unique fishing spots along the Popo Agie River.<sup>24, 25</sup>

**Flaming Gorge National**

**Recreation Area:** Flaming Gorge Dam and Reservoir provides critical management for the Colorado River. It is also an economic provider to Sweetwater County and to the state bringing in over 2.5 million visitors each year.<sup>23</sup>

**Medicine Bow National**

**Forest:** At over 2.9 million acres, the Medicine Bow National Forests provides a wide variety of recreation opportunities such as snowmobiling, fishing, hunting, hiking, and rock climbing.<sup>29</sup>



...AND SO MUCH MORE!





## CONSERVING WYOMING'S GREAT OUTDOORS: RESPONSIBLE RECREATION CAMPAIGNS

Never has it been more important to dedicate resources to ensuring outdoor spaces are protected. National, state, and regional campaigns help to do this by educating users and visitors on best practices in responsible recreation. The following are some examples of these campaigns and their broad reach.

### RECREATE RESPONSIBLY COALITION

What started as a hashtag on social media (#recreateresponsibly) during the COVID-19 pandemic turned into a national movement that has garnered over 5 billion impressions to date. The goal was simple: protect the natural spaces being overrun with visitors during an unprecedented time.<sup>30</sup> The coalition has created general resource materials and launched several campaigns to disseminate information to educate outdoor recreationists on issues including water and fire safety, winter recreation, Leave No Trace, and more. These campaigns have been adopted by state agencies nationwide.

### WY RESPONSIBLY

The Wyoming Office of Tourism (WOT), in partnership with the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, has embraced Recreate Responsibly and promoted their version as #WYresponsibly in its social and digital media. In summer 2022, WOT recorded over 13 million impressions (that is, times content displays on a computer, cell phone, tablet, or other device) for its #WYresponsibly campaign, resulting in approximately 55,000 clicks. As a digital and social media campaign, #WYresponsibly drives users to relevant content that will educate them on best practices in outdoor recreation.

### #WYRESPONSIBLY CAMPAIGN

In Wyoming in the summer of 2022,  
the #WYresponsibly hashtag recorded:

**13M**  
IMPRESSIONS

**55k**  
CLICKS



LEAVE NO TRACE REACHES:

**25M** PEOPLE ANNUALLY

through social, digital, and print media on the national level<sup>33</sup>

## IN WYOMING, LEAVE NO TRACE:



Currently has three place-based initiatives



Employs a statewide advocate to organize trainings, community events, and school programs<sup>34</sup>

## LEAVE NO TRACE

Leave No Trace (LNT) is a nationwide campaign that helps educate and train people on best practices while enjoying nature. Federal land-management agencies and state parks have a long relationship with LNT.<sup>31</sup> The campaign educates users about packing out litter, keeping waterways clean, making outdoor recreation spaces inclusive, protecting wildlife, avoiding trail damage, building fires safely, avoiding crowding, and other ways to behave well in the outdoors.<sup>32</sup> LNT also offers educational resources and training for youth with a focus on stewardship and sustainability.

## TREAD LIGHTLY!

Tread Lightly! is a national organization that advocates ethical behavior in outdoor recreation to instill good stewardship among all users. Their educational programs, trainings, and resource materials cover best practices for a broad range of land- and water-based outdoor activities, recreational equipment, and motorized and non-motorized vehicles. Their impact has been far-reaching. During 2021-22, Tread Lightly! volunteers removed more than 33,000 pounds of trash from public lands. In addition, the campaign recorded over 39 million impressions of its social and digital media content, and 12,147 new or renewing members signed on to support the cause.<sup>28</sup>



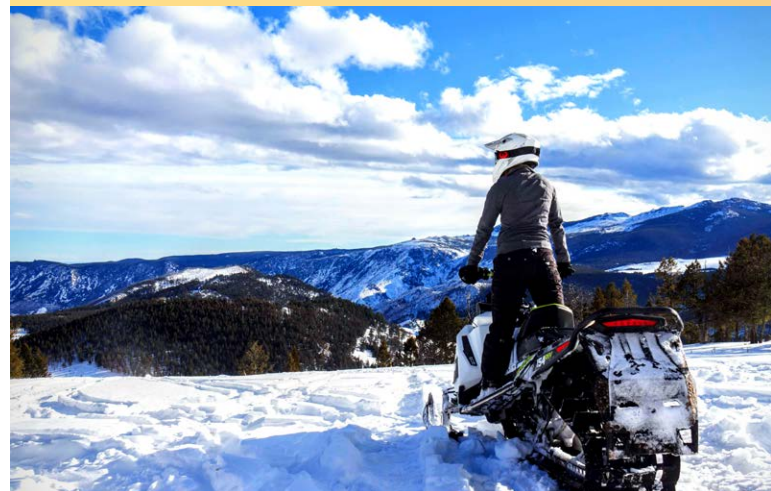
## THE COWBOY CHARACTER CHALLENGE: A WYOMING TWIST

Visit Laramie has taken responsible recreation to a new level through the Cowboy Character Challenge, a fusion of Leave No Trace principles and the Cowboy Code of Ethics.<sup>35,36,37</sup> The challenge, which works closely with Laramie businesses and the Forest Service, seeks to incentivize travelers to visit lesser-known recreation areas, while being mindful of capacity at local trailheads and campgrounds. With the mantra “promote but protect,” the challenge redirects people to lower-traffic areas that can support increased visitation. In the end, Visit Laramie is offering both locals and visitors a great way to discover something new.

“

In the first year of the Cowboy Character Challenge, we saw many recreationists from across the country spread out to discover lesser-known areas far off the beaten path and an increase in midweek visitation. Our vision is to continue to grow the outdoor recreation economy in Albany County while using the Challenge as a tool to develop it in a sustainable and responsible way. ”

— Scott Larson, Executive Director, Visit Laramie, Albany County Tourism Board





# THE MANY BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION



## ECONOMIC

Outdoor recreation is a growing economy in Wyoming. In 2021, outdoor recreation in Wyoming contributed \$1.5 billion, or 3.6 percent, to the state's GDP.<sup>5</sup>



## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Having access to the outdoors lessens the risk of major diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. It also decreases stress levels, anxiety, and depression. Promoting greenspaces as desirable places to spend time and recreate can improve quality of life and reduce public health costs.<sup>2, 3</sup>



## UNIFIED COMMUNITY

The benefits of the outdoors extend beyond the individual. Communities that have access to outdoor recreation and greenspaces use these areas to organize social events and foster inclusion. Research also shows a connection between access to the outdoors and volunteerism.<sup>3</sup>



## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Outdoor recreation is good for everyone. Greater inclusivity in outdoor recreation creates a sense of belonging and promotes the outdoors as common ground. More diversity in users of the outdoors helps protect Wyoming's natural spaces for the future.<sup>38</sup>



## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND STEWARDSHIP

Outdoor education and sustainable recreation practices teach users how to care for their environment, ensuring the vitality of greenspaces for the next generation. The return on investment of protecting these areas now could potentially be 100:1.<sup>4</sup>





# SOURCES

1. Bureau of Economic Analysis: "How will outdoor recreation be defined?". Retrieved January 12, 2023, from <https://www.bea.gov/help/faq/1194>
2. Pearson, D., & Craig, T. (2014, September 28). The great outdoors? Exploring the mental health benefits of natural environments. Retrieved April 11, 2021, from [https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01178/full?source=post\\_page-](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01178/full?source=post_page-)
3. The Health and Social Benefits of Recreation. An Element of the California Outdoor Recreation Planning. Program. National Park Service. (March 2005), from, [https://www.nps.gov/goga/learn/management/upload/1536\\_ca-health\\_benefits\\_081505-2.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/goga/learn/management/upload/1536_ca-health_benefits_081505-2.pdf)
4. Role of Parks and recreation in CONSERVATION: Position Statement: National recreation and Park Association. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/role-of-parks-and-recreation-in-conservation/>
5. Bureau of Economic Analysis, annual report on Outdoor Recreation, released 9 Nov 2022. <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>
6. Community economic contributions from recreational trails usage on public lands: Implications from a comprehensive Wyoming study. (2015, March 24). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://headwaterseconomics.org/trail/45-recreational-trails-public-lands-wyoming/>
7. Wyo Parks Trails Program, (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://wyoparks.wyo.gov/index.php/home-trails>
8. Just the Facts. Department of Administration and Information: Economic Analysis Division. (2020), from, [http://eadiv.state.wy.us/Wy\\_facts/Facts2020.pdf](http://eadiv.state.wy.us/Wy_facts/Facts2020.pdf)
9. Hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing are economic drivers for Wyoming. Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/News/Hunting,-fishing-and-wildlife-viewing-are-economic>
10. Bureau of Economic Analysis. Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account (2019), from, <https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Wyoming.pdf>
11. Top 100 RV parks in Wyoming - WYOMING campground & RV park reviews. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.campgroundreviews.com/regions/wyoming>
12. Wildlife Watching in the U.S.: The Economic Impacts on National and State Economies in 2011: Addendum to the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation Report 2011-2. (2014). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://digitalmedia.fws.gov/digital/collection/document/id/1906>
13. Hunting Access summary. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Public-Access/Access-Summary>
14. Wyoming's hot springs (n.d.) from, <https://www.montanahotsprings.net/wyoming.html>
15. National Centers for Environmental Information: Thermal Springs in the U.S.. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/b4e8785f0f75464b9e08547ccf0b18d7>
16. Rocky Mountain research Station forest inventory & analysis: Wyoming: Rocky MOUNTAIN research station. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.fs.usda.gov/rmrs/interior-west-forest-inventory-analysis-wyoming>
17. Rocky Mountain System PROVINCES (U.S. National PARK SERVICE). (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.nps.gov/articles/rockies.htm>
18. National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. (n.d.) from, <https://www.rivers.gov/wyoming.php>
19. Tourism to Yellowstone Creates \$629.6 million in economic benefits. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/news/18019.htm>
20. Stats report viewer. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from [https://irma.nps.gov/STATS/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20\(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)?Park=YELL](https://irma.nps.gov/STATS/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Annual%20Park%20Recreation%20Visitation%20(1904%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year)?Park=YELL)
21. Grand Teton National PARK creates economic benefits. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.nps.gov/grte/learn/news/grand-teton-national-park-creates-economic-benefits.htm>
22. Stone, Gary. Status of North Platte River water reservoirs. University of Nebraska Lincoln: Cropwatch. (14 Feb 2017), from, <https://cropwatch.unl.edu/2017/status-north-platte-river-water-reservoirs>
23. Flaming Gorge Dam and Reservoir. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/flaming-gorge-dam-and-reservoir>
24. Lander. (2021, January 30). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://windriver.org/destinations/lander/>
25. Lander Promotional Brochure (n.d.) from, [https://www.landerwyoming.org/document\\_center/business/Lander-EDC-Brochure1.pdf](https://www.landerwyoming.org/document_center/business/Lander-EDC-Brochure1.pdf)
26. Tourism to Devils Tower National monument CREATES \$26,996,400 million in economic benefits. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.nps.gov/deto/learn/news/tourism-to-devils-tower-national-monument-creates-more-than-26-million-dollars-in-economic-benefits.htm>
27. Bighorn National Forest homepage. (n.d.), from, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/bighorn>
28. Tread Lightly! (n.d.), from, <https://treadlightly.org/about-us/>
29. Recreation. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2021, from <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recmain/mbr/recreation>
30. Recreate Responsibly Coalition (n.d.). Retrieved January 12, 2023, from <https://www.recreateresponsibly.org/mission>
31. Land Management Agency Partnership (n.d.) from, <https://lnt.org/our-work/protecting-parks/agency-partnerships/>
32. Problems we solve (n.d.), from, <https://lnt.org/why/problems-we-solve/>
33. Leave No Trace (n.d.), from, <https://lnt.org>
34. Wyoming (n.d.), from, <https://lnt.org/state/wyoming/>
35. Code of the West (n.d.), Center for Cowboy Ethics and Leadership, from, <https://cowboylethics.org/cowboy-ethics/>
36. Show Cowboy Character: Recreate Responsibly (n.d.), from, <https://www.visitlaramie.org/plan-your-visit/visitor-information/recreate-responsibly/>
37. Show your Cowboy Character (n.d.), from, <https://www.visitlaramie.org/cowboy-character-challenge/>
38. Five Ways to Make the Outdoors More Inclusive: An Action Plan for Change. Atlantic Re:think (n.d.), from, <https://www.theatlantic.com/sponsored/rei-2018/five-ways-to-make-the-outdoors-more-inclusive/3019/>
39. Study Shows Rock Climbers Bring \$4.5 Million Each Year to Lander's Economy (5 November 2022), from, <http://www.wyomingclimbers.org/economic-impact-study>
40. Wyoming Comprehensive Snowmobile Recreation Report: Summary of Key Findings. University of Wyoming, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. (2021-2021) from, <http://wyotrails.state.wy.us/research/index.aspx>
41. Wyoming Comprehensive Off-Road Vehicle Recreation Report: Summary of Key Findings. University of Wyoming, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. (2021) from, <http://wyotrails.state.wy.us/research/index.aspx>



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.*

