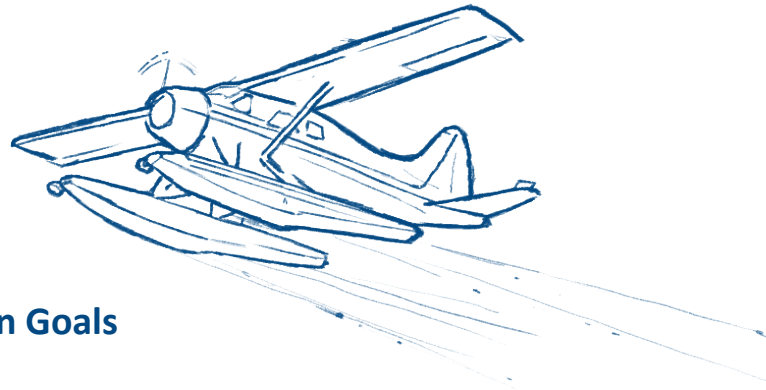


A group of birders is gathered on a wooden platform, likely a viewing blind, during a birding event. They are dressed in outdoor gear, including jackets, hats, and gloves. Many are using tripods with long lenses, and some are using binoculars. The background shows a line of evergreen trees under an overcast sky. The text "CHAPTER 4 STATEWIDE OUTDOOR RECREATION GOALS" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

CHAPTER 4

STATEWIDE OUTDOOR RECREATION GOALS



CHAPTER 4

Statewide Outdoor Recreation Goals

Over the course of 2021 and 2022, the Statewide Advisory Group (SWAG) helped formulate an emerging vision for outdoor recreation in Alaska by guiding the development of seven statewide goals.

GOAL 1: Alaska Life Outdoors

GOAL 2: Economic Development

GOAL 3: Workforce Development

GOAL 4: Public Health and Wellness

GOAL 5: Growth and Stewardship

GOAL 6: Funding

GOAL 7: Partnerships and Management

Using the Confluence Accords¹¹⁰ as a framework for development, the SWAG identified the seven goals for the Alaska SCORP 2023-2027 through a series of facilitated working group meetings. Structurally, five goals focus on outdoor recreation enhancement strategies and two goals present implementation strategies.

Specific focus groups for each goal worked to provide recommended strategies to help achieve the broader SCORP goals. Action items compliment each strategy and recommend measurable steps toward the advancement of investments in Alaska outdoor recreation.

2023 - 2027 SWAG⁸²

- Ben Mulligan, ADF&G
- Lee Hart, Alaska Outdoor Alliance
- Mike Illg, Alaska Recreation and Parks Association
- Chris Beck, Alaska Trails
- Jeff San Juan, Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority
- Mélisa Babb, Alaska Society of Landscape Architects
- Dan Oberlatz, Alaska Alpine Adventures
- Eugene Peltola, Bureau Indian Affairs
- Zach Million, BLM
- Keith Comstock, Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development
- Erik Obrien, The Denali Commission
- Ed Fogels, Natural Resources Consultant
- Jessie Doherty, State of Alaska, DHSS, DPH
- Dana Diehl, The Alaska Tribal Health Consortium
- James King, USFS
- Jeff Samuels and Sarah Leonard, Alaska Travel Industry Association
- Julius Adolfsson, AKDOTP&F Program Development
- Kyla Pomrenke, Department of Labor
- Caleb Martin and Rod Arno, Alaska Outdoor Council
- Nate Boltz, Challenge Alaska
- Leah Boltz, Inclusive Play
- John Springsteen, Governor's Office

**"The outdoors is what makes Alaska great.
Our parks highlight the treasures."**

– SCORP public survey comment



Hunting in the Ship Creek drainage
Photo by Paxson Woelber

“I would like to see the outdoor recreation industry in Alaska expand in a way that is respectful and supportive to Indigenous cultures. Teaching about safety, responsibility, and the benefits of outdoor recreation along with the history of the land and the Indigenous cultures allows citizens to engage with the land and one another in an informed and respectful way. Education should be easily accessible, and things such as trailhead signage give equal opportunity on education no matter income level. By expanding outdoor recreation opportunities closer to towns and making more accessible areas for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, more people will have access to the outdoors, and can have the opportunity to improve their mental and physical health as well as engage with the land and Indigenous cultures.”

– SCORP public survey comment

GOAL 1

Support the Alaska Outdoor Recreation Way of Life

This SCORP expands the concept of “outdoor recreation” in a way that not only celebrates life outdoors, but honors traditions and heritage.

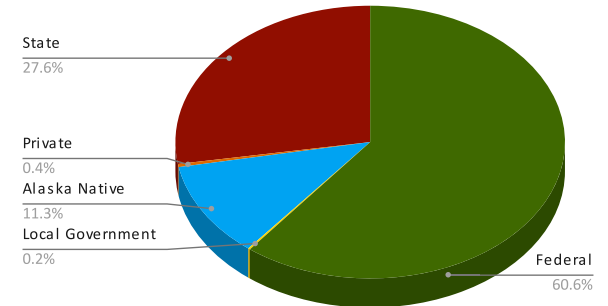
For Alaskans, outdoor recreation is a way of life. Rooted by the history and culture of life outdoors, modern and traditional knowledge foster the deep connections Alaskans have with the land. Time spent on land and water, hunting, fishing, foraging, and collecting not only complements life in Alaska, but also sustains it.

Whether by horse or bike, dog sled or snowmachine, Alaskans connect to the outdoors in countless ways and inspire visitors to seek adventure here. In the mountains or on the shores, in the waters or on the trails, in the backcountry or at an urban park – Alaska promises an experience as unique as the individual.

Alaska’s outdoor way of life is instrumental in how many perceive Alaska. A primary theme of this goal is to open doors for more people to experience what Alaska has to offer. The objectives aim to shed light on the endless experiences within Alaska’s wild places and deep heritage. Since these interactions drive outdoor recreation in the state, this goal serves as a framework for the SCORP.

WHO OWNS ALASKA?

More so than any other state, land ownership in Alaska is dominated by public lands.



Data Source: BLM AK Administered Lands SMA | BLM GBP Hub (arcgis.com)

Land ownership and management in Alaska is unique. This means two things for outdoor recreation: first, Alaska has a wealth of public land which provides the foundation for our unique recreational opportunities; second, each agency has their own rules and budgets governing access to their land. As a result, the future of outdoor recreation, and what it means for Alaska’s way of life and economy, is a wide-open topic for public decision making and investment.¹⁰⁶

SCORP public survey results indicated 99 percent of Alaskans engage in outdoor recreation. Popular activities include visiting public parks and picnic areas (51.9%), neighborhood strolls (50.8%), and hiking (46.7%). See Appendix A3 for details.

OBJECTIVES

1. Expand outdoor recreation opportunities
2. Support the “stepping stone approach” for programs and facilities
3. Promote winter recreation opportunities
4. Integrate history, heritage, subsistence, culture, education, and the arts
5. Improve information on outdoor recreation options, locations, and activities

OBJECTIVE 1. EXPAND OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

In a world where much of the land is privately held and natural landscapes are significantly altered by urbanization, agriculture, and other land uses, Alaska’s vast public lands offer incredible outdoor adventure. Alaska is a recreation playground for all: residents and visitors, young and old, first-time users and experts. This section presents information on the outdoor recreation opportunities that currently exist and those that are needed to improve and enhance life outdoors in Alaska.



Bird Ridge
Photo by Jody Overstreet

STRATEGY 1.1: Provide more opportunities for the “missing middle.” Alaska has well developed options for sightseeing and other passive forms of outdoor recreation as well as rugged wilderness adventures. Alaska needs more experiences that serve the middle ground: active day adventures that offer up-close experiences of the wild, but aren’t too daunting and still provide a good meal, warm bed, and fast internet at the end of the day.

ACTION A: Use the public survey and demographic information as well as input from the Statewide Advisory Group (SWAG) and Subregional SCORP Teams, to identify specific types of needed opportunities; particularly for the “missing middle” of the outdoor recreation spectrum.

The SCORP identifies three main categories of outdoor recreation activities, presented in Strategies 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4. This information is used to outline broad priorities for ongoing support and new investments.

STRATEGY 1.2: Expand options for in-town activities.

This includes access to community trails, parks, greenbelts, and sport fields.

ACTION A: Identify and address gaps to connect residential and commercial neighborhoods, including accessible parking, trailheads, trails, and sidewalks.

ACTION B: Create parks and outdoor recreation facilities in underserved locations.

ACTION C: Expand educational programs and interpretive information that highlights local cultural or historical heritage.

STRATEGY 1.3: Expand options for edge-of-town public land opportunities. These areas allow easy access to multi-use recreation activities in less developed Alaska landscapes, while still being close to populated areas.

ACTION A: Reserve additional public lands for outdoor recreation embedded in or near communities.

ACTION B: Where already reserved, maintain and improve outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands.

ACTION C: Provide connections between large open space areas and the community.



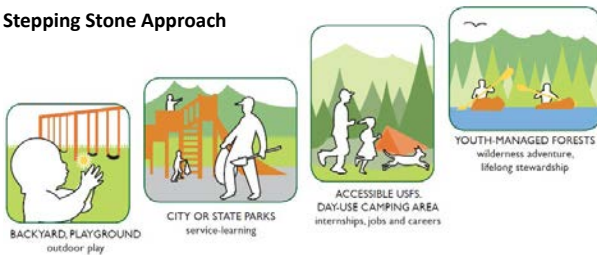
Photo by Alaska Channel

Specific examples of facilities for in-town activities range from a skateboard park in Sitka, the extensive set of trails, and greenbelts in Anchorage, and seasonal ice rinks and skate paths like those found at A.R.C. Lake in Soldotna.



Photo by USFWS

Stepping Stone Approach



The **Stepping Stone Approach** seeks to meet people where they are in their outdoor recreation journey — taking people from backyard playgrounds all the way to wilderness adventures. Successful stepping stone programs include investments in outdoor recreation programs or social networks that create immersive experiences across each next step.

Kincaid Park⁶⁸

A Mecca for Outdoor Sports in a Wilderness-like Setting

With 1,400 acres, Kincaid Park has plenty of space for Anchorage outdoor enthusiasts and visitors to enjoy year-round recreation activities. While still largely a natural area where moose and bears roam, Kincaid Park includes approximately 40 miles of four-season trails, a biathlon range, an outdoor stadium, soccer fields, disc golf course, a central chalet with restroom facilities and other amenities, and a motocross track. It is an edge-of-town experience for all ages and abilities with easy access to outdoor adventures.

STRATEGY 1.4: Increase out-of-town opportunities.

These locations support larger-scale wildland adventures, taking advantage of Alaska’s hundreds of millions of acres of undeveloped public lands and waters. Examples include backpacking, snowmachine or ski trips; hunting, fishing, and other subsistence activities; salt water and river adventures; remote campgrounds, lodges, and cabins.

ACTION A: Create new access to wild areas. See Goal 5 for details regarding balancing growth and stewardship.

ACTION B: Invest in new and improved facilities and infrastructure that expand opportunities to enjoy Alaska. Broad priority facilities and infrastructure identified through the SCORP planning process are listed below. Investments should include maintenance, repair, and upgrades.

- Outdoor recreation facilities – with parking, restrooms, trash receptacles, and orientation and interpretive information
- Waysides along major highways – with parking, restrooms, trash receptacles, and orientation and interpretive information. Maintenance of waysides is a long-standing, statewide issue. See Goal 7 for more information.
- Trail systems and trailheads – from accessible, front-country trails to multi-day, back-country adventures
- Public-use cabins – including front-country and more remote cabins
- Campgrounds and emergency shelters – including upgraded facilities with additional amenities
- Boat launches – including associated water trails and popular fishing areas
- Winter trails – including associated grooming and safety programs
- Trams - provide new and ADA accessible scenic and wildlife viewing areas

OBJECTIVE 2. SUPPORT THE STEPPING STONE APPROACH FOR PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES

Expanding and improving a wide range of opportunities go hand-in-hand with making sure there is the social infrastructure to help people develop a connection with outdoor spaces. It is important to develop more programs and facilities that invite new users to get out and enjoy Alaska outdoor recreation, especially those new to the state, those who lack experience, knowledge, or gear, and those new to fitness.

STRATEGY 2.1: Support programs that build skills and connect people to outdoor activity. This can be achieved through organized or self-propelled educational programming and resources designed to engage new users and provide progressive levels of skill, safety, and comfort in the outdoors. This model was developed by the Chugach Children’s Forest. See Goal 4 for more information.

ACTION A: Expand Collaborative Networks – investigate partnerships and create collaborations to maximize the effectiveness of messaging and programming. Example framework partnerships and existing models include the Chugach Children’s Forest program,¹⁶ the National Avalanche School,⁶⁹ and the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program.¹⁰

STRATEGY 2.2: Assess the need and work to improve opportunities for outdoor recreation training courses.

ACTION A: Identify gaps in current and available educational resources.

ACTION B: Provide a broad range of outdoor recreation educational resources such as wilderness training and safety courses to fill identified gaps.

OBJECTIVE 3. PROMOTE WINTER RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

With the right facilities and equipment, winter can be every bit as enjoyable as summer. Year-round support for outdoor recreation infrastructure is needed for Alaska to deliver and celebrate what makes our state a unique, enjoyable place to live and visit. For more information, see *Goal 2 for more information*.

OBJECTIVE 4. INTEGRATE HISTORY, HERITAGE, SUBSISTENCE, CULTURE, EDUCATION, AND THE ARTS

Much of Alaska's history and culture is deeply woven into the land itself. More can be done to highlight Alaska's rich and diverse history, connecting Alaskans to their home and their past, while drawing travelers to Alaska.

Outdoor recreation can be a gateway to telling the Alaskan story. Alaska has well over 10,000 years of Indigenous history,¹⁰ with some 20 distinct Indigenous languages²¹ and a strong tradition of living with and from the land.

STRATEGY 4.1: Acknowledge and highlight Alaska Native past and present stewardship of outdoor recreation lands through strengthened partnerships, and public education and outreach programs.

ACTION A: Develop plans with ANCSA corporations, local tribes, and regional non-profits such as the Alaska Native Heritage Center.

ACTION B: Work in partnership with Alaska Native organizations and school districts to expand interpretation and education about Indigenous place names and the traditional uses, practices, and values of the land at outdoor recreation sites statewide.

STRATEGY 4.2: Enhance interest in and value of parks and outdoor recreation by highlighting Alaska's unique history and heritage.

ACTION A: Support outdoor recreation infrastructure that tells the history of Alaska's outdoor spaces. Include programs that identify and illustrate the history of Alaska's outdoor spaces including Alaska Native art and performances and greater recognition of the integral role of subsistence.

ACTION B: Expand interpretation and education at outdoor recreation sites statewide. Use industry best standards for interpretation and education methods.

OBJECTIVE 5. IMPROVE INFORMATION ABOUT OUTDOOR RECREATION LOCATIONS, ACTIVITIES, AND SKILL LEVELS

Without a statewide outdoor recreation inventory, it is difficult for visitors and residents to fully take advantage of what Alaska has to offer. While an ambitious undertaking, investing in this objective will encourage people to be more comfortable knowing where to go for different types of outdoor adventures and be better prepared for their experiences. To reach full capability, such an inventory should include diverse information available in multiple formats including online GIS mapping databases, digital and hard copy maps, and wayfinding. Experiencing Alaska life outdoors could be enriched by ready access to information highlighting cultural and natural discovery. See *Goal 7 for strategies that help achieve this objective*.

In terms of outdoor-related education, 33 percent of Alaskans who participated in the SCORP public survey expressed interest in cultural and natural history interpretation programs.

Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark⁷²
The Best Remaining Example of Early 20th Century Copper Mining

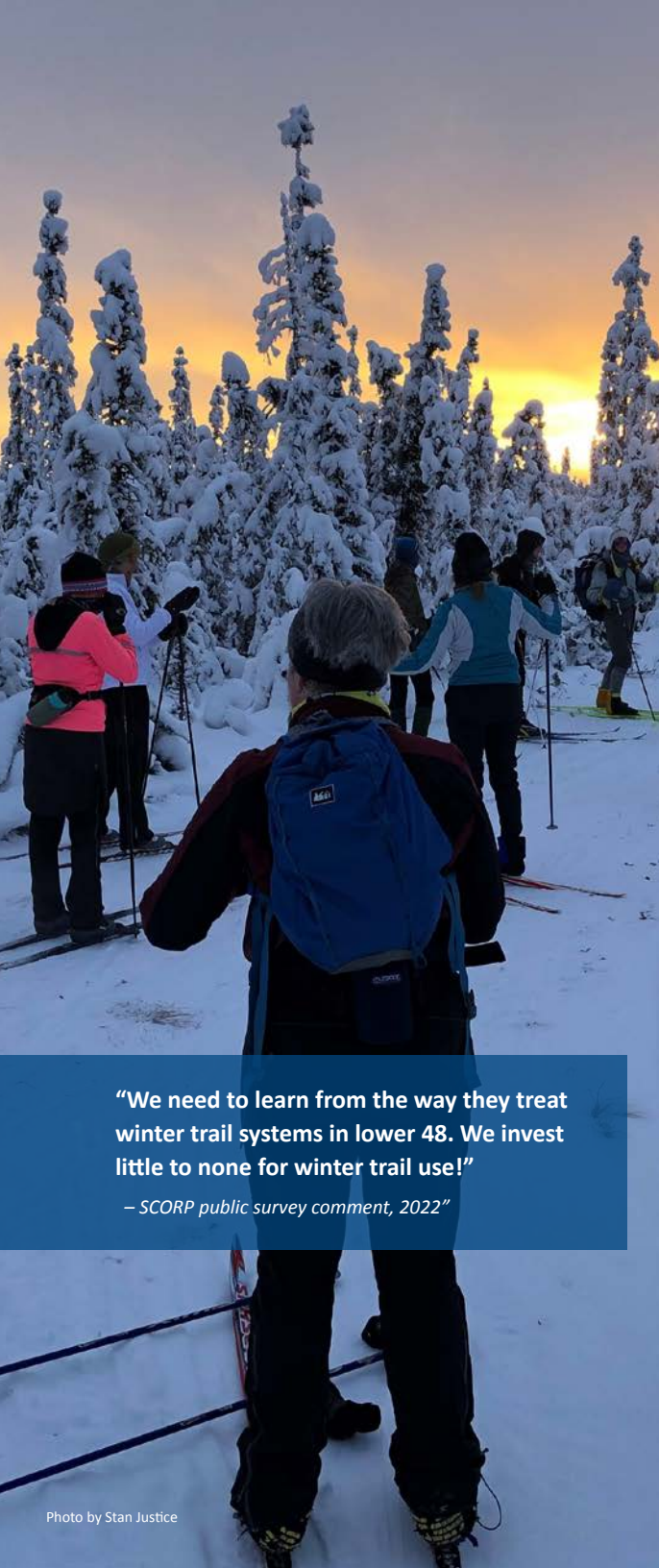
Mining is a large part of Alaska's story. The National Park Service, local community members, and Friends of Kennecott are collectively engaged in ongoing planning efforts to identify buildings that will be stabilized or rehabilitated. Their goal is to protect the historic integrity of the mill town for future generations.

Tribal Tours, Sitka Alaska
Experience Alaska with Real Alaskans

Founded by the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Sitka Tribal Tours is a non-profit organization that employs Sitka community resident guides. The entire team participates in annual training with Tlingit elders and local historians guaranteeing Native cultural authenticity and historical accuracy within their tours.

CONCLUSION

People love what makes places unique. Land managers and the outdoor recreation industry in Alaska should support and expand on the elements that make Alaska's land special and nurture the wild, varied, and diverse cultures that reside here. The objectives, strategies, and actions presented in this section would help create more opportunities for Alaskans and visitors to fully engage in Alaska's outdoor way of life.



“We need to learn from the way they treat winter trail systems in lower 48. We invest little to none for winter trail use!”

– SCORP public survey comment, 2022”

GOAL 2

Make Outdoor Recreation a Cornerstone of Alaska’s Economic Future

OUTDOOR RECREATION – THE SLEEPING GIANT OF ALASKA’S AND THE NATION’S ECONOMY

Alaska’s outdoor world is more than just a pretty landscape – it is an economic engine with room to grow. Building a stronger future for the outdoor recreation economy will require additional investment in outdoor infrastructure, a talent pipeline that grows a larger workforce, upgraded marketing and travel information, and a broad coalition to guide and advocate for the next generation of widely beneficial, sustainable growth.

WHY IT MATTERS – A LOOK AT THE BREADTH OF ALASKA’S OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

Outdoor recreation supports familiar economic activities like tourism but also less visible parts of the Alaska economy. Alaska’s outdoor recreation industry¹⁰⁴ includes:

TOURISM: The chance to experience Alaska’s outdoor resources – our glaciers, mountains, wildlife and wilderness – is the heart of our state’s tourism economy. Tourism in Alaska includes a wide range of outdoor recreation activities, supporting spending on tours and travel, guides and outfitters, lodging, and restaurants, all creating jobs for Alaskan residents and businesses. Tourism’s economic impact includes spending by out-of-state visitors, as well as spending on travel in-state by Alaska residents.⁴⁰ Annual outdoor recreation spending in Alaska was \$3.2 billion in 2018 and has continued to grow.¹⁰²

\$250 million a year! That’s the increase in annual spending if a typical year’s out-of-state visitors had reasons to add “One More Day” to their Alaska visit.³⁴

Heather’s Choice

Success in Alaska-based Manufacturing a Alaska

“When I started Heather’s Choice in the summer of 2014 with nothing but a pickup truck, a few tabletop dehydrators and a hand drawn logo, I never could have imagined where I would find myself today, with a crew of 12 and a backpacking food brand that is distributed nationwide to trusted retail partners such as REI.”

– Heather Kelly, Founder of Heather’s Choice

BUSINESS, WORKFORCE, AND RESIDENT

ATTRACTION: Generous outdoor recreation amenities support Alaska’s economy by attracting and retaining businesses, residents, and a skilled and energetic workforce. *See Goal 3 for more information.*

MANUFACTURING: Companies that make outdoor equipment often locate in places with outdoor amenities and active employees, supporting jobs and communities. Several outdoor recreation manufacturers now generating millions in national sales – including fat tire bikes, pack rafts – started but have now left Alaska. Heather’s Choice started, grew and stayed in Alaska.⁵¹

SUPPORT SERVICES: Tourism and outdoor recreation create demand for a range of support sector jobs. One example is in the construction, operation, and maintenance of lodging (from hotels to cabins, campgrounds to Airbnb’s). Other examples include airplane and motorcoach mechanics, fuel service vendors, and marketing or web design.

RETAIL AND RENTAL BUSINESSES: Visitors and residents directly support a range of businesses tied to outdoor recreation activities, including sales of outdoor gear and apparel, brew pubs and restaurants, and grocery stores. This spending helps support the base of commercial services that make for vital communities.⁹⁵

RETIREMENT AND INVESTMENT INCOME:

Outdoor recreation amenities draw recreation focused retirees and second homeowners, as shown by communities around the U.S., and Alaskan communities like Hope, Homer, Sitka, and Talkeetna. Their spending on local goods, services, homes, and real estate benefits the economy, and the taxes they pay support schools and other services.⁴⁹

TAX REVENUE: Visitor fees directly contribute over \$200 million in revenues to state and local governments each year.²³ The revenue generated by the impact of outdoor recreation on local government property, sales, and bed tax revenue further adds to this revenue.

HEALTHIER RESIDENTS: Access to the outdoors improves public health and reduces costs to treat a wide range of chronic conditions. *See Goal 4 for more information.*



OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Alaska's remarkable outdoor recreation resources could be contributing more to the state's economy. The question: how can Alaska further capitalize on Alaska's outdoor resources? Specific challenges include:

- Lack of awareness about the value of the outdoor recreation industry
- Limited funding to act on Alaska's untapped potential and respond to growing outdoor recreation demand
- Lack of a unified voice from outdoor recreation industry advocates
- Limited development of winter recreation opportunities
- While Alaska's outdoor resources are world class, our communities and recreation facilities are often less competitive than comparable destinations in other states and countries

OBJECTIVES

1. Increase awareness of how outdoor recreation benefits Alaska's economy
2. Spread the economic benefits of outdoor recreation more broadly across Alaska
3. Balance strategies to grow outdoor recreation economic benefits with stewardship
4. Recognize and take advantage of the varying economic impacts of different types of outdoor recreation use and users
5. Expand winter outdoor recreation opportunities
6. Expand opportunities for biking, hiking, public use cabins, and hut-to-hut systems
7. Develop travel options with themed itineraries
8. Develop stronger gateway communities
9. Develop accessible, approachable outdoor recreation opportunities

Enjoying single track trails at Matanuska Lakes State Recreation Area
Photo by Chris Beck



OBJECTIVE 1: INCREASE AWARENESS OF HOW OUTDOOR RECREATION BENEFITS ALASKA'S ECONOMY

STRATEGY 1.1: Improve information on Alaska's outdoor recreation industry, growing demand, and future opportunities. Alaska's outdoor recreation industry needs to do what other economic sectors do – compile and share factual, quantified information on its economic significance. This includes data on visitor and resident spending in different outdoor recreation activities, growth in the overall industry, and returns on investment from past projects. *See Goal 7 for more information.*

OBJECTIVE 2: SPREAD THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION MORE BROADLY ACROSS ALASKA

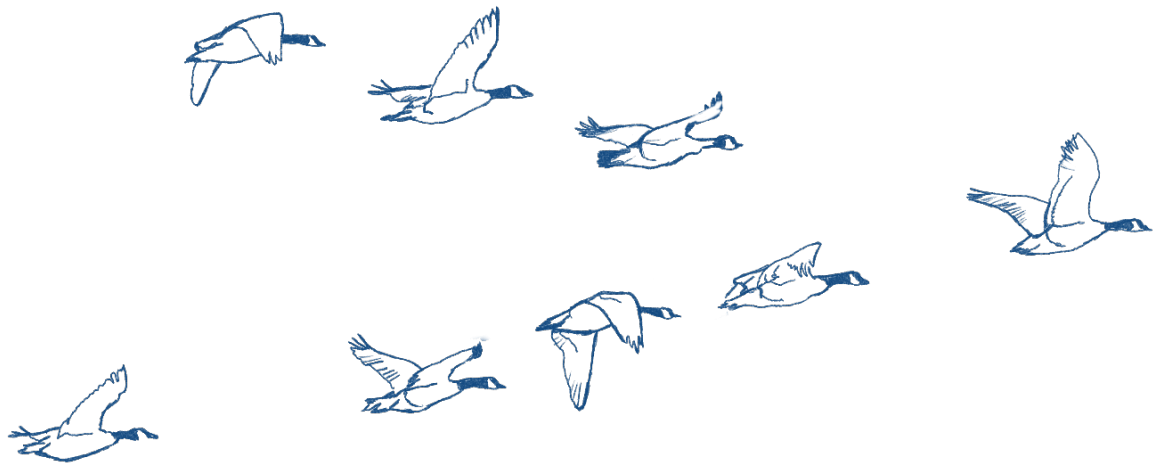
The economic benefits of the outdoor recreation industry currently concentrate in relatively limited areas of Alaska. Some locations are bursting at the seams with visitors, while other Alaska regions and communities, including many with significant outdoor recreation potential, currently generate few or none of the outdoor recreation's potential economic benefits.

Community Outdoor Recreation Plan: a template to expand and manage outdoor recreation growth

Supply: What are current or potential outdoor recreation opportunities and constraints?

Demand: What is the realistic local potential to attract visitors?

Community Goals: What are community economic and quality of life goals? How can outdoor recreation support those goals?



STRATEGY 2.1: Support local outdoor recreation and tourism planning as well as plan implementation.

ACTION A: Produce locally based outdoor recreation plans. Communities need to produce plans defining their goals and strategies for types of activities and levels of use.

ACTION B: Encourage state, borough, and regional Native organizations to provide grants for economic development planning and technical assistance programs. Smaller communities typically lack the resources needed to do local planning. In the 1990's, the State DCCED provided grants of approximately \$25,000 to Alaska communities for locally driven economic development planning. New programs in that spirit are needed to help communities come together and define shared goals and strategies for their economic future.

ACTION C: Foster support from state and local agencies and native organizations for implementation of an outdoor recreation plan. Alaska's many small communities and villages lack capacity to carry out agreed-upon plans. With support from partners outside these locations, local residents, businesses, entrepreneurs, and other partners can make progress implementing outdoor recreation economic strategies identified in their plans. *See Goal 6 for more information.*

CASE STUDIES: Destination Development

Oregon State's Travel Department works to spread visitation and associated job and business opportunities to new locations. They first help communities plan for growth, and then follow up with marketing and investment support to implement plans.⁴¹

Colorado recently established a similar program, the Colorado State Outdoor Recreation Grant, that helps communities develop their outdoor recreation potential.⁴²

\$250 million a year! That's the increase in annual spending if a typical year's out-of-state visitors had reasons to add just one more day to their Alaska visit.³⁴



Curry Ridge Trail
Photo: Chris Beck

OBJECTIVE 3: BALANCE ACTIONS TO GROW OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMIC BENEFITS WITH STEWARDSHIP

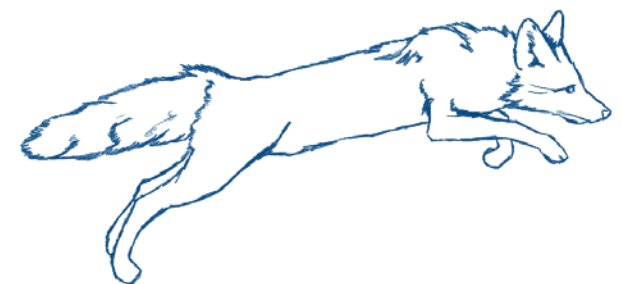
Goal 2's objectives focus on generating growth in jobs, income, and business opportunities. These actions need to be balanced against stewardship objectives, including conserving the environment and providing quality outdoor experiences which is a subject covered in Goal 5. Land manager survey responses reflect these combined intentions.

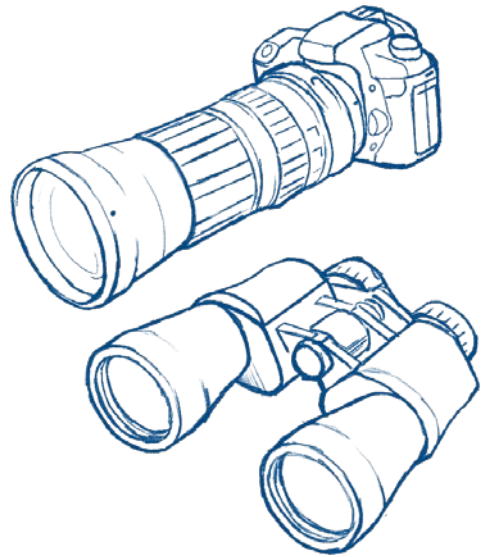
Land Managers Survey Results

What objectives are most important to serve your jurisdiction's outdoor recreation users?

Top three responses:

1. Investment in expanding and improving existing infrastructure
2. Protecting natural resources from recreation use impacts
3. Promoting outdoor recreation as a local and regional economic development strategy





OBJECTIVE 4. RECOGNIZE AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF VARYING ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF OUTDOOR RECREATION USE AND USERS

Economic impacts should not be the only factor in determining outdoor recreation policy. However, outdoor recreation investment decisions need to recognize and respond to economic opportunities associated with different types of outdoor recreation uses. This information, shared below, provides one reference for weighing the benefits of outdoor recreation investments.

Types of travelers; unique spending habits. Each of three categories of out-of-state visitors to Alaska brings real economic benefits. In the summer of 2016, spending totaled \$1.97 billion excluding the travel costs to and from Alaska.⁷

That total includes \$1.25 billion in spending by air (independent) visitors, \$640 million in spending by cruise passengers, and \$84 million in spending by

Consumer Spending: Impacts on the National Economy by Outdoor Recreation Category⁸⁴

AMERICANS PARTICIPATING IN OUTDOOR RECREATION ANNUALLY SPEND

	GEAR, ACCESSORIES & VEHICLES	TRIP RELATED	TOTAL
CAMPING	\$31,271,155,486	\$135,591,624,999	\$166,862,780,485
FISHING*	\$11,867,666,850	\$23,908,160,290	\$35,775,827,140
HUNTING*	\$16,059,527,274	\$11,318,772,808	\$27,378,300,082
MOTORCYCLE RIDING	\$16,726,560,701	\$47,428,610,964	\$64,155,171,665
OFF ROADING	\$15,520,574,134	\$35,996,107,969	\$51,516,682,103
SNOW SPORTS	\$12,530,315,740	\$60,190,242,316	\$72,720,558,056
TRAIL SPORTS	\$25,342,546,672	\$176,144,141,213	\$201,486,687,885
WATER SPORTS	\$29,059,965,205	\$110,911,844,967	\$139,971,810,172
WHEEL SPORTS	\$13,857,894,195	\$82,864,146,456	\$96,722,040,651
WILDLIFE WATCHING	\$12,272,757,581	\$17,947,854,866	\$30,220,612,447
TOTAL	\$184,508,963,838	\$702,301,506,848	\$886,810,470,686

Different levels of spending for different activities. National economic data shows that camping, trail sports, and water sports generate the greatest contribution to outdoor recreational spending nationally.

TABLE 7.13 - Visitor Expenditures in Alaska, Per Person, Overall Excluding Transportation to/from Alaska By Transportation Market, 2006, 2011, and 2016 (%)

	AIR			CRUISE			HWY/FERRY		
	2006	2011	2016	2006	2011	2016	2006	2011	2016
Average per person, per night	\$146	\$148	\$167	\$79	\$74	\$74	\$70	\$77	\$83
Average per person, per trip	\$1,376	\$1,455	\$1,674	\$636	\$632	\$624	\$1,310	\$1,021	\$990

Notes: This data is based to intercept respondents only. Spending on cruise packages and ferry tickets to enter/exit state is excluded.

highway and ferry visitors.⁸

The summers of 2020 and 2021 clarified the spending power of Alaska residents and independent travelers, when COVID-19 closed nearly all cruises to Alaska. *See Chapter 2 for more information.* While most cruise-focused businesses experienced significant declines, Alaskan businesses focused on independent and in-state travel reported strong

years. Emboldened travelers filled any open hotels and spent more than the average cruise ship visitor. Bed taxes and car rental taxes soared, in some cases rivaling pre-pandemic receipts.¹³

Overnight versus day use: A primary difference in the level of spending by outdoor recreation users is the distinction between overnight stays with spending on lodging and food as compared to day trips.

STRATEGY 4.1: Spend one more day and one more dollar. The core strategy for growing the outdoor recreation industry’s economic benefits is to give visitors and residents reasons to spend more per person (meaning more time and money) in Alaska, benefiting Alaska-based businesses. This requires expanding the range of quality of outdoor opportunities at both existing and new facilities.

ACTION A: Open more outdoor recreation opportunities. While Alaska has remarkable outdoor recreation resources, many of these are only accessible to the hardest adventurers with hearty budgets. Additional investments are needed to improve access to Alaska’s outdoor attractions, including new and upgraded trailheads and trails, trams, waysides and viewpoints, modernized campgrounds and cabins, and access points.⁷⁶ See Goal 1 for more information.

The average length of stay by visitors to New Zealand is 19 days versus nine days in Alaska.¹³

Like Alaska, New Zealand is a long-haul destination where nature-based outdoor recreation is a primary attraction. What differentiates New Zealand from Alaska is NZ’s more extensive system of campgrounds, trails, hut-to-hut systems, day use areas, and full spectrum outdoor recreation marketing. These public investments benefit residents and provide the foundation for a thriving, extensive “ecosystem” of private sector outdoor recreation businesses.

STRATEGY 4.2: Provide more “world-class” Alaska outdoor recreation attractions. Prioritize investments in internationally competitive outdoor recreation draws. Aim to provide this level of attraction in every region of Alaska, to motivate travelers to visit new areas of Alaska, to stay one more day or consider return trips. Such attractions require two things:

- A uniquely appealing feature – such as a glacier, a particularly striking landscape, concentration of visible wildlife, or formally designated, natural, cultural, or historical places of significance.
- The infrastructure supporting that experience – trails, trams, viewpoints, transportation, and guide services, and the ability for land managers and owners to sustain the quality of the experience to meet and exceed expectations of users.

ACTION A: Collaborate with regional and statewide partners to identify where and how best to provide high quality attractions that attract visitors. While focusing on big projects, investment options need to be viewed in context, recognizing that adding a few new jobs in a small town with limited economic opportunities can be as important as adding more jobs in a larger community.

STRATEGY 4.3: Bring economic benefits to Alaska and Alaskans. Alaska also clearly benefits from businesses held by parties from outside Alaska, notably the internationally owned cruise companies delivering visitors that help support Alaska-based businesses and communities. But an important consideration for public outdoor recreation investments should be supporting jobs and other economic benefits to Alaska residents and Alaska-owned businesses.

ACTION A: Traveler Information and Marketing. Support project and programs that improve information to help high-spending independent travelers plan their own experiences. Help people who are interested in but intimidated by Alaska find rewarding outdoor activities that match their year-round interests and skills. See Goal 7 for more information.

World-Class Draws: Intrinsic attraction plus well-developed infrastructure. The outdoor destinations below reveal successes, the importance of major infrastructure investments, and challenges of continuing to deliver high quality experiences as user numbers increase. Each of these locations attract thousands of users each day.



Iceland’s Blue Lagoon – a must-see attraction that some see as a tourist trap.



Taiwan’s modernized Yehliu Geopark, – a popular, wave-sculptured landscape that is intensely developed.



New Zealand’s 20-kilometer Tongariro Alpine Crossing Trail – supports over 1,500 people per day.



Alaska’s Denali National Park – balancing wildlife, wilderness, and a large and growing demand.

Photo by Denali National Park



Photo by Alaska Backcountry Guides

ACTION B: Continue and expand programs supporting Alaska-owned businesses and Alaska-made products. The State of Alaska sponsors the Made in Alaska⁵ branding program which helps support Alaska-based manufacturers of a range of products, including outdoor recreation gear. Helpful options include featuring Alaska-based products on regional tourism marketing websites, and providing loan and technical advice programs commonly offered by other states.



OBJECTIVE 5: EXPAND WINTER OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Objectives 5 and 6 identify two particularly important, underdeveloped, categories of outdoor recreation activities. While other types of outdoor recreation that will generate important economic benefits, these two categories where research and survey data show significant potential for more growth and more benefits to Alaska’s outdoor recreation economy.

Alaska’s snow season – including the three months of winter, but often running from late fall well into spring – offers recreation potential competitive with anything Alaska can offer in summer. Growing winter visitation comes with more people learning about Alaska’s winter attractions. Alaska’s snow, explorable landscapes, and extensive public lands provide an untapped opportunity to grow winter use.

One important motivation for expanding the visitor season into winter will be creating more multi-season tourism businesses and more living-wage jobs for Alaska residents.

If attracting visitors in winter was simple more businesses would be doing that today. The heart of Alaska winter – when daylight and temperatures go way down – is less appealing for many people, likewise late autumn. In contrast, February through April offer longer and often sunny days, rising temperatures, reliable snowpacks, and an abundance of enjoyable winter activities.

Top Growth in Recreation Demand 2019-2022

1. Day use recreation (city parks, picnic areas)
2. Winter biking (trail head parking, trails, open space)
3. Walking or biking (paved trails, parking areas)
4. Cross-country skiing (trailheads, groomed and open space trails)
5. Camping or RV-ing (campgrounds)
6. Mountain Biking (unpaved trails, trailheads, open space)
7. ATV riding (places to ride, developed trails)

See Chapter 2 for more results.



Photo by Chris Beck

Snow-Season Potential ^{26, 109}

According to Explore Fairbanks staff, the number of Fairbanks' micro-businesses catering to winter tourists has grown steadily in recent years, with new aurora viewing facilities, ice-fishing tours, and dog sledding tours. Explore Fairbanks CEO and president Scott McCrea stated, “If we look at which season is growing at a faster rate over the last ten years, the winter season was growing faster than the summer. Summer remains our peak for number of visitors, but winter has expanded the most.”

According to park officials, the number of winter visitors to Denali National Park has jumped 400 percent in recent years.

STRATEGY 5.1: Support expanded winter facilities. A new generation of planning and investment is needed to meet existing winter demand, grow opportunities, and secure economic benefit.

ACTION A: Expand resources for winter trailhead parking, restrooms, and storage facilities for trail grooming equipment. Existing facilities, including groomed trails and trailheads for snow machines and backcountry skiing are overwhelmed many weekends of the year.

ACTION B: Improve funding for winter snow machine trails. The State SnowTRAC program collects annual snow machine registration fees and sends most of those funds back to organizations that groom winter trails. Use is steadily increasing while funding is not keeping pace with the costs to maintain winter trails, trailheads, or search and rescue operations.



Crowded trailheads in Chugach State Park

Growth in “Earn Your Turns” Backcountry Skiing
“Demand for all kinds of outdoor adventure grew over the last several years, but the pandemic has exploded the popularity of backcountry skiing. Our avalanche course program demand skyrocketed, and we are currently fully back to maximum operating potential.” Nick D’Alesio, Owner of Remarkable Adventures, LLC. and co-owner of Alaska Guide Collective, LLC. as interviewed by Alaska Outdoor Alliance’s Lee Hart.

- Increase money raised from snow machine registration fees, by increasing the annual fee, or preferably, by instituting a single, larger fee paid at the time snow machines are purchased.
- Study and consider ways to increase compliance with snow machine registration, for example a one-time, lifetime license at time of purchase versus an annual registration.
- Continue to hold a pre-season meeting between DPOR and representatives of all snow machine grooming service areas for two-way communication on issues and opportunities.

ACTION C: Work with DOT&PF to increase road safety and improve accessibility to winter recreation terrain. Improve plowing and avalanche control on roads and highway pullouts on high-traffic winter recreation areas like Turnagain, Thompson, and Hatcher Passes.

ACTION D: Work in partnership with the private sector to provide comfort – comfortable lodging, easy access, and if possible, food – in proximity to high quality winter recreation areas. Options include public use cabins and public private partnerships to develop lodging on public land. *See Goal 6 for more information.*

ACTION E: Inter-agency and non-profit partnerships. Municipal governments should work closely with local non-profit Nordic ski clubs, bike, snow machine and similar organizations, like those in Fairbanks, Juneau, Mat-Su, and Anchorage, to share the costs of developing and maintaining groomed trails. Where winter terrain crosses land in multiple ownerships, work collaboratively with affected landowners and agencies to facilitate permitting and reduce barriers to public access.

STRATEGY 5.2: Develop a coordinated winter information campaign. Build on Alaska’s stature as an internationally recognized skiing destination. Ski magazines and websites routinely feature Alaska helicopter and backcountry skiing opportunities. To reach broader audiences, an expanded winter campaign is needed, working with statewide and regional partners including ATIA, regional destination marketing organizations, commercial providers, and public land managers.

Iceland: Unappealing Weather- Big Attraction⁵⁵

Mid-June weather is rainy with temperatures ranging from the mid-40s to low-50s. Yet, Iceland had a 400 percent increase in visitors from 2010 to 2018. With the right marketing, facilities, and access, bad weather doesn’t have to be a barrier to large numbers of satisfied visitors.

ACTION A: Improve information on the details and diversity of Alaska’s winter activities. Focus on the developed winter facilities accessible by all skill levels in and around population centers. Add information on more adventurous backcountry ski and snowmobile areas like Thompson, Hatcher and Turnagain Passes, White Pass (Skagway) and Chilkat Pass (Haines) as well as fly-in destinations.

ACTION B: Include links to practical information about winter facilities including maps showing groomed and maintained motorized and non-motorized winter trails and popular backcountry ski areas.

ACTION C: Provide information so travelers can safely enjoy Alaska’s serious winters, including typical and current weather conditions, avalanche information, advice regarding apparel and footwear, and links to applicable organizations.

STRATEGY 5.3: Develop strategic investment plans for winter recreation. Prepare facility improvement plans including the return on proposed investments in specific promising locations including motorized and non-motorized trails, backcountry recreation areas and lift-served ski areas. Examples include Hatcher Pass, Eaglecrest Ski Area in Juneau, and the Broad Pass in the Denali Highway area.



Photo by Blaine Harrington

Growing Interest in Snow Machining by Residents and Visitors

“Alaska Mining and Diving pre-order program for snowmobiles in 2020 set a record; exceeding all target sales by such a large margin that the factory suppliers restricted sales since they couldn’t keep up with the demand. There are six month to year-long waiting lists for snow machines, off highway vehicles, and boats.”

— Nick Olzenak, President and General Manager as interviewed by Alaska Outdoor Alliance’s Lee Hart

STRATEGY 5.4: Reduce conflicts between winter recreation users. Groomed trails make winter fun accessible and enjoyable for all users. More can be done to manage potential conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreationists, and different types of non-motorized uses. Examples of successes include separating motorized and non-motorized uses in Hatcher and Turnagain Passes, or at dedicated cross-country areas like Birch Hill in Fairbanks. In other areas, shared motorized and non-motorized trails have been successful. Two general strategies can help minimize conflicts:

“In much of Alaska, snow machine trails are also great trails for fat tire bikes, skiers, and dog mushers.” – SCORP SWAG member

ACTION A: Expand both motorized and non-motorized areas. Kincaid Park in Anchorage is an example of a successful mixed use park with both motorized and non-motorized use areas offering cross-country ski trails, single track bike trails, non-motorized multi-use trails, and a motorized use area.

ACTION B: Implement education and trail etiquette programs. Communities need to implement local strategies to mitigate user conflicts and provide access for all. As one SCORP working group participant said, “Have folks on both sides sit down and explain their desires and listen to one another. We do not need to be adversaries.”

OBJECTIVE 6. EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR BIKING, HIKING, PUBLIC USE CABINS, AND HUT-TO-HUT TRAIL SYSTEMS

Like Objective 5, this section identifies a category of outdoor recreation where there is significant growth nationally and in Alaska. At the national level, three of the top four outdoor recreation activities⁸⁵ in the U.S. were non-motorized trail activities. The first was jogging or trail running, followed by hiking, fishing, and then biking. Extracts below from the Outdoor Industry Association’s 2017 report show the economic benefits of these activities, with trail sports as the single largest contributor to the US’s \$800 billion outdoor recreation industry. *See Objective 4 for the full table.*

National Consumer Spending On Trail-Related Outdoor Recreation Activities⁸⁶

	Gear, Accessories	Trip Related	Total
Trail Sports (day hiking/backpacking)	\$25 billion	\$176 billion	\$201 billion
Wheel Sports (on/off road biking)	\$13 billion	\$82 billion	\$96 billion

STRATEGY 6.1: Support the non-profits that build and maintain trails, including bike, trail, and hut organizations. Trail advocacy groups throughout Alaska, including bike clubs, are working with local governments to raise funds and manage paid and volunteer work crews to improve local hiking and biking trails. More can be done to build and support these partnerships.



Photo by Chris Beck

San Juan Hut to Hut Trails⁸⁹

The non-profit San Juan Huts organization created a remarkable system of huts along trails connecting Telluride and Durango with Moab, Utah. Huts are stocked with food and drinks, allowing paying bikers and skiers to travel light and enjoy the sights.

Alaskan groups focused on biking

Valley Mountain Bikers and Hikers (Palmer), Valdez Adventure Alliance, Tsalteshi Trails Association (Soldotna), Sitka Cycling Club, Singletrack Advocates (Anchorage), Kodiak Island Mountain Bike Association, Homer Cycling Club, Girdwood Trails Committee, Fairbanks Cycle Club, Chugach Mountain Bike Riders (Wasilla), Arctic Bike Club (Anchorage), Juneau Mountain Bike Alliance. Other non-profits focus on trails in general, including Trail Mix Inc., Sitka Trail Works, Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation, Anchorage Park Foundation, and Alaska Trails.

ACTION A: Increase collaboration, including public funding, between public agencies and non-profits. This support leverages resources available to non-profits who construct and maintain biking and hiking trails. Hiker and biker spending then supports local businesses. For example, the City and Borough of Sitka partnered with the local trail organization, Sitka Trail Works Inc., who drafted a successful FLAP grant application and was given the funds to manage construction of the much-loved Sitka Cross trail. Public agencies, municipal, borough and tribal park and recreation organizations should also increase awareness of grant funds for trail projects. *See Goal 7 for more information.*

ACTION B: Develop and manage non-motorized trail systems that reduce conflicts between trail users and improve safety. Options include education like trail etiquette signage, and more trails that separate use or up and downhill riding.

STRATEGY 6.2: Expand community to community bike routes in Alaska. States and communities around the country have used bike tours as a rural economic development strategy. Alaska may lack the extensive system of rural roads found in other states, but our low traffic highways, often with wide shoulders, open opportunities for safe, scenic riding. Data from a Montana study²² shows that touring cyclists spend 40 percent more compared to the average motorized tourist, due to their slower pace.

Cycle Oregon⁴³

Each year non-profit Cycle Oregon organizes bike tours. "Cycle Oregon doesn't just expose riders to richly diverse Oregon communities. It also provides much needed financial support to those communities."

ACTION A: Work to further expand and publicize recognized U.S. bike routes in Alaska. Alaska has six recognized segments in the U.S. Bicycle Route System, a project to create and publicize publicly accessible, paved bicycle travel routes across the country. Promote bike events, linked to these routes, like the Iditarod Trail Invitational, Frosty Bottom in Anchorage, White Mountains 100 in Fairbanks, Valdez Fat Bike Bash, Fireweed 400, and Kluane Chilkat International Bike Relay.

STRATEGY 6.3: Develop Alaska versions of long trails. The SCORP public survey shows that long, interconnected trails were in the top group of desired trail improvements in Alaska. *See Chapter 2 for more information.* This matches the national and international enthusiasm for long trails. From the Pacific Crest and Appalachian Trails in the Lower 48 states, to trails in Europe and South America, long trails are drawing visitors from around the globe, showing a remarkable ability to attract use and spending. Much of the use is for portions of these long trails rather than full-length trips. Elements that are key to success of long trails include:

- Access to spectacular terrain
- A route appealing to users of different skill levels – wild, but not too wild
- Community connections – supporting local business
- Multi-purpose – supporting diverse types of use

Change is Afoot

The State's most recent tourism survey found that hiking and nature walks were the fastest growing area of participation for both air and cruise out-of-state Alaska visitors between 2011-16.⁹



Long Trails: Soaring Global Popularity

- 120,000 people walked **New Zealand's Great Walks** in 2017, an increase of 50,000 people from ten years prior.
- Interest in **Spain's 500-mile Camino de Santiago** steadily grows, now exceeding 300,000 people a year.
- Just 20,000 people have walked the 2,184 miles of **Appalachian Trail** since 1936, but 3 million people hike a portion of the trail annually. (2017 data each of the above)
- In 2022, the Alaska Legislature approved funding for key segments of **an Alaska Long Trail**. Support from borough governments and tourism organizations is focused on creating more reasons for visitors to spend time and money in Alaska.



STRATEGY 6.4: Expand Public Use Cabins and Hut-to-Hut systems. Alaska’s public use huts have never been busier. Especially in a place like Alaska, where people may be unsure of weather and the possibility of wildlife encounters, the option to travel light and stay indoors is a huge draw. Alaska residents ranked the need for more public use cabins very high in the SCORP public survey. Demand for huts exceeds supply. For any given weekend, and many weekdays, many public use cabins are fully booked.

Since 2017, the State of Alaska’s public use cabins have seen an overall revenue growth of 133 percent. With over 2.2 million tourists visiting Alaska annually, the demand for accessible outdoor experience is high and growing by a steady 4-7 percent annually.¹⁹ Interest in hut-to-hut hiking systems continue to grow across the U.S. and the world. “Fiercely competitive” – that’s how park concessionaire Aramark, who runs the five Sierra High Camp cabins in Yosemite National Park, describes the process to secure a place in a cabin.

ACTION A: Alaska needs more public use cabins in the right locations. Cabins that are accessible by road or in high amenity locations receive more use than those without. Once cabins are built, they are net revenue generators for agencies. Clustering a group of cabins in a relatively compact area helps reduce maintenance costs.

ACTION B: Alaska needs more hut-to-hut systems. Public land managers can help deliver more of these opportunities, taking advantage of new state and federal funding, and partnering with non-profits working to establish such systems. Alaska Huts, the statewide non-profit, is an example. Alaska Huts has partnered with Chugach National Forest and the Alaska Railroad for a hut-to-hut system in the Spencer Glacier area. “Huts” can be anything from a cozy cabin in the backcountry, to an isolated country inn, to a hostel in a small town.



Easy End to Day of Trekking

On the Queen Charlotte Track in New Zealand, tour companies take you by boat to the trail’s start and move your luggage each night to the next inn. This supports a set of different businesses and opens the backcountry to people who would otherwise not want to be there.

STRATEGY 6.5: Support Close-to-Home Active Outdoor Travel. The SCORP public survey found neighborhood strolling to be at the top of the most common outdoor recreation activities. For health, safety, and enjoyment, communities need to make it easier to move around conveniently without a car. This includes a focus on “complete streets” – streets with ample sidewalks, safe street crossings and other features that put pedestrians on an equal footing with cars.⁹²

ACTION A: Fund implementation of recommendations found in the Statewide Active Transportation Plan, and similar plans in individual communities. New options in the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law as well as federal multi-modal legislation currently moving through Congress could increase funding to states for active transportation solutions, including upgraded sidewalks and trails.

ACTION B: Incorporate active transportation policies in community plans. This includes integrating bike and pedestrian facilities of all types into long-term planning of community infrastructure design and construction. Subdivision rules, already common in many communities, can be used to reserve trail connections in and through private land when property is subdivided and developed.

ACTION C: Emphasize trails and bike or pedestrian facilities to connect and improve existing and future outdoor recreation facilities, as well as tie into community infrastructure.

ACTION D: Work with DOT&PF to determine and design for slower, safer speeds on roads in settled areas, with self-enforcing speed limit features.

Bike Friendly

There are five communities recognized as bike friendly in the state: Anchorage, Kenai, Juneau, Sitka, and Soldotna. Communities can apply to receive League of American Cyclists Bike Friendly Community Status. Data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey shows Alaska ranks 12th in the U.S. for rate of bike commuters.



OBJECTIVE 7: DEVELOP TRAVEL OPTIONS WITH THEMED ITINERARIES

While some travelers beeline to the most widely known attractions, some prefer to wander with little or no plan. In between is the chance to follow a curated pathway focused on a particular interest, like birds, wildlife, a particular cultural or historic theme. As the sidebar outlines, developing such themed itineraries has been very successful in other parts of the world and is an undeveloped opportunity in Alaska.

STRATEGY 7.1: Bring together partners in the tourism industry, cultural institutions, and public land managers to explore options to create Alaska-based travel itineraries. Ideas include aviation sites, WWII, music, coastal fishing towns, public-use cabins, mining history, etc.

Themed Itineraries: Linking Business and Outdoor Recreation

Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail: connecting world class birding along the Gulf Coast, with towns, lodging, dining.⁹⁹

Tennessee: visit the Tennessee Department of Tourism's 16 themed trails and byways covering moonshine, music, and mountains.⁹⁸

OBJECTIVE 8: DEVELOP STRONGER GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

Much of the potential economic benefits of outdoor recreation come from spending that proceeds or follows outdoor activities (e.g., a pub after a bike ride or meals and lodging on a snow machine trip). The economic benefits of outdoor recreation go up where outdoor recreation opportunities are linked to attractive communities.

"Gateway communities" are places where outdoor recreation opportunities are a driving force in community life. Successful gateway communities offer recreation nearby and in town, coupled with quality, inviting places to walk, dine, shop, and spend a night. Travelers from within and beyond Alaska seek out such places. Talkeetna, pictured at right, is a good example of a place that starts with access to outdoor recreation like river trips and flightseeing. But what distinguishes Talkeetna and makes it a destination for 400,000 visitors a year is the concentrated, walkable, and historic downtown.

Some characteristics that create gateway communities are beyond local control, for example, a concentrated historic downtown, a unique natural feature, or lands designated as national or state recreation destinations. Other elements creating gateway community success come from local action, including outdoor recreation facilities, connections from town to those areas, and creation or preservation of walkable, concentrated downtowns. Such communities are common in Southeast but less so in the rest of Alaska.



Photo by Chris Beck

Most popular visitor activity worldwide?

Strolling, dining, shopping in a concentrated, mixed use, walkable setting.



Photo by Juneau Chamber of Commerce

Southeast's success as a cruise destination is as much about compact and walkable communities as it is about interest in Alaska's wild places.



Photo by Chris Beck

The same is true in New Zealand, Europe, or Iceland. Active travelers and residents seeking quality places to live or visit are drawn to walkable communities.

STRATEGY 8.1: Promote the benefits of gateway communities; share strategies for how communities can secure those benefits. Communities need to make their own decisions on if and how they may wish to harvest the potential economic benefits of outdoor recreation. Strategies for communities wishing to grow the economic benefits of outdoor recreation are presented below.

ACTION A: Outdoor recreation advocates – agencies, non-profits, users – should share the lessons from successful gateway communities around the world. A simplified summary of that is below; an excellent book on this topic is referenced in the endnote.⁵⁷



1. A concentrated, walkable, mixed-use center with lodging, food, bars, rentals, housing.



2. Convenient, inviting transit, trails, and roads link the core to nearby memorable outdoor recreation places.



3. Strong marketing at state and local levels promote active recreation destinations and experiences.



4. Outdoor recreation events draw in new users and drive year-round spending.

OBJECTIVE 9: DEVELOP ACCESSIBLE AND APPROACHABLE OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

By 2044, the U.S. Census Bureau predicts Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) will constitute the majority of the U.S. population and a leading consumer group with strong purchasing power.

STRATEGY 9.1: Work toward a more equitable and inclusive distribution of federal and state funding for outdoor recreation infrastructure in rural and Alaska native communities.

STRATEGY 9.2: Help facilitate access and capacity for funding, grant writing, and GIS mapping for outdoor recreation opportunities.

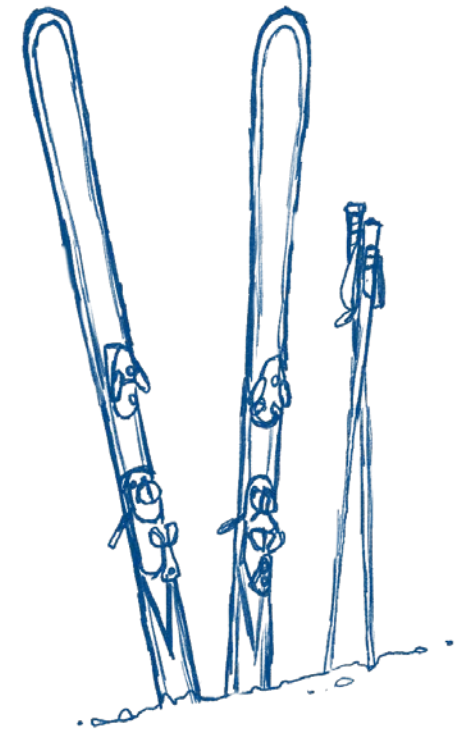
STRATEGY 9.3: Work with Alaska Native tribal entities to create meaningful opportunities for collaboration, and to better communicate historic Indigenous connections to state lands. Recognize their interests in stewarding ancestral lands, fish and wildlife habitat.

STRATEGY 9.4: Build connections and partnerships with local, regional, and statewide Native organizations to provide a stronger role in decisions about local economic development connected to public lands. Examples include the Sustainable Southeast Partnership in the Tongass, the Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission, and the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage.



Dinner from the River – Drying salmon on the Kuskokwim⁶²

The goal of the Kuskokwim River Inter-tribal Fish Council is to cooperatively manage Kuskokwim River Chinook salmon stocks and to ensure a more self-determined management structure.



GOAL 3

Grow the Outdoor Recreation Workforce; Use Outdoor Recreation to Attract and Retain Residents and Businesses

For the success of individual businesses and a thriving state economy, Alaska needs a capable workforce sized to match our state's economic opportunities. Alaska, like much of the nation, currently has more job openings than qualified applicants, particularly in tourism and outdoor recreation.³⁰ Filling this workforce gap, which is forecast to grow, is a continuing challenge given Alaska's small population and location.

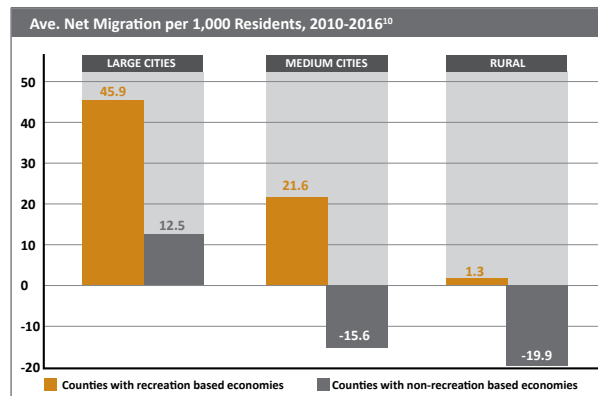
To meet Alaska's workforce needs, this goal presents outdoor recreation objectives and strategies in two broad categories:

- Use access to abundant outdoor recreation opportunities to help attract and retain residents, businesses, and a skilled, creative, energetic workforce in all sectors of the Alaska economy. *See Objective 1 of this goal.*
- Increase the number of available skilled workers and average earnings of the outdoor recreation workforce in Alaska. *See Objectives 2 through 5 of this goal.*

Role of Outdoor Recreation in Quality of Life and Workforce Attraction¹⁰²

Research explains how quality of life can attract and retain businesses and skilled workers, and the specific importance of outdoor recreation as an essential part of the quality of life, especially in Alaska.

- A large majority of corporate executives (87%) say quality of life is a major factor in deciding where to expand or relocate business operations.⁴⁷
- According to a National Association of Realtors survey, four of the top seven most important factors for an American deciding where to live are tied to outdoor recreation, including walkability.⁷⁰
- A survey of the 50 fastest growing businesses in Utah revealed "Utah's outdoor lifestyle and access to a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities were among the most frequently considered factors when deciding to locate their business in Utah or to expand."⁹⁴
- As the chart below shows, communities with outdoor recreation-based economies are more successful at attracting entrepreneurs and new residents, including retirees and people with investment income, than communities that don't offer much outdoor recreation.⁵⁰



"Is the great outdoors a reason to live in Alaska or just a side benefit? As it turns out, six out of ten Alaskans say access to outdoor spaces is a major reason for living in the Last Frontier."⁴⁷

— Geraldine Gambal, *Area Development Magazine*



Volunteers on Little O'Malley Peak Trail in Chugach State Park
Photo by Alaska Trails

What is the Outdoor Recreation Workforce?

Outdoor recreation generates a diverse array of jobs, in various settings and seasons, and with a wide range of salaries and responsibilities. For some individuals, the appeal of outdoor recreation is as much about the lifestyle as it is the wages; for others, a good salary, benefits package, and advancement opportunities are essential. Workforce categories include:

- **Direct Public and Private Sector Outdoor Recreation Providers:** including guiding services, education and naturalist program providers, charter pilots and sportfishing boat captains, and direct support secondary providers such as travel planners.
- **Outdoor Recreation Management and Administration:** including planning, design, environmental reviews and permitting for projects; administration of outdoor recreation grants, staff, programs, and projects; and public engagement or coordination of volunteer agencies or organizations.
- **Outdoor Recreation In-Field Management:** in-field components of work by public agencies, such as DPOR and ADF&G, including law enforcement and emergency response, natural resource conservation projects, outdoor recreation infrastructure design and engineering, and facility construction and maintenance.
- **Support Services:** activities that support the outdoor recreation industry including marketing, outdoor recreation sales and rentals, construction, lodging, dining, and access providers such as RV rentals, shuttle, or charter services.

“Alaska lost 29,900 jobs since 2015 and experienced nine years of net out-migration, averaging nearly 6,000 people per year.”

- Neal Fried, Alaska Department of Labor^{17, 18}

“Every business in every industry in Alaska is having trouble hiring employees.”

- John Bittner of the University of Alaska Small Business Development Center³²

“Average wages in Alaska used to be 15 percent higher than the Lower 48 states, now they’re just seven percent.” Alaska’s cost of living remains high. Although down from number one, it is still high at sixth in the US.

- Alaska Department of Labor^{17, 18}

“We struggle to fill positions in every category: the people who manage our parks, grant administration, engineering, law enforcement, planning and management, campground hosts...”

- Ricky Gease, DPOR Director

Challenges to Developing, Attracting, and Retaining a Quality Workforce

In Alaska and nationwide, recruiting and retaining a quality workforce is increasingly difficult. Specific challenges in Alaska include:

- Seasonality of work in Alaska
- Stagnant pay and declining benefits relative to comparable professional positions
- Lack of affordable housing, particularly for entry level and seasonal employees
- Alaska’s long winters, small population, remoteness, and relatively modest urban amenities
- The steady decline in Alaska’s overall economy and the resulting net population out-migration

Opportunities – Motivation for Living and Working in Alaska

- Access to the diverse Alaskan outdoor recreation life
- An uncrowded state with small population and the vast amounts of public open space that many people appreciate
- In larger communities, quality public school systems relative to those found in many U.S. metro areas.
- Lowest taxes in the U.S.¹⁰⁸
- An annual permanent fund dividend check
- Alaska’s mild summers and snowy winters are increasingly rare in other U.S. states



Photo by Chris Beck

Bend Oregon: Transformed by Outdoor Recreation

Bend evolved from a dying, former timber town, to a booming outdoor recreation economy where an attractive town and recreation amenities have attracted businesses including high tech, manufacturing, professional services, and a new branch of the Oregon State University.

“Labor availability has become the primary constraint for growth in Anchorage so far this year. In the coming decade perhaps no other challenge our city faces is as important as what we are willing to do to retain, grow and educate our city’s labor force.”

– Bill Popp, ADEC CEO ³⁰

“While many economic forces are outside our control, we can retain and attract new residents by enhancing our quality of life and place.” Targeted investments, including amenities like outdoor recreation, can help stem the tide of out-migration and get us back on the path of growth.”

– Bill Popp, ADEC CEO ³⁰

“Alaska’s outdoor recreation workforce is sized for our historic low level of recreation investments. We need to ramp up that workforce in a hurry” – SCORP SWAG member

Over the last ten years, outdoor recreation was the only sector of the Alaska economy that grew despite the COVID pandemic.

OBJECTIVES

1. Invest in outdoor recreation facilities and programs that attract and retain businesses, employees, residents, and retirees
2. Improve information to understand the outdoor recreation industry’s workforce trends and needs
3. Expand outdoor recreation training and skill development
4. Expand the size of the outdoor recreation workforce to meet growing outdoor recreation demands
5. Raise the quality of outdoor recreation jobs for Alaskans by expanding visitor spending and seasons

OBJECTIVE 1: INVEST IN OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS THAT ATTRACT AND RETAIN BUSINESSES, EMPLOYEES, RESIDENTS AND RETIREES

Alaska competes for businesses, residents, and workforce. Our unique outdoor recreation opportunities can make the difference in attracting and retaining businesses, residents, retirees, and second homeowners that help build Alaska’s workforce and add spending to the economy.

STRATEGY 1.1: Identify and invest in outdoor recreation opportunities as an attraction and retention strategy. Alaska needs to match competing communities by investing in outdoor recreation to attract and retain residents, businesses, and employees.

ACTION A. Share information on the impact of outdoor recreation in Alaska as a workforce attraction and retention strategy. The benefits need referenced when advocating for outdoor recreation projects and programs with decision makers and the public.

ACTION B. Promote Alaskas outdoor recreation stories and successes. Public land management agencies can partner with destination marketing groups to share outdoor recreation information when introducing Alaska to prospective new businesses and residents.

ACTION C. Emphasize investments in outdoor recreation opportunities that affect decisions to stay in Alaska. For example, public land managers can expand opportunities in and around communities that are unique to Alaska. Communities can also invest in more ways for residents to enjoy Alaska’s long winters by providing introductory programs or facilities that help first-time users discover winter recreational opportunities. *See Goals 2 and 4 for more information.*

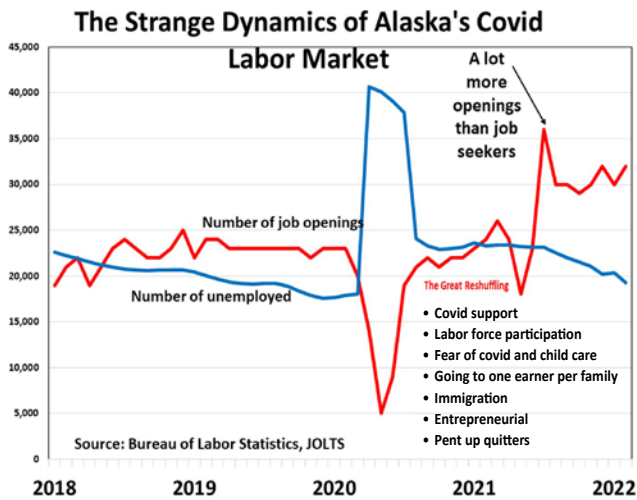
OBJECTIVE 2: IMPROVE INFORMATION TO UNDERSTAND THE OUTDOOR RECREATION INDUSTRY’S WORKFORCE TRENDS AND NEEDS

Forecasting economic futures and resulting workforce needs is always challenging. There are three trends relevant to outdoor recreation’s role in the Alaska economy:

- Growth in Alaska’s outdoor recreation industry spurred by growing interest by out-of-state travelers and residents.
- Job loss and out-migration of working-age adults in Alaska⁹⁰ reflects the decline in oil production in Alaska’s economy.^{105, 106}
- Recent and significant increases in federal funding for outdoor recreation, driven by the passing of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Great American Outdoors Act. (These funds are only beginning to become available in Alaska and will create opportunities for a substantial increase in outdoor recreation jobs.)



Given the trends and other information provided, Alaska clearly needs to prepare its workforce to meet an increase in outdoor recreation investment in the state. This need is further emphasized by Alaska's existing labor shortfall, illustrated in the chart below.



STRATEGY 2.1: Work with partners to better understand, forecast, and meet outdoor recreation workforce needs.

ACTION A: Document specific workforce and skill-sets needed across the outdoor recreation industry in collaboration with public, non-profit and private partners.

“Federal spending in Alaska will create the opportunity for as many as 40,000 new jobs in Alaska over the coming ten years.”

— Jon Bittner of the University of Alaska Small Business Development Center ³²



A Sign of the Times

ACTION B: Identify the specific challenges limiting the outdoor workforce. Identify these challenges to inform strategies for solutions. *See Objectives 3 and 4 that follow.* Examples of constraints include comparative wages and benefits, housing, seasonality, skill requirements, and access to international workers.

ACTION C: Share workforce solution case studies. Provide examples of workforce solutions from other workforce sectors throughout Alaska, or in the outdoor recreation industry in other states. For example, when faced with growing teacher shortages, the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta school district sourced teachers from the Philippines.

OBJECTIVE 3: EXPAND OUTDOOR RECREATION TRAINING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY 3.1: Make entry into the outdoor recreation industry more attractive through training – offering more options to rise from entry level to advanced recreation positions.

ACTION A: Expand formal outdoor recreation training and accreditation programs, taking advantage of established training programs, and filling in gaps as needed. Established partners include the University of Alaska, Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA), and State of Alaska Vocational programs. Current known needs include:

- Facility design and permitting
- Facility maintenance and construction
- Grant writing and administration
- Front line workers

ACTION B: Build improved career pathways for entry level, field work positions to evolve into better paid, sustainable full-time jobs. For example, state and federal agencies should improve options so entry level field work can lead to better paying positions. Options include internship programs and changes to the academic standards that limit advancement.

Travel Industry Partnerships

ATIA sponsors two programs that can help with recruitment and job training: Work for Alaska (a tourism workforce recruitment campaign) and AlaskaHost (a hospitality training program). New partners can leverage these programs, increasing their reach and value.

ACTION C: Grow outdoor recreation job and business development skills in rural and Alaska Native communities by providing more opportunities for rural residents to capitalize on the outdoor recreation economy. For-profit ANSCA corporations as well as regional non-profits play a big role in this effort. Examples include business ownership training, financial support for training programs and skill workshops, low-cost business start-up loans, and paid internship programs. Businesses and agencies across the outdoor recreation industry can host positions that hire local residents and take advantage of their knowledge of local natural settings, issues, and communities.

OBJECTIVE 4: EXPAND THE SIZE OF THE OUTDOOR RECREATION WORKFORCE TO MEET GROWING OUTDOOR RECREATION DEMANDS

As highlighted in Chapter 2 and Objective 2 of this goal, Alaska's outdoor recreation workforce needs to grow.

STRATEGY 4.1: Make outdoor recreation jobs more attractive through benefits beyond wages. Employers can provide other ways to attract and retain skilled employees in addition to wages. Options include subsidized housing (as is done for seasonal positions by agencies like NPS and USFS), skill-building programs that lead to advancement, and programs so seasonal work can evolve to full time. Flexible work hours and part time positions give employees more time to enjoy outdoors in Alaska along with their other interests. It is a powerful attraction for many prospective employees.

STRATEGY 4.2: Encourage increased staff and wages for outdoor recreation agencies and land management agencies. Given Alaska's high cost of living and other intrinsic challenges, higher wages must be considered as a part of the solution to attracting and retaining an adequately-sized and capable outdoor recreation workforce.

Investments in public recreation staff can pay for themselves, by producing better facilities leading to increases in public recreation revenues and fees and more private sector jobs. *See Goals 2 and 6 for more information.* The SCORP Public Survey found Alaska residents want expanded outdoor recreation opportunities and support a range of options for growing public funding for that purpose. *See Chapter 2 for more information.*

Workforce Gap:

Staffing levels within DPOR and DMLW need to grow. For example, processing trail right-of-way and easement applications at DMLW frequently can take five years or longer. Additionally, recreation management plans are not updated timely due to lack of staff. However, the State's modest salaries relative to the challenges of the work make it increasingly difficult to fill positions.

Questions and answers from the land managers survey:

Q: What are the biggest challenges for recruiting and retaining the outdoor recreation workforce?

A: "Insufficient pay scale and benefits for workforce."

Q: For people in management positions, what is the most important objective under your jurisdiction?

A: "Availability and skills of outdoor recreation workforce;"

A: "We need more Park Rangers!!!!;" and

A: "State Parks projects are run by volunteers...the park system is running on fumes!"



Bristol Bay Sportfish Academy

The Sportfish Academy brings together local youth with skilled sportfishing guides to help young people gain the skills needed to join the thriving sportfishing lodge business happening in their own backyards. The program has helped dozens of Bristol Bay residents find work with local fishing lodges and demonstrates how local knowledge brings value to these businesses and their clients.

Bristol Bay's Anchor Tourism Businesses

Katmai National Park's concessionaire purchased and operates a high-end fishing lodge near Dillingham. These actions reflect Bristol Bay Native Corporation's (BBNC) commitment to regional investments that open new options for residents to enter the outdoor recreation industry. BBNC supports this local investment approach, recognizing the investments may be less profitable than out-of-region alternatives.



STRATEGY 4.3: Unite non-profit, public, and business partners to provide workforce solutions

Nonprofit organizations have shown great success in supplementing public funds to build and maintain trails, parks, and other outdoor recreation facilities as well as providing outdoor recreation concession services.

ACTION A: Strengthen partnerships between non-profits and public agencies. Non-profits can generate funding well beyond what agencies can do on their own. Non-profits can leverage public funds like the Recreation Trails, LWCF, and SnowTRAC programs to bring in resources often not available to the public sector, including volunteer labor and funding from foundations, individuals and businesses, and Native Corporations. The extensive winter trails in Willow and the Petersville Road area are good examples of non-profits leveraging public funding dollars with volunteers and other non-state funding sources. The result expands the outdoor recreation workforce beyond the capabilities of public recreation agencies.

OBJECTIVE 5: RAISE THE QUALITY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION JOBS FOR ALASKANS BY EXPANDING VISITOR SPENDING AND SEASONS

In addition to growing the numbers of visitors and travel-related jobs in Alaska, outdoor recreation policy can work to grow the quality of outdoor recreation and tourism jobs, generating more well-paid jobs for Alaska residents and greater success for Alaska-based businesses.

Compared to other industry sectors, the outdoor recreation and tourism industry has a large share of lower wage and seasonal service positions. One example: in Southeast Alaska, in pre-COVID 2019, the visitor industry provided 18 percent of all jobs, but only 12 percent of workforce earnings.⁹³ The high percentage of lower paying jobs in the outdoor recreation and visitor industries has multiple causes, primarily due to

the extreme seasonality of the industry. Other causes include the relative ease of starting a tourism business and the fact that a large share of the work requires minimal training or formal education.⁸²

Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation (MSTPF)⁶⁴

MSTPF brings together volunteers, partners, funders, and grantees. They offer funding to qualified local organizations to develop and maintain trails or acquire lands to create parks. Since 2011, MSTPF's investments have supplemented public funding to build or improve 440 miles of trails and provided \$2 million dollars in grants with local partners.



Photo by Trail Mix, Inc.

Stewarding the Trails of Juneau

Trail Mix, Inc. combines funding from the City and Borough of Juneau, USFS, and local donations to support paid and volunteer trails crews.

Variations in Volume and Value: Experiments in Visitor Industry Policy^{44,63}

In 1993, Colorado residents voted to slash state marketing budgets out of frustration with crowds of tourists. The result was minimal change in the numbers and impacts of visitors but a large decline in average visitor spending. The right kind of marketing can make a big difference in the spending per visitor.



Photo by Alaska Wilderness Adventures

Active Adventure Draws High Value Travelers

Image of out-of-state clients enjoying another day of active adventure on the Kenai River, and paying \$4000 to \$6000 for a week-long to ten-day trip in Alaska (prices cited are based on a review of websites of tour operators).

More can be done to promote higher paying jobs for Alaskans, and more lucrative, successful Alaska-based businesses.

Specific actions to help meet these objectives are covered in other SCORP goals including:

- Improve facilities and programs to grow winter recreation opportunities, to increase jobs and business opportunities through more of year. *See Goal 2 for more information.* Expand marketing focused on **winter and outdoor recreation** and high value visitors. *See Goal 7, Objective 4.*
- Expand opportunities to serve markets that result in more visitors who spend **one more day** in Alaska, through providing more of the facilities for active outdoor recreation. *See Goal 2.*
- Expand the numbers of **outdoor recreation and tourism businesses owned, operated, and staffed by Alaska residents** through a variety of training and lending programs. *See Goal 3, Objective 3.*
- Invest in **infrastructure that increases typical visitor spending**, for example more options for trams and overnight at outdoor recreation destinations, and more options for independent travelers. *See Goal 2.*

GOAL 4

Empower and Enable Alaskans to Lead Active Healthy Lives

Outdoor recreation plays a key role in improving both physical and mental health. Supporting programs and infrastructure that promote outdoor activity encourages healthy lifestyles, provides a proactive, cost-saving alternative to improving overall health, and reduces the risk of chronic disease. In order to provide these opportunities, Alaska should equitably expand access for outdoor recreation to residents of all races, ages, abilities, and socioeconomic levels. To accomplish this goal, new strategies are needed to help ensure all Alaskans have access to outdoor recreation and are encouraged to invest in personal and community health and wellness.

ACHIEVING HEALTH AND WELLNESS GOALS IN ALASKA OPPORTUNITIES:

For much of the year, Alaska boasts an inviting climate that includes temperate summers perfect for adventuring outside and ample snow to support a wide variety of winter sports. Coupled with wild and scenic places and access to public lands, it's easy to see why residents are enthusiastic about outdoor life in Alaska. To support this lifestyle, Alaska has a diverse and wide array of health and wellness organizations as well as parks, trails, and other infrastructure that encourage individuals and communities to pursue healthy lifestyles.

According to the 2022 SCORP public survey, Alaskans primarily spend time outside for health and exercise purposes (49.5%) and for their mental well-being (44.4%).

BARRIERS: The weather and climate of Alaska can also be a limiting factor for many outdoor recreationists. Winters are long, dark, and cold while summers are prone to unpredictable, inclement weather. Adapting to these seasonal changes can impact residents as well as visitors. Accommodating these challenges often require costly outdoor recreation equipment, preparedness for potential wildlife encounters, and an understanding of the vastness of Alaska landscapes. These factors can be intimidating and may reduce motivation to spend time outside.

“Access is limited if you are lower income and do not own gear. Bikeable and walkable communities are my favorite. For outdoor exercise, I'm often concerned about my safety in Anchorage and wildlife outside of Anchorage, which limits the time I can spend solo exercising.”

— SCORP public survey comment, 2022



“Outdoor recreation is essential for people's mental and physical health.”

— SCORP public survey comment, 2022

Settlers Cove State Recreation Site
Photo by Peaches Wallin

In the SCORP public survey, respondents reported wildlife (24.3%), expenses (23.0%), lack of knowledge of outdoor opportunities (21.4%), and lack of supporting infrastructure (20.8%) as impediments to participating in outdoor activities.

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify new partnerships for planning and funding of outdoor recreation
2. Expand research and improve data collection
3. Invest in outdoor recreation infrastructure that empowers more Alaskans to be active outside
4. Invest in community and regional outdoor health programs
5. Plan for more inclusive, equitable access to outdoor recreation opportunities

OBJECTIVE 1. IDENTIFY NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE PLANNING AND FUNDING OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Improving health and wellness through outdoor recreation falls into two general categories. The first is through infrastructure – parks and playgrounds, boat launches and swimming pools, trails and sidewalks. These are generally provided by public land managers and private and non-profit organizations. A second category is through programs, education, and funding. These are provided by a broad range of partners including health organizations, government health agencies, and health-focused businesses and non-profits.

Developing new and strengthening current partnerships between these two categories can help outdoor recreation play a larger role in promoting health and wellness for all Alaskans.

STRATEGY 1.1: Bridge partnership gaps between health agencies and organizations, recreation providers, and for-profit health businesses.

ACTION A: Collaborate with a convening entity (possibly, DHSS and Healthy Alaskans 2030) to create recommendations for cohesive actions that promote outdoor recreation and physical activity.

ACTION B: Work with health providers and parks to assess the opportunity of a statewide ParkRx program. See Strategy 4.1 of this goal for more information.

ACTION C: Support the Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act with health and wellness partners to improve the lives of veterans and their families in the state.

ACTION D: Maximize investments of the Centers for Disease Control, Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (CDP&HP), and other granting agencies that fund health and wellness programs.

The Mat-Su Health Foundation⁶⁵ is giving the Mat-Su Parks and Trails Foundation \$4 million over ten years to expand outdoor recreation facilities in the Mat-Su.

STRATEGY 1.2: Develop partnerships that provide youth programs for health and wellness, fun, skill development, training, and workforce development.

ACTION A: Support schools and other partners to provide year-round outdoor recreation opportunities for youth, particularly during vulnerable times of the day, week, or year such as before and after school, weekends, and the summer.

ACTION B: Identify and disseminate information on innovative and successful school-based outdoor recreation programs in Alaska.

ACTION C: Connect organizations with funding and program resources.

The Chugach Children's Forest¹⁶

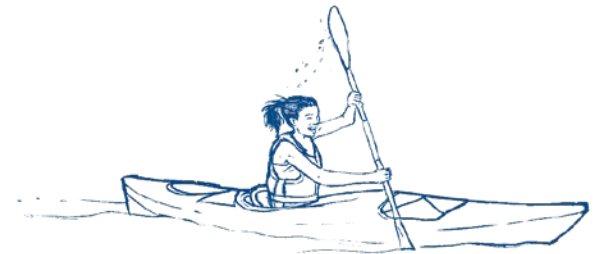
Introducing Diverse Young Alaskans to Their Wild Backyard

The Chugach Children's Forest is a unique partnership between Alaska Geographic and the Chugach National Forest. Combining education, career opportunities, and volunteer and service-learning, this partnership actively engages Alaskans of all backgrounds and fosters healthy, sustainable connections to the outdoors by providing "life-changing" expeditions and education.

Alaska Afterschool Network³

Investing In Our Children

The Alaska Afterschool Network is a network of nonprofit, private, tribal, and government organizations that promote high quality, after school programs as a critical component in the positive development of Alaska's youth.



OBJECTIVE 2. EXPAND RESEARCH AND IMPROVE DATA COLLECTION

Currently, there is minimal tracking of the public health benefits of outdoor recreation for Alaskans.

STRATEGY 2.1: Collect and disseminate quality information on the health benefits of active outdoor recreation and the unique needs and opportunities in Alaska.

ACTION A: Compile previous health needs assessments to identify practices and policies that best serve the state's diverse population and health inequities, especially among Alaska's youth and rural Alaskans.

ACTION B: Support new research to identify and further understand barriers to outdoor recreation.

ACTION C: Identify populations with less access to regular, accessible healthy outdoor recreation opportunities.

ACTION D: Publicize the benefits of outdoor recreation on lowering healthcare costs in the state.

OBJECTIVE 3. INVEST IN OUTDOOR RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE THAT EMPOWERS MORE ALASKANS TO BE ACTIVE OUTSIDE

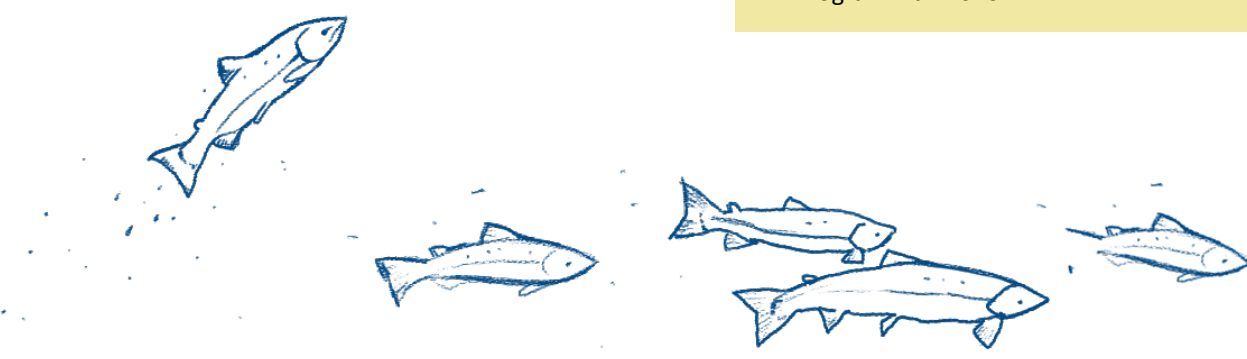
Statewide investments in outdoor recreation infrastructure make it easier for all Alaskans to be active outdoors. Alaska residents need easy access to an inviting, diverse array of year-round outdoor recreation infrastructure and opportunities. Infrastructure that is tailored to entry-level users is important. Access to readily available opportunities will encourage people of all skills and abilities to experience life outdoors. Examples of such infrastructure include well-signed community parks, trails that are groomed and ADA-accessible, and trailside cabins.

A Sample Of Existing Health Need Studies

1. Healthy Alaskans 2030 State Health Improvement Plan⁵²
2. Health and Healthcare in Alaska 2014¹¹
3. National Recreation and Park Association-Making the Case: Parks and Health⁷⁴
4. 2021 State of Mental Health in America⁶⁷
5. Strengthening the System: Alaska's Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program Plan 2020-24¹²



Photo by Suzie Mauro



In the 2022 SCORP survey of Alaska land managers, respondents indicated that COVID-19 has been the primary driver of outdoor recreation facility demand increase. This was followed closely by an increased popularity of activity - perhaps corresponding to the nationwide lockdowns during the height of the pandemic. Strategies that guide investments in sustainable outdoor recreation infrastructure are needed to help encourage the growing interest in pursuing life outdoors in Alaska.

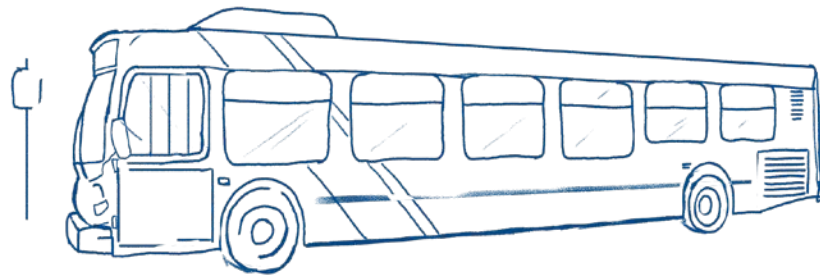
STRATEGY 3.1: Improve transportation systems to make it more convenient and inviting to be active outside.

ACTION A: Bring together local governments, non-profit outdoor recreation organizations, and health organizations to assess the availability and quality of parks and trails and to fill the gaps in underserved locations.

ACTION B: Engage in the work of non-profit organizations that enhance outdoor recreation infrastructure and encourage experiencing the outdoors. This can include partnerships for fundraising and actively promoting the use of public lands for improved infrastructure.



Trail crew on the Reed Lakes Trail in the Hatcher Pass Management Area



STRATEGY 3.2: Improve outdoor recreation access from homes, workplaces, and schools by reducing transportation barriers.

ACTION A: In communities with public transportation, partner with or encourage transit managers to provide better access to parks and trailheads, especially on weekends.

ACTION B: Improve year-round walkability and bike access within Alaska's communities, through timely and adequate winter maintenance of walking and biking infrastructure.

ACTION C: Maximize investments of the Safe Routes to Schools, Complete Streets, Green Streets, CDP&HP, and similar programs to provide biking and walking connections between neighborhoods, parks, schools, commercial areas, and other everyday destinations.

STRATEGY 3.3: Expand opportunities for winter outdoor recreation activities. See Goal 2 for more information.

STRATEGY 3.4: Improve public information about outdoor recreation opportunities.

ACTION A: Partner with local governments, transit agencies, and tourism organizations to provide comprehensive, accessible, and practical information on outdoor recreation access. See Goal 7 for more information.

OBJECTIVE 4. INVEST IN COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL OUTDOOR HEALTH PROGRAMS

Quality programs can promote being active in the outdoors as an affordable way to improve the health and wellbeing of Alaskans. There is a long list of programs in Alaska that encourage people to be active outside. It is important to continue to expand the programs that connect public health and outdoor recreation.

STRATEGY 4.1: Identify benefits of non-profit outdoor recreation programs.

ACTION A: Support public and non-profit partners who provide healthy outdoor activity programs by identifying the locations and infrastructure needed for successful outdoor recreation programs. Success stories across the state include, the Mat-Su Valley's Government Peak Recreation Area,⁶⁶ The Junior Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage,⁸⁰ and DPOR Boating Safety Program.¹⁴

ACTION B: Investigate tools like ParkRx⁶⁶ and Walk with a Doc¹⁰⁷ to address shared health risk and preventative factors.

STRATEGY 4.2: Integrate outdoor recreation activities into school curriculum.

ACTION A: Support outdoor education organizations and similar programs to create and expand a place-based outdoor education curriculum and teacher resources adaptable for grades K-12 throughout the state.

OBJECTIVE 5. PLAN FOR MORE INCLUSIVE AND APPROACHABLE ACCESS TO OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

While everyone would benefit from regular immersion in the outdoors, certain populations have special needs and less access to outdoor recreation. Work is needed to better understand and address specific health and wellness inequalities or barriers as well as to expand access to and the approachability of outdoor recreation infrastructure, programs, and opportunities.

Calypso Farm and Ecology Center³⁵

Encouraging Local Food Production and Environmental Awareness Through Hands-on Education

Calypso Farm and Ecology Center is an educational farm in Ester, Alaska which offers hands-on education programs for all ages. The School Garden Initiative, for example, responds to the need for hands-on educational opportunities in schools and provides a gardening and nutrition connection for children and locally grown food for the community.



Photo by Calypso Farm and Ecology Center

During Fall Farm Skills Days, participants engage in activities such as woodcarving, fire building, and outdoor cooking. They carve a handmade spatula to cook with, harvest their own vegetables from the garden, and cook over a fire they build themselves.

The Anchorage Outdoor School⁶¹

Engaging Students with the Natural World

The Anchorage Outdoor School offers educational programs for youth and enables students to develop an appreciation for Alaska's public lands and natural resources while experiencing the mental and physical benefits of being outdoors. Students are given the opportunity to engage directly with the natural world to explore outdoor skills, natural and cultural history, science, outdoor recreation activities, career options, and develop social-emotional skills.

Training Rural Alaska Youth Leaders and Students (TRAYLS)⁹⁷

"I'm excited to build the bridge on this trail. It's something that I'm already interested in, and being able to gain experience in engineering through this program will look great when I apply for college after my senior year."

– Quinn Aboudara, TRAYLS participant⁸⁸

The TRAYLS program was launched in 2017, as a pilot program designed to train rural Alaska youth and young adults in various forestry related skills. Typically, TRAYLS crews spend time with various outside experts in fields like archaeology, forestry, watershed management, and ecology.



Winner Creek Trail, Girdwood

"Encourage public schools to teach children to respect and do outdoor recreation."

– SCORP public survey comment, 2022

“Any additional options that help get my family out in nature is awesome! Both my husband and self are overweight and my son is ten. I want to be a better model for connection with nature and health despite my own struggles in that area. Ease of access matters!”

– SCORP public survey comment, 2022



Healthy lifestyles may help improve the mind, body, and spirit of Alaska residents. Approximately 18.9 percent of the population of Alaska, and 26.2 percent of those under 18 years old, live below the Federal Poverty Level. Among all Alaskans, 12.6 percent are without health insurance coverage, compared to 8.8 percent in the U.S. as a whole.⁵³ Access to affordable and accessible recreation may help those who are impoverished and uninsured to improve their health without burden.

The median age of Alaskans in 2019 was 38.4 which aligns with the national median age in the same year. Similar to the national pattern, the percentage of Alaska’s population age 65 or older is expected to continue rising over the coming decades, reaching an estimated 15.8 percent of the population by 2045.¹⁸ However, the burden of an aging population may be disproportionate throughout the state, and regional demographic differences will play a large role in providing appropriate outdoor recreation activities for local residents.

STRATEGY 5.1: Expand access to and approachability of outdoor recreation infrastructure, programs, and opportunities.

ACTION A: Support outdoor recreation programs and infrastructure for older populations including ADA compliant trams that open up new, currently inaccessible scenic and wildlife viewing vistas..

ACTION B: Support outdoor recreation programs and infrastructure for low-income, BIPOC, and other underserved populations.

ACTION C: Support outdoor recreation programs and infrastructure for special needs populations.

Inclusive playgrounds, for example, provide physical, social, and sensory play opportunities and enhanced ADA accessibility.

CONCLUSION

Mental Health America’s 2021 “State of Mental Health in America” study estimates that roughly 20 percent of Alaska’s adult population is experiencing mental illness and ranks Alaska as 49 of 51 in overall mental health concerns. While this outlook is bleak, Alaska’s outdoor recreation opportunities are a remarkable resource to promote healthier mental and physical lifestyles. Additionally, there has been a recent research shift to look at the immediate and long-term environmental determinants of well-being in our communities.

It is important to provide infrastructure and programs to expand the contribution of outdoor recreation to Alaska’s health and wellness while promoting partnerships to make them happen. Moreover, ensuring readily available access to public lands is an important step in ensuring that all Alaskans can have places to move their bodies, connect to nature, and find re-creation of body, mind, and spirit on a daily basis.⁷⁵

“Alaska’s population is aging as more and more older folks stay when they reach retirement age. Keep that in mind when deciding on facilities. Be sure and keep in mind folks with limited mobility. Ramps not steps, railings, handicap (ADA) compliant restrooms, etc.”

– SCORP public survey comment, 2022

GOAL 5

Balancing Outdoor Recreation Growth and Stewardship

Residents and visitors share a love for Alaska’s unique outdoor world. The sheer vastness of Alaska, our spectacular wild landscapes, glaciers and peaks, abundant wildlife, fish-filled streams, and rugged coastlines are the primary reasons most residents chose to live in Alaska. *See Goal 3 for details.* The chance to experience these same world-class outdoor recreation resources explain why over two million out-of-state travelers visit Alaska each year.

Outdoor recreation demand keeps growing. This continued growth brings real benefits, supporting jobs and businesses, generating funds that help pay for our schools and roads, and supporting a scale of restaurants and other services beyond what resident spending alone could support. But tourism and outdoor recreation growth can also create problems. In many locations, the agencies and nonprofits providing outdoor recreation services are increasingly hard-pressed to keep up with current use, much less anticipated growth. Recreation activities and facilities can impact the quality and health of natural landscapes, while growing use can bring unwelcome changes to Alaskans’ favorite trail, campground, fishing spot or community.

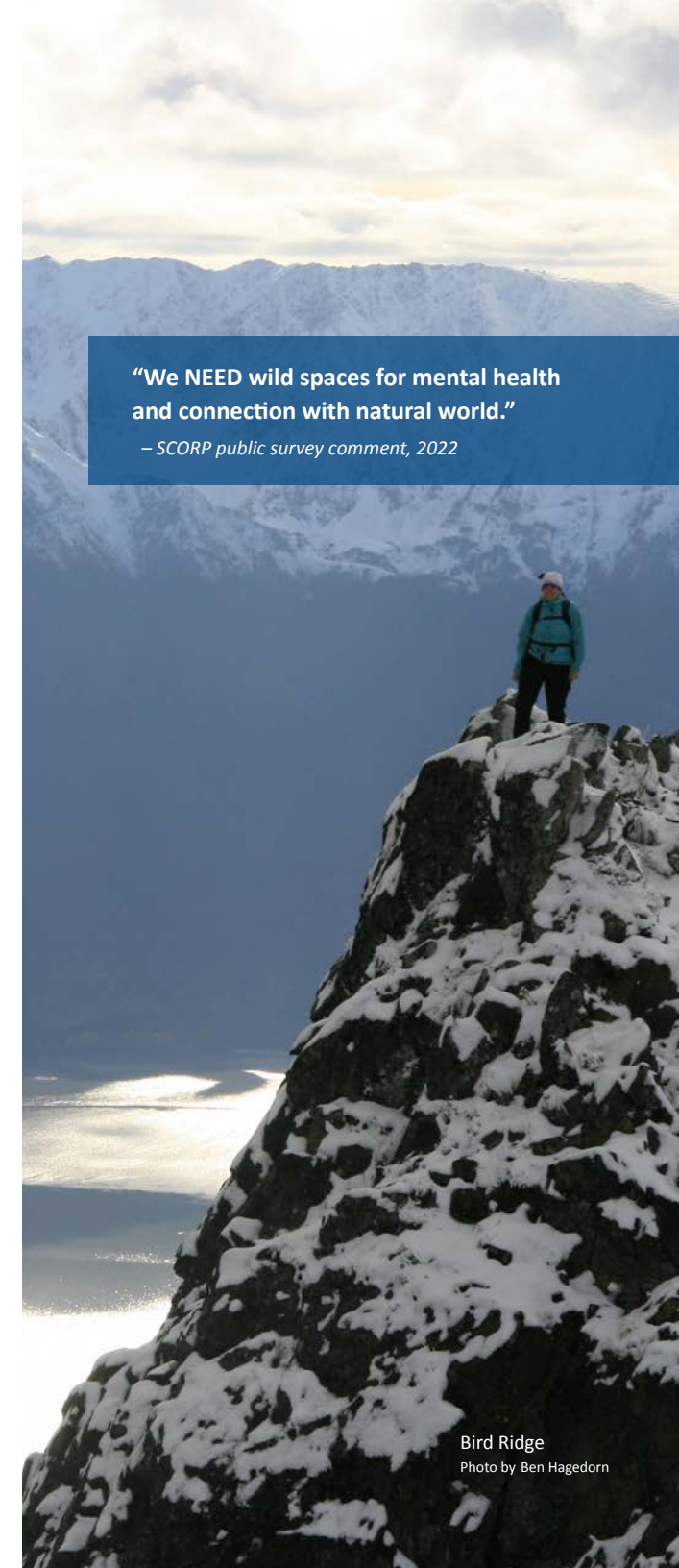


Photo by Chris Beck

Weekday afternoon in April: Earn Your Turns event crowd on top of Peak 2 in Chugach State Park.

Outdoor Recreation in Alaska: Big Now and Destined to Grow. *See Chapter 2 for details.*

- From 1990 to 2019, visitors to America’s national parks grew from 256 million to 328 million; in 2022 many lower 48 national parks had their busiest months ever³⁹
- Over the last 40 years, annual out-of-state travel to Alaska grew from under 400,000 to over 2,000,000 visitors⁶
- Projections by the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation show Alaska’s population growing in coming years, with the fastest growth occurring in the Anchorage and Mat-Su regions²⁹
- Hiking and nature walks were the fastest growing area of participation by cruise and independent out-of-state visitors from 2011 to 2016⁶
- Alaska State Parks experienced busiest summers ever in 2020 and 2022²⁷



“We NEED wild spaces for mental health and connection with natural world.”

– SCORP public survey comment, 2022

Bird Ridge
Photo by Ben Hagedorn

Alaska needs the benefits outdoor recreation can bring, and growth and change are coming whether we seek it or not. **The goal of this SCORP is to both promote and guide growth** so that growth benefits Alaskan residents, communities, and businesses and, at the same time, sustains what makes Alaska a great place to live, visit, and be active outside. The specific topics addressed in this chapter include:

- How to maintain the underlying quality of the natural environment while expanding outdoor recreation use and facilities.
- How to maintain the quality of destinations and provide high quality experiences in Alaska while meeting growing outdoor recreation demand.
- What should be the roles or policies of public land management agencies and other outdoor recreation partners who are contending with these issues?

Specific objectives for balancing growth and stewardship are presented below, followed by strategies to obtain those objectives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Document challenges and benefits of outdoor recreation growth
2. Invest in sustainable, infrastructure utilizing best management practices
3. Proactively guide growth with inclusive regional and local plans
4. Support growth and stewardship through partnerships

OBJECTIVE 1. DOCUMENT CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION GROWTH

Balancing growth and stewardship requires good data on how recreation activity is growing and changing. Chapter II of this SCORP provides a start at a new set of tools needed to meet the data needs of outdoor recreation providers.

STRATEGY 1.1: Improve monitoring, measurement, and analysis. New and better systems are needed, not just to track amounts of outdoor recreation use, but to monitor the issues and trends tied to balancing growth and quality.

ACTION A: Upgrade information regarding use, trends, and impacts. Better recreation use data are needed, including the new tools described in Ch II, and regular updates of the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program. *See Objective 5, Goal 7 for more information.*

ACTION B: Compile and share information on Alaska's experiences managing growth of tourism and outdoor recreation. Awareness is growing around the globe about the risks of "over-tourism" and the need to guide outdoor recreation growth. In Alaska and nationwide, destination marketing organizations (DMO's) are adding an "M" for management to their names and missions. Partners, including municipalities, DPOR, ATIA, nonprofits, users, and user groups need to work together and share lessons on strategies to both grow and maintain quality destinations. One option is to make these issues priority topics at annual statewide and regional conferences.

OBJECTIVE 2. INVEST IN SUSTAINABLE, INFRASTRUCTURE UTILIZING BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Sustainable infrastructure, utilizing best management practices, lowers maintenance costs and balances growing demand with resource protection. Sustainability considers not just the initial construction, but also the ongoing operational, maintenance, and replacement costs. Well-designed, well-built, and strategically located infrastructure provides high quality experiences, protects the environment, reduces ongoing maintenance costs, and attracts the support of partners and communities.

Drivers of Growth and Change

Notes below from interview with Alexis Shubin, Reservation Specialist at Alaska Wildland Adventures, 2022:

There has been a big shift in Alaska tourism as COVID accelerated a change that's been happening over the last ten years. We are seeing steady growth by Alaskans and independent travelers looking for active outdoor experiences.

- Outdoor-oriented businesses are thriving.
- Alyeska Resort is offering ecology hikes and Bird-to-Gird Bikepath riding tours.
- New, successful business are opening, especially in biking and paddling.
- Gear rental businesses are having very strong years.
- Businesses like ours are fully booked this year and filling up the next.
- The traditional, older demographic (65 plus) is still coming, but there are more families and more young couples wanting more active outdoor adventures.
- Alaska has been demystified through reality-TV shows and social media. More and more people want to plan their own trips and to create their own experiences.

Drivers of Growth and Change

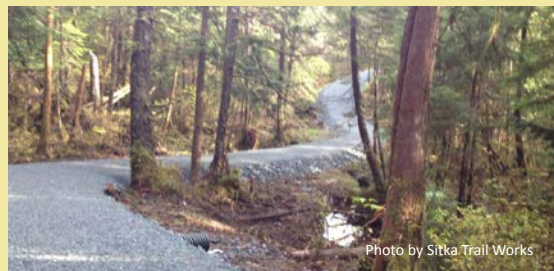
Southeast Alaska cruise destinations are approaching capacity, as demand for cruising continues to grow. One result is two major, planned Southcentral cruise dock projects. These projects will send a new wave of visitors to the Railbelt and beyond:

- Whittier Dock (Huna Native Corp)
- Seward Dock expansion (Alaska Railroad Corporation)

STRATEGY 2.1: Set sustainability standards and make the investments needed to construct and upgrade sustainable facilities. Alaska needs to invest in research and planning for outdoor recreation resources to be sustainable.

ACTION A: Compile and produce sustainable Alaska-based design standards and construction manuals. Sustainable infrastructure standards have been developed by both public agencies and groups like the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), covering a wide range of outdoor recreation facilities. Parties involved in facility construction, including agencies, nonprofits, and private firms, should work together to further refine standards, and ensure they meet Alaska conditions. See Goal 7, Objective 6 for more information.

ACTION B: Share and apply modern sustainability standards. Much of Alaska's outdoor recreation infrastructure is aging and needs serious maintenance or reconstruction. Many trails, trailheads, and other recreation facilities were located by happenstance rather than with the goal of reducing impacts and



Sitka Trail Works

Upfront costs were high for a gravel pad on the Sitka Cross Trail, but rain-country boardwalks get slippery and deteriorate. The investment pays off in long-term maintenance cost savings while also providing a safer, more enjoyable trail.

maintenance costs. Modern standards need be applied in coming years to both upgrade current and construct new facilities. The wide use of sustainability standards available can help guide and streamline the significant infrastructure upgrades needed in Alaska.

ACTION C: Save money and improve facilities by applying sustainability principals at large scales. Develop master plans for infrastructure systems, like a long stretch of trail or a set of public use cabins, so incremental progress on subsets of that system fits with and supports a larger scale, sustainable plan.

STRATEGY 2.2: Plan facilities to respond to anticipated changes, including the impacts of climate change and growing demand. The diverse impacts of climate change in Alaska, including more intense rainfall, thawing permafrost, and vegetation changes need to guide the design of future outdoor recreation infrastructure, along with the need to plan for continued growth.



Clearing dangerous, dead spruce from campgrounds in the Mat-Su Borough.

Dead spruce trees in public campgrounds and along trail systems are posing real problems in Alaska, leading to forced closures of State campgrounds, and big increases to already tight maintenance.

Results of the Land Manager survey conducted as part of this SCORP (see Appendix 3) confirmed the top two priorities in response to a question about management objectives were:

- Investing in deferred maintenance
- Protecting natural resources from excessive use



Volunteers on a sustainable trail in Chugach State Park
Photo by Alaska Trails



Hatcher Pass
Photo by Cooper Brown

OBJECTIVE 3. PROACTIVELY GUIDE GROWTH WITH INCLUSIVE REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANS

Local and regional planning are essential to clarify goals and make informed decisions on investments and other outdoor recreation strategies. The SCORP provides a valuable, broad framework for encouraging and guiding outdoor recreation statewide. This objective focuses on the need for planning at the regional and local level – providing practical outdoor recreation plans with locally based strategies to support growth and maintain quality experiences for residents and visitors. *See Goal 7 for planning strategies at the statewide level.*

Talkeetna Tourism Growth Exceeding Community Capacity



Photo by Chris Beck

The town of Talkeetna has become a major visitor destination over the last three decades, receiving over 400,000 annual visitors. Handling this use has stressed every aspect of the small town's capacity, from sewer and parking to more subjective measures, like the retention of the "real town" qualities that make the area attractive to visitors and residents. Solutions are challenging in a small, unincorporated town.

Kenai Coastal Fishing Locations



Demand for personal use and sportfishing continues to grow, but neighbors and residents are often unhappy due to inadequate trash receptacles, parking, and bathrooms needed to accommodate crowds. The result is wide public opposition to tourism growth, contributing to a Borough decision to cut the Kenai tourism and marketing budget in half, hoping to reduce visitor impacts.

Hemlock Burn Trail in Chugach State Park



Photo by Chris Beck

The Hemlock Burn trail was built to meet growing use by hikers, bikers, and skiers. Months of meetings with the community and neighbors led to changes in the trail's design. The trail is now a year-round success with many types of users. But the underlying issue of how to best respond to growth and demand in the Chugach frontcountry goes unanswered.

STRATEGY 3.1: Support the need for planning, at the right scale and with the right partners.

Tourism and outdoor recreation are different than other economic sectors. Decisions rest with a wide, diverse list of public and private parties. Settings range from public lands to public streets, to the tourist wanting a photo of your front yard or the helicopter tour whumping over your house. Impacts include everything from business opportunities to bed and sales tax revenues, to the odds of finding a table at your favorite downtown restaurant, or serenity on your favorite trail.

Balancing Growth and Stewardship

“The Railbelt needs to be honest about the scale of growth coming this way. A rising tide raises all boats, a flood sinks them all.”

– Ricky Gease, DPOR Director

“Where trails bridge frontcountry and backcountry, route-planning should prioritize preservation of the wild character that makes Alaska an aspirational destination for outdoor recreation enthusiasts and a trait appreciated by many residents.”

– Lee Hart, Alaska Outdoor Alliance

“We need to find the middle ground between those people who want no growth and those who want no rules. That middle ground is growth with rules, managed growth.”

– Talkeetna Community Tourism Plan

“It’s up to residents to determine what “good stewards” of recreational opportunities means, there is no one rule.”

– Rod Arno, Alaska Outdoor Council

ACTION A: Support broad, collaborative outdoor recreation planning. Given the nature of outdoor recreation and tourism, the best way to guide these activities to maximize benefits and minimize problems is by bringing together all the parties with capacity to influence these activities as well as the public. More resources need to be devoted, at the local, state and federal levels, to produce successful local and regional plans. These investments can provide the following benefits:

- Efficient ways for multiple parties to participate, including public land managers, local governments, regional corporations and tribes, businesses and business organizations, and nonprofits.
- Inclusive opportunities for the public to be meaningfully involved in developing recreation public policy.
- A process that builds from good information about trends in use and impacts of outdoor recreation activity, such as the new GIS mapping and mobility data tools.
- A process that opens the door for new leaders and “friends” organizations to assist with ongoing policy development, fundraising, and infrastructure maintenance.
- A means to guide growth to meet demand and provide quality experiences, appropriately weighting interests of current users of recreation settings and the broader community interests in expanded economic and other outdoor recreation benefits.

ACTION B: Produce and regularly update plans at the right scale. Outdoor recreation planning is needed at three levels: regions, communities, and park units. For example, there can be a broad regional plan for the Kenai Peninsula, more detailed plans for communities such as Hope or Homer, and then plans for large park or refuge areas such as the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. More resources are needed to both update older and create new plans. *See Goal 7 for more information.*

“These days no place stays special by accident.” Recreation and tourism planner Ed McMahon, coauthor of “Balancing Nature and Commerce in Gateway Communities”⁵⁹

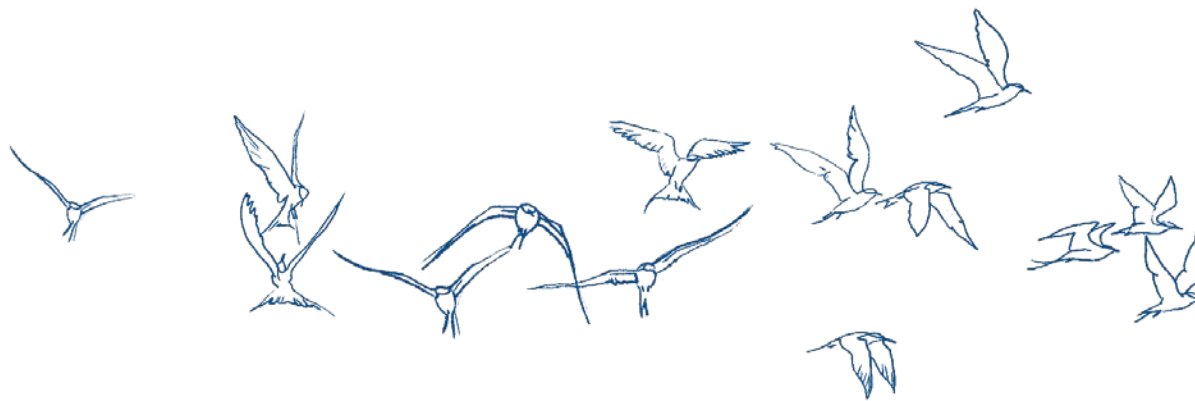
– Ed McMahon, Recreation and Tourism Planner



Hatcher Pass
Photo by Cooper Brown

STRATEGY 3.2: Seven general principles for guiding outdoor recreation growth. While every location will have its own specific opportunities and needs, the overarching principles below are valuable throughout Alaska.

1. Focus on the local application of the seven goals of this SCORP.
2. Provide a spectrum of recreational opportunities. Take an "intensity-of-use approach," providing options from intensively used areas able to support high use, to opportunities for solitude and wild places. Providing high-use areas of high quality are particularly important. For a large share of recreational users, locations like the Mendenhall Glacier in Juneau or Flattop in Anchorage are popular because of, not in spite of, the many users. Infrastructure in these valuable locations must be built to support intense levels of use.
3. Plan for growth by evaluating capacity. Limits on capacity can range from utilities like water and sewer, to parking areas, to workforce. More subjective, but equally important, are characteristics such as authenticity and solitude. Starting with a clear understanding of these limitations provides the basis for actions needed to accommodate and redirect growth.
4. Add capacity to disperse use and reduce congestion. Address crowding at current facilities by providing new outdoor recreation opportunities, including new facilities and better access to undeveloped recreation areas. These actions can disperse use and help provide the experience of solitude and wilderness many residents and visitors seek in Alaska.
5. Plan for revenue generation. Design and manage public facilities that can help create revenues to support ongoing operations. Likewise, set up local and regional fiscal structures that link growth in use with growth in revenues to support use. *See Goal 6 for more information.*



6. Use innovative policies to accommodate types of use. Smart management can help meet the needs of different types of recreation use within the same general areas. The rules allowing a mix of motorized and non-motorized days at Eklutna Recreation area and the splitting of the Turnagain Pass area into winter motorized and non-motorized areas are good examples.
7. Prioritize outdoor recreation investments that are good for visitors and residents.

OBJECTIVE 4. SUPPORT GROWTH AND STEWARDSHIP THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Focusing solely on encouraging growth or, alternatively, only on protecting Alaska’s natural ecosystems and outdoor recreation places, is easier than finding the balance between those often competing intentions. Partnerships are an effective tool for reaching that desired balance.

STRATEGY 4.1: Incentivize stewardship and conservation efforts. Support programs at the statewide and regional level that encourage and reward businesses and recreation users for supporting sustainable outdoor recreation practices. Programs are needed that incentivize and recognize businesses that enhance outdoor recreation sustainability. For example, this can be done through marketing and certificates or seals such as ATIA's Adventure Green program.



ADVENTURE GREEN is ATIA's voluntary certification program based on the idea that following sustainable tourism practices can benefit visitors and hosts alike.²⁴



JUNEAU TOURISM BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
This program, began in 1997, brought together Juneau tourism businesses and the City and Borough to minimize the impacts of tourism, considering both residents and industry concerns. Key to success is a process for communication between communities and the tourism industry, leading to mutually agreed upon mitigation actions.⁶⁰

STRATEGY 4.2: Create connections and partnerships between users and land managers, enhancing a sense of ownership while growing a volunteer base.

This includes establishing local resident volunteer programs or citizen forums focused on trail work, environmental restoration, or outdoor recreation planning. These activities can be done directly by land management agencies or in partnership with nonprofits. Other options are partnerships between schools, volunteer groups, and businesses to strengthen community ties around mutual care of outdoor recreation infrastructure including campgrounds, cabins, or trails.

CONCLUSION

To deliver outdoor recreation’s economic, health, and quality-of-life benefits, Alaska needs to balance the growth of public outdoor recreation opportunities while being good stewards of publicly owned natural resources. Alaska’s State Constitution (Article 8, Natural Resources, Section 4) makes clear that stewardship of Alaska’s natural resources on public lands is a priority, and these resources must be managed on a sustained yield basis.

8.4. Sustained Yield: Fish, forests, wildlife, grasslands, and all other replenishable resources belonging to the State shall be utilized, developed, and maintained on the sustained yield principle, subject to preferences among beneficial uses.

No singular strategy can reach this goal. All the parties involved in the broad world of outdoor recreation and tourism have to resolve to reach this balance point using good information, collaborative local and regional planning, and strong partnerships.



Rhein Lake Public-Use Cabin in Nancy Lake State Recreation Area
Photo by Denali Crichett



“We’re leaving money on the table!”
- refrain from multiple SCORP SWAG members

Outdoor Recreation is a \$3.2 billion industry in Alaska.

Average stay in New Zealand, like Alaska a long-haul tourist destination, is 22 days, in Alaska, just nine days.

If visitors had more reasons to add just one more day in Alaska, the result would add \$250 million per year in extra spending in our state.^{6, 76, 102}

Photo by Kristina Smolenski

GOAL 6

Grow Stable and Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Funding

ALASKA, IT’S TIME TO KEEP UP WITH THE DEMAND

Over the last 40 years, demand for outdoor recreation in Alaska has increased dramatically driven by a population that grew from 400,000 residents to over 700,000.⁵⁸ This includes a fivefold increase in out-of-state visitors, from under 400,000 a year to over two million today.⁶ In addition to more people, improvements in recreation gear (e.g., bikes, snow machines, ATV’s, skis, etc.) have further added to the number of people enjoying Alaska's outdoors. During this same period, funding and infrastructure supporting Alaska’s outdoor recreation have increasingly fallen behind the dramatic growth in use. Alaska needs a new era of outdoor recreation investments (in the \$100’s of millions) to meet current demand, support inevitable growth, repair facilities, and open access to new outdoor recreation areas. These investments pay for themselves, creating a stronger Alaska economy, supporting better health for Alaska residents, and making Alaska an even more desirable place to live and visit.

BIG NEEDS, BIGGER RETURN ON INVESTMENTS

Expanded, stable, and sustainable funding will allow public land managers, non-profits, and the outdoor recreation industry to generate more benefits from Alaska’s outdoor recreation potential. Expanded funding is needed for:

- planning and outreach to identify and prioritize needs
- design and permitting to get projects to shovel ready
- replacing and renovating outdated facilities and constructing new infrastructure
- ongoing operations, maintenance, and management

Progress will require change in State of Alaska funding as well as significant investments from other sources, including local and federal governments, business, and non-profits. The good news, as illustrated in the sidebar, investments in outdoor recreation consistently deliver large dividends.

CASE STUDIES: Smart Investments in Outdoor Recreation Pay for Themselves^{31, 45}

- Mat-Su Borough: \$5.00 back for every dollar invested.
- Maricopa County, AZ: \$4.85 back for every dollar invested.



Photo by Chris Beck

Overflowing trailhead parking lots – an example of outdoor recreation demand outgrowing existing infrastructure.

Below are five objectives that address these funding needs and opportunities, as well as examples of how Alaska can build a new era of expanded investment and returns in the outdoor recreation industry.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Secure funding by focusing on high value projects
2. Maximize use of established and one-time federal funds to increase federal funding
3. Grow and sustain in-state public and private funding
4. Engage public and private partners to establish priorities and expand investment opportunities
5. Provide facts and build a coalition to increase investments in outdoor recreation

OBJECTIVE 1: SECURE FUNDING BY FOCUSING ON HIGH VALUE PROJECTS

Local, state, and federal funders confront funding needs that exceed available dollars. The odds of securing outdoor recreation funding will be increased by identifying projects and programs that deliver clear, tangible benefits and have strong, supportive constituencies.

Given the diverse benefits of outdoor recreation, there is no simple formula for picking priority outdoor recreation projects. However, the criteria below can help identify projects of high value with high return-on-investment that are most likely to be funded.

STRATEGY 1.1: Define the criteria for prioritizing outdoor recreation projects and programs that:

- Generate economic and fiscal benefits, supporting Alaskan businesses and communities
- Benefit both residents and visitors
- Improve the quality of life in communities, helping to attract businesses and a capable workforce
- Generate revenues that help support agency operational costs through program receipts or public-private partnerships



↑ Access to Alaska’s most memorable terrain; trails connecting regions and communities
↓ Ready access to alpine terrain



↑ Outdoor recreation facilities that link to and support commercial services
↓ Places and facilities that open new seasons and economic opportunities



↑ Revenue-generating, self-sustaining cabins and trailheads



- Leverage additional resources such as projects that lead to matching investments in volunteers or other funding sources
- Spread the benefit of outdoor recreation across Alaska, and deliver value to underrepresented groups and communities
- Increase private investment (e.g., in lodging, food or guide services)
- Revitalize and maintain established infrastructure – expanding capacity where growth has exceeded capacity
- Protect access and quality of the environment, subsistence resources, and outdoor recreation experiences

ACTION A: Include economic benefit, revenue generation, public support, and the other criteria presented above to review and rank projects submitted for funding , so that other funding sources can be tapped for local match and funding partnerships. *See Chapter 1 for details.*

ACTION B: Expand resources needed to carry out more regular, inclusive recreation planning processes, focused on application of criteria above, at state, regional and local levels. Incorporate new analysis tools, such as GIS mapping and visitor mobility data. *See Goal 7 for more information.*



Planning Leads to Funding

From 2021 to 2022, the Fairbanks North Star Borough engaged in an extensive trail planning process that captured the views of a wide segment of the area’s residents, businesses, and landowners. The result was a new commitment by the Borough to spend \$300,000 per year to reserve, rebuild, and construct key trails throughout the community.⁴⁶

OBJECTIVE 2: MAXIMIZE USE OF ESTABLISHED AND ONE-TIME FEDERAL FUNDS TO INCREASE FEDERAL FUNDING

Federal funding will never, on its own, provide the base of stable, sustainable outdoor recreation funding needed in Alaska. Reaching that goal will require substantial state and local funding. But federal funds do provide a critical piece of the funding puzzle. Access to federal dollars provides the ability to leverage in-state funds, stretching the impact of every dollar.

STRATEGY 2.1: “Don’t leave federal dollars on the table.” Work with state administrators and legislators to secure all available federal funds.

ACTION A: Secure the minimum required State match for LWCF dollars in annual legislative budgets – a task for the LWCF grant managing agency and support from beneficiaries of these funds.

ACTION B: Explore new options for greater efficiency in receipt and spending of federal outdoor recreation funding. *See Goal 7 for more information.*

ACTION C: Build a GIS database of shovel-ready projects to take advantage of bursts of recent federal funding. This task requires sufficient receipt authority to access matching funds, and resources for initial

site planning – work that can be carried out by outdoor recreation agencies with support of outdoor recreation advocates.

ACTION D: Partner with in-state recipients and managers of federal funds such as DOT&PF, the Denali Commission, and Alaska Regional Development Organizations (ARDORS). These organizations have valuable funding capabilities. For example, the Denali Commission can turn one-year federal funds into multi-year dollars. Another example is DOT&PF, a recipient of federal transportation funds that can direct funding to outdoor recreation projects like trailheads and waysides.

ACTION E: Increase federal outdoor recreation funding available in Alaska. This requires coordination by Alaska advocates working at the national level to shift dollars within federal agencies and direct more future federal funding to outdoor recreation – such as the funds expected to be included in an updated Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) for use on State lands.

Federal Funding for Recreation in Alaska

(Potential funding coming to Alaska if required minimum match is secured)

- **\$2.5 million** LWCF per year
- **\$7 million** FLAP in award cycle
- **\$1.5 million** RTP per year
- **\$12 million** Transportation Alternatives (TAP) in award cycle (1-2 years)
- **\$20+ million** Hunter Access (Pittman-Robertson) per year
- **\$20+ million** Fishing Access (Dingell – Johnson) per year
- **\$100’s of millions** Federal Surface Transportation Bill (in the national infrastructure bill)
- **\$100’s of millions** to Alaska’s tribal organizations
- **\$TBD** Great American Outdoor Act

“You can’t serve three times more people without increasing the operating budget”

– Stuart Leidner, Mat-Su Region Superintendent

OBJECTIVE 3: GROW AND SUSTAIN IN-STATE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDING

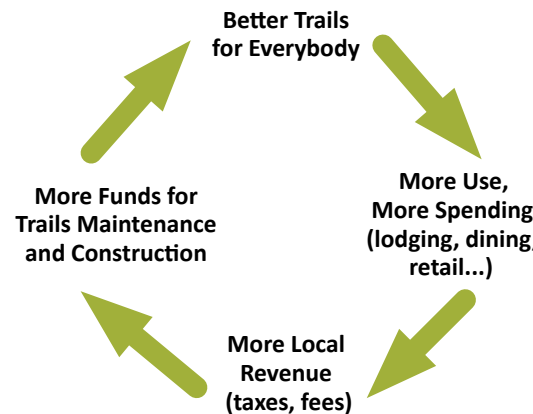
In 2022, the State Legislature increased the operation budget for DPOR, and approved capital funding for segments of a major long trail project. These welcome increases, reversing years of flat or declining budgets, need to continue to maintain current facilities and keep up with growing demand.

The direct consequences of inadequate funding are clear: deteriorating and overcrowded trails, parking lots, and campgrounds. But inadequate facilities also cause many local residents to oppose the facilities needed to meet growing outdoor recreation use. This has happened, for example, with dip netting in the Kenai River and in the community of Hope. Both locations have experienced big increases in use without commensurate improvements in parking, restrooms, and waste management.

The table below provides a helpful perspective on the limited funding currently available for state recreation areas – in this case Chugach State Park, which experienced a 50 percent increase in use between 2019 and 2021.^{25, 28, 73}

Public Park/Forest	Acres	Annual Visitors	Annual Budget and Staff
Chugach State Park	495,000	1-1.5 million	\$1 million; 8 full time; 1 seasonal
Chugach National Forest	5.4 million	500,000	\$21 million; 110 full time; 100 seasonal
Denali National Park	6.1 million	600,000	\$15 million; 129 full time; 135 seasonal

New fiscal structures are needed to help maintain and rehabilitate current infrastructure, meet growing demand, spread use and provide high quality experiences. The overarching challenge is connecting growing outdoor recreation use with corresponding increases in revenue. DPOR’s existing budget is based on this concept, with approximately half of its operating budget coming from program receipts, and the remainder from a share of the State’s vehicle rental car tax. The problem is this revenue still falls short of what is needed, both to cover the millions needed to maintain existing State of Alaska facilities, and the need for new facilities to respond to growing demand.

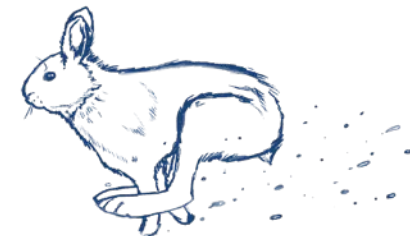


Making the Connection – the model above shows how growing recreation use creates spending, which generates more local revenue, which could be used to improve the facilities that drive that use.

STRATEGY 3.1: Increase outdoor recreation funds managed by the State of Alaska.

ACTION A: Invest in facilities and programs that create self-sustaining revenue. One part of this action is improving pay-to-play fee structures. Examples of facilities that can generate significant program receipt revenue include public-use cabins, high-amenity campgrounds, highly used areas such as Totem Bight State Park, and adequately-sized trailhead and boat launch parking lots. A related fundraising strategy is to collect 100 percent of day use fees at parking areas through better enforcement and installation of electronic fee stations, as well as improving revenue collection from large volume commercial operators who use wayside rest stops. Additional programs and events in state park facilities are another good option.

ACTION B: Encourage the Alaska State Legislature to provide more outdoor recreation capital funding. Upgrading facilities, such as adding electricity in campgrounds, can justify increased fees and thereby increase program receipts. This is one of DPOR’s few available strategies to increase operating budgets. Options for capital funding to make those improvements include legislative budgets, statewide General Obligation Bonds, and federal funding for projects on state land.



Outdoor Recreation Funding Strategies in Other States

The State of Oregon diverts 15 percent of its lottery revenues to state parks and watershed protection. From 2018 to 2022, this revenue generated \$32 million in state park capital funds.⁸³

The State of Utah uses one percent of both the statewide bed tax and sales tax. Together, this generates \$70 million per year for outdoor recreation projects.⁸⁷

ACTION C: Investigate statewide options to generate new, stable, sustainable outdoor recreation funding. Other states, including those that compete with Alaska for residents and visitors, dedicate substantially more state funding for outdoor recreation than Alaska. Options to explore in Alaska include statewide general

or revenue bonds portions of a new statewide bed or sales tax, or a state lottery.

ACTION D: Establish regulations and tools to increase funding options. This includes new legislation to allow public / private financing partnerships to happen in State Parks. *See Objective 4, Strategy 4.3 that follows.* Any potential increase in funding also means planning for an increase in state receipt authority as well.

STRATEGY 3.2: Increase local outdoor recreation funding for local and state outdoor recreation projects and facilities. Local governments have the authority to raise funds for specific purposes, including outdoor recreation trails and parks. Funding mechanisms include bond measures and recreation service districts. These measures raise money through local sales, property or bed taxes, and, while requiring voter approval, have a track record of support in Southcentral Alaska.

Find out what people want, make promises, deliver tangible results, repeat.

The Anchorage Park Foundation has obtained voter support for \$2 million to \$3 million dollars of park and recreation bonds in 12 of the last 15 years.

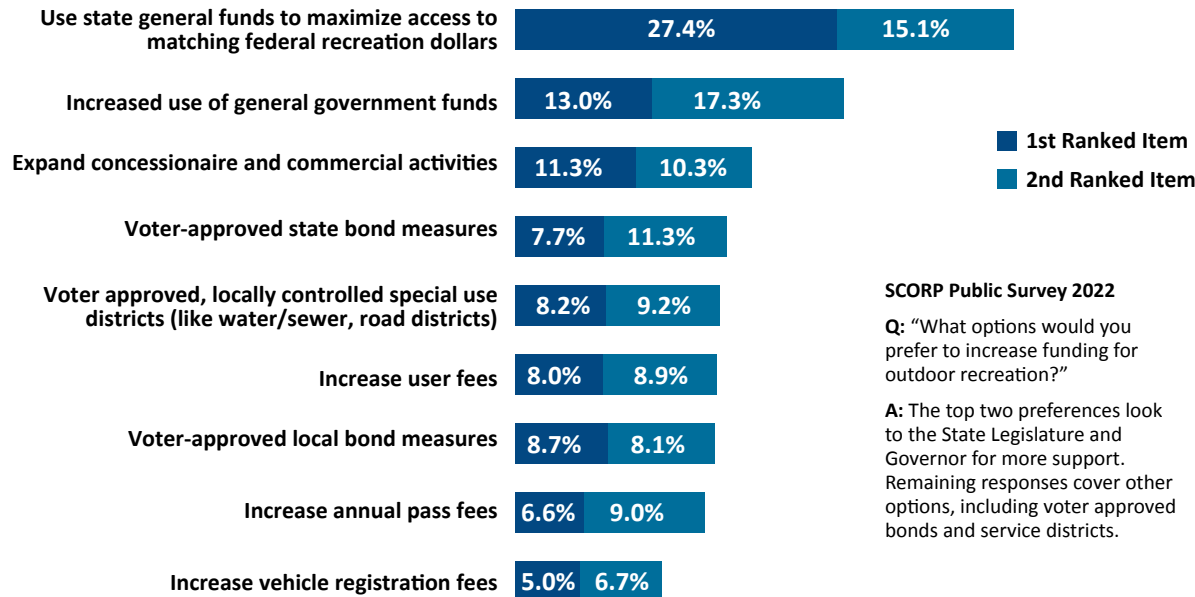
Eagle River voters approved a recreation service district that pays for operations and new park facilities in that area.

The Talkeetna Special Use district uses a portion of the locally generated sales tax – much of which comes from visitors – to upgrade the overloaded downtown sewer system.

“Our trails, parks, and campgrounds are one of the main reasons we love living here! We need to expand them and maintain them well. They deserve a healthy state budget.”

– SCORP public survey comments, 2022

Funding Facilities Strategies¹



SCORP Public Survey 2022

Q: “What options would you prefer to increase funding for outdoor recreation?”

A: The top two preferences look to the State Legislature and Governor for more support. Remaining responses cover other options, including voter approved bonds and service districts.



OBJECTIVE 4: ENGAGE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS TO ESTABLISH PRIORITIES AND EXPAND INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

A wide range of public and private organizations, non-profits, corporations, and individual businesses can help expand the base of funding and other resources for outdoor recreation in Alaska. Some of these entities, for example larger corporations, have well-established grant programs. Others, like health organizations, are just beginning to consider giving to support recreation projects and programs.

Actions common to all the strategies that follow:

- respond to the interests of the respective partner
- build relationships and trust
- demonstrate tangible results

STRATEGY 4.1: Grow partnerships with private parties, non-profits, and sponsorships by corporations to help build and maintain outdoor recreation facilities and programs.

Private and non-profit entities can help provide volunteers, labor, or funding for outdoor recreation programs and projects. This includes groups that may not have a specific tie to outdoor recreation but might support outdoor recreation as part of their broader mission or with a goal of creating community goodwill. Examples include local or statewide foundations like the Chugach Park Fund, the Juneau Community Foundation, and the Rasmuson Foundation. Individuals and businesses are often willing to sponsor outdoor recreation elements like signs, benches, parks, or trail segments. Recreation advocates should be prepared with shovel-ready projects for those moments when funding options suddenly appear.

Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP): A non-profit and for-profit partnership working for next generation sustainable economic health in Southeast Alaska

Over the last ten years, the SPP has emerged as a potent nonprofit organization in Southeast Alaska. It is a "dynamic collective uniting diverse skills and perspectives to strengthen cultural, ecological, and economic resilience across Southeast Alaska." SSP's work includes support for the Alaska Youth Stewards program who does valuable in-field trail and conservation work and was a recipient of a \$16 million grant from the Sealaska Corporation to extend this work.⁹⁶

STRATEGY 4.2: Leverage public funds by working with non-profit recreation organizations.

Partnerships between public agencies and non-profit organizations can bring real benefits to both parties. Non-profits can carry out actions not available to public agencies, including advocating for funding, attracting volunteers, and aggregating funds from multiple sources.

Partnerships: City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) and Trail Mix, Inc.

Trail Mix, Inc. is a not profit that runs volunteer and paid trail crews. CBJ Parks and Recreation Department annually commits \$60,000 to Trail Mix, Inc. as well as project materials. This partnership produces a reliable source of funding which can be leveraged with other sources including USFS funds. In turn, CBJ has highly valued trails used by residents, visitors, and local businesses.¹⁰⁰

STRATEGY 4.3: Expand public-private investment partnerships. Create mutually beneficial partnerships with private businesses through mechanisms like investment or concessionaire arrangements. National Parks use this approach to provide commercial services which benefit users and generate significant revenues for operations and capital costs. Success requires the right locations, projects, and programs and the right financial arrangement. Given that the State of Alaska is clearly land rich, but often funding poor, one part of this approach would be to offer below market lease rates where it would benefit the public. However, allowing commercial investment on state lands will require legislative change. Examples include leases for modest food retail at waysides or trailhead parking lots.

STRATEGY 4.4: Tap into health-related funding.

Outdoor activity is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for preventing and reversing a wide array of physical and mental health concerns. It is a less expensive – and more enjoyable! – alternative to treating disease. *See Goal 4 for more information.*

STRATEGY 4.5: Improve partnerships with Native Corporations, Native Regional non-profits and Tribes.

Outdoor recreation in Alaska is defined broadly, including subsistence and outdoor cultural activities. Alaska's for-profit, regional, and village Native corporations currently make up a large majority of the state's highest grossing businesses as well as owning 40 million acres of Alaska land. These corporations, tribes, and regional non-profits have economic, stewardship, and health goals that overlap directives in the SCORP. Public agencies need to reach out to these native entities and explore ways to work together toward their common interests.

OBJECTIVE 5: PROVIDE FACTS AND BUILD A COALITION TO INCREASE INVESTMENTS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

Alaska would unquestionably benefit from an increase in outdoor recreation funding. These increases are needed to respond to steadily growing demand, to address our aging and undersized facilities, and to benefit Alaska’s economy, health, and outdoor way of life. This last objective presents three strategies for generating a needed increase in outdoor recreation funding.

“Why is it – with all the benefits that outdoor recreation provides – that we’re always so short of funding? Fishing, mining, other sectors aren’t forced to rely on volunteers and bake sales for needed investments.”
 – Public comment at session on tourism and outdoor recreation at Western Counties Conference in Anchorage on May 20, 2022

STRATEGY 5.1: Advocacy – provide the facts, images, and stories that illustrate the need for and benefits of outdoor recreation investments.

ACTION A: Improve systems for gathering outdoor recreation information. Provide useful, up-to-date information to inform public opinion, decision makers and private sector investors. *See Goal 7 for more information.*

Total Spending by Transportation Mode: Alaska's Out-of-State Visitors²

Air	\$1.27 billion
Cruise	\$1.16 billion
Highway and Ferry	\$60 million

ACTION B: Produce and regularly update information documenting the value of Alaska’s outdoor recreation industry. Most important is creating a unified set of messages, widely used by different outdoor recreation advocates, including websites, video, printed material, presentations. Document the array of outdoor recreation benefits: jobs, physical and mental health, business and resident attraction and retention, home values, benefits to way of life. *See Goal 7 for more information.*

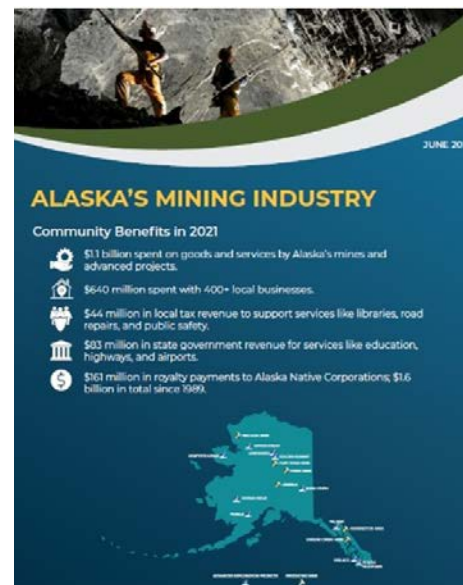
STRATEGY 5.2: Actively share a compelling package of Alaska outdoor recreation information.

ACTION A: Build a coalition and solidify the leadership needed to better share the outdoor recreation story. Bring together currently separated outdoor recreation advocates, providing a strong, fact-based, share voice for the outdoor recreation sector, and the basis for expanded outdoor recreation funding. The proposed statewide Office of Outdoor Recreation could play a lead role in this effort. *See Goal 7 for more information.*

ACTION B: Create and implement a partner-driven, comprehensive outreach strategy, including a centralized information platform, with memorable, standardized slogans, brand, and messaging.

CONCLUSION:
Grow stable and sustainable outdoor recreation funding.

New funding approaches are required for Alaska to have a quality, sustainable system of outdoor recreation facilities. Alaska needs to take advantage of every federal dollar, but also increase State and local funding. Our state needs to shift to an investment mindset, putting in the tens of millions needed to upgrade aging infrastructure and meet new, evolving outdoor recreation demands. These investments will generate hundreds of millions in economic benefits, and unlike other economic sectors, will directly improve the day-to-day quality of life for all Alaskans.



Mining and Community
 The outdoor recreation industry needs to work together to share all the ways this under-appreciated economic sector benefits Alaska, like information shared by the Alaska Mining Association.²⁰



Getting Outside

"The chance to hike, hunt, ski, bike, ride my snow machine – that's what makes me so glad I live in Alaska."

– SCORP session attendee at 2022 Trails Conference



“I would encourage the development of new types of partnerships and a method to share their strategies and successes with others.”

– SCORP public survey comment, 2022

Granite Tors in Chena River State Recreation Area
Photo by Ethan Tyler

GOAL 7

Strengthen Partnerships to Improve Outdoor Recreation Management

Alaska’s outdoor recreation potential has yet to reach its peak. The recent shift in prioritizing its value and contribution to improving life outdoors in Alaska can help direct investments that meet current demand and plan for sustainable growth. New strategies are needed to guide this next phase of development. The work is ambitious and should be driven by new and strengthened partnerships where public agencies, private sector businesses, non-profits, Native and tribal organizations, and recreation user groups work together to advance and achieve statewide goals.

IMPROVE LEADERSHIP BY ESTABLISHING A STATE OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Managing the growth of Alaska’s outdoor recreation resources and industry would benefit from the creation of an Alaska Office of Outdoor Recreation. The Office could provide the leadership necessary for Alaska to take greater advantage of our expansive, but less than fully-developed outdoor recreation resources, and grow outdoor recreation’s contribution to Alaska’s economy, health, and quality of life.

Sixteen states have established State Offices of Outdoor Recreation or Task Forces. Though landscapes and resources may differ, the overarching mission of these offices is similar: advocate for the outdoor recreation industry and the overall well-being of the state and its residents.

Nationwide, the Offices are managed and housed in differing configurations and range from appointment by governor to positions created under other offices within the state administration. The State Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) is a viable option to house the Office of Outdoor Recreation.



This reflects DPOR’s responsibility for preparing the SCORP, administering federal LWCF and RTP funds, and the Division’s statutory responsibility [Alaska Statute 41.21.020 (9) and (10)] to provide a clearinghouse of services for other outdoor recreation agencies. Other viable options include the Department of Commerce and Community Economic Development or an agency partner outside of the state administration.

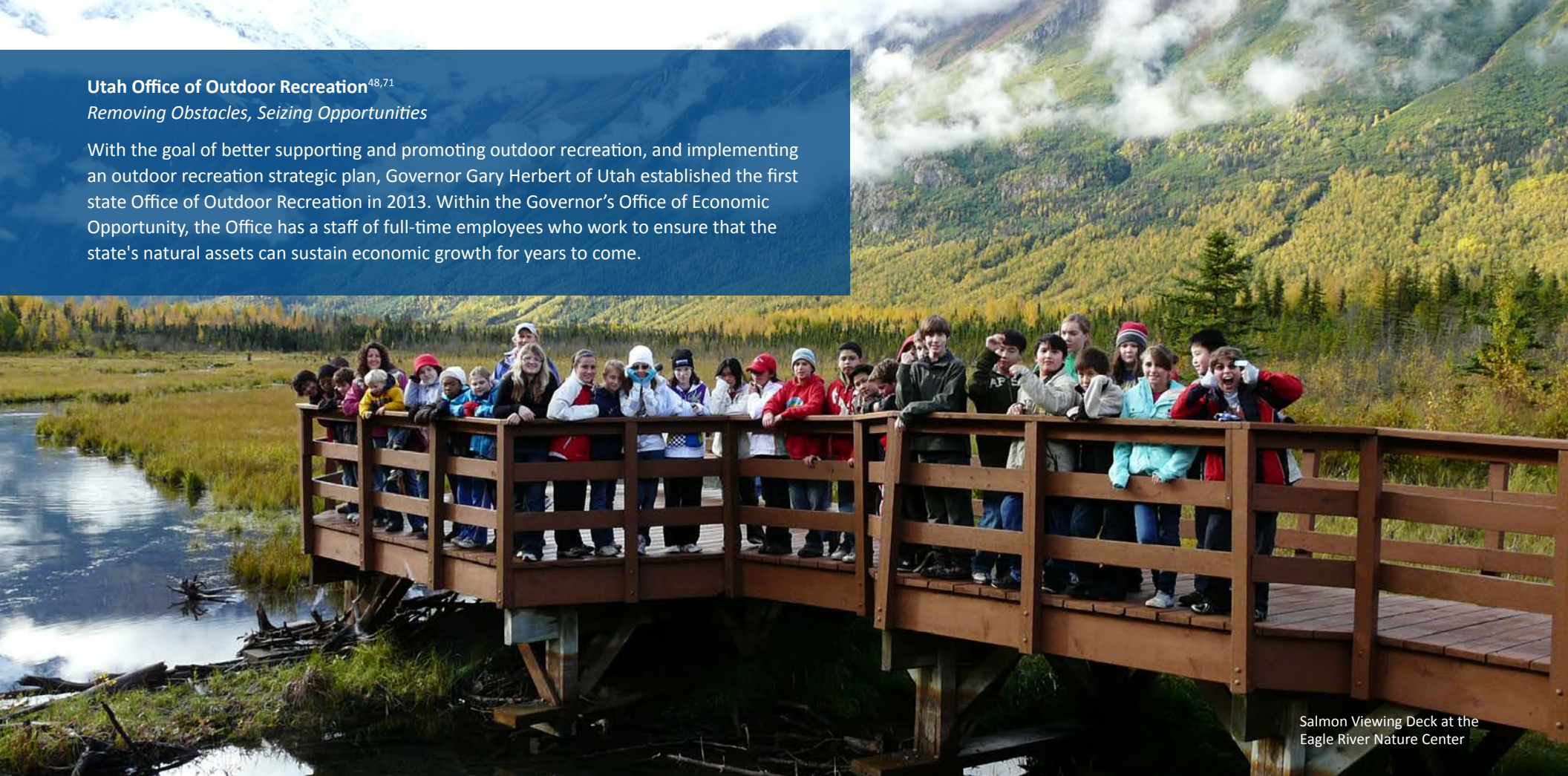
To be successful, the Office will need to bring together outdoor recreation interests in Alaska. It needs to include diverse parties with an interest in outdoor recreation in Alaska and be able to address the currently fragmented state of the outdoor recreation industry.

The National Outdoor Recreation Learning Network is currently made up of 16 states which have established State Offices of Outdoor Recreation or Task Forces. Additionally, there are 15 states, including Alaska, that are simply a part of the Learning Network and lack a designated coordinating office. The steps discussed herein will provide the fundamental strategies needed to establish an Alaska Office of Outdoor Recreation. This will enhance the capabilities of the Learning Network statewide.

Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation^{48,71}

Removing Obstacles, Seizing Opportunities

With the goal of better supporting and promoting outdoor recreation, and implementing an outdoor recreation strategic plan, Governor Gary Herbert of Utah established the first state Office of Outdoor Recreation in 2013. Within the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, the Office has a staff of full-time employees who work to ensure that the state's natural assets can sustain economic growth for years to come.



Salmon Viewing Deck at the Eagle River Nature Center

The SCORP 2023-2027 SWAG offers a good starting point for establishing and providing ongoing guidance and represent a diverse network of partners. SWAG members and subject matter experts understand issues and opportunities facing Alaska. Members should be in a good position to advance SCORP priorities and help guide the ongoing growth and stewardship of Alaska's outdoor recreation resources. To be successful, an Office of Outdoor Recreation will require establishing a formal advisory body with active participation from interagency leaders, but also must have adequate and sustainable funding and staffing.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop new data systems to track outdoor recreation use, trends, and economic impact and leverage the information to make informed decisions
2. Manage federal funding more effectively
3. Reduce hurdles and provide more options for improving outdoor recreation facilities and programs
4. Work with partners statewide to help residents and tourists better understand and enjoy Alaska's outdoor recreational opportunities
5. Expand technological solutions in all aspects of outdoor recreation
6. Adequately fund, facilitate, develop, and update plans

These actions are critical to the success and implementation of the SCORP and need to be carried out regardless of the creation of an Alaska Office of Outdoor Recreation.

OBJECTIVE 1: DEVELOP NEW DATA SYSTEMS TO TRACK OUTDOOR RECREATION USE, TRENDS, AND ECONOMIC IMPACT AND LEVERAGE THE INFORMATION TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS

To make informed decisions on outdoor recreation investments, solid data on outdoor recreation use and trends is necessary. Outdoor recreation use data in Alaska is currently limited, often out-of-date, and divided between various organizations and agencies. This limits the accurate information outdoor recreation resource managers need to best serve the public and achieve the SCORP goals.

STRATEGY 1.1: Provide reliable data on outdoor recreation activities to produce a comprehensive overview of outdoor recreation in Alaska.

ACTION A: Improve collaboration by setting up a working group to find solutions to data needs and by working collaboratively with public and private sector parties. Develop better ways to collect, standardize, and share data with the groups below:

- State of Alaska Departments: ADF&G, Commerce, Labor; DNR, DPOR (Note: ADF&G already has a strong data collection system, a comparable comprehensive system is currently lacking in DPOR)
- Federal land managers: NPS, USFS, USFWS, and BLM
- University of Alaska
- U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
- ATIA and other regional Destination Marketing Organizations

ACTION B: Obtain Accurate Data. Time series information is needed to capture year-round frequency and trends in different locations throughout Alaska. This includes capturing notable trends in the types of activities.

Trends can include those resulting from the availability of new gear such as fat-tire bikes, pack rafts, snow machines, and ATVs, or changes in levels of

participation in familiar activities like the nationwide decline in hunting over the last two decades.⁸¹ See *Chapter 2 for more information*. There is also a need for a better way to understand the economic impact of different outdoor recreation activities including data on levels of participation or the average economic impact per day. See *Goal 2 for more information*.

ACTION C: Measure the benefits of outdoor recreation. More systematic, comprehensive data is needed to measure the contributions of outdoor recreation activity to Alaska's economy, workforce retention, and health. While some information is currently collected in certain categories, such as out-of-state visitor spending, there is not an annual, collective summary.

Categories of information needed include:

- Overview of the economic significance of outdoor recreation in Alaska, including annual spending and economic benefits
- Data that includes the economic and health benefits of a variety of activities and types of travelers (residents, cruise visitors, independent air travelers); day versus overnight; commercial guide versus self-sufficient experiences; levels of expenditures on gear; the average amount of money spent per day by type of activity

ACTION D: Measure economic impacts of visitor and resident activities. Statewide surveys of visitor activities need to be expanded to include the activities of and spending by in-state residents. The only statewide information collected in prior years on outdoor recreation came from portions of the Alaska Visitors Statistics Program (AVSP). While valuable, it excluded resident activities and missed significant economic benefits. But by excluding resident activities, the AVSP misses the significant economic benefits generated when Alaskans elect to stay and spend on recreation in Alaska, rather than somewhere outside the state.

ATIA is now collecting data on in-state recreation, which will allow for more strategic investments in OR infrastructure.

New Zealand Outdoor Recreation Ethos^{77,78,79} *New Zealanders in the Outdoors*

New Zealand actively researches and grows its outdoor recreation sector through a variety of lenses. Their Department of Conservation studies demonstrate the importance of outdoor recreation beyond the economy: from how New Zealanders engage with the outdoors to understanding how visitors might contribute toward environmental advocacy.

Monitoring and measuring use can help determine where investment would promote visitor and local outdoor recreation participation most.

ACTION E: Take advantage of new technologies for collecting supply data through GIS mapping and demand information such as anonymized cell phone data, as one lower-cost method for capturing current use patterns. See *both Chapter 2 and Objective 6 of this goal for details on this topic*.

Using Apps to Monitor Trail Use^{37,38} *Discover New Places to be Active*

New and emerging technologies like cell phone data and apps (like Strava) have potential applications for monitoring outdoor recreation use. While this data does not give absolute numbers of users, they can be helpful tools to identify trends and locations.

The city of Fremont, California included trail use data in their 2021 Trails Strategy Plan. The plan uses Strava data to map trail use popularity.

OBJECTIVE 2: MANAGE FEDERAL FUNDING MORE EFFECTIVELY

Updating the SCORP allows the State of Alaska to continue to be eligible for the federal Land, Water, Conservation Fund (LWCF) program. The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a second, important source of annual federal outdoor recreation funds. Together these two competitive grants provide more than \$3 million dollars a year for outdoor recreation projects and land acquisitions, allowing Alaskan communities and agencies to more than double their in-state dollars invested in outdoor recreation.

The LWCF program, which comes through the National Park Service, requires a 50 percent non-federal match; RTP funds authorized by the Federal Highway Administration require a non-federal 20 percent match. The matching requirements can be met in different ways, including cash, in-kind services, or donations of land.

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation is responsible for managing and distributing both LWCF and RTP funds.

STRATEGY 2.1: Simplify the application process for both DPOR and applicants. Recognizing that federal grant opportunities are competitive, with rules and requirements set outside DPOR, and the process will always require significant work.

ACTION A: Provide sufficient, sustainable funding needed for DPOR to effectively administer the program so applicants are notified of grant requests in a timely manner.

ACTION B: Review all the steps in the application process, possibly working with a group of experienced applicants, to simplify the process to apply for and respond to applications.

ACTION C: Improve the materials and support services offered to applicants. Provide extra assistance in lower population areas so they are equipped to submit competitive applications.

ACTION D: Investigate additional partnerships to consolidate review and approval of a range of different federal outdoor recreation grants including Pittman Robertson, Dingell Johnson, Federal Land Access Program, LWCF, and RTP.

STRATEGY 2.2: Use the goals and strategies of this SCORP as the fundamental reference for determining how best to expend funds.

ACTION A: Use federal funds to leverage work and resources from outdoor recreation partners, including non-profits allied with eligible municipalities or public agencies.

ACTION B: Support community-driven recreation priorities in both large and small communities. *See Chapter 3 for more information.*

STRATEGY 2.3: Evaluate Guidance and explore ways to address needs in both the RTP and LWCF programs.

ACTION A: Work with the Federal Highways Administration to ease limits or prohibitions on the use of RTP funds for trails on logging roads.

ACTION B: Explore options to help Alaska Tribal governments participate in the LWCF program. Although federally recognized tribes are eligible for LWCF, Alaskan tribes does not have a land base (i.e. reservation). Through the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), Alaska Native corporations hold title to roughly 44 million acres of land in private corporate ownership. LWCF requires that grant projects be undertaken on public lands for the public.

ACTION C: Work with federal agencies to manage or mitigate Buy America requirements. Currently there are no domestic producers of most of the tools (like chainsaws) needed to maintain mechanized trail and park infrastructure year-round.

STRATEGY 2.4: Work with partners to explore new ways to meet funding match requirements. The portions of Alaska currently positioned to generate matching funds for federal grants are organized municipal governments that raise revenues through taxes that include sales, property and bed taxes. Areas of Alaska that don't tap into local revenue-generating capability, such as large sections of rural Alaska, should investigate options for securing non-federal matching funds. For example, they can work with the Denali Commission, regional economic development organizations, non-profits, regional native organizations, and local governments.

“Land managers with budget struggles should look for more opportunities for creative partnerships trail building, hunting, and other groups. Creative partnerships would allow more federal funds with match requirements to be met and spent on well planned projects.”

– SCORP land manager's survey comment, 2022



“Make state rest areas and waysides safer and cleaner for families to stop at. Make some open in winter. If a family drives from Fairbanks to Anchorage in January, there is almost no place for a child to go to the bathroom.”

– SCORP public survey comment, 2022



Chugach State Park
Photo by Krista Rice

OBJECTIVE 3: REDUCE HURDLES AND PROVIDE MORE OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

Outdoor recreation investments are currently limited by regulatory hurdles and a lack of flexible investment tools. There is a need to address and resolve specific policy and funding issues for land management agencies, focused on the State of Alaska.

STRATEGY 3.1: Reform the state trail easement process. Investments in new processes and changed staffing are needed to lower the cost and speed up DMLW’s trail easement process. Too often trail easement applications by local governments, or recreation user groups languish for years without action by DNR.

ACTION A: Dedicate sufficient staff in DMLW to provide a reliable schedule for the timely processing of trail easement applications (e.g., no more than one year).

ACTION B: Allow applicants to assist with the process to reduce the burden on regulatory staff. For example, through assisting the survey process using approved GPS technologies.

ACTION C: Solidify and promote the use of a trail permit system as an alternative to granting right-of-ways or easements in situations where a full land right is not essential.

ACTION D: Allow for use of new, lower-cost survey technologies based on accurate GPS technologies (versus more traditional survey methods).

STRATEGY 3.2: Expand state and federal agency responsibilities to meet outdoor recreation needs, including responsibilities that currently fall between the boundaries of different agency missions, like waysides. Alaska has struggled to meet the clear need for waysides with restrooms, trash receptacles, and trailheads. Neither the DPOR nor DOT&PF has taken responsibility or reserved funding to meet this year-round need. Support facilities are an essential part of travel and outdoor recreation in Alaska for both residents and visitors, and there is a need to work towards a solution. The overarching strategy is to bring together the partners who could help solve these issues including DOT&PF, DPOR, federal land managers, federal highways, local governments, and tourism businesses.

ACTION A: Expand access to funding opportunities to re-open, maintain and service existing waysides and construct new facilities and infrastructure. Explore the extent that discretionary federal transportation funds or formula funds coming to DOT&PF can be used.

Stretches of Road without Restrooms

There are no year-round public restrooms on the road between popular destinations:

- Big Lake and Fairbanks
- Girdwood and Cooper Landing
- Girdwood and Seward
- Soldotna and Homer

Without year-round restrooms, people inevitably dispose of waste in ways that can negatively impact ecosystems and the aesthetics of the landscape.

When Alaskans were asked in a 2022 public survey, which outdoor recreation facilities are needed, 42.2 percent of respondents indicated restrooms and highway waysides needed the most development.

ACTION B: Develop new strategies to share operating costs that are not supportable by any one partner. A Denali Borough example is the work being done to share responsibility for building and maintaining wayside facilities between DOT&PF and the local government. Another option would be to create partnerships where Tribal Transportation Funds are made available to Alaska’s federally recognized tribes.

ACTION C: Create new opportunities in the private sector, either as operators of roadside and historical park concessions or as contributors to the cost of operating roadside and historical park facilities.

ACTION D: Explore investing in multi-purpose waysides that double as trailhead parking areas, and locations for private, concessionaire-operated coffee, snack, and restroom stops.

ACTION E: Develop highway-specific wayside plans for extended stretches of roads like the Parks Highway. Locate waysides, at reasonable distances and aim to fill in gaps and consider where private operators such as gas stations or restaurants might meet the need for restroom stops.

STRATEGY 3.3: Improved Options for Public-Private Partnerships. New tools and rules are needed to support public-private partnerships for outdoor recreation investment.

ACTION A: DPOR needs authority to finance outdoor recreation facilities that the State currently does not have the capacity to fund, especially where revenue generated could help cover the the construction, operational, maintenance and replacement costs. *See Goal 6 for solutions to funding DPOR operations.*

STRATEGY 3.4: Provide one-stop multi-agency commercial use permitting. Work to simplify the process for permit applicants and thereby open new opportunities for outdoor recreation users seeking the services of guides for hiking, fishing, and other activities. A related objective is to improve the tracking of user information associated with commercial outdoor recreation activities.

ACTION A: State and federal land managers should investigate the process for simplified, standardized permits for commercial use of public lands.

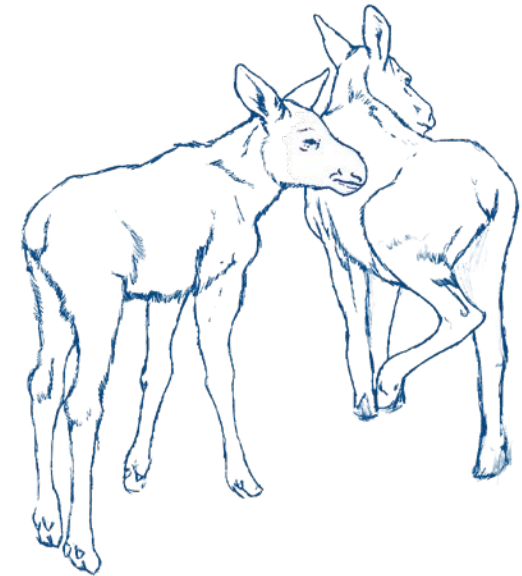
ACTION B: As part of developing a shared multi-agency process, set up an automated database system, to make it simple to record, compile, and learn from user data.

ACTION C: Geospatial tags to track, monitor, and record use by commercial operators.

OBJECTIVE 4: WORK WITH PARTNERS STATEWIDE TO HELP RESIDENTS AND TOURISTS BETTER UNDERSTAND AND ENJOY ALASKA’S OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Improved information and marketing strategies offer a cost-effective means to maximize the value of trails, camping areas, winter adventures, and other outdoor recreation facilities and locations. A successful approach includes a collaborative process with diverse partners to better share information and coordinate marketing tools.

ATIA, regional marketing organizations, online sources like OuterSpatial, and private entities like Alaska.org¹ already provide a wide and steadily improving range of information about Alaska’s outdoor recreation opportunities. This section proposes ways to build on that work and further improve the information that invites a broad range of residents and visitors to get outside and enjoy Alaska. A similar approach is needed for the subject of construction and maintaining roadside trails.



CASE STUDY: Cantwell to Healy Planning and Environmental Linkages Study¹⁵

A Comprehensive Multi-modal Look at Transportation Improvements

DOT&PF, FHWA, Western Federal Lands, and NPS, are working together to identify potential future transportation and access improvements along the Parks Highway corridor between Cantwell and Healy. The study team is conducting a Planning and Environmental Linkages study that will look at current and future conditions and needs of transportation and access facilities along this stretch of highway as it relates to the users and communities in the areas between Cantwell and Healy.

The process is truly collaborative as it brings together regional, community, and local stakeholders for a comprehensive, multi-modal look at recent, active, and future transportation improvements along the interstate highway corridor. This collaborative framework could be applied to other highway corridors for planning future facility improvements.



“We LOVE the wildness of Alaska. We’ve lived here for years, but sometimes feel like we don’t quite know how to use or access some of the opportunities. Increased public knowledge of what’s out there would be awesome! as well as consistent information!”

– SCORP public survey comment, 2022

Outdoor recreation information needs to be available in multiple formats: in-person questions and answers at visitor information centers; hardcopy maps and brochures; on-site physical signs, maps, and interpretive information; and high-quality digital platforms providing curated accurate online information. Building this integrated system of marketing and user information will take time and money, but will quickly return the value of these investments through increased visitor spending and a better quality of life for residents.

STRATEGY 4.1: Improve the contents and platforms that provide information about outdoor recreation regionally and statewide. Make it easier and more inviting for interested residents and visitors to discover the diverse array of public outdoor recreation options available year-round.

ACTION A: Ensure that all Alaskans can envision themselves in the stories told by our state’s public lands and waters to connect with meaningful opportunities.

STRATEGY 4.2: Expand in-field trail signs and mileage markers. These are often absent in Alaska but present and appreciated in competing destinations around the world.

ACTION A: Minimize trail user conflicts through education, good trail design, signage, special use restrictions, and smart, informed management decisions.

STRATEGY 4.3: Invest in information accessibility and availability. These improvements could be a hallmark of the upcoming generations’ work in the DPOR.

STRATEGY 4.4: Use marketing as a tool to help provide quality experiences for a variety of users.

ACTION A: Bring together public, nonprofit, and private partners to identify how they might best use their respective experience, knowledge, and missions to upgrade information about the outdoor recreation and heritage opportunities available statewide and locally. Improved outdoor recreation information is needed in several categories which are detailed in the following actions.

ACTION B: Entice visitors and Alaskans alike with pre-arrival marketing that reveals the breadth and depth of recreational opportunities around the state. This could include photographs of different types of activities for all abilities as well as well-developed multi-town or multi-day itineraries and timeframes that highlight the best Alaska has to offer.

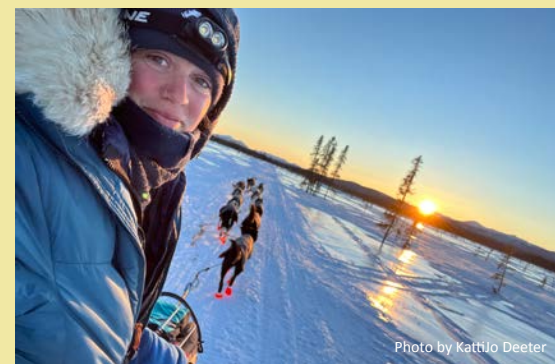


Photo by Kattilo Deeter

Black Spruce Dog Sledding³³
Authentic Mushing Immersion

Dog sledding across the winter landscape is an incredible way to immerse oneself in both the cultural and natural resources of Alaska. While extreme winter temperatures can often be a deterrent, businesses can prepare and educate their clients to ensure a memorable experience. The team at Black Spruce Dog Sledding in Fairbanks has done just that. By preparing a detailed video of “how to dress,” visitors can arrive prepared and feel confident that cold toes will not stand in the way of the experience of a lifetime.

ACTION C: Create links to information and helpful, logistical suggestions about possible adventures so visitors can enjoy their adventures (e.g., businesses, access information, seasons, level of challenge, etc.).

ACTION D: Provide helpful information for easy, safe, and enjoyable recreation once visitors arrive or for residents who are already here. This could include enhancing online user information that makes it easy to set up a variety of adventures, from a one-day hike with shuttle service to a multi-day snowmachine trip; high quality, hard copy collateral material readily available, informative interpretive wayfinding signs on trails, and Visitor Information Centers with people equipped with helpful maps and other collateral information and personal, up-to-date knowledge.

For this SCORP, the goal is to set up the initial framework of this statewide, mapped database. *See Chapter 2 for more information.* Subsequent work will provide useful information on an illustrative subset of existing and planned outdoor recreation facilities. In the years following the completion of the SCORP, a more complete set of data will be entered including specific information that would be essential for tracking quality, capacity, and need for improvements of outdoor recreation facilities and places.

OBJECTIVE 5: EXPAND TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS IN ALL ASPECTS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Alaska currently lacks clear, comprehensive information about the supply of outdoor recreation facilities and use areas, a way to identify and track the location, and status of the diverse places that support our unique outdoor recreation way of life. A new database to house and continually update this information would give Alaska, for the first time, a comprehensive tool to manage the state's outdoor recreation resources.

Creating and sustaining this tool is a big step, requiring contributions from multiple parties and a system to keep this information current into the future. A contractor was hired to create the starting framework for the database and associated GIS maps using anonymized cell phone data and GIS outdoor recreation supply mapping. The contractor will identify the categories of facilities and activities that provide the most useful information and help create a snapshot of outdoor recreation in Alaska.

As stated in Objective 4, for this SCORP, a goal is to set up the initial framework of this statewide, mapped database. *See Chapter 2 for more information.*

Chena Outdoor Collective ^{2,36} *Real People, Real Alaska*

Two Rivers is home to the Chena River State Recreation Area, the Chena Hot Springs Resort, and a place called "Where the Alaskan Husky Outnumbers the Human Residents in the Valley."

The Chena Outdoor Collective boasts multiple opportunities for visitors including learning about the history of dog mushing, dog sled tours in winter, walking with reindeer, peony farm tours, and panning for mining. This collaborative business located in a geographic area, which alone offers a multitude of outdoor recreation opportunities, ensures visitors have a once in a lifetime experience while supporting local businesses.



Photos by Kalyn Holl Photography

“A state-run app that contains trail info, helps people connect with others (buddy system), discover parks current usage level, and delivers alerts regarding wildlife sightings would be most helpful. I’d pay for that. I know there are third party apps out there, but one specifically for Alaskans would be really cool and helpful.”

- SCORP public survey comment, 2022

STRATEGY 5.1: Develop an on-line GIS hub and database as a reference for government and project developers.

STRATEGY 5.2: Document facility and activity status. The initial database and accompanying GIS maps would document the location, function, size, characteristics, and status of recreation facilities and activity areas.

STRATEGY 5.3: Include economic attributes. Other potential attributes to include are economic benefits per day, specific schedules, need for and costs of capital improvements, or other needed actions such as leases to private sector partners or acquisitions.

STRATEGY 5.4: Create a digital platform system to solicit public feedback. Alaska needs a digital platform system to solicit feedback on Alaska outdoor recreation facilities and experiences. This is a way to receive and record feedback as well as benefit from this information.

As is increasingly common in many different fields, from tourism services to a trip to the doctor, businesses are becoming customer service oriented. State, federal, and local public land managers should do the same and strive to respond to public feedback about the quality and character of our outdoor recreation places and facilities. Where land management agencies agrees with the feedback but lacks the resources to respond, this information can be used to explain the need for expanded resources with decision makers.

STRATEGY 5.5: Develop long-term maintenance geospatial data management strategies through shared resource models. The review of statewide data sources has shown that smaller organizations lack the resources to develop the critical data needed to generate a complete picture of outdoor recreation

supply. A survey conducted in support of Chapter 2 of this SCORP revealed that frequently, small organizations lack a dedicated technical staff. This is a common industry-wide problem and could be solved by consolidating resources under a statewide GIS department. Centralized GIS support dedicated to outdoor recreation within the Office of Outdoor Recreation could help stakeholders at various geographic scales gain access to specialized staff and reduce both redundancy and operating costs within and across organizations. *See Chapter 2 for more information.*

OBJECTIVE 6. ADEQUATELY FUND, FACILITATE, DEVELOP, AND UPDATE PLANS

This plan’s statewide goals and strategies with its regional objectives, priorities, and programs provide a leap forward in SCORP development. While a great start, the SCORP is a "living" document, used and refined by regional and statewide partners as conditions and opportunities evolve.

Planning will be essential to balance the need to respond to and promote growth, while helping to balance expansion with the need to maintain quality of experiences and stewardship of our underlying natural and cultural resources.

STRATEGY 6.1: Improve planning at multiple scales including local, regional, and state levels. Comprehensive outdoor recreation plans for regions (e.g. Bristol Bay or the Upper Copper River Basin) can help bring together land management agencies, local governments, Native tribes and corporations, and residents to make decisions that work towards common goals.

STRATEGY 6.2: Ensure outdoor recreation planning processes are based on the goals of this SCORP. The starting theme, reflecting those goals, is that growth is desirable and coming whether we seek it

or not. Planning processes need to find ways to guide that growth. For example, by improving access and facilities to disperse use or by using “intensity of use” planning will ensure there are a balance of locations with both the facilities to absorb high volume use as well as quiet, less visited locations. *See Goal 5 for more information.*

STRATEGY 6.3: Provide more capacity and authority for land management agencies to carry out outdoor recreation planning at the regional scale and for specific sites. Currently, planning for DPOR is carried out by DMLW. DPOR lacks the staff and mechanisms needed to prepare new or update existing plans – planning needed to respond to rapid growth and change in outdoor recreation. Likewise, DPOR no longer has landscape architects and park planners on staff needed for site specific plans, waysides, campgrounds, trails, boat launches, and other facilities. This step is critical to make supported and planned projects into “shovel ready” project. As a result, potential projects are not readily eligible for funding as it becomes available.

CONCLUSION

Alaska has the remarkable natural and cultural resources to greatly expand our state’s quality of life, improve our health, attract and retain a quality workforce and strengthen our economy. Achieving this will require passionate leadership, purposeful planning, and responsible management. A broad, thoughtful, and publicly informed approach is necessary to ensure that Alaska’s outdoor recreation industry meets its full potential while simultaneously addressing the need to allocate public funds equitably and address concerns of local communities.

The details regarding the State of Alaska’s Office of Outdoor Recreation are not solid at this juncture. This SCORP poses the questions, “who will make these aspirational things happen?” and “how will this transformative work be accomplished?”

Local governments and organizations are positioned to get this work completed. They will be most successful with a dedicated proponent to the overarching cause that can coordinate the vision and prioritize the investment of projects and programs throughout the state. The proposed unit is the State of Alaska Office of Outdoor Recreation.



CHAPTER 4

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