

WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION *Summit*

2026 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit Takeaways

Co-convened by the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute and the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation

UW | Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute

WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION

WORS theme: "Building Capacity for Tomorrow"

The theme of this year's event emphasized intergenerational knowledge exchange, strategic planning, community support, and the importance of partnerships. Sessions focused on equipping current and future leaders in Wyoming's outdoor recreation sector with practical tools, resources, and connections to help their communities and organizations thrive.

Why Outdoor Recreation in Wyoming?

The Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit (WORS) supports Wyoming's tourism industry through one of its biggest drivers: outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation drives 4.5% of Wyoming's GDP, generating $2.3 billion dollars and supporting over 16,500 jobs in 2024 (BEA.gov). The WORS supports this industry by providing a space for Wyoming's outdoor recreation community to come together, attend relevant and engaging sessions, and encourage widespread synergy and broad support for outdoor recreation.

Over 150 participants

including speakers, panelists, and attendees.

Two days of outdoor recreation sessions

(1 full day & 1 half day + field trips)

1 keynote address, 2 general sessions, and 12 breakout sessions

Topics:

- Power and impact of outdoor recreation in Wyoming
- Place-based education and student engagement
- Wyoming's Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives
- Managing tourism impacts from outdoor recreation
- The outdoor recreation project process
- Private and public partnerships
- Trail Rehabilitation
- WGFD programs
- Community stewardship on public lands
- Engaging elected officials
- Technology and public land access
- Existing infrastructure and tourism
- UW student research projects
- Search and rescue information sessions
- WYORBA

Also included:

- Field trip options in the Saratoga area
- A happy hour
- Dedicated mingling time
- Optional early morning outdoor adventure

Setting the Scene

Day 1 began at the Platte Valley Community Center in Saratoga, Wyoming. April 30th began with place-based field trips in the Saratoga area. Attendees had five options to choose from:

- a guided hike along the newly rehabilitated Tie Hack trail,
- a tour of historic downtown Saratoga (and museum!),
- a trip to the Grand Encampment Museum,
- a workshop session focused on place-based experiential learning for public K-12 educators, and
- a tour of the Saratoga National Fish Hatchery.

In the afternoon, event attendees convened back at the community center for welcome remarks and a keynote address from Stacy Bare, a leader in experiential outdoor adventures as mental health treatment and current director of Friends of Grand Rapids Parks in Michigan. Bare spoke about the impact and transformational quality of experiences in the outdoors, specifically those that test physical and mental limits. Bare also emphasized the importance of balancing the economic impact of outdoor recreation with responsible efforts made to improve mental and physical wellness, positing that it is more important to encourage people to get outside in the ways they find fulfilling rather than seeking the most extreme adventure or thrill. Bare dug into the thorny conflict surrounding the explosive growth of outdoor recreation in the Mountain West, highlighting that while most outdoor recreationists love the outdoors, the collective impact is unsustainable for future generations.

"We have to join hands and welcome in new hands to create opportunities for transforming experiences from the doorway to the mountaintop and everywhere in between."

—Stacy Bare





Takeaway 1

WYOMING'S OUTDOOR RECREATION NETWORK IS MATURING FROM GRASSROOTS EFFORT INTO COORDINATED INFRASTRUCTURE.

Throughout the event, sessions were well-attended, illuminating Wyoming's recreation community's hunger for this level of coordination. The spotlight on the 12 Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives, the Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Trust Fund, and community partnership efforts all point to the same story: Wyoming has moved past singular efforts and is building durable, statewide systems to sustain recreation infrastructure for the long haul.



Takeaway 2

LOCAL, HOMEGROWN PROJECTS ARE PROVING THE MODEL FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION DEVELOPMENT AND STEWARDSHIP.

Sessions on the Tie Hack Trail rehabilitation, the Wyo Trail F.A.I.R.I.E.S. volunteer stewardship program, and Friends of the Bridger-Teton's 400+ partnerships were both well-received and inspiring for efforts across the state and region. The strong turnout and engagement across these sessions signals that communities across the state are actively looking to replicate these grassroots, partnership-driven approaches rather than waiting on top-down solutions.



Takeaway 3

THE NEXT GENERATION IS ALREADY IN THE ROOM, NOT JUST BEING TALKED ABOUT.

University of Wyoming students presented original capstone research alongside seasoned agency directors and legislators. These sessions drew high levels of engagement, covering topics such as fly fishing guide standards and statewide business needs assessments. For a state where workforce retention is a concern, this is a positive signal that the University of Wyoming's outdoor recreation pipeline is producing talent ready to step into leadership.

Post-Event Survey Feedback Summary

One week after the event's conclusion, attendees were invited to provide feedback through an anonymous Qualtrics survey. Here are some of the highlights:

Overwhelmingly positive feedback

Attendees praised Saratoga, the food quality, and the planning team.

A summit that keeps getting better

Attendees plan to return and see the summit as a growing force in Wyoming.

Real-world impact

Connections made at the summit are already moving projects forward.

Attendees want more

More hands-on sessions and promotion to reach new recreation communities.

Gratitude

This event wouldn't be possible without the generous support from our sponsors. Thanks to all of the organizations who made valuable contributions to this event through their financial support and presence.

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www.caspercollege.edu/program/outdoor-rec

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WATR – Wyoming Assistive Technology Resources
www.uwyo.edu/wind/watr

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Workforce Wyoming Services
dws.wyo.gov

UCAR
www.ucar.edu

Kate's Real Food
www.katesrealfood.com

Bella's Bistro
We would also like to thank Bella's Bistro for catering the event. Check them out here: www.bellaswyoming.com

Special Thanks

We would like to extend heartfelt gratitude to each member of the event planning committee: Dan McCoy, Mark Tesoro, Glenn Gardner, Blaine Potts, Brendan Kelly, Rachel Spear, and Taylor Kruger.

Save the Date
for the 2027
WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION Summit

WORS 2027 Information

Please mark your calendars to join us at the 2027 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit, which will be held May 6—7, 2027, at the Marion H. Rochelle Gateway Center in Laramie, Wyoming. Information about topics, speakers, and lodging will become available as planning proceeds. Please contact Taylor Kruger (tkruger@uwyo.edu) or Jamie Hansen (jamie.hansen@wyo.gov) with questions.