

— PROCEEDINGS —



WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION *Summit*



Jay Kemmerer
WORTH Institute



MAY 1-3, 2025

MARION H. ROCHELLE GATEWAY CENTER
LARAMIE, WYOMING

Taylor Kruger

QUICK FACTS

OVER

160 ATTENDEES

INCLUDING SPEAKERS,
PANELISTS, AND ATTENDEES

2 DAYS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION SESSIONS

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

PROGRAMMING INCLUDED

1 KEYNOTE ADDRESS, 5 GENERAL
SESSIONS, AND 12 BREAKOUT SESSIONS

TOPICS INCLUDED:

Power of outdoor recreation (economic, social, cultural), demystifying the EXPLORE act, corner crossing, economic impact of backcountry discovery routes, the outdoor retail industry (challenges & opportunities), grant funding strategies, Bridger-Teton Avalanche Center and Wyoming State Trails/USFS partnership, accessible outdoor recreation, weed and pest/recreation partnerships, workforce challenges in outdoor recreation, economic diversification through outdoor recreation, working with elected officials, rural economic development, challenges for guides, volunteer & community trail crews, and supporting public land management through partnerships



2025 Theme: Outdoor Recreation in Wyoming Communities: Building Partnerships, Developing Workforce, and Accessing Resources



Why Outdoor Recreation in Wyoming?

The Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit (WORS) supports Wyoming's 2nd-biggest industry—tourism—through one of its biggest drivers: outdoor recreation. Through relevant, representative, and engaging programming across sectors, the WORS provides a space for Wyoming's outdoor recreation community to come together, encouraging widespread synergy and broad support for outdoor recreation.

The 2025 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit had three goals, aligned with its theme:

- 1 Foster collaboration and partnerships** among Wyoming's outdoor recreation stakeholders to strengthen community connections and shared initiatives.
- 2 Support workforce development** in the outdoor recreation sector by exploring education, training, and career opportunities.
- 3 Enhance access to resources**—including funding, tools, and information—that help communities grow and sustain outdoor recreation efforts.

Setting the Scene

The WORS was held on May 1—2, at the Marian H. Rochelle Gateway Center in Laramie, Wyoming. The event kicked off with a keynote address from Luis Benitez, the face of outdoor recreation's emerging political movement and the previous director of the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office. Benitez discussed how harnessing the associated effects of increasing outdoor recreation—economic impact from amenity tourism, community changes, and more—can be a net positive for communities across the state and region. Benitez's keynote launched the event with enthusiasm, energizing the audience for the programming ahead, providing the audience with the question: *What are some ways in which Wyoming communities can harness the power of outdoor recreation for their benefit?*



Building off this momentum, the WORS focused on how outdoor recreation can support Wyoming communities in three major ways: building partnerships, developing workforce, and accessing resources.

GOAL 1

Foster collaboration and partnerships among Wyoming's outdoor recreation stakeholders to strengthen community connections and shared initiatives.

Partnerships between federal and state agencies, non-profits, and other organizations are crucial for outdoor recreation projects. The importance of partnerships was illustrated through several sessions at the WORS. In a landscape where sustainable federal funding for outdoor recreation-related projects is uncertain, sessions at the Summit aimed to platform organizations that have developed and maintained successful partnerships with state and federal land management agencies. While these partnerships are mutually beneficial, they also serve as an important mechanism of support for federal and state land management agencies struggling from cuts, both financial and staffing.

The WORS featured two panel discussions that supported this goal, titled ‘Working with Elected Officials: Integrating Outdoor Recreation into Wyoming’s Legislative Agenda’ and “Supporting Public Land Management Agencies through Partnerships.”

The legislative panel followed a tumultuous legislative cycle under new house and senate leadership. Wyoming State Representatives Andrew Byron and Jeremy Haroldson, former Wyoming Representative Sandy Newsome, and Fremont County Commissioner Mike Jones served on the panel to discuss the importance of creating and maintaining relationships with local government and state representatives so that they can actively and accurately represent Wyomingites’ interests. This panel was moderated by Addi Jenkins, the executive director of the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Business Alliance (WYORBA), and Michael Kusiek, the executive director of Wyoming Pathways. Panelists answered several passionate questions from the audience, highlighting the importance of two-way public engagement.



The federal land management partnerships panel featured regional representatives from the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service. Mark Tesoro, the Manager of the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, moderated the panel. This panel aimed to provide the audience with insights into how nonprofits, private organizations, and other industry partners can best support federal and state land management agencies facing budget cuts and other challenges that come about from administrative change. Takeaways



from this conversation included encouraging community members to connect with local field office staff for information on current projects and volunteer opportunities and potential utilization of the Good Neighbor Authority, a federal program that permits states, tribes, and counties to collaborate with the USFS and BLM to perform management activities on federal public lands. “It was great to have high level engagement from the Forest Service and BLM at the Outdoor Recreation Summit,” says Tesoro, “The more opportunities we can have to be in the same place talking with federal land managers about recreation on public lands the better off the citizens, non-profits, businesses and communities will be.”

Other sessions featuring partnerships included a presentation from the Bridger-Teton Avalanche Center and Wyoming State Trails, who shared that working together and sharing resources helps bridge data gaps, improves access to safety information for users, and increases educational opportunities. Additionally, Fremont County Weed and Pest shared a session focused on how nonprofits and other organizations can work with local weed and pest offices to improve recreational sustainability and overall land health. Another session focused on the impact of volunteerism, particularly regarding grassroots community trail development. Led by Laramie Trail FAIRIES (Fast Acting Initial Response Indefatigable Environmental Stewards) founder Richard Vercoe, this session focused on providing insights from and examples of successful volunteer trail crews. This session featured perspectives from other trail organizations, including Lander Cycling Club, Wyoming Pathways, Central Wyoming Trails Alliance, Speedgoat Trail Co., and Pilot Hill Inc. The panel highlighted citizen crews’ opportunities, challenges, and benefits for creating more dynamic, engaged, and diversified relationships with land managers to better meet communities’ needs.

Shelby Kappler and Terri Wofford, both representing the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities (WIND), presented about Wyoming Assistive Technology Resources (WATR) and how they are impacting outdoor recreation through the distribution of and education about assistive technology. Kappler and Wofford also discussed a partnership between WATR and Wyoming State Parks, which has made great strides across the state, including developing an accessible pier and incorporating adaptive equipment into the Shoshone District. Finally, presenting a case study of how a private company can successfully partner with public land management agencies, AllTrails representative Pitt Grewe and Friends of the Bridger-Teton’s Jennifer Ricupero discussed AllTrails’ new Public Lands Program, a free resource for agencies and nonprofit organizations that helps manage and share trail information with partners and users. Friends of the Bridger-Teton shared how this resource has helped keep people safe and prepared, contributing to an effective and successful partnership.

Takeaways on Partnerships

1. | Relationship-building is an important first step in a successful partnership.
2. | Establishing trust and creating a shared vision are also key to a successful partnership.
3. | Partnerships between nonprofit organizations, industry leaders, and federal and state land management agencies provide crucial support (and sometimes, volunteer manpower) for project development and implementation.



GOAL 2

Support workforce development in the outdoor recreation sector by exploring education, training, and career opportunities.

Developing and supporting a thriving workforce is key to successful outdoor recreation industries, including manufacturing, retail, guiding, and more. Workforce development, a key component for the outdoor recreation industry, was featured in several sessions at the WORS. A crucial piece of the economic development puzzle, the outdoor recreation workforce—including retailers, manufacturers, guides, and University of Wyoming graduates—faces several challenges and opportunities as the industry expands.

One of the first sessions addressing Wyoming's outdoor recreation workforce was focused on outdoor retailers. An integral piece of Wyoming's thriving recreation industry, outdoor retail faces unique opportunities and challenges—from navigating shifting tariff policies and evolving consumer expectations to recruiting employees in a rural market. Led by WYORBA's Executive Director Addi Jenkins, this panel featured Wyoming retailers from across the state, including Wild Iris Mountain Sports, Fast Haus Ski and Bike, and Rocky Mountain Powersports. Some challenges that were addressed in this panel included workforce sustainability, incorporation of public input, and tariffs; specifically, opportunities to educate customers about the impact of tariffs, including price increases. Panelists spoke about the need to build business partnerships across the state. Not only does this serve as an opportunity to explore Wyoming, but it can also bring communities in touch. "Business owners are the backbone of our communities and are vital to development," says Summit attendee Maddy Giovanni, a development advisor for the Wyoming Business Council.



Another panel examined Wyoming's manufacturing industry, which faces similar challenges to those presented by retailers. The panel featured Wyoming-based manufacturers, including Manufacturing Works, MAVEN Optics, Brunton, Weatherby, Magpul Industries, and WYld Gear. The panel identified challenges and opportunities for these manufacturing companies, with challenges including competition overseas, tariffs and exports in international sales, and workforce sustainability. There were many opportunities mentioned, however, including the impact of tariffs on sourcing, Wyoming's identity with marketing, and local pride associated with their product.

Looking at the future of Wyoming's workforce, Dan McCoy, Director of the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute, moderated a panel with current University of Wyoming students studying outdoor recreation and tourism management and looking for jobs or careers in these fields. Student panelists shared that they are not demanding a full-time, benefitted job, but rather an opportunity to work in the field and use the skills and abilities curated throughout their course of study. Getting a chance to gain experience in the outdoor



recreation industry was a goal for the students, and they expressed a desire for employers to value the ability of a young professional to learn and adapt in a new role. “University of Wyoming students are consistently seeking meaningful experiences that will allow them to advance to careers that provide stability, opportunities for growth, and a foothold into a successful career,” says Director McCoy.

Lastly, outdoor guides, a key sector for Wyoming’s workforce, were featured through a panel moderated by Taylor Phillips, the founder of EcoTour Adventures, a guiding service out of Jackson, Wyoming. This panel featured voices from several different guiding disciplines, including fishing, snowmobiling, and climbing, as well as an educational perspective from the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). This panel took a storytelling approach and described the unique challenges that guides in Wyoming face, including varying client expectations, old-fashioned perceptions, and long-term viability in an industry reliant on visitation. Tightly linked to Wyoming’s rugged landscapes, guiding professionals are experts at their craft and have a keen eye for outdoor recreation development, and how to engage people in the outdoors. Guiding remains a key component of Wyoming’s outdoor recreation and tourism industry.

Takeaways on Workforce Development

1. Students and young professionals want opportunities and experience in outdoor recreation and tourism industries; there is a need to make professional connections.
2. Wyoming businesses need to connect with and support each other through strategic marketing and communication initiatives and collaborative problem-solving.

GOAL 3

Enhance access to resources—including funding, tools, and information—that help communities grow and sustain outdoor recreation efforts.

Accessing resources, including financial and community support, is crucial for the outdoor recreation community to thrive. Funding, tools, and information about funding and tools are necessary for many Wyoming communities to advance outdoor recreation endeavors. An economic powerhouse, outdoor recreation can be harnessed for community development and empowerment, but this can be a challenging endeavor for rural areas, both with finding financial support as well as community engagement. At the WORS, several sessions discussed how to leverage outdoor recreation for community benefit, while also providing some practical knowledge and tools for attendees to bring home with them.



Photo credit Wyoming Office of Tourism



Aaron Bannon, previously with America Outdoors and one of the primary supporters of the EXPLORE Act (Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act), presented a session focused on demystifying the EXPLORE Act language and making it relevant to Wyoming communities. This Act has the goal of enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities on federal lands by modernizing policies, improving access, and empowering local partnerships. While the EXPLORE Act is a significant step forward for outdoor recreation development across the nation, there remain some implementation challenges, namely, that there was no federal funding allocated for execution. However, Bannon presented practical implications for Wyoming through the EXPLORE Act, including support for gateway communities (*Sec. 131, allowing for a collaborative assessment of needs relating to housing, municipal infrastructure, and visitation*) and expansion of the Good Neighbor Authority to incorporate recreation (*Sec. 351, allowing states, counties, and Tribes to construct, restore, or repair recreation infrastructure on federal lands under GNA agreements*). Highlighting these major takeaways and disseminating the text is an important way of sharing access to exciting progress at the federal level.



Grant Coordinator Brynn Hirschman (Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation) and Grant Manager Louisa Lopez (Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources) shared a session focused on grants—how to find, apply, and receive funding. Coming from the state, this information resonated with Summit attendees as it provided a hands-on approach for bringing opportunity to their communities. This session focused on grant funding through several different mechanisms, including the Recreation Trails Program (RTP), the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and the Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Trust Fund (ORTTF). In this presentation, Hirschman and Lopez went through the details about each grant, sharing tips and tricks along the way (for example, recommending that grant applicants provide links to support statements). Additionally, Hirschman and Lopez shared that while the LWCF and RTP have funding available each year, they have more specific criteria for applicants to meet; the ORTTF will begin accepting applications in 2026 and will release guidelines ahead of time to provide applicants with all relevant information.

Paul Huberty, Executive Director of the Wind River Development Fund, presented about his success with outdoor recreation development on the Wind River Indian Reservation. Titled “Economic diversification through outdoor recreation,” this session focused on creating independence and building a sustainable local economy. Huberty shared his “be bold and think big” mindset, telling about how he and his colleagues applied for many grants and opportunities, eventually receiving an award from the Recompete Pilot Program, which provided the WRDF with \$36 million to build holistic investments in ecotourism, cultural preservation, workforce development, indigenous agriculture, health care expansion, and land sovereignty. These strategies aim to create new growth opportunities by growing the indigenous-led economy and accessing the robust tourism industry in nearby National Parks. So far, this project has led to the creation of free certificates like first aid and first responder training to develop their workforce, efforts to repair recreation

site facilities to increase tourism potential, and the creation of public outdoor spaces like baseball fields and parks to promote a higher quality of life for all residents.

The WORS also featured a panel discussion from prominent members of Wyoming’s statewide rural economic development scene, including representatives from the Wyoming Association of Municipalities, the Wyoming Business Alliance, the Wyoming Economic Development Association, the County Commissioners Association, and Tata Chemicals. This panel focused on how outdoor recreation can drive economic development, in traditional as well as surprising ways. Panelists described Wyoming’s need for highly skilled workers, emphasizing that these individuals often value quality of life when considering job opportunities, citing Pilot Hill as a reason someone might want to move to and work in Wyoming. Outdoor recreation is critical to the success of other industries; outdoor recreation activities in Wyoming attract workforce and help with recruitment and retention efforts. Panelists encouraged local industry leaders to be advocates for outdoor recreation in their communities, reiterating the value that outdoor recreation brings through many avenues.

Other sessions focused on accessing outdoor recreation resources included a session focused on the economic impact of Backcountry Discovery Routes, led by Bill Whitacre. Whitacre’s presentation focused on boosting rural economies through the development of new BDR trails in Wyoming. BDR—adventure motorcycling—aims to create off-highway experiences for users, promote rider education and stewardship, and drive sustainable economic stimulus to rural communities along their routes. Whitacre discussed the Wyoming BDR trails, one which loops around the Red Desert, starting and ending in Baggs, and the other which is a 1,000 mile route extending from Baggs to Burgess Junction. These routes have brought significant tourism dollars to several Wyoming counties; an economic impact study conducted in 2022 found that the Wyoming BDR brought in approximately \$4.8 million dollars.

Photo credit Wyoming Office of Tourism



Takeaways about Accessing Resources

1. Wyoming communities can benefit from leveraging opportunities provided through national and statewide grants, as well as implementing EXPLORE Act policies.
2. Sharing success stories—development on the Wind River Indian Reservation, Backcountry Discovery Routes, and more—is important in providing examples of how rural communities can benefit from outdoor recreation development.
3. Support of outdoor recreation development can take many different forms, but it has benefits that ripple through communities, including encouraging workforce recruitment and retention.



Session Highlight: Corner Crossing Panel

On Thursday, the WORS featured a lunchtime session focused on corner crossing—a major issue for Wyoming and the region. Dan McCoy, Director of the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute, moderated this panel, which included Jim Magagna, the Executive Director of the Wyoming Stockgrowers Association, and Ryan Semerad, an attorney based in Casper, Wyoming, who represented the Missouri hunters in a previous civil lawsuit. This group discussed the high-profile corner crossing case that affects Wyoming communities and has developed national attention and provided some protocol for both landowners and recreationists looking for access.

Read the article from WyoFile here: <https://wyofile.com/corner-crossing-experts-urge-caution-for-wyoming-recreators-in-wake-of-ruling/>



Post-Event Survey Feedback Summary

Event organizers sent out a post-event survey to all WORS attendees within a week of attendance, with 67 responses collected. Most of the attendees at the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit heard about the event through a professional meeting or group. When ranking aspects of the Summit for importance, respondents ranked networking as most important, followed by breakout sessions. Topics of greatest interest included: the role of outdoor recreation in rural economic development, recreation retail, the panel with elected officials, the panel with public land management agencies, sessions highlighting economic impact and development, and grant funding tips and tricks. Several respondents also mentioned how the question-and-answer portions of all sessions were helpful.

Survey feedback highlights that the majority of WORS attendees were satisfied with the overall event length, as well as the general and breakout sessions and break length. Additionally, most survey respondents reported that communication about the event was sufficient.

“I thought it was great, informative, and extremely well led. The planning was on point, and it was an enjoyable and educational experience.” — *Summit attendee*

“Incredibly well organized with valuable sessions and engaging speakers.” — *Summit attendee*



Thanks to our sponsors:

Discover Carbon County, SE Group, Pointe Strategies, Wagners, COR Expeditions, Kate's Real Food, Wyoming Business Council, AllTrails, and NOLS Rocky Mountain.



**POINTE
STRATEGIES**



Thanks to our steering committee

- Addi Jenkins, Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Business Alliance
- Brendan Kelley, United States Forest Service
- Dan McCoy, Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute
- Frances Schaetz, Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation
- Laurel Stephens, Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources
- Mark Tesoro, Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation
- Michael Kusiek, Wyoming Pathways
- Blaine Potts, Bureau of Land Management
- Rachel Spear, Platte River Trails



WORS 2026 Information

Please mark your calendars to join us at the 2026 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit, which will be held April 30—May 1, 2026, at the Platte Valley Community Center in Saratoga, Wyoming. Information about topics, speakers, and lodging will become available as planning proceeds.

Please contact Taylor Kruger (tkruger@uwyo.edu) or Fran Schaetz (frances.schaetz1@wyo.gov) with questions.



SAVE THE DATE

WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION
Summit

April 30—May 1, 2026

Platte Valley Community Center
Saratoga, Wyoming



Resources

- AllTrails Public Lands Program here: <https://publiclands.alltrails.com/>
- Backcountry Discovery Routes here: <https://ridebdr.com/>
- Bridger-Teton Avalanche Center here: <https://bridgertetonavalanchecenter.org/>
- EXPLORE Act here: <https://recreationroundtable.org/priorities/recreation-package/>
- Friends of the Bridger-Teton here: <https://www.btfriends.org/>
- Trail FAERIES here: <https://www.laramiebikenet.org/trail-fairies>
- Wind River Development Fund here: <https://wrdf.org/>
- Wyoming Association for Municipalities here: <https://wyomuni.org/>
- Wyoming Business Alliance here: <https://www.wyomingbusinessalliance.com/>
- Wyoming Economic Development Association here: <https://www.wyomingeda.org/>
- Wyoming Institute for Disabilities here: <https://www.uwyo.edu/wind/index.html>
- Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Business Alliance (WYORBA) here: <https://www.wyorba.org/>
- Wyoming Outdoor Recreation grants here: <https://wyoparks.wyo.gov/index.php/learn/recreation-grants>





Save the Date

FOR THE 2026



WYOMING OUTDOOR RECREATION
Summit

April 30—May 1, 2026

Platte Valley Community Center
Saratoga, Wyoming



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