



UW

Jay Kemmerer
WORTH Institute

2024-2025

ANNUAL REPORT



Executive Summary

In 2024–2025, the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute advanced its mission to expand and diversify Wyoming’s visitor economy through an integrated focus on research, workforce development, and statewide engagement.

Highlights from the year include:



Historic Milestone: A \$5 million gift from Jay and Karen Kemmerer—matched by the State of Wyoming—formally established the WORTH Initiative as a named institute and secured over \$6 million in permanent endowment funds.



Statewide Reach: The WORTH Institute delivered programming to people in all 23 Wyoming counties, engaged over 60 communities, and hosted two major events: the 2025 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit and the Wyoming Search and Rescue Conference.



Workforce Innovation: More than 100 students benefited from WORTH’s workforce programs, including hospitality trainings, career fairs, and funded internships. The new Haub School Virtual Career Center and the Western Hospitality Certificate program expanded professional development access statewide.



Student Impact: Over \$40,000 in scholarships and internship support was awarded. Experiential learning included a multi-city tourism industry tour, on-site visits, and the inaugural Pulte Gateway to Hospitality Innovation Challenge.



Research Leadership: The WORTH Institute published major economic impact studies—spanning the outdoor recreation economy, creative industries, and local events—and launched new projects examining visitor experiences and resident sentiment in Teton and Fremont counties.



National Recognition: The WORTH Institute was featured at the TTRA International Conference and joined the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable’s Workforce Consortium Steering Committee, ensuring Wyoming’s voice in national policy and workforce development.



Strategic Growth: The WORTH Institute launched its first-ever Strategic Plan and Marketing Plan, held its inaugural staff retreat to align goals, and introduced the WORTH Institute Partner Program to strengthen engagement with industry, government, and nonprofit stakeholders.

This year’s accomplishments signal a bold trajectory for the WORTH Institute as a state and national leader in outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality innovation.

Letter from the Director

Dear Colleagues, Partners, and Friends,

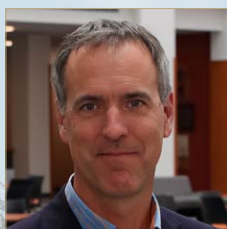
It is my great pleasure to share the 2025 Annual Report for the Jay Kemmerer Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism, and Hospitality (WORTH) Institute. This year marked a historic milestone: thanks to a transformative \$5 million gift from Jay and Karen Kemmerer, matched by the state of Wyoming, the WORTH Institute became a named, endowed institute. It is the first of its kind in the nation and one of only two named institutes at the University of Wyoming. Their generosity ensures that the WORTH Institute will continue to support and grow Wyoming's visitor economy with lasting impact for generations to come.

Tourism remains a cornerstone of Wyoming's economy. In 2024, the industry generated \$4.9 billion in direct travel spending, employed more than 33,800 people, and supported \$1.4 billion in earnings—a 5.6% increase over the prior year. Tourism is Wyoming's second-largest industry by economic impact and the largest private employment sector, with more than 72% of visitor spending coming from out-of-state and international travelers. These figures show the continued strength and importance of the visitor economy to the state's prosperity.

None of the accomplishments in this report would have been possible without the incredible contributions of the WORTH Institute's faculty and staff. Their commitment to excellence, creativity, and service has elevated the Institute's work across research, workforce development, and statewide engagement. Whether facilitating hospitality trainings, publishing economic research, leading student or statewide focused events, or building new academic and industry partnerships, our team continues to drive innovation and support Wyoming's future.

The pages that follow illustrate the breadth of what we have accomplished and hint at what lies ahead. We are grateful to the many partners, faculty, students, donors, and community leaders who make this work possible. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan McCoy".

Dan McCoy, Ph.D.
Director, The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute



Thank you to our donors!

The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute gratefully acknowledges the generosity of our donors whose contributions are helping to shape the future of outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality in Wyoming. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the following donors for their contributions since July 1, 2024:

- Anonymous (3)
- Bradley and Yancy Bonner
- Chalie and Suzanne Brown
- EcoTour Adventures
- Ford Wyoming Center
- Catherine and Tom Holland
- Brynn Hirschman
- Cynthia and Michael Keller
- Jay and Karen Kemmerer
- Jordan Kobliska
- Alex and Dawn Klein
- John and Nancy Koprowski
- Dan McCoy and Melanie Arnett
- Debbie and Stuart Pummel
- Bruce and Phyllis Salzburg
- Janice and William Smith
- Andrew Byron and Bayless Sword
- Sarah Wines

Thanks to their generosity—and matching funds from the Wyoming Office of Tourism and the State of Wyoming—we raised over \$6,176,691 this year. This support advances the WORTH Institute's impact, faculty excellence, and student support through scholarships, internship funding, professional development opportunities, and careers in tourism and outdoor recreation.

The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute Mission

Expand and diversify Wyoming's economy by supporting the outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality industries. We achieve our mission through three operational pillars:



Workforce Development: Supply opportunities for students and working professionals to develop the skills and knowledge to thrive in the tourism, hospitality, and outdoor recreation industries.



Statewide Engagement: Produce impactful programs and services for communities, businesses, and stakeholders across Wyoming.



Research: Provide timely and relevant research to address industry opportunities and challenges.

What is an Institute?

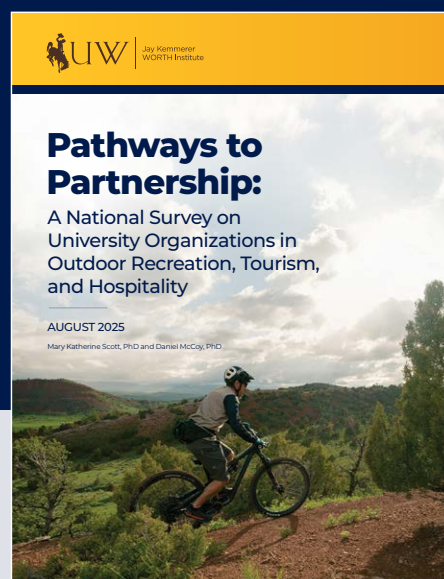
At UW, an institute is a cross-disciplinary hub for research, education, and creative work that advances university-wide priorities. Institutes unite faculty across departments and colleges to address complex challenges that extend beyond any single discipline.

The **Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute** exemplifies this model, leveraging partnerships, research, and workforce development to support and grow Wyoming's outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality economy.



How does the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute compare to Peer Institutions?

A 2025 study commissioned by the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute surveyed university-based organizations across the United States engaged in outdoor recreation, tourism, hospitality, and agritourism to benchmark their structures, missions, staffing, funding, and programming. With responses from nine institutions, the study identified common challenges, such as financial sustainability and staffing limitations, as well as shared goals in workforce development, community engagement, and applied research. The findings provide a foundational understanding of the field and highlight opportunities for collaboration, innovation, and peer learning among like-minded university programs.



The WORTH Institute stands out among peer institutions for its integrated approach to outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality—the only participating organization to explicitly include hospitality as a core mission area.

Like many of its peers, the WORTH Institute emphasizes applied research, workforce development, and statewide engagement, yet its structure, funding model, and scale reflect both shared challenges and unique opportunities.

Key similarities with peer institutions include:

- A focus on community-based outreach
- Participation in state-level partnerships
- Challenges with staffing and long-term financial sustainability

Notable distinctions of WORTH include:

- New endowment support
- Statewide hospitality training programs
- A higher-than-average number (14) of affiliated faculty

While many peer institutions focus mainly on recreation and tourism, the WORTH Institute's inclusion of hospitality as a core aspect of Wyoming's travel economy provides distinction.

Below is a comparative snapshot based on key dimensions gathered in the survey:

Category	The WORTH Institute	Peer Average (8 Orgs)
Mission Areas	Outdoor Rec, Tourism, Hospitality	Outdoor Rec, Tourism, Agritourism
Years in operation	4	22
Carnegie Classification	R1	Majority R1
FTE Staff	7 (plus 14 affiliated faculty)	Average: 6.4 FTE; fewer affiliates
State Engagement	Strong – WOT, WYO Rec, Annual Summits	Strong across most respondents
Self-Sustaining Funding	Not yet self-sustaining	Only 2 report full self-sufficiency
Experiential Learning	Yes – the WORTH Institute offers or connects students with non-credit training opportunities and certificates in each mission area	Mixed—most offer experiential learning in tourism, but fewer opportunities exist in other mission areas
Marketing Strategy	Formal marketing plan and agency	Few have formal marketing plans
Sponsored Program Fees	Yes – up to 44.5% indirects	Varies; some charge, others do not

The WORTH Institute’s combination of research, education, and outreach—supported by public funding, grants, and a growing endowment—positions it as a dynamic, cross-sector institute helping Wyoming lead in sustainable tourism and outdoor recreation development.

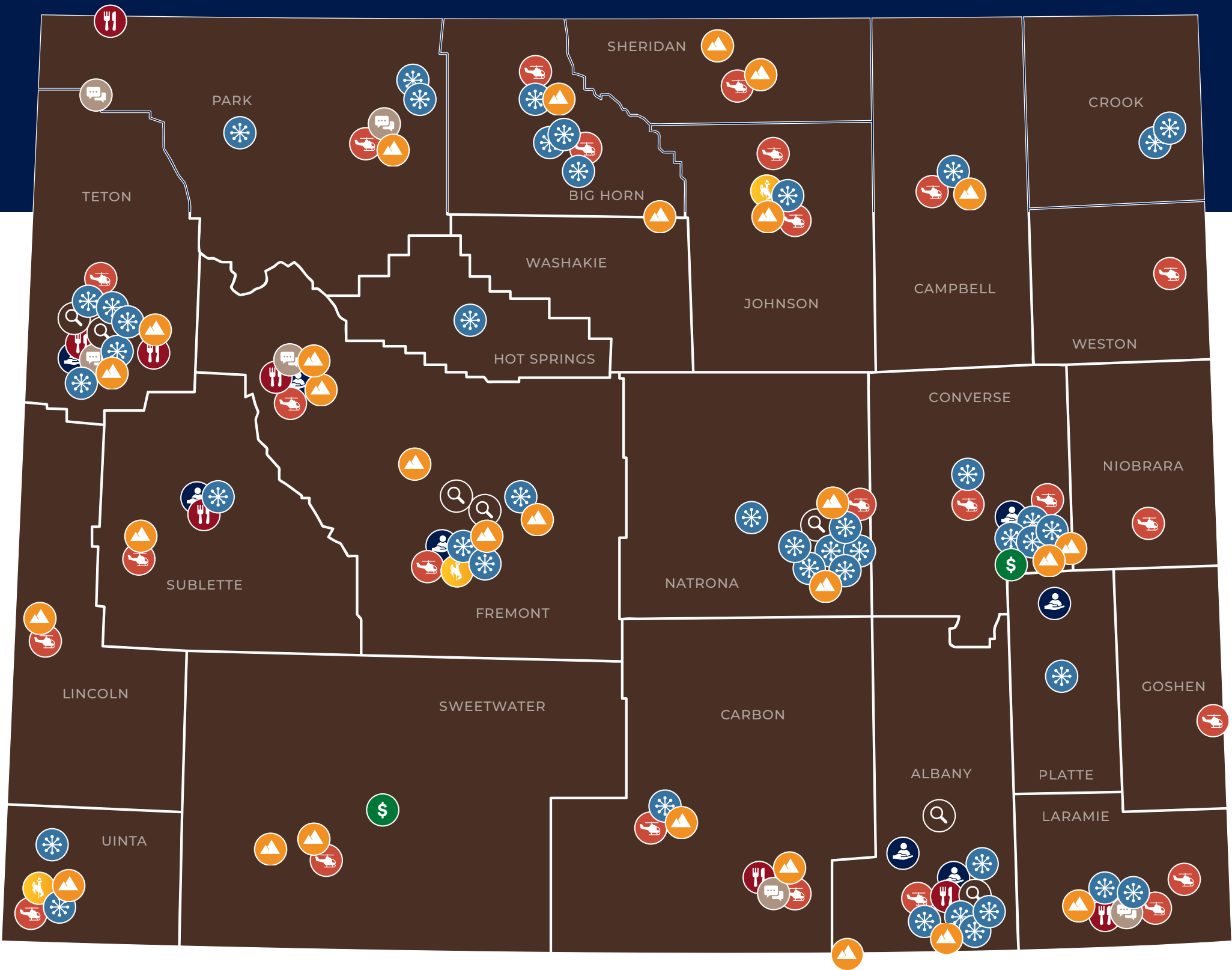


Statewide Engagement Map

This map showcases the breadth of our statewide engagement. These activities reflect the WORTH Institute’s commitment to strengthening Wyoming’s second-largest industry by supporting communities, students, and tourism professionals throughout the state. Our reach in 2025 included:

- All 23 counties represented in programming
- 66+ towns and cities engaged through research, training, or event participation
- Multiple overlapping program types per location (internships, research, outreach)

-  **Internships and Agreements:** Current locations of interns and internship agreements.
-  **Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit Attendees:** Cities and towns represented at the 2025 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit in Laramie.
-  **Statewide Engagement:** Locations of the WORTH Institute programming, including hospitality trainings, agritourism education, outdoor wellness programs like WY Well & Wild, Wyoming Walks, and the Outdoor Recreation Knowledge Exchange webinar series.
-  **UW in Your Community:** Public events hosted across Wyoming highlight student and faculty engagement, strengthen partnerships, and elevate the University’s role in supporting local tourism economies.
-  **Wyoming Search and Rescue Conference Attendees:** Cities and towns represented at the 2025 Wyoming Search and Rescue Conference.
-  **Sponsored Research Projects:** Counties where the WORTH Institute is conducting or has completed research projects
-  **Economic Impact Reports:** Locations where the WORTH Institute has delivered or collaborated on economic analysis for key events or organizations.
-  **Student Networking and Industry Engagements:** Locations of structured events where students interacted with industry professionals.
-  **Hospitality and Tourism Fair Vendors:** Business or organization locations of those who attended the spring 2025 Hospitality and Tourism Fair.





Statewide Engagement

The WORTH Institute continues to serve as a vital connector for Wyoming's tourism and outdoor recreation economy through an array of extension, outreach, and statewide engagement efforts. These efforts reinforce our commitment to community collaboration, economic development, and workforce support across the state.

2025 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit

Held May 1–2 in Laramie, the 2025 Summit convened over 160 participants, representing 28 Wyoming towns, 18 counties, and 4 neighboring states. The program featured 18 sessions and 60+ speakers, including Wyoming legislators, industry professionals, and community leaders. Topics included the economic impact of outdoor recreation, legislative initiatives, outdoor retail, and sustainable growth strategies. The summit is co-hosted by the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation.



Save the Date:

The 2026 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit will be held April 30–May 1 in Saratoga, Wyoming.

2025 Wyoming Search and Rescue Conference

On May 3, the WORTH Institute co-hosted the Search and Rescue Conference in Laramie in partnership with the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation and the Wyoming Search and Rescue Council. This event drew over 100 attendees representing 38 Wyoming towns across 18 counties. The agenda included 12 sessions, with topics ranging from trauma response to interagency collaboration. The SAR community expressed strong interest in making this a recurring event.



Extension Programming and Statewide Initiatives

Led by Extension Educator Hailey Sorg, the WORTH Institute delivered valuable programming across the state:

WY Well & Wild: This innovative wellness and education series reached communities through nature journaling, guided hikes, and Leave No Trace education in locations such as Casper, Laramie, Douglas, Basin, Buffalo, and Sundance.

Wyoming Walks: A popular place-based walking series, developed through a collaborative partnership and delivered with the support of UW Extension educators across the state, was expanded from two counties to fourteen. This program invites residents to explore their own communities like tourists, enjoy the health benefits of walking, and connect with local experts along the way.

Outdoor Recreation Education & 4-H: Programs such as ATV safety, outdoor wellness, and nature-based training were delivered through 4-H partnerships in Natrona, Albany, and Converse Counties.

Agritourism: Programs and workshops were delivered throughout the state at the Wyoming Food Coalition Conference, the Wyoming Sheep and Wool Festival, Ranching in the West Seminar Series, and through the new “Intro to Agritourism” course designed for ORTM and RMAL students at the University of Wyoming.



Signature Programs and Community Engagement

Ready, Set, Explore! Launched in partnership with UW Extension and agencies including Wyoming State Parks, Wyoming Game and Fish, Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, and the Bureau of Land Management, this family-friendly nature challenge encouraged families to get outside, connect with nature, and spend meaningful time together. With monthly incentives and engaging outdoor activities, the program drew participation from 75 families across the state.

Wyoming Ag & Art Tours: With support from the Ellbogen Foundation, UW Extension, and local tourism boards, the WORTH Institute co-developed three county-level tours in Park (June 28), Albany (August 9), and Laramie (August 23) Counties, celebrating the intersection of agriculture, tourism, and the arts.



Outdoor Recreation Knowledge Exchange

In partnership with UW Extension and CSU Extension, the WORTH Institute facilitated a five-part webinar series that engaged 440 registrants from 28+ states. Topics included workforce development, public-private partnerships, and the future of outdoor recreation. See the recordings of the [webinars here](#) and register for our upcoming sessions, starting Sep. 4, 2025.

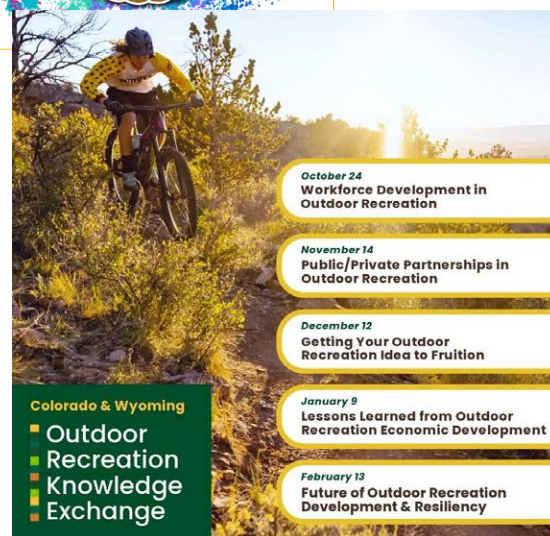


Photo credit Wyoming Office of Tourism



The Teton Pines Country Club team engages in a hands-on communication activity as part of their hospitality training.



Workforce Development

The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute remains a hub for developing a highly skilled and adaptable tourism, hospitality, and outdoor recreation workforce in Wyoming. Our efforts span professional certifications, experiential learning opportunities, industry engagement, and targeted trainings benefiting students, professionals, and employers across the state.

Outdoor Guide Certification Program

The WORTH Institute continued to offer its online, competency-based Outdoor Guide Certification Course, training 31 students globally in 2024–2025 through six courses. Hosted on the WyoLearn platform, this program equips guides with essential skills and knowledge to succeed in the outdoor industry.

Hospitality and Tourism Fair

In February 2025, the WORTH Institute hosted its most successful Hospitality and Tourism Fair to date. The event welcomed 20 employers—including Xanterra, Brush Creek Ranch, Hilton Garden Inn, the Grand Teton Lodge Company—and over 100 students, fostering meaningful employment internship connections.



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and

Pulte Gateway to Hospitality Innovation \$20k Challenge

This spring, 16 students from the University of Wyoming, Central Wyoming College, and Laramie High School participated in the inaugural Pulte Gateway to Hospitality Innovation Challenge. Sponsored by the Pulte Family Charitable Foundation, the challenge tasked students with developing real-world solutions for the Hilton Garden Inn, Laramie. The winning team proposed innovative uses for the hotel's shuttle service and experiential collaborations with UW hospitality classes. More information can be [found here](#).



Internship Support and Scholarships

In 2024–2025, the WORTH Institute supported 11 students through the WORTH Institute Internship Scholarship and the Pulte Gateway to Hospitality Student Transformation Fund. These awards, ranging from \$500 to \$17,000, empowered students to pursue high-impact internships across Wyoming with organizations such as:

- Friends of the Bridger-Teton
- Visit Laramie
- Sinks Canyon State Park
- Hilton Garden Inn
- Wilderness Adventures
- Cowboy Saloon
- Wyoming Business Council
- Glendo State Park

Visit haubcareers.uwyo.edu/channels/outdoor-recreation-tourism-management/ to watch our student stories series.



Student Professional Development

WORTH provided numerous experiential learning opportunities in 2024–2025:

Wyoming Tourism Industry Familiarization Tour: A three-day trip for 30 students to Cody, Yellowstone, Jackson, and Dubois included site visits and networking with over 20 tourism businesses and agencies. Thank you to everyone who took time out of their schedule to meet our students!

Wyoming Governor's Hospitality and Tourism Convention: Nine students attended and were paired with mentors in the industry.

Brush Creek Ranch Visit: A group of students toured the luxury property and explored future employment opportunities.

Haub School Virtual Career Center: In collaboration with the Haub School Career Services, the WORTH Institute launched a virtual career center in January. This platform allows students to explore career pathways, advance professional skills, and explore internship, employment, and scholarship opportunities. In addition to individual advising sessions, this platform grows our capacity to serve hospitality and tourism students statewide. Visit the platform at haubcareers.uwyo.edu.



Hospitality and Customer Service Trainings

The WORTH Institute Extension Educator delivered several hospitality training courses across Wyoming to strengthen customer service skills and build local capacity. In 2024–2025, sessions were delivered in Jackson, Buffalo, Gillette, and Lander with over 100 participants. In locations, such as Gillette and Jackson, partnerships with local organizations made it possible to open these trainings to community members at no cost. Partners included:

- Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce
- Visit Gillette/Wright
- Campbell County Chamber of Commerce
- Teton Pines Country Club
- Maven Optics

Western Hospitality Certificate

The WORTH Institute collaborated with the Center for Principle-Based Leadership and Ethics to launch the Western Hospitality Certificate. Based on the “Code of the West,” this flexible training program emphasizes customer service, ethical leadership, and organizational sustainability through on-site or remote workshops. Find out more about the [certificate here](#).



WyoWonders Curriculum Update

The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute partnered with Wyoming Ag in the Classroom to update and enhance the outdoor recreation and tourism curriculum featured on the WyoWonders platform (www.wyowonders.org). These updates ensure that students across Wyoming engage with current, research-based content that reflects the state's growing outdoor economy, responsible recreation practices, and career pathways in tourism. By aligning this K-5 curriculum with industry needs, the Institute is helping to build early awareness of tourism as one of Wyoming's leading economic sectors.



Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Outdoor Workforce Consortium

The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute is an inaugural steering committee member of the Outdoor Workforce Consortium, a national collaboration of outdoor recreation industry leaders and higher education institutions working to address long-term workforce challenges and opportunities. This consortium is organized by the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) and includes more than 25 institutions and organizations across the country.



As a Steering Committee member, the Institute contributes to shaping the consortium's direction and programming. The Institute brings to the table its expertise in workforce development, education, and applied research, particularly in rural and outdoor-based economies like those in Wyoming. The consortium's objectives include aligning educational pathways with employer needs, addressing workforce shortages, and supporting the growth of a diverse, skilled outdoor recreation workforce.

The WORTH Institute's participation reflects its leadership in the national conversation on outdoor industry careers and ensures that Wyoming's needs and innovations are represented in shaping solutions to national workforce challenges in outdoor recreation. For more information about the consortium, [go here](#).

Teton County Workforce Development Course (In Development)

The WORTH Institute partnered with the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce and the Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board to create an online course for frontline workers. The training will introduce Teton County's tourism landscape, customer service best practices, and responsible visitation messaging. The course is scheduled for release in fall 2025.



Photo credit Wyoming Office of Tourism



Research

The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute continues to serve as a leader in applied, interdisciplinary research that informs tourism, outdoor recreation, and hospitality policy and practice across Wyoming. In 2024–2025, WORTH researchers produced timely and impactful studies on topics ranging from economic impact to resident sentiment, workforce development, and visitor experience. This body of work advances WORTH’s goal of being the go-to research hub for Wyoming’s visitor economy.

Economic Impact Studies

The WORTH Institute produced several economic reports designed to support decision-making across the state. Highlights include:

Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Report 2025: Developed with the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, this report found the state’s outdoor recreation economy grew to \$2.2 billion in 2023, supporting 15,798 jobs and accounting for 4.1% of Wyoming’s GDP (the fifth highest nationally). Furthermore, the Institute calculated the total direct tax revenue generated by outdoor recreation at the local, county, and state level yielded a staggering \$244 million in 2023. View the [full report here](#).



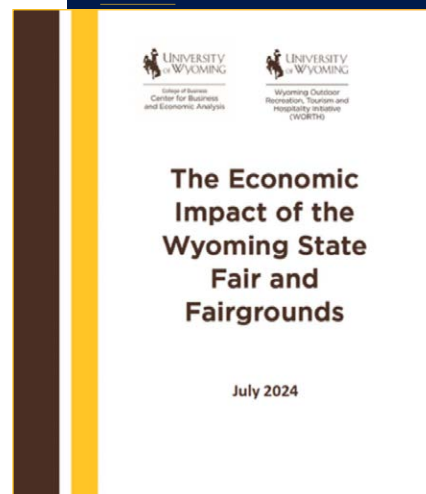
Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Grant Program: Estimated the economic and tax impact of over \$20 million in grant awards supporting outdoor recreation infrastructure and community development projects statewide. See the [report here](#).

State Fairgrounds and Events Center: Assessed the economic contribution of the Wyoming State Fair, supporting planning and funding efforts for future upgrades. View the [full report here](#).

Creative and Film Economy Reports: Evaluated the scale and scope of Wyoming's creative and film industries, with arts and culture directly supporting over 10,000 jobs and \$1.1 billion in value added statewide. Morgan Holland, the WORTH Institute's Senior Research Economist, contributed to this work through the UW Center for Business and Economic Analysis. Read all the [CBEA reports here](#).

Laramie Jubilee Days & National Outdoor Leadership School: Localized studies quantified the impact of annual events and institutions on their respective communities.

Jackson Hole Lodging Forecasts: The WORTH Institute, in partnership with the Jackson Hole Chamber and the Center for Business and Economic Analysis, continued to deliver monthly forecasts for key lodging indicators in Teton County.



Fee-for-Service Research

The WORTH Institute's partnerships resulted in research directly informing local and regional tourism economies:

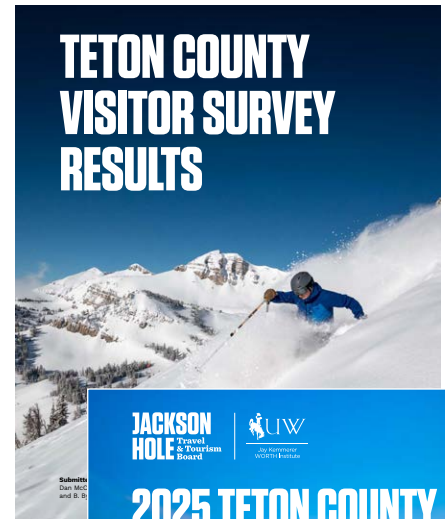
Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board, Sustainable Destination Management Plan (SDMP): The WORTH Institute partnered with the Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board in the implementation of their Sustainable Destination Management Plan (SDMP). Focused on responsible and sustainable tourism, our work supports goal 7 of the SDMP: monitor tourism and its impacts on people and place. Our work includes resident and visitor sentiment surveys, and a tourism indicator dashboard.



Visitor Intercept Report: In collaboration with the Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board and Boley Travel, the WORTH Institute led a comprehensive visitor intercept survey based on Goal 7 of the Teton County SDMP. Conducted during the winter 2023–2024 and summer 2024 peak visitation periods, this study gathered insights from nearly 2,000 visitors to assess satisfaction, travel behaviors, and the visibility and impact of responsible visitation messaging. Results indicated high overall visitor satisfaction and loyalty to the Jackson Hole experience, but also revealed gaps in awareness and recall of responsible visitation messaging. The findings serve as a benchmark for monitoring visitor experience and shaping future sustainable tourism strategies in the region. More information is [available here](#).

Resident Sentiment Survey: As part of the SDMP, the WORTH Institute partnered with the Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board and Boley Travel to design and implement the 2025 Resident Sentiment Survey. This rigorous, survey-based study gathered responses from a scientifically representative sample of Teton County households to assess how tourism affects quality of life, community character, and resident priorities. Results showed that while 89% of residents agree tourism is vital to the local economy, fewer than 40% believe its benefits outweigh the drawbacks. Major concerns included housing affordability, traffic congestion, and a perceived lack of resident influence in tourism decisions. The findings also provide a robust benchmark for ongoing planning and will guide future actions to better align tourism with community values. See the [full report here](#).

Tourism Dashboard: Starting in the summer of 2023, the WORTH Institute has supported the Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board and Datafy in developing a virtual dashboard visualizing over 50 tourism performance indicators. The project earned international recognition and was presented at the International Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA) conference in Ireland. See the [entire dashboard here](#).



Student Research

Capstone

Five senior capstone teams in the Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management program completed community-based research projects in spring 2025, mentored by Dr. Dan McCoy:

- **Tourism Assessment of the Great American Rail Trail** (Bighorn Basin).
- **OHV Trails and Economic Development Strategy** (Southwest Wyoming).
- **Roger Canyon Recreation Plan** (Laramie).
- **Angler Perceptions of Trout Mortality** (Upper North Platte River Basin).
- **Search and Rescue Report** (Statewide SAR analysis).

Graduate Student Research

Resident Attachment in a Changing Community: Research on Tourism and Amenity Migration in Teton County

Manasseh Franklin's graduate thesis examined the intersection of tourism, amenity migration, and resident place attachment in Teton County, Wyoming. Through in-depth interviews with both long-term residents and newcomers, the study explored how residents form emotional, social, and environmental bonds with the region and how those bonds are being tested by rapid community change.

The research found that while tourism is widely accepted and even valued for its contributions to local amenities and quality of life, the impacts of amenity migration, particularly the influx of affluent new residents, are more disruptive. Participants expressed concerns over housing affordability, community disconnect, and rising exclusivity, which in turn are contributing to feelings of displacement and diminished local voice. Residents called for stronger planning, equitable housing policy, and protections for the area's unique ecosystems and cultural character.

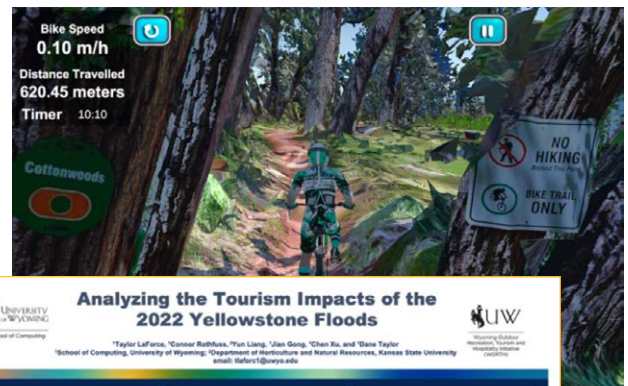
The study provides valuable insight for sustainable destination planning and reinforces the importance of incorporating resident perspectives and place attachment into tourism management frameworks. Manasseh is formatting her work for submission to the peer-reviewed journal, *Tourism Geographies*.



Faculty Research Grants

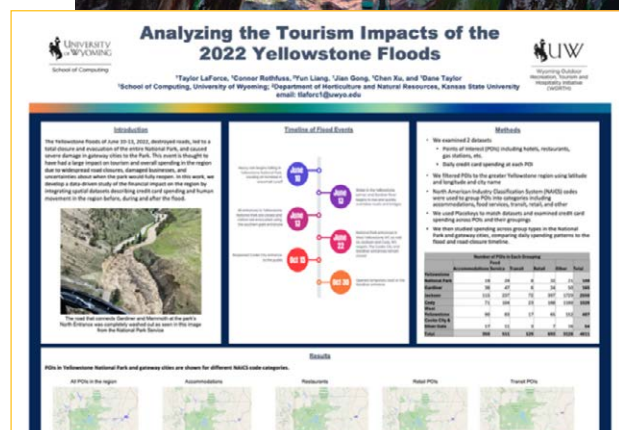
In 2024, the WORTH Institute awarded \$432,000 in faculty research funding to seven interdisciplinary teams. These projects, selected from 10 proposals totaling \$779,000 in requests, represent collaborations across the University of Wyoming and the state's community colleges, highlighting innovation, community engagement, and workforce development. Funding for these research projects came from Governor Gordon's Wyoming Innovation Partnership.

Simulating Trail-Based Learning: A team led by Dr. Ahmed Abdelaty developed a first-of-its-kind virtual mountain biking simulation using drone and LiDAR data from trails near Lander. This immersive XR tool is a hands-on learning platform for students in outdoor education and trail design at Central Wyoming College.



Digital Twin & AI for Tourism Resilience:

Researchers from UW's School of Computing created a dashboard and AI models to evaluate tourism impacts of the 2022 Yellowstone floods. Their work has already been showcased at national conferences and offers a glimpse into how Digital Twin technology can enhance tourism planning in real time.



Winter Tourism in Rural Communities: The WinterFest project, co-led by UW faculty and the Laramie Public Art Coalition, demonstrated how winter festivals can drive tourism in off-peak seasons. With over 1,100 participants and 40 businesses engaged, the event catalyzed new tools like a “Festival Toolkit” for other rural communities in Wyoming, hoping to bolster winter visitation. A full report can be [found here](#).



State Trust Lands and Recreation Policy: Legal scholars and law students produced a landmark article in the Environmental Law Reporter analyzing recreation access on state trust lands across the West. In addition, their work was presented at the State Trust Lands: Emerging Issues Forum. Their research has already shaped conversations among policymakers and land managers, with future data-driven work underway.

Eco-Tourism and Buffalo on the Wind River Reservation: This project laid the foundation for Indigenous-led eco-tourism by collaborating with the Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative. With planning support from graduate students, a new visitor center is now under development to anchor future tourism efforts on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

Consumer Insights into Wyoming Branding: Marketing faculty used physiological response equipment to test consumer preferences for Wyoming origin-labels. This novel approach informed best practices in local product branding and is under review for publication in a leading marketing journal.

Hunting Governance and Big Game Policy: A study led by Dr. Kelly Dunning is examining public participation in big game regulation and commissioner decision-making. Early results, informed by hundreds of coded articles and an upcoming statewide survey, will directly inform Wyoming Game and Fish Department strategy.



Wyo Made design by Kamryn Scott, a Casper College Visual Arts student

These projects are more than academic exercises, they are tangible steps toward a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable visitor economy in Wyoming. The WORTH Institute is proud to support faculty and students whose work is shaping the future of tourism and recreation in our state.

Research—Looking Ahead

Upcoming and ongoing research projects include:

- A two-year user experience and economic impact study on multimodal pathway use in Teton County and Grand Teton National Park, in partnership with Friends of Pathways. This study will also assess the desired future conditions of pathways in Grand Teton National Park.
- Results for economic impacts reports for NOLS.
- Wind River Visitors Council Resident Survey: developed and launched a resident sentiment survey in Fremont County to assess perceptions of tourism’s impact on local quality of life. Results are expected in August of 2025.
- A partnership with Young Strategies, Inc. for an annual indicator report for the Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board.



The WORTH Institute's News & Noteworthy Events

A Transformational Gift: Launching the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute

In December 2024, the University of Wyoming announced a historic \$5 million gift from Jay and Karen Kemmerer, matched with state funds to total more than \$6 million. This extraordinary investment elevated the WORTH Initiative into the newly named Jay Kemmerer Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism, and Hospitality Institute, the first named institute of its kind in the nation and one of only two named institutes at UW. This transformational gift secures a permanent endowment and positions the WORTH Institute to lead innovation, research, and workforce development in Wyoming's second-largest industry. The Institute's expanded mission will benefit students, faculty, communities, and the visitor economy for generations to come. Read [more here](#).



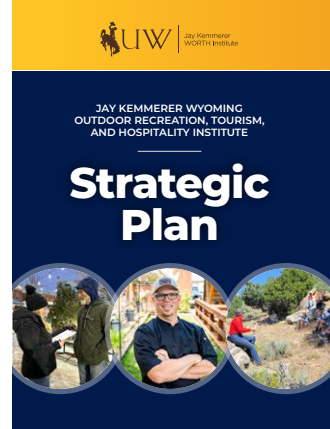
Celebration of the Kemmerer gift at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort

More than 60 people gathered at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, including First Lady Jennie Gordon and President Ed Seidel to celebrate the Kemmerer gift and naming of the institute.



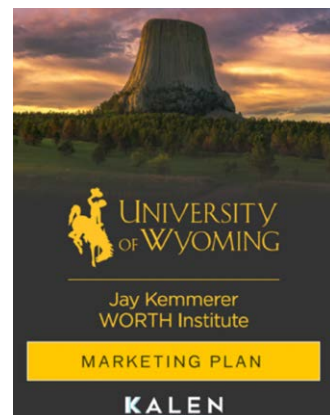
The WORTH Institute's First Strategic Plan

In 2025, the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute completed its inaugural strategic plan, laying a clear and focused vision for the next three years. Guided by input from over 40 stakeholders and facilitated by former Haub School Dean Doug Wachob, the plan outlines priorities in research, workforce development, and statewide engagement. It establishes the Institute as a central hub for Wyoming's tourism, outdoor recreation, and hospitality industries, matching university expertise with industry needs to grow and diversify the state's visitor economy. Read the [plan here](#).



The WORTH Institute Marketing Plan

2025 saw the WORTH Institute partner with a marketing agency to develop and launch its first comprehensive marketing plan to elevate brand awareness, strengthen stakeholder engagement, and amplify its statewide and national impact. This strategic roadmap focuses on digital optimization, compelling storytelling, event promotion, and audience-specific outreach. Key components include launching a multi-platform social media presence, producing a video series showcasing student and industry success stories, and refining the Institute's website as a central information hub. With measurable goals and a phased implementation calendar, the plan supports the WORTH Institute's mission to expand Wyoming's visitor economy while driving long-term sustainability and visibility. Kalen Marketing, a Casper-based small business, led the development of the plan.



The WORTH Institute Faculty and Staff Retreat

In June 2025, the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute held its inaugural work plan retreat at the historic CM Ranch in Dubois, Wyoming. The retreat served to align the 2025–2026 work plan with the Institute's newly adopted strategic plan, fostering cohesion across the Institute's three pillars: research, workforce development, and statewide engagement. Staff reviewed major accomplishments from the previous year, developed action plans and budget priorities for the coming year, and committed to clearer communication strategies, including launching a refreshed website. Discussions focused on enhancing collaboration, launching new signature projects, and improving the delivery and visibility of the WORTH Institute throughout Wyoming. The retreat concluded with actionable next steps, including finalized pillar workplans, updated reporting templates, and a unified commitment to mission-driven growth.



The WORTH Institute Partner Program

In summer 2025, the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute launched its official Partner Program to build deeper connections between industry, government, and nonprofit organizations within Wyoming's tourism, outdoor recreation, and hospitality sectors. The Partner Program enables collaborators to engage with the WORTH Institute's research, workforce development, and statewide initiatives while increasing visibility and impact. With tiered participation levels, partners can connect through exclusive networking events, guest speaking opportunities, and early access to student recruitment pipelines. The program reflects the WORTH Institute's commitment to forging mutually beneficial partnerships that strengthen Wyoming's visitor economy and support the Institute's long-term sustainability. For more information or to become a partner, visit the [link here](#).

	LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION (annual contribution)		
	Bronze	Silver	Gold
SPONSORSHIP BENEFITS:			
Complimentary registration for the spring Hospitality and Tourism Fair or spring Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Festival. This includes a table and two registrations.	⊙	⊙	⊙
Receive an annual report of supported student development opportunities (What were your contributions used for? Student success stories from funding)	⊙	⊙	⊙
Inclusion on the WORTH Institute page with logo and website link, and recognition on the WORTH Institute Career Center	⊙	⊙	⊙
Individualized promotion of employment opportunities directly to hospitality and tourism students through graduate channels	⊙	⊙	⊙
Priority scheduling for on-campus visits, meet and greets, and class visits with students	⊙	⊙	⊙
Complimentary registration for the spring Hospitality and Tourism Fair and the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Festival. This includes a table and two registrations.			⊙
Participation in a formal mentorship program with hospitality and tourism students			⊙
Access to data from Hospitality and Tourism alumni development database, average salary, career locations, etc.			⊙
One "company day" where you get to see the College of Business. Talking to the faculty, networking lunch, and a class visit provided, or scheduling parents.			⊙
Recognized as a sponsor of Hospitality and Tourism students attending industry events on and around the mountain, and the annual report			⊙
Priority room reservation for on-campus meetings after the spring Hospitality and Tourism Fair			⊙

Visit www.uwyo.edu/worth/partnersprogram.html to enroll

Utah Economic Development Best Practices Trip

Dr. Dan McCoy represented the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute on a multi-day economic development learning tour in Utah, hosted by the Wyoming Business Council and Wyoming Economic Development Association. The trip explored innovative practices in rural economic and community development, housing, outdoor recreation, and regional collaboration. The experience included site visits and presentations in Salt Lake City and Richfield, offering valuable insights that can inform future initiatives in Wyoming's tourism and outdoor recreation economy.



National Leadership Forum on Rural Development through Outdoor Recreation

Dr. Dan McCoy was invited to participate in the first-ever National Leadership Forum on Rural Development through Outdoor Recreation, hosted by the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) in Pennsylvania. Funded by the Richard King Mellon Foundation, the forum convened state and national leaders to explore the role of outdoor recreation in revitalizing rural economies. Dr. McCoy joined representatives from across the country to share the WORTH Institute's work in Wyoming and contribute to national discussions on outdoor recreation policy, infrastructure, workforce development, and economic impact in rural communities.



Photo Credit: Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

National Recognition for the WORTH Institute at AUBER Conference

In October 2024, Dr. Dan McCoy was invited to present at the national conference of the Association for University Business and Economic Research (AUBER) in Boise, Idaho. His presentation highlighted the innovative model of the WORTH Institute, including its approach to statewide engagement, workforce development, and applied economic research in support of Wyoming's visitor economy. Attended by directors of university-based research centers across the country, the presentation positioned the WORTH Institute's as a national leader in rural economic diversification through tourism and outdoor recreation.



The WORTH Institute's Role in the WBA Workforce Committee

To support workforce-related issues across Wyoming, the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute has actively contributed to the Wyoming Business Alliance (WBA) Workforce Committee. Serving on this committee, the



WORTH Institute's Director Dr. Dan McCoy has helped shape strategies to address labor shortages, talent retention, skill gaps, and housing challenges impacting the state's economy. The Institute's involvement has included guiding the development of action plans for talent recruitment and retention, housing and infrastructure, and education and skill development. Through collaboration with employers, educators, and state agencies, the WORTH Institute has supported efforts to create centralized resources, expand internship opportunities, align workforce training with industry needs, and explore childcare solutions.

Jackson Hole Travel & Tourism Expo

In January 2025, the Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board hosted its first-ever Travel & Tourism Expo to showcase the economic and community impact of tourism in Teton County and engage the public in the implementation of the Sustainable Destination Management Plan. The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute was invited to present at the event, highlighting our collaborative efforts with JHTTB to support the plan through visitor and resident surveys, economic analysis, and the development of a destination impact dashboard. This community-facing event underscored the importance of data-informed decision-making and public engagement in sustainable tourism planning.



International Partnership Development: Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG)

In 2025, the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute joined a University of Wyoming delegation to Guatemala to reestablish a strategic partnership with the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala (UVG). The visit focused on expanding collaboration in curriculum development, faculty training, student exchange, and research initiatives. The delegation identified opportunities for joint work in tourism and hospitality, business and entrepreneurship, and sustainable agriculture. This engagement lays the foundation for future collaboration that enhances the WORTH Institute's international impact and connects Wyoming students and faculty with global learning and research opportunities.



Innovations in Hospitality Panel at WHTC Summit

The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute co-hosted the "Innovations in Hospitality" panel during the 2024 Wyoming Hospitality and Travel Coalition (WHTC) Fall Summit in Laramie. Moderated by the WORTH Institute's Director Dr. Dan McCoy, the session featured Dr. Robert Rippee, Executive Director of UNLV's Black Fire Innovation Hub and UW alumni, who brought national insights into hospitality innovation and technology. The panel explored cutting-edge strategies for addressing evolving guest expectations, workforce development, and community integration. The WORTH Institute also sponsored the summit's welcome reception at the Wildcatter Suites, further reinforcing its leadership in convening and connecting stakeholders across Wyoming's visitor economy.



Wyoming's Tourism Industry on Capitol Hill

In March 2025, Dr. Dan McCoy joined a Wyoming delegation in Washington, D.C. for Destination Capitol Hill, the U.S. Travel Association's premier legislative fly-in event. Alongside representatives from the Wyoming Office of Tourism and Wyoming's travel industry, Dr. McCoy met with both U.S. Senators Cynthia Lummis and John Barrasso to discuss the unique challenges and opportunities facing Wyoming's tourism and outdoor recreation industries. These productive conversations focused on the need for continued federal support to sustain and grow the state's visitor economy.



Welcome to Our New Graduate Students!

We are pleased to welcome Jenny Bautz and Bianca Walder as the newest graduate students at the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute. Jenny and Bianca bring fresh energy and diverse experiences to our growing team, contributing to research with Friends of Pathways and Grand Teton National Park. We're excited to have them on board as we continue to expand our statewide impact.



The WORTH Institute sponsorship of other events and programs

- State Trust Lands: an emerging issues forum
- Wyoming Conservation Corps
- Wyoming Hospitality and Travel Coalition Fall Summit Welcome Reception
- Wyoming Hospitality and Travel Coalition Education Foundation
- Wild and Working Lands Film Festival
- Native American Fish and Wildlife Society National Conference



Looking ahead to 2025-2026

Workplan Overview

The Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute enters 2025–2026 with momentum and clarity following the strategic planning process and the elevation to a named institute. With over \$6 million in endowed and matched support from the Kemmerer family and state partners, the WORTH Institute is focused on advancing Wyoming’s visitor economy through an integrated approach that combines research, workforce development, and statewide community engagement.

Key priorities include:

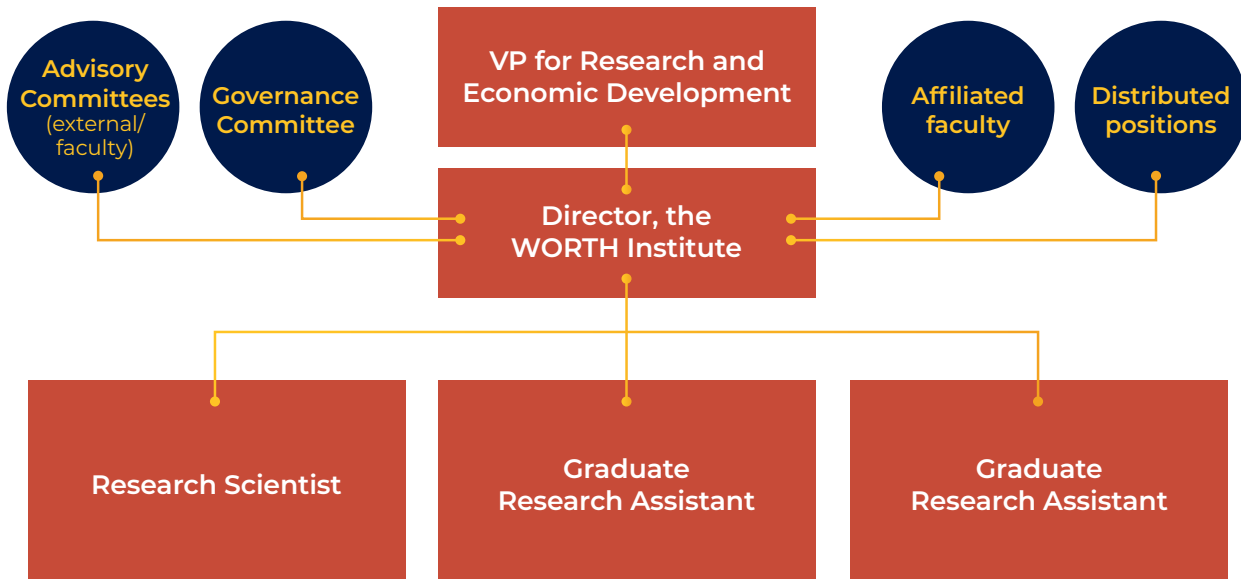
- ✓ Launching high-impact research on workforce trends, agritourism, and the economic impact of grants and events.
- ✓ Expanding internship support, scholarship opportunities, and employer partnerships to retain talent in Wyoming.
- ✓ Growing engagement in rural communities through toolkits, hospitality trainings, and programs like Wyoming Walks and WY Well & Wild.
- ✓ Leading the coordination of statewide events, including the 2026 Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit, the Wyoming Search and Rescue Conference, and the Outdoor Recreation Knowledge Exchange webinar series.
- ✓ Evaluating the need for signature workforce offerings like a Center for Western Hospitality and a new Tourism Leadership Institute in partnership with Leadership Wyoming.
- ✓ Pursuing an AmeriCorps Planning Grant to design the Resource Assistance for Tourism and Outdoor Recreation (RATOR) program—an initiative to place early-career professionals in Wyoming communities to build local capacity for tourism, outdoor recreation, and economic development across Wyoming.

As the WORTH Institute continues to deliver on its mission, it will do so with a growing team, stronger cross-pillar integration, and renewed energy to elevate outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality across the state.



Organizational Structure

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the school and the close ties of the institute to research and economic development for the state, the WORTH Institute is now organized under the Research and Economic Development Division. The director reports to the Vice President for Research and Economic Development. See the organizational chart below.



Distributed Positions

Distributed positions are financially supported by, and perform duties for, the WORTH Institute, but report to their respective colleges/departments. These positions are allocated to colleges or schools through a Memorandum of Agreement with the WORTH Institute.



Affiliated Faculty

Affiliated faculty maintain appointments in other units; however, their work intersects with WORTH-related projects, research, or services. The WORTH Institute affiliated faculty include:

- Ahmed Abdelaty, an Assistant Professor in Civil and Architectural Engineering and Construction Management, UW
- Melanie Armstrong, Director of the Ruckelshaus Institute and Associate Professor in the Haub School of Natural Resources, UW
- Eric C. Atkinson, Associate Professor of Biology at Northwest College, Powell
- Yi-Ling Chen, Associate Professor in the School of Politics, Public Affairs, & International Studies
- Kayla Clark, Assistant Lecturer in the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources and the Communication & Journalism department, UW
- Kelly Dunning, Timberline Associate Professor of Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation, UW
- Sara Ghezzi, Professor of Practice of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management, UW
- Elizabeth Minton, Associate Professor of Marketing, UW
- Brian Linton, Central Wyoming College
- Tarissa Spoonhunter, Assistant Professor in the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources and Director of the High Plains American Indian Research Institute, UW
- Temple Stoellinger, Associate Professor and Wyoming Excellence Chair with a dual appointment in the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources and the College of Law, UW
- Richard Vercoe, Assistant Lecturer in the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources, UW
- Darran Wells, Central Wyoming College
- Chen Xu, Associate Professor in the School of Computing, UW

Advisory Committees

The WORTH Institute relies on the expertise, feedback, and input from an external advisory committee consisting of industry professionals in Wyoming, a UW faculty advisory committee, and a governance committee.

External Advisory Committee

The WORTH Advisory Committee supplies advice, support, and coordination between both private industry and agencies. A majority of the members represent various private industry sectors. The current membership is below. If you are interested in serving on the Advisory Committee, please contact the Director. The expectations of the external advisory committee members are to:

1. Participate in bi-annual meetings timed with the Fall Hospitality and Tourism Summit and the Governor's Hospitality and Tourism Conference (the dates and times vary each year).
2. Advise the WORTH Institute.
3. Offer insight on current and future trends and needs within the recreation and tourism industry.
4. Provide expertise to assist UW in supporting the recreation and tourism industries in Wyoming.

Committee membership:

First Name	Last Name	Title	Organization
Budd	Betts	Owner	Absaroka Ranch
Domenic	Bravo	President & CEO	Visit Cheyenne
Chris	Brown	Executive Director	Wyoming Lodging and Restaurant Association
Dave	Glenn	Director	Division of State Parks, Historic Sites, Trails, and the Outdoor Recreation Office
Tom	Holland	Executive Director	Wilderness Adventures
Sarah	Howe	Director of Sales and Marketing	Grand Teton Lodge Company
Mike	Keller	General Manager of Yellowstone National Park Lodges	Xanterra Parks & Resorts
Karen	Kemmerer	Haub School Board Member	CM Ranch
Alex	Klein	Vice President and General Manager	Grand Teton Lodge Company and Flagg Ranch Company
Amy	Larsen	Industry Relations Manager	Wyoming Office of Tourism
Mike	Lilygren	Co-Owner	Maven Outdoor Equipment Company
Debbie	Pummel	Director of Hotel Performance	Safari Timberline Hospitality
Shannon	Schiner	Guest Experience Director	Jackson Hole Mountain Resort
Diane	Shober	Executive Director	Wyoming Office of Tourism

UW Faculty Advisory Committee

Membership on the faculty advisory committee consists of a diverse array of campus constituents. The Director invites members to the committee through college deans, faculty senate (for the at large position), and the vice president for research and economic development, to serve two-year terms. The committee meets at least twice per year. The purpose of the UW faculty advisory committee is to:

1. Understand the WORTH Institute background, history, relevance, and importance and,
2. advise the WORTH Institute on current initiatives, future directions and,
3. increase cross-campus collaboration.

Advisory committee membership:

First Name	Last Name	Department
Chase	Thiel	College of Business
Vacant		Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources
Mandy	Marney	College of Agriculture, Life Sciences, and Natural Resources
Robert	Macy	Office for Research and Economic Development
Caroline	McCracken-Flesher	College of Arts and Sciences
Jeff	Hamerlinck	At large

Governance Committee

The WORTH Institute Governance Committee provides high-level guidance and strategic oversight to the Jay Kemmerer WORTH Institute. Comprised of senior university leadership, the committee ensures that the Institute's mission, programs, and partnerships remain aligned with the University of Wyoming's strategic priorities and land-grant mission. This committee serves as a vital conduit between the Institute and the broader university administration, offering input on major initiatives, funding opportunities, academic integration, and long-term sustainability.

The committee advises on:

- Strategic direction and alignment with university and college/school goals
- Opportunities for cross-college/school collaboration and interdisciplinary research
- Integration of workforce development initiatives across academic units
- Evaluation of institutional support and resource needs
- Advancement of the WORTH Institute's statewide and national profile

The WORTH Institute Governance Committee meets bi-annually, as needed, to review progress, provide feedback, and help shape the future of the Institute in service to Wyoming's visitor economy.

First Name	Last Name	Title
Scott	Beaulier	College of Business
John	Koprowski	Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources
Kelly	Crane	College of Agriculture, Life Sciences, and Natural Resources
Parag	Chitnis	Office for Research and Economic Development



UW

Jay Kemmerer
WORTH Institute

WYOMING
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