IOWA OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

November 2026





LETTER FROM THE IOWA OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION TASK FORCE CHAIR

Governor Reynolds,

Please accept this final report from the Iowa Outdoor Recreation Task Force. The creation of the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation reflects a bold vision for Iowa's future and an understanding that outdoor recreation is an economic driver, workforce development tool, community-building asset and important contributor to the health and wellbeing of Iowans.

You challenged this Task Force to bring together diverse perspectives from across Iowa's outdoor recreation community and develop practical, impactful recommendations to establish a strong foundation for the new Office. Representing a broad cross-section of stakeholders and expertise, we shared a common belief: Iowa possesses extraordinary outdoor recreation assets and untapped potential to strengthen our economy, improve quality of life and elevate our state's reputation as an outdoor recreation destination.

We discussed how Iowa can leverage public-private partnerships, strengthen connections between communities and natural resources, support business development and tourism, improve public health, foster workforce recruitment and retention and use data to maximize impact. Our recommendations provide a roadmap for the Office and its partners, recognizing that IEDA financial resources will need to be considered moving forward.

One theme emerged consistently: collaboration is essential. No agency, business, nonprofit or community can fully realize Iowa's outdoor recreation opportunities alone. Success will require continued partnerships among state agencies, local governments, tourism organizations, educational institutions, private businesses, nonprofits and outdoor recreation advocates. Iowa has a long history of innovative collaboration, and we believe that spirit will drive future success.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the dedicated Task Force members whose commitment, expertise and thoughtful discussion made this report possible. Special thanks also go to the Iowa Economic Development Authority, Iowa Tourism Office, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable and the many individuals who provided testimony, comments and ideas throughout this process.

Throughout my career working with Iowa manufacturers, communities and industries, I have witnessed firsthand the power of strategic investment, collaboration and innovation. Those same principles can help Iowa build one of the nation's most dynamic outdoor recreation economies, creating opportunities for businesses, strengthening communities, attracting visitors and workforce talent and improving the lives of Iowans.

These recommendations are a starting point, not an endpoint. Success will depend on the continued work of the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation and partners across the state. I am honored to have served as Chair and grateful to work alongside such a talented group. Iowa's landscapes, communities, businesses and people provide a foundation few states can match. Now is the time to build upon that foundation and seize the opportunity before us.

Respectfully,



Chad Reece
Chair, Iowa Outdoor Recreation Task Force
Vice President, Government & Industry Relations
Winnebago Industries | Forest City, Iowa

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION **6**

OPPORTUNITIES **7**

IOWA OUTDOOR RECREATION TASK FORCE **8**

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS **9**

1. Innovation and Data Development **10**

1.1 - Implement a Statewide Outdoor Recreation Data and Analytics Program 10

1.2 - Develop an Overview of State, Federal and Private Funding for Outdoor Recreation in Iowa 11

1.3 - Coordinate an Outdoor Recreation Business and Workforce Needs Assessment 13

1.4 - Coordinate a Cross-Sector Outdoor Recreation Access and Participation Survey to Further Community Health and Quality of Life in Iowa. 14

1.5 - Contract a Statewide Outdoor Recreation Lodging Assessment 15

2. Financing and Implementation **17**

2.1 - Ensure the Work of the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation Continues 17

2.2 - Explore Fee Mechanisms to Support Outdoor Recreation Economic Development 18

2.3 - Develop a 5-Year Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan for the State of Iowa 20

2.4 - Develop and Implement an Iowa Outdoor, Nature & Economic Zone (Iowa ONE Zone) Initiative 22

2.5 - Establish an Iowa Outdoor Recreation Business Network to Integrate Private-Sector Business Development into Outdoor Recreation Projects 23

3. Community Vision and Capacity Building **25**

3.1 - Implement an Outdoor Recreation Industry Outreach Plan and Facilitate Local and State-Level Collaboration to Expand the Outdoor Recreation Economy. 25

3.2 - Facilitate Cross-Sector Outdoor Recreation Partnership Forums 27

3.3 - Develop and Distribute an Iowa Gateway Community Outdoor Recreation Visitor Readiness Guide 28

3.4 - Develop an Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Maintenance & Restoration Investment Strategy Guide 29

Recommendation 3.5 - Develop and Implement Outreach and Engagement Programs for Businesses and Private Partners. 31

4. Education and Marketing 32

4.1 - Elevate Messaging and Marketing to Amplify Iowa's Brand as an Outdoor Recreation Destination 32

4.2 - Create Marketing Campaigns to Capitalize on Iowa's Most Competitive Outdoor Recreation Assets 33

4.3 - Deploy an Outdoor Recreation Marketing Toolkit 34

4.4 - Develop Iowa's "Agritourism-Outdoor Recreation" Competitive Advantage and Tourism Product 36

4.5 - Implement an Outdoor Recreation Event Attraction Strategy 37

5. Resilience and Wellbeing 38

5.1 - Develop a Community Guide to Overcoming Outdoor Recreation Challenges 38

5.2 - Develop Funding Strategies & Build Grassroots Support for Expansion of Child-Friendly Outdoor Recreation in Iowa Communities 39

5.3 - Implement an Iowa Outdoor Recreation Education & Access Resource Network for Iowa Schools 40



INTRODUCTION

Outdoor recreation represents a significant economic opportunity for Iowa. Across the country, the outdoor recreation industry supported more than 5.2 million jobs and generated $1.3 trillion in gross domestic output in 2024. Between 2012 and 2024, the industry experienced 43.3% inflation-adjusted growth, demonstrating both the strength of the sector and its potential for continued expansion.

Iowa has the assets to compete for a greater share of that growth. From trails, waterways and parks to fishing, boating, biking and climbing, outdoor recreation is already part of the fabric of communities across the state. Iowa also has an opportunity to build on what makes the state distinct, including experiences that connect outdoor recreation with agriculture, tourism and rural communities.

Recognizing that opportunity, Governor Kim Reynolds signed Executive Order 19 on June 8, 2026, establishing the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation. The Governor charged the Office with strengthening Iowa's outdoor recreation economy by fostering greater collaboration among public agencies, private businesses and community partners and elevating Iowa as a destination for outdoor enthusiasts, families and visitors.

The Governor also established the Outdoor Recreation Task Force to help chart the path forward. Representing the outdoor recreation industry, public agencies, private businesses and communities across Iowa, the Task Force examined how the state can better leverage its existing assets, strengthen partnerships and position outdoor recreation as a driver of economic development, tourism and quality of life.

The Task Force began with a simple premise: Iowa has the assets. The opportunity is to better connect, promote and build upon them.

That work resulted in five opportunities for advancing Iowa's outdoor recreation economy. Grounded in the duties of the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation established by Executive Order 19, the recommendations provide a framework for turning Iowa's outdoor recreation assets into greater economic opportunity for communities, businesses and the state.

Some recommendations can move forward independently, while others are designed to work together and build momentum over time. Several draw from successful approaches used by outdoor recreation offices in other states; others reflect opportunities unique to Iowa. Together, they provide a practical path for the Office of Outdoor Recreation to strengthen Iowa's outdoor recreation economy and help the state compete for a greater share of one of the nation's fastest-growing economic sectors.

OPPORTUNITIES



Innovation and Data Development

Create a data-driven outdoor recreation innovation framework that measures impacts, evaluates economic performance, and guides the integration of outdoor recreation into Iowa's broader economic development and sustainability vision.



Financing and Implementation

Develop forward-thinking and innovative funding strategies utilizing public, private, and non-profit partnerships to prioritize sustainable urban and rural outdoor recreation opportunities that leverage, promote and enhance localized and statewide economic and natural resource goals.



Community Vision and Capacity Building

Inspire community vision and strengthen community outdoor recreation capacity by convening public and private stakeholders around shared strategies and providing technical assistance, training and resources that help them maximize long-term benefits for communities across the state.



Education and Marketing

Elevate outdoor recreation as a central pillar of Iowa's tourism and quality-of-life strategy, using coordinated marketing and education to plan, develop, maintain and maximize outdoor recreation assets efforts to attract visitors, support healthy communities and improve resident satisfaction statewide.



Resilience and Wellbeing

Integrate outdoor recreation into public health, community vitality, talent attraction, workforce development, cultural enrichment and economic development to improve physical and mental wellbeing while also helping communities attract and retain residents, support businesses, grow the workforce and create stronger local economies.

IOWA OUTDOOR RECREATION TASK FORCE

Task Force Members

Chad Reece (Chair)
Winnebago Industries
Forest City

Jamie Borglum
Crawdaddy Outdoors
Waverly and Ames

Jen Cross
Great Outdoors Foundation
West Des Moines

Jeff Franco
Pottawattamie County Conservation
Pottawattamie County

Taylor Getting
Calyx Creek Lavender & Lodging
Oxford

Kisha Jahner
Marion County Board of Supervisors
Marion County

Jeremy Olsgard
Grizzly Coolers
Decorah

Matt Ostrum
Active Endeavors
Davenport, Coralville, West Des Moines

Brian Pauly
Mason City Parks & Recreation
Mason City

Forest Ridgeway
Bike World
Clive, Urbandale, Ames, West Des Moines

Ex-Officio Members

Tammie Krausman
Iowa DNR

Amy Zeigler
Iowa EDA

Outdoor Recreation Program Manager

Lora Friest
Iowa EDA





TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Innovation and Data Development

Opportunity: Create a data-driven outdoor recreation innovation framework that establishes a baseline, measures impacts, evaluates economic performance and guides the integration of outdoor recreation into Iowa's broader economic development and sustainability vision.

Recommendation 1.1 - Implement a Statewide Outdoor Recreation Data and Analytics Program

Establish a statewide outdoor recreation data and analytics program that leverages digital tools used by the Iowa Tourism Office, Iowa DNR and partners to track and report recreation trends, inform marketing and investment decisions and identify opportunities to improve outcomes and return on investment.

BACKGROUND

Data is essential to understanding and growing Iowa's outdoor recreation economy. Existing tools and datasets from the Iowa Tourism Office, Iowa DNR and other state and national sources provide valuable information on visitor behavior, economic impact, recreation participation and marketing performance. However, opportunities exist to better coordinate data collection, analysis and reporting across state agencies and partners. The Task Force recommends that state agencies use a more integrated approach to help Iowa identify emerging trends, evaluate investments, improve marketing effectiveness, leverage AI and other technologies and make informed decisions that strengthen outdoor recreation, tourism and economic development statewide. These agencies and relevant partners should meet at least two to four times each year to review information and develop opportunities that improve individual and collective program outcomes and return on investment. Recommended statewide outdoor recreation analytical measures will change over time as new systems evolve, but currently include the following, among others:

- Outdoor recreation GDP, jobs and wages.
- State and county park, trail, water trail and public land visitation.
- Visitor origin, demographics and travel patterns.
- Trip spending and economic impacts by region.
- Infrastructure utilization, including trail use, campground occupancy and event attendance.
- Participation trends by activity (biking, paddling, fishing, camping, hunting etc.).
- Outdoor recreation marketing campaign performance and ROI.
- Workforce and business growth indicators, including outdoor recreation employment and business creation.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- State agencies and partners meet at least two times annually to review information and develop opportunities that strengthen outdoor recreation, tourism and economic development statewide.
- Increased use of data to guide outdoor recreation marketing, business development and infrastructure investments at the state level.
- Increased understanding of visitor preferences, recreation trends and economic impacts across Iowa.
- Increased coordination and decision-making among state and local partners through the use of outdoor recreation data and analytics has improved individual and collective program outcomes.
- Increased return on investment from outdoor recreation infrastructure, business and marketing investments statewide.

Recommendation 1.2 - Develop an Overview of State, Federal and Private Funding for Outdoor Recreation in Iowa

Build on the state funding summary provided in the Iowa State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) to develop a more comprehensive funding overview that captures the broader, multi-faceted aspects of the outdoor recreation industry, including the public and private funding and technical assistance available to both public and private partners in the outdoor recreation industry.

BACKGROUND

The Task Force recommends the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation (Iowa OOR) works closely with public and private partners to maximize the growth and development of Iowa's outdoor recreation industry by developing a comprehensive funding overview that captures the broader, multi-faceted aspects of the outdoor recreation industry, including the funding and technical assistance available to public and private partners in the outdoor recreation industry.

Iowa's SCORP includes a list of state grant programs that support public land acquisition, restoration, development, educational programming and historic structure rehabilitation. Many Offices of Outdoor Recreation have similar resources. However, the Task Force feels that Iowa has an opportunity to lead the nation by going beyond the traditional focus on state grants for public partners. Iowa can develop a resource that builds on the SCORP and provides information about grants, financing and technical assistance resources available to private partners, entrepreneurs and outdoor recreation businesses. This resource will also empower Iowa's business planners and economic development partners to serve outdoor recreation private businesses and communities as they work collectively to expand the outdoor recreation economy in Iowa.

The Task Force recommends the Overview includes funding opportunities for private outdoor recreation businesses located in Iowa as well as those that may be motivated to relocate to Iowa. Tax incentives, grants, loans and other motivators exist to help new outdoor recreation businesses with site development, infrastructure, equipment, workforce development, innovation research, renewable energy, waste disposal, marketing and many other aspects of business development, expansion and relocation.

There are also several state and federal programs and grants that fall outside the traditional scope of SCORP but are related to the broader outdoor recreation economy. Developing a more comprehensive understanding of this related funding could further expand outdoor recreation opportunities in Iowa. For example, federal highway administration funding is available to scenic byway organizations for infrastructure development; economic development and brownfield grants can help communities transform underutilized areas into outdoor recreation destinations; and Department of Health programs can support initiatives that promote healthy living. Grants are also available for specialty crop producers, value-added agricultural producers, farmers markets and other businesses and organizations operating at the intersection of agriculture and outdoor recreation. In addition, several large private foundations and federal funding entities invest millions of dollars annually in outdoor recreation projects and initiatives that benefit both public and private partners. Iowa's outdoor recreation industry could benefit significantly from increased awareness and utilization of these funding opportunities.

Developing an Overview of State, Federal and Private Funding for Outdoor Recreation in Iowa will make it easier for local and state partners to work together. The resource will help Iowa's public and private investors, entrepreneurs and community leaders understand, navigate and leverage available funding opportunities to maximize the true impact of projects. It will establish a baseline of public investment that can be used to measure return on investment, identify funding gaps and inform future policy and program decisions.

At the local level, the resource will help a wide range of partners, including entrepreneurs, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, tourism professionals, nonprofits, councils of governments, regional planning organizations and local governments, identify and access funding opportunities and technical resources they may otherwise never know about. This is especially important given the high turnover rate in these organizations. Equipped with a more complete understanding of available resources, these partners will be better positioned to develop realistic funding strategies, advance outdoor recreation projects and support outdoor recreation business development throughout Iowa.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increased understanding of Iowa's investment in outdoor recreation across agencies, departments, programs and grantors.
- Increased understanding of private, federal and nonprofit programs, technical assistance and funding opportunities available to expand Iowa's outdoor recreation economy.
- Increased capacity to obtain and measure return on investment into the outdoor recreation economy.
- Increased understanding of how public partners can recruit and empower private partners to invest in public-private outdoor recreation ventures.
- Increased private investment in outdoor recreation infrastructure and supporting businesses.



Recommendation 1.3 - Coordinate an Outdoor Recreation Business and Workforce Needs Assessment

Complete an Outdoor Recreation Business and Workforce Needs Assessment that increases Iowa's understanding of existing outdoor recreation business capacity and need, how the outdoor recreation workforce sector is and can be fostered and answers workforce questions that will help retain and recruit a public and private outdoor recreation workforce that supports existing and future outdoor recreation businesses and sector careers.

BACKGROUND

Outdoor recreation is a $1.3 trillion industry in the United States, contributing 2.4% of U.S. GDP and supporting 5.2 million jobs, or 3.2% of total U.S. employment. The outdoor recreation industry now generates more economic output and is growing faster than many other sectors of the economy, underscoring its significance as a driver of national and state economies. Iowa is well positioned to capitalize on this growth. According to the latest federal data, Iowa has one of the nation's fastest-growing outdoor recreation economies in specific sectors and is demonstrating strong momentum and opportunity for business expansion, workforce development and community investment.

The Task Force feels a comprehensive business and workforce assessment is needed to help Iowa identify current businesses and business opportunities, understand existing workforce and determine future talent needs, identify and project workforce gaps and find ways to maximize opportunities across the outdoor recreation industry. The Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation could then use the assessment to provide information for and collaborate with multiple state agencies to advance outdoor recreation business development, mobilize workforce recruitment and retention and develop the skilled workforce needed to grow outdoor recreation businesses and compete for a larger share of this nationally expanding market.

The Task Force feels it would be strategic to include specific business information such as the business location within Iowa, business type (industry, retail, guide etc.), current number of employees, industry growth potential, position within the industry and a clear understanding of which outdoor recreation sectors are served by the business. Gaps and opportunities within various sectors of the industry in Iowa and the nation would help with future expansion efforts.

The workforce assessment should evaluate in-demand skills, occupations, certifications, recruitment and retention strategies, the impacts of AI and the effectiveness of Iowa's educational institutions in preparing workers for outdoor recreation careers in both the private and public sectors. It should also examine pathways such as internships, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship support; explore opportunities for regional partnerships and Outdoor Workforce Zones; strengthen connections between employers and job seekers; engage young people in outdoor recreation careers; and align workforce development efforts with Iowa's existing health and wellbeing initiatives to create a stronger, more competitive and resilient outdoor recreation workforce.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increased understanding of the outdoor recreation business community in Iowa, related opportunities for growth and current and projected workforce needs.
- New outdoor recreation business development and recruitment.
- Increased employment and improved recruitment and retention in Iowa's outdoor recreation industry.
- Growth in outdoor recreation-related education, certifications, internships and apprenticeships.
- Stronger partnerships between employers, educational institutions and workforce programs.
- Increased outdoor recreation business growth, entrepreneurship and investment.
- Greater youth participation in outdoor recreation career pathways.
- Better alignment of workforce initiatives with health, wellbeing and community development goals.
- Larger, more skilled outdoor recreation workforce that meets employer demand and strengthens Iowa's competitiveness in the outdoor recreation economy.

Recommendation 1.4 - Coordinate a Cross-Sector Outdoor Recreation Access and Participation Survey to Further Community Health and Quality of Life in Iowa

Work with Iowa DNR and Public Health to implement a newly developed Outdoor Recreation Access and Participation Survey that goes beyond the traditional SCORP analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the connections between outdoor recreation use, public health, education, business and other related factors, so that the Office of Outdoor Recreation can work more effectively with public health and other partners to increase participation in outdoor recreation for improved health benefits and quality of life.

BACKGROUND

Outdoor recreation contributes to community wellbeing, quality of life and economic vitality and the SCORP outdoor recreation participation survey conducted by the Iowa DNR and many other states incorporates some public health and personal activity information. However, the Task Force recommends that new survey techniques and technologies be used to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the connections between outdoor recreation use, public health, education, outdoor recreation businesses and other related factors. This will make the work of the Office of Outdoor Recreation more effective as it works with public health and other private and public partners to increase participation in outdoor recreation for improved health benefits and quality of life. It will also be useful for economic development and private business partners who could take action to increase outdoor recreation at a local level.

New surveys have recently been developed and tested by Auburn University in Alabama and the Center for Outdoor Recreation Economy at Oregon State to capture more intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural, environmental and systemic data. Use of the new survey could deepen Iowa's understanding of motivations and constraints and help public health and business partners derive real solutions that have nothing to do with building more infrastructure. Health considerations are incorporated throughout the survey. Follow-up surveys with sub-groups can also be conducted based on respondent answers. This more detailed assessment is affordable due to its use of new technology.

The following is an example of how the new survey functions related to biking participation. Rather than recording that a specific number of people do or do not bike and what typical barriers are, the new survey, conducted at a county level, would identify why specific respondents don't bike. It may or may not have anything to do with their proximity to a bike trail. The respondent might not know how to bike, may not want to bike alone, have a dangerous intersection between themselves and the trail or not even own a bike or have anywhere to rent a bike. The survey trends by county would then inform very specific strategies and support private and public actions to address the real issue, whether it is skills education, bicycle business development, creation of a community bike-lending program or installation of a crossing light.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Completion of Outdoor Recreation Access and Participation Survey that includes innovative recommendations, performance measures and partnership strategies to integrate outdoor recreation into statewide health and economic development initiatives.
- Increased understanding of how and why personal decisions regarding outdoor recreation impact public health and community vitality.
- New partnerships between Iowa DNR, public health, economic development and private businesses.
- Increased use of outdoor recreation to support community wellbeing through education, business recruitment, private-public partnerships, programming and other innovative strategies.

Recommendation 1.5 - Contract a Statewide Outdoor Recreation Lodging Assessment

Complete a statewide lodging assessment, including campgrounds, cabins, RV sites, glamping, lodges and hotels, to understand existing accommodations, identify geographic and market gaps, forecast future demand and prioritize lodging types needed to support outdoor recreation visitors. Use the findings to guide infrastructure investments, community planning, business recruitment and entrepreneur support programs.

BACKGROUND

Iowa lacks a comprehensive understanding of whether existing lodging options meet the needs of outdoor recreation travelers, particularly in communities near high-demand recreation assets and emerging destinations. While the state continues to invest in trails, waterways, parks, wildlife areas and other outdoor recreation infrastructure, lodging availability, quality and diversity can be a limiting factor in converting day visitors into overnight guests and increasing visitor spending.

The Task Force sees a need for a statewide lodging assessment that establishes a baseline inventory of accommodations, identifies geographic, seasonal and market gaps and evaluates whether current lodging types align with visitor demand. The assessment would help determine where shortages of campgrounds, cabins, RV sites, glamping accommodations, lodges and traditional hotel rooms may be constraining tourism growth. It would also identify opportunities for private investment, entrepreneurship and public-private partnerships that can strengthen local economies and better support outdoor recreation visitors.

By providing data-driven insights, communities, businesses and policymakers would be better equipped to prioritize investments, recruit lodging providers, support entrepreneurs and align tourism, economic development and outdoor recreation strategies. Expanding appropriate lodging options can increase overnight visitation, visitor spending, local tax revenues and the overall economic impact of Iowa's outdoor recreation sector.

- Overnight visitors spend significantly more than day visitors, making lodging one of the most important drivers of local tourism revenue.
- Many rural communities have invested in trails, lakes, rivers and parks but lack sufficient lodging to fully capture the economic benefits of those investments.
- Different visitor segments require different lodging products. Families, cyclists, paddlers, RV travelers, hunters, anglers and luxury travelers often seek different accommodation types.
- Emerging recreation trends, including glamping, RV travel, farm stays and experiential tourism, may create opportunities for new Iowa-based businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Understanding lodging gaps can help communities prioritize infrastructure investments such as utilities, broadband, transportation access and workforce housing that support tourism growth.
- A statewide inventory can help avoid duplication of investments and focus resources on areas with the greatest market demand and economic return.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- A statewide lodging inventory and gap analysis has identified priority lodging needs by region, recreation asset and traveler type.
- Assessment findings are available to, and being used in local planning by, tourism and economic development efforts to inform and foster business and economic development.
- Communities and private developers are using the assessment findings to pursue lodging projects that address documented market gaps and support outdoor recreation visitation.
- Increased lodging development, expansion and/or investment in identified gap areas is being pursued by private and public partners in communities throughout the state.
- Increase in the number and diversity of private and public lodging options in and near outdoor recreation destinations, including campgrounds, cabins, RV sites, glamping, lodges and hotels.
- Growth in overnight stays, lodging tax revenue, visitor spending and overall economic impact of Iowa's outdoor recreation sector.



2. Financing and Implementation

Develop forward-thinking and innovative funding strategies utilizing public, private and non-profit partnerships to prioritize sustainable urban and rural outdoor recreation opportunities that leverage, promote and enhance localized and statewide economic and natural resource goals.

Recommendation 2.1 - Ensure the Work of the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation Continues

Ensure the work of the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation (OOR) continues by:

1. codifying the Iowa OOR,
2. allocating new funding for the Iowa OOR Program Manager position and the recommendations included in this document,
3. developing a cross-sector advisory group to advise the Iowa OOR and
4. maintaining state memberships in national outdoor recreation organizations.

BACKGROUND

The Task Force believes the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation should receive sustained public and private support and be formally established in state code to ensure continuity of operations and long-term advancement of Iowa's outdoor recreation priorities. Codification would provide stability beyond administrative changes and help ensure that at least one full-time staff position remains dedicated to coordinating and advancing statewide outdoor recreation initiatives.

The Task Force also recognizes that successful implementation of many recommendations contained in this plan will require dedicated funding. Strategic investments in outdoor recreation can strengthen local and regional economies, maximize returns on public and private infrastructure investments, support business development and entrepreneurship, attract visitors and talent and contribute to improved health and quality of life for Iowans.

As a relatively new office, the Iowa OOR will benefit from ongoing input from a diverse group of public, private and nonprofit partners. Establishing a cross-sector advisory council would provide a formal mechanism for reviewing progress, identifying emerging opportunities and challenges and ensuring representation from the many outdoor recreation interests, industries and regions across Iowa. This collaboration can help strengthen coordination, accountability and future program development.

Continued participation in national organizations, including the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, the Confluence of States and other relevant networks, will provide access to industry expertise, research, best practices, training opportunities and interstate collaboration. These relationships can help Iowa remain competitive, informed and connected to evolving trends and opportunities within the outdoor recreation economy.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- The Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation is codified in state law and maintains a clearly defined mission, responsibilities and organizational structure.
- Dedicated and recurring funding is established for the Iowa OOR Program Manager position and implementation of priority recommendations identified in this plan.
- A cross-sector Outdoor Recreation Advisory Council is established, meets regularly and provides annual recommendations to the Iowa OOR.
- An increasing number of recommendations from this plan are advanced, funded or completed through coordinated efforts of state agencies and partners.
- Iowa maintains active membership and participation in national outdoor recreation organizations, conferences and peer-learning networks.
- Iowa secures new partnerships, technical assistance opportunities, grants or other resources through engagement with national outdoor recreation organizations.
- State agencies, communities, businesses and outdoor recreation organizations report increased coordination and awareness of available Iowa OOR programs, resources and initiatives.
- Additional public, private and philanthropic funding is leveraged to advance outdoor recreation priorities identified through the Iowa OOR.
- Outdoor recreation economic, community and quality-of-life outcomes demonstrate measurable progress through statewide performance indicators and reporting.

Recommendation 2.2 - Explore Fee Mechanisms to Support Outdoor Recreation Economic Development

Explore feasible fee mechanisms that dedicate funding for outdoor recreation economic development initiatives and priorities.

BACKGROUND

After the “Overview of State, Federal and Private Funding for Outdoor Recreation in Iowa” is completed, as proposed in recommendation 1.2 the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation will have a more comprehensive overview of private and public outdoor recreation funding and programs that capture the broader, multi-faceted aspects of the outdoor recreation industry, including the public and private funding and technical assistance available to both public and private partners in the outdoor recreation industry.

The Task Force recommends that the understanding provided by the Overview be used to develop a new fee structure or to modify an existing tax or fee structure related to the outdoor recreation industry. All or a portion of the proceeds could be dedicated to the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation for the development, maintenance and enhancement of outdoor recreation projects with the greatest potential local and statewide economic impact. The Task Force hesitates to make more specific recommendations for fee structure without additional time to analyze existing fees, taxes, mechanisms and budgets.

However, several examples of fee-supported funding mechanisms related to outdoor recreation exist. These include the federal Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, which is supported by excise taxes on fishing and boating equipment. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources funds and operates its Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) program through registration fees and related revenue sources. The Environmental First Fund and the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund also provide support for state park and natural resource projects. In addition, nonprofit organizations such as the Iowa Parks and Recreation Association Foundation provide funding assistance for parks and recreation initiatives.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- New revenues are invested in high-priority outdoor recreation projects that demonstrate measurable economic benefits for local communities and the state.
- Increased local and private matching investments are leveraged by funded projects.
- Communities receiving the new funding show improved tourism readiness through expanded amenities, services, lodging, wayfinding and visitor infrastructure.
- Increased outdoor recreation visitation, tourism spending and related tax revenues.



Recommendation 2.3 - Develop a 5-Year Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan for the State of Iowa

Develop a 5-year strategic plan that will inform, guide and prioritize decision making for the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation and the cross-sector advisory group.

BACKGROUND

As a new office, the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation will need a clear strategic framework to guide decision-making, coordinate efforts, prioritize investments and measure progress. The Task Force recommends development of a 5-year plan, which will establish a shared vision for Iowa's outdoor recreation future, identify the state's greatest opportunities and competitive advantages and provide a roadmap for implementation. The plan will align public, private and nonprofit partners around common goals, support data-driven investment decisions, improve accountability and position Iowa to capitalize on emerging outdoor recreation, tourism and economic development opportunities. The Task Force recommends the Plan includes, but is not limited to, the following components:

- A comprehensive inventory and assessment of Iowa's outdoor recreation assets, natural resources and supporting infrastructure, including a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, condition data from the Iowa DNR asset management system and a statewide inventory and condition assessment of city parks, county conservation properties and other locally managed outdoor recreation assets.
- Identification and prioritization of Iowa's most significant outdoor recreation opportunities, including recommended investment, development and implementation strategies to maximize economic, community and quality-of-life outcomes.
- Evaluation of barriers, constraints and challenges affecting outdoor recreation access, participation, development and investment, with recommendations to address identified issues.
- A competitive analysis of Iowa's position within the outdoor recreation economy, including benchmarking against peer and neighboring states to identify advantages, gaps and opportunities for differentiation and growth.
- Robust public and stakeholder engagement, ensuring meaningful input from residents, visitors, businesses, nonprofit organizations, local governments, state agencies and outdoor recreation user groups.
- Alignment with the goals, priorities and implementation framework of Iowa's SCORP and other relevant state, regional and local planning efforts.
- An assessment of successful models, best practices and policy approaches used by other states to support outdoor recreation development, private-sector investment and public-private partnerships, including recommendations for those most applicable to Iowa's outdoor recreation economy and communities.
- Development of measurable goals, performance metrics and implementation priorities to guide decision-making, evaluate progress and inform future investment decisions.
- Identification of priority regions, recreation assets, gateway communities and destination development opportunities where strategic investments could generate the greatest public benefit and economic return.
- Recommendations for funding strategies, partnership models and organizational responsibilities needed to achieve the plan's goals and advance implementation over the next five years.

Successful implementation of this planning effort will depend on strong participation from local governments and recreation partners across the state. Previous efforts by the Iowa DNR to inventory and assess outdoor recreation infrastructure for the State SCORP achieved limited participation from cities and counties, resulting in a more complete understanding of state-managed assets than locally managed facilities. Because local governments are not required to participate in these assessments, engagement has varied considerably.

Task Force members representing cities and counties recommend that the Office of Outdoor Recreation work closely with statewide, regional and local partner organizations, including the Iowa State Association of Counties, Iowa County Conservation System, Iowa League of Cities, Iowa Foundation for Parks and Recreation, Regional Planning Commissions, Municipal Planning Organizations and other local government associations to communicate the value and importance of participation. Developing a comprehensive understanding of Iowa's outdoor recreation assets, infrastructure conditions and investment needs will require collaboration across all levels of government and the outdoor recreation sector.

Task Force members further note that many recommendations contained in this report rely on accurate statewide data and analysis. By linking participation in inventory and planning efforts to future technical assistance, funding opportunities and program development initiatives, the Office of Outdoor Recreation can help encourage broader engagement and ensure the resulting plan reflects outdoor recreation needs, opportunities and priorities across all regions of Iowa.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- A comprehensive 5-year Iowa Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan is completed, adopted and regularly utilized by the Iowa Office of Outdoor Recreation and the cross-sector advisory group to guide priorities, investments and decision-making.
- Broad participation from state agencies, local governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations, outdoor recreation users and other stakeholders is achieved during plan development, resulting in a plan that reflects statewide needs and opportunities.
- Increased participation by counties, county conservation boards and municipalities in statewide outdoor recreation inventory and assessment efforts.
- A statewide inventory and condition assessment of outdoor recreation assets and infrastructure is completed and used to inform funding, planning and development decisions.
- Priority outdoor recreation opportunities, target investments and implementation actions are identified and incorporated into agency, community and partner work plans.
- Public, private and nonprofit partners demonstrate increased alignment around shared statewide outdoor recreation priorities and implementation strategies.
- Funding decisions, grant programs and technical assistance efforts are informed by the plan's findings and investment priorities.
- Priority regions and outdoor recreation destinations receive targeted support and investment based on documented needs and opportunities identified in the plan.
- Additional public, private and philanthropic investment is secured to advance outdoor recreation priorities identified through the planning process.

Recommendation 2.4 - Develop and Implement an Iowa Outdoor, Nature & Economic Zone (Iowa ONE Zone) Initiative

Develop and pilot an Iowa Outdoor, Nature & Economic Zone "Iowa ONE Zone" initiative to unleash the potential related to significant state and local investments that have or are occurring within a region with a cluster of significant natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities.

BACKGROUND

The Task Force recognizes that there are regions of Iowa that have uniquely competitive natural resources layered with exceptional existing and potential outdoor recreation opportunities as well as the potential for expanded business creation and public private collaboration.

To capitalize on these layered opportunities, the Task Force recommends development of a new Iowa Outdoor, Nature & Economic Zone (ONE Zone) Initiative. The ONE Zone Initiative will identify and support regions where outdoor recreation, economic development, tourism and community investment can be strategically aligned to maximize impact. Learning from previous regional park and recreation initiatives, the Task Force recommends the ONE Zone program incorporates a stronger emphasis on business development, entrepreneurship, workforce growth and public-private partnerships.

Using the statewide inventory, SWOT analysis and strategic planning efforts outlined in Recommendation 2.3, the Office of Outdoor Recreation will be able to identify regions with the greatest potential to become nationally and regionally competitive outdoor recreation destinations. The Task Force recommends that the selection criteria consider natural resource assets and recreation infrastructure, as well as market opportunities, community readiness, partnership capacity and economic development potential.

To build capacity and demonstrate success, the Task Force recommends the Office of Outdoor Recreation launch the initiative as a pilot program, initially designating three to five ONE Zones based on the capacity of the Office to work with local, regional and state partners to coordinate technical assistance, strategic planning, funding opportunities and project development support. Assistance would be directed toward high-impact outdoor recreation and related economic development projects, helping communities advance projects from concept and planning through implementation, operations and long-term management.

The Task Force recommends that the ONE Zone Initiative include business recruitment, entrepreneurship support and investment strategies designed to encourage the growth of outdoor recreation-related businesses and industries. By coordinating outdoor recreation development with economic development efforts, the ONE Zone Initiative will strengthen community vitality, attract private investment, create jobs and enhance the long-term economic resilience and competitiveness of participating regions.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Iowa has a clear, data-driven understanding of its highest-priority and most competitive outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Funding, partnerships and private investment increase for prioritized outdoor recreation projects and businesses in Iowa ONE Zones.
- Priority outdoor recreation projects advance from planning to implementation to sustainable operation for maximum long-term economic impact.
- Increased recognition of natural resources and outdoor recreation tools for sustainable economic health, business development, workforce attraction and quality of life.
- Increased incorporation of outdoor recreation business recruitment strategies into comprehensive plans, tourism strategies, downtown revitalization efforts and economic development initiatives.
- Iowa ONE Zones experience growth in businesses, visitation, visitor spending, overnight stays and collaborative partnerships.

Recommendation 2.5 - Establish an Iowa Outdoor Recreation Business Network to Integrate Private-Sector Business Development into Outdoor Recreation Projects

Establishment of an Iowa Outdoor Recreation Business Network of manufacturers, outfitters, retailers and private businesses and others, can inform business and workforce development and workforce development and more easily integrate private-sector business development into new and existing outdoor recreation projects to strengthen Iowa's outdoor recreation economy.

BACKGROUND

There is currently no comprehensive understanding of Iowa's outdoor recreation industry, nor is there a statewide inventory of outdoor recreation businesses. Iowa's outdoor recreation economy includes a diverse range of businesses and occupations, from family-owned enterprises and tourism-based services to advanced manufacturing firms requiring highly skilled professionals such as engineers, GIS specialists, designers and technicians. The greater industry encompasses manufacturers, retailers, guides, outfitters, campgrounds, specialized lodging providers, agritourism operations, equestrian instructors, bike shops, liveries, land managers, tourism professionals, digital content creators and many others.

The Task Force recommends completing an Outdoor Recreation Business and Workforce Analysis to better understand the size, composition, workforce needs and economic impact of Iowa's outdoor recreation industry. The findings should be used to establish an Iowa Outdoor Recreation Business Network that serves as a statewide forum for collaboration, communication and industry engagement.

The Network will enable the Office of Outdoor Recreation and other state agencies to more effectively communicate with Iowa's outdoor recreation businesses, receive industry input and identify emerging opportunities and challenges. It could also help communities, counties and economic development organizations better integrate private-sector business development into outdoor recreation planning and investment efforts. Many communities successfully secure grants and other funding for outdoor recreation infrastructure projects but need guidance on recruiting, supporting and expanding complementary

businesses that maximize economic impact and increase returns on public and private investments. Proven economic development strategies already exist but could be strengthened and adapted to meet the needs of specific communities and businesses through direct engagement with the members of the Network. The Task Force recommends the Office of Outdoor Recreation convene the Network to provide this expertise, facilitate collaboration among public and private partners and maximize sustainable outdoor recreation business development and expansion.

Examples of opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- Providing business-sector input to communities seeking to address service gaps near outdoor recreation assets. For example, communities could work with the Business Network to identify opportunities for outdoor recreation business incubators, grant programs or business recruitment efforts that support trails without bike shops, water trails without canoe liveries or guide services, campgrounds lacking visitor amenities and reservation services or recreation corridors that need restaurants, lodging and visitor-serving businesses.
- Helping communities understand how to prepare and market vacant downtown storefronts and underutilized buildings for outdoor recreation-related businesses. The Business Network could also provide input to communities for how to maximize programs, like Iowa's Catalyst Grant Program, to more successfully recruit outdoor recreation businesses.
- Building the capacity of business development organizations to support outdoor recreation entrepreneurs and businesses. Organizations such as ISU CIRAS, the Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Centers, the Small Business Development Center, Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses and others could work with the Outdoor Recreation Business Network to better understand the business potential, pitfalls and opportunities associated with the outdoor recreation market so they can more effectively advise outdoor recreation business growth, particularly in regions where multiple recreation assets create significant economic development potential.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increased number of outdoor recreation projects have incorporated business development strategies or partnerships.
- Increased number of business development organizations, programs and advisors are supporting outdoor recreation entrepreneurs.
- Increased number of communities implementing policies, programs or incentives that support outdoor recreation business development.
- Increased number of outdoor recreation-related businesses.
- Increased employment opportunities in Iowa's outdoor recreation sector.
- Increased property tax, sales tax and other economic activity generated by outdoor recreation-related businesses.



3. Community Vision and Capacity Building

Inspire community vision and strengthen community outdoor recreation capacity by convening public and private stakeholders around shared strategies and providing technical assistance, training and resources that help them maximize long-term benefits for communities across the state.

Recommendation 3.1 - Implement an Outdoor Recreation Industry Outreach Plan and Facilitate Local and State-Level Collaboration to Expand the Outdoor Recreation Economy

Develop and implement an Outdoor Recreation Industry Outreach Plan that is grounded in learning from the SWOT analysis, the Business and Workforce Inventory, the Recreation Access and Participation Survey and other research, to facilitate communications with and between the industry, as well as to expand collaboration with and between Iowa's local and state public agencies, private partners and nonprofit stakeholders to advance the outdoor recreation economy in Iowa.

BACKGROUND

Iowa's outdoor recreation industry is wonderfully diverse at the same time it is fractured and disjointed. Many outdoor recreation businesses in Iowa were developed independently by entrepreneurs who are operating in relative isolation. Opportunities for partnership, technical and financial support, business expansion and workforce development that exist through public and private, local, state and federal partners are not being communicated or fostered in any coordinated or easily accessible way. While Iowa's outdoor recreation sector continues to grow, no single entity exists to connect businesses, entrepreneurs, land managers, community leaders and development partners. Many communities have invested in outdoor recreation infrastructure without strategies to support business development, workforce growth, visitor services or entrepreneurship that maximize economic returns. As a result, funding opportunities, technical assistance, business resources and strategic partnerships are often underutilized and outdoor recreation is viewed as an amenity rather than an economic development strategy.

As more is learned about the industry and individual Iowa businesses and the Office of Outdoor Recreation works with partners to develop new guides and funding information, the Office of Outdoor Recreation will be uniquely positioned to reach and provide important information to these businesses to help them thrive and to expand the outdoor recreation economy. The Task Force recommends that the Office develop and implement an Outdoor Recreation Industry Outreach Plan that is grounded in learning from the SWOT analysis, the Business and Workforce Inventory, the Recreation Access and Participation Survey and other research, to facilitate communications with and between the industry, as well as to expand collaboration with and between Iowa's local and state public agencies, private partners and nonprofit stakeholders to advance the outdoor recreation economy in Iowa.

Because the industry is currently fractured, they recommend the outreach plan include one-on-one outreach and deliberate outreach at industry meetings and events to help the owners and managers of outdoor recreation businesses understand and maximize existing opportunities related to marketing and promotion, grant funding, partnership programs, manager and business technical training, business expansion programs, infrastructure and equipment loans and public-private partnership opportunities. The outreach should also encourage them to unite as an industry so they can support each other and receive support more effectively from local and state tourism and economic development professionals.

Outdoor recreation is a major economic driver in Iowa, contributing approximately $5.9 billion annually to the state's GDP and supporting nearly 48,000 jobs but nationally, the industry contributes $696.7 billion to GDP and supports more than 5 million jobs, demonstrating significant potential for continued growth. Despite substantial investments in trails, parks, waterways and other recreation assets, Iowa has not systematically explored or recruited outdoor recreation manufacturers and related industries even though Iowa possesses many of the assets needed to become a leader in outdoor recreation manufacturing, including a central U.S. location, strong transportation networks, competitive business costs and a highly skilled manufacturing workforce. Existing strengths in metal fabrication, engineering, plastics, composites and advanced manufacturing provide a strong foundation for producing outdoor recreation products and equipment. Iowa's universities further strengthen this advantage through expertise in product design, engineering, materials science, entrepreneurship and technology commercialization, supporting the development of new products, startups and industry innovation. Together, these assets position Iowa to attract and grow outdoor recreation manufacturers, suppliers and innovators while creating high-quality jobs and long-term economic growth.

The Task Force believes that by providing access to a unified network of industry partners, the Office of Outdoor Recreation can provide important information and connections to Iowa agencies, departments, universities and others so public and private partners can maximize outdoor recreation business growth, workforce attraction, innovation and long-term economic prosperity across Iowa.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increased number of outdoor recreation businesses expand their marketing through partnership with local and state tourism and economic development entities.
- Increased number of outdoor recreation businesses partner with their communities to develop new businesses in abandoned or vacant buildings through the catalyst program.
- Increased number of Iowa outdoor recreation businesses securing federal business grants and/or loans for expansion or development.
- Increased number of outdoor recreation businesses expanding within their community or to other communities.
- Increased outdoor recreation sales and contribution to local and state sales tax.
- Increased number of outdoor recreation entrepreneurs and businesses participating in local and state technical business programs.
- Increased cross-sector collaboration and partnership development.
- Increased outdoor recreation business recruitment, expansion and entrepreneurship.
- Increased investment in outdoor recreation-related economic development projects.
- Growth in outdoor recreation manufacturing, innovation and product development.
- Increased outdoor recreation employment.
- Increased number of communities leveraging outdoor recreation as an economic development strategy.

Recommendation 3.2 - Facilitate Cross-Sector Outdoor Recreation Partnership Forums

Create and facilitate a series of Cross-Sector Outdoor Recreation Partnership Forums as needed to bring together outdoor recreation dependent businesses, communities and state partners to explore innovative business retention and expansion strategies and create opportunities for community growth during major infrastructure projects and/or policy changes.

BACKGROUND

Task Force members have noticed that policy changes made by state agencies and project decisions related to state infrastructure, natural resource management, transportation, public health and economic development can have significant positive and negative impacts on outdoor recreation businesses and communities. Even when they want the project, businesses and communities may not have the technical expertise to develop strategies that would help them thrive throughout the project and beyond. They may not understand the economics of upfront public private investments that can result in long-term economic gain. Individual agencies are focused on implementation and may have limited capacity, technical expertise, or the flexibility to help communities capitalize on change.

Therefore, the Task Force recommends that the Office of Outdoor Recreation create and facilitate a series of Cross-Sector Outdoor Recreation Partnership Forums as needed to bring together outdoor recreation dependent businesses and communities and state partners to explore innovative business retention and expansion strategies and create opportunities for community growth during major infrastructure projects and/or policy changes. The communication and coordination among state agencies, local governments, nonprofit organizations and private-sector partners by the forums can help identify potential challenges early and create opportunities for collaborative, innovative solutions. Rather than simply recognizing that projects or policy changes may affect local businesses and communities, partners can work together to minimize disruptions and identify strategies that support long-term economic success.

Examples may include expanded marketing campaigns, technical assistance from other state agencies, identification of public and private funding sources that would mitigate negative impacts, public-private investment opportunities and collaboration that benefits both business and community interests in the short and long-term and innovative business partnership that help communities adapt to change while advancing community and economic development goals.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increased communication, information sharing and coordination among agencies, communities, businesses and industry partners.
- Increased problem solving between and with multiple state agencies and departments for the benefit of local businesses and communities.
- Increased number of collaborative solutions occurring at the state and local level that include innovative approaches to help businesses and communities thrive during major projects.
- High participant satisfaction with the forum's effectiveness and value.

Recommendation 3.3 - Develop and Distribute an Iowa Gateway Community Outdoor Recreation Visitor Readiness Guide

Develop and distribute an Iowa Gateway Community Outdoor Recreation Visitor Readiness Guide with strategies to help downtowns and communities enhance the economic and tourism impacts of nearby outdoor recreation attractions.

BACKGROUND

Although many Iowa communities serve as literal "gateways" to natural areas and outdoor recreation assets, few communities maximize the economic and tourism potential associated with the outdoor recreation economy, particularly in rural Iowa. The Task Force believes that Iowa's parks, natural areas, and outdoor recreation assets can be powerful economic drivers when communities foster related business development, branding, marketing and connections to outdoor recreation experiences.

Unfortunately, while many communities would like to leverage their natural assets and outdoor recreation opportunities to spur downtown revitalization and economic growth, they often do not know where to start. Some lack the technical expertise or staff capacity to launch new branding and marketing, implement affordable projects, increase their appeal to outdoor recreation users or spur and support business growth. As a result, Iowa has bike trails with no bike shops, water trails with no canoe liveries and other business gaps, even while communities have vacant downtown storefronts.

In recent years, rural Iowa communities have expressed to the Iowa Tourism Office, the First Impressions Program and other state partners a desire to use outdoor recreation and natural areas to revitalize or strengthen their local economies and tourism appeal. The Task Force recommends the development of an Outdoor Recreation Visitor Readiness Guide to provide communities with best practices, implementation strategies, case studies and connections to Iowa resources in an effective and accessible format. The Task Force feels the guide will help communities throughout the state identify realistic opportunities, prioritize investments and achieve their goals at a pace that aligns with local budgets, capacity and public-private support. It will also help motivated communities who want to develop their outdoor recreation economy move forward with specific actions even if they don't qualify for specific state programs.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- The Visitor Readiness Guide is widely distributed and used by Iowa communities.
- Communities implementing guide recommendations demonstrate improved visitor readiness and stronger connections between outdoor recreation assets and downtown business districts.
- The number of outdoor recreation-related businesses, amenities, and services in gateway communities increases.
- Gateway communities experience increases in visitation, visitor spending, local tax revenues, and outdoor recreation-related economic activity.

Recommendation 3.4 - Develop an Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Maintenance & Restoration Investment Strategy Guide

Develop and distribute an Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Maintenance and Restoration Investment Strategy Guide that demonstrates the economic, tourism, public health and community value of Iowa's existing outdoor recreation assets and expands sustainable public and private funding for their maintenance, restoration and replacement.

BACKGROUND

City and county parks, trails and other outdoor recreation assets are essential infrastructure that contribute to public health, quality of life, tourism, workforce attraction and economic development. Yet many communities face increasing maintenance and replacement costs, aging facilities and limited funding capacity. These challenges can lead to deferred maintenance, diminished user experiences and growing demands on public funding programs.

Many outdoor recreation assets were developed without comprehensive plans for long-term maintenance, restoration and replacement. In some cases, facilities no longer meet current user needs, have safety or accessibility deficiencies or are poorly connected to downtown districts, lodging establishments and other visitor-serving destinations, limiting their economic and community value.

Organizations responsible for planning, funding and managing outdoor recreation infrastructure, including cities, counties, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Regional Planning Commissions and state agencies, have a shared interest in understanding both the long-term costs and broad public benefits associated with these investments. This need is becoming increasingly important as outdoor recreation infrastructure supports a growing number of tourism, business development and quality-of-life initiatives that depend on safe, attractive and well-maintained public assets.

The Task Force recognizes the continued importance of investing in new outdoor recreation opportunities but believes those investments must be balanced with a sustained commitment to maintaining, restoring and modernizing existing assets. To support this effort, the Task Force recommends utilizing the statewide inventory and SWOT analysis proposed elsewhere in this report to establish a baseline understanding of infrastructure conditions, investment needs and funding gaps. This information can help state and local leaders make informed decisions, prioritize investments and develop long-term asset management strategies.

The Task Force also recommends that the Office of Outdoor Recreation develop and distribute an Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Maintenance and Restoration Investment Strategy Guide. The Guide should provide practical tools, best practices, case studies and funding strategies that communities can use to develop sustainable approaches for maintaining, restoring and replacing outdoor recreation infrastructure. It should also highlight successful public-private partnerships, innovative financing models and collaborative agreements that have expanded investment in outdoor recreation assets.

In addition, the Guide should strengthen understanding of the economic, tourism, public health and community development benefits generated by well-maintained outdoor recreation infrastructure. By helping communities build public support, demonstrate return on investment and identify sustainable funding solutions, the Guide can support the long-term viability of Iowa's outdoor recreation assets and ensure they remain drivers of community vitality, visitor attraction and economic growth for years to come.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- An Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Maintenance and Restoration Investment Strategy Guide is developed, distributed and actively used by communities, counties and partner organizations statewide.
- Increased recognition among local and state leaders of the economic, tourism, public health and quality-of-life benefits generated by well-maintained outdoor recreation infrastructure.
- More communities incorporate long-term maintenance, restoration and replacement planning into outdoor recreation project development and capital improvement programs.
- Increased use of asset management data and infrastructure condition assessments to prioritize outdoor recreation investments and funding decisions.
- Growth in public, private and philanthropic funding dedicated to the maintenance, restoration and replacement of outdoor recreation infrastructure.
- Increased adoption of public-private partnerships, user-supported funding mechanisms and other sustainable funding strategies for outdoor recreation assets.
- Reduced deferred maintenance needs and improved condition ratings for parks, trails and other outdoor recreation infrastructure.
- More communities use lifecycle cost analysis and long-term financial planning when developing new outdoor recreation projects.
- Increased connectivity between outdoor recreation assets, downtown districts, lodging establishments and other visitor-serving destinations.
- State and local funding programs increasingly support maintenance, restoration and modernization projects alongside new infrastructure development.
- Improved user satisfaction, accessibility and safety of outdoor recreation facilities.
- Greater utilization of outdoor recreation assets, increased visitation and stronger economic impacts associated with well-maintained infrastructure.



Recommendation 3.5 - Develop and Implement Outreach and Engagement Programs for Businesses and Private Partners

Create and implement employer-focused outdoor recreation engagement programs that help Iowa businesses improve workforce wellbeing, support talent attraction and retention efforts and encourage active lifestyles. Employers would be able to access turnkey workplace challenges, campaigns, events, educational resources and partnership opportunities to connect their employees with outdoor recreation experiences in Iowa. These programs may be delivered through registration fees, sponsorships or partner investments, creating a sustainable revenue source for the Office of Outdoor Recreation. Similar in concept to statewide wellness challenge programs, these efforts would position outdoor recreation as a workforce and economic development tool and increase awareness and participation among Iowa residents.

BACKGROUND

Outdoor recreation is increasingly recognized as a competitive advantage for communities and employers seeking to attract and retain talent, improve employee wellbeing and enhance quality of life. However, many employers lack the resources, expertise and structure needed to effectively engage employees in outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Task Force recommends that the Office of Outdoor Recreation address this gap by developing a suite of participation-based programs, challenges, campaigns and partner opportunities to make outdoor recreation accessible and relevant to employees.

By providing ready-to-use engagement tools and coordinated statewide initiatives, the Office can help businesses connect employees to Iowa's outdoor assets and create new opportunities for industry partnerships, sponsorships and future reinvestment in outdoor recreation priorities. These efforts will also increase Iowa resident participation, strengthen workforce outcomes, generate additional support and revenue for outdoor recreation projects. The engagement tools should also increase the understanding of how outdoor recreation can be utilized as a workforce health incentive and a workforce retention tool to reduce business expenses, and as a community engagement and marketing tool that improves community relationships and drives customer loyalty.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Statewide employer outdoor recreation engagement program is developed and launched.
- Number of participating businesses, employees and communities.
- Annual revenue generated by program participation and sponsorships.
- Increased workforce and resident participation in and awareness of outdoor recreation activities.
- Increased private sector investment in outdoor recreation.
- Greater recognition of outdoor recreation as an important component of business and community health.

4. Education and Marketing

Elevate outdoor recreation as a central pillar of Iowa's tourism and quality-of-life strategy, using coordinated marketing and education efforts to attract visitors, support healthy communities and improve resident satisfaction statewide.

Recommendation 4.1 - Elevate Messaging and Marketing to Amplify Iowa's Brand as an Outdoor Recreation Destination

Collaborate with the Iowa Tourism Office, other state agencies and state departments and public and private partners to elevate messaging and marketing strategies that amplify Iowa's brand as an outdoor recreation destination, raise awareness of Iowa's outdoor recreation adventures among residents and visitors, keep pace with tourism marketing innovations and promote Iowa industries and products in state, national and global markets.

BACKGROUND

The Iowa Tourism Office's outdoor recreation marketing efforts have demonstrated strong return on investment through increased travel, overnight stays, partner engagement and interest from potential workforce recruits. Likewise, the Iowa DNR has successfully promoted outdoor recreation participation to residents, increasing awareness and use of Iowa's natural resources and building an engaged community of outdoor enthusiasts and advocates across the state. Iowa's DOT Byway Program is considered one of the most innovative byway programs in the nation. Iowa's County Conservation System is a national leader in outdoor recreation reservation and trip planning and Choose Iowa is creating unique and dynamic outdoor ag experiences.

The Task Force recommends quarterly meetings be held with partners to enhance collaboration, information sharing and strategic partnerships. These meetings should be combined with deliberate private-sector engagement to strengthen Iowa's position as an outdoor recreation destination, improve experiences for residents and visitors and maximize Iowa's outdoor recreation businesses and industries. The Task Force believes that individually, these efforts are powerful; united they can help Iowa become a national leader in outdoor recreation. They also recommend that the partners work together to develop at least one new shared messaging campaign annually to strengthen Iowa's outdoor recreation brand and elevate Iowa in multiple platforms.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- State agencies are meeting quarterly to collaborate and elevate Iowa's outdoor recreation sector, actively exchanging information, resources and ideas and maximizing marketing campaign platforms and initiatives.
- Public and private partners are developing and implementing at least one new outdoor recreation focused shared messaging campaign annually.
- Residents and visitors are experiencing improved access to outdoor recreation information through integrated planning tools, coordinated communications and innovative digital and AI-enabled platforms.
- Increased visitation and use of outdoor recreation is measurable in outdoor recreation sectors targeted by the new shared messaging campaigns.

Recommendation 4.2 - Create Marketing Campaigns to Capitalize on Iowa's Most Competitive Outdoor Recreation Assets

Create collaborative marketing campaigns to capitalize on Iowa's outdoor recreation brand by identifying, promoting and investing in Iowa's most competitive outdoor recreation assets, experiences, industry strengths and target audiences.

BACKGROUND

Not all outdoor recreation opportunities provide the same level of competitive advantage in attracting visitors, residents, businesses and workforce talent. Through statewide SWOT analyses, market research and strategic planning efforts, the Office of Outdoor Recreation will identify the experiences, assets, destinations, industry sectors and audience segments where Iowa is best positioned to differentiate itself. By focusing investment, promotion and partnership efforts on these strengths, Iowa can build a more distinctive outdoor recreation brand and maximize the return on public and private investments.

The Task Force recommends that the Office of Outdoor Recreation create collaborative marketing campaigns by working with local, regional and industry partners to align and promote Iowa's most competitive outdoor recreation assets, experiences and industry strengths through coordinated messaging and marketing efforts. Consistent branding and outreach across organizations will help establish a stronger statewide identity while increasing awareness of Iowa's outdoor recreation opportunities among target visitor, resident and workforce audiences.

To support these efforts, the Task Force recommends that the Office of Outdoor Recreation share market research, audience insights, branding resources and promotional tools with local and regional partners. As the primary owners, managers and promoters of many outdoor recreation assets, these partners play a critical role in shaping Iowa's outdoor recreation image. Coordinated marketing across websites, social media, newsletters, public relations efforts and influencer campaigns will strengthen Iowa's market position, improve the effectiveness of marketing investments and increase returns for both state and local partners.

Examples of some of Iowa's competitive advantages that could be highlighted include the following:

- Iowa's International Nature Ecosystems: Iowa has globally unique natural resources, including the Loess Hills, the Driftless Area, Neil Smith Wildlife Refuge, Globally Significant Birding Areas, the Upper Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Refuge and other internationally significant ecosystems with learning and outdoor recreation experiences that are found no other place in the world.
- An Accessible Outdoors Campaign: Several Iowa communities have invested in universally accessible outdoor recreation infrastructure, including accessible fishing, paddling, playgrounds, trails and other recreational facilities. These investments position Iowa as a Midwest leader in accessible outdoor recreation and create opportunities to attract visitors seeking inclusive recreation experiences.
- Ag-Outdoor Rec Excursions: Iowa has a unique intersection between agricultural tourism and outdoor recreation that, once it is defined through the Agriculture and Outdoor Recreation SWOT analysis and refined, can be developed and marketed as a one-of-a-kind attraction in the nation.
- Veteran's Outdoors: Iowa's strong outdoor recreation culture, rural lifestyle, affordability and veteran-friendly policies create opportunities to attract veterans as visitors and future residents.

By bringing together local and state partners to develop and implement targeted marketing assets and campaigns that highlight Iowa's uniquely competitive strengths, Iowa can expand visitation, increase outdoor recreation participation, support broader talent attraction and community development goals and maximize everyone's return on investment.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- State, regional and local partners are using consistent outdoor recreation messaging, branding and promotional materials that align with Iowa's identified competitive strengths.
- Outdoor recreation marketing efforts are prioritized around assets, experiences, destinations and audience segments where Iowa has a distinct competitive advantage or strong market appeal.
- Local and state, private and public partners are implementing collaborative messaging campaigns that position Iowa in key outdoor recreation target travel sectors.
- Public and private partners are collaborating to develop marketing assets, storytelling content, photography, videography and visitor information that showcase Iowa's priority outdoor recreation experiences and appeal to shared target audiences.
- Cooperative marketing programs, grant opportunities and strategic partnerships are elevating Iowa's signature outdoor recreation experiences and expanding Iowa's reach in priority markets.
- Growth in overnight stays, visitor spending and tourism-related economic activity associated with outdoor recreation.

Recommendation 4.3 - Deploy an Outdoor Recreation Marketing Toolkit

Develop and deploy an Outdoor Recreation Marketing Toolkit that empowers private businesses, communities and other stakeholders to promote Iowa's outdoor recreation opportunities at key visitor touch points.

BACKGROUND

Thousands of visitors engage with outdoor recreation businesses, retailers, tourism partners and community attractions throughout Iowa each year. These locations represent valuable opportunities to inspire visitors to explore additional outdoor recreation experiences, extend their stays and discover new destinations. However, many businesses and partners lack access to professional Iowa-focused marketing materials, consistent messaging and resources that highlight the state's outdoor recreation assets. Some of their employees are not even aware of all the outdoor recreation opportunities Iowa has available.

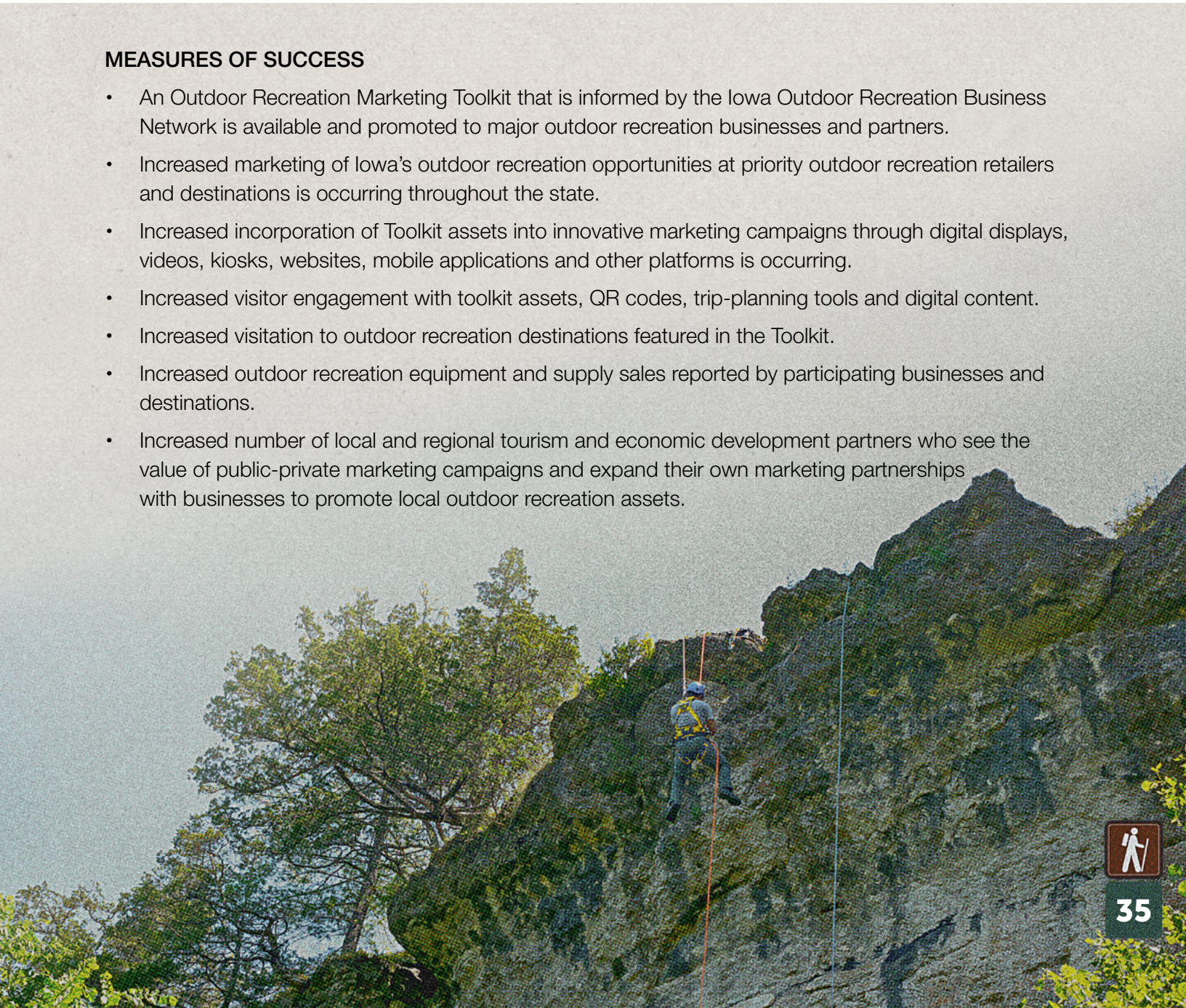
The Task Force recommends that the Office of Outdoor Recreation develop and deploy an Outdoor Recreation Marketing Toolkit that empowers these private businesses, communities and stakeholders to promote Iowa's outdoor recreation opportunities at key visitor touchpoints. One-on-one outreach to the highest profile businesses should be a priority, but the Toolkit could be available to Iowa outdoor recreation focused business willing to maximize marketing opportunities at the customer-point-of-contact. The Toolkit will help Iowa transform high-value points of contact into effective channels for promoting Iowa's outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Task Force recommends the Office work with the Iowa Outdoor Recreation Business Network to develop the specifics of the toolkit, which could include professional photography, video content, maps, testimonials and other resources compatible with interactive displays, QR code-enabled trip-planning tools and branded marketing materials. It may also include marketing strategies to help businesses increase awareness of Iowa's outdoor recreation assets and recommend marketing techniques that help them encourage visitors to explore additional opportunities. For example, individuals purchasing bicycles or paddling equipment may be more likely to extend their stay, return for future trips or explore new parts of the state if they see posters or videos of people engaged in complementary activities such as rock climbing, fishing, camping or trail-based experiences.

Increased awareness and direct promotion of Iowa's outdoor recreation opportunities will also encourage additional spending on equipment, services and experiences while motivating visitors to bring friends and family on future trips. This effort would support local businesses, strengthen connections among Iowa's outdoor recreation assets and contribute to growth of the state's outdoor recreation economy.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- An Outdoor Recreation Marketing Toolkit that is informed by the Iowa Outdoor Recreation Business Network is available and promoted to major outdoor recreation businesses and partners.
- Increased marketing of Iowa's outdoor recreation opportunities at priority outdoor recreation retailers and destinations is occurring throughout the state.
- Increased incorporation of Toolkit assets into innovative marketing campaigns through digital displays, videos, kiosks, websites, mobile applications and other platforms is occurring.
- Increased visitor engagement with toolkit assets, QR codes, trip-planning tools and digital content.
- Increased visitation to outdoor recreation destinations featured in the Toolkit.
- Increased outdoor recreation equipment and supply sales reported by participating businesses and destinations.
- Increased number of local and regional tourism and economic development partners who see the value of public-private marketing campaigns and expand their own marketing partnerships with businesses to promote local outdoor recreation assets.



Recommendation 4.4 - Develop Iowa's "Agritourism-Outdoor Recreation" Competitive Advantage and Tourism Product

Partner with Choose Iowa to identify and develop Iowa's competitive advantage at the intersection of agritourism and outdoor recreation, developing a strategic framework for public-private partnerships that connect agricultural assets, outdoor recreation opportunities and visitor experiences.

BACKGROUND

The intersection of agricultural tourism and outdoor recreation represents a unique competitive advantage for Iowa. Many of Iowa's outdoor recreation opportunities occur within agricultural landscapes, connect visitors to working lands or complement agritourism experiences. Likewise, many agricultural tourism destinations and private businesses benefit from proximity to trails, waterways, parks, wildlife areas and scenic byways.

Because both sectors are integral to Iowa's economy, culture and identity, the Task Force recommends completing a coordinated SWOT analysis and market assessment to identify and strengthen Iowa's competitive advantages at the intersection of agritourism and outdoor recreation. The assessment should help establish a strategic framework for public-private partnerships that connect agricultural assets, outdoor recreation opportunities and visitor experiences while supporting tourism growth, entrepreneurship and rural economic development.

The Task Force further recommends the Office of Outdoor Recreation use the results of the research to work collaboratively with Choose Iowa, tourism organizations, communities, businesses and landowners to promote existing experiences and develop new experiences that are distinctive, authentic and difficult to replicate in other states. The Task Force believes that strategic investments in agritourism-outdoor recreation partnerships, infrastructure, product development and marketing can help establish Iowa as a premier destination for agritourism and outdoor recreation experiences.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- A SWOT analysis and market assessment of Iowa's agritourism and outdoor recreation sectors has been completed to identify opportunities for collaboration, development and promotion.
- Private and public infrastructure is being developed to improve existing, and create new, agriculture and outdoor recreation experiences.
- Agriculture-outdoor recreation marketing is spurring tourism and private business growth.
- Programming and public-private cooperative marketing partnership opportunities have been developed to make Iowa the primary destination for authentic agriculture and outdoor recreation experiences.

Recommendation 4.5 - Implement an Outdoor Recreation Event Attraction Strategy

Develop and implement an Outdoor Recreation Event Attraction Strategy that identifies, recruits and supports outdoor recreation events aligned with Iowa's competitive strengths and elevates Iowa as a destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

BACKGROUND

Major sporting and outdoor recreation events can generate significant economic impact while introducing thousands of participants, spectators, media representatives and industry leaders to Iowa's outdoor recreation opportunities. Iowa already hosts successful local and regional outdoor recreation events and possesses many of the assets needed to attract larger regional and national competitions.

The Task Force recommends strategically identifying events that align with Iowa's strengths and competitive advantages. This will enable the state to focus resources on opportunities that are most likely to succeed and deliver long-term benefits. Examples may include amateur and professional cycling events, paddling competitions, birding festivals, hunting and conservation events, fishing tournaments, trail-running races and other outdoor recreation gatherings that showcase Iowa's landscapes, communities and recreation infrastructure.

A coordinated event attraction strategy can help Iowa move from hosting individual events on an ad hoc basis to proactively pursuing opportunities that strengthen Iowa's outdoor recreation brand, drive visitor spending and create lasting awareness of Iowa as a premier destination for outdoor recreation.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Increase the number of regional and national outdoor recreation events hosted in Iowa.
- Increase event-related visitation, overnight stays and tourism spending.
- Increase participation by event organizers, sponsors, vendors and outdoor recreation businesses.
- Increase media exposure and awareness of Iowa as an outdoor recreation destination.
- Increase the percentage of event attendees who indicate they are likely to return to Iowa for future outdoor recreation activities.
- Media impressions, social media engagement and earned media coverage highlighting Iowa as an outdoor recreation destination increase.



5. Resilience and Wellbeing

Integrate outdoor recreation into public health, community vitality, talent attraction, workforce development, cultural enrichment and economic development to improve physical and mental wellbeing while also helping communities attract and retain residents, support businesses, grow the workforce and create stronger local economies.

Recommendation 5.1 - Develop a Community Guide to Overcoming Outdoor Recreation Challenges

Work with the Department of Public Health, Department of Education, Iowa DNR and other state agencies to develop and distribute a Community Guide to Overcoming Outdoor Recreation Challenges. Recommendations should be informed by findings from the proposed Outdoor Recreation Access and Participation Survey. The Guide should help Iowa communities identify and address barriers to outdoor recreation participation through proven strategies, private-public partnerships, resources and case studies that respond to the specific challenges identified in the Survey.

BACKGROUND

Many Iowans face challenges to participating in outdoor recreation, including access to opportunities, limited financial resources, lack of equipment or storage space, transportation challenges, social issues, safety concerns, insufficient outdoor skills and limited awareness of available opportunities. Trying to increase outdoor recreation without knowing which of these barriers impact specific Iowa populations can be an ineffective use of financial and technical resources.

The Task Force recommends the Office of Outdoor Recreation work with the Department of Public Health, Department of Education, Iowa DNR and other state agencies to develop and distribute a Community Guide to Overcoming Outdoor Recreation Challenges that is informed by the proposed county-level Outdoor Recreation Access and Participation Survey. The Survey will provide valuable insights into participation patterns, health and wellness outcomes and challenges associated with outdoor recreation access in Iowa. It will help the partners identify where and how challenges are limiting participation and develop a practical Guide that supports communities in implementation of effective solutions through public-private partnerships and strategies.

This recommendation uses an innovative survey method to develop a Community Guide to Overcoming Outdoor Recreation Challenges through collaboration with multiple state agencies who will recommend real-life strategies to empower Iowa's public health professionals.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Multiple Iowa agencies have come together to develop and distribute a Community Guide to Overcoming Outdoor Recreation Challenges.
- Increased public-private partnerships supporting outdoor recreation access initiatives.
- Increased adoption of proven strategies such as equipment lending programs, recreation scholarships, transportation assistance, safety improvements and awareness campaigns.
- Communities using the Guide have increased outdoor recreation participation and improved health indicators.

Recommendation 5.2 - Develop Funding Strategies & Build Grassroots Support for Expansion of Child-Friendly Outdoor Recreation in Iowa Communities

Convene public and private partners to develop funding strategies and build grassroots support for expansion of parks, natural areas and outdoor recreation spaces in Iowa communities. Prioritize accessible, modern recreation infrastructure that supports individual play, family activities, team sports and safe, convenient access for users of all ages and abilities.

BACKGROUND

Access to parks, trails and natural areas is strongly linked to increased physical activity, improved mental health and enhanced community wellbeing. Research shows that individuals with access to parks and green spaces are more likely to meet recommended physical activity levels, while park users have activity rates approximately 47% higher than those without local park access. Proximity to parks is also associated with higher usage rates, reduced stress, stronger social connections and improved perceptions of safety. As a result, the quality, accessibility and distribution of outdoor recreation infrastructure are increasingly recognized as important determinants of public health, quality of life and community attractiveness.

The SWOT analysis proposed earlier in this plan should evaluate the quantity, quality, accessibility and distribution of parks, trails, natural areas and recreation amenities across Iowa communities. The Task Force recommends that the findings of the SWOT analsyis are used to identify gaps, prioritize investments, support recreation master planning, establish measurable access goals and guide data-driven decision-making.

Although the Iowa DNR has attempted this in the past for use in the Iowa SCORP, city participation has been low. The Task Force recommends that the Office of Outdoor Recreation convenes public and private partners, including the Iowa League of Cities, Iowa Foundation for Parks and Recreation, Iowa Parks Foundation and private-sector stakeholders, to increase participation in the SWOT analysis and then to use the analysis to develop funding strategies, build grassroots support and advance the expansion of child-friendly, accessible parks, natural areas and outdoor recreation spaces across Iowa.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Every Iowan is located within 3 miles of a public, natural area and has easy access via sidewalks and/or trails.
- Increased public-private investment in community outdoor recreation infrastructure.
- Increased number of Iowa communities and neighborhoods with parks and quality outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Increased outdoor recreation safety, accessibility and community connectivity.
- Increased community participation in outdoor recreation.

Recommendations 5.3 - Implement an Iowa Outdoor Recreation Education & Access Resource Network for Iowa Schools

Work with the Department of Education to develop, distribute and implement a dynamic Iowa Outdoor Recreation Education & Access Resource Network Guide for Schools that helps Iowa schools, educators and youth-serving organizations identify, access and participate in outdoor recreation field trips, skills training programs and learning opportunities offered by various public and private partners.

BACKGROUND

Iowa offers numerous outdoor recreation education, skills training, and experiential learning opportunities through public agencies, county conservation boards, nonprofit organizations and private-sector partners. However, participation varies widely across schools due to limited staff capacity, inconsistent awareness of available programs and challenges navigating multiple providers and opportunities. Transportation costs and logistics often create additional barriers, particularly for rural and underserved schools. Therefore, the Task Force recommends the Office of Outdoor Recreation work with the Department of Education to develop, distribute and implement a dynamic Iowa Outdoor Recreation Education & Access Resource Network Guide for Schools that helps Iowa schools, educators and youth-serving organizations identify, access and participate in outdoor recreation field trips, skills training programs and learning opportunities offered by various public and private partners.

A coordinated statewide approach can improve access by:

- Providing educators with a clear, easy way to find information about outdoor recreation opportunities, simplifying public and private engagement for education professionals.
- Connecting education professionals and schools with public agencies, nonprofit organizations and outdoor recreation businesses through a centralized resource hub.
- Coordinating disconnected outreach strategies to provide educators with a single point of access for field trip opportunities, outdoor recreation skills programs, outdoor recreation curriculum and curriculum-aligned experiences, funding resources and partner contacts.
- Increasing private outdoor recreation opportunities that enhance various learning curriculum by engaging private businesses and giving those private businesses a platform through which they can make themselves available to education professionals and schools.
- Expanding transportation support through a grant (like the Iowa Arts Council has).
- Recruiting and featuring private-public partnership opportunities to expand student participation and awareness of outdoor recreation skills, activities, and career pathways.
- Creating new opportunities for outdoor recreation skills development, environmental education, career awareness and lifelong engagement in outdoor recreation among Iowa youth.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- Outdoor recreation education and partnership opportunities have been compiled and are available in a dynamic platform to all Iowa schools, including on-site and off-site opportunities.
- Increased state, local, and private investment supporting outdoor recreation education and youth programming.
- A new Outdoor Recreation Transportation Assistance Grant funding source has been established and is being utilized throughout the state.
- Increased number of partnerships between schools, county conservation boards, public agencies, nonprofit organizations and private-sector providers.
- Increased number of schools are participating in outdoor recreation field trips, skills training programs and partner-led activities and programs.
- Increased student participation in outdoor recreation experiences and skills training and an increased awareness of outdoor recreation careers and lifelong recreation opportunities among Iowa students.



IOWA™
Economic Development

IOWA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
1963 Bell Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50315

iowaeda.com

JG 11102026