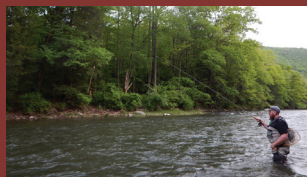
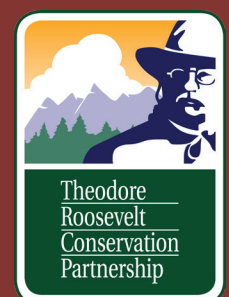


How Conservation and Recreation Groups Can Support Rural Communities



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Introduction: Connecting Conservation and Rural Economic Well-Being

Photo: George Evans Gunnison Gorge Anglers

The well-being of people and places is connected. In 2020, this relationship became clearer than ever as people looked to the outdoors for safe activities during a global pandemic. It is also clear that rural communities are critically important to the future of conservation in America. Farmers, ranchers, and private landowners manage a significant portion of America's open spaces, which provide water, air, wildlife habitat, and other resource benefits, and rural communities surround our public lands. Rural residents are deeply connected to their communities and the outdoors: a recent study by Duke University about rural attitudes toward the environment and conservation in America highlighted that people from rural America are "more likely to view where they live as being an important part of how they define themselves, which in turn shapes their views, including on environmental policy."¹

In recent years, a number of conservation organizations have increasingly understood and valued the connection between rural communities and conservation. Local, regional, and national conservation organizations are working across land ownership boundaries in places around the country to address conservation issues like wildlife habitat connectivity, watershed conservation, and climate resilience at a landscape scale, and in ways that support community-driven conservation priorities. Outdoor recreation—including hunting and fishing—is increasingly viewed as an important economic driver for rural communities and as a way to support community well-being. A renewed emphasis on quality of life and on creating communities that are good places to live, work and play has increased the relevance of outdoor amenities and natural resource stewardship.

This evolution creates space for conservation organizations and outdoor recreation groups to take a new approach to community engagement: one that recognizes mutual values and benefits, and the intersection of conservation, recreation, and community economic development. Meaningful community engagement is a good step for conservation organizations to build relationships, establish goodwill, and achieve their goals. As more communities focus on understanding and addressing historic inequities and racial biases, conservation organizations can also approach community engagement efforts with justice, equity, diversity and inclusion at the forefront, working together to understand and address inequities when advancing shared conservation and community priorities.

This white paper is intended to highlight the opportunities for alignment between rural community development and conservation. The following sections offer ideas, case studies, and resources for organizations looking to integrate support for rural community development into conservation initiatives and priority setting.



Recommendations for Getting Started

Photo: NicholasSpitz via Flickr

Relationships must be founded on trust and care for one another. This approach requires recognizing that rural community revitalization and economic opportunity are important values; that resource conservation and outdoor access can be aligned with those values; and that hunting and fishing organizations, land trusts, and other recreation and conservation groups can provide meaningful support for community-led development priorities in ways that are consistent with a conservation organization's core mission. Once established, partnerships and initiatives that maintain or improve a community's well-being and protect ecological function and conservation values have the potential to cultivate more support, more involvement, and produce long-lasting community and conservation solutions.

To help get started, here are some tips and lessons learned:

Do your research. Understand your community's economic vision, demographics, and local priorities and needs. For example, look for your community's economic development plan, vision documents, existing inventories of assets, and prior planning documents and proposals.

Identify community leaders and partners. Think about who might be working on these priorities already, and reach out to open a conversation with them. For example, identify local city and county leaders, local economic development organizations or community staff, local land trusts and watershed groups, local parks departments, and main street organizations.



Identify possible roles and ways that your organization could help. For example, as demonstrated by the case studies, conservation groups can:

- Contribute staff time and energy to complement local capacity;
- Help convene or organize partners and facilitate meetings;
- Elevate equity concerns and help to include, center, and support the perspectives of BIPOC leaders and those advocating for equitable access to resources and opportunities;
- Apply for grants or other funds on behalf of the community, and boost community proposals by providing letters of support, in-kind services, and assistance with match requirements;
- Advocate for local projects with state and federal agencies and partners;
- Bring in or provide additional technical support and subject-matter expertise;
- Support land management planning and design for outdoor spaces or recreation infrastructure;
- Provide stewardship support to help take care of outdoor amenities;
- Share information, publicize successes and market opportunities.



Specific tips to keep in mind:

- Think broadly and creatively about how your organization's long-term priorities and conservation mission are related to community priorities and needs, to identify opportunities for genuine mutual benefit.
- Recognize that relationships take time: be willing to focus on shared outcomes over time rather than focus on short-term outputs. Make sure you are willing to engage in ways that build trust.
- Showing up and listening is a key first step: demonstrate that you are willing to listen first and understand community priorities.
- The intent behind this work should be to develop transformational relationships, based on a genuine belief in the connection between community well-being and long-term resource stewardship. This should not be approached as a transactional means to an end.
- Help fill true capacity gaps while respecting leadership already present in the community.



Case Studies

The following case studies showcase different ways that conservation organizations and outdoor recreation groups can work with rural communities to support shared outcomes, with a focus on community economic development that supports conservation and the outdoor recreation economy:

- 1. Aberdeen, South Dakota —** Hunting and fishing are strong economic drivers and contribute to rural quality of life. This story highlights the opportunity for conservation groups to support community revitalization by working with farmers, ranchers, and businesses to connect conservation investments for preserving wildlife habitat with financial benefits for private landowners, helping to drive hunting-based local economic growth.
- 2. Lincoln, Montana —** Many communities have plans they want to implement but are constrained by limited capacity or access to resources. This story highlights how conservation organizations can augment community capacity and help to implement a community's vision, including by applying for federal and state grants and bringing together people and resources to support community goals for connecting main street revitalization and outdoor recreation.
- 3. Montrose, Colorado —** With recent increases in telework and interest in rural quality of life, more communities will be looking for ways to advertise outdoor amenities as a way to draw in new residents and businesses. This story illustrates the opportunity for conservation groups to work with the recreation industry to help rural communities attract growth by investing in outdoor access and amenities, coupled with investments in land and water restoration.
- 4. Southeast Alaska —** This example highlights how a conservation organization can quickly pivot capacity and programs to support urgent community needs in ways that help create genuine and long-term trust-based relationships. In this story, a local conservation organization reacted to the humanitarian needs of the community in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, shifting resources and funding to help meet basic priorities and address fundamental equity gaps.

These stories illuminate what can be accomplished when conservation and recreation groups show up for rural communities. As partners, they can connect land and water conservation and recreation priorities with local priorities for community well-being, economic development, and outdoor recreation infrastructure and access.

Aberdeen, South Dakota



Highlights: *This partnership highlights the opportunity for conservation groups to support community revitalization by helping to connect financial benefits for local working landowners with conservation investments for conserving wildlife habitat, helping to drive hunting-based local economic growth.*

Key Partners: *The Aberdeen Pheasant Coalition, spearheaded by the Aberdeen Pheasants Forever chapter (Northern South Dakota Chapter 77) and supported by local businesses, the tourism industry, conservation organizations and sportsmen groups.*

The Aberdeen Story²:

Aberdeen, South Dakota, is known as the “Pheasant Capital of the World,” in reference to the ring-necked pheasants that populate the surrounding countryside. These large and colorful birds are a favorite for hunters due to their willingness to hold in thick cover and then take flight with an explosive burst of wing beats, and for their reputation as excellent table fare.

Pheasant hunting is not just an American pastime; it also helps generate revenue in rural communities across the Midwest. Brown County in South Dakota, where Aberdeen is the county seat, is no exception: In 2010, the county saw an estimated \$17 million in spending from pheasant hunters who frequented the local restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, and other establishments. The Aberdeen Convention and Visitors Bureau estimates that every dollar that enters the community through pheasant hunting is magnified 3 to 7 times as it moves through the local economy.

But pheasants, like other wildlife, depend on quality habitat to survive and thrive, and due to a loss of grassland habitats in the state, pheasant populations have been in decline. In South Dakota, this decline was heavily influenced by a 40 percent decrease in enrollment in the USDA Farm Service Agency’s Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) from 2007 to 2015. CRP is a voluntary Farm Bill conservation program designed to safeguard environmentally sensitive land. Decreases in CRP resulted in declines in pheasant populations and local hunting-based economic revenue, and by 2013, Brown County’s pheasant hunting revenue was cut in half to \$8.7 million.

In response to this economic downturn and loss of hunting opportunities, and to help turn things around, the local Aberdeen Pheasant Coalition was formed. This coalition—made up of conservation and sportsmen’s groups, local businesses, and the tourism industry—set out to provide a financial incentive to landowners to enroll their lands in CRP and the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks walk-in hunting program, which opens private lands to public access for hunting.

The Coalition—led in-part by the area Pheasants Forever chapter—met with local banks, grocery stores, restaurants, and sporting goods stores, and raised over \$107,000 in 2016 that have been used to enroll 4,055 local acres in CRP and the state walk-in program, plus an additional 600 acres of non-CRP land for walk in access. Landowners who enroll in both programs receive an additional \$25 per acre in compensation, and the private lands are enrolled for a term of either 10 or 15 years.

To highlight participating landowners and program contributors, the Coalition developed field signs to mark enrolled properties, and businesses that donated to the effort received signs to hang in their storefronts to show customers that they support the program and their community. The Aberdeen Convention and Visitors Bureau then promoted the area to the nation's pheasant hunters in an effort to attract tourists who would come and spend money in the local economy.



Photo: NicholasSputz via Flickr

The Coalition and community's work appears to be paying off: in 2018, pheasant hunting revenue in Brown County increased to \$12.67 million. In 2020, the Coalition developed a map booklet that is available across the community to help pheasant hunters more easily locate and use enrolled properties, and the Coalition is now looking to raise more money to enroll additional lands in the program and build upon their success. Other South Dakota counties have taken note and are looking to replicate the Coalition's model in their own communities.

By working together, community and conservation leaders have been able to directly support a hunting-based plan for economic growth that is good for wildlife and for the natural environment.

As Emmett Lenihan, Pheasants Forever's former Senior Farm Bill Biologist puts it, the work of the Aberdeen Pheasant Coalitions is "a win for landowners, a win for sportsmen, and it's a win for the businesses because we bring more money back into the economy." It's also a benefit for conservation and water quality because CRP doesn't just benefit pheasants. Downstream water users, pollinators, deer, waterfowl, and many others are direct beneficiaries of these efforts.



Lincoln, Montana

Photo: Richard Hayes, Integrated Trail Lab

Highlights: *This partnership highlights how conservation organizations can support community capacity for local revitalization by partnering to apply for federal and state grants that enable community health and safety, public engagement, planning, and infrastructure. It also highlights the benefit of long-term relationship building between conservation partners and community leaders.*

Key Partners: *Community of Lincoln, Heart of the Rockies Initiative, USDA Rural Development, Blackfoot Challenge, Five Valleys Land Trust, The Wilderness Society, The Trust for Public Land, Chamber of Commerce, Montana Governor's Office of Economic Development, Montana Business Assistance Connection, Montana Department of Commerce, Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild, Montana State University, Western Transportation Institute, Lewis & Clark County, LOR Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, United States Forest Service.*

The Lincoln Story³:

Lincoln, Montana is a community with just over 1,000 people, located near the headwaters of the Blackfoot River. Centrally located in western Montana and surrounded by public land, Lincoln draws recreation enthusiasts from across the country and is a designated Continental Divide Trail Gateway Community. Historically a logging town, local leaders have begun to embrace a vision for the community's future that builds on Lincoln's access to outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities.

There is a long-standing history of collaboration between conservation groups and community leaders in the region, going back 20 years to shared work in the Blackfoot Watershed. Building on that history, conservation partners have been working with community leaders and residents for the past 5 years on a process called Envision Lincoln. The goal of the process has been to develop an overarching community vision for future growth and well-being, focused on Lincoln's small-town atmosphere and unique natural environment. The community recognized the potential for outdoor trails to contribute to this vision, and identified developing an in-town trail plan as a priority.

However, Lincoln lacked community capacity to identify and secure the financial and technical resources needed to put the Envision Lincoln plan into action. Being aware of and understanding how to navigate complex federal and state grant programs is often an obstacle for local communities, as is having the staff capacity necessary to write applications and follow through on proposals. There are also often challenges for communities related to securing local match for federal grant programs, facilitating the cash flow, finding qualified contractors, and completing reporting requirements.

The Heart of the Rockies Initiative (HOTR) stepped in as a lead conservation partner to help bridge this gap. Having observed the inextricable link between conservation and thriving rural communities, HOTR launched a Rural Development (RD) Program in 2019 and identified Lincoln as one of three initial partner communities in western Montana. The goal of HOTR's RD program is to work with communities to better understand their needs, including how those needs align with conservation—and to connect those communities with relevant USDA Rural Development programs, state programs, and other sources of funding and support to address those needs.

In just one year of working together, HOTR, partners and Lincoln community leaders were able to:

- Host a community Charrette to solicit feedback on in-town trails and main street revitalization;
- Work with state and local offices to designate Lincoln as a Montana Mainstreet Affiliate Community, making Lincoln the first unincorporated town in the program and eligible for state-based funding;
- Access Big Sky Trust Fund resources for the development of a Downtown Master Plan;
- Successfully engage USDA Rural Development staff, apply for and utilize funds from a USDA Rural Business Development Grant to launch an interactive online trail map and develop a more detailed implementation plan for the In-Town Trails Plan; and
- Secure State Recreation Trail Program funding for one segment of the In-Town Trails Plan.

These investments will have a direct economic impact: local businesses supporting the work have estimated that fostering more recreation tourism will sustain 42 jobs and create 20 new jobs, helping to advance Lincoln's vision of economic growth tied to their proximity to outstanding outdoor recreation.

HOTR played a variety of roles to support this work, including facilitating community feedback, helping to coordinate with state and federal offices and engage other conservation partners and funders, serving as a grant applicant and providing grant administration, and providing cash match and in-kind support for projects. By supporting Lincoln's capacity to implement their local vision connected to outdoor recreation, HOTR is helping to grow the outdoor economy and connect public and private land conservation to long-term community sustainability and well-being.

Assisting with applications for designations and programs that unlock financial and technical resources is one significant way conservation groups can help local communities realize their local vision. Based on its work with Lincoln and two other communities in Montana in 2020, HOTR has developed a set of policy priorities designed to enhance program access for the most rural communities. HOTR has also worked to engage local land trust partners to support the technical assistance needs of rural communities, and with the help of those partners, plans to scale up this work to assist nine communities in 2021. Moving ahead, the Lincoln work can serve as a blueprint for how conservation organizations can help meet community needs.



Montrose, Colorado

Photo: George Evans Gunnison Gorge Anglers

Highlights: *This partnership highlights the opportunity for conservation groups to work with the outdoor recreation industry to support a community's vision for attracting new businesses and residents by investing in outdoor amenities and recreation access, with a "play where you work, work where you play" approach.*

Key Partners: *The City of Montrose, Gunnison Gorge Anglers⁴, Great Outdoors Colorado, the Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Montrose Urban Renewal Authority, and Mayfly Outdoors.*

The Montrose Story⁵:

The City of Montrose, located in the Uncompahgre Valley on Colorado's Western Slope, has a population over 19,000, and a growing reputation as an outdoor mecca with a diverse and growing economy.

Situated a short drive from three renowned national parks (Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Arches, and Canyonlands), five world-class ski areas, and thousands of acres of public lands representing nearly 70 percent of the region, there is a dizzying array of outdoor recreation opportunities in the Montrose area. The area also benefits from a regional airport which is among the fastest growing in the state.

With these strong natural and built amenities in mind, the City of Montrose over the past five years has launched a strong push to rebrand and revitalize the community as an economic, labor, and transportation hub for businesses directly related to the outdoor recreation industry and for those attracted to the area because of the outstanding access to outdoor recreation amenities for their employees. The City's economic and community development plan is aimed at attracting new and expanding outdoor-related businesses, creating good-paying jobs, and supporting the well-being of local residents.

The Uncompahgre River is the anchor of this plan. In 2016, the Montrose City Council formed the Montrose Urban Renewal Authority (MURA), encompassing approximately 150 acres along the Uncompahgre River northwest of downtown. In 2018, MURA partnered with developers to launch Colorado Outdoors, a 164-acre economic development project along the Uncompahgre River. The project aims to attract outdoor-centric industries to Montrose and transform the City into a compelling destination for businesses and families by investing in river restoration, housing, and commercial development.

⁴ Gunnison Gorge Anglers is the local [Trout Unlimited](#) chapter in the Montrose region

⁵ To learn more about this case study, contact: Gunnison Gorge Anglers: Joel Evans, fishboycolo@msn.com; City of Montrose: Lisa Kuczmarski, Director of Business and Tourism, lkuczmarski@ci.montrose.co.us; Mayfly Outdoors: David Dragoo, Founder, david@mayflyoutdoors.com

A central pillar of the City's strategy has involved partnering with outdoor recreation companies and conservation organizations to restore and revitalize the community's river corridor, focusing on access, infrastructure, and amenities along the Uncompahgre River. The Colorado Outdoors project goals encompass a range of these activities, including restoring the Uncompahgre River to the level of Gold Medal waters, and expanding fishing and river access. Two major examples are the design and construction of a new \$3 million paved recreational trail along the river, and a \$2.5 million multi-year river restoration project of approximately 1.7 miles of the river corridor.

The Colorado Outdoors project has attracted significant local, state, and national attention and partnerships. A partnership between Mayfly Outdoors, a Colorado-based outdoor products company, and the City of Montrose is central to the project. Mayfly partnered with the City to kickstart the trail and restoration work by donating nearly 42 acres of land to the City to increase public access for fishing and other forms of recreation. This public-private partnership then helped the City secure a \$2 million grant for the river trail—the largest grant the City had received in its history—from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), a governmental entity that funds parks, wildlife, and land conservation. Mayfly—a leading manufacturer of several high-performance fishing tackle brands—also recently completed a new state-of-the-art 41,000 square foot company headquarters within the project that employs over 100 people.

The donation of land from a private entity to the City, in conjunction with funds from GOCO, provided a unique opportunity to restore the river at a larger scale with several community partners coming together to achieve a single mission. As Joel Evans of Gunnison Gorge Anglers (GGA) shared, "This new section of river restoration significantly adds to prior restoration sections completed some years ago within the city limits of Montrose. This greatly enhances the local fishery and as well as public access to previously private land."

Early on, the City and Mayfly convened a group of stakeholders to inform the river restoration goals of the project. GGA, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), Ecological Resource Consultants, and the US Army Corps of Engineers were key stakeholders, helping to guide appropriate restoration practices and priorities to maximize the ecological outcomes, and provide unparalleled opportunities for anglers and water enthusiasts.

As a conservation organization, GGA was a leader in bringing its years of experience restoring portions of the Uncompahgre River, as well as other rivers in Southwest Colorado. GGA and other partners also contributed to the financial goals of the project by publicly supporting grant proposals, helping the City receive approximately \$785,000 in additional funds from the CWCB and CPW. In addition, GGA led the initiative to enact catch-and-release fishing regulations on this section of river with CPW, aligning the projects conservation goals with those of local anglers.

Thanks to this strong public and private support, the project kicked off in September 2020, with phase one completed in March 2021. It is clear that the support of the outdoor industry and conservation organizations has helped the community advance its vision in ways that build long-term ties to the outdoors for the Montrose economy and its residents.



Southeast Alaska

Highlights: *This example highlights how a conservation organization can quickly pivot capacity and programs to support urgent community needs, in ways that help to create genuine and long-term trust-based relationships. In this example, a place-based conservation organization reacted to the humanitarian needs of their community in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, shifting resources and funding to help meet basic priorities and address fundamental equity gaps in access to resources.*

Key Partners: *Alaska Native Sisterhood Grandcamp, Sitka Conservation Society, Sustainable Southeast Partnership, Alaska Community Foundation, Kids Kupboard, Sitka Tribe of Alaska, AC Lakeside, Youth Advocates of Sitka, City and Borough of Sitka, and others.*

The Southeast Alaska Story⁶:

Founded in 1967, the Sitka Conservation Society (SCS) is the oldest conservation organization in Alaska. SCS does grassroots work based in Sitka, Alaska, a small coastal town in the heart of the Tongass, the largest national forest in the United States. SCS works to protect the natural environment of the Tongass National Forest while supporting the development of economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable communities within Southeast Alaska.

In 2020, as the pandemic began to unfold, SCS leadership anticipated the challenges that local communities would be facing and quickly pulled together to develop a new strategy framework to shift their 2020 programs to community COVID-19 response. One priority was to pull together partners and networks across the Sustainable Southeast Partnership to identify and meet community needs and deliver the services that would hopefully be coming from the state and federal government responses to the pandemic. SCS shifted their fundraising capacity toward creating a mutual-aid network and building out capacity to support the community. At the same time, SCS policy staff were working with Alaska congressional staff and regional USDA staff to find the programs that would be put in place to help people. SCS prioritized 1) identifying programs with the purpose of getting resources out to people who needed it, and 2) figuring out how those programs work and where SCS could advocate for their improvement or help partners in smaller communities and Alaska Native Tribes get access.

The first program they engaged with was the USDA Summer Meals program. SCS Executive Director Andrew Thoms shared, “my policy director was up all night trying to sift through the red tape to see how this program could work, and she finally found a partner from northern Alaska who went above and beyond to help us sponsor Sitka’s program. In that program, we delivered over 40,000 meals to children over the summer when the schools couldn’t do their food program, and met our goals of incorporating nutritious wild Alaskan salmon into these meals. It was a really emotional process for us to be successful knowing that if we failed to figure out the program, kids wouldn’t get the food they needed.” Then SCS received some funding from the Alaska Community Foundation, which initially had reservations about a conservation NGO being able to do this type of community work. After a successful initial test grant, the Foundation gave SCS five more grants for food programs, including Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, together with the Alaska Native Sisterhood and Alaska Native Brotherhood.

Working with the USDA Farmers to Families program, SCS was able to use the infrastructure set up from the mutual aid network to get resources out to the people who needed them most. This required ongoing engagement with USDA and the entities who received contracts for food distribution: the first contractor was a state-wide rural grocery store chain who was great to work with, but the second contractor was a national company with no capacity at the community level. SCS stepped back in to support local food distribution with no financial support, working instead with the Alaska Community Foundation and volunteers to staff the work and then coordinate food distribution with a third contract holder. SCS was able to combine their on-the-ground experiences in this program with their traditional policy work to engage Congressional staff and USDA leadership on obstacles in the program and opportunities to make improvements for better delivery, improved equity in food sourcing, and better long-term outcomes.

SCS also developed a Transitional Employment “Community Conservation Corps” program, which was delivered through a contract with the City and Borough of Sitka using CARES Act relief funding, through which SCS was able to invest in strengthening and maintaining community assets and planning out an “all lands” project with the Tongass National Forest for long-term visitor and recreation output. SCS Policy Director Katie Riley stated, “Our CCC program gave us experience with how nonprofits can leverage coronavirus relief funding to employ local residents and subcontractors and spread these funds to local businesses, while investing in projects that have benefits for locals as well as our recreation and visitor industry. We hope to apply our insights to President Biden’s plan for a ‘Civilian Climate Corps’, so that this program can maximize the benefits to local community members, as well as creating outcomes that will benefit our economy and environment.”

This response to a humanitarian crisis has led to stronger relationships for SCS on the ground. For example, SCS now has a stronger relationship with the Alaska Native Sisterhood Grand Camp: Paulette Moreno, the ANS Grand President shared, “I always thought that (SCS) only cared about hugging trees, but now their ED is a dues-paid member of the Alaska Native Sisterhood Sitka Camp 4 and this year the only projects they have been doing are to take care of people. Now I know that these actions are shared values that benefit not only the people of Alaska’s Southeast communities but the ancestral peoples of the forest and shores of this sacred land, we may continue to strive towards common ground.”

Because they were willing to respond to community needs and alter their planned program, SCS now has knowledge of a variety of USDA programs and has built capacity to work directly with community leaders, understanding and supporting the needs of local residents. By taking on these programs in the pandemic, SCS was able to build toward creating the system change that they want to see based on their mission—including on the equity front. The relationships and knowledge they developed will help SCS’s work on the Tongass and in supporting sustainable communities in Southeast Alaska.



Additional Resources

Great new resources have become available over the past year that can support you in this work. Take time to review and learn from the following materials and programs:

[The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable's Rural Economic Development Toolkit:](#)

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR), working with Oregon State University's Outdoor Recreation Economy Initiative and the National Governors Association Outdoor Recreation Learning Network, created a toolkit to help rural communities build their outdoor recreation economies. The toolkit highlights 15 best practices for developing an outdoor recreation economy, and outlines various challenges rural communities may face. It also discusses how to tackle misperceptions about outdoor recreation and address related cultural and infrastructure changes. An extensive list of federal grants and sources of technical assistance is included to help communities secure the funding and assistance needed to accomplish their goals.

[Recreation Economy at USDA - Economic Development Resources for Rural Communities:](#)

This USDA toolkit, published in 2020, includes input from USDA's Rural Development, the Forest Service, and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture. It provides program overviews, identifies ways USDA agencies can partner to support the outdoor recreation economy, and highlights examples of past investments.

[Recreation Economy for Rural Communities \(RERC\) program:](#)

RERC is a new planning assistance program to help communities develop strategies and an action plan to revitalize their Main Streets through outdoor recreation. Launched in 2020, the program is co-sponsored by the USDA Forest Service, the Northern Border Regional Commission, and the EPA. 10 communities received technical assistance in 2020, and five communities also were awarded small-dollar implementation grants by the [Outdoor Recreation Roundtable](#).

[Bureau of Economic Analysis \(BEA\)](#) and [Outdoor Industry Association \(OIA\)](#) data on the outdoor recreation economy:

The BEA's outdoor recreation satellite account, most recently updated in November 2020, measures economic activity generated by outdoor recreation and the production of outdoor goods and services, the contribution of outdoor recreation to the U.S. GDP, and industry breakdowns of outdoor employment and compensation. OIA's 2017 analysis helped lead to the inclusion of the outdoor recreation economy in BEA's analysis. State specific information can be found in both reports.

Extending Our Welcome: Trends and Strategies for Tourism in Appalachia:

A recently released tourism-focused report by the Appalachian Regional Commission reviews different elements of growing and supporting tourism, and includes a number of interesting community case studies.

Other Conservation Partners:

A number of conservation organizations have been working to connect conservation, outdoor recreation, and community economic development—these groups often have resources that others can learn from. For example:

- The Conservation Fund's [Rural Economic Development](#) page has examples that can provide inspiration for how your organization can work with community leaders to support community-based economic opportunity while conserving natural resources;
- Headwaters Economics has a number of [examples and reports](#) that can support community engagement; and
- The Montana Access Project hosts a [webinar series](#) that addresses many topics of interest.



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Photo: George Evans Gunnison Gorge Anglers

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