

# State Offices of Outdoor Recreation

More than 164 million Americans have made outdoor recreation a priority in their lives since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether visiting local parks or traveling into the expansive backcountry, consumers are driving a boom in the outdoor industry. According to the [U.S. Department of Commerce](#), outdoor recreation generated a record \$862 billion in gross output, 1.9% of U.S. GDP and 4.5 million jobs in 2021, 3% of all employment nationwide. That year, the outdoor recreation economy grew [three times faster](#) than the U.S. economy as a whole. [Investments](#) in outdoor recreation infrastructure and access can offer economic, social, and health benefits for rural and urban communities and make states more competitive not just in outdoor employment but also in [other sectors](#) that rely on access to the outdoors as a recruitment and retention tool. States can harness the momentum of this fast-growing segment of the economy through the creation of an office of outdoor recreation, or OREC.

## 5 Things to Know About State Offices of Outdoor Recreation



**ORECs can help unify and leverage each state's unique outdoor recreation economy.**

Offices can support economic development initiatives, stakeholder outreach, workforce programs, business recruitment, conservation and stewardship projects, youth engagement, equitable access, and more. They can also provide a single point of contact for business and government and expand on points of crossover with sectors such as transportation, education, conservation, tourism, and commerce.



**ORECs exist in 18 states from coast to coast and across the political spectrum.** Those 18 states are: Arkansas, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming. The newest offices—in Massachusetts, Arkansas, and Maryland—were created in 2021 and 2022.



**ORECs can be created in several ways.** Outdoor recreation offices have been created through legislation, executive action, insertion into state budgets, or some combination of those measures. Before they create offices, some states form a task force composed of state outdoor recreation advocates.



**ORECs can be housed within different agencies of state government.** Outdoor recreation offices have been created within departments of commerce, economic development, natural resources, and parks, heritage and tourism. They can also be placed directly in the governor's office as a senior policy advisor.



**States are coordinating at the national level.** The Confluence of States, established in 2018, is a bipartisan coalition whose mission is to grow the outdoor recreation industry, protect the nation's recreation assets and transform conservation into a driver of economic prosperity. Signatories are committed to advancing the following principles: conservation and stewardship, education and workforce training, economic development, and public health and wellness.



## State Examples

1

**Utah** established the first OREC in 2013 to ensure every resident can live a healthy and active lifestyle through outdoor recreation and access to natural space. In 2022, the OREC merged with the Division of Recreation to create a new entity—the Division of Outdoor Recreation—under the Department of Natural Resources (HB 305). The division administers several programs, including the Utah Outdoor Recreation Grant, which supports the construction and expansion of outdoor recreation amenities.

2

The **Massachusetts** OREC, established in December 2022 and housed in the governor's office, will work alongside state agencies and build partnerships to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities and coordinate policy around funding, equity and other issues.

3

**New Mexico** lawmakers created the Outdoor Recreation Division and the first Outdoor Equity Fund in 2019 (SB 462) to provide outdoor experiences to low-income youth. The division is currently spearheading several initiatives related to strategic planning, business development, education, conservation and access.

4

The **Arkansas** OREC is housed within the Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism and is tasked with bringing together interested stakeholders to promote the state, its unique natural resources and continued development of recreational opportunities.

5

**North Carolina** created the position of outdoor recreation and recruitment director through the 2017 state budget. The Outdoor Recreation Industry Office works to ensure the state's strategic growth as a place where outdoor businesses and recreation communities can thrive.

## Additional Resources

- NCSL Policy Snapshot, [State Funding for Outdoor Recreation](#) (2022)
- [A Guidebook to Developing Offices of Outdoor Recreation](#), Confluence of States (2023)
- [The Value of State Offices of Outdoor Recreation](#), Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (2021)
- [Elevating Outdoor Recreation Together](#), Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism at Utah State University (2018)
- U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, [Outdoor Recreation](#) (2022)