

UTAH'S

OUTDOOR RECREATION STRATEGIC PLAN

Utah Outdoor Adventure Commission

October 2023



Utah Outdoor Adventure Commission

COMMISSION MEMBERS

Representative Jeff Stenquist
Utah House of Representatives

Kate Bradshaw
Utah League of Cities and Towns

Senator Kirk Cullimore
Utah State Senate

Jason Curry
Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation

Kelly Goonan, Ph.D.
Southern Utah University

Brandy Grace
Utah Association of Counties

Pitt Grewe
AllTrails, Inc.

Jeff Hartley
Sage Government Solutions

Crista Hinton
Utah League of Cities and Towns

Michelle McConkie
Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration

Scott Strong
Utah Division of State Parks

Jerry Taylor
Utah Association of Counties

Josh Van Jura
Utah Department of Transportation

Vicki Varela
Utah Office of Tourism

R. Logan Wilde
Utah Department of Agriculture and Food

TECHNICAL ADVISORS

Ty Hunter
Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation

Shane Stroud
Utah Attorney General's Office

Chase Pili
Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation

SUPPORT

This plan was developed by the Outdoor Adventure Commission in collaboration with the Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism at Utah State University and the Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation.

PLANNING AND ANALYSIS TEAM

Jordan W. Smith, Ph.D.
Jake Powell
Casey Trout
Nate Trauntvein, Ph.D.
Wayne Freimund, Ph.D.
Chris Monz, Ph.D.
Chase C. Lamborn, Ph.D.
Rachel Hall
Elizabeth Sodja
Eunjung Yang, Ph.D.

UTAH DIVISION OF OUTDOOR RECREATION STAFF

Tara McKee
Carly Lansche
Evan Beistch
Maureen Casper
Patrick Morrison
India Nielson
Rachel Toker
Caroline Weiler

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Letter from the Outdoor Adventure Commission Chair

As Chair of the Utah Outdoor Adventure Commission, I want to take a moment to share with you the remarkable benefits of outdoor recreation in our beautiful state of Utah. The diverse landscapes and natural wonders that grace our region make Utah a unique haven for outdoor enthusiasts and a source of pride for all residents. This strategic plan charts a path forward for how Utah's outdoor recreation destinations continue to serve the needs and desires of Utahns and millions of visitors each year.

The Value of the Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan

- **Improved Outdoor Experiences:** Improved facilities and infrastructure will lead to better experiences for all, attracting a wider range of visitors and encouraging them to explore and appreciate the beauty of Utah.
- **Economic Prosperity:** By strategically developing our outdoor recreation infrastructure, we can boost our tourism industry, generate revenue, and support local businesses.
- **Recreation for Future Generations:** The plan ensures responsible growth, ensuring that our outdoor recreation resources remain intact for future generations to enjoy. It will also help ensure outdoor recreation is more accessible to everyone. Doing so will strengthen our sense of community and ensure that all Utah residents can benefit from these experiences.

Utah's outdoor recreation offers numerous advantages that impact our economy, health, and overall quality of life. Supporting and promoting outdoor recreation in Utah is not only an investment in our state's future but also a way to enhance the well-being of our residents. I am committed to working with local and state authorities, as well as national organizations, to act on this strategic plan and ensure that Utah continues to be a beacon for outdoor enthusiasts for years to come.

I encourage you to take advantage of the many outdoor opportunities in our state and to consider how they can positively impact your life. Together, we can continue to protect and enjoy the natural beauty that makes Utah so unique.

Sincerely,
Representative Jeff Stenquist
Chair, Utah Outdoor Adventure Commission
Utah District 46



Letter from the Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation

I hope you are taking time to enjoy the incredible outdoor spaces that our beautiful state of Utah has to offer. It is with great excitement that we release Utah's Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan.

Utah is renowned for its variety of recreation opportunities, from the red rock canyons of our state and national parks to the pristine wilderness areas that call out to hikers, bikers, climbers, and adventurers of all kinds. We are blessed with a natural treasure trove that not only adds to our quality of life but also plays a vital role in our economy, our physical & emotional health, and our sense of community. Our state's identity as an outdoor recreation destination to live in and visit is growing at a blinding speed.

This statewide strategic plan for outdoor recreation will help ensure that as we grow, our outdoor spaces continue to thrive and offer benefits to our residents and visitors. In developing the plan, we relied heavily on your input, experiences, and insights - collected during 14 interactive workshops held throughout the state over the past year. Your thoughts and ideas were invaluable in shaping the future of outdoor recreation in Utah. As we work to bring this plan to reality, we are committed to engaging with communities, organizations, and individuals who share our passion for the great outdoors.

Together, we can ensure that Utah remains a shining example of how outdoor recreation can enrich our lives, strengthen our economy, and care for our public lands.

Thank you for your dedication to our incredible state and its outdoor wonders. Let's work together to ensure a bright and sustainable future for Utah's outdoor recreation.

Sincerely,
Jason Curry
Director, Utah Director of Outdoor Recreation
Commissioner, Utah Outdoor Adventure Commission



Introduction

From the powder-covered slopes of the northern Wasatch to the red rock wonderland of the state's southern regions, Utah is known around the world for its outstanding outdoor recreation destinations and the unique experiences they provide. With 2.5 million Utahns participating in outdoor recreation each year, outdoor recreation is clearly fundamental to who Utahns are and how they live their lives¹. To provide future generations with the same opportunities that are available today, the state needs a long-term strategy for investing in its unparalleled outdoor recreation resources.

Outdoor recreation within Utah is managed and provided through various federal and state agencies as well as county and municipal governments. Each of these entities manages outdoor recreation following different mandates and internal objectives. More coordination between these various agencies and levels of government can help identify where strategic investments in outdoor recreation could support the desired experiences of Utahns. This strategic plan represents a common path forward for outdoor recreation within the state.

The plan was collaboratively developed through the input of hundreds of outdoor recreation planners and managers as well as elected and appointed officials who met over the course of 14 interactive workshops to share their insights into the challenges and opportunities for outdoor recreation in Utah. The plan and the recommendations within it are also data-driven, grounded in a wealth of geospatial, fiscal, program, and survey data.



Data and Stakeholder Input Supporting the Strategic Plan

The strategic planning process utilized the best available data and stakeholder input to chart a path forward for improving outdoor recreation opportunities within the state.

Data

Stakeholder Input

- **A statewide outdoor recreation asset database.** The outdoor recreation asset database aggregates and organizes data on outdoor recreation assets across Utah, regardless of whom those assets are managed by. The asset database was used to quantify and compare access to different types of outdoor recreation assets, such as trails and campgrounds, across the state².
 - **A comprehensive assessment on how outdoor recreation and tourism is funded within Utah.** Outdoor recreation is funded through a variety of taxes and use fees. The funding assessment quantified how the state generates, manages, and uses these funds³.
 - **Projections of future outdoor recreation use.** Strategically investing in outdoor recreation assets requires an understanding of where demand is increasing or declining. These projections of future use were used to provide insights for how use is likely to change within the state.
 - **A comparative analysis of the differences in outdoor recreation management between Utah and other western states.** An inventory of state-managed funding streams and programs in other western states provided insights on how to improve outdoor recreation management in Utah. The comparative analysis also showed how Utah "stacks up" relative to other states⁴.
- **Fourteen regional workshops held around the state.** Fourteen regional workshops were held throughout Utah to identify critical threats to outdoor recreation assets and opportunities, and also to develop policy, program, and project priorities that meet local needs⁵.
 - **A general population survey.** A statewide survey was used to understand outdoor recreationists' attitudes towards state investments in different types of outdoor recreation infrastructure⁶.

Structure of the Plan

The strategic plan establishes a common, unifying framework within which all entities supporting outdoor recreation in Utah can align their individual planning and management efforts.

The plan sets a strategic path forward for outdoor recreation in Utah by first establishing four Cardinal Directions or common overarching goals to improve outdoor recreation opportunities across the many municipalities, counties, and land management agencies within the state.

Each Cardinal Direction is then supported by a series of associated objectives (the reasons why actions to achieve that Cardinal Direction are needed) and major areas of opportunity (actions the state can take to achieve each objective).

The plan is not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, the plan reflects the common aspirations, needs, and desires of stakeholders across Utah. As such, it serves as a common unifying structure to align the many local, regional, and agency-specific planning and management efforts that are constantly occurring across the state.

Cardinal Directions & Objectives

BUILD AND SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

Objective 1.1 - Increase the ability of municipal, county, state, tribal, and federal entities to access and share resources

Objective 1.2 - Increase the ability of user groups, non-profits, and private industry to support infrastructure development and maintenance

Objective 1.3 - Ensure infrastructure development and outdoor recreation management meets local needs

INCREASE THE ECONOMIC AND HEALTH BENEFITS GENERATED BY OUTDOOR RECREATION

Objective 4.1 - Distribute the economic benefits of outdoor recreation to the areas where use is occurring

Objective 4.2 - Increase the capacity of gateway and natural amenity regions to plan for, and manage, non-local visitation

Objective 4.3 - Improve the ability of individuals to achieve the mental and physical benefits of outdoor recreation



IMPROVE AWARENESS AND EDUCATION ABOUT SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE RECREATION

Objective 2.1 - Decrease the need for search and rescue support for uneducated or ill-prepared recreationists

Objective 2.2 - Foster a sense of stewardship for Utah's outdoors

Objective 2.3 - Minimize conflict between different outdoor recreation activities

Objective 2.4 - Increase all Utahns' awareness of the benefits of outdoor recreation

INCREASE ACCESS TO OUTDOOR RECREATION WHILE PROTECTING NATURAL AND SCENIC LANDSCAPES

Objective 3.1 - Provide a wide variety of recreation opportunities, ranging from the highly-developed to the very primitive

Objective 3.2 - Ensure existing outdoor recreation assets are well maintained for decades to come

BUILD AND SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

Objective 1.1 - Increase the ability of municipal, county, state, tribal, and federal entities to access and share resources

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Objective 1.3 - Ensure infrastructure development and outdoor recreation management meets local needs

Given the complex jurisdictional and administrative systems across which outdoor recreation opportunities are provided within Utah, building and supporting collaborative processes is essential to developing unified approaches to common challenges. Collaborative processes bring different agencies, counties, municipalities, and user groups together to collectively address problems which no one entity could solve alone⁷.

Collaborative processes can take many forms. They can include informal arrangements between user groups and land management agencies such as volunteer agreements. They can also include complex arrangements between multiple user groups, non-profits, private industry, and land managers who agree to work together to identify and prioritize common challenges associated with outdoor recreation management (e.g., the Central Wasatch Commission, the Zion Regional Collaborative, etc.).

Regardless of their size or level of formality, collaborative processes provide many benefits to outdoor recreation management agencies as well as the public. They often provide a mechanism to discuss and/or address shared challenges and potential solutions with community members, which is lacking in many outdoor recreation management decisions where a brief opportunity for “public comment” may be the only interaction between a resource manager and community members. Collaborative processes also provide a means of coordinating (and possibly funding) the actions of multiple stakeholders, allowing them to address emergent issues (e.g., the use of e-bikes) in coordinated ways.

Objective 1.1

Increase the ability of municipal, county, state, tribal, and federal entities to access and share resources

Across federal, state, county, and municipal agencies, budgets to develop and maintain outdoor recreation infrastructure are limited. Additionally, many agencies have stipulations on how they can spend certain types of monies³. Consequently, many agencies do not have enough money, or the right “type” of money, to accomplish projects they know would improve outdoor recreation opportunities on the lands they manage. Public policies should allow outdoor recreation providers to use public funding in the most efficient way to support mutually-identified needs.

A common definition of outdoor recreation infrastructure within state code can provide the agencies and entities that manage infrastructure development funds the flexibility to jointly support the development of mutually-beneficial projects.

Tourism, Recreation, Cultural, Convention, and Airport Facilities Tax (TRCC) or Restaurant and Car Rental Tax - Allowable uses include financing tourism promotion as well as developing, operating, and maintaining airport facilities, convention facilities, cultural facilities, recreation facilities, and tourism facilities.

County Transient Room Tax - Allowable uses include establishing and promoting tourism and acquiring, leasing, constructing, furnishing, maintaining, and operating, tourism-related facilities.

State Transient Room Tax - Allowable uses include new outdoor recreation infrastructure that will support local economic development.

Off-highway Vehicle Account - Allowable uses include law enforcement training and enforcement, off-highway vehicle education, trail maintenance and development.

Boating Account - Allowable uses include law enforcement training and enforcement, boating education, and boating facility maintenance and development.

Outdoor Adventure Fund - Allowable uses include construction and upgrades to outdoor recreation infrastructure, land acquisition for outdoor recreation infrastructure, and access to outdoor recreation infrastructure.

Utah Outdoor Recreation Grants - Allowable uses include the construction of new outdoor recreation infrastructure.

Areas of Opportunity

Ensure clear language is used in state code regarding how outdoor recreation is supported.

There are several state programs funded through either state taxes or use fees that support outdoor recreation³. These taxes and fees are the result of many individual pieces of state legislation, and consequently may not complement each other as well as they could. A careful review of state code is warranted to ensure if, and what types, of outdoor recreation infrastructure can be funded by existing taxes and fees. Currently, many pieces of legislation use vague language to define the types of outdoor recreation infrastructure their funding can be used to support³. Regular reviews of state policy can also ensure existing programs have stable and predictable revenue sources, are transparent to taxpayers, and align the sources of taxes/fees with the beneficiaries.

Utilize the Outdoor Adventure Commission (OAC) to encourage improved collaboration and coordination.

Boards that encourage organizational alignment across the many entities which manage or support outdoor recreation are needed given similar outdoor recreation opportunities are provided by local, state, and federal agencies⁴. Utah's OAC can be utilized to improve collaboration and coordination across the many agencies and organizations that develop and manage outdoor recreation opportunities within the state. The OAC could be a leading example of a state-led entity designed to provide not only the strategic vision for outdoor recreation within a state, but also the network of information sharing and coordination required to achieve that vision.

Leverage the outdoor recreation coordinated investment initiative to implement coordinated efforts.

HB224, passed in the 2023 Legislative Session, established the Outdoor Recreation Coordinated Investment Initiative. It is a mechanism that holds the promise of ensuring outdoor recreation managers can mutually-invest in shared interests. The Initiative allows the Division of Outdoor Recreation to enter into partnership agreements with other entities for the purposes of “managing, maintaining, expanding, restoring, and improving outdoor recreation infrastructure on public lands within the state”⁸. While the Initiative has been established, its administrative structure is still in the process of being developed. The Initiative can serve as a unique mechanism for the state to build stronger relationships with federal, county, and local outdoor recreation providers. The process of identifying potential formal partnerships between the Division of Outdoor Recreation and other entities can be an opportunity to foster the exchange of information and ideas among stakeholders, provide a mechanism to discuss shared challenges and potential solutions, and allow stakeholders to address emergent issues.

Objective 1.2

Increase the ability of user groups, non-profits, and private industry to support infrastructure development and maintenance

User groups, non-profits, and private businesses provide an incalculable number of services that support and improve outdoor recreation opportunities across the state. In many areas, user groups support the lion's share of the maintenance requirements of outdoor recreation assets. Nonprofits play a critical role in organizing and advocating for the needs of specific activities or land uses. Private industry provides the gear, technology, and tax revenues that either directly or indirectly support outdoor recreation opportunities. The state should facilitate and support these organizations to encourage collaboration with municipal, state, county, and federal outdoor recreation providers.

User groups, non-profits, and private businesses provide an incalculable number of services that support and improve outdoor recreation.



Areas of Opportunity

Facilitate and encourage private industry's support for outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation is a major factor driving the decisions of businesses to locate in Utah. Policies that provide private industry the opportunity to support the areas they are passionate about are needed, and if developed correctly, could help alleviate the very large deferred maintenance backlogs faced by the land management agencies. Policies and programs that provide a mechanism to streamline private industry's support of outdoor recreation opportunities within the state, do not substantially alter or degrade the outdoor recreation experiences that an area is intended to provide, and align with the goals and objectives of any local planning efforts, should be supported. These efforts could take many forms such as enabling private industry to donate to outdoor recreation projects or coordinating and/or incentivizing private industries' interest in stewardship efforts.

Curate and share outdoor recreation partnership agreements. Typically, collaborative processes between land management agencies and user groups, non-profits, and private businesses require dedication, resolute commitments to achieve specific ends, and passionate leaders willing to champion an idea on behalf of their constituents. While these characteristics are very useful in collaborative processes, they are not essential. Not all collaborative processes need to be onerous; in fact the more they can be streamlined the more likely they are to succeed⁹. Coordinated efforts to share best practices for partnership agreements could accelerate the interests of private industry or user groups interested in stewarding the state's outdoor recreation assets.

Support the collaborative development of platforms that provide information on where, when, and how to participate in outdoor recreation. There is a large opportunity to support the collaborative development of a unified and dynamic web-based platform that can inform Utahns about where, when, and how they can participate in outdoor recreation. The development and refinement of this platform can help federal, state, and local outdoor recreation managers more efficiently communicate with the recreating public. Currently, each managing agency curates and disseminates information about the opportunities offered on their lands through static web pages that do not accurately describe current conditions (e.g., if a trail is washed out or if a campground is closed for maintenance). A digital 'one-stop shop' for outdoor recreation opportunities eliminates the need for agencies to curate their own resources, ultimately allowing outdoor recreationists to have a better understanding about what opportunities are available, and what to expect on site. The state can help play a facilitating role in brokering the relationships between land management agencies, municipal governments, and the private industries who are most well-suited to develop, deliver, and maintain a resource like this.

Objective 1.3

Ensure infrastructure development and outdoor recreation management meets local needs

Utah's outdoor recreation providers want planning and management efforts that meet local needs⁵. What works for outdoor recreation management in one area of the state may not work in other areas of the state. Dominant recreational activities and views towards management agencies vary widely across Utah, and consequently policy, planning, and management efforts need to acknowledge local contexts. Efforts to develop collaborative processes should be done so with consideration of the highly variable nature of preferences and needs across the state. Regional planning efforts can be utilized to build and support partnerships while allowing local stakeholders to develop the outdoor recreation needs and priorities they believe are most important.



Areas of Opportunity

Support and facilitate local and regional outdoor recreation plans. While Utah currently lacks formally organized outdoor recreation focused collaborative working groups, the state is in an exceptional position to develop collaboratives that increase coordination and collaboration. Regional collaborative working groups can facilitate coordination and planning for emerging and long-term needs within their own region. The formation and support of local workgroups provide a new space where regional challenges can be discussed and regionally relevant solutions can be proposed, debated, and implemented.

Bolster support for outdoor recreation planning assistance. There is an opportunity for Utah to build upon its exceptional financial commitments to outdoor recreation infrastructure development through coordinated planning assistance. If properly funded and supported, planning assistance efforts can provide financial and organizational support to local and regional efforts to build, maintain, and diversify opportunities to engage in outdoor recreation. Importantly, they can also provide specialized knowledge and technical assistance to local and regional efforts – often these groups are fueled by passionate stakeholders who lack the time, knowledge, skills, and fiscal resources necessary to realize their visions. Coordinated planning assistance efforts can also ensure the efforts of local and regional working groups align with this strategic plan.

Regional planning efforts can build and support partnerships while allowing local stakeholders to develop the outdoor recreation needs and priorities they believe are most important.

IMPROVE AWARENESS AND EDUCATION ABOUT SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE RECREATION

Objective 2.1 - *Decrease the need for search and rescue support for uneducated or ill-prepared recreationists*

Objective 2.2 - *Foster a sense of stewardship for Utah's outdoors*

Objective 2.3 - *Minimize conflict between different outdoor recreation activities*

Objective 2.4 - *Increase all Utahns' awareness of the benefits of outdoor recreation*

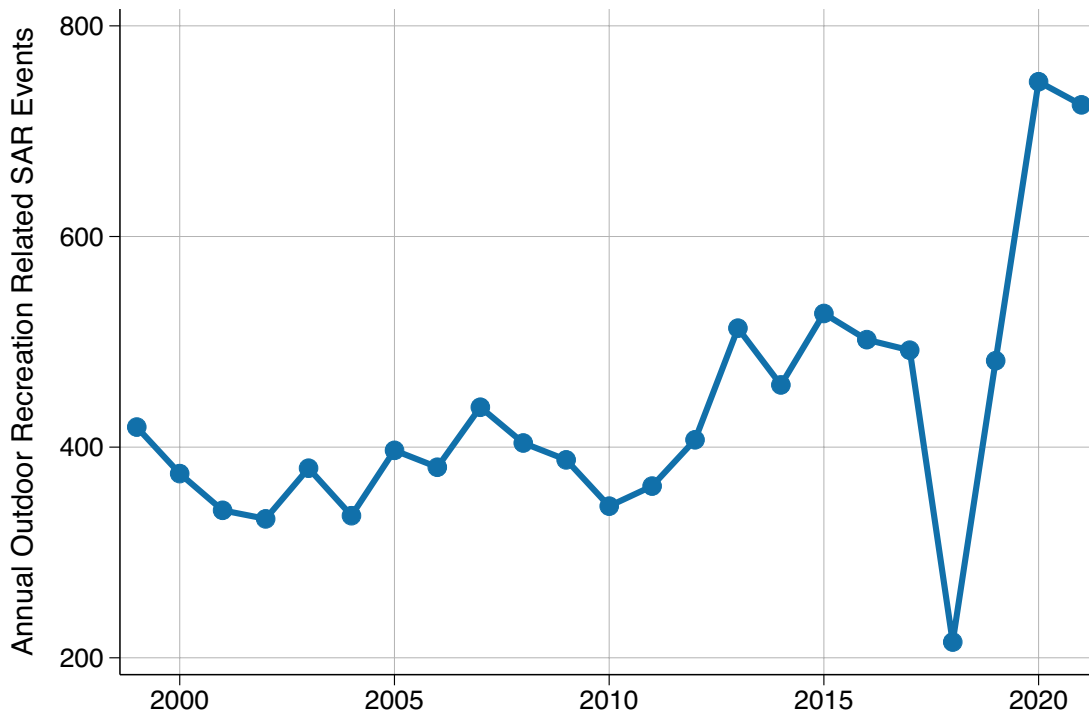
Over the past few years, several agencies and offices across the state have placed an increased focus on the development and dissemination of information about safe and responsible recreation. Continued focus on awareness and education are needed to decrease the burden on local governments⁵. In the state's more rural outdoor recreation destinations, a greater and more coordinated focus on safe and responsible recreation could decrease the burden on county emergency services who coordinate search and rescue efforts. Conversely, safe and responsible recreation education efforts in urban areas can help ensure new outdoor recreationists have satisfying experiences and continue to participate responsibly. There is an acute need for education efforts to foster a sense of stewardship for Utah's outdoors and stoke a sense of wonder and curiosity amongst the state's youth.

Objective 2.1

Decrease the need for search and rescue support for uneducated or ill-prepared recreationists

Outdoor recreation related search and rescue (SAR) events in Utah have increased from around 400-500 in the late 1990s and early 2010s to upwards of 800 in recent years. This growth is likely driven by an increased interest in Utah's outdoors as well as a rapidly growing state population. County sheriffs offices, who are responsible for enlisting, training, and financially supporting the costs of local SAR teams, have borne significant burdens in recent years. Proactive education efforts may reduce the need

for SAR over time, but could also be hastened with intergovernmental coordination between the Division of Outdoor Recreation, the Utah Office of Tourism, and county destination marketing organizations (DMOs). While each organization focuses on different audiences, they collectively have a massive capacity to educate outdoor recreationists within the state. Preventative and coordinated education efforts should also be paired with adequate financial resources to mitigate the costs of SAR events.



Annual outdoor recreation related search and rescue events in Utah (1998-2021)

Note. Excludes events related to training, equipment maintenance, law enforcement or fire assistance, and all non-outdoor recreation related uses of county search and rescue personnel (e.g., traffic enforcement, suicides, etc.).

Data source: Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism analysis of Utah Department of Public Safety, Division of Emergency Management Data.

Objective 2.1

Areas of Opportunity

Expand the development and dissemination of responsible recreation education campaigns.

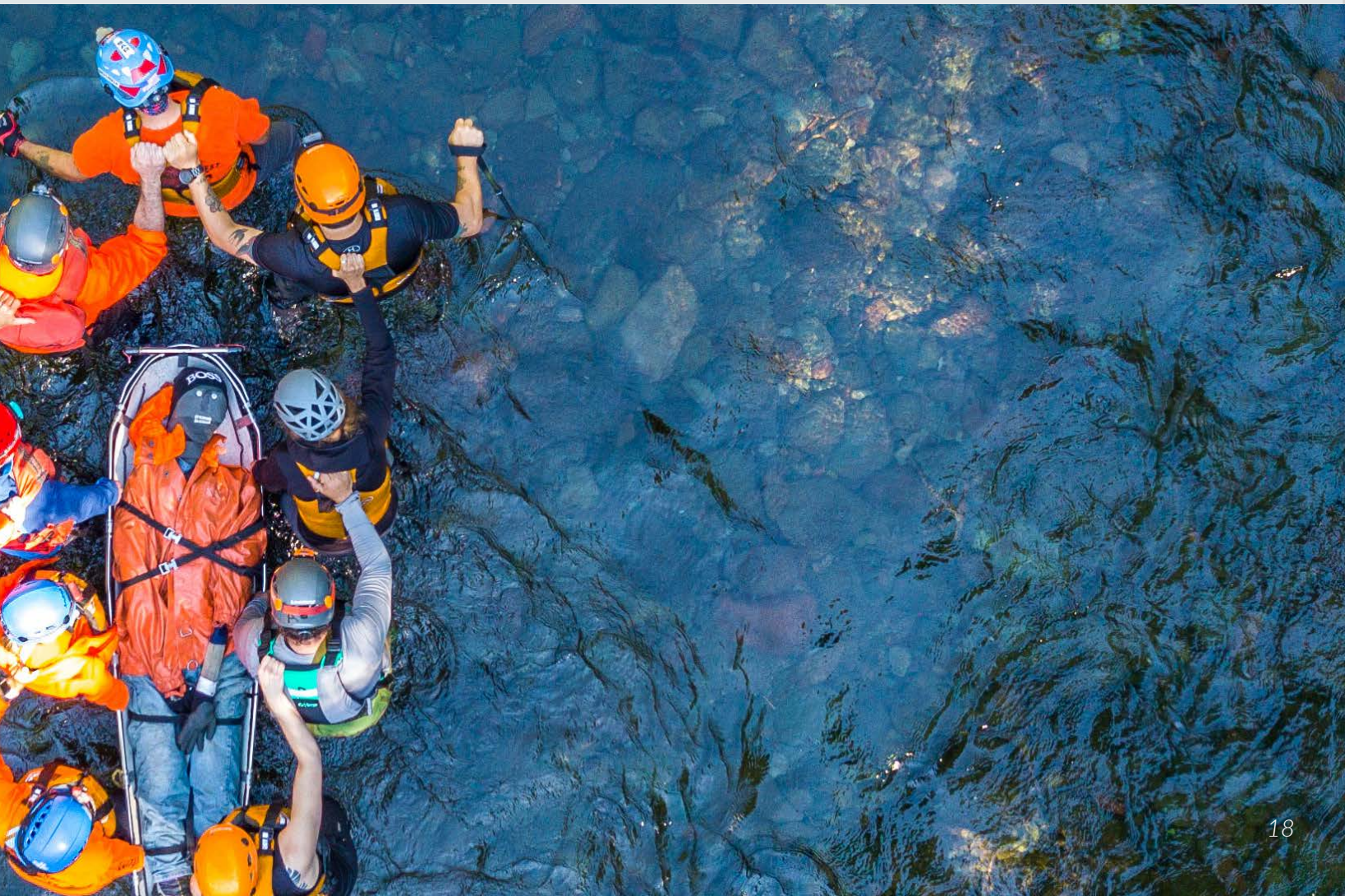
Agencies and entities involved in outdoor recreation promotion and management should curate and/or continue to develop and disseminate responsible recreation education campaigns and marketing materials using various modes of delivery. The Utah Office of Tourism is particularly well-suited to extend their existing high-level, impactful, responsible recreation messaging efforts to state and county websites to the trail maps, brochures, and kiosks individuals interact with immediately before engaging in outdoor recreation. Doing so will help ensure outdoor recreationists receive consistent messages, regardless of where they are recreating.

Integrate program evaluation into outdoor recreation and education programs. Program evaluation should be a key component of education campaigns and training requirements. It is unclear whether simply implementing education campaigns or training requirements will increase safety, recreator ethics, or adoption of desired behaviors. Therefore, any education campaign or mandatory training program should be paired with routine evaluation of the program to ensure the education is having the intended effect. Upon evaluation, campaigns and training requirements can be modified or discontinued if resources could be put to better use elsewhere.

An aerial photograph of a river with clear, shallow water revealing a rocky riverbed. On the right side of the image, several people wearing bright orange safety gear and helmets are visible, likely engaged in a rescue or training exercise. The water is a mix of blue and green, reflecting the surrounding environment.

Outdoor recreation related search and rescue events have increased from around 400–500 in the late 1990s and early 2010s to upwards of 800 in recent years.

Ensure adequate funding for SAR and other visitor management needs. Financial assistance to counties to support SAR efforts have not kept pace with training, search, and equipment costs. The fiscal sustainability of county SAR efforts will likely require both an increase and diversification of financial support. Funding sources should align with the source of the need (e.g., in-state versus out-of-state, activity type, etc) to the extent possible. In addition to support for SAR efforts, many counties support outdoor recreation through road maintenance and waste management. There is a need, and an opportunity, to create creative policy solutions that ensure counties can recoup their financial commitments to provide these services and continue to support outdoor recreation.



Objective 2.2

Foster a sense of stewardship for Utah's outdoors

Outdoor recreation participation fosters a sense of stewardship. Stewardship can involve high-effort activities, such as coordinated trail maintenance, as well as low-effort activities, such as providing small financial donations to support the maintenance of outdoor recreation assets. There is an opportunity for the state to take a leadership role in cultivating and supporting the development of local stewardship initiatives³.



Area of Opportunity

Cultivate the development of local stewardship initiatives. There are many exemplary local stewardship initiatives across the state. These include trails foundations, “friends of” groups, activity-specific clubs (e.g., high school mountain biking clubs), and civic/religious organizations. These groups often face challenges about how to formalize their organization, developing relationships and agreements with state and federal land management agencies, and managing the logistic details of coordinated volunteer efforts. The development of “best practices,” online tools and resources, and a compendium of local stewardship initiatives are needed to hasten the many benefits associated with stewarding the state’s exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities.

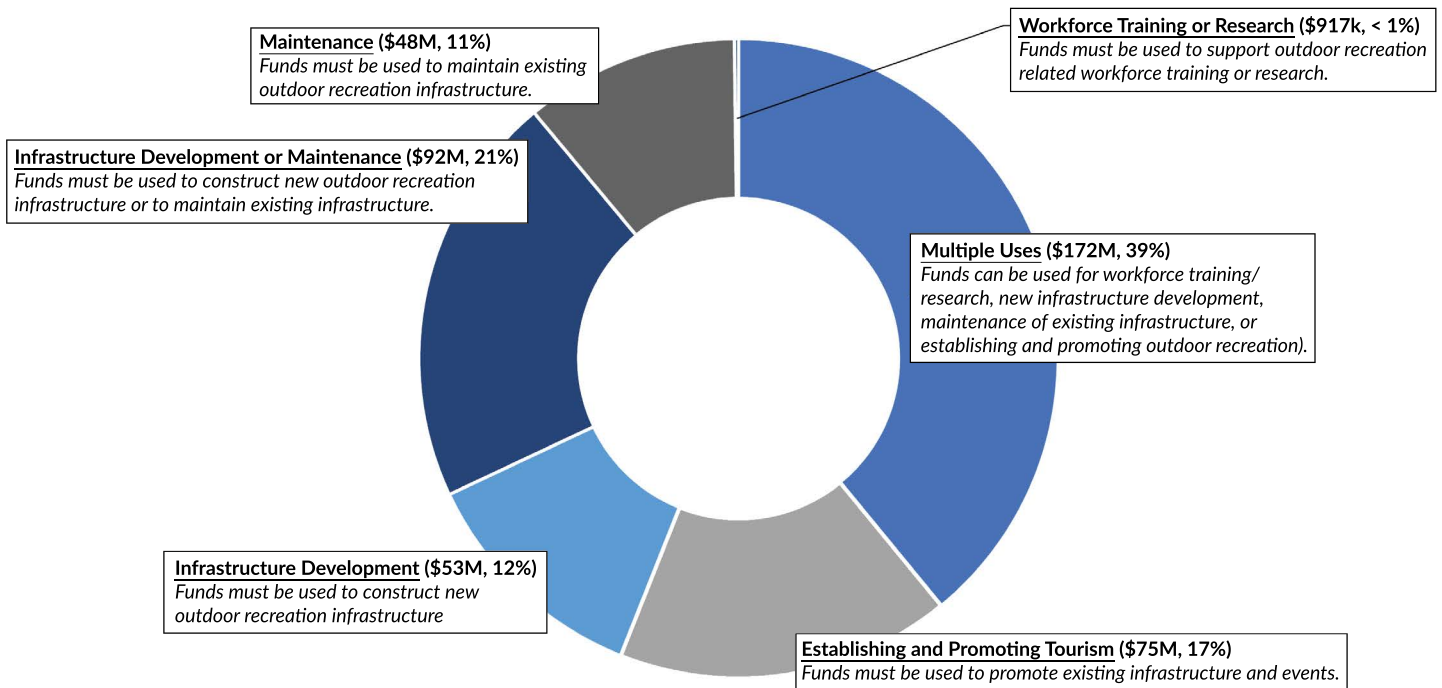
There currently are no state-led mechanisms to cultivate and capitalize on the desire of outdoor recreationists to steward the state's outdoor recreation resources.

Objective 2.3

Minimize conflict between different outdoor recreation activities

Improving awareness of, and education about, safe and responsible recreation can minimize conflict between different outdoor recreation activities. While recreation managers have a variety of direct approaches to minimize conflict such as spatially and temporally separating conflicting modes of experience, indirect approaches are often much more socially acceptable and practically feasible. Education efforts are one of the most common methods of indirect approaches to managing conflict. There is good evidence that educational efforts, whether they be through signage on-site, social media campaigns, or other means, can be used to minimize conflict amount conflicting user groups^{10,11}.

Amount and percentage of annual state and county funding that can be used to support outdoor recreation in different ways.



Area of Opportunity

Assess funding dedicated to workforce training and research. State funding dedicated to support outdoor recreation workforce training and research amounts to only 1/10th of 1% of all state investments in outdoor recreation and tourism. Investments in training programs can ensure municipal, county, state, and federal outdoor recreation managers are utilizing best practices for developing and maintaining outdoor recreation opportunities. An increased investment in outdoor recreation research could also ensure the many entities who manage outdoor recreation assets have readily available and reliable data to inform their management decisions. Workforce training and research specifically focused on mitigating and managing conflict will be particularly needed in the years ahead, as the number of outdoor recreationists within the state increases and the ways individuals can participate in outdoor recreation expands.

More detail in the Strategic Plan's Funding Report³.



Long-term monitoring efforts can quantify outdoor recreation participation rates, use patterns, infrastructure and maintenance needs, and economic benefits throughout the state.

Objective 2.4

Increase all Utahns' awareness of the benefits of outdoor recreation

While nearly three-quarters of the state's population currently participates in outdoor recreation⁴, there are hundreds of thousands of residents who currently do not. A fundamental step to broadening participation within the state will be to understand residents' tastes, preferences, and desired outdoor recreation experiences. This information can be utilized to inform decisions about where new trails, campgrounds, pavilions, and other outdoor recreation assets are constructed. This need will likely become increasingly important as the state's population continues to grow and diversify. Developing strategic marketing and communication efforts that resonate with the state's potential outdoor recreationists will also be an essential step to getting more Utahns recreating outside. Efforts to understand the messages most likely to catalyze participation and facilitate enduring involvement can be utilized by many organizations and agencies that facilitate outdoor recreation. For example, they can be used to inform outreach and education efforts (e.g., safe riding or boating campaigns), on-site messaging (e.g., kiosks, interpretive material, etc.), and efforts to establish and promote outdoor recreation (e.g., county and state marketing efforts).

Area of Opportunity

Identify the preferences, and needs, of outdoor recreationists. Long-term monitoring efforts can quantify outdoor recreation participation rates, use patterns, infrastructure and maintenance needs, as well as the economic benefits generated by outdoor recreation throughout the state. Monitoring efforts can inform infrastructure development priorities of the Legislature and state agencies who coordinate or oversee investments in outdoor recreation infrastructure (Utah Office of Tourism, Utah Department of Transportation, Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation); they can also be used to develop messages designed to catalyze outdoor recreation participation and facilitate enduring involvement.

INCREASE ACCESS TO OUTDOOR RECREATION WHILE PROTECTING NATURAL AND SCENIC LANDSCAPES

Objective 3.1 - Provide a wide variety of recreation opportunities, ranging from the highly-developed to the very primitive

Objective 3.2 - Ensure existing outdoor recreation assets are well maintained for decades to come

Outdoor recreation is a fundamental use of our municipal, county, state, and federal public lands, and efforts to increase access are in the public good. Increased access may involve developing new, or expanding existing, parking lots, staging areas, put-ins, etc. in locations where current infrastructure is inadequate. It may also involve developing new parks, trails, and greenways in areas that are closer to large population centers (e.g., urban reclamation efforts).

The administrative context of an outdoor recreation setting should determine if, where, and how access is increased. “Managing,” as opposed to increasing, access may be well justified in some outdoor recreation settings where use is exceptionally concentrated (e.g., Arches National Park¹²), where the biophysical characteristics of the setting prohibit use beyond a certain point (e.g., Timpanogos Cave National Monument), or where the managing agency is striving to preserve certain types of experiences and desired conditions (e.g., the opportunity to experience solitude in Wilderness areas¹³). Careful thought and local planning is needed to determine if, where, and how more access is provided. If local planning efforts frame these questions around the specific types of outdoor recreation opportunities they are trying to provide, they will be much easier to answer.



Objective 3.1


Provide a wide variety of recreation opportunities, ranging from the highly-developed to the very primitive

Outdoor recreation planners and managers can begin to meet the diverse needs of the public by defining the types of outdoor recreation opportunities they want to provide, and then delineating where they want to provide them across the lands they manage¹⁴. The state's outdoor recreation settings can be characterized by how natural they are, how intensively managed they are, and how much use they receive¹⁵. Different combinations of these characteristics are more, or less, suited to distinct types of outdoor recreation activities. For example, an urban park that is intensively managed and receives a lot of use would facilitate outdoor recreation activities that are dependent upon those characteristics (like community, large family, and religious gatherings). Conversely, a Wilderness setting that receives minimal management and low levels of use would facilitate activities that are dependent upon those characteristics (perhaps backpacking or backcountry skiing). Recent research has characterized these different combinations of characteristics into eight distinct classes, each with prescriptive guidance for managers¹⁶.

Objective 3.1

Area of Opportunity


Support local planning efforts that identify where distinct types of outdoor recreation opportunities should be provided. Municipal, county, regional, and state organizations should begin to inventory and map the types of outdoor recreation opportunities they want to provide. By identifying where distinct types of outdoor recreation opportunities should be provided, outdoor recreation planners and managers can identify complementarities and eliminate redundancies. In the absence of this planning, outdoor recreation systems tend to be dominated by settings that all serve the “average” visitor¹⁰. As a result, everything becomes generic, nothing is unique, and the needs of many current (and potential) outdoor recreationists go unmet.



More natural settings with more infrastructure and heavy use

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- Ensure existing infrastructure minimizes ecological degradation from visitor use
- Continue to invest in maintenance and infrastructure
- Ensure existing infrastructure supports large and diverse groups



More natural settings with more infrastructure and little use

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- Ensure investments in maintenance and infrastructure preserve activities requiring low visitor use densities



More natural settings with less infrastructure and heavy use

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- Invest in infrastructure to minimize environmental degradation from visitor use



More natural settings with less infrastructure and little use

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY


- Preserve opportunities for activities requiring low visitor use densities



Less natural settings with little infrastructure and little use

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- Monitor use for possible increases in demand and associated environmental impacts



Less natural settings with more infrastructure and heavy use

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- Continue to invest in maintenance and infrastructure
- Ensure existing infrastructure supports large and diverse groups



Less natural settings with more infrastructure and little use

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- Reallocate management resources to areas with more demand

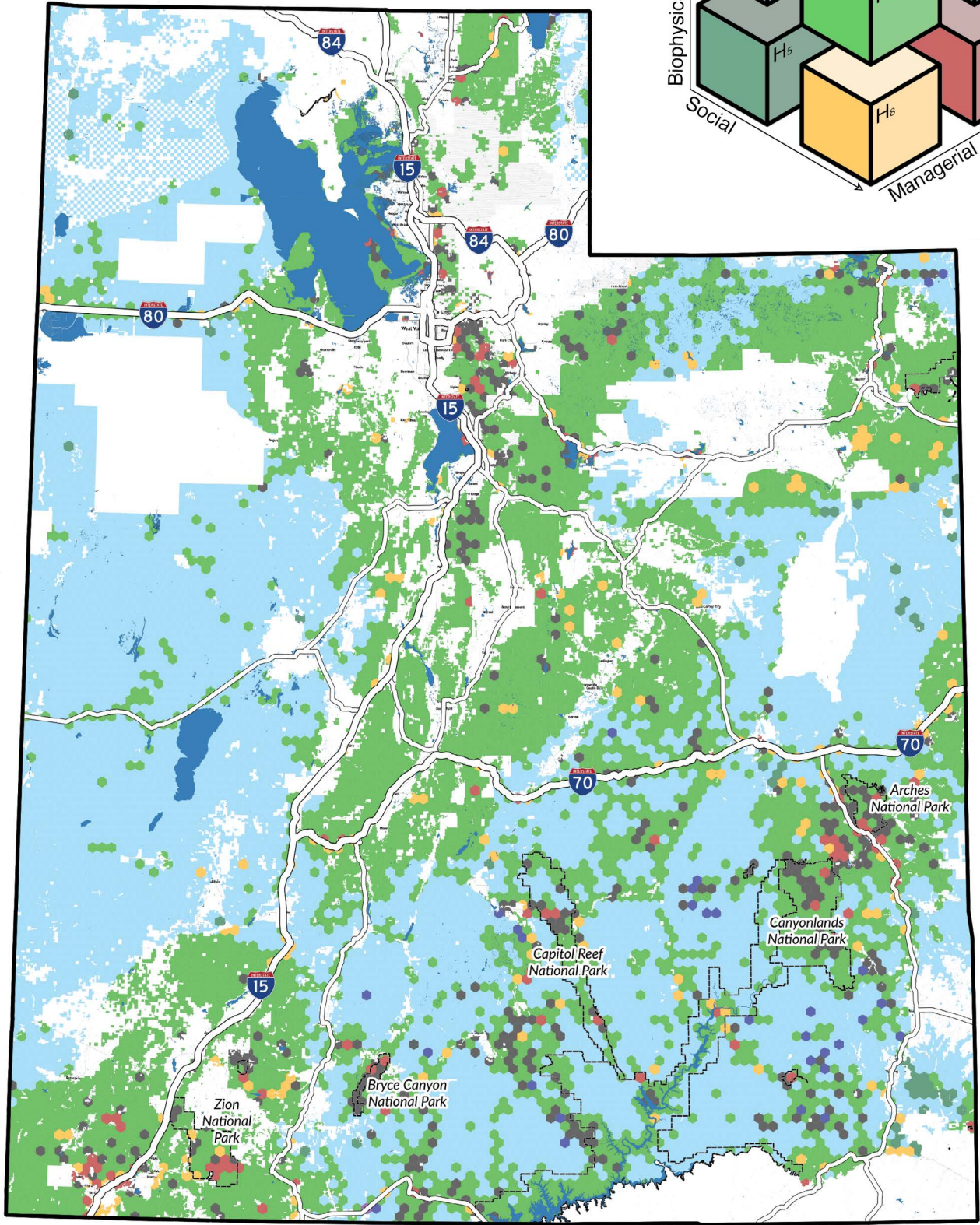
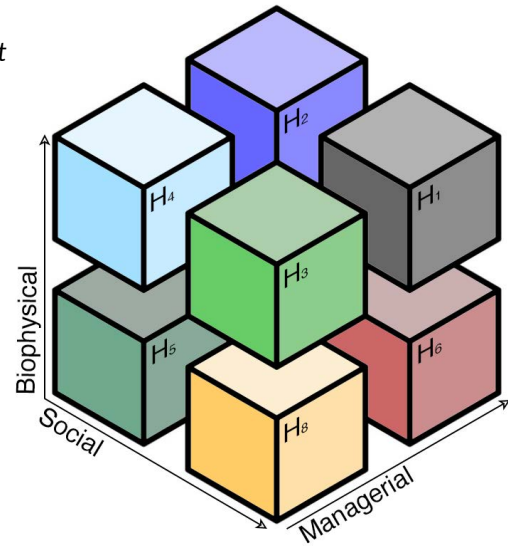


Less natural settings with little infrastructure and heavy use

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- Invest in infrastructure to meet demand

Recreation opportunities are commonly defined by how natural settings are, how much management presence there is, and how much use they receive. Different combinations of these characteristics facilitate different types of experiences. Resource managers and supporting agencies can strategically invest in different types of settings to preserve the diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities provided across the state.



Data source: Zhang & Smith (2023)¹⁶


Objective 3.2

Ensure existing outdoor recreation assets are well maintained for decades to come

A lack of funding for operational and maintenance costs is a major concern for outdoor recreation managers in Utah⁵. Yearly evaluations, vegetation control, mowing, signage updates, trash removal, flood and rain damage, patching concrete and asphalt, and possibly regrading are all regular annual maintenance requirements and costs that managing agencies should have plans to support. Covering these costs will ensure outdoor recreation systems do not face deferred maintenance backlogs in the future. The state is currently supporting the maintenance of outdoor recreation infrastructure through a variety of programs³; efforts to bolster this support could alleviate the concerns of municipalities and counties who do not utilize use fees to cover operational and maintenance costs¹⁷.

Area of Opportunity

Support the maintenance of outdoor recreation infrastructure. With maintenance backlogs being a consistent concern among municipal, county, state, and federal outdoor recreation providers within the state, creative policy and management solutions are needed to ensure outdoor recreation infrastructure is maintained. Stewardship programs, use fees, taxes, and support from private industry can all be used to address maintenance concerns. Thoughtful and coordinated discussions are needed to determine when, where, and how each of these potential solutions can be utilized.



Fiscal resources to cover operational and maintenance costs are essential to avoiding deferred maintenance backlogs.

INCREASE THE ECONOMIC AND HEALTH BENEFITS GENERATED BY OUTDOOR RECREATION

Outdoor recreation benefits individuals, families, and communities across the state. Utah's parks, greenspaces, and trails provide opportunities to walk, run, play, and socialize – all essential elements of a healthy and balanced lifestyle. Utah's exceptional access to outdoor recreation opportunities shape our identity; they are also significant reasons why the state is one of the happiest and fittest in the country. Preserving and building upon Utahns' exceptional ability to connect with nature will be essential to preserving our identity and extraordinary lifestyles well into the future.

Outdoor recreation is also a significant part of the state's economy⁴. The economic benefits from outdoor recreation are realized in many ways, some of which are not obvious. Tax revenues from the sale of goods and services supporting outdoor recreation are the most apparent. For example, purchasing a lift ticket and renting ski gear for example, supports the state's ski towns. Other less-apparent benefits include the desire of private businesses to relocate to the state because of our high-quality and easily accessible outdoor recreation opportunities¹⁸. Healthy, active, and nature-based lifestyles also reduce healthcare costs, an often overlooked benefit of developing and improving access to outdoor recreation opportunities¹⁹.

Strategic investments can be made to support the communities where outdoor recreation is occurring. Doing so allows these communities to grow and support outdoor recreation in the ways that they want and in a fiscally sustainable way. Additionally, efforts to expand awareness of the benefits of outdoor recreation can expand the many positive physical and mental health outcomes of getting outside. Investments in these areas will help ensure future generations of Utahns can live healthy, active, and nature-based lifestyles and that the communities serving as launching points into the outdoors can do so for decades to come.

Objective 4.1 - *Distribute the economic benefits of outdoor recreation to the areas where use is occurring*

Objective 4.2 - *Increase the capacity of gateway and natural amenity regions to plan for, and manage, non-local visitation*

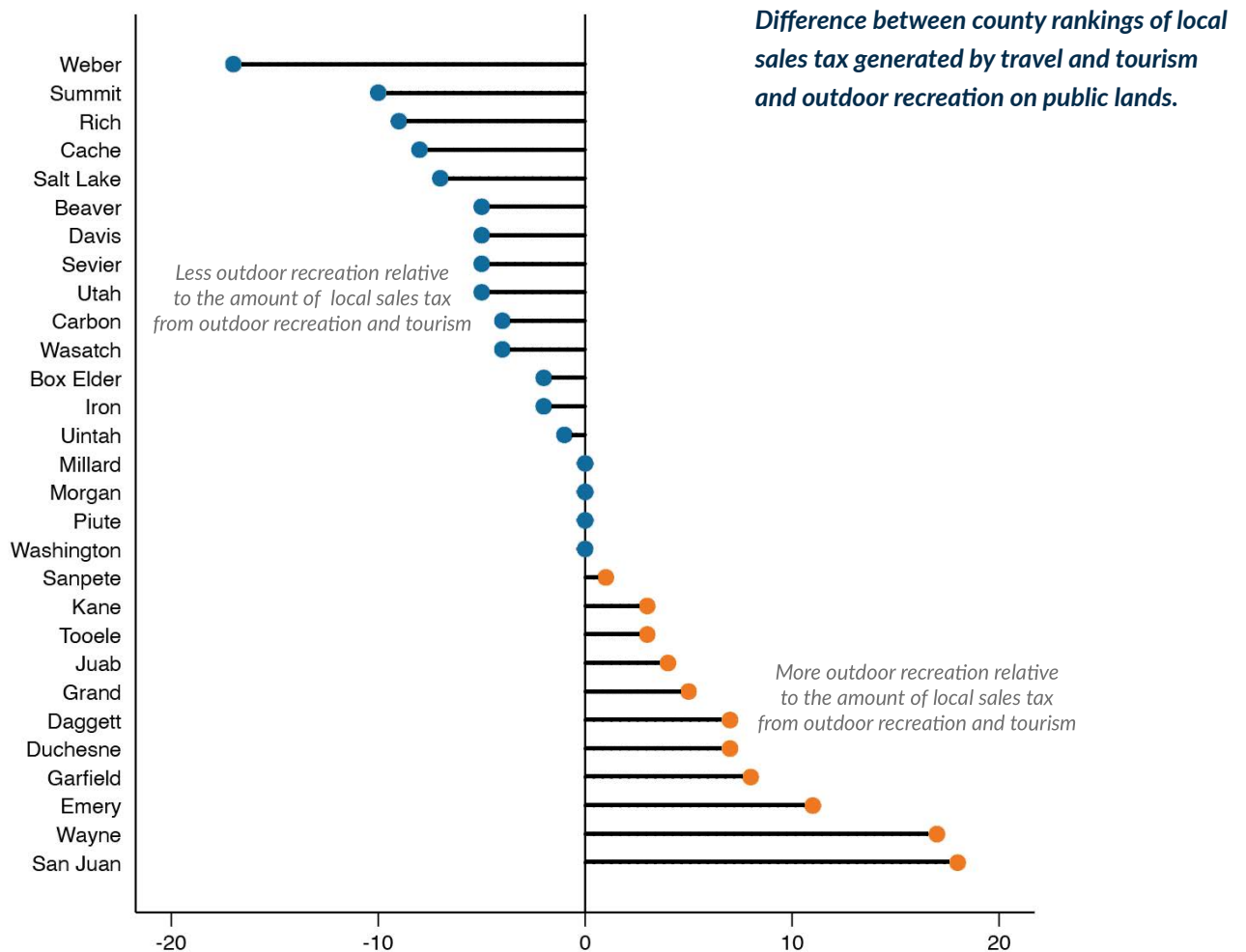
Objective 4.3 - *Improve the ability of individuals to achieve the mental and physical benefits of outdoor recreation*

Objective 4.1

Distribute the economic benefits of outdoor recreation to the areas where use is occurring

Outdoor recreationists who live along the Wasatch Front purchase the vast majority of the supplies supporting their outdoor recreation trips (e.g., clothing, equipment, food, fuel, etc.) close to where they live, as opposed to close to the places they recreate. Even when outdoor recreationists do spend money locally in less populous destinations, their purchases tend to only include food, fuel, and (maybe) lodging. Rarely if ever do outdoor recreationists make large purchases (durable goods such as recreational vehicles) within the taxing authority where they recreate. This creates an obvious disparity between where tax revenue is generated and where the impacts of that purchase will be felt. More focused efforts to support the municipalities and counties where outdoor recreation is occurring can help ensure these communities are able to grow their outdoor recreation economies in ways that respect local values and interests. These efforts can also support the development of higher quality, safer, and more sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities.

There is an opportunity to align where the tax revenues from outdoor recreation are generated and where outdoor recreation support services are most needed.



More detail in the Strategic Plan's Workshop Report⁵.



Objective 4.2

Increase the capacity of gateway and natural amenity regions to plan for, and manage, non-local visitation

Gateway communities are the small cities and towns located on the “doorstep” of national parks, national forests, and other public lands. These communities experience unique planning and development challenges stemming from their proximity to popular outdoor recreation and tourism destinations, and the corresponding high levels of tourism they experience²⁰. Many of the major challenges to Utah’s gateway communities center around the capacity of gateway communities to plan for, and manage, outdoor recreation use in a way that both outdoor recreationists and tourists have desirable experiences and local residents can retain the autonomy and quality of life they want.

Area of Opportunity

Support planning assistance programs tailored to the unique challenges of Utah’s gateway communities. There is an exceptional need to bolster the capacity of Utah’s gateway communities to plan for, and manage, outdoor recreation in ways that reflect their needs, values, and vision. Some gateway communities may not want to develop more extensive outdoor recreation and tourism economies, seeing visitors as the source of unwanted problems. Alternatively, some gateway communities may be looking to outdoor recreation and tourism as bastions of prosperity after other industries have gradually dwindled away. Regardless of their desired path forward, Utah’s gateway communities need the tools and resources to chart, and achieve, their own path forward. Planning assistance programs that share best practices and lessons learned across gateway communities are needed.

Objective 4.3

Improve the ability of individuals to achieve the mental and physical benefits of outdoor recreation

The connection between nature and health has been apparent for at least several decades²¹. The state is now well positioned to invest in efforts that encourage outdoor recreation as a means of connecting with nature and subsequently improving physical and mental health. Strategic investments in connecting people to nature through outdoor recreation holds the promise of reducing healthcare costs¹⁹ and increasing the public's understanding of the biophysical world²². Ample opportunities exist to build connections between the programs of state health departments, the medical community, and outdoor recreation management agencies. Building these connections help ensure future generations of Utahns can live healthy, active, and nature-based lifestyles.

Area of Opportunity

Support programs that improve the ability of individuals to achieve the mental and physical benefits of outdoor recreation. Addiction, chronic disease, and mental health issues are an unfortunate part of every Utah community. State policies designed to mitigate these unwanted issues include:

- Integrating outdoor recreation into wellness policies at state institutions
- Programs that provide training and support to medical professionals regarding the benefits of outdoor recreation
- Requirements and technical support for counties and municipalities to assess the public health impacts of new development
- Requirements for school districts to adopt wellness policies that support or mandate time spent participating in outdoor recreation



Conclusion

This strategic plan provides a unified direction for how the many municipalities, counties, state and federal agencies can all focus their outdoor recreation policy and management efforts in the years ahead. The four Cardinal Directions serve as bearings on the horizon, guiding the many disparate actions of these entities towards a common end. The plan builds upon the state's long and pioneering history of investing in outdoor recreation³. Previous investments have proven invaluable to building the many high-quality and easily-accessible outdoor recreation opportunities that millions of Utahns enjoy each year. Hiking along the foothills above Salt Lake City, boating in Jordanelle, riding a side-by-side down the Piute trail, and mountain biking

the red rock of Moab are all truly unique Utah outdoor recreation experiences. An incalculable number of positive memories have been made at outdoor recreation destinations like these. They are just a few of the examples where state investments have created a lasting impact on the health and well-being of Utahns. Through the strategic direction laid out in this plan, we can ensure future generations of Utahns will be able to pursue an unparalleled diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities, live active and healthy lifestyles, and make their own memories outdoors. Outdoor recreation in Utah has an exceptionally bright past, the direction charted in this plan will help ensure the future is even brighter.



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