Overview

Outdoor recreation presents a unique opportunity to serve diverse constituencies because it is a powerful driver of economic growth, produces jobs, strengthens families and communities, and provides tangible physical and mental health benefits. In addition to fulfilling a basic human need for fun and relaxation, time spent outside has been shown to reduce the risk of obesity, reduce stress and help treat ADHD in children, and ameliorate PTSD symptoms in veterans. Outdoor recreation programming can be a powerful tool for diverting at-risk youth from dangerous behaviors and for building skills and confidence in people with special needs. Furthermore, participation in outdoor recreation activities can galvanize support for public land conservation.

Legislation

There are several legislative approaches to promoting outdoor recreation and protecting public lands, including:

- Developing grant programs to provide outdoor education for underserved youth, such as Washington’s No Child Left inside program, which also employs veterans.
- Creating a state Office of Outdoor Recreation to coordinate industry and opportunities, such as Colorado, Utah (SB73), and Washington (SB5843), and more recently Oregon (HB3350) and North Carolina.
- Designating a specific day as “Public Lands Day,” such as Colorado (SB21), Nevada (SB413), New Mexico (SM11), Ohio (HR120), Oregon (HB2143), and Virginia (HJR640).
- Increasing access to parks, such as Nevada AB385 that grants students ages 9 to 11 free entry to state parks.

Key Points

- The outdoor recreation economy consists of $887 billion in consumer spending and 7.6 million American jobs.
- Voters in Western states strongly support outdoor recreation related activities on public lands, including infrastructure improvements (94%), improving access (82%), and promoting the outdoor economy (79%).
- There is a growing body of research demonstrating the physical and mental benefits of outdoor recreation and time in nature, e.g., children being better able to focus their attention and reduced PTSD symptoms and stress levels in veterans.

Other Resources

- Outdoor Industry Association’s Recreation Economy Report, including an overview for each state.
- Colorado College Conservation in the West 2017 Poll.
- The Great Outdoors Lab in Action Research Summary.
- Children and Nature Network Infographic.