

MN Outdoor Recreation Task Force August Meeting Notes

Date: 08/26/2020 & 08/27/2020

Location: Webex

Attendance

Task Force Members:

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Agency Staff:

John Edman (Explore Minnesota), Randolph Briley (DNR), Gratia Joice (DNR), Leann Kispert (Explore Minnesota), Andrew Korsberg (DNR), Shannon Lotthammer (DNR), Madison McGovern (CCMI/DNR), Laura Preus (DNR), Erika Rivers (DNR)

Meeting Notes

Day 1:

Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Presentation

Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) is America's leading coalition of 30 outdoor recreation trade association and organizations working to promote the growth of the outdoor recreation economy and activities. ORR has a state committee focusing on outdoor recreation issues at the state level. The co-chairs of the state committee, Ashley Brinkman and Jill Sims presented to the task force.

- ORR represents 110,000 businesses with interests including skiing, hunting, climbing, fishing, diving, off-roading, boating, and more.
- 3 committees within ORR
 - Government relations committee – federal level
 - Communications committee
 - State committee – newer committee working with states that have existing offices of outdoor recreation (OREC offices) and supporting efforts in states which do not have offices

- OREC offices implement strategic plans to grow recreation through state policies, programs, and initiatives
 - OREC offices are placed in different areas
 - Wisconsin's office is placed in the tourism department
 - Michigan's office is shared between their DNR and economic development corporation
- Confluence of States
 - Group of states focused on bipartisan collaboration to amplify the outdoor recreation voice focused on four principles
 - 1) Conservation and stewardship
 - 2) Education and workforce training
 - 3) Economic development
 - 4) Public health and wellness
- Outdoor recreation economy
 - National
 - 2.2% of US GDP
 - \$778 billion annually
 - 5.2 million jobs
 - Minnesota
 - 2.7% of GDP
 - \$9.6 billion annually
 - 101,000 jobs
- Benefits of an OREC office
 - Collaboration
 - OREC directors take on a collaborative role
 - Can reduce inefficiencies, redundancies, and silos through communication and knowledge sharing
 - OREC offices can act as facilitator between other state offices, i.e., Tourism and DNR
 - Central contact point at the state level for constituents and businesses
 - Promoting accessibility of the outdoors
 - Helping people become more comfortable in outdoor spaces
 - Grant programs to help underrepresented groups outdoors
 - State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)
 - Help with coordination and drafting the 5-year plan making a state eligible to receive funding through Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON)
 - COVID-19 response
 - Influx of inquiries and requests for information or aid came through associations and the OREC directors became a good point of contact
 - Some manufacturers were connected and began to produce personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Task Force member questions and discussion
 - Would having an OREC office help manage maintenance backlogs and utilize available funding?

- Some areas have seen improvement in backlog maintenance and planning for grants and funding opportunities.
 - 38 outdoor recreation infrastructure projects for LAWCON funding – 34 were in states with OREC offices
 - DNR – these projects fit into ORFP funding
 - LAWCON works differently for each state—in MN, the DNR is the liaison
 - In MN, 40% go directly to funding national lands
 - 40% goes to stateside program
 - Half of this is dedicated to state lands and the other half is dedicated to a grant program that funnels funds to support state, local, and municipal outdoor recreation systems
 - 20% is divided among 5 programs
 - Forest Legacy
 - Endangered Species
 - Battlefields
 - Highlands Conservation Act
 - Outdoor Recreation Legacy
 - Funds specifically devoted to communities with 50,000 people or more living in them
- Challenges to setting up an OREC office?
 - Not approaching the state correctly – using a one size fits all approach
 - Using broad enough language to allow room for a state’s specific needs
 - Not enough cross-pollination and collaboration across sectors
 - Industry needs to see opportunities for growth and increasing equity that are available – most population growth in Minnesota has been black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) communities
 - Industry tends to be slower to respond but are seeing the market change
 - Recognize that BIPOC and poverty are not synonymous
- What does diversity of activities and providing access to them look like?
 - Industries are working on bridging the gap and not all activities and interests were included in earlier descriptions, for example, hiking is included.
 - Continued problem of equating poverty with underserved groups and communities
 - Reconcile motivations of for-profit companies with promoting equal access of shared lands
 - Providing access to equipment
 - Metro-area should not be excluded from opportunities of growth

Outdoor Recreation Office Panel Discussion

- Panelists
 - Brad Garmon – Michigan Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry Director

- Conversation started with state parks and outdoor recreation as integral to Michigan's quality of life, economics, and community sustainability
- 2018, the former governor convened the outdoor rec advisory council with 18 members
 - Pulls in non-profit, advocate voices, and industry
 - Still felt an office was necessary in addition to the council
- Michigan is a part of the Confluence of States
- Focus on economic development
- Learnings
 - MN is ahead with conversations about diversity and equity
 - How can we help industry to make the change they want to see in representation and elevating voices in leadership
 - Bring in different voices and people to speak at these conversations
 - Brad is hosting virtual conversations with people of different backgrounds and expertise to center the idea that outdoor recreation is not a white activity
 - Challenge to carve a lane that is necessary and not redundancy of other efforts in tourism or DNR
 - Trying to bridge the network with the private sector from the government side of the effort
 - Solution is different for different states depending on focus and needs
- Cailin O'Brien-Feeney – Oregon Office of Outdoor Recreation Director
 - Created in 2017 and housed within the Department of Parks and Recreation
 - Oregon had an Outdoor Recreation Task Force of 33 people developing recommendations in 2019 to early 2020
 - Recently published and will set priorities for the state
 - Greatest value of the office is the point of contact provided to the state
 - Especially helpful to have this during the pandemic to direct the state's approach to outdoor rec policy
 - Included economic recovery and safety of being outdoors in a pandemic
 - Challenges
 - View internal to government that agencies may be giving up sovereignty by participating
 - OREC office should just be a convener
 - Oregon Parks and Recreation is supported by user fees and lottery revenue only
 - Currently in a tight budget and temporarily identified as a layoff
 - Short term and bridge funding provided by other agencies because of cross-agency collaboration in work
 - Diversifying funding streams is critical
- Lindsey Davis – Vice President of ORR and Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation advisory committee member
 - OREC Office is 7 years old

- Office of Outdoor Recreation and Office of Tourism held a town hall with Senator Romney and his staff
 - 400 people attended the session
 - Define recreation as more than a tourism driver
 - Pandemic hit recreation 31% higher than national average
 - OREC advisory committee is a 40+ person group that meets monthly to support the OREC office
 - Represents non-profits, businesses, conservation groups, etc
 - Priorities this year have been CARES Act, PPE, and EIDL assistance
 - Outdoor recreation is up 150% for Utah
 - Generally good reception to the office
 - Good opportunities to share best practices and understand problems that arise (major sewage issues from overuse of specific areas)
 - Close to home recreation is important for health, well-being, and community livability
- Discussion
 - Top pieces of advice?
 - Be clear on steps toward implementation of priorities
 - Identify gaps
 - Consider collaborative funding
 - New Mexico's outdoor equity funds?
 - There are youth outdoor grant funds in Utah and Washington
 - Metropolitan Parks and Open Space capital equity grant program
 - Metrics to measure success?
 - Michigan is building metrics
 - Economics based – number of jobs, size
 - Health metrics
 - Access to safe recreation in communities
 - Oregon
 - Trends in outdoor recreation participation
 - Task force plan
 - Brainstorming ideas for conservation and stewardship

NGA Presentation

- Bevin Buchheister, senior policy analyst for the National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices presented on the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network, which she helped launch in 2019
 - The network engages state outdoor recreation issues related to conservation, stewardship, education, workforce training, economic development, infrastructure, equity, inclusion, public health, and wellness.
- The Outdoor Recreation Learning Network formed to help OREC offices and states with these offices to leverage their resources to advance outdoor recreation benefits.
 - 26 member states

- Each has an appointed point person
 - Do not need an OREC office to be a member
 - Sponsored by REI, OIA, ORR, and VF
 - Content is not driven by sponsors, but by members, governor's advisors, or outdoor recreation officials.
 - There are two members from each state and an annual meeting each year
- Key Issues
 - Economic development
 - Conservation and stewardship
 - Education
 - Workforce training
 - Public health
 - Equity and wellness
- Peer network
 - Information sharing at monthly calls and annual meeting
 - First annual meeting shared information on formation of offices; funding sources for agencies, workers, and economic impact studies; handling federal land acquisitions
 - Best practices in a pandemic
 - Park closures, dealing with crowds, new visitors unfamiliar with outdoor ethic
- Where OREC offices are housed
 - Economic development departments
 - Some funded through agency
 - Public-private partnership in North Carolina
 - Governor's office of economic development (Utah)
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Natural Resources departments
 - Office of tourism
- Ways to create an office
 - Executive action
 - Memorandum of Understanding
 - Bill
 - Resolution
- Great American Outdoors Act
 - Increased dedicated funding to states
 - States must match funds at 50% to access
- Additional funds
 - USDA
 - Rural economic development opportunities and technical assistance grants
- Successful initiatives by any states for improving access specifically for individuals with disabilities?
 - Maryland taps into state dedicated funds to match LAWCON and created accessible boating marina and program

Day 2:

Work Group Report-Outs

Work groups shared updated SWOTs.

Stewardship and Conservation

- Group was generally happy with where the SWOT stood in August
- Did not have any changes, but open to input from task force members

Promotion and Public Awareness

- Condensed items into topics
- Approach is based on a five year vision of success
- The broad nature of outdoor recreation, the many diverse interests in the state, makes cohesive messaging a challenge.
- A collaboration amongst the state's outdoor community and varied interests can form a cohesive voice to better communicate to government, individuals in all demographics, and the private sector.
- Parity for outdoor interests
 - Unifying outdoor rec space by pulling groups together and advocating worth of outdoors and tourism and placing individual interests later
- Agency overlap and capacity
 - DNR and Explore Minnesota communicated and promote similar information
- Format Updates
 - Downloadable PDFs, paper maps, brochures limit reach to new demographics
 - Move toward apps, social media, video, and mobile-first strategies
- Funding
 - Dollars for tourism promotion and other marketing allocated from the MN Legislature is disproportionate to some neighboring states. More budget (appropriately allocated) will help the state better promote outdoor recreation and reach new consumers.
- Partnerships
 - Public and private partnerships
 - Can increase funding, exposures, technology, expertise, marketing niches, etc.
- Formalized outdoor recreation
 - More formal approach to planning and a seat at the table for important events
- Appropriate funding
 - Proper staffing and funds to achieve goals

Economic Development

- Vision statement: Unite and invest in Minnesota's resources to drive a world-class outdoor economy that facilitates obstacle-free access, promotion, awareness, stewardship & conservation on behalf of Minnesota's residents.
- Five year vision of success
 - Bringing together outdoor recreation stakeholders and resources to collaborate on behalf of our shared parks, forests, trails, transportation corridors and destinations.
 - Building and strengthening and growing public/private partnerships, ensuring all Minnesota's landscapes are positioned as equal tenants in the Minnesota brand if you will.
 - Sharing resources.
 - Wisdom, best practices, bringing together the silos that exist out there.
 - Seeking to see the unseen, hear the unheard, questioning the status quo in that approach.
 - To lean out, simplify, make effective the system of both information creation and information sharing that is intended for the consumption of Minnesota residents.
 - Focusing on their creating a pathway to get government communication out of government circles.
 - Make this communication mainstream.
 - Creating metrics of money spent on outdoors
 - Creating a path where economic development within MN's outdoors has the ability to have an economic impact for residents and businesses
 - Make better known the SCORP plan for the Minnesota outdoors, as created from a position of reference the plan as decisions are made on an ongoing basis.
 - Refreshing the communication tools to speak the language of the 21st century mobile customer
 - Audiences outside of Minnesota
 - Establishing communication partners to distribute Minnesota's positioning statements or brand to unique niche or target audiences outside of the Minnesota market.
 - Creation of an Office of Outdoor Recreation to help us coordinate, create, design, implement, deliver upon all of those goals.
 - Funding and staffing the office appropriately.
 - Prioritizing Minnesota residents first.
 - Building real relationships and unity among varied and different outdoor recreation groups, and industry within the state.
 - Understanding and deploying economic development tools and investments where outcome and end product to first build economy of Minnesota's residents and businesses.

Coordination

- Vision statement: Work together to create a strong, sustainable outdoor recreation community that delivers inclusivity, enhances diversity, builds economy and reduces conflict.
- Deliverables
 - 1. Bringing together the outdoor recreation stakeholders within Minnesota annually. Build community. Drive relationships. Facilitate unified understanding of outdoor recreation.
 - Also bring together groups that to date have not had an opportunity or voice to sit at the table.
 - BIPOC
 - Underserved communities
 - Women in general
 - Share and make clear the SCORP the State of Minnesota is currently implementing.
 - When more of Minnesota knows the plan, be open to adjusting the plan based on the feedback of a greater response from Minnesota
 - 2. Clearly understand an object is not needed for outdoor recreation.
 - Being outside is outdoor recreation.
 - 3. Minnesota has established a “Culture of Outdoors” that is welcoming of everyone.
 - Values of how we will all treat each other, when we are outside together
 - We have world-class outdoors, if we can build atop of that excellence a welcoming culture of safety, inclusivity, togetherness, stewardship — Minnesota will be a destination for our outdoor culture, on top of the outdoor resources.
 - 4. An office of OR exists that can coordinate, create, design, implement, and deliver upon these goals
 - Fund and staff this office appropriately prioritizing Minnesota residents first.
 - Minnesota residents need to know outdoor opportunities available to them.
 - And once Minnesota residents learn what’s available, this Office should continue to ask what they are missing, evolve, adapt, grow.
 - Promote Minnesota’s outdoor benefits to broader world.
 - Build real relationships/unity amongst the varied and different outdoor recreation groups within Minnesota.
 - Relationships where compromise is not considered failure, but creating a win/win based on our total population, our total natural resources, and our total funding to make it all happen.
- Discussion
 - Support for number 3 especially – great way of leading together and leading nationally
 - Minnesota has great natural resources and should be proactive in defining the culture around it

Access

- Inclusivity
 - Listing out groups which may be underserved or underrepresented

- Black, indigenous, people of color, including state-wide Native communities
 - People with disabilities
 - LGBTQ
 - Immigrant communities
 - People with limited income
 - People with limited outdoor experience
 - Varied education levels
- Be explicit –funds were being used for things other than identified targets
- Vision
 - Increasing leadership positions with diversity for park programs
 - Building bridges with community liaisons
 - Reorganizing cost structures to provide more free and lower cost outdoor recreation opportunities
 - Promoting stewardship and educating younger generations on opportunities
 - Safety and welcoming place for all communities in recreation
 - Zero tolerance policy for racism

Grand Visioning

One member from each work group will work together to create a holistic vision statement.

Public Engagement Subcommittee Ideas

Randolph Briley, Gratia Joice, Aaron Hautala, Greg Lais, and Katy Friesz are working together on the public engagement subcommittee to develop a public engagement strategy related to getting feedback on recommendations developed by the task force.

- Two categories of public engagement
 - Formal opportunities
 - One or two large virtual public engagement sessions
 - Share background information and draft recommendations
 - Ask for feedback: What do you like? What don't you like? What is missing? What should be prioritized?
 - Two to four focused public engagement opportunities with identified groups
 - Groups not at the table; groups we should further engage with
 - Informal opportunities
 - Shareable information and survey to collect feedback:
 - Background information
 - Draft recommendations
 - Short survey: What do you like? What don't you like? What is missing? What should be prioritized?
 - Who's involved?

- Task force members to leverage personal/professional networks to seek feedback
- ORTF listserv
- Other groups ID'd by task force members and through public comment at task force meetings
 - Bang the Table
 - Platform launching that can be used for public engagement
- Communicating outside of government circles
 - Link to a website?
 - Clearly states goal of work and provides background/context
 - Share out of task force member networks
- Make sure to focus information that hasn't already been focused on elsewhere
- Not a lot of data on non-users available or how land use may differ from traditional uses

Next Steps

- Homework
 - Within work groups, have draft recommendations ready by September 16th.
- Review of Timeline
 - Review draft recommendations at September meeting.
 - Small group meeting between September and October to collate draft recommendations and finalize before public engagement.
 - October and November – public engagement period
 - Fine tune recommendations based on public input by December

Next Meeting

The next official task force meeting is scheduled for September 21st.