



Creating Outdoor Recreation Economies (CORE)

The NC Department of Commerce's Main Street & Rural Planning Center announces a technical assistance program offering Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Planning and Asset Development services.

The program will offer planning and asset development to leverage the abundant outdoor recreation resources available across the state of North Carolina to bolster local economic vitality. This will be accomplished through focusing on activities communities can do to: Increase tourism; Encourage small business development; Position communities to attract outdoor gear manufacturing industries; Plan for outdoor recreation asset and infrastructure development; and Enhance quality of life improvements for residents.

In North Carolina, outdoor recreation is a big economic driver!

- \$9.9 Billion in total Outdoor Recreation Value Added economic impact within North Carolina
- 123,647 direct jobs statewide in the Outdoor Recreation associated employment categories
- \$5.2 Billion in wages and compensation for North Carolina workers

How can your community benefit from this dynamic economic sector?

Creating Outdoor Recreation Economies (CORE) Application

[Apply](#)

Creating Outdoor Recreation Economies (CORE) Primary Contact

David McRae

Appalachian Regional Commission Assistant Program Manager

North Carolina Department of Commerce

919-814-4672 office

984-365-0853 mobile

david.mcrae@commerce.nc.gov

FAQs

What is an outdoor recreation economy?

The outdoor recreation economy is a broad economic sector that includes consumer spending on things such as guides, outfitters, and equipment. Outdoor recreation also fuels employment and consumer spending in other sectors such as manufacturing, retail, transportation, food service, tourism, travel, and more. There are also other intangible and harder to quantify economic benefits of outdoor recreation that include improved physical and mental health and attracting residents and workforce talent. All of which can make your community a more desirable place to live, work, and play.

How can community and economic development planning enhance a local outdoor recreation economy?

The strategic planning process will provide an economic vision developed with input from community leaders and public participation.

The visioning process will identify recommendations and activities to build an ecosystem of places where people participate in outdoor recreation, small business support, outdoor recreation infrastructure that increases quality of life for residents, tourism, creative placemaking, and more. These elements work together to increase economic opportunity and community vitality.

Is there grant funding available through this program?

No. There is no direct grant funding available under this program. However, identifying potential funding opportunities is a component of the strategic planning process.

What does a community need to do to engage with the Rural Planning Center for these services?

- A representative of the local government must complete a brief application.
- A Memorandum of Understanding approved by the local governing board is required to engage the NC Department of Commerce's Main Street & Rural Planning Center in the planning process.

What is expected from communities who participate in this program?

- A representative from the unit of local government to serve as the primary point of contact.
- Approval of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the local governing board is required.
- Collaboration with the Rural Planning Center to form a stakeholder's group to provide input and steer the planning process.
- Collaboration with the Rural Planning Center to gather other public participation and input during the planning process.

What is the duration of the strategic planning process?

We will tailor the strategic planning process to meet the needs of each individual community. Therefore, the duration of each planning process will vary from community to community.

What are the benefits of strategically planning to enhance your local outdoor recreation economy?

- Outdoor recreation is a big economic driver in North Carolina:
 - \$9.9 Billion in total Outdoor Recreation Value Added economic impact within North Carolina in 2020.
 - 123,647 direct jobs statewide in the Outdoor Recreation associated employment categories
 - \$5.2 Billion in wages and compensation for North Carolina workers
 - In 2017, Outdoor Recreation in NC resulted in \$28 Billion in total consumer spending
- People want to participate in outdoor recreation of all kinds:
 - Nationwide, 7.1 million more Americans participated in outdoor recreation in 2020 than in the year prior.
 - 56% of North Carolinians participate in some form of outdoor recreation each year.
 - This includes more than 22.8 million visitors to North Carolina State Parks in 2021 — three million more than any other year on record.
- Quality of Life for Residents:
 - People want to live, work, and play in communities with high quality of life, and increasingly this includes access to outdoor recreation.
 - There are numerous benefits to participating in outdoor recreation including physical and mental health, workforce recruitment, and enhanced community placemaking.

What types of people and organizations should be included during the planning process?

A diverse stakeholder group that represents the broad spectrum associated with the outdoor recreation economic ecosystem will achieve the most successful strategic planning outcomes. Ideally this group will remain together as a cohesive entity after the completion of the plan to continue work on implementing recommendations. Not all groups are required to be represented on the primary stakeholder group, and input from certain sectors can be provided via surveys and other public input methods. But a diverse cross-section will be beneficial to the planning process.

- Local government leaders
- Economic development professionals
- Tourism Development Authority
- Chambers of Commerce or local business owners
- Recreation user groups (Friends of Parks, bicycle groups, hiking clubs, scouts, etc.)
- Education (K12, Community College, University, applicable youth programs)
- Parks and Recreation
- Environmental/Conservation Groups (Land Trusts, Riverkeepers)
- Public Land Management Agencies (State Parks, National Forest, Wildlife Resource Commission)
- Entrepreneurship support organizations (SBTDCs, Small Business Centers, CDFIs)

What are the program deliverables that a community will receive at the end of the process?

There are a variety of final products that a community will be provided at the end of a strategic planning process including:

- Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan - The plan will include elements that focus on how recreational assets can be leveraged to increase economic and community vitality. The plan will contain background information, data obtained from public input, and recommendations to implement the findings which will help the community enhance their local outdoor recreation economy.
- Asset Mapping – an inventory of all outdoor recreation and associated industry assets available within a community will be identified. This inventory will convey details about the asset that will enable community leaders to best leverage their assets to support economic development.
- Training – There will be training opportunities for community stakeholders to increase knowledge of strategies to grow economic opportunity based around outdoor recreation.

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