

OUTDOOR REC DRIVES JOBS

Careers in the Recreation Economy

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable partnered with Oregon State University's Center for the Outdoor Recreation Economy to look deeper into the career paths, workforce needs, and future opportunities across America's outdoor recreation economy.



BACKGROUND: THE OUTDOOR ECONOMY IS TAKING OFF

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) partnered with Oregon State University's Center for the Outdoor Recreation Economy (CORE) to look deeper into the career paths, workforce, needs, and future opportunities across America's Outdoor Recreation Economy.

The outdoor recreation economy, which accounts for 2% of U.S. GDP and 4.3 million jobs (3% of all employees in the United States) connects people to high-quality outdoor experiences in environments from local parks to expansive backcountry lands and waters around the country.

This sector helps develop economies and create jobs, increases rural prosperity, improves public health outcomes and quality of life, and promotes environmental stewardship and conservation.

The backbone of this thriving sector is a growing workforce that meets the dynamic needs of today's fast-paced industry.

While professionals from across the country are seeking roles in this exciting industry that supports a conservation ethos and enables high quality of life, we also know that there is a growing skills gap in the outdoor workforce and that there are tens of thousands of open jobs (31,000 in the marine industry alone) available for people seeking life-long and meaningful careers.

Despite wide-ranging and positive impacts to society, as well as ample opportunities to work in the industry, there are lingering misconceptions in the public and with policymakers about the types and diversity of jobs in the outdoor recreation economy.

To illustrate the wide array of career opportunities for workers with and without higher academic degrees, the skill sets required to excel in them, and the successful career paths that other professionals have followed, ORR presents this report.



“Time outside isn't just a crunchy, nice to have, granola thing. Outdoor recreation is a true economic driver, as well as creating a higher quality of life. These jobs are part of our sustainable future.”

Marc Berejka, Director of Community and Government Affairs, REI

The \$689 billion outdoor recreation economy—and its 4.3 million jobs around the country—has never factored so importantly into the American identity.

A convergence of factors have made this the case.

▶ **New national conservation and recreation investments and initiatives** are going to work for recreation infrastructure to address deferred maintenance needs (repairs to infrastructure and assets that have been delayed due to budget constraints and lack of funding), mitigate impacts of climate change and unprecedented recreation demand on our natural resources, and expand access to nature for all.

▶ **The COVID-19 pandemic** pushed Americans to seek safe, rejuvenating experiences outside, and millions more recreated in 2020 and 2021 than any year prior.

▶ **Travelers are flocking to communities adjacent to outdoor recreation destinations** (aka gateway communities), and many are relocating to live in such regions of the country thanks to remote work opportunities near accessible recreation assets or recruitment by businesses using nearby recreation assets to attract and retain workers.

▶ **Staying close to home during COVID-19** also spotlighted opportunities to increase equitable access to outdoor recreation locations for communities who have historically lacked close-to-home opportunities.



Photo credit: Outdoor Afro

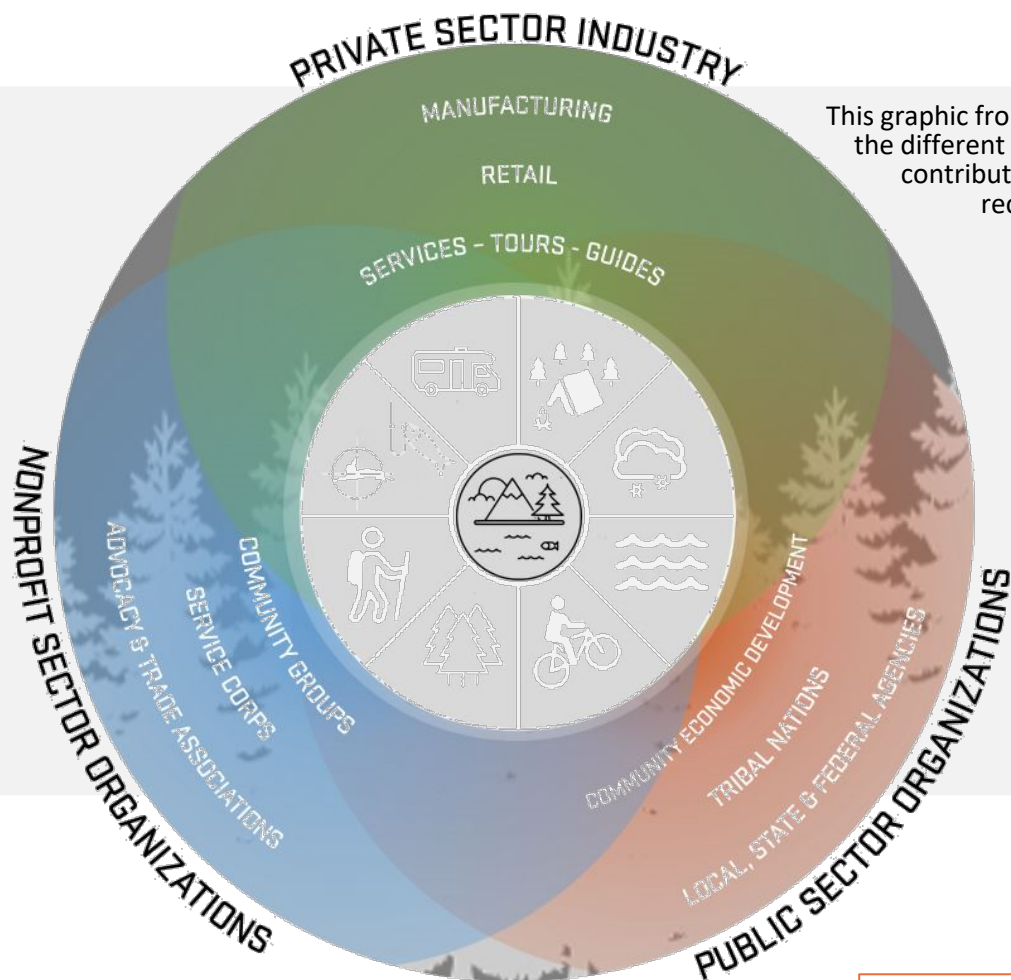
THE OUTDOOR WORKFORCE

As a newly organized sector including well over 110,000 small, medium, and Fortune 500 businesses across America, **many of the professional and technical careers in the outdoors are simply unseen or unknown by the public.** The majority of participants in outdoor recreation activities only interact with consumer-facing employees, including retail and hospitality staff members, guides and outfitters, parking and campground attendants, and concessionaires who sell food, beverages, supplies, and souvenirs at recreation hot-spots.

While these important jobs certainly make up a segment of jobs in the outdoor recreation economy, there are also millions of professional and technical, full-time positions across the sector that provide competitive wages and meaningful careers.

Private Sector

These for-profit organizations manufacture gear, apparel, and outdoor vehicles, provide services like guiding and outfitting to outdoor enthusiasts, and sell outdoor products both online and in-person.



This graphic from CORE illustrates the different types of segments contributing to the outdoor recreation economy.

Nonprofit Sector

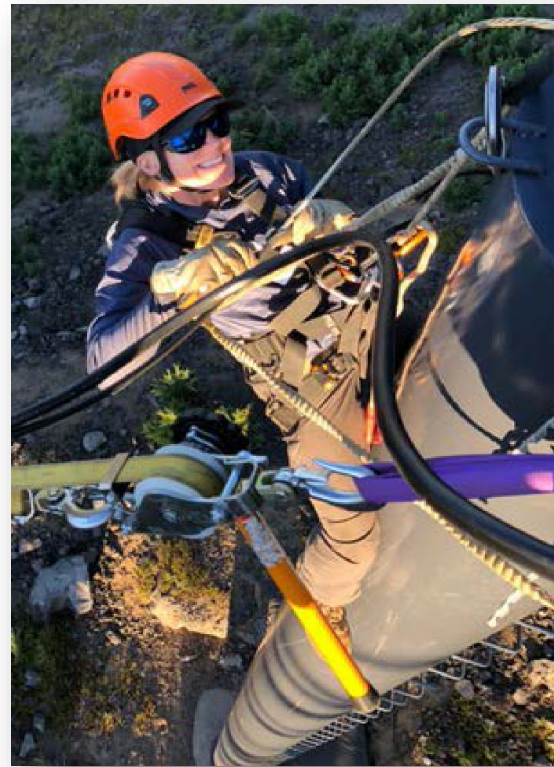
These organizations sustain the growth and development of the recreation economy, whether they are service corps that place people of all ages on stewardship projects on public lands and waters, community groups that connect the public to the outdoors, or advocacy and trade associations that help promote beneficial outdoor recreation policies at the federal, state, and local levels.

Public Sector

These organizations are responsible for managing recreation on public lands and waters and the people who use them, and also include organizations that connect outdoor recreation opportunities to community economic development. Importantly, Tribal Nations are critical stakeholders in the recreation economy, given their stewardship of, and connection to, today's public lands and waters since time immemorial.

As evidenced by this breakdown, outdoor recreation industry organizations span a wide range of sizes and functions, from well-known clothing and gear retailers like REI and Bass Pro Shops, to manufacturers like Brunswick (boats), Winnebago (RV), and Dometic (RV, marine, and camp equipment), to nonprofits like the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Outdoor Afro, and The Nature Conservancy, to agencies like the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, state and local land managers, and everything in between.

But what does work in the outdoor recreation industry look like in practice? **ORR researchers interviewed 18 industry experts** to provide a wide range of roles across segments of the recreation economy, illustrating the diversity of meaningful opportunities in the industry.



Technical Specialists

For those who crave systems, problem-solving, mechanics and technology. These workers are most likely to be found behind-the-scenes, designing new technologies and / or working diligently to ensure that outdoor products work efficiently and safely for all users.

- Auto and RV Technicians
- Ski Lift Technicians Inspectors
- Software Engineers and Web Developers
- Accountants
- Biologists/Ecologists
- Manufacturing / Engineering
- Trail, Infrastructure and
- Facility Design and Maintenance
- Permitting and Planning
- Landscape Architects and Engineers
- GIS / Cartography
- Shipping Logistics
- Business Analytics

Participant-Facing

For those who love the person-to-person interactions of connecting people to place. These workers are most likely to be found in front-facing roles, and live for the feeling of creating meaningful outdoor experiences for Participants.

- Sales and Customer Service
- Outdoor Education / Interpretation
- Community Managers
- Cultural Storytellers
- Public Affairs
- Communications and Development
- Travel Advisors
- Event Planning
- Client Relations
- Concessions Operators

Integrators

For those who possess both technical expertise and enjoy working with people, but don't have a preference for either. These workers help achieve outstanding outdoor experiences by utilizing a wide range of skill-sets—think “generalist” more than “specialist.”

- Land Managers
- Community Economic Development
- Environmental Justice
- Recreation Management
- Social Scientists
- Risk Management
- Product Design and Development
- Corporate Sustainability
- Outdoor Recreation / Conservation Policy
- User Experience / Interface
- Guiding and Outfitting

MEET REAL PEOPLE IN THE OUTDOOR RECREATION INDUSTRY


To accompany this report, ORR and OSU interviewed a variety of outdoor recreation professionals to learn more about their career paths, day-to-day, motivations behind their work, and best aspects of their work / life balance. [Access these Workforce Profiles here.](#)

WORKFORCE PROFILES

To capture the real people behind these statistics and trends across the outdoor recreation industry, we're showcasing a wide variety of professionals in this career path module. Dive into career paths from across the outdoor industry through the profiles at right.

 <p>J. DARYL ANTHONY</p>	 <p>KEN STAMPS</p>	 <p>TERESA MARTINEZ</p>	 <p>PATRICK GREEN</p>	 <p>KRIS ELLIOTT</p>
 <p>CAITI ANDERSON</p>	 <p>SHANNON WATERS</p>	 <p>KENNEDY REDDICK, JR</p>	 <p>ANGELA PILKINGTON</p>	 <p>LIZ OGILVIE</p>
 <p>TIM SCOTT</p>	 <p>ROBIN HALL</p>	 <p>ALICIA SMITH</p>		





JOB IN HIGH DEMAND: RV TECHNICIANS

RV Service Technicians are in increasingly high demand in the outdoor recreation industry. **RV Service Technician became the third-fastest growing job nationwide in 2020**, according to the compensation platform PayScale's year-over-year report created through crowdsourced data. Despite employment challenges, RV manufacturers still produced more RVs than ever in 2020. With programs like the RV Technical Institute offering educational payment opportunities starting at \$40,000 and \$50,000, moving up to \$90,000 through training, RV technicians can be a particularly good pathway for high school graduates, career pivots, and the formerly incarcerated.

<https://www.payscale.com/research-and-insights/end-of-year-report-2020/>

WHY THE OUTDOOR RECREATION INDUSTRY?

Many workers gravitate towards work in the outdoor recreation industry to align with colleagues that share similar conservation values and work on products and places they care about. Outdoor workers frequently describe the outdoor recreation industry as “value-led,” meaning that ideals like outdoor recreation access, environmental protection, or “a life outdoors” are shared by a wide breadth of workers.

It is not uncommon for coworkers in outdoor jobs to work hard together during the week and meet on the weekend for outings at the local trailhead, campground, or marina. Outdoor conferences, trade shows, and other gatherings tend to include a healthy balance of indoor work with outdoor socializing.

This combination of work and play leads to a more sustainable work /life balance compared to other industries, and provides benefits not just to the workers but also to their families. Other workers on the manufacturing side of the industry highlighted good-paying, stable jobs as a reason for pursuing their work.



**“It’s a quality of life decision for most -
‘I want to work outside’.”**

Pitt Grewe, Director,
Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation

SALARY

A wide range of outdoor jobs offer pay to sustain lifelong careers. [A 2019 survey from Outside Business Journal](#) which collected self-reported data from over 1,400 respondents highlights key statistics across different descriptive and demographic categories in the industry. As this data is three years old, these figures have increased due to inflation.



OUTDOOR RECREATION INDUSTRY CAREER RESOURCES

Here is a sampling of online resources related to finding work in the outdoor recreation economy.

[Basecamp Outdoor](#)

Basecamp is an online community connecting individuals in the outdoor, active lifestyle, and action sports industries. Basecamp equips you with the best job opportunities and insider info so you can navigate your next move in the outdoor industry with confidence. Chat openly about the ups and downs of your outdoor industry career (including how to break in) and get real-time advice, camaraderie, and connections to opportunity from a supportive community.

Through an inclusive, supportive group of tens of thousands of members, a newsletter, a podcast, and other resources, we help a talented workforce grow their careers. We network, post jobs and news, share gear discounts, and talk about the industry in general. Including the important stuff like diversity and the wage gap.

[Career Outdoors](#)

Career Outdoors helps mission-driven outdoor lovers turn their passion into a paycheck by providing industry specific resources, strategies, and advice to help people create careers they love in outdoor and environmental sectors. We want the brightest people in positions that connect communities and help our planet - and we don't think that a confusing hiring process should be holding you back.

[In Solidarity Project](#)

We are passionate about building a better, stronger, more diverse outdoor recreation industry. We work closely with industry partners to sign The Outdoor CEO Diversity Pledge and to facilitate and lead DEI-focused consulting projects and speaking engagements. This site is a resource for job seekers from underrepresented communities looking for employment in the outdoor and travel industries.

[CareerBoat.com](#)

Careerboat.com is the recreational marine industry's leading online job board dedicated to advertising jobs for boat builders, yacht builders, boat yards, marinas, boat dealerships, yacht brokerage firms, yacht crew, and marine industry suppliers.

[RV Industry Job Board](#)

The RV industry is committed to promoting exploration, adventure, and responsible recreation, while advocating for innovation and conservation in our business practices. As an association, we encourage and promote sustainability, diversity, safety, and the many community activities of our member companies. Members of the RV Industry Association post jobs frequently here.

WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

Like many other sectors, the outdoor recreation industry also faces urgent challenges with its workforce. The baby-boomer generation is retiring quickly, and taking with it a wealth of institutional knowledge and wisdom, creating a skills gap in maintenance, manufacturing, and management careers across the industry. The industry itself is also changing rapidly, with skilled workers and innovators needed for fiberglass, electric, and next generation technologies. **For these reasons, filling the workforce with qualified talent presents the biggest supply chain issue for the outdoor recreation industry.**

Additionally, due to historic exclusionary practices, the outdoor recreation industry has work to do to build a workforce that is representative of the American population, particularly in regard to race / ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation.

Exacerbating these issues, job seekers can run into challenges as they try to break into this sector. **Additionally, there are not consistent degrees, trainings, job titles, or even categories of jobs across the outdoor recreation economy.**

Due to this lack of consistency, and because the sector has only recently been federally recognized for five years with the establishment of the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account at the Bureau of Economic Analysis, there are currently several degree and certification programs offered by private and higher education institutions to prepare people for recreation job openings, but they are not unified nor consistent across the industry.

Lastly, many place-based outdoor businesses in recreation destinations have seen the cost of living rise dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic and current inflationary environment as new residents take advantage of remote work opportunities and housing supply lags behind demand. **For these businesses and their employees, housing affordability has become increasingly difficult, and has forced tough questions about appropriate pricing strategies to provide affordable and accessible services while supporting employees' cost of living needs.** When industry executives were asked about barriers to hiring in a recent survey about the outdoor workforce, one of the top reasons listed was "housing opportunities where the job is located."

JOBS OF THE FUTURE

As the world becomes more digitally connected, **more marketing and digital engagement will be needed.** Several managers in our research stated the need for marketers, website technicians, social media professionals, and other creators to engage through these platforms.

As more electric transportation hits the road, more employees will be needed to sell and service them. From electric vehicles to electric bicycles, more outdoor recreators will be using electric technology. As sales of these products increase, so will service and manufacturing needs in this area.

With the United States firmly planted as the leader in outdoor recreation companies across the globe, **R&D, innovation, manufacturing and other skilled technical roles are expanding rapidly** to ensure the country's competitive advantage and keep up with product demand.



Oregon State University - Cascades

TOURISM, RECREATION, AND ADVENTURE LEADERSHIP

The tourism and outdoor recreation industries are among the largest in the world and continue to grow in Oregon and throughout the nation. As a tourism, recreation and adventure leadership (TRAL) graduate, you will be a leader, educator and entrepreneur in our most important natural spaces. You will be on the cutting edge of this exciting, ever-changing industry and go on to educate others about the natural world, lead life-changing adventure opportunities, and create brand new businesses based on the idea of sharing the outdoors with others.

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN OUTDOOR PRODUCTS

The Bachelor of Science in Outdoor Products will prepare you for a career in the outdoor industry. Leaders in the industry are looking to hire innovators who champion responsible systems approach to product commercialization with respect for our natural world. In this interdisciplinary degree, you'll study design, engineering, natural resources, outdoor recreation, sustainability, and business with expert faculty who have experience in research, industry and public agencies.

Oregon State University - CORE

SKI LIFT MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN TRAINING, LEVEL 1

This training provides current ski lift staff the technical skills and expertise needed to become Level 1 ski lift maintenance technicians. Through a hybrid learning experience, students will have the opportunity to join employees from resorts across the country. Self-paced, online course modules present content such as lift systems and operations, safety standards, communication systems, drive line systems, preventative maintenance, sheave assemblies and more. This training covers all content included in the National Ski Areas Association Level One Technician Requirements.

OUTDOOR INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATE

This professional development program helps aspiring leaders gain the skills, competencies, and knowledge needed to lead the future of the outdoor recreation economy. The cohort-based program brings together professionals from private industry, nonprofit, and public sectors in outdoor recreation to learn about leading in this unique, purpose-driven industry through online coursework, peer and self-reflection, one-on-one professional coaching, self-assessments, Masterclass sessions with industry experts, and networking.



Oregon State
University

EXAMPLES OF OUTDOOR DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

Below is a small sampling, non-exhaustive list of some of the academic and training programs related to career advancement in the outdoor recreation industry.

RV Technical Institute

The mission of the RV Technical Institute is to provide world-class training for RV maintenance and repair that will reduce the RV industry's shortfall of trained RV technicians. The RV Technical Institute seeks to improve the RV consumer experience, reduce repair event cycle times and aggressively reduce the RV industry's shortage of trained technicians.

Utah State University

OUTDOOR PRODUCT DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

A degree in Outdoor Product Design & Development (OPDD) from Utah State University is the first step to a high skill, high wage, high demand career opportunity in product design, development, or management. The OPDD program prepares students for an exciting career bringing innovative, sustainable, and impactful product to market in the dynamic sports, outdoor, and active industries.

Western Carolina University

OUTDOOR INDUSTRY CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

WCU's Professional Outdoor Industry Certificate program provides skills, insight, knowledge, and networking opportunities to students and learners from a variety of backgrounds who are interested in a rewarding career or thriving business in the outdoor recreation industry.

Western Colorado University

OUTDOOR INDUSTRY MBA

The two-year program includes an MBA Core as well as specialized tracks for either the product or service side of the industry. The MBA Core includes traditional MBA courses with content focusing on the outdoor industry. The Product Concentration has specialized courses in Sustainable Outdoor Product Development and Material Sourcing; Supply Chain and Logistics in the Outdoor Industry; and Sustainable Finance. The Service Concentration has specialized courses in Resort and Hospitality Management, Natural Resource Regulation and Economics, and Sales and Customer Experience.

University of Colorado Boulder

OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY PROGRAM

The Outdoor Recreation Economy program at CU Boulder provides learners with a variety of opportunities to expand their knowledge and advance their careers in the outdoor recreation industry. This program's flexible options allow you to engage in a way that fits both your career goals and your budget. Become an innovative leader, foster sustainable business operations, govern and promote access to public lands, or leverage outdoor amenities to grow local, sustainable economies.

OTHER RESOURCES FOR REFERENCE

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis OUTDOOR RECREATION SATELLITE ACCOUNT

The Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account (ORSA) measures the economic activity as well as the sales or receipts generated by outdoor recreational activities, such as fishing and RVing. These statistics also measure each industry's production of outdoor goods and services and its contribution to U.S. GDP. Industry breakdowns of outdoor employment and compensation are also included.

Outside Business Journal

For almost four decades, we've served our community of brands, retailers, nonprofits, advocacy groups, PR agencies, media outlets, and outdoor recreationists as the most trusted source of news in the outdoor industry. We also publish an award-winning print magazine of the same name, formerly known as The Voice.

Oregon State University CENTER FOR THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

The Oregon State University Center for the Outdoor Recreation Economy (CORE) is delivering a new kind of workforce development to meet the unique needs of the vast, extremely entrepreneurial, and rapidly growing outdoor recreation industry.



WORKFORCE STUDY EXPLANATION

This project was developed with the assistance of the Oregon State University Center for the Outdoor Recreation Economy. Chris Perkins, Senior Director at Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, Kristen Freaney, Founder at Path to Peak, and Lee Davis, Executive Director at the Oregon State University Center for the Outdoor Recreation Economy were project leads. The project leads owe great gratitude to graduate researchers Jasmine Brown, Ph. D candidate at Michigan State University, and Miles Radin, Masters in Environmental Management Degree Recipient at the Yale School of the Environment, who conducted interviews in the Spring of 2022 to inform this report. Additionally, we wish to recognize:

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