

Partners Outdoors: A Tradition of Action

The Partners Outdoors program was initiated in 1992 to draw together tomorrow's leaders from federal recreation-providing agencies and the recreation industry in order to accomplish two goals: (1) to reinforce an awareness of shared customers and interdependence of the public and private sectors and (2) to catalyze partnership-based actions to better serve recreation visitors to public lands. After more than two decades, it is clear that the sessions have achieved both goals. The tangible results of Partners Outdoors are especially heartening. Major actions have occurred as direct outgrowths of Partners Outdoors meetings; dozens of other advances have developed as participants maintained contact long after the formal sessions adjourned.

Among the major outgrowths of past Partners Outdoors sessions are:

- WOW - Wonderful Outdoor World: a program to introduce city kids to the outdoors, which began in Los Angeles and, thanks to national partners like Disney, Coleman, the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service, spread to cities across the nation;
- The federal recreation-fee demonstration program authorized by Congress beginning in FY96 and now replaced by a multiple-year program through 2017;
- Recreation Roundtable research on visitor motivations, satisfaction levels and barriers to participation; beginning in 1996, this research became a joint public-private effort;
- The National Recreation Lakes Study Commission, and its report "Reservoirs of Opportunity," followed by the introduction of the National Recreation Lakes Act of 2001, which supported implementation of the recommendations made by the Commission, and the establishment of the Federal Lakes Recreation Leadership Council to coordinate a recreation demonstration program with 31 pilot study lakes;
- Amendments to the Golden Eagle Pass, making it available for private sale on a commissionable (1993) and consignment (1998) basis;
- The Smokey Bear hot-air balloon and display, used to celebrate that campaign's 50th anniversary and increase public understanding of fires in the forests;
- Active federal agency participation in many state tourism conferences;
- The Washington, D.C., Urban Treehouse project, enlisting the National Park Service to host a modified version of the successful Atlanta experiment;
- Introduction of the Ranger for a Day concept to increase public volunteerism and awareness of recreation facilities and services;

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Page Two

- **Legends** and **Beacon** awards: recognition of outstanding federal agency employees by the American Recreation Coalition during Great Outdoors Month® in June;
- An awareness campaign for Universal Access Design to encourage broad-based adoption of new practices by recreation's public and private providers;
- Renewed interest in and enthusiasm for www.recreation.gov;
- Production and distribution of the **Toolbox for the Great Outdoors** interactive CD, followed by creation of the dynamic **Toolbox for the Great Outdoors** Web site to provide information, including case studies, on numerous programs that can be used to supplement traditional appropriations for recreation programs;
- A new focus on the importance of encouraging young people to enjoy healthy fun outdoors, as reflected in initiatives like the Forest Service's "Kids in the Woods," the Bureau of Land Management's "Take It Outside," the Fish and Wildlife Service's "Let's Go Outside," and the National Park Service's "Kids in Parks";
- The creation of the "Outdoor Recreation Village" at the 2008 Super Bowl -- the template for public-private partnerships coordinating National Get Outdoors Day, now expanded from 50 official sites across the country in 2008 to more than 200 sites in 41 states in 2015;
- The organization of PHATFOs – Physicians for Healthier Americans Through Fun Outdoors – to build awareness of the links between outdoor recreation and good health and to find ways to work with the healthcare community to use those links to enhance public health and support outdoor recreation;
- The initiation of a "Transit and Trails Connections Study" with the goal of increasing and enhancing public access to National Wildlife Refuges;
- The expansion of the Kids in Parks "TRACK Trails" program – a partnership of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, Blue Ridge Parkway and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation – to more than 20 trails in three states and the District of Columbia; and
- An expanded recognition of Great Outdoors Month®, with all state governors joining the President in proclaiming June as Great Outdoors Month®.

In addition to these important accomplishments, Partners Outdoors has been responsible for many agreements and initiatives that result from informal discussions among Partners Outdoors participants.