

OUTDOOR RECREATION: A PANDEMIC TO PROSPERITY WHITE PAPER

*Prepared for Rural Development Taskforce, a Resilient Louisiana Task Force
May 14, 2020 (Melissa Flurry, John Dean, Gary Perkins)*

NEED

The trajectory of many rural economies in pre-pandemic times was already in a downward spiral.

For rural communities to thrive and lift their economic trajectories, such communities can and must expand their entrepreneurial capacity and leverage their competitive advantages and assets.

The great outdoors is a key competitive advantage and asset for rural communities.

A focus on growing the outdoor recreation economy will enable rural communities to leverage their competitive advantages and build entrepreneurial community.

OPPORTUNITY

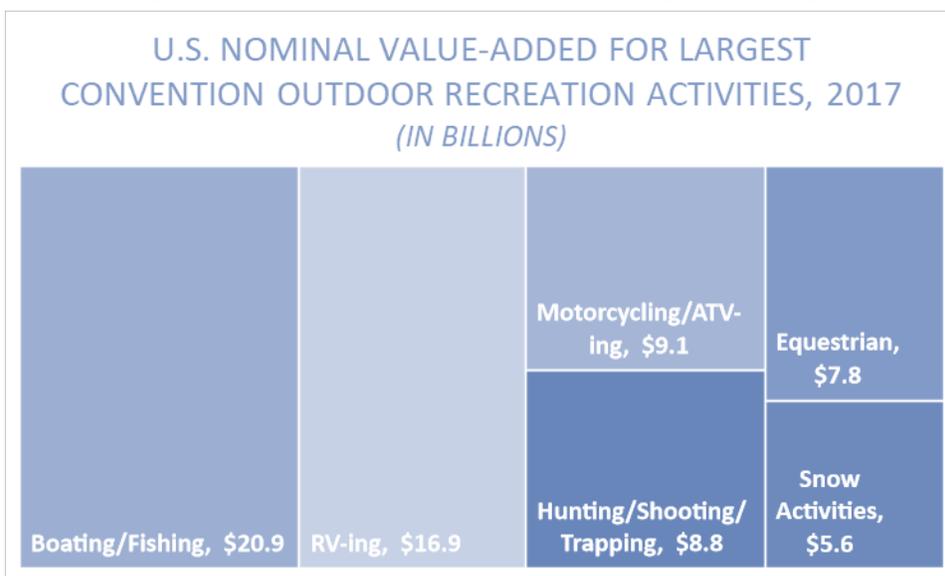
1. ACCESS TO OUTDOOR RECREATION LIFTS RURAL ECONOMIES

Outdoor recreation access attracts people/businesses and supports health and jobs.ⁱ

2. OUTDOOR RECREATION IS A GROWING INDUSTRY

The government found that in 2017 -- the second and most recent year for which the numbers were calculated -- the U.S. outdoor recreation real GDP of \$427.2B accounted for 2.2 percent of total GDP and grew almost 40 percent faster than the economy as a whole.

The following chart depicts the outdoor recreation categories adding the most valueⁱⁱ:



Closer to home, the first state-level numbers showed Louisiana's GDP from outdoor recreation of \$5.898 billion representing 2.5% of state GDP in 2017.

3. **OUTDOOR RECREATION CAN INCLUDE TOURISM. IT'S MORE THAN TOURISM.**

The worlds of outdoor recreation and tourism are intertwined but distinct. Even without tourism, rural communities boasting even median level of natural amenities can leverage outdoor recreation as economic drivers. Nature-based, outdoor-recreation amenities attract entrepreneurs, companies, and employees.

DEFINING OUTDOOR RECREATION

The emphasis here is on leveraging conventional, as opposed to broad, outdoor recreation activities. Conventional activities leverage natural amenities, rural Louisiana's competitive advantage. Characteristics of conventional activities include ...

- ... Activities involve some level of intentional, physical exertion and
- ... occur in nature-based environments outdoors
- ... Examples: hunting, hiking, camping, fishing, ATV-ingⁱⁱⁱ

Broad activities do not require nature or exertion. They can include playing baseball, visiting an amusement park, or attending a festival.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE ACTION

Transforming the outdoor recreation industry into a more powerful force for growth will rely on the characteristic approaches involved in encouraging cluster development, a key economic development activity.

1. SUPPORT CREATION OF THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ECOSYSTEM BY ...

... **CREATING A STATE DIVISION OF OUTDOOR RECREATION.** Connect and cross boundaries between tourism, parks and recreation, natural resources management and economic development to improve benefits from and quality of outdoor recreation for all. (Example: New Mexico/www.nmoutside.com)

... **LAUNCHING AN OUTDOOR RECREATION MANUFACTURERS GROUP.** Host quarterly roundtables. (Example: Outdoor Gear Builders of Western North Carolina)

... **CREATING AN OUTDOOR RECREATION ANGEL INVESTORS NETWORK.** Example: Shenandoah Valley Angel Investors explicitly states its interest in supporting outdoor recreation startups. (<https://www.svangelinvestors.com/>)

... **ESTABLISHING OUTDOOR RECREATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ROLE.** Work with state division, agencies, communities, entrepreneurs, and nonprofits to support development and funding of outdoor recreation opportunities.

... **RECRUITING OUTDOOR RECREATION-BASED MANUFACTURERS, OR OUTDOOR EXPERTS TO CREATE A LOUISIANA PRESENCE.** Interview current base of outdoor recreation manufacturers to identify targets. An expert rider who offers an academy can attract visitors ... and manufacturers.

2. EXPAND OUTDOOR RECREATION ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS BY ...

... **CREATING AN ENTREPRENEUR ACCELERATOR PROGRAM FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION PRODUCTS.** Include ongoing coaching and skill-building. Virtual. Leverage Louisiana's stable of outdoor recreation product entrepreneurs to attract state and national participants. (Ex: <https://www.mountainbizworks.org/waypoint/>)

... **BUILDING OUTDOOR RECREATION PRODUCT DESIGN COMPETENCY INTO THE REGION'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS.** Four schools nationwide currently offer this program. Product design skills of any sort will bring economic value to communities. Include industry liaison positions on staff.

3. BUILD THE VISION BY ...

... **MEASURING AND COMMUNICATING IMPACT.** Create parish-level data equivalent to BEA Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account data. Current parish-level statistics do not capture the value. That is why BEA created the ORSA reports. At least one state added creation of this data to its State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan process.

... **MARKETING TO INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL AUDIENCES.** Develop how-to kit on recruiting outdoor recreation manufacturers, entrepreneurs, and workforce to different regions of state. Share success stories. (Example: <https://edpnc.com/industries/outdoor-recreation/>)

... **CREATING MULTI-SPORT EVENTS IN RURAL REGIONS ACROSS STATE.** Launch a statewide gravel bike race circuit in conjunction with a kayak fishing tournament. Start with the assets on hand.

ⁱ . "Policies to Boost State Outdoor Recreation Economies", Rowland-Shea, Jenny, Center for American Progress, June 2019.

ⁱⁱ U.S. BEA, ORSA, September 2019

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. BEA, ORSA Methodology

Background: Growing the Recreation Economy in the Heart of Louisiana, a CLEDA-commissioned report, The Flurry Group, October 2019.