

Partners Outdoors: A Tradition of Action

The Partners Outdoors program was initiated in 1992 to draw together 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 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 has now spread to cities across the nation, thanks to national partners like Disney, Coleman, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service;
- The federal recreation-fee demonstration program authorized by Congress beginning in Fiscal Year 1996 and now replaced by a 10-year program through Fiscal Year 2014;
- Recreation Roundtable research on visitor motivations, satisfaction levels and barriers to participation; beginning in 1996, this research became a joint public-private effort;
- Amendments to the Golden Eagle Pass, making it available for private sale on a commissionable (1993) and consignment (1998) basis;
- The Partners Outdoors Fair on Capitol Hill designed to showcase creative partnership efforts aiding protection of America's outdoors and enhancements of visits to public sites;
- The Smokey Bear hot-air balloon and display, used since 1994 to celebrate that campaign's 50th anniversary and to increase public understanding of fires in the forests;
- Active federal agency participation in many state tourism conferences;

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- The Washington, D.C., Urban Treehouse project, enlisting the National Park Service to host a modified version of the successful Atlanta experiment;
- **Legends** and **Beacon** awards: recognition of outstanding federal agency employees by the American Recreation Coalition during the Great Outdoors Week program in June;
- Shared-use facility strategy: an example is the federal information center in the REI flagship store in Seattle;
- Arrangements for a special Bureau of Land Management 50th anniversary display at Walt Disney World's EPCOT Center during 1996;
- An awareness campaign for Universal Access Design to encourage broad-based adoption of new practices by recreation's public and private providers;
- Introduction of the Ranger for a Day concept to increase public volunteerism and awareness of recreation facilities and services;
- 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 the first-ever National Get Outdoors Day on June 14, 2008 at over 50 official sites across the country; and
- An expanded recognition of Great Outdoors Month, with nearly 50 state Governors joining the President in proclaiming June 2011 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.