



MAINE'S 10-YEAR OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

# ROADMAP



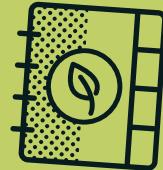


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A black and white photograph of a woman with long, wavy hair, smiling broadly. She is wearing a dark beanie with a large, light-colored pom-pom on top, and a dark, striped, fuzzy-texture jacket. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**There's no shortage of outdoor recreation in the Pine Tree State, but plenty of potential exists. That's why we're blazing a trail for Maine's outdoor recreation economy — to sustain it and help it grow for years to come.**

Maine's outdoor recreation economy is a cornerstone of the state's economy, culture, competitiveness, identity, and quality of life. Outdoor recreation economy resources range from boat builders in the Mid-Coast to guides and outfitters in the Katahdin Region to gear manufacturers in Freeport and the hundreds of cherished parks, waterways, and forests such as the Allagash and Acadia National Park.

This summary of *Maine's 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap* is a guide to growing and diversifying Maine's \$3.4B outdoor recreation economy over the next ten years.<sup>1</sup> It identifies trends, challenges, and opportunities facing the outdoor recreation economy and outlines a comprehensive suite of strategies to enable the continued success of this vital sector.

The outdoor recreation economy comprises workers across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, making up about 4.5% of statewide employment.<sup>2</sup> With 30,000 workers in 2023, Maine employs a higher share of people in the outdoor

recreation economy than many other states – ranking 7th nationally for the percentage of wage and salary employment in outdoor recreation.<sup>3</sup> The outdoor recreation economy has the potential to be a catalytic economic driver for decades to come, as defined in the following document.

The *Roadmap* defines the outdoor recreation economy as the economic activity (manufacturing, retail, tourism, construction, professional services, lodging, arts, culture, and so much more) generated by Maine's outdoor recreation destinations through activities like boating, biking, running, hiking, hunting, fishing, RVing, snowmobiling, skiing, and more, supported by a network of businesses, public agencies, volunteers, and nonprofit partners.

*Maine's 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap* marks the first time that a focus on outdoor recreation as an economic driver has been defined in this broad way.

<sup>1</sup> BEA Outdoor Recreation Satellite Accounts 2023

<sup>2</sup> BEA Outdoor Recreation Satellite Accounts 2023

<sup>3</sup> Lightcast™, 2023, BEA Outdoor Recreation Satellite Accounts 2023



**The outdoor recreation economy comprises workers across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, making up about 5% of statewide employment.**

# THE ROADMAP PLANNING PROCESS

*Maine's 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap* was developed through a multi-pronged process including:

- ✓ **Engaging nearly 450 Maine residents** from throughout the state and representing the diversity of sectors that make up the outdoor recreation economy
- ✓ **Analyzing data from the outdoor recreation economy**, including workforce, industry, supply chain, and competitiveness factors
- ✓ **Leveraging and aligning with the goals and targeted actions** defined in prior published State plans, including:
  - Maine's 2020-2029 Economic Development Strategy: THE 2024 RESET (2024)
  - Office of Tourism Destination Management Plan (2024)
  - Maine Climate Council Climate Action Plan (2024)
  - State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (update in process)
  - Wabanaki Cultural Tourism Plan (2024)
  - Forest Opportunity Roadmap / Maine (FOR/Maine) (2018)
  - SEA Maine Roadmap for the Marine Living Resource Economy (2024)

## EXTENSIVE OUTREACH

The planning effort prioritized extensive outreach to stakeholders to hear as many perspectives as possible and ensure that those who benefited from the outdoor recreation economy in Maine were part of the planning process.



60

interviews conducted



8

focus groups  
facilitated



200+

leaders engaged



31

cities and towns  
represented



16

Maine counties  
represented



7

roadshow stops  
across Maine



# A SHARED VISION

The *Roadmap*, aligned with the visions and goals of these plans and other initiatives throughout Maine, emphasizes two essential themes: **Collaboration and Assurance**. By working in partnership and strategically aligning our efforts, we can preserve, enhance, and expand Maine's assets. This unified approach enables us to not only directly confront challenges, but also foster the expansion of economic opportunities for Maine's communities.



## LEGACY AND HERITAGE

Spending time recreating outdoors and being a good steward is a way of life in Maine, and long-time residents have a deep connection to and respect for the land and water that should be passed on and continued as the outdoor recreation economy grows.

## ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY

Maine's natural beauty and diverse recreational opportunities are attracting increasing numbers of visitors, but infrastructure needs to be improved to accommodate this growth, enable quality and consistency of experiences, and ensure residents benefit from enhanced recreation assets and the economic value that comes with increased tourism.

## Existing Opportunities and Challenges

To realize the vision, the *Roadmap* first identifies opportunities and challenges facing Maine's outdoor recreation economy, including:

### WORKFORCE

While Maine is in the top ten states for outdoor recreation economy employment, the sector struggles to attract and retain talent due to relatively low compensation, seasonality, workforce housing challenges, and a lack of awareness of career pathways, education, and training opportunities.

### RURAL REVITALIZATION

Outdoor recreation can be a powerful economic development and diversification tool in rural areas. However, local municipalities and leaders need support and capacity to plan for and implement the required infrastructure.

### MODERNIZATION AND INNOVATION

In addition to advancing new products and services that help outdoor recreation businesses adapt to economic, environmental, and social challenges, the sector needs access to supply chains, materials, and other innovations that can help businesses thrive.



## PRIVATE LAND ACCESS

Most of Maine's land is privately owned, and while many landowners grant public access, it can be challenging for recreationists to understand where access exists and for landowners to communicate and manage access effectively.

## DIVERSIFICATION

Expanding the definition of outdoor recreation beyond traditional activities like hiking, skiing, and fishing to embrace emerging trends like ecotourism, restorative tourism, dark skies, and outdoor wellness experiences can capture broader interests, attract new people, and create a more diverse array of outdoor recreation options for visitors.

## INCLUSION AND BELONGING

Creating equitable access to outdoor recreation that is welcoming to all Maine residents, regardless of background or ability, is essential for fostering a thriving and inclusive sector.



**Creating equitable access to outdoor recreation that is welcoming to all Maine residents, regardless of background or ability, is essential for fostering a thriving and inclusive sector.**

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Addressing the impacts of climate change on Maine's natural resources and adopting technologies that can reduce environmental and ecological risk and increase resiliency is crucial to ensure the long-term viability of the outdoor recreation economy.

## QUALITY AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

Maine's legacy of high-quality craftsmanship in woodworking and textiles offers a distinct advantage. However, rising manufacturing costs and a shrinking skilled workforce challenge the sector's growth. Blending tradition with modern, sustainable practices can help preserve this heritage while meeting new market demands.





# A FOCUSED MISSION

## GOAL

1

Elevate Maine's outdoor recreation industry into a critical and thriving pillar of the state's economy



## GOAL

2

Increase and sustainably manage outdoor recreation



## GOAL

3

Establish outdoor recreation as a tool for building vibrant, economically diverse, and resilient communities



## GOAL

4

Establish Maine as a premier state for outdoor recreation businesses, education, training, and career opportunities



The full report outlines strategies for each goal and provides detailed recommendations that leaders in the outdoor recreation economy can implement to enhance the sector's impact and achieve a shared vision.

# OVERALL MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The following overall metrics will measure successful implementation of the recommendations of *Maine's 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap*:



## \$3.7B

Maine's outdoor recreation economy will grow by 10%, matching the overall state GDP goals with a value of \$3.7B by 2035.



## 5%

Maine will maintain its 5% workforce employed in the outdoor recreation economy, remaining in the top ten states nationwide.

Additional measures of progress and success are contained in the full report under each core strategy.

As the outdoor recreation economy continues to evolve, Maine is well-positioned to capitalize on growing interest in outdoor activities and experiences. With strategic investments and policies, Maine can secure its position as a leading destination for outdoor recreation businesses, workers, and enthusiasts, generating economic growth, fostering community well-being, and preserving its natural heritage for generations.



# INTRODUCTION



# ABOUT THE PROJECT

In 2023, the Core Team hired Fourth Economy, a national strategy firm, to manage the development of a strategic roadmap, and Blaze Partners, a Maine-based creative firm, to support communications surrounding the roadmap development process. Roadmap development kicked off in October 2023 and included a year of stakeholder engagement, data collection and analysis, strategy brainstorming, and community vetting.

The resulting publication, *Trailblazer: Maine's 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap*, is a plan to guide Maine's \$3.4B outdoor recreation economy over the next ten years.

## THE CORE TEAM

The *Roadmap* was developed under the leadership of a multi-disciplinary Core Team, which includes the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation, Maine Outdoor Brands, the University of Maine, Maine Marine Trades Association, Maine Technology Institute, and the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands.



# TRAILBLAZER VISION

By 2035, Maine will be a trailblazing force in the outdoor recreation economy, amplifying its world-class natural assets, innovative businesses, and rich heritage across all seasons to significantly drive Maine's economic growth, foster a skilled and diverse workforce, enhance community well-being, and champion sustainability, climate resilience, and stewardship.



## ROADMAP GOALS

The *Roadmap* is guided by four main goals that the sector seeks to achieve over the next ten years:

- 1** **Elevate Maine's outdoor recreation industry into a critical and thriving pillar of the state's economy**
- 2** **Increase and sustainably manage outdoor recreation**
- 3** **Establish outdoor recreation as a tool for building vibrant, economically diverse, and resilient communities**
- 4** **Establish Maine as a premier state for outdoor recreation businesses, education, training, and career opportunities**



A photograph showing three people sitting on a log in a forest. On the left, a man with curly hair is looking towards the center. In the center, a woman with long dark hair is smiling broadly. On the right, another woman with long blonde hair is also smiling and gesturing with her hand. They appear to be engaged in a friendly conversation.

# ABOUT MAINE'S OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

# OVERVIEW

In Maine, outdoor recreation has long been a critical driver of economic activity. As an economic segment, it is a significant for-profit, nonprofit, and government employer and presents opportunities for economic growth, especially within the state's rural areas.

Many Maine residents, as recreationists themselves, take advantage of the state's abundant natural resources, which also attract thousands of annual visitors. Maine's 3,500 miles of coastline, 17 million acres of forest, 6,000 lakes and ponds, almost 32,000 miles of rivers, and 2,000 coastal islands are the backbone of outdoor recreation economic activity.<sup>4</sup>

Everything from consumer spending on outdoor recreation gear, rentals, vehicles, services, and guides to business spending on marketing, facility maintenance, and events — as well as the essential work of park rangers, trail builders, land managers and stewards, and game wardens — make up critical parts of the overall outdoor recreation economy in Maine.

<sup>4</sup> Facts About Maine

**\$3.4B** 

Valued at \$3.4 billion, outdoor recreation made up 3.7% of Maine's economy in 2023, the 6th largest share in the nation.

## MAINE'S TOP OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES

by consumer spending and contributions to gross regional product (GRP) in 2023



**Boating and Fishing**

**\$384M**



**RVing**

**\$265M**



**Multi-Use Apparel/  
Accessories**

**\$196M**



**Snow  
Activities**

**\$108M**

# DEFINING THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

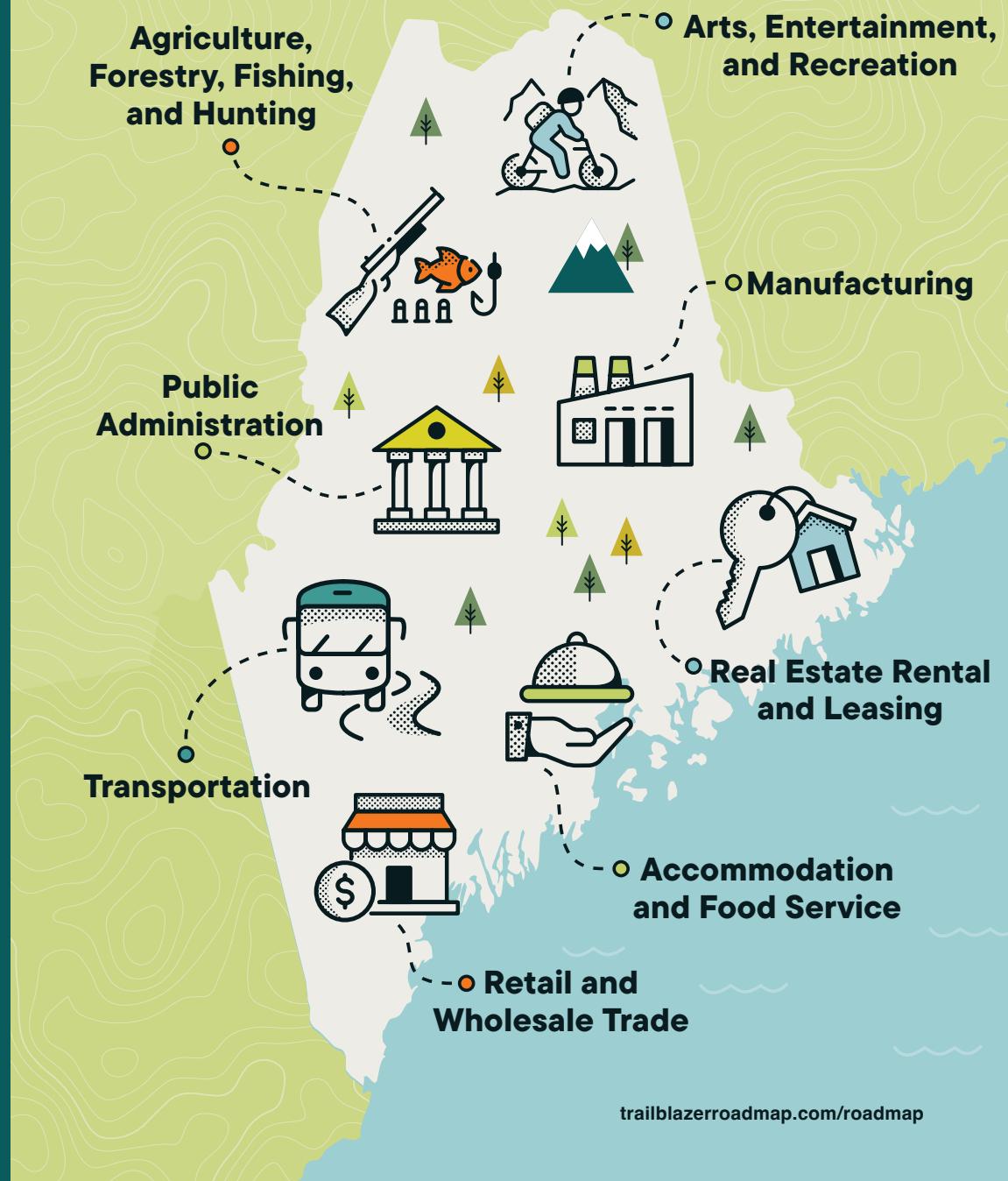
The outdoor recreation economy is now a recognized segment of the national economy, first tracked by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) in their 2018 Outdoor Recreation Satellite Accounts (ORSA). Like other Satellite Accounts, BEA's ORSA is constructed from a supply-use framework, identifying and crediting all industries that contribute to the outdoor goods and services supply chain. BEA acknowledges that "outdoor recreation can be defined in many ways," and incorporates both conventional (traditional outdoor activities) and broad (any activities that occur outdoors) activities in their approach.

The outdoor recreation economy is defined as the economic activity (manufacturing, retail, tourism, construction, professional services lodging, arts, culture, and so much more) generated by Maine's outdoor recreation destinations through activities like boating, biking, running, hiking, hunting, fishing, RVing, snowmobiling, skiing, and more, supported by a network of businesses, public agencies, and nonprofit partners.

Formally defining and then measuring this complex economic sector requires examining industry classifications and the relationship between different components of the economy.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis

## KEY PARTS OF MAINE'S OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY



# SECTOR STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

Maine's outdoor recreation economy, as it stands today, presents several strengths, challenges, and opportunities for future growth and development, which surfaced through data analysis and community input throughout the *Roadmap* planning process.

## Heritage, Legacy, and Identity

Outdoor recreation in Maine is deeply intertwined with the state's heritage and legacy. For many Maine residents, spending time outdoors is more than just a pastime; it's a way of life.

Maine's natural resources – the coastline, rivers, lakes, streams, and uninterrupted, working forest landscape – set it apart. The state's rugged beauty and natural resources are a source of pride and a symbol of the state's unique character. There is a sense that there are things in Maine to experience that can't be found elsewhere. Maine's history is closely tied to the natural world, as its forests, rivers, and coastline have provided sustenance, transportation, resources, and economic livelihood for its residents for generations.

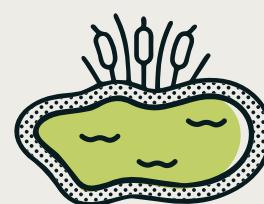
Because of this, outdoor recreation is a defining aspect of Maine's cultural identity. Outdoor activities are deeply ingrained in the daily lives of many who call the state home. Fishing, hunting, hiking, boating, and snowmobiling are not just hobbies but often family traditions passed down through generations. These activities provide a sense of place, community, and connection to the natural world.

## Value of environmental stewardship and conservation

This connection to the land has also led to a strong sense of environmental stewardship. Maine residents are deeply invested in protecting and preserving the natural resources they enjoy and depend on. Maine residents view public land as a shared resource, a legacy for future generations, and a cornerstone of their



quality of life. They value the opportunity to access forests, lakes, rivers, and coastlines for recreation, relaxation, and connection with nature. Residents also highly emphasize protecting their state's natural beauty and biodiversity, believing public lands are critical in conserving wildlife, clean water, and healthy ecosystems.



**Maine residents are deeply invested in protecting and preserving the natural resources they enjoy and depend on.**

## Enhanced health and well-being

Outdoor recreation has a profound impact on physical and mental health. Those who live in Maine value the opportunity to hike, bike, paddle, ski, and engage in other activities that promote fitness, stress reduction, and overall well-being. Being outdoors has tangible therapeutic benefits, and spending time in nature is often a source of peace, rejuvenation, and inspiration.

The global COVID-19 pandemic saw many people turning to outdoor recreation because it was seen as a fun, new, safe form of entertainment that the whole family could enjoy. Following that national growth in outdoor recreation, interest has stabilized and cooled as people return to other types of activities and entertainment. This poses challenges for the sector, which must respond to a decline in revenues after a couple of strong years.

## Economic contributions

Maine's numerous outdoor recreation opportunities/activities significantly contribute to the state's economy, supporting jobs and businesses in rural communities. Valued at \$3.4B, outdoor recreation made up 3.7% of Maine's economy in 2023, the 6th largest share in the nation.<sup>6</sup> Indirect, induced, and multiplier contributions contributed an additional \$5.7B to the economy in 2023.<sup>7</sup> This is driven by spending, production, wages, and taxes generated through outdoor recreation-related goods and services.

# 3.7%



**Outdoor recreation made up 3.7% of Maine's economy in 2023, the 6th largest share in the nation.**

Maine has particular strength in several industry concentrations, such as footwear manufacturing, outdoor goods sales, recreational and vacation camps, guided tours and outfitted travel, skiing facilities, recreational vehicle and watercraft sales, boat building, fishing, and marinas, all of which correspond to Maine's signature assets, companies, and brands.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> BEA Outdoor Recreation Satellite Accounts 2023

<sup>7</sup> Lightcast™, 2023, BEA Outdoor Recreation Satellite Accounts 2023

<sup>8</sup> Maine's State of the Industry Report, 2024



# 20x



**Maine is exceptional in its concentration of people working in footwear manufacturing, with more than 20 times the expected average industry size.**

Source: Maine's State of the Industry Report, 2024

## Innovation, modernization, and sustainability

Maine's commitment to research and development is reflected in its diverse array of R&D labs, centers, and institutes, including the University of Maine System, Maine Community College System, Maine Maritime Academy, and private colleges and nonprofit research organizations across the state. With easy access to vast recreational areas—such as the Appalachian Trail, the Katahdin Region, Acadia National Park, and rivers offering Class III–V rapids—Maine provides an ideal environment for outdoor recreation product development and innovation.

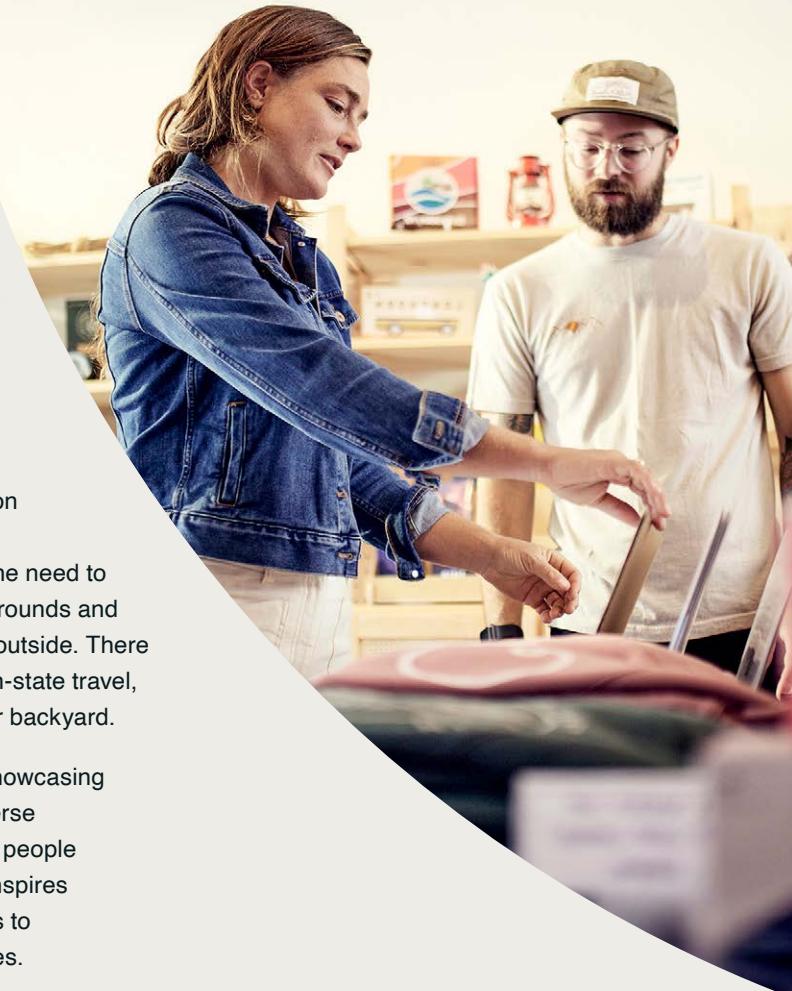
However, the companies and entrepreneurs that comprise the outdoor recreation industry need support and resources to innovate, modernize, expand local supply chains, and grow and maintain their businesses' long-term viability. Many outdoor recreation businesses interviewed as a part of this planning process have cited the growing need to adopt renewable energy and clean technology, from solar and geothermal to transitioning to electric vehicle fleets, and are particularly interested in ensuring

the products and services they offer are sustainable from a lifecycle perspective. Maintaining Maine's strength in research and development is critical to the sector's success.

## Need for inclusion and representation

There's a growing movement within outdoor recreation to create more inclusive spaces and experiences and address barriers to participation related to race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status. There is recognition of the need to become more welcoming to people of all backgrounds and make it more financially accessible to recreate outside. There is also a need to balance out-of-state visitors, in-state travel, and residents experiencing the outdoors in their backyard.

Marketing platforms have a significant role in showcasing the beauty of the outdoors and highlighting diverse voices within the recreation community. Seeing people who look like them enjoying outdoor activities inspires individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to feel a sense of belonging and to try it themselves.



**For most outdoor recreation occupations in Maine, the barrier to entry is relatively low, with no formal higher education needed. Nearly three-quarters of outdoor recreation jobs require no more than a high school diploma at entry level, but offer a broad array of training and opportunity for skill development.**

Source: Maine's State of the Outdoor Recreation Industry Report, 2024

## Workforce and talent

Maine offers world-class training and education resources for outdoor recreation employment. From the growing number of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs focused on the outdoor industry to the graduate-level outdoor industry business degree at the University of Maine, as well as specialized programs in boat building and outdoor leadership, the state provides critical training, education, and skill development for those seeking careers in outdoor recreation. However, greater awareness of these programs is essential to sustaining Maine's strong outdoor recreation employment rate, which has been declining over the past decade. This trend is expected to continue due to Maine's aging workforce.

Employment in this sector often appeals to those who value the opportunity to work outdoors and see the direct impact of their efforts. Occupations span diverse roles, from boat building and trail maintenance to guiding services and administrative, educational, design, marketing, retail, and hospitality-related positions. However, many of these jobs are characterized by low wages, temporary or part-time schedules, and a lack of benefits, making them less competitive than other career paths. Employers and small business owners face a significant challenge in the outdoor recreation economy: the scarcity of workforce housing, which hampers their ability to recruit, attract, and retain skilled talent. Ensuring the long-term health and growth of Maine's outdoor recreation economy will depend on effectively addressing these workforce challenges.

## OUTDOOR RECREATION CAREER TYPES



### Outdoor Tourism and Hospitality

- Registered Maine Guides
- Resort operators and sporting camp managers
- Cultural heritage tour leaders focusing on outdoor landmarks
- Wildlife and environmental photographers for tourism campaigns



### Conservation and Stewardship

- Land trust managers and environmental restoration specialists
- Park rangers and wildlife biologists
- Advocacy roles for outdoor policy and public access
- Volunteer coordinators for conservation programs



### Media, Marketing, and Storytelling

- Content creators for outdoor brands (bloggers, vloggers, social media managers)
- Outdoor-focused podcast producers and hosts
- Documentary filmmakers highlighting outdoor adventures or environmental issues
- Branding and marketing specialists for destination campaigns



### Gear and Equipment Innovation

- Outdoor apparel designers
- Engineers developing eco-friendly outdoor gear
- Technologists creating AR/VR outdoor training simulations
- Repair and upcycling specialists for outdoor gear



### Health and Wellness Integration

- Wilderness therapists and adventure therapy providers
- Personal trainers specializing in outdoor fitness
- Yoga or mindfulness instructors for outdoor retreats
- Nutritionists or dietitians catering to adventure sports



### Infrastructure and Urban Planning for Recreation

- Trail designers and urban park planners
- Sustainable transportation specialists for outdoor destinations
- Engineers for adventure parks or zipline courses
- Consultants for integrating outdoor access into urban spaces

## Climate resilience

Climate change profoundly impacts the outdoor recreation economy, from extreme winter storms to wetter summers.<sup>9</sup> Unpredictable and extreme weather events disrupt outdoor recreation activities, force closures, and alter operating seasons. These sudden events have damaged outdoor recreation infrastructure, such as trails, bridges, and buildings, leading to costly repairs and replacements.

Warmer temperatures alter snow conditions, making it difficult for ski resorts and snow-based recreational activities to operate. This leads to shorter ski and snowmobile seasons, reduced snowpack, and changes in snowmaking practices.

With so much of the outdoor recreation economy dependent on weather and climate, climate resilience has become a central consideration for the *10-year Roadmap*. Developing climate-resilient infrastructure and operations, such as designing buildings and trails to withstand extreme weather events, will be essential. Maine residents, businesses, nonprofits, and government leaders must continue to prioritize sustainability and stewardship to adapt to the effects of climate change on the outdoor recreation economy.

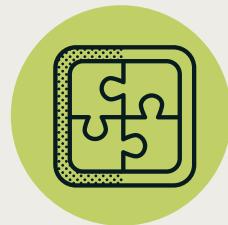
<sup>9</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/climate-impacts>

**Climate change profoundly impacts the outdoor recreation economy, from extreme winter storms to wetter summers.**



## Cross-sector collaboration and identity

All of this will require collaboration across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors, as well as the ability of the diverse industry segments to speak in a unified voice. Manufacturers, retailers, facility managers, and service providers face common economic challenges and can collectively advocate for solutions more effectively if they work collaboratively. This requires intentional convening and networking, bringing diverse industry segments together so they can learn about one another, cultivating a shared identity as members of the outdoor recreation economy, and creating common messaging that projects coordinated communication about the outdoor recreation economy.



**Manufacturers, retailers, facility managers, and service providers face common economic challenges and can collectively advocate for solutions more effectively if they work collaboratively.**



**31%**

**Maine's outdoor recreation economy workforce is older, less racially diverse, and lacks gender parity compared with national averages for the sector. Thirty-one percent of outdoor recreation industry workers are over 55 years old, providing an opportunity for those entering the industry to gain skills and training from an experienced workforce.**

Maine's State of the Outdoor Recreation Industry Report, 2024



# STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Each of the four goals of the *Roadmap* is supported by specific strategies that have emerged throughout the planning process.

Note that these are not the only ideas that emerged in the planning process — there are many other ways to support a thriving outdoor recreation economy in Maine. However, these emerged as top priorities among stakeholders during the *Roadmap* planning process. These goals, strategies, and action items build on a long history of developing, supporting, and maintaining the outdoor recreation economy in Maine.



**GOAL****1**

## Elevate Maine's outdoor recreation industry into a critical and thriving pillar of the state's economy

### **Strategy 1A:** Strengthen collaboration and unify Maine's outdoor recreation industry

While outdoor recreation has long been a cornerstone of Maine's identity, the sector now requires dedicated representation and support to fully realize its potential. Maine's outdoor businesses are diverse but connected by their shared reliance on the natural environment and a values-driven workforce. By bringing together outdoor recreation industry trade associations to align on policy and convening the industry annually at gatherings like the Maine Outdoor Economy Summit, we can foster a unified voice and strengthen collaboration across the sector. Creation of an implementation team and continued engagement, especially from the private sector, alongside state, federal, educational, and nonprofit partners, will ensure that key recommendations are acted on, and stakeholders remain committed to the industry's long-term growth and success.

### **Strategy 1B:** Define and communicate the value of Maine's outdoor recreation economy

To position Maine as a leader in the outdoor recreation economy, we must effectively showcase the sector's vast depth and breadth. Collecting and sharing annual economic benchmarking data will highlight the industry's significant contributions to the state's overall economy. Paired with inclusive, coordinated storytelling, we can present a compelling narrative that resonates with a wide range of audiences — policymakers, consumers, investors, economic developers, entrepreneurs, educators, and potential workers. A clear and focused message, strategically delivered to both local and global audiences, will strengthen Maine's standing as a hub for outdoor recreation, driving further growth, awareness, and investment in the sector.



**GOAL  
2**

## Increase and sustainably manage outdoor recreation

### **Strategy 2A:** Enhance Maine's outdoor recreation infrastructure to meet evolving recreation demands

To sustain and grow Maine's outdoor recreation economy, it's essential to invest in modern, resilient infrastructure that meets the needs of current and future outdoor enthusiasts. These efforts should have community and landowner support and may include actions such as improving community walkability and bikeability, developing climate-resilient trail networks, expanding recreation areas, and enhancing facilities such as parking, boat launches, and toilet facilities to improve visitor experiences and accommodate current and anticipated participation. Assessing existing outdoor recreation infrastructure through comprehensive inventory and needs assessment will provide a clearer understanding of our current state, allowing us to better prioritize upgrades and expansions that enhance the outdoor experience for all residents and visitors. Maine's natural resources and stunning landscapes are among our greatest assets for outdoor enthusiasts.

Enhancing these assets could include expanding conservation lands and recreational easements, supporting state plans like the Climate Action Plan and Working Lands initiative to conserve 30% of Maine's land and water by 2030. Securing permanent funding streams will be essential to sustaining these improvements and supporting long-term growth.

### **Strategy 2B:** Ensure that Maine's outdoor recreation opportunities are inclusive, accessible, and welcoming to all communities

Ensuring that Maine residents and visitors can enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation will create a more robust and sustainable sector. This includes fostering diversity in participation and representation across dimensions such as race, ethnicity, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and nationality. To achieve this, outdoor spaces must be designed inclusively, with clear information



on trail difficulty, facilities, and accessibility so that everyone feels confident in participating. Efforts should reduce barriers — such as transportation, language, and financial — through programs like gear-lending libraries and free access days, while expanding access to information and training to empower new participants. Supporting community-led organizations will allow leaders from these groups to help teach, mentor, and foster a deeper connection to outdoor activities within their communities.

## **Strategy 2C: Expand programming to teach outdoor recreation skills and promote everyday access**

Maine's outdoor recreation culture can be further strengthened by expanding skills-based programs, increasing public knowledge of recreational opportunities, and promoting access through four-season activities. By leveraging Maine guides and outdoor educators, residents, visitors, and students will gain confidence in biking, hiking, paddling, skiing, and other outdoor pursuits while learning responsible practices. Promoting four-season recreation and enhancing access to information about where to go and what to expect will help make outdoor recreation a regular part of life in Maine. Events, races, and festivals will further celebrate and connect the community through shared outdoor experiences. These efforts will support physical and mental well-being while driving economic growth.

## **Strategy 2D: Support private landowners to maintain and improve recreational access**

Maine's outdoor recreation economy relies heavily on the unique tradition of public access to private lands, with about 94% of the state's forest land privately owned. More than half of this land is open to the public, and the state's implied permission structure allows recreationists access to private property unless posted. As outdoor participation grows, strengthening relationships with private landowners becomes critical to maintaining access to recreational assets like trails and waterways. There should be a focus on supporting landowners through stewardship agreements, increasing recreationist education about responsible practices, and enhancing volunteer capacity to maintain access and landowner relationships. Programs like the Outdoor Partners initiative at IF&W will play a key role, and increasing funding for state agencies to hire staff will further support landowners with education and enforcement efforts.

## **Strategy 2E: Grow Maine's outdoor recreation management and resource stewardship capacity**

As outdoor participation increases, Maine must expand its ability to manage recreation sustainably while protecting natural resources. This strategy



focuses on increasing public education initiatives to promote responsible outdoor behavior, emphasizing safety, Leave No Trace principles, and respectful interactions with wildlife and fellow recreationists. To address current gaps, it is essential to invest in a dedicated workforce to steward outdoor spaces effectively. Developing standard messaging and stewardship principles that partners across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors may voluntarily adopt will promote consistency in recreation management. Collaboration with public agencies, businesses, nonprofits, and volunteer groups will enhance Maine's capacity to maintain recreational assets, manage visitor impacts effectively, and ensure adequate staffing is in place, equipped to uphold and protect Maine's natural resources.

**GOAL**

**3**

## Establish outdoor recreation as a tool for building vibrant, economically diverse, and resilient communities

### **Strategy 3A:** Connect outdoor recreation initiatives to community development and economic growth

Leaders across the state are working to re-energize Maine's downtowns and rural communities, re-imagining their economies, capitalizing on historic assets, and infusing arts and culture into civic life. With traditional industries in flux, outdoor recreation presents a transformative opportunity for rural communities. Considering outdoor recreation as a key part of state and local economic development efforts and making outdoor recreation a meaningful economic multiplier will help support current and future work, and build prosperity in rural communities. Recent data has shown that the outdoor industry can be a powerful driver of Maine's economy. Outdoor recreation also fuels employment in other sectors, such as manufacturing, finance, retail, transportation, food services, tourism, travel, and more.

### **Strategy 3B:** Strengthen municipalities' and local planning entities' research and implementation capacity

Maine's municipalities strongly influence land use, development, infrastructure investment, and transportation, some of the fundamental building blocks of community growth. However, many small municipal governments are stretched thin, with few paid staff and limited resources. Additionally, in much of northern Maine, a significant portion of outdoor-related development takes place in the Unorganized Territory with the Land Use Planning Commission serving as the planning and zoning authority where there is no local government in place. Municipalities and planning entities need robust capacity-building support and resources to achieve local and state goals around outdoor recreation economy development.



*Photo by: Billy Black*



These can include additional staff and/or outside technical assistance to bolster their in-house capabilities, enhancing data and trends analysis, access to state and federal funding, connections to planning entities and consultants, and support for collaborations with nearby towns and other potential partners. Additionally, municipal staff need easy access to best practices, such as planning, zoning, permitting tools, broadband, housing, climate-resilient infrastructure standards, and funding mechanisms.

### **Strategy 3C: Enhance and connect communities' outdoor recreation infrastructure and destination assets to downtowns, schools, and local neighborhoods**

Maine is home to a rich array of natural resources like forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, and the coast. However, having these natural resources near our communities isn't enough to spur economic development on its own. We know that towns and cities that invest in their outdoor assets attract employers and employees who value the work-life-balance that outdoor access provides. Investments must be carefully planned to create assets that are sustainable, accessible to residents, attractive to visitors, and benefit local economies and communities. Connecting outdoor recreation assets to downtowns, schools, and neighborhoods is a proven strategy to spur local business activity.

### **Strategy 3D: Share the story of Maine's outdoor recreation economy to illustrate its benefits — healthy lifestyles, thriving businesses, strong communities, and an exceptional quality of life**

Maine's natural resources can drive talent and business attraction that support a high quality of life. Understanding the importance of the interdependence of a healthy environment, outdoor recreation, and a vibrant economy is critical. Outdoor recreation, combined with placemaking initiatives, can make communities more inviting, encourage social interaction, and stimulate economic growth. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share can improve how people feel about the world around them. Additionally, research shows that outdoor recreation can improve educational outcomes for students of all ages including attention and test scores, retention, and high school graduation rates. It can also lower long-term individual and public health care costs by reducing stress and obesity rates, improving physical fitness, increasing productivity, and strengthening social bonds with family and friends.



**Research shows that outdoor recreation can bolster educational outcomes for students of all ages, including improved attention, test scores, retention, and high school graduation rates.**

**GOAL****4**

## Establish Maine as a premier state for outdoor recreation businesses, education, training, and career opportunities

### Strategy 4A: Engage and equip Maine's youth for careers in the outdoor industry

Maine's outdoor recreation sector offers diverse careers — from boat building and guiding to manufacturing, design, business, and more — but many young people are unaware of these opportunities. With an aging workforce, it is critical to focus on attracting and preparing the next generation. To address this, we need to foster a passion for the outdoors by increasing access to outdoor experiences, integrating outdoor education and career pathways into K-12 curricula, and boosting enrollment in specialized career and technical training programs. Hands-on experiences, internships, and mentorship will help students build early connections and skills. Strong partnerships with industry, schools, and nonprofits will be key to preparing Maine's next generation of outdoor professionals.

### Strategy 4B: Attract talent through post-secondary education and training

With a strong employer base and higher education opportunities that include access to outdoor recreation, Maine can be a leading hub for outdoor industry post-secondary education on the East Coast. By promoting existing programs that offer essential training in business management, leadership, and hands-on skills like boat building, and designing new ones based on industry need, we can draw both in-state and out-of-state students to explore diverse career paths in the outdoor economy. Supporting summer jobs, internships, and apprenticeships will provide practical experience and valuable connections. Additionally, integrating specialized training with traditional classes through microcredentials will equip students with the skills needed in this evolving sector.



## Strategy 4C: Strengthen professional development and employer collaboration

Maine's outdoor industry offers opportunities for both first-time workers and those seeking second careers, with roles that develop valuable leadership skills. We must collaborate with employers to understand evolving skill needs, create clear career pathways, and address recruitment challenges. Supporting professional development through on-the-job training, microcredentials, and tailored growth opportunities will help equip employees for evolving industry needs. Additionally, advocating for workforce housing and exploring employer consortiums or statewide benefits pools can reduce costs and improve retention.

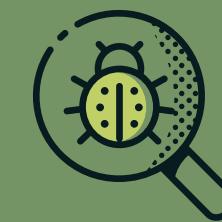
## Strategy 4D: Strengthen support for starting and scaling outdoor recreation companies

Maine can be a hub for outdoor recreation businesses by offering comprehensive support for both startups and scaling companies, building tailored programs that address the unique needs of the outdoor industry. By integrating entrepreneurial networks, mentorship opportunities, and access to funding, Maine can empower entrepreneurs and fuel business growth. Additionally, expanding Maine's national and international presence

will enhance the visibility of the state's outdoor products and experiences. By leveraging strategic partnerships, participating in trade shows, and expanding supply chain connections, Maine can strengthen its brand recognition in key markets, further positioning itself as a destination for outdoor business innovation and success.

## Strategy 4E: Drive innovation and R&D for outdoor recreation companies

Maine's research and development capabilities, coupled with its unparalleled access to natural testing environments in all four seasons, makes it a prime hub for outdoor innovation. The University of Maine's pioneering work in textiles, advanced composites, and renewable materials offers outdoor companies' unique opportunities to develop cutting-edge products. Innovations in lightweight, durable, and sustainable materials derived from forest products could revolutionize outdoor gear and equipment. By fostering collaborations between businesses and research institutions, creating funding opportunities, and promoting sustainable manufacturing practices, Maine can enhance competitiveness and sustainability in the outdoor recreation sector, both locally and globally.



**Maine's research and development capabilities, coupled with its unparalleled access to natural testing environments in all four seasons, makes it a prime hub for outdoor innovation.**

## Strategy 4F: Promote development of the outdoor recreation entrepreneurial ecosystem

An industry-focused development approach fosters collaboration among outdoor recreation businesses and business support organizations, enabling them to share resources, reduce costs, drive innovation, and build scale. By facilitating shared access to knowledge, equipment, facilities, materials, and staff, businesses can overcome challenges like high overhead costs and seasonal employment gaps. Shared spaces, such as co-working or co-manufacturing facilities, can serve as hubs for startups and established companies alike, promoting knowledge exchange and collective growth. Strategic partnerships with educational institutions, government agencies, and anchor institutions/firms will enhance workforce development, sustainability practices, business scaling opportunities, and resource circulation to promote Maine's economy.



Maine's outdoor economy is on the frontlines of climate change, facing direct impacts such as shorter winters and increased extreme weather events.

## Strategy 4G: Bolster climate resilience for Maine's outdoor recreation industry

Maine's outdoor economy is on the frontlines of climate change, facing direct impacts such as shorter winters and increased extreme weather events. We must equip the industry with up-to-date data and practical solutions to enhance resilience. By helping businesses and organizations adapt their operations, infrastructure, and offerings to withstand climate disruptions — such as expanding shoulder season activities and developing durable trail systems to handle increased heavy rainfall and flooding — Maine can safeguard the long-term success of its outdoor recreation sector.



# THE CORE TEAM

This report was a collaborative effort and was developed under the guidance of the following organizations and individuals:



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## Report by Fourth Economy

Fourth Economy is a national community and economic development consulting firm. Powered by a vision for an economy that serves the people, our approach is centered on principles of competitiveness, equity, and resilience. We partner with communities and organizations, public and private, who are ready for change to equip them with tools and innovative solutions to build better communities and stronger economies.

Blaze

## Communications by Blaze Partners

Blaze Partners is a full-service advertising and digital marketing agency based in Falmouth, Maine, and proudly certified as a B Corp. For years, we've supported Maine's outdoor recreation economy and Maine Outdoor Brands, helping to amplify their impact. At Blaze, we are relentless in our pursuit of big ideas, always focused on achieving meaningful objectives. Our approach is rooted in consistency, transparency, and integrity. Having been on the client side ourselves, we deliver the level of service we once dreamed of — built on collaboration, innovation, and trust.

We're proud to be the communications partner behind the brand development, website, PR strategy, and all creative deliverables for *Maine's 10-Year Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap*.





# MAINE'S 10-YEAR OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY ROADMAP

Blazing a trail for Maine's outdoor recreation economy



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[trailblazerroadmap.com/roadmap](http://trailblazerroadmap.com/roadmap)

