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# VERMONT OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMIC COLLABORATIVE

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*A network initiative to leverage Vermont's outdoor recreation assets, brand, and culture to sustain, grow, and drive economic development in the outdoor recreation sector and the Vermont economy as a whole.*

Why focus on outdoor recreation in Vermont?

1. **It's big. And growing and diversifying.** In Vermont, outdoor recreation accounts for 34,000 direct jobs and \$2.5 billion in consumer spending. Outdoor participation by residents and visitors is growing, especially in trail running, adventure racing, mountain biking and backcountry skiing. -- building on traditional sectors that are already strong: downhill skiing, hunting and fishing, snowmobiling.
2. **Outdoor manufacturers are being lured away.** Incentives are pulling Vermont brands and companies to other countries and states. Vermonters can work together to identify challenges and opportunities for this sector to remain secure and profitable in Vermont and, in so doing, serve as an example to other brands and companies that may consider locating here.
3. **But Vermont has the backdrop they want.** Companies in all sectors can and should use our natural landscape, access, and infrastructure as a recruitment tool. The 2016 Economic Development Marketing Plan, "Telling the Vermont Story," underscored the power of the outdoors and outdoor recreation as a recruitment tool. Increasing numbers of Prospective employees -- especially younger ones -- prioritize environmental quality and access to the outdoors in career planning.
4. **Growing the outdoor recreation sector means economic growth for other industries.** If people play here, they stay here. And they invest here. In fact, one cornerstone of the Marketing Plan is to tell the stories of the many businesses whose founders fell in love with the Vermont landscape and came back with a business, or stayed here because of it. (Examples: IBM's Vermont founder Tom

Watson Jr. loved skiing so much he bought Madonna Mountain (Smuggler's Notch) and relocated his company here. Dealer.com's President and CEO is also an avid mountain biker who takes frequent trips to hit the trails around Vermont and the Adirondacks, and the entire organization is built around a culture of fitness)

5. **Vermont has one of the strongest brands in the world.** Say "Vermont" and it *means* something *good* to people around the world: skiing, mountains, hiking, maple syrup, beer, craftsmanship, authenticity, quality-of-life.
6. **Our land ethic matters.** Big recreation business is facing a crisis in places like Utah that do not value land conservation the way Vermonters do. Here in Vermont, we have an easy and beautiful story to tell about conservation and recreation providing for a sustainable outdoor industry perfectly consistent with a vibrant working landscape of farms and forests.
7. **We need to unite the hard-working volunteers and non-profits in Vermont with a common agenda to maximize the economic impact.** We get things done in Vermont, and we do it with community, volunteers and non-profit partners.
8. **Public lands in Vermont provide much of the backdrop and access.** We have great natural assets, public lands, and resources managed for access, but, public lands need consistent resources to meet the growing demands of a recreating public, while sustaining the high quality of those trails and facilities over time.

## **Strategic Focus: Leverage Vermont's Outdoor Recreation Assets to Stimulate and Improve Economic Outcomes**

We know the economy in Vermont benefits from our shared love of the outdoors. Direct spending at outdoor retailers and service providers (gear outlets, manufacturers, sales reps, guide services, marketing firms that specialize in outdoor recreation, etc.) as well as per trip expenditures (meals, gas, hotels etc.) add up to a whopping \$2.5 billion annually in consumer spending. Nationally, the \$646 billion outdoor recreation industry is now being measured as part of America's gross national product. and is nearly as big as the pharmaceutical industry and motor vehicle sales and parts combined.

By promoting our outdoor recreation assets and businesses Vermont will be able to sustainably support this sector and help drive overall growth in our economy.

### **Sustain: Amplify What Is and Keep It Strong**

**Market the outdoor recreation values and attributes of Vermont by:**

- Finding opportunities to tell the story of successful outdoor recreation initiatives (trail towns, public-private partnerships etc.) and businesses (gear retailers and manufacturers, product innovations, supply chain development, etc.) to regional and national audiences.
- Sharing knowledge of and experiences in Vermont's outdoors – across modes in a modern and fresh way.
- Collaborating to develop policy relating to outdoor recreation and the businesses of outdoor recreation.
- Examining and promoting laws, policies and initiatives that support marketing and smart business development.

**Continuously steward outdoor recreation resources and the organizations that support them by:**

- Maintaining and improving our world-class trail systems with an emphasis on connecting trail networks across the state.
- Supporting non-profits, volunteers and land managers to maintain outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Supporting conservation and land stewardship efforts.
- Providing accurate information about outdoor recreation opportunities.

**Grow: Make More Possible**

**Guide the development of community-oriented outdoor recreation assets and increase economic impacts by:**

- Removing barriers for outdoor recreation development in Vermont.
- Engaging communities at various levels of readiness and provide resources for growing their outdoor recreation infrastructure and stewardship.
- Recommending incentives, tax structures and other industry-related programs and policies to support our outdoor recreation businesses.
- Aligning with the statewide economic development marketing plan for businesses and residents.
- Providing business liaisons for potential employers and manufacturers to identify and address industry-specific development needs.

The time is now. Western states, despite their issues, are way ahead. RI, NC and other eastern states are actively angling to get ahead. We know how to do this, have been doing it, and now just need to build a frame around our effort to enhance organization, collaboration, and communication among the strong diversity of interested parties.

## **The Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative: A Network of Experts with Specialized Knowledge and Interests -- and a willingness to work together.**

Together, Vermont's outdoor industry, trail groups, conservation groups and state government will engage in Collective Impact Model work to create a common agenda and strategic plan. The network will determine how to structure and govern a Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC).

### How do we get there?

- The first step is to establish a core group of primary stakeholders from the private sector of the outdoor recreation economy -- both for-profits and non-profits and including gear manufacturers, retailers, brand representatives, trail and user groups and conservation organizations -- and also from state government through the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.
- The steering committee designs the process of reaching actionable outcomes to achieve the purposes of VOREC; engages others in the private commercial outdoor industry, state, federal, municipal and regional governmental organizations and the nonprofit sector; and facilitates communication and collaboration among all participants to take full advantage of all that each brings to the effort of the whole.
- VOREC can only be successful through collaboration with all individuals and groups with knowledge of and access to information and resources to identify and develop strategies to take advantage of opportunities for strengthening and growth.
- The group will identify discrete points of focus or action areas that will pull experts from across the various sectors, with the steering committee at the hub of the wheel.