



## American Recreation Coalition

*Dedicated to the protection and enhancement of everyone's right to health and happiness through recreation.*

### **January 2012 Newsletter: Special Partners Outdoors Report Partners Outdoors 2012 January 8-11 Kingsmill Resort, Williamsburg, Virginia**

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#### **Partners Outdoors 2012 Tackles Tough Recreation Funding Issues**

Leaders from the recreation industry and federal agencies met at Partners Outdoors 2012, held January 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> at Kingsmill Resort in Williamsburg, Virginia. The conference focus was *Funding Recreation Opportunities* and the gathering marked the 21<sup>st</sup> year of the invitation-only meeting of top public and private sector recreation leaders.

Participants discussed current funding strategies for federal land managers, including disadvantages and opportunities for future improvement. Discussions focused on current and potential funding mechanisms for recreation infrastructure and operations, including use of fee receipts, special taxes, concessions and permit strategies, partnerships and more, that will help the recreation community meet the public's needs for quality recreation experiences now and in the future.

Recommendations from Partners Outdoors 2012 aim to achieve a number of very valuable outcomes, including:

- ◆ Increase understanding of current and potential ways to fund capital and operational costs of recreation programs on public lands and waters;
- ◆ Assess new opportunities for linking healthcare and education programs to public lands operations and maintenance fiscal needs;
- ◆ Recommend pilot efforts to replace recreation services now funded through annual appropriations with sustainable alternative strategies; and
- ◆ Recommend effective monitoring of visitor desires and satisfaction levels, including value satisfaction.

Please visit the Partners Outdoors blog [here](#) for more information and to download presentations.

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## Crandall Opens Partners Outdoors

On Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, American Recreation Coalition President Derrick Crandall welcomed Partners Outdoors participants to Williamsburg, Virginia. He touched on the history of Partners Outdoors, which began with discussions at Mount Rushmore in 1990. The meeting remains an opportunity for representatives of federal agencies and private partners to discuss strategies to serve seamlessly visitors to public lands.

Mr. Crandall told the group that Partners Outdoors is the premier opportunity for innovators and problem solvers in the outdoor recreation community to come together and talk about shared interests and goals, discuss problems and address changes in technology, the American public and more in terms of the great outdoors. He tasked participants to convert conversation into action and to challenge themselves to think as creatively and as practically as possible.

Video of Mr. Crandall's presentation is [here](#).

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## Examining Park Visitors and What They Want

James Bedwell, Director of Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources for the U.S. Forest Service, moderated the general session panel titled *Setting the Stage: Current Findings on Visitors to Public Lands, Lifestyle Trends and Political Realities*. He began the session by touching on the America's Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative, announced in 2010 by President Obama. AGO has engaged people across the country in a dialogue about what's great about the Great Outdoors of America, he said. And recreation has become a larger part of AGO as Americans nationwide continue to insist on its importance. Mr. Bedwell gave some insight into the AGO working group, which is comprised of various federal agencies. The agencies in the working group must work together in these times of financial difficulty to determine successful, budget-neutral solutions to problems facing access to the great outdoors.

The session's first speaker was Bruce Peacock, Chief of the Environmental Quality Division of the National Park Service. Dr. Peacock presented findings of the recently released *Comprehensive Survey of the American Public 2008-9*, which is the second comprehensive survey by the National Park Service examining park visitation. The survey discovered that a high percentage of American adults – 47% – have visited a park in the last two years. Visitors to parks find that activities like viewing outdoors exhibits and attending ranger-led activities add the most to a park visit. The survey also found that the main deterrent to park visitation is poor marketing: many Americans don't visit parks because they don't know much about parks. Other deterrents include the high hotel and food costs in parks, long travel times to parks and reservations that need to be made too far in advance. Despite these reported deterrents, Dr. Peacock reported that the survey team was heartened by the findings. The team compared the

results of this survey to the first survey released in 2000, and found that there was a marginal increase in overall participation as well as a marginal increase in Hispanic and African American minority participation. Good marketing could remove the main reason people don't visit parks by providing them with good information, he reported.

Bob Bonar, President and COO of Snowbird Ski & Summer Resort, discussed recently enacted legislation permitting expansion of summer activities by ski areas and why the new policy makes sense for both public land managers and ski area managers. The new law, the Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act, was supported by the Forest Service and most environmental groups. The law paves the way for more robust summer operations at the nation's 121 ski areas that operate on public lands. Guests visiting ski resorts in the summer will now find more opportunities for activities like mountain biking, ziplines, alpine slides and even in organized competitive events. Ski resorts that provide these activities will be able to generate revenue through the summer months and provide more year-round jobs. Mr. Bonar reported that Snowbird has been able to provide salaries and health benefits to over 1,000 year-round employees, and he expects that number to grow as Snowbird continues to explore options for summer activity.

Robert Ratcliffe, Deputy Assistant Director of Renewable Resources and Planning for the Bureau of Land Management, ended the evening's session. He discussed the America's Great Outdoors initiative (AGO) and the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR), which he described as "the implementation arm for AGO." Mr. Ratcliffe remarked that the AGO team discovered during their listening sessions that outdoor recreation can inspire people to care about the outdoors, which was an awakening to conservationists. An overwhelming number of public online comments on AGO were related to outdoor recreation, and FICOR was established to address this priority. FICOR will provide an opportunity for directors of agencies who manage federal outdoor recreation facilities, lands and water to meet twice per year and: 1) energize themes and priorities across all agencies; 2) provide a national, web-based portal for recreation information; 3) align visitor use management on public lands and waters; 4) align and enhance outdoor recreation planning; 5) develop a sustainable funding model; and 6) improve visitor safety. FICOR plans to rely heavily on partners to help build, create and manage facilities to accomplish the above goals, and Mr. Ratcliffe welcomed the partnership of organizations at Partners Outdoors.

Video of the session and downloadable speaker presentations are [here](#).

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## **Great Outdoors Month: An Opportunity for Partnership**

Sunday's reception and dinner showcased Great Outdoors Month, held annually in June. The hallway leading to the reception featured Great Outdoors Month gubernatorial proclamations and informational posters on annual events like National Get Outdoors Day, National Trails Day, National Marina Day, National Fishing and

Boating Week and the Great American Backyard Campout.

James Bedwell, Director of Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources for the U.S. Forest Service, and Derrick Crandall, President of the American Recreation Coalition, spoke during dinner about upcoming opportunities for June 2012. Mr. Bedwell reminded participants that Great Outdoors Month is a chance to focus efforts to connect with youth and other target demographics. Great Outdoors Month events unite public and private partners and support the President's America's Great Outdoors initiative.

Mr. Crandall elaborated, saying that June provides an opportunity for outdoor recreation interests to showcase efforts which unite often-divided political forces. The great outdoors, he said, are important to our health, our economy and our sense of connectivity. Mr. Crandall called for increased efforts in 2012 to elevate the visibility of Great Outdoors Month and urged participants to create opportunities for political players to be friends of the great outdoors. The Western Governor's Association's new Get Out West initiative provides an opportunity for governors to put their fingerprints on a Great Outdoors Month event, and Mr. Crandall encouraged participants to get involved with the organization.

Video of the session is available [here](#).

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## **FLREA: Celebrating Successes and Examining Difficulties**

Robert Ratcliffe, Deputy Assistant Director of Renewable Resources and Planning for the Bureau of Land Management, welcomed participants to the second day of discussion on the morning of Monday, January 9<sup>th</sup>. He set the stage for the panel on *The Recreation Fee Program Today: Accomplishments and Challenges*, which discussed the current recreation fee program, how it is successful and where problems lie. He encouraged panelists to imagine an ideal fee system, but to consider appropriate future alternatives that would best serve the American public. Mr. Ratcliffe asserted that if the Federal Lands Recreation Act (FLREA) sunsets in 2014, fees will still remain. He implored participants to think of ways to improve FLREA in terms of the focus, clarity and transparency of the program.

The first set of speakers was comprised of representatives from the Interagency Fee Working Group. Jane Moore, Fee Program Manager for the National Park Service, was first to speak. She explained the purpose of fees, saying that people who use certain facilities – like outdoor recreation enthusiasts – should help defray some of the cost of running such a site. Ms. Moore showed a video featuring several places in the U.S. where fees have improved recreation sites enormously – and where patrons understand and encourage fee charges. She concluded by telling participants that the members of the Interagency Fee Working Group were participating in Partners Outdoors to be active listeners, take suggestions and listen to critiques of the current fee system.

Anthony Bobo, Acting Deputy Division Chief of Recreation and Visitor Services for the Bureau of Land Management, spoke on lessons learned through the years of the fee program. Mr. Bobo focused on the importance of using fee revenue to enhance the visitor experience. Participating agencies under FLREA keep 80% of fee revenue at the local recreation site. The working group has found that people support and appreciate fees when they can see the benefits of those dollars going back into their local program. Fee revenue should be kept separate from Congressionally appropriated revenue, Mr. Bobo said, but public lands managers should keep in mind that fee revenue stream can be unpredictable and plan accordingly. Mr. Bobo emphasized the importance of working with partner organizations to fully leverage fee income.

Brandon Flint, Acting Fee Program Manager for the U.S. Forest Service and Interagency Pass Program Manager for the National Park Service, expanded on the importance of partnerships. He remarked that the America the Beautiful annual pass has provided partnership opportunities between federal agencies and made significant headway towards improving communication with visitors. The pass is \$80 per year and can be accepted at any recreation area managed by the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He pointed out that a major disadvantage to the pass program is that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is unable to participate due to a jurisdictional and budgetary difference in Congress. Passes like the America the Beautiful annual pass also make it easier for federal agencies to use technology to track visitor data – which can result in an improved experience for the visitor. And passes encourage visitors to comply with fees by making the fee payment process simpler. Fee compliance is a big issue, Mr. Flint said, and it is important to make sure everyone who utilizes publicly managed sites pays fairly.

The working group wrapped up their panel with a presentation by Phil LePelch, National Coordinator of the Recreation Fee Program for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Mr. LePelch explained the benefits of the working group, including better communication and cooperation between agencies that manage public lands and better information-sharing techniques. The working group has also developed program consistency and decreased visitor confusion. To date, \$2.5 billion has been re-invested into visitor improvements under FLREA and has improved accessibility and safety for visitors.

The next panel presented an alternate point of view, with speakers who laid out disadvantages of the current fee program. Kitty Benzar, President of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition, spoke first. She asserted that public lands should be managed in a way that is welcoming – that is, without fees. She went on to say that public-private partnerships can be problematic because American taxpayers own public lands and trust their stewardship to agencies. Ms. Benzar said that a partnership between a federal agency and a private organization should maintain the agency as the senior associate in the partnership in order to keep the American public's best interests under consideration. She asserted that this is not always the case. She criticized what she sees as growing commercialization of public lands. Visiting public lands has turned into a marketing transaction, said Ms. Benzar, and fees on these areas drive away the

visitors who love them. She called for agencies to stand up for the public and be responsible for the public lands.

Warren Meyer, President of the National Forest Recreation Association, discussed how to implement fee programs that meet the needs of both public land visitors and public land agencies. Agencies can save a tremendous amount of money by allowing private organizations to operate public land sites, but he noted that federal agencies need to provide clear and transparent actions for this to be effective. He pointed out that many recreation budgets are being cut at the federal, state and local levels, and used California as an example of a state where simply having a fee program is insufficient to maintain operation. Many parks and recreation areas in California charge high fees, but these fees are not enough to maintain the program.

Mary Coulombe, Chief of Natural Resources Management for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, addressed challenges in the current fee structure. The largest problem for the Corps is that the agency cannot participate in FLREA due to structural budgetary differences. The Corps hosts seven million recreation visits per year – the highest visitation of any federal agency – and collects about \$45 million per year in recreation fees, which all return to the Treasury. Ms. Coulombe and the Corps would like to see those fee dollars stay at local recreation sites to improve facilities. And visitors to Corps sites expect their fees to do just that. When visitors find out that their fee dollars are returned to the Treasury instead of being reinvested in local sites, they're annoyed, said Ms. Coulombe. And visitors are confused that the Corps cannot take part in recreation-wide programs like the America the Beautiful annual pass. Ms. Coulombe stated that the Corps will need to close parks next year if these challenges are not addressed because its current budget cannot support the current recreation program. The Corps may be the leading federal recreation provider, she explained, but its operational inconsistencies are difficult for the public and will compromise the agency's future as a provider of quality recreation.

Downloadable speaker presentations are [here](#).

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## **Strategies for Future Fee Programs**

Kevin Kilcullen, Branch Chief of Visitor Services for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, moderated the program titled *The Recreation Fee Program Tomorrow: Strategies and Tools for 2014 and Beyond*. He asked panelists to identify strategies and tactics that effectively address the funding challenges of the future. He also asked panelists to address three challenges: 1) identify the role of the recreation fee enhancement program in offering visitor services; 2) identify ways agencies track what they're doing; and 3) identify barriers and issues to address to be more consistent in offering quality programs.

Craig Crutchfield, Branch Chief for Interior in the Office of Management and Budget, addressed the fee issue from an economist's point of view. Fee charges must be determined appropriately, he said, because the charge is ultimately covered by either the user or the taxpayer. The challenge in recreation areas is that public lands provide a mix of public and private goods. A widely available public good – like a hike in the woods – should be paid for by the taxpayer while a private good providing a more exclusive and direct benefit – like the use of a campground – should be paid for by the individual. Mr. Crutchfield said that recreation fees should supplement, not supplant, an agency's recreation budget. Fee money must be spent to the advantage of the visitors, and those users have a say in how recreation budgets are spent because they pay for it. Listening to visitors can mean listening to them when they say a site charges too much. Mr. Crutchfield ended his remarks by saying he does not see a way that appropriations can come back to a level that will replace fees. Fees are here to stay, he said, but agencies need to be more judicious in their use of fee dollars.

Daniel Smith, Superintendent of Colonial National Historical Park, outlined the history of fees at his park. The National Park Service has collected a fee at Jamestown since 1940. The current Colonial National Historical Park charges \$10 for a family to tour Jamestown and Yorktown for seven days. A major problem in collecting fees at Colonial National Historical Park is that the park is only able to collect fees from 35% of visitors. Some are eligible for discounts while others simply access the park in ways which avoid entrance fee payment. Mr. Smith called for flexible and reasonable fees that visitors are comfortable with and result in an improvement of the area.

Derrick Crandall, President of the American Recreation Coalition, acknowledged that fees are a complex issue. Future fee programs must be designed to permit the public to share the legacy of the great outdoors. He urged participants to take advantage of new ideas now, well in advance of the deadline for action in 2014. Mr. Crandall urged recreation interests to develop consensus requests for Congressional action. Visitors must be able to pay fees easily and conveniently, and fees must be reasonable. Mr. Crandall pointed out that recreation fees have existed since the early days of the National Park System, and they exist in various forms including fishing licenses, lift passes, campground fees and more.

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## **Discussing Creative Solutions to a Complex Issue**

Margaret Bailey, Senior Vice President at CHM Government Services, moderated the session on *Creative Strategies for Meeting the Financial Needs of Public Recreation Programs*. Ms. Bailey pointed out the need to agree to common terms and goals for the public and private recreation sectors. Both sectors offer services and opportunities but approach investments and operating costs in different ways. Public recreation managers are at a disadvantage in that they operate on a fraction of the money that competing private industries have access to. She also called for budget processes of federal land management agencies to be clarified.

John Flood, Chief of the Sustainment and Community Services Branch at the Headquarters of the Air Combat Command for Langley Air Force Base, provided an alternative to traditional federal fee collection techniques. He discussed Air Force Services' Non-Appropriated Funds (NAFs), which are generated funds that are used for "quality of life" programs for Air Force troops and families. NAFs do not cover mission-sustaining facilities like libraries, fitness centers, intramurals, community centers and picnic areas by congressional mandate. NAFs partially cover support for programs like arts and crafts, outdoor recreation, golf, pro shops, cabins and marinas. He explained that the Air Force is in the process of changing business models internally to meet the needs of enlisted troops. NAFs will soon be subject to four new core missions: 1) Regeneration; 2) Daily Life; 3) Fitness; and 4) Food.

Laurie Shaffer, Acting Chief of the Federal Duck Stamp Office for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, discussed the Federal Duck Stamp Program. The program is the only federally run art contest, and Ms. Shaffer described it as an excellent way to reach out to the public. The program began when hunters approached conservationist J. N. Ding Darling and asked for support of a tax to secure wetlands for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The program has been a success for 79 years, partially because the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has researched and responded to the need for changes during that time. The Federal Duck Stamp Program has developed an e-stamp pilot program which sold 380,000 stamps in 2011. The Duck Stamp is loved by the public and is replicated at the state level. The Duck Stamp provides a beautiful keepsake, and also serves as a pass into any National Wildlife Refuge.

Tom Burrell, President and CEO of Our Lands & Waters Foundation, utilizes the nonprofit's partnership authority to support the Corps fully. The Corps returns all its collected user fees from recreation to the Treasury, and so has limited funds to maintain or improve its recreation sites. In contrast, Our Lands & Waters operates under a cooperative agreement with the Corps that allows fees to stay at the recreation site where they are collected – Our Lands & Waters reinvests the money back into the recreation areas. Our Lands & Waters is able to pay for gatekeepers, handle contracting, collect fees on behalf of the Corps, raise funds and rebuild infrastructure and has raised over \$7 million for a Corps facility in the Fort Worth area. Mary Coloumbe, Chief of Natural Resources Management for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, noted that it would be ideal to replicate this kind of program nationally, but there are practical limitations.

Downloadable speaker presentations are [here](#).

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## **Recreation.gov: A Portal to Recreation**

Jane Moore, Fee Program Manager for the National Park Service, and Mary Coulombe, Chief of Natural Resources Management for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, provided participants with an update on improvements in Recreation.gov. The website is a key objective of the President's America's Great Outdoors initiative and seeks to be

the federal portal to recreation. The federal team operating the website is looking ahead for better ways to keep its information updated and provide better reservation capabilities when offers for a next generation contract are solicited in two years. Recreation.gov is starting to provide photos of sites to give potential visitors a better idea of what they can expect. Recreation.gov also provides information used by many local tourism agencies. Recreation.gov offers an opportunity for nonprofit and private organizations to participate in providing information, because the website is the face of recreation to millions of people nationwide. “We have to give them what they need and build on informational systems that are already out there,” said Ms. Coulombe.

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## **Marketing Public Lands, from a Private Industry Perspective**

Robin Carson, General Manager of Kingsmill Resort, gave participants a briefing on Kingsmill and a quick marketing pep talk. She shared insider knowledge on how to manage an operation under financial pressure – a situation she sees replicated on many federally managed sites. She advised managers to think about what their sites have that nobody else offers – whether that is a special spirit, ambiance or the night sky. Ms. Carson cited the James River and historic Williamsburg as two of the major benefits of the Kingsmill location. She also emphasized understanding the visitor market, how that market changes and what visitors expect. “The greatest likelihood of success is giving your visitors what they want,” she said. Ms. Carson advised land managers to find a win-win for the community to promote local tourism which brings major benefits to the entire area.

The downloadable speaker presentation is [here](#).

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## **Offsite Learning Excursion: Williamsburg and More**

The Monday afternoon session included an off-site education tour of Colonial Williamsburg and Colonial National Historical Park.

Staff members of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation welcomed participants to the Visitor Center in Williamsburg, which provides a centralized ticketing, orienting and transportation center for visitors. Tourists can gather information on regional attractions like Jamestown, Busch Garden and William and Mary College and orient themselves on all Williamsburg has to offer. The Center also provides transportation to regional attractions to 1.5 million visitors annually, including 30,000 guests per year to Colonial National Historical Park. The briefing also covered marketing and pricing initiatives undertaken by the Foundation and ended with a tour of the town’s historic attractions.

Staffers at the Historic Jamestowne Visitor Center explained how the Colonial National Historical Park partners with the Federal Highway Administration to maintain the parkway and bridges that lead to the park and with Preservation Virginia to develop two visitor centers at Jamestown and Yorktown. The park estimates that 350,000 people

pay a fee to enter the park every year – though substantially more visitors enter the park without paying their fee. The park has seen a decline in visitation since the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Jamestown in 2007. And the park enjoys a dramatic increase in visitation on fee-free days: two or three times as many visitors enter the park on those days.

The tour allowed the group to view creative public-private partnerships and see fee successes and problems in person at facilities.

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## **Partnerships the Key to Success for Outdoor Recreation**

Jim Kurth, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, gave the keynote speech at dinner on Monday evening. He discussed the importance of federal agencies developing partnerships with private and nonprofit organizations to keep Americans in the great outdoors.

Mr. Kurth pointed out that when Americans are welcomed into places like national wildlife refuges and use and enjoy public lands in a compatible way, federal agencies enlist them in future public land support. He referenced “Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges in the Next Generation,” a conference the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hosted last summer to organize ways to plan conservation acts of the future – noting that most of the conversation at the conference focused around the role of people in the great outdoors. Mr. Kurth reminded the audience that finding ways to involve non-traditional visitors like Hispanics, African Americans and youth in the great outdoors is critical to maintaining our public lands – and that partnerships are the key to success.

Video of Mr. Kurth’s presentation is available [here](#).

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## **Eliminating Barriers to the Great Outdoors**

Frank Peterson, President and CEO of the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), started Tuesday morning off with a session on *Transforming Information About Fishing and Boating into Knowledge*. He gave participants an inside look at how RBFF works to get more people interested in fishing and boating. The first trick, he said, is to reduce barriers that keep people from experiencing the outdoors. Many people don’t know what to do in the outdoors or how to do it, which is why RBFF has compiled an online resource called Fishopedia that compiles information on where and how to boat and fish. Camping, hiking and fishing are three crossover activities that most frequently get people into the outdoors, and Fishopedia gives untrained anglers and boaters more information on how to get outdoors. RBFF is looking to expand fishing and boating into new markets and has several successful programs that target Hispanics, women and youth.

Video and a downloadable PDF are available [here](#).

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## The Great Outdoors and Health

Andrew Leider, Senior Program Manager at the Institute at the Golden Gate, moderated Tuesday morning's session on *New Resources: Health and the Great Outdoors*. "I'm here to help you understand you are all in the health care business," he said. Mr. Leider went on to say that connecting health and the great outdoors can be a marketing challenge, but that reminding people to take care of themselves and look after their health can be a great way to push them into the great outdoors.

Mr. Leider then introduced Jason Urroz, Director of Kids in Parks at the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation. Mr. Urroz spoke about his program's innovative efforts to get kids outdoors and help them create healthy lifestyles before they develop health problems. Kids in Parks is a partnership between the Blue Ridge Parkway, Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina Foundation. The program works with public lands at every level – city, county, state and federal – to create self-guided programs for American families. Kids in Parks has developed a program called TRACK Trails, which is a series of networked, self-guided trails. The program provides brochures with a trail map and other information so that parents can lead their children on a hike and discover animal and plant life together. The program also incentivizes children to come back for a return visit – kids can earn prizes by logging their hike online at [www.kidsinparks.com](http://www.kidsinparks.com). The more hikes they log, the bigger prizes they earn! TRACK Trails is easy to transfer to other state programs – and California and South Dakota are moving to develop their own programs.

Robin Schepper, Senior Advisor on the Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative at the Bipartisan Policy Center and former Director of the First Lady's Let's Move Program, spoke next. Ms. Schepper echoed some of the sentiments of other conference speakers: most importantly, that outdoor exercise needs to be marketed as a way to have fun, and getting there needs to be convenient for the average American family. Americans aren't concerned about which agency operates which public land, she said. Ms. Schepper ended with an emphasis on the importance of partnership and encouraged participants to work with members of the health care industry. She told participants to be leaders in trying to solve the obesity epidemic: "You have the places and the assets – partner with the groups who have the ideas and the programs."

Video of the session and downloadable speaker presentations are [here](#).

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## Innovative Outdoor Education Programs

Rich Weideman, Assistant Director of Partnerships at the National Park Service, moderated the session on *New Resources: Education and the Great Outdoors*. He

emphasized the importance of partnerships to developing educational programs, and described his experience developing educational programs at Alcatraz Island. Partnerships with outside organizations were imperative to developing educational programs on human rights and current prison systems at the site – and area children benefitted dramatically from their exposure to the park and to programs. He told participants that fee demo money was used to create some program exhibits.

Frank Peterson, President and CEO of the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), spoke next on youth education resources developed by RBFF. The organization has partnered with the Discovery Channel to develop Explore the Blue, a web-based program for educators, families and children. The program seeks to stimulate students' imagination and instill a lifelong connection to the great outdoors. The program also develops activities that allow kids to explore the outdoors with their parents. Explore the Blue partners with community advocates to bring the program into schools, reaching 879,152 youths last year with an introduction to fishing and boating.

Vanessa Morel, Washington, D.C. Director of NatureBridge, discussed the program and its East Coast expansion. NatureBridge is a nonprofit residential environmental education program that works to create the next generation of stewards to the great outdoors, among children of all backgrounds. The program seeks to create a bridge between the health crisis and the education crisis, getting kids outside to stimulate learning. Currently operating in the West, NatureBridge will begin developing programs at Prince William Forest Park in Virginia soon. National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis is a champion of the program and is supporting NatureBridge's efforts to bring similar programming to East Coast national parks.

Eliza Russell, Director of Education Programs for the National Wildlife Federation, discussed ED OUT with the group. ED OUT is a remarkable program pioneered by Dr. Steven Walts, Superintendent of Prince William County Schools in Virginia. The program relies on partners to develop outdoor educational programming for a day towards the end of the school year. ED OUT has been a great success in Prince William County, one of the largest, most diverse school districts in the country. The program shows that kids who have a tactile, hands-on learning experience learn the best – and the outdoors is great at providing this kind of experience.

Video of the session is [here](#).

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## Action Team Reports

Before Tuesday's closing reception, three action teams presented their summaries to develop real-world strategies in the three areas below.

- Recreation Fees: Learning from the Past, Sharing Ideas for the Future: How fees can be used and where fees are retained vary among agencies, and fee

needs are unique for every agency. The team agreed that land managers need to be more transparent in reporting their use of fees and avoid confusing the public in their program implementation.

- Piloting New, Sustainable Funding Strategies on Public Lands and Waters: The team recommended that land managers develop and strengthen friends groups and focus on building local partnerships. Improving fee programs on public lands largely depends on maintaining financial sustainability.
- Assessing Recreationists' Interests and Satisfaction Levels on Public Lands: The team told participants that understanding users and what they seek to gain from an experience on public land is critically important. And partners can help federal agencies assist with data collection. Land managers need to find better ways to share information about the use of fees paid by visitors so they have a better understanding of the value of their visit.

View presentations from action teams [here](#).

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## **Why Recreation Will Continue to be a Force for Good in America**

The conference ended with a champagne toast and reception sponsored by Xanterra Parks & Resorts, owner of Kingsmill Resort. Ruth Coleman, Director of California State Parks, shared personal reflections on why recreation will continue to be a force for good in America. California State has slashed recreation budgets in the last two years, and California State Parks are struggling to remain open, yet Ms. Coleman shared evidence that she and her team remain positive as they wrestle with these challenges. A great deal of hope has come from Californians themselves – communities are rallying together to pool time and resources to keep parks open, several wealthy benefactors have made generous donations to California State Parks in the last year, and corporate partnerships are being explored. Participants responded with a toast to the beautiful outdoors and the can-do spirit of partnership that will continue to sustain the recreation community and its resources.

Video of Ms. Coleman's remarks is [here](#).

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For more information or to address questions/comments, please email: [tgeorgevits@funoutdoors.com](mailto:tgeorgevits@funoutdoors.com).

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