

Chapter 8: Public Lands, Tourism, and Community Connections

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Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Purpose

Public lands and protected areas play an integral role in regional economic development—a connection often overlooked in the United States. This chapter makes the case for devoting greater attention to the role of public lands as a generator of regional tourist activity, and points to the opportunity for public land managers to collaborate with tourism industry providers, tourism promoters, and regional planning entities to ensure sustainable tourism growth.

Public lands visitation provides benefits to gateway communities in the form of jobs, expenditures, and new business development, while visitation fees often are used to support conservation goals. Parks, forests, monuments, and refuges are attractions that provide a venue for people to enjoy natural amenities and for tourism providers to earn a living facilitating these outdoor experiences. Greater acknowledgment of the economic impact of public lands visitation may help to expand support for their continued management. Tourism growth associated with public lands also can result in changes to nearby communities and put pressure on existing infrastructure. Yet, decisionmakers are not always cognizant that changes in agency policy or specific management actions can potentially affect a broad array of tourism enterprises, as well as communities dependent on the tourism industry. Sustainable tourism planning aims to minimize negative economic, social, and environmental impacts, while addressing needs of visitors, the industry, and host communities now and in the future (Mowforth and Munt 1998). Public lands add value to a regional destination and are often marketed to prospective travelers by tourism promoters and industries. Yet, not all public land managers fully acknowledge that the land they serve is part of a global tourism network, nor do they have access to current tourism industry data to allow for proactive planning. Planning

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and management of public lands would be enhanced by collaborative engagement from regional tourism entities and enterprises who depend on public lands.

Problem Statement

Tourism can be an important economic development opportunity for rural communities that serve as gateways to parks, forests, reserves, and protected areas. In resource-rich regions, tourism can augment existing economic activities, such as farming, cattle grazing, or logging, and become a primary source of employment. For example, the Olympic Peninsula of Washington was formerly among the largest timber-producing areas in the United States in terms of volume, and local communities depended on jobs in logging and mills. In 1981, Olympic National Park was declared a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization World Heritage Site. In 2018, the park received 3.1 million visitors who came to experience its temperate rainforest and dramatic wilderness coastline. New guiding enterprises, accommodations, and retail enterprises have been launched. Although economic benefits from tourism may help sustain local communities, proximity to public lands and protected areas can be associated with immigration and can introduce enduring social changes that are not always welcome. Natural resource agencies play an important role as providers and caretakers of treasured natural and cultural destinations, yet the critical position of public lands in the tourism system is not always fully acknowledged or well understood. We suggest that new thinking, new research, and incorporation of sustainable tourism frameworks can help land managers to embrace their role as a tourism provider in ways that will result in better economic, environmental, and social outcomes. In addition, there are opportunities for greater coordination between agency officials, tourism providers, marketers, and planners to explore regional sustainable tourism as a form of rural development with greater intentionality.

As was noted in chapter 4 (Armstrong and Derrien 2020), language is powerful and shapes the way we consider and frame the world as well as the position of ourselves and others in it. An important distinction between the concepts of “outdoor recreation” and “tourism” requires further elaboration. “Outdoor recreation” is a term primarily used in North America and a few other industrialized regions. The term encompasses leisure (free-time) activities that occur in a natural or outdoor setting, and the positive experiences that these activities generate (Moore and Driver 2005). This concept draws our focus to the nature of the outdoor activity (e.g., hiking or skiing), to the benefits of the activity to the recreationist (e.g., fun or relaxation), and to interactions of visitor use with the environment. Outdoor recreation management involves “providing opportunities for satisfying

outdoor recreation experiences while sustaining the health and integrity of the natural environments on which these opportunities depend” (Moore and Driver 2005: 17). Management of outdoor recreation appears less concerned with how people traveled to public lands, what services they relied upon, or where they came from (local or nonlocal), and is more focused on what they do after they arrive and on how to minimize harm to the natural or social environment. However, in this report and elsewhere, the concept of outdoor recreation is being reconsidered (Blahna et al. 2020a).

Whereas outdoor recreation focuses on leisure and nature-based settings, tourism is a broader concept that includes travel for both pleasure and business. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization,

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which imply tourism expenditure (UNWTO 2008: 1).

This definition refers to an entire system of interactions and transactions that involve a traveler (or visitor), a set of activities being undertaken by the traveler, an array of tourism intermediaries who facilitate the travel, the host community and local hospitality vendors, travel agents, and the interconnected systems of transportation that result in travelers arriving at destinations, which include public lands. In other words, the concept of tourism reflects the industry, visitor activities, visitor experiences, and network of entities that support the trip. In the context of public lands management, tourism emphasizes the connections and market interactions among actors involved in the production and consumption of natural and cultural heritage. Land managers and policies in the United States traditionally revolve around the concept of classic outdoor recreation within localized use contexts (and management jurisdictions), as opposed to tourism and regional, national, and international use contexts. We assert that by not considering public lands visitation in the context of a tourism system, public land managers are overlooking important connections and opportunities that allow for more proactive and informed land management.

Greater attention to measuring the benefits of public lands visitation may help create a stronger case for their ongoing management, in lieu of declining capacity. Protected areas such as national and state parks, forests, grasslands, refuges, and monuments are primary destinations in the United States, catering to both local

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users and travelers, with benefits to the regional and national economy. Outdoor recreation accounts for 2 percent of gross domestic product in the United States (USDC BEA 2018). In 2016, an estimated 889 million recreation visits were made to federal lands, generating \$49 billion in visitor spending (Cline and Crowley 2018). Collectively, U.S. state parks drew 791 million visits in 2016 (Leung et al. 2017). Nonlocal visitors to protected areas generate new income and employment for gateway communities. Expenditures associated with park visitation represent a revenue source for regional businesses, including hotels, restaurants, transportation, retail suppliers of gear and equipment, and outfitting and guiding services (White et al. 2016). Although research has shown that tourism may not be a panacea, the industry can augment other economic sectors and provide seasonal and year-round employment opportunities (Briedenhann and Wickens 2004). The economic value of visits to parks and protected areas for nearby communities is beginning to be more fully appreciated.

Public lands are often at the center of regional tourism promotion efforts, yet many public land managers are missing potential opportunities to partner with tourism providers, industry officials, and regional tourism promoters. Working in concert, public and private entities can create a pathway toward sustainable tourism that protects the environment and provides opportunities for local communities. We argue that a systems-based perspective to understand tourism in the context of public lands will shed light on new relationships and change the way we think about, plan for, and manage visitation to parks, forests, and other protected areas.

Barriers and Challenges

Traditional recreation management has emphasized the development of a range of outdoor settings that provide for associated recreation opportunities leading to diverse visitor experiences. Planning for outdoor recreation typically occurs with consideration of visitors after they set foot on public lands. In contrast, a systems approach considers public lands visitation within a regional and global framework. Only recently has public agency recreation management been concerned with aspects of visitor demand, recognizing changing demographics, consumer trends, market segments, and niche outdoor experiences that shape visitor expectations. Similarly, state and local tourism agencies devote considerable resources to destination marketing rather than collaboration centered on destination management. More investment from tourism promoters on collaborative processes, partnerships, and stewardship of the public lands could strengthen a region's ability to support visitation. Viewing tourism as a developmental activity has rarely been an aspect of managing visitors on public lands. The lack of this view has resulted in plans and

actions that have no vision as to what the object of development is or what it is that tourism should sustain.

An example of the need for tourism-based land management includes the lack of consistent focus on factors that contribute to shifts in visitor's demand, which can contribute to agencies being unprepared for changes in visitation levels or consumer needs. Meanwhile, local businesses, visitor bureaus, economic development entities, and tourism promoters are often linked to broader tourism networks and share responsibility for generating visitor interest and directing people to natural attractions (which may or may not be consistent with agency intent or capacity).

In the context of public lands management in the United States, there has been considerably less attention placed on understanding elements and dynamics of the global tourism industry or structural aspects of the tourism system. This includes the role of local and nonlocal entities in shaping patterns of tourism growth for nonmarket goods and services (i.e., recreation opportunities, nontimber forest products) (Cerveny 2008). In most other parts of the world, tourism is integral to the establishment and overall management of protected areas, because visitors are often needed to finance conservation (Eagles et al. 2002, Leung et al. 2018). This difference in perspective is partly due to the legacy of most of U.S. public lands management being linked to extractive industries such as timber, for which we now have a wealth of information, as opposed to outdoor recreation and tourism. As extractive industries continue to decline in economic viability, and tourism continues to grow, many land management agencies will consider a fundamental reappraisal of how they manage these multiple uses.

Tourism and visitation to public lands can cause challenges for gateway and neighboring communities. Changes in social identity, socioeconomic structure, demographic composition, power relations, quality of life, and aesthetics associated with tourism expansion have been well-documented (Andereck et al. 2005, Cerveny 2008, Smith and Brent 2001). The tourism industry can generate a new group of tourism entrepreneurs and seasonal workers to communities, shifting social dynamics. Success stories exist, such as Leavenworth, Washington, a former logging community where a citizen coalition convinced the city to remake their community with a Bavarian motif to encourage tourism (Frenkel and Walton 2000). Still, numerous case studies depict rural communities wrestling with dramatic changes associated with tourism growth, such as an influx of guests, tourism entrepreneurs, and outside corporations; with commoditization of their community or heritage; or with tourist encounters in areas once considered "local," such as neighborhoods or favorite hiking trails or fishing holes (Sharpley 2014). These

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issues can be exacerbated when agencies and stakeholders in the tourism system are not engaged in coordinated planning and management. Understanding the social impacts of visitor use on public lands to neighboring communities—coupled with a commitment to professional recreation and tourism planning—is an important role of public agencies. A commitment to understanding the benefits and undesirable consequences of tourism has led to responses on the part of land managers, such as the broader trend toward introductory visitor facilities (e.g., visitor centers) in local communities, such as at Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument in Utah or Channel Island National Park in California.

Agency officials would benefit from recognizing their role in the tourism system and developing linkages with local and nonlocal tourism entities to plan for tourism in a way that is consistent with the agency's vision; that does not exceed agency capacity to manage resources; that is economically, socially, and ecologically sustainable; and that provides access to all. Figure 8.1 provides one generic depiction of the elements of the tourism system in the context of public lands. The figure shows how multiple institutions play a role in shaping the volume and character of protected area tourism and those stakeholders concerned about its implications.

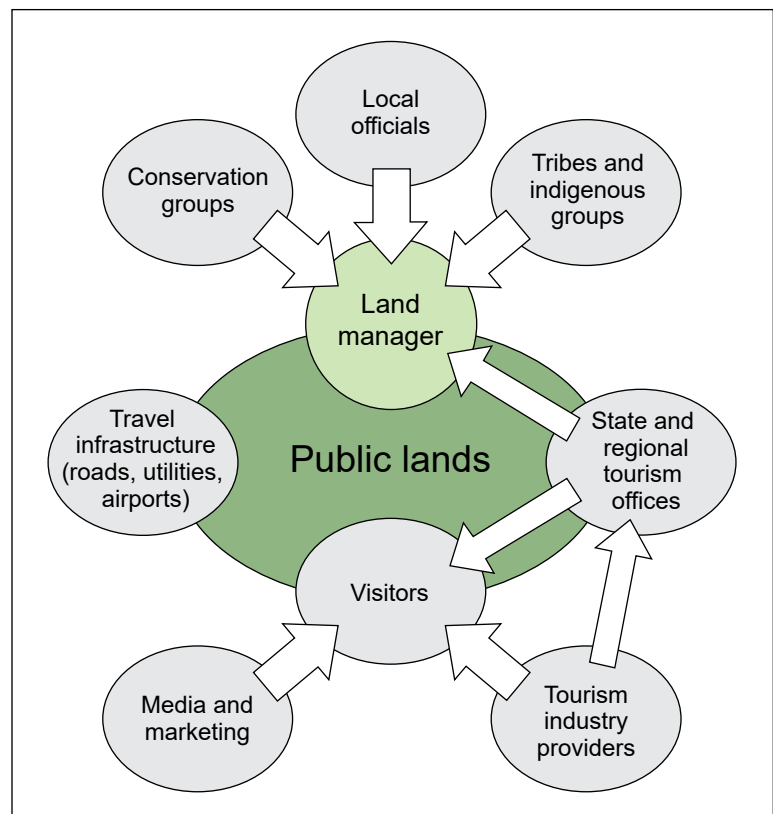


Figure 8.1—Tourism system for public lands management. Public land managers are influenced by many local and regional stakeholders. Meanwhile, nonlocal and local industry promoters can influence the volume and characteristics of visitors through promotional efforts. Transportation infrastructure also affects visitor flow and volumes. In planning and managing for recreation on public lands, this complex array of tourism actors is not always considered.

Greater engagement with the tourism system is reflected in more stewardship-based tourism marketing like the new “Leave No Trace” partnership with the state of Colorado, or direct investment in public lands, such as the grant-making and destination development programs administered by state tourism offices in Indiana, Montana, Oregon, and elsewhere. Other examples of more proactive and engaged tourism planning can be found in destinations with strong public-private partnerships, multiple jurisdictions, and a regional focus, such as the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Some of the barriers might be related to deeply embedded notions about the role of people on the landscape. U.S. public land managers historically have been trained to focus on stewardship of their land base, providing access to visitors while emphasizing management of other resources (fish and wildlife habitat, water quality) or commodities (timber, minerals, rangelands), depending on agency mission. In the traditional view, people are often viewed as a disturbance factor, and their presence requires managers to mitigate their impacts and protect valued resources. As noted in chapter 1, this deeply embedded notion of humans as “anthropogenic factors” would affect how some land managers respond to nature-based tourism—an entire industry explicitly devoted to marketing outdoor experiences and connecting people with public lands. This may be compounded with biased perspectives of some public servants toward commercial enterprise in particular sectors, such as retail trade or services, versus tangible commodities like timber or minerals.

Other institutional lenses inhibit full appreciation for the role that public lands managers play in shaping the tourism system as well as the collective response that tourism providers, promoters, and players in the tourism system have on shaping the number of visitors who arrive and the types of experiences they seek. Below are five key barriers to implementing a systems-based sustainable recreation and tourism strategy on public lands:

- An agency predisposition to managing for protection of ecosystems and resources, with less attention to human connections, including recreation, cultural heritage, livelihoods, and other connections to public lands. A more balanced and interactive relationship between resource protection and recreation land use would help (Blahna et al. 2020b).
- An historical “supply-side” approach to managing resources and visitors (recreation settings) once they arrive on the park/forest without recognizing the factors that lead to increases or decreases in visitor demand for natural amenities, consumer (visitor) activities and technologies, and particular experiences (which are often generated by the media).

- Historical hesitancy to embrace commercial tourism enterprises, such as outfitter-guides who secure permits to bring groups into forests and parks, as critical partners in providing outdoor recreation programs and services. Shared language and concepts for land managers and planners to discuss tourism and mediated visitor experiences would help address this gap.
- Capacity constraints (personnel and budgetary) that limit opportunities for partnerships around recreation and tourism at the local and regional level. Although this is changing, there is a relative lack of well-established collaborative forums or deep relationships between land managers and tourism providers at local, regional, or national scales, compared to groups engaged in ecological restoration, fire management, or other land management activities.
- Overemphasis on jurisdictional boundaries, specifically that agency concerns have ended at the boundaries of the agency. Hesitancy to engage stakeholders who operate beyond their jurisdiction has encouraged managers to minimize tourism as a regional issue that is relevant to their operations.

Addressing these embedded values and biases may require a paradigmatic shift in the way that public lands are conceptualized, managed, and funded, as suggested in chapter 1 of this report.

New Conceptual Approaches

New approaches may help to clarify the role of public lands in the tourism system and to identify an array of tourism actors and institutions that are implicated when visitation to public lands expands or contracts. New research on the sociology, economics, and geography of tourism can accompany these efforts.

Systems approach—

A social-ecological systems (SES) approach can help identify actors and institutions involved in tourism to parks, forests, and protected areas and reveal the dynamic interactions among these entities. McCool and Kline (2020) expressed the need to conceptualize, plan, and manage in the context of a dynamic system that recognizes emergent properties and pressures. Anderies et al. (2004) developed a framework for understanding institutions in the SES that cooperate and have the potential for collective action. Their model includes a configuration of resource users and public agency providers interacting with the resource itself and the public infrastructure that supports resource use. A systems approach is useful for perceiving how policy, regulation, markets, and infrastructure can affect the flow of visitors to and from public lands as well as patterns of resource use once they arrive. A systems approach to understanding tourism and its connection to parks and protected areas would allow a more holistic view of recreation and tourism (Baggio 2008, Eagles 2009, Plummer and Fennell 2009).

Measuring benefits of recreation and tourism—

National forests, parks, and other public lands provide several benefits (e.g., recreation opportunities, health, water quantity and quality, erosion control, and biodiversity) to individuals and communities that are not always considered when evaluating investments in and tradeoffs associated with land management strategies. Greater attention to measuring the benefits of public lands visitation may help create a stronger case for their ongoing management, in lieu of declining capacity. It is necessary to determine both the use and non-use values of public lands to promote efficient land management strategies. Some use values can be directly identified by market transactions (e.g., land prices and entrance fees). For other nonmarket uses (e.g., hiking, birdwatching, and photography) and non-use values (e.g., knowledge of existence or that resource and opportunities are being passed on to future generations), resource economists use techniques such as the travel cost method (Parson 2017), hedonic pricing (Taylor 2017), contingent valuation method (Alberini and Kahn 2006), benefit transfer (Johnston et al. 2015), and more recently, the choice experiment method (Louviere et al. 2000) to estimate the monetary values of environmental goods and services. Sánchez et al. (2016) used an online survey of wilderness visitors with the travel cost model to estimate the losses for closure of hiking sites during a season (ranging from \$29,000 to \$2.9 million) in the San Jacinto Wilderness, San Bernardino National Forest. Rosenberger et al. (2017) estimated recreation economic values using the benefit transfer method based on the updated Recreation Use Visitor Database (Loomis 2005, Rosenberger and Loomis 2001). The authors provided information to estimate the recreation economic values of different recreation activities for each national forest. One study by Sims et al. (2018) used the benefit transfer method to estimate the health-related cost savings resulting from physical activities from open space for Tennessee's Cumberland region. They found that total health-related cost savings to be \$466 million per year from physical activities on open space.

Nonmarket values associated with recreation and tourism, such as improved health and well-being, sense of place, cognitive growth, and stewardship, are often acknowledged, and work is being done to better account for these benefits by using models such as ecosystem services. Cultural ecosystem services are the “non-material benefits people obtain from ecosystems through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation, and aesthetic experiences” (MEA 2005: 5). Cultural services have proven difficult to define and measure, but scientists have begun to develop frameworks that are meaningful to public land managers and show the diverse benefit of public lands to people (Bryce et al. 2016, Plieninger 2013). This can be seen in a number of recent publications that focus on outdoor recreation and health outcomes (Thomsen et al. 2018). Information of the benefits

and monetary values produced by national forest, parks, and other public lands can potentially assist land managers in evaluating potential tradeoffs when making resource management and planning decisions.

Stakeholder and social networks—

The use of both stakeholder analysis and social network analysis may be useful to help recreation planners and land managers identify entities that play a role in recreation and tourism within a particular geographic region (Prell et al. 2009). Stakeholder analysis involves the identification of entities (e.g., local hospitality industries, outfitter/guides and other permit holders, transportation agencies, travel bureaus, state and municipal economic development groups, user groups, citizen groups, and environmental groups) who have an interest or “stake” in how public lands are managed (Waligo et al. 2013). Using this approach, all relevant entities are identified, the impact of proposed projects or actions are assessed, and their roles, access to knowledge, resources and capabilities are evaluated systematically. Social network analysis can be used to assess the relationships, affinities, and communication patterns among organizations (Scott 2017). Researchers have used social network analysis to build conceptual models of regional tourism and recreation networks to understand how to build coalitions, structure communications, and engage in collaborative planning (Scott et al. 2008).

Global tourism trends—

Recent research assessing the global tourism industry should be viewed as a resource for land managers (Buhalis and Costa 2006, Conrady and Buck 2007, Theobald 2005). Studies on tourism markets, consumer trends, sector analysis, regulations, finance and banking, immigration and border policy, and other aspects are helpful in understanding how visitors may arrive in destinations and their expectations once they set foot on public lands. In Alaska, for example, cruise ships are the primary source of visitors to parks, forests, and protected areas. Therefore, changing dynamics in the cruise industry can have significant impacts on recreation patterns (Cerveny 2008). Some work has focused on industry factors related to sustainable tourism (Eagles and McCool 2002, Eagles et al. 2002, Harris et al. 2002), but more study is needed with an updated view on changing dynamics. This lack of consistent focus on factors that contribute to shifts in visitor demand can result in agencies being unprepared for changes in visitation levels or consumer needs. New guidelines for visitor management in protected areas are being developed that encourage consideration of sociocultural, economic, and resource effects of tourism development (Leung et al. 2018). For a discussion of changing dynamics of international tourism on U.S. public lands, see Helmer et al. (2020).

Knowledge of industry dynamics would help resource managers become proactive in management, allowing them to anticipate trends and mitigate challenges associated with increased visitation or diversifying uses. Agency decisionmakers would benefit from regular publication of data visitation trends, industry trends, market conditions, and consumer product information that would help to inform their understanding of who might be coming to public lands and what they desire from their outdoor experiences.

Models for tourism partnership and collaboration—

Partnership and collaboration offer some hope for public agencies working with networks of institutions within the SES framework (Bramwell and Lane 2000, Mellon and Bramwell 2016). Some public agencies are beginning to work closely with tourism promoters, providers, and agencies and municipalities to engage in recreation planning and to communicate changes in policy or management. Examples for collaboration and capacity building in protected area tourism have been shared in the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidelines for sustainable tourism (Leung et al. 2018). They may participate as members in visitor bureaus or regional development boards, where they seek common goals for visitation levels, activity types, and the spatial distribution of visitor activities to reduce social or environmental impacts or promote community benefits. In some instances, such as the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee, collaborative groups have emerged, bringing together various entities that play a role in the visitor industry, including public land managers. We recognize that capacity constraints in public agencies make it challenging to match the level of commitment required to participate effectively in collaborative processes. Public agency planners and partnership coordinators working together may gain added capacity by developing linkages with local and nonlocal tourism providers and promoters to plan for tourism in a way that is consistent with the agency's vision and does not exceed agency capacity to manage resources. Greater engagement of land managers with regional development entities can lead to recreation plans that are socially and economically sustainable for host communities and public agencies.

Compelling Questions

This growing body of knowledge on collaboration and partnership dynamics has generated a number of intriguing research questions:

1. What drives tourism demand? How do global, regional, and local entities shape consumer trends? How does user-generated content shared on social media contribute to visitation patterns? What does that look like for

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a particular national forest, national park, or protected area? How is tourism demand affected as the U.S. population becomes more diverse? How is tourism demand affected by changes in forest landscapes? How do public land agency policies and management actions shape visitation patterns?

2. What are the direct and indirect benefits that public lands visitation provides to rural communities? What are some of the challenges or concerns associated with a reliance on tourism? How do we measure the distribution of economic and social benefits at various scales? How can the economic and societal benefits of public lands tourism be leveraged to provide equitable community services and resources?
3. What models can be employed to use the revenue generated from tourism to ensure the provision of high-quality experiences through the development and maintenance of facilities, infrastructure, services, and programs?
4. What tools, metrics, or planning frameworks exist (or are needed) that can help public land managers in the United States consider whether recreation plans are economically and socially sustainable for rural communities? What can we learn from ecotourism and sustainable tourism indicators used in other parts of the globe? How might agencies cooperate to ensure that sustainable tourism guidelines developed by the IUCN be applied in the United States?
5. Can effective coordinating models be found to support regional sustainable tourism planning and management?

Conclusions

Visitors to national parks, forests, and protected areas generate income and employment opportunities for gateway communities. Tourism linked to natural and cultural heritage represents an opportunity for rural development. Historically, resource managers have focused on the supply side—providing quality outdoor experiences and a diversity of settings for visitors to public lands while protecting the natural and social environment. More recently, land managers have recognized that outdoor recreation is part of a larger tourism system and that many local and nonlocal partners and proponents play a role in shaping recreation demand. In addition, agency planners are beginning to acknowledge the impact of management decisions related to roads and facilities on host communities and tourism enterprises. Expansion of tourism leads to impacts on natural and cultural resources, but also can affect the distribution of economic benefits and social dynamics within host communities. We have laid out the critical need for embracing tourism in sustainability planning for public lands, illustrated the barriers and challenges, and

highlighted new conceptual approaches and trends that can help to achieve these goals. We hope to realize a vision for public lands that serves the economic and social needs of neighboring communities, while also improving and increasing opportunities for tourists.

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