

Western Playgrounds/ Outdoor Recreation: *Who Cares?*

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- As a former public land policymaker, I have a strong interest in land management – how do we manage public land resources for the benefit of the American people?
- After leaving government, I have focused most of my Colorado Board service on non-profits that acquire or steward open space, public lands or national trails.
- As Denver/Front Range have grown, the use and abuse of public lands for outdoor recreation has also grown. Land managers in Colorado are struggling to keep up with the astonishing growth in recreational demand.
- Today, I want to share some of what is happening in Colorado because I know the same thing is happening at a different scale in Salt Lake City, Boise, ID and other urban areas around the West.

Introduction

Outdoor Recreation Defines What Living in the
WEST is All About



[2]

- As a group, we Westerners are among the healthiest Americans, in part, because we have a big playground in our National Forests, Public Lands, National Parks, Refuges, State Parks and local open space. Outdoor recreation is key to our physical, mental and spiritual well-being.
- Saving, setting aside and protecting lands for recreation, wildlife or scenic beauty is the important First Step.

The Challenge

“Saving a landscape as a national park is only part of the preservation battle – saving the spirit of the place is also essential.”

Jim Robbins, Yale Environment 360 (July 31, 2017)

“I don’t want a West of man-camps and gas field booms, nor a West of precious tourist towns that exist to feed a global cowboy/mountain man/Disney/ski resort/New Age fantasy, surrounded by busted towns that are ghettos for workers.”

Luther Propst, quoted by Todd Wilkinson, Mountain Journal (Sept. 10, 2017)



3

- But how we steward or care for those lands as we use them for recreation is a vital Second Step that often is ignored or lost in the louder debate.
- Recreation, human access and recreation development impact natural landscapes and require ongoing management to conserve the experience for those that follow.

99 GORGEOUS PLACES IN COLORADO: PART 1, THE POSTCARD PLACES

 By Colorado.com Staff Writer
Updated: February 5, 2018

In the first of three stories about iconic places to Come to Life in Colorado, we've rounded up 33 of the state's most spectacular vistas (in no particular order). Point your camera's viewfinder at these epic landscapes, and you're practically guaranteed a postcard-worthy result.

13. Hanging Lake

The Scene: Appearing to cling to the edge of a mountainside, the almost supernaturally green **Hanging Lake** is surrounded by moss-covered rocks and a meandering trail. Wisps of water cascade quietly off a cliff into the lake's still depths, adding to an already surreal atmosphere. **Nearby Town:** **Glenwood Springs**



[4]

- But recreation on federal lands is something the West has sold for decades. Here is a sample of what several states are “selling.”
- The Colorado Tourism Board urges, “Come to Life in Colorado” and highlights 99 Instagram-worthy vistas including Hanging Lake on US Forest Service lands.



THE MIGHTY 5: UTAH'S NATIONAL PARKS

The Mighty 5® national parks in Utah draw several million visitors from around the world each year to marvel at surreal scenery and unforgettable activities. A trip to The Mighty 5 means watching the sunrise over the towering depths of [Canyonlands National Park](#), then watching the sunset through an impossibly delicate rock bow in [Arches National Park](#). It means standing nose-to-nose with ancient petroglyphs in [Capitol Reef National Park](#), then lying on your back as a beautiful meteor shower streaks across the Milky Way. It means gazing down at coral-hued rock hoodoos in [Bryce Canyon National Park](#), then gazing upward at the steep walls of slot canyon trails in [Zion National Park](#). It means hiking, river rafting, biking, picnicking, walking, mule riding, exploring and stargazing.

There's more than one way to visit the Mighty 5. Select the adventure that's right for you below or sample our recommended park itineraries at the bottom of the page. To experience Utah's national parks during peak solitude, visit our [national parks in winter](#) page.



{ 5 }

- In Utah, where “Life is Elevated,” the state has successfully promoted visits to the “Mighty 5” National Parks.



NATIONAL PARKS & MONUMENTS

Discover the wonder of Wyoming's most iconic landmarks and wilderness areas. Colorful pools, jagged peaks, otherworldly rock formations and breathtaking canyon walls remain untouched within state borders. Some of America's most pristine landscapes are living in Wyoming, beckoning adventure-seekers to take in their beauty.

Wyoming is home to the first national park (**Yellowstone**), the first national monument (**Devils Tower**), and the first national forest (**Shoshone**) as well as **25 national historic landmarks** and **11 nationally recognized areas, trails and monuments**. Start exploring Wyoming's preserved lands.



[6]

- Wyoming uses the more understated slogan, “That’s WY” (Why), but highlights its first-in-the-nation status for the:
 - 1st National Park
 - 1st National Monument
 - 1st National Forest
- Wyoming encourages visitors to “start exploring Wyoming’s preserved lands.”

Outdoor Recreation = Big Biz

THE DENVER POST

“Outdoor recreation industry, seeing role to protect public lands, boasts \$887 billion impact”

(4/27/2017)

- 2% of U.S. GDP
- \$347 billion GDP
- \$673 billion annual gross output
- 3.8% growth since 2012

Feb. 2018 U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

[7]

- Recreation is big business.
- Last month, pursuant to the Outdoor Recreation Jobs & Economic Impact Act of 2016, sponsored by Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO), the US Bureau of Economic Analysis calculated the economic impact of outdoor recreation for the first time.
- At close to an annual \$350 billion, outdoor recreation constitutes 2% of US GDP.
 - More than agriculture at 1%
 - More than mining/O&G at 1.4%
 - And even more than legal services at 1.3% of GDP.
- The outdoor recreation economy’s growth rate of 3.8% is faster than the growth rate of the overall economy at 2.8%.
- In 2017, the OIA, using slightly different methodology, calculated the economic impact of outdoor recreation at \$887 billion – close to the Bureau’s annual gross output of \$673 billion.
- Either way, recreation is a significant contributor to GDP.

Public Lands & Recreation

- BLM – FLPMA
 - “Outdoor recreation principal/major use”
- NPS – Organic Act
 - “conserve scenery”
 - “provide for enjoyment”
- USFS – NFMA/MUSY
 - “coordination of outdoor recreation”
- FWS – Refuge Recreation Act
 - “recreational opportunities”



{ 8 }

- All of the federal land agencies have a defined recreational component in their statutory missions.
 - BLM and FS as multiple use agencies provide a more dispersed, “do-it-yourself” recreational experience.
 - NPS provides a more infrastructure-heavy experience of our national treasures, managed to a non-impairment standard.
 - FWS provides recreational opportunities in wildlife refuges consistent with refuge management goals.

Public Lands & Recreation

- USFS – Framework for Sustainable Recreation
 - Vision: “Renewing Body & Spirit, Inspiring Passion for the Land”
 - 2012 Planning Rule: “Recreation on the National Forests/Grasslands invokes feelings of connection to natural world and inspires responsibility to care for it.”
- BLM – Recreation Strategy, Connecting with Communities
 - Increase collaboration with communities, produce greater well-being and socioeconomic health, deliver “outstanding recreation experiences” while sustaining the distinctive character of Public Land recreation settings.

[9]

- Over the last decade, the USFS and BLM have worked on developing an outdoor recreation vision.
- Both agencies include a role for public stewardship:
 - Forest Service – speaks of inspiring the “responsibility to care for [the natural world]”
 - BLM – encourages “sustaining the distinctive character of Public Land recreation settings”

20th Century Framing

Outdoor Recreation vs. O&G/Mining/Grazing

Western Future	vs.	“Dying legacy industries”
Set aside for recreation	vs.	Allow energy exploration
Nonconsumptive	vs.	Consumptive
Bigger \$\$ contributor	vs.	Smaller \$\$ contributor
Better	vs.	Bad
Everyone values	vs.	Not so much

[10]

- In the last century, we tended to pit recreation against extractive industries.
 - Recreation as a non-consumptive use that will be a positive economic contributor to the West's future.
 - Extractive industries consume resources and are the West's “dying legacy industries.”
 - The implication was Recreation is good, Extraction is bad and the good would and should replace the bad.

21st Century Framing

“While we see plenty of differences between these two ways [extraction & recreation] of finding value in western landscapes, we also see plenty of similarities.”

Prof. Patty Limerick, CU

- Demonstrated capacity to create substantial environmental disturbance
- Both firmly embrace capitalism/drive for profit
- Both supply employment and multiplier effects
- Both depend on transportation network/fossil fuel vehicles
- Jobs can be dangerous/invisible to beneficiaries
- Participants in both economies see themselves as innocents; puzzled, defensive & “grumpy” when criticized

(11)

- My friend and astute Western historian, Univ. of Colorado Prof. Patty Limerick urges us to take another look at that framing. She asserts there are actually many similarities between extraction and recreation or as she describes it, “areas of kinship.” Here are a few; both have:
 - Capacity to create substantial environmental disturbance.
 - Embrace capitalism and drive for profit.
 - Provide jobs and multiplier effects in in their communities.
 - Depend on transportation and fossil fuels.
 - The jobs in both can be dangerous and invisible to beneficiaries.
 - Participants see themselves as innocents; puzzled, defensive and “grumpy” when criticized.

21st Century Issue



Exploding Recreational Demand

(12)

- For the last 6 years, I have served on the Board of Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC), a statewide stewardship organization connecting volunteers with stewardship work on federal, state and local open space lands.
- In the last several years, our federal and state land management partners have come to VOC for help in managing the impacts from increased recreation at a time when the state was recovering from significant wildfires and floods.
- They need trained volunteers to help stretch their limited resources to steward the lands they manage.
- What are the challenges:
 - The 2 right-hand slides show that Instagram-worthy Hanging Lake – graffiti and a conga line of hikers.
 - In Utah, the “Mighty 5” campaign has resulted in increased visitation and crowds of people and cars at Arches.

21st Century Issue

- Visitation is Up
 - Hanging Lake, CO
 - 2013 – 90,000 visitors
 - 2016 – 150,000 visitors
 - Rocky Mtn. National Park
 - 2014-2016 – 30% increase in visitors
 - Colorado 14'ers
 - 2016 – 260,000 hiker days per year
 - 2017 – 311,000 hiker days per year
 - Utah's National Parks
 - 2015-2016 – 21% increase
 - Zion – 60% increase in a decade
 - Arches – doubled in a decade
 - USFS: 205 million visits per year
 - FWS: 80% increase since 1985



[13]

- As the population grows in an urbanized West, recreational demand has accelerated.
- Visitation is up across federal lands:
 - Hanging Lake, CO (USFS)
 - 2013 – 90,000 visitors
 - 2016 – 150,000 visitors
 - Rocky Mtn. National Park
 - 2014-2016 – 30% more visitors
 - Colorado 14'ers
 - 2016 – 260,000 hiker days per year
 - 2017 – 311,000 hiker days per year
 - Utah's Mighty 5
 - 2015-2016 – 21% increase
 - Zion – 60% in a decade
 - Arches – doubled in a decade
 - USFS – 205 million visits per year (326 million U.S. population)
 - FWS – 80% increase since 1985

21st Century Issue

- “Disappointing” Behavior Increasing
 - Dog poop on trails
 - Human poop/T.P. near trails
 - Skiing on 14’ers
 - Mtn. biking “self-made” trails
 - Hiking a 14’er in flip-flops
 - 11 dead in 2017
 - Non-recreational camping
 - Ignorance
 - “The resource is infinite/my impact minimal”



(14)

- Along with that growth comes disappointing behavior.
 - Dog poop/dog poop bags left on the trail
 - Human poop/toilet paper near trails & campsites
 - Bushwhacking ski and bike trails on the 14’ers
 - 11 dead on the 14’ers in 2017
 - Non-recreational camping on US Forest lands
 - This photo illustrates the debris left by “urban traveler” campers at a US Forest Service campground between Boulder and Nederland, CO
 - Another photo from this “5280” article illustrates the piles of hypodermic needles left behind
 - A big problem: Ignorance
 - Former recreational lead for Region 2 of US Forest Service, Jim Bedwell, noted this problematic attitude: “The resource is infinite/my impact is minimal”

Challenges

Land Mgmt. Budgets Flat/Declining for 20 Years

“We have challenges of being able to maintain access/infrastructure.”

US Forest Chief, 2018

- USFS: 2016 Deferred Maintenance \$5.5 billion
 - 2017 – 56% of budget goes to fire suppression
- NPS: 2018 Deferred Maintenance \$11.9 billion
- FWS: 2018 Deferred Maintenance \$1.4 billion
- BLM: 2016 Deferred Maintenance \$.81 billion

CRS Reports/DOI FY 2019 Budget

(15)

- This increased use comes at a time when land management budgets have been flat or declining for 20 years.
- Every land management agency has a “deferred maintenance” or “maintenance backlog” challenge.
 - USFS 2016 - \$5.5 billion (but 56% of budget went to fighting fire in 2017)
 - NPS 2018 - \$11.9 billion
 - FWS 2018 - \$1.4 billion
 - BLM 2016 - \$0.81 billion
- That means close to \$19 billion in deferred maintenance on federal lands (to put that into context, BLM’s budget is around \$1 billion). And as Lynn Scarlett pointed out in her remarks, these are not one-time costs, but ongoing needs that will reoccur as roads and roofs wear out or fires or floods occur.

UPDATE:

- The FYI 2018 Appropriations bill signed into law on March 23, 2018 provides:
 - BLM - \$50 million for maintenance backlog
 - NPS - \$138 million for maintenance backlog
 - FWS - \$53 million for maintenance backlog
- A step in the right direction (\$241 M), but inadequate to fully address the backlog (\$19 B)

Challenges

INSTAGRAM IS LOVING NATURE TO DEATH

Lesser-known lookouts are suffering under the weight of sudden online fame.

“Horseshoe Bend is just seven miles upstream from the Grand Canyon, but that’s far enough to feel rugged and remote in comparison to the groomed paths and railings along the Grand Canyon’s rim. . . Yet amazingly, the view fits perfectly in frame on an iPhone. Which you’ll realize as the massive crowd around you tries to get the same shot. Five years ago, Horseshoe Bend saw only a thousand visitors in a year. But this year, [over 4,000 people a day](#) have come to see the bend, take selfies at the rim, and dangle their feet over the exposed edge.”



Brent Knepper, The Outline (Nov. 7, 2017)

[16]

- New challenges – the role of technology and social media in drawing crowds to a once remote area.
 - “Bagging & posting” 14’ers in Colorado or 12’ers in Idaho bring out the crowds and the inexperienced.
 - This article describes Horseshoe Bend which used to see 1,000 visitors a year but now sees 4,000 every day! All to grab an iconic selfie.
 - GPS coordinates posted with photos overwhelm good fishing spots or scenic places, bringing crowds to areas not prepared to handle the numbers.

Options

- Expand Supply
 - Corporate investment in Special Places
 - “adopt-a-trail/historic place”
 - Concessionaires manage the infrastructure “guts”
 - Park Rangers interpret
- Control Demand
 - Auction access
 - Smart phone charge for access by the foot
 - Sell “blackout days” to preserve experience for a few
 - Limit numbers at popular sites

Professor/Economist Walt Hecox, Colorado College

(17)

- What are some of the options to address these challenges?
- In October, Great Outdoors Colorado, VOC, grant makers, land managers and stewardship groups gathered to educate each other on the problem and discuss solutions.
- Colorado College Economics Professor, Walt Hecox, who has led the Colorado College’s Annual Conservation Poll, got us started with some tough choices. He challenged us by saying you can:
 - Grow the supply of recreational resources – for example, corporate adopt-a-trail/road or greater roles for concessionaires
 - Slow/limit the demand for those resources – limit visitors, auction access, charge for use.

Options

- Education
 - “Leave No Trace” principles
 - PLAN AHEAD AND PREPARE
 - TRAVEL AND CAMP ON DURABLE SURFACES
 - DISPOSE OF WASTE PROPERLY
 - LEAVE WHAT YOU FIND
 - MINIMIZE CAMPFIRE IMPACTS
 - RESPECT WILDLIFE
 - BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHER VISITORS
 - CO Tourism now includes LNT in all info packets



[18]

- Education of these new recreational users:
 - Observation of the principles of Leave No Trace (LNT) are important to reduce impacts. For example, the Colorado Tourism Board now supplies LNT info in all CO travel packets.
 - Colorado Alpine Rescue, after the 2017 death toll on 14'ers, is starting an education campaign on Safe Colorado 14'er hiking similar to their successful avalanche education.

Options

- Focus more use in urban areas

- “We can harden those spaces”

Susan Daggett, DU College of Law, former Earth Justice

- Concentrate use at certain places

- 14’ers as “urban interface” build infrastructure

Peter Metcalf, Black Diamond



[19]

- Susan Daggett and Peter Metcalf argued that we should steer recreational users to places that have the hardened infrastructure to take the abuse of increased numbers.
 - Focus some recreational use in urban areas. (Susan Daggett)
 - Consider the 14’ers in Colorado as “urban interface” and build the infrastructure—a parking lots, permanent toilets, hardened trails—to handle the crowds. (Peter Metcalf)

Options

- Users “Pay to Play”
 - CA “green tag” program
 - USFS fees at Maroon Bells
 - Muir National Monument vehicle reservation
 - Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act fees
 - Raise NPS entrance fees at popular parks



(20)

- But where can the money come from?
- California’s “green tag” OHV fee program is one successful model to raise funds from users.
- USFS/NPS charge parking fees and entrance fees at certain popular places.
- The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 (FLREA) fee program was started in the Bush Administration and Lynn Scarlett and I both advocated to Congress to let FS/Interior agencies collect fees at developed locations and plow the \$\$ back into those areas, but...
 - Some object and have sued (“I already pay taxes” or “that place is an exception to FLREA”).
 - Although NPS collects the most \$\$, in 2015 OIG faulted NPS for not using the authority as much as it could.
 - This year Interior Secretary Zinke was blasted for seeking big fee increases at 17 popular parks under this authority.
 - FLREA authority was set to expire in 2016, but it was extended into FY 2019.

Options

- Impose an Excise Tax on Equipment:
 - Pittman Robertson/Dingell Johnson excise taxes on hunting (11% guns/ammo/bows) & fishing (10% tackle, 3% motors)
 - \$\$ goes back to states for game species management
 - 1930-2010: Pittman Robertson - \$6.4 billion for wildlife
 - 1952-2010: Dingell Johnson - \$6.6 billion for habitat/education
- OIA opposes “backpack” tax
 - Mountain bikes, backpacks, tents, skis etc. – out
 - We already pay excise taxes to import our products
 - We are a new industry

(21)

- The Hook & Bullet component of outdoor recreation has been taxing the equipment they use in their recreation for many decades. In 1930 Pittman Robinson was enacted to tax hunting equipment and in 1952 Dingell Johnson to tax fishing equipment. This money goes back to the State Game & Fish agencies for habitat acquisition and management for game species. Over the years – billions of \$\$. This year, Secretary Zinke highlighted \$1 billion from this tax for state wildlife programs.
- Some argue that other members of the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) should do likewise – tax those \$10,000 mountain bikes, \$50 backpacks, tents and skis.
- Since 1999, OIA has opposed this arguing that since much of their product is imported they already pay excise taxes into the General Treasury and shouldn't be asked to pay more. This position may change as the industry plays a larger role in GDP.

Options

- Federal Legislation for New Money
 - National Trails Stewardship Act of 2017 – Implement
 - National Park Restoration Act of 2018 (Alexander)
 - 50% of all energy revenue above forecast for NPS infrastructure
 - Estimated \$7 billion over 10 years
 - Mandatory spending
 - State Wildlife Action Plans (non-game)
 - OIA/AWFA Blue Ribbon Panel \$1.3 billion energy/mineral royalty
 - Fully Appropriate LWCF (\$900 million per year)
 - Acquisition focus federal, state, local
 - SB 1633 – “Recreation Not Red Tape Act” (Wyden)
 - SB 2130 – “Outdoor Economy Act” (Tester)
 - Outdoor Recreation FACA – study access/maintenance

(22)

- Federal Legislation can bring focus and funding to outdoor recreation management.
- 2018 “National Trails Stewardship Act” directs USFS to publish a national strategy to strengthen role of volunteers to “augment and support capabilities of federal employees.”
- Recently Secretary Zinke and Senator Alexander introduced a “National Park Restoration Act” – “all energy” additional revenue towards NPS infrastructure needs.
- “State Wildlife Action Plans” to conserve nongame habitat – OIA/AWFA say use energy royalties to fund this need.
- Fully appropriate Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) (\$900 million per year)
 - Enacted in 1964; uses offshore O&G royalties to meet the annual appropriated amount.
 - 2 components:
 - State grants to acquire/develop recreational lands
 - Fed side – acquire lands and waters
 - *Note* neither is focused on maintenance/stewardship of the lands
 - Full appropriation only happened twice in 49 years – most \$\$ flows into General Treasury and the annual appropriation is well below \$900 million. Up for reauthorization in 2018. FY 2018 Appropriation Bill funds LWCF at \$425.
- “Recreation Not Red Tape” – help outfitters and promote private section volunteers
- “Outdoor Economy Act” – Interior Recreation FACA; FS already has a recreation FACA

Options

- State Taxes for Conservation
 - FL/SC: Real Estate taxes
 - TX: Sporting Goods Sales tax
 - CO: Great Outdoors Colorado – lottery proceeds
 - 50% GOCO Trust for Wildlife, Rivers, Parks & Trails
 - 40% Conservation Trust Fund



[23]

- Some states have found ways to raise \$\$ for conservation.
- In Colorado, the lottery proceeds have been used to fund acquisitions and support stewardship work.

Options: Volunteer Stewardship

“Caring enough about something to sacrifice for it.”

Ann Baker Easley, ED, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado

- What:

- Trails work
- Habitat restoration
- Disaster restoration (fire/floods)
- Watershed management
- Infrastructure (signs, tent pads, fences)
- Education
- Beautification – litter, graffiti, dog poop
- Leverage land managers scarce resources (people/\$\$)



[24]

- Stewardship: A nonprofit leader who has dedicated her career to stewardship, Ann Baker Easley defines it as, “Caring enough about something to sacrifice for it.”
- Here in Salt Lake City, we need only think of the annual 10% tithe that Latter Day Saints commit to the church as an example of the kind of sacrifice entailed in “stewardship.”
- Volunteer stewards can enhance the supply of “land managers” by partnering trained volunteers on public land projects to do a variety of restoration work.

Options: Volunteer Stewardship

- Colorado Effort
 - 30 organizations
 - 100,000 volunteers
 - 5 million residents, only 2% volunteer
 - Risk: “Anecdotal, piecemeal, not systemic”



(25)

- We have a strong effort in Colorado: 30 organizations who annually provide 100,000 volunteers. But put into the context of the size of our population—100,000 volunteers out of 5 million is not enough.
- The risk is that the stewardship work is piecemeal, a patchwork without ecological impact.

Options: Volunteer Stewardship

- What's needed to make a difference:
 - Nationwide stewardship effort
 - See Corps Network
 - Volunteer offices in Public Land agencies
 - Stewardship work standards
 - Funding for ongoing effort/not project-by-project



[26]

- Through our dialog in Colorado and our conversations in DC, VOC has identified some concrete steps that could enhance the role of volunteer stewardship:
 - Nationwide stewardship network similar to the youth-focused Corps Network
 - Volunteer offices in FS/BLM field offices – volunteers helping to coordinate stewards for the work inside the agencies
 - VOC/USFS share the cost of the volunteer coordinator
 - Work standards/training for trail work, water restoration
 - Outdoor Stewardship Institute (OSI) training certificate – quality assurance for the land manager – volunteers trained in the work and safety protocols
 - New funding model for stewardship work – across a landscape and multiple years of funding (with metrics) directed to make a meaningful impact rather than year-by-year piecemeal work that may not be adequate to the need.

Conclusion

Once the land is “saved” how do we care for it/keep it open?



(27)

- So that is our challenge as Westerners – once we “save” the land how do we care for it while we enjoy it?
 - All the options need be carefully considered, even if they are uncomfortable.
 - What do we need to “sacrifice” to steward these lands?
- Thank you.