



Confluence: Summit on the Outdoors Alaska Pacific University Campus, Anchorage, June 3, 2016 Breakout Session Notes

Below are the summarized notes from three breakout groups plus additional comments offered by the full group when each breakout reported back. Breakouts were organized around three major themes:

- **Policy & Funding:** the range of public and NGO policies and funding that affect opportunities and constraints for outdoor recreation
- **Trade:** Manufacturing, Retail, Travel, a wide range of outdoor businesses; manufacturing including equipment, bikes, packrafts, clothing, crafts
- **Infrastructure and Facilities,** Public Land & “Destination Management”, such as trails, cabins, access, management for residents and visitors

Each group was assigned to discuss and record views on five questions:

1. What do you see as primary **trends, opportunities and roadblocks**, affecting potential for growth of Alaska outdoor recreation?
2. What **new strategies** are needed to make the most of Alaska’s resources and to meet changing outdoor recreation demands and support jobs and business?
3. Describe a compelling, **ambitious vision** of the new/future Alaska? (on your topic)
4. What one, near **term tangible action** might this outdoor recreation initiative take to move towards this big vision?
5. Who does the work, who are best **partners**?

Notes below provide a summary of discussions around each of the five questions. On a number of topics, participants in the different break-out sessions ended up reaching similar conclusions. The notes aim to capture the common ground around each question, while also capturing the topics in the different breakouts.

1. Primary Trends and Opportunities, Roadblocks?

Views common to each breakout

- Even as the amount and variety of interest in outdoor recreation continues to expand, funding has decreased and could continue to decline at the state and federal level
 - Declining budgets set up the need and opportunities for public private partnerships, and other creative new approaches to providing and sustaining infrastructure. The USFS “Sustainable Recreation Initiative” is one example.
 - There is a lack of money for both capital and maintenance needs.
 - Funding challenges could be an opportunity for initiating positive change and raising awareness about the importance of recreation to community health and the economy.
 - Recreation investment stays in the community, creates jobs, attracts visitation, creates related small-business opportunities and has an overall positive impact on local economies.
 - Expectations continue to grow; AK is not keeping up.

- Alaskans need to learn from places like Utah and work together to advance the OR industry

Policy & Funding

- Outdoor recreation is not embedded in statewide policy and consequently is not prioritized for funding and decision-making.
- The cost of gear and equipment, of access is a roadblock to getting outside.
- Outdoor recreation advocacy groups have increasing visibility in Alaska, e.g., Bike Anchorage, but it's challenging for these groups to coalesce with other like-minded organizations, and impact larger scale policy and funding issues. "efforts often are diffuse"
- There is a need for better data and improved access to data, including mapping, access and land ownership.
- Safety is an issue at many community/neighborhood parks in Alaska. Residents should have safe outdoor recreation options close to home (e.g., community parks). This is where youth are often first introduced to outdoor recreation.

Trade & Manufacturing

- "Outdoor Recreation is an industry" – takes in not just the most obvious elements of the industry like tourism guide services, it also takes in range of support businesses.
- Key trade sectors related to outdoor recreation include manufacturing, retail and workforce development – as morning sessions revealed, there are a number of energetic, creative people and businesses building success
- Alaska's small population, short summer season (short season for growing food) and distance from markets makes it hard to achieve economies of scale.
- Shipping costs are prohibitive. Small Alaska businesses relocate once their out-of-state demand and production grows; "victim of success".
- Alaska's unique characteristics, active residents and international brand gives the state some real advantages

Infrastructure, Public Land & Destination Management

- Traveler interests are evolving.
 - Travelers seek and Alaska needs to offer a wide spectrum of opportunities and challenges.
 - There is a worldwide decline in backpacking; today's recreationalists are looking for active adventure during the day, but for more amenities at night (a bed, a shower, a microbrew).
 - While Alaska has well developed infrastructure for large volume travel, and has the natural setting for rugged adventure, the state is weak relative to competing locations in infrastructure and services to meet the desires of the middle of adventure spectrum, e.g. for backcountry huts, improved trails, trekking and other "soft" adventures.
- Meeting growing outdoor rec demands leads to local-based businesses, local jobs
- The Internet could be one tool to help meet and influences travel research and decision-making.
- US lower 48 populations are "moving west," populations are shifting to places with better outdoor recreation opportunities, more public land. Market opportunities and market
- Need a statewide trail system, integrated system

2. New Outdoor Recreation Strategies

Views common to each breakout

- Strengthen messaging around outdoor recreation.
 - Better promotion of the variety of opportunities and methods of access into the outdoors.
 - Make recreation messaging more inclusive and less intimidating.
 - Maximize seasonality of recreation to include winter, spring and fall.
 - Incorporate hunting and fishing, motorized and non-motorized into the recreation conversation.
 - Market to a diverse range of cultures and ethnicities.
 - Promote recreation as supporting healthy people and healthy places.
 - Capitalize on extreme adventure (mountain climbing, extreme skiing) as a way to excite interest but then offer less daunting alternatives
- Improve coordination and collaboration...
 - Between local, state and federal land management agencies.
 - Between nonprofits.
 - Between public and private entities, including establishing co-management agreements and locally-based management/control of certain public lands.
 - Between motorized and non-motorized user groups. Broker community-based user conflict resolutions.

Policy & Funding

- Encourage municipalities to create a dedicated trail system or recreation fund.
- Take into account local cultures and characteristics during recreation planning to make sure plans align with community visions.
- Develop an improved inventory of funding tools that have been tried, often successfully around the US.

Trade & Manufacturing

- Improve cargo logistics and transportation infrastructure to create more reliable, affordable and quicker supply chains.
- Use backhauls to take advantage of empty cargo space and to export Alaska goods in a more cost effective way.
- Consider introducing an export tax credit or subsidy to encourage local businesses to stay in Alaska.
- Streamline the recreation permitting process (Utah example).
- Encourage “cluster development” and strategic site selection of complementary industries.
- In Alaska, traditional cluster development is less practical than in states with more population and larger economies, as there rarely is the necessary critical mass of related businesses and markets to generate the needed synergy. But – there are opportunities for a narrower version of cluster development, where multiple businesses in a single category (lodges, backcountry food?) could together create enough demand to bring more suppliers into the picture, and generate more market awareness and demand than any could create on their own.

Infrastructure, Public Land & Destination Management

- Need to be more flexible and responsive to traveler interests and trends.
- Develop a continuum of recreation opportunities, not just the two extremes (luxury and minimalist).

- Focus on the adventure market – “that’s where the growth is”
 - “We’re way behind the rest of the world.”
 - Need more opportunities in the spirit of “trekking” – that is options that provide adventure and comfort. These open doors for much greater array of participants, including kids and reluctant spouse, and also support local business
- Revenue from use should go directly into maintenance of facilities and trails.
- Develop an integrated, multi-season trail system.
- Need more workforce skills development in outdoor recreation and related fields.
- Improve access to recreation. Examples include:
 - In coastal communities that lack affordable and accessible harbor parking for water recreation.
 - Locations along the road system in Alaska, with abundant, spectacular terrain, but limited access and facilities. One good example: is the land both north and south of the Glenn Highway. All the land south of the Glenn Highway lies across the Matanuska River, making it effectively inaccessible to any but the most determined hiker. Land on the north side of the highway is accessible. But, while the trails are popular with ATV’s, there is little or no trail management, and the trails are much less inviting for bikers and hikers.

3. Ambitious Vision?

Aggregate of all breakouts

- Statewide, integrated and connected trail system
- Outdoor recreation that benefits local communities: healthy people, healthy economy, “live work play” concept.
- Coordinated, collaborative partnerships between landowners, land managers, outdoor users and industry.
- Alaska has world-class outdoor experiences, from the backyard to the backcountry, with access available for all.
- Trans-Alaska Trail (Alyeska Pipeline)
- Statewide huts system.
- Statewide winter trail system.
- Stewardship mentality – take care of and expand our OR infrastructure
- Provide a continuum of opportunities.
- Local, community-based solutions (e.g. on potential motorized-non-motorized conflicts; “when issues are addressed locally often solutions can be found)
- 100 miles of trails within 100 miles of any resident.
- Detailed, inclusive, interactive maps of trail, recreation opportunities

4. Priority Near Term Actions?

Views common to each breakout

- Better coordination and advocacy between current groups; develop a statewide coalition/task force/advisory committee to develop solutions, policies, recommendations.
 - Create a new statewide Alaska outdoor recreation coalition
 - Stitch together the many non-profits, agencies, user groups with interests in improving outdoor recreation in AK

- “Don’t be anti-anything,” - aim for positive framing.
- Aim for improvements in infrastructure that are good for visitors *and* residents
- Aim to get support and direction at the state level... “legitimacy”, “continuity over time”

Policy & Funding

- Outside Alaska Foundation or other similar group should advocate for infrastructure funding and greater collaboration between partners.
- Sell state land to support recreation projects and maintenance.
- Develop a long-term Alaska outdoor recreation strategic plan.
- Establish a sustainable funding source to pay for local/state recreation needs.
- Conduct a comparative analysis of local and state funding models that other places are using successfully.

Trade & Manufacturing

- Market and advertise Alaska’s offerings; “market the things we take for granted.”

Infrastructure, Public Land & Destination Management

- Conduct broad outreach to stakeholders; identify the right groups to market trails.
- Education; use facts, data, numbers to advocate for economic growth, visitation and product development; frame recreation as an economic driver. Take the facts to the decision-makers: Tourism industry, government and potential new businesses that might locate here.
- Direct federal money to Alaska.
- Assemble simple/graphic version of the facts and figures that make the case for outdoor recreation – markets, growth, opportunities
- Take advantage of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan process – use to compile information, as a framework for a statewide plan?
- Be realistic about the relative import of “facts and figures” – useful/helpful, but real challenge is political: pulling together currently dispersed voices, creating leadership and legitimacy

5. Coalition Partners?

Aggregated answers from all breakouts

- Non Profits, e.g., Student Conservation Association (SCA).
- Land Managers.
- Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA).
- Alaska State Parks and the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) process.
- Recreational Trails Program (RTP).
- Alaska Native Organizations and Corporations, including Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC).