State Taps UNH for NH Outdoor Recreation Management Plan

Research shows 90% of Granite Staters participate in $2.7B outdoor recreation industry

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To boost the power of the Granite State’s $2.7 billion outdoor recreation industry, New Hampshire’s Division of Parks and Recreation partnered with UNH to complete a comprehensive five-year recreation management plan.

That plan, called the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Management Plan, was accepted by the National Park Service recently, giving the state access to millions of dollars in federal recreation funding. The UNH team provided essential research on residents’ visitation patterns, behaviors, attitudes and perceptions toward outdoor recreation in New Hampshire.

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“This is a plan for the people and by the people, so public engagement was essential to its success,” says Michael Ferguson, associate professor of recreation management and policy at UNH, who led the research. “Over two years, we reached more than 1,000 Granite Staters and 300 federal, state and private recreation providers to truly understand what the people of New Hampshire want and need.”

Ferguson and his UNH team, the Applied Recreation Research Collaborative, confirmed that outdoor recreation plays a major role in the lives of people in the state.

“A remarkable 90% of New Hampshire residents engage in outdoor recreation each year, with 72% enjoying access to recreational areas within just 10 minutes from home,” Ferguson says. “There was widespread satisfaction in these outdoor experiences, with nearly everyone (98%) indicating they intended to return.”

Other key findings from the UNH-led research and focus groups:

- 99% of residents believe outdoor recreation enhances their quality of life, mood and stress levels, with 85% also crediting it for boosting their overall health and wellbeing.
- 99% of residents recognize outdoor recreation as a pillar of the state’s economy, enhancing property values, boosting tourism and economic development, with 97% expressing satisfaction with state investments in outdoor recreation.
- 85% of residents feel both safe and included in outdoor recreation areas, appreciating their accessibility across diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.
The research also pointed to opportunities for improvement:

- 25% of residents indicated they have stopped visiting certain outdoor recreation areas, due largely to overcrowding and poor visitor behavior, and nearly three-quarters of outdoor recreation providers perceive high levels of crowding in outdoor recreation areas.
- Three-quarters of outdoor recreation providers and 58% of visitors recognized shorter winters impacting activities.
- 20% of residents say they or someone in their household has a physical or cognitive condition that is a barrier to their participation in outdoor recreation.

“Outdoor recreation in New Hampshire is a $2.7 billion industry that employs 28,000 workers. We’re home to 48 mountains over 4,000 feet, 10 public beaches, more than 30 ski areas, 1,000 lakes and 12,000 miles of trails,” says Ferguson. “We were pleased to be afforded the opportunity to provide the state with scientifically rigorous research to support informed decision-making, policy development and financial investments toward these incredible outdoor resources.”

**WRITTEN BY:**
Beth Potier | UNH Marketing | beth.potier@unh.edu | 2-1566

**PHOTOGRAPHER:**
Jeremy Gasowski | UNH Marketing | jeremy.gasowski@unh.edu | 603-862-4465

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Email us: unhtoday.editor@unh.edu.