

# America the Beautiful Community Recreation Survey

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## Sample Report

*The purpose of this project is to provide best practices for successful locally-led public land recreation and conservation projects, as well as outline current public land challenges facing local communities.*

*As the administration moves to achieve the goals in the America the Beautiful initiative, we hope the best practices documented in these case studies will provide examples of community-supported public land protections, and that the challenges documented herein could be proactively addressed to effectively meet community needs for more natural places.*



## Summary

Recreation assets on lands of all types have an important role to play in reaching the goals of the America the Beautiful Initiative.

In communities across the country there are elected officials, business owners, non-profits, and volunteers working daily to expand outdoor access to natural places. This work protects important ecosystems while simultaneously improving quality of life—which in turn encourages business investment. With growth in both remote work and demand for outdoor access, communities with access to open land are prospering, but more support from federal land managers is needed to meet community needs to improve both access and ecosystems.

To better understand these needs [Public Land Solutions](#) has created this America the Beautiful Community Recreation Survey. PLS is conducting the survey through a variety of channels:

- Recreation roundtables both virtual and in-person
- Feedback from community trail and open space committees
- Written survey responses via an online portal

The goal of these discussions is to survey communities about their outdoor spaces, regardless of land owner or manager, to understand which natural places are successfully contributing to quality of life, healthy ecosystems and economic development, and which ones need improvements.

Through information collected about the best recreation assets in a region, and the places that most need improvements, PLS is categorizing trends in both best practices and critical needs.

This information will allow us to identify opportunities for federal agencies to better assist local communities in their efforts to preserve natural places and provide outdoor access, both through sharing best practices and working to address critical needs.

## Identified Trends

To date the survey has been conducted in four communities: (please click on a location to navigate)

- Moab, UT
- Lander, WY
- Flagstaff, AZ
- Farmington, NM

The following best practices and on-going challenges have been identified in the four sample communities in the report below:

### Best Practices

- **Partnerships** between local governments and federal land managers to meet recreation demand
- **Specific Trails for Specific User Groups** to avoid user conflicts
- **Transportation and Connectivity** projects utilizing city owned corridors to access federal lands
- **Mineral Withdrawal** protecting recreation assets
- **OHV Route Naming and Marking**
- **City Owned Recreation Assets**

### Ongoing Challenges

- **Funding for staff to manage/match funded programs**
- **State Trust Land Relationships** as recreation use grows on State Trust Lands
- **Cross Jurisdiction Challenges** between state and federal lands
- **Timely NEPA Processes** to meet growing demand responsibly
- **Education and Planning Programs** that could be models for a range of communities

By sharing best practices and providing detailed examples to communities facing similar challenges, the administration has the opportunity to support local efforts to protect natural acres of all types. Further, by cataloging current challenges facing multiple communities, there is an opportunity to begin to develop solutions that could work across the country.

In this way, natural places important to communities can be expanded, while also improving quality of life and community attractiveness via outdoor access. Creating ways to share best practices across states and regions, while also considering methods to direct resources towards current challenges will assist in achieving the America The Beautiful goals while simultaneously enhancing local economies.

# Community Surveys

## Moab, Utah

### Examples of Best Practices

**Partnership: [Sand Flats Recreation Area](#):** This area is a 5 minute drive from Main Street in Moab UT, and is home to the world famous Slickrock Trail. This high plain of slickrock domes, bowls, and fins in the shadow of the LaSal Mountains makes it a unique landscape that attracts adventurers in every category. To manage the onslaught of mountain bikers, jeepers, side by sides, and general explorers, Grand County and the BLM created a partnership to manage camping, trail, and road use in 1995. This [film](#) depicts the history of the region and encapsulates the success of this partnership. A pay station collecting fees for both day visits and camping has generated funds to manage the area successfully.



While Sandflats was designated No Surface Occupancy as part of the Moab Master Leasing Plan, it has been nominated for oil and gas development utilizing directional drilling from contiguous lands. These potential leases have been repeatedly deferred illustrating the kind of de facto protection that results when a recreation asset becomes a contributor to the local economy.

**Specific Trails for Specific User Groups: [Moab's Non Motorized Trail System](#):** Prior to the creation of the BLM's 2008 Resource Management Plan, motorized and non-motorized visitors shared many of the resource extraction related roads that crisscrossed the region. In that management plan, 150 miles of singletrack trails for hiking and biking were planned, built, and marketed. This key management provision and forethought is what allowed the Moab economy to prosper with few user conflicts.

### Ongoing Challenges

**Cross Jurisdiction Challenges: [Willow Springs Road](#):** Dispersed Camping: Camping in pullouts and at deadends on double track roads has long been popular, but as demand has grown, dispersed camping areas close to town have seen skyrocketing use—even before “vanlife” was a word. Managing this type of use is critical as without designated camping areas significant resource damage is inevitable. The Moab BLM has successfully mitigated this damage and designated hundreds of campsites in the region, with the Willow Springs road being one of the only places where this problem remains rampant. Changes are afoot as a new Utah State Park is in the process of being established in the region, which will bring additional resources and potential camping solutions.

**State Trust Land Relationships: [Kane Creek Recreation Area](#):** In this area, the BLM has negotiated leases with Utah's School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) to create additional designated camping areas. The Northwest Ordinance of 1785 granted lands to states when they entered the union to generate funding to support public education. The location of the parcels was determined via section maps, and thus many parcels fall in areas where today recreation is the dominant use, yet SITLA is not in the business of managing recreation. For the moment the BLM has a cost effective arrangement with SITLA on Kane Creek, but as pressure to generate revenue grows, the agency may not be able to meet the state's revenue goals.

**Moab Contributors:**

- Grand County Trail Mix Committee
- Grand County Council Members
- BLM Moab Field Office
- Manti-La Sal National Forest
- National Park Service
- City of Moab

## Lander, Wyoming

### Examples of Best Practices

**Mineral Withdrawal: [Johnny Behind the Rocks](#):** This is a popular mountain bike area with a purpose built tight stacked loop trail system, which allows visitors to do a longer or shorter ride from the same trail head, minimizing the need for additional parking and restrooms. In 2018 a [20-year mineral withdrawal](#) was announced for the Johnny Behind the Rocks Recreation Zone. This type of protection is of course temporary, but it does give the recreation asset acreage time to grow in value to the community, allowing the long term value of this protected natural place to become established within the community, increasing the chances of eventual permanent protection.

**Transportation and Connectivity: Access to the Wind River Range** - A lack of trailheads and access trails can lead to user conflict when hikers, equestrians and cyclists are all using the same short section of trail to access a much bigger trail system. The trail system itself can accommodate everyone's needs, it is the entrance point that needs to be addressed. A working example of where this solution is coming into play is the arrangement between [Sinks Canyon State Park](#) and the Shoshone National Forest. To separate equestrians from other visitors a Stock Bypass trail was built from Bruce's Picnic Area. While the area remains popular and busy this new trail construction was much appreciated by locals and visitors.





## Ongoing Challenges

**State Trust Land Relationships:** [The Bus](#) is a stacked loop trail system just outside Lander that straddles a BLM parcel and a contiguous Wyoming state lands parcel. This island of federal and state land is surrounded by private land. To date there has been little mineral interest in the state parcel, nor is there pending development of the nearby private land. Of course both the private landowners and the State of Wyoming have valid and existing rights to utilize these lands as they see fit, but for the moment the highest and best use for the community appears to be the stacked loop trail system. However parking and trail management remain an issue since both the state parcel and the private areas would need to be more involved with the management of recreation in the area to make progress on these issues.

### *Lander Contributors:*

- Wyoming Pathways
- The Bike Mill
- National Outdoor Leadership School
- Montezuma Land Conservancy
- Lander Cycling, BLM Liaison
- Wind River Outdoor Recreation Collaborative
- Back Country Horsemen Lander

## Flagstaff, Arizona

### Examples of Best Practices

**Transportation and Connectivity:** [Flagstaff Urban Trail System \(FUTS\)](#): This nearly 60 mile trail system through the city is super popular and utilizes all kinds of greenways to provide a transportation/recreation network that runs along the Rio de Flag, through urban corridors, and by groves of Ponderosas and other natural places. The FUTS is used to access nearby federal lands along with the city's parks and open spaces. This network is unique to Flagstaff and other cities often inquire how they did it. The answer is zoning. The Flagstaff City Code defines FUTS trails as public improvements and requires new development subject to nexus / proportionality. The City's Zoning Code also has resource protection standards for floodplain, hillsides and forests for new development in greenfield areas, which tend to follow linear corridors providing more opportunities to both protect greenways and add FUTS trails to the system.



**City Owned Recreation Assets:** [Picture Canyon Natural Cultural Preserve](#): Flagstaff manages over 3,000 acres of legally designated open space. In addition to Picture Canyon these include Observatory Mesa Natural Area and the Schultz Creek Trailhead. City leaders are committed to open space as a major component of the region's ecological health, as well as quality of life and thus economic development. The newest designation of McMillan Mesa Natural Area is unique in that it was created through a citizen ballot initiative supported by 80% of Flagstaff's voters.

## Ongoing Challenges

**State Trust Land Relationships: Equitable access for all citizens to open space and recreation resources:** Funds are needed to develop new parks on lands already owned by the city, and accommodations /plans are needed for five State Trust Land Parcels contiguous to both city and federal lands that are of great interest to citizens. People often forget that state trust lands are not public and in fact are expected to be developed to fund education, yet the placement of some parcels begs the question: would the youth of Flagstaff be better served in the long run by the conservation of these lands?

**Funding for staff to manage/match funded programs:** [Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project](#): Flagstaff is surrounded by the largest contiguous ponderosa pine forest in the world. In 2012 votes approved a \$10 million bond to reduce wildfire risk and post-fire flooding in the Rio de Flag and Lake Mary watersheds. Over 6000 acres have been treated and thinned, but funding is needed to leverage this investment to maintain the health of Flagstaff's forests.

*Flagstaff Contributors:*

- Mayor of Flagstaff
- City Open Space and Trail Managers
- Coconino National Forest
- Arizona BLM

## Farmington, New Mexico

### Examples of Best Practices

**OHV Route Naming and Marking:** [BLM Partnership with Choke Cherry Crawlers](#) - The Farmington area boasts many many miles of dirt roads and trails, and while locals know their way around, visitors and new OHV owners rarely do. The Cherry Crawlers OHV group has partnered with the BLM to design and sign loops in the area. Volunteers do the work and BLM, along with Fish and Game reimburse the club for expenses. This work is extremely important as the Side by Side OHV market continues to grow.



By marking loops and educating users via on site signage about route difficulties, users are more likely to stay on the trail and minimize resource damage. The need for additional education in this market is extensive. Marked OHV routes are one of the best tools for minimizing user conflict. Plus marked and named routes are better suited for marketing and thus enhancing the area's reputation to OHV visitors.

**Specific Trails for Specific User Groups:** [East Glade Trailhead](#) This area has received extensive attention from the BLM in the last 5 years and is now providing an important access point for single track trails, as well as a very well designed mountain bike skills park. The East Glade Skills Park includes ramps, hills, berms and other features. Right out of the parking lot is a toddler-sized skills park, with small jumps and a practice balance beam. To the left, up a short hill, is where the main action is at. Here, there are three lanes to choose from – beginner, intermediate, and expert – with skill-appropriate features that are fast, flowy, and fun. The park has a large parking lot with great views of the La Plata Mountains, and connections to a large complex of trails known as Road Apple Rally.

## **Ongoing Challenges**

**Timely NEPA Processes: The Boneyard:** This area illustrates a familiar pattern of recreation land use with a terrifying twist. Local cyclists take an interest in an area, and user created trails begin to appear. In addition visitors from nearby communities whose trails are snowy at this time of year, began to ride in the area. An effort was made to stop the illegal trail building, and begin the NEPA process for a new trail system properly designed. When demand gets ahead of supply it often leads to public confusion about what uses are allowed and which are not. And in this case, a nearby area has long been used as a shooting range and the user created trails actually put visitors in danger. There is work being done to divide the area and accommodate both uses and meet both local and visitor needs. In most cases when formal trails are in the pipeline, illegal trail building does decline.

**Education and Planning Programs: Programs are needed for improved user education and master planning:** As visitation increases in an area, existing problems are often exacerbated. Farmington currently has growing OHV, mountain bike, and equestrian use. Shared use on existing trails can lead to extensive trail damage as horses leave deep ruts in sandy trails built for mountain bikers, and cyclists can be in the way on OHV routes. Examples of stacked loops with different trails for different uses such as Phil's World in Cortez, Colorado exist, but these types of recreation assets take careful planning and deliberate visitor education. Once in place these stacked loop systems can optimize visitor experiences using minimal acreage in primarily front country areas, if they are planned correctly and are able to deliver quality experiences.

### *Farmington Contributors:*

- Canyon Off Road Associations
- Choke Cherry Crawlers
- 505 Cycles
- Endeavor NM Outdoor Business Group
- FAST Farmington Area Singletrack
- City of Farmington