



Wisconsin Recreational River, Wisconsin

NOVEMBER 2023

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION:
A Synthesis from Roundtables in Support of
the Bureau of Land Management's Blueprint
for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation**



About the Foundation for America's Public Lands

As the official charitable partner of the Bureau of Land Management, the Foundation for America's Public Lands connects us to our public lands and waters and sustains these special places for the benefit of present and future generations. Whether by foot, horseback, or on wheels, recreational activities are how most people connect with their public lands. As one of its first program initiatives, the Foundation for America's Public Lands is working to engage partners in a shared commitment to improve the accessibility and sustain the quality of the diverse recreation opportunities found on America's public lands.

For more information, visit americaslands.org.

Acknowledgments

The Foundation for America's Public Lands extends gracious appreciation to all involved in the outdoor recreation roundtables. We give a tremendous thank you to each person who attended the roundtables and who shared ideas, questions, and expertise. We are grateful to the top leadership at the Bureau of Land Management, their team of recreation and communications professionals who developed the Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation, and the resource managers who stepped out of their busy jobs to assist as notetakers and otherwise support the roundtables. The Foundation Board of Directors, consulting teams, and inaugural Chief Executive Officer celebrate the collective efforts put forth to bring people together to talk about the challenges and opportunities for outdoor recreation on public lands.



Introduction

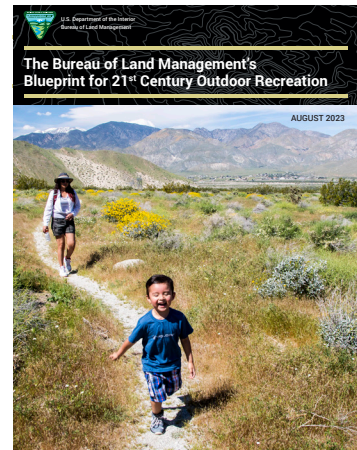
Providing recreational opportunities is central to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) mission to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Yet today, the Bureau's recreational assets are faced with unprecedented demand. As pressures to public lands recreation resources continue to climb, we face a critical window to advance a transformational shift in recreation management.

In August 2023, BLM released its Blueprint for 21st Century Outdoor Recreation (Blueprint), establishing a new vision to provide exceptional and unique recreational experiences that invite all to share in the enjoyment and stewardship of their public lands. The Blueprint establishes a critical jumping off point as the Bureau seeks to prioritize its recreation needs and build and sustain relationships among a diverse group of users and partners.

The first-of-its-kind Blueprint establishes a roadmap for the next several years focusing on four strategic pillars:

1. Grow and Diversify Resources for BLM Recreation
2. Prioritize and Embrace Partnerships
3. Expand Outreach and Establish a Culture of Inclusion
4. Meet the Demand, Protect Resources, and Improve Access

DOWNLOAD



The Blueprint is available on the BLM's website here:

<https://www.blm.gov/programs/recreation/our-strategy>



Implementation of the Blueprint will require a deepening of relationships, new partnerships, new capacity and ultimately, new resources for success. Put simply, the Bureau can't achieve its vision alone.

Roundtables

To assist the Bureau in launching this ambitious outdoor recreation effort and to build foundations for the partnerships that are essential to achieving the Bureau's vision, the Foundation for America's Public Lands (Foundation) designed a series of roundtable convenings intended to:



Build awareness of the current resource constraints and visitation pressure on the BLM;



Introduce a paradigm shift toward recreation management for public lands through the Blueprint;



Invite partner organizations to be thought partners and strategists in both addressing current needs on Bureau lands and moving toward a future vision; and



Build and sustain relationships with new and existing partners to implement the Blueprint.

The Foundation held in-person roundtables in Washington, DC (July 2023) and Las Vegas, NV (September 2023) and a virtual meeting (October 2023). The Foundation also hosted informal social gatherings the evening before the in-person roundtables to allow partners and BLM staff to meet each other in a relaxed setting before the work of the following day.

The formal roundtable meetings opened with high-level remarks from Foundation board members and BLM leadership, demonstrating that support for the Blueprint starts at the top. BLM staff then provided information about recreation demand and BLM resource constraints, and an overview of the Blueprint. Panel discussions featuring Bureau and Foundation

What's At Stake

Increasing Demand, Stagnant Resources:

Over the last decade, BLM has experienced a substantial increase in visitors, with a 35% surge in visitation since 2015. However, the agency's budget and staffing levels have not kept pace with this growing demand. The agency's recreation budget has remained relatively stagnant at an average \$0.79 per visit, and has even declined in real terms, while recreation staffing levels have declined by more than 10% in the past five years. The disparity between growing visitor numbers and shrinking resources puts immense strain on both the land and the BLM's ability to manage these places effectively.

Inadequate Access and Inclusion: Despite the proximity of BLM lands to over 120 urban centers and thousands of towns, the lack of awareness, access, and inclusion limit diverse communities' engagement with these public lands. BLM outdoor recreation opportunities need to be more known and accessible to all people, including youth and underserved communities.

Need for Diverse and Sustainable Funding:

Public lands and waters contribute more than \$111 billion in economic output and approximately 498,000 jobs nationwide. Despite this, the current funding for BLM recreation is neither sufficient nor diversified, hindering the agency's ability to ensure the sustainable use and conservation of these lands.

Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources:

As visitor numbers grow, so does the potential impact on the natural and cultural resources on these lands and waters. Without proactive management and clear guidance for visitors, the risk of harm to these precious resources increases.

Amid funding constraints, competing priorities and limited staff capacity, the Bureau's recreation program is in a state of triage, with impacts to resources, experiences and local jurisdictions mounting.

leadership and partners offered an opportunity to further explore barriers and opportunities, and hear from nonprofits, governments, and business interests. Speakers shared creative financing methods, new ways of gathering and using data to inform management, and how grants can be leveraged many times over with community involvement.

In order to gather information on partner perspectives, the Foundation asked participants to engage in small-group discussions with framing questions and note-takers to record themes of the conversations (see Appendix I). The two in-person roundtables provided rich dialogue, and alongside panel questions and a survey from the virtual meeting, informed the findings and recommendations in this report.

Key Insights from the Roundtables:

In planning the roundtables, it became clear that understanding who existing and potential Bureau partners are, and investing in building relationships, are fundamental needs. A strong mix of partners attended the roundtables (representing businesses; recreation, heritage, affinity, and conservation nonprofits; and local and state governments and several Tribes). However participation did not fully reflect the broad range of entities with an interest in recreation on BLM lands.

Participants expressed excitement about the Bureau's recreation vision and pillars as outlined in the Blueprint, and many are ready and willing to engage in problem-solving and strategic thinking about implementation. At the same time, participants raised concerns about how the resource-constrained Bureau will prioritize recreation and manage it in ways that are compatible with conservation and wildlife habitat as well as more

traditional uses such as mining and grazing. The BLM planning and travel management backlog is a tremendous barrier to overcome.

Multiple partners shared that they receive varied responses to their offers to help due to the agency staff managing other priorities and the lack of Bureau infrastructure for working with outside organizations. Participants raised questions of access, articulating that it goes well beyond physical access to public lands but is important in terms of overcoming language, transportation, information (such as signage), physical abilities, outdoor experience and other barriers.

Partners and BLM staff alike acknowledged the inherent challenges in the federal employee hiring system, and also recognized that untapped opportunities exist with partners who can assist in attracting, training, and supporting a more diverse workforce than has historically been at the agency.

Participants were eager to learn more about the emergent work of the Foundation and how it can help attract and leverage private funds as well as bring partners and the BLM together to improve coordination and relationships.

Overall, participants recognized that it will require a long term, concerted and multi-faceted effort to address the pillars of the Blueprint and achieve its vision. All agreed that taking near-term action is critical to making progress toward implementing the Blueprint, while also working on the longer-term systems change that is needed for success.

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PARTNERSHIPS:

Invest in the People and Systems Needed to Make the BLM a Partnering Agency

WHAT WE HEARD

Roundtable participants embraced the Blueprint's renewed emphasis on partnerships, but expressed frustration with current capacity and practices. Entry points for partnership conversations with Bureau are confusing or nonexistent—many participants noted that outreach to field offices is often not received or returned. Where traction with partnerships has been achieved, many informal partnership arrangements lacked durability and continuity, often lapsing amid staff turnover and partner transitions. Participants shared anecdotes where partners with funding and volunteer resources have been unable to implement projects due to lack of local agency capacity or unclear procedural next steps, highlighting additional barriers such as limited program officers, grant management, and contracting staff. BLM participants shared similar concerns noting a lack of support structures for partnerships at the field level and onerous procedural constraints. All participants expressed a strong desire to learn from past examples of success, and to build standardized and replicable models for partnership. Perhaps most importantly, participants highlighted the need for relationship-based models for success, where trust, consistent communication, and mutual benefit form the basis for partnership.

PRIORITY ACTIONS TO RESPOND

ESTABLISH A BLM NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP OFFICE.

- Coordinate existing capacities spanning the National Partnerships, Interpretive, Volunteer, Youth, Education, and Heritage Program Leads.
- Facilitate peer-learning and exchange of success stories among partners and agency staff.
- Evaluate opportunities to improve the efficiency and relieve the administrative burden of partnership grants and agreements.

- Provide field direction, guidebooks, training and other resources to support field office staff and document effective grant and agreement structures.
- Develop systems to establish and maintain communications with partners at national, state and field/district levels.
- Utilize information gathered during roundtables to strengthen the Bureau's database of partners and the skills and assets they offer.

PILOT THE PROPOSED COMMUNITY LIAISON PROGRAM.

- Establish dedicated resources and staffing in multiple locations to demonstrate program need and impact.
- Build a network approach to help community liaisons in field locations learn from and support each other.
- Develop models for co-funding positions with partners and other state, local and tribal governments based on shared stewardship goals.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

STRENGTHEN AN ORGANIZATION-WIDE COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS.

- Create performance criteria and metrics of success for sustaining and developing partnerships among relevant district, field and regional office staff.
- Promote more leadership development opportunities that allow for staff to advance careers while maintaining continuity in their offices and roles to reduce turnover.
- Develop systems to ensure a handoff between outgoing and incoming staff to reduce partnership disruptions when turnover does occur.
- Establish a strike-team or teams to support high-impact partnership opportunities such as permitting of special recreation management areas or partner-led infrastructure improvements, to ensure timely follow-through and address capacity limitations in district and field offices.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Work with Partners to Advance Near-Term Actions

WHAT WE HEARD

While roundtable participants embraced the Blueprint's broad vision and framework for a paradigm shift, all were eager to understand and contribute to shared implementation actions. BLM Leadership and partner participants universally noted the challenges of translating the Blueprint's overarching framework into clear and consistent direction, accountability and support at district and field office levels, where managers face capacity constraints and are central to effective implementation. For many participants, the roundtables marked the first time they were invited to convene to share feedback with the Bureau. Nearly all expressed a desire to remain engaged to inform strategies and prioritization of implementation actions.

PRIORITY ACTIONS TO RESPOND

ENGAGE PARTNERS IN BLUEPRINT IMPLEMENTATION.

- Use state-level recreation assessments and preliminary step-down plans under the Blueprint as a basis for further exploring and vetting priorities, partnerships, and resource needs.
- Develop partnerships with state offices of outdoor recreation, and other partner and user groups, to convene state-level outdoor recreation summits that can further refine implementation strategies, share BLM and partner priorities, identify overlapping goals, and plan near-term, early action initiatives.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

MEASURE AND INVEST IN EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION.

- Create guidance, qualitative and quantitative performance criteria, and budget allocation criteria to promote outdoor recreation and the Blueprint among district and field staff and reward effective local efforts.



Bizz Johnson Trail, California

RESOURCES:

Clearly Articulate What is Needed to Implement the Blueprint

WHAT WE HEARD

Roundtable participants highlighted the myriad ways in which the Bureau's recreation program is under-resourced to meet current and emerging demand or respond to the opportunities to work with users and partners. Partners discussed the potential to replicate strategies used with other land management agencies, requiring dedicated partnership liaison capacity at the local unit level. Participants asked for clarity around what components of the Blueprint can be implemented under current funding levels, which require new appropriations, and which may be resourced through other avenues such as corporate sponsorships, volunteers, or community-based partnerships. Partners further expressed a desire for the Bureau to more clearly identify investment opportunities as a means to inform advocacy and partnership development.

PRIORITY ACTIONS TO RESPOND

STRENGTHEN THE BUREAU'S OUTDOOR RECREATION INVESTMENT PROPOSITION.

- Clarify the need for and role of increased appropriations in achieving the Bureau's vision and effective implementation of the Blueprint.
- Develop systems and accessible databases to regularly track and identify recreation infrastructure maintenance and expansion needs to enable an articulation of resource gaps.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

ALIGN EXISTING BUREAU RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS.

- Ensure recreation programs of work have equal access to the agency's limited human resource, contracts, and grants and agreements personnel.
- Prioritize funding opportunities to integrate natural resource restoration and resilience with outdoor recreation infrastructure needs.



Molalla Recreational River, Oregon

ACCESS:

Prioritize Early Wins to Improve Access and Foster a Culture of Inclusion

WHAT WE HEARD

Roundtable participants emphasized the challenges and opportunities of improving access to BLM outdoor recreation experiences. Many discussed physical barriers in the form of landlocked public lands, limited river access and unclear services and consideration of persons with disabilities. Others noted that information about recreation sites, trails, roads and other recreation opportunities is largely inaccessible to the public, creating a knowledge barrier for many potential users. Many roundtable participants also discussed the need to address barriers to access confronting historically underserved and underrepresented populations, citing lack of access to transportation; high costs for participation; perceptions and challenges associated with safety; limited education, outreach, and lack of interpretation in languages other than English; and a lack of representation in public lands frontline staff. All participants expressed a desire for the Blueprint to create pathways to holistically improve access for all Americans to their public lands. While access projects and initiatives will take time to develop and implement, participants expressed a desire to identify near-term, actionable next steps to establish a strong foundation for durable and sustained initiatives.

PRIORITY ACTIONS TO RESPOND

PRIORITIZE NEAR-TERM ACTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND FOSTER A CULTURE OF INCLUSION.

- Identify state priorities and partnership opportunities for land and easement acquisitions to improve recreation access to BLM lands and waters.
- Work in partnership with organizations representing historically underserved and underrepresented populations to identify priorities for outreach, translation, staff recruitment, and volunteer program development.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

CREATE GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT POSITIVE RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCES FOR HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED AND UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

- Clarify for district and field staff requisite procedures for the use of new data analytics and outreach strategies in Bureau resource management, travel and recreation planning.
- Ensure planning processes relevant to outdoor recreation consider disproportionate impacts of management decisions and opportunities to enhance access for nontraditional users.

Wild Rivers Recreation Area, New Mexico

PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING:

Streamline to Meet Urgent Needs

WHAT WE HEARD

Roundtable participants expressed frustration with BLM planning processes, which are time consuming and often languish without being completed or implemented. They emphasized that planning processes need improvement to address user conflicts and ensure economic and social impacts are considered. Participants expressed a need to overcome inconsistent approaches across field offices and to incorporate closer collaboration among partners and user groups in more efficient and streamlined approaches. They asked the Bureau to find pathways that allow for critical recreation projects such as limited travel management, signage, and infrastructure improvements to proceed to address emergent impacts and enhance user experiences.

PRIORITY ACTIONS TO RESPOND

DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME PLANNING FATIGUE AND INACTION.

- Clarify analysis and decision-making processes for urgent recreation infrastructure improvements such as signage, parking, trail or road improvements necessary to respond to demand and imminent and foreseeable impacts to natural and cultural resources.
- Work with state, Tribal and local governments to assess shared stewardship priorities for recreation and travel planning implementation and foster collaborative solutions among diverse partners.
- Establish leadership direction, guidance and training for field offices to expedite processes for targeted Resource Management Plan or Travel Management Plan amendments necessary to advance collaborative recreation proposals and investments.



Alt Nez Special Recreation Management Area, Montana

FOUNDATION FOR AMERICA'S PUBLIC LANDS:

Develop and Scale Collaborative Recreation Approaches with Partners and the BLM to Demonstrate Models for Success

WHAT WE HEARD

Roundtable participants shared their insights and ideas on possible roles and programming that the Foundation for America's Public Lands can develop as the congressionally chartered partner of the BLM to further implementation of the Blueprint. Many of these insights draw from past experiences working with other congressionally chartered foundations and public land management agencies. Participants embraced the three roles the Foundation has identified:



Awareness Builder: Serving as a connector to the public to communicate the value of public lands and create a more positive perception of the BLM



Convener: Actively listening, reflecting, and creating action plans based on community engagement



Funder: Funding programs and initiatives to test assumptions, promote models, and to create impact

Participants emphasized the importance of facilitating collaborative approaches to outdoor recreation, and providing venues for sustained and coordinated action to advance shared goals and objectives. They also identified opportunities for the Foundation to leverage outside resources to demonstrate effective solutions, interface with partners and the private sector on critical data and research needs, and facilitate coordination and communications necessary to advance the Blueprint's vision.

PRIORITY ACTIONS TO RESPOND

STRATEGICALLY INVEST IN A FEW LANDSCAPES TO DEMONSTRATE SUCCESS AT SCALE.

- Co-invest with the Bureau in a suite of recreation assessment, planning, infrastructure, education and stewardship projects in a few locations to demonstrate the impact of targeted resources in advancing the needs of diverse public land users while protecting resources.
- In aligned landscapes, co-invest with the Bureau in community liaison positions and other collaborative capacity necessary to advance priority recreation initiatives, coordinate partners, and leverage resources.

INVEST IN YOUTH, VETERAN, AND SERVICE CORPS PROJECTS.

- Prioritize projects through youth, veteran, and service corps that respond to recreation demand, protect resources, and develop career pathways.

CONVENE PARTNERS TO GROW AND SUSTAIN A MOVEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE BLUEPRINT.

- Explore opportunities to support additional national and regional convenings to chart progress, prioritize implementation, and foster collaborative approaches to recreation management.
- Evaluate engagement, advocacy, and implementation capacity needs at partner organizations to understand where the Foundation might offer additional support.

OTHER ACTIONS TO RESPOND:

EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT PRIORITY RESEARCH, DATA AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NEEDS.

- Convene recreation industry, the private sector and other partners to explore barriers and opportunities to enhance visitor use data
- Explore opportunities to contract for geospatial and remote-sensing analysis and digitization to support priority Bureau recreation assessment and planning needs.
- Invest in critical research on Bureau recreation use and management, including social science.
- Develop a partnership guide to help communities understand BLM structure and orient partners to authorities and tools for partnerships.

STRENGTHEN BRANDING, OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS.

- Use polling, focus groups and other strategies to test messaging necessary to reach current and potential BLM recreation users and inspire them to share in the stewardship and enjoyment of their public lands.
- Develop a communications campaign that celebrates the Bureau, incorporates partners and furthers the Blueprint's vision in connection with the BLM's 80th anniversary as an Interior agency and 50th anniversary commemorating the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

Conclusion

The Roundtables offered all participants a critical launch-point to build shared awareness of the challenges confronting the Bureau, and the array of solutions needed to achieve a paradigm shift in recreation management. Ultimately, achieving the vision outlined by the Bureau in the Blueprint is a shared responsibility, not just among the Bureau's field staff and leadership, but among a diverse array of partners, including the Foundation for America's Public Lands. Through this report, the Foundation is inviting all Americans to embrace the Bureau's call to action to share in the stewardship and enjoyment of their public lands and to share their insights and perspectives as we work together to support next steps. To remain engaged, please complete this form and stay connected to the work of the Foundation: americaslands.org/stay-connected



To learn more, visit: americaslands.org

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Appendix

Washington, DC Small Group Conversations:

Morning

- What are your reactions to the Blueprint?
- What key factors will lead to success?
- How can the BLM and partners work together to overcome barriers?
- What would make the Blueprint resonate at the local level?

Afternoon

- How can we elevate and address the need for additional outdoor recreation resources on public lands both now and in the future?
- What does your organization bring to the table to help implement the Blueprint?
- What tools, networks and information are needed to mobilize the community of people and organizations interested in recreation on BLM lands?
- How can we build support for and participation in the western roundtable in Las Vegas in September?
- What questions would you like to discuss?

Las Vegas Small Group Conversations

Morning

- What are your reactions to the Blueprint and what you heard this morning?
 - What excites you?
 - What surprises you?
 - What's missing?
- What key factors will lead to successful implementation of the vision?
 - Are there success stories you think the BLM should draw on? What key criteria might be replicated?

- How can the BLM and partners work together to overcome some of the challenges identified in the Blueprint?
 - How specifically would you coach the BLM to "show up" with partners?
 - What do partners need to do to support the BLM?
 - How might partners effectively work together on shared issues?

Afternoon

- How can the need for additional outdoor recreation resources (funding, staffing, recreation infrastructure) on public lands be elevated and addressed both in the short term and in the future?
 - Who are the key audiences?
 - How might the agency move beyond a reliance on appropriations to fill this large need?
- What actions are needed, both within the BLM and the partner community, to establish a culture of inclusion on public lands?
- What does your organization bring to the table to help implement the Blueprint?
 - What stands out from the day's panel conversations that the BLM should draw on?
- What tools, networks and information are needed to mobilize the community of people and organizations interested in recreation on BLM lands?

Other questions if there's time:

- How can data be more effectively used by the Bureau? By partners? What key questions could be answered with data?
- What are your hopes for how the new Foundation for America's Public Lands can add to the collective work of partners?