

Outdoor Recreation as an Economic Driver in Tennessee

Outdoor recreation is a major economic driver across Tennessee. When leaders allocate funds and invest in outdoor recreation opportunities, the result is healthier economies and communities.



\$9 Billion
ECONOMIC IMPACT

2.1%
TENNESSEE GDP

93,000
TENNESSEE JOBS
(2.9% of all employees
in the state)

To date, 18 states have created Offices of Outdoor Recreation (OREC), Task Forces, or Policy Advisors. Establishing a Tennessee OREC in the Department of Tourism would unify and coordinate state and private investment in businesses and infrastructure to boost the state economy.

OREC was recommended by TACIR Commission in December 2022 as the best approach for us to navigate this opportunity across intergovernmental agencies and jurisdictions. OREC offers an opportunity to focus on economic development and tourism in rural counties and a solution-oriented focus on user group conflicts and overlapping jurisdictions rather than leading with a regulatory or law enforcement approach.

A Tennessee Office of Outdoor Recreation will:

- Lead with economic competitiveness and leverage existing trends for the benefit of all industries while accelerating new statewide investments.
- Promote Tennessee's outdoor recreation assets to expand tourism and help attract new companies and investments. This will increase jobs, expand the tax base, and contribute to making Tennessee the number one place to do business.
- Encourage healthy lifestyles & contribute to addressing concerning health trends in Tennessee.
- Convene and increase cooperation between local, state, and federal policymakers and agencies, businesses, and nonprofit partners to help leverage outdoor recreation to support economic growth.



#1 Economic Contributor
 Recreational Boating and Fishing is the Top Contributor to the outdoor recreation economy across Tennessee.

\$854M economic impact from boating and fishing outings

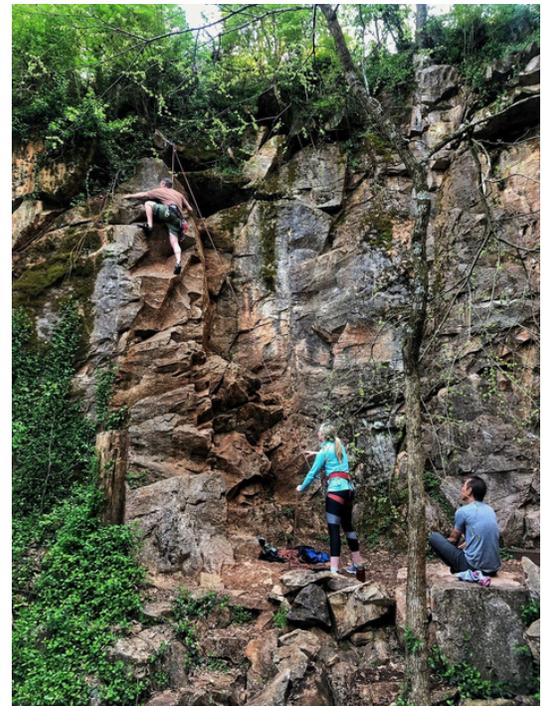
Great Smoky Mountains National Park is, perennially, the #1 most frequently visited National Park in the nation, accounting for more than 14M visitors in 2021, with more than 18M visitors to NPS sites statewide in 2021. Among other reasons for the popularity of GSMNP, about two-thirds of the nation’s population can get to the Great Smoky Mountains within a day’s drive.

The Ocoee River is generally considered the Southeast’s most popular whitewater destination, hosting over 250,000 paddlers a year. A 2012 study conducted by TVA determined that recreation on the Ocoee contributes \$43 million annually to the economy within 60 miles of the river.

18M visitors to Tennessee National Park service sites in 2021

All of the same factors driving the popularity of GSMNP and the Ocoee River also bring visitors to other outdoor pursuits in Tennessee.

In 2022, the Tennessee RiverLine released an economic impact study in partnership with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and The University of Alabama, that states the regional initiative may attract more than 800,000 new paddlers, generate \$104 million in annual spending in river communities, and offer many other economic and health impacts.



References:
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<https://www.thriveregionalpartnership.org/perspectives/ocoe-whitewater-adventure>
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Science-based conservation for the rivers of Tennessee