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FEBRUARY 2025



# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

## Letter from the Director

Dear Friends of Arkansas' Great Outdoors,

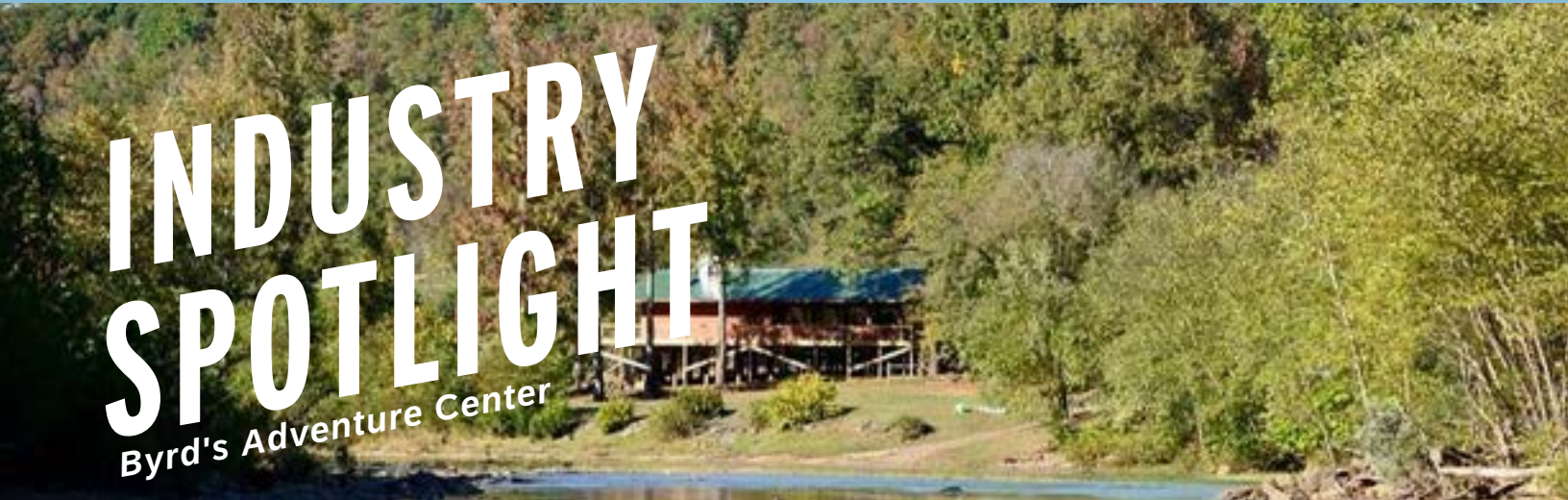
As we step into the fourth year of the Arkansas Office of Outdoor Recreation, I am filled with gratitude and excitement. 2024 was a year of incredible growth and success, where we cemented our role as a vital connector for outdoor recreation and economic development.

In 2024, our team expanded with the additions of Becky Flynn, deputy director of the Office of Outdoor Recreation, and Terrance Youngblood, director of the Outdoor Recreation Grants Program. Relationships flourished, and groundbreaking initiatives took shape.

Highlights include the debut of Arkansas at major industry events like the Outdoor Retailer Summer Show and Sea Otter Classic, a testament to our growing reputation as a leader in the outdoor economy. We also completed pivotal steps like finalizing the Maumelle Pinnacles Conservation Area Recreation Master Plan, advancing the Delta Heritage Trail network, and launching the development of a statewide Guide Vetting Program to boost outdoor tourism and bolster the guide industry.

A cornerstone of our year was conducting Regional Outdoor Recreation Listening Sessions across the state. These sessions brought together community members, local leaders, and industry stakeholders to share resources, gather input, and identify regional opportunities. The feedback was instrumental in shaping recommendations for resource expansion, regional recreation master plans, infrastructure workshops, and targeted marketing initiatives, all of which we are implementing in 2025.

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# INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Byrd's Adventure Center

**L**ocated on the Mulberry River in the Ozark National Forest, Byrd’s Adventure Center is a multi-faceted outdoor recreation destination that supports both tourism and Arkansas ’outdoor economy.

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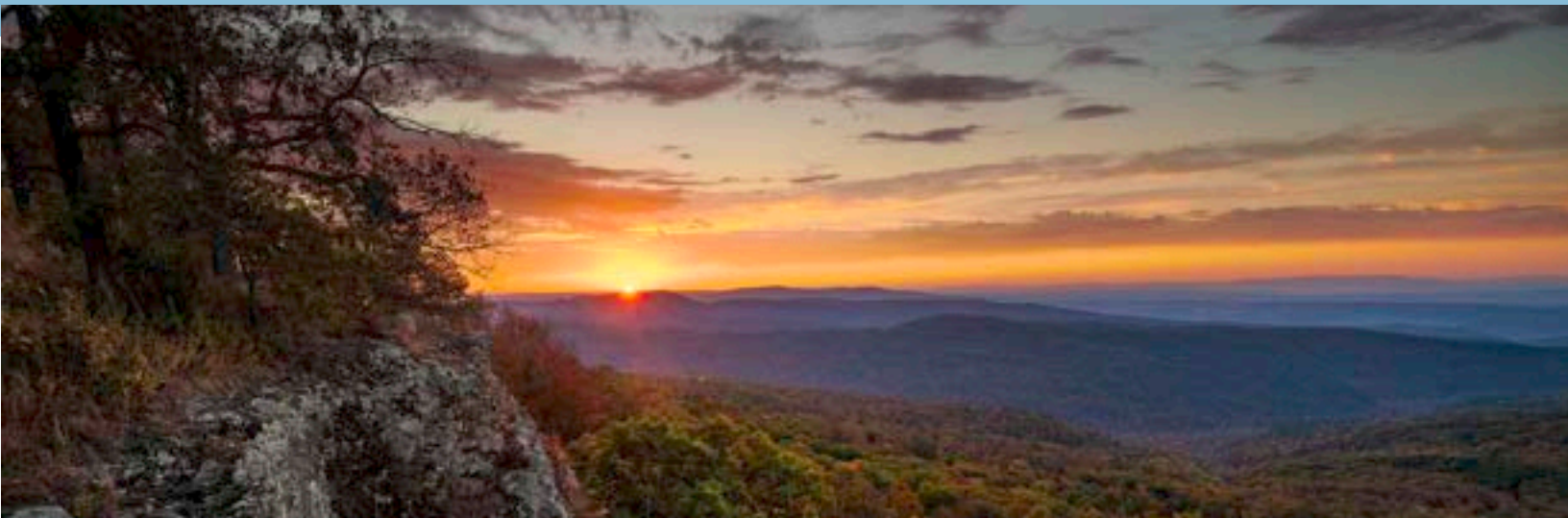


# GRANT UPDATES

## State Grants

**A**nother grant cycle has come and gone, and it's time for Big Check Day! All successful FY 2025 FUN Park and Matching Grant applicants of the Outdoor Recreation Grants Program (ORGP) will be recognized on March 6 at the at the Division of Heritage Building in Little Rock. The application portal for the next ORGP grant cycle will open May 1 on our website.

[READ MORE >](#)



## **ArDOT Grants**

The Arkansas Department of Transportation (ArDOT) 2025 Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant applications portal will open soon. A kickoff meeting will be held in person at 1 p.m. on Feb. 26 and virtually at 10 a.m. on Feb. 27.

RTP provides funding to public, private, and nonprofit agencies for constructing and maintaining motorized and non-motorized recreational trails and support facilities, with an 80/20 reimbursement match. TAP supports projects like pedestrian and bicycle facilities, recreational trails, safe routes to school, and community improvements such as historic preservation and stormwater management, also with an 80/20 match.

Click the links below to register for a meeting, see the awarded projects from 2024, and learn more about the programs.

[Register HERE](#)

[Learn More](#)

[2024 Projects](#)





### **Ozark OffRoad Cyclists**

Ozark Off-Road Cyclists is a nonprofit organization in Fayetteville created from the passion of local cyclists. This group of volunteers tirelessly advocates for the upkeep of existing trails and the creation of new ones on both public and private lands. They collaborate with local, state, and federal agencies to safeguard the natural environment and enhance recreational opportunities so that mountain bikers, trail runners, pet owners, equestrians, and outdoor enthusiasts of all ages can enjoy the stunning Ozark region. They have successfully secured various grants to support their initiatives.

[LEARN MORE HERE >](#)

### **Mountain Biking and Music**

In February, Bentonville's OZ Trails and the Momentary teamed up to bring you Send It South—a three-day festival where bikes, beats, and bonfires take center stage. Equal parts adrenaline and atmosphere, it was a weekend built for those who craved the thrill of world-class mountain biking paired with a soundtrack of live music. From trilside performances to fireside gatherings, Send It South allowed riders listen and connect in the heart of Northwest Arkansas. Check out the highlights from this event!

[CHECK OUT THE HIGHLIGHTS>](#)



## **Natural State Day at the Capitol**

The Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism, spearheaded by the Office of Outdoor Recreation, hosted the inaugural Natural State Day at the Capitol on February 4! This event was a showcase of the profound economic and recreational impact of the outdoor industry in Arkansas. Attendees experienced exhibits from over 30 outdoor recreation organizations and businesses, highlighting Arkansas' thriving outdoor economy.

The day's events included a press conference with remarks from Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders; Secretary Shea Lewis of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism; Clint Gaston, Owner of Gaston's White River Resort; and Bruce Stanton, Vice President and General Manager of PRADCO Outdoor Brands; alongside, Senate President Pro Tempore, Bart Hester of Bentonville and Representative John Maddox of Mena.

During the event, the Trails at Mena project was spotlighted as an example of the state's ongoing investment in outdoor recreation infrastructure. This transformative project, located near Mena, Arkansas, will expand the existing Queen Wilhelmina State Park by 8,000 acres to the city of Mena. This project will include a world class downhill, lift served bike park. These trails are expected to boost tourism, foster local economic growth and solidify Arkansas as a premier destination for outdoor adventure.

Highlights of the day included a cycling demonstration by USA Cycling, a boat display featuring Arkansas manufacturers, and interactive activities showcasing the diverse opportunities available for outdoor enthusiasts.

To view photos and video highlights from the event, including a video of Governor Sanders' remarks, visit the link [HERE](#).



### **Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit - Feb. 23-24**

The second Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit will co-locate in concert with the 51st annual Arkansas Governor's Conference on Tourism. This year's summit features sessions on the economic impact of outdoor recreation, workforce development, industry resources and balancing conservation with tourism. Industry partners and community leaders will come together to help shape the future of Arkansas' outdoor economy. This year's event is sold out, but stay tuned for future opportunities and the 2026 Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit.

### **New Global Cycling Accelerator**

Applications for the new Arkansas Global Cycling Accelerator in Bentonville are now closed. The accelerator is a 10-week program that supports cycling-related technology innovation, provides access to key investors and mentors and helps participants build strategic partnerships with leading brands in the industry. The program, led by cycling industry veterans and entrepreneurs, will accept a cohort of 10 startups from North America, Europe and Asia. Those chosen for the program will be announced at the Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit reception in Bentonville on Feb. 24. Follow along with progress [HERE](#).

### **GORP Around the State**

The GORP Around the State program started in early 2024, expanding outreach and resources to outdoor-focused entrepreneurs across Arkansas. The program offers workshops, mentorship, and resources tailored to the needs of local startups in outdoor recreation. Alongside Fayetteville and Bentonville, GORP holds events and workshops in cities like Little Rock, Morrilton and Helena. By visiting various communities, GORP helps startups statewide gain insights and support in the outdoor recreation sector, fostering connections and growth for Arkansas's outdoor economy. Learn More [HERE](#).

# GENERAL UPDATES

## Arkansas Next highlights Outdoor Careers

The November 2024 issue of Arkansas Next: A Guide to Life After High School features an in-depth look at careers in the outdoor industry. Starting on page 45, the feature story introduces students and job-seekers to the diverse opportunities available in outdoor careers, from guide service and park management to graphic design and outdoor product entrepreneurship. It highlights real-world examples of Arkansans thriving in these roles, underscoring the growing importance of the outdoor economy in The Natural State. With 95,000 copies distributed to more than 500 middle schools, high schools, colleges, universities, and workforce centers, this issue aims to inspire 8th-12th grade students and adult job-seekers to explore Arkansas' outdoor sector as a pathway to meaningful and sustainable careers. For those unable to access a hard copy, a digital edition is available online. Read it [HERE](#).

## Natural State Initiative Opportunity Zones

Natural State Initiative Opportunity Zones are specially designated areas in Arkansas created to encourage economic growth and development. These zones offer tax incentives to businesses and investors who open or expand their operations within them. For outdoor recreation businesses, this is a chance to grow while benefiting from financial advantages designed to stimulate development in these communities. By investing in these Opportunity Zones, you're not only supporting your business' success but also helping to create jobs, attract tourism, and strengthen Arkansas' outdoor economy. Contact the Arkansas Office of Outdoor Recreation to learn how your business can take advantage of these zones. Learn More [HERE](#).



**ARKANSAS**  
— OFFICE OF —  
**OUTDOOR RECREATION**

## **ARKANSAS OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION**

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The Office of Outdoor Recreation works to grow and support the outdoor recreation economy at the state level through collaboration with outdoor businesses, local communities and stakeholders.



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