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**AUGUST 2025**

# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



## Letter from the Director

Dear Partners and Friends of Outdoor Recreation,

Outdoor recreation has long been part of Arkansas' identity, but new data from Heartland Forward shows just how deeply it fuels our state's economy. In 2023 alone, the outdoor recreation economy contributed \$7.3 billion to Arkansas' GDP, supported more than 68,000 jobs, and generated nearly 8% of all state tax revenue. It now accounts for 2.5% of the state's total GDP, surpassing farming, and has grown 33% since 2019, outpacing the national average. These numbers reflect not only economic strength but also the momentum behind Arkansas' growing reputation as a leader in the outdoor industry.

This data provides a measurable view of how outdoor recreation fuels growth across sectors, from manufacturing and tourism to retail and transportation. It also validates the work we've undertaken to make Arkansas a national leader in this space.

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For the full report click [HERE](#).



**From its headquarters in Fort Smith,** PRADCO Outdoor Brands operates one of the largest fishing lure manufacturing facilities in the country. With iconic names like Rebel, Bomber, and YUM under its umbrella, PRADCO helps anglers across the globe chase the strike.

PRADCO’s roots in Arkansas run deep, and so does its connection to the outdoors. With a steady focus on research and development, the company continues to evolve while staying grounded in the needs of anglers and the waters they fish.

For the outdoor recreation industry, PRADCO is more than a manufacturer. It’s a steady force that supports jobs, innovation and a culture built around time outside.

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**New Project Officer**

We’re excited to introduce Amanda Hamilton, the newest member of our team. She has joined our Outdoor Recreation Grants Program as a Project Officer, where she’ll work closely with local and state partners to support outdoor recreation projects across The Natural State.

Amanda will play a key role in managing grants and helping shape the future of outdoor recreation in Arkansas.



## Outdoor Recreation Grants Program, Great Strides Grant Program

Since 2001, the Great Strides program has funded 105 projects in 58 counties, totaling \$3,832,315.60. The Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism received 39 grant applications from across the state, totaling \$6,264,285.49 in requested funds for fiscal year 2025.

The Great Strides/Trails for Life Grant recipients for FY2025 are:

- Denning (Franklin County) to provide the citizens of Denning with a pathway to better health by constructing a walking trail around Denning Town Park.
- Keo (Lonoke County) to give the citizens of Keo a recreational opportunity that is not available by creating a walking trail in downtown Keo City Park.
- Ozan (Hempstead County) to build a much-needed concrete ADA-accessible walking trail in the newly created Ozan Town Park.
- Sulphur Springs (Benton County) to add a walking trail at Sulphur Springs City Park and give citizens a low-impact option for outdoor exercise.

[READ MORE >](#)

The Great Strides Program Trails for Life grant application for fiscal year 2026 opened on March 10 and closed on June 30.

## Open Grant Applications

The application portal for the Outdoor Recreation Grants Program FUN Park and Matching grants opened on the Office of Outdoor Recreation website on May 1 and will close on Aug. 29. More information about eligible projects and how to apply can be found below.

[READ MORE >](#)

# GRANT UPDATES

## Matching Grants Success

In May, our team at the Arkansas Office of Outdoor Recreation celebrated the grand opening of a park that features a new pump track, bicycle playground and more.

We're proud to have supported this exciting project through two matching grants:

- Phase 1: \$131,500 awarded in FY22
- Phase 2: \$80,000 awarded in FY24

The City of Hot Springs has done a fabulous job turning vision into reality, creating an inclusive, high-energy space for bikes, boards and community fun. This is what investing in outdoor recreation looks like. Big congratulations to everyone involved in making Velocity Park a new hub for active outdoor play in Arkansas.

## Grant Collaboration Update: ARDOT RTP & TAP

The application windows for ARDOT's Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) have closed, with award announcements expected in the coming weeks. In a new effort to foster cross-agency collaboration, a member of our grants team will serve on ARDOT's RTP/TAP advisory committee, while an ARDOT team member will join our FUN/Matching Grant committee. This reciprocal approach will enable both our agencies to gain a deeper understanding of each other's priorities and processes, align funding strategies more effectively, and identify opportunities for joint projects that maximize impact and efficiency.

Both RTP and TAP are 80/20 reimbursement-based grant programs supporting trail development, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and community enhancements. We're looking forward to seeing how this new level of collaboration shapes future outdoor recreation projects across Arkansas.



### **The Nature Conservancy in Arkansas**

For more than 40 years, The Nature Conservancy in Arkansas has been working to protect the lands and waters that define our state. From restoring native forests in the Delta to improving stream health in the Ozarks, their projects balance conservation with access, ensuring natural spaces remain both ecologically strong and open for recreation. Their work often intersects with trail building, river access, and habitat restoration, making them a valuable partner in Arkansas' outdoor recreation landscape. Whether it's prescribed fire, land acquisition, or community collaboration, The Nature Conservancy brings science, strategy, and a long view to protecting what makes Arkansas wild — and worth exploring.

[LEARN MORE HERE >](#)

### **The Arkansas Graveler**

This summer, cyclists from across the country took on The Arkansas Graveler — a weeklong, 350+ mile gravel ride winding through the Ozarks and into the Arkansas River Valley. More than just a race, the event is a point-to-point journey through some of the most scenic and remote parts of the state, with overnight stops in small towns and plenty of elevation gain along the way. Riders tackled rugged climbs, forested backroads, and rolling hills, experiencing both the physical challenge and the hospitality that set Arkansas apart. Events like the Graveler highlight the state's growing reputation as a premier destination for gravel cycling and outdoor adventure. This was the second year for the Graveler event, which will change locations and routes annually.



### **Arkansas Stands Out at Outside Festival**


Arkansas made a strong impression at the 2025 Outside Festival in Denver, where more than 35,000 outdoor enthusiasts gathered to celebrate all things adventure. Our joint activation with Arkansas Tourism helped spotlight the state's trails, rivers, parks and outdoor experiences, and it paid off. In a post-event survey, The Natural State ranked among the top five most-recalled brands, right alongside national names like REI Co-op, The North Face, and Fjällräven.

### **Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) Video**

In celebration of Great Outdoors Month in June and the '25 in 2025' campaign to create the 25th office of outdoor recreation nationwide, ORR invited governors from around the nation in states with offices of outdoor recreation to share personally about what the outdoors means to them and their state's economies. Click [HERE](#) to see a video message from Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders

### **GORP Video Library**

The Office of Outdoor Recreation has offered to house the University of Arkansas' Office of Entrepreneurship and Innovation's Greenhouse Outdoor Recreation Program (GORP) free digital video series, called Start Smart: A Business Building Curriculum. The curriculum was designed to help early-stage entrepreneurs learn the fundamentals of building a business. The modules are taught by subject matter experts from around the state and are self-paced, allowing users to work through the material at their own pace. Access the video series [HERE](#).



# GENERAL UPDATES

## Resource Update

We've revamped the Natural State Initiative Opportunity Zones landing page to make it easier to navigate and more useful for communities, businesses and partners looking to invest in outdoor recreation. The refreshed page includes clearer information on eligibility, project types, benefits and tools to help identify potential zones across the state. Additionally, updated boundaries and minimum investment requirements within the plan will take effect in August. See the new page [HERE](#).

## Seeking Petit Jean Airport Operator

We're seeking an operator to provide fixed based operations and aviation services at Petit Jean State Park, the only airport and fly-in campground in an Arkansas State Park! This is your chance to serve aviators, outdoor adventurers and park visitors in one of the most scenic destinations in The Natural State. Learn more [HERE](#).

## Save the Date: 2026 Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit

Mark your calendar for the third annual Arkansas Outdoor Economy Summit, along with the 2026 Governor's Conference on Tourism for Feb. 23-25, 2026 in Little Rock. This statewide gathering brings together leaders in conservation, business, tourism, and outdoor recreation to share ideas, spark partnerships, and shape the future of Arkansas' outdoor economy.

More details will be announced soon. Stay tuned.



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

## **ARKANSAS OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION**

**1100 North Street | Little Rock, AR 72201**

**501-682-6829**

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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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