



Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism and Hospitality Initiative (WORTH)



# 2022-23 Annual Report

Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism and Hospitality Initiative (WORTH)

Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources





**DEAR FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES, AND PARTNERS,**

We are so excited to share this report with you, which details the WORTH Initiative’s incredible first year of operation. I am struck by all that we’ve accomplished in so little time, and excited about the the strategic direction we’ve set for the future. We have had robust partnerships with more than a dozen different entities and I cannot thank our partners enough for all their work with us.

WORTH is a strategic initiative established by University of Wyoming President Seidel to support and expand the outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality industries in Wyoming while prioritizing sustainability. Our mission is to diversify the state’s economy and provide long-term benefits to Wyoming residents. We achieve this mission through three focus areas: applied research, educational products and services, and extension and outreach.

I am incredibly proud of our team’s dedication and the impactful work they have accomplished. I would like to highlight some of our key staff members who have been instrumental in driving the success of the WORTH Initiative: Morgan Holland, our Senior Research Economist, Taylor Kruger and Nilou Shamloo, our Graduate Research Assistants, and Hailey Moss, our Tourism Extension Educator. Furthermore, I would like to recognize our affiliated faculty, Drs. Curt Davidson, Wes Eaton, and Sara Ghezzi. Each of them brings unique expertise and passion to their respective roles, furthering the mission of WORTH. Finally, I would like to thank Mary Katherine Scott for her work on several important projects including the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Report, Kyle Trumble for his work to coordinate the Inter-Tribal Tourism Summit, and Jessica Perry for her work on all things graphic design, including this report.

I invite you to explore our accomplishments and ongoing projects in this report, which highlights our research endeavors, educational initiatives, and outreach efforts. Together, we can create a vibrant and sustainable future for Wyoming’s tourism industry.

Sincerely,



Dan McCoy, Ph.D.  
Interim Director, WORTH Initiative



## WHAT IS THE WORTH INITIATIVE?

Tourism is the second largest industry in Wyoming, generating \$4.5 billion in 2022. In addition, tourism is the largest private employment sector in Wyoming, employing over 33,000. The Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism, and Hospitality (WORTH) Initiative supports this growing sector and seeks to expand it while focusing on sustainability. WORTH aims to diversify the state's economy and provide long-term benefits to Wyoming residents. The WORTH Initiative achieves its mission by focusing in three areas:



### APPLIED RESEARCH:

Delivering timely and relevant applied research for WORTH industries.



### EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES:

Supplying diverse workforce training products and other educational services to students and working industry professionals.



### EXTENSION AND OUTREACH:

Providing extension and outreach to the tourism industry across Wyoming.







## BACKGROUND

In 2018, the University of Wyoming started the Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management degree as a partnership with the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources and the College of Business. The degree program now boasts over 80 enrolled students. However, the 2020 UW Strategic Accelerated Review Process under the direction of UW President Edward Seidel identified a lack of tourism industry support. In response the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources, in partnership with the College of Business and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, proposed the establishment of WORTH. In 2021, President Seidel officially added WORTH as one of two other new strategic initiatives: The Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI) and the School of Computing (SoC). In January of 2022, WORTH received funding from the Wyoming Innovation Partnership (WIP). In March of 2022, the WORTH Initiative officially kicked-off.



### WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT WORTH IS AN INITIATIVE?

Initiatives are established at the behest of the University of Wyoming President or Board of Trustees to address a critical need or opportunity for the University. Initiatives differ from centers and institutes in that they may not be bound to one department, college, or campus beneficiary, but rather serve the campus and state.



## APPLIED RESEARCH

The WORTH Initiative serves as a frontline resource for these industries by delivering timely and relevant applied research to businesses and organizations working in outdoor recreation, tourism or hospitality around Wyoming. Here are a few examples of the valuable research projects WORTH has undertaken and contributed to the industry.

### COMPLETED RESEARCH PROJECTS:

#### WHTC MARKETING STUDY

In 2022, WORTH conducted a marketing spending study of private firms involved in tourism and hospitality for the Wyoming Hospitality & Travel Coalition (WHTC). The purpose of the study was to estimate the amount of money Wyoming tourism-related businesses spent on marketing in 2022 based on firm size, which was determined by number of employees. The importance of this study was to show that private tourism-related companies contribute to marketing, not just the Wyoming Office of Tourism through lodging tax revenue. A survey was compiled and delivered to nearly 1,500 tourism or hospitality-related businesses to inquire about their marketing spending. WORTH found that between 2019-2022, private firms spent 26.5% more on marketing than in previous years. This study was achieved through a partnership between WORTH and the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center (WYSAC).



#### VIA FERRATA IN SINKS CANYON STATE PARK

WORTH funded a study centered on community perceptions and the impacts of outdoor recreation development in Sinks Canyon State Park located near Lander, Wyoming. Proposed new infrastructure to the area includes the construction of a Via Ferrata, a kind of climbing route popular in Europe, that could increase visitation to Lander and surrounding areas. The study was led by research faculty in the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources and findings will be disseminated through academic publications and research forums.



## OUTDOOR RECREATION REPORT

In partnership with the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, the WORTH Initiative compiled a report on outdoor recreation in Wyoming to highlight this important and growing industry. The report compares the economic contribution of different activities such as snow sports, hunting, fishing, off-roading, and more, and underscores how outdoor recreation directly supports more than 15,000 jobs in Wyoming. The report also describes the natural features in Wyoming that draw outdoor recreationists to visit and discusses the benefits of outdoor recreation to health and wellness, community, workforce recruitment and retention, and more. Finally, the report documents the efforts being made – nationally and in Wyoming— to conserve and steward natural spaces so that they remain healthy and vibrant for future generations.



1,589 copies posted directly to mailing lists including state government officials and other stakeholders; 420 additional copies handed out individually. Online: 876 views and 142 downloads since March 2.

## UPCOMING RESEARCH PROJECTS:

### WYOMING TOURISM OR OUTDOOR RECREATION RESEARCH GRANTS

Beginning this year, WORTH will allocate \$200,000 in grant funding to UW faculty members and their co-collaborators (from Wyoming community colleges and beyond). Applicants will propose research that aligns with WORTH's mission: to support, expand, and diversify Wyoming's economy through outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality industries. Selected projects and research goals must directly and positively impact these industries in Wyoming. Preference will be given to applicants who prioritize interdisciplinary research, leverage outside funding matches, and encourage more diversity, equity, and inclusion in Wyoming's outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality sectors.

### SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN, JACKSON HOLE TRAVEL AND TOURISM BOARD

The Jackson Hole Travel and Tourism Board selected WORTH to measure the impact of their Sustainable Destination Management Plan (SDMP). Specifically, WORTH will identify and catalogue impact indicators and data in multiple areas related to sustainable destination management in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. This data collection and analysis will be accomplished over the next two years through surveys, interviews, and multi-source data collection, in-market qualitative destination-wide study of visitor use, and visitation impacts. Partnering with WORTH staff on this project is the Wyoming Survey and Analysis Center (WYSAC), which will assist in mailing surveys and analyzing the data captured.

### WORTH BENCHMARKING SURVEY

To better understand how the WORTH Initiative compares to similar institutes, centers, and programs at other institutions, we are currently compiling information about institutes and centers with similar foci. Soon, we will send out a Qualtrics survey to gain a clearer picture of what these programs are doing, where their funding comes from, the composition of their staff and affiliated faculty, and other characteristics. This data will help WORTH identify areas where we excel as well as where we could focus more of our efforts, and even potential future partners.



## EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTS AND TRAINING

To support the workforce development needs of outdoor recreation and tourism sectors in Wyoming, the WORTH Initiative offers diverse training services and educational products to students and industry professionals.

### EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS DELIVERED:

#### OUTDOOR GUIDE CERTIFICATION

The UW Outdoor Guide Certification course is a 32-hour online, standardized, competency-based training program, designed to provide aspiring or established guides the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in the industry, regardless of their area of outdoor expertise. WORTH continues to support and offer this course. Since spring 2021 we have offered 10 courses with 167 registrants, generating \$41,200 in revenue.



#### CENTENNIAL VALLEY TOURISM SUMMIT

At the request of President Seidel, the WORTH Initiative co-hosted a Centennial Valley Tourism Summit with Visit Laramie and the Albany County Tourism Board. The primary goals of the summit were to provide tourism-related businesses in the Centennial Valley with updates from key stakeholders and to gather information on how UW and WORTH can support Centennial Valley tourism-related businesses. Key stakeholders included Visit Laramie and the Albany County Tourism Board, the U.S. Forest Service's Laramie Ranger District, the Wyoming Office of Tourism and the Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation. 22 people attended and there were 6 presentations. As an outcome of that summit, Visit Laramie is working to staff the Visitor's center this summer to help alleviate some of the impacts from visitors to the snowy range.

**Centennial Valley  
Tourism Summit**

April 27th 9 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
at the Trading Post  
2753 Hwy. 130, Centennial, Wyoming

**GUEST PRESENTATIONS BY:**

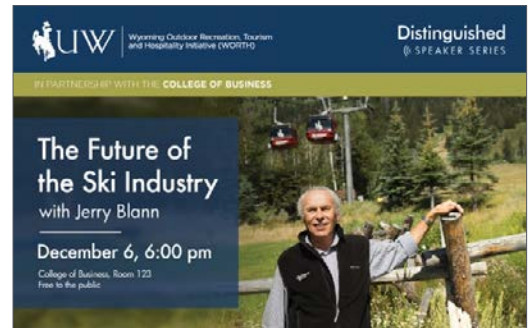
- Albany County Tourism Board
- USFS Laramie Ranger District
- Wyoming Office of Tourism
- Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
DAN.MCCOY@UWYO.EDU • (307) 766-5009

UWYO | Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation, Tourism and Hospitality Initiatives | LARAMIE RECREATION AREA

## THE FUTURE OF THE SKI INDUSTRY

Jerry Blann, former president and CEO of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort discussed the past, present and future of the ski industry. His presentation was part of the UW Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources' Distinguished Speaker Series and sponsored by the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism and Hospitality (WORTH) Initiative and the College of Business. Over 20 people attended his talk on December 6.



## FEASIBILITY STUDY

WORTH compiled a feasibility study for the UW College of Business and their Bachelor's of Science degree in Management, proposing a new focus area in hospitality. This new focus area complements the department's existing minor in hospitality, which has also undergone a revision to streamline coursework and increase student accessibility.



## HOSPITALITY TRAINING

WORTH held a single day hospitality training program for Jackson Fork Ranch's employees in October. Eight employees were trained in best practices for high quality customer service and hospitality.



## TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY JOB FAIR

On February 1, WORTH organized and hosted a job fair with the College of Business and the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources. The fair included 12 registered vendors, and over 40 students.



## EMERGING ISSUES FORUM

In April, WORTH co-convened an Emerging Issue Forum on outdoor recreation with the Ruckelshaus Institute and the Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Office. The forum, titled "Building It the Way We Want It," brought together 160 stakeholders, managers, policymakers, and interest groups in Laramie, Wyoming to discuss the question, "How can Wyoming communities balance the benefits and impact of growing outdoor recreation and tourism—economically, culturally, and environmentally?" The three-day forum and workshop included over 50 panelists and speakers, 60 undergraduate and graduate students presenting their capstone projects, field trips, a networking reception, and more.





## INTER-TRIBAL TOURISM SUMMIT

Also in April, WORTH co-hosted the Inter-Tribal Tourism Summit with the High Plains American-Indian Research Institute (HPAIRI) and the Wind River Visitors Council. The goal of the summit was to create more awareness, understanding, and discussion around the impacts and opportunities of tourism on the sovereign nations and inhabitants of the Wind River Indian Reservation. The summit was attended by over 80 people, included 27 presenters, and 7 presentations and panel discussions by scholars and tourism industry professionals on economic opportunities, tourism data and trends, Native American culture, and more.

WORTH is working to develop a road map for tribal engagement in the tourism space and will share a report with both the Norther Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Business Councils.



## CERTIFIED DESTINATION EXPERT – LARAMIE

In partnership with Visit Laramie, WORTH has created a training program for front line hospitality staff. The program helps participants become a Certified Destination Expert (CDX) for Laramie and Albany County. This training equips frontline hospitality workers with the knowledge and training to communicate with visitors about attractions and amenities in Laramie and surrounding areas. The training program is online and self-paced and available through WYOLearn catalog at the University of Wyoming.



## FUTURE EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS:

- ✓ Create transfer student planning guides with all seven of Wyoming's community colleges regarding the College of Business' B.S. in Management degree, with a focus in Hospitality.
- ✓ Promote the College of Business' B.S. in Management degree with a focus in Hospitality to targeted audiences in Wyoming and Front Range. Develop strategic marketing campaign for this purpose.
- ✓ Revise the existing Certified Outdoor Guide online course with updated materials and case studies relevant for today's audience.



## EXTENSION AND OUTREACH

The WORTH Initiative champions the University of Wyoming in becoming more engaged in outdoor recreation, tourism, and hospitality industries around the state. We achieve this by providing extension and outreach services to tourism-related small businesses and organizations across Wyoming. Essential to our efforts is hiring talented and highly motivated individuals to help us reach audiences in all corners of the state.

### NEW HIRES

Since January 2023, WORTH has made critical hires in two areas to support its mission. Hailey Moss is our new Tourism Extension Educator and is based in the College of Agriculture, Life Sciences, and Natural Resources. In this role, Hailey is responsible for assisting rural Wyoming communities and businesses to maximize natural resource-based tourism opportunities in a responsible way.



Hailey Moss



Morgan Holland

Our second new hire is Morgan Holland, Senior Research Economist, who is with the Center for Business and Economic Analysis in the College of Business. Part of Morgan's job duties for the WORTH Initiative will be to conduct economic impact studies for outdoor recreation, hospitality, creative economy, and other tourism-related industries.



## HOSPITALITY TRAINING

In addition to strategic hires to bolster our extension and outreach mission, WORTH also provides customized hospitality training for business owners, such as hotels, guest ranches, and more.



## WESTERN CONFLUENCE MAGAZINE

Our outreach efforts go even further when disseminated in print and digital media, as they are in the Ruckelshaus Institute's upcoming publication of Western Confluence Magazine. WORTH is pleased to sponsor this special issue, thematically focused on developing sustainable outdoor recreation and tourism in the West, and Director Dan McCoy served as the guest editor for the volume.



## THE FUTURE

In the future, WORTH will continue to expand its impact through extension services to the state, and also tailor economic impact studies for specific projects or funding allocations. These important contributions will aid small business owners around Wyoming by making educational resources and economic data available and more accessible than ever before.



Haub School students with Governor Gordon attending the Wyoming Governor's Hospitality and Tourism Convention, March 2022



## OTHER SPONSORED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

WE HELPED SUPPORT OR SPONSOR SEVERAL PROGRAMS AND SYMPOSIA AT UW INCLUDING:



### **YELLOWSTONE 150TH SYMPOSIUM**

The Yellowstone 150th Symposium featured prominent figures from the National Park Service and elsewhere within the Department of the Interior—including Yellowstone Superintendent Cam Sholly—as well as from numerous Yellowstone-associated Native American tribes.



### **WILD AND WORKING LANDS FILM FESTIVAL**

The second annual Wild and Working Lands Film Festival, hosted by the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming, inspires audiences to better understand our current world and work toward a future where people and natural environments prosper together.



### **FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: ECO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ENVIRONMENT SYMPOSIUM**

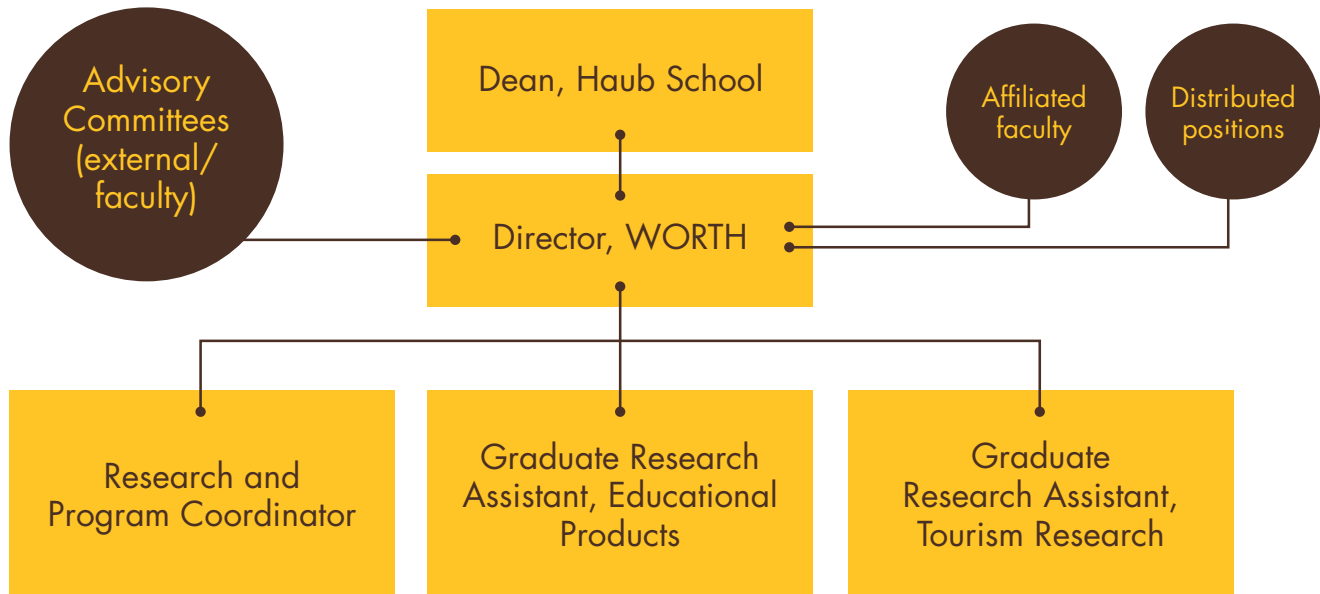
A joint symposium with the University of Arizona, WORTH provided the keynote address on May 4, titled “*The Wyoming Model: The WORTH Initiative and Connection Across the State*”





## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the school and the close ties of the initiative to the ORTM degree, the WORTH Initiative is organized under the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources. However, the WORTH budget is under Academic Affairs and is managed by the Director of WORTH. The director reports to the Dean of the Haub School. See below organizational chart.



## DISTRIBUTED POSITIONS

Distributed positions are financially supported by, and perform duties for, the WORTH Initiative, but report to their respective colleges/departments. These positions are allocated to colleges or schools through a Memorandum of Agreement with the WORTH Initiative.

Research  
Scientist,  
Economist,  
CBEA (COB)

Sustainable  
Tourism,  
Assistant  
Professor (Haub)

Internship and  
Employment  
Coordinator  
(Haub/COB)

Extension  
Educator,  
Tourism (ALSNR)

Assistant  
Professor, HOSP  
(COB)

## AFFILIATED FACULTY

Affiliated faculty maintain appointments in other units; however, their work intersects with WORTH-related projects, research, or services.

## ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The WORTH Initiative relies on the expertise, feedback, and input from both an external advisory committee consisting of industry professionals in Wyoming and a UW faculty advisory committee.

### EXTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Dean of the Haub School invites and appoints committee members to serve two-year terms. The expectations of the external advisory committee members are to:

1. Participate in bi-annual meetings timed with the Fall Hospitality and Tourism Summit and the Governor's Hospitality and Tourism Conference (the dates and times vary each year).
2. Advise the ORTM degree program and the WORTH Initiative.
3. Offer insight on current and future trends and needs within the recreation and tourism industry.
4. Provide expertise to assist UW to best support the recreation and tourism industries in Wyoming.





**Current WORTH external advisory committee membership:**

FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	TITLE	INSTITUTION/ORGANIZATION
Budd	Betts	Owner	Absaroka Ranch
Domenic	Bravo	President & CEO	Visit Cheyenne
Chris	Brown	Executive Director	Wyoming Hospitality and Travel Coalition
Dave	Glenn	Interim Director	Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources
Tom	Holland	Executive Director	Wilderness Adventures
Mike	Keller	General Manager of Yellowstone National Park Lodges	Xanterra Parks & Resorts
Karen	Kemmerer	Member	Haub School Board
Alex	Klein	Vice President and General Manager	Grand Teton Lodge Company and Flagg Ranch Company
Mike	Lilygren	Co-Owner	Maven Outdoor Equipment Company
Kristi	Murphy	Recreation Program Manager	USFS, Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin National Grassland
Debbie	Pummel	Regional Director of Sales	Safari Hospitality
Diane	Shober	Executive Director	Wyoming Office of Tourism
Andrew	Way	Vice President, Marketing	Jackson Hole Mountain Resort

**UW FACULTY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Membership on the faculty advisory committee consists of a diverse array of campus constituents. The Director invites members to the committee through college deans, faculty senate (for the at large position), and the vice president for research and economic development, to serve two-year terms. The committee meets at least twice per year. The purpose of the UW faculty advisory committee is to:

1. understand the WORTH Initiative background, history, relevance, and importance and,
2. advise the WORTH Initiative on current initiatives, future directions and,
3. increase cross-campus collaboration.

**Current WORTH faculty advisory committee membership:**

FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	COLLEGE, SCHOOL, OR DIVISION
Chase	Thiel	College of Business
Curt	Davidson	Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources
Kelly	Crane	College of Agriculture, Life Sciences, and Natural Resources
Steve	Farkas	Office for Research and Economic Development
Caroline	McCracken-Flesher	Arts and Sciences
Jeff	Hamerlinck	At large



UW

Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism  
and Hospitality Initiative (WORTH)

WYOMING  
INNOVATION  
*partnership*



The WORTH Initiative is supported in  
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Wyoming Innovation Partnership

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