

NEWS RELEASE

October 19th, 2023

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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The Outdoor Pikes Peak Initiative makes strides to balance outdoor recreation and conservation priorities.

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. October 19, 2023 - The Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance (PPORA) is excited to provide an update to the community on progress being made on the collaborative regional planning effort, the Outdoor Pikes Peak Initiative (OPPI). PPORA has led the initiative with a Task Force of outdoor leaders since 2021, funded primarily through Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) who awarded PPORA an additional \$128,000 this summer to complete the vision plan sometime next spring.

As a recap of work conducted to this point and which inform and provide interrelated building blocks for the Vision Plan, we'd like to share some key accomplishments.

- OPPI formed a diverse **Task Force** comprised of land managers, and conservation and recreation partners across El Paso, Teller and Fremont counties who provide strategic leadership to the process.
- Early on, OPPI evaluated over **100 planning documents** from the region to glean existing values and goals for the region's outdoors and followed this with a land manager needs assessment to learn management and operational goals and challenges.
- Through partnership with the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs (UCCS), the **Outdoor Pikes Peak Data Hub** was developed for communicating outdoor-related information to the public and community leaders of the Pikes Peak region for better understanding, recognition of value, and thoughtful fact-based planning and decision-making.
- Through partnership with the Colorado Tourism Office, PPORA conducted a **benchmark survey and analysis of the region's outdoor industry** to better understand needs and aspirations and to inform this planning from the industry stakeholder perspective.
- OPPI also identified and evaluated 16 innovative and effective **management and funding models** from across the nation to learn best practices that could be applied to our region. The Task Force narrowed this to four models for deeper analysis.
- Important to this process is engaging with **elected officials**. The OPPI project team, to date, has met with Woodland Park, Cripple Creek, Victor, Monument, and Colorado Springs city councils and El Paso and Fremont County Commissioners. (Teller County Commissioners canceled and has not been rescheduled.)
- OPPI conducted the first round of **community engagement** through 11 listening sessions across the three counties, as well as online surveying and pop-up outreach events. Hundreds of participants attended and provided feedback on challenges, opportunities, and big ideas related to the region's natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities. Through this outreach, as well as direct emails, OPPI received

over 2,000 individual comments that were categorized and brought into the next phase of the project.

“The community engagement stage of this planning initiative has hands down been the most exciting and informative,” said PPORA Executive Director Becky Leinweber. “Hearing directly from the people who enjoy our region’s natural and recreation assets and are invested in the future has been the best part of this multi-stage process so far, and their concerns and aspirations weigh heavily on the project leadership. I look forward to the next opportunity for engagement with the public after the first of the year.”

Because having safe, accessible, desirable natural and recreation amenities draws residents, visitors, businesses, and workforce to the region - OPPI gathered community leaders outside of the “outdoors” lens for visionary thinking on how best to build a future of exceptional natural resource care and protection while providing exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities. In addition, the Task Force has been meeting in topic focus groups with local subject matter experts, based on key themes coming from all of these plan building blocks to help flesh out emerging priorities and strategies.

Core to this process, was asking the questions, “What’s best for the resource?” “What’s best for recreational opportunities?” What is needed in management and funding to achieve this?” One emerging option being explored is to engage Colorado Parks and Wildlife in greater management responsibilities in the region. Other examples of topics being explored include unified communications, improved connectivity of trails to one another and communities, and regional geographic identification of our highest conservation and recreation values.

As we approach the end of 2023, the OPPI process will continue to flesh out the priorities and strategies with the Task Force and community leaders, more deeply exploring themes including partnerships, communication, connectivity, management, and funding - all of which affect natural resources and recreation both - as well as themes specific to each one. These will be brought into the draft plan, which leads to the next opportunity for community engagement in January 2024.

Stay tuned for more information on the dates and locations of the January listening sessions and release of the next online by visiting: www.OutdoorPikesPeakInitiative.org. For OPPI updates, sign up [HERE](#).

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ABOUT PIKES PEAK OUTDOOR RECREATION ALLIANCE (PPORA)

Pikes Peak Outdoor Recreation Alliance’s mission is to strengthen the outdoor recreation industry for the Pikes Peak region through leadership and collaboration. PPORA’s work is rooted in 5 pillars: To GROW, INSPIRE, STRENGTHEN, STEWARD, ADVOCATE. Visit www.ppora.org to learn more about the organization and www.pikespeakoutdoors.org for resources to enjoy the outdoors in the Pikes Peak region.

The [Colorado Outdoor Regional Partnerships Initiative](#) is funded jointly through Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Great Outdoors Colorado and was created to ensure that our State remains a world-class outdoor destination while preserving our land, water, wildlife, and quality of life. Read the full text of the [Executive Order B 2020 008](#) that helped create the Regional Outdoor Partnerships. Funding is designed to support new and existing coalitions that meet criteria under a State-level Vision and advance development of local and regional planning elements to inform a Statewide Conservation and Recreation Plan.