

Gov. Hickenlooper establishes Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office; appoints Luis Benitez as Director



Governor John Hickenlooper announced today that Luis Guillermo Benitez has been appointed as Director of the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office. This is a new office and position that will be housed in the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT).

"Luis Benitez is the epitome of an outdoor recreation industry professional: a world class mountaineer and guide, educator, leader and community advocate. We couldn't have found a better-suited person to represent our state's Outdoor Recreation Industry," said Gov. Hickenlooper. "Luis has the knowledge and experience with Colorado's Outdoor Recreation Industry to become a successful convener and collaborator with all industry participants throughout the state. His passion for the outdoors is contagious, and he combines this with a business savvy that will ensure we continue to elevate Colorado's business brand and the continued prominence of our Outdoor Recreation Industry."

The Outdoor Recreation Industry Office is being established in recognition of the huge impact and importance of the industry to the future prosperity and health of Colorado. It will provide a central point of contact, advocacy, resources and support at the state level for the diverse constituents, businesses, communities and groups that rely on the continued health of the Outdoor Recreation Industry. The industry provides significant employment opportunities and is a critical component of the economic base in many rural and mountain communities. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, the industry contributes \$4.2 billion in wages and salaries in Colorado.

As Colorado's first-ever Outdoor Recreation Industry Director, Benitez will be the state's

key focal point for the industry, promoting it throughout the world and supporting the growth of Colorado businesses that provide services and products in the Outdoor Recreation Industry. He will also collaborate with key leaders throughout Colorado to advance the industry.

"I am incredibly excited to have the opportunity to connect who I am personally with what I get to do professionally," said Benitez. "Colorado is in a strong position to lead the Outdoor Recreation Industry on many levels, and this office will be the start of creating not only the collective voice for the outdoor community in our state, but also starting to craft the collaborative vision for the future of the Outdoor Recreation Industry in Colorado".

Benitez is one of the more experienced, respected and busiest professional guides and leadership development consultants in the world. He has summited the top of the famed "Seven Summits" 32 times, including being a six-time summiteer of Mt. Everest while serving as the Director of Operations for Adventure Consultants, a New Zealand based international guiding company. Benitez's first summit of Everest was to climb with the blind athlete Erik Weihenmayer on his historic 2001 Everest summit.

Benitez works to tie the lessons available from the mountains and carry them back to the everyday challenges of life and business. In this regard, Benitez also manages and leads critical thinking/situational leadership seminars in Chile for the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business. This has led to the creation of an innovative consulting group - Endeavor Consulting - which focuses on experiential leadership development at the executive level. Benitez previously worked with Vail Resorts, Inc., where he led Talent Management for Eagle County in Colorado and was responsible for the design and implementation of leadership development programming and curricula for the company, as well as assisting in cultural and leadership integration for acquisitions from the Talent Management perspective.

Prior to Vail Resorts he served as the Director of the Rocky Mountain Region for Outward Bound Professional (OBP) for the Colorado Outward Bound School, where he partnered with key regional stakeholders regarding permitting, resource management, and operational oversight for OBP programming and structure. Benitez was also responsible for leading courses in various mountaineering/skiing/rock climbing and paddling environments.

Benitez is currently a town Councilman in Eagle, CO, where he has championed the extension of existing mountain bike and commuter trail systems and worked on the vision

for the town's river corridor including a proposed whitewater park while also providing overall strategic direction for the towns growth and development.

Benitez will begin his director role on July 1, 2015.