

Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Sector — Project Interview Summary

North State Region – Siskiyou Outdoor Recreation Alliance

Representative Interviewed: Justi Hansen & Renee Casterline
Interviewed by: Calder Johnson

1 Assets

Think about the natural assets — public lands, parks, trails, or other features — and the community assets — community facilities, airports, train stations, unique areas, and/or cultural events — that draw visitors to the region, and how the project connects to them. Then consider what kinds of investments, whether in staff capacity, coordination, or regional information sharing, the project would most benefit from to move forward.

Consider:

- *What natural assets attract people to the region, and how does the project connect to them?*
- *What community assets attract and bring people to the region, and how does the project connect to them?*
- *What investments would most help the project advance?*

Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- Natural Assets
 - No specific natural assets were identified
- Community Assets and Regional Access
 - The South Siskiyou Sustainable Recreation Plan represents a holistic approach integrating outdoor recreation with **conservation, fire mitigation, economic development, and community health**
 - **World-class recreation** is accessible within minutes of town: backcountry skiing is 15 minutes away, mountain biking 10 minutes from community centers
 - The Everett Memorial Highway alone generates an estimated \$5,000 to \$25,000 per day in **economic activity**, demonstrating the direct link between natural access and local economic health
 - Recreation is understood as **foundational to healthy communities**, on par with conservation and education, not merely a consumer amenity
 - The project seeks to shift community identity from recreation as consumption toward a **broader conservation ethic**

Challenges:

- **Private land access** is the primary barrier to connecting communities via trails, requiring policy solutions that protect landowners from liability while enabling meaningful public access

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2 Policy & Regulations

Reflect on the policies or regulations the project has encountered, and whether they have opened doors or created roadblocks. Consider also where the policy landscape simply does not match conditions on the ground, and whether a governance structure — like a joint powers authority or special district — could help bridge that gap.

Consider:

- Which policies or regulations have helped or hindered the project?
- Where does the policy landscape not match reality on the ground, and what structures might help?

Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- State metrics for rural areas should focus on **stabilizing existing jobs and businesses** rather than adding new ones: a fundamental reframing of how rural economic success is measured
- Incentive structures offering fire mitigation support in exchange for trail easements across **private timberland** could unlock access to the 280,000 acres of private land needed to connect South County communities
- **Prevailing wage and bidding requirements** should be adapted for isolated rural areas where standard requirements create cost barriers disproportionate to local conditions
- **Integrating fire mitigation and recreation planning** within funding programs would better reflect the interconnected realities on the ground

Challenges:

- Connecting South County communities requires crossing 280,000 acres of private timberland; **private landowners fear liability and fire risk**, and at least one landowner has explicitly refused permission to cross property that would link Dunsmuir to McCloud
- No clear state policy exists protecting private landowners from **liability for trail access**, leaving the single largest connectivity barrier unaddressed
- **Lack of coordinated policy** creates jurisdictional conflicts over road access responsibilities: the Everett Memorial Highway situation, where the Forest Service, county, and city disputed snow plowing duties, illustrates how the absence of clear policy produces paralysis
- Sierra Pacific Industries allows trail use with no written agreement, creating **legal vulnerability** for all parties

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- **Proposition 68's** 30-year public access requirement lacks natural disaster clauses, creating unacceptable risk for landowners in fire-prone areas
- State policy currently **fails to value recreation holistically**, and evaluation frameworks designed for urban job creation are inappropriate for rural economies where stability and worker well-being are the meaningful measures of success

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Funding

Consider what funding opportunities have identified and pursued, and what challenges have arisen if none are available. Think about how well current funding aligns with the actual needs and timeline — including reimbursement structures, long-term maintenance, and the ability to braid multiple sources together — and whether a capacity gap exists between the project and the funding it requires.

Consider:

- *What funding opportunities have been found, and what gaps or challenges remain?*
- *How well does available funding match the project's real needs, and can multiple funding sources be leveraged?*

Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- A **community recreation tax** is being pursued, with three years of preparation needed to build the public education and community identity required to win the vote; the goal is for residents to understand recreation investment as investment in public health, education, economy, and stewardship
- Recreation must be positioned and funded as a **multi-benefit investment**, not a single-sector amenity

Challenges:

- Rural communities need **long-term, sustained funding** rather than short-term project grants; a Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant was valuable but ended without follow-up funding
- Planning and construction funding exists in the current landscape, but **maintenance funding** does not; trail stewardship requires significant ongoing resources with no sustainable mechanism to cover them
- Most recreation activities generate **no ticket or fee revenue**; fishing licenses provide modest income but the vast majority of recreation infrastructure is used for free with no mechanism for visitors to contribute back

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- **Local fundraising capacity** is severely limited: \$28,000 raised on Giving Tuesday represents the organization's best effort, far short of operational needs
- **SORA is financially precarious**, operating the Nordic Center while simultaneously conducting planning and advocacy; short winter seasons, part-time year-round staff at barely sustainable wages, and recent capital investments in lodge construction and a new groomer have pushed the organization to the edge
- **Prevailing wage requirements** create additional cost barriers in isolated rural areas where labor markets do not reflect urban wage assumptions
- Funders consistently prioritize innovation over **consistency and longevity**, leaving the organizations that sustain rural recreation infrastructure chronically underfunded
- Multi-year community education is required before a tax measure can succeed; **that preparatory work** itself requires funding that does not currently exist

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Data

Think about what data resources exist in the region to support your project — things like visitation numbers, economic impact, or user behavior — and what is missing that should be measured. Consider who owns the data, what happens to it when the project ends, and whether data to demonstrate the project's value to the agencies and funders who need to act on it can be used.

Consider:

- *What data is available and what important data is still missing?*
- *Who owns the data, and can it be used to make the case to funders and decision-makers?*

Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- Economic data is a powerful tool for community buy-in: Everett Memorial Highway data showing \$5,000 to \$25,000 per day in **economic activity** successfully made the case for road plowing when county officials resisted
- Business surveys and trailhead tabling could generate **specific, on-the-ground visitor data**
- Forest Service road user data, originating from a master's thesis project, demonstrates that locally initiated data collection can produce **usable results**
- State funding for **simultaneous economic impact analyses across multiple rural communities** could produce comparable regional data efficiently

Challenges:

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- **Purchased data** lacks the granularity and community specificity needed for local advocacy and decision-making; locally collected data is more useful but requires capacity and funding that most rural organizations do not have

5 Climate Change

Reflect on whether climate change is a factor in the project — through shifting seasons, temperature fluctuations, or changing visitor behaviors — and how the project is responding or adapting. Consider whether the project is connected to climate resilience or mitigation funding, and what it would take to do so.

Consider:

- *How is climate change affecting the project, and how are the project sponsors responding?*
- *Is the project connected to climate resilience or mitigation funding opportunities?*

Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- **Fire mitigation and recreation planning** should be integrated and funded together; "recreation is conservation" is the organizing argument, and scientists, lawyers, and community members all need to help articulate and advance that connection
- **Connecting recreation infrastructure investment to fire mitigation funding** represents a significant untapped opportunity if the policy and funding frameworks can be aligned

Challenges:

- Rising snow levels threaten the **Nordic Center's** viability at its current elevation, putting a core piece of community recreation infrastructure at long-term risk
- White fir die-off on Gateway trails has required extensive **hazard tree removal**; tree death accelerates soil drying and trail degradation, compounding maintenance burdens
- **Shorter and less predictable seasons** directly threaten organizational sustainability; SORA's financial precarity is inseparable from climate-driven season compression
- **Organizational stability** is a prerequisite for sustained community work; climate impacts that undermine financial viability undermine everything built on top of it

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Workforce

Think about the workforce gaps standing in the way of the project moving forward, and whether the project's proponents are finding the skills, contractors, and project managers they need locally. Consider also whether the project creates opportunities to build longer-term workforce pipelines through partnerships with community colleges, workforce boards, or local hire programs.

Consider:

- *What workforce gaps are slowing the project, and is the project finding the talent needed locally?*
- *Does the project create opportunities to build long-term workforce pipelines in the region?*

Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- **People are the region's greatest asset**, but capacity is its biggest weakness; the constraint is human time and bandwidth, not vision or creativity
- Trail maintenance represents a **significant workforce opportunity**, particularly for kinesthetic learners, with potential for year-round employment rather than seasonal work
- A partnership with College of the Siskiyous for **vocational training and certificates** in trail construction and maintenance is possible and could help young people establish themselves in the community
- Machine-built trails require **machine maintenance**, creating demand for specialized skills that could anchor a durable local workforce pipeline
- The goal is not job creation but job stabilization: existing businesses paying above minimum wage with healthcare benefits is the **meaningful measure of success**

Challenges:

- **Forest Service capacity issues and small city staff limitations** constrain the partners available to support project work
- Building complex trail infrastructure **without sustainable maintenance funding** risks creating liabilities the community cannot support -- a concern that shapes what should and should not be built
- Rural communities **lack the critical mass** to support new businesses without exceptional circumstances; existing businesses are struggling, not growing (The Fifth Season outdoor store has laid off staff, and the owners of Shasta Gravity Adventures sold their business to escape unsustainable working conditions while holding down full-time jobs simultaneously)

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- Workforce development must accompany infrastructure development, but funding structures **rarely support both together**

7 Collaboratives

Reflect on the collaborative relationships your project depends on — across jurisdictions, land managers, or tribal partners — and where those relationships are accelerating progress or slowing things down. Consider whether there is a regional body or coordination structure your project needs but does not yet have access to.

Consider:

- *What collaborative relationships does your project depend on, and where are they helping or hindering?*
- *Is there a regional body or coordination structure you need but don't yet have?*

Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- Collaboration and convening are essential connective tissue for rural communities and should be recognized and funded as **core project components**, not peripheral activities
- Grant programs should explicitly include **convening and coordination** as fundable line items

Challenges:

- No specific collaborative challenges were identified

8 Branding & Marketing

Think about whether your project or region has a clear identity, and how effectively you are telling your story to your community, to funders, and to decision-makers at the state and federal level. Consider whether your project's brand or identity could go beyond marketing to become a tool for financing, advocacy, or building political will.

Consider:

- *Does your project or region have a clear identity, and how well are you telling that story?*
- *Could your project's brand become a financing or advocacy tool, not just a marketing one?*

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Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- The **multi-benefit framing** of the plan (recreation as conservation, public health, economic development, and education simultaneously) represents a powerful potential narrative for funders and policymakers

Challenges:

- No specific branding or marketing challenges were identified