

Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Sector — Project Interview Summary

Redwood Region – Arts Nature Trails Project

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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
 - **Joint Federal and State Land**
 - Redwood State and National Park
- Community Assets and Regional Access
 - The **Great Redwood Trail** connects the natural landscape to an active, developing trail corridor
 - A distinctive **fusion of natural assets and a rich arts and cultural community** creates a unique regional identity

Challenges:

- **Rural staffing capacity, administrative capacity, and regional information sharing** limit the region's ability to develop and manage assets
- **Rural infrastructure constraints** impede project implementation; the region does not lack expertise, but lacks capacity to act on it

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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

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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:

- **Cannabis tourism** presents emerging economic opportunity, though operators face significant regulatory hurdles
- A recent **CEQA exemption for people-powered trails** reduces a key regulatory barrier for trail development
- **AB 518 (low-impact camping)** delegated regulatory authority to counties, offering local flexibility, though some counties may impose their own requirements
- **Small farm owners** could meaningfully benefit from adding just 5–10 campsites, generating an average of \$8,000 in additional annual income, if regulatory barriers were reduced

Challenges:

- State regulations create disproportionate **compliance burdens** in rural areas relative to urban counterparts
- **ADA compliance** requirements present ongoing challenges for trail and recreation infrastructure as well as small businesses
- The CEQA exemption for people-powered trails, while helpful, **removed tribal leverage for consultation**, a significant tradeoff that warrants attention

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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?

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Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- The region is geographically proximate to the world's largest concentration of **venture capital**, representing an untapped private sector opportunity
- The Great Redwood Trail received \$60 million in **Proposition 4 funding**, providing significant climate-connected investment in the region's core asset

Challenges:

- **Reimbursement-based state grants** create barriers for smaller rural organizations; Redwood Region Rise had to secure private foundation funding just to cover upfront costs before reimbursement arrived
- No dedicated funding has been identified for the **Arts Nature Trails project**
- **Traditional federal sources** have become significantly harder to navigate: EPA, National Endowment for the Arts, USDA
- The **state has not been investing** meaningfully in outdoor recreation, tourism, or arts and culture
- **California Arts Council grants** are capped at \$25,000 and oversubscribed four to one, leaving 75% of applicants unfunded
- **Coastal Conservancy** and similar sources provide relatively modest funding
- Capital funding options are limited and **do not address operational or planning needs**

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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?*

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Discussion Points

Opportunities:

- **Visit California** provides extensive county-level data through annual modeling-based reports
- Cities like Eureka and Ukiah have invested in **Placer.ai subscriptions**, yielding detailed visitor data: Friday night markets, for example, draw 6,000 to 7,000 visitors
- These localized datasets demonstrate the **potential value of more systematic data** investment across the region

Challenges:

- **Data is highly uneven:** well-resourced cities are "lanterns in a dark night" against a largely dark regional picture
- The primary challenge is not data existence but **getting data to the people who need it** and providing capacity for analysis
- Rural regions frequently make decisions based on intuition rather than systematic data **due to time and capacity constraints**

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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:

- Overlapping seasonality of wildfire mitigation and tourism creates **workforce development opportunities**; workers can move between trail restoration and fire mitigation work across the year
- **Workforce connectivity** between ecological restoration, trail work, and wildfire mitigation is actively being explored

Challenges:

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- **Wildfire is the dominant climate threat**, though the coastal location offers some degree of protection
- **Sea level rise** poses a significant long-term risk to Humboldt Bay and the Eel River Valley
- Recreation infrastructure is **not yet systematically designed** for climate stressors or emergency response

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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:

- **Local talent** for project construction and implementation exists; gaps are in recruitment and communications about opportunities, not in the people themselves
- A strong regional ethic of "home growing," **providing tools and pathways for people already in the region** rather than recruiting from outside
- **Non-linear workforce pathways** offer real potential: workers might spend six months on trail restoration, six months on wildfire mitigation, then launch their own business
- **Wraparound services and backbone support for seasonal employment**, including pre-arranged off-season work, could stabilize this workforce model

Challenges:

- Workforce pipelines in this sector resemble paths or trails rather than traditional career ladders, making them **harder to fund and institutionalize**
- State job **data collection fails to capture this type of employment**, leading to systematic underrepresentation in workforce planning and policy

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Collaboratives

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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:

- **Jobs First's** greatest contribution has been creating a container for people to meet who would not otherwise connect, generating new relationships, resources, and projects
- The **Arts Nature Trails** project itself emerged from collaborative discussions and is now being integrated with the Great Redwood Trail
- Rural regions have a strong desire for collaboration; stakeholders are willing to build **regional collaborative infrastructure** on a volunteer basis if necessary
- **Investment in collaboratives** as a standing regional function produces outsized value relative to cost

Challenges:

- **Volunteer-run collaboratives** are prone to collapse over time due to participant exhaustion
- Rural regions have strong collaborative intent but lack the capacity to sustain coordination without **dedicated resourcing**
- No funded, durable regional body currently exists to **anchor ongoing collaboration**

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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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Opportunities:

- The region's asset density (redwoods, art, coast, rivers, wine, cannabis) enables visitors to have **multiple distinct experiences in a single day**; full brand vitality comes from this layering, not from any single asset
- The natural environment and small-town culture are effective tools for attracting **Bay Area investment**, philanthropy, and talent
- Brand messaging tied to natural assets can unlock **private sector and philanthropic funding** beyond traditional tourism marketing
- **Visit California** has been more active in the region over the past year and represents a relationship worth deepening

Challenges:

- The region's abundance of assets is also its branding challenge: **multiple narratives compete rather than reinforce each other**, and a single coherent elevator pitch does not yet exist
- **Some local officials are unaware that Visit California exists** as an organization, limiting the region's ability to leverage that relationship
- **Relationship-building with Visit California** needs to be more intentional and sustained