

Funding: Opportunities

Available Funding Sources

- Multiple state and federal funding sources have been identified for planning work, with grants received from CDFW, Air District, WCB, and SNC already supporting project work
- The Great Redwood Trail received \$60 million in Proposition 4 climate funding, providing significant investment in a core regional asset
- Proposition 4 climate funding is broadly available and potentially applicable to additional projects, though distribution is slow
- Federal programs — including the Great American Outdoors Act, Secure Rural Schools, and RTP — provide a baseline of support for recreation infrastructure
- The Explore Act (BOLT Act) and historic trail designation unlock additional federal funding access for qualifying projects
- The \$750 million in film and media tax breaks signed by the governor represents a substantial potential investment in the region's creative economy infrastructure

Innovative & Diversified Funding Models

- Projects designed around earned income streams may qualify for entrepreneurship and small business funding, opening a broader funding landscape beyond traditional tourism grants
- A self-sustaining organizational model reduces long-term dependence on grant cycles
- Diverse funding sources — private foundations, individual donors, industry partners, Vision Circle multi-year commitments, and recurring Friends donations — demonstrate a viable portfolio approach
- California's OHV program offers a proven model; a similar centralized funding mechanism for non-motorized trail users could transform the landscape
- An excise tax on outdoor recreation equipment has been proposed as a potential trail maintenance funding source
- Visitor-focused sales taxes have succeeded elsewhere (Mammoth achieved 72% and 67% approval) and could work in rural communities with clear public communication
- California's specialty license plate programs is a model with significant potential to scale across the state if structured well

Funding: Opportunities - *continued*

Structural & Policy Funding Reforms

- A regional block grant concept — one grant to a county-level entity coordinating across recreation, forestry, and fisheries — has been proposed to CNRA leadership
- A community recreation tax is being pursued; with three years of community education, residents can be brought to understand recreation investment as investment in public health, education, economy, and stewardship
- Legislation is in development for an organization analogous to a park nonprofit but oriented toward outdoor recreation broadly, which could create a more durable funding structure
- Funding mechanisms modeled on highway project maintenance planning could normalize long-term stewardship funding for trail infrastructure
- Colorado and Nevada both have dedicated state recreation departments; Nevada's model is worth examining for California adoption
- Policies recommending that funders prioritize smaller community-based organizations, and create coordination ecosystems between large and small groups, could improve both equity and long-term impact of investments

Leveraging Private & Cross-Sector Capital

- The region is geographically proximate to the world's largest concentration of venture capital — a significant and largely untapped private sector opportunity
- GoBiz and Jobs First's focus on economics and job creation provides new leverage for positioning recreation projects within economic development funding frameworks
- Upfront government investment shortens the timeline to private foundation funding, breaking the chicken-and-egg dynamic where each funder waits for the other to commit first

Navigation & Capacity Building

- State investment in a grants clearinghouse function could help organizations identify appropriate funding sources and understand bid requirements, saving significant time and resources sector-wide
- Recreation must be positioned and funded as a multi-benefit investment — spanning climate, health, equity, economic development, and conservation — to unlock a broader range of funders
- Specific funding asks to state leadership for collaborative support have not yet been made but represent an accessible near-term opportunity

Funding: Challenges

The Capital vs. Operations Mismatch

1. **Most available funding is capital-based, while the greatest needs are operational** (staffing, maintenance, planning, etc.)
2. **Maintenance funding does not exist** despite trail stewardship requiring ongoing resources
3. Most funding is restricted to capital projects and cannot be used for maintenance, overhead, or administrative costs, leaving **stewardship perpetually underfunded**
4. **Sustained operational funding is the core unmet need** — covering community management, trail maintenance, signage, interpretive materials, post-disaster repairs, and staff capacity
5. **Funders consistently favor well-established organizations over smaller community-based groups** with limited administrative experience or staffing, concentrating resources where capacity already exists
6. **Arts and library funding is reliably the first cut during budget deficits**, including loss of art teachers in schools, despite demonstrated impact such as NIH-funded culturally relevant public art that improved COVID vaccine uptake

Planning & "Shovel Ready" Gaps

7. **Funding secured for design and planning is typically insufficient to bring documents to full bid-ready status**
8. Planning and concept development funding is scarce
9. Multi-year community education is required before a tax measure can succeed, and that **preparatory work itself requires funding that does not currently exist**

Administrative & Structural Barriers

10. The **administrative burden of managing multiple, often incompatible funding sources is significant** and requires local skilled staff to serve as expeditors
11. **Reimbursement-based state grants create cash flow barriers for smaller rural organizations** — Redwood Region Rise had to secure private foundation funding just to cover upfront costs before reimbursement arrived
12. **Grant restrictions prevent integrated infrastructure improvements even when projects share a location**; public works projects cannot include co-located recreation improvements such as parking, bathrooms, or signage
13. **Funding is needed to digitize old Forest Service maps and agreement documents before they are lost**
14. **Prevailing wage requirements create additional cost barriers in isolated rural areas** where labor markets do not reflect urban wage assumptions

Funding: Challenges - continued

Federal Funding Instability

15. Traditional **federal sources** — EPA, National Endowment for the Arts, USDA — **have become significantly harder to navigate**
16. **Federal funding lacks consistency in timing and availability**
17. The Forest Service has only \$10,000 annually for trail maintenance, **forcing heavy reliance on volunteers working for minimal compensation**

Chronic Underfunding of Non-Motorized & Rural Recreation

18. **Non-motorized trail funding is very limited outside of Prop 68 and RTP**, despite non-motorized users far outnumbering motorized ones — with no dedicated funding source comparable to the OHV tax
19. **Climate funding distribution tends to favor urban projects** with larger voter bases over rural communities with greater equity needs
20. **Typical grants** range from \$5,000–\$15,000 with extensive deliverables **and rarely cover project administration costs**
21. **Relying on membership dues and matching funds from cities and counties is insufficient**

Oversubscription & Navigation Difficulty

22. **Grant programs are severely oversubscribed** — 150 applications competing for 4–6 awards — indicating a fundamental mismatch between available funding and sector need
23. **California Arts Council grants are capped at \$25,000** and oversubscribed four to one, leaving 75% of applicants unfunded
24. The funding search has been described as "turning couch cushions" — **organizations continuously braid multiple small sources with no consistent foundation**
25. **Wildlife Conservation Board funds** may be accessible for recreation, but eligibility is **unclear**

Organizational Sustainability

26. Funders consistently prioritize innovation over consistency and longevity, leaving the **organizations that sustain rural recreation infrastructure chronically underfunded**
27. **Local fundraising capacity** is severely limited and **far short of operational needs**
28. Some organizations are financially precarious, operating programs while simultaneously conducting planning and advocacy on **barely sustainable wages and compressed seasonal revenue**
29. **No dedicated funding** has been identified for certain projects leaving initiatives w/o a viable path forward
30. **Management funding needs far exceeding** what small foundation grants can reliably provide
31. **Sector silos prevent funders from recognizing and supporting multi-benefit projects**, fragmenting resources that should be coordinated