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Outdoor recreation activities and associated expenditures by people engaging in leisure time activities remains a mostly untapped reservoir of economic potential for a New Mexico economy. We are continuously challenged to find new revenue streams to pay for education, infrastructure, health care, and the myriad demands on state funds.

As concerns emerge that protect and preserve our fragile natural resources of air, soil and water while creating a sustainable valued sector of the New Mexico economy, this initiative can very possibly be a major part of the state's economic development strategy. While a detailed accounting of all private and community wide benefits and costs associated with expansion of this outdoor recreation sector, which provides more jobs than the oil and gas industry nationwide, is still to be fully developed. By focusing on the outdoor sector by the state's leaders can provide a sustainable addition and even a mode of transition from reliance on the energy extraction industry.

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham has made it clear to all that she is willing to tackle on all fronts challenges of low wages, poverty and a renewed commitment to improving educational outcomes in the state. Further development of the outdoor economy can be a component of this strategy. Recognizing our varied ecosystems and the unique cultural diversity of the state's population is of great benefit moving forward. Changing demographics, including an aging population, more racial and ethnic diversity, and increasing urbanization, are transforming to an increased demand for outdoor recreation.

According to the experts the outdoor economy will continue to be a leading economic growth sector in the future. Public land agencies are having a noticeable challenge keeping up with changing needs and interests in the area of outdoor recreation. National parks and monuments are often overcrowded with people demanding new areas in which to participate in outdoor activities. The addition of areas to recreate in New Mexico may be but one of the solutions to the overcrowding and demand on the U.S. National Parks Service, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management recreation areas. To be more precise, a careful analysis by outdoor recreation economists can pinpoint needs, opportunities, challenges, including costs and benefits. Both of New Mexico's newest national monuments, the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks and the Rio Grande de Del Norte have both seen significant increases in tourism and a boost to the local and state economies as outdoor economic boosters.

Under the past state land office administration numerous signs were installed where roads cross the boundaries of state trust lands saying keep out. Even land lessees have inappropriately blocked access to public land areas used for recreational activities. Additionally, similar complaints about purchasing recreational permits being too time-consuming and difficult to get needs to be changed. Regardless of the issue, it will be important for several state offices and our legislature to work together to plan and implement a healthy outdoor economy for New Mexico.

A most important factor in growing a state's economy through outdoor recreation would be the establishment of a state office of outdoor recreation to organize collaborators and market outdoor recreation tourism. Sportsmen and recreationists alike have voiced a desire to have year-round access to all public lands for outdoor activities, especially with new related activities and recreational equipment being introduced. And although it is ethical and right for our public lands to be preserved and protected, there are better methods than no trespassing signs. A state office of recreation would be key to plan, coordinate, and implement strategies to support the growth of a vibrant outdoor economy.

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