Making the case for businesses as leaders for our public lands and waters:

BUSINESS ALLIANCES

CREATING A STRONG VOICE FOR THE OUTDOORS.

A SUMMARY FROM THE 2017 SHIFT CONFERENCE BUSINESS ALLIANCE WORKSHOP
11.8 Billion

"Nearly half of all Americans — 48.4% — participated in at least one outdoor activity in 2014. This equates to 141.4 million participants, who went on a collective 11.8 billion outdoor outings."

Outdoor Recreation Participation Topline Report 2016

One of the best ways to make the business case for public lands is to hear directly from business leaders who care about the outdoors, including leaders whose businesses depend on public lands or outdoor recreation, and those whose businesses are located in a community because owners and employees want to enjoy the outdoor way of life. These leaders can speak directly to why we need public lands and how they contribute to the economy.

It can be particularly compelling when businesses form or join alliances that amplify their collective voice. Alliances can open doors, forge partnerships across sectors and across political divides, spur economic growth, and create meaningful change.

By working together, businesses and partners can be a strong voice to promote outdoor recreation and support the lands and waters that are the lifeblood of the outdoor recreation economy.

The 2017 SHIFT Conference brought together leaders from multiple states involved in creating or advancing alliances with members of the business community. The participants at the SHIFT Business Alliance workshop shared elements of their success, including: why they formed, how they are organized, common themes and differences, examples of success, and support they need to have even more of an impact. This document includes notes and take-away points from the workshop.

Making the Case for Outdoor Business Alliances
WHY START OR JOIN A BUSINESS ALLIANCE

MAKE COMMUNITIES STRONGER
Outdoor recreation is an economic engine that can help diversify local economies so that they are stronger and can weather the boom/bust cycles of other industries. One participant said it best: kids need jobs to come home to.

FACILITATE COMMUNICATION
Forming an alliance can bring together regional partners for economic development, connect the outdoor industry, and improve coordination.

SHARE LEARNING AND INSPIRATION
Alliances can help identify and spread success stories and best practices, foster networking and job sharing, support entrepreneurship, and generate a culture of creation, mentorship and inspiration.

ADVOCATE ON SPECIFIC ISSUES
Alliances can advocate for policies and actions that help grow the outdoor industry within a region or protect the natural assets that support local businesses and attract growth. Coalitions and partnerships can help to facilitate action, elevate business voices, and build strong advocates and local leaders within the community.

CHANGE THE CONVERSATION
There is a persistent myth that the outdoor economy consists of transient, low paying jobs – business alliances can change the conversation to demonstrate the wide range of economic activities that are directly related to the outdoor economy and also how the outdoors affects other industries.

CREATE A STRONGER VOICE
Coming together can create a stronger collective voice for businesses making the case that public lands and outdoor recreation are good for the economy. Coalitions can help business leaders cultivate a sense of responsibility and engagement and can unite leaders to speak with a common voice that has greater impact.

ADD CAPACITY
By creating an alliance, businesses and partners can fund or pool resources, expertise, and capacity to advance the collective interests of members and to accomplish any of the objectives identified above.
COALITIONS CAN BE LIMITED TO BUSINESSES OR CAN INCLUDE BOTH BUSINESSES AND PARTNERS, INCLUDING NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS. PANELISTS SHARED MULTIPLE WAYS TO ORGANIZE A BUSINESS ALLIANCE OR COALITION, INCLUDING:

- Forming a coalition, alliance or partnership with an informal structure. This could include a steering committee, leadership committee, or board, but everyone has other jobs and the coalition is not formally incorporated.

- Creating an alliance hosted by or within an existing non-profit, but with a separate board or leadership council. This could include using the host as a fiscal agent or for other support, but creating an independent leadership structure and priorities.

- Creating a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to organize the alliance and engage on issues related to outdoor recreation, economic development, and conservation.

- Creating a 501(c)(6) nonprofit business league or association to educate, advocate for and promote the common business interests and impacts of members.

- Combining one of the above strategies with a 501(c)(4) civic organization to enable political activity (501(c)(6) business leagues can also engage in some political activity).
There are some key differences in how business alliances are organized. These included:

**Advocacy vs Direct Engagement**
Some alliances engage in direct advocacy, and some don’t. With those that do engage, some are primary organizers of advocacy campaigns, and some joined or supported members joining in their individual capacity.

**Paid Membership vs. Unpaid Membership**
Some coalitions require membership dues, some have fiscal sponsors, and some rely on voluntary donations or the in-kind contributions of coalition members or leaders.

**Membership Restrictions**
Some alliances only allow business owners to be members or are limited to particular kinds of business owners, and some include both businesses and partners, including conservation groups and other non-profit organizations.

**Formal vs. Informal**
As described above, some alliances have formal structures and others are informal coalitions or partnerships.

**Geographic Scale**
Some are limited to a local community or region, others are state-wide.

**Political Activity**
Some alliances engage in political activity, including endorsing candidates, while others are not political and do not endorse candidates.

**Conservation as Part of Mission**
Some coalitions have conservation explicitly as part of their mission, while others are focused on industry growth as the primary purpose with conservation issues coming up under that purpose.
A VIDEO BOOK IN NORTH CAROLINA HIGHLIGHTING BOTH THE OUTDOORS AND OUTDOOR GEAR MANUFACTURERS IN THE REGION WAS AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY TOOL WITH LOCAL LEGISLATORS. NORTH CAROLINA HAS NOW CREATED AN OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION IN PART BECAUSE OF SUCCESSFUL LOCAL ADVOCACY.

"Outdoor recreation is an economic powerhouse in the United States, each year generating $887 billion in consumer spending and 7.6 million jobs. As a business, you are the industry’s voice - learn more and be heard"

Outdoor Industry Association, 2017
Supporting business alliances is an important step in elevating awareness about the impact of the outdoor recreation economy...

There are a number of ways to support existing alliance or to help create new ones

**Capacity Support**

Alliances can use help with:

- Technology, including website design and support for visual materials
- Training, workshops, and mentorship programs
- Grant writing and other applications
- Financial support for organizing and activities, including support to help community leaders attend gatherings like SHIFT
- Technical assistance for organizing
- Tools for communication, networking and community building
- Creating a resource guide to help alliances find resources, share best practices and connect with relevant programs and partners

**Advocacy Support.**

Alliances can use help with:

- Getting access to and developing relationships with decision-makers
- Keeping current on relevant issues and knowing when or how to activate
**TOP 10 QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU START**

1. **Who is going to be the face?**
2. **What is the funding source?**
3. **Do any of these orgs have staff, and if not, what is the time and resource requirement to start one?**
4. **How broad is your alliance / who do you invite / who are your core members (i.e., outside the outdoor industry, or any business that supports the outdoors)?**
5. **How broad is your geographic range? Does it depend on population? How far are people really willing to drive to participate?**
6. **What format do you want the org to be (e.g., 501C3 or 501C6)?**
7. **Is it a membership organization?**
8. **If regional alliance, can it be part of a state-wide alliance?**
9. **What are you trying to accomplish? How does group establish priorities?**
10. **What will be some early wins to help build momentum?**

**Making the case for outdoor business alliances**
THE BOTTOM LINE

OUTDOOR RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS ARE GOOD FOR BUSINESS AND CAN HELP DIVERSIFY AND GROW LOCAL ECONOMIES. BRINGING TOGETHER ALLIANCES OR COALITIONS WITH SMALL BUSINESSES AND OTHER PARTNERS THAT CAN REPRESENT THAT VIEWPOINT IS POWERFUL AND HELPFUL.

The information in this document was developed during the Business Alliance Workshop at the 2017 SHIFT Conference in Jackson, WY. Representatives were all founders or members of an outdoor business alliance or council as well as founders, executive directors, and staff of businesses and non-profit organizations. Special thanks to Christian Beckwith and SHIFT, Meryl Harrell for workshop documentation, Gerben Scherpibier for coordinating and Lana Weber for document creation.