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# REIMAGINE RECREATION

## Internal Engagement Summary









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# Executive Summary

In fall 2022, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service launched the Reimagine Recreation campaign to update the Framework for Sustainable Recreation, the agency's national recreation strategy, and develop a national recreation action plan for how to achieve the stated vision and goals. As part of this effort, the Reimagine Recreation team reached out to Forest Service employees from all programs and levels within the agency to listen and learn from those with first-hand understanding of the complex issues and opportunities connected to recreation on National Forest System lands. This report summarizes the outcomes of internal engagement, which took place via two informational webinars, one employee survey, and four open-door listening sessions.

The document is intended to serve Forest Service staff and leadership by providing a transparent overview of the perspectives received, which collectively represent the foundation for this national-level planning effort. This report is also being made available to support additional national, regional, and forest level efforts, where applicable.

Five key focus areas emerged through quantitative and qualitative analysis of internal engagement responses: **(1) Workforce Support, (2) Infrastructure, (3) External Collaboration, (4) Visitor Use, and (5) Organizational Management and Leadership.** Across the focus areas, lack of staff, hiring challenges, and insufficient budgets were consistently identified as barriers to a successful recreation program. These barriers often inflame or compound other issues, such as resource damage from high levels of visitation or a lack of capacity to sufficiently support program partners. Additionally, employees report that it is difficult to find or acquire the necessary tools to do their jobs, such as high-quality training, mentors, and planning resources.



Without adequate staff, funding and technical resources employees stated that they are often overwhelmed. Without the consistent ability to proactively manage aging infrastructure, complex partnerships, or the changing needs and desires of visitors, employees describe a work environment where they are continually reacting to challenges. Staff perceive administrative "red tape"—particularly in the areas of hiring, agreements, and partnerships—as a key contributor to persistent program inefficiencies, low staff morale, and unsustainable workloads. Many employees struggle to manage increasing amounts and changing types of use with current staffing levels and available training. As a result, existing staff lack the time and training needed to intentionally promote more welcoming and inclusive opportunities for underserved populations on National Forest System lands.

In a similar vein, while partnerships are as important as ever for recreation and public lands, some staff feel their programs should be sufficiently staffed, funded, and supported to meet the basic needs of visitors and staff and to maintain resilient and quality infrastructure and services. Overall, staff feel that outdoor recreation resources could indeed fulfill the notion of the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run, but without additional support, the potential for meeting public recreation needs will never be met.

The full report provides additional detail and context for these and other challenges. The report also highlights potential strategies to address complex, interconnected issues. Although not detailed in this report, the Reimagine Recreation team recognizes (and is compiling) relevant, ongoing work attempting to tackle many of the issues and challenges expressed here. Examples of such ongoing work include items directed by the Chief's Office memo (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/interim-policy-changes-partnership-and-cooperator-agreements>) concerning grants and agreements policy changes. Employees also shared ideas for further innovation and what existing practices or programs are working well, demonstrating that there is a firm grasp within the agency of the workplace conditions, resources, and pathways needed to reimagine recreation.











# Introduction

## REIMAGINE RECREATION PROJECT OVERVIEW

Reimagine Recreation is a Forest Service strategic planning effort that seeks to understand and respond to contemporary issues and opportunities in recreation management across National Forest System lands. This multilayered effort began with extensive internal employee engagement during the second half of 2022. Internal employee engagement was followed by a Tribal forum to initiate Tribal-related discussions. Stakeholder engagements are planned for summer 2023. By gathering important data points from both within and outside of the agency, Reimagine Recreation will:

- Harness the knowledge and ingenuity of employees, partners, Tribes, States, and other stakeholders to collaboratively reimagine recreation, with an emphasis on inclusivity.
- Update the Forest Service recreation strategy (Framework for Sustainable Recreation).
- Develop a multiyear national recreation action plan that sets clear priorities for the agency and identifies the necessary workplace conditions, resources, and pathways that will best achieve those priorities.

The Reimagine Recreation planning team comprises regional office and Washington Office Forest Service staff and National Park Service – Denver Service Center staff, operating under the guidance of the Forest Service Washington Office Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources leadership team. The planning team collaborates with regional recreation directors and a variety of other agency resource program area staff. Sam Rider (national recreation planner), Alison Koopman (eastern region recreation planner), and Maureen Finnerty (National Park Service project manager) are co-leads of the Reimagine Recreation effort. The leadership team mentioned above includes Gordie Blum (director), Andrea Gehrke (deputy director), Penny Wu (assistant director, Public Services), and Ellen Shaw (assistant director, Business Services). The director of Washington Office Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers, Katie Armstrong, has also provided important leadership and counsel. Finally, the planning team would like to thank Deputy Chief Chris French and Chief Randy Moore for the time, resources, and direct engagement critical to the long-term success of this effort.

As part of the Forest Service's varied and complex mission, the agency's outdoor recreation program has an amazing potential to provide the greatest good for the greatest number for the long run. Gifford Pinchot and Aldo Leopold's combined vision of "wise use" and "land ethic" has defined the overall evolution of the Forest Service as a multiple-use driven Federal land management agency.



The concept of “land ethic” catapulted a pivotal shift in Americans’ relationship with the natural world and their public lands. Drawing inspiration from this enduring connection of Americans to public lands, coupled with evident contemporary challenges, the Reimagine Recreation effort seeks to solidify recreation as a mainstay priority within the agency.

This summary document is intended to serve USDA Forest Service staff and leadership by providing a transparent overview of the input received during employee sensing conducted fall 2022. This collection of perspectives will provide the foundation for this national-level planning effort and is being made available to support additional national, regional, and forest level efforts, where applicable.

## **INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW**

Developing a meaningful national recreation strategy and an implementable action plan requires input from many voices and perspectives. The Reimagine Recreation effort executed several internal engagement opportunities during 2022 to listen to and learn from Forest Service employees. Staff at all levels of the agency engaged in the informational webinars, open-door sessions, and an agencywide employee survey. These efforts are summarized below.

### **Informational Webinars – September 27 and October 5, 2022**

- Two 1-hour events
- 550 participants in total
- A short presentation on Reimagine Recreation was followed by a question-and-answer session.

### **Open-door Sessions – November 2022**

- Four 2-hour sessions
- 350 participants in total
- Employee feedback was collected around key recreation issues and ideas for change.

### **Employee Survey – October to November 2022**

- 15-question survey, open for 6 weeks to all Forest Service employees
- Employees selected one response on a Likert scale (unsure, strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree) to each statement. Topics covered include hiring, retention, training resources, funding, workforce diversity, visitor engagement, partnerships, and planning.
- Staff also had the opportunity to provide feedback and ideas via open-ended questions.
- 751 responses from across the agency (fig. 1).
  - ▶ 387 District Office (52%)
  - ▶ 188 Forest Supervisor's Office (25%)
  - ▶ 84 Regional Office (11%)
  - ▶ 49 Washington Office (6%)
  - ▶ 20 Research Station (3%)
  - ▶ 13 Other (2%)
  - ▶ 10 Enterprise Program (1%)

Survey respondents included employees representing a variety of positions and areas, including but not limited to: technicians, resource specialists, archaeologists, landscape architects, engineers, partnership coordinators, public affairs, law enforcement, program managers, staff officers, directors/deputy directors, district rangers/deputy district rangers, and forest supervisors/deputy forest supervisors.



## What office do you work in?

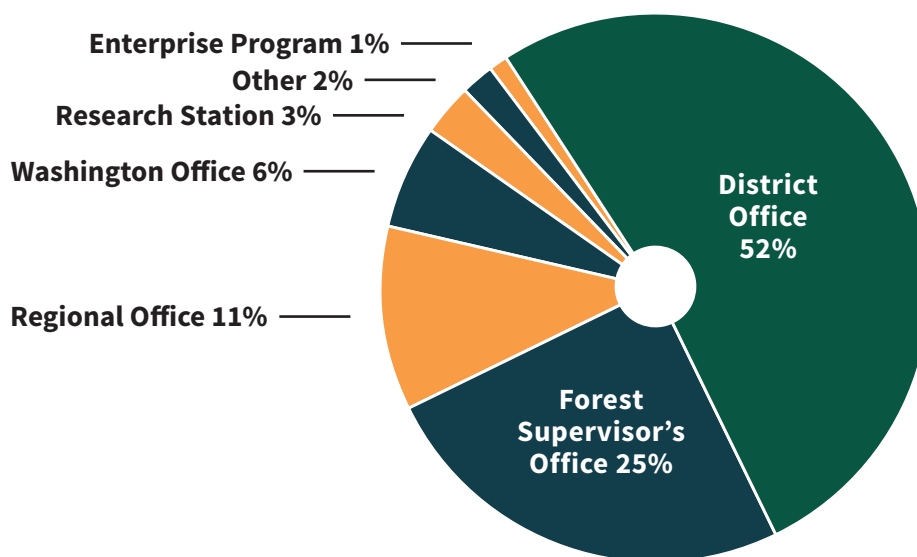


Figure 1. Office Representation

## METHODOLOGY

The Reimagine Recreation team analyzed the quantitative and qualitative information collected during the webinars, listening sessions, and survey responses. The summary report is organized into five sections made up of key focus areas that emerged through this process. The focus areas contain more specific topic areas that include:

- A statement broadly summarizing the issue.
- A “what we heard” section that represents the experiences or opinions of employees that were shared by multiple individuals who participated in the survey, webinars, or listening sessions.
- Figures that reflect responses to specific survey questions using the Likert scale and that represent the percentage of survey respondents who gave each response.
- Specific potential strategies provided by employees through the survey, webinars, or listening sessions. The Reimagine Recreation team presents these with the recognition that further work to investigate and ground truth these ideas may be needed.

***Please note that this summary report only represents the opinions of individuals that participated in the webinars, listening sessions, and the survey, not the agency as a whole, and that due to the number of responses, not every experience or idea is shared in this report.***

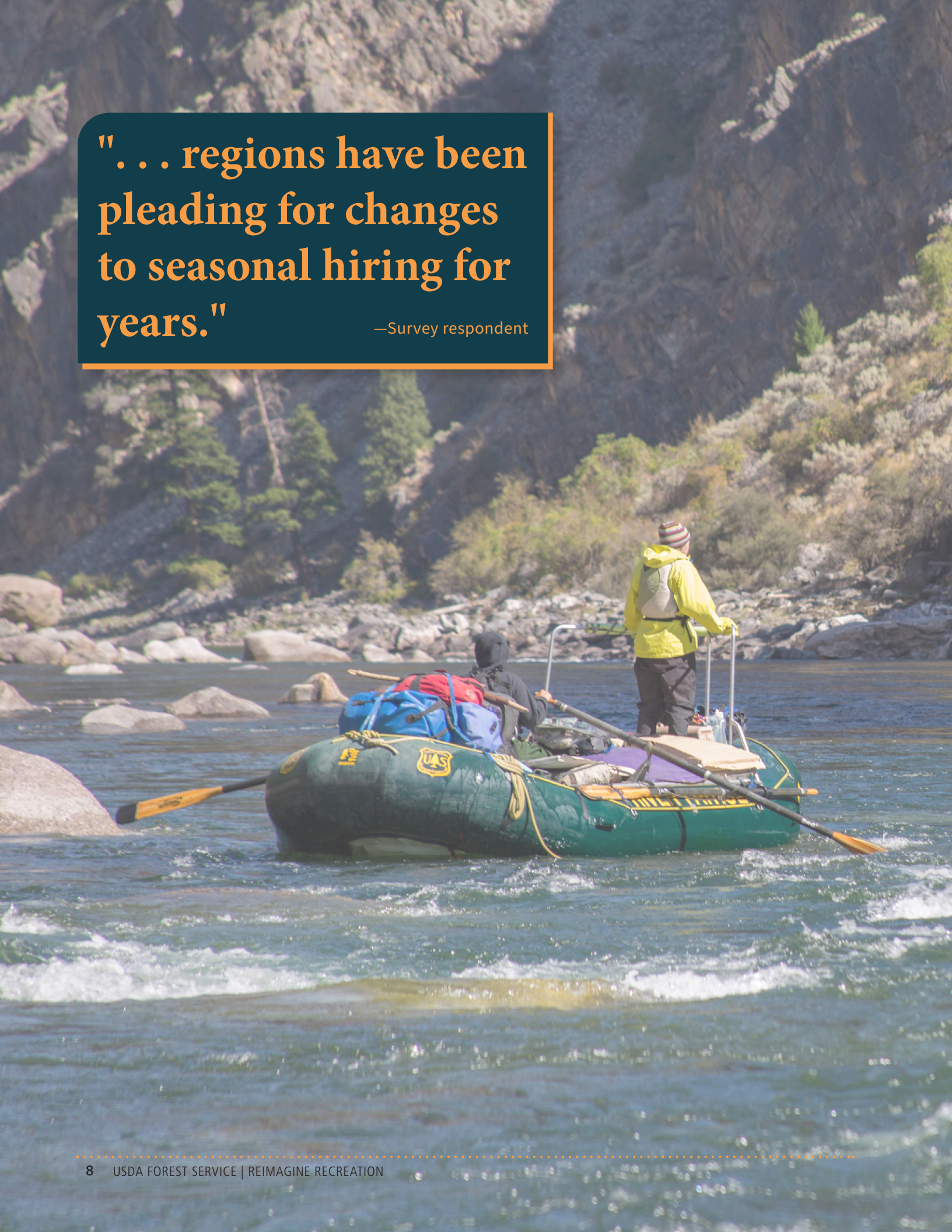
## NEXT STEPS

This summary report is one of several inputs the planning team will be using to develop the national recreation strategy and action plan. Additional perspectives are being collected from Tribal entities, Forest Service regional and national leadership in recreation and related programs, and from partners and stakeholders.



**"... regions have been  
pleading for changes  
to seasonal hiring for  
years."**

—Survey respondent







# Internal Engagement Summary

## FOCUS AREA 1: WORKFORCE SUPPORT

### Topic 1A: Recruitment and Retention (e.g., housing, pay, human resources/hiring)

#### *Issue Statement*

The agency has difficulty recruiting and retaining staff for many reasons, including lack of employee housing, increased cost of living, and inefficiencies in the hiring process. The results of this difficulty include low staff capacity, unfilled positions, high employee turnover, and loss of essential skills.

#### *What We Heard*

- Staff who participated in internal engagement opportunities expressed having difficulty filling current vacancies. While many hiring authorities are useful, they are not all being used to their fullest potential. Obstacles to optimizing hiring authorities include centralized hiring events; questions that do not fully represent the qualifications needed for specific recreation positions, human resources centralization, which removes hiring from local control; and long hiring timelines (many positions have six months between the job posting and first day of work).
- Respondents view the lack of pay equity with comparable positions in private industry as a significant hurdle to employee retention.



- Ninety-four percent of survey respondents feel the recreation program is understaffed (fig. 2). Staff capacity was mentioned as a challenge for recreation staff in most survey questions and categories.



# 94% Agree

**There is a shortage of recreation staff to effectively manage and run recreation programs.**

Figure 2. Recruitment and Retention – Staffing Levels

- Poor retention is also attributed to low morale, burnout, a lack of career ladder positions, and a lack of succession planning. These obstacles to retention lead good employees to leave the Forest Service or to “move on to move up,” leaving the next employee to rebuild those skills.
- When asked about availability of workforce housing, 91 percent of respondents felt current opportunities are inadequate to recruit and retain recreation staff (fig. 3). This sentiment was echoed in the open-response questions from the same survey and the responses during the open-door sessions. Staff indicate that this problem is primarily impacting seasonal staff and recreation staff at the GS-3 through GS-7 levels.



# 91% Agree

**There is inadequate workforce housing to recruit and retain recreation staff.**

Figure 3. Recruitment and Retention – Housing

## ***Potential Strategies***

1. Review and modify hiring practices for seasonal staff.
  - a. Establish seasonal rehire authority throughout the agency rather than just on an employee’s current unit to streamline application and hiring process.
  - b. Establish seasonal hiring periods by region to fit the seasonal needs of the individual units and compress hiring timelines for seasonal staff.
  - c. Consider replacing seasonal positions with more permanent and year-round temporary positions.
  - d. Create pathways to provide seasonal staff with step increases, and offer participation in the Thrift Savings Plan benefit when they reach the hours equivalent to a full-time permanent employee.



2. Increase pay equity.
  - a. Implement retention bonuses, especially at lower pay levels.
  - b. Increase base pay to attract and retain qualified staff.
  - c. Examine locality pay to pay fair wages; increase cost-of-living allowances to track the rapidly rising cost of living in some areas (e.g., resort towns).
3. Improve and streamline all hiring practices.
  - a. Convert seasonal positions to permanent or career seasonal positions to reduce the amount of hiring needed.
  - b. Increase human resources staff to help reduce the hiring timelines throughout the agency.
  - c. Complete an after-action review of the recent national hiring event to document elements of the process that worked well and where there are areas for improvement.
  - d. Look for opportunities to provide more district-level access to hiring decisions and processes that meet local and regional needs while maintaining efficiency and effectiveness.
  - e. Develop and increase the use of programs, such as high school Youth Conservation Corps, that hire residents. Create opportunities to reduce barriers for residents being considered for positions within the agency.
  - f. Explore new direct local hiring authorities for units in geographic areas that have difficulty hiring due to their location.
  - g. Identify and promote pathways for partners and volunteers to become Federal employees (e.g., the use of special hiring authorities).
4. Improve recruitment methods. Engage with colleges, youth corps, local communities, and K-12 schools to increase awareness of Forest Service career options.
5. Improve workforce housing.
  - a. Create mechanisms, agreements, or standard operating procedures to host employees with local partners, and work with communities and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to develop solutions.
  - b. Prioritize capital improvement program funds to build more housing.
  - c. Provide housing stipends.
  - d. Improve seasonal housing opportunities (e.g., remove restrictions on hosting summer seasonals at ski area permittee employee lodging, explore local housing options).



## **Topic 1B: Workforce Development**

### ***Issue Statement***

Agency recreation staff have inconsistent access to trainings and developmental resources necessary to be fully successful and supported. In some cases, the tools they need may not yet exist. In other cases, those that do exist may be ineffective, staff do not know how to access existing resources, and/or staff do not have the time or leadership support to prioritize training and development opportunities.

### ***What We Heard***

- Many recreation positions are not run as career ladder positions, and promotion within the same district or unit is challenging. Staff who want to stay in the same location or cannot afford to move to secure a higher graded or permanent job are sometimes limited in their professional development opportunities.
- When staff leave positions, essential knowledge is often lost. Consistent, informative transition plans should be required of staff when leaving or changing positions to ensure the smooth transfer of responsibilities, resources, and information to the incoming staff member.
- Due to a lack of developmental tools or knowledge or the inability to access developmental tools, many employees learn through trial and error, leading to inefficiencies.
- Technical skills are often lacking at the field level. Field-level staff need training in the technical skills they will need to support recreation activities and infrastructure, such as rigging, blasting, stonework, and log cribbing.
- A heavy reliance on computer-based learning is not necessarily the best way to carry out training. Forest Service staff often perform hands-on fieldwork, and many of these skills are best taught in person.
- Information and resources to support success in recreation roles are available online; however, there is a knowledge gap for existing and new employees regarding the location of these resources and information.





- Only 11 percent of survey respondents think sufficient recreation workshops are available at the unit or region level to effectively build relationships and communicate lessons learned. Comments from the short answer section of the survey indicated that even when opportunities for workshops and other professional development were available, staff often did not have the time or resources to dedicate to pursuing/attending them.
- Fifty-two percent of respondents disagree that there are sufficient core competency trainings for recreation staff to feel equipped to do their job. This number indicates that trainings may need to be improved or increased. Information about existing trainings may also need to be more widely shared (fig. 4).

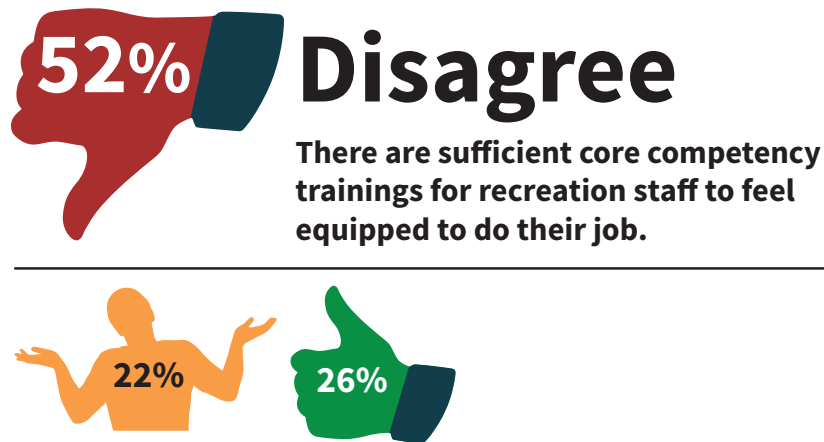


Figure 4. Availability of Tools And Knowledge Resources – Training

### ***Potential Strategies***

- Increase the availability of career ladder positions to allow staff to transition from lower to middle to higher GS levels without having to leave a position. Use career ladders to create tenure in an office for retention.
- Create a streamlined training and resource hub as a “one-stop shop” for recreation staff.
- Develop an organized onboarding process that includes mentorships and recreation-focused resources and information for permanent and seasonal employees across the agency.
- Acknowledge the time, skills, and experience staff bring from working on the forests and grasslands and promote accordingly (including promoting seasonal staff to full-time staff or permanent full-time or permanent seasonal employee appointments).
- Create professional development and training curriculums specific to recreation staff to build skills such as trail maintenance, business planning, operations, and recreation planning.

**“Barriers to retention that should be considered include increasing cost of living and non competitive wages, but also an overwhelming workload and insufficient capacity to provide adequate mentorship to new employees and develop/nurture new partnerships.”** —Survey respondent



## Topic 1C: Workforce Diversity

### Issue Statement

Agency staff are unsure if hiring authorities are an effective tool to increase workforce diversity throughout the agency. Progress is still needed to make the agency a more welcoming environment and build a more diverse workforce.

### What We Heard

- Many survey respondents are unsure if the different hiring authorities and tools are being effectively used to increase the diversity of the Forest Service recreation workforce (fig. 5).
  - ▶ Sixty percent of respondents either disagree or are unsure that veterans hiring authorities are being effectively used.
  - ▶ 35 percent of respondents believe the Resource Assistant Program is being effectively used to increase diversity of the Forest Service workforce.
- This uncertainty is also reflected in the responses to the open-ended questions on the survey. Some respondents indicated that the hiring authorities are the only way the Forest Service is having success bringing on new employees, and others stated that hiring authorities are not effective, as the workforce still lacks diversity.

### Recreation Staff Workforce Diversity



Figure 5. Recreation Staff Workforce Diversity



- The Forest Service may not draw a diverse pool of applicants because the recruiting tools and techniques to attract and retain diverse candidates are not resonating or relevant to those candidates.
- After diverse employees are hired, they may be unsupported. Employees may struggle without the support of an internal community, and some have reported continued discrimination within the workforce.

### *Potential Strategies*

- Improve pay through career ladder positions or wage grade series for appropriate positions.
- Improve working conditions, create more permanent positions, and have career paths available to those recruited from partner groups.
- Identify avenues for employees to develop social support networks as a way to improve their overall quality of life.
- Continue using and supporting the Resource Assistants Program and the VetsWork Program. Both programs have a strong mentoring component and a clear pathway to career placement in the Forest Service. Increase awareness of these and similar programs throughout the agency through increased communications efforts.
- Continue and expand trainings on diversity, equity, and inclusion and “This is Who We Are” content for employees and partners. Integrate this work into performance metrics, interview questions, and new employee orientations.
- Increase the diversity of partnerships to promote diversity within the Forest Service workforce.







## FOCUS AREA 2: INFRASTRUCTURE

### *Issue Statement*

Across the agency, developed recreation facilities are outdated, in disrepair, or failing and staff capacity to address these issues is limited. Given evolving recreational preferences and shrinking budgets, a need exists to strategically evaluate what infrastructure will best serve the public in the future and how to make it resilient to the impacts of visitor use and climate change.

### *What We Heard*

- Clean, functioning bathrooms and other recreation facilities are a priority for and expectation of the public. Some districts have difficulty consistently delivering this service given staffing, funding, and contracting challenges.
- Great American Outdoors Act funding has helped units address the backlog of deferred maintenance, but they also need funds to support ongoing maintenance and operations needs and the development of new infrastructure, particularly as a tool to engineer solutions to resource damage from overuse.

### *Potential Strategies*

- Prioritize designing infrastructure to be resilient to or adapt to climate change. Consider public health, accessibility, and visitation trends when planning new or repairing existing infrastructure.
- With 57 percent of survey respondents stating they disagree or strongly disagree that there is sufficient support to develop both socially and environmentally responsive site designs, invest in staffing and training to increase competency and capacity in this realm.
- Provide clean, sanitary facilities in more efficient ways by:
  - ▶ raising the maximum purchase card limit for minor repairs and services like toilet pumping,
  - ▶ developing indefinite delivery, indefinite quality contracts or other contracts to facilitate on-demand services that can benefit multiple offices or units, and
  - ▶ developing partnerships with local governments, nonprofits, or recreation user groups to assist with maintenance and operations.
- Modernize site fees for both the rate charged and the rate collection method to increase funding sources available for operations and maintenance and optimize the staff time needed to reconcile fees.
- Help staff understand how to leverage authorities that can allow outside management of developed sites beyond the traditional concessioner model.



## FOCUS AREA 3: EXTERNAL COLLABORATION

### Topic 3A: Capacity and Resources to Support Partnerships and Volunteers

#### *Issue Statement*

Partnership and volunteer development is often hindered by a lack of agency staff capacity and resources to adequately support new, and existing, partner and volunteer relationships. Administrative requirements and agreement processing can also be a barrier to engaging in partnership and volunteer opportunities for many staff members.

#### *What We Heard*

- Opinions vary on whether sufficient supports and resources are in place to develop and sustain recreation related partnerships (fig. 6). While 28 percent of respondents agree that there is sufficient leadership support and prioritization of the partnerships program, only 8 percent of respondents agree that there are sufficient recreation staff available to engage with partners. This result indicates that one of the primary supports needed to develop and sustain partnerships for recreation programs is increased staff capacity.
- Recreation specialists need help coordinating the day-to-day operational activities required for working with partners and volunteers. These tasks are often deprioritized in favor of deferred maintenance and other high-priority tasks.
- Units need more staff capacity to increase and diversify partnership and community engagement. For example, large-scale, established partnerships are prioritized at many units, leaving little or no capacity to work with grassroots and local partnerships.
- Units have significant differences in issues related to the recruitment and retention of volunteers due to a range of factors, including socioeconomics, location (rural or urban), and staff training and capacity.

**There are sufficient policies and guidance to support the partnership program.**

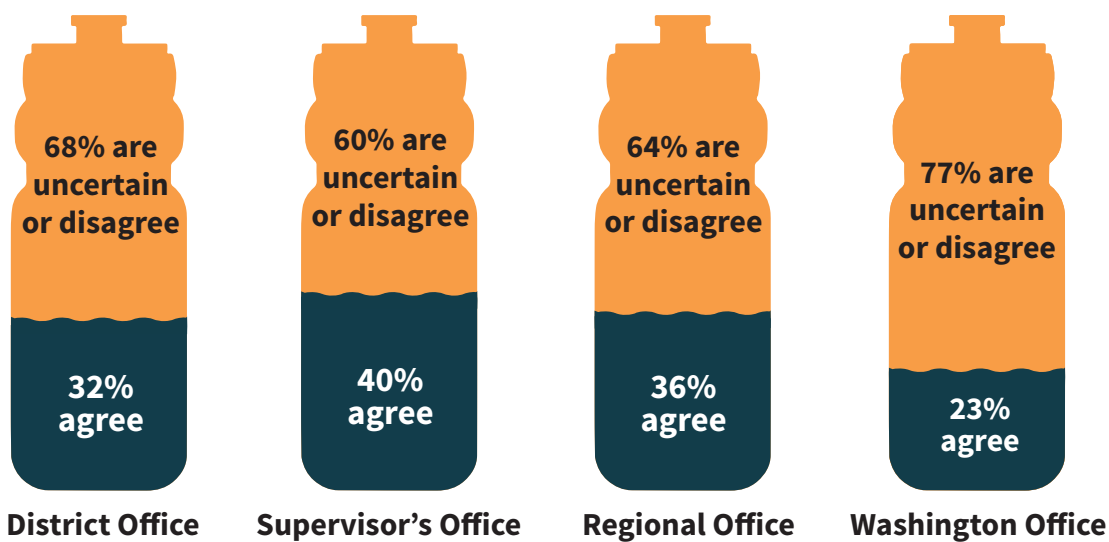


Figure 6. Recreation-Related Partnerships by Office



- At the unit level, partnership coordinators are often focused on natural resources-related partnerships (e.g., fire/fuels, ecosystem management) rather than recreation partnerships. Consolidation of partnership duties across disciplines may also cause recreation partnerships to be overlooked due to competing priorities.
- Respondents across the agency did not widely agree on whether there are sufficient policies and guidance to support the partnership program (fig. 6). Respondents from the Washington Office had the highest percentage of unsure responses, indicating that the Washington Office may not fully understand how districts or units work with partners and manage their individual partnership programs.
- As figure 7 shows, 63 percent of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that there are sufficient experts available who can help and mentor staff in collaborating with external stakeholders. Engaging with these stakeholders is essential to unit and recreation planning at the site level throughout the agency.



Figure 7. Availability of Tools and Knowledge Resources – Recreation Planning and Management

### ***Potential Strategies***

- Establish partnership coordinators at the unit level to handle administrative tasks associated with partners and volunteers, write grants and agreements, act as the point of contact for new and existing partners and volunteers, coordinate scheduling and project timelines, and connect partners and volunteers with appropriate Forest Service staff for project implementation.
- Improve processes involved in bringing on partners and volunteers, particularly those processes that serve as barriers to partnering or volunteering.
- Cultivate relationship building by investing in training and other support systems for field staff, including providing time for staff to build relationships with volunteers and partners.
  - ▶ Create or leverage support in the regional or Washington offices in relationship building and partnerships.
  - ▶ Apply stewardship mapping and improved documentation to create consistency in volunteer and partnership program management.
  - ▶ Provide additional training at the unit and district level to support partnerships and volunteer operations.



## **Topic 3B: Reliance on Partnerships**

### ***Issue Statement***

Partners and volunteers play a vital role in supporting agency operations; however, the agency may rely too heavily on partners and volunteers.

### ***What We Heard***

- Leaders have demonstrated good intent to prioritize partnerships, and units depend on many partners to accomplish the mission of the Forest Service. For example, in fiscal year 2022, one forest had 615 volunteers who completed 33,704 hours of work, equivalent to 18.69 full-time employees and over \$1 million of work completed. This example doesn't count the Workforce Development Program work on the forest, which had 46 volunteers who completed 6,467 hours of work, equivalent to 3.59 full-time employees, and just under \$200,000 dollars of work completed. Managing these programs is often a collateral responsibility for existing staff.
- Partners have become a source of labor to supplement the Forest Service workforce. Right now, partners are quickly becoming “the workforce.” However, due to low staff capacity, the Forest Service is often unable to monitor and train these resources, which may result in lower quality work. Given the time needed to plan and coordinate projects with partners and volunteers, this source of labor is not effective or efficient.



### ***Potential Strategies***

- Create balance between partnership development, staff capacity, and funding. Prioritize actions and projects according to skills needed.
  - Establish additional positions to manage volunteers and partnerships.
  - Prioritize partnerships that are in alignment with staffing levels.
  - Commit to equity in partnership projects across all programs.
  - Focus on partners and volunteers as shared stewards, not as replacements for agency positions.
- Develop programs and infrastructure such as matching initiatives, to support volunteer and partner work.
- Raise awareness with partners and elected officials on conditions within the agency.

## **Topic 3C: Streamline Grants and Agreements**

### ***Issue Statement***

The processes for receiving money from partners through grants and adding funds to partner agreements are challenging for staff. Policies often do not meet the needs of staff and partners and should be evaluated to identify both simple and structural changes that would improve the program. The workload associated with managing agreements is considerable and further taxes already overloaded recreation staff.

### ***What We Heard***

- Lengthy processing times for grants and agreements can delay the delivery of critical, time-sensitive programs.
- More technical assistance and support from grants and agreements staff would help recreation grants, agreements, and statements of work to be successfully executed.
- Inflexible deadlines that often do not match up with the budget allocation process present major challenges to executing agreements and modifications.

### ***Potential Strategies***

- Explore different policy, training, and staffing models that could help to streamline and simplify the agreement process to improve outcomes, such as shorter timelines for processing agreements.
  - ▶ Hire grants and agreements positions at the unit level.
  - ▶ Consider having partnership coordinators at the supervisor's office administer agreements to free up field staff to complete project work and execute programming with partners.
- Update existing policy to accomplish the following:
  - ▶ Better allow staff to share funds/resources across management boundaries to address landscape-level issues.
  - ▶ Reduce or eliminate match requirements to facilitate a more diverse and equitable partnership program.
  - ▶ To give greater flexibility to the agency and its partners, allow longer agreement lengths (i.e., 30-year agreements instead of 10-year agreements) or the ability to add on option years beyond the 10-year mark.

**“....we need to focus more on partnership staffing, training and policies that support establishing/growing partnerships at the forest/district level.”**

—Survey respondent





## FOCUS AREA 4: VISITOR USE

### Topic 4A: Increasing and Changing Visitation

#### *Issue Statement*

The COVID-19 pandemic and other broad, national trends are contributing to steadily increasing visitation across National Forest System lands. Recreation use patterns and needs also continue to change over time. Due to high levels of visitation and rapidly evolving use types, staff are often unable to meet the needs of recreation visitors and have noted corresponding increased resource impacts.

#### *What We Heard*

- Survey respondents point to a lack of staffing and funding resources as factors that have left some districts in a reactive position related to overcrowding, new forms of recreation, and other visitor management issues.
- Staff expressed the need for additional guidance, policy, and planning resources to help them proactively address and monitor increasing and changing visitation. Staff noted conflicts with wildlife, increasing pollution, and other natural and cultural resource impacts resulting from high levels of visitation or, in some cases, a lack of knowledge on the part of the public related to responsibly recreating on Forest Service lands.

#### *Potential Strategies*

- Improve recreation managers' access to and understanding of visitor use management resources related to increasing and changing visitor use.
- Prioritize and support comprehensive, mid-level recreation planning (funded, with staff) that focuses on adaptive management strategies to proactively address the challenges and opportunities of future recreation technologies and activities.
- Prioritize resources to address overuse and crowding, particularly where overlapping sensitive natural and cultural resources exist.
- Implement management tools, such as permits, reservations, and transportation services, while balancing the agency's capacity to manage the operating systems, equity of access and design, and ease of use for the public.
- Include stewardship messages that encourage responsible recreation behavior in agency communication with the public, in addition to or instead of promoting visitation to or providing information about a place or activity.
- Increase outdoor ethics and conservation education programs that provide opportunities to engage directly with agency personnel. Most survey respondents (78 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that face-to-face contact with field rangers provides meaningful engagement and an important touch point for new visitors. That number was 10 points lower for existing visitors but still overwhelmingly supportive of this approach.
- Clarify rules and policies for new or changing recreational uses to limit impacts from these activities that may be unintentional (e.g., permitted trails for e-bikes), and provide supporting implementation resources to outreach and communicate this information to visitors.

## **Topic 4B: Inclusivity in Recreation**

### ***Issue Statement***

A need exists to improve access to and awareness of National Forest System lands, resources, and opportunities, particularly for communities historically excluded from public lands and outdoor recreation or whose needs have not been equitably considered when developing recreation resources and amenities. At the same time, it is paramount that the agency continues to provide resource protection and high-quality visitor opportunities.

### ***What We Heard***

- Most survey respondents felt that existing accessibility features (i.e., physical, social, and cognitive considerations, as well as language translation) did not meet the needs of visitors (fig. 8).

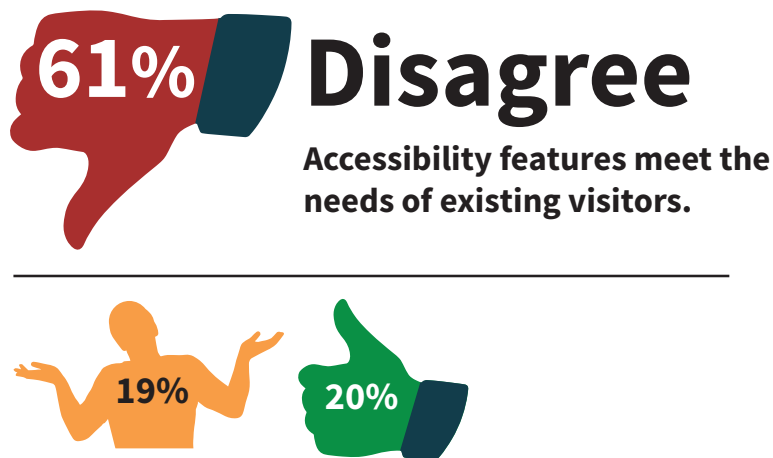


Figure 8. Accessibility Features

- Social and cultural barriers for underserved groups need to be understood and considered. Staff stressed the need for more inclusive outreach, partnerships, and public engagement to historically excluded communities and underrepresented populations of the public.
- A need exists to better understand the needs of existing users, as well as the needs of those from underserved groups, to develop policies and strategies that are inclusive, equitable, and continue to provide for high-quality recreation opportunities and resource protection.
- Safety on Forest Service lands is key, especially for more vulnerable or underrepresented communities. Identifying barriers that discourage or prevent people from connecting with National Forest System lands is important to reaching new and diverse users.





## Potential Strategies

- Consider ways to provide and improve equitable access to fee-based recreation areas. Look to examples within and outside the agency as a model of what could be accomplished on forests and grasslands, such as free statewide passes to developed recreation sites for a participating family's cumulative volunteer hours.
- Devote time and resources to understanding visitor experiences, challenges, and potential strategies for issues, particularly in the preplanning phase of a project.
- Focus on accessibility and inclusivity in recreation trainings to help shift and expand staff perspectives to equitably consider visitor use management and recreation opportunities.
- Consider how the design of recreation resources can improve accessibility. Potential actions/improvements include:
  - trail descriptions that include information about length, width, grade, and cross slope.
  - signage that is in languages other than English, and
  - road upgrades that allow passage in a two-wheel-drive vehicle.
- Evaluate the social equity aspect of permit and reservation systems. Consider the following:
  - Expand methods for obtaining permits; not all visitors have internet. Translate permit information into languages other than English.
  - Use a lottery instead of first-come, first-served approach that benefits people with fast internet and flexible schedules.
  - Change the method of fee collection; sites that are cashless impact visitors who do not have a credit card, smartphone, or enough cellular data to pay on their phone.
- Consider alternative transportation systems that allow people without vehicles to experience national forests. Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: Available public transportation options (e.g., shuttle buses) meet the needs of existing visitors.
- Employ outdoor ethics programs and face-to-face public contact as engagement tools for both new and existing visitors. Customize the content and messaging to meet the needs of diverse visitor groups.



## **Topic 4C: Visitor Information**

### ***Issue Statement***

For existing and new users alike, it can be challenging to find accurate, easily digestible information to help plan a trip, understand agency rules and regulations, and recreate both responsibly and safely. Both agency and nonagency information resources can be difficult to find and understand and often do not meet the needs of visitors.

### ***What We Heard***

- Visitors generally turn to external sources of information before official Forest Service resources, such as websites, social media, or visitor centers. External resources that visitors commonly use include tourism bureaus, gear shops, third-party apps, and social media influencers.
- Survey respondents felt that external platforms about where and how to recreate were slightly better than agency platforms in meeting the needs of visitors (fig. 9).

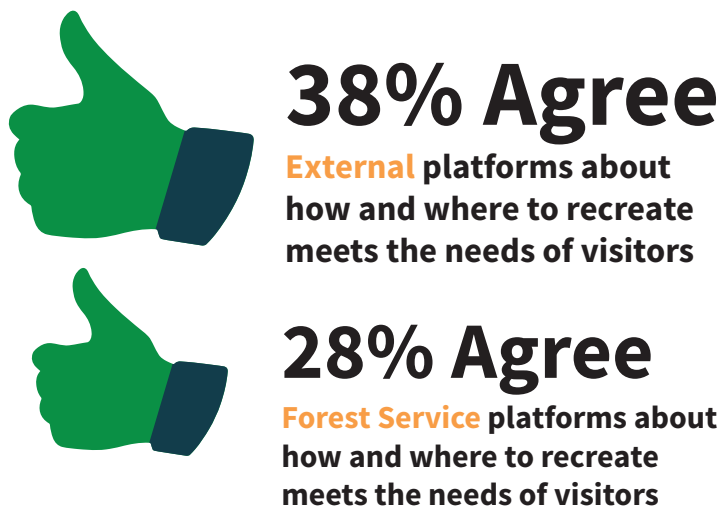


Figure 9. Visitor Information: Forest Service vs. External Platforms

**“External information sources provide visitors more of what they need than Forest Service information sources, but often fail to connect the visitor with important outdoor ethic/resource protection info or safety information . . .”**

—Survey respondent

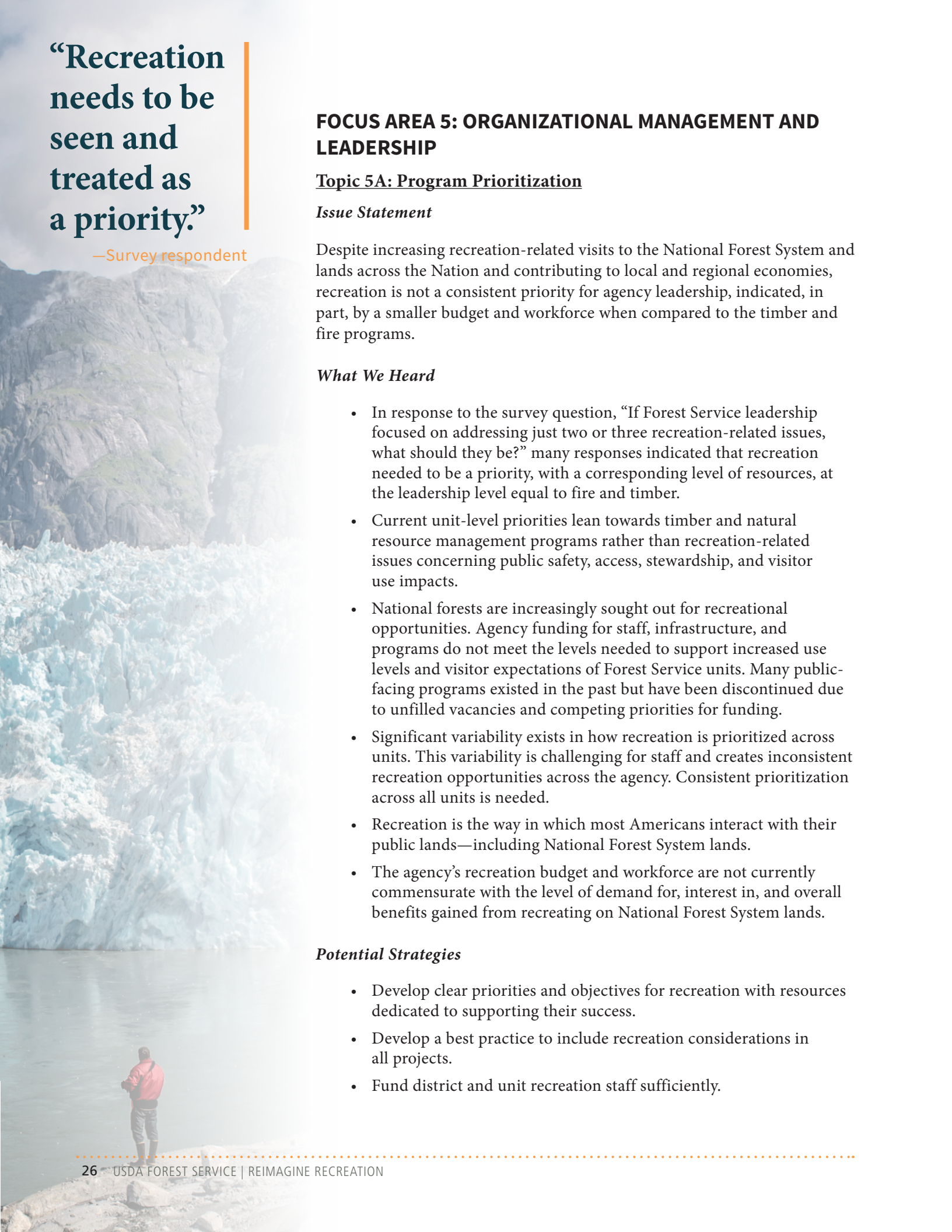


## *Potential Strategies*

- Prioritize accurate, simple, and consolidated information that continually emphasizes responsible recreation practices and ethics.
- Update and improve the Forest Service website by hiring web design and digital communication professionals. This task is currently a collateral duty for public information staff.
- Hire communications staff with backgrounds and expertise in recreation to focus solely on the development and dissemination of visitor information. Priority communications tasks could include the following:
  - Build relationships with external organizations, outdoor retail companies, social media influencers, and others to raise the profile of the agency, share information, and amplify messaging more consistently.
  - Develop quality online maps, a modern, up-to-date web presence, and other high-value Forest Service-branded visitor resources.
  - Identify and implement creative and innovative ways to reach underserved communities, new visitors, and younger visitors.
- Deliver information using a spectrum of communication methods to ensure meaningful and effective engagement with all visitors. Information delivery includes continuing to invest in more “traditional” engagement methods, such as interpretive and educational programs, face-to-face outreach, visitor centers, and paper maps or brochures. Staff emphasized that these methods are still valuable ways to connect with the public, particularly with people who do not want or are not able to access online resources.







“Recreation  
needs to be  
seen and  
treated as  
a priority.”

—Survey respondent

## FOCUS AREA 5: ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

### Topic 5A: Program Prioritization

#### *Issue Statement*

Despite increasing recreation-related visits to the National Forest System and lands across the Nation and contributing to local and regional economies, recreation is not a consistent priority for agency leadership, indicated, in part, by a smaller budget and workforce when compared to the timber and fire programs.

#### *What We Heard*

- In response to the survey question, “If Forest Service leadership focused on addressing just two or three recreation-related issues, what should they be?” many responses indicated that recreation needed to be a priority, with a corresponding level of resources, at the leadership level equal to fire and timber.
- Current unit-level priorities lean towards timber and natural resource management programs rather than recreation-related issues concerning public safety, access, stewardship, and visitor use impacts.
- National forests are increasingly sought out for recreational opportunities. Agency funding for staff, infrastructure, and programs do not meet the levels needed to support increased use levels and visitor expectations of Forest Service units. Many public-facing programs existed in the past but have been discontinued due to unfilled vacancies and competing priorities for funding.
- Significant variability exists in how recreation is prioritized across units. This variability is challenging for staff and creates inconsistent recreation opportunities across the agency. Consistent prioritization across all units is needed.
- Recreation is the way in which most Americans interact with their public lands—including National Forest System lands.
- The agency’s recreation budget and workforce are not currently commensurate with the level of demand for, interest in, and overall benefits gained from recreating on National Forest System lands.

#### *Potential Strategies*

- Develop clear priorities and objectives for recreation with resources dedicated to supporting their success.
- Develop a best practice to include recreation considerations in all projects.
- Fund district and unit recreation staff sufficiently.



**Topic 5B: Fiscal Sustainability**

**Issue Statement**

Recreation programs throughout the agency lack consistent, reliable funding sources to be sustained.

**What We Heard**

- Most survey respondents (87 percent) agree or strongly agree that increased, reliable appropriated internal funds are required to successfully administer recreation programs. Currently, these programs have a strong reliance on external funds due to a lack of appropriated internal funding. This is similar to the agency’s reliance on partnerships and volunteers to support unit activities, as well as a strong reliance on external funds due to the lack of appropriate internal funding.

**Innovative and successful conservation finance opportunities are essential to successfully administer our recreation program, by office.**

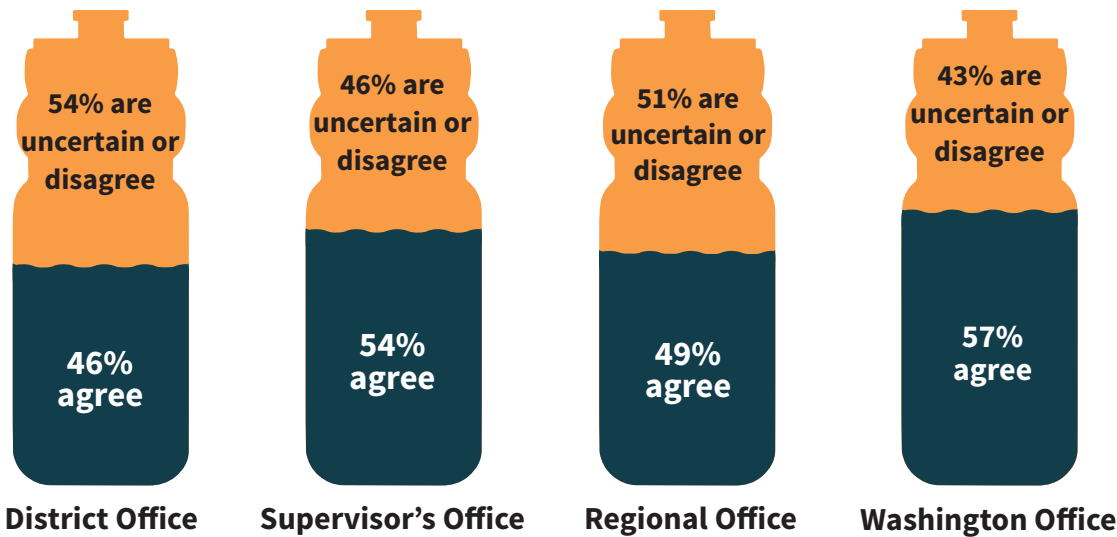


Figure 10. Recreation Programs Funding Avenues

- Conservation finance is not widely understood across the agency, with 33–43 percent of each office unsure whether it is essential to successfully administer Forest Service recreation programs. This may be because conservation finance is still relatively new, and there is a need to explain how it can support recreation programs throughout the agency.
- Trail programs are often funded through State grants that come from Federal dollars. This funding often does not meet the needs of programs with yearly expenses such as trail maintenance. For example, at one forest, 80 percent of recreation funding comes from State grants. Without these grants, the recreation program wouldn't have a seasonal crew. Over the past 15 years, the recreation department has lost approximately 50 percent staffing and has been unable to rehire vacant positions. As a result, trail maintenance experienced backlogs, signage was left in disrepair, and many campgrounds experienced infrastructure and other issues. Visitor use numbers have increased on average by 800,000 visits per year (excluding the bump seen in 2020 and 2021), and staffing has decreased.

## Potential Strategies

- Explore changes to fee collections. Increase developed recreation fee pricing to be commensurate with market rates, modernize collection methods, and establish fee retention at other profitable venues such as ski areas.
- Adjust staff funding structures. For example, permanent full-time and permanent seasonal staff could be fully funded using salary and expense budget funds. Other funding sources, such as recreation fees and grants, should be used to improve and maintain facilities, trails, and other resources.
- Restructure operations funding by supporting efforts that would leverage diverse funds from annual operations, heritage and wilderness resources, trails, and general operations to apply towards operations and maintenance and partnerships. For example, treat toilet pumping as a utility cost and fund it as a resource issue using multiple funds, or use resource information management or forest plan maintenance funding for national visitor use monitoring.
- Improve collaboration across program areas and units to leverage existing funding. Encourage programs to work together on projects to be more efficient and effective. If funding was not separated between the groups but dispersed by project (as it is in the Great American Outdoors Act), there would be more collaboration. Similar collaboration could be accomplished between recreation programs at different but complementary units. Establish a sufficient baseline funding level of appropriated funds to support recreation programs rather than increasing project-specific funds (e.g., Great American Outdoors Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) that do not cover base recreation operations.
- Reduce sites and services to fit available funding or consider fees.



An abandoned vehicle sits in the Willamette National Forest. For a few years now, the Forest Service has budgeted \$60,000 to remove abandoned vehicles, and even this hasn't been enough to keep up with dozens of vehicles abandoned across the forest. In the worst cases, the cost for one vehicle can exceed \$20,000 due to technical recovery and hazmat expenses. The Willamette National Forest covers these costs off the top, but other forests often put the expense on recreation programs—redirecting funds away from recreation and infrastructure projects. The issue became so common that the Forest Service created a blanket purchase agreement with four vendors to facilitate the removal of abandoned vehicles. USDA Forest Service photo.



## **Topic 5C: Climate Resiliency and Management**

### ***Issue Statement***

The effects of climate change have had, and will continue to make, a lasting impact on National Forest System lands, natural and cultural resources, and visitor use and recreation opportunities. Recreation program managers need more resources focused on climate resilience in relation to recreation. The agency is collaboratively implementing a new Wildfire Crisis Strategy (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/wildfire-crisis>) to protect communities, critical infrastructure, watersheds, habitats, and recreational areas. Many of the strategic planning guidelines and other elements within the Wildfire Crisis Strategy's Implementation Plan align with suggested approaches to recreation management found in this summary report. Further, landscape highlights described within the Wildfire Crisis Strategy's Initial Landscape Investments include important recreation opportunities, public access, trail systems, and other recreation-related protection needs. Contemporary agency emphasis on confronting the wildfire crisis presents an advantageous opportunity to integrate across program areas to build resources towards achieving climate resilience in the recreation realm. At the same time, climate impacts extend beyond fire events that western units have been experiencing. Building resources for climate resilience will be important, considering other increasingly occurring natural disasters such as wind events and flooding.

### ***What We Heard***

- Only 18 percent of survey respondents agree that there are sufficient climate resiliency tools and resources (fig. 11). This result is important to note, as responses also indicate that climate informed recreation management should be a priority for leadership and field-level staff.

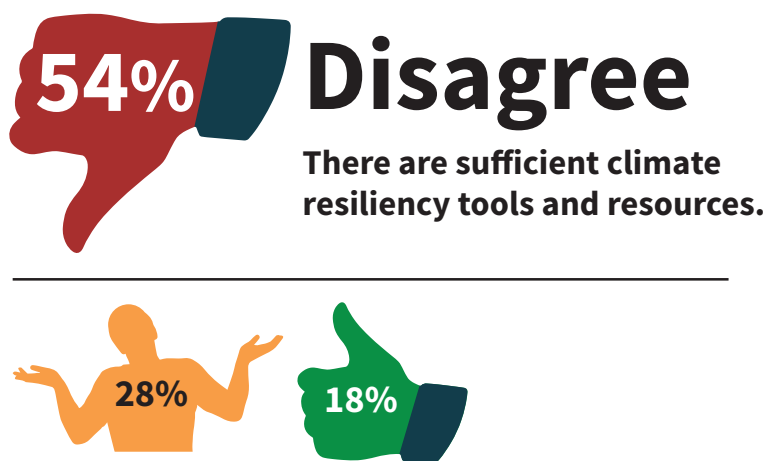


Figure 11. Availability of Tools and Knowledge Resources – Climate Resiliency

- Recreation-related climate change challenges are well documented, and the Forest Service needs to invest in and share resources that will support a common vision and understanding of the impacts climate change will have on recreation. Unit use seasons are growing, with visitation increasing both earlier and later in the calendar year than historic norms. However, many seasonal staffing structures and recreation programs have not made similar adjustments to respond to the changing needs.



## *Potential Strategies*

- Improve access to climate change resources and information that already exist within the Forest Service (e.g., research stations, research and development). Make sure that recreation planners and managers know about the information, where it can be found, and how to best use it to plan for climate change at their sites.
- Develop a national, regional, and/or site-level climate change analysis process that focuses on climate adaptation and resilience. At the site level, this process could be supported by a national or regional planning team to share subject matter experts and reduce the site-level workload.
- Improve research on climate change related to recreation by engaging with research and development, external academic partners, and other climate partners. Focus research on impacts and potential strategies or approaches.
- Integrate climate resilience into deferred maintenance and other infrastructure-related projects. Use design narratives and engineering reports with a holistic approach to site design that fully considers climate resilience.
- Develop common language, a recreation-focused toolkit, best practices, and vulnerability assessments focused on climate change.
- Develop new staffing models that create longer employee seasons to accommodate extended periods of higher visitor use levels.



## **Topic 5D: Recreation Program Management**

### ***Issue Statement***

Because recreation is vital to the public and recreation is foundational to conservation, program managers need resources, such as subject matter experts, site data, planning, monitoring, and other management tools, to support the success of their recreation programs and proactively manage recreation resources.

### ***What We Heard***

- As shown in figure 12, there are varying opinions on the availability of tools and knowledge resources for recreation programs. Forty-four percent of respondents indicate that there are sufficient recreation-related policies and guidance for recreation planning and management. However, only 16–21 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that there is sufficient internal and technical assistance available—through the Enterprise Program, the new Planning Service Organization, and other resources—to develop monitoring tools and protocols, conduct research, and analyze data. So, while there may be sufficient general policies and guidance in place, Forest Service staff still lack the tools and resources they need to successfully manage recreation programs throughout the agency.

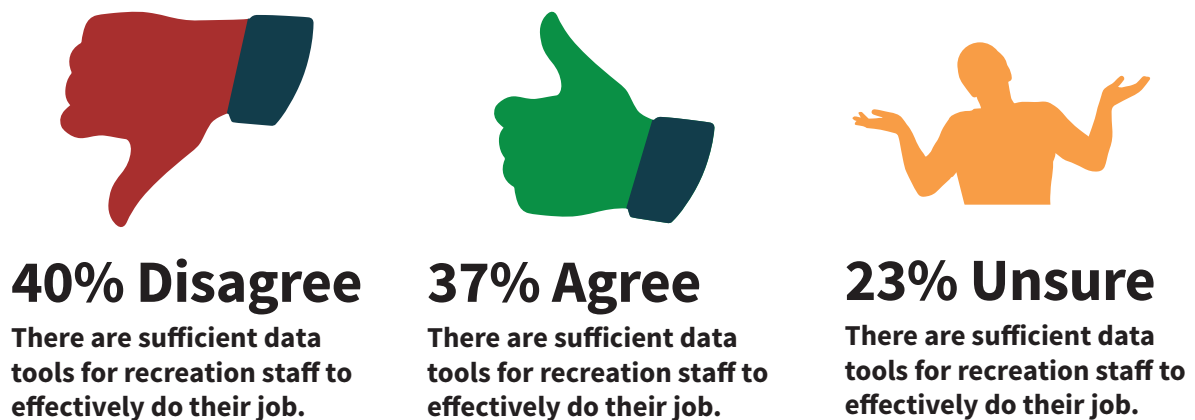


Figure 12. Availability of Tools and Knowledge Resources – Sufficient Data Tools

- As shown in figure 12, respondents have differing opinions on whether sufficient data tools are available for recreation staff to effectively do their job. Of those who disagree, strongly disagree, or are unsure (which totals 63 percent of respondents), responses to open-ended questions indicate that the issues with current data tools include data usability, application, collection, and storage.
- The Forest Service needs to collect the data that can be used by unit-level management to assess individual recreation site performance and make informed management decision related to the sites (e.g., allocate more resources, repurpose the site, evaluate infrastructure). Potential data needs related to individual recreation site performance include visitation, site use, site occupancy, revenue and fee collection, partnerships, maintenance, labor, and expenses.
- In many cases, the Forest Service uses reactionary management approaches more often than proactive or visionary approaches. This approach can often be stressful for staff and lead to operational inefficiencies.

- Site-level land managers are being stationed increasingly further away from the land they manage due to the combining and centralization of units for administrative purposes. This situation can create a disconnect between those that manage the sites and the staff and resources onsite.
- Designated areas need specialized support to meet the standards established in law and policy.
- A need exists for specialized skill sets in certain professions such as landscape architects, recreation planners, trail planners, and designers.
- Recreation programs are often the public's first, and sometimes only, engagement with the units. Many of the forests and grasslands' recreation sites are in various states of disrepair or are inadequately equipped, creating safety and visitor experience issues and reducing the likelihood of positive experiences and return visits.
- A need exists to increase awareness and access for trainings and build skills in core competencies for recreation management and planning.

### *Potential Strategies*

- Explore different management frameworks, including co-stewardship of Forest Service lands with Tribes, nonprofits, and other stakeholders, where possible and/or appropriate, and manage recreation across Forest Service boundaries and with external partners where appropriate.
- Implement regional and site-level recreation planning to establish proactive management and purposeful growth.
- Explore landscape-level recreation planning.
- Invest in visitor use management planning.
- Invest in baseline data collection to support informed management practices and planning.
- Develop a unit-level recreation performance data evaluation process that includes performance metrics, data needs, collection methods, and analysis to be used in unit level recreation management and decision making.
- Evaluate unit resource and facility capacities to ensure that desired conditions for the unit are being met and to adequately plan for future use.
- Prioritize recreation projects that support visitor needs, such as access to potable water and safe infrastructure. With the help of regional foresters, unit-level priority recreation projects could be included in the forest program of work at a higher priority level to support their completion.
- Establish recreation programs as separate from special uses, lands, minerals, or other divisions, with clearly defined roles.
- Invest in professional project management software and training to allow staff to manage details, communicate, collaborate, and report project progress.
- Advocate for and support hiring qualified recreation professionals and appropriate support staff to implement recreation program priorities.





# Appendix A: Survey Questions

## Employee Survey – Reimagine Recreation

This employee survey is part of a larger effort to reimagine recreation across national forest system lands. Your insights and perspectives will help inform a revised strategic vision for recreation and the creation of a National Recreation Action Plan. To learn more, visit Reimagine Recreation ([sharepoint.com](https://sharepoint.com)).

Three initial foundations – or focus areas – have been identified:

**REINVEST** in our workforce and delivery systems to provide employees with the skills, knowledge, tools, financial resources, and operating environment necessary to succeed;

**REENGAGE** visitors and partners, both prospective and existing. Provide a place for everyone to feel welcome and connected to the outdoors; and

**REINVENT** creative ways to steward recreation on our public lands. Reexamine how to plan, design, adapt, and manage the recreation landscape now and into the future.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential. You may include personal contact information if you are willing to be contacted for a possible follow-up discussion. Estimated completion time for the survey is 15-20 minutes.

**Your responses to the survey, along with other avenues of engagement, will feed directly into revising the recreation vision and formulating a draft National Recreation Action Plan for the agency.**

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact the Reimagine Recreation Planning Team at [sm.fs.reimaginerec@usda.gov](mailto:sm.fs.reimaginerec@usda.gov).

**THE SURVEY WILL CLOSE NOVEMBER 18th.**

Thank you for taking the time to provide your invaluable perspective!

## Section A. Employee Information

### 1. What title best represents your position?

- Staff Officer
- Special Uses Permit Administrator
- Technician (trails, OHV, wilderness, and other non-law enforcement recreation field-staff)
- Visitor Use Assistant
- Interpretive/Outreach Specialist
- Resource Specialist (Biologist, Forester, Archaeologist, etc.)
- Program Manager (Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage, Lands and Realty, etc.)
- Landscape Architect
- Engineer (including technicians)
- Public Affairs Officer/Staff
- Partnership or Volunteer Coordinator/Manager
- Law Enforcement Officer
- Grants Management Specialist/Officer
- Contracting Specialist/Officer
- NEPA Specialist/Coordinator
- Social Scientist
- Director/Deputy Director
- District Ranger/Deputy District Ranger
- Forest Supervisor/Deputy Forest Supervisor
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. What area of the agency do you work in?

- National Forest System
- Research & Development
- State & Private Forestry
- Business Operations
- Office of the Chief
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. What office do you work in?

- Washington Office
- Regional Office
- Enterprise Program
- Supervisor's Office
- District Office
- Research Station
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



Section B. **REINVEST** in our workforce and delivery systems to provide employees with the skills, knowledge, tools, financial resources, and operating environment necessary to succeed.

4. Recreation Staff – Recruitment & Retention  
[Unsure, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree]
  - a. There is a shortage of recreation staff to effectively manage and run recreation programs
  - b. There is inadequate workforce housing to recruit and retain recreation staff
  - c. There is a lack of training and professional development opportunities to retain recreation staff
  - d. There are insufficient consistent funding sources for employee awards, transfer of station costs, and other employee financial incentives to retain recreation staff
  - e. There is a shortage of support services for recreation staff (e.g., human resources, information technology, contracting)
5. Recreation Staff – Availability of Tools & Knowledge Resources  
[Unsure, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree]
  - a. There are sufficient templates or examples for recreation staff to effectively do their job (e.g., agreements, contracting, NEPA compliance, signage)
  - b. There are sufficient data tools for recreation staff to effectively do their job
  - c. There are sufficient subject matter experts and mentors to assist recreation staff
  - d. There is awareness of and access to sufficient Communities of Practice (a place to ask questions and share resources with colleagues) for recreation staff to troubleshoot efficiently
  - e. There are sufficient Forest-level or Region-level recreation workshops available for recreation staff to effectively build professional relationships and communicate lessons learned
  - f. There are sufficient core competency trainings (e.g., Recreation 101, Wilderness 101, Special Use Permits 101) for recreation staff to feel equipped to do their job
  - g. There are sufficient field schools/skill-sharing clinics for recreation staff to share and collectively build best practices
  - h. There are sufficient external learning opportunities (e.g., conferences, academic courses) for recreation staff to network and broaden professional learning to effectively do their job
6. Recreation Programs – Funding Avenues  
[Unsure, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree]
  - a. Increased, reliable appropriated funds are required to successfully administer our recreation programs
  - b. Priority project-specific funding, legislative funding (e.g., Great American Outdoors Act), and other special funding streams are vital to successfully administer our recreation programs
  - c. Developed recreation site fees are essential contributions to a viable recreation business model
  - d. Special uses cost recovery is essential to successfully administer our recreation programs
  - e. Cost-sharing of resources among administrative units, agencies, and/or organizations are critical to successfully administer our recreation programs
  - f. Local or state government funding sources (e.g., State OHV grant programs) are critical to successfully administering recreation programs
  - g. Fundraising by partners is critical to successfully administer our recreation programs

h. Innovative and successful Conservation Finance opportunities are essential to successfully administer our recreation programs

7. Recreation Staff – Workforce Diversity

[Unsure, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, Agree]

- a. Job Corps (including Youth Corps, Indian Youth Services Corps, 21st Century Conservation Corps, et al.) is being effectively used to increase the diversity of our recreation workforce
- b. Resource Assistant Program is being effectively used to increase the diversity of our recreation workforce
- c. Pathways and federal internship programs are being effectively used to increase the diversity of our recreation workforce
- d. Colleges and universities, including technical schools are being effectively used to increase the diversity of our recreation workforce
- e. Peace Corps/AmeriCorps VISTA are being effectively used to increase the diversity of our recreation workforce
- f. Schedule A hiring authority is being effectively used to increase the diversity of our recreation workforce
- g. Veterans hiring authorities (e.g., VRA, VEOA) are being effectively used to increase the diversity of our recreation workforce

8. Please add any additional thoughts, ideas, or approaches relevant to questions 4 through 7.  
[Open-ended]

Section C. **REENGAGE** visitors and partners — both prospective and existing. Provide a place for everyone to feel welcome & connected to the outdoors.

9. Engaging existing visitors on national forest system lands.

[Unsure, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, Agree]

- a. Information on Forest Service platforms about where and how to recreate meets the needs of existing visitors
- b. Information on external platforms about where and how to recreate (e.g., partner websites, apps like All Trails, tourism magazines) meets the needs of existing visitors
- c. Resources available in multiple languages and platforms are inclusive of all existing visitors
- d. Transportation solutions are beneficial resources for aiding existing visitors
- e. Reservation and permit systems are effective visitor use management tools
- f. Volunteer stewardship opportunities attract existing visitors
- g. Face-to-face public contact (e.g., ranger patrols, visitor center staff, outreach and interpretive programming) provide meaningful engagement for existing visitors
- h. Outfitter and guide services meet the needs of existing visitors
- i. Variety of available recreation opportunities and settings with quality trails and roads, and both developed and dispersed recreation options meet the needs of existing visitors
- j. Accessibility features (including physical, social, and cognitive considerations) meet the needs of existing visitors
- k. Trash and sanitation solutions address needs of existing visitors
- l. Outdoor ethic education programming (Leave No Trace, Stay the Trail, Recreate Responsibly, et al.) is crucial to promoting existing visitor stewardship and comfort



10. Engaging new visitors, including, but not limited to, historically underserved and/or socially vulnerable populations, on national forest system lands.

[Unsure, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, Agree]

- a. Information on Forest Service platforms about where and how to recreate meets the needs of new visitors
- b. Information on external platforms about where and how to recreate (e.g., partner websites, apps like All Trails, tourism magazines) meets the needs of new visitors
- c. Resources available in multiple languages and platforms are inclusive of all potential new visitors
- d. Transportation solutions are beneficial resources for inviting new visitors
- e. Reservation and permit systems are equitable visitor use management tools
- f. Volunteer stewardship opportunities provide a gateway to national forest system lands for prospective visitors.
- g. Face-to-face public contact (e.g., ranger patrols, visitor center staff, outreach and interpretive programming) provide important touch points for new visitors
- h. Outfitter and guide services meet the needs of new visitors
- i. Variety of available recreation opportunities and settings with quality trails and roads, and both developed and dispersed recreation options encompass the needs and desires of new visitors
- j. Accessibility features (including physical, social, and cognitive considerations) meet the needs of new visitors
- k. Trash and sanitation solutions address needs of new visitors
- l. Outdoor ethic education programming (Leave No Trace, Stay the Trail, Recreate Responsibly, et al.) is crucial to promoting new visitor stewardship and comfort

11. Recreation-related Partnerships – Develop & Sustain

[Unsure, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, Agree]

- a. There are sufficient recreation staff to engage with partners (e.g., dedicated partnership staff, not a collateral duty assignment or expectation)
- b. There are sufficient staff experts available to provide advice or assistance in regards to existing policies, agreement management, and other technical aspects of the partnership program
- c. There is sufficient leadership support and prioritization to support the partnership program
- d. There are sufficient policies and guidance to support the partnership program

12. Please add any additional thoughts, ideas, or approaches relevant to questions 9 through 11

[Open-ended]

Section D. **REINVENT** creative ways to steward recreation on our public lands. Reexamine how to plan, design, adapt, and manage the recreation landscape now and into the future.

13. Recreation Planning and Management – Availability of Tools & Knowledge Resources  
[Unsure, Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, Agree]

- a. There is sufficient technical support available to develop monitoring tools and protocols, conduct research, and/or analyze data
- b. There is sufficient internal assistance available through the Enterprise Program, the new Planning Service Organization, and other resources
- c. There are sufficient planning examples, templates, and best practices available
- d. There is sufficient access to external assistance through avenues such as Challenge Cost Share Agreements, Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity's, Blanket Purchase Agreements
- e. There are sufficient experts available that can help and mentor staff in collaboration techniques with external stakeholders (e.g., states, tribes, nonprofits, businesses, etc.)
- f. There are sufficient climate resiliency tools and resources (e.g., climate-informed planning frameworks, climate impact models, increased sustainability of recreation facilities and resources) available to inform recreation planning, implementation, and management
- g. There are sufficient recreation-related policies and guidance for recreation planning and management
- h. There is sufficient support to develop both socially and environmentally-responsive site designs

14. What and who come to mind when you hear the phrase “recreation-shed” in the context of landscape-level planning?  
[Open-ended]

15. If Forest Service leadership focused on addressing just two or three recreation-related issues, what should they be? What creative approaches or helpful tools are you either currently using, or would like to employ, to combat these specific issues?  
[Open-ended]

**16. Optional** - Please share a photo that highlights a recreation-related success or challenge for your unit or program. Provide a brief description of the photo and what it represents.

Please include your name and contact info here if you are willing to be contacted for follow-up discussion.  
[Text Box]

Please also consider attending one or more of four two-hour open-door sessions:

Nov. 3, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. MST  
Nov. 7, 9 a.m. - 11 a.m. MST  
Nov. 9, 12 p.m. - 2 p.m. MST  
Nov. 10, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. MST

Team Meeting ID: 299 461 526 897, Passcode: Kn4ZQs  
*Thank you so much for your time and feedback!*









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