

Symposium of Practice

Opportunities:

- Natural Assets
 - **Federal public land**
 - U.S. Forest Service
 - Inyo, Stanislaus, and Humboldt-Toiyabe national forests
 - Tahoe National Forest
 - Plumas, Tahoe, Lassen, and Humboldt-Toiyabe national forests
 - Stanislaus, Inyo, Sierra, Sequoia national forests
 - Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit
 - National Parks
 - Yosemite National Park
 - Devil's Postpile and Manzanar national monuments
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - **State public land**
 - State Parks
 - South Yuba River has five state parks
 - Empire Mine and Malakoff Diggins state historic parks
 - Plumas Eureka State Park features the oldest ski resort in North America with a recently restored pommel lift
 - Trione-Annadel State Park and Willow Creek State Park
 - **Joint Federal and State managed land**
 - Redwood State and National Park
 - **Land trusts**
 - Truckee Donner and Bear Yuba land trusts
 - **Regional parks**
 - , Monte Rio Redwoods Regional Park and Open Space Preserve
 - **Special park districts**
 - The project provides visitors opportunities to camp in **well-maintained contemporary campgrounds**
 - The project serves as a **gateway for public access** to significant federal land holdings in the region
 - The **South Yuba River** is a major destination
 - A **gravel race** in October further activates the region seasonally
 - The **Feather River watershed** is the largest in the Sierra, providing approximately **65% of California's clean drinking water**
 - **Diverse landscapes** support fishing, hunting, backcountry skiing, and recreation ranging from desert to alpine peaks within a single day's journey
 - 10,000 miles of maintained dirt roads, 21 fire lookouts, the Pacific Crest Trail, and **world-class trail systems** in Downieville, Quincy, and Susanville
 - OC Coastkeeper created **kelp forests and oyster beds** for climate protection
 - Natural assets fall into two complementary categories: **intrinsic value** (ecosystem services, wild environments) and **utilitarian value** (recreation opportunities) -- the trail project draws on both
 - Recreation users seek **long, uninterrupted outdoor experiences** away from urban infrastructure
 - The **landscape itself is the equity**, with economic activity reverse-engineered from existing assets
 - **Landscape diversity** includes redwood forests, Myakama volcanic range, and oak grasslands
 - The Inland Empire offers a striking **range of natural environments** (mountain terrain, desert landscapes, and wine country) within a single region
 - San Diego's abundant **sunshine and coastal geography** create a consistent, year-round outdoor recreation draw; beaches stretching from Oceanside to the Mexican border anchor the region's natural identity
 - **Mission Bay, the Pacific coastline**, and trail systems within **Balboa Park** offer diverse outdoor recreation opportunities within an accessible urban context
- Community Assets and Regional Access
 - Limited community assets exist beyond a **federal highway** and **some air service** into the region
 - These public access assets allow **easy access to campgrounds** for visitor experiences
 - **Transportation infrastructure** is the primary community asset facilitating project success
 - A **strong bike community** hosts five events annually across public and private lands; bike tourism is rapidly growing
 - Cities anchor **cultural draw** through events like Hot Summer Nights, Victorian Christmas, Cornish Christmas, and the Nevada County Fair
 - **Four-season recreation** offerings — ski resorts, horseback riding, kayaking, rafting, water skiing, and hiking — attract diverse visitor segments
 - The **Pines to Mines** regional trail vision and **historic downtowns** contribute to a coherent recreation identity
 - **Life jacket loaner** programs from the Division of Boating and Waterways and wayfinding infrastructure support visitor safety and access
 - The **Great Redwood Trail** connects the natural landscape to an active, developing trail corridor
 - A distinctive **fusion of natural assets and a rich arts and cultural community** creates a unique regional identity
 - **SBTS connects communities to public lands** through trail development and events, enabling residents to access federal lands without getting in a car
 - **Trails function as a force multiplier**, connecting towns to main streets, creating new business models, and generating reasons to visit previously overlooked communities

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Tourism & Outdoor Recreation — Project Discussion Guide

- Recreation in rural areas is **essential to culture and economy** — not merely a quality-of-life enhancement as in coastal areas
- The project creates **community-driven visions** for linking towns with trails and drives tourism into town centers while expanding local access to public lands
- Four **pilot microtourism projects** are oriented toward local Indigenous and Latino communities in Anaheim and Santa Ana, designed to complement major attractions like Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm rather than compete with them
- Projects target the growing millennial market seeking **authentic, participatory cultural experiences** (cooking classes, visiting YouTube influencer locations, and community-based activities) rather than traditional theme park visits
- All four projects were **shovel-ready** and are designed to be **self-sustaining** through earned income streams, potentially accessing entrepreneurship funding rather than ongoing tourism grants
- One project is run by Rev Hub, focusing on a **tech-tourism crossover**; others center on local entrepreneurship and cultural practices
- Orange County's **cultural diversity** represents significant untapped tourism potential
- Microtourism and major attractions are **currently complementary**, with cultural tourism extending visitor stays beyond the theme park experience
- Rural Sierra communities represent a rare and largely undiscovered preservation of **folk art, Americana, and distinct local cultures**
- **World-class recreation** is accessible within minutes of town: backcountry skiing is 15 minutes away, mountain biking 10 minutes from community centers
- The Everett Memorial Highway alone generates an estimated \$5,000 to \$25,000 per day in **economic activity**, demonstrating the direct link between natural access and local economic health
- Recreation is understood as **foundational to healthy communities**, on par with conservation and education, not merely a consumer amenity
- The project seeks to shift community identity from recreation as consumption toward a **broader conservation ethic**
- The region draws **global visitors** through a dense concentration of cultural and culinary assets: vineyards, world-class beer, cheese, music festivals, and breweries
- Creative partnerships with **local businesses** (i.e. a trail beer release with Old Caz Brewery benefiting Friends of Treoniale and RTA) extend the organization's reach and funding base
- **Route 66** represents a significant cultural and heritage asset with substantial untapped tourism potential
- The region has a dense and diverse **cultural asset base**: San Diego Zoo, the new Elephant Safari Park, Balboa Park's museums and open spaces, Seaport Village, the Port of San Diego, and a thriving small business ecosystem
- Three **established cultural districts**, Oceanside, Barrio Logan, and Balboa Park, plus the newly designated Liberty Station Arts District, provide structured community identity anchors across the region
- The County hired its first **arts and culture manager** and reopened its film office, signaling new institutional investment in creative economy infrastructure
- Chula Vista's investment in a **film and media building** with green screen space and creator incentives positions the region to compete for production activity
- **Youth engagement** has proven highly effective: a logo competition for the collaborative produced strong participation, with the youth sector lead creating the winning design, demonstrating that arts and culture resonate deeply with young people across all sectors

Challenges:

- Sufficient funding for staffing is very important for **project management**
- Administrative capacity funding is essential because **administering state and federal grants is complicated** and requires specialized skill sets
- Project success depends on **adequate human resources, administrative expertise, and partnership development**
- **Overcrowding at key sites** (Pioneer Trail, Hoot Trail, river crossings, Donner Pass Road) is straining resources and visitor experience
- **Critical infrastructure gaps** persist across recreation sites: bathrooms, water, parking, call boxes, and safety equipment are lacking
- **Only two rangers cover three counties**, leaving state and federal lands severely understaffed
- Multiple jurisdictions at the river (3) and park districts (5) make **coordinated decision-making difficult**
- Volunteer organizations are **unsustainably carrying the maintenance burden**
- Some **park districts are exploring consolidation** due to financial strain
- **Rural staffing capacity, administrative capacity, and regional information sharing** limit the region's ability to develop and manage assets
- **Rural infrastructure constraints** impede project implementation; the region does not lack expertise, but lacks capacity to act on it
- Recreation resources are not broadly recognized as **economic drivers** or as psychologically important to **rural community health**
- Historic maps of the Sierra Nevada and agreement documents stored at the USFS Region 5 facility in Vallejo are critical to Towns to Trails projects and are **at risk of disposal** following federal office closures; their loss would be irreplaceable
- **Private land access** is the primary barrier to connecting communities via trails, requiring policy solutions that protect landowners from liability while enabling meaningful public access
- **Infrastructure investment** is needed to fully leverage existing assets, particularly along the Route 66 corridor
- The **Tijuana River sewage crisis** is directly affecting Imperial Beach and Coronado, threatening coastal recreation assets and visitor experience
- **Gentrification in Barrio Logan** illustrates a recurring pattern: artists and cultural investment make neighborhoods attractive, then rising costs displace the communities that created the value. This is a structural threat to the cultural districts that anchor the region's identity

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2 Policy & Regulations

Opportunities:

- State funding from **Proposition 68**
- The **Innovative Finance for National Forests** program
- **California's Jobs First** policies
- The **Great American Outdoors Act** has helped significantly to enhance campgrounds and address the maintenance backlog
- The **U.S. Forest Service's mission to develop partnerships with local communities** has supported the project
- Multiple state and federal policy initiatives have provided essential financial and programmatic support
- State funding alignment through **Explore California and climate bond programs is anticipated**, though benefits have not yet materialized
- A **Recreation Resiliency Master Plan** was proactively developed to position the region for emerging legislative and funding opportunities
- An agreement to use higher county-level parking fines at State Park sites (replacing insufficient ticket amounts) demonstrates **effective local policy workarounds**
- **Cannabis tourism** presents emerging economic opportunity, though operators face significant regulatory hurdles
- A recent **CEQA exemption for people-powered trails** reduces a key regulatory barrier for trail development
- **AB 518 (low-impact camping)** delegated regulatory authority to counties, offering local flexibility, though some counties may impose their own requirements
- **Small farm owners** could meaningfully benefit from adding just 5–10 campsites, generating an average of \$8,000 in additional annual income, if regulatory barriers were reduced
- **Good Neighbor Authority** is being explored as a potential mechanism for navigating cross-jurisdictional project work
- **Relationships with agency staff** are more valuable than any specific policy in getting projects done
- In the past, completing **NEPA on federal land satisfied CEQA requirements** for state-funded projects — restoring this practice would reduce duplicative burden
- Policy mechanisms to **preserve housing stock** for local residents would support workforce stability and community health
- Post-COVID **cottage food legislation** has been helpful, allowing home-based food businesses to sell at farmers markets and lowering barriers for micro-entrepreneurs
- The **Explore Act and BOLT Act** are helpful federal policies advancing recreation access on public lands
- **Proposition 4 and the California Trails Act** are elevating public consciousness around outdoor recreation and access
- **Outdoors For All** has successfully united conservation, recreation, equity, access, and diversity groups around a shared agenda
- **NEPA**, while complex, serves a useful function in encouraging thoughtful public land use
- Recent federal and state initiatives are moving in a **positive direction overall**
- State metrics for rural areas should focus on **stabilizing existing jobs and businesses** rather than adding new ones: a fundamental reframing of how rural economic success is measured
- Incentive structures offering fire mitigation support in exchange for trail easements across **private timberland** could unlock access to the 280,000 acres of private land needed to connect South County communities
- **Prevailing wage and bidding requirements** should be adapted for isolated rural areas where standard requirements create cost barriers disproportionate to local conditions
- **Integrating fire mitigation and recreation planning** within funding programs would better reflect the interconnected realities on the ground
- Stronger **CEQA exemptions** for pilot projects would allow new approaches to be tested before full environmental review is required
- Recreation funding and policy should be aligned with **habitat restoration** frameworks, which currently receive disproportionately more support despite trails serving far more people
- Elevated thresholds for DIR **prevailing wage** compliance on smaller projects would meaningfully reduce cost and administrative burden
- More discretion in **contractor selection** (beyond lowest-bid requirements) would improve project quality and allow for better-aligned partners
- Agencies lack policy on the creation and management of **social trails**, but the public creates them when they are not served
- Adopting GO-Biz CA Jobs First regional designations as a standard definition would resolve confusion caused by **differing regional boundary definitions** across agencies and programs
- A **highly inclusive planning** process (278 meetings conducted to reach stakeholders where they were, with three sectors added beyond the 12 required (youth, farmworkers, and LGBTQ community)) produced broader buy-in and more representative outcomes
- Policies favoring **smaller community-based organizations** in funding allocations, combined with coordination ecosystems linking large and small organizations, could more effectively distribute resources and build lasting capacity

Challenges:

- Uncertain and confusing federal environment
- **Bridging state and federal funding** requires skilled staff who can facilitate complex transactions
- A **massive deferred maintenance backlog** has rendered many campgrounds obsolete and impeded on-the-ground work
- Securing sufficient administrative capacity to handle **complex state and federal grant requirements**

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- **Duplication of NEPA & CEQA environmental review** for the same project on federal land adds significant cost, time, and effort
- **State Parks is reluctant to implement parking permits** or towing at over-visited river crossings, citing its public access mission, even as over-visitation causes harm
- The policy landscape does not yet support **integrated infrastructure improvements or streamlined cross-jurisdictional permitting**
- State regulations create disproportionate **compliance burdens** in rural areas relative to urban counterparts
- **ADA compliance** requirements present ongoing challenges for trail and recreation infrastructure as well as small businesses
- The CEQA exemption for people-powered trails, while helpful, **removed tribal leverage for consultation**, a significant tradeoff that warrants attention
- **NEPA and CEQA** processes are not project stoppers, but both require funding that is difficult to secure
- A policy change in the last five years now **requires CEQA even when NEPA has already been completed** for state money spent on federal land, adding cost and delay
- A recent CNRA meeting included **no discussion of working with the federal government or Forest Service**, raising questions about how rural California, where state parks are often absent, fits into state planning
- **No consistent policy framework** exists to guide cross-jurisdictional recreation and land management work
- City policies **restricting Airbnb** create challenges in a region already facing hotel room shortages
- Airbnb restrictions stem from **legitimate housing shortage concerns**, but they also foreclose a meaningful income opportunity for small entrepreneurs such as empty nesters with spare rooms
- Immediate advocacy support is needed in response to a **logging executive order** with significant implications for public lands recreation
- **California Wildlife Areas prohibit bikes** without clear logical justification -- a policy artifact of bikes being invented after 1990 rather than any evidence-based rationale
- Fortress conservation models have been criticized by Indigenous tribes and communities of color as a form of **Colonization 2.0**, reflecting a failure to center equity in land management policy
- Federal and state policies frequently **fail to reflect local** topography and community context; hard-line regulations need to be replaced with **frameworks that allow local adjustment**
- Policy should prioritize **equity over equality** to account for historic injustices in who has had access to public lands
- Connecting South County communities requires crossing 280,000 acres of private timberland; **private landowners fear liability and fire risk**, and at least one landowner has explicitly refused permission to cross property that would link Dunsmuir to McCloud
- No clear state policy exists protecting private landowners from **liability for trail access**, leaving the single largest connectivity barrier unaddressed
- **Lack of coordinated policy** creates jurisdictional conflicts over road access responsibilities: the Everett Memorial Highway situation, where the Forest Service, county, and city disputed snow plowing duties, illustrates how the absence of clear policy produces paralysis
- Sierra Pacific Industries allows trail use with no written agreement, creating **legal vulnerability** for all parties
- **Proposition 68's** 30-year public access requirement lacks natural disaster clauses, creating unacceptable risk for landowners in fire-prone areas
- State policy currently **fails to value recreation holistically**, and evaluation frameworks designed for urban job creation are inappropriate for rural economies where stability and worker well-being are the meaningful measures of success
- **CEQA scope** has far exceeded its original intent through decades of litigation; monitoring requirements can shut down crews for days or weeks over minor wildlife encounters, and small capital projects in the tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars cannot absorb these compliance costs
- **CEQA exemptions** are too easily challenged; agencies frequently apply extra conditions to avoid lawsuits, particularly in affluent neighborhoods, adding cost and delay that has nothing to do with environmental protection
- Consultants sometimes introduce **late-stage survey requirements** that delay projects significantly, creating perverse incentives within the compliance system
- Trail classifications do not align with **DIR labor categories**, forcing organizations to use ill-fitting designations like "landscaping" or "carpentry," complicating compliance and cost estimation
- Private money spent on state facilities still triggers **prevailing wage** requirements: paying \$70 to \$80 per hour instead of a livable \$35 to \$40 per hour results in half the work being completed for the same dollar investment
- The state has not clearly defined what **funding can be used on federal land**, leaving organizations in an ambiguous position when pursuing state grants for federal land projects
- **Short-term rental market** dynamics are displacing residents in coastal communities, as investors purchase homes and build ADUs for tourist rental rather than resident housing
- **Permitting structures** in some recreation sectors create permanent competitive advantages for early entrants; surf instruction permitting is a concrete example where existing permit holders maintain exclusive access, locking out new operators

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Opportunities:

- **Funding is available** to carry project through planning phase to developing “bid ready” documents
- **Multiple state and federal funding sources** have been identified for planning work
- **Grants received from CDFW, Air District, WCB, and SNC** have supported project work; various infrastructure grants are also in pursuit
- The region is geographically proximate to the world's largest concentration of **venture capital**, representing an untapped private sector opportunity
- The Great Redwood Trail received \$60 million in **Proposition 4 funding**, providing significant climate-connected investment in the region's core asset
- The project is funded through Sierra Nevada Conservancy in partnership with USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region 5, with a **broad coalition** of national forest, county, and city partners
- **Diverse funding sources** include private foundations, individual donors, industry partners, a Vision Circle program (three-year commitments of \$2,500/year minimum), and Friends of the Stewardship recurring donations
- California's **OHV program offers a proven model**; a similar centralized funding mechanism for non-motorized trail users could transform the funding 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, accessible communication
- A **regional block grant concept** (one grant to a county-level entity coordinating across recreation, forestry, and fisheries) has been proposed to CNRA leadership
- **GoBiz and Jobs First's** focus on economics and job creation provides new leverage for recreation advocacy
- Projects designed around **earned income streams** may qualify for entrepreneurship and small business funding rather than traditional tourism grants, opening a broader funding landscape
- The **self-sustaining model** reduces long-term dependence on grant cycles
- **Upfront government investment** shortens the timeline to private foundation funding, helping break the chicken-and-egg dynamic where each funder waits for the other to commit first
- **Proposition 4** climate funding is available and potentially applicable to the project, though bureaucratic distribution is slow
- A **community recreation tax** is being pursued, with three years of preparation needed to build the public education and community identity required to win the vote; the goal is for residents to understand recreation investment as investment in public health, education, economy, and stewardship
- Recreation must be positioned and funded as a **multi-benefit investment**, not a single-sector amenity
- State investment in a **grants clearinghouse** function that would help organizations identify appropriate funding sources and understand bid packet requirements could save significant time and resources across the sector
- Funding mechanisms **modeled on highway project maintenance** planning could normalize long-term stewardship funding for trail infrastructure
- Legislation is in development for an organization analogous to a parks nonprofit but oriented toward outdoor recreation broadly, which could create a more **durable funding structure**
- Colorado and Nevada both have **dedicated state recreation departments**; Nevada's in particular is seen as a strong model worth examining
- A state partnership modeled on California's **specialty license plate** programs is being explored as a potential mechanism to fund tourism infrastructure: a model with significant potential to scale across the state if structured well
- **California Arts Council** grants are being actively communicated to artists and entrepreneurs through newsletters, extending reach into the arts community
- **San Diego Foundation** invests heavily in art and community projects, providing a significant local philanthropic anchor
- 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
- 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

Challenges:

- Funding secured for design and planning is typically **insufficient to bring documents to full bid-ready status**
- **Local skilled staff** are needed to serve as expeditors and bridge compatibility issues between state and federal funding streams
- The **administrative burden** of managing multiple, often incompatible funding sources is significant
- **Implementation funding questions** remain unresolved
- The core barrier is not a lack of funding but a **fundamental misalignment**: most available funding is capital-based, while the greatest needs are operational (staffing, maintenance, planning, coordination), and project planning
- **Forest Service has only \$10,000 annually for trail maintenance**, forcing heavy reliance on volunteers and affinity groups who work for minimal compensation
- Planning and concept development funding is scarce, making it **difficult to get projects to a "shovel ready" state**
- Public works projects such as for bridges **cannot include co-located recreation improvements** such as parking lots, bathrooms, or signage
- **Reimbursement-based grants** create barriers for smaller districts and nonprofits
- Grant restrictions **prevent integrated infrastructure improvements** even when projects share a location
- **Reimbursement-based state grants** create barriers for smaller rural organizations; Redwood Region Rise had to secure private foundation funding just to cover upfront costs before reimbursement arrived
- No dedicated funding has been identified for the **Arts Nature Trails project**
- **Traditional federal sources** have become significantly harder to navigate: EPA, National Endowment for the Arts, USDA

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- The **state has not been investing** meaningfully in outdoor recreation, tourism, or arts and culture
- **California Arts Council grants** are capped at \$25,000 and oversubscribed four to one, leaving 75% of applicants unfunded
- **Coastal Conservancy** and similar sources provide relatively modest funding
- Capital funding options are limited and **do not address operational or planning needs**
- The primary need is **unrestricted funds** to enable competitive grant matching and eliminate lengthy reimbursement processes
- **Federal funding** (GAOA, secure rural schools, RTP) lacks consistency in timing and availability
- Described funding search as "turning couch cushions" and "hosting bake sales" due to lack of consistent sources
- Non-motorized trail funding is very limited outside of **Prop 68 and RTP** (federal program through state)
- The funding search has been described as "**turning couch cushions**"; the organization continuously braids multiple sources and relies on 500–1,000 volunteers per season as match
- Grant programs need **broader scope**, wider arrays of fundable activities, and **easier advance payments** with less bureaucratic burden
- **Sector silos** prevent funders from recognizing and supporting multi-benefit projects
- **Sustained operational funding** is the core unmet need: covering community management, trail maintenance, signage, interpretive materials (including bilingual print and digital), post-disaster repairs, and staff capacity for economic development support along the route
- Typical grants range from \$5,000 to \$15,000 with **extensive deliverables**, and rarely cover project administration costs
- **Federal funding is difficult to access** without achieving BOLT Act designation or historic trail status
- **Management funding** needs are in the five-to-six-figure annual range, far exceeding what small foundation grants can reliably provide
- The funding landscape shifts year to year based on outdoor industry performance and political administration, making **long-range planning** difficult
- Climate funding distribution is bureaucratically slow and **tends to favor urban projects** with larger voter bases over rural communities with greater equity needs
- Specific funding asks to state leadership for **collaborative support** have not yet been made but are needed
- Need funding to **digitize old Forest Service maps** and agreement documents
- Rural communities need **long-term, sustained funding** rather than short-term project grants; a Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant was valuable but ended without follow-up funding
- Planning and construction funding exists in the current landscape, but **maintenance funding** does not; trail stewardship requires significant ongoing resources with no sustainable mechanism to cover them
- Most recreation activities generate **no ticket or fee revenue**; fishing licenses provide modest income but the vast majority of recreation infrastructure is used for free with no mechanism for visitors to contribute back
- **Local fundraising capacity** is severely limited: \$28,000 raised on Giving Tuesday represents the organization's best effort, far short of operational needs
- **SORA is financially precarious**, operating the Nordic Center while simultaneously conducting planning and advocacy; short winter seasons, part-time year-round staff at barely sustainable wages, and recent capital investments in lodge construction and a new groomer have pushed the organization to the edge
- **Prevailing wage requirements** create additional cost barriers in isolated rural areas where labor markets do not reflect urban wage assumptions
- Funders consistently prioritize innovation over **consistency and longevity**, leaving the organizations that sustain rural recreation infrastructure chronically underfunded
- Multi-year community education is required before a tax measure can succeed; **that preparatory work** itself requires funding that does not currently exist
- **Grant programs** are severely oversubscribed (150 applications competing for 4 to 6 awards) indicating a fundamental mismatch between available funding and sector need
- Most funding is restricted to capital projects and **cannot be used for maintenance, overhead, or administrative costs**, leaving the ongoing work of stewardship perpetually unfunded
- **Non-motorized recreation** has no dedicated funding source comparable to the OHV tax, despite non-motorized trail users far outnumbering motorized ones
- **Proposition 4's** original legislation did not think through all implementation issues, creating complications particularly around income components; amendments or more flexible policies are needed
- Hundreds of millions in funding are reportedly available, but the landscape is so difficult to navigate that organizations cannot reliably access it; **clarity and navigation support** are as important as the funding itself
- **Wildlife Conservation Board** funds may be accessible for recreation but eligibility is unclear
- Discover Inland Empire currently relies on **membership dues and matching funds** from cities and counties, a funding base that is insufficient for implementing larger projects
- Funders consistently **favor well-established organizations** over smaller community-based groups with limited administrative experience or staffing, concentrating resources where capacity already exists
- **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
- Despite arts being an eligible sector for Catalyst funding, the program received limited proposals in this area, suggesting an **awareness or capacity gap among arts organizations**
- **Makerspaces** are expensive to build despite office vacancy rates of approximately 20%, representing a misalignment between available physical space and the capital required to convert it
- Tension exists between **directing funding** to wealthy coastal communities facing acute problems (such as Coronado's sewage crisis) and consistently underserved communities in Southeast San Diego; both have legitimate claims but compete for the same resources
- San Diego invests in artist infrastructure, but this work is vulnerable to budget cycle fluctuations and **lacks protected, sustained funding**

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4

Data

Opportunities:

- Data is available from **destination marketing organizations, the U.S. Forest Service**, and other federal agencies
- A river ambassador nonprofit collects **high-quality data** on visitor counts, origins, and activities, though the program lacks funding
- Existing data from partners including Tahoe National Forest, State Parks, and SYRCL demonstrates **strong visitation and economic impact**
- Emerging tools like Placer.ai and Buxton offer **potential to track visitor behavior and spending patterns**
- **Visit California** provides extensive county-level data through annual modeling-based reports
- Cities like Eureka and Ukiah have invested in **Placer.ai subscriptions**, yielding detailed visitor data: Friday night markets, for example, draw 6,000 to 7,000 visitors
- These localized datasets demonstrate the **potential value of more systematic data** investment across the region
- **SBTS conducts surveys** at each event using consistent questions, building a proprietary dataset over time
- The organization **collects its own data** for grant applications and to support local business conversations about mountain biker spending patterns
- **Outdoor industry economic forecasts** from comparable recreation destination towns provide useful benchmarks
- In small towns, board members, city officials, and business owners **directly observe** visitor origins and economic impact. Data confirms what local leaders already know
- **SBTS develops its own data** rather than depending on external sources, giving it control over what gets measured and how it's used
- Several tourism-heavy cities within Orange County maintain their own **detailed data**
- California leads the nation in **outdoor recreation economic output** at \$87.87 billion (12.6% of the national total) providing a powerful macro-level advocacy figure (though the number includes Disneyland and RVs, so rural-specific figures require a significant asterisk)
- **Reasonable visitation data** exists for national forests and parks, and good data is available on rural communities outside park and forest boundaries
- Economic data is a powerful tool for community buy-in: Everett Memorial Highway data showing \$5,000 to \$25,000 per day in **economic activity** successfully made the case for road plowing when county officials resisted
- Business surveys and trailhead tabling could generate **specific, on-the-ground visitor data**
- Forest Service road user data, originating from a master's thesis project, demonstrates that locally initiated data collection can produce **usable results**
- State funding for **simultaneous economic impact analyses across multiple rural communities** could produce comparable regional data efficiently
- **Phone-based location data** is emerging as a useful and relatively accessible tool for tracking trail visitation
- Agencies hold relevant data, and improved **data-sharing agreements** could significantly strengthen the advocacy and grant-making case for trail investment
- The San Diego Arts Council and Economic Development Corporation have **strong data on economic impact**, with arts and culture generating approximately \$10 billion regionally
- **San Diego Tourism Authority** maintains excellent data on visitor numbers, origins, activities, and spending, providing a solid macro-level foundation for advocacy and planning

Challenges:

- Additional visitor and usage data collection is required for effective design planning
- Relevant **data exists but is fragmented** across multiple organizations and not regularly updated
- Additional **data on campground usage and visitor numbers is needed** to inform design decisions
- **Geographic boundaries between Visit California regions and Jobs First regions do not align**, creating mismatches between visitor data and regional economic development needs
- **Data is fragmented** across agencies: Forest Service (data is 3–5 years old), State Parks, and non-profit data
- **No shared dashboard or standardized metrics** exist
- Forest Service was supposed to install **trail counters for bike trails** but status unknown
- **Visit California** regional data does not break down where people recreate or show local impacts
- Without comprehensive, current visitation data, **grant applications are difficult to substantiate** and impact is hard to demonstrate
- The relationship between visitation, economic impact, and community benefit cannot be clearly or compellingly **documented**
- **Data ownership and access** across agencies remain unclear
- Capacity to build a recreation economy dashboard with multiple integrated metrics does not currently exist
- **Data is highly uneven**: well-resourced cities are "lanterns in a dark night" against a largely dark regional picture
- The primary challenge is not data existence but **getting data to the people who need it** and providing capacity for analysis
- Rural regions frequently make decisions based on intuition rather than systematic data **due to time and capacity constraints**
- **Visit California** is perceived to hold larger datasets but not to prioritize rural regions in how that data is shared or applied
- **Limited data available** through chambers of commerce, DMOs, or counties
- Orange County has **no county-wide tourism data** infrastructure; data is siloed within individual cities with no aggregation or shared metrics across the region
- The **fragmented data landscape** makes it difficult to tell a compelling regional story to funders or policymakers
- **User behavior data** is severely lacking; surveys are rare due to funding constraints and the Forest Service's National Visitor Use Monitoring process only runs every five years

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- **Collecting data on federal land** requires permits and permissions from local rangers, and approval depends on personal relationships built over five to ten years -- land managers control access to data collection, not just data ownership
- **Paper records are vulnerable to loss** during office cleanings and closures, and historic Forest Service maps face disposal risk
- **Indigenous tribes lack the administrative capacity funding** needed to share ethnographic, cultural, and geographic data that would significantly enrich the project
- National Forest economic impact data is outdated; the Forest Service stopped systematic collection in the early 2000s
- **Purchased data** lacks the granularity and community specificity needed for local advocacy and decision-making; locally collected data is more useful but requires capacity and funding that most rural organizations do not have
- **Quantifying trail project benefits** beyond anecdotal evidence and partner letters remains a persistent challenge, weakening grant applications and policy advocacy
- **Strava data** is limited in usefulness: not all trail users participate, and activity is heavily concentrated in certain areas, skewing the picture
- Bike industry and outdoor companies either do not have or will not share **sales data** that could help demonstrate recreation's economic footprint
- **Visit California data resources** are not well known among trail-focused organizations, suggesting an outreach and awareness gap
- **Connecting weather disruption data to visitation impact** data is methodologically difficult, making it hard to quantify climate costs to the recreation economy
- **Neighborhood-level data** for small business planning is needed for places like downtown, Pacific Beach, Mission Beach, La Jolla, and Del Mar
- Competition between coastal cities for tourism dollars intensifies the **need for detailed local data**, but the capacity to produce it does not exist at that scale
- **Differentiating between what tourists need and what local residents need** is a recognized priority but has not been systematically built into data collection approaches
- **Survey fatigue** among visitors is limiting the ability to gather behavioral data on what activities tourists actually engage in

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Opportunities:

- **Climate change considerations are actively incorporated** into campground infrastructure redesign and planning
- River ambassador data suggests 80% of river visitors travel from out of town, likely **seeking relief from valley heat**
- Projects including river access management, trail planning, and shuttle systems align well with **GHG reduction, wildfire resilience, and emergency preparedness** goals
- Strong alignment with the **County's Resource Resiliency Roadmap**
- Overlapping seasonality of wildfire mitigation and tourism creates **workforce development opportunities**; workers can move between trail restoration and fire mitigation work across the year
- **Workforce connectivity** between ecological restoration, trail work, and wildfire mitigation is actively being explored
- **Trails can serve as tools** to help the Forest Service get ahead of fire risk, creating natural partnerships between recreation infrastructure and forest management
- Reduced snowpack has extended recreation seasons into March and January, bringing additional visitors during previously off-season months
- The region's **outdoor adventure economy** (backcountry skiing, individual expeditions) is more resilient to snowpack variability than a resort-dependent model
- Strong potential connections exist between **Proposition 4 funding** and forest management; grantmakers need to be more open-minded about multi-benefit projects that span recreation, forestry, and watershed health
- **Trails can serve a dual purpose** for recreation and fire mitigation, offering a compelling case for climate-connected investment
- Environmental restoration projects for kelp and oysters are generating **new ecotourism opportunities** including kelp forest diving, oyster sales to restaurants, and bike and kayak rentals
- Environmental restoration and ecotourism are **developing in tandem**, offering a model for connecting climate resilience investment to visitor economy outcomes
- Visitors are increasingly motivated to experience natural environments before climate change and disasters alter them permanently, creating **urgency-driven demand**
- **Fire mitigation and recreation planning** should be integrated and funded together; "recreation is conservation" is the organizing argument, and scientists, lawyers, and community members all need to help articulate and advance that connection
- **Connecting recreation infrastructure investment to fire mitigation funding** represents a significant untapped opportunity if the policy and funding frameworks can be aligned
- Current year conditions (moist ground and stable weather) are **favorable for construction**
- Dead tree management from fire snags and Sudden Oak disease, while burdensome, is generating **consistent annual work** that could anchor workforce pipelines
- The **Chollas Creek Greenway** project, a 10.5-mile watershed corridor in southeast San Diego, demonstrates how climate adaptation investment can simultaneously address flooding, create ecotourism destinations, build blue-green infrastructure, capture stormwater, develop trail systems, support nearby businesses, and generate workforce opportunities, all while serving a historically disinvested community
- A \$200,000 **Groundwork San Diego ecotourism project** funded through Catalyst creates park space with natural stormwater capture and bike trail connections while directly addressing flooding risk
- **Agrotourism opportunities** with avocado farms and wineries in East County offer additional climate-adjacent recreation development potential
- The scoring rubric requiring 40% of project benefits to flow to **disinvested communities** per SB 535 definitions ensures climate investments address equity alongside resilience

Challenges:

- **Climate change is significantly impacting campground** locations, resilience, and camping seasons
- **Federal climate resilience or mitigation funding is not available** for this type of recreation infrastructure project
- **Connecting recreation infrastructure to California's Proposition 4** funding presents significant challenges
- Despite climate change informing campground redesigns, **the project has not secured climate-related funding opportunities**
- **Weather changes evident**; minimal snow this year forced ski resorts to close early
- **Wildfire** is a constant and growing concern across forest recreation areas
- **Proposition 4 climate bond funding** has not reached recreation work; fire-related funding is available but does not extend to recreation amenities
- A Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant application that included recreation components for a river crossing was **denied for not being "shovel ready"**
- Recreation sites are generally **not designed for climate stressors or emergency response** needs
- Despite strong alignment with climate goals, recreation projects have **not secured climate-related funding**
- **Wildfire is the dominant climate threat**, though the coastal location offers some degree of protection
- **Sea level rise** poses a significant long-term risk to Humboldt Bay and the Eel River Valley
- Recreation infrastructure is **not yet systematically designed** for climate stressors or emergency response
- A **longer and more intense fire season** affects the ability to work, visitor enjoyment, and employee job stability
- The region **depends on snowpack** at 5,000 feet for healthy watershed and creek flows; reduced snow accumulation raises serious concerns about water availability
- More rain instead of snow means trail crews worked year-round this year, which **signals both opportunity and ecological concern**
- The region lacks the ski resort infrastructure to **capture high-elevation snowpack**, making it more exposed to climate-driven precipitation shifts

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- Average temperatures have risen several degrees Fahrenheit during the rideable and hikeable season, and storm patterns have become **increasingly erratic** -- late-season snowfall, early rainfall, and prolonged dry spells are all increasing
- Climate unpredictability fundamentally **disrupts visitor planning**: people book PTO, flights, and accommodations months in advance and cannot easily adjust; one recent event saw 18 inches of snow fall after ski resorts had already closed, costing millions in lost revenue
- Ski resorts face **difficult staffing decisions** during warm periods when snow may or may not return, and outdoor retailers report that unpredictable conditions are affecting purchasing behavior
- **Reduced visitor confidence** translates directly to declining rural economic activity: less lodging, food, and service spending in communities that depend on it
- Climate funding decisions tend to favor projects in high-population areas, with money flowing disproportionately to the Central Valley, Bay Area, and Sacramento rather than **rural regions**
- Rising snow levels threaten the **Nordic Center's** viability at its current elevation, putting a core piece of community recreation infrastructure at long-term risk
- White fir die-off on Gateway trails has required extensive **hazard tree removal**; tree death accelerates soil drying and trail degradation, compounding maintenance burdens
- **Shorter and less predictable seasons** directly threaten organizational sustainability; SORA's financial precarity is inseparable from climate-driven season compression
- **Organizational stability** is a prerequisite for sustained community work; climate impacts that undermine financial viability undermine everything built on top of it
- **Extended wet seasons** disrupt project timelines and organizational capacity in ways that are difficult to plan around
- New weather patterns now require a second brushing pass within a single season, adding **unbudgeted maintenance costs**
- Dead tree management from both **Sudden Oak disease and fire snags** has become a perpetual annual burden with no dedicated funding stream
- **Flooding** is an emerging concern with implications for trail infrastructure integrity
- Wildfire damage creates remediation work but also forces **trail advisories that reduce visitation**, with downstream economic effects that are difficult to quantify
- **Geographic disparities** make equitable distribution of climate-related tourism investments structurally difficult: coastal communities and inland disinvested communities compete for resources with very different baseline capacities to absorb and leverage investment

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Opportunities:

- **Local skilled workers, contractors, and project managers** are available and could support the project
- Strong potential exists for **partnerships with community colleges, local hire programs, and local contractors**
- A **long-term workforce pipeline** could be built if sustained federal and/or state investment is secured
- **Many people moving to area** seek outdoor and nature-related jobs, creating a potential local talent pipeline
- **Significant job creation potential** exists if sustained funding becomes available
- **River Ambassadors provide crucial on-the-ground capacity** (visitor education, data collection, and safety compliance) serving as an effective extension of understaffed state park rangers
- **Workforce pipelines for trail building and fire break work exist** and could be strengthened with more focused investment
- **County plays an active role** filling gaps by identifying grants and writing on behalf of nonprofits that lack capacity
- **Local talent** for project construction and implementation exists; gaps are in recruitment and communications about opportunities, not in the people themselves
- A strong regional ethic of "home growing," **providing tools and pathways for people already in the region** rather than recruiting from outside
- **Non-linear workforce pathways** offer real potential: workers might spend six months on trail restoration, six months on wildfire mitigation, then launch their own business
- **Wraparound services and backbone support for seasonal employment**, including pre-arranged off-season work, could stabilize this workforce model
- Recent job postings for trail builders and guides received an **overwhelming response**, demonstrating strong interest
- **Targeted recruitment has worked**: a guide relocated from Alaska after researching Quincy; three others came from outside the area after attending events or reading about the region
- SBTS pays "house-buying wages" with benefit packages so **employees can participate in the local economy**, not just work in it
- **Second homeowners are being recruited as board members and major donors**, converting a community tension into a potential resource
- The **restaurant industry** offers a proven model for soft skills development through direct customer interaction and could serve as a template for workforce pipelines in the microtourism sector
- The trail project generates a **broad, sustained bell curve of economic activity** rather than a construction boom-and-bust: local businesses can build tours, shuttles, fly fishing guide services, and cultural experiences around the route
- The Sierra Nevada has one of the **highest densities of trail builders** in California and the United States; trail contractors actively seek purposeful work, with businesses ranging from hundreds of thousands to five million dollars in scale
- Many small businesses collectively produce **sustained economic activity** that stays within the community rather than extracting value outward
- **People are the region's greatest asset**, but capacity is its biggest weakness; the constraint is human time and bandwidth, not vision or creativity
- Trail maintenance represents a **significant workforce opportunity**, particularly for kinesthetic learners, with potential for year-round employment rather than seasonal work
- A partnership with College of the Siskiyous for **vocational training and certificates** in trail construction and maintenance is possible and could help young people establish themselves in the community
- Machine-built trails require **machine maintenance**, creating demand for specialized skills that could anchor a durable local workforce pipeline
- The goal is not job creation but job stabilization: existing businesses paying above minimum wage with healthcare benefits is the **meaningful measure of success**
- The region has a **decent applicant pool** when positions are posted, and the Bay Area recreation economy draws workers from outside the region
- **California Conservation Corps** trains workers from outside the Bay Area who then find local employment, functioning as an informal regional pipeline
- A **volunteer trail coordinator training program** is being developed that could create a clear pathway to paid positions
- Laborers can be trained and promoted to operator or planner roles; the **Santa Cruz trails ladder program** is a proven model worth replicating
- The existing **Travel Academy** program could be expanded to serve student and broader workforce audiences, providing a foundation to build from rather than starting from scratch
- Larger hotel chains provide **workforce training** that could be models for smaller businesses if structured incentives or requirements are put in place
- Requiring large organizations to **hire locally** could create more durable career pathways and keep wages circulating in the regional economy

Challenges:

- Funding for local contractors and project managers is **sporadic and inconsistent**
- The project is currently **limited to the planning and design** phase only
- Implementation must go through a **federal bid process**, raising concerns about whether local contractors can meet federal bidding requirements
- Local capacity exists but cannot be activated without **sustained investment**
- Rural areas **struggle to attract skilled workers**
- Forest Service hires seasonal workers but **not for recreation maintenance**
- The River Ambassadors program was initially funded by State Parks but **now has zero state funding**; the supporting **nonprofit is struggling to continue**, and Nevada County cannot fully fund a program on state property

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- Workforce pipelines in this sector resemble paths or trails rather than traditional career ladders, making them **harder to fund and institutionalize**
- State job **data collection fails to capture this type of employment**, leading to systematic underrepresentation in workforce planning and policy
- **Heavy reliance on volunteer organizations with MOUs** is unsustainable; the **Forest Service does not compensate these groups**, who must independently raise their own operating funds
- The current **workforce model cannot be maintained** at scale without dedicated, ongoing investment
- **Significant capacity gaps** exist in grant writing, management, and implementation across partners
- **Housing is the primary workforce constraint**: not expensive as ski resort communities, but critically limited in quantity
- The Greenville fire destroyed approximately 10% of the county's **housing stock**
- **Second home purchases** further lock up available housing, and the surrounding **national forest limits the ability to expand communities outward**
- A chicken-and-egg dynamic persists: **building community** requires people, but attracting people requires community
- **Dedicated Forest Service staff** on local districts, essential for project oversight, has become increasingly difficult to secure
- Too many **second homeowners** relative to full-time residents can destabilize community cohesion even as they bring economic resources
- **Soft skills** are the most significant workforce gap identified across all steering committee members
- **High turnover** is a persistent problem, with newly hired workers quickly departing for other opportunities
- **Generation Alpha** workers present new challenges, with reduced interpersonal skills attributed to digital-native behavior and constant phone use
- **Internship quality** has declined since COVID, with programs devolving into low-wage jobs rather than genuine pathways to management and career development
- The Sierra Nevada has talented people broadly, but the most significant capacity constraint is at the tribal level: **tribal administrative capacity is a slowdown**, not a hard roadblock, but it affects collaboration timelines
- The region sits at the intersection of large public land holdings and checkerboarded private ownership, **complicating workforce development and economic planning**
- **Large capital incursions are uncommon** in the Sierra Nevada, limiting the scale and consistency of workforce and income growth; private equity dynamics that drive percentage increases elsewhere do not apply in the same way here
- **Forest Service capacity issues and small city staff limitations** constrain the partners available to support project work
- Building complex trail infrastructure **without sustainable maintenance funding** risks creating liabilities the community cannot support -- a concern that shapes what should and should not be built
- Rural communities **lack the critical mass** to support new businesses without exceptional circumstances; existing businesses are struggling, not growing (The Fifth Season outdoor store has laid off staff, and the owners of Shasta Gravity Adventures sold their business to escape unsustainable working conditions while holding down full-time jobs simultaneously)
- Workforce development must accompany infrastructure development, but funding structures **rarely support both together**
- Young people are often **unaware** that trail work is a paid career
- Neither San Bernardino nor Riverside County offers **hospitality-focused training** through workforce development agencies, leaving a significant gap in the regional pipeline
- Temecula Valley wineries have been forced to close Tuesday and Wednesday (beyond the typical Monday closure) due to **insufficient staffing**, representing a direct and measurable economic impact from the workforce gap
- No clear pathways exist for local graduates to access **hospitality careers**, despite regional demand
- San Diego's **economy is sharply bifurcated** between high-paying R&D jobs requiring advanced degrees and lower-paying tourism and service jobs, with limited pathways connecting the two
- Tourism and recreation jobs are widely **perceived as temporary youth employment** rather than adult careers, despite many workers depending on them as long-term livelihoods, a misperception that shapes both policy and investment
- A significant portion of the service workforce lives in Tijuana and crosses the border daily to work in San Diego hotels at low wages, raising complex questions about **cross-border economic dynamics**
- Many border-crossing workers face **compounding barriers** including limited formal education, language gaps, and soft skills deficits that are not being addressed through current workforce programs

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Opportunities:

- **Strong agency partnerships**, particularly with U.S. Forest Service management, are fundamental to project advancement
- **Information sharing bodies** have been helpful to the project
- A **formal regional coordination body is not considered necessary** for this project type
- **Building relationships with federal partners** is incredibly important
- The region has a **strong and proven collaborative infrastructure**: the Recreation Coalition, South Yuba River Public Safety Cohort, Pines to Mines Alliance, a new Resilience Project with a governing board, and a quarterly park district conference serving five districts
- The **South Yuba River Safety Cohort** has operated for eight years, meets weekly during summer for coordinated communication, and has received CSAC award recognition
- **Nevada County plays a critical role as a neutral convener**, not an operator, allowing it to align multiple jurisdictions and land managers around shared priorities without overstepping
- The **CCC in eastern Nevada County** brings agencies and community members together effectively
- **Jobs First's** greatest contribution has been creating a container for people to meet who would not otherwise connect, generating new relationships, resources, and projects
- The **Arts Nature Trails** project itself emerged from collaborative discussions and is now being integrated with the Great Redwood Trail
- Rural regions have a strong desire for collaboration; stakeholders are willing to build **regional collaborative infrastructure** on a volunteer basis if necessary
- **Investment in collaboratives** as a standing regional function produces outsized value relative to cost
- SBTS operates under **master challenge cost-share agreements** with the Forest Service, providing a durable structural foundation for collaboration
- Long-lasting personal relationships with **trusted Forest Service staff** are currently the most effective tool for navigating policy barriers creatively
- The organization excels at **convening stakeholders** across cities, counties, and state and federal agencies, including challenging partners
- An emerging opportunity exists for **collaboration between recreation and forestry groups** that have not previously seen themselves as partners, a potential renaissance of ecological partnership modeled on historical Patagonia-era advocacy
- **Recreation crosses political boundaries** and is difficult to politicize, making it a strong platform for broad coalition building
- State-to-federal coordination around recreation and **recognition of recreation's role in rural economic development** is an area ripe for investment
- SBTS has strong administrative and grant-writing capacity; what's needed is **higher-level state-to-federal coordination**
- A tentative plan exists for Cal State Fullerton to assume **stewardship of the collaborative** beyond the grant period, providing an institutional home and long-term sustainability
- Research on 6,500 organizations across Orange County and the Inland Empire during the Great Recession found that all 29 organizations that succeeded during and after the recession cited **strategic partnerships and collaboration** as their top success factor, and all grew primarily on **earned income** rather than donated income
- Nationally, 73% of nonprofit revenue comes from earned income, yet organizations disproportionately focus fundraising efforts on donations, a **structural misalignment** this collaborative is positioned to address
- Strong committee membership enhances the **collaborative's credibility** and long-term sustainability prospects
- Stakeholder **motivations for participation** vary widely, reflecting the breadth of organizational interests the collaborative is able to engage
- **Cultural relationships with Indigenous tribes** on ancestral lands and multi-generational community members form the social and cultural foundation of the project, alongside its physical landscape
- **Relationships consistently accelerate projects**; no instances of relationships causing slowdowns have been observed
- True project roadblocks occur when a key stakeholder is not engaged until late in the process and then blocks progress; **early and ongoing inclusion is essential**
- ESSRP and Sierra Works regional working groups are cited as **helpful models of successful collaboration**
- **Working groups** must continue to receive funding: they are essential infrastructure for project advancement, not optional add-ons
- Collaboration and convening are essential connective tissue for rural communities and should be recognized and funded as **core project components**, not peripheral activities
- Grant programs should explicitly include **convening and coordination** as fundable line items
- All **collaborative relationships** are described as helpful; RTA works primarily with state parks, counties, and local government, with no federal land involvement currently
- The park's **nonprofit partner** funds 80 to 90 percent of Treoniale Annadelle work, demonstrating the leverage a strong nonprofit-agency partnership can provide
- A **practical division of labor** with Regional Parks Foundation (the Foundation purchases materials while RTA coordinates volunteers) maximizes what each partner does best
- **Private donors** in Napa write checks directly for trails in their neighborhoods on county land with master plan approval
- **Regional variation** in how trail work is organized offers useful comparative models: Marin uses in-house crews, Napa and Sonoma bid out work, and the East Bay is growing in-house capacity
- **Engaging outside tourism-only circles** (such as the Southern California Procurement Alliance's work around LA28) surfaces fresh thinking and has provided inspiration for symposium and project design
- The San Diego Arts Council **works closely** with the California Arts Council; a former co-convener's appointment to the state council strengthens the pipeline between regional and state arts infrastructure

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- The collaborative prioritized **activating existing stakeholders**, coalitions, and cultural districts rather than duplicating infrastructure
- **Technical assistance, grant writing training, and active introductions** between organizations were integral to the collaborative's model, improving proposal quality and building long-term organizational sustainability
- The **Prison Arts Project**, managed by SDSU and expanding statewide and nationally, demonstrates the region's capacity to develop high-impact collaborative programs with broad reach
- Encouraging **smaller organizations to team with larger partners** built long-term capacity while improving the competitiveness and impact of Catalyst investments

Challenges:

- Skilled NGO facilitators and expeditors have been essential for braiding state and federal funding together, but **ongoing capacity to hire and retain** them is needed
- Coordination requires significant ongoing time and facilitation capacity that is **not formally resourced**
- **No dedicated funding exists for collaboration** infrastructure, even though it functions as a core regional asset
- Decision-making authority is **distributed across many entities**, which can slow progress
- Collaboration is the region's greatest strength, but it is **treated as informal work** rather than funded infrastructure
- **Volunteer-run collaboratives** are prone to collapse over time due to participant exhaustion
- Rural regions have strong collaborative intent but lack the capacity to sustain coordination without **dedicated resourcing**
- No funded, durable regional body currently exists to **anchor ongoing collaboration**
- **Dismantling of Forest Service agency** (not individual staff) is the primary collaborative challenge; supervisor positions do not pay enough to attract and retain talent
- The state needs to maintain confidence that the federal government and Forest Service can follow through on **commitments to partners**
- Healthy, **well-staffed partner agencies** are essential; resources are narrowing in the short term, requiring increasingly strategic thinking about how to use partnerships
- **Higher-level state-to-federal coordination capacity** is needed but does not currently exist
- A **complex web of relationships** spans multiple land ownership types (National Park Service, Forest Service, BLM, State Parks, and private landowners) each with different timelines, priorities, and decision-making processes
- **Partners operating on different timelines** creates variable progress speed, though forward movement continues
- **Prevailing wage** requirements are inconsistently triggered depending on how money flows: private funds going directly to RTA avoid the requirement, but the same funds routed through a park nonprofit partner may trigger it, complicating project planning
- Potential expansion into **Lake County federal lands** is being deliberately deferred due to the additional regulatory complexity that federal land involvement introduces

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8

Branding & Marketing

Opportunities:

- The project is **straightforward to explain** to community members, funders, and government decision-makers
- **Project success could serve as a valuable tool** for future financing, advocacy, and building political support
- Investment in branding and marketing could **unlock financing and advocacy opportunities** beyond traditional marketing
- A **wayfinding signage project** is underway, with a digital outpost consolidating all existing maps under one QR-code-accessible platform
- A second **annual recreation fair** is in progress to build a shared regional narrative around stewardship ("Play hard, play lightly")
- Cultural districts, chamber marketing, and events organically generate **visitor awareness**
- Truckee benefits from Visit Tahoe Truckee, TBID dollars, and **professional DMO-led branding and marketing**
- The South Yuba Public River Safety Cohort has actively marketed **river safety messaging**
- A **clear identity is emerging** — Recreation Economy + Stewardship + Resilience — with strong potential as a financing and advocacy tool, not just a marketing message
- The region's asset density (redwoods, art, coast, rivers, wine, cannabis) enables visitors to have **multiple distinct experiences in a single day**; full brand vitality comes from this layering, not from any single asset
- The natural environment and small-town culture are effective tools for attracting **Bay Area investment**, philanthropy, and talent
- Brand messaging tied to natural assets can unlock **private sector and philanthropic funding** beyond traditional tourism marketing
- **Visit California** has been more active in the region over the past year and represents a relationship worth deepening
- Adopted the **"Lost Sierra" name** 20 years ago transforming an unknown corner of California into a recognized outdoor recreation destination over 15-20 years
- The organization has a **global membership of over 40,000 people** who signed up independently, and **strong media relationships** that consistently generate quality storytelling and visitor interest
- A San Francisco Chronicle outdoor writer is coming to cover the Connected Communities project, representing a significant **earned media** opportunity
- SBTS functions as the **de facto visitor bureau and chamber of commerce** for the region, with its brand serving as a financing and advocacy tool, not just a marketing vehicle
- **Engagement with Visit California** is growing, including a meeting last week
- The project brand has demonstrated that **reputation-building through consistent quality work** and storytelling over two decades can drive both visitation and investment
- Existing DMOs have indicated they **would support a county-level advocacy** organization (similar in model to CalTravel) as long as it does not function as a marketing organization competing with their city or district work
- A county-level advocacy body could provide a **unified voice for regional tourism** interests without threatening existing DMO contracts
- The **multi-benefit framing** of the plan (recreation as conservation, public health, economic development, and education simultaneously) represents a powerful potential narrative for funders and policymakers
- RTA has an **established brand identity** that is recognized and amplified by regional parks and foundation partners through newsletters and media coverage
- The organization's **nonprofit status** is actively used as a tool for financing, advocacy, and marketing
- A goal of reaching over 50% **public awareness** among park users is defined and achievable with additional investment
- **Cultural districts** provide effective micro-level branding; Barrio Logan's Chicano and Latino identity is a strong model for how distinct neighborhood brands can elevate specific arts and culture communities while contributing to a broader regional narrative
- San Diego functions as a **large county that feels like a collection of small towns**, with strong interpersonal networks that can be leveraged for grassroots brand-building and community storytelling
- **Chula Vista's Gaylord Hotel** represents an innovative approach to competing with downtown San Diego for conferences and events, diversifying the region's meeting and convention identity

Challenges:

- The project and region currently **lack a clear brand identity**, despite the region's existing reputation
- The project's story is **not being actively communicated** to key audiences
- **No investment in branding or marketing** has been made, despite its potential value as a financing and advocacy tool
- The **region currently lacks a comprehensive brand strategy** and has not invested in active marketing outreach
- The existing **website is passive**; the region is not attending fairs, running advertising, or telling its story proactively
- Messaging remains fragmented across agencies and partners, with **no unified narrative**
- Recreation is marketed for tourism but **not fully leveraged** as a policy and funding strategy
- As a rural county, capacity for aggressive branding and marketing is limited, and this **work consistently falls to the bottom of the priority list**
- The region's abundance of assets is also its branding challenge: **multiple narratives compete rather than reinforce each other**, and a single coherent elevator pitch does not yet exist
- **Some local officials are unaware that Visit California exists** as an organization, limiting the region's ability to leverage that relationship
- **Relationship-building with Visit California** needs to be more intentional and sustained
- Local chambers of commerce lack digital capacity with **no significant regional marketing** infrastructure outside of SBTS
- The region **falls between two Visit California areas** (Shasta Cascade and Gold Country), making it hard to surface as a destination the way clearly defined regions like the Eastern Sierra do

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- Building a **destination reputation takes time**; Downieville did not become an international destination overnight, and patience and sustained investment are required
- Orange County has nine city-level DMOs but **no county DMO**, leaving a significant gap in regional coordination and advocacy capacity
- Existing DMOs **strongly opposed the formation of a county DMO** during steering committee discussions, fearing it would threaten their city and business district contracts
- DMOs showed **limited interest in the collaborative overall**, viewing it as a potential interference with their existing work rather than a complement to it
- The **tourism industry's territorial nature** is a structural barrier to the regional collaboration this project requires
- The majority of park users are currently **unaware of RTA's work** despite strong project delivery and partner recognition
- **Newspapers** are declining in relevance as a media channel, and no clear replacement strategy for earned media has emerged
- Increased public presence requires funding that does not currently exist, creating a catch-22 where **visibility investment** competes with operational needs
- Big Bear is **perceived as a seasonal destination**, suppressing year-round hotel and Airbnb occupancy despite a robust off-season offering of hiking, skydiving, ziplining, and cultural events
- A state-level task force has been recommended to coordinate regional messaging when **weather events** affect destinations; low snowfall affecting ski resorts is a recurring example where uncoordinated messaging compounds the economic damage
- Regional branding remains heavily focused on coastal San Diego, leaving inland communities, East County, and culturally distinct neighborhoods **underrepresented** in the broader identity the region projects
- **Micro-level competition** between cities for tourism attention and dollars drives fragmented individual branding investments rather than a unified regional narrative
- Downtown San Diego's ongoing transition from office and workforce uses to residential raises questions about the **long-term character of the urban core** and what kind of tourism and retail environment it will support