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NGA Launches Outdoor Recreation Learning Network to Promote Economic Growth Through the Outdoor Industry

Collaboration to Enhance State Strategies on Conservation, Stewardship, Economic Development, Equity, Wellness

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH – The National Governors Association (NGA) today announced the launch of the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network to help governors and their staffs leverage their unique natural, cultural and historical resources to advance economic, workforce, health and environmental benefits.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates that the outdoors industry employed more than 4.5 million people nationally in 2016, and generated more than \$730 billion in economic impact.

NGA Solutions: The Center for Best Practices will partner with state outdoor recreation directors through the network to convene governors' office staffs and other state officials. Through peer-to-peer exchanges, the network will spotlight strategies states can use to advance outdoor recreation. It will focus on key issue areas, including conservation, stewardship, education, workforce training, economic development, infrastructure, public health, equity and wellness.

"Utah launched the first state outdoor recreation office in 2013 to focus on recreation management, support recreation businesses and ensure that our state's cherished natural assets can sustain economic growth for years to come," said Utah Governor Gary Herbert, who noted that outdoor recreation contributes \$12.3 billion to the Utah economy and employs more than 110,000 people.

Since Utah's action, more than a dozen states have created outdoor recreation offices. Additional states are creating task forces, councils or taking other steps to promote the outdoor recreation economy. The NGA Outdoor Recreation Learning Network is intended to help other states replicate Utah's success while tailoring it to their own circumstances and needs.

"From hunting to fishing to hiking and the many other activities in between, Maine people have been enjoying our vast natural resources for generations," said Maine Governor Janet Mills, whose state established an outdoor recreation office in October 2018. "Experiencing and protecting the outdoors is an integral part of our cultural heritage, it is who we are as a people, and it is a cornerstone of our state's economy. I am excited that Maine is joining the NGA's Outdoor Recreation Learning Network as we continue to promote our state's unparalleled recreational opportunities and support job creation and economic growth, particularly in rural Maine."

Governors launched the network at NGA's annual Summer Meeting, where state leaders share best practices and hear from experts in various fields. This year, the meeting is being held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from July 24-26. In addition to Gov. Herbert and Gov. Mills, participants included Oregon Governor Kate Brown, Vermont Governor Phil Scott, Montana Governor Steve Bullock, Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak and outdoor recreation directors from many states. The launch was held at the Natural History Museum of Utah's Rio Tinto Center at the University of Utah and included a guided walk in nearby Red Butte Garden featuring a narration by Dr. David Strayer of the University of Utah, a leading researcher in the cognitive benefits of outdoor recreation.

"This effort hearkens back to the founding of the organization," observed Nikki Guilford, NGA interim executive director and chief of staff. "In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt hosted the first meeting of the nation's governors at the White House to discuss conserving America's natural resources."

Following that inaugural meeting, governors decided to form an association through which they could come together to discuss mutual concerns and act collectively.

The founding sponsors of the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network include REI Co-op, the Outdoor Industry Association and the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable.

"At REI Co-op, we believe a life outdoors is a life well-lived. So, we applaud NGA's launch of the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network. And we're grateful to the dozen-plus states that have created offices of outdoor recreation, as well as to states considering them," said Eric Artz, REI's president and CEO. "There are tremendous opportunities for maximizing the social and economic benefits of time outdoors – whether that's improving stewardship, access, equity, youth development or health outcomes."

"We have seen states with offices of outdoor recreation take great steps forward promoting and bolstering outdoor recreation – bringing more jobs and revenue to rural and gateway communities and coordinating amongst government agencies while helping to get more children and families outside and into healthier lifestyles," said David Weinstein, state and local policy director for Outdoor Industry Association. "The Outdoor Recreation Learning Network will

be a great resource for existing outdoor recreation offices and for states looking to develop new offices to collaborate on and improve outdoor programs and initiatives – OIA looks forward to helping build it.”

“Outdoor recreation is a crucial part of America's economy, contributing 2.2 percent of the gross domestic product and growing faster than the economy as a whole,” said Jessica Wahl, president of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable. “ORR is proud to partner with the National Governors Association to launch the game-changing Outdoor Recreation Learning Network. This partnership will ensure that the outdoor recreation sector has the support it needs to continue to grow in states across the country, providing outdoor access for all, jobs, and health and quality-of life benefits for generations to come.”

For more information about the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network, see www.nga.org/outdoors.

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Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association (NGA) is the nonpartisan organization of the nation's 55 governors. Through NGA, governors share best practices, address issues of national and state interest and share innovative solutions that improve state government and support the principles of federalism.