



COLORADO
TOURISM OFFICE

Executive Summary: Colorado Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan

FISCAL YEAR 2025–2035



Acknowledgments

The development of a Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan for Colorado was a collective undertaking of more than 1,000 stakeholders throughout the state. The Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) expresses our profound appreciation to all individuals who played a pivotal role, including representatives from government agencies, destination management/marketing organizations (DMOs), the CTO Board of Directors, industry associations, tourism stakeholders, and Colorado residents. Through virtual meetings, in-person workshops, one-on-one interviews, and public surveys, you generously shared your expertise, perspectives, and vision, shaping a comprehensive strategy that reflects our collective aspirations for destination stewardship. Special recognition is extended to the members of the CTO's Destination Stewardship Council (DSC), whose guidance and leadership steered the process with wisdom and foresight.

Land Acknowledgment

In the spirit of healing and education, the Colorado Tourism Office acknowledges the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and the 51 contemporary tribes with historic ties to the land currently known as Colorado. We recognize and honor these Indigenous peoples as the original inhabitants of this land.

Introduction

Colorado, renowned for its natural wonders, vibrant cultural scene, and diverse communities, welcomed 93.3 million visitors from around the globe in 2023.* As stewards of the tourism industry, the CTO launched a destination stewardship strategic planning initiative to prioritize and advance a sustainable future for Colorado. This plan aims to balance the goals of welcoming visitors while preserving Colorado's resources and enhancing the quality of life for residents, making tourism a force for good.

The CTO, a division of the Governor's Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT), is aligned with OEDIT's mission to empower all to thrive in Colorado's economy. The CTO's vision is to inspire the world to explore Colorado responsibly and respectfully. This is achieved through statewide collaboration with DMOs, tourism partners, local communities, and private businesses. As the nation's first state tourism office with a Destination Stewardship department, the creation of a statewide strategic plan and eight regional plans was essential to identify and align opportunities.



* [Longwoods International. Travel USA Visitor Profile. 2023.](#)

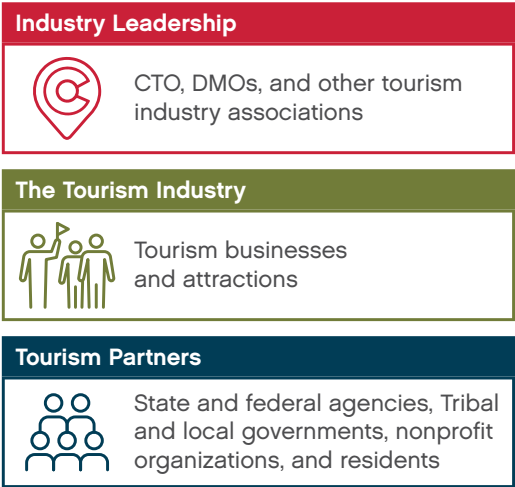
Tourism businesses and attractions (collectively referred to as the “tourism industry”) play a crucial role in promoting destination stewardship principles. Through direct engagement with visitors, the industry can educate travelers on preserving natural landscapes, respecting local cultures, and supporting sustainable practices. By drawing inspiration from and leveraging the strategies in this plan, Colorado’s tourism industry can transform tourists into stewards while pursuing other strategies alongside industry leadership that reflect their specific needs and ambitions.

Why Is This Plan Needed?

Many of Colorado’s tourism destinations face critical challenges due to rising visitation and climate change, necessitating strategic action. An increase in tourists, while beneficial for the economy, can exert pressure on the environment, leading to habitat degradation, pollution, and resource depletion. Additionally, the influx of visitors in some areas is intensifying traffic congestion and affecting the overall quality of life for residents. Rising global temperatures are reducing Colorado’s snowpack, shortening the ski season, and impacting other forms of winter tourism and recreation. Recognizing these complexities, the CTO and its partners across the state are working to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism while continuing to strengthen the tourism economy. This plan serves as a roadmap for our collective destination stewardship efforts, guiding the tourism industry toward a sustainable future.

Who Is This Plan For?

The Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan is a comprehensive roadmap for industry leadership, the tourism industry, and tourism partners to address shared priorities over the next 10 years. It provides guidance for stakeholders and residents on fulfilling stewardship roles within their communities. Recognizing that destination stewardship involves many interconnected efforts, this plan emphasizes the importance of collaboration and public-private partnerships to align initiatives across multiple agencies, organizations, and communities.



Planning Process

The planning process was highly collaborative, offering stakeholders multiple opportunities to provide input. More than 1,000 individuals were engaged throughout the process, contributing more than 2,500 unique insights and perspectives to shape the strategies. From July 2023 through June 2024, stakeholders and communities contributed to the development of the plan through webinars, workshops, one-on-one interviews, surveys, and public reviews of drafts.

Plan Overview

The plan is comprehensive and reflective of tourism’s influence on numerous facets of the visitor and resident experience. It presents 118 community-led strategies organized into 14 sections across two focus areas for achieving the vision for destination stewardship success. Strategies are divided into these focus areas to leverage the critical role of industry leadership in advancing destination stewardship and sustainability while enhancing collaboration across major tourism resources.

Vision Statement

Throughout the planning process, stakeholders were asked when they would consider Colorado's destination stewardship efforts to be successful. The hundreds of responses received were wide-ranging and inspiring, leading the CTO to craft the following vision statement that captures collective aspirations from across the state:

Destination stewardship in Colorado is a success when:

- **Our tourism resources and experiences are protected**
- **Our residents benefit from and support the tourism industry**

This vision reflects the multifaceted nature of destination stewardship, balancing environmental and economic sustainability with community engagement and visitor satisfaction. It emphasizes collective responsibility and prioritizes the needs of Colorado's communities, natural resources, and cultural landscapes.

The Strategies

FOCUS AREA 1 - Industry Leadership and Support for Destination Stewardship

The first focus area highlights the pivotal role of the CTO and DMOs across the state in advancing destination stewardship. This section begins with Foundational Strategies that destination leaders should implement before engaging travelers in destination stewardship efforts. With these fundamentals established, consumer-focused strategies are structured around three phases of the traveler buying cycle.

- Dreaming and Seeking Inspiration
- Planning and Booking
- Experiencing the Destination



Foundational Strategies - Those necessary for destination leadership to have in place prior to engaging travelers in destination stewardship efforts.

1. Identify Internal Resources for Destination Stewardship
2. Strengthen Local Coalitions for Effective Destination Stewardship
3. Identify Resources to Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Initiatives
4. Elevate Destination Stewardship Efforts
5. Encourage Adoption of Green Business Practices
6. Support Local Tourism Destinations and Attractions to Advance Destination Stewardship



Traveler Buying Cycle Strategies



Dreaming and Seeking Inspiration - This phase centers on capturing the attention of potential travelers through engaging digital media and compelling narratives, thoughtfully crafted by the CTO and DMOs to inspire visitation.

1. Prioritize Stewardship in Conjunction with the Colorado Brand
2. Target Visitors who Share Colorado's Stewardship Values
3. Increase Awareness and Promotion of Colorado as an Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Destination



Planning and Booking - Combines the phase where travelers start outlining trip details with the booking phase when they finalize itineraries and make travel arrangements for destinations, activities, and accommodations.

1. Encourage Travelers to *Do Colorado Right* Before Arrival
2. Develop and Amplify Local *Do Colorado Right* Campaigns and Messaging
3. Recognize Businesses and Sustainable Destinations with a Commitment to Destination Stewardship



Experiencing the Destination - Covers the travel and on-site experience, emphasizing the importance of engaging travelers with stewardship principles while they are in the destination.

1. Integrate the Practice of Land Acknowledgments into Various Touchpoints
2. Optimize *Do Colorado Right* Messaging at Points of Market Entry
3. Amplify *Do Colorado Right* Messaging for Colorado Residents
4. Educate Children on the Importance of Destination Stewardship
5. Influence Visitor Behavior at Key Locations
6. Encourage Support for Stewardship Among Travelers



FOCUS AREA 2 - Shared Stewardship of Tourism Resources

While some aspects of destination stewardship extend beyond the direct scope of the CTO and DMOs, discussions with various agencies and experts identified existing programs in Colorado that align with common priorities. By collaborating with these entities, the tourism industry can strengthen its efforts, address challenges, and promote the sustainability of the state's resources. The second focus area of the plan is organized around 10 essential shared tourism resources that are the foundation of Colorado's tourism industry (listed in no particular order):

Strategies



Communities - The towns and cities that offer their own unique charm, cultural heritage, and natural beauty for visitors and residents.

1. Prioritize Local Community Involvement in Tourism Planning
2. Increase Knowledge of the Value of Tourism for Residents
3. Create Vibrant and Welcoming Public Spaces
4. Encourage Responsible Visitation in our Communities
5. Strengthen Understanding and Communication Surrounding Short-Term Rentals
6. Promote Responsible Trail Connectivity
7. Advance Litter Prevention and Zero Waste Practices
8. Enhance Water Conservation and Quality Initiatives
9. Promote Dark Sky Preservation and Experiences
10. Increase Public Restroom Accessibility



Outdoor Recreation - Activities such as hiking, camping, cycling, rafting, skiing, snowboarding, hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing that attract adventurers and nature enthusiasts from around the world.

1. Expand *Do Colorado Right* Campaigns on Public Lands
2. Facilitate and Convene Collaborative Outdoor Management Discussions
3. Identify the Need for Timed Entry Permit Systems and Seasonal Closures
4. Enhance Recreation Site Assessment Efforts
5. Develop and Distribute Recreation and Trail Guides
6. Expand Trail Ambassador and Volunteer Initiatives
7. Promote Guided Recreation Opportunities
8. Enhance Destination Stewardship through Strategic Partnerships with the Private Sector
9. Foster Inclusive Outdoor Experiences
10. Provide Education on Responsible Backcountry Vehicle Use



Wildlife and Biodiversity - The diverse ecosystems and species that provide enriching tourism experiences while contributing to the long-term health and vitality of our planet.

1. Promote and Facilitate Guided Wildlife Viewing
2. Create Wildlife Viewing Brochures and Encourage Ethical Viewing
3. Reduce Human-Wildlife Conflicts
4. Champion Wildlife Habitat Protection and Restoration
5. Promote Pollinator District Initiatives
6. Enhance Wildlife Monitoring Efforts
7. Collaborate with Hunting and Fishing Communities to Promote Sustainable Practices
8. Implement Wildlife Conservation Education for Tourism Professionals
9. Safeguard Wildlife by Encouraging Mindful Driving
10. Champion Nature-Positive Tourism



Cultural Heritage - The shared customs, traditions, beliefs, values, practices, arts, and artifacts passed down through generations.

1. Foster Inclusive Cultural Heritage Partnerships
2. Elevate Native American Heritage
3. Promote Ethical Native American Handcrafts
4. Enhance Awareness of Diverse Cultural Heritage
5. Develop Immersive Cultural Heritage Experiences
6. Create Themed Cultural Heritage Trails and Audio Tours
7. Conduct Historic Surveys for National and State Recognition
8. Facilitate Access to Historic Preservation Grants
9. Strengthen Museum Involvement in Tourism
10. Highlight Colorado's Agricultural and Culinary Heritage



Arts and Creative Industries - The visual and performing arts, music, film, design, literature, crafts, digital media, and other creative endeavors that offer diverse attractions and celebrate the state's cultural identity.

1. Foster Partnerships with Local Artists
2. Boost Art Venues through Grant Programs
3. Promote Diverse Arts through Festivals and Events
4. Cultivate Artistic Approaches to Stewardship Challenges
5. Promote Creative Venues and Galleries to Visitors
6. Amplify Local Artisan Markets
7. Elevate Colorado's Music Scene
8. Create Interactive Artistic Experiences
9. Develop and Promote Community Arts Guides
10. Integrate Art into Outdoor Recreation



Local Tourism Businesses and Organizations - Hotels, restaurants, transportation providers, breweries, shops, and other entities that provide essential services, enrich visitor experiences, and drive economic growth within the community.

1. Provide Support to Rural Tourism Organizations
2. Strengthen Destination Management/Marketing Organizations Across the State
3. Empower Tourism Entrepreneurs
4. Provide Technical Assistance and Disaster Relief to Tourism Businesses
5. Support Minority Tourism Entrepreneurs
6. Promote Employee Ownership for Tourism Entrepreneurs
7. Support Cannabis Entrepreneurs in Tourism
8. Attract Film and Television Shoots to Colorado's Tourism Destinations
9. Champion the Value of Tourism
10. Bolster Tribal Tourism through Strategic Partnerships



Transportation - The network of airports, highways, buses, trains, and other infrastructure that ensure connectivity throughout the state.

1. Increase Availability of Eco-Friendly Transit Methods
2. Develop Comprehensive Transportation Connections
3. Raise Awareness and Ridership of Bustang, Snowstang, and Pegasus Services
4. Encourage Rail Travel for Visitors
5. Upgrade Pedestrian and Bike Pathways
6. Promote Carpooling for Tourism
7. Implement and Incentivize Congestion Reduction Measures
8. Create Parking Solutions
9. Prioritize Inclusive Transportation Accessibility
10. Expand Electric Vehicle Infrastructure



Agriculture, Food, and Liquid Arts - The intersection of agriculture and tourism through restaurants, breweries, wineries, cideries, agritourism experiences, and agricultural products that highlight the state's food and beverage industry.

1. Safeguard and Celebrate Culinary Traditions
2. Promote Colorado as a Culinary Destination
3. Engage Culinary Experts for Global Exposure
4. Support Culinary Festivals and Events
5. Create Immersive Culinary Tourism Itineraries
6. Advance the Development of Agritourism
7. Enhance Agritourism Signage and Routes
8. Promote Agritourism Offerings
9. Elevate Local Agricultural Products
10. Broaden MICHELIN Guide Partnerships Statewide



Tourism Workforce - The professionals whose dedication and expertise provide a welcoming destination, shape positive visitor experiences and can influence responsible behavior.

1. Develop Industry-Focused Workforce Strategies
2. Strengthen Industry Collaboration with the Colorado Community College System
3. Share Solutions to Support Workforce Housing Challenges
4. Implement Employer-Assisted Housing Programs
5. Promote Workforce Diversity and Inclusion
6. Foster Career Advancement in Tourism
7. Enhance Recognition for Tourism Professionals
8. Promote and Integrate Tourism Career Education in Schools
9. Build the Brand of Working in Tourism
10. Support Professional Development and Networking Events in the Industry



Climate - The weather and atmospheric conditions crucial for preserving biodiversity, ensuring sustainable ecosystems, and protecting the well-being of current and future generations.

1. Encourage Sustainable Tourism Business Practices
2. Advance Sustainable Aviation Initiatives
3. Support Renewable Energy in the Tourism Sector
4. Transition Tourism Fleets and Public Shuttles to Clean Energy
5. Promote Electric Off-Highway Vehicles
6. Expand and Promote Electromobility Options for Visitors
7. Encourage Diverse, Climate-Adaptive Tourism Offerings
8. Champion Natural Habitat Restoration
9. Facilitate the Creation of Destination-Specific Climate Action Plans
10. Encourage Climate Impact Mitigation and Reporting



Regional Destination Stewardship Strategic Plans

As we lay the foundation for statewide destination stewardship, it is important to acknowledge the diverse travel regions and communities in Colorado. In parallel to the Statewide Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan, eight regional plans were created for each of the state's travel regions. These plans were crafted with input from tourism and community leaders who utilized the planning process to identify and prioritize the most pressing issues and opportunities in their areas.

Implementation and Coordination Plan

Implementing the Colorado Statewide Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan is a substantial endeavor, involving the coordination of numerous state and federal agencies along with a vast network of dedicated tourism industry partners. To effectively execute this ambitious plan, securing solid commitments from these organizations and leveraging existing funding opportunities will be essential.

Central to this initiative is the indispensable leadership of the Destination Stewardship Council (DSC). Comprising industry leaders, the DSC has been instrumental in shaping the strategic direction outlined in the plan. Moving forward, the DSC will serve as the implementation steering committee, convening regularly to facilitate ongoing dialogue on destination stewardship. These meetings will provide a platform to review progress, adjust strategies as needed, and foster collaboration essential to achieving our goals.

An annual report and online dashboard will serve as resources to evaluate progress against key indicators and celebrate achievements, demonstrating the collective impact of our efforts in advancing destination stewardship throughout Colorado.

Looking Ahead

The Colorado tourism industry is committed to protecting and enhancing our state for present and future generations. By embracing this responsibility, we are working toward a shared vision where destination stewardship is central to our tourism industry and community life. Through collaboration, innovation, and dedication, we aim to leave a lasting legacy for all who call Colorado home and those who are drawn to its stunning landscapes and rich heritage.

We commend the pioneers who have already initiated local destination stewardship plans tailored to their communities. These independent efforts reflect the foresight and dedication of local leaders and stakeholders, deserving our collective admiration and support.

Communities that have not yet begun their destination stewardship planning are encouraged to draw inspiration from the statewide framework and regional plans to pursue strategies that meet their specific needs and ambitions. For those already engaged, we hope the statewide and regional plans reinforce your efforts, providing additional resources, insights, and opportunities for collaboration. By sharing experiences and learning from one another, we can foster a statewide culture of destination stewardship that honors our diverse landscapes and cultures, enriches our communities, and secures a sustainable future for Colorado.

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