

# Leading the way toward statewide destination stewardship

A roadmap for the future

**ARIZONA**  
OFFICE OF TOURISM

Dear partners,

As we look to the future of tourism across the state of Arizona, we recognize the value of our state's beautiful and wonder-filled destinations and the need to be better stewards.

Arizona's destinations have always been a draw for individuals seeking outdoor adventure and beauty, but many of the state's outdoor recreation areas were met with record visitation and overuse during the pandemic. Left unchecked, unintentional negative impacts can affect residents and visitors alike. We are taking up and encouraging a new level of responsibility for our state's destination stewardship - expanding our focus beyond record-breaking visitation, and the economic impacts of travel and tourism.

Building upon our three-year strategic plan, we've drafted this stewardship roadmap for the Arizona tourism industry. We've focused our efforts on the next five years and beyond. While the Arizona Office of Tourism will act as the convener of the tactics, it is our hope that this will continue to build and grow with collaboration from stakeholders at the local, state and national levels.

Our work as the destination marketing leader for the state reaches beyond our industry. In order to ensure the future of Arizona as a world-renowned travel destination, we look forward to working together on a proactive approach to destination stewardship that supports visitors and residents alike.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Debbie Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Debbie" and the last name "Johnson" clearly distinguishable.

Debbie Johnson  
Director  
Arizona Office of Tourism



# What is Destination Stewardship?

Destination leaders and their organizations across the country and around the world are embracing a new level of responsibility—one driven by a higher calling than occupancy rates, visitor volume and economic development. The impact of destination marketing extends far beyond the confines of hotels and attractions. Our collective work and the decisions we make as an industry impacts resident quality of life and our natural and cultural resources. The recognition of this new level of responsibility is defined as **destination stewardship**.

For our purposes, the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) defines destination stewardship as a value system that embodies the ethics of sustainable tourism, responsible marketing, and economic development.

Digging deeper, destination stewardship should:

- Maximize sustainable options to protect **environmental** resources that constitute a key element in tourism products and development, maintain essential ecological processes and conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, proactively seek out industry-related feedback from stakeholders and destination residents, provide **socioeconomic** benefits including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contribute to poverty alleviation.
- Respect the **cultural authenticity** of our communities, conserve their established and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and acceptance.

A 2017 McKinsey/World Travel & Tourism report describes some of the unintentional negative impacts that driving more visitors to a destination can have, including, but not limited to:

- Alienated residents
- Degraded visitor experience
- Overloaded infrastructure
- Damage to nature and natural resources
- Threats to culture and heritage

Clearly, the stakes are high. The good news is that a destination stewardship approach is being embraced by the travel and tourism industry. As we contemplate our future trajectory in destination stewardship it's important to keep in mind that global tourism expanding, dynamics like the COVID-19 pandemic can happen, and consumer demand for sustainability is increasing. After what our industry experienced over the last few years, it's clear that we are more interconnected than ever and need to take proactive steps to lead our industry with that understanding.

# What is the Destination Stewardship Roadmap?

This document serves as a **Destination Stewardship Roadmap** for AOT. It establishes a framework that the agency can build out over time to lead Arizona's travel and tourism industry in advocating for and protecting the issues associated with sustainable tourism: environment, socioeconomics, and cultural authenticity. It will also be utilized to help frame future decisions, conversations, and coalitions to positively impact the future of Arizona as a destination.

Working with the Coraggio Group, AOT asked industry stakeholders about the top areas of emphasis they believe are most important for the long-term success of the industry. The top two areas were:

- Ensuring that Arizona's natural resources are used responsibly and cared for by locals and visitors alike.
- Respecting the history, natural beauty, and unique culture of every community.

Industry stakeholders were asked about the top threats or challenges facing Arizona as a destination. The following were listed in the top threats:

- Climate Change and Natural Disasters
- Workforce Housing
- Insufficient Public Infrastructure
- Limited Transportation Options

The Planning Team then explored possible stewardship principles organized around the concepts and management of environment, socioeconomics, and cultural authenticity.

The principles below capture the distilled thinking of the Planning Team as it provides a Destination Stewardship Roadmap for Arizona.

## Destination Stewardship Principles

We believe we have a role to play as stewards of Arizona as a destination. This means actively seeking input and engaging stakeholders, including residents and visitors, and bringing the tourism industry together around a shared vision for the future that will inform and guide our decisions and actions.

Tourism-related strategies we implement should:



**Create meaningful experiences** that honor the unique history, traditions, and heritage of every Arizona community.



**Care for Arizona's natural beauty** by actively protecting its natural resources and building infrastructure.



**Ensure tourism's critical role** in sustaining a thriving Arizona economy by balancing visitation equitably across rural and urban areas while respecting short-term economic needs without undermining the long-term potential of Arizona's communities.

# AOT's Destination Stewardship Initiatives

AOT believes Destination Stewardship is a topic that requires more attention than ever to ensure Arizona tourism remains a viable economic engine for all Arizonans. Further, we believe the long-term success of our state's tourism industry depends in large part on our collective willingness to accept a greater responsibility to become active stewards of our destination. In doing so we will ensure Arizona remains a vibrant destination for visitors and a desirable place for residents to call home for generations to come.

AOT's current strategic stewardship initiatives include:

- **Responsible Destination Marketing:** AOT's marketing programs (Consumer Advertising, Trade Relations, and Media Relations) strive to develop and implement responsible destination marketing tactics, such as a community's seasonality, to ensure we are meeting the needs of statewide partners.
- **AppreciateAZ:** AOT built AppreciateAZ as its responsible outdoor recreation and sustainable tourism brand to ensure visitors and residents are equipped with the knowledge and skills to protect our state's iconic natural features for current and future generations.
- **Cultural and Heritage Marketing Integration:** AOT incorporates Arizona's culture and heritage and promotes through various marketing channels and programs.





## AOT's Destination Stewardship Roadmap Timeline

**2022**

Establish an Arizona Destination Stewardship Task Force composed of state agency members and industry-related representatives with an interest in destination stewardship.

AOT to look internally for ways to increase stewardship opportunities (environmental, socioeconomics, cultural authenticity) in partnerships and grant programs.

Develop and/or incorporate an AOT marketing campaign using Arizona Destination Stewardship principles.

Add new key performance indicators in AOT's Strategic Plan that specifically identify stewardship-oriented impacts.

**2023**

Begin intentional discussions at high-level industry and state government meetings, with the goal of establishing awareness of the economic impact and importance of destination stewardship.

Incorporate specific Destination Stewardship learning tracks at the Governor's Conference on Tourism and include a keynote speaker who is a Sustainable Tourism/Destination Stewardship expert.

**2024**

Expand the Arizona Destination Stewardship Task Force to include federal agencies and local communities with a strong interest in stewardship.

Request the Arizona Destination Stewardship Task Force to create a statewide Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan.

**2025**

In partnership with the Governor, release the statewide Destination Stewardship Strategic Plan and promote it as a priority for Arizona's economy.

Hold an industry Stewardship Summit that is organized entirely around education and dialogue on the topic of stewardship.

**2026  
and beyond**

Implement a PR campaign to showcase Arizona communities that are embracing AOT's Stewardship Principles as guidance for how they lead and promote their destinations.

Implement a policy that all grant-seeking destinations must show evidence of embracing stated destination stewardship principles in their work and related impacts.

