

JANUARY 2024



Sustainability Program



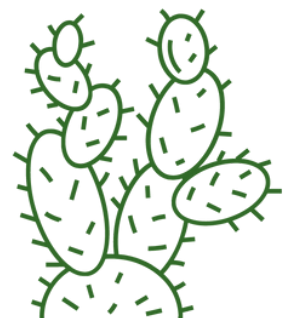
Recommendation by

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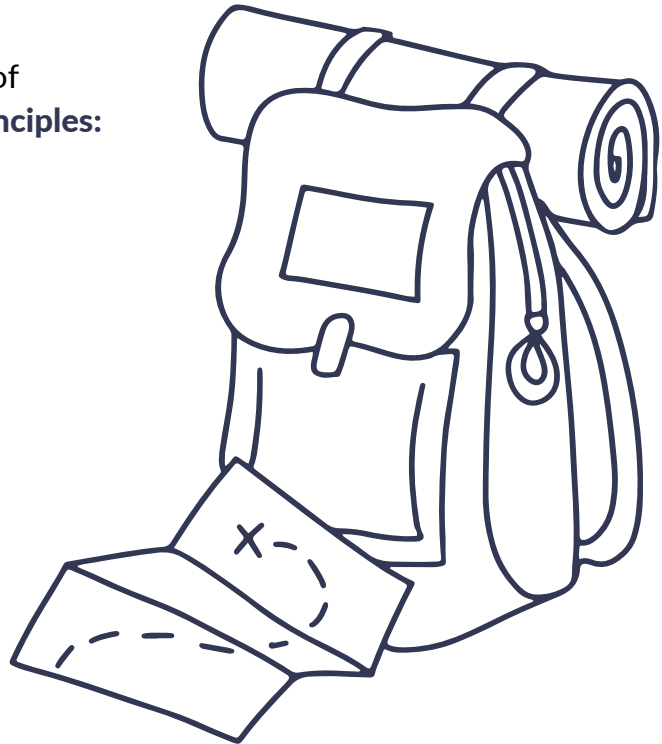
Overview

The Foundation

In 2020, the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) partnered with the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics to create statewide messaging for responsible non-motorized outdoor recreation.

This collaboration led to the creation of **AppreciateAZ's 7 Leave No Trace Principles:**

1. **Plan Ahead & Prepare**
2. **Stick to Trails**
3. **Trash Your Trash**
4. **Leave What You Find**
5. **Be Careful with Fire**
6. **Respect Wildlife**
7. **Share the Outdoors**



Program Feedback

The AppreciateAZ Leave No Trace program had positive feedback statewide. Especially, as the stunning natural resources of Arizona were at risk of being loved to death. As outlined in the [2023 Arizona Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\)](#).

Our outdoor recreation spaces provided an important means to relieve stress and remain active during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although there was less travel overall to Arizona in 2020, the percentage of trips specifically to spend time outdoors increased from 8% in 2019 to 13% in 2020. Outdoor recreation areas continue to feel the impacts of increased visitor and resident awareness from the pandemic.

Since then, the love of Arizona's natural spaces has only grown. In fact, Arizona is the sixth most-visited state for outdoor recreation. National Parks within Arizona have seen a 28% increase in visitation since 2020. More than half (54%) of Arizona's domestic visitors participate in outdoor activities on their trips, which is significantly higher than the national average (42% of domestic trips).



Tread Lightly!

Beyond the partnership with Leave No Trace, AOT recently expanded its efforts by collaborating with Arizona State Parks & Trails to partner with the leading motorized responsible outdoor recreation organization, Tread Lightly!. Together AOT, State Parks, and Tread Lightly! will draft statewide motorized messaging under the AppreciateAZ umbrella. This messaging is coming at a critical time, as the sale of Arizona Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) decals has increased by 88% since 2020.

Trends

But the love of majestic outdoor spaces is not the only trend in this post-pandemic world. According to a study by Expedia Group, 90% of consumers look for sustainable options when traveling. When it comes to sustainability, there is a lot of confusion, mixed messaging, and lack of understanding globally. However, the most recognized definition internationally is by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO):

Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.

To address this issue, specifically within the tourism industry, in 2007 a coalition of 32 partners, including the United Nations, worked to establish global standards for sustainable tourism. This led to the creation of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), a non-profit whose mission is to:

To be an agent of change in the world of sustainable travel and tourism by fostering the increased knowledge, understanding, adoption and demand for sustainable tourism practices.



AOT knew that they could not and should not undertake this work on their own. That is why in 2020, AOT joined GSTC as a destination member. This membership has brought global partnerships, connections with experts, recognition, and educational opportunities. As an active member, AOT has had multiple staff serve on the Destination Stewardship Working Group, attended their annual conference, and recently had the founding member Dr. Kelly Bricker as a speaker at the annual Governor's Conference on Tourism.



True sustainability efforts must be deeply rooted throughout all that the organization does. It must be a core value that is included in the organization's mission and vision. This holds true for AOT as can be seen in its mission and vision below.

Mission

We stabilize and strengthen local economies, protect environmental and cultural resources, create a meaningful visitor experience and enhance the quality of life for Arizonans through tourism collaboration, promotion and development.

Vision

Create an Arizona experience that captures and nurtures the hearts and minds of people who call it home and travelers the world over in search of extraordinary adventure and natural wonders.

It also starts internally by staff which is why members of the AppreciateAZ team created the [Responsible Tourism 101 Toolkit](#) (to be updated).

Another example of AOT's sustainability efforts can be found in the guidelines that were drafted for the [Visit Arizona Initiative Grant Program](#), specifically within the [Outdoor Recreation Revitalization Grant](#) and the [Legacy Golf Course Revitalization Grant](#). These two grant programs have provided funding for imaginative efforts that protect and preserve the outdoor spaces and lower water use in golf courses.





But AOT did not stop there. In 2022, they created a Stewardship Roadmap to help guide statewide efforts for the next 5 years. This roadmap outlines three strategies to ensure efforts lead to proper stewardship.



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.



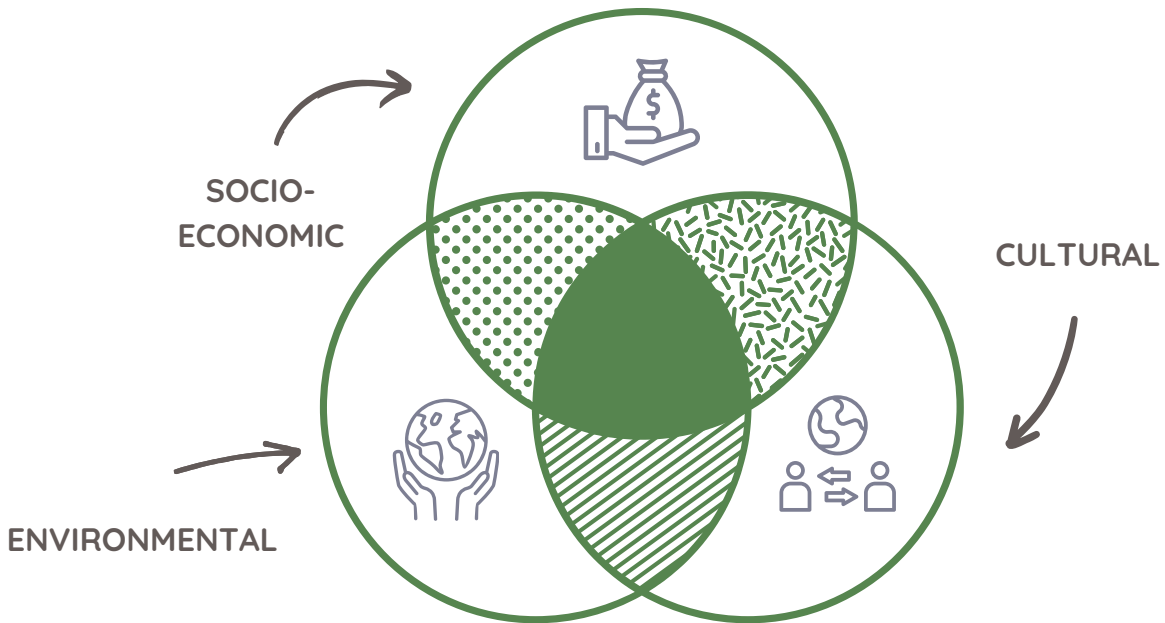
Ensure tourism's critical role in sustaining a thriving Arizona economy by balancing visitation equitably across rural and urban areas while respecting short-term economic needs without undermining the long-term potential of Arizona's communities.

With the foundation in place, AOT now knows that they must look towards the future and ways to expand their efforts.



Guiding Principles

Foundation will be critical as Arizona begins growing and expanding its efforts. To assist in directing these endeavors, a series of guiding principles will connect the historical efforts to actions that will lead to a stronger Arizona Tourism future.



Sustainable Tourism Definition

Tourism that stabilizes and strengthens Arizona's local economies, protects environmental and cultural resources, creates a meaningful visitor experience, and enhances the quality of life for Arizonans.

Pillars of Sustainability



#1 – Responsible Behavior Communications

The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics has done extensive research on messaging and how it changes behavior. They shared their findings with the AOT team as both organizations worked to build out AppreciateAZ, AOT’s responsible outdoor recreation and sustainable tourism brand. To empower change, all expanded messaging will be:

- Positive and free of shame
- Simple and concise
- Unified and consistent

Arizona is a diverse and expansive state. While research guides the AOT’s efforts, research does have its limitations. Quantitative data (measure based) and qualitative data (interpretation based) are essential. Oftentimes qualitative data gives clarity and understanding to the quantitative data. This is one of the reasons stakeholder engagement is critical for sustainable efforts, especially when dealing with a geographical area as large as the state of Arizona.



#2 – Stakeholder Engagement



Diversity of stakeholders engaged ensures that all voices are heard. Stakeholders should include individuals from all listed segments and spanning various geographical areas of the state. Individuals chosen should be actively engaged and able to provide honest constructive feedback.

Pillars of Sustainability

To truly enhance the quality and sustainability of tourism to the state of Arizona, it will take a multi-tiered effort, including the education and training of the various entities within the tourism industry.

Education should be led in the same manner as responsible behavior messaging:

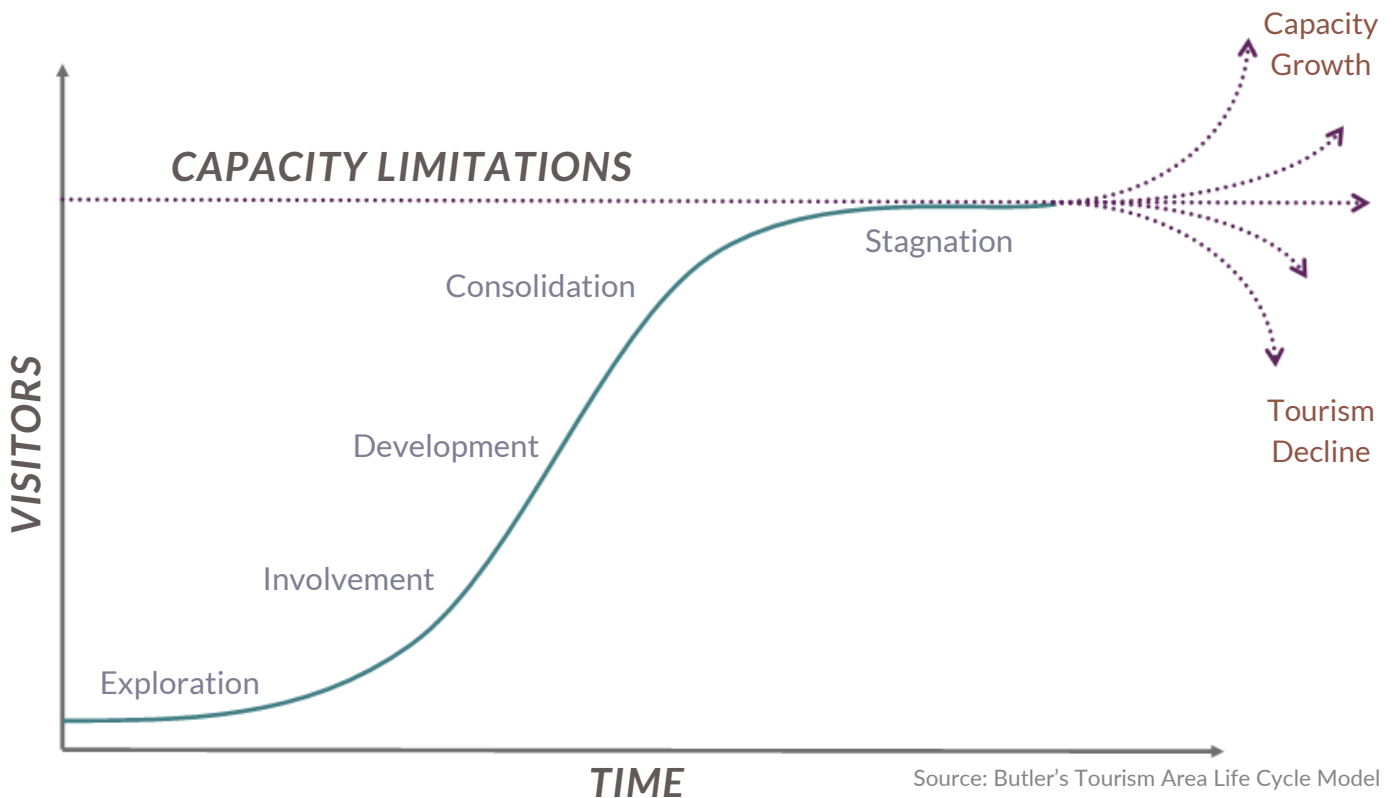
- Positive and free of shame
- Simple and concise
- Unified and consistent



#3 – Industry Education & Training

Given the diverse needs of the state, education should meet the partner where they are. Community led tourism helps lead to not only a more sustainable product but a better experience for the visitor.

Current destination needs can be identified by utilizing Professor Richard Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle (see below). Destination Stewardship education and efforts should be aligned with the community’s current location along the life cycle.



Source: Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle Model

Pillars of Sustainability



#4 – Steer Sustainable Tourism Statewide Efforts

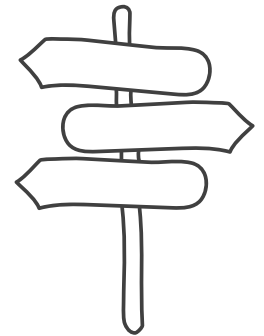
Community led efforts aligning together to create a statewide overarching goal will not only protect the stunning assets of Arizona but will also enhance the overall tourism product. Visitors are rarely aware of borders. Meaning that a tourist will often not realize they are in a different city or managed public land during their trip. Consistent statewide messaging and efforts will ensure that the entire tourist experience is striving towards sustainability.

While many Arizona tourism products vary throughout the state, a lot can be learned by going through the process together. Collaboration between competitors can help each entity learn and grow. Through the state's efforts, opportunity for education through collaboration will be a direct result of this work.



Vision

Where Are We Going



PILLAR #1 Responsible Behavior Communications

Statewide holistic responsible communication packages that encompass multiple elements within the visitor experience. Each package would serve a different purpose for the relevant partner. This can include anything from how to be water-wise, outdoor recreation, shopping locally, etc. Communications should be available for personalization by partners to ensure that visitors receive tailored adaptations of the same message.



PILLAR #2 Stakeholder Engagement

Strengthen State Agency Collaboration: The tourist experience is interwoven into various elements of a destination. The entire tourism experience can impact everything from roads, businesses, waste production, water use, etc. Due to this, AOT has a track record of deep engagement with multiple State Agencies. There is an opportunity to expand and include more in this effort.

Regional Destination Stewardship Councils: Following AOT's already established regions, Destination Stewardship Councils will be created for each region to assist in connecting communities to the State. Councils will include individuals from all spokes of the stakeholder wheel (see pg. 9). Stakeholders will help guide and assist with various efforts, including the creation of a Statewide Sustainable Tourism Comprehensive Plan.



PILLAR #3 Industry Education & Training

Create a Destination Management Program where partners throughout the state can join to receive training, destination assessments, strategy planning assistance, product development and more. Membership costs will be run similar to the Arizona Visitor Information Center (AVIC) program where fees provide cost recovery for various membership benefits.



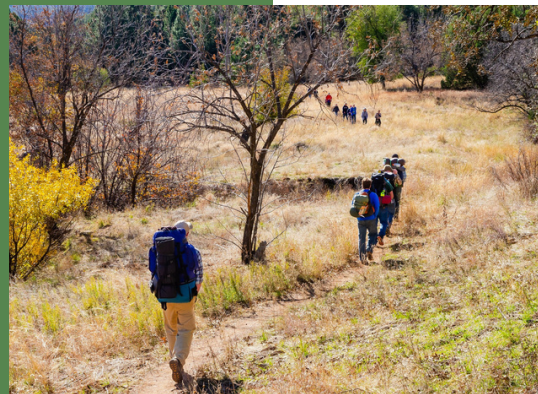
PILLAR #4 Steer Sustainable Tourism Statewide Efforts

Regional Statewide Sustainability Assessments: Based on the globally recognized Sustainable Tourism Criteria managed by the GSTC, each Arizona region will be assessed through qualitative and quantitative data. This holistic approach will help identify current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the tourism industry.

Statewide Comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Plan: Utilizing regional assessments, AOT along with stakeholder engagement and industry expertise will develop the first ever Statewide Comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Plan. This plan will help fortify the Arizona tourism product and provide guidance for future efforts.

Strategy

How Are We Going to Get There



Internal

AOT Sustainability Internal Working Group (Cross-Division and Cross-Leadership Levels):

- Administration: Erika Black, Senior Procurement Specialist
- Communications: Josh Coddington, Director of Communications and Public Information Officer
- Marketing: Jordyn Walworth, Social Media Marketing Manager
- Public Affairs: Jenna Lehman, Senior Community Relations Manager
- Public Affairs: Karla Bravo, Senior Grants and Community Engagement Manager
- Research: Diego Cando, Senior Research Manager
- Trade & Media Relations: Jessica Remington, Director of Travel Industry Marketing
- Tribal Relations: Dawn Melvin, Tribal Tourism Relations Manager

Quarterly Working Group Meetings

Staff Training:

- Update Staff Tool-Kit
- In-Person Sustainable Tourism Training

Annual Review of Toolkit and In-Person Training

Expand AppreciateAZ Online Information:

- Industry Page
- Consumer Page

Continuous Updates as Program Expands



External

Sustainability Pulse Check

- Staff
- Coalition Partners
- Industry Partners

6 Months

Expand AppreciateAZ Responsible Tourism Messaging

- Tread Lightly! Message Creation
- RFQ Ad Agencies on Statewide Contract
- Content Creation

12 Months

Destination Management Program

- Development
- Educational Resources
- Launch of Program

12 Months

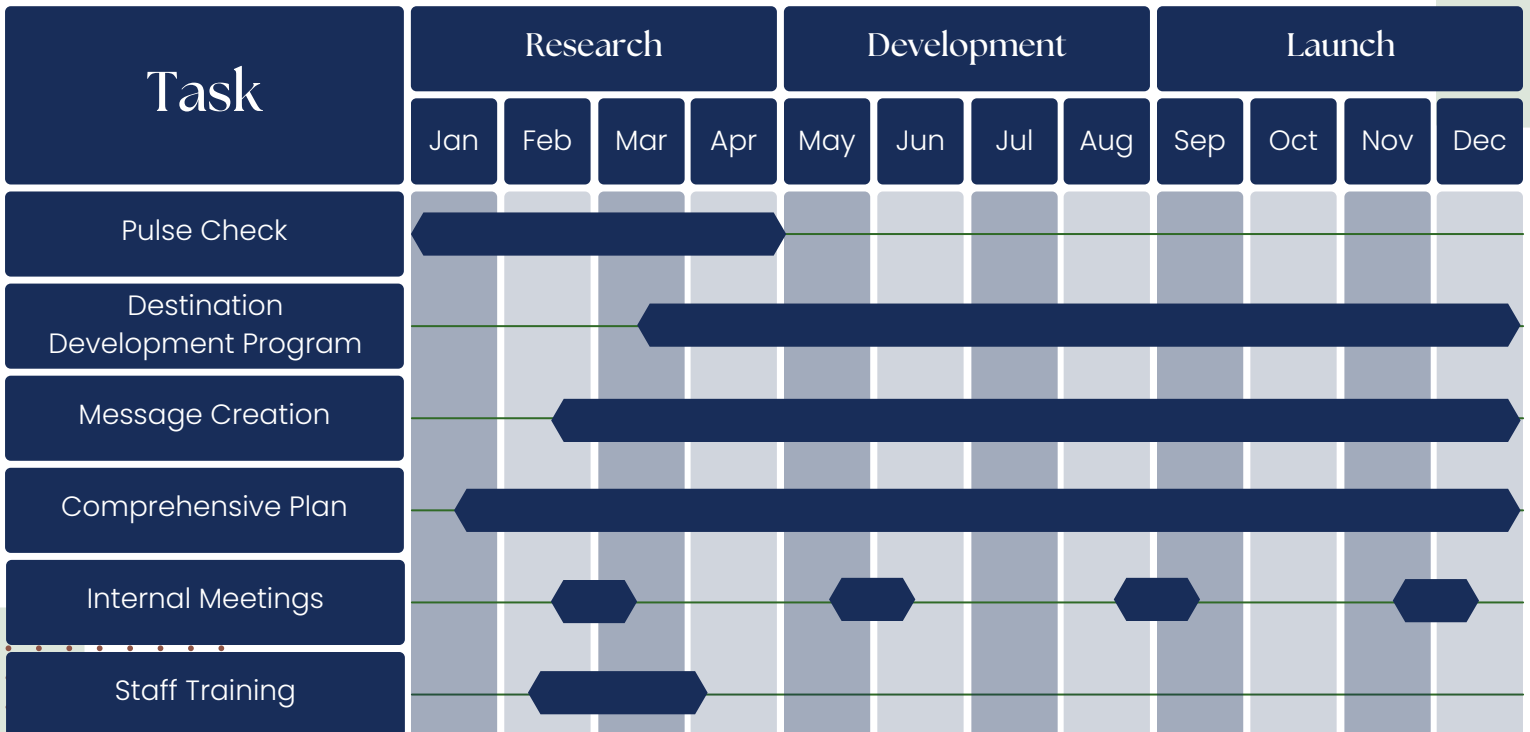
Statewide Comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Plan

- Regional Stewardship Councils
- Regional Assessments

12 Months

ARIZONA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Gantt Chart



For inquiries, contact us.



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ARIZONA
OFFICE OF TOURISM

