Outdoor recreation is finally getting recognition it deserves

By Guest Columnist
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Last November, the Outdoor REC Act passed unanimously in Congress, and was signed into law. This act will ensure that the jobs associated with tourism, hunting and fishing, manufacturing of outdoor gear, and other economic implications of visits to our public lands will finally be recognized and counted as part of the United States GDP.

The Federal Recreation Council (FRC) and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) are moving forward in creating the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account (ORSA), that will record the official economic contribution, and finally give credence to the economic powerhouse that the outdoor recreation economy is.

We at the Glenwood Springs Chamber Resort Association are encouraged to see the BEA moving forward with this study, and are appreciative of the continued work and bipartisan support from the main sponsor Sen. Cory Gardner and co-sponsor Sen. Michael Bennet, both of Colorado.

As the president and CEO of the Glenwood Springs Chamber Resort Association for 30 years, I have seen first-hand the substantial positive impact that the outdoor recreation economy has had on our community and businesses. With 65 percent of Coloradans participating in outdoor recreation activities and a booming tourism industry, outdoor recreation and our public lands in Colorado contribute 229,000 jobs in the state, and $28 billion in consumer spending annually. In the last 15 years, Glenwood Springs has seen steady increases in travel spending, earnings and employment, an improvement that speaks to the growing importance of outdoor recreation to our community.

The BEA held a public comment period in May to solicit feedback on the best way to properly define outdoor recreation, an important first step toward being able to accurately and fully include the ORSA in the GDP.

The comments submitted were received in such a positive manner that the BEA has chosen to keep the comment period open until the end of this month, which speaks to the weight that these comments hold, and the importance of their submission. (Submit comments by emailing OutdoorRecreation@bea.gov.) While reviewing public comments, the BEA and FRC are moving forward and beginning to prepare estimates of the contribution of outdoor recreation by establishing a definition of outdoor recreation. These estimates are slated to be completed by the beginning of next year.

The federal government’s official recognition of the outdoor recreation economy will showcase the importance of the outdoor recreation economy and the public lands on which it depends. Public lands are the most basic infrastructure supporting outdoor recreation. With the substantial contribution of the outdoor recreation economy acknowledged, we can better understand the necessary investments needed to properly maintain and support a healthy public lands system.

Garfield County is made up of 60 percent public lands with many famous destinations such as Hanging Lake and Sunlight Mountain Resort, making this study and its implications one that our community and businesses need in order to continue to grow and succeed.

Outdoor recreation activities that take place on the public lands in our county not only draw visitors who spend money, but they provide us with a competitive advantage when attracting new businesses, employees, and families that want access to the standard of living often associated with proximity to outdoor recreation and public lands.

The Glenwood Springs Chamber represents approximately 500 regional businesses, all of whom benefit from outdoor recreation and what it brings to our community. We are excited and encouraged by the early progress...
made by the BEA in the first stages of this study, and the business owners, families, and employees in our community fully stand behind its continuation and speedy completion.

*Marianne Virgili has been president and CEO of the Glenwood Springs Chamber Resort Association for 30 years. A certified Chamber of Commerce Executive, she has served on the board for American Chamber of Commerce Executives and Western Association of Chamber Executives, is past president of Colorado Chamber of Commerce Executives and past national chair of the U.S. Chamber Foundation’s Institute for Organization Management.*

**COMMENTS**

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