MEMORANDUM

To: Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation
From: Outdoor Recreation Roundtable
Re: Comments on the FY 2024 Interagency Recreation Visitation Data Report
Date: August 4, 2026

On behalf of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable and its member businesses and organizations, thank you for the release of the FY 2024 Interagency Recreation Visitation Data Report, the first unified accounting of recreation visitation across the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Park Service (NPS), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the USDA Forest Service (USFS). The report is a significant step forward in fulfilling Section 132(f) of the EXPLORE Act and reflects exactly the kind of federal data coordination ORR has long advocated for.

ORR sees this report as validating the core premise behind ORR's own data initiative: outdoor recreation data exists across the federal system, but it remains fragmented and not yet fully actionable for business planning, infrastructure investment, access policy, gateway community engagement, or decision-making to improve public health outcomes.

This report represents meaningful progress supporting the implementation of the EXPLORE Act and better visitor, business and agency decision making. ORR recognizes that many of the improvements outlined below will require additional time, funding, technical capacity, and interagency coordination. Our recommendations are therefore divided between **near-term priorities that would most improve the report's reliability and usability and longer-term enhancements that agencies could pursue as resources allow.** ORR stands ready to work with FICOR and participating agencies by providing industry expertise, sector-specific examples, technical feedback, and connections to potential research and data partners.

<u>Feedback for Near-Term Priority:</u>

1. **Build a standing feedback pathway**

ORR requests a clear, recurring process for industry stakeholders, states, Tribes, researchers, and technology partners to provide input before future reports and pilot protocols are finalized. This could occur through ORR's Data Work Group or another forum designated by FICOR.

A standing engagement process would allow agencies to draw on outside expertise to identify relevant data sources, test assumptions, refine reporting categories and methods, and evaluate results. These partnerships should protect privacy, intellectual property, and public accountability. ORR members bring significant regional and activity-specific expertise and should be consulted where relevant to the design and implementation of pilot projects.

2. **Close the NOAA data gaps and improve detail on BOR estimates**

NOAA does not yet report total visitation or FY 2024 activity-specific data, which leaves marine recreation, coastal tourism, diving, boating, fishing, paddling, and other water-based activities significantly underrepresented. Future reports should work toward including such visitation data.

This is a critical gap given that national marine sanctuaries represent significant fishing and boating resources. While estimating use in open-water areas can be difficult, the National Park Service's fishing-visit estimates for Everglades National Park demonstrate that credible visitation estimates can be developed in these settings, and FICOR should apply that precedent to NOAA's sanctuaries.

A similar gap exists at the Bureau of Reclamation: the report includes 14 Reclamation units with recorded boating visits, but no corresponding fishing estimate, suggesting potentially significant unmeasured fishing activity at these sites. ORR asks FICOR to prioritize closing this gap as well and consider including all Reclamation units.

3. **Increase granularity of activity categories**

Several recreation activities that matter directly to ORR members are currently folded into broad categories that limit the usefulness of the data. Future reports should break out "Other Recreation" into more specific categories, including horseback riding, recreational shooting, snow sports, climbing, and swimming.

Future reports should also further disaggregate motorized recreation. For example, OHV use should distinguish among ATVs, UTVs/ROVs, dirt bikes, four-wheel-drive vehicles, sandrails, snowmobiles, and other motorized uses where applicable. ORR also recommends adding on-road motorcycling as a reportable recreation activity where it occurs on or in connection with federal recreation lands and waters.

Similarly, bicycle use could distinguish among road biking, mountain biking, gravel biking, e-biking, and personal mobility devices where feasible.

4. **Add user-type and vehicle-entry information where practical**

Future reports should not only distinguish between what type of recreational equipment is being used, but also for what purpose. Vehicle-entry or access-mode data could help clarify how visitors are using federal recreation sites. For example, a visitor may enter with an RV, trailer, motorcycle, or OHV, and then use that vehicle for recreation or sightseeing. Better access-mode information would help agencies and industry partners understand actual recreation patterns more accurately.

Fishing also provides an opportunity to distinguish between shore, private-boat, and for-hire fishing trips, and capture target species or broad fishery type where feasible, rather than reporting a single undifferentiated fishing-visit total.

5. **Standardize and document methodology**

The report acknowledges that data collection methods vary by agency and unit. ORR recommends that future reports include clear methodology notes so that users can understand how estimates were derived and can weigh precision accordingly across agencies and units.

Future reports should explain how each estimate was developed, including whether it is based on direct counts, surveys, modeling, partner data, or broader estimates. This is important because some estimates, such as certain Forest Service figures, may rely on surveys conducted only once every five years, but the report does not currently make that clear. Streamlined methodology across all agencies will help with apples-to-apples comparisons that will improve visitation estimates and create a scalable foundation for infrastructure investment, visitor services, access and resource management, business planning, public-private collaboration, and better support for gateway communities.

6. **Improve geographic and regional comparisons**

Future reports should make it easier to compare recreation use by state, agency, reporting unit, and landscape type. National totals can hide important regional differences, including where activities such as OHV riding, biking, e-biking, horseback riding, and hiking are most common across BLM lands, parks, forests, refuges, and other federal recreation areas.

More detailed geographic data would help industry, advocates, and land managers plan investments, improve infrastructure and maintenance, and identify where shared-use

conflicts or safety concerns may require increased investment and staffing, better trail design, clear signage, user education, or separation of uses.

Additional suggestions for Longer-Term Enhancements

1. **Move toward seasonal, timely, and year-over-year reporting**

The FY 2024 report was published in June 2026 while agencies were already collecting FY 2026 data. ORR understands the constraints of federal reporting timelines, but faster, more seasonal reporting would materially improve the usefulness of the data for business, infrastructure, and communications decisions.

Future reports should also include year-over-year comparisons showing growth or decline by agency, unit, geography, and activity category.

2. **Deliver the data in usable, machine-readable, and interactive formats**

ORR is glad to see plans for a downloadable, machine-readable data package (in Excel or similar formats) with metadata. Static PDFs make this data harder for the outdoor recreation industry to use. At a minimum, agencies should provide downloadable, machine-readable data that includes:

- One row for each reporting unit, activity, and year
- Consistent unit IDs, location information, and geographic coordinates
- Clear activity names and definitions, including whether data are zero, missing, not collected, or not applicable
- The year, collection method, sample size, confidence level, and data-quality rating, when available
- Historical data, revisions, and explanations of changes to unit names or boundaries

Where feasible, data should include interactive tables that allow users to filter by agency, unit, state, activity, year, and other relevant categories. ORR urges FICOR to make this a standard, timely, and ideally API-accessible feature of every future report.

In addition to the proposed API, agencies should create an online dashboard that allows users to filter the data, compare locations, track trends, and export results.

Closing

ORR and its members are very appreciative of this opportunity to provide feedback and are eager to support FICOR in advancing this work. The FY 2024 report is a significant first step toward more coordinated federal recreation data. ORR would welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations further and to help identify sector-specific examples that illustrate where the data is already useful and where additional detail would better serve the outdoor recreation economy.