

Parks Plus: Economic Vitality

May 7, 2025



Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

Agenda

- Plenary Presentations (40 minutes)
 - Estimating Economic Impacts- *Michele Archie*
 - Impacts of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism in Colorado Springs- *Sandy Elliott, Tourism and Finance Manager and Britt Haley, Director of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services*
- Q&A
- Optional- Small Group Discussions (15-20 minutes)



Stimulating Tourism and Local Economies



Role of Parks in the Tourism Industry

Parks Plus: Economic Vitality

- Iconic destinations: some parks are destinations in their own right (Central Park, Golden Gate Park)
- People seeking nature and outdoor recreation experiences seek out parks access
- Parks contribute to local history and culture (public art, monuments, landmarks)
- Parks and other outdoor facilities may serve as event venues for concerts, festivals, and races
- Parks provide a place for people to relax and connect with others

Parks & Recreation Support Local Businesses

Parks Plus: Economic Vitality

- Parks increase nearby pedestrian traffic – helpful for restaurants, retail, and other nearby brick and mortar
- Parks provide space for vendors and markets, which can serve both residents and shoppers interested in local culture
- Recreation facilities host leagues and tournament practices and games

Across the US in 2021, Tourism Economics and Sports ETA estimated \$91.8 billion in economic impact due to sports tourism



Conservation Economics

At Trust for Public Land

- How do people value parks, conserved lands, trails, and outdoor recreation?
- How do these spaces contribute to **economic development**?
- What benefits (or **ecosystem services**) does nature provide in these spaces?



Estimating Your Economic Impacts of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

Michele Archie | Harbinger Consulting

Impacts of Tourism and Outdoor Recreation on Local Economies

Michele Archie
michele@harbingerconsult.com



There are approaches to collecting visitor data and even making economic impact estimates that can work no matter where you're starting




Poll: Three quick questions about your visitor research

Economic Impact Analysis 101

Economic **impact**

How many dollars do you attract from outside your area & how much does that “new money” benefit your place?



This is a key type of economic analysis when you're looking at the value of tourism

Economic **significance**

How many dollars are spent by all visitors & how much total economic activity does it support?

Direct effects

Changes in the economy caused by the direct spending of a visitor attraction or its visitors (e.g., on lodging, meals, transportation, guides & outfitters, souvenirs, etc.)

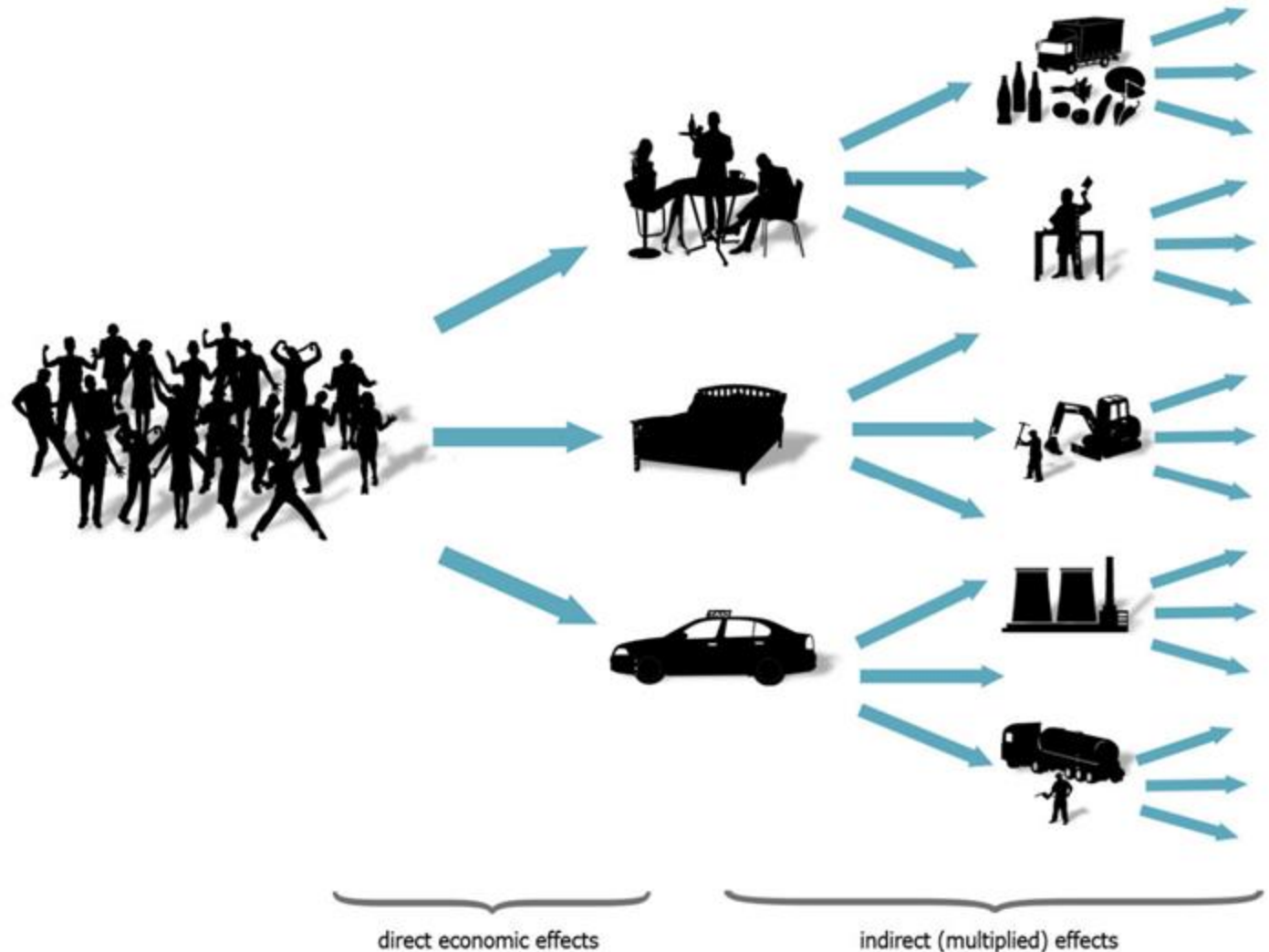
Secondary effects

Indirect effects

Changes in the economy caused by subsequent business spending (e.g., linen suppliers, food distributors, local fly tiers, crafters, etc.)

Induced effects

Changes in the economy caused by increased household (employee) spending (rent, utilities, groceries, etc.)



Economic impact analysis

In plain English and in this case: the exercise of estimating the relationship between visitor spending and all of these secondary effects...until there is not one theoretical penny left in the local economy from the dollars your visitors dropped on t-shirts, Airbnb, local brews, generous tipping, and gas to get out to the trailhead and back.

There are lots of other kinds of economic value associated with outdoor recreation and the places where it happens

Don't put all your eggs in one basket

Quality of life

Community health (physical and mental)

Local business growth and success

Wildlife habitat & connectivity

Property values

Heritage and culture

Community pride and engagement

Resilience & natural system services

Tax dollars

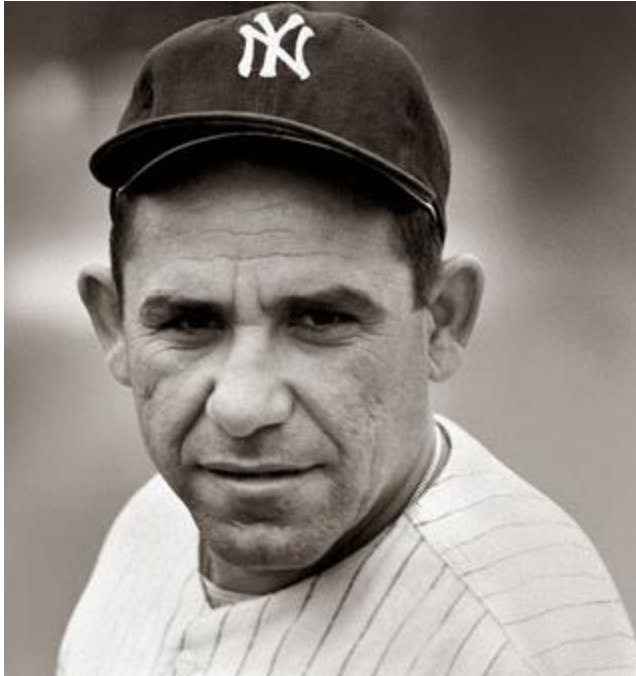
So how do you start?
Remember “garbage in, garbage out”

Focus on your most important questions and collect data to answer those well

The quality of any economic analysis depends heavily on the quality of the data going in. So focus on doing a good job collecting data to answer a narrow set of questions at first if you need to. Build from there.

One core idea

Curiosity first. Advocacy second.



You can observe a lot by just watching. - Yogi Berra

- **Keep an open mind.** You may have a great sense of what you're going to learn. You might even be right. But don't build a study just to confirm that.
- **Build your message on the facts,** not on what you want the facts to be.
- **Study to learn, not just to advocate.** What you learn might help you fine-tune programs, identify issues and solutions, ask new questions.

Use The Research Design Funnel

It can be an iterative process to decide:

- What's most important to you.
- How you can answer your questions.
- Whether the kind of research you envision is doable for your organization and worth the investment of time and other resources.

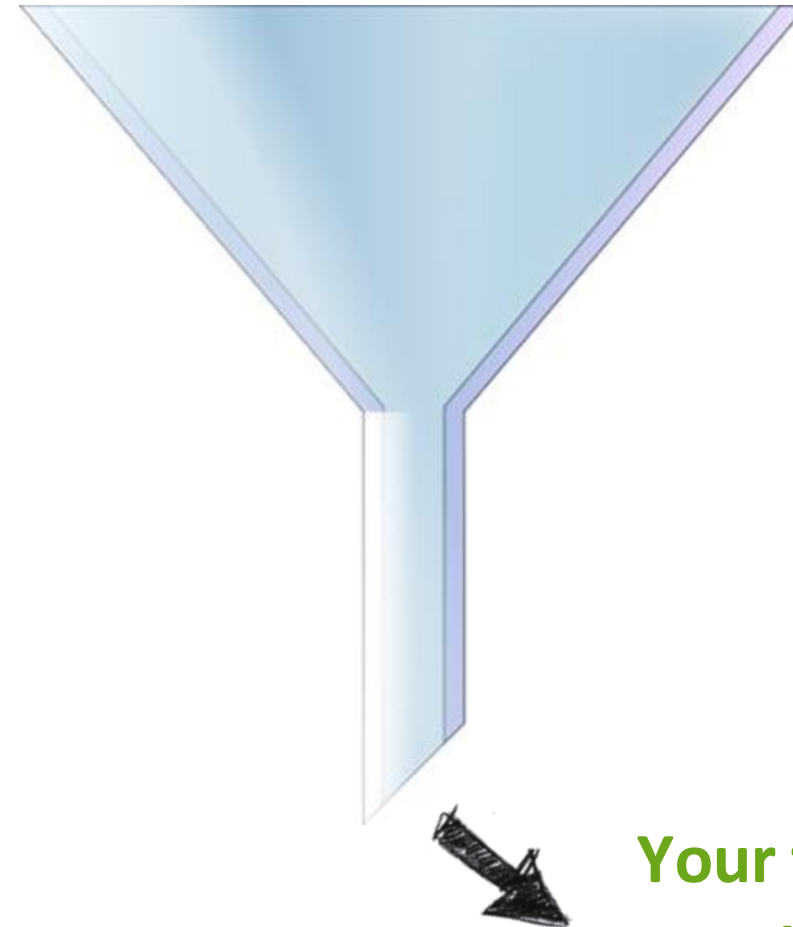
What you
want to
know about

Central
questio
ns

Your
“whys”

Your goals

Assumpti
ons to
test





**Your top 2-3
questions in order
of priority**

If you want to estimate the economic impact of outdoor recreation and tourism, learn these things about your visitors

1. **Number of visitors** (nonlocal only if your focus is economic *impact*)
2. **Average spending** (generally per visitor/day)
 - a. **Daily expenditures** per visitor or visitor party (surveys usually ask about expenditures by category—e.g., lodging, meals, shopping, entertainment, transportation—to improve accuracy)
 - b. Party size and **number of days in the area**
3. Maybe: **Importance of the attraction or event**

Where can you get this info?

	1	Number of visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your own visitor counts• A collection of visitor counts or estimates from partners in a region• Averages from similar organizations, events or attractions in your area• “Big data” — Zartico, PlacerAI, etc.
	2	Average spending & visitor origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A survey of your own visitors• Local, regional or state tourism promotion agencies• University tourism and recreation programs and researchers• Studies from other, similar places
	3	Importance of the event or attraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your own or another local visitor survey

What next?
How to put visitor data to use

How Can Visitor Research Help?



What can you do with trail count data?



Quick case study: [Two counters, three months: Understanding trail use trends with our automated counter grant program](#), Eco-Counter.

Consider making data collection an ongoing process

What do you already collect?

Anything to tweak, change, stop doing?

What can you add on an ongoing basis?

What questions are important to answer with consistent, long-term data collection?

Visitor counts may fall in this category.

What should be done periodically?

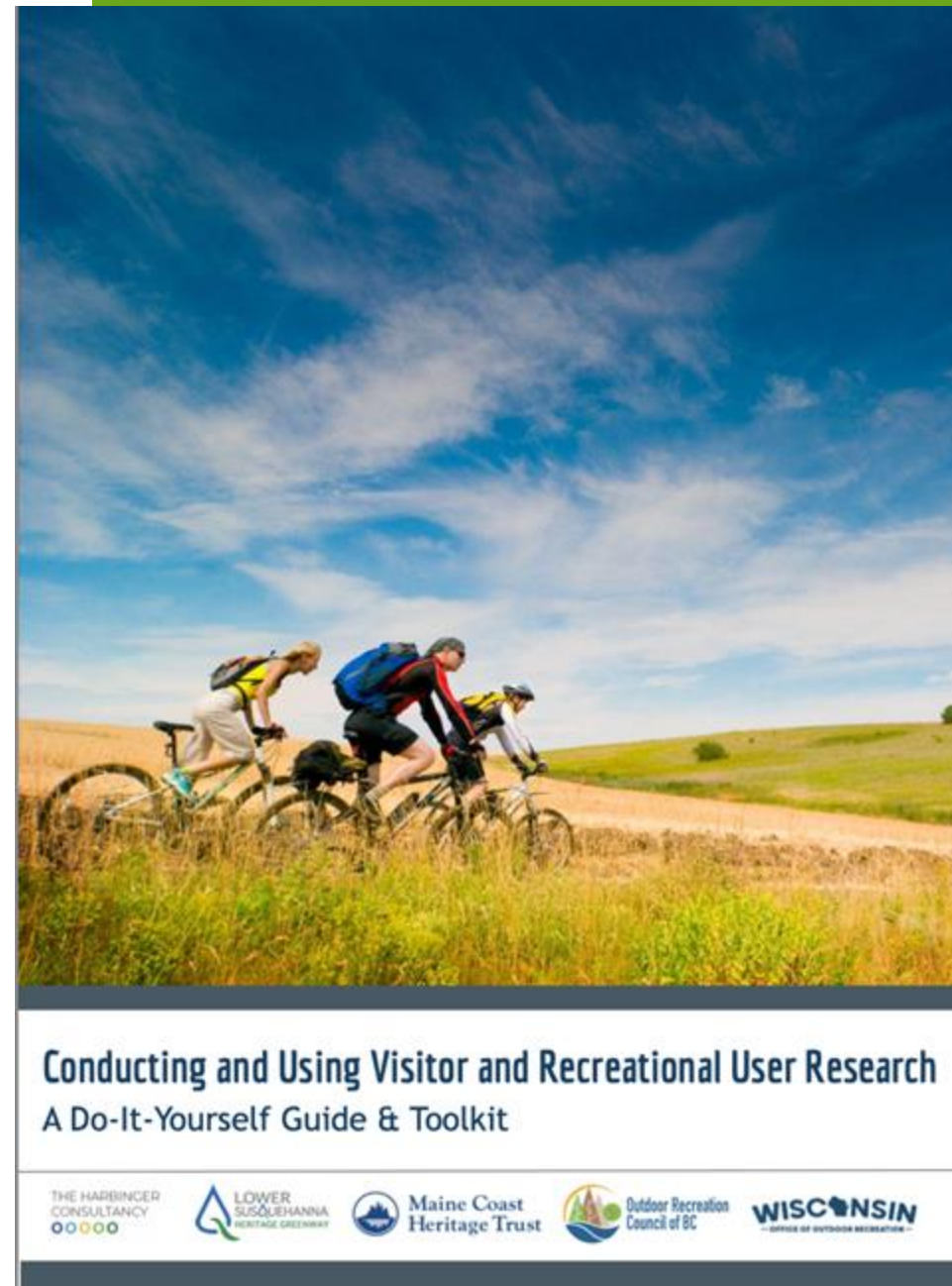
What questions can be answered with occasional or periodic data collection?

Visitor surveys often do not need to be conducted annually.

**Some helpful resources for visitor research,
estimating economic impact or significance,
and otherwise putting visitor data to good
use**

Conducting Visitor and Recreational User Research: A Do-It-Yourself Guide & Toolkit

A resource to help you
through the process



About the guide



Produced through a collaborative partnership.

A tool for educating, supporting, building capacity, and encouraging data collection by members, allies and constituents.

Intended to support the capacity of communities and small-to-mid-sized outdoor recreation, heritage and conservation organizations to produce solid research and use it for good.

Other partners



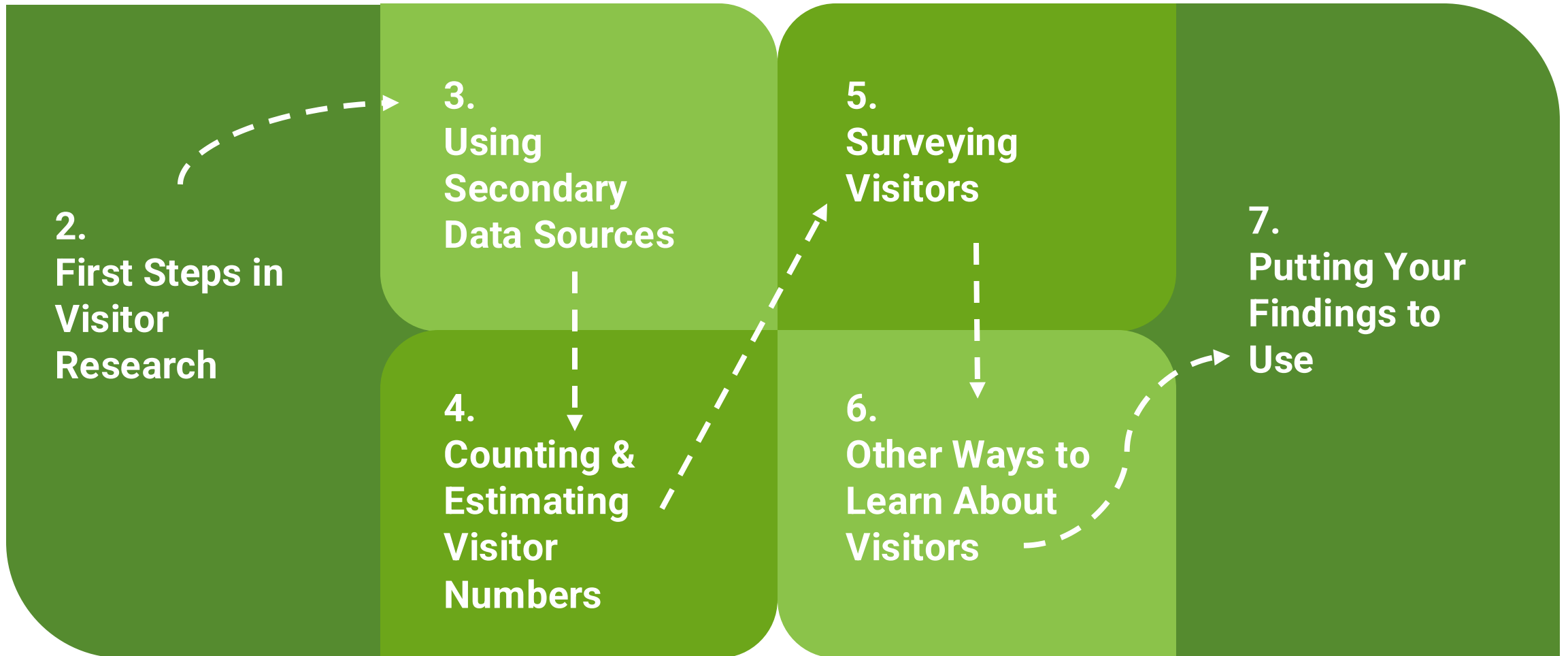
Maine Coast
Heritage Trust



Outdoor Recreation
Council of BC



Self-guided tour through the visitor research process



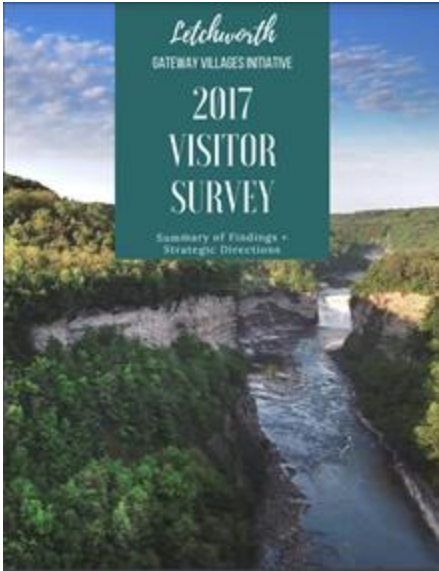
Plus

Annotated Resource Section

Eight pages of resources linked to specific sections of the guide



Research Design Examples



Other helpful resources

- [Three Ways to Estimate the Economic Impact of Trails and Outdoor Recreation](#) (free American Trails webinar)
- [Trails for Us: How Trails Benefit Local Communities](#) (free American Trails webinar)
- [Tell Your Economic Story Without Hiring an Economist](#) and [DIY Visitor Research for Parks, Trails, Heritage Sites and the Towns That Serve Them](#) courses
- Headwaters Economics [Library of Trails Benefits](#)



Parks and Tourism in Colorado Springs

Britt Haley and Sandy Elliott, City of Colorado Springs



Economic Vitality, Stimulating Tourism, and Local Economies

May 7, 2025

Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services



Our Foundation – Colorado Springs in 1871



Garden of the Gods

Palmer Park

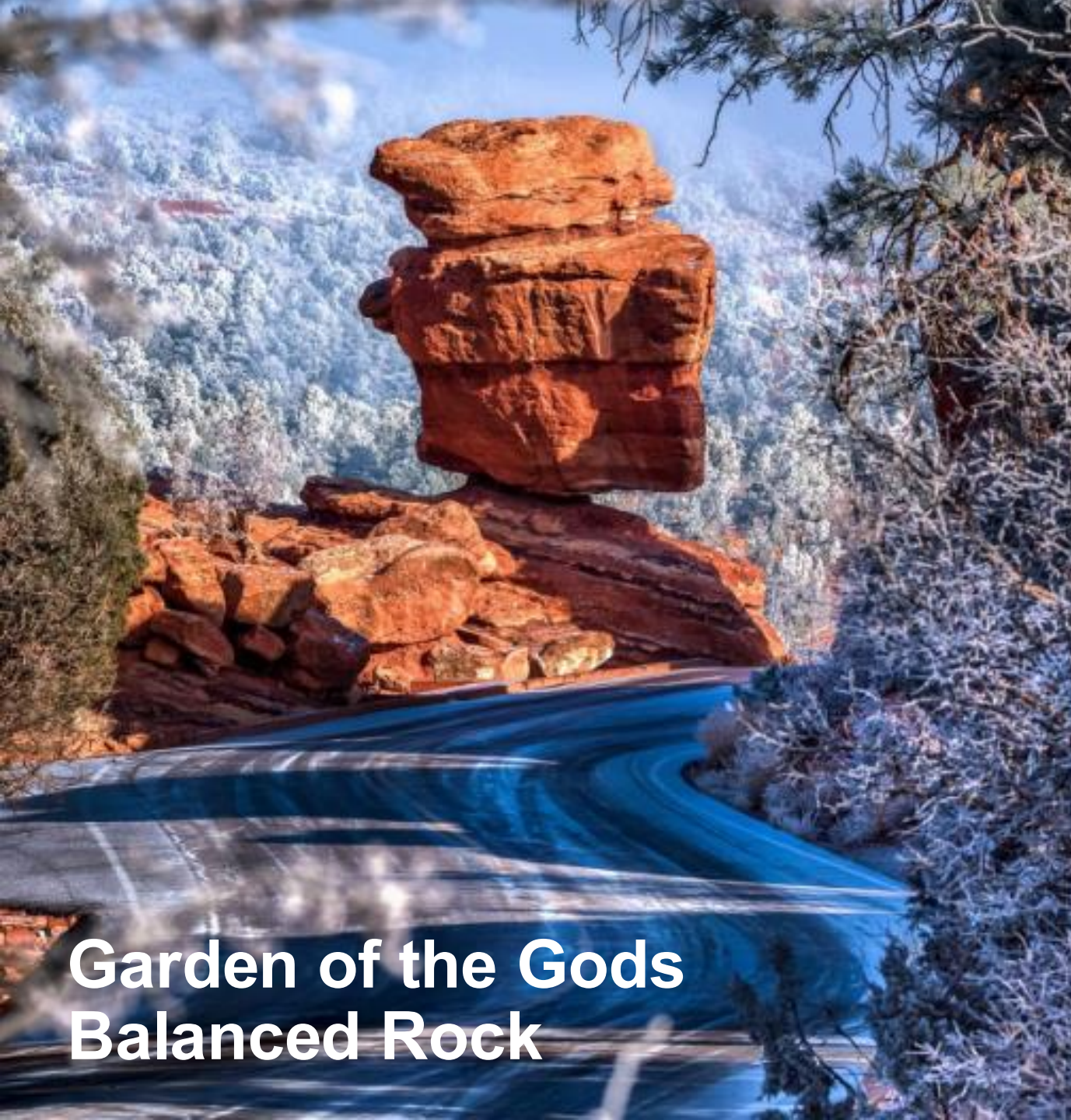


Cheyenne Mountain State Park

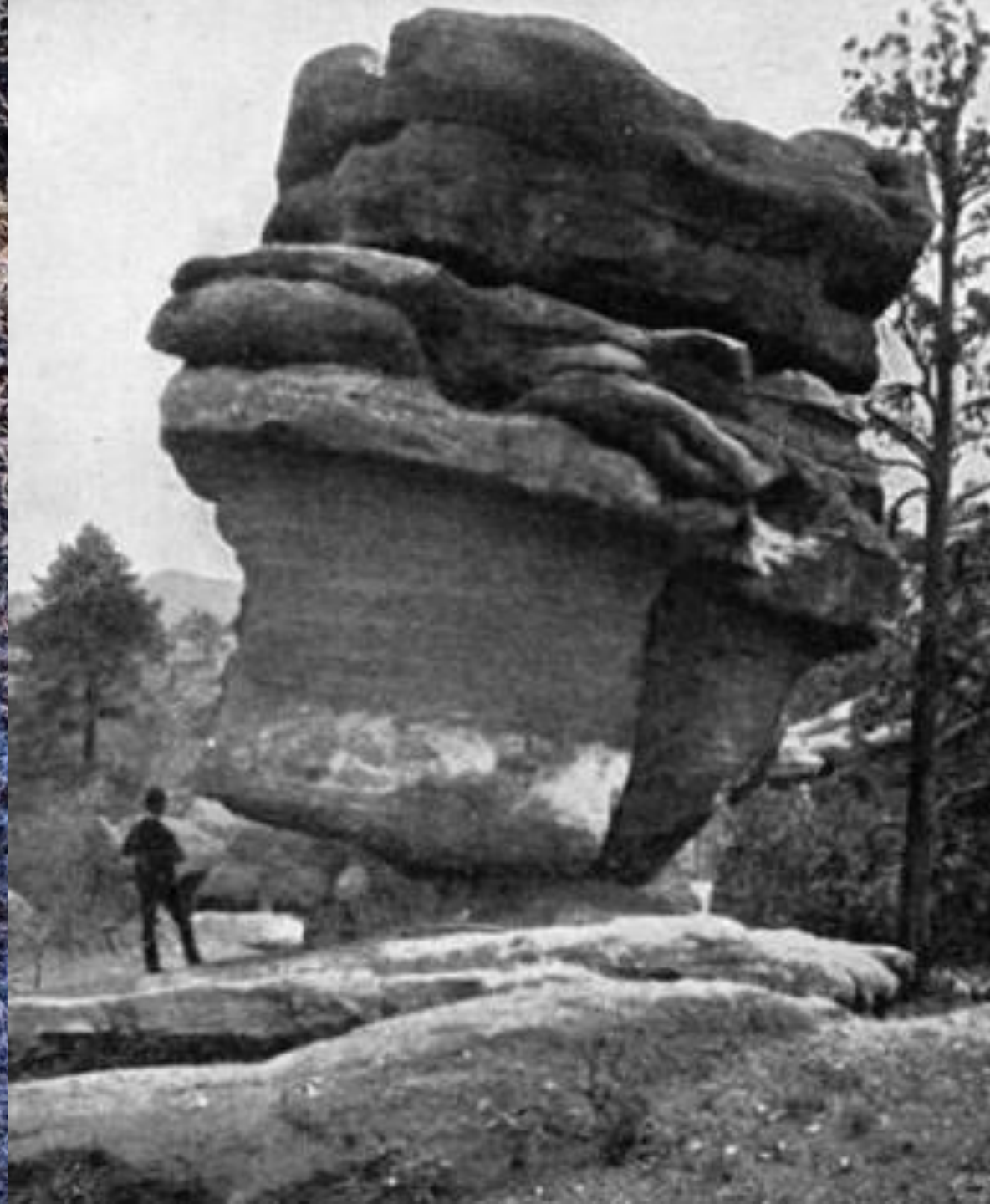


Garden of the Gods Run





**Garden of the Gods
Balanced Rock**





Pikes Peak – America's Mountain

The image shows a modern building with a light-colored stone or brick facade and a series of tall, narrow vertical windows. In the foreground, a large, rusted metal sign is partially visible. To the right, a black metal railing runs along a paved area, likely an observation deck. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

PIKES PEAK SUMMIT VISITOR CENTER



Tourism and Outdoor Recreation



Sporting Events



Pulpit Rock





Red Rock Canyon



Helen Hunt Falls



Leave No Trace Gold Standard Certification



Equity and Accessibility



Panorama Park





Programs and Strategies



Archaeology Program



Sharing Their Stories

America the Beautiful Park

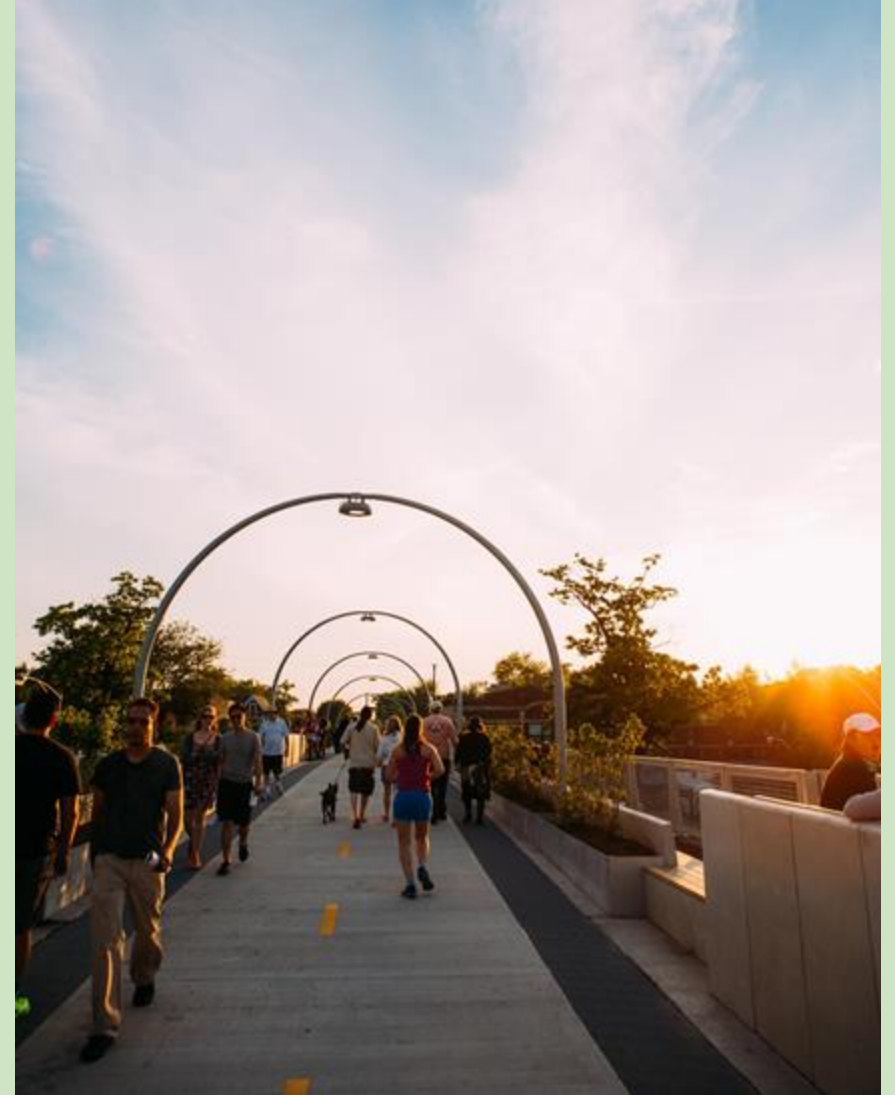


Q&A



Series Dates & Topics

- **November 6-** Parks & Prosperity: Drivers of Economic Vitality
- **January 15-** Mobilizing Parks as Employment Magnets
- **March 5-** Making Spaces into Places
- **May 7-** Stimulating Tourism & Local Economies
- ➔ • **July 9-** Parks Beyond Boundaries: Strategies for Inclusive Growth ←



Discussion Questions

20 minutes

- In examining visitor data, what information do you wish you had available? What do you want to learn?
 - What data do you already collect on your visitors?
- What's your biggest challenge or question related to estimating economic impacts in your work?
- Who are your most important audiences? And how do you tailor economic impacts data to them?



Fill out exit
ticket from
Zoom once
you leave the
room.

See you
on July 9

Peer
Discussion

Raise your
hand function



Since 1972, TPL has protected 4 million acres of public land; created 5,364 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places; raised \$93 billion in public funding for parks and public lands; and connected nearly 9.4 million people to the outdoors.

To learn more, visit tpl.org.

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Thank you!

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