

## Outdoor Recreation Industry Snapshot

FutureNow is an independent body that provides industry informed advice to influence skills development strategies across the Creative, Leisure and Technologies sectors. Our work assists Western Australia to be prepared with the new order skills required by the evolving economy and our changing society.

### Growth in outdoor recreation leads to increased employment need

The outdoor recreation industry is a growing field of employment in Western Australia.<sup>1</sup> As more people venture outdoors, they are paying for activities to support them in their transition to experiences such as hiking tours, mountain biking<sup>2</sup> and ocean swimming classes. This is resulting in career pathways beyond the volunteer and casual roles often associated with outdoor recreation. With continued growth in this industry and out of the box expansion of activities, such as hiking and yoga at sunset, it is predicted more people will return to, or consider outdoor recreation as a career path. This is especially important given significant numbers of outdoor recreation trained staff left the industry during the COVID-19 pandemic and still have not returned to fill employment vacancies, such as camp instructor.

### Development and marketing of adventure trail towns boosts tourism and trail participation

There has been significant government funding in boosting regional Western Australia towns to become “adventure trail towns”.<sup>3</sup> These towns are aligned to world-class trail criteria for hiking, trail running and mountain biking, and are attracting national and international enthusiasts and local participants to regional Western Australia. This is an intelligent move taking advantage of our natural expansive Western Australia terrain, beautiful weather conditions and aligning with the cultural shift in motivation to exercise outdoors in nature.<sup>4</sup>

### Expansion of outdoor activities to support mental health

With the increasing mental health issues, especially among youth,<sup>5</sup> key nature-based organisations such as Nature Play WA, are promoting outdoor activities for social and health reasons, rather than competitive reasons. Their Talk N Walk program aimed at tween and teen girls, encourages girls to swap their mobile phone socialising and instead take a walk-in nature and chat in person. This acknowledges the importance of social connections but aligns with the additional benefits of moving outdoors to decrease stress and anxiety, and enhance creativity and problem solving.<sup>6</sup>

#### International study in outdoor education and wellbeing benefits

A 2022 PhD student at the University of Notre Dame is researching the value of outdoor education programs on enhancing wellbeing with international level academic staff. It is thought this thesis could become the basis for a future growth development trend of linking recreation and wellbeing.

### Increasing alignment of outdoor recreation and tourism

The link between outdoor recreation and tourism is becoming stronger and more overlapped<sup>7</sup> as investment in outdoor active facilities, events and trails in key tourist locations are growing. These include the Matagarup Zip and Climb, Cape-to-Cape hiking tours and Eco Tours such as Carnac Island swimming with Australian sea lions. The concern and need to work

alongside tourism and environmental experts in designing outdoor activities was highlighted at the 2022 WA Trails Forum and will continue to play a future role as these recreation activities expand.

## Popularity shift towards outdoor recreation activities

Outdoor walking and the flexibility of free outdoor community events, like the parkrun, have seen increased participation since the COVID-19 pandemic. The outdoors has had a marketing makeover influenced by online adventurers, millennials travelling in vans and adventure films such as the “Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour” and “Facing Monsters” a feature documentary about Western Australian Kerby Brown chasing and surfing the largest waves in Western Australia with stunning visual coastal scenery.<sup>8</sup>

### Increasing accessibility of outdoor recreation locations

The importance of enabling those with a disability to also enjoy the increased popularity of outdoor recreation has seen the creation of inclusive outdoors recreation organisations, such as Break the Boundary Inc. This organisation provides nature-based off-road cycling, adaptive mountain bikes and hiking opportunities for people living with a disability. The State Government has also contributed funding including the \$2 million towards improving disability access in national parks across Western Australia.

## Increased links with education providers to boost outdoor recreation student numbers

Education providers have indicated a drop in students studying outdoor recreation in 2022 even with the shift towards outdoor recreation activity growth. As a result, numerous outdoor recreation education providers are developing links with up-and-coming prospective students. Including creating advanced standing for students from Sport Education and Development Australia (SEDA) to the University of Notre Dame outdoor recreation program, either as a major or minor program of study.

## Outdoor recreation leaders being recognised as a possible priority occupation

The recognition of the need for outdoor recreation leaders led to the inclusion of this occupation to be reported on for the 2023 Western Australia Jobs, Education and Training survey for the Department of Training and Workforce Development. This occupation was not listed in 2022 and its inclusion may help inform the development of the 2023 Western Australian State Priority Occupation List.

## The impact of employment growth in outdoor recreation for skill development

To align with the growth in outdoor recreation activities, skill development is being enhanced through training and accreditation in outdoor recreation activities, such as mountain biking and ocean swimming. Part of this skill development is supported through the yearly Outdoor Active Recreation grant by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. There has also been an increased alignment of staff from complementary therapies such as mindfulness, yoga and meditation becoming part of the outdoor recreation staff team. In addition, there is increased knowledge and inclusion of indigenous consultation to ensure stories and nature landmarks across trails are respected and shared.

### 2022 upskilling of staff across outdoor recreation roles

Significant staff numbers left the outdoor recreation industry over the past two years. This has meant that remaining staff were often seconded to higher level positions where they did not have the required full skill set. Upskilling was therefore a focus in 2022 for Parks and Leisure WA. Including key workshops being held in recreation strategy and planning, event risk management and a regional manager facilities course.

## What does all this mean for skill development for the outdoor recreation industry in 2023?

There will be a continued need for specialist outdoor recreation qualifications and skill development such as mountain biking, roping courses and paddling. As outdoor recreation businesses commence and expand there will be a need for customer service and business marketing and development skills. The emphasis on recreation and mental health will lead to an increase in knowledge and understanding of how recreation enhances wellbeing and the tailoring of programs and experiences to support this. There will be increased skills and knowledge required in working with tourism and indigenous operators and consultants. Health and safety skills and qualifications will continue to be at the forefront of outdoor recreation operations.

## Industry Initiative Reports 2022

[Mountain Bike Strategy: mountain biking and off-road cycling in Western Australia 2022-2032](#) – this report outlines the vision for mountain biking and off-road cycling in Western Australian with 4 focus areas and underlying key strategies over this 10-year period.

[Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2022-2027](#) – this blueprint provides an overarching guide for the planning, development and management of quality trails and trails experiences across Western Australia during this 5-year period.

[FutureNow Outdoor Recreation Career Resources](#) – case study interview of an outdoor recreation camp leader and an overview of key outdoor recreation staff interests, skills, working environment and outdoor recreation career pathways accessible via the FutureNow website.

## FutureNow

### We would like to hear from you

FutureNow continually seeks feedback from the outdoor recreation sector to facilitate workforce development, and the development and delivery of responsive training and skills sets to meet emerging sector needs. If you can contribute to this in any way or require further information, please contact

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## References

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