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# Sovereignty, Strategy, and Stewardship: Building Outdoor Recreation Economies on Tribal Lands

*A Case Study from the Wind River Indian Reservation*

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# Why This Work Matters

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Wind River Indian Reservation:  
2.2 million acres, home to Eastern  
Shoshone and Northern Arapaho  
Tribes

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Rich natural, cultural, and  
recreational assets

3

BUT: persistent underinvestment  
and barriers to accessing capital

4

*We asked a simple question: What  
would it look like if the outdoor  
economy actually served Native  
communities first?*

# The Vision: Launching a Strategic Plan

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## Goals:

- Diversify the economy beyond government and energy
- Center tribal values in land use
- Build sustainable, tribally-owned recreation infrastructure

## Guiding Pillars:

- **Sovereignty** – ensuring all development aligns with tribal governance and values.
- **Sustainability** – economically, environmentally, and culturally.
- **Opportunity** – creating pathways for tribal entrepreneurs, youth employment, and community wealth.



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# What We've Learned

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Outdoor rec as sovereign economic development

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Barriers to access = barriers to prosperity

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Demand is there: anglers, hunters, campers, and cultural tourists are eager to engage—ethically

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*Policy matters: We're pursuing a tribal resolution to expand hunting access to non-tribal members—a game changer for revenue.*

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# What We're Building

- **Tribal permitting system** that is online-accessible for non-member recreation
- **Marketing ecosystem** to reposition Wind River as a destination
- **Capacity-building** through youth workforce development and community ownership



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# What We've Accomplished

1 \$4.43 million in Wyoming  
Outdoor Recreation Grant  
funding awards across 7 projects

3 \$3 million in funding from the  
MacKenzie Scott Foundation

2 \$36 million in EDA Recompete  
Grant funding awards across  
9 projects

4 EDA Economic Recovery Corps  
Fellow (me!)

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## Takeaways

- Tribal lands = massive untapped outdoor recreation markets
- Authentic, sustainable tourism requires tribal leadership
- Economic development is about self-determination, not extraction



*If you want to support tribal outdoor recreation economies—start by listening.*



## Closing Thoughts

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- Let's rethink how outdoor recreation can be a tool for Native prosperity
- Partner with tribes early—and on their terms
- Support policy shifts that expand tribal control over land, licensing, and visitation

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# Thank you.

*With gratitude to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes, and all those working toward Native economic sovereignty through stewardship.*

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