



SOCIETY OF OUTDOOR
RECREATION PROFESSIONALS

SORP provides leadership for the outdoor recreation profession through skill development, networking, and technical guidance.

CEU Credits

Interested in obtaining learning credits for this session?

- Quiz: <https://forms.gle/kDTTEiay4FLtrSp46>
- Survey: <https://forms.gle/HQikXjxFK6jucB9d6>

This course is worth the following credits courtesy of American Trails: 1.00 AICP CM | 1.00 LA CES HSW | 0.10 CEU/1.00 PDH Equivalency Petition). A certificate is automatically emailed to those who pass. Quizzes can be retaken if need be.

This webinar is being recorded and will be available at www.recpro.org. After the webinar wraps all registered attendees will receive an email with a link to the recording and links for CEU credits.



Scan for Quiz



Scan for Survey

The Life of an Outdoor Recreation Professional



What We'll Cover

- What are competencies?
- Why are competencies important?
- Development process that lead to the Outdoor Recreation Professional Competency Framework (ORPCF)
- Using the competency framework

Presenters



Angie Braley

Training Specialist

*Society of Outdoor Recreation
Professionals (SORP)*



Kristy Anderson

Research Scientist

*Eppley Center for Parks and
Public Lands*



Sam Rider

National Recreation

Planner

USDA Forest Service



Nora Campbell

Social Scientist

USDA Forest Service

**What type of work do you
do in outdoor recreation?**

**What skills do you use
most in your work?**

What is a competency?

Competency: The “essential skills, knowledge, abilities, and personal characteristics needed for effective job performance” (Hurd, 2005, p. 46).

Skill: An ability to do an activity well, especially because you have practiced it.

Proficiency: Scaled indicators of expertise.





OUTDOOR RECREATION PROFESSIONAL

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

These competencies, grouped into buckets, are important skills for outdoor recreation managers and planners across the recreation workforce for the benefit of all programs, services, and activities.

LAND MANAGEMENT	RECREATION ACCESS	PROJECT MANAGEMENT	RECREATION MANAGEMENT	RECREATION PLANNING + VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT	PROGRAM + OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT	SPECIALIZED SKILLS
Historical Context of Public Lands Management	Accessibility Laws + Principles	Budgeting + Milestones	Conflict Resolution + Consensus Building	Community Context	Business Acumen	Contract Administration + Management
Interdisciplinary Collaboration	Information Access	Facilitation	Customer Service	Desired Conditions / Visioning	Management Intent	Human Dimensions Tools + Data
Land Management Jurisdiction + Policy	Physical Access	Implementation + Monitoring	Information Gathering + Management Application	Indicators + Monitoring	Operations and Maintenance	Grants + Agreements
Public Lands Law	Socioeconomic Access	Outreach + Public Input	Leadership	Management Strategies	Program Assessment	Site Design
Shared Stewardship	Welcoming + Belonging	Technical Writing	Professional Development	Scenery/Visual Resources	Safety + Risk Management	Special Uses + Permits
Tribal + Indigenous Relations			Public Speaking / Presenting	Site-Specific Policy	Operations + Maintenance	
				Visitor Preferences		

RECREATION-ADJACENT EXPERTISE

These topics, though relevant to recreation professionals, are specific fields of expertise that should be addressed and supported by trained professionals. Recreation professions should understand these topics, how they impact recreation systems, and when to defer to experts for information and decision-making support.

- Ecology/Recreation Ecology
- Engineering
- Historic/Cultural Management
- Interpretation + Education
- Landscape Architecture
- Personnel Management
- Social Science
- Tribal Relations
- Water Resource Management
- Wildlife Management

Definitions - Proficiency Levels

Entry Level - Actively learning this skill, occasionally working on this skill, and/or needs supervision to complete work in this skill.

Full-Performance Level - Formal education or training, can accomplish this skill without direct supervision, and can oversee entry level work in this skill.

Expert Level - Extensive experience implementing this skill, is able to train others in this skill, and can produce the high-quality outcomes associated with this skill.

Example - Community Context

Core Competency	Entry level	Full-Performance Level	Expert Level
<p>Community Context: Understand the unique characteristics and trends of a community to develop and enhance relevant recreation access, opportunities and associated benefits.</p>	<p>Identify and evaluate trend and community data for a specific project or planning area.</p>	<p>Collect community data from multiple sources, assess its importance and relevance, and make conclusions and recommendations related to recreation access, opportunities, and benefits for the project or planning area.</p>	<p>Provide guidance and recommendations within your organization on community context information collection and analysis approaches. Interpret and disseminate relevant research to ensure planners and managers have access to relevant information. Conduct research and/or identify policies to enhance recreation access, opportunities, and benefits.</p>

SORP partnership with U.S. Forest Service

- *Reimagine Recreation* focus paths
 - ↪ Collective Workforce
 - ↪ Optimized Information Delivery
 - ↪ Collaborative Planning and Management
- Identified core competencies and skills support professional development of the collective outdoor recreation workforce
 - ↪ Federal, state, and local governments
 - ↪ Tribes
 - ↪ Nonprofit organizations
 - ↪ Research and academia
 - ↪ Private partners and service providers
 - ↪ Volunteers and service organizations



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Advisory Group



INDIANA INSTITUTE ON
DISABILITY AND COMMUNITY
**EPPLEY CENTER FOR PARKS
AND PUBLIC LANDS**



Oregon State University
Center for the Outdoor
Recreation Economy



COMPETENCY RESEARCH

Competency Definition Review

Reviewed competency definitions, identified commonalities and differences across definitions

- 15 different definitions, identified from government, private, and academic sources
- Informed approach to defining competencies and designing competency model

Competency Inventory

Reviewed recreation competencies from public, private, and non-profit recreation agencies

- Identified over 400 individual competencies
- Identified ~20 competency topics, informing bucket development

Competency Model Case Studies

Reviewed competency and career pathway models across similar and dissimilar industries

- Tuned competency model/structure to align with best practices
- Identified best practices for communicating competency models and career pathways in outdoor recreation

Competency Research



Photo: Progressive Trail Design

Trails



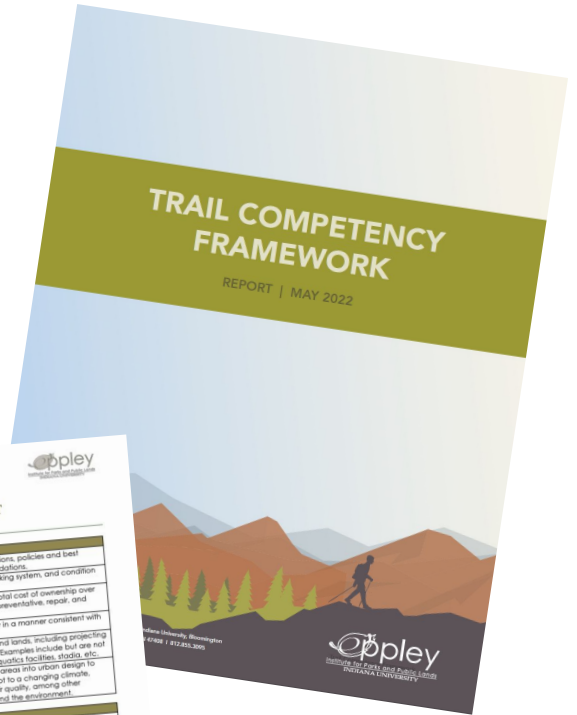
Wilderness



**Wild & Scenic
Rivers**

EPPLEY CENTER RESEARCH PROJECT

- Built off similar work for trails and parks
- Modified Delphi approach
- Subject Matter Expert Definition & Recruitment
- Data collection via survey (two rounds)
- Analysis and findings
 - ↪ Report detailing process
 - ↪ Competency recommendations
- Timeframe: Spring-Fall 2025



WORLD PARKS ACADEMY PARK MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES		
1.0	Asset Management	Comprehend and comply with accessibility regulations, policies and best practices, including transition plans and accommodations.
1.1	Accessibility Management	Develops and maintain an accurate inventory, tracking system, and condition "snapshot" of assets in the agency.
1.2	Inventory and Condition Assessment	Knowledge, skills, and abilities to manage for the total cost of ownership over the lifecycle of a facility or park, including cyclic, preventative, repair, and rehabilitative maintenance.
1.3	Lifecycle Management	Assets are operated efficiently, reliably, and safely in a manner consistent with rules, regulations, and standards.
1.4	Planning and Procedures	Managing and planning for property, buildings, and lands, including projecting the need to acquire, dispose, and build facilities. Examples include but are not limited to parks, open spaces, trails, sports and aquatic facilities, trails, etc.
1.5	Property and Structure Ownership Management	The strategic planning and installation of natural areas into urban design to manage the impacts of storm water runoff, adapt to a changing climate, reduce urban heat island effect, and improve air quality among other ecosystem services that benefit human health and the environment.
1.6	Green Infrastructure	
2.0	Leadership and Assets Identification	
2.1	Community Gardens and Farms	Develop and manage community gardens/farms within an urban context for the purposes of involving people in developing skills, health improvement, and expanding environmental awareness; and manage farmed parkland for cultural, recreational, environmental and commercial outcomes.

Competency framework for World Parks Academy (Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands) Copyright © 2017, the Trustees of Indiana University



Subject Matter Experts

An outdoor recreation professional in a field such as park management, recreation planning, landscape architecture, natural resource management, applied outdoor recreation research, or conservation education.

Meets most of the following criteria:

- Has several years of experience in land management, particularly with respect to outdoor recreation management (planning, access, visitor use management, monitoring & assessment of conditions, operations).
- Demonstrates an ability to inclusively lead outdoor recreation projects and programs in collaboration with partners through business and operations acumen, effective communication and facilitation skills, and demonstrated ability in implementation and evaluation.
- Can effectively apply a wide range of knowledge of relevant laws, policies, standards, and grants/agreements as they apply to outdoor recreation projects and programs.
- Has demonstrated growth in professional trajectory, i.e., through career progression in outdoor recreation ranks, work experience in recreation planning or management, agency leadership, or a broad portfolio of responsibilities.



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Research Participants

- Modified Delphi Method featuring two survey rounds (second abridged)
 - ↪ Round 1 Response Rate: 19.8%
(130 responses / 656 email addresses, including referrals)
 - ↪ Round 2 Only included the 130 individuals who completed Round 1

- Respondent snapshot
 - ↪ 72% of respondents had 16+ years of experience working in outdoor recreation
 - ↪ 59% held a master's degree or higher
 - ↪ All regions of the United States represented
 - ↪ Approximately two-third of respondents identified as US Forest Service employees, with additional representation from every federal land management agency, state agencies, local (city and county) agencies, as well as nonprofit/NGO, consultants, higher education, and more

Determining Consensus & Evaluating Feedback

- Consensus
 - Threshold consensus level of 90%
 - Percentage of respondents who selected “Somewhat agree” and “Strongly agree”
 - Weighted analysis provided additional context given representation of USFS federal employees
- Rich qualitative input from open-ended comments



Findings

- Consensus: 90% threshold met for 35/48 competencies on 1st Round
- Consensus several competencies largely improved after revisions from Round 1

Examples:

“Traditional Ecological Knowledge” competency was expanded and renamed “**Tribal and Indigenous Relations**” in Round 2, which ultimately centered understanding and appropriately considering treaty rights within the Land Management bucket

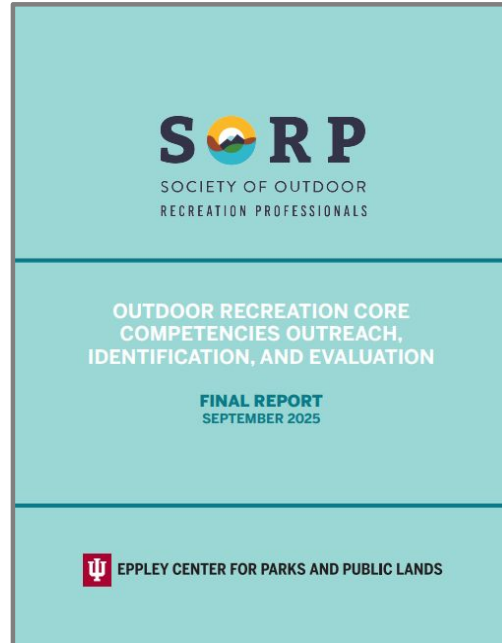
“Language Access” within the Recreation Access bucket was broadened to “Communication Access” in Round 2, resulting ultimately in **Information Access**

While agreement for a “Visual/Graphic Communication” competency within Recreation Management increased in agreement from Phase 2 (86%) from Round 1 (79%), it did not meet the threshold target and was ultimately excluded.

Final Report

Recommended next steps

- Defining competencies by experience level
- Expanding specialty competencies (recreation-adjacent expertise)
- Integrating via training and professional development

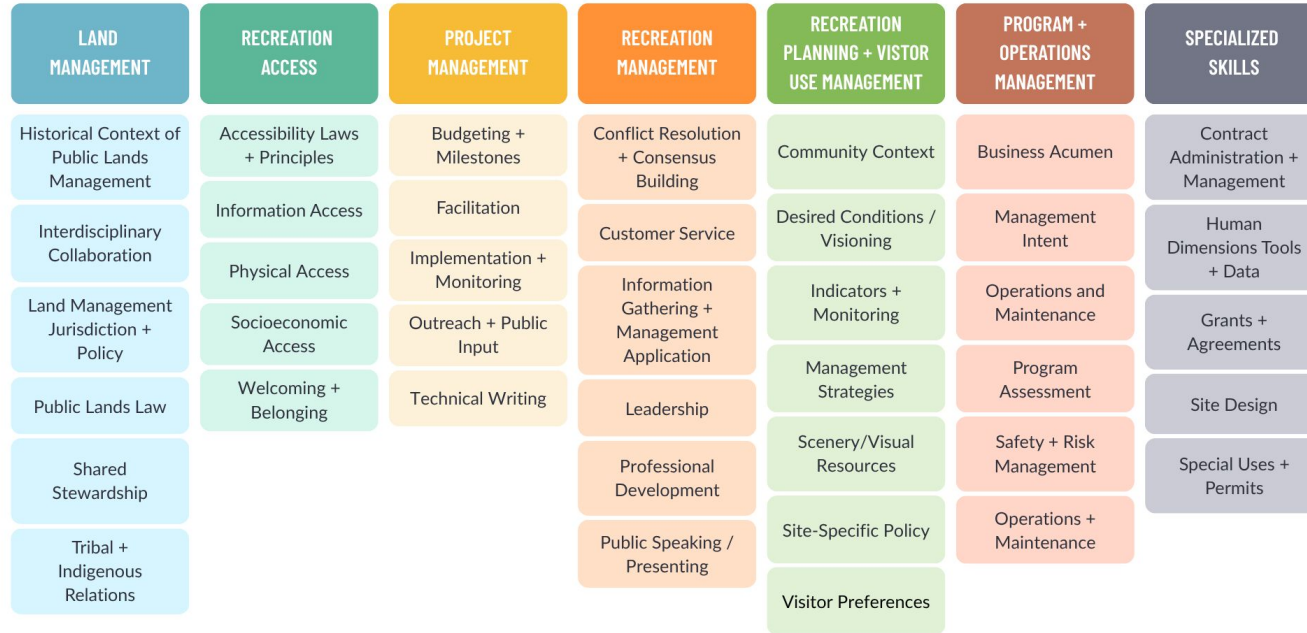




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Outdoor Recreation Professional Competency Topics

- Land Management
- Recreation Access
- Project Management
- Recreation Management
- Recreation Planning + Visitor Use Management
- Program + Operations Management
- Specialized Skills

Definitions - Proficiency Levels

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Competency Details

Program + Operations Management Competencies

	Core Competency	Entry level	Full-Performance Level	Expert Level
30	Business Acumen: Understand administrative practices and leverage grants and other funding sources to support program development and delivery and meet current and future program goals.	Describe different funding sources and partnerships for recreation program planning, management, operations, and maintenance.	Coordinate with partners, permit holders, concessionaires, and communities and participate in developing a recreation business plan. Identify the best suited to lead management activities and secure funding.	Identify and model a shared stewardship approach to recreation program management. Build and maintain relationships based on mutual goals for visitor experiences and resource management. Develop a multi-year programmatic approach to funding in collaboration with partners.
31	Management Intent: Determine and communicate direction for recreation infrastructure management based on law and policy, site design standards, and desired conditions.	Identify applicable laws and policies, site design standards, and desired conditions or goals for the recreation site, activity, or project.	Understand and use management intent in planning, project management, and operations. Convey management intent to staff, partners, volunteers, and users.	Define management intent based on laws and policies, site design standards, and desired conditions. Facilitate the shared understanding of management intent among decision-makers, staff, partners, and the community.
32	Operations and Maintenance: Develop and implement comprehensive operational plans that address health and safety requirements, annual and cyclical maintenance, and minimum and recommended staffing needs.	Understand and assist with implementing the elements of an operations and maintenance plans, policies, and procedures.	Create an operations and maintenance plan for a recreation site or complex. Include operations schedule, priority maintenance needs, health and safety requirements, and strategies for financial sustainability.	Lead development of programmatic or unit-wide operations and maintenance standards that address maintenance schedules, recreation infrastructure resilience to disasters and climate change, and risk management protocols for public and employee health and safety.
33	Program Assessment: Use recreation assessment and monitoring programs and projects to maintain and improve recreation assets.	Identify basic methods and tools used to assess recreation programs and projects. Recognize the purpose of monitoring and how assessment data informs planning and management decisions.	Collect, organize, and summarize program assessment data using appropriate tools and methods. Apply findings to recommend operational or planning adjustments.	Design, lead, or evaluate assessment and monitoring programs. Interpret trends, analyze complex datasets, and integrate findings into long-range planning or program improvement strategies. Communicate results to leadership, partners, and the public.

Website + Competency Library

OUTDOOR RECREATION PROFESSIONAL

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

About Core Competencies

Outdoor recreation professionals play a critical role in creating, managing, and sustaining meaningful outdoor experiences for all. To support this work, the Outdoor Recreation Professional Competency Framework was developed through a multi-year, cross-sector collaboration.

Led by the Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals (SORP) in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, the Epley Center for Parks and Public Lands, and informed by a cross-sector Advisory Group, this effort brings together perspectives from federal, state, and local agencies, nonprofit organizations, academia, and private industry. The result is a research-based, consensus-driven framework that defines the foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities needed across the outdoor recreation field.

WHY IT MATTERS

A shared competency framework helps:

- Create a common language across agencies and organizations
- Strengthen hiring, onboarding, and performance practices
- Align training and professional development
- Support career pathways and workforce growth
- Advance a more consistent and effective field of practice

[Framework One Pager](#)

[Competency Library](#)



How to use the ORPCF - Individuals

- Explore the ORPCF to understand the full range of competencies in outdoor recreation.
- Identify your strengths and areas for growth.
- Use the ORPCF to guide your professional development and learning goals.
- Seek out training, experiences, and resources to build your proficiency.
- Use the ORPCF language to communicate your skills and value to others.
- Revisit the ORPCF regularly to track your progress and growth over time.



How to use the ORPCF - Supervisors

- Use the ORPCF to clarify role expectations and key competencies for your team.
- Incorporate the ORPCF in hiring to assess candidate fit and potential.
- Use the ORPCF as a tool for onboard and orienting new staff.
- Guide ongoing training and development using competency gaps and goals.
- Use the ORPCF to support meaningful check-ins, feedback, and performance conversations.
- Empower staff to take ownership of their development using the ORPCF.



How to use the ORPCF - Organizations/Agencies

- Integrate the ORPCF into workforce planning, job descriptions, and career pathways.
- Support a culture of continuous learning and professional growth.
- Align training investments and resources with the competencies that matter most.
- Champion the ORPCF across your organization and the broader outdoor recreation community.
- Adapt the ORPCF to meet your organization's professional development needs.



Next Steps

- Boost awareness of ORPCF availability + discuss how to adopt and adapt it
- Align training and development programs with competencies/skills
- Create and share tools and resources for individuals and organizations
- Provide feedback opportunities + revise/update the ORPCF as needed





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