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DEPARTMENT

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First-Ever ORD Director Leaves Legacy Of Equity, Stewardship

Outdoor Recreation Division Director Axie Navas Departs Office

SANTA FE, N.M. – Axie Navas, whose efforts as the first-ever Outdoor Recreation Division Director propelled New Mexico as a national leader in the field, is leaving state government.

Growing New Mexico’s outdoor recreation assets is a priority for Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, who signed a law creating the state’s first Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD), a division of the Economic Development Department, just a few months after taking office in 2019. Navas, a former editor at Outside magazine, was named New Mexico’s first ORD Director.

“In less than four years, the state has shown that strategic investments in outdoor recreation are creating jobs and helping to grow businesses across the state,” Economic Development Cabinet Secretary Alicia J. Keyes said. “Axie has led this charge with innovative and groundbreaking work, garnering many accomplishments for New Mexico along the way. We thank her for her service and wish her luck in the next phase of her career as she balances that with her new obligations as a first-time parent.”

[The Bureau of Economic Analysis \(BEA\) annual report](#) released in early November showed that New Mexico now ranks fifth in the United States for outdoor recreation employment growth in 2021, with an 18.2 percent bump in the sector year over year. The data also demonstrated that the state is outpacing the nation in GDP, employment, and compensation generated by the outdoor recreation economy.

Since 2019, some of the top accomplishments for the office have been:

- Creating the first-of-its-kind Outdoor Equity Fund, a grant that has funded 128 organizations with \$2 million and introduced nearly 40,000 young New Mexicans to the outdoors.
- Awarding over \$5 million to 66 outdoor infrastructure projects statewide through the Outdoor Recreation Trails+ Grant program. These projects will create or support a combined 959.6 miles of trails and 1,115 jobs.
- Working with the Confluence of States; a bipartisan collaboration to ensure the outdoor recreation industry protects and sustains the economy and environment, one state at a time for generations to come. Navas was elected chair and vice-chair of the Confluence of States in 2021 and 2022 respectively.
- Sponsoring of a paid high school outdoor internship program that has placed 29 students with nine New Mexico outdoor recreation employers, catalyzing over

\$90,000 in funding for student interns to better connect underserved and nontraditional students to college and careers.

- Launching the first-ever Outdoor Pitchfest, now the annual Adventure Pitch, which awarded \$15,000 in cash prizes to three entrepreneurs this year.
- Sponsoring and producing inaugural outdoor recreation incubators and accelerators.
- Ensuring outdoor recreation access is considered under Gov. Lujan Grisham's 30x30 Executive Order.
- Serving on a state-led coalition to develop permanent, robust conservation and outdoor recreation funding at the state level – an initiative that will go to the legislature in 2023.
- Garnering a \$1.985 million Economic Development Administration grant award to help the outdoor industry recover and thrive post-pandemic.

Under Navas, ORD also successfully led an Outstanding National Resource Waters petition to protect 125 miles of rivers in New Mexico based on their “outstanding” recreational significance to the state, ensuring exceptional water quality for hunters, anglers, acequias, birders, and everyone else living and recreating along their banks.

Outdoor recreation industry events have also seen an uptick with Navas at the helm. Annual in-state conferences, like the ORD sponsored Outdoor Economics Conference, as well as destination outdoor events have increased statewide. The office continues to partner with industry leaders to champion development in this target industry.

“I am so proud of what the Outdoor Recreation Division has accomplished since Gov. Lujan Grisham created the office in April 2019,” ORD Director Navas, who departs at the end of the year, said. “To cite just a few wins, we’ve launched the first-of-its-kind Outdoor Equity Fund, developed robust outdoor infrastructure funding for communities throughout the state, and grown outdoor industry career opportunities by a magnitude of almost 20. I’m confident that this is just the beginning, and that ORD’s momentum will continue to pick up speed from here under the guidance of the next director. It’s bittersweet to leave, but I know ORD will thrive in this next chapter as an established and powerful champion of the outdoor economy and equitable outdoor access.”

ORD Deputy Director Alyssa Renwick will lead ORD until a permanent director is named. Those interested in the position should send a resumé and letter of interest to Secretary Keyes via, Westlee Painter, Executive Assistant to Deputy Secretary Jon Clark, at WestleeA.Painter@edd.nm.gov.

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EDD's mission is *to improve the lives of New Mexico families by increasing economic opportunities and providing a place for businesses to thrive*. EDD's programs contribute directly to this mission by training our workforce, providing infrastructure that supports business growth, and helping *every community* create a thriving economy. Since January 1, 2019, EDD has supported more than 14,000 new jobs and trained 9,401 New Mexicans for better pay. EDD has utilized LEDA to make investments in 56 businesses, supporting more than 8,600 new jobs at an average wage of \$65,748, \$570 million in annual payroll, \$7.2 billion in new capital investment, and a ten-year economic impact of \$34+ billion. Forty communities across 22 counties have benefited from EDD programs.

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