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Outdoor Recreation Division begins next chapter with new Executive Director

SANTA FE, N.M. – The Outdoor Recreation Division has a new Executive Director. Ana Karina Armijo, who most recently served as Marketing and Tourism Director for the Town of Taos, was hired to fill the role of Executive Director for the Outdoor Recreation Division. Armijo will officially enter the role on Sept. 18, 2023.

Armijo first began her position with the Town of Taos in 2015. Since then, Armijo implemented a tourism promotion strategy that grew annual Lodgers' Tax collections from \$800,000 to \$1.75 million.

One of Armijo's significant accomplishments during her time with the Town of Taos was successfully implementing short-term rental policy changes that brought more equity and accountability for the community. Armijo directed the effort to create the short-term rental ordinance for the Town of Taos after the passage of [House Bill 117](#), during the 2020 Legislative Session, enabling local governments to collect Lodgers' Tax from short-term rental properties. In addition, Armijo negotiated the first Volunteer Collections Agreement with Airbnb in the state, which resulted in a 20 percent increase in Lodgers' Tax collection for the Town of Taos.

Armijo also directed the process for the Town of Taos in their successful effort to become an official MainStreet community and played a key role in establishing the first scheduled public charter air service for the region.

Armijo has served as a Board Member for the Taos County Chamber of Commerce since 2022 and a Board Director for the New Mexico Hospitality Association (NMHA) since 2020. Armijo was named Tourism Professional of the Year by NMHA in 2022 and has earned a series of awards and accolades for tourism marketing and promotion over the years on behalf of Visit Taos.

Armijo received a master's degree in Tourism Management from Colorado State University and a bachelor's degree in design from the University of Cincinnati, and will soon receive a Professional Certificate in Sustainable Tourism Destination Management from George

“New Mexico has been my home for almost 30 years and I'm so honored to serve in this role where I can champion a sustainable and equitable outdoor recreation economy that celebrates the diverse people, culture, and landscape of our beautiful state,” Armijo said.

“Karina has been a reliable stakeholder and a trusted voice in the space of tourism and outdoor recreation for years. Her collaborative demeanor and extensive experience with community engagement and environmental stewardship is the ideal blend for success in this role,” Acting Tourism Secretary Lancing Adams said. “I'm incredibly grateful to have Karina lead the Outdoor Recreation Division as we enter this new chapter and I'm fully confident in her ability and potential to deliver for New Mexico.”

Additionally, on August 4, 2023, the New Mexico Tourism Department (NMTD) and the New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will reinforce the strong trajectory of the Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD).

Outdoor recreation was identified in EDD's **20-year plan** as one of nine target industries for economic diversification; many of the recommended strategies were to align outdoor recreation closer to tourism efforts. The MOU represents a renewed commitment from the state to prioritize access, equity, and promotion of outdoor recreation opportunities for both residents and visitors. The **MOU states** that NMTD shall assume all responsibility of the functions, personnel, records, property, established programs, grants, appropriations, and overall supervision of the Outdoor Recreation Division.

“By aligning the Outdoor Recreation Division with the New Mexico Tourism Department, we will be able to forge new partnerships through existing marketing and development programs to ensure that residents and visitors alike can gain from the public health, environmental, and economic benefits of sustainable outdoor recreation,” Adams said.

EDD has been home to New Mexico's first-ever Outdoor Recreation Division since Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham created the division in 2019. “The staff has led with innovative programs, investing in recreational infrastructure, and expanding access to the outdoors for thousands of youths,” EDD Deputy Secretary Jon Clark said. “EDD remains committed to growing our outdoor economy and creating outdoor recreation jobs as the division begins its next chapter under the Tourism Department's leadership and benefits from the department's class-leading marketing expertise.”

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis 2021 annual **report**, outdoor recreation generated \$2.3 billion in economic impact for New Mexico.

With the established programs and initiatives of NMTD, ORD will be able to build upon the partnerships and campaigns that promote outdoor recreation and advocate for investment in sustainable infrastructure development. Ever since its inception over 10 years ago, outdoor adventure has been a centerpiece of the New Mexico True creative marketing strategy. Recent research highlights the strength of New Mexico's position as a premier destination for outdoor recreation. According to 2022 data, 60 percent of trips to New Mexico included an outdoor activity, whereas the U.S. average is only 48 percent. Additionally, a brand impact effectiveness study conducted in 2019 indicates that New Mexico rates well alongside its competitors in outdoor activities.

Existing employees with the Outdoor Recreation Division from the Economic Development Department, including Deputy Director Alyssa Renwick, have transitioned to the Tourism Department. Staff members of the Outdoor Recreation Division can be reached at nmoutside.com.

The next chapter for outdoor recreation

So, what's next for the Outdoor Recreation Division?

This moment signifies the forging of a collaborative partnership between EDD and NMTD to further expand ORD. During fiscal year 2024, ORD will be operating within NMTD to leverage existing programs and infrastructure. EDD successfully launched the office July 2019 and incubated flagship programs that will continue to serve the outdoor recreation sector.

- The partnership agreement enhances the connection between ORD and the tourism economy.
- As outdoor recreation was identified as one of the state's nine target industries, EDD incubated several successful outdoor recreation flagship programs.
- EDD forged a 20-year plan for each target industry, and through this process, it was determined that many recommended strategies for outdoor recreation would benefit by leveraging NMTD's marketing and tourism development program infrastructure.
- By aligning with the Tourism Department, ORD will be able to link up with additional programs and partnerships so it can progress in its vision to ensure that New Mexicans gain from the public health, environmental, and economic benefits of sustainable outdoor recreation.
- EDD will continue its critical business-attraction efforts for outdoor recreation, while NMTD implements key strategies for fiscal year 2024.

If you are currently working with the Outdoor Recreation Division on any program or service delivered by the division, please continue working with your program coordinator. We look forward to sharing continued progress and updates soon.

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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.

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