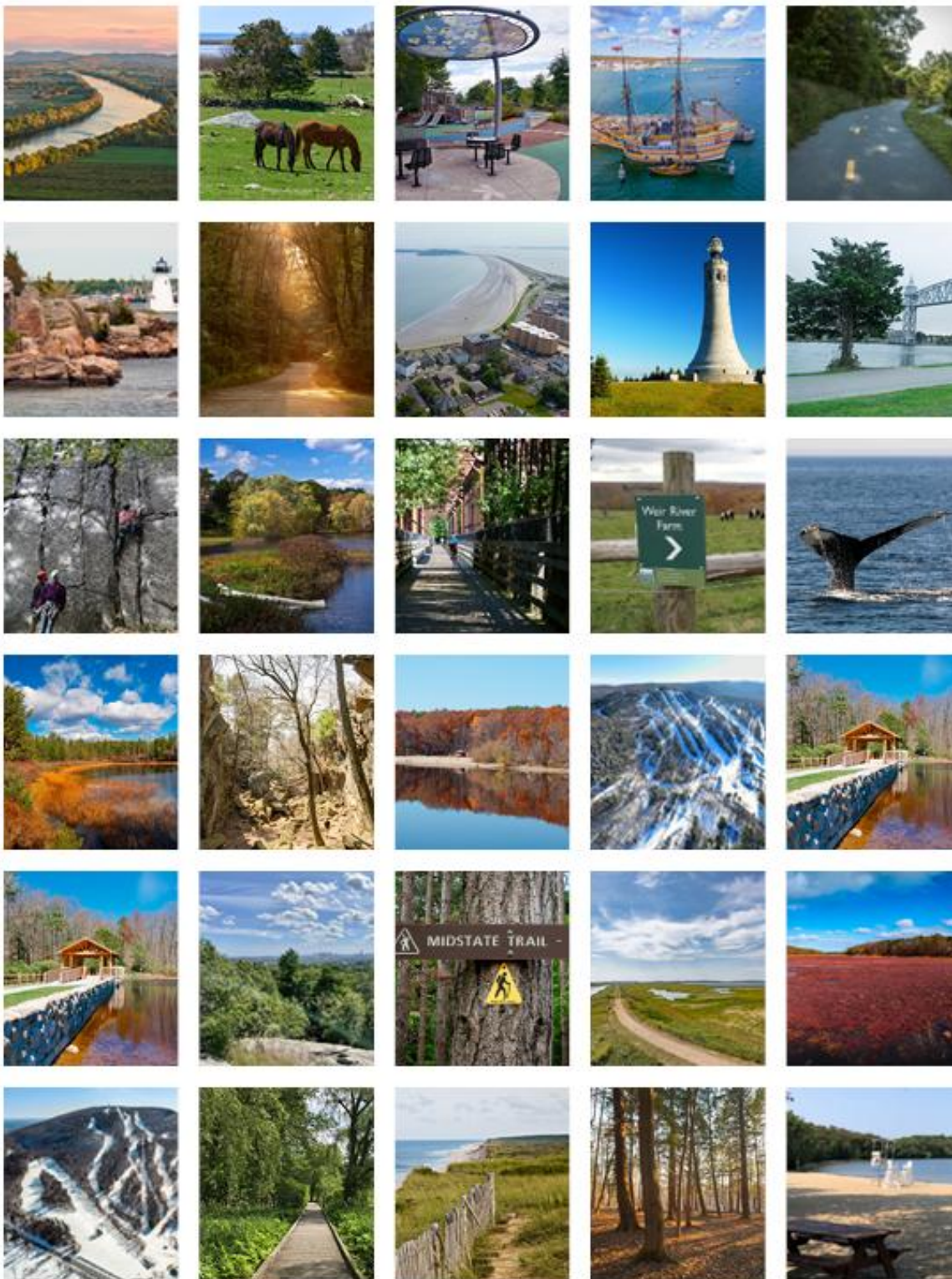




REGIONAL SESSIONS SUMMARY & TAKEAWAYS





Regional Sessions Summary

Between November 2025 and January 2026, a series of regional listening sessions were conducted as part of the Massachusetts Outdoor Industry Pathways Initiative. These sessions engaged regional stakeholders from across the Commonwealth to explore Massachusetts' outdoor recreation identity; how outdoor recreation is currently discussed, supported, and promoted within participants' work; and opportunities for stronger statewide collaboration across the outdoor industry.

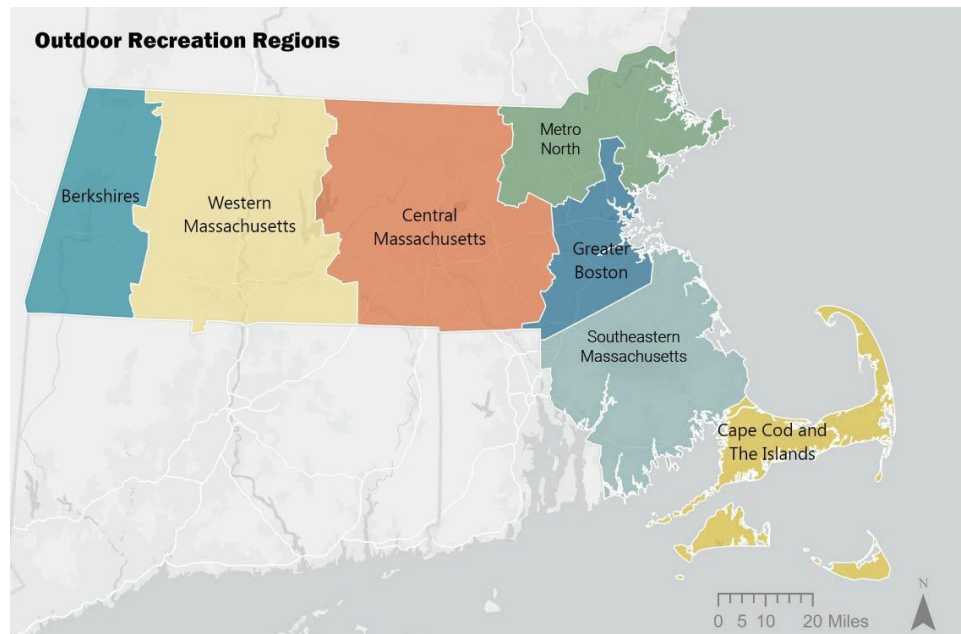
Given the regional focus of the sessions, participants primarily represented planning, tourism, economic development, and other regional-level sectors. A subsequent phase of engagement will focus specifically on outdoor recreation businesses and other ground-level outdoor industry stakeholders.

The summary below highlights key takeaways from six virtual listening sessions and two in-person sessions held at the Western Massachusetts Outdoor Recreation Summit at Greenfield Community College in November 2025. For more detailed summaries of each session, visit: <https://arcg.is/0jmaKq1>.

Findings Across All Regions

Regional Identity and Assets

Outdoor recreation plays an important role in the overall identity of each region, though how it is expressed and promoted to both visitors and residents, varies by geography. The following descriptions reflect how participants characterized the outdoor recreation available in their region and may not capture every recreation opportunity each region offers.



These regions were used as a baseline for outreach. Regional boundaries were informed by the Massachusetts Regional Tourism Councils and were not intended to be definitive for the purposes of this engagement process.



Western Massachusetts/Berkshires: Mountain landscapes supporting downhill and Nordic skiing, hiking, and trail-based recreation; scenic byways and fall foliage tourism; river recreation including paddling and fishing; and a strong integration of cultural institutions, arts, and outdoor recreation that reinforces the region's identity as both a nature- and culture-based destination.

Central Mass: Rolling agricultural and forested landscapes with a strong network of rail trails; four-season, family-friendly outdoor recreation opportunities; lakes, rivers, and reservoirs that support paddling, fishing, and swimming; and a growing emphasis on local food systems, agritourism, and community-scale recreation assets.

Metro North¹: Coastal and riverfront outdoor recreation assets combined with historic sites and landscapes; equestrian facilities and traditions; convenient access to a wide variety of trails for walking, hiking, biking, and mountain biking; climbing opportunities; and proximity to population centers that supports frequent, short-duration outdoor experiences.

Greater Boston: An extensive network of urban and suburban parks and parkways; rail trails that connect downtowns, neighborhoods, and transit; diverse water-based recreation including boating, paddling, and harbor access; highly accessible and inclusive trail systems; and strong demand for close-to-home, park-based outdoor recreation.

Southeastern Mass: Working waterfronts and maritime communities; coastal and inland water recreation opportunities; agritourism and rural landscapes; equestrian facilities and trail riding; and a strong connection between outdoor recreation, local heritage, and working lands and waters.

Cape and Islands: Iconic coastal landscapes featuring beaches, dunes, and salt ponds; extensive opportunities for swimming, boating, paddling, fishing, and wildlife viewing; trail networks and conservation lands; and a highly seasonal tourism economy that shapes recreation demand, workforce needs, and infrastructure capacity.

Common Challenges

Awareness & Communication

- Limited awareness of local outdoor recreation assets amongst residents and visitors
- Fragmented promotion, marketing, and storytelling across regions
- Need for improved information infrastructure and centralized, user-friendly resources

Access & Equity

- Physical barriers to recreation access, including limited parking and inadequate trailhead or site infrastructure

¹ In the *Massachusetts Outdoor Industry Pathways Needs & Opportunities Report*, this has been renamed to Northeastern Massachusetts.



- Financial barriers during peak seasons, such as fees, equipment rentals, and resident-only policies
- Transportation challenges for individuals without access to a personal vehicle
- Accessibility gaps for people with disabilities and adaptive recreation users

Business & Infrastructure Gaps

- Limited availability of equipment rentals (e.g., bikes, kayaks, outdoor gear), particularly in less tourism-driven regions
- High insurance costs affecting guides, outfitters, stables, and tour operators
- Insufficient supporting services, such as lodging and food and beverage options, near recreation sites
- Seasonal constraints that limit year-round business viability and workforce stability

Coordination & Collaboration

- Stakeholders often working in silos across sectors and geographies
- Limited cross-regional communication and collaboration
- Need for stronger alignment among tourism, planning, conservation, and outdoor recreation business sectors

Regional Variations & Unique Considerations

Western Mass/Berkshires

- Strong existing outdoor recreation infrastructure and a deeply rooted recreation culture
- Unique integration of arts, culture, and outdoor recreation that differentiates the region statewide
- Established regional leadership and coordination through the Western Massachusetts Outdoor Recreation Summit and the Western Massachusetts Outdoor Recreation Coalition

Central Mass

- Abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, including water-based assets, that remain underrecognized and underpromoted
- Gaps in supporting services, such as food and beverage options, lodging, gas stations, and EV charging, near key recreation sites
- Opportunity to better connect recreation assets to nearby downtowns and rural centers to support local businesses and visitor spending
- Potential to position the region as an accessible, family-friendly, four-season destination

Metro North

- Need to expand awareness and invite in residents who do not currently recreate outdoors to increase inclusivity and local participation
- Municipal partnerships are critical for improving access, programming, and outreach to new and diverse user groups



- Strong potential for local and regional tourism growth, with nearby but under-visited destinations and trail systems
- Opportunity to strengthen connections between community recreation, regional trails, and local businesses

Greater Boston

- Strong emphasis on equity, access, and expanding outdoor recreation opportunities for underserved communities
- Youth engagement identified as a critical pathway for long-term participation, workforce development, and stewardship
- Need for better education and awareness among residents about nearby outdoor recreation opportunities and outdoor businesses
- Opportunity to leverage urban parks, waterfronts, and trail networks as gateways to broader regional recreation systems

Southeastern Mass

- Ongoing challenge of being perceived as a “pass-through” region, with competition from Boston and Cape Cod destinations
- Need for more cohesive regional storytelling, branding, and centralized visitor information

Cape & Islands

- Conservation organizations and land trusts play a critical role in providing and maintaining outdoor recreation access
- Outdoor recreation is central to quality of life and the visitor experience, but remains highly seasonal
- Need to balance conservation, community needs, and visitor use during peak seasons
- Opportunity to expand shoulder-season and off-season recreation offerings to support year-round economic resilience

Reactions to Organizing Pathways

Participants were asked to give their reactions to three possible organizing pathways for the outdoor industry in Massachusetts, with room for a fourth “Build-your-own” option. For more information on each pathway, see [the Pathways background document](#).

(1) Outdoor Recreation Summit (2) Outdoor Business Alliance (3) Outdoor Recreation Coalition

Across all seven different listening sessions, participants demonstrated alignment around preferred organizing opportunities:

Outdoor Recreation Coalition (Strongest Support)

Participants in every region favored a coalition model to:



- Unite diverse partners, including outdoor recreation businesses, tourism organizations, land trusts, advocacy groups, municipalities, planners, and state agencies
- Provide statewide coordination and policy alignment
- Support shared messaging, branding, and communication infrastructure
- Enable cross-regional and cross-sector collaboration
- Serve as a coordinating entity for state and federal partnerships
- Bridge gaps between sectors that currently operate in silos

Outdoor Recreation Summit (Strong Support)

The concept of a statewide summit was widely viewed as either a critical first step or a complementary strategy to a coalition. Participants noted that a summit could:

- Create dedicated space for stakeholders to connect and build relationships
- Surface shared priorities organically through dialogue and exchange
- Increase statewide visibility and alignment around outdoor recreation
- Facilitate the sharing of best practices, case studies, and success stories
- Be integrated into existing events (e.g., the Governor's Conference, Boston Run & Outdoor Expo)
- Rotate locations across the Commonwealth to ensure regional representation

Outdoor Business Alliance (Limited Support)

Support for a standalone outdoor business alliance was more limited, with several concerns raised:

- Massachusetts already has numerous business, trade, and membership organizations
- Risk of duplicating or competing with existing chambers of commerce, regional tourism councils, and trade associations
- Potential to disproportionately benefit larger or more established businesses over small and emerging operators

Alternative & Complimentary Ideas:

Rather than creating a separate business alliance, participants suggested:

- Incorporating a business incubator or accelerator function within a coalition or summit framework
- Creating engagement pathways for pilot projects and demonstration initiatives for small businesses
- Establishing grant programs to support business participation, innovation, and collaboration
- Developing mentorship programs that connect established outdoor businesses with emerging entrepreneurs



Cross-Cutting Themes

Communication is Critical

Across all regions, participants emphasized the need for a stronger, more cohesive communication backbone, including:

- Centralized, accessible information about outdoor recreation assets and opportunities
- Shared marketing and promotional infrastructure
- Improved coordination among land managers, tourism offices, municipalities, and businesses
- Statewide campaigns that promote stewardship, responsible recreation, accessibility, and a shared Massachusetts outdoor recreation identity

Organizational Pathways Should Build on Existing Systems

Participants consistently stressed that any new structure should be additive rather than duplicative:

- Leverage existing organizations, events, and networks
- Avoid competition with established entities
- Focus on filling gaps rather than creating parallel systems
- Strengthen and formalize connections that already exist across sectors

Local Awareness as the Foundation

While attracting visitors is important, participants emphasized that resident engagement must come first:

- Ensure residents are aware of and feel prepared to use local recreation assets and businesses
- Expand participation among individuals and communities that do not currently recreate outdoors
- Build a culture of outdoor recreation within communities where it is not traditionally part of daily life
- Support municipal-level programming, education, and outreach

Conclusion

The Massachusetts Outdoor Industry Pathways regional listening sessions revealed remarkable consistency in how outdoor recreation is valued across the Commonwealth. While each region has distinct assets and challenges, stakeholders share a common vision for stronger statewide coordination through mechanisms such as an outdoor recreation coalition and a statewide outdoor recreation summit.



MASSACHUSETTS OUTDOOR INDUSTRY PATHWAYS

The enthusiasm and engagement demonstrated across all regional sessions provide a strong foundation for building a more coordinated outdoor industry, one that serves residents and visitors, supports businesses and communities, and preserves and grows what makes outdoor recreation in Massachusetts unique.