

The Culture & Commerce of Outdoor Recreation in the Mountain West

Outdoor recreation has played a key role in linking city and mountains into a unified ecology across the Mountain West. This core-periphery dynamic fits outdoor recreation into long historical processes of globalization, imperialism, and technological change. Outdoor recreationists simultaneously depend on high technology and claim a “back to nature” mentality. In the first place, it is possible to view recreationists not so much as fleeing their societies but relying heavily on the development, production and distribution of high technology by big business. This view presents outdoor recreationists as active agents for the powerful outdoor recreation industry. Meanwhile, outdoor recreationists demand government land protection and regulation, allowing them to disperse across parks, forests and wilderness areas. Certainly, the flourishing of outdoor recreation has brought exciting achievements, like drawing the 2002 Winter Olympics to Salt Lake City. However, growth and development around popular locales, like national parks or ski towns, is part of a much larger Western story of urban sprawl and watershed pollution or shortages. Simply put, exploring the culture and commerce of outdoor recreation in the Mountain West offers crucial insights into the histories of technology and environment.

This panel will explore the cultural and commercial consequences that flow from the development of high technology for the purposes of outdoor recreation. Each panelist will examine an area of outdoor recreation and how key constituents like corporations, consumers, labor, or government have impacted its history. Panelists will give a presentation followed by a round table discussion relating the presentations and how historians can help communities understand outdoor recreation’s past to help inform its future.

Organizer:

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