Outdoor Recreation on the National Forests
Remarks of the Hon. James R. Lyons,
Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment,
U.S. Department of Agriculture, June 8, 1998

... At USDA, we’re proud of the role we play in promoting outdoor recreation and the physical, psychological, and even spiritual benefits that come from outdoor recreation experiences.

We’re also very much aware of the economic importance of outdoor recreation for all of you with a business interest in outdoor recreation and the thousands of communities across the United States that benefit from outdoor recreation and tourism in their own backyards. . . .

Now, among the most valuable products that flow from the national forests are the experiences that leave on a roll of film, or as memories of great hiking or camping experiences, or in the exhilaration one feels while running a wild river or wind surfing the Columbia Gorge.

Outdoor recreational experiences are among the most valuable products the come from the national forests. In fact, recreation is the window through which most Americans see their national forests. And we’re working hard to help them understand what they’re seeing and to expand opportunities for Americans to see more. . . .

RECREATION IS BIG BUSINESS ON THE NATIONAL FORESTS. Three-quarters of what the national forests contribute to the GDP comes from outdoor recreation—that’s nearly $100 billion each year.

We manage a diverse and spectacular portfolio of recreation opportunities. There’s something for everyone to enjoy on the national forests—from extreme skiing to day hikes, from camping and hiking to world class hunting and fishing, from back country experiences to motorized access, scenic byways, and all-American Roads. . . .

During my tenue with the Department, we’ve not only tried to highlight our recreation program, but we’ve also tried to take a more business-like approach to its management and promotion.

We developed a marketing strategy and an icon that we hope will become to outdoor recreation what the Nike swoosh is to sporting goods . . . a sign that connotes high quality outdoor experiences and customer satisfaction. . . .

We’re building partnerships more than ever before, because we need the help, and we know that high quality outdoor recreation experiences are the product of public/private partnerships. . . .

We’ve got a great product to sell. And, with your help, we can make it even better!
Survey results show that 94.5% of Americans 16 years of age or older participated in at least one of the surveyed forms of outdoor recreation [in the previous year]. That is almost 19 out of 20 people and approximately 189 million participants nationwide.

Some activities, such as walking, do not require a specific setting. However, most activities either require or are enhanced by a particular environment or specific facilities. While private industry attempts to find a way to capitalize on the growing market of outdoor recreation, public agencies already have the basic resources necessary to provide for the public demand in this area. The most essential resource is, of course, land. Government agencies are responsible for much of the land that is still available for outdoor recreation activities. While most agencies do have resource oriented responsibilities other than recreation, it is viewed as important to respond to public demands for recreational use of public lands.

For 25 of the 31 activities included in both studies, there are millions more participants in the 1995 totals than there were in 1983. In addition to millions of new participants for traditional activities, there are participants for adventure activities that were rarely pursued 15 years ago such as...rock climbing.

Since 1982-3, many activities dramatically increased in popularity: hiking (94%), backpacking (73%), downhill skiing (59%), primitive area camping (58%). Of these 31 activities, the trend seems to be for some declines in participation in consumptive activities such as hunting, while non-consumptive activity participation seems to be on the rise...