

# OUTDOOR CHATTANOOGA STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2028



**CITY  
IN A  
PARK**

*Chattanooga*   
**PARKS & OUTDOORS**

**Outdoor  
Chattanooga** 

PHOTO: Paddlers on the TN River



# OUTDOOR CHATTANOOGA

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Executive Summary . . . . . 03**

**Vision, Mission, & Values . . . . . 04**

**Programs . . . . . 05**

**History . . . . . 06**

**How the Plan is Measured . . . . . 07**

**Strategic Goals . . . . . 08**

**Community Health and Wellness . 09**

**Connecting People and Nature . . . 12**

**Access to the Outdoors . . . . . 13**

**Regional Outdoor Economy . . . . . 16**

**Build a Solid Foundation . . . . . 18**

As Mayor of Chattanooga, I feel one of the best and simplest antidotes is to get outside. Here in our beloved city, we are blessed to be surrounded by such natural resources. We truly are a city in a park and honored to have been nominated as the first "National Park City" in America.

Outdoor Chattanooga, born in 2004, aimed to make outdoor recreation a defining lifestyle, enhancing the region's resources and economy. Today, it serves as our community's gateway to a rich natural landscape, connecting locals and visitors alike through events, programs and partnerships.

Despite Chattanooga's outdoor acclaim, our city grapples with being among the top 10 most overweight cities in America. Research consistently highlights the health benefits of outdoor activity, emphasizing the importance of nature in our lives, both physically and mentally.

Reflecting on two decades of programming, our Outdoor Chattanooga division and its partners have identified what works in our quest to shape Chattanooga into a happy, healthy haven. Our inclusive approach stems from the community-led initiative that made us One Chattanooga, welcoming everyone, including our guest to enjoy our outdoors.

Outdoor Chattanooga pledges to "meet you at your front porch" to encourage outdoor engagement. The next chapter is now. This strategic plan emphasizes our community health, enhanced outdoor accessibility, stronger connections to nature, support for a regional outdoor economy, and a foundation for long-term success.

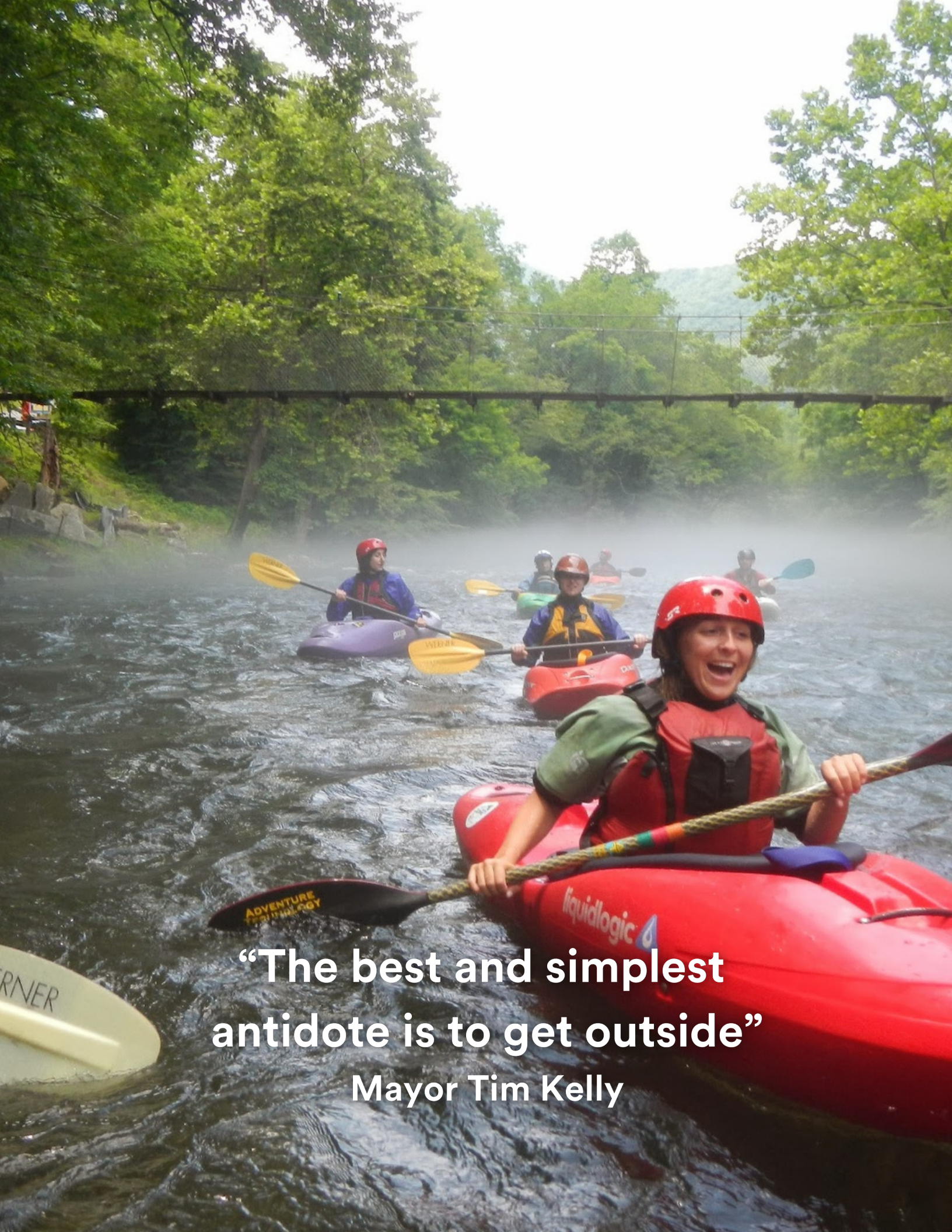
True growth requires honest reflection. I invite you to join Outdoor Chattanooga's commitment to building a healthier future, connecting all to the outdoor amenities our city and region are blessed with and continuing to help build our regional economy. Your participation is key to our shared endeavor of becoming a City In A Park and joining the world as the first National Park City in America gaining worldwide attention.



Mayor Tim Kelly







**“The best and simplest  
antidote is to get outside”**

**Mayor Tim Kelly**



# OUTDOOR CHATTANOOGA STRATEGIC PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year Outdoor Chattanooga celebrates an inspiring 20 years of outdoor play, outdoor connection, and outdoor education. This 2024-2028 Strategic Plan honors that legacy, recognizing the pivotal milestones and diverse community members who have contributed to establishing the Chattanooga region as a nationally recognized hub for outdoor recreation.

Consider this strategic plan our comprehensive outdoor community training program - a living document, shaped by community stakeholders and informed by numerous local, state, and national recreation plans. It outlines the actions necessary to energize and strengthen our city and partnerships, as we invest in our region's unique strengths and natural assets. We are committed to collaborating across geographic boundaries to address our current challenges and build a solid foundation for navigating future opportunities and threats.

Over the next five years, Outdoor Chattanooga is committed to the goal of reducing barriers and increasing inclusivity, ensuring all Chattanoogaans and visitors are welcome in our outdoor spaces.

Our focus areas include community health and wellness, expanding access to the outdoors, fostering deep connections between people and nature, supporting an innovative regional outdoor economy, and building a solid foundation for long-term success. Through these initiatives, we are committed to a sustainable and thriving outdoor future and a healthier community for all.

### INSPIRED BY YOU

"We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for supporting us as we seek to impact the lives of these youth. We would not be able to do what we do without our amazing community partners. Your time and care for these boys has certainly shaped their lives, even if they don't know it yet."

-Bridge Chattanooga Crew #18





# We see the outdoors as a welcome home for all Chattanoogaans and guests.

Our mission is to spark a contagious love of the outdoors through adventure and action sports, nature exploration, and community partnerships.

## OUR VALUES

### WE BELIEVE PEOPLE

- Have a fundamental right to the benefits offered by the natural spaces surrounding us.
- Have a fundamental right to be safe, welcomed, and respected in all public spaces.
- Deserve to have the highest level of trust in those who represent the Department of Parks & Outdoors.

### WE BELIEVE COMMUNITY

- Acknowledgement of historic inequity of and injustice in public spaces is necessary for individual and community healing, now and for generations to come.
- Is powerfully nurtured in public parks, playgrounds, playing fields, on outdoor adventures, in public gatherings, at celebrations and in the arts.
- Is enriched and supported by public parks and spaces that have a strong sense of place.

### WE BELIEVE NATURE

- Is necessary for sustaining healthy and happy lives, connecting us to one another and to every living being.
- Has provided Chattanooga with its stunningly beautiful landscape and it deserves our respect, care, understanding, and preservation.
- Offers lessons that can guide us to a more sustaining and healthy relationship with the natural environment and the climate we depend on for life and livelihood.



# OUTDOOR CHATTANOOGA STRATEGIC PLAN

## PROGRAMS



### LEARN TO

introductory outdoor recreation skills in a safe and welcoming environment



### EXPLORE

encourages a greater sense of place by exploring story, history, and habitat



### MEET UPS

builds our outdoor community through meet-ups and connections with locals, clubs, and retailers



### ELEVATE

workshops, events, internships, and leadership opportunities designed to elevate the outdoor industry



# MILESTONES

- 1998** Rapid Learning Starts with OutVenture
- 2003** “Chattanooga region to be nationally known for outdoor recreation” - Mayor Bob Corker  
Public Outdoor Recreation Meeting with 800 in attendance  
3 State / 3 Mountain Challenge
- 2004** Outdoor Chattanooga Founded
- 2005** Head of the Hooch
- 2006** Philip Grymes Joins Outdoor Chattanooga  
Raccoon Mountain Phase 1 Trails  
Tour de Georgia
- 2007** Friends of Outdoor Chattanooga Incorporated  
Outdoor Expo and Gear Swap  
Outdoor Industry Association Rendezvous
- 2009** OutVenture joins Outdoor Chattanooga  
River Rat Open Water Swim
- 2010** Outdoor Chattanooga Building Opens  
Swim the Suck  
National Trails Symposium  
Pro Walk Pro Bike Conference
- 2011** Outside Magazine’s Best Outdoor Town  
Fireside Concert Series  
ChattaJack  
7 Bridges Marathon
- 2012** Chattanooga Bicycle Transit System
- 2013** Stringer’s Ridge Preserve Opens  
US Cycling National Championships  
Lookout Wild Film Festival  
Ironman 140.6  
TN Recreation and Parks Conference
- 2014** Interscholastic Climbing League  
Outside Magazine’s Best Town  
Ironman 70.3
- 2015** Chattanooga Marathon
- 2016** Ironman 70.3 World Championships
- 2018** Southern Zone Open Water Championships
- 2021** Southern Zone Open Water Championships
- 2022** Outdoor Chattanooga building dedicated to Philip Grymes
- 2023** Walden’s Ridge Park Opens  
Aetna Trails Open
- 2024** Outdoor Chattanooga Celebrates 20 Years





# OUTDOOR CHATTANOOGA STRATEGIC PLAN

## MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS



#### Total Reach

Total number of people served through programs, outreach, conferences, and events.



#### Net Promoter Score

Program participant responses to “How likely is it that you would recommend Outdoor Chattanooga to a colleague or friend?”



#### Team Program Hours

Total direct program hours provided to our community by Outdoor Chattanooga staff or volunteers per year.



#### Outdoor Economy

Total impact of Chattanooga's Outdoor Economy.



#### Partner Satisfaction Rate

Partner responses to “How satisfied were you in partnering with Outdoor Chattanooga?”



#### Volunteer Hours

Total volunteer hours in support of Outdoor Chattanooga programs, events, and outreach.



“I think it’s really awesome that you guys provide this service. It’s one of the things that makes Chattanooga a really special community.”

M. Wyatt



# STRATEGIC GOALS

1

## **Community Health and Wellness**

When successful: Our region's population and natural resources will be healthier and have built new pathways and habitats for continued positive gains.

2

## **Connecting People and Nature**

When successful: Chattanooga will be a leader in how urban environments connect people and nature and is identified as a National Park City.

3

## **Access to the Outdoors**

When successful: Every Chattanooga will have access to safe outdoor spaces and introductory programming that brings them joy.

4

## **Regional Outdoor Economy**

When successful: Our community, visitors, and industry partners will have a user-friendly inventory of the region's outdoor industry and recreational assets, as well as clear economic impact data.

5

## **Build A Solid Foundation**

When successful: Outdoor Chattanooga's team, resources, and structure will be matched to the work ahead, aligned with related city and regional initiatives, and operating sustainably.



# COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS

We will connect the daily work of Outdoor Chattanooga to advance the health and wellness goals of the people, communities, and counties we work with.

## OUR COMMITMENT

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### CONNECTION

Connecting people to the mental, emotional, and physical health benefits found outdoors.



### HEALTH

Prioritizing the health of our workforce by streamlining access to activity and nature.



### ACCESSABILITY

Offering entry outdoor programs to meet the needs and requirements of people with poor to fair health.



### HEALING NATURE

Highlighting the power of nature to heal people, communities, and itself.



### STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship work and advocacy that builds healthy lands and water resources in our community.

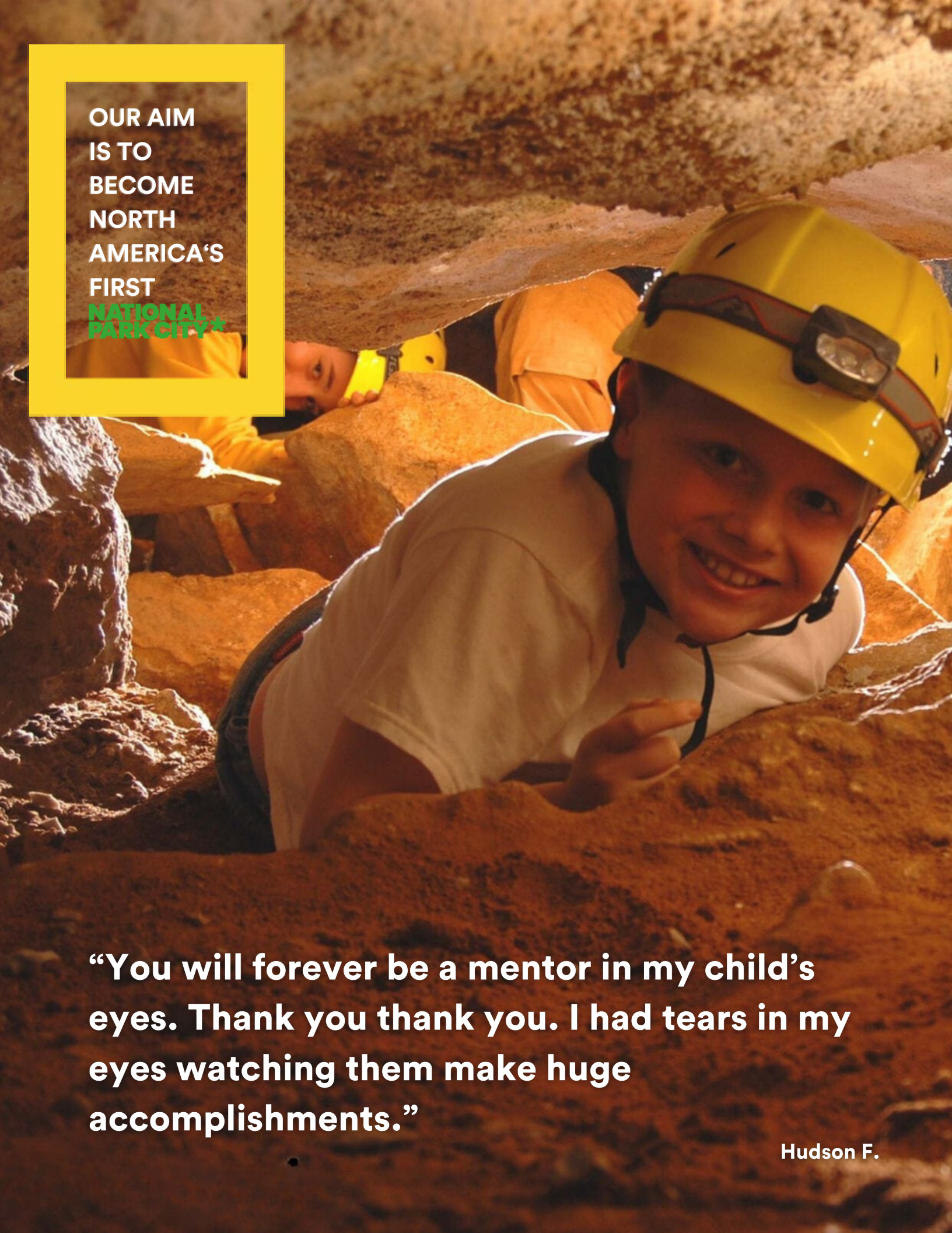




**“I learned how to get back on the kayak if I fall, which of course will take some practice on my own as well. The details on the paddle stroke and using my body were spot on. It was a great experience.”**

**Jennifer B.**





OUR AIM  
IS TO  
BECOME  
NORTH  
AMERICA'S  
FIRST  
**NATIONAL  
PARK CITY\***

**“You will forever be a mentor in my child’s eyes. Thank you thank you. I had tears in my eyes watching them make huge accomplishments.”**

**Hudson F.**



# CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE

Together, we'll forge a strong bond with the natural world, elevating our regional identity as a leader in outdoor adventure and action sports.

## OUR COMMITMENT

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- ▶ **VISIONARY FRAMEWORK**  
Complete a 10-year Strategic Framework for Outdoor Chattanooga, informed by comprehensive community engagement and key principle partnerships.
- ▶ **THOUGHT LEADER**  
Operating as a thought leader, specifically on the impact of the Southern outdoor economy and natural environments.
- ▶ **FORCE MULTIPLIER**  
Acting as a force multiplier for the work of local programs, regional partners, and National Park City initiatives through dedicated communication strategies, media, policy implementation, and events that share their work and best practices.
- ▶ **EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE**  
Creating educational signage, communication materials, and programming focused on individual and community stewardship of public outdoor spaces.
- ▶ **ANNUAL EVENTS**  
Build 2 signature annual events/conferences within the Department of Parks and Outdoors.



# ACCESS TO THE OUTDOORS

We will work with communities to provide safe and equitable access to outdoor recreation, increase the diversity of people participating in these activities, and ensure that people of all backgrounds are welcomed and included in the programming, planning, and communication of Chattanooga's outdoor landscapes.

## OUR COMMITMENT

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- ▶ **INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMMING**  
Outreach and introductory programming grounded in the principles of safety, patience, and trust in all Chattanooga city neighborhoods.
- ▶ **REPRESENTATION**  
Representation as a top priority when building new programs, partnerships, outdoor spaces, and communication strategies.
- ▶ **ACCOUNTABILITY**  
Holding ourselves accountable to engage in difficult conversations and prioritize resources that move outdoor activities and spaces from isolated and exclusionary to welcoming and inclusive.
- ▶ **CLIMATE AFFECT ON EQUITY**  
Working with community leaders to plan programming that anticipates the impacts of climate change on outdoor access, with a specific focus on Equity Investment zones.



**“Outdoor Chattanooga has played a crucial role in supporting The H2O Life in fostering and maintaining connections with marginalized communities in the broader Chattanooga region. We eagerly anticipate expanding opportunities for all residents to relish.”**

**Shawanna Kendrick  
Founder/CEO The H2O Life**







**"Since opening our doors in 2019, our shop's main goal has always been to help build a community for fly fishers and anglers in Chattanooga. The outdoor community has responded with overwhelming support. We couldn't have chosen a better town to set up shop and spread our roots."**

**Seth Fields, Owner/Manager  
The Hatch Outfitters**





# REGIONAL OUTDOOR ECONOMY

We will foster an entrepreneurial spirit where our region's outdoor industry and recreational economy can grow, including small businesses, startups, nationally known outdoor companies, government agencies, and nonprofits.

## OUR COMMITMENT

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### ▶ **ADVOCATE**

Operating as an advocate and information hub with local, regional, state, and federal government for the needs of our communities' outdoor economy.

### ▶ **SUPPORT**

Supporting craftsman and entrepreneurship spaces for businesses and programs within the outdoor economy.

### ▶ **ATTRACTION**

Attracting outdoor industry conferences and events to our region in partnership with tourism, outdoor recreation councils, chamber of commerce, and key partners.

### ▶ **BUILDING WORKFORCES**

Building the next-generation outdoor and recreation workforces alongside local university and workforce development programs.

### ▶ **ASSISTANCE**

Assisting in the development of the Tennessee Office of Outdoor Recreation.





**“Outdoor Chatt is very visible throughout the Chattanooga community as a leader in outdoor recreation. The inclusiveness, affordability, and variety of your programs make a significant impact on the community and also utilize open space throughout the city to its fullest potential.”**

**Anonymous**



# BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION

We will create a solid foundation of human talent, technology, programs, infrastructure, and sustainable support to ensure we realize the strategic objectives of this plan and prepare for the larger vision ahead.

## OUR COMMITMENT

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### ► BUILD A TEAM

Build and train a team of staff and volunteers ready to achieve this plan and further the work of Chattanooga's National Park City initiative and Parks and Outdoors comprehensive plan.

### ► FRIENDS OF CHATTANOOGA

Assisting Friends of Outdoor Chattanooga in expanding its role as a strong and effective non-profit support and advisory partner of Outdoor Chattanooga.

### ► FUNDING

Close Outdoor Chattanooga's annual resource to meet the needs identified in this plan and achieve the goals of One Chattanooga's plans.

### ► ROAD MAP

Create a road map for Chattanooga's outdoor industry infrastructure investments to be equal to similar Southeast outdoor communities.

### ► EXPAND

Expand Outdoor Chattanooga's benefits to community partners to include co-branding, facility access, and a greater number of public/private partnerships.



# YOU ARE OUTDOOR CHATTANOOGA

## CONTACT



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Established in 2004, Outdoor Chattanooga is a unique division of the City of Chattanooga's Parks and Outdoors Department. Our mission is to spark a contagious love of the outdoors through adventure and action sports, nature exploration, and community partnerships.

As a community organization, we value your engagement, feedback, and expertise. To learn more about Chattanooga and our region's thriving outdoor community or to get involved as a partner, participant, or volunteer, we invite you to visit us online or in person at the Philip Grymes Outdoor Chattanooga Center.

PHILIP GRYMES  
OUTDOOR CHATTANOOGA  
CENTER

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