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VISIT CENTRAL OREGON AWARDS \$300,000 TO TWELVE REGIONAL TOURISM PROJECTS THROUGH THE CENTRAL OREGON FUTURE FUND

Now in its fourth year, Visit Central Oregon's successful grant program is designed to support tourism-related projects that benefit both residents and visitors

(SUNRIVER, Ore.) — Visit Central Oregon has announced that twelve recipients will be awarded a total of \$300,000 in grant money as part of the [Central Oregon Future Fund](#). Now in its fourth annual cycle, the grant program supports local tourism projects that benefit both visitors and Central Oregon residents. Visit Central Oregon selected the twelve recipients from a total of 26 applications requesting more than \$1 million in funding.

The recipients represent a wide range of tourism-related projects — from a new event complex expanding Cowdeo youth rodeo programming in Jefferson County, to a trail project in Sisters with a goal to create the first fully verified accessible adventure trail system in Oregon.

Visit Central Oregon chose the twelve recipients in cooperation with eight advisory grant reviewers, which included industry representatives from regional tourism and hospitality, media/publishing, outdoor recreation, and Central Oregon's rural communities including the Warm Springs Reservation and Warm Springs Reservation community-based non-profit.

Each of the recipients has at least one thing in common: Every project awarded a Central Oregon Future Fund grant emphasized tourism-related programs and enhancements in line with the Fund's pillars of promoting accessible adventure, cultural tourism, and stewardship. The 26 applications included nine accessible adventure projects, fourteen cultural tourism projects, and three stewardship projects. The twelve recipients include five accessible adventure projects, six cultural tourism projects, and one stewardship project.

In addition to the Future Fund, Visit Central Oregon supports stewardship projects through the [Central Oregon Destination Management Studio](#), which is a regional collaborative process. That program includes more than \$100,000 in support for stewardship projects, including Dark Sky initiatives, a trails improvement project managed by the Deschutes Trails Coalition, and the development of an arts and heritage program focused on Central Oregon's music culture.

"By reinvesting tourism dollars directly into projects that protect our natural landscapes and enhance our Central Oregon community, we are ensuring that our destination remains strong for future generations of residents and visitors alike," said Scott Larson, CEO of Visit Central Oregon. "Four years in and we are continuously proud to support local projects and initiatives that foster accessibility, diversity and sustainability."

The 2026 Central Oregon Future Fund grantees include:

- **Jefferson County Event Complex:** The project will expand Cowdeo youth rodeo programming and enhance the Corwin Arena to increase regional event capacity, improve visitor access, and strengthen tourism-driven economic activity.

- **Wasco County Fairgrounds:** Wasco County will enhance the Wasco County Fairgrounds by procuring a mobile performance stage and completing lighting, accessibility, and event-area improvements to expand tourism-driven concerts, festivals, and regional community events.
- **High Desert Food and Farm Alliance:** This project expands the High Desert Food Trail with development of an Accessibility Edition, inclusive itineraries, and a shoulder-season Accessible Travel Week, connecting visitors of all abilities to Central Oregon farms, food, and agritourism.
- **Sunriver Nature Center and Observatory:** SNCO's Accessible Trails & Inclusive Interpretation Initiative combines ADA-accessible trails, multilingual and audio signage, and a virtual walking tour to ensure visitors of all abilities can enjoy Central Oregon's natural beauty year-round.
- **Deschutes Land Trust:** This project improves visitor access to Metolius Preserve, creating an inviting place to hike, roll and ride. These infrastructure and trail improvements increase the inventory of accessible trails in the Sisters area for visitors of all abilities.
- **Sisters Trails Alliance:** Sisters Trails Alliance's goal is to create the first fully verified for accessible adventure trail system in Oregon by rating all non-motorized trails, training volunteers, and expanding adaptive recreation opportunities for people of all abilities.

"Sisters Trails Alliance believes everyone should have access to our beautiful outdoor spaces. We are so grateful for Visit Central Oregon's investment in our Accessible Trails Project, which will help us to assess and modify trails and infrastructure, expanding inclusive recreation for people of all ages and ability levels." - Stephanie Presley, Executive Director, Sisters Trail Alliance

- **Ballet Bend:** Bend's first professional ballet presenting organization; will bring nationally and internationally recognized dance to Central Oregon.
- **BendFilm:** BendFilm Festival is a five-day independent film event in October including films, filmmaker Q&A sessions, and community events. Funds will support BendFilm's continued expansion for bringing screenings, conversations, and creative opportunities to audiences in our rural communities such as Warm Springs and Madras.

"The Future Fund grant from Visit Central Oregon plays a direct role in helping BendFilm continue expanding access to film and storytelling in our rural communities. This support allows us to bring screenings, conversations, and creative opportunities to audiences in Warm Springs and Madras, strengthening cultural connection across Central Oregon. We are grateful for this investment in both our work and the communities we serve." - Clay Pruitt, Managing Director, BendFilm

- **Oregon Adaptive Sports:** All Access Adventure will deliver signature adaptive outdoor programs from September 2026 through May 2027 for over 100 people with disabilities of all ages and their families including specific programs for Disabled Veterans.
- **ThinkWild:** Converting a gravel lot into an accessible pollinator garden and outdoor classroom for hands-on learning, community stewardship, and connection to the Crooked River.

"This funding is helping us take the project beyond a native plant garden and turn it into a true community space. By adding signage and places to sit and spend time, it will become a welcoming, educational spot along the Crooked River. It also supports hands-on learning, local students and volunteers won't just enjoy the space, they'll help build and care for it while learning how to be part of restoring the landscapes around them." - Hannah Wuerfel, Beaver Works Habitat Restoration Coordinator, ThinkWild

- **ScaleHouse:** A contemporary arts project featuring two new exhibitions at Scalehouse Gallery in Bend that will invite visitors to explore identity, leadership, and migration.
- **Wake Creative, Inc.:** Sketch and Release is a touring multimedia production celebrating Black Oregonians through film, performance, music, and community dialogue. This interactive experience explores identity and future-building across 12 rural and metro venues statewide.

“As a Future Fund recipient, Sketch and Release Tour is able to move from concept to reality, bringing high-quality, Black-led multimedia storytelling to rural Central Oregon communities that are often overlooked. The support will not only amplify our capacity to tour and engage audiences across multiple counties, it also validates the importance of culturally responsive work and opens doors to new partnerships, future funding, and long-term community impact.” - Jason McNeal Graham, Wake Creative, Inc.

To learn more about the Central Oregon Future Fund and this year’s grant recipients, visit visitcentraloregon.com/Future-Fund.

ABOUT VISIT CENTRAL OREGON

Visit Central Oregon is a 501c6 that serves as the regional destination marketing organization. We drive overnight visitation to the region to support a thriving tourism economy. We inspire travel to the region through an integrated marketing campaign that celebrates our unique culture, people, and landscapes. As the Regional Destination Management Organization (RDMO) appointed by the Oregon Tourism Commission, we manage the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP) which is leveraged by the Deschutes County budget to optimize the economic impact of tourism to the region. We collaborate with industry partners towards a shared healthy vision of tourism for the region.

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