

# “Check Out Colorado State Parks” Program



## EFFICIENCY SUCCESS STORY

In June 2016, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), in partnership with Colorado Department of Education, State Library and local library systems, launched the “Check Out Colorado State Parks” program to encourage Coloradans to visit state parks, experience outdoor recreation and learn more about Colorado’s wildlife. This program now provides 297 Colorado libraries with two park passes and adventure backpacks filled with binoculars, viewing guides, information about the state parks and a list of suggested educational activities. Patrons of participating libraries can check out a backpack for up to a week and visit state parks for free.

With 3.6 million library card holders and 31 million library visits annually, the program is an innovative way to reach new, under-served populations. By partnering with local libraries, CPW can efficiently reach communities and individuals in every corner of the state instead of paying for multiple local advertisements. The

libraries also improve their influence by offering a new, innovative service to their customers. Plus, both entities are now sharing program information and promoting each other’s services or programs whenever possible.

To start the program, CPW initially spent about \$23,000 and the State Library spent about \$7,000. Under this cost-sharing partnership, CPW paid for the library displays, the backpacks and most of the binoculars, while the Library paid for the customized educational brochures through a library grant. Additional binoculars were also provided through donations. The combined start-up costs are equivalent to buying three ads in a popular front-range monthly subscription magazine, or two months of advertising on a high-traffic billboard in Denver. Having the program run throughout the year is more cost-effective, as it provides continuous exposure. The renewal costs



Staunton State Park

DUSTIN DOSKICIL/CPW

## TAKEAWAYS:

**297** libraries currently participating

**3,960** backpack checkouts in the first six months

**31 million** Potential library patrons using “try it before you buy it” marketing concept

**Cost-sharing partnership between CPW and State Library**





DUSTIN DOSKICIL/CPW

Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area



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Roxborough State Park



CPW

Golden Gate Canyon State Park

**In the first six months, there were approximately 3,960 backpack checkouts. That's 165 checkouts per week!**

to continue the program the second year were less than \$6,000. Additional savings have come from utilizing the library's internal delivery system to avoid paying \$8,000 in shipping costs to transport backpacks and passes to the libraries, engaging library volunteers in collecting program evaluations from patrons and using CPW volunteers to enter and analyze program evaluation data.

The 'try it before you buy it' marketing concept is similar to a test drive. Whenever the customer can try it for free first and/or receive a recommendation from a trusted source (like their local library), it is usually more effective than a paid advertisement.

After one year, it's clear the program has been a great success! By tracking backpack checkouts and patron evaluations, CPW and partners have data to support the continuation of the program. In the first six months, there were approximately 3,960 backpack checkouts. That's 165 checkouts per week! Patrons also reported they were highly satisfied with their visit, with 97% likely to recommend a visit to a state park, 77% likely to buy a day pass to visit a state park, and 54% likely to buy an annual pass to state parks based on their experiences with the program. The program has been extended for another year and expanded to include most of the publicly-funded college and university libraries, representing another new audience CPW wants to engage.

In addition to helping library patrons learn about state parks and new opportunities within the parks, this program also plays a crucial role in exposing new visitors to Colorado's state parks. As one patron reported, "I didn't know anything about the kids programs some of the state parks offer. We are new to the U.S.A. I'm looking forward to the education programs about wild animals. My kids will love it, and so will I." Moreover, it expands opportunities to potential visitors who may not be likely to visit a state park otherwise. As one patron explained, "This pass is wonderful and a great idea for any family unable to afford much of anything. We do plan on buying a pass as soon as it is in the budget." Reaching approximately 31 million patrons who visit Colorado's libraries every year is an exciting new marketing strategy. CPW is hoping the exposure to state parks and activities will help to increase visitation and recruitment in the long term.

Learn more about the [Check Out Colorado State Parks](#) program.

