

Luis Benitez Bio

Luis stepped into his current role with the Outdoor Recreation Industry Office when the agency was established in 2015. But, don't let the shirt and blazer fool you; Luis self-identified as a dirtbag prior to his appointment by Governor Hickenlooper, and he still does.

His early career was spent conducting mountaineering, climbing, and skiing courses for the Outward Bound Professional development program. While Luis still guides for Outward Bound through his Endeavor Consulting Company, an even more intense occupation captured his imagination: high altitude mountaineering. Through Endeavor Consulting and other organizations, Luis has led parties of climbers to the summit of some of Earth's most imposing peaks. His first of six summits on Mount Everest was in 2001 with blind athlete Erik Weihe, and Luis has guided on the famed Seven Summits numerous times.

At the heart of his career, Luis has always focused on teaching as well as serving. Some of his most rewarding work has been to help create the nonprofit "Trekking For Kids", which focuses on service based expeditions allowing participants to climb and trek while teaching them about local issues like housing and healthcare for orphans around the world. He has also worked closely with Warriors to Summits, a nonprofit focusing on serving returning Veterans by connecting them with the outdoors.

Luis' staggering climbing achievements are only one of many reasons why he is where he is today. He's fortunate to have been able to transfer the fearless passion and leadership he honed in the mountains to our state's flourishing outdoor recreation industry. And today, Luis is at the helm of a powerful machine going at full throttle.

The outdoor recreation industry in Colorado is responsible for over \$28 billion in consumer spending and \$2 billion in taxes annually. The national outdoor recreation industry has grown to such great heights that it recently earned its place in the calculus of our national gross domestic product - contributing a larger percentage than mining, oil, and gas. The State of the Rockies Project's 2018 Conservation in the West Poll, which was released at the first Outdoor Retailer trade show in Denver, shows that 96% of Coloradans believe the outdoor recreation industry is essential to the economic future of our state, and that our public lands give us an advantage over other states.

This industry is bigger however, than just sales of skis and fishing poles. A major shift is taking place, one in which Luis seeks to transform the outdoor industry into a powerful force for economic development, conservation, education and wellness. Through the Outdoor Recreation Industry Office, communities across the state are uniting and becoming empowered to advocate for and steward the resources that enable their adventurous pursuits and passions.