CAREER TOOLKIT
Military Veterans &
The Outdoor Industry
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SO, YOU WANT TO WORK IN THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY, DO YOU?

From park rangers to financial analysts, the outdoor recreation economy provides career opportunities across a wide range of skills. In fact, the outdoor industry employs more than 7.6 million Americans with jobs in the field, in the lab, on the road, in the office, and everywhere in between.

But, the competition to get in is tough. World-famous brands can be magnets for talented workers, and advancement opportunities can be limited in the kind of mom-and-pop specialty retailer shops that have traditionally made up the industry’s core. Because this industry is driven by tight margins and many of its executives have as much passion for a powder day as a profit, jobs in the outdoor industry attract a wide range of passionate individuals eager to get their foot in the door.

As the $887 billion outdoor recreation economy continues to grow, its workforce must continually renew itself with a talent pool that is as innovative as its products. Military veterans are an untapped resource in the outdoor industry workforce. Considering all the experience and skills training veterans receive, they make a natural fit for the outdoor industry.

But, it can take time to build the relationships required to land your dream job. Just like most job searches, you have to be committed to working hard and staying innovative, never complacent with the status quo. Ultimately, this is a community of people that strive for authenticity, give back through advocacy, and care about environmental sustainability. We believe that nature is a compelling teacher and a powerful healer that needs to be protected. It is a community where you can avoid being pigeon-holed as a weekend warrior, and instead work for a company that values your time in the wilderness.

Being called a “dirtbag” isn’t a bad thing – it’s a badge of honor. We love what we do and we work as hard as we play. We are a community built on our shared passion for being active outdoors and conserving the places we play.
GET TO KNOW THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY
THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY: TOGETHER WE ARE A FORCE

Outdoor recreation is among our nation’s largest economic sectors, and generates more than $125 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenue. It also represents the lifeblood of thousands of American communities and provides livelihoods for millions of American workers.

The industry fuels direct employment of guides, designers and product developers, merchandisers, salespeople, marketing, administrative professionals, and retail. It also contributes to other sectors, such as manufacturing, finance, transportation and logistics, food service, tourism, travel, and more.

The Outdoor Industry Association has a membership of more than 1,200 companies and other trade organizations fall under our umbrella as well, incorporating specific sports and interest groups including: the Snowsports Industries Association, the Adventure Travel Trade Association, the International Mountain Bicycling Association, the US Surfing Federation, and more. The outdoor industry is an inclusive group. If you have any expertise or interest in any of the activities below, you’re already among the outdoor industry’s ranks.

ACTIVITIES INCLUDED*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TRAIL SPORTS</th>
<th>FISHING</th>
<th>CAMPING</th>
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<td>Day hiking</td>
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<td>ATV / ROV/4x4 Jeep</td>
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<td>Dune buggy</td>
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<td>Motocross</td>
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<td>FISHING</td>
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<td>Shotgun</td>
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<td>WATER SPORTS</td>
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<td>Hunting</td>
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<td>Kayaking</td>
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<td>Shooting</td>
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<td>Hunting</td>
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<td>Stand-up paddling</td>
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<td>Shooting</td>
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<td>Surfing</td>
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<td>NATURAL</td>
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<td>SNOW SPORTS</td>
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<td>Snowboarding</td>
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<td>CLIMBING</td>
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<td>Bouldering</td>
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<td>Ice/Mixed</td>
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<td>Mountaineering</td>
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<td>* This list is not exhaustive. If a person is doing an activity outside, consider it a part of the outdoor industry.</td>
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BUSINESS CULTURE: What to Expect?

So you have a passion for climbing, hiking, or biking? And you want to pursue a career where you can leave a positive impact on sustainable business practices? This could be the industry for you. Our tag line is “Together We Are a Force,” and you’ll be a leg up if you show your understanding for that principle from the get-go.

Company culture varies, but most outdoor-industry businesses share a few core values:

1. Passion and love for our planet and recreation.
   Working jointly to promote and protect the lands we love and play in.

2. Ditch the suit and tie, but still mean business.
   There are two times a year you can count on seeing outdoor industry folks in a suit-and-tie: the annual Capitol Hill pilgrimages, known as the “Capitol Summits” sponsored by the Outdoor Industry Association to lobby on behalf of the industry and public lands. “Business casual” is the norm for every other dress-to-impress occasion, including when customers or stakeholders are present. That said, many outdoor businesses are casual and “fresh off the trail” may be acceptable at some offices as well. Dressing for an interview? Sport a plaid button-up and clean, work-wear-inspired pants. Bonus points for trading your briefcase for a backpack, or an epic sunglass tan. Of course, the most important thing is to be true to yourself, so wear what makes you feel professional and confident.

   Have you ever ridden your bike (across the state) to a trade show? Or taken a post-meeting hike with your team? If you start working in the outdoor industry... you just might. We push for business success while striving for healthy, sustainable lifestyles, deeply rooted in work/life balance. What better way than to blend our jobs with our outdoor passions?

ACRONYMS 101
Learn the shorthand

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<th>ATTA</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adventure Travel Trade Association</td>
<td>Outdoor Industry Association</td>
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<td>GOA</td>
<td>OR</td>
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<td>Grassroots Outdoor Alliance</td>
<td>Outdoor Retailer (Trade show)</td>
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<td>NSSF</td>
<td>SIA</td>
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<td>National Shooting Sports Foundation</td>
<td>Snow Sports Industries Association</td>
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Courtesy Thom Schroeder
WHERE TO FOCUS?

The outdoor industry can be a bear to break into, and many professionals have degrees specific to their fields, such as product design, marketing, and business. However, if you target the right on-ramp, it’s possible to get your foot in the door without previous industry experience. Consider these options:

Military-Sales
Many major brands (see page 9) have strong military ties—and sales teams focused specifically on equipping our troops. If you have business or sales experience and can leverage your insider military knowledge (especially of federal acquisitions, purchasing, contracting, and procurement procedures), military sales could be right for you.

Retail
As a customer-centric industry, any sales-floor experience will be viewed positively by hiring managers. If you have any customer service, sales, inventory management, stocking, or accounting experience, consider retail as a possible avenue—even better if it is at a sporting goods or specialty outdoor retailer where you can gain direct industry exposure.

Guiding
While it’s not always stable as a year-round gig, guiding is a legitimate career path (and entry point) into the outdoor industry. Leading groups into the wilderness can require real technical skill and credibility. If you have a medical background or opt for low-risk guiding activities, you may already meet some of the minimum requirements. Also, the GI bill may help you pay for many professional certifications.

The National Park Service
The NPS is a major employer in the outdoor industry and as a federal agency, veterans receive preferential hiring. The park service has a wide range of available jobs, especially in early spring when summer-season hiring is at its peak. Law enforcement is a natural fit for veterans with security or military police experience.
FIND YOUR MILITARY FAMILY

The outdoor industry is crawling with former military personnel. Don’t be afraid to speak up about your service and reach out to other vets to strengthen the veteran community. Connect with these folks and more through the Veteran Outdoor Leaders Group on LinkedIn.

**STACY BARE**
**THEN**
Captain, US Army, Military Intelligence and Civil Affairs
**NOW**
National Director of Programming & Operations, The Phoenix

**BETH WELLIVER**
**THEN**
Captain, Air Force, Weather Officer, Protocol Officer
**NOW**
Equipment Business Manager, Specialized Bicycle Components

**MADDY TOFT**
**THEN**
Captain, US Army, Aviation
**NOW**
Operations Supervisor, Merchandising, REI Co-op

**DAVE PETRI**
**THEN**
Commander, US Navy, Surface Warfare
**NOW**
Vice President of Marketing, Farm to Feet

OTHER RESOURCES
Networking organizations to check out

**CAMBER OUTDOORS camberoutdoors.org**
A membership organization devoted to professional development, leadership training and increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the outdoor industry.

**VET EXPEDITIONS vetexpeditions.com**
Empowering veterans to overcome challenges associated with military service through outdoor leadership, employment, and community.

**MALAKYE malakye.com**
This networking and job-listing site hosts a learning platform and posts hundreds of open outdoor industry positions.
WHAT COMPANIES HAVE A MILITARY CONNECTION?

Turn your passion for an active lifestyle and getting outside into a career by getting familiar with these brands that directly serve the military with their products.*

![Logos of various military-related companies](image)

VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESSES

There are dozens of companies owned or started by vets. If you’re an entrepreneur, consider getting in touch or look into the “Boots to Business” training offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration as part of the Department of Defense’s Transition Assistance Program.

Learn more: https://sbavets.force.com/s/.

Adventure Not War  |  Gear to Go  |  RipTide Kayaks
Adventures Accessed |  Goodworld  |  River Rock Outfitter
Airborne Outfitters |  GoRuck    |  StringSling
Alpha Outpost       |  Heavy Cover|  Sword & Plough
Backwater Paddle Company |  Kota Longboards |  Team Rubicon
Bushcraft Outfitters |  Kryptek   |  Triple Aught
Combat Flip Flips   |  Liberty Bottle Works |  Ugly Spoons
Feather Raft        |  Outdoor Equipped |  Virtus Outdoor Groups
Freeman              |  Red Oxx    |  Yak Angler

* These lists are not exhaustive. If a company makes gear, there’s a chance it’s got a military connection.
FIND A CULTURE FIT – It’s Key

Cultural fit is arguably the most important factor to job satisfaction and successful work performance. Before an interview, be sure to do some research. Visit the company’s website, follow it on social media, and search for the latest news online or industry publications such as SNEWS, SGB, or Outdoor Insight.

Using several data points will give you a better perspective of the company. While studying up, be sure to learn about their heritage and get a sense of the company’s future direction and current product focus areas. Do you agree with the direction they’re headed?

Also, be sure to familiarize yourself with the brand’s culture: Patagonia, The North Face, and Columbia Sportswear are three of largest outdoor brands, and they share similar values of inspiring people to get outside and protect the environment. However, each brands’ ethos is very different: The North Face prides itself on a conquistador, “top of the mountain” attitude, while Patagonia’s surfer culture has a more relaxed “the joy is in the journey, not the destination” approach. Columbia, as another example, has an inclusive vibe (and price-point) that communicates their ethos of “connecting active people to their passions.”

Make sure the company you are applying to is one that aligns with your values. Sharing core ideals is crucial to success, growth, and happiness within the organization.

PRO TIP
Ask about a company’s culture during interviews or networking events. Then listen close: Is there a lot of turnover? Do teams take lunchtime bike rides? Is the boss a jerk? True insights can be hard to glean from online research, so anecdotal feedback is key.

LEARN ABOUT THE INDUSTRY’S ORIGINS

ARTICLE

FILM
Valley Uprising The story of climbing’s early days in Yosemite Valley
Fire on the Mountain The Army’s 10th Mountain Division & Snow Sports Industry

PODCAST
The Outdoor Biz theoutdoorbizpodcast.com
GET HIRED
Outdoor Industry recruiters and hiring managers look at a wide range of qualities when considering you for a high-demand position at an adventure brand. If you want to gain a competitive advantage, you must think about how you can leverage your unique military skills and experiences to stand out. How can you demonstrate that you’re qualified for the position and also a good fit for the company?

The next few pages offer tips for showing your best self to the hiring professionals that will scrutinize your resume. Understand that the point is to tell a story that draws a direct connection between your skills and your love for the outdoors. In this industry, that’ll make you shine.

Set your sights on your dream job, and go after it with everything you’ve got.

PRO TIP
Research, research, research. Show you’re in-the-know, and be ready for off-the-wall interview questions by becoming a regular at these outdoor-centric news sources.

OIA outdoorindustry.org
SNEWS snewsnet.com
SGB sgbonline.com
Outdoor Insight outdoorinsightmag.com
Inside Outdoor insideoutdoor.com

Prefer Podcasts?
OIA soundcloud.com/oia-audio-outdoorist
Outdoor Biz theoutdoorbizpodcast.com

THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ISN’T JUST ABOUT THE RESUME. BREAKING INTO THIS BUSINESS ALSO REQUIRES A LOVE OF THE OUTDOORS.
Job-Finding Fundamentals

Baseless success isn’t a given in the outdoors—or the outdoor industry. Preparation, planning, and good timing are just as critical in job-finding as they are in peak-bagging. Fine-tune your skills, prep your kit, and take the long-game approach for your best chances at a career with staying power.

1. Translate Skills
According to former Assistant Secretary of Labor, Ray Jefferson, 80% of all private-sector jobs have a direct correlation to one in the military. No matter what you did or what rank you were in the service there’s likely a similar role at a brand, service, or logistics company serving the outdoor industry. Your challenge is to describe previous job-responsibilities in a language that this industry’s hiring pros understand.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military Role</th>
<th>Industry Role</th>
<th>Core Competencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operations Planner</td>
<td>Product Development Manager or Materials Manager</td>
<td>Leader, strong analytical skills, understands risk management, experienced manager, excellent written and verbal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinance Depot Supervisor</td>
<td>Warehouse or Shipping Manager</td>
<td>Leader, experienced people-manager, strong understanding of operations and demand planning, problem solver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply Clerk</td>
<td>Retail Floor or Inventory Manager</td>
<td>Organized and disciplined, accountable, responsible, strong understanding of demand planning, understands risk management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Specialist</td>
<td>IT or E-commerce Manager</td>
<td>Data specialist, strong analytical skills, organized, detail oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs Officer</td>
<td>Communications or Public Relations Manager</td>
<td>Excellent written and verbal communication skills, strong interpersonal skills, skilled in digital marketing and social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographic Specialist</td>
<td>Outdoor Event or Product Photographer</td>
<td>Excellent written and verbal communication skills, proficient with photo editing software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiter</td>
<td>Sales Representative</td>
<td>Persuasive, strong interpersonal skills, strives for measurable results, excellent communication, self-starter</td>
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2. Sell Yourself
Your military training included a deep-dive into skills that most following a traditional career path don’t provide. Set yourself apart by shining the spotlight on training that other applicants might not have:

**LEADERSHIP**
The military not only trains its members to lead, but it also provides on-the-job experience under pressure. Highlight the number of people you’ve managed, and be specific about your strengths.

**GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**
Did you spend time overseas? Many outdoor industry companies make or sell their products around the world. You may have cultural awareness and market knowledge that will add value to your role.

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE**
Are you fluent in any foreign languages? This is always a value-add, but may be especially worth noting if your target employer does any business in the language you speak.

**TEAMWORK**
Pulling together is an essential part of success in the military, and you’ll carry that culture of team-work into your civilian career. Be sure to call out occasions when you contributed to your team’s success.

**TECHNICAL EXPERTISE**
Did you get specialty training in information systems? Or are you a master mechanic? Small companies may appreciate a hint about how easily you pick up new skills and how interested you are to expand your core competencies. Showing initiative about technical training can give you a leg up on the competition.

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**OTHER RESOURCES**
Find jobs, resume tools & more

**HIRING OUR HEROES** hiringourheroes.org
A comprehensive job-finding site with tons of resources specifically for veterans.

**INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS & MILITARY FAMILIES** ivmf.syracuse.edu
Run by Syracuse University, IVMF is an interdisciplinary academic institute focused on advancing the lives of the nation’s military veterans and their families.

**OUTDOORINDUSTRYJOBS.COM**
One of the most comprehensive listings of vacant industry positions.

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Courtesy Joe Andary/Unsplash
JOB-FINDING FUNDAMENTALS (CONTINUED)

3. Show Up

Showing up when you’re off-the-clock is highly respected in this industry, so volunteering and attending industry events shows that you’re also passionate outside of the office.

Attending trade shows is another way to show-up and start building relationships and studying the breadth, depth, and culture of the industry. If you can get yourself a badge or a way in the door, the “it” shows to attend are Outdoor Retailer (outdoorretailer.com) in Denver, CO, the Shot Show (shotshow.org), and Interbike (interbike.com) in Reno, NV.

Additionally, outdoor companies may have a foundation or a relationship with a nonprofit organization that shares its mission or has similar values. Getting involved at the local, regional, or national levels could be your way into the industry—not to mention boosting your resume, building your skills, and helping you make industry friends. Check into the nonprofit partnerships of brands where you’d like to work, consider which industry-favorite cause speaks to you, and sign up to help.

LAND USE & LAND ACCESS

CONSERVATION & THE ENVIRONMENT

INCLUSIVITY & DIVERSITY IN OUTDOOR PARTICIPATION
Example Organizations Outdoor Women’s Alliance, Latino Outdoors, Big City Mountaineers, Outdoor Afro, Natives Outdoors, Outdoor Outreach, Women’s Wilderness, Higher Ground, High Fives Military to the Mountains, Project Healing Waters, SheJumps, Camber Outdoors
Authenticity is paramount in the outdoor industry, so expedition experience may be just as important as your professional resume. You don’t have to be hardcore, but sharing personal achievements in the field shows that you understand the transformative and character-building aspects of the great outdoors. If you’ve participated in any formal wilderness training such as NOLS, WFR, or AIARE for example, state it on your resume. Your certification shows expertise, and technical skills enhance your authenticity.

5. Identify Your Weaknesses
When searching career opportunities, assess open positions that appeal to you and take note of specific skills, certifications, or education that you don’t (yet) possess. Want to be a guide? Hone your knowledge of natural history and rescue techniques. Interested in working for a brand? Study product life cycles and practice the sports they focus on. Interested in building the business? Consider an MBA or PM certification.

Schedule informational interviews or grab a casual cup of coffee with industry contacts to get an understanding of their roles and company culture. You’d be surprised how happy people are to share their experiences. Spend time mapping out an action plan—whether it’s going back to school, volunteering, or taking an entry-level position to help gain core competencies. Check your eligibility for GI benefits that may help get you closer to your dream job. If you are a veteran with a VA disability rating of 10% or more you qualify for Vocational Rehabilitation & Education(VR&E) benefits for up to 12 years after separation from active duty.

6. Don’t Forget Your Resume
Your resume should be spotless and well-crafted. Tell a story of your passion for the outdoors and add specific details about your accomplishments. Hiring managers may not be able to catch every detail of your work, but provide numbers and specifics when you can: What tools did you use? How many people did you supervise? What percentage of growth did you achieve? When it’s all buttoned-up, run your resume past a career advisor or the best editor you know.

PRO TIP
AVOID JARGON
One thing the military and the outdoor industry have in common? A vocabulary filled with acronyms and insider terms. Recognize that using specific military terms can feel exclusive and uninviting—the opposite of the mood you’re going for in an interview.
NETWORKING: MAKE AN IMPRESSION

Consider your plaid shirt your new uniform, and follow the social protocol for getting business done in this recreation-based industry.

**BE OPEN**
Outdoor industry insiders pride themselves on being inclusive, supportive, and curious. Welcome new people to a conversation circle, introduce friends, and approach everyone with a smile.

**ASK QUESTIONS**
Fess up to being inexperienced in this business and you’ll likely get tons of advice and support from the old-timers. They’ll open up more if you get them talking about their pet causes.

**EMBRACE YOUR INNER ENTREPRENEUR**
Networking events are a great place to show breadth and some basic business savvy. Brush up your business vocab. Want to start a business of your own? Consider a vet-specific incubator (Learn more at http://bit.ly/VetBusinessTips).

**MAKE A MISSION STATEMENT**
Establish a personal mission statement and develop an elevator pitch. Jot down a few sentences to craft your introduction in which you get specific about what you want, how you want to get there, and what you need to make it happen. Then, share it with everyone in a position to help.

**FIND A MENTOR**
For many in the outdoor industry, our colleagues are like family, which can make breaking-in cold turkey extra challenging. Try to build a casual networked connection into a more formal mentor/mentee relationship.

**RESPECT YOUR AUDIENCE**
Be respectful when hot-button or political topics come up, and recognize that in the outdoor industry there are wide ranging attitudes and perspectives about political issues.

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**PRO TIP**

**WILLING TO RELOCATE?**
If you’re applying to jobs as an out-of-towner, consider that there can be a strong bias against non-local candidates. If you’re transitioning out of the service, you may be looking for a new home-town, anyway. So, if you’re willing to move, make it clear to hiring managers that you’ve considered the logistical, financial, and personal upheaval, and are excited about the transition—not worried about the hardship. Note that not all companies will offer relocation assistance, but it’s worth asking in the later stages of the interview or application process.

Courtesy Vet Expeditions
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to all of the individuals, organizations, and published resources that contributed to the development of this toolkit.


HELPFUL LINKS & ORGANIZATIONS

Outdoor Industry Association (OIA)– https://outdoorindustry.org/
Snow Sports Industries America (SIA)– https://www.snowsports.org/
Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA)– https://www.adventuretravel.biz/
American Sportfishing Association (ASA)– https://asafishing.org/
Outdoor Retailer (OR)– https://www.outdoorretailer.com/
Shot Show– http://shotshow.org/
Interbike– https://www.interbike.com/
SNEWS– https://www.snewsnet.com/
Outdoor Insight Magazine– http://www.ouamericatdoorinsightmag.com/
Outdoor Biz Podcast– https://www.theoutdoorbizpodcast.com/
SGB Media– https://sgbonline.com/
Veteran Outdoor Leaders LinkedIn group– https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8643166
Camber Outdoors– https://camberoutdoors.org/
Veteran Expeditions– http://www.vetexpeditions.com/
American Corporate Partners– https://www.acp-usa.org/
Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University– https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/
Malakye, job search for lifestyle and outdoor industries– https://www.malakye.com/
National Park Service job postings– https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/workwithus.htm
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This toolkit was developed by the Outdoor Industry Association’s Skip Yowell Future Leadership Academy–Class 3. It is an effort to raise awareness, provide education, and increase veteran participation in the outdoor industry through employment. This toolkit aims to promote deeper inclusion to strengthen and enhance the outdoor industry through diversity.

ADAM HIGINBOTHOM is an outdoor enthusiast who is equally at home on the water, on the trail, or on the sales floor. He strives to improve the outdoor pursuits of individuals in his community while encouraging responsible use of our public lands. He loves Phish, local breweries, and .

KRISTY HOLLAND grew up on military bases in Florida, Panama, and Seattle before landing her first outdoor industry job at Backpacker magazine in 2007. Since then, she’s been a wilderness backpacking guide for NOLS, a backcountry ski patroller, a gear-repair sewing technician, and a developer for the Korea-based manufacturing company, Youngone. She cares about sharing knowledge, working collaboratively, and helping connect people to resources that help them have more fun outside.

MORGAN MAKOWSKI is a fast hiker, slow trail runner, and expert parallel parker, Morgan is the Director of Marketing at HydraPak. She joined the company in 2015, leading it through a well-received rebrand and positioning strategy. Today, HydraPak is the market leader in OEM hydration. Prior to joining HydraPak, Morgan spent six years in sports marketing roles within the golf industry. She currently divides her time between the mountains and ocean, with her Vizsla (Remi) in Oakland, CA.

JOLEEN ONG is the Corporate Responsibility Program Manager for Licensing at Columbia Sportswear. Originally from New York, Joleen started her career focused on business and human rights at Social Accountability International and made the transition to the Pacific Northwest over 5 years ago. She is a published writer and the editor of two award-winning social justice short documentaries.

JEFF SERMAK is a passionate outdoorsman looking to leave a positive impact on the planet, people, and the outdoor industry. When he’s not at his desk or flying around North America, you’ll find him cutting a rug in some small town bar.