



February 14, 2019

The Honorable Rob Portman
United States Senate
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
United States Senate
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mark Warner
United States Senate
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Angus King
United States Senate
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Portman, Warner, Alexander and King:

The undersigned organizations representing the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR), a coalition of leading U.S. outdoor recreation trade associations, are writing to thank you for your leadership in championing the “Restore our Parks Act.”

Outdoor recreation is a crucial part of the American economy. A recent report from the Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) calculated the outdoor recreation industry’s annual gross output to be \$734 billion, surpassing other sectors such as agriculture, petroleum and coal, and computer and electronic products. Outdoor recreation makes up 2.2 percent of the U.S. GDP, and supports some 4.6 million jobs across the country.

The outdoor recreation economy is among our Nation’s leading economic sectors, and public lands and waters are the backbone of our industry. These public areas provide significant economic benefits, particularly for nearby rural communities, and proper maintenance is essential towards providing access and ensuring that the full economic impact of the outdoor recreation industry is realized.

Roads, buildings, trails, campgrounds, water systems and more recreational infrastructure suffer from accumulating deferred maintenance that negatively impacts visitor access, enjoyment, and safety on public lands for the rapidly growing community of outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

Federal lands and waters cannot return to sound condition without substantial efforts. We applaud your bi-partisan collaboration in developing a proposal to address the mounting deferred maintenance backlog on the Nation’s public lands and waters, as well as the consideration to not adversely impact the Land and Water Conservation Fund, payments to states associated with onshore and offshore oil and gas revenues, and the Reclamation Fund. However, it’s important to note that the damaging effects of deferred maintenance extend beyond federal land management agencies managed by the Department of the Interior.

While the Park Service holds the largest share of the overall backlog, all four major land management agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service (FS), face mounting deferred maintenance backlogs that negatively impact outdoor recreational pursuits and the associated economic benefits. In the wake of the worst fire season in U.S. history, it’s imperative that Congress addresses the agency’s \$5.49 billion maintenance backlog to ensure that recreation remains viable to meet ever growing demands for outdoor recreation opportunities on FS lands.

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Eighty-four million people annually enjoy the 158,600 miles of trails managed by the FS, which generate \$9 billion in annual visitor spending and support 143,000 jobs. Maintenance of FS routes is imperative to the outdoor recreation industry because this agency's sustainable multiple-use management concept supports a variety of activities and programs. When one FS road or trail goes out of service, it is indefinitely placed on the backlog and can negatively impact a number of outdoor recreational pursuits. Without including the FS in the solution, the agency will continue to be limited in its ability to carry out the multiple-use approach that enables prioritization of shared conservation stewardship, putting Americans back to work, and serving the American public.

Public-private partnerships also hold the potential to serve as an effective tool to augment public financing of maintenance and repair projects. Requiring federal land management agencies to submit request for proposals to the public to operate, maintain, improve, or fund outdoor recreation assets with insufficient funding prior to closure, unless there is an imminent health or safety threat, would provide opportunities for current businesses, non-profit organizations, volunteers, concessioners, and other governmental and private entities to weigh in on increasing access and improving infrastructure on public lands and waterways prior to closures. This would also provide transparency to land management decisions by discouraging the practice of prematurely closing underfunded outdoor recreation assets to keep them off the backlog.

In addition to new federal financing to address the maintenance backlog, policies to effectively prioritize resources and facilitate public-private partnerships would help ease the maintenance backlog and significantly enhance the experience for visitors to public lands and waters.

The longer this systemic problem continues, the more challenging it will become for the Department of the Interior and the FS to manage public lands and waters in a way that maximizes opportunities for recreational and conservation activities.

Thank you for your consideration and swift passage of this bill through committee. We look forward to working with you to achieving a historic and important step forward for places all Americans cherish.

Sincerely,

America Outdoors Association
American Horse Council
American Sportfishing Association
Archery Trade Association
Association of Marina Industries
Boat Owners Association of the United States
The Corps Network
International Snowmobile Manufacturers
Association
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas
Motorcycle Industry Council

National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds
National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Park Hospitality Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
PeopleForBikes
Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association
RV Dealers Association
RV Industry Association
Snowsports Industries America
Specialty Equipment Market Association
Specialty Vehicle Institute of America