



**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee; Hearing on Recreation
Thursday, March 14, 2019 at 10:00 a.m.
366 Dirksen Senate Office Building**

**Statement for the Record
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable**

Dear Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin and Members of the Committee:

The undersigned organizations representing the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) -- the nation's leading coalition of U.S. outdoor recreation trade associations -- thank the committee for recognizing the importance of outdoor recreation to our nation's communities and economies.

A recent report from the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) calculated that outdoor recreation generated \$734 billion in economic activity in 2016, surpassing other sectors such as agriculture, petroleum and coal, and computer and electronic products. Outdoor recreation makes up 2.2% percent of U.S. GDP, supports 4.5 million jobs and is growing faster than the economy as a whole.

This impressive data shows that the outdoor recreation economy is among our nation's leading economic sectors. However, improved access, infrastructure and permitting are crucial to ensuring that the full economic impact of the outdoor recreation industry is realized, and our lands and waters are managed sustainably so future generations can enjoy these outdoor experiences as much as we do today.

I. Access:

Improved access - to the physical places and to information and technology - will allow this critical aspect of America's economy to grow and provide more opportunities for the enjoyment of all forms of outdoor recreation.

1) Fully-funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

Access can be improved and enhanced by fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Ninety-eight percent of LWCF projects have a recreation benefit and these projects have touched almost every community in the country. Many projects connect multi-use trails to the public and open access points to multi-use recreation assets. Full and dedicated funding would ensure that local communities have the certainty they need to make strategic investments around outdoor recreation. The outdoor recreation community is ready to work with Congress and other local stakeholders to identify areas where LWCF projects have the support of recreation users, businesses and elected officials and could grow jobs and the economy and achieve strategic access outcomes through volunteers, private capital investments or policy adjustments.

2) Managing for recreation

Congress has tools to designate Wilderness, Monuments and Wild and Scenic Rivers, but needs a new tool to designate areas with high-quality recreation assets that help local communities and economies thrive. Congress should create a National Recreation Area system that prioritizes and manages recreation to ensure multi-use recreation opportunities can remain sustainable economic drivers in areas where recreation is the main use of the natural resource.

3) State Outdoor Recreation Directors

There should be recognition in Congress that these types offices and/or commissions are good for recreation management, business development and recruiting and retaining jobs in and around the recreation economy, with a goal of all 50 states creating an office/commission by 2022.

4) Electronic passes

Electronic passes are necessary to improve the visitor experience, better track visitation and ensure collected entrance fees are going toward recreation enhancement projects. Passes should be available online and eventually incorporate peak/off-peak pricing. The incorporation of a donation option and up-to-date information on trails, campgrounds, fire danger, closures, and more would greatly help with access issues at entrance sites and could potentially provide additional funding for our special places.

5) Recreation.gov

ORR is uniquely qualified to work with the government to achieve full implementation of Recreation.gov 2.0. The improved site should provide third-party booking options and a catalogue of opportunities for customers to explore the outdoors near reserved campsites. This will help visitors book through sites they trust and explore all an area has to offer, while supporting rural and gateway businesses that provide the public with world-class recreation opportunities.

6) Programs and Opportunities for Veterans

With growing data on the health benefits of outdoor recreation, we must ensure recreation opportunities, jobs and programs are provided to returning service members and veterans through the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs. ORR members are looking for a skilled workforce as well as ways to support those affected by PTSD and TBI. The outdoor industry provides a full spectrum of opportunities for veterans and their families to work, socialize, heal and re-connect.

7) Broadband

Bringing broadband to rural areas doesn't just help tourists who want to stay connected during their outdoor trip, it ensures the businesses located in these communities have the access they need to connect with their customers and recruit and retain employees.

8) Rural Development Programs

The 2018 Farm Bill's conference report language provides clear recognition by Congress that outdoor recreation investments can and should be competing for funding from Rural Development (RD) programs. ORR stands ready to support federal agencies in implementing

Congress’s direction by helping state directors of outdoor recreation and state agencies better understand aspects of the outdoor recreation economy, identify communities and businesses interested in marketing or growing outdoor recreation opportunities, and work to connect them with RD resources to improve access by making strategic recreation-related investments in “business, facilities, infrastructure, planning and marketing.”

II. Infrastructure:

Public lands and waters are the backbone of our industry and recreation around these special places provides significant economic benefits, particularly for nearby rural communities. Infrastructure must keep pace with consumer trends, and we need to invest in sustainable ways to ensure the public can continue to enjoy, and care for, recreation assets.

1) Maintenance Backlog

Recreation infrastructure such as roads, bridges, trails, campgrounds, marinas, water systems and more suffer from a growing deferred maintenance backlog that negatively impacts access, enjoyment, and safety on public lands for the rapidly growing community of outdoor recreation enthusiasts. ORR urges action to address the \$18.62 billion combined deferred maintenance and repair backlog of the major federal land management agencies, (National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service).

2) Public Private Partnerships and Recreation Fees

In addition to new federal financing to address the maintenance backlog, policies that 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.

Much of America’s recreation infrastructure on public lands and waters is already associated with revenue streams from recreational activity – fishing and hunting licenses; entrance and activity fees; campground, slip and launch fees; recreation permits and registration fees; and excise and fuel taxes. The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides funding to states to develop and maintain trail infrastructure and is funded by a federal tax on off-highway vehicles. Congress needs an accurate estimate of the total amount of fuel tax collected so we can ensure the appropriate amounts are returned to states for their infrastructure projects and to help inform future national infrastructure legislation. We are paying into the system and look forward to working with Congress on opportunities to advance our grey and green infrastructure by incorporating a recreation title addressing the backlog and other necessary recreation improvements in any infrastructure measure that comes together.

We encourage you take into account the significant leveraging of limited federal resources Conservation Corps accomplish in partnership with land management agencies and ensure these cost-effective public-private partnerships continue. By partnering with Corps, agencies achieve more with their budgets and accomplish cost-effective projects to help address the multi-billion-dollar maintenance backlog; remediate wildfires and invasive species; improve access to public lands; build and maintain multi-use trails and increase recreation opportunities and ensure productive fish and wildlife habitat for enthusiasts, hunters, and fishers.

ORR members have models of innovation around the recreation experience and modernized campgrounds and marinas, as well as a vision for the future, accounting for the growing and changing recreational activities and infrastructure needed to engage the next generation of enthusiasts. It is imperative that as we look at infrastructure backlog and improvements, we are building the infrastructure and programming needed for diverse high-quality customer experiences in the years to come.

R VX and KOA's partnership on Campgrounds of the Future or the conservation finance model that supported a mountain biking trail in Wayne National Forest are examples of updating infrastructure in ways that keep pace with the changing outdoor recreation landscape. ORR stands ready to work with Congress on pilot projects that can modernize, manage and market campgrounds, trails, fishing programs and more in rural communities, which could benefit from additional visitation and visitor spending.

These projects also underscore the importance of the recent Farm Bill authority connecting outdoor recreation to rural economies and forest restoration projects. There is an opportunity to look at the forest restoration workload with a recreation lens and identify projects where multiple objectives can be met and where the agencies can more directly consider how restoration and recreation projects can overlap or where outdoor recreation investments should be considered as the Forest Service designs priority restoration projects. This should give U.S. Forest Service staff the space to add recreation outcomes back into the mix as part of top priority work, rather than after (and if) top priority work is done. ORR can support pilot projects that better integrate the mutual objectives of recreation and restoration into the scope of work.

III. Permitting:

As the country urbanizes and more Americans are disconnected from the outdoors, public demand is growing for guided outings. These trips provide safe and often transformative experiences on our public lands and waters, contributing to the recreation economy in local communities and growing the next generation of outdoor advocates and stewards.

From fishing to skiing to mountaineering, rafting and biking, the antiquated permitting system is inhibiting the growth of businesses across the country and hampering the ability of facilitated outdoor recreation providers -- including for-profit and non-profit outfitters and guides, university recreation programs and volunteer-based clubs -- to introduce more people to the outdoors. ORR suggests legislation that makes the permitting systems more efficient, transparent, and responsive to the needs of guides and outfitters across all sustainable recreation activities.

- 1) Tackle multi-jurisdictional permitting. This will reduce administration costs for the agencies and streamline the permitting process for permit holders. This is already happening to a limited degree but for it to become commonplace, one agency needs to enforce the rules of the other agency.
- 2) Utilize contemporary online technology and streamlined application and management processes to overcome the current dysfunction of district-level permit processing and ensure a transparent and timely process. This should have a public interface so guides and outfitters know areas that are already at maximum user-days and the system can find nearby opportunities where permits are readily available.

- 3) Institute a feedback system where all permit applications will receive a timely response and additional information if the permit process is taking longer than expected.
- 4) Solve the indemnification issue preventing state universities from taking trips on federal lands.

Improving the permitting system on our public lands also requires adding recreation as a priority to the management in certain areas where outdoor recreation is prevalent, and the local economy could benefit from improved management of all forms of outdoor recreation. This -- in addition to the agencies being responsible on the back end for their improvements in recreation management, and bringing recreation into the mission of agencies like Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation -- could go a long way to ensuring recreation and the critical jobs, health and social benefits it provides is not seen as an afterthought.

ORR stands ready to partner with this committee and Congress as they come together to improve outdoor recreation access, infrastructure and permitting and grow our nation's outdoor recreation economy. Comprised of the leading trade associations covering the breadth of the outdoor recreation landscape, we can provide contemporary and thoughtful solutions that will improve the health and vibrancy of communities and economies across the country. We stand ready to be part of the discussion on strategic improvements that will preserve recreation opportunities for future generations, while updating infrastructure and access for the 21st century user community.

We look forward to working with you to achieve a historic and important step forward by passing a Recreation Package this session of Congress.

Sincerely,

Jessica Wahl



Executive Director
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

American Horse Council
American Sportfishing Association
American Trails
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 Marine Manufacturers Association
National Park Hospitality Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
PeopleForBikes
RV Industry Association
Specialty Equipment Market Association