



## **ORR LETTER SUPPORTING RECREATION TITLE IN INFRASTRUCTURE BILL**

Infrastructure is an issue of vital economic interest for the nation and a promising area for bipartisan solutions in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. The outdoor recreation community urges you to seize this opportunity by prioritizing and including an outdoor recreation title in any infrastructure legislation that your committees consider.

As members of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) - the leading coalition of U.S. outdoor recreation trade associations - we are writing to remind policymakers that outdoor recreation makes up 2.2 percent of the U.S. GDP and supports over 4.5 million jobs across the country. The outdoor recreation industry contributes \$734 billion to the U.S. economy surpassing other major sectors like agriculture, petroleum, coal, and computer and electronic products. Our federally managed lands and waters host over one billion visits annually and play an essential role in supporting this vibrant outdoor recreation industry.

An infrastructure package represents an extraordinary bipartisan opportunity to not only rebuild our crumbling roads, bridges and airports, but also to improve the beloved infrastructure on National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other federally managed lands and waters. Sadly, many of the roads, trails, marinas, campgrounds and other outdoor structures are worn-out or desperately in need of renovation and expansion. Simply put, we have Eisenhower-era recreation infrastructure at a time when visitors depend on safe roads and bridges, attractive open spaces, clean public waters, and 21st century amenities.

The benefits of expanding and improving the outdoor recreation economy are clear and compelling. When Americans participate in outdoor recreation, they purchase gear, equipment, food, lodging and more, and contribute \$65.3 billion in annual tax revenue to federal coffers. Much of America's recreation infrastructure on federally managed lands and waters is also associated with revenue streams - fishing and hunting licenses; entrance and activity fees; campground, slip and launch fees; recreation permits and registration fees; and excise and fuel taxes. Additionally, a recent study confirmed that for every dollar Congress invests in the National Park Service, \$10 is returned to the U.S. economy, which directly benefits our nation's rural areas and gateway communities.

As Congress tackles our nation's infrastructure challenges, outdoor recreation needs to be at the table. ORR has convened the leading trade associations in this space to provide contemporary and thoughtful solutions that will improve the health and vibrancy of communities and economies across the country. These concepts range from facilitating the use of industry partnerships to creating an infrastructure bank as well as leveraging the investment of federal funds like we've seen in the National Park Service Centennial Challenge authority.

We look forward to working with you on opportunities to advance our grey and green infrastructure by incorporating a recreation title in any infrastructure measure. Investments in outdoor recreation are investments in the enjoyment and stewardship of America's iconic public lands and waters, while also supporting and expanding American jobs and our economy.

**ORR urges policymakers to make these solutions a priority so that all Americans have access to safe public lands and waters infrastructure and healthy outdoor recreation experiences:**

### ***Restore our Parks Act & Restore our Parks and Public Lands Act***

Many of the roads, trails, marinas, campgrounds and other outdoor structures on federally managed lands and waters are worn-out or desperately in need of renovation and replacement. Growing deferred maintenance, increased visitation and lack of sufficient appropriations have affected recreation and the local communities that rely on recreation visitors. More than \$1 billion of the \$11.6 billion backlog in our National Parks is on recreation assets such as trails, campgrounds and marinas. While the National Park Service holds the largest share of the overall \$18 billion backlog, all four major land management agencies face mounting deferred maintenance backlogs that negatively impact outdoor recreation and the associated economic benefits. When Americans and international visitors come to recreate on our public lands, they should be awed by the natural beauty of the great outdoors—not disappointed with the recreation infrastructure that supports runners, hikers, bikers, climbers, anglers, campers, boaters, RVers, snowmobilers, off-road vehicle riders and more. This bipartisan legislation offers a thoughtful solution to this growing problem that, without swift action, will continue to have a negative impact on our nation’s iconic recreation infrastructure and the hundreds of millions of outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy them each year.

### ***Recreation Not Red-Tape Act***

As outdoor recreation grows in popularity and economic impact, land management agencies need updated tools to protect and improve access to, and infrastructure on America’s public lands and waters. The Recreation Not Red-Tape Act offers sensible, non-controversial proposals for identifying and appropriately managing important places for sustainable outdoor recreation across the country. If passed, this bipartisan and bicameral bill will update processes and policies on our national public lands and waters to improve the outdoor recreation experience for all forms of outdoor recreation.

### ***Recreational Trails Program Full Funding Act***

Bipartisan legislation that requires a study to determine the best available estimate of the total amount of off-highway recreation fuel taxes paid into the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is currently funded through the HTF at \$85 million annually. This is only a portion of the \$270 million annually that the Federal Highway Administration conservatively estimates motorized trail users pay into the HTF through fuel taxes for use in non-highway recreation. RTP is a user-pay, user-benefit program that benefits all recreationists and serves as the primary funding mechanism for thousands of motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities. This legislation would provide authorizing committees with an accurate assessment of what trail users pay into the HTF and help inform Congress in continuing to authorize the program

### ***Target Practice and Marksmanship Support Act***

This bipartisan legislation amends the Pittman-Robertson Trust Fund formula to give state fish and wildlife agencies more flexibility to use excise tax dollars for construction and maintenance of public shooting ranges.

### ***Promote 21st Century Conservation Service Corps to rebuild recreation infrastructure***

With the establishment of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) as part of the Natural Resources Management Act of 2019, Congress recognized the need to address modern conservation, recreation, forestry, and infrastructure projects through cost-effective partnerships with Corps. We encourage you to continue this focus and make the additional investments necessary to carry its intent forward and put more young adults and recent veterans to work on the thousands of unmet needs on our public lands. While Corps don’t pour pavement, they provide a critical and cost-

effective labor force for projects like developing more productive fish and wildlife habitats, increasing access to public lands and waters, improving recreation facilities, enhancing and building multi-use trails, addressing backlog maintenance and historic preservation. Corps already utilize RTP funding and source project work from various operations, maintenance, and construction accounts at land management agencies. Through a recreation title in any infrastructure package, Corps should be utilized and prioritized on a wide variety of projects sponsored by the following federal agencies in order to better leverage limited taxpayer funds and have the added benefits of developing the next generation infrastructure workforce:

- Natural Resource & Recreational Infrastructure (USFS, DOI, NOAA, USACE)
- Disaster, Wildfire Mitigation and Resiliency Infrastructure (USFS, DOI, NOAA DOT)
- Transportation & Transit Infrastructure (DOT, DOI, USDA, USFS)

***Allow other departments such as the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and the Army Corps of Engineers to follow the Forest Service model and develop management plans that allow for flexibility in extending recreational seasons and increasing use during the offseason***  
Concessioners should be permitted to extend their hours and promote year-round recreational activities. These adjustments would attract a greater number of visitors to federally managed lands and waters, thus providing more revenue to National Parks and increasing their positive economic impact on the agency and surrounding local economies.

The National Forest Service was successful in changing policy to allow for flexible usage of ski areas sites, thereby increasing visitation and further incentivizing private investment for year-round business.

Example: Congress recognized the value of providing seasonal flexibility for private investment on public lands when it passed the Ski Area Recreational Opportunity Enhancement Act (SAROE) of 2011 (P.L. 112-46). Prior to that law, most ski areas operating on National Forest System Lands were restricted to Nordic and Alpine skiing. SAROE, and the U.S. Forest Service's accompanying guidelines, authorized additional seasonal and year-round recreation activities and associated facilities, including zip lines, mountain bike terrain parks and trails, and more. Just as Congress and the US. Forest Service opened opportunities for ski areas to promote year-round, natural resource-based recreation activities, flexibility on operational hours and seasons would improve water-based recreation.

***Require maintenance backlog funds be promptly reinvested in the sites for which they are intended***  
The National Park Service currently faces a \$12 billion maintenance backlog. This deficit hampers the ability of parks to make necessary infrastructure improvements and offer recreational sites for the robust use and enjoyment of the public. In concession contracts, a portion of the revenue is dedicated for maintenance backlog. In recent years however, this dedicated money has not been properly attributed back to the concession area for which it was intended. Maintenance backlog on concessioner property compromises future contracts, with decreased property value and incentive for private enterprises to continue or take over operations. Additionally, Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act funds that are collected on federal lands and waters must be reinvested in the sites for which that are intended without delay.

### ***Federal Campground Infrastructure Modernization and Expansion***

Outdated Eisenhower-era federal campground infrastructure, crumbling roads and bridges, deferred maintenance needs and limited camping availability are critical issues for the outdoor recreation industry. As outdoor recreation and RV camping on our public lands continues to grow in popularity, maintenance, infrastructure and inventory needs have not kept up with demand. Inadequate campgrounds limit access to outdoor recreation opportunities and negatively impact the visitor experience. Outdoor recreation is the number one driver of economic activity on federal lands and accounts for \$734 billion - over 2.2% of our nation's GDP - and is growing faster than the U.S. economy. Outdoor recreation and campgrounds are sound investments and generate a significant amount of revenue for the federal government. A National Park Service report determined each tax dollar invested in the National Park Service effectively returns \$10 to gateway communities and the U.S. economy. Beyond federal investments, enhanced concessioner and public private partnerships can help tackle these issues and the \$73 million in campground infrastructure deferred maintenance could be eliminated; new revenue generating experiences and facilities can be offered to the public; shoulder and non-peak seasons should be extended; dynamic fee categories reflective of improved campsites/services ranging from WiFi to RV utility hook-ups should be implemented; rentals of RVs, yurts, cabins, and outdoor recreation equipment/gear should be utilized to generate additional revenue, drive rural prosperity and provide enhanced visitor experiences.

### ***Improve broadband access in federally managed lands and waters to support recreational safety and enjoyment***

According to the Brookings Institution, at least 10 percent of Americans lack access to a broadband internet connection. Many of those Americans live in what would be considered "rural" areas. Federal Communications Commission regulations on Internet Service Providers have improved access to broadband for rural areas, yet the access divide remains stark. In some states, such as Alaska, 14 percent fewer Americans have access to broadband when compared to urban areas.

For recreational boating and angling, access to broadband is a critical safety and enjoyment issue for navigating our nation's waterways. Lack of broadband can put boaters at perilous risk without information about navigational channels, changes in weather and access points. For example, lack of broadband access at Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary has posed a risk for some boaters in obtaining accurate weather during changing conditions. This can pose as a serious safety concern for vessels on the water. From a user enjoyment perspective, broadband access improves the overall recreational experience on the water, allowing consumers to connect with others and boost their enjoyment.

### ***Direct the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study and assess the status of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in the United States***

In November 2015, GAO released the study, *AIS: Additional Steps Could Help Measure Federal Progress in Achieving Strategic Goals* ([GAO 16-49](#)), which examined the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force activities and challenges in addressing AIS. The report rightfully states, "addressing aquatic invasive species is a complex, interdisciplinary issue with the potential to affect many sectors and levels of government operations." It is our belief that since the time of the 2015 study the situation surrounding AIS has not significantly improved. Therefore, we request that GAO update and build upon its past work on this topic by studying the effectiveness of current AIS programs and decontamination procedures; availability of decontamination stations in relation to usage and inspection procedures; need for a national decontamination standard; and inspection wait times.

### ***Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (NOAA ORF, PAC funding)***

The National Marine Sanctuary System is an essential network of protected waters held in trust for all Americans. Consisting of more than 600,000 square miles of ocean, coasts and Great Lakes, national marine sanctuaries conserve some of the nation's most critical natural, historic and cultural resources. They are home to millions of species, preserve our nation's maritime heritage and promote access for exploration and world-class outdoor recreation. Sanctuaries are vital to maintaining the healthy ocean and Great Lakes ecosystems that support local economies. Investing in marine sanctuaries underscores the continuing ecological, historical and recreational value of America's underwater national treasures and their associated economic impact.

The Sanctuaries Operations, Research and Facilities (ORF) account supports growth in community-based sanctuaries, conducts cooperative conservation science and research programs, and explores new technologies. ORF also conducts public education, outreach and awareness efforts to show how sanctuaries can serve as a model for protecting marine ecosystems around the world and connect communities to their marine and Great Lakes wonders.

The Procurement, Acquisition and Construction (PAC) account replaces vessels that are mission critical to operations, management and enforcement. It also improves visitor centers, facilities and signage, and supports the Sanctuary Challenge Fund. The Fund finances significant projects and programs across the National Marine Sanctuary System to improve sanctuary visitor experiences and strengthen public engagement.

### ***Modernized Fee Collection/Electronic Passes***

Americans live in a digital world, but fee collection remains largely analog. Implementing a 24/7 automated fee collection system (similar to E-ZPASS), as well as online pre-sale of entrance and America the Beautiful passes would reduce long lines and lost revenue. 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 incorporating peak/off-peak pricing might be considered. 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.

### ***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. 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.

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.

RVX 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.

Sincerely,

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 & Campgrounds  
National Forest Recreation Association  
National Marine Manufacturers Association  
National Park Hospitality Association  
National Shooting Sports Foundation  
PeopleForBikes  
Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association  
RV Dealers Association  
RV Industry Association  
Specialty Equipment Manufacturers Association  
Specialty Vehicle Institute of America