



## **A Recreation Package: Supporting health, quality of life, jobs and the economy**

Outdoor recreation is a major force in America, contributing \$778 billion to the economy, accounting for 2.2% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product, growing faster than the economy as a whole in every indicator, and supporting 5.2 million jobs, many of which are in rural communities. 2019 saw a number of legislative successes for outdoor recreation, including recreation hearings and markups in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and passage of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act. As a result of Congress' attention towards supporting the outdoor economy, several recreation-focused bills have been introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. 2020 provides a unique opportunity to package these bipartisan, bicameral bills into the first-ever "Recreation Package." This group of bills would help revitalize rural communities, as well as improve access to, and infrastructure on America's public lands and waters for now and into the future. The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable - America's leading coalition of outdoor recreation trade associations comprised of 29 members serving more than 100,000 American businesses - encourages passage of the first-ever "Recreation Package" and stands ready to assist Congress in this landmark effort.

### The Bills:

**Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act (H.R. 2435):** This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish the Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans to report on and make recommendations regarding the use of federal lands for medical treatment and therapy for veterans.

**American Workforce Empowerment Act (H.R. 4469):** This bill allows tax preferred college savings plans (529 plans) to fund certain postsecondary certificate and apprenticeship programs.

**Public Lands Telecommunications Act (H.R. 2611):** This bill supports the establishment and improvement of communications sites on or adjacent to Federal lands under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture through the retention and use of rental fees associated with such sites.

**Recreation Not Red Tape Act (H.R. 3458):** The Recreation Not Red Tape Act removes barriers to outdoor recreation, making it easier for more Americans to get outdoors - enjoying its benefits and generating jobs - by creating consistent permitting process for outfitters and guides, directing federal agencies to make recreation a priority, maintaining public lands and more.

**Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation Act (H.R. 3879):** This bill modifies the procedures for issuing special recreation permits for certain public land units.

**Ski Area Fee Retention Act (H.R. 2509):** This bill establishes the Ski Area Fee Retention Account. A specified portion of rental charges for ski area permits on a Forest Service unit shall be deposited in such account. Amounts in the fund shall be available to the unit for expenditure without further appropriation for ski area administration, improvements, visitor services, and leasing of administrative sites. Funds may be reallocated only if the rental charges collected exceed the reasonable needs of the unit.

**Transit to Trails Act (H.R. 4273):** This bill directs the Department of Transportation (DOT) to establish the Transit to Trails Grant Program to award grants to certain governmental and

private entities for projects that increase transportation access to public lands, waters, parkland, or monuments for critically underserved communities.

\*\*\*In addition to these important existing and potential bills, the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable and its members also support swift passage of the *Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act (H.R. 1225)* and the *Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act (H.R. 3195)*. These crucial pieces of legislation will help ensure Americans' continued access to outdoor recreation on federally-managed lands and waters by eliminating the deferred maintenance backlog and funding recreation projects across the country.

#### Other Concepts:

**Climate Resiliency:** Changes in environment and weather threaten the outdoor recreation economy by threatening the communities, lands, and animals that support it. Policymakers can address these environmental challenges and mitigate their impacts with policies that

- Support the use of innovative public-private partnerships across federal agencies for disaster and community resilience activities, and for projects ensuring the long-term sustainability of our public lands
- Recognize Outdoor Recreation Economy Workforce Development initiatives and training programs as career pathways for workers transitioning from coal reliant positions, especially in rural economies
- Prioritize outdoor recreation assets in disaster supplemental conversations

**Inclusion of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in FLREA:** The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) allows recreation-providing land management agencies to collect and retain a portion of entrance, camping, parking and other fees. Eighty percent of the revenue is kept at the collection site, while the remaining 20 percent is distributed to non-fee associated sites. This program has been incredibly successful but lacks the inclusion of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), an agency that hosts 270 million recreation visits per year at close to 5,000 sites in 43 states. These visits generate \$11 billion in economic impact and support 189,000 total jobs. Meanwhile, as demand for recreation on USACE lakes continues to grow, the agency's recreational infrastructure assets and services are crumbling.

USACE possessed the authority to retain recreation use fees until 1985, at which point the revenue was diverted from on-site improvements to USACE's Operations and Management budget to be used as a funding offset. As a result, millions of recreationists at USACE lakes have continued to pay fees only to see that money sent to the U.S. Treasury at the expense of declining access, service, and the overall quality of recreation experiences. With national trends showing USACE to be a major provider of recreation well into the future, it's imperative that USACE be granted fee retention authorities under FLREA. This change would provide a much-needed revenue source for improving the quality of recreational assets and services and address the backlog of maintenance needs at recreation facilities.

**Streamlined Data Collection:** Improving the management and conservation of federal lands for the benefit of outdoor recreation requires an understanding of participation and associated economic impact. A few high-level national surveys exist, and most of the land managing agencies (Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation) have conducted agency-specific surveys of outdoor recreation participation. However, the national surveys don't provide the level of detail required for analysis across agencies, and the agency-specific surveys are not compatible with one

another and have varying degrees of specificity. Collection of visitation and economic impact data across the federal land management agencies should be harmonized and streamlined.

**Workforce Development:** The Outdoor Recreation Economy is made up of in-demand and high-growth industries that include those critical to restoring economic resiliency to our rural and under-resourced communities. Any recreation legislation should include policies supporting workforce development in these industries. Policies can support outdoor recreation workforce development by:

- Establishing an Outdoor Recreation Economy Workforce Development Task Force to determine the scope of the workforce development need in the outdoor recreation economy and propose solutions to meet this need
- Recognizing the Outdoor Recreation Economy and its related industries (disaster resilience, response, and recovery, energy, transportation and infrastructure (including green infrastructure), resource management, etc.) as in-demand and high-growth industries, and ensuring existing and future workforce development initiatives support it as such
- Providing the flexibility for businesses and workforce development programs to tailor their programs to best meet the needs of their industry and their participants
- Requiring states include workforce development activities in future State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORPS)
- Proposing a federal study to understand the full scope of workforce needs in the Outdoor Recreation Economy
- Setting aside % of any funds allocated for outdoor recreation-related project work for workforce development activities
- Support partnerships between businesses in the Outdoor Recreation Economy and important Outdoor Recreation Economy workforce development stakeholders (national service programs, apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, institutions of higher education, local education agencies, etc.)