



The Honorable Jared Golden
Chairman
Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural,
and Rural Business Development
Committee on Small Business
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jim Hagedorn
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural,
and Rural Business Development
Committee on Small Business
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Golden, Ranking Member Hagedorn, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR), thank you for bringing attention to the economic and environmental opportunities provided by the forestry sector by holding last week's hearing on sustainable forestry's role in climate solutions. We appreciate the recognition in your memo that outdoor recreation offers major economic, environmental, and social benefits in forests around the United States. We are pleased to provide the perspective of the outdoor recreation industry and share strategies and opportunities to effectively utilize forests for the benefit of communities around the country, particularly in rural America. As you will read below, the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities program is one example that Congress can continue to support to guarantee these outcomes.

ORR is the nation's leading coalition of outdoor recreation trade associations – made up of 34 national members, as well as other nonprofit organizations and business entities — serving more than 110,000 businesses. According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis released last year, the recreation industry generated \$788 billion in economic output, accounted for 2.1 percent of GDP and 5.2 million American jobs and was growing faster than the economy as a whole in every indicator.

COVID-19 and the desire for safe, family-friendly activities during the pandemic made 2020 the biggest year for outdoor recreation participation and sales in American history. A survey published in May 2020 found that 81 percent of Americans had already spent time outside at that point in the pandemic, with 32.5 percent turning to outdoor recreation for the first time. 8.1 million more Americans hiked in 2020 vs. 2019 (a 16.3 percent increase), and the total percentage of Americans who participate in outdoor recreation rose from the previous ten years. Many sectors within the industry saw record participation numbers in the past year: freshwater fishing added 3.4 million participants in 2020, shipments of RVs reached an all-time high in the first quarter of 2021, new model powersports sales increased 40 percent in 2020 over 2019 levels, and retail unit sales of new powerboats in the U.S. increased by 12 percent in 2020 over 2019. These figures capture our nation's recognition over the past year that outdoor recreation provides significant physical health, mental health, and community benefits. Importantly, new participants in outdoor recreation are younger, predominantly female, and more diverse.

With statistics like these in mind, many communities around the United States have recognized that investing in outdoor recreation infrastructure in and around national, state, and local forests provides a resilient economic development strategy that benefits locals and visitors alike. For instance, the Pennsylvania Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship promotes outdoor recreation, conservation, and economic development in a two-million acre region of public land in northern



Pennsylvania that had experienced high unemployment and population loss after a decline in timbering, mining and oil and gas drilling. By focusing on outdoor recreation and conservation values through a unique intergovernmental cooperative agreement, the region now enjoys \$1.8 billion in annual spending and over 8 million day-trip visitors who support an entrepreneurial ecosystem of 300+ private-sector partners involved in the outdoor recreation industry. Or consider the Northern Forest Center, which aims to create rural vibrancy by connecting people to the 30-million acre Northern Forest stretching across Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. Outdoor recreation is at the core of their rural economic development strategy, and through strategies like a destination development grant program and mountain biking trail investments, they have managed to sustain more than 7,200 jobs in forest-based businesses and tourism and leverage over \$233 million in funds for the region.

As these examples demonstrate, it is possible to address the most acute impacts of climate change while enhancing and sustaining economies, and outdoor recreation investments in forests provide a clear example. Through federal investments like the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities program, which provides technical assistance to communities seeking to build outdoor recreation-based economies, or last year's historic passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, Congress is helping create more opportunities for communities to thrive while addressing climate change. Reauthorization and expansion of RERC, in particular, will support urban and rural communities in making best use of their natural resource assets for environmental and economic benefit.

We hope the House Committee on Small Business in the 117th Congress will see us as a key partner in identifying more opportunities for outdoor recreation infrastructure investment going forward.

Sincerely,

Jessica Turner
Executive Director