

ORR OUTDOOR RECREATION ROUNDTABLE



May 6, 2020

Senator Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Senator Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy:

Nearly two months into a pandemic that has virtually shut down the nation's outdoor recreation industry, the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) cannot stress enough how important passing the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) is to revitalizing America's outdoor recreation industry, and the small businesses and rural communities it supports.

ORR is the nation's leading coalition of outdoor recreation trade associations – made up of 31 national trade associations serving more than 100,000 businesses. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the outdoor recreation industry generated \$778 billion in output, accounted for 2.2 percent of GDP, supported 5.2 million jobs and was growing faster than the economy as a whole in every indicator.

However, about 90 percent of the outdoor sector is made up of small businesses, and they have been devastated by this pandemic. An industry survey last week found that 79 percent of outdoor businesses have had to lay off or furlough employees, and that 89 percent are seeing decreased revenue. Our retailers, apparel and gear manufacturers, outfitters and guides, and outdoor hospitality businesses are experiencing unprecedented downturns and many will never reopen again – particularly if we don't act now.

Whether as a stand-alone bill or in a stimulus package, the entire outdoor recreation business community urges Congress to pass GAOA as soon as possible.

GAOA will fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$900 million annually. The LWCF has, for 50 years, been our nation's most successful conservation program. LWCF funds can be a lifeline for communities that rely on recreation access to local, state and national parks, wildlife habitats, and working forests. And we need more of such places in an era of social-distancing and close-to-home recreation. This bill would achieve the decades-long goal of fully and permanently funding LWCF, allowing for more recreation access projects on local, state and federal lands that will support business certainty today and a thriving outdoor recreation economy for years to come.

GAOA also addresses the \$20 billion maintenance backlog facing our public lands and waters, providing funds that would improve important outdoor recreation related facilities such as docks, restrooms, campgrounds, trails, roads and more. After experiencing an unprecedented surge in visitor demand on the federal land and water system throughout the past decade, years of wear and tear combined with underfunding have resulted in continuously deteriorating infrastructure. These recreation assets, in parks, forests, wildlife refuges and more, could be under considerably more stress as even more Americans recognize the many benefits of time spent outside. This funding will ensure that adequate infrastructure for all types of recreation on our public lands and waters can support rural communities and economies.

A National Park Service study has shown that for every dollar Congress invests in the National Park Service, \$10 is returned to the U.S. economy, directly benefiting the nation's rural areas and gateway communities. And it will help restart the outdoor recreation economy so this sector can do what it does best – revitalize communities, create jobs, support healthful activities, improve quality of life and provide access to amazing outdoor experiences for generations to come. At its core, the outdoor industry relies on public lands and waters where people recreate – and GAOA is the most important thing Congress can do to invest in that outdoor recreation infrastructure.

Addressing the infrastructure needs on our public lands and waters also creates jobs. A Pew Charitable Trusts study estimates that addressing the backlog in our national parks alone would create or support nearly 110,000 infrastructure-related jobs, most of these in struggling rural communities. And, when visitors return to our parks and public lands, we can be assured that these special places will be safe, accessible and ready to help generate tourist dollars in local communities and tax revenues for local, state and federal agencies.

As the nation begins phased emergence from COVID-19 mitigation efforts, all outdoor recreation businesses – while adhering to CDC guidelines – should be included in our health and economic recovery strategies.

Americans are going to need to get outside to preserve physical and mental health, and recreation businesses are desperate for the certainty this investment would provide in boosting local and rural economies.

ORR stands ready to work with federal, state and local agencies to ensure Americans have access to nearby open spaces, and adequate infrastructure at some of our most inspiring federal lands and waters for generations to come. Passing GAOA now will help heal people, communities and the outdoor recreation economy. We urge swift passage of this vital legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

America Outdoors
American Horse Council
American Mountain Guides Association
American Trails
American Sportfishing Association
Archery Trade Association
Association of Marina Industries
Boat Owners Association of the United States
CHM Government Services
The Corps Network
Diving Equipment and Marketing Association
International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas
Motorcycle Industry Council
National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds
National Forest Recreation Association
National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Park Hospitality Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
Outdoor Industry Association
PeopleForBikes
Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association
RV Dealers Association
RV Industry Association
Snowsports Industries America
Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals
Specialty Equipment Market Association
Specialty Vehicle Institute of America
Sports & Fitness Industry Association