



September 15, 2023

Testimony of Ambreen Tariq  
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 1657, H.R. 3107, H.R. 3200, and H.R. 4984  
September 19, 2023

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, members of the committee.

On behalf of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this hearing. Our industry is in strong support of several important recreation provisions, including the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act (H.R. 3107) and the Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act (H.R. 3200). I would also like to express our appreciation to the sponsors of these bipartisan pieces of legislation – Representatives Zinke, Peltola, Neguse, Lawler, and more – whose leadership on these bills will help strengthen coordination and focus on the recreation economy for both federal agencies and rural communities.

In my role as the Senior Program Director at ORR I work on issues of workforce, access, and economic development related to outdoor recreation. I also coordinate a program called [Together Outdoors](#), a coalition that aims to increase diversity and nurture an environment where all people have welcoming outdoor experiences in outdoor recreation through engagement, partnership, and action. I have over a decade of experience in labor and environmental and this has given me a unique perspective into how business bottom line is intrinsically connected to our natural resources and land and water management decisions and outcomes.

The [Outdoor Recreation Roundtable](#) (ORR) is the nation's leading coalition of outdoor recreation associations representing the more than 110,000 outdoor businesses in the recreation economy and the full spectrum of outdoor-related activities. [Recently released data](#) from the U.S. Department of Commerce shows that outdoor recreation generated \$862 billion and 4.5 million American jobs in 2021, comprising 2% of the nation's economy and 3% of all employees in the country.<sup>1</sup> The data also shows that outdoor recreation's growth tripled that of the national economy from 2020-2021 as we saw more people flocking to the outdoors and valuing how important time outside is to our mental and physical health, quality of life, as well as helping strengthen rural communities and economies.

Despite the increased numbers our industry is seeing in visitation and participation, there are growing challenges to consider. How do we accommodate more visitors while ensuring quality outdoor recreation experiences and the health of our public lands and waters? How do we support businesses impacted by canceled trips and travel or closures from fires and smoke? How do we make sure communities have the assistance they need to support sustainable recreation while advancing equitable access to front-country and backcountry outdoor recreation? These bills, along with several other bipartisan and bicameral provisions we hope to see come together in a recreation package by the end of the year, are about the federal government working better for businesses, states, the communities who rely on recreation assets, and the American people who enjoy them. Whether it is a manufacturer in Wisconsin, a ski resort in Colorado, or a family-owned diner outside a popular national park, businesses in our industry are like others in that they need certainty to continue to make investments in their employees and serve their

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "[Value added by Industry as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product](#)" (accessed Friday, September 15, 2023)



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customers. Both bills provide this much-needed certainty through good government collaboration at the highest levels and on-the-ground tools for main street businesses and rural communities.

### ***Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR)***

While several land and water management agencies have traditionally been the main entities prioritizing outdoor recreation policies, virtually the entire federal government is engaged with aspects of today's thriving outdoor recreation economy. Coordination among these agencies helps to build a collaborative culture by which they can share innovative ideas, approach challenges that cut across various jurisdictions, and work together to make long term and beneficial impacts. This is much like what ORR does for our members every day – bringing together industry leaders to work on issues that improve and grow the entire recreation community, whether you are a hunter, climber, RVer, hiker, boater, or biker.

As outdoor recreation continues to grow in importance for policy priorities – from rural economic development and transportation to health and equity – this level of coordination is critical because it ensures that agencies are aligned internally and provides a single point of contact externally for outdoor recreation stakeholders – including our members and the industry.

The Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation could help important efforts, like Together Outdoors, by bringing together agencies around important issues of welcoming new users outdoors and telling the stories of those communities who have diverse and historic relationships to our public lands and waters.

At its core, the Improving Outdoor Recreation Coordination Act is about breaking down government silos so we can see a better return on investment for taxpayer dollars and come up with the best policies for our industries' biggest opportunities and challenges. This legislation will result in better management of our federal lands and waters, more coordinated policies across federal agencies, and valuable interactions with non-federal partners.

As you finalize this legislation, I would like to suggest a few small changes to the bill before it moves through committee.

1. Many agencies are doing important work for our sector that are not currently members of FICOR and we hope many others will also engage in this policy space. As such, it is important to ensure that FICOR has the ability to add new members, as necessary.
2. It would be more appropriate for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as a whole to be included in this group rather than NOAA Fisheries, because NOAA is larger in scope and includes other recreation activities like scuba diving and boating.
3. FICOR should be supported equally across all necessary Departments, rather than just by one agency, to ensure commitment of support from the various land and water management agencies. And, since FICOR is already up and running with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), this legislation should be flexible enough in design to allow continued coordination practices by the principals of the agencies.
4. We greatly appreciate that the legislation invites state representatives to FICOR meetings, and we recommend this invitation be extended to include Tribal participation as well.
5. The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable and several of our members have been extremely active in working with states to create [state Offices of Outdoor Recreation](#). To date, twenty such offices have been created. These offices are tasked with state coordination around outdoor recreation and have had a great impact on state policies as well as coordination among red, blue, and purple

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states to leverage best practices from across the country that drive business and build thriving communities. FICOR should coordinate with these states and any others who create state Offices of Outdoor Recreation, as well as with state leaders and interests.

### ***Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act***

Post-pandemic, more people are choosing to live where businesses know they can recruit and retain employees. Much of this growth is happening in and around rural gateway communities. Attention to the authentic and sustainable development of recreation economies in places near parks, forests, and Bureau of Land Management lands is critical to supporting not only conservation of those natural resources that are often the driving forces behind this growth, but also the small to mid-sized businesses who are the backbone of these communities.

The Gateway Community and Recreation Enhancement Act will help communities plan for recreation in ways that support key areas like housing, over-crowding, and workforce development.

1. As we are seeing one of our biggest issues in workforce, the opportunity to capitalize on vocational training programs and public-private partnerships could help increase the capacity and business potential of rural entrepreneurship.
2. A unified way of collecting and showcasing real-time visitation data will also help disperse visitor use to lesser-trafficked areas. This will help alleviate the overcrowding we are seeing in some of our iconic places, but without local communities feeling the economic harms of reduced tourism. Having a single model that can compare and contrast location-based activities with accurate, real-time data on visitor movements and recreational activities will allow land managers, lawmakers, and businesses to make more informed decisions around resource allocation and management. This will also help visitors who plan and save for months for such a trip to make better choices around how, when, and where they take these trips.
3. Similar to the FICOR legislation, we suggest that this bill expand to other agencies like NOAA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. A better definition than using the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act-related agencies might be found in the Every Kid in a Park Act, which encompasses a broader range of agencies that provide recreation-related services on public lands and waters.

### ***First-ever Recreation Package***

I would also like to thank this Committee for your continued work on bringing together bipartisan and bicameral bills in a first-ever recreation package. Similar legislation, the America's Outdoor Recreation Act, has passed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee unanimously twice. This common-sense package of bills, which I hope will include the two we are discussing today, is a collection of important outdoor recreation policies – some of which have been worked on for decades. Many of them fix deeply urgent needs for climbers, anglers, hunters, RVers, and all the businesses who provide world-class outdoor experiences. There is no bigger legislative priority for the entire outdoor recreation industry than AORA. We hope this transformative bill will pass and be signed into law this year and we look forward to working with you and your Senate counterparts to ensure that happens.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the outdoors and for advancing these important bills. Both recreation bills discussed today are wins for Republicans and Democrats, American businesses, and the



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American people – not just today’s recreationists but also future generations of outdoor lovers who we hope will gain the same benefits we do from time spent in nature. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Ambreen Tariq  
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable