

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

November 14, 2022

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
1236 Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for America's Outdoor Recreation Act and conservation priorities

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

On behalf of the human powered outdoor recreation community, we write to express strong support for S. 3266, America's Outdoor Recreation Act and to ask that Congress pass a package of recreation and conservation priorities before the end of the Congress.

AORA, which reflects extensive input from recreation stakeholders across the country, is a comprehensive bipartisan bill that would improve outdoor recreation opportunities across the United States and provide broad public health, environmental, and economic benefits to the American public. These benefits could be strengthened further if passed alongside collaboratively developed land protection legislation advanced by both parties during the 117th Congress. A year-end conservation and recreation package will facilitate sustainable and equitable outdoor recreation experiences across the nation, protect important landscapes on which recreationists depend, and continue to strengthen the outdoor recreation economy.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access



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Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Outdoor recreation is the most common way that Americans come to know their public lands and waters. It contributes immeasurably to people's lives and supports vibrant communities through better health, well-being, and the ability of recreation access and amenities to attract businesses and workers across a range of industries, particularly in rural communities. It also supports the growing outdoor recreation economy, which, according to recently released data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, accounted for \$862 billion in gross economic output, 1.9 percent of U.S. gross domestic product, and 4.5 million jobs in 2021.¹

Participation in outdoor recreation is on the rise nationally. Visitation data from federal land management agencies including the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service² all show a steady increase in recreational visits over the past decade.³ As this trend continues, land managers need clear policy direction from Congress to ensure that outdoor recreation opportunities are sustainable and that the benefits of outdoor recreation are available to all.

Outdoor recreationists and the outdoor economy both rely on access to conserved public lands and waters. The lands and waters that support recreation experiences are irreplaceable, and designations to protect these landscapes for their recreation and conservation values are a core and necessary component of effective recreation policy. Multiple land protection proposals developed during the 117th Congress could strengthen AORA's central goal of improving recreation opportunities and facilitating greater access to public lands.

¹ Bureau of Economic Analysis, BEA 22-55, *Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2021* (2022). Available at: <https://www.bea.gov/news/2022/outdoor-recreation-satellite-account-us-and-states-2021>.

² Gwendolyn Aldrich and Evan Hjerpe, *The Conservation Funding Crisis*, Conservation Economics Institute (2022). Available at: <https://www.conservacionecon.org/public-lands>.

³ National Park Service visits fell in 2020 and 2021, which is likely due to pandemic-related closures.



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We ask that Congress work to pass AORA and a package of protective designation bills before the end of the year.

S. 3266, America's Outdoor Recreation Act

AORA is a comprehensive bill that would improve recreation management and facilitate access to public lands and waters throughout the country. This bill reflects years of thoughtful input from outdoor recreation interests of all stripes, including Outdoor Alliance and our member organizations. AORA reflects strong bipartisan collaboration and would benefit the full spectrum of recreational users—from hikers, bikers, skiers and paddlers, to hunters and anglers, to motorized recreation enthusiasts. In addition to its unanimous advancement by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, many of these provisions have been considered and advanced with bipartisan support by the House Natural Resources Committee, which unanimously voted to report the Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation (SOAR) Act last year.

Of particular relevance to the human powered outdoor recreation community, AORA would safeguard Wilderness climbing opportunities by directing the establishment of national-level guidance for the placement and maintenance of fixed climbing anchors in Wilderness areas. Wilderness areas are integral to America's climbing history, and climbing is an established use in Wilderness areas throughout the country. AORA would provide certainty for both climbers and land managers by clarifying how fixed anchors—essential tools for safely and sustainably ascending and descending technical terrain—are managed within these areas.

Outdoor Alliance also supports provisions of AORA that would:

- Facilitate meaningful outdoor experiences and enhance outdoor equity by improving the recreational permitting systems for outfitters and guides;
- Promote mountain biking as a sustainable recreation activity on federal lands by identifying opportunities for long-distance bike trails;
- Direct Forest Service and BLM to create or update travel management plans and over-snow vehicle use maps for applicable land management units;



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- Require land management agencies to work with local communities to study and address the impacts of seasonal closures of public lands;
- Direct land management agencies to work with local partners to understand the needs of, and economic benefits to, gateway communities and work with these communities to address infrastructure issues and other needs;
- Require agencies to inventory outdoor recreation resources and take steps to enhance recreation opportunities in these areas;
- Legislatively establish the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation, an existing federal council focused on improving accessing to nature and expanding outdoor recreation opportunities;
- Require land management agencies to post information about access closures online in a timely manner;
- Modernize and improve how land management agencies collect visitation data;
- Improve access to outdoor recreation programs for service members and veterans;
- Increase youth recreation on federal lands; and
- Codify the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program, which improves access to outdoor recreation opportunities in underserved communities.

Together, these policy changes would modernize how federal agencies facilitate recreation opportunities and make outdoor recreation accessible for more Americans. We hope that Congress moves expeditiously to pass AORA before the end of the year.

Protections for High-Value Recreation Landscapes

Protected public lands and waters are vital to the outdoor recreation experience. The 117th Congress has made considerable progress on a number of bills of particular importance for our community. These bills would protect and provide management direction for landscapes of high recreation and conservation value and are the product of years of engagement and negotiation by outdoor recreationists, Tribes, conservationists, local communities, and other stakeholders. A package of protective designations to accompany AORA would permanently protect valuable recreation opportunities and appropriately complement AORA's improved direction to land managers.



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The House of Representatives passed the Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act (H.R. 803) in early 2021. This package of bills would protect millions of acres of public lands and more than 1,000 river miles throughout California, Colorado, Arizona, and Washington. H.R. 803 was developed with extensive input from the outdoor recreation community, which is reflected in the bills' thoughtful approach to preserving sustainable access for climbing, mountain biking, hiking, camping, paddling, and more, while also permanently protecting conservation values like wildlife habitat and water quality.

In the Senate, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee has also made significant progress on land protection legislation. The outdoor recreation community strongly supports the following bills, which the Committee passed with bipartisan support:

- Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act (S. 1589)
- Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act (S. 1538)
- Bonneville Shoreline Trail Advancement Act (S. 1222)
- Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act (S. 1769)
- Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument Expansion Act (S.4080)
- Land Between the Lakes Recreation and Heritage Act (S.3997)
- Cerro de la Olla Wilderness Establishment Act (S.177)
- Buffalo Tract Protection Act (S. 180/H.R. 5805)
- M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act (S.3129)
- York River Wild and Scenic River Act of 2021 (S.491/H.R. 1469)
- Ruby Mountains Protection Act (S. 609)

The Energy and Natural Resources Committee has also held hearings on additional land protection bills of particular importance for the outdoor recreation community, several of which are also in H.R. 803. These include:

- Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (S. 455)
- Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (S. 1493)
- Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act (S. 173)
- Grand Canyon Protection Act (S.387)
- PUBLIC Lands Act (S. 1459)
- River Democracy Act (S.192)
- Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument Access Act (S.4784)



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These proposals reflect an enormous amount of collaborative work by the 117th Congress, the outdoor recreation and conservation communities, and other stakeholders. Outdoor Alliance supports all of these bills individually, and supports their inclusion in a year-end package alongside AORA.

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In the coming weeks, Congress has a valuable opportunity to capitalize on the bipartisan work of the last two years and pass America's Outdoor Recreation Act alongside broadly supported pieces of conservation. We ask that you support the chairs and ranking members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the House Natural Resources Committee in negotiating a package, centered around AORA, to advance opportunities for all Americans to enjoy their public lands and waters. Thank you for your work to support outdoor recreation and conservation priorities during the 117th Congress, and we look forward to working with you to see these priorities enacted.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Sen. Joe Manchin
Sen. John Barrasso
Rep. Raúl Grijalva
Rep. Bruce Westerman

Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance
Chris Winter, Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Clinton Begley, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Kent McNeill, CEO, International Mountain Bicycling Association



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David Page, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Pete Ward, Interim Director, American Alpine Club
Kaleen Deatherage, Interim Executive Director, the Mazamas
Keegan Young, Executive Director, Colorado Mountain Club
Chad Nelsen, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

