

Katherine Andrews
Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism
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Subcommittee on Federal Lands
10:00 a.m. | 1324 Longworth House Office Building

In support of the EXPLORE Act to foster and encourage recreation on federal recreation lands and waters, consistent with multiple-use mandates and land management planning, and for other purposes.

Good morning Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse and thank you for inviting me to be here with you today. My name is Katherine Andrews, and I am the Director of Arkansas' Office of Outdoor Recreation at the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism, and incoming chair of the Confluence of States, a bipartisan organization of my outdoor recreation counterparts across the United States.

I am so pleased to testify in support of this important legislation, and I'm particularly proud to appear before the Natural Resources Committee, which is chaired by the Honorable Bruce Westerman, my fellow Arkansan. I thank him for the tireless work he does on behalf of all Arkansans.

Arkansas is known as The Natural State for a reason – from our clean running streams and pristine wilderness to our diversity of outdoor recreation options that range from hiking and biking to floating and climbing. Arkansas is home to the mountain bike capital of the world, the duck hunting capital of the world, the trout capital of the world, and we are quickly becoming the climbing capital of the South. We have the world's longest bayou, the highest waterfall between the Rockies and the Appalachians, and the nation's first national river. Arkansas is also the only state where you can hunt both an elk and an alligator. At the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism, our mission is to protect and promote our state's natural, cultural and historical resources, ultimately contributing to a thriving economy and higher quality of life.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis has cited benefits for areas with high outdoor recreation — like business attraction, workforce retention, public health and wellness, getting kids outside and off screens, and the conservation of our natural assets. A robust outdoor recreation industry isn't just nice to have; it is necessary and deeply impactful. In 2022, 4.3 million visitors spent an estimated \$278

million in local gateway regions while visiting National Park Service lands in Arkansas. These expenditures supported a total of 3,900 jobs, \$107 million in labor income, \$191 million in value added, and \$362 million in economic output in the Arkansas economy.

My goal as Director of Arkansas' Office of Outdoor Recreation is to leverage our state's unmatched natural beauty to promote tourism and grow our outdoor economy. We want to ensure that Arkansas does not just compete in this space, but rather, we envision Arkansas as a true national leader in outdoor recreation and the outdoor economy. We market the beauty and potential of The Natural State to the world for recreation tourism and outdoor business opportunities.

To achieve this, access to the outdoors is critical. Access provides our residents and visitors from across the world the ability to engage with our greatest natural resources. These gifts are to be enjoyed, respected and revered by us today, and we must conserve and preserve them for future generations to also enjoy.

The issue of access to these natural places leads me to the reason I am here today. I am here to offer my support for Congressman Westerman's legislation, which will allow thorough but pragmatic movement toward reopening the Albert Pike campgrounds, a unique area that has long been a draw for tourism and outdoor recreation in Arkansas. By doing so, we will open countless opportunities for young families and new residents while providing our seasoned residents with joy and adventure in a beloved location. In addition, it will provide access to the rugged Ouachita Mountains and clear streams, providing hiking, fishing and other recreational opportunities for all. I fully support the new legislation and ask for your support.

Part of my role as Director of Arkansas' Office of Outdoor Recreation is to help craft outdoor recreation opportunities for future generations so that they can enjoy and care for nature just as we do today. In our state, we've taken a bold approach involving multiagency and private partners working together. Access to outdoor recreation inspires generations of Arkansans to care for and champion the future of our natural places, ensuring that we remain The Natural State.

There are two parts of the state that our office serves. First, our industry partners: bike shops, boat manufacturers, river guides, duck lodges, outfitters, technology companies in the outdoors, any kind of outdoor recreation company you can think of. We help them access resources to grow, help them understand their barriers to growth, and help them overcome those barriers.

Second, we work with our community partners: towns, counties, and advocacy groups that are hoping to support the growth and access to outdoor recreation. We help them understand the great benefits of outdoor recreation on a local economy, and we help them access grants, resources, and other funding so they have more ability to leverage their natural assets and build infrastructure to attract visitors and outdoor recreationists.

The legislation proposed today will solve some of our most pressing issues facing our federal land managers, cut red tape for providers and small businesses, allow states and outdoor recreation leaders to further our missions of conservation and preservation of our natural assets, strengthen the outdoor economy, and increase access to outdoor recreation opportunities across the country on our federal lands.

Thank you so much for having me here today.