

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

Testimony of Louis Geltman, Policy Director, Outdoor Alliance
Legislative hearing on H.R. 3400, Recreation Not Red-Tape Act
October 3, 2017

On behalf of Outdoor Alliance and the outdoor recreation community, I would like to express our thanks to Chairman Bishop for introducing H.R. 3400, the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act and to Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Hanabusa for holding this hearing. We strongly support the RNR Act and believe that it will facilitate improved land management and better access to outdoor recreation for all Americans.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of eight member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, and the Mazamas and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, **paddle, mountain bike, and backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands**, waters, and snowscapes.

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, nearly half of all Americans participate in some form of outdoor recreation, and these activities employ 7.6 million Americans, support \$887 billion in annual consumer spending, and generate \$65.3 billion in federal tax revenue and \$59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue each year. Opportunities for outdoor recreation on **our country's public lands benefit Americans' quality of life and foster a connection to place and a stewardship ethic. Our country's public lands are the birthright of every American**, and we are extremely pleased to see bipartisan, common sense legislation aimed at protecting and enhancing opportunities to sustainably enjoy outdoor recreation.

The Recreation Not Red-Tape Act includes provisions that will help ensure that more Americans have ready access to the **invaluable experiences provided by America's public lands**. Our community strongly supports provisions in the bill to:

- Offer a sense of Congress in support of state offices of outdoor recreation;
- Improve the availability of federal and state recreation passes and facilitate their online sale, while improving special use permitting for outfitters and guides;
- Improve access to outdoor recreation programs for service members and veterans;
- Extend seasonal recreation opportunities where appropriate;
- Direct management agencies to develop recreation performance metrics for the evaluation of land managers;



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- Add recreation to the mission of important land management agencies, including the Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, FERC, and the Department of Transportation; and
- Help land managers accept volunteers to conduct stewardship activities, and facilitate trail maintenance across agency jurisdictions.

Most importantly, the outdoor recreation community strongly supports the bill's provision to help identify and protect important areas for outdoor recreation through a National Recreation Area System.

In our land management system, recreation is often treated as a secondary benefit of conservation-focused designations. This arrangement can work extremely well in many circumstances, and our country has developed a system of protected public lands that is the envy of the world. Our focus on the most iconic and pristine backcountry areas, however, can sometimes leave close-to-town, accessible, frontcountry areas—which can be some of the most important places for recreation—exposed to inappropriate development pressure or leave recreationally significant areas subject to less than ideal management.

Currently, when land managers conduct planning activities like Forest Planning for National Forests or Resource Management Plan development for BLM units, they are appropriately required to inventory for areas that could become new Wilderness or Wild and Scenic River designations. While these inventories and designations are absolutely essential, right now there is no analogous land-use designation process specifically dedicated to assisting Congress in evaluating, protecting, and enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities.

Recreation Not Red-Tape will instruct land managers, during their existing planning processes, to inventory for places of recreational significance, just as they currently are required to inventory for potential new Wilderness or Wild and Scenic Rivers designations. This process will assist Congress in developing new National Recreation Area designations and help to ensure that management plans appropriately account for recreation.

This change will facilitate greater access to sustainable recreation in healthy, ecologically sound surroundings for more Americans, including those living in a diversity of geographic settings, from rural to urban. This process will make sure recreationally significant areas on public lands are given the management attention they deserve, benefitting public lands communities and the businesses supported by the outdoor recreation economy. More Americans will have better access to high quality settings for activities like mountain biking, climbing, skiing, paddling, and hunting and angling in close-to-home settings.



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While we strongly support the National Recreation Area section of the bill as introduced, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee to make even more explicit the essential link between sustainable recreation opportunities and conservation and ecological protection. Additionally, we would support enhancements to the bill to strengthen the protection these landscapes receive for their ecological, as well as their recreational, values.

Finally, Outdoor Alliance does have concerns with the bill's ski area fee retention provisions. While we are not opposed to National Forests retaining ski area fees in general, we are concerned that ultimately, appropriations would be scaled back and the result would be replacing appropriated dollars with money allocated to specific, very limited purposes related to ski area development. Additionally, our community believes that it is appropriate for ski areas to be paying fees for their—essentially exclusive—use of public lands, and those fees should be directed toward a public purpose broader than **addressing the industry's** own development needs. We would like to see the purposes for which retained fees can be used broad enough to encompass special-use permitting and recreation infrastructure needs beyond what is directly related to ski areas. This change should continue to benefit the ski industry by freeing agency capacity, as well as by making Forests more attractive recreation destinations, attracting more customers to their businesses.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity share our community's support for the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act, and look forward to working with the Subcommittee towards its passage.

