

**Testimony of:
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H.R. 3400 – Recreation Not Red-Tape Act
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
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Chairman McClintock, ranking member Hanabusa, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on H.R. 3400, the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act (RNR). As former Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee and as the Representative of the 3rd Congressional District in West Virginia, where I sponsored legislation to designate the New River Gorge National River and the Gauley River National Recreation Area, I offer my perspectives to help you craft legislation that will advance recreation opportunities for millions of Americans.

I commend Chairman Bishop and Senator Wyden for their bipartisan efforts that led to the introduction of the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act. I also especially appreciate the understanding that federal land management processes need modification and streamlining to enable federal agencies to enrich the lives of Americans with sustainable recreation access.

As you may know, I have worked with outfitters, recreation interest groups and local communities in my State to sponsor legislation to create one of the nation's premier National Recreation Areas. The New Gorge National River and the Gauley River National Recreation Area are now home to America's finest adventure resorts and to the Summit Bechtel National Boy Scout Reserve. These facilities and developments are a direct result of bipartisan, and I stress bipartisan, efforts in Congress to make recreation a priority at these resources. My hope is that RNR is an opportunity for us to renew the bipartisan spirit in advancing the recreation potential of public lands through the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act.

These Congressionally-designated recreation areas in my state of West Virginia preserve their natural beauty while generating significant economic benefits. In 2006, a National Park Service study found that visitation to the New River Gorge National River, which includes the Gauley River NRA, generated over \$79 million in visitor spending and 2,488 full-time job equivalents in four rural, West Virginia counties. Making sustainable outdoor recreation a priority for these areas provided these economic benefits.

The Recreation Not Red-Tape Act offers the potential to advance these economic benefits to many rural economies throughout America. The Act's goal to cut red-tape should enable federal agencies to adapt more quickly to the changing recreation interests of Americans without years of duplicative study and analyses. As the Act states, sustainable recreation and conserving natural resources are compatible missions of federal land-managing agencies. RNR provides the opportunity to explore ways to accomplish both these missions as we did in West Virginia.

One of the central concepts of RNR is the National Recreation Area System, which is truly landmark legislation. This provision has the potential to deliver recreation and economic benefits to many areas, but we will have to work together to carefully consider how to authorize this System to avoid complicating management or inadvertently adding to the potential for litigation over management conflicts.

Several provisions in RNR are particularly noteworthy and commendable. Authorizing recreation as a legitimate mission of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Reclamation is particularly important.

The provision encouraging the Department of Defense to advance outdoor recreation opportunities for service members and veterans includes very good provisions.

Some of the sections on Modernizing Recreation Permitting are good while other sections need adjustment. The provision requiring agencies to issue one permit when a trip crosses multiple boundaries is good, although it needs to include some reform on current cost recovery regulations in conjunction with streamlining of agency documentation to have real benefit. I believe more can be done in this Section to appropriately facilitate access for families. I recommend that the Committee work with Members of the Committee who have authored legislation, such as H.R. 289, to address these issues.

While the concept of the National Recreation Area System in SECTION 305 is good, some provisions need adjustment before the bill moves forward. For example, the provision establishing priorities for Administration of the areas within the National Recreation Area System needs significant adjustment to avoid increasing the potential for litigation over management priorities.

Currently, the legislation calls for “maximizing protection” of recreation values in NRAs. As proposed, the Act includes natural features as recreation values, as well as “existing or potential opportunities” (SEC. 305 (a)(1)). Natural features are “areas with unique ecological, geological, hydrological, scenic, cultural, or historic features or attributes that accommodate a variety of outdoor recreation activities . . .”. These provisions could be interpreted in such a way as to require maximizing protection of healthy ecological features, which may require protecting ecological features to the greatest extent possible, a strict conservation measure that might diminish the recreation potential of an area or lead to more litigation and red-tape, not less. However, I am confident this provision can be revised to enable the Act to be true to its title.

In measuring the performance of land managers, I strongly urge you to add economic benefits to the list of parameters.

Overall, the intent of the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act is commendable and, provided some adjustments are made, it will be a milestone in support of outdoor recreation on public lands. I thank you again for your interest and support for outdoor recreation and for the opportunity to submit this testimony on the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act.