



**MOTORCYCLE
INDUSTRY
COUNCIL.**



**OUTDOOR
INDUSTRY
ASSOCIATION**



November 16, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader of the Senate
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the business community that produces equipment, gear, footwear, and apparel used for a wide range of outdoor recreation purposes, we encourage the 115th Congress, under your leadership, to focus efforts that support the recognition of the outdoor economy as being critical to America's national interest. We request a meeting with you and your legislative team to discuss how prioritizing recreation can help grow jobs and our economy. To schedule this meeting, please contact Nicole Vasilaros at nvasilaros@nmma.org.

As an outdoor recreational business community we are committed to work with Congress to grow jobs and ensure all Americans have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors. This past year, leaders of outdoor industry associations made an unprecedented move to join forces and strategically work together for the benefit of American outdoor recreation as a whole. Industry groups representing nearly 90% of the outdoor economy, including boating, angling, hunting, camping, archery, shooting sports, both towable and motorized recreational vehicles, powersports and outdoor equipment, gear, and apparel are joining forces to grow diverse participation, expand access, and promote conservation. Rather than focus on our individual industries, we have come together as outdoor recreation business leaders seeking achievable action for the entire outdoor recreation sector. We hope to continue these efforts and welcome collaboration with your office to take groundbreaking steps for the outdoor economy.

The outdoor recreation industry contributes approximately \$646 billion per year to Gross Domestic Product, about 4% of the entire U.S. economy. From 2005 to 2011, the outdoor recreation economy

grew approximately 5% annually, despite the Great Recession.¹ The very real potential for significantly growing the outdoor recreation economy will directly benefit the millions of Americans whose jobs are sustained by this industry and the U.S. businesses that manufacture American-made products for recreational use. A 2012 outdoor recreation study showed 6.1 million direct jobs in the outdoor recreation industry. This figure represents approximately 4% of the U.S. workforce and is a larger contributor than the jobs generated by the oil, gas, and education industries combined.² Large segments of the outdoor recreation sector are labor-intensive, meaning that growth in the sector will lead to the creation of additional jobs, and most importantly, sustainable domestic jobs which cannot be outsourced and are oftentimes found in rural communities. These will include jobs in retail, manufacturing, and government service on public lands and waters.

As an outdoor recreation community, we stand ready to achieve increased participation and economic growth, and offer the following strategic response:

1. Grey and Green Infrastructure Needed

At the beginning of the 115th Congress, work with the private sector to introduce a legislative package that addresses both “Grey and Green” infrastructure opportunities. The recreation community would benefit from improvements to traditional surface transportation projects that more readily transport our goods and consumers from coast to coast. In particular, fully fund the Federal Lands Transportation Program and the Federal Lands Access Program to pay for the completion of all surface transportation projects in and leading to federal public lands and waters, and reauthorize and fully fund the Recreational Trails Program (RTP).

Recreation enthusiasts need public lands and waterways infrastructure funding that would pay for construction and maintenance of public buildings, recreation sites (e.g., boat ramps and campgrounds), and utility services (e.g., electric, water, solid waste management) and the development, installation, and maintenance of technological services on public lands and waters (e.g., wireless internet services). To achieve these objectives:

- enact new appropriations to provide a one-time infusion of funding to ensure adequate federal support to reduce by half the maintenance backlogs in public lands and waters infrastructure;
- increase annual appropriations for the civil works, recreation, and trails budgets for public lands and waters infrastructure in the DOI, USDA, NOAA, and ACOE budgets, as well as for any other departments and agencies with jurisdiction over recreation on federal lands and waters;
- reauthorize the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), and include the Army Corps of Engineers, to ensure fees collected on public lands and waters are used for recreation enhancements in those areas.

In addition to the need for public investment in public lands and water infrastructure, an increase in private investment in recreation infrastructure will be critical to continuing to attract visitors to participate in recreational activities. Private investment mobilized through public-private partnerships is a nimble and sustainable source of funding to augment direct federal funding. Private maintenance and marketing, facilitated by more flexible procurement and contract management rules, can also be instrumental in driving visitation to public lands and waters, as well as serving the goals of

¹Outdoor Industry Association. “The Outdoor Recreation Economy” (2012). Accessed online at: https://outdoorindustry.org/pdf/OIA_OutdoorRecEconomyReport2012.pdf.

²Ibid.

conservation and public access. Private participation in these partnerships will be empowered if Congress considers:

- removing barriers to and encouraging the expansion of public-private partnerships for public lands and waters infrastructure;
- enacting legislation to create an endowment for public lands and waters infrastructure, and encouraging private investments in infrastructure projects in these areas.

2. Workforce Development

Many recreational products are proudly built in the USA, sustaining good paying manufacturing jobs across the country. From boats to recreational vehicles (RVs) to hunting, archery and fishing equipment to motorized vehicles, to hiking boots and climbing rope, these products are largely designed, produced and/or assembled in the U.S. While recreational businesses have experienced sustained growth, the demand for a skilled workforce has not been met. Recreation businesses looking to grow capacity are met with labor shortfalls. Growing the outdoor economy will require production of more recreational products and a corresponding level of employment. The 115th Congress should focus efforts on providing readily accessible vocational and technical training for students. Many technical programs currently focus on automotive training but, vocational studies and apprentice programs would benefit from new sector engagement like recreation products.

3. Expand Recreational Access at Federally Managed Lands and Waters.

Recreational use of public lands and waterways managed by federal, state, and local governments is big business for America. Hiking and camping are a part of the story, but on public lands and waters, visitors engage in diverse recreational activities, including motorized recreation, boating, hunting, fishing, trail sports, horseback riding, and shooting sports. Growth from the outdoor economy is threatened because government officials charged with public lands and waters management have erected unnecessary and unjustifiable barriers to many forms of outdoor recreation, usually without taking the harmful consequences for our economy into account. Conservation and access should not be mutually exclusive principles for federal management. Outdoor recreationists require clean water, abundant fisheries, and properly maintained trails to recreate. Many recreational consumers already contribute to conservation efforts via excise taxes on their fuel and/or equipment. While we support sound conservation, federal managers must balance the needs of conservation with the public right to access. Federal officials must acknowledge that diverse forms of land- and water-based recreation are legitimate, and that including them in management plans for public lands and waters is central to fulfilling their organizations' mission and growing the overall outdoor economy. To achieve a measureable increase in recreation access, we recommend the following:

- Federal agencies should be required to conduct a mandatory assessment of economic impacts before decisions on access restrictions or prohibitions are made. Congress should require any agency that manages public lands and/or waters to publish a detailed economic assessment and justification before any access or permit restriction or prohibition is implemented and demonstrate that this assessment and justification have been taken into account in the decision-making process leading to the access restriction or prohibition. Public reporting would be two-fold. The first component would be an economic impact statement that is similar to an environmental impact statement, but focusing on the communities and industries that may be impacted and the lost economic value for outdoor recreation on public lands and waters, including tourism,

manufacturing, and retailing. This economic impact statement would be released to the public and open for comments and additional evidence before any decision is announced. Second, any final decision regarding an access restriction or prohibition must be supported by an economic assessment and analysis in the agency's justification of its final decision.

- Require shorter review terms for access denials. Access restrictions and prohibitions are not subject to review often enough to allow local, regional, and national stakeholders a meaningful voice in the management of federal lands and waters and to accommodate changed environmental conditions. Any closures or access/permit denials must be subject to near-term periodic reviews with notice to the public and an opportunity to comment, with the potential for the management plan to be reopened and reconsidered.

Thank you for your leadership and the opportunity for the outdoor recreation business community to work collaboratively with your office and the 115th Congress to grow the outdoor economy and increase public access to public lands and waters. Again, we welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your legislative team to discuss these recommendations and begin the process of working directly with the next Congress. To schedule this meeting, please contact Nicole Vasilaros at nvasilaros@nmma.org.

Sincerely,

American Horse Council
American Recreation Coalition
American Sportfishing Association
Archery Trade Association
International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association
Motorcycle Industry Council
National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Park Hospitality Association
Outdoor Industry Association
Recreational Vehicle Dealers Association
Recreational Vehicle Industry Association
Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association
Specialty Vehicle Institute of America