



February 7, 2022

The Honorable Angus King  
Chair  
National Parks Subcommittee  
United States Senate  
304 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Steve Daines  
Ranking Member  
National Parks Subcommittee  
United States Senate  
304 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Chair King and Ranking Member Daines,

On behalf of the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable and our 35 national association members, we would like to thank you for convening this important hearing on the implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA). GAOA is a legacy piece of legislation with the power to transform outdoor recreation on our nation's public lands and waters, as well as expand outdoor access for all Americans for generations to come.

Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) is the nation's leading coalition of outdoor recreation entities representing more than 110,000 American outdoor businesses and the full spectrum of outdoor activities. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the recreation industry generated \$689 billion in economic output, accounted for 1.8 percent of GDP, and 4.3 million American jobs in 2020, despite industry slowdowns and access restrictions caused by COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, outdoor recreation was growing faster than the economy as a whole.

GAOA is one of the most important pieces of outdoor recreation legislation ever signed into law. The highest usage of public lands and waters is often recreation activities, and enabling these pursuits provides both public good and major return on investment for the American taxpayer. However, decades of underfunding have eroded the infrastructure that supports these activities. GAOA addresses this by fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million per year and establishing the Legacy Restoration Fund, which allocates billions of dollars to help address the maintenance backlog on public lands and waters. In a time when more Americans than ever rely on outdoor recreation to ensure their physical and mental health, and communities lean on public lands and waters for economic stability, it is critically important to ensure the success of both components of GAOA.

The Legacy Restoration Fund, if implemented appropriately, can solve for a majority of recreation backlog projects, ensuring improvements to docks, restrooms, campgrounds, trails, roads and more. These necessary improvements to important recreation-related facilities will make for a better system that is more accessible, more enjoyable and safer.

Additionally, full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund will positively impact millions of Americans in urban and rural communities. With this dedicated funding, we have the potential to ensure significant and long-lasting returns to the American public. In fact, a recent ORR survey which

called for outdoor recreation projects that would benefit from LWCF funding yielded over 200 submissions, from bike trails to campsites to road improvements and more.

We can guarantee the success of GAOA through funding that takes into account the unprecedented demand for outdoor recreation, updated and more streamlined processes, rural economic development and urban access, and a holistic view of the recreation experience when prioritizing projects. For example, fixing roads and trails is not effective if the facilities (such as campgrounds or trailheads) they lead to are in disrepair and do not offer a positive visitor experience.

We believe this return on investment requires a focus on three key areas:

### **Planning**

In order to achieve and maintain public trust, federal agencies should have an open, transparent methodology that identifies and prioritizes recreation projects and addresses resource protection, visitor use and access, health and safety, and long-term financial sustainability. Planning should involve private recreation sector partners that can ensure infrastructure is not just being updated to today's standards but will also meet the needs of the next decade of recreation demand and technologies.

Planning also needs to consider projects that:

- Improve existing recreation public access
- Balance investments in revenue generating and non-revenue generating projects
- Manage visitation pressures
- Connect to adjacent, non-federal recreation areas
- Contribute to rural economic development
- Benefit underserved communities
- Mitigate future costs
- Help adapt to a changing climate
- Support public-private partnerships

Projects must also be planned and managed in such a way that they will not contribute to future maintenance backlogs in the future. We can ensure this by prioritizing recreation throughout the federal agencies, preventing funds being diverted from recreation projects, and increasing recreation appropriations from Congress. This is more important than ever as Americans rediscovered their love of the outdoors during the pandemic and many public lands and waters saw record visitation.

### **Oversight and Coordination**

We believe that with proper oversight and coordination among agencies and the private sector, GAOA funding can diminish the recreation backlog, improve access, and grow sustainable economies for decades to come. To achieve this, agencies should provide centralized and transparent project management oversight to ensure consistency in GAOA fund deployment.

One suggestion for improvement involves the way GAOA projects are categorized in agency databases. At present, agency classification of projects is unspecific - the category "recreation

assets” is a catch-all for projects involving camping, day use, roads, and visitors’ centers. An additional layer of classification to define the recreation infrastructure that is being built will help the American public understand the real value of LWCF and also allow for portfolio-level analysis of how GAOA dollars are being allocated towards recreation projects.

Additionally, the public should have real-time access to current project lists and timelines, which could help spark private investments in those areas. Annual reporting of results should also be implemented through standardized project dashboards. Additionally, re-establishing the Federal Inter-Agency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR), a version of which existed in both Obama and Trump administrations, would help agencies coordinate and standardize projects across jurisdictions.

### **Contracting**

To achieve the best results, project contracting should be competitive, performance-based, and provide the greatest return possible for every dollar available. Contracts should also focus on specifications that include benefits such as reduction in operational costs, job sustainment & creation, sustainability, innovation, leverage of volunteers and community partners, such as Service and Conservation Corps, and more. Projects should recognize the need for additional contracting and management expertise to ensure consistency, thoroughness, and transparency.

To help achieve these outcomes, ORR is working closely with leadership at multiple agencies to ensure GAOA projects provide the greatest benefit to the greatest number of visitors as efficiently as possible, and we appreciate their time and dedication to this funding. Continued engagement and partnership with private industry is crucial to maintaining trust, efficiency, and transparency in GAOA implementation.

Outdoor recreation is a major part of the U.S. economy, and strategic implementation of GAOA can ensure this sector continues to grow and benefit communities and people across the country. ORR stands ready to work with the Subcommittee and agencies to ensure this legacy legislation has the impact we all intended.

Sincerely,

America Outdoors  
American Horse Council  
American Sportfishing Association  
American Trails  
Archery Trade Association  
Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education  
CHM Government Services  
Diving Equipment and Market Association  
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas  
Motorcycle Industry Council  
National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds  
National Forest Recreation Association

National Marine Manufacturers Association  
National Park Hospitality Association  
National RV Dealers Association  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
Outdoor Industry Association  
Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association  
RV Industry Association  
Snowsports Industries America  
Specialty Equipment Market Association  
Specialty Vehicle Institute of American  
Sports & Fitness Industry Association  
The Corps Network