

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

May 5, 2025

Rep. Bruce Westerman
Chair, House Natural Resources Committee
202 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Jared Huffman
Ranking Member, House Natural Resources Committee
2330 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: May 6 full committee reconciliation markup

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, we write to provide perspectives on the committee's proposed legislation to comply with Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for FY25. The proposed legislation presents a vision out of step with views and aspirations of the millions of Americans who enjoy our public lands and waters every year. We encourage the committee to reconsider this approach and support a richer, long-term vision of the ways public lands and waters support our country and economy.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten 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, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Outdoor recreation pursuits are deeply meaningful in the lives of Americans for a wide range of personal reasons. They also support nearly \$1.2 trillion in gross economic output, 2.3 percent of GDP, and nearly 5 million American jobs according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Beyond those numbers, outdoor recreation amenities and access to public lands and waters play a huge role in attracting a



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wide array of businesses and workers to rural communities across a range of industries and support vibrant and diversified local economies.

These benefits depend on a thoughtful and judicious approach to public lands management that:

- Maintains a livable climate;
- Supports conservation, restoration, science-based active management where appropriate, and a cautious, sustainable, and harmonious integration of development activities on multiple-use lands;
- Manages recreation sustainably and precisely; and
- Funds land management agencies to fulfill their stewardship responsibilities.

These benefits also depend existentially on keeping public lands public, and to that end, we are pleased to see that the draft legislation does not embrace direct public land sales.

While we understand the committee's remit as developing revenue from the public lands and waters under its jurisdiction, the draft legislation takes a short-sighted view on the ways that public lands and waters support economic vibrancy in our country. The activities proposed in the draft would have far-reaching negative effects on recreation and conservation values that would significantly outweigh any short-term economic benefits. We ask that the committee reconsider the approach laid out in this draft and approach this task with an eye toward long-term economic and landscape sustainability and vibrancy.

Some of our specific objections follow.

NEPA

The National Environmental Policy Act is an essential avenue for public engagement in the development and execution of projects that affect public lands and waters, and the opportunity for public participation in management decisions is a core attribute of what makes public lands public. Public engagement is not only essential to protecting environmental values and the communities that depend on them, but also to the development of projects in a manner that minimizes conflict and



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supports long-term stakeholder buy-in. The NEPA process is an important up-front investment in project success.

The NEPA proposals contained in the draft legislation undercut core values around considered analysis and public participation in many ways, including through the imposition of unrealistic timelines. Most objectionable, however, are provisions that seem to allow project proponents to pay to avoid the possibility of administrative or judicial review of decision documents. This provision runs counter to core American values and traditions bedrock to our legal system.

Forestry

Outdoor Alliance strongly objects to provisions to mandate increased timber production from National Forests and BLM lands. These provisions are blind to market needs and other resource values and pull agency resources from necessary actions like wildfire risk mitigation.

Similarly, we strongly oppose long-term timber contracts that amount to a *de facto* privatization of public lands, where timber companies will be able to hold license to conduct timber operations for as long as 20 years. These provisions undercut the ability of land managers to adjust operations based on changing conditions and needs and local community values, as well as the ability of local communities to invest in the outdoor recreation economy through recreation infrastructure like trails.

RMP prohibitions

Outdoor Alliance is a longstanding supporter of agency planning efforts as a means of gathering public input and putting into practice the delicate balance among multiple-uses needed for responsive and sustainable land management. For Congress to step in and invalidate BLM resource management plans because of the dissatisfaction of a particular stakeholder group sets a bad precedent that undermines public confidence in the integrity of the agency decision-making process.



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Collectively, the RMPs subject to prohibition under the proposed legislation¹ comprise more than 975 climbing sites, 1577 trail miles, and 127 miles of whitewater paddling. Outdoor recreationists have participated in these planning efforts to ensure these resources are accounted for, and sending BLM back to the drawing board on these plans is a poor use of very limited agency resources.

Onshore and offshore oil & gas

The outdoor recreation community and outdoor recreation economy are impaired when they come into conflict with poorly sited oil and gas development. For years, the outdoor recreation community has supported reforms to minimize conflict between these public lands uses.² Reasonable reforms like those implemented through the Inflation Reduction Act and subsequent rulemaking from the Bureau of Land Management help to reduce speculative leasing, ensure the clean-up of abandoned or orphaned wells, and secure an appropriate return for the American public from the use of public resources. Meaningful public input opportunities and the ability of land managers to defer leases where leasing conflicts with other resource values are essential and modest measures to help reduce conflicts among public lands uses.

The proposed draft runs counter to all of these values and safeguards.

In addition to these changes, we strongly oppose mandating lease sales in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Cook Inlet. The Arctic Wildlife Refuge is not an appropriate place for oil and gas development. Across the United States, coastal communities and business have come together in bipartisan fashion to roundly reject offshore leasing, which directly imperils communities' ways of life and economies.

¹ Excluding North Dakota, where our data is incomplete.

² See PUBLIC LAND SOLUTIONS & OUTDOOR ALLIANCE, MINIMIZING CONFLICTS BETWEEN OUTDOOR RECREATION AND OIL & GAS LEASING (2025), *available at*

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Mining

The outdoor recreation community has strongly advocated for many years for protections for the Boundary Waters, America's most visited Wilderness area and a premier and valued canoeing destination. We strongly oppose efforts to undermine the decades of public engagement and process that led to its protection, and we strongly oppose the draft bill's provisions mandating the restoration and approval of leases in Superior National Forest.

Similarly, our community opposes the Ambler Road and efforts to open this area of Alaska to destructive development activities.

Our community acknowledges the need for our country to develop domestic mineral resources, including from public lands. This need, however, underscores the imperative for modernizing the 1872 Mining Law to account for modern needs and resource values, including the goal of generating government revenue.

Coal

Given changing energy markets and the necessity of climate action, we do not believe it is appropriate to subsidize coal extraction on public lands.

Rescissions

The proposed legislation rescinds a number of funding streams of particular importance to supporting outdoor recreation values on public lands and waters.

These include:

- Funding for environmental and climate data collection;
- Funding for NOAA to invest in climate resilience for coastal communities, which is critically important for protecting coastal recreation values and opportunities from the effects of climate change;
- Funding for facilities for NOAA and National Marine Sanctuaries;
- Funding for old-growth protection on National Forest System lands;
- Funding for NPS climate resilience, conservation, and protection and funding for NPS and BLM conservation and restoration; and



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- Funding to support staffing at the National Park Service.

These funding sources are important investments in the sustainability of our public lands and waters and their ability to support multiple-use values into the future. They are also an important investment in the outdoor recreation economy, and we oppose these rescissions.

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The outdoor recreation community supports a shared vision for our country's public lands and waters. In that vision, special places are conserved for their intrinsic and social values; energy, timber, and mineral development occurs in a manner cognizant of climate needs, recreation and conservation values, and public input while providing a fair return for the American public; and land managers have the resources they need to do their jobs. The proposed legislation runs directly counter to this vision through rollbacks of protections, favoritism to extractive industry, cuts to public process and even legal review, and rescissions of needed funding. The committee should take a step back from the approach embodied by this draft legislation and work to deliver proposals that better reflect the expectations of the American people.

Sincerely,



Louis Geltman
Vice President for Policy and Government Relations
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance
Heather Thorne, Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Clinton Begley, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Kent McNeill, CEO, International Mountain Bicycling Association
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