

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

May 29, 2025

Senator John Thune
Majority Leader
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Public lands and waters in the House reconciliation bill.

Majority Leader Thune, Minority Leader Schumer, and Senators,

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, we write to share our perspectives on H.R. 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, and to inform the budget reconciliation process in the Senate.¹ H.R. 1 presents a vision out of step with views and aspirations of the millions of Americans who enjoy our public lands and waters every year. While we appreciate that some controversial provisions, including the direct sale of public lands, were removed from the bill prior to the House vote, we remain deeply concerned regarding this bill's impact on public lands and waters. We encourage the Senate to take a different approach to budget reconciliation that supports a richer, long-term vision of the ways that 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.

¹ These comments are based on the text of the bill release on May 20th, 2025, available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text>, and the Amendment to Rules Committee Print 119-3 available at [https://amendments-rules.house.gov/amendments/RCP_119-3_Managers_xml%20\(002\)250521201648156.pdf?_gl=1*1d1iw5*_ga*MTUzOTg1ODUwMi4xNjgzNzY3MzQx*_ga_N4RTJ5D08B*cZ3NDc4NzcwMjckbzEkZzEkdDE3NDc4NzcwMzZMkajAkbDAkaDA](https://amendments-rules.house.gov/amendments/RCP_119-3_Managers_xml%20(002)250521201648156.pdf?_gl=1*1d1iw5*_ga*MTUzOTg1ODUwMi4xNjgzNzY3MzQx*_ga_N4RTJ5D08B*cZ3NDc4NzcwMjckbzEkZzEkdDE3NDc4NzcwMzZMkajAkbDAkaDA).



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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.² Beyond those numbers, outdoor recreation amenities and access to public lands and waters play a huge role in attracting a 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; cautiously and harmoniously integrates development activities such as energy extraction and mining on multiple-use lands; manages recreation sustainably and precisely; and funds land management agencies to fulfill their stewardship responsibilities.

A number of provisions in H.R. 1 run counter to this approach and would threaten the strong economic and public health benefits that outdoor recreation provides. These include:

- Phasing out incentives and investments that are working to facilitate a clean energy transition while supporting jobs and local economic growth across the country;
- Allowing project proponents to pay for expedited environmental analyses while evading judicial review;
- Pulling agency resources away from wildfire mitigation and other land management priorities by mandating increased timber output on National Forests and BLM lands;
- Reducing royalty rates and undoing important reforms to the oil and gas leasing process that facilitate responsible energy development and benefit taxpayers;
- Mandating approval of copper mining in the headwaters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, America's most-visited Wilderness area; and

² U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, BEA 24-53, Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2023 (2024).



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- Rescinding critical funding for land conservation, coastal resilience, and management of public lands and waters.

Additionally, the economic and public health benefits of outdoor recreation also depend existentially on keeping public lands public, and to that end, we are pleased that earlier proposals to sell off more than 500,000 acres of public lands in Utah and Nevada were removed from the bill prior to House passage. An analysis by Outdoor Alliance's GIS lab found that these land sales would have affected outdoor recreation opportunities in both states.³ Treating these land sales as a revenue raiser during budget reconciliation would have set a harmful precedent that could put public lands at risk each time lawmakers need to identify a pay-for to fund unrelated policy priorities.

Existing laws provide a clear process for targeted land disposals that reinvests proceeds towards conservation and other local purposes. To the extent that land sales are necessary to address legitimate local concerns, it is essential that these land sales occur within this existing process and with an opportunity for stakeholders such as recreationists to provide input. **As the Senate takes up H.R. 1, the outdoor recreation community categorically opposes any effort to reinsert the House land sales or otherwise to sell off public lands through budget reconciliation.**

Similarly, we appreciate that several provisions that would have prohibited implementation of BLM Resource Management Plans in several western states were removed prior to the House vote. Collectively, the RMPs that would have been subject to prohibition under the proposed legislation comprise more than 975 climbing sites, 1577 trail miles, and 127 miles of whitewater paddling,⁴ and were informed by recreationists who invested time and resources in these planning processes. 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.

³ See, Outdoor Alliance, *Midnight Land Sales in Reconciliation Megabill*, available at <https://www.outdooralliance.org/blog/2025/5/12/midnight-land-sales-in-reconciliation-megabill>.

⁴ Excluding North Dakota, where our data is incomplete.



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We are also pleased that a provision to approve the Ambler Road in Alaska was removed prior to House passage. Our community opposes the Ambler Road and efforts to open this area of Alaska to development activities due to the project's expected impact on sensitive ecosystems and subsistence uses by Alaska Native Tribes.

Finally, we encourage the Senate to approach the budget reconciliation process with an eye toward long-term economic and landscape sustainability and resilience. While we understand Congress' goal of developing revenue, including through public lands and waters, H.R. 1 takes a short-sighted view on the ways that public lands and waters support economic vibrancy in our country. The activities proposed in the bill would have far-reaching negative effects on recreation and conservation values that would significantly outweigh any short-term economic benefits. We ask that the Senate take a more holistic, long-term approach that accounts for the full range of benefits that public lands and waters provide to our society.

Some of our specific objections to provisions in H.R. 1 follow.

Clean Energy

Both the outdoor recreation community and the outdoor economy are profoundly affected by the climate crisis. With each passing year, our community experiences greater and greater challenges associated with climate change, ranging from region-wide closures of national forests due to wildfire danger, to extreme heat waves deterring outdoor recreation during peak season, to record low levels of snowfall in areas that depend on ski tourism as a key component of their economy. Transitioning our society towards clean energy in order to address and mitigate these climate impacts is an urgent priority for our community.

To this end, we are strongly opposed to provisions in Title XI, Subtitle C that would abruptly phase out clean energy tax credits that are working to facilitate a clean energy transition while supporting jobs and economic growth through the country. Similarly, we oppose the rescissions of clean energy investments in Title IV, particularly Section 42103's repeal and rescission related to the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF). Most GGRF dollars have already been obligated but are being held up by the Administration—a decision that has drawn legal challenges.



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Congress should not move to rescind these already-obligated funds while the Administration's funding freeze is being evaluated by the courts.

NEPA

Outdoor Alliance opposes Section 80151, which would allow project sponsors to pay for expedited review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA 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 supports long-term stakeholder buy-in. The NEPA process is an important up-front investment in project success.

The public input process afforded by NEPA is often the primary way that members of our community provide input on (or sometimes become aware of) projects and proposals that affect outdoor recreation access and conservation values on public lands. We also at times work as proponents of recreation infrastructure projects—like trail networks—that require navigating the NEPA process, and we are familiar with the frustrations that can accompany NEPA from that perspective. Improving the NEPA process while retaining the law's core tenets of informed, science-based decision making, transparency, and robust public input is a priority for our community. With this perspective in mind, we are open to—and supportive of—targeted science-based reforms to NEPA, especially where they are shown to be necessary to achieve climate, recreation access, ecological restoration, and clean energy goals.

Rather than taking a targeted approach, Section 80151 undercuts core values around NEPA 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.



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Forestry

Outdoor Alliance strongly objects to Sections 80313 and 80314, which mandate increased timber production from National Forests and BLM lands. These provisions are unrealistic given agency capacity constraints and are blind to market needs and other resource values. This approach is a prime example of Goodhart's Law—when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure. There is a better way to accomplish the goals of wildfire resilience, forest health, and thoughtful timber production to benefit rural economies.

While targeted ecologically-informed forest thinning can be an important tool for increasing wildfire resilience in dry forests, overall timber output should not be the metric by which agencies plan and prioritize projects. These timber targets will force land managers to focus their limited capacity on removing trees in areas where valuable timber is easily accessible rather than where wildfire mitigation is most greatly needed to protect communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.⁵ The U.S. Forest Service is already operating under a national strategy that prioritizes fuels reduction and other wildfire risk management actions in the most strategic areas. A coarse, agency-wide mandatory increase in timber volume targets will only distract from that important work and should not be advanced by the Senate.

Similarly, we strongly oppose long-term timber contracts proposed in Sections 80311 and 80312 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.

⁵ See, Alan A. Ager et. al., Tradeoffs between US national forest harvest targets and fuel management to reduce wildfire transmission to the wildland urban interface, 434 *FOREST ECOLOGY & MANAGEMENT* (2019), available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foreco.2018.12.003>. Agency mandated timber volume targets force land managers to weigh tradeoffs related to wildfire risk reduction in the wildland-urban interface.



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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.⁶ 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 oil and gas leasing provisions in Title VIII run 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 due to irreversible impacts on wildlife and Indigenous communities. We also oppose mandating offshore lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico and the Cook Inlet. More than 12 million acres of federal waters are already under lease for oil and gas development, and less than 20 percent of that acreage had started producing oil as of December 2024. Oil and gas companies have also stockpiled roughly 1,800 unused leases. Across the United States, coastal communities and businesses have come together in bipartisan fashion to roundly reject offshore leasing, including 400 municipalities, 2,500 elected officials, 55,000 businesses and 500,000 fishing families opposing new offshore oil and gas drilling. With widespread bipartisan opposition to a practice that directly imperils communities' ways of life, local fisheries and economies, and millions of acres already under lease, there is no reason to mandate new offshore drilling lease sales.

⁶ See, PUBLIC LAND SOLUTIONS & OUTDOOR ALLIANCE, MINIMIZING CONFLICTS BETWEEN OUTDOOR RECREATION AND OIL & GAS LEASING (2025), *available at* <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54aabb14e4b01142027654ee/t/67c0cedac7a40b4d3f9c3bf6/1740689115392/Whitepaper-Minimizing+Conflicts+Between+Oil+%26+Gas+Leasing++and+Outdoor+Recreation+021425.pdf>.



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Mining

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. Needed mining reforms include dedicating adequate funding for abandoned mine remediation, establishing royalties for hardrock mining, and providing clearer discretion for agencies to approve or deny mining projects based on foreseeable impacts to ecological, cultural, or recreational resources.

The headwaters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness—America’s most-visited Wilderness area and a premier and valued canoeing destination—are one such area where the long term impacts on outdoor recreation, local economies, and sensitive ecosystems outweigh any short-term benefit from mining. The outdoor recreation community has strongly advocated for many years for protections for the Boundary Waters, and we strongly oppose efforts to undermine the decades of public engagement and process that led to its protection. As such, we strongly oppose Section 80131’s provisions mandating the restoration and approval of leases in Superior National Forest.

Coal

Given changing energy markets and the necessity of climate action, we do not believe it is appropriate to mandate coal lease sales or reduce the royalty rate for coal extraction on federal public lands as is proposed in Title VIII, Subtitle A, Part V.

Rescissions

H.R. 1 rescinds a number of funding streams of particular importance to supporting outdoor recreation values on public lands and waters. These include:

- Funding for the Forest Legacy Program, which supports the conservation of private forestlands while often providing for outdoor recreation access;
- Funding to support staffing at the National Park Service;
- Funding for environmental and climate data collection;



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- 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; and
- Funding for NPS climate resilience, conservation, and protection and funding for NPS and BLM conservation and restoration.

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.

* * *

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. H.R. 1 runs directly counter to this vision through rollbacks of protections, tilting multiple use management towards extractive industry, cuts to public process and even legal review, and rescissions of needed funding. We ask that the Senate take a different approach that supports economic prosperity in the near term while sustaining the irreplaceable benefits that public lands and waters provide to society over the long term.

Sincerely,



Louis Geltman
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Outdoor Alliance



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cc: Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance
Heather Thorne, Executive Director, Access Fund
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