

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

November 20, 2025

Senator John Thune
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Senator Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Outdoor recreation community support for Senate FY26 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

Majority Leader Thune, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leader Jeffries,

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, we write to encourage Congress to pass a strong, bipartisan, full-year funding bill to support public lands and waters in Fiscal Year 2026. Robust, well-resourced federal land management agencies are essential for facilitating outdoor recreation opportunities across the U.S. and for maintaining and growing America's \$1.2 trillion outdoor recreation economy. We support the Senate's FY26 Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (S. 2431), which maintains funding for important recreation and conservation programs, while providing the direction necessary to ensure that these programs are carried out as Congress intends.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of nine 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, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike,



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backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Federal public lands and waters provide outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation and provide countless environmental, cultural, and public health benefits to society. In recent decades, outdoor recreation has grown considerably in popularity, diversity, and economic importance, with a record of 175.8 million Americans venturing outdoors in 2024.¹ Federal public lands and waters make many of these experiences possible, and also form the foundation of America's outdoor recreation economy, which contributed \$1.2 trillion to America's economy, supported nearly 5 million jobs, and accounted for 2.3% of U.S. Gross Domestic Product in 2023.² In addition to these economic benefits, research shows that outdoor recreation also provides a significant return on investment, with recreation contributing nearly 14 times more to the GDP than what it receives from federal spending.³

These benefits all depend on reliable, safe access to federal public lands and waters, which is only possible if federal land management agencies are well-resourced and adequately staffed. Unfortunately, over the past several decades, federal appropriations for outdoor recreation programs have decreased considering inflation, while visitation to public lands has increased dramatically.⁴ The outdoor recreation community has long advocated that Congress increase funding for recreation and conservation programs on federal public lands to a level more aligned with the needs of land managers, local communities, and the American public.

These longstanding funding and staffing challenges have worsened through recent efforts to downsize the federal workforce and reorganize federal agencies without

¹ 2024 Outdoor Trends Report Executive Summary, Outdoor Industry Association (2024).

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

³ Recreation Funding in America: Current Results and Future Insights, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (2024).

⁴ See, Outdoor Alliance, *Protect Public Lands With Proper Funding*, Outdoor Alliance Blog (May 13, 2024), <https://www.outdooralliance.org/blog/2024/5/13/protect-public-lands-with-proper-funding>; See also, Gwendolyn Aldrich and Evan Hjerpe, *The Conservation Funding Crisis*, Conservation Economics Institute (2022).



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clear direction from Congress. Within the last year, the National Park Service has lost more than 4,000 permanent employees,⁵ the Bureau of Land Management has lost 1,500 employees,⁶ and the U.S. Forest Service has lost at least 4,800 employees.⁷ These workforce reductions amount to a roughly 15-25% cut to land management agency staff, including a significant number working in outdoor recreation-related programs. Beyond staff losses, the funding for important recreation access programs, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund, has been withheld or frozen, and distribution of other recreation funds, such as disaster recovery funding for public lands in the southeast affected by Hurricane Helene, have been slowed.

Inadequate resources for federal land management agencies degrade the visitor experience on public lands and affect our community's ability to bring non-federal resources towards recreation access, infrastructure, and restoration projects on federal lands. Parking issues, trash, unwanted fire starts, erosion, and other maintenance issues have all become more common across public lands, sometimes in a way that creates a significant public safety issue. In some cases, even partner-led efforts to complete recreation infrastructure projects, such as trail systems, are delayed for years due to lack of capacity by agency staff to complete project planning or conduct necessary fieldwork—bottlenecking outside resources that could be deployed in supporting public lands with just modest investments in agency capacity.

At the time of this writing, public lands and waters are also reeling from a 43-day government shutdown, which resulted in large numbers of federal land management staff being furloughed while public land units largely remained open. Although in some cases, states and non-governmental organizations stepped up to fill the gap left by an absence of federal funding, this dynamic is not sustainable

⁵ Estimate based on Department of Interior data.

⁶ Jennifer Yachnin et al., Shutdown plans give window into staffing cuts, E&E News, Greenwire (Oct. 2, 2025), <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/10/02/shutdown-plans-give-window-into-staffing-cuts-00591653>.

⁷ Eric Katz, Forest chief says losing 5,000 employees won't impact fire season response. Many federal firefighters disagree, GovExec (June 11, 2025), <https://www.govexec.com/management/2025/06/forest-chief-says-losing-5000-employees-wont-impact-fire-season-response-many-federal-firefighters-disagree/406010/>.



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over the long term. With the shutdown over, Congress must ensure that public land managers resume normal operations.

Fortunately, appropriators have already done the difficult work of negotiating strong, bipartisan legislation to support America's public lands and waters in FY26. The Senate Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, which recently passed out of Committee with overwhelming bipartisan support, would restore stability to federal land management agencies and ensure that recreationists of all backgrounds can continue to enjoy sustainable access to federal lands and waters. Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the Senate bill and encourages Congress to expeditiously pass it to ensure that federal agencies have the resources that they need to care for public lands and provide for recreation access in FY26. We especially appreciate that the bill:

- Maintains or expands funding for important outdoor recreation programs including USFS Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness; BLM Recreation Resources Management; and NPS National Recreation and Preservation;
- Ensures that Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars are used for their intended recreation and conservation purposes;
- Rejects new controversial environmental policy riders that would impede the bill's passage;
- Ensures that public land management agencies hire and retain adequate staffing levels to fulfill their missions; and
- Maintains funding for vital research programs that benefit public lands and waters.

In short, the Senate Interior bill provides critical funding, congressional direction, and stability at a time when public lands and waters and local communities need it most. We ask that Congress move swiftly in passing this important legislation.

Thank you for considering our community's input.

Best regards,



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Louis Geltman
Vice President for Policy and Government Relations
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Chair Susan Collins, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Ranking Member Patty Murray, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Chair Tom Cole, House Committee on Appropriations
Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro, House Committee on Appropriations
Chair Lisa Murkowski, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Ranking Member Jeff Merkley, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Chair Mike Simpson, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Ranking Member Chellie Pingree, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

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
David Page, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Ben Gabriel, Executive Director, American Alpine Club
Madeline Bachner Lane, Chief Executive Officer, Colorado Mountain Club
Chad Nelsen, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

