

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

Testimony of Louis Geltman, VP for Policy & Government Relations, Outdoor Alliance
 United States House Committee on Appropriations
 Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
 Outside Witness Testimony Addressing USDA Forest Service, EPA, and Department of Interior
 April 23, 2026

Agency	FY27 Program Funding Recommendations
Department of Agriculture Forest Service ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness: \$70M ● Land Mgmt. Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring: \$18.13M ● Cap. Improvements & Maintenance, Trails: \$24M ● Cap. Improvements & Maintenance, Roads: \$79M ● Legacy Roads and Trails: \$6M
Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recreation Resources Management: \$100M ● Resource Management Planning: \$75M ● National Conservation Lands: \$78M ● Wilderness Management: \$23.06M ● National Scenic and Historic Trails: \$11.496M
Department of Interior National Park Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National Recreation and Preservation, Natural Programs: \$25M, including \$13.47M for Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance ● Park Service Operations for the National Trails System: \$18.856M
Environmental Protection Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BEACH Act Grant Program: \$17.76M ● U.S./Mexico Border Water Infrastructure Grant Program: \$100M
Other Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Include report language to address outdoor recreation hiring

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Subcommittee members:

Thank you for your critical work to fund public lands and waters in FY26, and thank you for the opportunity to provide requests to inform the FY27 appropriations process.

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

¹ All Forest Service appropriations should be accompanied by a commensurate increase to Salaries & Expenses.



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Federal public lands and waters provide outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation, which support critical public health and environmental benefits for the American public and form the foundation for America’s growing outdoor recreation economy, which accounted for \$1.3 trillion in gross economic output, 2.4 percent of U.S. GDP, and 5.2 million jobs in 2024.² Investing in outdoor recreation on public lands and waters provides a significant return on investment for American taxpayers, with recreation contributing nearly 14 times more to the GDP than what it receives from federal spending.³

Due to decades of underinvestment, federal land managers face resource challenges that have left them unable to meet modern needs related to recreation access and conservation. This underfunding directly impacts the visitor experience, and in some cases hinders partner-led efforts to bring non-federal funding and resources to support trail restoration and other needed recreation infrastructure projects on federal lands. Deeper investments from Congress are needed to unlock more of the economic benefits of outdoor recreation, particularly for local communities in the vicinity of public lands.

Federal land management agencies have seen extensive staff losses over the past year, which have disproportionately affected their recreation programs. Since the beginning of FY25, the USFS has lost 9,312 staff, the BLM has lost 1,659 staff, and the NPS has lost 4,640 staff.⁴ Additionally, the USFS recently announced a major reorganization plan requiring certain national and regional staff to relocate, which will likely cause additional staff to leave the agency. Although the recent passage of FY26 appropriations has helped bring some stability to these agencies, a federal hiring freeze currently prevents hiring vacant positions needed to provide a high-quality recreation experience.

FY27 funding is especially needed to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act. As the first comprehensive update to federal recreation policy in decades, EXPLORE will improve outdoor access for veterans and service members, support public lands gateway communities, expand public/private partnerships for recreation infrastructure, create long-distance bike trails, simplify outdoor permitting, and more. Agency staff are currently working hard to meet the bill’s early planning deadlines, but EXPLORE’s longer term, tangible benefits—trails improved, partnerships signed, permits streamlined—cannot be realized without greater investments in agency staff, including at the national and regional levels.

USDA Forest Service

Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness: \$70M. The Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness budget line item is the foundation of the USFS’s recreation program. An increase is necessary to address

² U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Outdoor Recreation Economic Statistics, U.S. and States, 2024 (2026).

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

⁴ U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Federal Workforce Data: Workforce Changes, <https://data.opm.gov/explore-data/analytics/workforce-changes> (last visited Apr. 20, 2026).



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inflation and cost-of-living for USFS employees and to account for a significant increase in recreational visits to USFS lands over the past decade. Funding this program at \$70M would allow the agency to rebuild its recreation workforce and provide high-quality visitor experiences.

Land Management Planning/Assessment/Monitoring: \$18.13M. Forest plans form the foundation for sustainable recreation opportunities and restoration activities across our National Forests, but a majority of plans are outdated. An increase in funding will help the USFS increase the pace and scale of forest plan revisions and launch the Planning Service Organization—a new national organization to make forest planning more efficient and responsive to stakeholder input.

Capital Improvements and Maintenance, Trails: \$24M. The USFS manages more than 160,000 miles of trails, which provide access to extraordinary scenic, cultural, and ecological resources. Funding will help maintain and expand the USFS trail system and strengthen trails partnerships.

Capital Improvements and Maintenance, Roads: \$79M. The USFS manages over 371,000 road miles, along with bridges and parking lots, that are critical access points for outdoor recreationists. Significantly increased resources are needed to help the agency improve recreation access and make the USFS road system resilient to high use levels and extreme weather.

Legacy Roads and Trails: \$6M. The Legacy Roads and Trails Program is critical for preventing adverse impacts to water quality, habitat, and recreation from USFS roads.

Bureau of Land Management

Recreation Resources Management: \$100M. The Recreation Resources Management subactivity is the BLM's primary account for providing sustainable recreation opportunities. Despite overseeing more lands than any other federal land manager, BLM's recreation funding has historically lagged considerably behind other agencies. Funding at \$100M will help BLM account for inflation and increased visitation and facilitate high-quality recreation experiences.

Resource Management Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring: \$75M. BLM planning ensures the best use of BLM lands, including balancing recreation with other multiple use values. Approximately 134 of the BLM's 169 Resource Management Plans are outdated, and additional plans need to be completed for new National Monuments.

National Conservation Lands: \$78M. The National Conservation Lands system includes some of our country's marquee destinations for outdoor recreation. Investing in these lands is critical for their long-term protection and their ability to deliver economic benefits to local communities. Increased funding is needed to account for the increase in acres protected over the last 20 years, and to address the backlog of management plans for recently protected areas.

Wilderness Management: \$23.06M. BLM Wilderness lands, which include a network of 263 Wilderness areas and 487 Wilderness Study Areas totaling more than 21 million acres, provide



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some of the nation's best opportunities for backcountry recreation. Funding will maintain these areas' Wilderness character, while sustaining irreplaceable ecological and cultural resources.

National Park Service

National Recreation and Preservation, Natural Programs: \$25M, including \$13.47M for the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program. NPS requires additional resources to meet the challenges of increased visitation, extreme weather, and other stressors. Additionally, RTCA is critical for helping local communities realize their visions for improved recreation resources.

Environmental Protection Agency

BEACH Act Grant Program: \$17.76M. The BEACH Act grant program provides funding to coastal states to run their beach water quality monitoring and public notification programs. This cost-efficient program has strong bipartisan support. Our funding recommendation of \$17.76 million adjusts for inflation since the program's inception, and is critical for protecting public health and local economies in areas valued for coastal recreation.

U.S./Mexico Border Water Infrastructure Grant Program: \$100M. This funding is needed to address a significant public health concern caused by sewage pollution from the Tijuana River affecting coastal recreation in southern California and Mexico. Funding will advance the EPA Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution to upgrade treatment facilities at the U.S./Mexico Border.

Other Appropriations Priorities

Report Language Requested: *The [Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management] shall resume hiring for recreation and trails positions, including permanent positions, in order to provide and maintain appropriate access and recreation for visitors, including by maintaining natural and physical infrastructure, and by fully implementing the requirements of the Expanding Public Lands and Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act (Public Law 118-234 (2025)).*

- Justification: Federal agencies are operating under a hiring freeze that prevents them from filling strategic permanent positions needed to implement the EXPLORE Act, which requires a sustained capacity investment from regional and national staff—those most affected by federal workforce reductions and the recently announced USFS reorganization plan.

National Trails System: We support an increase in appropriations for the National Trails System across multiple agencies, including \$18.856M at NPS and \$11.496M at BLM. We also recommend that any increase in funding trails at USFS be made in parity with an increase for National Scenic and Historic Trails. This funding will ensure that federal agencies and stewardship partners can keep these iconic trails accessible, maintained, and sustainable.

