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NEW LEGISLATION MAKES IT EASIER FOR ALL AMERICANS TO ACCESS AND ENJOY THE OUTDOORS

SENATORS HEINRICH AND CAPITO PRAISED BY OUTDOOR ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES FOR NEW PROPOSAL THAT FIXES PUBLIC LAND PERMITTING SYSTEM

Washington, DC -- Outdoor organizations and businesses from across the country praised Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) today for introducing the Public Land Recreational Opportunities Improvement Act (PLROIA). This bipartisan legislation improves the outfitter and guide permitting systems of the federal land agencies to help more Americans gain access to the outdoors, and share in the legacy of America's public lands, through facilitated outdoor recreation experiences. PLROIA will positively impact a wide range of organizations that deliver facilitated outdoor recreation, including for-profit outfitters and guides, non-profit outfitters and guides, university recreation programs, and volunteer-based clubs. PLROIA is supported by members of the outdoor industry and the conservation community.

"REI operates outdoor programs across the country and we support hundreds of vendors and nonprofits who do the same. The outdoor provider community has consistently struggled with the complexity of the federal recreational permit system," said Rebecca Bear, Director, REI Outdoor Programs and Experiences. "Streamlining the application process will help outdoor organizations more rapidly get people outside and promote an outdoor life. REI and our 17 million members are grateful for Senator Heinrich and Capito's leadership."

PLROIA makes several important updates and revisions to current permitting law. It authorizes the agencies to collaborate with one another and issue a single permit for activities that cross agency boundaries. This significantly reduces administration for the agencies and streamlines the permitting process for outfitters and guides. Similarly, the bill enables permit holders to conduct a variety of recreation activities under one permit, rather than issuing new authorizations for each activity. These measures will allow recreation service providers to focus on helping people access public lands and create lasting outdoor memories, rather than dealing with bureaucratic barriers.

"Outdated regulations in the permitting system have made it time consuming, unpredictable, and in many cases—impossible—for outdoor organizations and businesses to provide outdoor experiences for the public on public lands," said Alex Kosseff, Executive Director at the American Mountain Guides Association. "The Public Land Recreational Opportunities Improvement Act removes old roadblocks to facilitated outdoor recreation and enables more Americans to get outside and enjoy public lands."

"As a volunteer-driven nonprofit outdoor education and conservation organization, The Mountaineers has been getting people outside responsibly for over a century," said CEO Tom Vogl. "Streamlining the permitting process will enable more people to get outside safely and responsibly through organized experiences facilitated by outdoor leaders and educators."

The bill also provides permit holders with certainty in the event of natural disasters, wildfire, or other circumstances beyond a permit holder's control. If a permit holder faces circumstances such as these, and is unable to operate, PLROIA directs the land agency to exclude the period of non-use when determining future allocations. This safeguard

provides much-needed certainty for outdoor recreation service providers to sustain their operations through good seasons and bad.

David Leinweber, owner of Angler's Covey views this as a positive direction for his business. "As a small outfitting business my infrastructure is public lands. Any business needs predictability and the ability to grow and this bill provides some key aspects to help my company predict the future in providing facilitated recreation services in demand on public lands."

PLROIA also provides exemption from indemnification requirements if a permittee is prohibited from providing indemnification to the United States by state or local law, an important step for improving access to federal lands for public universities and local recreation departments.

"Colleges, universities, MWR and municipalities have often been unable to run outdoor programs because of the financial costs associated with federal insurance requirements," said Jeannette Stawski, Executive Director of Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education. "PLROIA will help college and university programs grow and will give students across the country more opportunities to enjoy and experience public lands."

Under PLROIA, agencies will be allowed to use a portion of recreation fee revenue to improve their systems for processing recreation applications, making the process work faster for everyone. The bill also directs the agencies to reduce delays for permit seekers and reduce costs for administrators.

"Creating more opportunities for people from all walks of life to have educational and recreational experiences outdoors is what NOLS is about," said John Gans, NOLS President. "We are proud to be a part of this broad effort to reduce barriers to our shared public lands. In an increasingly urban society, it is essential that our citizens have opportunities to visit and come to know their public lands."

"Accessing America's public lands will be a lot easier when this bill passes," said Jamie Williams, President of The Wilderness Society. "Senators Heinrich and Capito deserve a lot of credit for developing a bill that eliminates bureaucratic red tape making it easier for youth programs, university recreation programs, nonprofit organizations and outfitters and guides to apply for and obtain recreational permits for public lands. The Wilderness Society is committed to connecting more Americans with the outdoors and this bill will help do just that."

In addition, PLROIA helps to reduce liability for facilitated outdoor recreation providers by bringing consistency to the application of exculpatory agreements across agencies. For small family-run outdoor businesses, nonprofit organizations, and youth programs these liability protections are essential to combat high insurance costs and keep small businesses and organizations in operation.

"Outdoor recreation helps children build positive relationships and develop a sense of achievement and belonging. It is an essential part of the Y's approach to youth development," said Kevin Washington, President and CEO, YMCA of the USA. "The current process for recreational permitting is complicated and restrictive. This legislation will simplify the process, enabling the Y and others to share nature's wonders with many more kids and families and instill in our youth a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors. We thank Senators Heinrich and Capito for their passionate leadership in easing the recreational permitting process for our public lands."

"From the smallest rural towns to the most densely populated cities, outdoor recreation makes America stronger. The outdoor recreation economy is a vital economic sector with \$887 billion in consumer spending and contributes 7.6 million good paying jobs," said Jessica Wahl, Government Affairs Manager at Outdoor Industry Association. "Senators Heinrich and Capito deserve a lot of credit for developing a bill that is both good for public lands and good for business."

Supporters of PLROIA are hopeful the bill will move before the end of the year.

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