

October 30th, 2019

Senator Lisa Murkowski
Chair, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Joe Manchin
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: October 31st Full Committee Hearing to Receive Testimony on Pending Legislation

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin:

On behalf of the outdoor recreation community, thank you for holding a hearing to consider the Recreation Not Red-Tape and SOAR Acts, two valuable bills to improve access to and management of public lands and waters for outdoor recreation. Our community greatly appreciates the Committee's attention to these bills and the Committee's work in considering the importance of outdoor recreation and the challenges that can be imposed by imprecise management, both through this hearing and the hearing held in March of this year.

S. 1967, the "Recreation Not Red-Tape Act"

Opportunities for outdoor recreation on our country's public lands and waters benefit Americans' quality of life and foster a connection to place and a stewardship ethic. They also support a thriving outdoor recreation economy, employing 7.6 million Americans, driving \$887 billion in annual consumer spending, and generating \$65.3 billion in federal tax revenue and \$59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue each year. Our country's public lands are the birthright of every American, and outdoor recreation is the most common way for Americans to come to know their public lands.



Over the past 50 years, our country has made tremendous strides in protecting iconic places on our public lands and preserving landscapes for their intrinsic value, and establishing additional protections through tools like the Wilderness Act will continue to benefit outdoor recreation and conservation. However, even as we pursue these protections—as well as development activities on public lands and waters—the gap between public lands managed for Wilderness character and public lands managed as multiple use has left some of our most important recreation-rich landscapes lacking in appropriate management or protection. Unquestionably, there are places on the public lands—particularly those close to towns or cities—where management should prioritize sustainable recreation use in a healthy and protected landscape.

Similarly, land managers are currently and appropriately responsible for stewardship of the resources under their charge, and simultaneously accountable for performance metrics related to development activity (for example, the number of board feet produced from a National Forest System unit). Many land management agencies, however lack a recreation mission component, and land managers are not evaluated based on their success in meeting objectives around the quality of the recreation experience.

This dynamic—and the historic tension between conservation and development—has left outdoor recreation at times unnecessarily neglected, and there are substantial opportunities to improve access to recreation opportunities, the quality of the recreational experience, and the attendant benefits, both economic and more personal.

The Recreation Not Red-Tape Act (RNR) will help to ensure that outdoor recreation is given appropriate consideration by land managers. This, in turn, will help more Americans to have access to quality recreation experiences and support economic diversification and resiliency for our country's public lands communities.

Together, our organizations strongly support provisions in RNR that:

- Direct management agencies to develop recreation performance metrics for the evaluation of land managers;



- Add recreation to the mission of important land management agencies, including the Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, FERC, and the Department of Transportation;
- Improve access to outdoor recreation programs for service members and veterans;
- Extend seasonal recreation opportunities where appropriate;
- Improve the availability of federal and state recreation passes and facilitate their online sale; and
- Help land managers accept volunteers to conduct stewardship activities, and facilitate trail maintenance across agency jurisdictions.

Additionally, our organizations have had significant positive experience in working with many of the recently-formed state offices of outdoor recreation and believe that they make a valuable contribution towards, among other benefits, better coordination between states and federal land managers in support of recreation goals. We appreciate the bill's statement of support for the role of these offices.

We also greatly appreciate the inclusion of the SOAR Act within RNR to make needed improvements to the special use permitting process, which we discuss in greater detail below.

Most importantly, the outdoor recreation community strongly supports the bill's provision to help identify and protect important areas for outdoor recreation through a National Recreation Area System.

As noted above, our country has developed a system of protected public lands that serves as a model for much of the world. Our focus on the most iconic and pristine backcountry areas, however, can sometimes leave close-to-town, accessible, frontcountry areas—which can be some of the most important places for recreation—exposed to inappropriate development pressure or leave recreationally significant areas subject to less than ideal management.

Currently, when land managers conduct planning activities like Forest Planning for National Forests or Resource Management Plan development for BLM units, they are appropriately required to inventory for areas that could become new Wilderness or Wild and Scenic River designations. While these inventories and designations are absolutely essential, right now there is no analogous land-use

designation process specifically dedicated to assisting Congress in evaluating, protecting, and enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities. RNR instructs land managers, during their existing planning processes, to inventory for places of recreational significance, just as they currently are required to inventory for potential new Wilderness or Wild and Scenic Rivers designations. This process will assist Congress in developing new National Recreation Area designations and help to ensure that management plans appropriately account for recreation.

This change will facilitate greater access to sustainable recreation in healthy, ecologically sound surroundings for more Americans, including those living in a diversity of geographic settings, from rural to urban. This process will make sure recreationally significant areas on public lands are given the management attention they deserve, benefitting public lands communities and the businesses supported by the outdoor recreation economy. More Americans will have better access to high quality settings for activities like mountain biking, climbing, skiing, paddling, and hunting and angling in close-to-home settings.

S. 1665, the “Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation (SOAR) Act”

For many people, structured, facilitated outdoor experiences provide a first exposure to more adventurous forms of outdoor recreation and to the natural world. These opportunities are essential for allowing new participants to experience outdoor recreation activities in a safe environment that allows for skill building and helps participants become more conscientious visitors to sensitive landscapes. These experiences are also essential for helping to connect communities that have historically lacked these opportunities with their public lands and waters.

The ability for facilitated access providers to offer these experiences is dependent, however, on a challenging and dated system for special use permitting for public lands activities. The SOAR Act will improve the recreational permitting systems so more people can experience public lands through volunteer-based clubs or with an outfitter, guide, non-profit outdoor leadership organization, or university outdoor program.

We strongly support this bill, which reflects years of thoughtful input from facilitated access providers, conservation organizations, and others.



S. 1723, the “Ski Area Fee Retention Act”

The human-powered outdoor recreation community is concerned by the Ski Area Fee Retention Act and believe substantial changes are necessary in order to ensure the bill redounds to the benefit of all National Forest visitors.

In general, it is appropriate for ski areas to be paying fees for their essentially exclusive use of public lands, and those fees must be directed toward a public purpose broader than addressing the industry’s own development needs. While we are not opposed to National Forests retaining ski area fees in general, we are concerned that ultimately, appropriations would be scaled back (or a spending offset identified from elsewhere in the Forest Service’s budget), and the result would be replacing appropriated dollars with money allocated to specific, very limited purposes related to ski area development.

If this bill moves forward, we believe it essential that the purposes for which retained fees can be used be broadened to encompass special-use permitting and recreation infrastructure needs beyond what is directly related to ski areas. This change should continue to benefit the ski industry by freeing agency capacity, as well as by making Forests more attractive recreation destinations, bringing more customers to their businesses.

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The outdoor recreation community greatly appreciates the committee’s attention to improving recreation opportunities on our country’s public lands and waters, and we look forward to continuing to work with you.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance



Kirsten Blackburn
Advocacy Manager
The Conservation Alliance