

# OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

October 19, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

## Re: **Outdoor recreation community reconciliation priorities**

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Speaker Pelosi:

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for your efforts in leading a generational investment in our country's infrastructure—including public lands and waters—and, most importantly, towards addressing the climate crisis. The FY22 budget reconciliation process and the Build Back Better Act are an urgent and fleeting opportunity to mobilize a government-wide and nationwide effort to address the climate crisis. This crisis gravely affects our public lands and waters, while, at the same time, investments in our public lands and waters will make a meaningful contribution towards climate resilience while supporting equitable and sustainable access to the outdoors and the outdoor recreation economy.

In addition, we support a full range of investments to address the climate crisis, recognizing that many of these investments will be outside of our direct organizational expertise in public lands and waters conservation, access, and management. To this end, we support the **Clean Electricity Performance Program (§ 30411)**. If this provision becomes politically unworkable, we strongly support other aggressive measures to move our country towards President Biden's goal of 100 percent clean electricity by 2035.



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Many of the investments proposed through the Build Back Better Act concerning public lands and waters, in addition to addressing the climate crisis, will be tremendously valuable in ensuring equitable access to the outdoors, supporting the outdoor recreation economy, and advancing the Biden administration's conservation priorities as articulated in the *Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad* and the subsequent *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful* report.

As Congress works to advance the Build Back Better Act and related infrastructure package, we write to share our perspectives on the items we believe to be the most critically needed and potentially meaningful investments. These items, described in greater detail below, include:

- The Civilian Climate Corps (§§ 70202, 70509, § 11001(a)(15));
- National Forest System restoration and fuels reduction projects (§ 11001);
- Conservation of threatened landscapes (Oak Flat, § 70201; Grand Canyon, § 70204; Thompson Divide, § 70211; Chaco Canyon, § 70212; Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, § 70804);
- Fossil fuel and hardrock mining reforms (§§ 70804, 70807);
- State and private forestry conservation programs (§ 11003);
- Improved NEPA implementation (§§ 70401, 11001(a)(10));
- Targeted investments in equitable access to the outdoors (§§ 70206, 70207, 11002(a)(4));
- Climate resilience funding for DOI and USDA (§§ 70208, 70209, 11002);
- Federal priority stream gauges (§ 70306); and
- DOI fire mitigation (§ 70205).

Moving forward, we ask that Congress act with purpose to seize this narrow opportunity and advance President Biden's vision around investing in climate resilience, conservation, and equitable and sustainable recreation access.

## House Natural Resources provisions

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the investments proposed by the House Natural Resources Committee. These proposals make urgently needed investments in our public lands and waters infrastructure, support the conservation of invaluable



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landscapes, and help to ensure that taxpayers receive a fair return for natural resource development activities. In particular, we strongly support:

- **Civilian Climate Corps (§ 70202, § 70509 (NOAA)).** A modern CCC will enable a strong and integrated approach to climate change, conservation, equitable and sustainable recreation access, and local economic development. Tackling the impacts of climate change, such as the increased risk of mega-fires, while restoring ecosystems, improving recreation access, and creating new jobs, is a winning strategy for moving America forward on environmental resilience and away from the pandemic-induced economic downturn. The CCC would create new job opportunities in the rapidly growing clean energy, ecosystem restoration, and recreation industries for both urban centers and rural communities, while at the same time inspiring a new generation of conservationists and healthy outdoor recreation enthusiasts.
- **Conservation of threatened landscapes (Oak Flat, § 70201; Grand Canyon, § 70204; Thompson Divide, § 70211; Chaco Canyon, § 70212; Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, § 70804).** Sections 70201, 70204, 70211, 70212, and 70804 protect landscapes under direct threat from ill-advised resource development activities in conflict with significant cultural, ecological and recreational values. Each of these sections is responsive to significant public outcry surrounding threats to these landscapes and process towards their protection.
- **Fossil fuel resources (§ 70804).** Outdoor Alliance strongly supports provisions ensuring a more appropriate return for the public for fossil fuel development activities on public lands and waters. These additional returns are entirely appropriate given the contributions of these activities to climate change, but also because of the direct impacts of activities like speculative oil and gas leasing on other resource values, including outdoor recreation. Particularly over the course of the previous administration, direct conflicts with other resource values have abounded, and the provisions in this bill section will restore a more appropriate balance among public lands and waters values. Given overwhelming community support—and the imperatives vividly illustrated by the recent oil spill in Southern California—



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we strongly support the provisions to end new oil and gas leasing on the Atlantic, Pacific, and Eastern Gulf coasts.

- **Hardrock mining (§ 70807).** Hardrock mining has a long history of deleterious effects on conservation and recreational resource values on public lands and waters. Those effects are exacerbated by the market distortions that stem from giving public resources away for free and a failure to hold industry accountable for resource damage. The reforms included in the Build Back Better Act will help to ensure that mining proceeds in a manner more cognizant of other resource values and provide much needed resources for addressing ongoing degradation caused by past mining activity.
- **Efficient and effective NEPA implementation (§ 70401).** The outdoor recreation community strongly supports the National Environmental Policy Act as a means of facilitating public participation in land management decision-making and as a means of ensuring that decisions are informed by environmental values and strong science. We also work, at times, in the development of recreation infrastructure that requires navigating the NEPA process, and we can share the frustration of stakeholders finding the process to be slow and challenging. We believe strongly that the path forward is additional resources for the land management agencies to conduct environmental analysis and look for efficiencies that remain respectful of NEPA's core values. We wholeheartedly support these investments.
- **Urban parks (§ 70206).** Urban parks and green spaces are essential community infrastructure. They support mental and physical health benefits and can create new, safe access points for traditionally underserved communities to enjoy spending time in the outdoors.
- **Every Kid Outdoors (§ 70207).** Funding for the Every Kid Outdoors program will help ensure access to public lands for grade school-aged children, giving more youth the opportunity to connect with their public lands and waters and develop an appreciation for nature and a stewardship and conservation ethic.
- **Climate resilience funding for the National Parks Service and Bureau of Land Management (§§ 70208 and 70209).** Public lands and waters are



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facing unprecedented effects as a result of climate change, and those changes in turn are undermining conservation and recreation values. Land management agencies must be adequately resourced to mitigate the deterioration of these invaluable resources and the values they support, including recreation.

- **Wildfire (§ 70205).** Wildfire increasingly threatens landscapes, communities, recreation opportunities, and the ability of land management agencies to fulfill their other stewardship responsibilities. We strongly support additional investments in ecosystem and community protection for the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as investments in forest health technology.
- **Federal priority stream gauges (§ 70306).** River and stream gauges are critical for ensuring community safety and monitoring the effects of land use and climate changes on stream flow. They are also invaluable for paddlers and a means of facilitating recreational access to rivers and streams, as many sections are safe or navigable only at particular water levels.

## Committee on Agriculture provisions

Title I of the Build Back Better Act includes important provisions for restoring forest health, supporting climate resilience, and supporting equitable and sustainable recreation access. In particular, Outdoor Alliance strongly supports:

- **National Forest System restoration and fuels reduction projects (§ 11001).** Wildfire has become an ongoing calamity across much of the United States, particularly in the West, and providing resources to the USDA Forest Service to reduce fire risk in an ecologically sound manner is an urgent priority. Moreover, as fire has taken up an ever larger portion of the agency's budget, it has become more challenged in managing its other stewardship responsibilities. We strongly support these critically needed investments in the Forest Service's capacity to address these challenges. Additionally, this section contains needed investments in the capacity of the Forest Service to achieve conservation goals and protect and enhance recreation opportunities, investing in rural communities and providing more equitable



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access to the outdoors. Highlight of investments we strongly support within this section, include:

- **Legacy Roads and Trails (§ 11001(a)(6));**
- **Land management planning and monitoring (§ 11001(a)(7));**
- **Trail maintenance (§11001(a)(8));**
- **Capital maintenance and improvements (§ 11001(a)(9));**
- **Efficient and effective NEPA implementation (§ 11001(a)(10));**
- **Protections for old-growth forests (§ 11001(a)(11));**
- **The Civilian Climate Corps (§ 11001(a)(15)); and**
- **Climate research and resiliency funding for USFS (§ 11002).**

Moreover, we greatly appreciate the emphasis in **§ 11001(b), Priority for Funding**, on projects that present the opportunity for meeting recreation objectives alongside the restoration purposes of identified projects. Combining recreation access and infrastructure maintenance and improvement with vegetation management and other forest system projects has the potential to realize tremendous efficiencies and make a meaningful difference in the accessibility, quality, and sustainability of recreation opportunities for all Americans.

- **State and private forestry conservation programs (§ 11003).** The Forest Legacy Program is a key tool administered by the Department of Agriculture in cooperation with state partners to protect forested areas. Within this voluntary program, states are enabled to permanently protect forested properties through conservation easements or direct acquisition. This program offers significant benefits to outdoor recreationists and communities by supporting sustainable forestry, protecting wildlife habitat, and enhancing access to recreation. Bill provisions will directly increase access to forested spaces across the U.S. by giving priority to projects that are located in areas where community members currently lack access to the benefits of forested spaces.
- **Grants to expand equitable outdoor access (§ 11002(a)(4)).** Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the provision to make grant funding available to Tribal, State, and local governments; nonprofits; and others to pursue expanded equitable outdoor access. This funding has the potential to



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significantly improve recreation access for underserved communities, and we strongly support this investment.

- **Climate research and resiliency funding for the USDA Forest Service (§ 11002).** Public lands and waters are facing unprecedented effects as a result of climate change, and those changes in turn are undermining conservation and recreation values. The Forest Service must be adequately resourced to conduct targeted research on the impact of climate change on forest health in an effort to increase carbon storage in forests and to mitigate the deterioration of these invaluable resources and the values they support, including recreation.

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Outdoor Alliance, our member organizations, and the outdoor recreation community are tremendously enthusiastic about the provisions outlined above and the potential for the Build Back Better Act to meaningfully improve people's lives, protect our public lands, and change the arc of our trajectory with regard to climate change, and we are keen to assist in any way.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman  
Policy Director  
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance  
Chris Winter, Executive Director, Access Fund  
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association  
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater  
Kent McNeill, CEO, International Mountain Bicycling Association  
Todd Walton, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance  
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers  
Mitsu Iwasaki, Chief Executive Officer, American Alpine Club





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Sarah Bradham, Interim Executive Director, the Mazamas  
Keegan Young, Executive Director, Colorado Mountain Club  
Chad Nelson, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation





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## About Outdoor Alliance

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.

