



July 11, 2023

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto
Chair, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Sen. Mike Lee
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
363 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: July 12th Subcommittee Hearing to Receive Testimony on Pending Legislation.

Dear Chair Cortez Masto, Ranking Member Lee, and members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, the outdoor industry, and conservation-minded businesses, thank you for holding July 12th's Subcommittee hearing on public lands legislation. Many of the bills before the Subcommittee would provide durable, greatly-needed protections for high-value recreation landscapes while supporting conservation and economic values. We encourage you to advance the bills noted below in 2023 in order to protect these values for present and future generations and to help meet the growing demand for recreation access.

The outdoor recreation community benefits immeasurably from access to protected public lands and waters and from the ecosystem services that they provide. These lands and waters also provide a foundation for the growing outdoor recreation economy, which accounted for \$862 billion in gross economic output, 1.9 percent of U.S. gross domestic product, and 4.5 million jobs in 2021. Recent data shows that participation in outdoor activities grew to a record 168.1 million participants in 2022. Protecting intact public lands and waters from development will help preserve and expand outdoor recreation opportunities for these new participants while providing support to a growing sector of the U.S. economy.

The outdoor recreation community is most supportive of land protection proposals that have been developed collaboratively with local recreationists in a way that balances recreation access with conservation values like clean water, biodiversity, wilderness character, and climate mitigation, while supporting the land management priorities of Indigenous peoples. Multiple bills being considered during July 12th's hearing embody this collaborative spirit, and we look forward to working towards their success in the 118th Congress. We also have concerns about the more top-down approach prescribed by one bill (S. 2216), noted below, which would unnecessarily remove longstanding land protections without a collaborative process.

Our comments on individual bills are outlined below.

Dolores River National Conservation Area and Special Management Area Act (S. 636)

Our organizations strongly support S. 636, which would establish a National Conservation Area (NCA) and a Special Management Area (SMA) encompassing more than 68,000 acres surrounding 76 miles of the Dolores River in western Colorado and improve the management of river flows below the McPhee Reservoir. This highly scenic section of the Dolores River Canyon houses outstanding recreational opportunities for whitewater rafting, kayaking, and canoeing when flows allow. There are also numerous remote backcountry hiking and backpacking opportunities and destinations for climbing and mountain biking. The bill would protect these important recreation assets and sustain the outstanding conservation values and cultural resources present across the Dolores landscape.

S. 636 is the product of nearly 15 years of collaboration by the Lower Dolores Plan Working Group, which includes agriculture and water users, local governments, recreation and conservation interests, mineral interests, landowners, and livestock operators. The bill would formalize the consultation process with this stakeholder group by requiring federal land managers to consider stakeholder input regarding management of base flows and managed releases below McPhee Dam in order to benefit native fish populations and water-based recreation. The bill would also protect conservation values by establishing the Ponderosa Gorge Roadless Area,

prohibiting new dams, and prohibiting new oil and gas leases and new mining claims within the NCA and SMA.

Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (S. 1254)

The Wild Olympics legislation will protect more than 125,000 acres of Wilderness and 464 river miles as Wild and Scenic on the Olympic Peninsula and preserve salmon streams and wild lands adjacent to Olympic National Park. In addition to protecting conservation values, the bill protects hundreds of miles of trails, scores of climbing sites, dozens of whitewater paddling runs, and valued backcountry ski terrain.

The Olympic Peninsula, with Olympic National Park and the adjacent Forest Service lands and rivers, is an important part of the outdoor recreation landscape in Washington, and preserving these iconic lands and rivers will benefit the state's growing outdoor recreation economy. Outdoor recreation in Washington added \$12.272 billion to the state's economy and supported more than 114,000 direct jobs in 2021.

While most of the prime Olympic Peninsula mountaineering destinations are within the Olympic National Park, several summits and crags of interest lay outside of existing Park and Wilderness boundaries on the Olympic National Forest. The Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act promises to provide lasting protection to places valued by climbers, locally and around the world. Proposed additions to the Mount Skokomish Wilderness, for example, will protect scrambling and climbing objectives including Mount Washington, Mount Pershing, Jefferson Peak, Mount Ellinor, and the nearby Ellinor Towers. In the spring, Mount Ellinor is a destination for backcountry skiers and snowshoers.

For whitewater paddlers, the region is unique because the watersheds that radiate out from the Olympic Mountains receive several feet of precipitation each year, providing an incredible number of river miles in a small geographic area. Dozens of whitewater runs pass through towering ancient forests and moss-covered gorges. The rivers also serve as a conveyor belt for sand that forms the beaches and surf breaks on the wild Washington Coast.

Because of the collaborative approach employed in the bill's development, embracing input from local and national mountain biking stakeholders among others, the legislation enjoys broad support from the mountain biking community. We are particularly pleased to support legislation that designates Wilderness while also using other protective designations where appropriate. The mountain biking loop trail along the Dungeness River passes through ancient forests and along the banks of a wild river. By including the trail within the Wild and Scenic River corridor but outside of proposed Wilderness, a designation is applied that will protect and enhance the mountain biking experience alongside conservation values.

End Speculative Oil and Gas Leasing Act of 2023 (S. 1622)

Our organizations strongly support the End Speculative Oil and Gas Leasing Act of 2023. Speculative leasing of lands that have low or no potential for oil and gas development greatly complicates conservation efforts on BLM lands and can serve as a major barrier for communities working to invest in the outdoor recreation economy through the development of sustainable recreational uses and amenities. Under the current system, huge swaths of public land are being leased at a very low rate, and it is unclear what companies intend to do with the land. This commonsense bill would require the BLM to regularly assess oil and gas potential on public land, and would prohibit new leases on lands with low or no potential for development, thereby allowing low potential lands to better support other purposes such as conservation or outdoor recreation.

Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act (S. 1634)

Our organizations appreciate the thoughtful protections embodied in the CORE Act. In addition to its essential protections for conservation values, the bill also protects hundreds of miles of trails, scores of climbing sites, miles of whitewater paddling, and valued backcountry ski terrain. Although portions of the original CORE Act were protected in 2022 through the designation of Camp Hale National Monument, action is needed from Congress to protect the remainder of the landscape, including the Thompson Divide, the San Juan Mountains, the Curecanti National Recreation Area, and new Wilderness areas along the Continental Divide.

All of the proposed designations in the CORE Act have been carefully vetted by recreation groups, and designations protect and enhance recreational opportunities like hiking, climbing, skiing, and mountain biking. The mineral withdrawals and resource protections in this bill further preserve the scenic and natural qualities of these landscapes.

We are particularly pleased to support legislation that designates Wilderness while also using other protective designations where more appropriate. This approach is essential, in particular, for protecting and enhancing mountain biking opportunities. Because of the collaborative approach employed in the bill's development, embracing input from local and national mountain biking stakeholders among others, the legislation enjoys broad support from the mountain biking community. This approach—embracing alternative designations where appropriate to protect both existing and prospective mountain biking opportunities—should be considered a model for other protective designation efforts around the country.

PUBLIC Lands Act (S. 1776)

Our organizations strongly support the PUBLIC Lands Act, which includes three titles that would provide protections for important conservation and recreation lands and waters in California.

The Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests title was crafted after years of input from business leaders, conservationists, anglers, mountain bikers, fire management professionals, and more, and we appreciate efforts to consider the needs of a broad array of regional stakeholders in developing this legislation. This title would conserve approximately 262,000 acres of public land as Wilderness, designate 379 miles of new Wild and Scenic rivers, and create a special restoration area of more than 700,000 acres. In addition to protecting conservation values in the area, the title would expand opportunities for sustainable recreation. With the establishment of the Elk Camp Ridge Recreation Trail, the bill would benefit northwest California by expanding mountain biking trails along the Elk Camp Ridge and in Del Norte County. It would permanently protect the South Fork Trinity River—a popular and valuable steelhead fishery—and study the feasibility of establishing the Bigfoot National Recreation Trail to highlight the botanical and biological diversity of the region. We greatly appreciate the bill's

attention to ensuring the protection and sound management of Wilderness climbing opportunities, as well as the inclusion of Land of the Lost—the closest sport climbing to Arcata and Eureka—in a special management area. In addition to new Wild & Scenic designations for whitewater resources on the East Fork North Fork Trinity and Canyon Creek, paddlers enthusiastically support the protection of more than 48,000 acres of public land within the proposed Wilderness areas surrounding already-designated Wild and Scenic watersheds on the Trinity, Eel, and Black Butte Rivers. Moreover, 25 whitewater river access points will be protected within proposed Wilderness and special restoration areas, and potential Wilderness areas will ensure boaters can continue to paddle along the banks of the lower portion of Redwood Creek surrounded by the tallest trees in the world.

The Central Coast Heritage Protection title would protect key conservation and recreation values within California's Central Coast, including popular destinations for outdoor recreationists of many forms, from mountain bikers to wildlife viewers. The title would protect more than 262,000 acres of public land within the Los Padres Forest and Carrizo Plain National Monument, designate 159 miles of river as Wild and Scenic, and create two new scenic areas, Black Mountain and Condor Ridge. Santa Barbara County's Condor Ridge is within the Santa Ynez Mountains, and its unique climate creates an area of high biodiversity and critical habitat for southern steelhead. This title designates a 400-mile-long Condor National Recreation Trail, supporting through-hiking and backpacking opportunities across the entire length of the Los Padres National Forest, from Los Angeles to Monterey County. It would also protect important and threatened wilderness characteristics around popular rock climbing areas in the Sespe Gorge along Highway 33. Paddlers support adding more miles to the Wild and Scenic Piru Creek, a waterway rare for the region that provides outstanding whitewater less than an hour drive from downtown Los Angeles. Importantly, all proposed new Wilderness boundaries were drawn in order to preserve existing mountain biking trails, and the title would mandate that the Forest Service conduct future studies for improving mountain biking trail opportunities across the Los Padres National Forest. Additionally, the bill protects trail corridors for numerous high priority trails identified by local mountain bikers through the Central Coast Concerned Mountain Bikers (CCCMB), an IMBA local group.

The San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection title would add lasting protections to the San Gabriel Mountains, supporting the health and well-being of all Angelenos and helping to sustain local businesses and the broader outdoor recreation economy. The San Gabriel Mountains National Monument represents 70 percent of the open space in the Los Angeles metropolitan region and provides 30 percent of the region's drinking water. This title would increase opportunities for Angelenos to enjoy the outdoors by expanding the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument by nearly 110,000 acres to include the western portions of the Angeles National Forest. We especially appreciate the various designations included in the bill that allow for multiple recreational uses. The San Gabriel foothills are an important urban/wild buffer zone and the gateway to the mountains for many millions of Angelenos who otherwise have limited access to open space and outdoor recreation. The establishment of a 51,000-acre National Recreation Area along the foothills and San Gabriel River corridor and Puente Hills will not only help improve that access, but will also ensure that these highly popular and heavily used areas receive the resources they need to be managed and maintained in a sustainable manner for the safety and enjoyment of all. The title would establish an 8,417 acre Condor Peak Wilderness and a 6,774 acre Yerba Buena Wilderness. Additionally, the San Gabriel Wilderness would be expanded by 2,000 acres, and the Sheep Mountain Wilderness by nearly 14,000 acres.

Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act (S. 1890)

Our organizations strongly support S. 1890, the Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act. The Owyhee Canyonlands of southeastern Oregon are a scenically spectacular landscape, rich in biodiversity and cultural resources, that represent one of the most significant conservation opportunities in the lower 48 states. Multiple sections of the Owyhee are considered nationally significant by whitewater paddlers. S. 1890 would permanently protect the recreational values of these whitewater runs, as well as opportunities for hiking and backpacking. This bill would also help communities in the vicinity of the Owyhee more fully realize the benefits of southeast Oregon's outdoor recreation economy.

S. 1890 was negotiated over multiple years by a diverse group of Tribes and stakeholders, including local ranchers, environmental organizations, and recreation interests. These diverse interests are reflected in the bill's approach to

conservation, which includes more than 1.1 million acres of new Wilderness designations alongside provisions to improve grazing management, facilitate local input in land management, encourage local economic development, and protect cultural resources. The bill would also move more than 21,000 acres of federal land into trust for the Burns Paiute Tribe and establish the Castle Rock Co-Stewardship area.

S. 2149, to sustain economic development and recreational use of National Forest System land in the State of Montana, to add certain land to the National Wilderness Preservation System, to designate new areas for recreation, and for other purposes.

Our organizations strongly support S. 2149, which protects important lands and waters in western Montana. This bill balances forest health, recreation, and conservation, and in addition to enhancing the state and national outdoor recreation economy, the bill will help sustain thousands of forest restoration jobs that improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Eighty percent of Montanans and millions of annual Montana visitors recreate on Montana's public lands. S. 2149 protects existing recreation opportunities like hiking, fishing the world-renowned Blackfoot River, and hunting in the famous Bob Marshall Wilderness, and identifies areas for new mountain bike and snowmobile access. The proposed Spread Mountain Recreation Management Area will preserve mountain bike access from Spread Mountain to Camp Pass, and the Otatsy Recreation Management Area would open 2,000 acres to high-quality snowmobiling near Ovando. Furthermore, the bill asks the Forest Service to study new recreation opportunities for varied users.

The bill will protect the health of the Blackfoot River and its native trout populations by protecting key tributaries, including the North Fork, Monture Creek, Morrell Creek, and West Fork Clearwater. The North Fork Blackfoot and Monture Creek are particularly valued by paddlers and would be excellent future candidates for Wild and Scenic designation. The bill preserves these important trout habitats and supports Montana's vibrant angling industry. This initiative protects wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors—important to game, like elk, and sensitive species like

grizzlies, wolverines, and lynx—by adding nearly 80,000 acres to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Mission Mountains Wilderness areas.

S. 2216, to release from wilderness study area designation certain land in the State of Montana, to improve the management of that land, and for other purposes.

Our organizations oppose S. 2216, which is identical to the Montana Sportsmen Conservation Act introduced in the 117th Congress. This bill would eliminate Wilderness Study Area (WSA) designations from the Middle Fork Judith, Hoodoo Mountain, and Wales Creek WSAs—an area totaling approximately 100,000 acres in western Montana. While we appreciate the need to reach permanent solutions regarding landscapes designated as WSAs, these solutions should be driven by a long-term vision that is developed collaboratively with Tribes and local stakeholders, including recreationists. Ultimately, it is our community's belief that an appropriate long-term vision for these landscapes must include a mix of recreation-friendly protective designations, as well as potentially new Wilderness and other areas' release back into multiple-use management. The specifics of the application of those designation types should be worked out through collaboration and without a gap in the protection of these landscapes created by an immediate and broad-scale WSA release.

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Thank you for holding this important hearing. We look forward to working with you to protect outdoor recreation opportunities across America's public lands and waters.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shoren Brown".

Shoren Brown
Vice President, Public Affairs
The Conservation Alliance

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rich Harper".

Rich Harper
Director of Government Affairs
Outdoor Industry Association



Our Organizations

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.

The Conservation Alliance is an organization of like-minded businesses whose collective contributions support grassroots environmental organizations and their efforts to protect wild places where outdoor enthusiasts recreate. Alliance funds have played a key role in protecting rivers, trails, wildlands and climbing areas. Membership in the Alliance is open to all companies who care about protecting our most threatened wild places for habitat and outdoor recreation. Since its inception in 1989, The Conservation Alliance has contributed more than \$21 million, helped to protect more than 51 million acres of wildlands; protect 3,107 miles of rivers; stop or remove 34 dams; designate five marine reserves; and purchase 14 climbing areas. For complete information on The Conservation Alliance, see www.conservationalliance.com.

Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) is the national trade association for the outdoor industry and is the title sponsor of Outdoor Retailer, the largest outdoor products tradeshow in North America. OIA serves over 1,300 manufacturers, suppliers, and retailers through a focus on international trade and public lands and recreation policy, sustainable business innovation and outdoor participation.