

# OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

June 22, 2021

Rep. Joe Neguse

Chair, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

1419 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Russ Fulcher

Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

1520 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

## Re: June 8 legislative hearing

Dear Chair Neguse and Ranking Member Fulcher:

On behalf of the human powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for holding June 8<sup>th</sup>'s legislative hearing to consider four bills of significance for outdoor recreation on our country's public lands and waters.

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.

## Modernizing Access to Our Public Land Act (H.R. 3113)

Outdoor Alliance supports the Modernizing Access to Our Public Lands (MAPLand) Act. The bill promises to support public access to public lands by ensuring that information regarding access, including easements, is readily accessible.

Moreover, better availability of information regarding the permissibility of various activities in particular settings will improve resource stewardship and reduce user



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conflict by reducing the frequency of inadvertent impermissible use. For example, motorized users will be less likely to unintentionally travel onto nonmotorized landscapes when information regarding permissible use is available in digital form. Private landowners will also benefit through fewer unintended incursions from visitors to adjacent public lands and waters, further reducing conflict.

With the recent passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, more resources are now available to help facilitate access to public lands and waters. An important first step to ensuring that those resources are efficiently deployed is to make sure that the public has access to existing easements that may not be readily identifiable because of the backlog of agency information digitization efforts.

We strongly support this effort to make agency geospatial data consistent and more readily available.

## **Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation (SOAR) Act (H.R. 3670)**

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 been deprived of 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, nonprofit 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.



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## **Ski Hill Resources for Economic Development (SHRED) Act (H.R. 3686)**

In general, our community does not oppose the concept of the Forest Service retaining fees paid by the ski industry for the use of public lands, and we also recognize the needs of the ski industry to have permits associated with its activities processed in an expeditious fashion. We are concerned, however, by aspects of the bill as currently drafted, and we ask the subcommittee to ensure that these fees continue to benefit the public at large rather than the ski industry exclusively.

Our community believes that it is appropriate for ski areas to be paying fees for their—essentially exclusive—use of public lands, and those fees should be directed toward a public purpose broader than addressing the industry’s own development needs. The purposes for which retained fees can be used must be broad enough to encompass, at minimum, special-use permitting and recreation infrastructure needs beyond what is directly related to ski areas, and those funds should not only become available after ski areas’ own desired project list is exhausted. With this change, the bill would continue to benefit the ski industry by freeing agency capacity, as well as by making Forests more attractive recreation destinations, attracting more customers to their businesses.

We are concerned that ultimately, appropriations to the Forest Service could be scaled back in consequence of this new revenue source, and the result would be replacing appropriated dollars with money allocated to specific, very limited purposes related to ski area development.

We ask the subcommittee, before proceeding with this bill, to make necessary changes to ensure that fees appropriately paid by the ski industry for its use of public lands continue to redound to the benefit of the broader public rather than the industry alone.

## **Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting Act (H.R. 3687)**

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting Act.

Our organization represents the participants in outdoor adventure activities, and these activities contribute substantially to participants’ happiness and even identity.



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Many of our modes of recreation are technical—even esoteric—and for any individual to become involved in one of these pursuits is often not so simple as walking down to a neighborhood park and picking up a basketball or soccer ball. Many of our sports require relatively expensive equipment; all require a degree of leisure time and technical knowledge.

A great many people started as kayakers or climbers or skiers because it was something a family member did. But because of our country's history of racial discrimination, generations of Americans were deprived of the economic means to pick up these pursuits or even felt safe venturing into the settings where they take place. Even when members of a new generation find the time and resources to become involved, they're less likely to have friends or family members who can introduce them to these fulfilling opportunities in the outdoors.

Facilitated access providers operating on public lands and waters through special use permits are a valuable on-ramp for new participants to active outdoor recreation. They can help impart the skills that can lead to a lifetime of meaningful experience in the outdoors. Given the particular importance of building these pathways for members of environmental justice communities, we strongly support studying the ways in which recreational special use permits contribute—and can better contribute—to facilitating more equitable access to the outdoors.

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



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Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers

Mitsu Iwasaki, Chief Executive Officer, American Alpine Club

Sarah Bradham, Interim Executive Director, the Mazamas

Keegan Young, Executive Director, Colorado Mountain Club

Chad Nelson, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

