



Public Affairs
6750 S. 228th St.
Kent, WA 98032

June 9, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of REI Co-op, I want to express our strong support for the Great American Outdoors Act. This bipartisan legislation represents a historic opportunity to reduce the chronic maintenance backlogs that have been diminishing our federal lands and waters. The bill also will make permanent Congress's financial support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, ending decades of erratic support.

As you know, our public lands and waters are places for recreation, connecting to others and even healing. This is true for Americans across the country, irrespective of geography, and has proven especially true over the last several months during the COVID-19 pandemic. The connection between outdoor recreation and public health may have never been so evident as it is today. I strongly believe that these trends are part of a broader shift in our society and will remain in place well beyond the end of the pandemic, so long as we put healthy investment into this portion of our public infrastructure.

It's also important to note how much the outdoor recreation economy has suffered during this economic downturn, in particular those small, main street businesses that rely on the public lands to be open and accessible. Most in our industry have not yet been deemed "essential businesses" and, therefore, have faced significant financial pressures as store hours are cut and guided trips, cancelled. As of last fall, the U.S. Commerce Department had found the outdoor recreation economy to account for 2.2% of GDP and 5.2 million jobs. The recreation sector is not nearly so robust today. It will benefit greatly – both near and long term – from investments that better conserve our public lands and waters, and provide access to more outdoor recreation opportunities.

Equally impressive is the process by which this bill has come together. Not long after last year's passage of the landmark John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, Republicans and Democrats in your chamber came together to advance concepts that previously seemed impossible to move through Congress. Now, another historic opportunity for bipartisanship is on the docket. In an era when divisive politics and disagreement regularly frustrate the legislative process, Congress's commitment to the outdoors demonstrates our capacity to find common ground.

As you continue to work through the important legislative agenda that is before the Senate, I urge you to pass the Great American Outdoors Act and look forward to this vital legislation becoming law.

Sincerely,

Eric Artz
President & CEO
REI Co-op



We inspire, educate and outfit for a lifetime
of outdoor adventure and stewardship.