



Empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience

April 13, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C.20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C.20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the American Hiking Society, our members, supporters, and the millions-strong hiking community nationwide, I encourage you to support inclusion of the overwhelmingly bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act (S.3422), the Outdoors for All Act (S.1458/H.R. 4512), the Transit to Trails Act (S.2467/H.R.4273), and the RTP Full Funding Act (H.R. 5797)/RTP Funding Transparency Act (S.1527) into an economic package that invests in trails, public lands, open spaces, and outdoor recreation infrastructure and have a direct economic impact as part of a larger stimulus package.

Millions of Americans across the country are turning to the outdoors in record numbers during these trying times to seek solace, fresh air, and exercise through hiking and other forms of recreation. In the weeks and months to come, our public lands, trails, and outdoor spaces will be integral to our nation's coping and recovery. Great parks, forests, refuges, BLM lands, and open green spaces make stronger, healthier communities, and every family deserves access to the outdoors and the countless benefits these places provide.

Our national, state, and local trails and public lands are a critical economic driver for communities big and small, urban and rural, across the nation. America's outdoor recreation economy supports over 5 million homegrown jobs, contributes over \$775 billion in annual economic output, and serves as the lifeblood for countless communities across the country. On federally managed land, outdoor recreation contributes more than \$64.6 billion to the national economy and supports more than 623,000 jobs annually.¹ Much of

¹ OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION, OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY 15 (2017), *available at* https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA_RecEconomy_FINAL_Single.pdf; "Forest Service

this spending takes place in rural gateway communities, communities for which this income is substantial, meaningful, and will remain local.

Great American Outdoors Act (S.3422)

The Great American Outdoors Act will provide a much needed jolt to the economy by providing shovel ready projects to increase job creation and economic stability while addressing the maintenance backlog across our public lands, including for trails, roads, and bridges. The bill would provide \$9.5 billion over five years from energy development revenues on federal land and water to address the most pressing deferred maintenance infrastructure needs within the National Park Service, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Indian Education. Additionally, the bill would permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to address the backlog of recreation and conservation needs in every state and county across the country. By addressing these two related challenges, the Great American Outdoors Act will secure the future of America's public lands legacy, protect visitor safety and recreation access, and sustain thriving local communities.

Outdoor-related businesses and nonprofits small and large, in urban and rural communities, will need further investment to aid in their recovery, expand access to public lands and close-to-home recreation opportunities to accommodate resurgent visitation without crowding, and restore jobs and create new ones to help stabilize the broader economy. We must ensure that public lands can accommodate a recovering America with ample infrastructure in good, safe working condition. This is the time to make these critical investments by passing the Great American Outdoors Act.

Outdoors for All Act (S.1458/H.R. 4512)

City parks and open spaces are an essential component to attracting and retaining a strong workforce and spurring local investment. According to the most recent data, America's local park and recreation agencies generated \$154 billion in economic activity in 2015, nearly \$81 billion in value added and more than 1.1 million jobs that boosted labor income by \$55 billion.²

This is even more important during the current crisis as local economies seek to recover from the impacts of COVID-19. In addition, the current pandemic has made stark the need for communities across the country to have ampler access to open spaces where they live. With reports of people flocking to these spaces, the need for more close-to-home parks has become even more evident as national, state and local parks are closing due to overcrowding. The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (OLRP), funded through the LWCF State and Local Assistance program, has made progress in expanding access to

Makes it Easier for Visitors to Enjoy National Forests and Grasslands." U.S. Forest Service, <https://www.fs.fed.us/news/releases/forest-service-makes-it-easier-visitors-enjoy-national-forests-and-grasslands>.

² National Recreation and Park Association, The Economic Impact of Local Parks (last visited Apr. 2, 2020),

<https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/the-economic-impact-of-local-parks> /.

outdoor spaces for urban communities. ORLP provides grants directly to cities and localities, giving easier access to necessary funding. It is the only federal program focused exclusively on supporting parks and outdoor recreation opportunities in cities. Continued support of the OLRP program by creating a dedicated source of funding through the Outdoors for All Act, is needed to ensure that natural spaces are available and accessible to local communities and those likely to be heavily impacted by the economic and health impacts of COVID-19.

Transit to Trails Act (S.2467/H.R.4273)

Investment in transit through legislation, like the Transit to Trails Act, has a direct economic impact in communities. According to the American Public Transit Association, investment in transit can yield 50,731 jobs per \$1 billion invested, and offers a 4 to 1 economic return.³ The Transit to Trails Act would contribute to that investment in transit by establishing a grant program under the Department of Transportation to provide transportation systems to and from underserved communities and public lands. In addition to the economic impact, at this time when people are searching for new ways to get outside, the bill removes barriers and increases access to public lands for underserved urban and rural areas.

We acknowledge the tireless work of federal, state and local officials, the public health sector, and Congress to respond to COVID-19 and protect the health and wellbeing of our communities. AHS is grateful for their continued public service and knows that immediate and evolving critical response takes precedence over all other issues.

RTP Full Funding Act (H.R. 5797)/RTP Funding Transparency Act (S.1527)

The nation's recreational trails community fully supports H.R. 5797 and S.1527 which strengthens and extends the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The RTP Full Funding Act/RTP Funding Transparency Act would ensure that the remarkable successes of RTP since its 1991 creation will continue to provide safe, enjoyable trails and access to the Great Outdoors for tens of millions of Americans. The Senate legislation requires a periodic Non-Highway Recreational Fuel Study, while the House bill includes additional transparency for RTP project reports and increased funding from existing non-highway gas tax revenues. Both pieces of legislation affirm the Congressional commitment initially made in 1991 that the nation's trails should benefit from the federal taxes collected on fuels used for recreation on trails.


RTP is partner-based, uniting federal/state/local agencies, trail enthusiasts and the recreation industry. More than 25,000 completed RTP projects contribute to our economy, to our health and safety, and to greater access to our public lands. Bipartisan RTP proponents seek to incorporate the elements of this legislation in upcoming legislative vehicles in Congress to address infrastructure and economic recovery in response to COVID-19.

³ American Public Transportation Association, Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment (last visited Apr. 2, 2020), <https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/research-reports/economic-impact-of-public-transportation-investment/>.

As Congress continues to respond it is our hope that the Great American Outdoors Act, Outdoors for All Act, the Transit to Trails Act, and the RTP Full Funding Act/RTP Funding Transparency Act be included as part of the solution to achieve economic recovery nationwide in both rural and urban communities and ensure that all Americans have access to open spaces for generations to come.

Please contact Tyler Ray, Director of Policy and Advocacy, tray@americanhiking.org, 301-565-6704 x705 with any questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tyler Ray". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Tyler Ray
Director of Policy and Advocacy
American Hiking Society