

American Hiking Society Statement for Senate Energy and Natural Resources Outdoor Recreation Legislation Hearing 12-2-21

Statement in Support of Pending Legislation before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of American Hiking Society and the 57 million strong hiking community who enjoy the trails and green spaces in their communities, we write in support of the following legislation under consideration by the committee which will support hikers, trails, public lands, and the outdoors by expanding equitable outdoor access.

S. 2887, Outdoors for All Act

S. 2887 would establish under law the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) Program administered under the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Since its establishment in 2014, ORLP has made progress in expanding access to outdoor spaces for communities in urban areas. Authorization of the program under law is needed to ensure that our nation's natural spaces are available and accessible to urban hikers, especially communities of color whose access to and inclusion in outdoor recreation have been disproportionately negatively impacted by geography, socio-economic status, and other factors. ORLP is a must to ensure that our nation's trails, public lands, parks, and open spaces are accessible for all communities for generations to come.

S. 1269 Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting Act

S.1269 will ensure all communities are benefiting from the outdoor recreation opportunities provided by special recreation permits. Special recreation permits often give hikers, other recreation users, and visitors to public lands their first experience in the outdoors through guides, outfitters, and organized group trips. Identifying ways that special recreation permits can more effectively serve communities that have historically lacked or been denied access is essential in realizing an outdoors for all. Specifically, the legislation would study the barriers that minority-owned businesses face when accessing our public lands recreation permitting system, and how to best improve the current permitting process to better facilitate access for recreational service providers serving diverse communities, including underserved and low-income individuals.

S. 1229 Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation Act (SOAR Act)

S. 1229 will make world-class and close-to-home outdoor experiences more accessible by updating the permitting system that guides and outfitters need to operate trips across public lands. The SOAR Act will increase opportunities for guided recreation on public lands by improving the outfitter-guide permitting systems of the federal land management agencies. By expanding guided recreation, Congress can provide more opportunities for first time visitors to experience public lands in a positive way and help develop lifelong connections to the outdoors.

S. 2258 Parks, Jobs, and Equity Act

S. 2258 will create a new, one-time \$500 million federal grant program to help state and local governments build new parks and greenspaces to increase access to the outdoors in underserved communities. Local parks and trails have always been critical infrastructure, providing communities with jobs, economic development, and outdoor recreation opportunities. The ongoing pandemic has given local parks and trails a whole new meaning for Americans, becoming vital spaces for fresh air, exercise, and respite from anxiety. Unfortunately, while the benefits of parks are more obvious than ever before, already 56 percent of park agencies have seen budget cuts this year, and 71 percent of local governments foresee significant future cuts.. These cuts will mean lost jobs and economic activity. And reduced park services and postponed upgrades are already hurting communities at a time when equitable access to the outdoors has never been more important.

We thank the committee for holding a hearing on these critical bills and urge the committee to quickly advance these bills out of committee.

Please contact Tyler Ray, Senior Director of Programs and Advocacy, with any questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,

Tyler Ray

Senior Director of Programs and Advocacy

American Hiking Society