

A Unified Policy Platform for the Outdoor Recreation Community Fall 2023

The Conservation Alliance, Outdoor Industry Association, and Outdoor Alliance represent conservation-minded business, the outdoor recreation industry, and the human-powered outdoor recreation community. We are united in our recognition of the intrinsic and ecological value of public lands and waters, but also their social value: their ability to support the quality of life of individuals and communities through outdoor recreation and the value of outdoor recreation to local economies. We operate from a common history and understanding that people come to know the outdoors through experience and then take action to advocate for its protection.

We are at a moment of intersecting crises facing our public lands and waters, but also a moment of opportunity.

The effects of climate change on outdoor recreation are wide-ranging and severe, and climate change is an existential crisis for people around the world. Recreationists see impacts like high temperatures, trail erosion from extreme weather events, wildfires, floods, and drought, all of which affect the quality of the recreation experience and sometimes prevent recreationists from getting outside entirely.

Addressing global biodiversity loss is similarly urgent, with the most recent Global Biodiversity Assessment calling for “transformative change” to curb the worst outcomes in terms of species extinction and habitat loss. The U.S. is rapidly losing open space to development—more than 24 million acres between 2001 and 2017.

At the same time, outdoor recreation is booming nationally, with the total number of participants increasing nearly 7 percent since the beginning of 2020 and with the newest cohort of recreationists more diverse in age and ethnicity. Despite this growth, the benefits of access to the outdoors are still not distributed equitably, and there is a need to ensure all communities have the opportunity to connect to the natural world through outdoor recreation.

Similarly, outdoor recreation's economic impact continues to grow, contributing \$862 billion in gross economic output to the U.S. economy in 2021, accounting for nearly 2% of gross domestic product. Communities around the country are looking to expand outdoor recreation opportunities to enhance residents' quality of life and support diversified local economies.

Our community has an opportunity to take on these challenges and opportunities through the policy agenda outlined below, making a measurable contribution to climate mitigation through conservation; protecting biodiversity; and enhancing equitable and sustainable access to the outdoors and the economically and culturally vibrant communities those values support.

1. Conserve America's Public Lands and Waters

Conserved public lands and waters are the setting for outdoor recreational pursuits like climbing, paddling, skiing, mountain biking, camping, hunting and angling, and more. Our public lands support clean air and water and wildlife habitat, and they help to mitigate the effects of climate change. They are the literal infrastructure for the outdoor recreation economy.

For all of the benefits we derive from protected public lands and waters, we will advocate for:

- Well-vetted **legislative protections** like National Recreation Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness. Legislative protections provide an opportunity for broad community engagement and tailored application of protections suitable for a given landscape. We will particularly work to support designations that protect, maintain, and, where appropriate, expand recreation access, particularly for underserved communities.
- **Administrative protections**, including National Monuments, Marine Sanctuaries, and mineral withdrawals. Administrative protections are an appropriate use of authority granted to the executive branch by Congress, and we will work to support the use of that authority to protect lands and waters for their conservation and recreation value and to support a greater role for Indigenous management and stewardship.

2. Make American Lands and Waters a Part of Climate Solutions

The most essential pathway for addressing climate change is the aggressive reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Addressing climate will also require action across all sectors of society, however, and nature-based climate solutions can make a meaningful contribution to overall climate efforts. Many of the actions that can be taken to make public lands and waters a part of climate solutions have the potential to also support conservation of nature, sustainable and equitable recreation access, and economic development through the outdoor recreation economy.

Our organizations will support policies to:

- Exeditiously reduce emissions-generating extractive activities from public lands and waters;
- Conserve landscapes;
- Restore landscapes and make them more resilient to climate stressors;
- Advance thoughtful development of renewable energy resources; and
- Use outdoor recreation and the outdoor recreation economy to help communities navigate economic transitions.

Specifically, we will support opportunities to fight climate change while generating benefits for conservation, recreation, and economic development through:

- **BLM's Conservation Rule**,¹ which will help to ensure that conservation and recreation values are more appropriately weighted in agency decision making.
- The USDA Forest Service's proposed rulemaking for **National Forest and Grassland Climate Resilience**.²

¹ Conservation and Landscape Health, 88 Fed. Reg. 19583 (proposed Apr. 3, 2023) (to be codified at 43 C.F.R. pts. 1600, 6100).

² Organization, Functions, and Procedures; Functions and Procedures; Forest Service Functions, 88 Fed. Reg. 24497 (proposed Apr. 21, 2023) (to be codified at 35 C.F.R. pt. 200).

- Effective implementation of the USDA Forest Service’s **Wildfire Crisis Strategy**, advocating to ensure robust incorporation of recreation into project design.
- Reforms to **BLM’s oil and gas leasing program**.
- **Mining reform**, to protect against the acute effects of prospective and legacy mines on water quality, conservation values, and recreation while addressing the need for critical minerals to support a clean energy transition.
- **Land management planning**, to ensure modern management regimes for public lands and waters, including National Forests, BLM lands, and National Monuments.
- Continued support for the **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)** to ensure public participation and sound environmental analysis, as well as support for core conservation laws like the **Clean Water Act**.
- Effective implementation of the Biden administrations **Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful** vision.

3. Support Sustainable and Equitable Outdoor Recreation Access

Outdoor recreation is the primary way in which Americans come to know their public lands and waters and develop a stewardship ethic. It supports quality of life for individuals and communities, personally, and through the benefits of the outdoor recreation economy and the ability of outdoor recreation amenities to attract businesses and workers across a range of industries. Ensuring that recreation access is pursued in concert with climate and conservation goals will support maximum benefit from individual projects and also help to build broader political support for conservation as more Americans see the benefits of protected public lands and waters directly in their lives.

To deliver more equitable and sustainable access for outdoor recreation, our organizations will support:

- **America’s Outdoor Recreation Act**,³ a bipartisan package of recreation policy improvements supporting better and more equitable facilitated access

³ S. 873, 118th Cong. (2023).

to public lands and waters; sound management for Wilderness climbing; long-distance bike trail opportunities; better data collection on recreation and more tailored management; and more.

- Efforts to develop and advance national **Outdoor Equity Fund legislation** in alignment with the Outdoor FUTURES initiative.
- The work of the **Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR)** to better align recreation policy among agencies, overcome barriers to recreation access, and improve data collection that can support better management outcomes.
- **BLM's efforts to develop a national recreation strategy.**
- The USDA Forest Service's **Reimagine Recreation** initiative.

4. Ensure Funding for Conservation and Stewardship

In recent years, Congress has made historic investments in climate and our public lands through the Inflation Reduction Act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the Great American Outdoors Act. Land management agencies tasked with stewarding our public lands and waters remain historically under-resourced, however, and these agencies require investment to ensure that the one-time resources allocated by Congress are effectively put to work; that the potential for natural climate solutions is achieved; and that agencies have the resources to plan, perform environmental analysis, partner with the outdoor recreation community and other stakeholders, and meet their potential for delivering results for climate, conservation, recreation access, and rural economic development.

To support the important work of land managers and the potential returns on investments in our public lands and waters, we will advocate for:

- Robust **appropriations** for land management agencies through the appropriations process.
- Effective **implementation of the IRA and IJA**, including by ensuring recreation is considered in project selection and design where appropriate.
- Reauthorization of the Great American Outdoors Act's **Legacy Restoration Fund**, which has made important investments in public lands deferred maintenance and which expires in 2025.

- A strong **2023 Farm Bill** that supports conservation and invests in the outdoor recreation economy to support rural economic development.

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The outdoor recreation community and the outdoor industry have an incredible opportunity before us. Our lands, waters, and planet are facing existential threats, but enthusiasm to address these challenges has never been greater. Our industry and community are better organized, better resourced, and better connected than at any time in the past, and we are ready to do our part to help address climate change, protect conservation values, and ensure more equitable and sustainable access to the outdoors.

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.

Based in Boulder, Colorado, with offices in Washington, D.C., Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) is a catalyst for meaningful change. A member-based collective, OIA is a passionate group of business leaders, climate experts, policy makers, and outdoor enthusiasts committed to sustainable economic growth and climate positivity while protecting—and growing access to—the benefits of the outdoors for everyone. For more than 30 years, OIA has catalyzed a thriving outdoor industry by supporting the success of every member company across four critically aligned areas: market research, sustainability, government affairs, and inclusive participation. OIA delivers success for its members through education, events, and business services in the form of solutions and strategies, consultation, collaboration, and opportunities for collective action. For more information, visit outdoorindustry.org.