

TESTIMONY OF MARK MENLOVE, WINTER WILDLANDS ALLIANCE
AND OUTDOOR ALLIANCE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,
ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
PUBLIC WITNESS HEARING, APRIL 17, 2013

Executive Summary of Outdoor Alliance FY2014 Budget Recommendations:

Agency	Program and Funding Recommendations
Dept. of Agriculture Forest Service	Land Management Planning/Assessment/Monitoring: \$215 million Recreation Management, Heritage and Wilderness: \$290 million Capital Improvements & Maintenance: \$325 million
Dept. of Interior Bureau of Land Management	Recreation Management: \$70 million National Landscape Conservation System: \$77.5 million National Monuments/National Conservation Areas: \$38.3 million
Dept. of Interior National Park Service	National Recreation and Preservation: \$52 million
DOI and USDA Jointly	Land and Water Conservation Fund: \$600 million

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Mark Menlove and I serve as Executive Director of Winter Wildlands Alliance, an Idaho-based national non-profit organization advocating on behalf of backcountry and Nordic skiers, snowshoers and other winter adventurers. Winter Wildlands Alliance is a founding member of the Outdoor Alliance (OA), a coalition of six national, member-based organizations including Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Hiking Society, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and Winter Wildlands Alliance that represents the interests of millions Americans who hike, paddle, climb, mountain bike, ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands, waters and snowscapes. Our collective direct membership is more than 100,000 people, and we have a network of almost 1,400 local organizations and clubs covering every state in the country.

Winter Wildlands Alliance is also a founding member of the Idaho Outdoor Business Council, a statewide coalition of businesses and recreation groups dedicated to preserving and promoting Idaho's spectacular wild lands and waters, and to educating public officials as to the importance of conservation measures and public lands funding initiatives as drivers for Idaho's outdoor recreation economy and quality of life

The Outdoor Recreation Economy Requires Realistic Funding for Public Lands

Outdoor recreation, which hinges on access to high-quality public lands and waters, is a major economic driver and source of jobs, particularly in the West. Americans spend \$646 billion pursuing outdoor recreation each year; according to the Outdoor Industry

Association's (OIA) research, that's twice as much as they spend on cars and pharmaceuticals. Another part of OIA's research shows that, in Idaho, outdoor recreation creates more than 77,000 jobs, \$6.3 billion in consumer spending, \$1.8 billion in wages and \$461 million in state and local tax revenue. Putting that in perspective, recreation accounts for eight percent of Idaho's economy and 13 percent of total jobs in the state. Incidentally, a 2012 statewide poll commissioned by the Idaho Outdoor Business Council showed that 76 percent of Idaho voters think that even with federal budget problems, funding for conservation and basic environmental protections should not be cut.

This spending and job creation will be severely dampened if the agencies that manage our public lands are underfunded and under-resourced. Inadequate funding and lack of resources often creates a dynamic where land managers are forced to close or highly restrict public access. This dynamic played out in my home state of Idaho earlier this year when a much-loved and highly-used system of backcountry yurts operated by Idaho Parks and Recreation under U.S. Forest Service permits was closed down for an extended period due to a permitting backlog and complications between the state and federal agencies. Not only did state Parks and Recreation lose much-needed funds from an asset that is nearly always used to full capacity, but local businesses, some of whom are my neighbors and friends, who rent gear and outfit skiers and snowshoers visiting the yurts lost revenue.

The Outdoor Alliance and Idaho Outdoor Business Coalition support a common sense budget approach that will adequately fund Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture activities that is essential to providing public recreation access to high quality public lands and waters. Numerous studies show that access to scenic open space and recreation opportunities is the anchor that attracts high wage earners and the companies that hire them – both workers and employers drawn by a quality of life based on outdoor recreation.

The Time to Invest in Land Management Planning is Now

Of particular concern to our community is adequate funding for land management planning. Last year the United States Forest Service (USFS) issued new regulations that direct how forest plans are created and implemented on our national forests and grasslands. These new regulations, commonly known as the "planning rule" replace regulations that are more than 30 years old. Forest planning is an often overlooked, but profoundly important exercise that creates a long-term blue print for what can and cannot happen on a given forest. From the human powered outdoor recreation community's perspective, the new planning rule is a thoughtful, nuanced and modern approach to planning; the USFS must have the resources to implement the planning rule.

The planning rule has three basic parts – assessment, plan development and plan monitoring, all of which are premised on a healthy degree of public engagement. Rather than generating a complete draft plan behind closed doors and then presenting it

to the public for review, the new planning rule incorporates information, sentiment, and perspectives from the public as the plan parts are developed in an iterative process. This new approach vests a broader swath of the public in the rendering of the plan and thus has the potential to not only ameliorate future conflict and expense, but to create, through crowdsourcing, better, more thoughtful and precise forest plans that will not only conserve and protect our national forests, but better serve local and regional economies.

If funding for forest planning is anemic, we fear that public engagement in the planning process will suffer and that USFS planning teams may choose data collection, analysis and planning techniques on the basis of what will be least expensive rather than what is most appropriate for a given forest. Solid forest plans will pay dividends not only for ecosystems and recreational resources, but also for local and regional economies that thrive because of their close proximity to healthy public lands that can be experienced and enjoyed.

As members of the Subcommittee are well aware, the path to arriving at a workable Forest Planning Rule has been long and tortured with misfires stretching back through three administrations. The majority of national forest units are operating on outdated plans and the queue is long for forests needing to revise plans under the new rule. With so much at stake, now is not the time to cut funding for this vitally important effort. We recommend a minimum of \$215 million for Land Management Planning, Assessment and Monitoring, substantially more than the \$184 million proposed by President Obama.

In addition to USFS, the Bureau of Land Management also must have sufficient resources to conduct Resource Management Plans as well as Master Leasing Plans throughout the West, including the innovative public outreach and engagement activities that we are starting to see. For example, towards the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, the Oregon state office of BLM engaged the public through a variety of in-person and online channels to inform their planning process for approximately 2.5 million acres of federal land in western Oregon. BLM secured public input on river resources, existing recreational opportunities and the need for future recreational opportunities.

BLM's efforts culminated in a series of five public meetings across the state, some co-hosted with local leaders of the recreation community. More than 200 people attended the last meeting in Portland on February 5 demonstrating the public's appetite to engage and assist in planning for how their lands are conserved and experienced. As with the new USFS approach to forest planning, the dollar cost of conceptualizing, designing and implementing this public outreach before a draft plan is released for public review is a wise investment of public dollars that improves plan quality, heads off potential conflict, and vests the public in how their lands are managed. If BLM does not have adequate resources to engage in both planning activities and public outreach, these public resources will suffer and local and regional economies will be negatively impacted.

Resources Required by USFS and BLM to Conserve Landscapes and Provide Sustainable Recreation for all Americans

The USFS **Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness** program oversees all recreation on national forest lands, and yet this program is chronically underfunded. We recommend **\$290 million** for this program to allow the Forest Service to prioritize resources and facilities, maintain current on-the-ground staff, and continue basic recreation resource analysis and planning.

The National Forest System serves more than 50 million visitors annually who participate in activities like backcountry skiing, hiking, climbing, paddling and mountain biking. More than 153,000 miles of trails support these activities yet the Forest Service struggles with maintenance backlogs in the billions of dollars. Although we believe a more appropriate figure is \$350 million, in the current budget climate we support the Administration's requested budget of **\$325 million for Capital Improvements and Maintenance** to avoid adding to this massive deferred maintenance backlog, improve non-motorized trail infrastructure, mitigate resource impacts, and provide high-quality recreational experiences on national forest lands.

Regarding the treasures managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Outdoor Alliance supports the base funding for Monuments and National Conservation Areas in the President's budget at \$38.3 million. We also enthusiastically support the total funding figure that the President proposes for the National Landscape Conservation System as a whole at \$77.5 million.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) enjoys bipartisan support and is a priority program for Outdoor Alliance. Projects such as the Henry's Lake Area of Critical Environmental Concern in Idaho, a proposed conservation easement on working ranch lands along the highway to West Yellowstone travelled by roughly two million visitors each year, enhance both the quality of life and the recreation economy in communities across the country.

We support the Administration's recommended **LWCF figure of \$600 million**, but greatly prefer that this sum come, as it has since the 1960s, from offshore oil and gas royalties. We are also delighted with the President's plan to fully fund LWCF in FY2015, but, again, believe this funding needs to come from traditional revenue sources that already exist. Although the President's FY2014 is innovative in its approach to LWCF funding, we feel it brings a level of complexity unwarranted to a pretty straightforward system that makes sense to the American people and recreation community.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our recommendations for FY2014.