

Opening Statement of the Honorable Robert E. Latta
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection
Hearing on “Outdoor Recreation: Vast Impact of the Great
Outdoors”
April 27, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning and welcome to the Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection subcommittee hearing on the outdoor recreation industry. As a current member and former chairman of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus, as well as someone who passionately enjoys all that outdoor recreation has to offer, I am very excited to explore this industry with you today. The outdoor recreation industry is both diverse and far reaching, spanning many of the traditional major U.S. economic sectors. And at the core of this industry is the American consumer. The outdoor recreation industry thrives when Americans are engaged and now more than ever we are seeing Americans get involved.

Every year, millions of Americans across the country go outside and enjoy the great outdoors. Whether they are camping, fishing, hiking, hunting or enjoying many of the other pastimes outdoor recreation has to offer, Americans are actively engaged. Increasingly, more and more Americans are prioritizing outdoor recreation and, in doing so, helping grow this industry. The vast contributions made by outdoor recreation to the overall U.S. economy reflect this trend. Americans spend \$887 billion in outdoor recreation annually helping create 7.6 million jobs and generate almost \$125 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue.

My home state of Ohio, where residents come together to enjoy the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Magee Marsh Wildlife Area and other public destinations near the beautiful Lake Erie, has also seen the significant economic benefits outdoor recreation has to offer. Over 53% of all Ohioans participate in outdoor recreation each year. With approximately \$17.4 billion spent by consumers in this industry, outdoor recreation helps create almost 200,000 jobs and \$5.1 billion in wages and salaries in Ohio alone.

In recognition of the outdoor recreation industry’s growing influence, Congress passed the Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act last year. Under this law, the Department of Commerce, in consultation with other federal agencies, will analyze outdoor recreation’s contributions to the nation’s gross domestic product.

Through this analysis, all of the economic activity generated by manufacturers, retailers, service providers, and the thousands of other businesses supporting outdoor recreation across the country will be quantified and incorporated into an annual, federal assessment of the national economy. As a result, policymakers and stakeholders alike will have the necessary information to make critical decisions that will allow this industry to thrive for generations to come.

In addition to economic output, outdoor recreation offers many other benefits. Outdoor recreation helps Americans get fit and lead healthy lives. Whether it be hiking, trail running, rafting or the like, outdoor recreation offers Americans many opportunities to get outside and be active. Recent studies also suggest that investments in outdoor recreation may help reduce crime and improve education throughout our communities. Another example of the positive impact outdoor recreation has on our communities that I am excited to hear about today is Outward Bound's veteran program. Outward Bound combines outdoor group adventures, such as canoeing and hiking, with facilitated therapeutic sessions designed to build self-confidence, pride, trust and communication skills that help veterans readjust upon their return.

Today as we gather to discuss the outdoor recreation industry, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how outdoor recreation is driving investment, creating jobs, promoting innovation, and working to establish more enjoyable consumer experiences through outdoor activities. For many states and communities, outdoor recreation is the cornerstone of economic activity. It creates jobs, generates revenue, and spurs vital investments. Our goal is to continue that progress and ensure that the outdoor recreation industry remains a strong pillar in the U.S. economy.