

## **Outdoor Recreation: Vast Impact of the Great Outdoors**

**Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection  
Thursday, April 27, 2017; 2123 Rayburn House Office Building**

Amy Roberts, Executive Director, Outdoor Industry Association

Congressman Robert Latta, Chairman, Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection

Congresswoman Janice Schakowsky, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for calling this hearing today and highlighting the important role of the outdoor recreation industry and America's great outdoors on the United States economy. This hearing is truly groundbreaking for our industry, partners and congressional champions. Outdoor recreation drives commerce and is among our nation's largest economic sectors, representing the lifeblood of thousands of American communities and providing livelihoods for millions of Americans.

Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) is the national trade association for suppliers, manufacturers and retailers in the \$887 billion outdoor recreation industry, with more than 1200 members nationwide. The outdoor industry supports more than 7.6 million American jobs and makes other significant contributions toward the goal of healthy communities and healthy economies across the United States.

Many members of Congress are familiar with our 2012 Outdoor Recreation Economy report which found that the industry contributes \$646 billion in consumer spending, 6.1 million

American jobs and a combined \$80 billion in U.S. tax dollars.

While those numbers have been used as the gold standard for measuring outdoor recreation's impact on the United States economy by elected officials from both parties and at all levels of government, our new economic report released just two days ago shows a very strong and growing sector that is critical to America's economic well-being and the livelihoods of Americans.

Our 2017 report shows that outdoor recreation contributes \$887 billion in consumer spending annually. This means that Americans spend more on outdoor recreation than on pharmaceuticals and gas and fuels combined. In fact, the impact of outdoor recreation on America's economy is almost as big as that of hospital care.

7.6 million American jobs depend on outdoor recreation. More American workers are employed by outdoor recreation than by computer technology, construction, finance or insurance. More Americans are directly employed by hunting and fishing than oil and gas extraction. From park rangers to land planners, from manufacturers to designers and from fly fishing guides to retail sales associates, outdoor recreation provides jobs across the skill spectrum. These jobs, predominantly based in rural communities, strengthen local economies. Many small businesses—including more than 5,000 outfitters and guiding companies—benefit from proximity and access to national forests. The outdoor sector employs people who want to work in the field, in the lab, on the road, in the office and everywhere in between.

The United States is globally recognized as the leader in outdoor recreation. As a multi-dimensional economic sector, outdoor recreation fuels employment in other sectors, such as

manufacturing, finance, retail, transportation, food service, tourism and travel. Career opportunities exist far beyond guiding and outfitting services and lodging and park services. The outdoor recreation industry employs product developers, small and large retailers and other professionals. Demand for advanced outdoor technical apparel, footwear and equipment drives innovation and entrepreneurship. It creates jobs for highly skilled workers in diverse fields such as technology, product design, manufacturing, sustainability and global commerce.

Further, America's natural landscapes and waterways are among our nation's greatest attractions for international visitors and for the recruitment and retention of American businesses, workers and their families. Corporations and businesses of all types are attracted to the quality of life that results from access to well-maintained green spaces and interconnected trails as a key tool for recruiting and retaining highly skilled workers and entrepreneurs that create many American jobs in both urban and rural communities.

The outdoor industry also contributes a combined \$125 billion every year in taxes, from \$60 billion in local and state and \$65 billion in federal tax dollars. Unfortunately, outdoor recreation assets reap very little of that through reinvestment back into our shared public lands and waters—the infrastructure needed for the recreation economy. Businesses in our industry are no different from businesses in other sectors. They rely on certainty that they can have access to adequate infrastructure to plan their investments and grow jobs.

These numbers may seem a bit staggering to those unfamiliar with the outdoor recreation economy. We are a relatively new industry made up of thousands of companies in every corner of the country and in every aspect of the supply chain. Our members represent manufacturers,

suppliers and distributors, retailers, guides and outfitters, nonprofits and universities—from one-door mom-and-pop shops to global Fortune 500 companies.

Despite the size of our industry, we are unique; while there are several well-recognized brands in the outdoor industry, you might not be able to name the 10 largest outdoor companies off the top of your head. You can, however, probably think of a bike store in your neighborhood, the local fly-fishing shop, an outdoor retailer down the street or the brand that makes your favorite rain jacket. The outdoor industry is made up of all of these businesses and is an integral part of our American life.

The outdoor activities that the outdoor industry represents are as diverse as the companies who make up the industry. From hiking, hunting, fishing, skiing, biking, surfing, paddling, ATV and off-roading to snowmobiling, camping, boating, climbing and horseback riding to simply going for a walk around your neighborhood, there is an outdoor activity for everyone. Outdoor products are found in every part of the country, from rural and “gateway” communities to the biggest cities in the world. And although most of our businesses are small and local, the impact of our industry is global.

We are still a relatively young industry, with many brands founded within the last several decades and new entrepreneurial startups coming online every day. Many outdoor businesses are only one generation removed from their founders, yet our industry has been growing at a rapid pace and has recently achieved higher visibility as more people embrace the outdoor lifestyle and as elected officials recognize the economic force of the outdoor industry and increasingly

support our issues.

The growth in our sector makes sense, and our annual Outdoor Foundation Participation Report shows that outdoor recreation participation grew, adding 1.6 million participants from 2015 to 2016. The report also shows that half of all Americans participated in at least one outdoor recreational activity in 2016. That equates to 144 million participants, who went on a total of 11 billion outdoor outings. That's a lot of hiking boots and water bottles.

The industry makes our nation's economy stronger, but it also represents the entrepreneurial spirit that makes America so great. It is helping Americans live healthy and active lifestyles and enjoy our shared national heritage—our public lands and waters. America's lands and waters embody the American spirit. Investments in outdoor recreation on public lands and waters earn compounding returns in the form of healthier communities, healthier economies and healthier people. From our national parks to local green spaces, from alpine lakes to transcontinental rivers, America's outdoor recreation assets are its citizens' common trust.

Our public lands and waterways belong to every American, and they are the foundation of our outdoor recreation economy. They hold the promise of prosperity and well-being. It is as much our responsibility to invest in them as it is our right to enjoy them. Preserving access is imperative to enhancing the industry's economic and social impact. Access ensures every American's ability to get outside where jobs, health and communities thrive.

In order to ensure the growth and success of the outdoor recreation economy, policymakers must:

1. Protect America's public lands and waters, assets that are the foundation of our sector.

2. Invest in local and federal recreation infrastructure and programs to ensure all Americans have access to public lands and waters.
3. Promote outdoor recreation as part of public health policy and national economic discussions.

Your committee has already been integral in the Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact (REC) Act, which passed last year with bipartisan, unanimous support and which will help the federal government and state and local policymakers fully understand the important contributions that outdoor recreation makes to the U.S. economy. This important law directs the government for the first time to recognize and assess outdoor recreation as a unique sector of U.S. gross domestic product. We hope that this official government data will shed light on business and land management policies that can help us continue our trend of growth and success.

I want to thank the committee on behalf of the outdoor industry, as the bipartisan REC Act is an important first step in elevating awareness about the impact of the outdoor recreation economy. However, it also underscores the imperative for leaders and lawmakers to protect and invest in policies that grow the infrastructure on which the outdoor recreation economy is built.

Outdoor recreation is the economy of the 21st century. Outdoor recreation is something a majority of Americans embrace that crosses demographic boundaries and brings with it diverse, high-paying and highly sought after jobs for American workers.

Time and time again across the country, when leaders invest in outdoor recreation, the result is healthier communities and healthier economies. The continued dynamic growth of the outdoor

recreation economy is inarguable evidence of its contribution to the nation's social and economic growth. Together, and with your help, we must invest in the outdoors—today, tomorrow and for generations to come.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy J. Roberts".

Amy Roberts  
Executive Director  
Outdoor Industry Association