



February 14, 2022

Dear Chairperson Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman and members of the House Natural Resources Committee,

We, the undersigned members, partners and supporters of the [Outdoors Alliance for Kids \(OAK\)](#), appreciate the prioritization of equitable access to nature and increased transportation options to parks, trails, green spaces and public lands in the Environmental Justice for All Act. OAK is a national strategic partnership of more than 100 businesses and organizations representing more than 60 million Americans, with a common interest in connecting children, youth and families with the outdoors. Our members and supporters believe that in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for equitable opportunities to recreate in the outdoors has never been more apparent.

Parks and public lands belong to all Americans to enjoy, regardless of income or zip code. Unfortunately, far too many under-resourced families face significant obstacles to accessing these special places. Urban, rural and remote communities, especially racially and ethnically diverse, low-income, and disabled communities, disproportionately lack safe access to their public lands and waters. The pandemic has dramatically expanded this access gap, with the Governors Highway Safety Association finding that pedestrian injury and death increased [21% during the pandemic](#).

The Environmental Justice for All Act is rooted in the principle that all people have the right to pure air, clean water and an environment that enriches life. With a multi-year inclusive public process that involved a diverse set of stakeholders and impacted communities, this legislation incorporates three vital programs to support equitable access to nature for youth and families that OAK strongly supports:

Section 11, Access to parks, outdoor spaces and public recreation opportunities

This provision would codify and guarantee funding for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program to enhance access to greenspace and develop recreational infrastructure in communities that lack park space and have been traditionally under-resourced. This important investment in local parks will expand access for one-third of Americans, including [28 million children](#), who lack access to a quality park close to home. Since the program's inception in 2014, ORLP funding has supported 69 projects, leveraging more than \$76 million in non-federal funds, to improve close-to-home outdoor access. With parks serving as critical, job-creating, resilient infrastructure and offering communities the proven physical and mental health benefits of access to the outdoors, we must act now to invest in open spaces.

Section 12, Transit to Trails grant program

The Transit to Trails grant program directs the Department of Transportation to establish a block-grant program to fund accessible transportation systems to parks, trailheads, green spaces and public lands. This will provide federal grants to match state and local funding of transit routes between cities and public lands to ensure underserved and rural communities can safely and equitably access parks and outdoor recreation opportunities. Connecting more families and individuals with quality nature, especially in critically underserved areas, will provide greater opportunities for employment, wellbeing and outdoor exploration.

Section 13, Repeal of sunset for the Every Kid Outdoors program

The Every Kid Outdoors (EKO) program provides fourth graders and their families with one year of free access to all national park sites. This program must be made permanent; by statute, the Every Kid Outdoors program will expire in 2026. Removing the sunset provision in EKO now will be essential in allowing agencies to provide lasting equitable access to federal public lands. Engagement with the outdoors is essential for developing resilient youth and strong families, and will develop future park visitors and stewards.

As we work to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that access to the outdoors is more important than ever. Engagement with the outdoors has been a lifeline for many during the pandemic and will be a crucial step in the healing process for youth and families while developing future park visitors and stewards. Expanding and bolstering programs that provide equitable access to nature will create healthier, more sustainable, economically vibrant and climate-resilient communities.

We strongly endorse and appreciate the inclusion of equitable access to nature programs within the Environmental Justice for All Act. For questions related to this letter, please reach out to Tara Brown, Senior Government Relations Representative at The Wilderness Society at Tara_Brown@twc.org. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Hiking Society
American Society of Landscape Architects
Appalachian Mountain Club
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Avid4 Adventure
Children & Nature Network
Choose Outdoors
Conservation Legacy
ForeverGreen Trails
Latino Outdoors
Move Redmond
National Recreation and Park Association

Nature For All
Outward Bound California
Seed Your Future
Sierra Club
SkyDay
The Corps Network
The Trust for Public Land
The Venture Out Project
The Wilderness Society