AMY KLOBUCHAR
MINNESOTA

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RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 8, 2015

The Honorable Penny Pritzker
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretaries Pritzker and Jewell:

Americans treasure the outdoors and our nation's businesses and entrepreneurs have been at the forefront of establishing critical partnerships to foster growth and ensure the strength and viability of our outdoor economy. It is time that the United States government recognizes this critical sector by measuring the full economic impact of the outdoors.

The federal agencies you lead are focused on promoting commerce, recreation, tourism and economic development, as well as protecting our natural treasures. In addition, your leadership as Co-Chairs of the National Travel and Tourism Strategy Task Force position you to effectively advocate for the importance of an outdoor economy that has had a positive impact on jobs, consumer spending, innovation and stewardship of natural resources. However, despite an estimated $646 billion spent annually on outdoor recreation and $621 billion in direct spending from travel and tourism, our country still lacks a comprehensive national picture of the benefits of our robust outdoor economy.

We encourage you to build on the progress your agencies have made by working with other key federal agencies such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Forest Service to assist in collecting data and information showing the economic benefits of the outdoor economy. In addition to working with other federal partners, your agencies should utilize a public-private partnership with industry stakeholders to support this important study. By collaborating and using the existing statistical resources available, your agencies can address the lack of information on the outdoor economy's national impact and ensure our nation's lands and waters are fully recognized for their vital contributions to the economy.

Our outdoor natural resources are the envy of the world and American businesses have long partnered with and benefited from access to these areas. Over the next year it is expected that our National Parks will see a growth in visitors from across the country and around the world to celebrate the National Park Centennial in 2016. The Centennial is not just a celebration of our past achievements. It should be seen as an opportunity to look at how these unique public outdoor spaces can be preserved and made more accessible to visitors for the next hundred years.

A national study on the benefits of the outdoor economy is an important tool for both policymakers and businesses and we understand the need for accurate data about all aspects of our economy in order to promote policies that support economic growth. A national study will also benefit outdoor-focused businesses that rely on accurate and substantial data to inform their decisions and reach consumers. For example, retailers, restaurants, manufacturers, lodges and even small tackle shops often consider their proximity to outdoor spaces when choosing where to locate. Large or small, businesses need to have information to guide their decisions to bring goods and services to market.

Americans understand the importance of outdoor recreation to the economy. Our many successful outdoor-focused businesses are proof of the economic benefits that our lakes, rivers, wetlands, wilderness areas, and forests provide. The economic benefits of the outdoor economy also go beyond the transactional benefits. By encouraging access to open spaces, we are promoting a healthy lifestyle, providing educational opportunities for students, and creating jobs. It is time to take a full account of all of these benefits to our economy and that starts with accurate and comprehensive measurements.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and we look forward to working with you to promote and accurately reflect the benefits of our outdoor economy.

Sincerely,

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator