



**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bruce Westerman**  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands  
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 3113, H.R. 3670,  
H.R. 3686, and H.R. 3687  
June 8, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Neguse. Today we meet to discuss four pieces of legislation relating to recreation on federal lands.

Outdoor recreation is vital to our nation's economy. In 2019, the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 2.1 percent, or \$459.8 billion, of current-dollar U.S. GDP.

I have the privilege of representing the 4th Congressional District of Arkansas where my constituents and visitors to the Natural State enjoy a wide array of recreational activities including camping, boating, canoeing and kayaking, hiking and

backpacking, rock climbing, hunting and fishing, and mountain biking.

America's federal lands and waters provide incredible opportunities for people to be active outdoors. Unfortunately, for many, outdoor recreational opportunities are not always easily accessible. Having a skilled outfitter or guide who can provide equipment and expert advice can make a huge difference.

Additionally, recreating on federal lands often requires special permits and payment of fees that, while important to help maintain our federal lands, too often involve confusing, cumbersome, and costly processes for recreationists and recreation service providers alike.

The bills before us today are intended to reduce the cost and complexity of recreating on federal lands and to help

recreation service providers continue to operate and build quality recreation facilities on federal lands.

First, we will hear testimony today on the SOAR Act sponsored by Chairman Neguse. This bill, which started out as a Republican bill called the Guides and Outfitters Act or GO Act, provides expanded access to outdoor recreation by improving our federal outfitter and guide permitting systems. New permitted uses of public lands are rarely authorized because permitting processes have become unnecessarily complex and costly in some agencies. The SOAR Act makes common sense changes to the permitting processes and regulations to enable more access to federal lands and increased economic benefits.

I'd like to thank Representative John Curtis of Utah, who spent a lot of time and effort on this bill and helped get it to the

place it is today. I'm deeply disappointed that this formerly bipartisan bill was introduced without him on board, and I hope that this concerning trend of Democrats introducing bills historically led by Republicans comes to an end immediately. We must not let good policy suffer at the hands of petty partisanship.

Second, we will be discussing the Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting Act, sponsored by another committee colleague, Representative Tlaib. This bill seeks to improve visitation and access to federal lands for communities of color, low-income communities, and Tribal communities by requiring the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to complete a report on the use of special recreation permits by recreation service providers serving environmental justice communities. I am really looking forward to discussing this legislation.

Frequently our friends on the other side pay lip service to reducing barriers and promoting access to federal lands for diverse user groups, while simultaneously supporting new burdensome rules and regulations and overly restrictive federal land designations, such as wilderness, which impose strict limitations on the types of authorized recreation as well as limits on group sizes. I would also like to note that this bill passed as an amendment to H.R. 803 at the start of the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress so it seems somewhat backwards to be holding a hearing on a bill that has already passed the House.

Next, we will hear testimony on the Ski Hill Resources for Economic Development Act or “SHRED” Act sponsored by Representative Kuster. The growth of four-season visitation at ski areas is spurring demand for expanded and updated facilities and amenities. Unfortunately, the Forest Service struggles to

keep pace with permitting for needed infrastructure improvements and capital investments at existing resorts. This bill is intended to help the Forest Service keep pace with ski area permitting demand by allowing a portion of the roughly \$39 million in annual fees that federal land resorts pay to the Treasury to be retained and used by the Forest Service in support of ski area permit administration.

Finally, I would like to highlight the Republican bill we are considering today, the MAPLand Act, sponsored by our Natural Resources Committee colleague, Representative Moore of Utah. This bill would direct federal land management agencies to consolidate, digitize, and make publicly available recreational access information as geospatial files. Currently, many of the easement records that identify legal means of access onto BLM and Forest Service-managed lands are stored at the local level on

paper files, which makes it difficult for hunters, anglers, and even the agencies themselves to identify public access opportunities. I am supportive of efforts to improve information on what the federal land management agencies own, which is why I've been a lead sponsor on complimentary legislation, the FLAIR Act, in past Congresses. The MAPLand Act will help land management agencies prioritize projects to acquire new public land access or improve existing access. This bill will be a game changer for sportsmen and recreational users of our federal lands.

I'm looking forward to the witness testimony today, and would especially like to thank my friend, Mr. Joel Pederson from the Mule Deer Foundation, for being with us today. With that, I thank you and yield back.