

THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT

S. 3422

Issue Overview

Our country's national parks and public lands comprise our nation's most significant natural and cultural treasures. These lands preserve our unique American heritage and history, offer unparalleled recreation opportunities for hundreds of millions of visitors each year, and centrally define and unite us as a nation. These irreplaceable resources also are major economic engines, propelling a nationwide outdoor recreation economy that supports more than 5 million American jobs, contributes over \$778 billion in annual economic output, and serves as the lifeblood for countless communities across the country.

These priceless resources face unprecedented pressures and threats – and the Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422) provides a targeted solution to maintain and enhance our national parks and public lands in the face of these challenges.

- Our national parks and public lands have been suffering from crumbling roads, visitor centers, and trails. Deteriorating infrastructure, exacerbated by increasing visitation pressures and inconsistent annual funding, has led to a nearly \$12 billion backlog in repair needs in America's national parks; this total increases to over \$20 billion when backlog maintenance needs on other public lands are included.
- At the same time, inadequate annual funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund – the nation's most important tool for conservation and public recreation access – has increasingly jeopardized the integrity of our public lands and impeded public use and enjoyment. LWCF full funding is critically needed to protect parks and public lands from the threat of development inside their borders; to connect landscapes for wildlife and fire management; to preserve water quantity and quality; to sustain working landscapes and rural economies; and to increase access for recreation for all Americans no matter where they live.



Road repairs in Yellowstone National Park.
(Credit: The Pew Charitable Trusts)

By addressing these two related challenges, the Great American Outdoors Act will secure the future of America's public lands legacy.

¹ Bureau of Economic Analysis data reported for 2017. Available at https://www.bea.gov/system/files/2019-09/orsa0919_1.pdf

Legislation

The Great American Outdoor Act (S. 3422), bipartisan legislation introduced by Senators Gardner (R-CO), Manchin (D-WV), Daines (R-MT) and Warner (D-VA), would ensure our parks and irreplaceable lands are protected for decades to come. Specifically, it would:

- Direct non-taxpayer funds already being deposited in the Land and Water Conservation Fund – including \$900 million in annual offshore energy receipts that routinely have been diverted from the fund for decades – to be spent only and fully on their intended purpose. Specific language protects congressional oversight of LWCF spending through the appropriations process, including the assessment of annual needs and adjustment of allocations according to changing opportunities and submissions from state and community partners.
- Establish the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Fund, which would direct up to \$9.5 billion in non-taxpayer monies (unobligated mineral receipts) over five years to address priority repairs in national parks and on other public lands. The National Park Service would receive 70% of Fund proceeds; the U.S. Forest Service would receive 15%; and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Indian Education schools would each receive 5%.



Hunting on the Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River, Montana (Credit: Bob Wick/BLM)



Rafting in the New River Gorge, West Virginia (Credit: Kent Mason)

Status

S. 3422 was introduced on March 9, 2020 and is awaiting Senate floor action. As of March 19, 2020, there are 59 Senators cosponsoring the bill, including Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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