



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE OUTDOORS ALLIANCE FOR KIDS (OAK)
TO U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS - SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES REGARDING
FISCAL YEAR 2022 APPROPRIATIONS

APRIL 16, 2021

Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Members of the House Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies,

We, the undersigned members and partners of the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK), thank you for your past support of funding for programs to connect children and youth with the outdoors across the federal government. We also ask that the subcommittee consider funding levels that would allow these programs to grow, thrive, and continue to provide a robust return on investment in Fiscal Year 2022.

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 recognize that in this time of crisis and in the wake of school closures and physical distancing measures, the need for equitable access to the outdoors while adhering to public health guidelines has never been more apparent. Beyond the benefits of promoting community health and wellness and engaging more youth in environmental stewardship, connecting youth to the outdoors is a vital part of maintaining a sustainable outdoor recreation economy. Outdoor recreation annually generates \$778 billion in economic output, comprises 2.2 percent of the United States gross domestic product (GDP) and supports 5.2 million jobs.

In order to swiftly recover from this economic recession and keep outdoor recreation nonprofits and businesses afloat, Congress must continue to invest in this sector. Doing so will create healthier, happier, more economically vibrant communities for children, youth and families both now and for generations to come.

OAK supports the following funding levels and asks the subcommittee to consider them for FY 2022:

U.S. Department of the Interior

- Every Kid Outdoors (EKO) at \$25 million.
EKO provides fourth graders with a pass so they and their families can access national parks and other public lands for free for a year. Investing in EKO now will be essential in enabling agencies to provide equitable access to federal, state, local and public lands when it is safe for park employees, visitors, and gateway communities to do so. Engagement with the outdoors will be a crucial step in the healing process for youth and families, and will develop future park visitors and stewards. Funding would be used for program staffing for administering agencies and park-adjacent youth-serving nonprofit organizations, and to subsidize costs for transporting students, especially those from low-income communities, to public lands.
- National Park Service Youth Programs at \$50 million.
The Youth Partnership Program in part funds the Public Land Corps program, which provides education and work opportunities for men and women aged 16-30. The NPS utilizes non-profit youth serving organizations to perform critical natural and cultural resource conservation projects at NPS sites. This program also supports programming and partnerships with youth serving organizations, which are under unprecedented financial strain due to the pandemic. These organizations provide underserved youth their first outdoor experience with the National Park for service, conservation, health and well-being. This funding would ensure youth can equitably access the mental and physical health benefits of experiencing the outdoors, a critical need that addresses the collective trauma that children are experiencing as a result of the pandemic.
- Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (ORLP) at \$125 million. ORLP provides grants for outdoor recreational opportunities in urban and low-income cities across the nation, targeting investment in park projects for families and communities that have been disproportionately denied access to the outdoors. ORLP will create new opportunities for larger urban communities in particular, increasing access to quality open spaces and facilitating the development of outdoor recreation partnerships.
- Centennial Challenge at \$30 million.
OAK supports this efficient program that leverages private dollars with federal funds to improve visitor experiences including education programs and projects for youth. Previous investments have yielded more than twice funded amounts in private donations, and many more opportunities await with a funding boost.
- Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program at \$15 million.
The RTCA program brings the expertise of over a century of land management

to the greater recreation community. When a community asks for assistance with a project, National Park Service staff provide free critical tools for success, on-location facilitation, and planning expertise, which draw from project experiences across the country and adapt best practices to a community's specific needs. Funding at \$15 million will ensure these trail planning services are made available to communities in all regions of the nation, including recreation programs for youth.

U.S. Forest Service

- Community Forest and Open Space (CFP) at \$5 million.
CFP compliments existing conservation programs by helping communities and tribes identify, purchase, and manage locally important forestlands threatened with development. These community forests can be tailored to local needs including expanding recreation access and outdoor education.
- Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Program at at least \$80 million.
U&CF has served more than 200 million people in more than 7,700 communities across the U.S. through the development and maintenance of local urban forestry programs, increasing nearby nature access to forests and trees.

Environmental Protection Agency

- National Environmental Education Act (NEEA) at \$10 million.
NEEA programs have far-reaching and well-documented positive impacts. They enable citizens from all walks of life to make informed, scientifically sound environmental decisions regarding energy consumption, water quality and conservation, with practical applications for math, science, technology, and engineering. action.They provide practical applications for science, technology, engineering, and math--skills that will be more urgently needed than ever before as the U.S. recovers from impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Outdoor and environmental learning increases academic performance across subject areas and is critical for ensuring America's children have the knowledge and experience to compete in the global economy.

Now more than ever, it's clear that access to the outdoors is a necessity, and not just nice-to-have. We urge you to invest in these programs, which would allow nonprofits and agencies to provide safe, equitable access to the outdoors for children, youth and families during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. For questions related to this testimony, please contact OAK's Senior Campaign Representative, Jayni Rasmussen at contact@outdoorsallianceforkids.org or 202-675-6696.

Sincerely,

American Hiking Society

American Forests

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Choose Outdoors

National Parks Conservation Association

National Recreation and Park Association

Sierra Club

The Wilderness Society

The Trust for Public Land