

Feb 5, 2025

Dear Congress:

We, the undersigned members and partners of the [Outdoors Alliance for Kids \(OAK\)](#), and the supporters of OAK's mission, write to thank you for your leadership in the passage and enactment of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act which contains key provisions that will improve recreational opportunities, supercharge economic development of the \$1.2 trillion outdoor recreation economy, especially for rural and gateway communities, and facilitate greater access to public lands. We are thrilled that this legislation passed by such overwhelming bipartisan margins, and look forward to working with you to ensure its successful implementation, as well as that the necessary federal agency resources and staffing are provided for this landmark law to succeed.

OAK is a leading national alliance of more than 100 businesses and nonprofit organizations representing more than 60 million individuals across the U.S., who share a common interest in connecting children, youth and families with the outdoors.

The passage of the EXPLORE Act demonstrates now more than ever the bipartisan commitment by Congress to creating more access to recreation opportunities, with all their benefits to communities and the economy. That commitment can only succeed, however, if Congress also ensures robust funding for federal land management agencies and adequate staffing levels so the law can be fully and successfully implemented. As Congress considers annual appropriations for both FY25 and FY26 and any reconciliation legislation, we strongly encourage you to consider the impacts on the newly enacted EXPLORE Act and outdoor access as a whole.

Access to the outdoors is extremely important to the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities. Access to nature has been found to provide many cognitive and emotional benefits that lead to improved mental wellness. Studies show that individuals who spend time in nature perform better on cognitive tests, are more happy overall, and have less stress and anxiety. In addition, time spent in nature often involves physical activity that improves physical and mental health, and overall wellbeing. These benefits are particularly important for America's veterans.

Natural outdoor spaces connect people to their communities and contribute to local economies. The outdoor recreation economy generates 5 million jobs, and is a crucial lifeline for rural communities, including those that are the gateways to public lands across the country. The successful implementation of the EXPLORE Act will make strides towards providing the resources and tools these communities need to maximize the economic benefits of their proximity to National Forests, Parks, refuges and hatcheries, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) sites, and all other public lands.

We look forward to working with you to implement these key provisions, and ensure that agencies have robust staff and resources to carry them out:

- **The Every Kid Outdoors (EKO) extension** which continues the Every Kid Outdoors program for 7 years, thereby providing every 4th grader, or homeschooled 10-year-old, an entry pass to enjoy federal land and waters, along with their families.
- **The Outdoors for All Act** which codifies the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program. ORLP provides funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to develop or renovate public recreational facilities in areas of higher population density. This program also prioritizes providing job training and employment for youth and low-income communities.
- **The Military and Veterans in Parks Act** will promote opportunities and enhance outdoor recreation experiences for veterans and active duty members on federal lands by improving facilities, signage, disability access, and information access. This will establish a jobs pilot program within the Department of the Interior, to employ veterans in jobs relating to conservation. The Military and Veterans in Parks Act also creates the Military Veterans Outdoor Recreation Liaison within the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture and Veterans Affairs to better coordinate support as an interagency position in the administration.
- **Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation (SOAR)** will simplify and streamline the process of obtaining permits for guides, outfitters, outdoor leaders and non-profit organizations. This will improve guided recreation opportunities on federal lands and waters, increasing access to the outdoors and providing economic benefits to gateway communities.

Sincerely,

*[*Sign on here*](#)*

Active San Gabriel Valley

Adventure Crew

American Camp Association

American Canoe Association

American Heart Association

American Hiking Society

American Society of Landscape Architects

Amigos De Los Rios

Appalachian Mountain Club

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education

Avid4 Adventure
Big City Mountaineers
Blue Star Families
Brown People Camping
Camp Fire National Headquarters
Children and Nature Network
City Parks Alliance
Conservation Nation
Justice Outside
KABOOM!
Kentucky Conservation Committee
Keystone Trails Association
Latino Outdoors
League of American Bicyclists
National Education Association
National Marine Sanctuary Foundation
National Military Family Association
National Recreation and Park Association
Nature For All
National Park Trust
Next 100 Coalition
North American Association for Environmental Education
Outdoor Foundation
REI Co-op
Safe Routes Partnership
Seed Your Future
Sierra Club

SOS Outreach

The Association for Experiential Education

The Corps Network

The Wilderness Society

Trust for Public Land

Washington Trails Association