

June 15, 2020

Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission
725 Summer Street NE, Suite C
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Sustainable Funding for Oregon's Office of Outdoor Recreation

Chair Mukumoto and Members of the Commission:

The outdoor recreation industry and conservation community are extremely discouraged by recent announcements to effectively dismantle the Oregon Office of Outdoor Recreation (OREC) and are thankful that a short-term funding solution has been determined through December 2020. While we empathize with the difficult fiscal situation that the State of Oregon faces right now, the value this office brings from its work of strategic collaboration across agencies and across sectors is invaluable to the long-term success of the outdoor recreation economy in the state.

Our coalition of outdoor recreation businesses, associations, and conservation groups strongly opposes any decision to eliminate the office which has already proven its great worth to the state and our community. We respectfully ask for your assistance in the continued stable funding for OREC and your help in working to find additional state funding to continue the office as it currently exists as defined in statute.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the outdoor recreation industry in the United States contributed \$778 billion in annual economic output, accounted for 2.2 percent of Gross Domestic Product, supported 5.2 million jobs and was growing faster than the economy as a whole in every indicator. The outdoor recreation industry brings the state of Oregon \$6.5 billion in business annually, which supports 87,000 jobs. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdowns necessary to slow its progression, America's outdoor recreation economy has been hindered at a time when we need the outdoors more than ever – 79 percent of outdoor businesses have had to lay off or furlough employees and 89 percent are seeing decreased revenue.

However, we know there is a bright future for outdoor recreation ahead, as several sectors of the industry are already experiencing rapidly increasing demand. With rising unemployment and Americans eager to experience the outdoors, continued investment in outdoor recreation will allow our businesses to get back to what we do best: stimulate local economies, put people back to work, and allow Americans to benefit from time spent outside. We expect OREC to play a crucial role in this process.

Action to eliminate OREC would have a rippling effect on the outdoor recreation community across the nation. Oregon has been at the forefront of demonstrating support for the outdoor recreation industry and with the support of efforts by the outdoor recreation and conservation community, the office was established; one that the outdoor recreation and conservation community has long been advocating for and which has been instrumental to many successes the State of Oregon has experienced in the outdoor recreation space. With outdoor recreation accounting for 2.9 percent of Oregon's GDP and 4.4 percent of the state's overall employment, these successes have helped to bolster a significant sector of the state's economy, all while conserving the state's unique natural resources and enriching the lives of its residents.

The elimination of OREC would give our community cause for worry both in Oregon and across the nation. We have worked alongside states over the past decade to create outdoor recreation offices and have now celebrated the creation of 17 such offices or task forces. Seven of those successes have occurred just within the last year. This showcases the incredible momentum we have been gaining for this effort as states recognize the intrinsic value the outdoors offers for residents and tourists and the need to better invest in the future of that unique asset. For Oregon to be the first state to ever eliminate an office of outdoor recreation would set a concerning precedent at a crucial time for the outdoor industry as the other 16 states that have outdoor recreation offices or task forces also navigate funding issues in the coming months and other states' legislatures reconvene to consider the possibility of adding an Office of Outdoor Recreation to their toolbox. The implications of this action will be felt across the nation.

Since its creation in 2017, OREC has set an example for other states in how we can better invest in the outdoors and the incredible benefits that can yield. We need your help in ensuring that the important work of this office continues as well as your collaboration to determine a stable future for the office. We hope to see a renewed commitment to support the office going forward that ensures continued strong standing for Oregon nationally. Continued investments in outdoor recreation offices will stimulate the outdoor recreation industry and bolster the conservation community which together make up of thousands of businesses that support communities in all 50 states, support rural economies, create jobs to carry out essential work, and provide opportunities for millions of Americans to recreate on our public lands and waters for generations to come.

Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association
American Whitewater
Boat Owners Association of the United States
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas
Motorcycle Industry Council
National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds
National Marine Manufacturers Association
PeopleForBikes
Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association
RV Industry Association
Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals
Specialty Equipment Market Association
Specialty Vehicle Institute of America
The Corps Network
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership