

**Testimony from Fred C. Ferguson, Vice President, Public Affairs and Communications
Vista Outdoor**

United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Full Committee Legislative Hearing

December 2, 2021

10:00 a.m. ET in room 366 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Introduction

Good morning Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso and members of the Committee. My name is Fred Ferguson and I serve as Vice President of Public Affairs and Communications for Vista Outdoor and as the President of our philanthropic arm, the Vista Outdoor Foundation.

Vista Outdoor (NYSE: VSTO) is a leading manufacturer and designer of outdoor recreation gear. We are headquartered in Anoka, Minnesota, and employ more than 6,000 people across 16 states and Puerto Rico. We serve our consumers through a portfolio of 38 iconic brands, which include CamelBak, Bell Helmets, Remington ammunition and accessories and Bushnell Golf, among many others.

We are a mission-driven company founded on the belief that when we bring the world outside, we bring it closer together. In a country that is increasingly divided along political lines, Vista Outdoor is committed to finding common ground for all outdoor enthusiasts, no matter their affiliation or activity of choice. The outdoors is for all Americans. This mindset drives action across our entire business, from our corporate Foundation, which recently awarded 10 grants to outdoor non-profits, to our sustainability program, which was recognized by Investor's Business Daily as the third best in the Consumer Goods category.

We are one of the largest contributors to conservation through the Pittman-Robertson Act. Since Vista Outdoor was created, we have proudly contributed nearly \$500 million to the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Trust Fund. And CamelBak, who for thirty years has been at the forefront of ending single-use plastics in drinkware, is leading an effort to expand water refilling stations on federal lands in hopes of increasing access to hydration while also reducing waste in our public lands and waterways.

Time is Now

The time to invest in the outdoors is now. Millions of people ventured outdoors over the past twenty months. Some reconnected with their favorite pastimes, such as hunting or biking, while others engaged in a recreational activity for the first time, including more than 10 million first time campers¹. This resurgence in outdoor activity has continued in 2021 and isn't expected to slow down anytime soon. With so many new and existing participants venturing outside, it's incumbent upon leaders in the private and public sectors to maintain the pandemic-fueled stoke by adjusting to these changing trends and creating an outdoor ecosystem that is more accessible, diverse and streamlined.

Vista Outdoor has been, and will continue to be, a leader in such efforts. We've invested more than \$500 million to expand our portfolio into new and dynamic categories. We've launched our Foundation, giving us the ability to support the outdoors in new and meaningful ways. And we've taken care of our employees by expanding benefits while also establishing an Employee Assistance Fund to support them in times of unexpected hardship.

The Committee's actions show that Congress is serious about the outdoors as well. The nine bills under consideration advance common goals that we support, including expanded access, greater diversity and better management of our public lands. We commend the Committee for this leadership and foresight in advancing this bipartisan docket of legislation.

Legislative Overview

Our commitment to, and our belief in, promoting outdoor recreation and protecting this country's public lands is why we're here today. We support each of the bills under consideration; and in the interest of time, I will highlight just a few:

SOAR ACT

We support the Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation Act (SOAR) Act. This legislation aims to remove duplicative permits and shorten processing times for recreation permits. Guides and outfitters are some of the best advocates for public lands and elevating their role in our recreation system is well timed and well deserved.

One provision we've highlighted for Committee staff relates to permits for guided bike trips. One of our brands is QuietKat, the leader in rugged overlanding electric bikes, or e-bikes. In our experience, the new normal for guided bike trips includes a mix of traditional and e-bike users. We think final language should reflect this new reality and ensure that traditional bikes and e-bikes operate under a single permit.

¹ <https://koa.com/north-american-camping-report/>

Outdoors for All Act

We support the Outdoors for All Act and the codification of the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program. Enactment of this legislation will have the dual effect of bringing more people outdoors while also breaking down barriers and using the outdoors as a force for change and equality.

FILM Act

We support the FILM Act. We need to recruit and activate the next generation of outdoor recreation champions, and The FILM Act will help us reach and inspire these future visitors, leaders and champions.

Outdoor Recreation Act

We support the Outdoor Recreation Act. This bill is another example where the outdoors is bringing us together. The list of supporters is diverse and encompasses all sides of the recreation ecosystem. That is not an easy accomplishment and deserves to be recognized.

While we support each of the provisions, two deserve special recognition.

First, the provision directing support for gateway communities was needed pre-pandemic, and is absolutely required now. Rural towns and counties take pride in the recreation assets located in their backyards, but they have limited tools to manage the growth and popularity that they create. With national parks and recreation sites regularly breaking visitation records², gateway community planning is an essential part of the visitor experience.

Second, we support the provision to authorize the BLM and Forest Service, in partnership with local stakeholders, to build additional recreational shooting ranges on public lands. Recreational shooting and hunting have grown in popularity during the last twenty months. Expanding range infrastructure will promote safety, minimize dispersed target shooting and support wildlife conservation funding. Recreational shooting is the leading contributor to the Pittman-Robertson trust fund, so expanded infrastructure is a sound investment in the future of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model.

Closing

Again, on behalf of Vista Outdoor and the many stakeholders of the \$689 billion outdoor recreation industry, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee. Millions of

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/national-parks-are-overcrowded-and-closing-their-gates-11623582002>

people connected with the outdoors during the pandemic and interest in the outdoors remains elevated. Our recreation infrastructure needs to expand in-kind so that we can deliver continued, enhanced experiences to these new and diverse outdoor participants. The bills included in today's hearing are a major step forward in meeting this challenge.

I would like to again thank Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, Committee members and your staffs for the tireless commitment and dedication to the outdoors.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.

###