TESTIMONY OF MARK SINGLETON, OUTDOOR ALLIANCE
UNITED STATES SENATE
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING: TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY REGARDING INVESTMENTS IN CLEAN ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS TO CREATE GREEN JOBS AND TO STIMULATE THE ECONOMY (SD-366).
JEFF BINGAMAN, CHAIRMAN
DECEMBER 10, 2008

WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY MARK SINGLETON
CHAIRMAN, OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

Mr. Chairman and members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee:

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of six national, member-based organizations devoted to conservation and stewardship of our nation's public lands and waters through responsible human-powered outdoor recreation. The Outdoor Alliance includes: Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Hiking Society American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and Winter Wildlands Alliance. Collectively, the Outdoor Alliance has members in all fifty states and a network of almost 1,400 local clubs and advocacy groups across the nation. Our coalition represents the millions of Americans who hike, paddle, climb, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands and waters.

Our staff and members spend much of their free time exploring public lands via the roads, trails, rivers, and at the campsites. Collectively, we witness firsthand the state of these resources and are among the many people impacted by an aging infrastructure that is mismatched with today's priorities for public land management. We recognize the need for active and immediate efforts to bring our public lands infrastructure and in some cases the lands themselves up to standards. Perhaps most importantly today, we believe that doing so would create an array of economic benefits across multiple sectors of the United States economy immediately and for decades to come.

Specifically, we suggest that the Committee prioritize the following activities in an economic stimulus package:

US Forest Service Road Decommissioning and Restoration: Unmanaged roads can wash out and erode, pollute water, damage wildlife habitat, impact recreation, and speed the spread of weeds. The current 380,000-mile US Forest Service (USFS) road network contains many redundant, obsolete or unnecessary roads that are costly to maintain and do not serve the millions of people who visit national forests. Outdoor Alliance supports a common-sense policy, including retiring unnecessary roads to limit environmental damage and focusing scarce resources on maintaining the roads that best serve the public. Currently, deferred maintenance is over $8.4 billion nationwide and increases annually as allocated funds fall far short of annual maintenance needs. A number of national forests

have already set sound road maintenance priorities, but lack the funds to reach those goals. An infusion of funding into road management would immediately put people to work and would avert risks to water supplies, wildlife habitats, recreational opportunities, and fire-sensitive communities.

USFS and BLM Recreation Infrastructure Improvements: Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands often provide the closest and best mountain biking, backcountry skiing, hiking, snowshoeing, paddling, and climbing opportunities for millions of Americans. Investing now in the construction and maintenance of trails, river access areas, campsites, parking areas, sanitary facilities, and other visitor amenities – in the tradition of the Civilian Conservation Corps – would immediately create new jobs and benefit our citizens and gateway economies for decades to come.

Federal Agency Recreation Field Staff: The primary federal land management agencies (US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and US Fish and Wildlife Service) each have a significant need for recreation field staff. The National Park Service has proposed 3,000 new rangers as part of their Centennial Initiative, and the other agencies certainly have a similar need. Hiring field staff to interact with the visiting public would directly create thousands of new jobs, encourage recreation-based tourism, reduce planning conflicts and errors, and create new opportunities for volunteerism. We envision these individuals as highly skilled recreationists that share experiences with the public, forming an invaluable personal connection between public land managers and the public.

Each of these priorities would result in both immediate and lasting economic and societal benefits for communities near public lands and the nation as a whole. In addition, each of these priorities is a wise and necessary investment that will protect at-risk public assets. We ask that you consider the following relevant points:

1. **These priorities offer a wide range of jobs:** From backcountry trail crews requiring physical stamina, to engineers requiring years of higher education, the priorities we are suggesting provide a full range of job opportunities. Thus, these projects offer work for a broad cross section of citizens.

2. **These priorities offer construction related jobs:** Many of the jobs relating to public lands infrastructure are within the hard-hit construction field. These jobs include heavy equipment operators, engineers, architects, surveyors, landscapers, and general contractors.

3. **These priorities bolster the recreation economy:** Outdoor recreation is a $730 billion industry in the US, and the vast majority of outdoor recreation occurs on public lands. These priorities will enhance recreation opportunities and in turn the recreation economy. The economic benefits of these actions are significant in both the manufacturing of outdoor equipment and products, and also in the nature-based tourism economies of countless and often rural communities. It is our belief that high quality infrastructure, landscapes, and management result in

high quality recreational experiences and in turn increased participation in human-powered outdoor recreation.

4. **These priorities avert economic and ecological risks:** Many roads and other infrastructure elements require maintenance to prevent failure – and failure can have massive impacts requiring costly remediation. Getting to work on the sizable backlog of basic maintenance and in some cases decommissioning of public land infrastructure is a good and needed investment. Doing so will protect the landscapes, water, and recreation that define our public lands, and protect our nation from future, much larger management expenses. Taking these actions is analogous to putting a new roof on your house to avoid major water damage – and by all accounts there are already some leaks in the old roof.

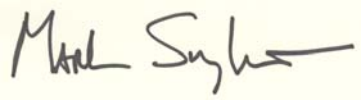
5. **These priorities can happen right away:** There is certainly no shortage of work to be done, and it is our understanding that agencies have active lists of projects in need of implementation. Unlike some agency actions, infrastructure maintenance and enhancements are generally noncontroversial and in fact popular with the public. Therefore agencies should be able to complete the planning and implementation of such projects in short order. In the parlance of the day, what we have recommended is "shovel ready."

6. **These priorities have additional societal value:** Protection and enjoyment of our American landscapes are core values of our nation. In addition to their inherent and iconic value, public lands provide human-powered outdoor recreation opportunities that foster public health, childhood development, an invaluable connection with nature, and other quality of life benefits. We believe that investing in our public lands is money well spent.

In conclusion, we feel that offering federal land management agencies significant economic stimulus funds for the priorities that we have listed above will have an immediate and lasting positive impact to the United States economy. We feel that the funding levels suggested at today's hearing by the witnesses (Roughly $2-3.5 billion each for BLM and USFS per year, and roughly $1.5 billion for the NPS) represent reasonable balances between the agencies' needs and their capacities.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Sincerely,



Mark Singleton: Executive Director, American Whitewater; Chairman, Outdoor Alliance
Brady Robinson: Executive Director, Access Fund
Martin Bartels: Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Greg Miller: Executive Director, American Hiking Society
Mike Van Abel: Executive Director, International Mountain Bicycling Association
Mark Menlove, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance