

Chairman Senator Joe Manchin's Opening Statement

Thursday, December 2, 2021

Full Committee Hearing On Outdoor Recreation Legislation

- The committee will come to order.
- This morning we are here to discuss nine bills related to outdoor recreation.
- I want to commend the sponsors of the bills on today's agenda for exploring innovative ways to improve outdoor recreation opportunities and for seeking to help both the public and the businesses that serve them.
- I am especially proud to have partnered with Ranking Member Barrasso on the *Outdoor Recreation Act*, and I will talk about our bill in more detail shortly.
- But first, I want to acknowledge that we will have Senator Luján joining us this morning to speak about his bill, and I welcome him to the Committee.
- Let me begin by saying outdoor recreation has been a powerful economic driver in states across the country—and West Virginia is no exception.
- I have seen firsthand the jobs that the outdoor recreation economy has brought to rural areas in West Virginia.
- The outdoor recreation industry generates 1.8 percent of my state's gross domestic product (GDP) and supports over 18,000 jobs.

- And almost three percent of our workforce is now employed in the outdoor recreation sector, having earned \$641 million in salaries last year.
- However, the COVID-19 pandemic has particularly impacted the outdoor recreation industry.
- According to a recent Department of Commerce report, employment rates generally across the US dropped 5% from 2019 to 2020, but outdoor recreation-related employment decreased 17.1%.
- As we discuss legislation this morning, I believe we must keep in mind how the ideas in these bills can help grow the \$374.3 billion annual contribution that outdoor recreation makes to the economies in rural America.
- Now, our Committee has talked at length about making it easier for people to enjoy our Nation's treasures—in a responsible way—as well as the importance of the outdoor recreation economy.
- That is exactly the reason why Ranking Member Barrasso and I introduced the *Outdoor Recreation Act*.
- Our bill enjoys the support of dozens of groups, including the Outdoor Alliance, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, local businesses—like Water Stone Outdoors in West Virginia, and by over twenty national outdoor recreation associations—from the RV Industry Association to the Motorcycle Industry Council.

- The *Outdoor Recreation Act* authorizes agencies like the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior to accept money from outside organizations that want to invest in outdoor recreation infrastructure on Federal lands.
- It also contains proactive measures related to climbing, biking, and target shooting on Federal land.
- These are common sense ways to improve the public's experience as they recreate on public lands.
- All of the bills before the Committee today seek to address recreation and resource management from different angles.
- Senator Heinrich's bill would assist those leading backpacking trips on Federal land.
- Senator Hickenlooper's bill would help to fund parks in urban areas.
- Senator Wyden's bill proposes to establish a system of National Recreation Areas.
- I'll remind everyone that West Virginia was actually home to the first National Recreation Area, designated in 1965 – the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area.
- Senator Cortez Masto's bill would help recreation organizations better serve under-resourced and low-income communities.
- Ranking Member Barrasso's bills would help the hunting community.

- The nine bills on today's agenda all have a common theme: facilitating people's ability to enjoy our public lands while supporting jobs and local economies.
- With that, I want to thank the witnesses for being here today to help us get a better understanding of the bills before us.
- Following this hearing, Ranking Member Barrasso and I, along with our colleagues, will get to work preparing a bipartisan recreation package that we can report out of this Committee.
- With that, I'll turn it over to Ranking Member Barrasso for his opening statement.