



**Opening Statement  
Oversight Hearing on Outdoor Recreation  
Chairman Lisa Murkowski  
March 14, 2019**

Good morning, everyone. The Committee will come to order. We're here today to focus on recreation on our nation's incredible public lands. This is a fun topic, one that should allow us to cover some things that we all enjoy, everything from guided bear hunts to four-wheeling and rock climbing.

In terms of timing I don't think we could have timed this any better. Just two days ago, the Senate was able to work with the House and the President on Tuesday signed our bipartisan lands package into law, marking the end of a years-long efforts. And, again I thank and acknowledge the great work of the Committee, certainly the strong support and assistance from Senator Cantwell to get us there and Senator Manchin, but really – Senator Heinrich – so many who were up to their eyeballs in the discussions, the negotiations and the assists, so greatly appreciated.

The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act is now law and – as its name suggests – it does promote recreation. One of the most significant provisions for that purpose is that the permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. That provides a minimum of 40 percent to the state-side program, and requires that at least three percent of funding or \$15 million – whichever is greater – be used to increase recreational public access.

Our lands package also ensures that BLM and Forest Service lands are “open” unless specifically “closed” to hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting. This is something I worked on, Senator Heinrich worked on, with the sportsmen and sportswomen for almost a decade.

Our lands package also protects some of our most treasured landscapes and waterways across the West for future generations of recreationists to enjoy. I would like to again thank President Trump for signing our bill. And I thank all of the members and staff from both sides of the aisle in both chambers for their hard work to make sure it reached the finish line. Senator Daines, you've just come in, I've been acknowledging the good work of so many. The work that you and Senator Gardner did on our side to help shepherd it was greatly appreciated.

The lands package is a victory for all of us, I think it's a victory for the country. But, we also recognize that there is more work to be done, which is why we are here today to focus on opportunities to improve access, infrastructure, and permitting for outdoor recreation.

We're seeing more and more folks who just want to be outside and be active in our National Parks, they want to be out there in our Forests, Refuges, and on our BLM lands. That's all great. We know firsthand in Alaska how recreating on public lands, including state lands, can enhance communities and foster economic development in rural areas. If colleagues have not looked at the committee background memo

that outlines the significant economic impact that we have from this industry and the opportunities that then come to us. The Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, the economic analysis from the Bureau there, shows that in 2016 outdoor recreation generated \$412 billion, accounted for 2.2% of U.S. GDP and grew at a rate of 1.7%. Those are real numbers, those are real economic benefits, particularly into some of our smaller and more remote areas.

But as the number of visitors increases, the strain is visible on our trail systems, roads, campgrounds, and even bathrooms. The maintenance backlog on our public lands is significant, totaling about \$21.5 billion across Interior and Forest Service lands.

Competing land designations make it difficult to provide adequate access for motorized and non-motorized recreation. Another matter that we hear a lot is that special recreation permits are way far too long to be processed. We had a situation in the Chugach National Forest, there was a guide who wanted to offer an opportunity for people to go ice fishing, so this is a pretty low key operation. He was told that there was a moratorium on permit applications and to check back in seven years. Seven years for a permit to take folks ice fishing. That is unacceptable.

Rather than encouraging individuals and small business to use our lands, federal bureaucracy and a lack of resources and capacity are often times making it difficult to respond to the increasing and diverse needs of recreationists and to provide that quality visitor experience.

So what I hope we will accomplish today is to hear from those on the ground who have encountered these issues. I want to start identifying fixes that can be implemented – whether it's through administrative action or legislation – to ensure that federal lands are open for these incredible recreation experiences and continue to be a source of economic prosperity.

I'm pleased to be able to welcome Dan Kirkwood, who is Co-Chair of the Visitor Products Cluster Working Group at the Juneau Economic Development Council, to speak about the tourism that we are seeing in southeast Alaska. And, really how tourism is impacting the local economy and the infrastructure on the Tongass National Forest. Thank you for making the long trip back.

We also have:

- Mr. Whit Fosburgh, President and CEO of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership;
- Dr. Thomas O'Keefe who is the Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director for American Whitewater;
- Jeffrey Lusk, the Executive Director of the Hatfield McCoy Regional Recreation Authority in West Virginia; and
- Ms. Sandra Mitchell, who is representing both the Idaho State Snowmobile Association and the Idaho Recreation Council.

So, good panel for discussion here this morning, we thank you all for being here. I will now turn to Ranking Member Manchin for his comments.

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