

# **Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation (SOAR) Act**

*Improving the permitting process for outfitters, guides and other outdoor leaders on public lands*

## Issue Background:

- **Americans Recreate on Public Lands:** Our public lands are where locals and visitors alike go to fill their freezers with elk or wild turkey, camp under the stars, focus their binoculars on a sought-after bird, bike on challenging single track, or cast a fly in a trout stream.
- **Outdoor Recreation Spurs Economic Activity:** Our public lands support the \$887 billion outdoor recreation economy that directly sustains 7.6 million American jobs — many in rural communities, where new economic activity can be spurred by improving access to outdoor recreation opportunities. Policies that invest in and increase access to the outdoors will ensure that the outdoor economy continues to grow and thrive.
- **Difficult Permitting Process for Outdoor Leaders:** As outdoor leaders and businesses increasingly participate in this outdoor recreation economy, the permitting processes to conduct recreation activities on public lands remains difficult and inconsistent across federal agencies.

Bill Highlights: The Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation Act streamlines and improves the recreational permitting process for federal agencies:

- **Improves the process for issuing recreation permits** by directing the agencies to eliminate duplicative processes, reduce costs, shorten processing times and simplify environmental review.
- **Increases flexibility for outfitters, guides and other outdoor leaders** by allowing them to engage in activities that are substantially similar to the activity specified in their permit.
- **Makes more recreation opportunities available** by directing the agencies to offer more short-term permits and create a program for sharing unused permit service days between permit holders.
- **Increases system transparency** by directing agencies to notify the public when new recreation permits are available and requiring the agencies to provide timely responses to permit applicants.
- **Simplifies the permitting process for trips involving more than one land management agency** by authorizing the agencies to issue a single joint permit covering the lands of multiple agencies.
- **Reduces permit fees and cost recovery expenses for small businesses and organizations** by excluding certain revenue from permit fee calculations and establishing a simple 50-hour cost recovery fee exemption for permit processing.
- **Provides new protections for Forest Service permit holders** by recognizing seasonal demand fluctuations and waiving permit use reviews in extraordinary circumstances beyond the control of the permit holder (wildfire, etc.).
- **Helps control liability insurance costs for permit holders** by allowing them to use liability release forms with their clients.
- **Reduces barriers to access for state universities, city recreation departments, and school districts** by waiving the permit indemnification requirement for entities that are prohibited from providing indemnification under state law.