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Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Praises Inclusion of Wildfire Funding Reform in Omnibus Spending Bill

Washington, D.C. (March 26, 2018) – The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) today celebrated the passage of wildfire funding reform as part of the FY18 Omnibus Spending Bill. This new legislation will support long-term wildfire mitigation practices and safeguard important forest programs including recreation, ensuring Americans continue to have access to healthy, active outdoor recreation on their public lands.

“ORR is delighted with the inclusion of wildfire funding reform in the Omnibus Bill,” said Derrick Crandall, ORR President. “We support comprehensive wildfire funding solutions paired with reasonable forest management reforms that reduce wildfire risk. This solution ends borrowing from non-wildfire programs and reductions in recreation and fisheries programs, projects and infrastructure that have impaired visitor access and enjoyment.”

Wildfire costs have risen out of control, constraining other federal agency efforts and jeopardizing public lands recreation programs and projects vital to an outdoor recreation industry that accounts for 2% of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product and \$673 billion in Gross Output [according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis](#).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that wildfire suppression costs [surpassed \\$2.3 billion this year](#), with more than 8.5 million acres burned. In addition to the tragic loss of lives and homes, vital recreation infrastructure has been destroyed. Fire suppression activities continue to rise as a percentage of the U.S. Forest Service’s (USFS) budget. This rise has reduced investments in trails, campgrounds and other recreation infrastructure, much of which needs modernization and expansion. Mid-year borrowing from recreation construction and operation accounts to meet firefighting costs has forced reductions in Congressionally-approved agency recreation efforts, adversely impacting the experiences of millions and having harmful consequences for gateway communities. Even where Congressional action has provided some repayment of borrowed recreation funds, delays in construction and maintenance have added costs and disappointed forest visitors.

USFS reports that 80 million acres of its forest lands are at high risk of catastrophic fire. This risk can be reduced with proactive forest management, but the increasing cost of firefighting has cut this management and other non-fire programs. In the last two decades, the number of USFS employees has dropped from 19,000 to 11,000 while the number of firefighters has doubled. The agency anticipates that it might expend more than 66% of its budget to firefighting by 2021, compared to 16% in 1995.

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable is the nation’s premier coalition of outdoor recreation trade associations. Our membership consists of organizations that represent thousands of American businesses that manufacture outdoor recreation equipment, vehicles and gear as well as entities that provide services and representation to outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Collectively, we advocate for policies that will increase participation in outdoor recreation activities, conserve America’s public lands and enhance infrastructure to improve the experience for outdoor enthusiasts everywhere.

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