

Senator Wyden Outdoor Recreation Bill
Discussion Draft Outline for Feedback
Senator Wyden
October 2015

Title I - Modernizing Recreation Permitting - Getting more people outdoors faster

Sec. 101: Special Use Permitting for Recreation Guides

This section streamlines the special use permitting process for outfitter guides, non-profits, or other groups leading recreation tours covering all land management agencies (Forest Service, Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife). A new reservation and payment system is established that recognizes the hardship upfront-payment for the entire season puts on outfitters and guides. The new system allows payment over manageable intervals based on actual use. This section also adds a provision allowing guides to sell the permits back to the Forest Service if they can't use them due to certain circumstances like low river levels or wildfires; permits being sold back won't impact future permit levels for those guides or impact historical data. This section would also direct agencies to adopt a consistent and uniform permitting process that is transparent and crosses agency district boundaries as well as across inter-agency jurisdictional boundaries.

Sec. 102: All Access Recreation Pass for Regular People

This section creates a program where all state and federal recreation passes are available together as one pass that can be used at all state and federal parks and public lands. A certain percentage of these passes would be made available to low income families or families with children enrolled in Title I schools. The passes would come with educational information about how to access and utilize the public lands. The agencies would be required to build on and develop materials or curriculum for schools to teach kids about the nearby public land, what to do on the lands, and encourage field trips to the public lands.

Sec. 103: Online purchases of National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass for Everyone

This section would require agencies to allow people to obtain passes and permits online with a standardized application form approved by the Secretaries. The current system of purchasing passes isn't uniform and not all are accessible online. Requiring online purchases as an option will improve access to federal lands. This section could also initiate a competition for a mobile app that would allow a recreational user to obtain permits electronically, the way you can a plane or train ticket, and to pay at trail heads electronically, the way you do with a parking meter.

Sec. 104: Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act to Increase the Retention of Public Lands Revenue for Public Lands Purposes

Modeled after the USDA FSMIP program, this section amends the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act to include ski area term permit fees, and all term permits that have a nexus to recreation, including recreation residences, resorts, organizational camps, etc. under the definition of recreation fees. These fees go into a special account so that the funds can be accessed by the land management agency without further appropriation from Congress.

Title II - The Multiplier Effect

Sec. 201: Labor Statistics

Requires the Bureau of Labor Statistics to collect information on the impact of recreation on the broader economy and local economies.

Sec. 202: Communities Supporting Public Lands Marketing Improvement Program

This section creates a program administered by U.S. Economic Development Administration that provides funds to state agencies or gateway communities to assist in exploring new or expanded recreation opportunities, particularly in rural areas.

Sec. 203: Conveyance of National Forest System land under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act

Under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act the BLM may sell or lease public lands for recreational or other public purposes to a state or local government or to a qualified nonprofit organization. This bill would extend the authority to the Forest Service to include national forest lands.

Sec. 204: Expanding Seasonal Recreation Opportunities

Establishes a program where land management agencies identify areas where recreation use is highly seasonal and incorporate ideas for expanding the duration of the recreation season. This analysis would take place as a part of the regular process of revising the associated land management plans.

Sec. 205: Communities Relying on Public Lands for their Local Economies Deserve More Federal Agency Cooperation

This section directs the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to work closely with communities that rely on those public lands as local economic drivers when the agencies are developing land use or transportation plans, programs, or regulations, or any other management policies for federal lands under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, the United States Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management that could significantly impact these local communities.

Sec. 206: Shifting the Definition of Success in the Forest Service

The current measure of professional success for a national forest supervisor is how many board feet he or she puts up for sale, which means that forest managers focus on timber rather than the many other uses of a forest. This bill changes that success metric to include recreational use, within relevant parameters, as a metric for measuring how well a forest supervisor is doing.

Sec. 207: Recreation Land-Use Designation for Front-Country Use

The bill creates a new land management designation: Front-Country Use, similar to the Wild and Scenic Rivers designation, that is based on the recreational value of an area and the protections and enhancements needed to encourage and support recreation on those lands. This would focus on “front country” areas accessible to urban areas and valued for their current and potential recreation uses.

Sec. 208: Recreation Mission

This section amends the organic acts of the Bureau of Land Management, Army Corps of Engineers, and Bureau of Reclamation to elevate recreation to be a priority if it isn't already a stated priority, like it is for the Forest Service in the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960.

Title III - Maintenance of Public Land

Sec. 301: Streamlining Recreation Projects

The bill, based on the categorical exclusions for certain timber sales, creates a categorical exclusion for short trails or recreational opportunities of 70 acres or less.

Sec. 302: Private-Sector Volunteer Enhancement Program

The agencies are directed to develop criteria for trail maintenance leadership that would allow certain groups or individuals to be deputized and certified to lead trail maintenance projects on federal lands. The purpose of this section is to promote private-sector volunteer programs within the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to enhance stewardship of the resources, values, and facilities of the Federal land managed by the Federal land management agencies.

Sec. 303: Priority Trail Maintenance

This section sets up a priority trail maintenance program to increase trail maintenance on a certain number of priority landscapes selected by the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture based on use or potential use. Trail systems that have received local support are examples of trails that should be prioritized in the program. It also allows the creation of interagency recreational projects to ensure that trails that cross jurisdictional boundaries are managed and maintained in a coordinated and uniform manner.

Sec. 304: Public Lands Service Corp Act Amendments

This section would expand upon the Public Lands Service Corps, a program that supports crews aged 16-25 who work on transportation, infrastructure, and conservation projects on our public lands. By offering greater incentives, the program can recruit new participants and expand its reach. The Public Lands Service Corps solves multiple problems – it creates jobs while also increasing the resources available to improve the health of our public lands and tackle the substantial public lands maintenance backlog.

Title IV - Funding Public Land Enhancements

Sec. 401: Recreation Infrastructure Grant Program

This section creates a grant program to fund projects that would address recreation bottlenecks. In some places, this means increasing the capacity of infrastructure to handle a popular recreation destination. In others, it means creating the infrastructure to allow for the recreational use to occur at all. This program would be similar to TIGER grants where the state or county would apply for grant funding and the federal government selects the project that receive grants, but these grants would be solely used for recreation infrastructure such as recreation access roads or bridges.

Sec. 402: Bureau of Land Management Foundation

This section would establish, based on the National Park Foundation, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the National Forest Foundation, a Bureau of Land Management Foundation to help the BLM leverage private funding to support public lands. It would be established as a charitable, non-profit organization to benefit the public by protecting and restoring the natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources managed by the BLM.

Sec. 403: National Park Endowment

This section would create an endowment with the purpose of funding National Park maintenance. The funds from the endowment would go to the Treasury which would manage the money for the Park Service. Funding under the endowment would be mandatory and in addition to funds appropriated by Congress.