

**Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK) Testimony to the House Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Re: EXPLORE Act Implementation
January 21, 2026**

On behalf of the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK), a national strategic partnership of more than 120 organizations from the private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors dedicated to creating access to nature and recreation for children, youth and families of every community from across the country, I would like to thank the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands—and specifically Committee Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman as well as Subcommittee Chair Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse—for this opportunity to share OAK's thoughts on the implementation of the EXPLORE Act to date.

EXPLORE's bipartisan passage, which built on the landmark Great American Outdoors Act that was introduced by the late Congressman John Lewis and signed into law by President Trump, marked a strong commitment by Congress to make America a leader in the drive to get people outdoors, engaged in healthy physical activity, and able to enjoy the beauty and benefits of being in our natural world. Over the last year, partners across the federal government and in the nonprofit sector have worked for the robust implementation of the many initiatives, programs, and policies contained within this legislation.

And while we are pleased with the progress that has been made across many fronts to execute the EXPLORE Act's bold goals, we must acknowledge that obstacles to the bill achieving its full potential have arisen. Our goal today, one we think is shared by many members of the House Natural Resources Committee, as well as the broader public, is to identify those steps which ought to be taken to ensure full compliance with the law and expeditious implementation of its many provisions which will benefit the large—and rapidly growing—outdoor recreation community.

We would like to acknowledge the incredible hard work and dedication of the many federal employees whose efforts have been critical to the implementation of this legislation so far. However, we must also highlight the fact that the reductions in agencies' workforces over the last year, especially in the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service are the most critical of the aforementioned obstacles to the EXPLORE Act's efficient implementation.

This bill requires each of these agencies to undertake reforms that will enhance the management of our public lands and create a better visitor experience. These changes require dedicated and knowledgeable staff who will oversee and execute these initiatives. When the U.S. Forest Service or National Park Service lacks the personnel to process permits or maintain trails, the primary victims are the children and families our coalition represents, who find the gates to nature effectively closed.

Congress has seen the necessity of funding the agencies in a manner that is consistent with the fulfillment of the mission contained within the EXPLORE Act. We hope that the agencies will use

the necessary funds to achieve adequate staffing levels for this work and that both branches can work together for the betterment of our public lands administration and the enjoyment of the people who visit them. A sustained, consistent, and predictable investment in the federal workers who help protect our public lands legacy is critical to ensuring the long-term success of the EXPLORE Act and the legacy of all those lawmakers who helped advance it during its extraordinary journey through the halls of Congress.

OAK wants to once again thank all those members of Congress who worked diligently to procure the passage of this landmark bill. And we encourage those members to continue demonstrating their leadership on this issue by ensuring that the relevant federal agencies have the resources and capability to implement the law as it was intended.

We thank you for your time and attention to this matter and look forward to working with your offices in the future on ways to enhance and improve this law.