

TESTIMONY ON H.R. 3400 – THE RECREATION NOT RED TAPE ACT
October 12, 2017

For consideration by the United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Federal Lands

Submitted by Matt Wade, Advocacy Director
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October 12, 2017

The Honorable Tom McClintock
Chairman
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2331 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Colleen Hanabusa
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
238 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 3400 – The Recreation Not Red Tape Act

Dear Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and Members of the Subcommittee,

The American Mountain Guides Association respectfully submits this testimony for inclusion in the public record regarding the Recreation Not Red Tape Act (H.R. 3400).

The American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA) represents the interests of the American mountain guiding community, which includes over 4,000 climbing and skiing guides who provide inspiring and educational facilitated outdoor experiences for the public on public lands. Our membership spans all 50 states and includes outfitters and guides who have been operating on public lands since the inception of the modern commercial recreation permitting system. We have extensive experience with public land management systems, philosophies, and permitting, and we welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the Recreation Not Red Tape Act.

The Recreation Not Red Tape Act enhances recreation opportunities for all Americans through thoughtful, bi-partisan legislation. We strongly support the following provisions in this bill that:

- Streamline the outfitter-guide permitting systems of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to reduce unnecessary red tape in the permitting process.
- Establish a system of National Recreation Areas that are protected and managed primarily for the recreational, social, and health benefits people receive through outdoor recreation. Such a system will reinforce the important role of outdoor recreation on our public lands and for the first time provide specific legislative provisions designed to protect and enhance outdoor recreation.

- Add recreation to the mission of the Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and the Department of Transportation to ensure the recreation opportunities located within these jurisdictions are accounted for in planning processes.
- Make recreation access easier for all Americans by making it possible to purchase federal and state recreation passes at one location in the same transaction, or online; and by improving access to outdoor recreation opportunities and programs for veterans and service members.
- Include recreation performance metrics in land manager evaluations to enhance the outdoor experience of visitors and advance recreation and tourism goals.
- Promote private-sector volunteer programs to enhance stewardship and support the maintenance of resources such as trails and facilities.

Additionally, as an industry that creates jobs that contribute to the nation's \$887 billion recreation economy, we appreciate that in this bill Congress acknowledges outdoor recreation and the outdoor recreation economy as vital to the United States.

Modernizing Recreation Permitting

Of particular importance, AMGA would like to emphasize the value of modernizing the outfitter and guide permitting process. For decades, our membership has navigated a convoluted and unpredictable permit system that impedes economic growth and limits opportunities for the public to enjoy their public lands with a guide. With different fees, deadlines, and operating plan requirements for different agencies (and even between neighboring districts within the same agency), the permitting system has discouraged existing businesses from expanding and has created roadblocks for the creation of new businesses. The Recreation Not Red Tape Act takes meaningful steps to improve this system and increase opportunities for facilitated outdoor recreation. Allowing joint BLM and Forest Service permits to be issued through a single cross-jurisdictional application will substantially reduce paperwork and administrative time, freeing agency resources for more responsiveness to permit requests and better management of existing permits. The establishment of a consistent application process and deadlines amongst agencies, and common outreach materials, will help expedite the permitting process for outfitters and guides so they can focus their efforts on improving visitor experiences and growing the outdoor recreation economy. The creation of an online permit application and renewal system will further streamline the permitting process and compliment the positive outcomes mentioned above. For these reasons, we strongly support the provisions in the bill that offer these improvements that modernize the recreation permitting system.

To advance the process of improving the permitting system, we recommend outfitter and guide stakeholder groups such as the AMGA be included in the review of the permitting system (Section 101 (2)(B)) to help identify opportunities for improved efficiencies and streamlining. We welcome the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee in this review process.

The AMGA would also like to show our strong support for Section 305 that identifies and protects a system of National Recreation Areas (NRAs). While current land management planning processes include designations for Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers, there is no analogous designation that provides guidance for recreationally significant areas. The NRA provision will provide this guidance to ensure recreation opportunities are protected and enhanced in areas that possess remarkable recreation values. We believe this will be of unique importance to front country recreation areas that often hold outstanding recreation opportunities but have limited protection. Moreover, we support Section (a)(1)(B)(iv)) that acknowledges the importance of scenic, wildlife, and other natural values that are essential to high quality recreation experiences.

While we support H.R. 3400 overall, we have concerns with Section 304 that seeks to establish a ski area fee retention account. We are not opposed to National Forests retaining ski area fees on the Forest in which they were generated; however, we are concerned that this bill restricts the use of those funds to ski area development and other ski area related activities. The AMGA would prefer to see those funds unrestricted and available for broader recreational purposes such as special use permitting and the maintenance of all types of recreation infrastructure. Furthermore, we are concerned that the retention of ski area fees will ultimately reduce appropriated funding for a broad array of recreational activities that serve a diversity of public interests.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective on H.R. 3400, the Recreation Not Red Tape Act. Although we have concerns with the ski area fee retention provision, we support the majority of the bill and we look forward to working toward its passage.

Sincerely,



Alex Kosseff
Executive Director
American Mountain Guides Association



Matt Wade
Advocacy Director
American Mountain Guides Association