

Prepared Testimony of
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Chairwoman Landrieu, Ranking Member Murkowski, and Members of the Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. My name is Joel Webster, and I am the Director of the Center for Western Lands at the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, a national conservation organization that is working to guarantee every American quality places to hunt and fish. We work with 36 partner organizations that represent the wide spectrum of the hunting and fishing community.

America’s natural resources are the ‘infrastructure’ of a robust outdoor recreation economy, one that (according to a 2012 Outdoor Industry Association report) accounts for \$646 billion in direct consumer spending and more than 6 million jobs. Never has the phrase “Made in the USA” been so accurate – American jobs and industries rely on America’s natural resources. They cannot be exported, but they do run the risk of being downsized if investments into conservation and access are not prioritized.

Hunting and fishing activities are not only a valued part of America’s heritage but a significant contributor to the outdoor economy. 37 million Americans hunt and fish and spend \$58 billion annually. While recreational activities like hunting and fishing might appear to be expendable or mere pastimes, they are vital everyday activities to those communities that rely on that business. To the tackle shop owner in Cocodrie, Louisiana who sells bait, ice and fuel, fishing is not a pastime – it will send a kid to college. For the outfitter based in Fairbanks, Alaska who relies on booking trips for caribou hunts, hunting is not expendable – it pays the mortgage.

I’d like to share a quick personal story. In 1961, my grandfather and a friend hired a public lands outfitter who took them on the hunting trip of their lives. On this trip, my grandfather traveled into the Bridger-Teton National Forest in Wyoming where he harvested a bull elk, a buck mule deer and a bear. He wasn’t a rich man, but between all the goods and services his trip required, he spent a significant amount of his hard-earned money. Years later, my father would allocate his discretionary income to

fund his own public lands hunting and fishing adventures. Fortunately, I became the lucky recipient of a long-standing and sustainable hunting and fishing tradition. I've been able to spend the past thirty years of my life hunting with my father, friends and colleagues. Last year, for a two month hunting season, I spent about \$3,500 on fuel, licenses, food and hunting gear. When you look at the big picture, the recreational activity of 37 million individual hunters and anglers adds up quickly.

These benefits do not stop with direct consumer spending and jobs. These activities generate \$39.9 billion in federal tax revenue and \$39.7 billion in state and local taxes. In fact, sportsmen have long understood the intersection between conservation and hunting and fishing. Through the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson federal excise taxes on guns, ammunition, fishing tackle, boats and fuel which are invested back into our natural resources, sportsmen have been paying their own way for the better part of a century. Which leads me to a bigger point: conservation of our natural resources is the critical first step in maintaining the vitality of the hunting and fishing economy.

Our natural resources take many forms, but a tangible example for me as a Westerner is the value of our federal public lands. These lands help drive the economic engines of rural communities and are where the large majority of western sportsmen hunt. According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, 72% of all hunters from the Pacific- and Mountain-West hunt on public lands. Each summer and fall, sportsmen crowd towns like Meeker, Colorado; Elko, Nevada; Salmon, Idaho; Cody, Wyoming; and La Grande, Oregon to hunt and fish, and they happily spend their hard earned money on vehicles, sporting goods, food, fuel, lodging, outfitters and guides. These sportsmen and the local economies depend on public lands for hunting and fishing.

Just as conservation of our resources is paramount, ensuring access to these places is also a necessity. There needs to be a commitment to providing public access to public lands. A 2004 report to the House Appropriations Committee concluded that more than 35 million acres of BLM and US Forest Service land had inadequate access. Proposed legislation such as Making Public Lands Public and the HUNT Act, would dedicate 1.5% of the Land and Water Conservation Fund—an important program in itself—to provide public access to currently landlocked public lands.

In closing, \$646 billion in direct consumer spending and more than 6 million American jobs rely on the conservation and responsible management of our natural resources. It is vital that decision makers commit themselves to reinvesting in public access and priority fish and wildlife habitat to support the sustainable outdoor recreation economy.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to working with you on these issues moving forward. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.