

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

November 17, 2020

Senator Mike Lee

Chair, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining

361A Russell Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Senator Ron Wyden

Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining

221 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Re: Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining November 18, 2020, legislative hearing

Dear Chairman Lee and Ranking Member Wyden:

On behalf of the human powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for holding the November 18, 2020, legislative hearing to consider a number of bills of significance for our community.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

H.R. 823/S. 241, the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act

As outdoor recreationists passionate about the protection of the natural landscapes where we enjoy our varied pursuits, we strongly support the thoughtful protections embodied in the CORE Act. In addition to its essential protections for conservation values, the bill also protects hundreds of miles of trails, scores of



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climbing sites, more than 20 miles of whitewater paddling opportunities, and valued backcountry ski terrain.

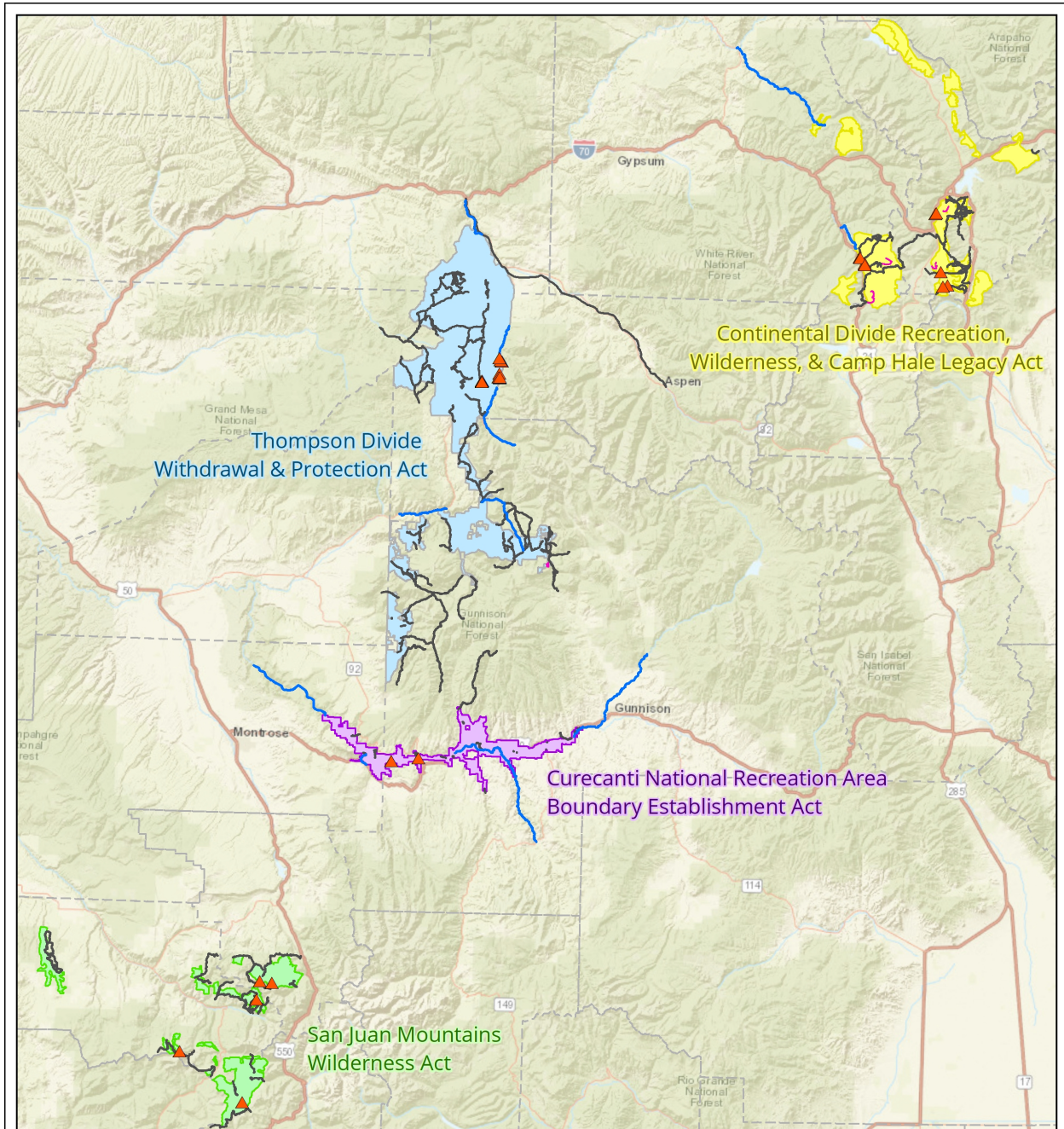
In the San Juans, the Sheep Mountain Special Management Area protects backcountry ski terrain near Lizard Head Pass and creates management for the Ophir Valley area for new mountain biking trails near the town of Ophir. The Liberty Bell and Whitehouse Wilderness additions protect world-class hiking and climbing opportunities in the iconic Mt. Sneffels range while allowing for a trail corridor for the iconic Liberty Bell/Hardrock 100 trail. In the Continental Divide bill, the Tenmile Wilderness and Recreation Management Areas provide opportunities for long ridgeline technical traverses, challenging backcountry ski terrain, and world class mountain biking, and the Spraddle Creek Wilderness addition provides a primitive backcountry area in close proximity to downtown Vail while keeping the future mountain bike extension of the North Vail Trail viable. These designations allow for a new Wilderness-urban interface which provides a unique opportunity to experience and protect these important landscapes.

All of the proposed designations in the CORE Act have been carefully vetted by recreation groups, and designations protect and enhance recreational opportunities like hiking, climbing, skiing, and mountain biking. The mineral withdrawals and resource protections in this bill further preserve the scenic and natural qualities of these landscapes.

We are particularly pleased to support legislation that designates Wilderness while also using other protective designations where more appropriate. This approach is essential, in particular, for protecting and enhancing mountain biking opportunities. Because of the collaborative approach employed in the bill's development, embracing input from local and national mountain biking stakeholders among others, the legislation enjoys broad support from the mountain biking community. This approach—embracing alternative designations where appropriate to protect both existing and prospective mountain biking opportunities—should be considered a model for other protective designation efforts around the country.



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Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act

- Continental Divide Recreation, Wilderness, & Camp Hale Legacy Act
- Curecanti National Recreation Area Boundary Establishment Act
- San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act
- Thompson Divide Withdrawal & Protection Act
- County Boundary
- Rock Climbing Site
- Whitewater Paddling River
- Backcountry Ski Trail
- Trail



0 8 Miles



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S. 4215, the Bonneville Shoreline Trail Advancement Act

Outdoor Alliance supports S. 4215, the Bonneville Shoreline Trail Advancement Act.

The BSTAA will help facilitate completion of the multiple-use 280-mile Bonneville Shoreline Trail (BST). The proposed boundary adjustments will remove 326.27 acres from Wilderness management across 19 carefully drawn areas, and these adjustments will be offset by the addition of an equal area of new Wilderness protection in Mill Creek Canyon. These adjustments will ensure bicycle access on the BST and allow for work on the trail to proceed using tools impermissible under Wilderness management. In addition to the direct benefits of the trail itself, the BST is a central component for trail planning efforts for jurisdictions across the Wasatch Front.

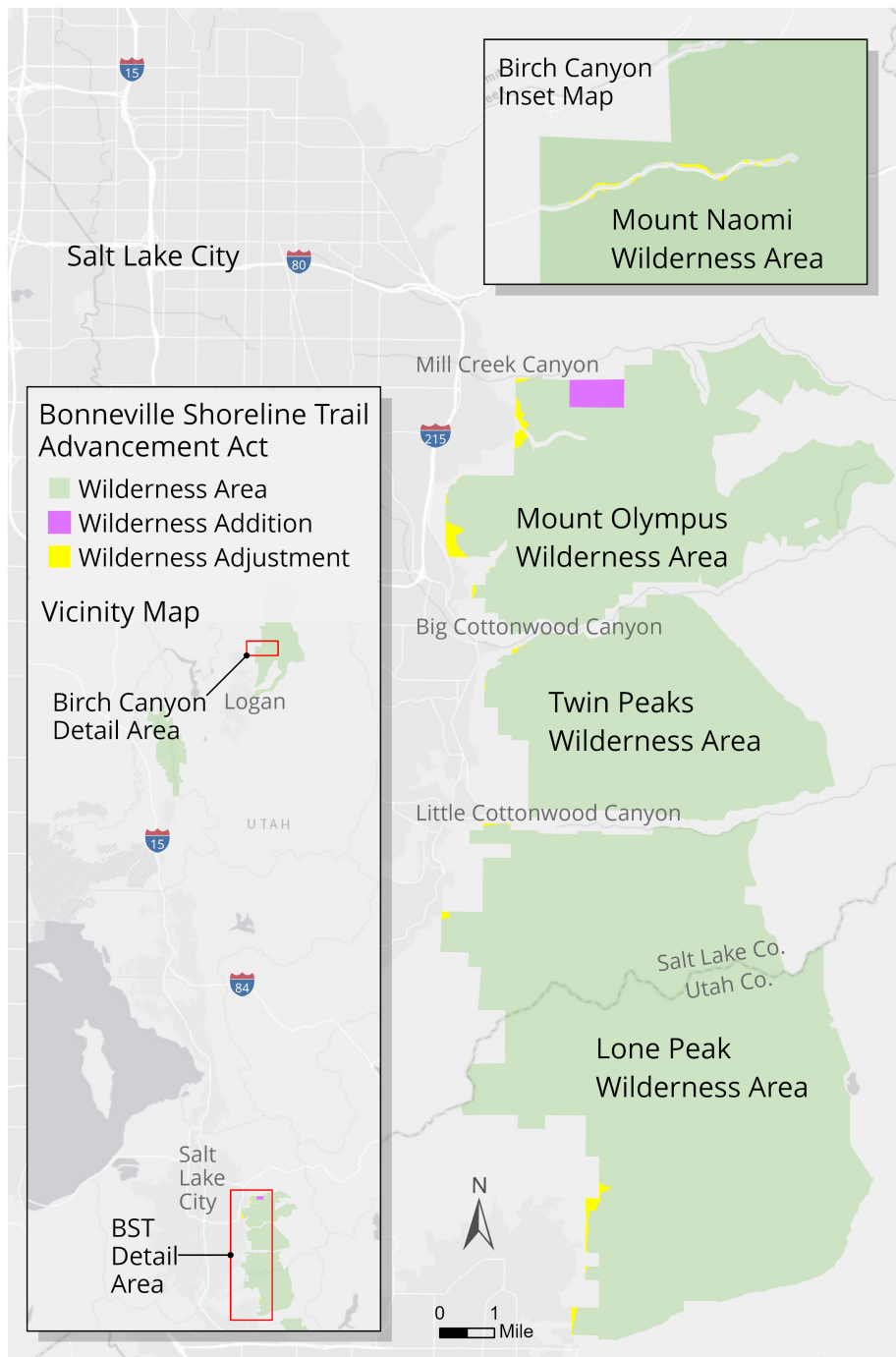
The outdoor recreation community strongly supports the Wilderness Act. An outgrowth of that support and our fundamental commitment to protection of Wilderness includes a sensitivity to the need to maintain strong public support for Wilderness protections. We believe that goal of maintaining broad public support is advanced by an openness to judicious adjustments to existing Wilderness in carefully considered settings. Common sense, modest adjustments, offset by new Wilderness additions, can be an important tool for ensuring that existing boundaries do not create insurmountable obstacles to sustainable recreation in places where relatively minor adjustments can be made without undercutting the values that animate the Wilderness Act. We believe that these conditions are met here.

Additionally, Outdoor Alliance and the outdoor recreation community remain committed to the success of the Central Wasatch Commission (CWC) and Mountain Accord process. Wilderness boundary adjustment to facilitate completion of the Bonneville Shoreline Trail has been at times a component of the CWC process, and we remain hopeful of seeing the goals of the CWC realized. Specifically, we strongly support sustainable solutions to the area's transportation needs and legislation to protect conservation values through new Wilderness designations; protect valued backcountry ski terrain from encroachment by ski area development through land exchanges; facilitate conservation of the watershed; and support sustainable access and maintenance of recreation infrastructure for dispersed human-powered outdoor recreation.



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Our support for the BSTAA is grounded in our belief that this bill represents a step forward in realizing a broader vision for conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation in the Wasatch.



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S. 1695, the Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Areas Act

Outdoor Alliance opposes S. 1695, the Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Act.

In many ways, the CORE Act represents a model for how new Wilderness designations should be achieved: through careful stakeholder input, with carefully drawn boundaries and other conservation designations also employed across a landscape scale. The BSTAA represents an appropriate approach for targeted, necessary, minor modifications to existing Wilderness, offset by new Wilderness additions, where those modifications can be made prudently and with respect for the values of the Wilderness Act.

In contrast, the Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Act proposes a highly controversial change that would create unnecessary conflict and undercut increasingly successful measures—like the CORE Act and BSTAA—that work toward sound Wilderness policy.

Since its enactment in 1964, the Wilderness Act has proven itself to be one of our country's most far-sighted laws, protecting wild places for their own sake, for their ecological importance, and for the importance to people of the opportunity to experience vast, wild landscapes. Outdoor Alliance supports the Wilderness Act wholeheartedly.

Because of the strength of Wilderness protections—as well as the importance of maintaining deep public support for this bedrock conservation law—Wilderness designations should be made carefully and with the broadest possible stakeholder engagement and support. Wilderness is best designated when it is approached collaboratively, in recognition of the full diversity of ways in which people wish to sustainably enjoy and engage with their public lands, and at a landscape scale, allowing for more flexible protective designations in some areas.

This approach has not always been followed. In recent years, mountain bikers have, at times, been left out of Wilderness designation conversations; at other times, mountain bikers have engaged in designation processes in a spirit of collaboration and compromise, but found their interests cut out at the eleventh hour. This has justifiably resulted in hard feelings, and it can be difficult to accept why a quiet,



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sustainable, human-powered activity is excluded from wide areas of public lands for reasons that can feel arbitrary or preferential.

Outdoor recreationists and the outdoor industry stand shoulder to shoulder with the conservation community in our support for the Wilderness Act. We also believe it absolutely essential that mountain bikers and others engaged in sustainable recreation activities be included in land management decision making; be afforded opportunities to enjoy their public lands, from frontcountry to backcountry; and have good reason to believe that our country's system for protecting public lands—viewed as a whole—works for them.

It is possible to accomplish these objectives without making changes to the Wilderness Act.

Foremost, our organizations believe that the solution to challenges regarding Wilderness is to protect more landscapes in ways that embrace opportunities for sustainable recreation of all types. Where Wilderness is designated, it often may be appropriate that broader contiguous landscapes be protected using designations that support a full range of sustainable recreation activities in addition to Wilderness designations. Thoughtful management may also require “cherry stemming” trails by maintaining non-Wilderness corridors in some areas. Where existing or prospective mountain biking opportunities are closed off, mitigation, by developing riding opportunities in nearby areas, should be standard. Bicycles should be managed precisely, not through careless shorthands like the often used phrase “motorized or mechanized,” which should be abandoned.

There continue to be outstanding opportunities for new Wilderness designations. Many of these designations should be pursued, however, in conjunction with alternative designations on broader landscapes, protecting opportunities for a range of outdoor recreation experiences. For some landscapes, this might mean smaller Wilderness areas than proposed as the most aggressive alternatives. Done thoughtfully and collaboratively, however, these mixed designations can provide greater ecological benefits and more opportunities for outdoor recreation and its attendant economic benefits, while building a broader base of public support and maintaining the goodwill necessary for the Wilderness Act to thrive for generations to come.



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Approaching landscapes at scale and moving away from binary decisions between Wilderness and lands managed as multiple use is also essential for providing the range of opportunities that supports the \$887 billion outdoor recreation economy. High quality recreation opportunities can occur in a range of settings, many of which deserve recreation-focused protections and management. These landscapes make invaluable contributions to clean air, clean water, and healthy wildlife populations; support gateway public lands communities and recreation economies; and allow more Americans—from urban to rural—to experience their public lands in meaningful ways that foster a sense of shared ownership and stewardship. Land managers and Congress need to employ a range of designations to meet these needs.

With these principles in mind, we believe that mountain biking opportunities can be protected and enhanced while maintaining the integrity of the Wilderness Act.

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On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for the Subcommittee's attention to the important issues reflected in this hearing, and we look forward to working with you in support of conservation and sustainable recreation opportunities.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Adam Cramer, Executive Director, Outdoor Alliance
Chris Winter, Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater
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Chad Nelson, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

