



*Empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience*

July 30, 2020

The Honorable Mark Takano  
Chairman  
House Committee on Veterans Affairs  
355 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20003

The Honorable Phil Roe  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Veterans Affairs  
355 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe:

On behalf of the American Hiking Society, our members, supporters, and the 44 million-strong hiking community nationwide, thank you for your consideration of the bipartisan Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act (H.R. 2435) during last week's hearing. We encourage the committee to quickly advance the bill through the committee and to the House floor. Across the country, veterans returning from wartime experiences turn to our hiking trails and public lands for their therapeutic benefits in assisting in the transition back to civilian life and reintegration into society.<sup>1</sup> The Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act is important to hikers, the broader outdoor recreation community, veteran service organizations, and the environmental community because it will work to expand outdoor access for our veterans.

The Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act is bipartisan legislation supported by a growing list of over 120 cosponsors, that is critical to increasing access to the outdoors for veterans under the care of the VA. Studies show a direct connection between regular opportunities for recreating in nature and improvements in vets' physical and mental wellbeing. One study found that veterans reported a greater than 10 percent improvement in psychological well-being, a 9 percent increase in social functioning, and a nearly 8 percent gain in positive life outlook after taking part in group outdoor activities.<sup>2</sup> Our veterans deserve the best care possible, including time in nature and the outdoors. The bill would create a federal task force made up of the Department of Veterans Affairs and land management agencies charged with developing recommendations to better connect veterans under the care of the VA to those opportunities. This task force will help identify any barriers among federal agencies in advancing that work, as well as ways to improve coordination across agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Warrior Expeditions, Background, <https://warriorexpeditions.org/background/>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Dep't of Veterans Affairs, Office of Research and Development, *Outdoor activities improve mental health in Veterans, study finds*, <https://www.research.va.gov/currents/winter2013-14/winter2013-14-25.cfm> (last visited July, 30, 2020). See also JASON DUVALL & RACHEL KAPLAN, PH.D., UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES ON VETERANS, REPORT PREPARED FOR THE SIERRA CLUB MILITARY FAMILIES AND VETERANS INITIATIVE (June 2013), [https://content.sierraclub.org/outings/sites/content.sierraclub.org/outings/files/SIERRA\\_REPORT\\_6\\_13\\_Exploring%20the%20benefits%20of%20outdoor%20experiences%20on%20veterans%20\(1\).pdf](https://content.sierraclub.org/outings/sites/content.sierraclub.org/outings/files/SIERRA_REPORT_6_13_Exploring%20the%20benefits%20of%20outdoor%20experiences%20on%20veterans%20(1).pdf).

Our veterans have done so much to protect this nation and we know how often they find time in nature, hiking on trails, and the outdoors to be healing. For these reasons, we respectfully ask the committee to continue the momentum of the legislation and quickly advance the bill. Please contact Tyler Ray, Director of Policy and Advocacy, [tray@americanhiking.org](mailto:tray@americanhiking.org), 301-565-6704 x705 with any questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Van Waes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Kate VanWaes  
Executive Director  
American Hiking Society