



October 6, 2023

Senator Rebecca Rausch, Chair  
Representative Daniel Cahill, Chair  
Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
State House Room 527A  
Boston, MA 02133

*Re: Support for S.488 and H.757, An Act Creating the Outdoor Recreation Program*

Dear Chair Rausch, Chair Cahill, and members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

Our organizations strongly support [S.488](#) and [H.757](#), *An Act Creating the Outdoor Recreation Program*. These identical bills would dedicate the **existing** 6.25% state sales tax on sporting goods for outdoor recreation projects and programs, generating more than \$50 million<sup>1</sup> annually to create and improve parks, community gardens, nature-based playgrounds, accessible trails, while increasing access to rivers, ponds, and lakes, and supporting activities like boating, hiking, biking, swimming, fishing, and camping. These bills also give priority consideration to projects that support underserved communities, including Environmental Justice populations, making these bills an equitable step forward to improve and grow the state's outdoor recreation economy, while supporting healthier residents, and protecting critical natural resources. The bill proposes that revenues be put in a dedicated fund to be managed and distributed by the new Office of Outdoor Recreation within the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

### **Economic Value**

Outdoor recreation is a significant driver of the Massachusetts economy, with \$9.5 billion annually in added value to the state's GDP, directly supporting 93,400 jobs, and \$5.14 billion in wages and salaries.<sup>2</sup> However, according to the U.S. Dept. of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, our state's outdoor recreation economy is shrinking when compared to other states. The analysis reports that in 2021 Massachusetts ranked 17<sup>th</sup> among all states in outdoor

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<sup>1</sup> According to Trust for Public Land, \$50 million in sporting goods sales tax revenue could support a \$600 million revenue bond.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/orsa1122.pdf>

recreation value added, and only 26<sup>nd</sup> among all states in value added growth.<sup>3</sup> Many neighborhoods are underserved by parks, trails, gardens, and safe access to rivers, lakes, and ponds. Creating a new Office of Outdoor Recreation was a critical step forward in stimulating the Commonwealth's economy, but the state needs to do more to grow this important economic sector.

### **Healthy Communities**

According to Trust for Public Land, when residents have access to safe parks and trails, they are 21% more likely to be physically active.<sup>4</sup> A 2016 national study of neighborhood parks found that the presence of outdoor recreational opportunities was associated with a rise in physical activity; while staffed programming and supervised activities increased park use by 48% and physical activity by 37%.<sup>5</sup> Projections by the state's Transportation and Climate Initiative indicated that increased bike and pedestrian trail infrastructure will result in more physical activity, generating up to \$13.5 billion in health benefits through 2032.<sup>6</sup> Green spaces not only provide opportunities for residents to improve their physical, emotional and psychological health, they also reduce heat island impacts, cooling neighborhoods and providing refuge from oppressive summer heat.

### **Climate Resilience**

Conserving, protecting, and restoring natural resources for public enjoyment also cleans water, protects habitat, and helps communities become resilient to climate change. Healthy forests, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and parks bolster the ability for watersheds and coasts to absorb floods and withstand storm surge. Nature-based solutions, including ecological restoration, strengthen fish and wildlife habitat and support diverse ecosystems. Robust parks, shade trees, and green spaces reduce the heat island effect—managing stormwater, and providing cooling shade, cleaner air, and shelter for urban neighborhoods, while creating habitats for small mammals as well as birds, bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. Urban trees, forests, gardens, and wetlands also sequester and store carbon, helping to mitigate climate change impacts.

### **Climate Mitigation**

Natural climate solutions are the only tools we have to remove carbon pollution from the atmosphere at scale, and at cost. Massachusetts' Natural and Working Lands sequester significant carbon equal to about 7% (4.6 million metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e) of the state's gross greenhouse gas emissions each year.<sup>7</sup> Land conservation, restoration, and management, as well as park creation and tree planting, enhance natural climate solutions in Massachusetts and have the potential to remove and reduce *an additional* 1-2 million metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e per year by 2030.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://apps.bea.gov/data/special-topics/orsa/summary-sheets/ORSA%20-%20Massachusetts.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tpl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/The-Power-of-Parks-to-Promote-Health-A-Trust-for-Public-Land-Special-Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> TRECH Project Preliminary Results. February 2021. <http://hsphe.me/TRECH> and <https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2343/2021/02/TRECH-SlidedeckUpdateFeb2021.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> TRECH Project Preliminary Results. February 2021. <http://hsphe.me/TRECH> and <https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2343/2021/02/TRECH-SlidedeckUpdateFeb2021.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mass.gov/lists/massdep-emissions-inventories>

<sup>8</sup> Nature4Climate, 2020. See MA state profile: <https://nature4climate.org/nature-in-action/usa/united-states-ncs-mapper>

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for *An Act Creating the Outdoor Recreation Program*. We hope you will report [S.488](#) and [H.757](#) out favorably.

If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact Linda Orel at [lorel@thetrustees.org](mailto:lorel@thetrustees.org) or Zeus Smith at [zsmith@crwa.org](mailto:zsmith@crwa.org).

Sincerely,

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Jennifer Ryan  
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