



Where Outfitters *Thrive*

March 18, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United State Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

Thank you for your diligent efforts to help the nation cope with coronavirus pandemic that is threatening economic viability of our nation.

America Outdoors represents outfitters and guides, who are seasonal recreational businesses which provide outdoor recreation services or equipment to the general public. We estimate that there are approximately 40,000 small businesses nationwide who provide these services, all of whom are affected by the current downturn. Approximately, 15,000 of these businesses operate under permit, contract or other authorization on federal lands managed by the National Park Service, the USDA Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Reclamation.

As you may suspect, the eroding economic conditions, the restrictions imposed on public gatherings, and the restrictions on air travel have all reduced reservations in our industry by over 25% and are resulting in a rising number of cancellations. Most outfitters with Spring operating seasons have partially or fully shut down, while others have delayed opening. Outfitters in state and National Parks are not certain those parks will be open. Many park operations are closing to commercial services. As a result, many outfitters are having to refund money or provide credits to their customers to the extent that is possible. Many of these businesses are at risk of default especially those whose customers are dependent upon air travel.

The industry overall has curtailed spending on equipment, marketing and recruitment of seasonal employees due this uncertainty, which will have a significant negative impact well into the season even these businesses are eventual able to open.

Therefore, we are respectfully asking you to consider:

- Ensuring that seasonal outfitters and guides are included in any financial benefit and relief package for seasonal recreational businesses, such as quick, low-interest or no interest loans;
- Allowing seasonal employers, such as outfitters and guides who employ 50 or more employees, to be exempted from the requirement for paid sick leave since the payroll tax exemption will end at the end of the season, which is generally two or three months prior to the end of the year, and limits their ability to recover those costs;

- Providing legislative authority to enable the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to provide flexibility in the administration of contracts, permits, and other authorizations that have been granted for the provision of accommodations, facilities, and/or services to visitors to lands or waters managed by the National Park Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation, or the Forest Service, in order to mitigate impacts due to COVID-19 on the holders of such authorizations and visitors, to the maximum extent possible consistent with such agencies' obligations regarding resource protection, visitor experience, and public health and safety. Such flexibility shall include, but not be limited to, fee deferrals and waivers, contract extensions, operational flexibility, and other appropriate measures to mitigate such impacts.
- Passing legislation designed to provide greater efficiency in the administration of permits for operations on federal lands such as S. 1665.
- We also support provisions that will allow deferral of mortgages and similar debt obligations during this difficult period.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Aaron Bannon". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Aaron Bannon
Executive Director