



The Outfitter Brief

News, Insights, and Advocacy from America Outdoors

August 2025

Organizational Updates

A Note from the Executive Director

Dear Members, Partners, and Friends,

While many of you have already seen me introduced through other channels, I'm grateful for the chance to address our full community here, directly, as America Outdoors' new Executive Director.

Having worked closely with outfitters, industry, and agency partners throughout my career, I know how much problem-solving, creativity, and passion this industry brings to the table. That spirit is what excites me most about stepping into this role.

AO's strength comes from connecting that collective expertise across regions and sectors. When we work together, we amplify our voice in policy, improve operations, and build a stronger future for all.

In the year ahead, we'll sharpen in key areas: meaningful and consistent communication, advocacy with follow-through, practical resources you can put to work, and stronger opportunities to connect and learn from one another. My commitment is to listen first, act with purpose, and ensure AO delivers value you can see in your business and on the landscapes we cherish.

If you missed it, I invite you to watch the recent [AO Town Hall recording](#) to hear more about what's ahead.

Aaron Lieberman

Executive Director, America Outdoors



Conference Registration is Open!

Join us December 9-12, 2025 in Salt Lake City this December for the America Outdoors Conference & Outfitter Expo! This is the premier gathering for the outfitting industry.

- Build powerful connections with peers and leaders
- Learn from industry experts in sessions designed to grow and protect your business
- Access resources that will set you up for success in the year ahead

Don't miss the chance to network, learn, and recharge with the people who understand your world best. AO Members email cshort@americaoutdoors.org for your discount code.

Register to Attend the AO Conference & Expo in SLC!

Join or Renew Your Membership Today!

America Outdoors is growing stronger every day - and we want you with us. Whether you're renewing your membership or joining for the first time, now is the perfect time to stay connected, supported, and represented.

Outfitter memberships expired on June 30th, so if you haven't renewed yet, let's keep you current! Your membership fuels our government affairs work, resources for outfitters, and the community that helps your business thrive.

[Join or Renew Now](#) to be part of shaping the future of our industry.

Need assistance? We're happy to help - just call 865-558-3595 or email cshort@americaoutdoors.org anytime.

Policy & Industry Updates



BLM Adopts 15 Categorical Exclusions (CXs) via NEPA §109

Outfitter/Recreation-Relevant Takeaways

DOI noticed adoption of multiple CXs (including USFS and TVA CXs) for BLM use under NEPA §109. Several directly relate to outfitter operations and recreation infrastructure. Key examples BLM intends to rely on include:

- **USFS 36 CFR 220.6(d)(5):** repair/maintenance of recreation sites and facilities (e.g., repairing vault toilets; maintaining campsites).
- **USFS 36 CFR 220.6(d)(12):** issuance/amendment of recreation authorizations on existing roads/trails/sites/facilities (e.g., events on designated routes, concession operations at existing campgrounds, shuttles).
- **USFS 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1):** trail construction/reconstruction (including improving accessibility to toilets, picnic tables, boat ramps).
- **USFS 36 CFR 220.6(e)(20):** restore/stabilize lands associated with roads/trails to more natural conditions.
- **USFS 36 CFR 220.6(e)(22) & (23):** infrastructure at existing recreation sites; road management up to ~8 miles.

Why it Matters: properly scoped projects—like renewing a shuttle SRP on existing roads/trails or upgrading small trail connections/accessible approaches—may move

faster if field offices apply these CXs appropriately. Bring your district early, site-specific information demonstrating “existing” settings and low impacts.



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Public Comment Alerts & Local Examples

BLM Red Rock Canyon (NV) — Competition/Business Use SRP Management Input: BLM is inviting public feedback on managing competitive and business uses at Red Rock; if you operate in Southern NV, this is a good case study to cite in comments elsewhere. [Summary Coverage](#) | [Read the EA](#)

BLM / GAOA at Five Years: DOI/BLM recap how GAOA investments are addressing maintenance and access—useful context when you advocate for trailheads, roads, docks, and site improvements. [Read More](#)

What We’ve Recently Covered

(...if you want to skip the respective updates below)

NEPA rule changes and a DOI comment opportunity were featured in July’s Advocacy Update.

USFS regional reorganization was flagged in a recent draft member update with a plain-English rundown of what could change; today’s item simply focuses on USDA’s open comment process and adds outfitter-specific input suggestions.

EXPLORE Implementation was previously addressed in an AO brief outlining core provisions and initial DOI/USDA orders; today's section simply updates agency-specific workstreams (gateway communities, connectivity, range access) and near-term actions for permittees.

Public land sale proposals and the formation of the Bipartisan Public Lands Caucus — covered in a prior AO update(s); we're tracking for any renewed push.

Roadless Rule rescission announcement (USDA) — AO summary previously published; we'll update when rulemaking/NEPA documents drop.

White House National Parks fee/access order and SUP safety alert — covered last month



USDA / USFS Reorganization:

What It Could Mean & How to Comment

USDA has opened public comment on a department-wide reorganization plan that includes significant USFS changes (consolidations and hub models have been publicly described; USDA's notice is the official vehicle for feedback). Comment deadline: August 26, 2025. Email: reorganization@usda.gov.

What's on the table (as publicly described so far)

- Transition from the traditional nine Forest Service Regions toward fewer “hub” locations and consolidated support functions—press coverage and stakeholder

analysis point to hubs such as Fort Collins and Salt Lake City, among others; the Department confirms the broader reorg is under review.

Potential impacts for outfitters & permittees

- Permit administration and customer service: centralization could shift points of contact and elongate chains of approval before the kinks are worked out.
- District-level relationships become even more critical for season-sensitive issues (trip modifications, fire closures, shuttle routing).
- Research & workforce ties: consolidations may affect local science partnerships that inform recreation, fire, and access management.

How to weigh in (concise, constructive comments perform best)

- Document specific functions that must remain responsive (e.g., SRP/OGP processing times, seasonal hiring/driver clearance windows).
- Request clear organizational charts and escalation pathways for permit issues under any new structure.
- Encourage service-level targets (e.g., 30-day amendment decisions, 14-day incident-driven adjustments).
- Urge continuity for local partnerships (trail coalitions, river managers, tourism boards) during transition.
- Provide one concrete case where a delayed decision cost revenue or reduced access—and how a hub model should prevent (not worsen) that outcome.

Note: AO is coordinating with partners tracking the proposal closely and will keep members updated as details formalize.

Recent AO newsletters have already flagged this reorg storyline for members; this item focuses on the active USDA comment opportunity and outfitter-specific input tips.

EXPLORE Act

Expanding Public Lands
Outdoor Recreation Experiences



Public lands • Access • Permits • Recreation

EXPLORE Act Implementation

What's Moving, What to Watch

AO has been in agency meetings as recently as last week to discuss implementation paths that affect permits, capacity, and review timelines. We'll share updates as agency guidance is released and will feature dedicated programming in Salt Lake City in December. Prior AO guidance on permit reviews under EXPLORE is available for context.

What this means for you (near term):

- Expect incremental guidance from DOI/USDA agencies clarifying how EXPLORE interacts with permit review steps, timelines, and waivers/assumption of risk.
- Watch for district-level communications with interim instructions; document delays or conflicts so we can flag patterns to agency leads.
- Bring your questions to our December sessions—designed around real-world permitting friction points members submit this fall.

Timeline to keep in view

- June 25, 2025: DOI issues implementation orders for EXPLORE and for gateway-community coordination.
- Summer–Fall 2025: Interagency coordination through FICOR; early site assessments and pilots begin to surface at select units for broadband/accessibility work.
- Early 2026: Initial public reporting deadlines on progress and funding; expect more unit-level details and additional implementation guidance.

Things You Can Do

- Share pain points and quick wins we can pass to agency teams (e.g., specific permit bottlenecks, campground or trailhead fixes that unlock capacity, wayfinding gaps).
- Flag provisions captured in EXPLORE (permitting and use reviews, liability, interagency coordination, inventories, Gateway Community opportunities) that would materially improve safety/operations/resource management so we can aggregate member input for NPS/USFS planners.

Read and Watch

On-the-ground pressures on public lands this summer (budget/staffing context).

[Read more.](#) (Axios Denver)

Federal land-sale proposals in NV/UT — context for earlier AO coverage.

[Read more.](#) (AP News)

USDA plan to rescind the Roadless Rule — potential impacts on backcountry recreation.

[Read more.](#) (Outdoor Alliance)

IOGA leadership news — Idaho context.

[Read more.](#) (Coeur d'Alene Press)

New recreation-grade topo maps — handy for trip planning and safety materials.

[Read more.](#) (USGS)

“Advancing a Surface Transportation” proposal — corridor/roadway implications near your ops.

[Read more.](#) (Federal Register)

Bipartisan Public Lands Caucus — caucus hub and launch coverage.

[Read more.](#) (U.S. House — Rep. Vasquez)

Zion wildlife workout — a 59-second ranger-made clip.

[Watch.](#) (National Park Service)

What's Up: August skywatching tips (Perseids, planets, easy targets).

[Watch.](#) (NASA)

Yellowstone Volcano Observatory — monthly field update video.

[Watch.](#) (USGS YVO)

Kīlauea activity — new overflight images from Halema'uma'u.

[See images.](#) (USGS HVO)

Deep-sea exploration livestream — Nautilus explores Marshall Islands seamounts.

[Watch live.](#) (Ocean Exploration Trust)

Closest-ever views near the Sun — Parker Solar Probe time-lapse.

[Watch.](#) (NASA APOD)

Everest FKT attempt — ultrarunner eyes no-O₂ speed record this fall.

[Read more.](#) (Outside Online)

Happy 81st, Smokey Bear — quick birthday feature & media.

[Read more](#). (USDA Forest Service — homepage feature)

Repairing the great outdoors — GAOA five-year project highlights (photos).

[Read more](#). (USDA Forest Service)



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