



IWV Supports the EXPLORE Act

February 1, 2024

Dear Members of Congress,

On behalf of Independent Women's Voice, I strongly applaud Representatives Bruce Westerman (R) of Arkansas and Raúl Grijalva (D) of Arizona for introducing **H.R.6492**, the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act. Independent Women's Voice fights for women and their loved ones by effectively expanding support for policy solutions that aren't just well-intended, but actually enhance people's freedom, opportunities, and well-being.

First, enhancing public target shooting range access will lead to more safe and responsible firearms use on federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Public lands must remain open and accessible to all users—including target shooters. Gun owners, like hunters, are the biggest drivers of conservation funding today under the **Pittman-Robertson Act**. Since 1937, **\$27 billion** has been dispersed to all 50 states through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's **Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program** (Pittman-Robertson Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux). Over **\$16 billion** has been generated by excise taxes collected on firearms and ammunition purchases under the Pittman-Robertson Act. Adjusted for inflation, this amount **totals** \$25 billion. Combined, these funds support wildlife conservation, habitat restoration, public target shooting ranges, and hunters education courses. A historic **\$1.6 billion** was raked in last year. Given the success of this, the Tax Foundation **dubbed** this as a "good excise tax."

Second, the proposal to enhance youth recreation opportunities on federal lands should also be welcomed. Spending time outdoors allows Americans, including young people, to relax, appreciate the natural world, and learn about true conservation practices.

Successful programs like **Every Kid Outdoors** allow fourth graders to explore 2,000 federal recreation areas—including National Parks, lands, and waters—with their families, friends, and classmates using a free annual pass. Per recent available data, nearly **186,000** kids aged under 16 participated in the program.

Third, the provision to reform film project requirements to not restrict First Amendment rights of individuals on public lands should be applauded. Low-impact filming - including social media postings - shouldn't be conflated with Hollywood productions that are high-impact and involve big crews.

The current administration is currently following guidance from a **2022 court ruling** that deemed news gathering on public lands - including social media postings - monetizable and, therefore, is **commercial** "regardless of the size of crew, or type of equipment used." This bill has reasonable reforms to not require applications and corresponding fees for low-impact filming with groups of six or fewer people.

For all these reasons, we urge Congress to work toward the swift passage of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act. IWV thanks Representatives Westerman and Grijalva for their leadership on this issue.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gabriella Hoffman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gabriella Hoffman
Director, Center for Energy and Conservation
Independent Women's Voice