

## **Title A: Outdoor Recreation: How Things Are Changing**

Subtitle A: The Rural Outdoor Investment Act has the potential to create rural economies centered on outdoor recreation. Here's what you need to know.

## **Title B: The Rural Outdoor Investment Act: What It Means for Outdoor Recreation**

Subtitle B: ROI is good for outdoor enthusiasts and even better for rural communities.

## **Title C: The Rural Outdoor Investment Act: What You Need to Know**

Subtitle C: This bipartisan bill could represent a sea change for outdoor recreation and rural economies.



[Image source](#)

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was hard to see any silver linings, let alone a light at the end of the tunnel. Every day seemed to bring more bad news, and when we were in the thick of it, it often felt like there was no end in sight. Now, as the pandemic is starting to become endemic, it's apparent that some of the changes it has brought aren't necessarily negative.

For those of us in the RV and outdoor recreation industry, the silver lining of the pandemic is an increased interest in outdoor living—and unlike cloth face masks and eating outside in plastic yurts, this is a change that’s here to stay.

## COVID-19 has changed the game for outdoor recreation

While there was a brief time early in the pandemic when people on social media shamed beachgoers and picnickers, the science showed fairly quickly that the COVID-19 virus doesn’t spread outdoors the way it does in enclosed indoor spaces.

This made parks, hiking trails, and beaches the place to be for most Americans—if people wanted to get out of the house or meet with friends and family, they headed outside because indoor spaces were off-limits. Since the onset of the pandemic, [half of American adults](#) have been participating in outdoor recreation at least once a month, and about 20 percent of these participants are new to outdoor recreation. A whopping [9.6 million Americans intend to purchase an RV](#) in the next five years.

Another boon to the RV industry and outdoor recreation as a whole was the so-called “Great Resignation,” which saw millions of Americans retiring early and others simply deciding to leave the workforce. For many, this free time meant time to [travel the country in an RV](#).

Related to this, many of those who remain in the workforce are working remotely, with others choosing self-employment or freelancing. Without being tethered to an office, these workers have the freedom to relocate or [work while traveling](#).

Even once the pandemic is in the rearview mirror—if it ever is—it’s hard to see people giving up their freedom from cubicle life or returning to spending weekends on the couch watching Netflix. Research shows that outdoor recreation has a [wide range of health benefits](#), along with reducing stress. It’s easy to see why the interest in outdoor recreation isn’t going away any time soon.

## The impact on rural communities

You may assume that this increased interest in outdoor activities would be good news for rural

communities with economies that rely upon outdoor recreation, but the truth is a little more complicated.

The relationship between rural economies and outdoor recreation is straightforward. While there are parks, beaches, and other recreation areas in all cities, the bulk of campgrounds, hiking trails, forests, mountains, and waterways is in the country's rural areas.

When people travel to these areas to participate in outdoor recreation, they fill up at local gas stations, eat at local restaurants, and patronize mom-and-pop campgrounds. Naturally, this is good news for rural economies; communities that were once in decline are revitalized and flush with new visitors.

So, where's the downside?

For some rural areas, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought an unprecedented amount of visitors and new residents, straining already limited resources. In many locations, parking is limited for attractions, aging facilities are left in disrepair due to [maintenance backlogs](#), and staff is thin on the ground.

In addition, when rural locations are overwhelmed with newcomers, it drives up costs due to simple supply and demand. These costs go up not just for visitors and new residents but also for the folks who have been living there for decades. This is evident in towns like [Bozeman, Montana and Moab, Utah](#), where cost of living has skyrocketed, and outdoor attractions are overcrowded.



[Image source](#)

## Rural Outdoor Investment Act: A game-changer for rural economies and recreation

In response to the increased demand for outdoor access, a bipartisan bill called the [Rural Outdoor Investment \(ROI\) Act](#) has been put forward by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York and Senator Michael Bennet of Colorado. ROI will provide the following funding for rural areas:

- \$30 million for public infrastructure, which can be used towards trailhead parking, new trails, signage, and more.
- \$5 million for planning grants to aid rural communities wishing to transition to outdoor recreation economies.
- \$2.5 million for university partnerships to provide technical support and planning.
- \$12.5 million for Main Street revitalization through Recreation Economy for Rural Communities grants.

Depending on the area, this could mean helping communities transition away from a reliance on coal

industry jobs or creating jobs in regions that suffer from a high unemployment rate.

As the name suggests, the ROI Act sees these investments as ones that will pay dividends. Increased funding for trails and campgrounds will bring new visitors (and their dollars) and create a better experience than over-crowded outdoor recreation areas that aren't properly maintained and are under strain from getting more use than they were designed to handle.

## What the ROI Act means for the RV industry

While only some of the funding from the ROI Act will go directly to those in the RV industry, the investment in outdoor recreation will certainly be a boon to the industry. The increase in spending is an indication that the government, too, sees outdoor recreation as an area for potential growth. We can expect continued investment in rural communities and recreation areas to bring sustained interest in RVing, particularly as infrastructure improves.

The ROI Act, along with a recent commitment of \$1.5 billion in funding through the [Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program](#), is a sign of the government's commitment to promoting outdoor recreation, which is great news for RVers and the industry.

## The bottom line

COVID-19 has changed the way Americans live and work, including how they spend their free time. More people are participating in outdoor activities, which creates opportunities for rural areas and those in the outdoor recreation industry.

The Rural Outdoor Investment Act provides necessary support both to rural areas that are already seeing an increase in visitors and also to areas that wish to build an economy centered on outdoor recreation. For those of us in the RV industry, this adds up to a bright future, as more people discover the freedom of the road.

### Sources:

<https://www.rvia.org/news-insights/outdoor-recreation-leaders-applaud-new-bill-bolster-rural-communities>

<https://www.psu.edu/news/health-and-human-development/story/how-has-covid-19-pandemic-affected-outdoor-recreation-america/>

<https://www.outsideonline.com/adventure-travel/advice/how-to-work-remote-road-traveling/>

<https://www.webmd.com/balance/ss/slideshow-health-benefits-nature>

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/infrastructure/maintenance-backlog.htm>

<https://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/environment/rural-outdoor-investment-act-schumer-bennet/>

[https://www.bennet.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/5/b/5bdfe7c4-a09d-413b-a7f3-](https://www.bennet.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/5/b/5bdfe7c4-a09d-413b-a7f3-69a6408eddda/C2B77B65E7BF70F0B375E8E0051F43A3.rural-outdoor-investment-act.pdf)

[69a6408eddda/C2B77B65E7BF70F0B375E8E0051F43A3.rural-outdoor-investment-act.pdf](https://www.bennet.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/5/b/5bdfe7c4-a09d-413b-a7f3-69a6408eddda/C2B77B65E7BF70F0B375E8E0051F43A3.rural-outdoor-investment-act.pdf)

<https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-announces-over-15-billion-support-state-wildlife-conservation-and>