

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

April 24, 2024

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Basil Gooden
Under Secretary for Rural Development
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Under Secretary Gooden:

We write today to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to clarify that projects in support of the infrastructure necessary to build and expand outdoor recreation activities are eligible for support under the USDA's Rural Development Community Facilities program. We have received direct feedback from state directors of outdoor recreation across the country that the ineligibility of Community Facilities investments for outdoor recreation infrastructure hampers their states' economic potential. The federal government has an opportunity to support rural areas as they make their communities more accessible and attractive to live, work, and spend their time.

Americans are increasingly venturing outdoors with a renewed passion, fueling a \$1.1 trillion outdoor recreation economy. However, investment in this vital economic engine has stagnated. If the Community Facilities program were to allow support for projects that create or increase access to outdoor recreation uses, it could foster an economy that works for everyone, including our rural communities. From bike trails in Fruita, Colorado to paddling and boating in Lake Placid, New York and hiking on the Buckeye Trail in Ohio, allowing outdoor recreation as an eligible activity under Community Facilities could provide a significant opportunity for small towns to strengthen and diversify their economies with investments that have a proven track record of success.

We ask that any such change benefit rural residents where they live and invest in the infrastructure necessary to increase access to recreation, such as trails, boat ramps and campgrounds, and maintain the exclusion of membership-based recreation, such as golf courses.

Our offices look forward to working with your Department to expand access to community facilities that provide recreation options, create good-paying jobs, and support local businesses so that as demand for outdoor recreation grows, rural economies grow too.

Sincerely,

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Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator