

Outdoor industry to become serious political force

By Brad Ressler, *Outside*

Outdoor recreation is an economic colossus: its reach is massive, its wealth enormous, and its influence continues to grow as more boots hit the ground. You can see it in Joshua Tree's crowded campgrounds or in Mount Tam's trailhead parking lots; in the Appalachian Trail's thru-hiking numbers or in REI's record sales.

In 2005, the Outdoor Industry Foundation commissioned the first of the economic studies to measure the industry's heft. The initial report returned impressive statistics, but it was the follow-up study six years later that stirred the giant from its slumber: the outdoor recreation economy, all \$646 billion of it, was nearly as much as Americans paid for pharmaceuticals and motor vehicle sales and parts, combined.

Now, thanks to the passage of a bipartisan bill that sailed through the House and Senate last month, and was signed into law by President Obama on Dec. 8, the outdoor industry is primed for a gargantuan reveal. The Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act of 2016, or REC Act, authorizes the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis to assess outdoor recreation's contribution to the nation's gross domestic product, or GDP.

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