

March 11, 2019

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Chairwoman, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
U.S. Senate  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Joe Manchin  
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
U.S. Senate  
306 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin,

On Behalf of the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) – the leading recreational marine trade association in North America, representing nearly 1,300 boat, engine, and accessory manufacturers – I thank you for convening a full committee hearing to examine opportunities to improve access, infrastructure, and permitting for outdoor recreation. NMMA applauds your collaborative leadership in prioritizing outdoor recreation and shining a light on the wide-spread bipartisan support behind the outdoor recreation industry. As the committee continues this very important discussion, we look forward to working with you to advance growth-oriented policies to improve both terrestrial and water-based outdoor recreation on federal lands and waters.

A recent report from the Department of Commerce’s Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) determined that the outdoor recreation industry accounts for 2.2 percent of U.S. GDP and supports 4.6 million jobs across the country. In terms of GDP, outdoor recreation’s economic contribution level is larger than mining, utilities, and chemical products manufacturing.

Generating \$170.3 billion in annual economic impact and supporting more than 35,000 businesses and 690,000 jobs, BEA identified recreational boating as a leading contributor to the overall outdoor recreation industry’s economic output. Given the significance of boating to our nation’s economy, we hope you will consider maritime recreation as you look to develop comprehensive solutions to improve access, infrastructure, and permitting for outdoor recreation. Below is a list of some of the issues impacting recreational boating – which have received broad bipartisan, bicameral support in recent years – that we encourage you to consider this Congress.

**I. Improve Water Infrastructure and Expand Access to Critical Waterways**

Congress should ensure America’s estimated 142 million boaters and 46 million anglers have access to the nation’s waters by investing in “full service” boating facilities and improved waterway infrastructure. The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, initiated in the 1950’s at the behest of the boating and angling community, is a user fee-user benefit system, that provides \$600 million annually for aquatic conservation and

infrastructure projects. From boat ramps and docks to boating safety to fish habitat conservation, this Trust Fund aims at re-investing in outdoor recreation and infrastructure. Yet, the Trust Fund cannot meet all the outdoor recreation needs. We see a particular lack funding for recreational maritime infrastructure, including: sufficient parking for vehicles with trailers, outdated ramp utilities, paved roads and ramps, and sufficient bathrooms and trash receptacles at public boating facilities. Congress should invest in facilities at boat ramps, which serve as the gateway to water recreation. Insufficient parking and outdated ramps cause delays at boat ramps, sometimes lasting several hours, and exacerbate user conflict among motorized and non-motorized participants. Facility improvements, such as trash and decontamination stations, will ensure boaters have proper facilities to be good stewards of the environment, and prevent environmental harms, including the spread of aquatic invasive species. Improperly dredged ramp channels can also result in safety concerns for marine vessels and operators, and shut out coastal access for small communities and marina businesses.

## **II. Improve Access to Broadband for Rural Areas**

According to the Brookings Institution, at least ten percent of American's lack access to a broadband internet connection. Many those Americans live in what would be considered "rural" areas. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations on Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have improved access to broadband for rural areas, however the access divide remains stark. In some states, such as Alaska, 14% fewer Americans have access to broadband when compared to urban areas.

For recreational boating and angling, access to broadband is a critical safety and enjoyment issue for navigating our nation's waterways. Lack of broadband can put boaters at perilous risk without information about navigational channels, changes in weather, and access points. For example, lack of broadband access at Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary has posed a risk for some boaters in obtaining accurate weather during changing conditions. This can pose as a serious safety concern for vessels on the water. From a user enjoyment perspective, broadband access improves the overall recreational experience on the water, allowing consumers to connect with others and boost their enjoyment.

## **III. Eliminate the Deferred Maintenance Backlog**

The National Park Service (NPS) currently faces a \$12 billion maintenance backlog. Recreational infrastructure suffers from this deficit, which hampers the NPS's ability to offer premier outdoor recreation experiences on our shared public lands and waters. NPS sites, such as Acadia National Park, Lake Powell National Recreation Area, Pictured Rocks National Seashore, and Sleeping Bear Dunes that offer picture-perfect destinations for maritime recreation, will continue to be in jeopardy as this systemic problem continues.

The outdoor recreation economy is among our Nation's leading economic sectors, and public lands and waters are the backbone of our industry. Water-based recreational infrastructure provide significant economic benefits, particularly for nearby coastal communities, and improved access, maintenance, and permitting are essential towards ensuring the full economic impact of the recreational boating and the outdoor recreation industry as a whole are realized.

NMMA appreciates your consideration and stands ready to assist you and the committee throughout this important endeavor.

Sincerely,



Nicole Vasilaros  
Senior Vice President of Government Relations and Legal Affairs  
National Marine Manufacturers Association