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RECREATE RESPONSIBLY COALITION SHARES ADVICE FOR PROTECTING OURLIVES AND THE LANDS WE LOVE AS WE HEAD OUTSIDE THIS SPRING

WASHINGTON—Increasingly positive news about the trajectory of vaccines in the United States has people hopeful for more traditional spring and summer adventures—planning domestic vacations and expanding on the surge in outdoor participation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.

The Recreate Responsibly Coalition, which emerged from the pandemic as a way to offer guidance for people to safely get outside, sees this as an opportunity to carry forward lessons learned last year so that we can continue to take good care of each other and our public lands as more and more people explore the outdoors.

A recent report from the Outdoor Industry Association found that millions of additional people became outdoor participants in 2020, with expectations that more than 60% of those who took up or resumed an outdoor activity intend to continue it. Many who are new to the outdoors reported exploring within 10 miles of their home—including biking and walking on the nation’s multiuse trails, which saw an increase in use of 51% in 2020, according to trail count data from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

“A year ago, everything in our lives was disrupted, including recreation. Since then, the outdoors has served a really important role for millions of people, helping us to safely connect with our friends, families and communities, while building resilience and taking good care of our mental and physical health,” said Kenji Haroutunian, an outdoor industry consultant and steering committee member of the Recreate Responsibly Coalition. “As we get ready for the annual seasonal surge in outdoor activity and we continue to welcome new outdoor participants, we should remember all we learned as we discovered the outdoors in new ways last year, continuing to practice responsible recreation and taking good care of each other and the public lands and wild places we all love.”

The coalition released nine top takeaways from being outside in 2020 that serve as good guidelines and reminders for everyone looking for outdoor adventure this spring and summer, whether they’re close to home or a road trip away:

- **Recreation is essential, not optional.** Time outdoors is essential for our well-being, and everyone should have access to it. Everybody needs, and should be able to access, the healing power of nature.
- **Sharing is caring.** Outdoor spaces are shared spaces, and there are a lot more people to share it with right now. It’s important to share outdoor spaces and acknowledge new procedures to follow as more people head outside.
• **Masks are easy.** Packing and wearing masks, when necessary, is easy. This last year, we found that our favorite masks helped keep us and everyone around us safer. Keep doing it!

• **Leave No Trace applies everywhere.** Leave No Trace isn’t just for the backcountry. The principles to pick up after yourself and protect the places you love apply in all outdoor settings, from picking up dog poop at your local park to keeping rivers and creeks clean.

• **Plan for the unexpected.** In a new world, we are learning to manage our expectations when going outdoors. You might find a closure, new routes or new rules. Everyone, from outdoor novices to backcountry experts, has spent a little more time on research than we did before.

• **Discovering our local gems.** With conditions ever-changing, we realized that finding green space close to us has never been more important. Not everyone has access to huge parks or forests, and we have new appreciation for our local parks and trails—even the trees on our neighborhood walks.

• **The outdoors needs our support.** If this past year taught us anything, it’s that the outdoor spaces don’t maintain themselves. We all have a role to play in asking decision-makers for funding to maintain these places and build new outdoor infrastructure.

• **Climate change is real.** In a year when the outdoors were everything, we saw the effects of climate change more prominently than ever. From wildfires that ravaged the West to unprecedented snow that shut down the Southeast, we need to pay attention and take action to protect our global climate.

• **There’s space for everyone.** Everyone enjoys the outdoors differently—from people exploring the beach for the first time, to families on picnics to kids on scavenger hunts to mountain bikers to backcountry campers to avid whitewater paddlers—and we must lead with kindness. We all have a role to play in building an inclusive outdoors.

This April, the coalition is highlighting several opportunities for people to put these lessons to work, recreating responsibly and exploring the outdoors, including National Park Week (April 17–22), Earth Day (April 22) and Celebrate Trails Day (April 24).

The Recreate Responsibly Coalition first came together in May 2020 as a group of two dozen organizations based in Washington State. Since then, the group has grown into a diverse, international community of over 1,000 businesses, government agencies, nonprofits, outdoor media and influencers. The coalition’s common ground is a shared love of the outdoors, a desire to help everyone experience the benefits of nature, and a belief that by sharing best practices, people can recreate responsibly to protect themselves, others and the outdoors.

Media assets and resources in English and Spanish can be accessed at recreateresponsibly.org and by following #RecreateResponsibly on social media, including long-form articles available for use by media outlets, and a recent roundtable featuring individuals from Recreate Responsibly, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and GirlTrek who discuss ideas for safe outdoor recreation this spring.

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