

THIS INDEPENDENCE DAY, CELEBRATE THE GIFT OF PUBLIC LAND

While our nation's founders fought for freedom from tyranny and oppressive taxation, personal liberty was at the core of America's origin story

Nearly 250 years later, personal liberty remains the great gift of our national sovereignty movement, and while signers of the Declaration of Independence couldn't have imagined it in 1776, the emergence of public land is one of the great expressions of our national identity. As colonists, we were surrounded by the wild woods and rivers of America, considered the domain of the King of England and off-limits to anyone else.

But in the new United States, those public lands changed ownership, becoming the property not of a king but of all citizens. Given that

history, there's no better expression of your right as an American than to recreate this holiday on public land.

Maybe you visit one of America's national parks that span tens of millions of acres of mountains, red-rock canyons, rivers, and even tropical islands. Or maybe you stay at a designated campground while you hike a few of the 193 million acres managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Feeling a little more adventurous? Shoulder into a backpack and trek across 111 million acres of designated wilderness. Or find a remote two-track trail and camp beside your vehicle on the 247 million acres of

ground administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Maybe you want to view wildlife? The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service administers over 588 National Wildlife Refuges and 70 national fish hatcheries.

Those are just the federal lands that are open to you, your family, and your neighbors. Every state has thousands (some have hundreds of thousands) of acres managed as state parks or state forests. Nearly every mile of our rivers is open to public recreation, and tens of thousands of lakes and reservoirs offer wonderful fishing, camping, and water-based recreation.

FINDING YOUR WAY

Public lands can sometimes resist visitation. They're not always clearly marked or defined, and they often require a vehicle to access. Some charge visitation fees to help cover administration and infrastructure improvement costs. Others are so remote and wild—we're looking at you, Alaska—that they require specific logistics to reach and special gear to access.

But there are plenty of resources to help you find public lands near you. If you're looking for a campground or designated recreation area, visit www.recreation.gov. Or maybe you want

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to find a place to hunt, hike, or fish. The Public Lands Foundation has interactive maps of federally managed public lands across the country. And every state wildlife and parks agency has maps and resources for visitors to state-managed lands.

If you're into take-it-with-you technology, the mobile mapping app onX shows land ownership of nearly every acre of the country and can be a great resource for finding out-of-the-way public parcels.

PUBLIC LAND FUNDING

As you recreate this Independence Day, keep in mind that while public land is open to everyone regardless of age, gender, race, or religion, it's not exactly free. It was costly to our founders, for sure, but this gift to all Americans and visitors required funds to acquire in some cases, and nearly all public property requires ongoing maintenance, which is funded through a variety of channels.

Acquisition of public lands is made possible through outright purchase. In some cases, state wildlife agencies use revenue from hunting and fishing licenses to purchase fee title or conservation easements that allow full or limited public use of the property. In other cases, funds from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund are used to purchase parkland, wildlife habitat, or even municipal playground equipment. In the case of wildlife refuges, states tap into federal and state funds

to acquire critical habitat that is then managed primarily for wildlife. Many of America's most pristine wetlands and waterfowl production areas were purchased with funds from the Duck Stamp, a special license required of every duck and goose hunter in America and thanks to Boone and Crockett member J.N. "Ding" Darling.

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While hunters and anglers fund many of these infrastructure improvements, the vast majority of visitors are Americans who never bought a hunting or fishing license.

But you shouldn't be overly concerned about pot-holes, port-a-potties, or parking signs this holiday as you enjoy America's expansive public lands. Use our public properties, share them, celebrate them, and cherish them. Just know that our public land, like our freedom, isn't free. ■

ABOUT THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY COMMUNICATION COUNCIL (OICC)

Formed around the commitment to educate all Americans about the origins of conservation funding in America, the Outdoor Industry Communication Council (OICC) is managed by Outdoor Stewards of Conservation Foundation (OSCF) and Wildlife Management Institute (WMI). A primary goal of the OICC is to better inform and promote the positive contributions that wildlife agencies, industry manufacturers, NGOs and end users such as hunters, anglers, trappers and target shooters make to conservation.

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PUBLIC LAND ACCESS RESOURCES:

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