



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
Republicans | Ranking Member Phil Roe, M.D.

H.R. 2435: The Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act

Background:

A 2014 study that was funded by the Sierra Club and conducted by researchers from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the University of Michigan found a link between outdoor activities and the long-term psychological well-being of veterans. The study provided veterans the opportunity to participate in multi-day outdoor adventure programs that included fly-fishing, kayaking, backpacking, whitewater rafting and more. 54 of the 73 veterans who took part in one of the programs and completed a post-adventure questionnaire a week after it ended reported significant improvements in psychological well-being, social functioning, and positive life outlook. These findings indicate that increasing opportunities for veterans to pursue outdoor recreation could be beneficial to improving mental health and wellness among those who have served.

The Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act would require VA to establish a Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans to report on and make recommendations regarding the use of public lands or other outdoor spaces for veterans. The Task Force would be co-chaired by VA and the Department of the Interior and be composed of participants from the Departments of, the Interior, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Defense, and Homeland Security as well as the Chief of the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Message:

- There is no one-size fits all approach to improving mental health, but research has shown that access to the great outdoors is beneficial for veterans.
- The Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act would create a Task Force to find new ways to utilize national parks and other public lands to offer veterans a wide-range of therapeutic recreation opportunities.
- The Accelerating Veterans Recovery Outdoors Act would build on VA's Whole Health approach to promoting veteran health and wellness through non-traditional methods that encourage veterans to take ownership over their health and live their lives to the fullest.