Policies in Support of Outdoor Recreation and Access

Legislation
There are several state legislative approaches to promote time outdoors, the associated health benefits, and public lands conservation, including:

Grant Programs
State-supported programs can help ensure outdoor access. Examples include:
- Washington’s No Child Left Inside program (2007), which ensures outdoor access for underserved youth and also employs veterans.
- New York’s Outdoor Rx Program (2018) would establish outdoor programs to benefit veterans, those in recovery from substance abuse, and individuals recovering from physical or mental trauma.
- California’s Community Access Program (2018) develops a grant program for transportation projects providing disadvantaged and low-income youth with access to outdoor experiences.

Outdoor Learning
States are encouraging outdoor learning environments, such as Oregon SB439 (2015) which provides outdoor school programs for 5th and 6th grade students, and Washington SB5357 (2017) which created an outdoor preschool pilot program.

State Economic Analysis
Commissioning a state study on the economic benefits of outdoor recreation provides valuable information about the industry’s impact both at the state and district level. An example is Washington state, with 2014 budget language available here and the report here.

Public Lands Day
States have selected a specific day to promote outdoor recreation and organize annual events. Examples include Colorado SB21 (2016), Nevada SB413 (2017), New Mexico SM11 (2016), Ohio HR120 (2015), Oregon HB2143 (2017), and Virginia HJR640 (2017).

Increasing Park Access
States can grant free entry to state parks for students of a certain age or grade, such as Nevada AB385 (2017) which applies to students ages 9 to 11.

Office of Outdoor Recreation
Designating state offices serves to support the outdoor industry and improve outdoor recreation opportunities. Examples include Colorado (2015), Utah SB73 (2013), and Washington SB5843 (2015), and most recently Oregon HB3350 (2017) and North Carolina (2017).

Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights
Currently 15 states have a Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights to promote outdoor activities that should be provided to children in the state, such as Ohio.

For more information, contact NCEL Deputy Director Dylan McDowell at (202) 744-1006 or mcdowell@ncel.net. The NCEL/Meridian team is prepared to offer personalized assistance such as sample legislation and ongoing connections to experts and more than 70 legislators pursuing outdoor recreation policies.