

2021 OK PUBLIC LANDS RESOLUTION

A RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA EMPHASIZING THE VALUE OF PUBLIC LANDS IN OKLAHOMA TO THE STATE'S ECONOMY, RECREATION, HERITAGE, AND QUALITY OF LIFE; AND SUPPORTING EFFORTS THAT BOOST THIS CRITICAL PART OF THE STATE'S ECONOMY.

WHEREAS, Oklahoma has some of the most beautiful landscapes on earth that are incredibly rich in wildlife, including the prairies of the Osage Hills, the playa lakes and wetlands of the Southern High Plains, the Ouachita Mountains, the Ozark Highlands, the Red Hills, the floodplain of the Red River, and the Arbuckle Plains; and

WHEREAS, public land under the management of the OK Department of Tourism and Recreation, OK Department of Wildlife Conservation, U.S. Forest Service, and other state / federal agencies constitutes just over 6% of the land in Oklahoma; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the essential role of nature, recreation and outdoor spaces in the physical and mental health of Oklahomans; and

WHEREAS, these state and federally owned lands are essential to the quality of life in Oklahoma for every economic class, providing public recreational opportunity for hunting, fishing, kayaking, riding all-terrain vehicles, wildlife viewing, photography, backpacking, cycling, sightseeing, and numerous other outdoor recreational activities; and

WHEREAS, outdoor recreation is a major economic driver in Oklahoma, generating an estimated \$10.6 billion in consumer spending and supporting more than 97,000 jobs in the state according to a study conducted by the Outdoor Industry Association; and

WHEREAS, Oklahoma's agriculture industry includes upwards of 50 different ranching lessees who depend on grazing on federal and state public land to sustain their operations; and

WHEREAS, Oklahoma's timber industry is dependent on federal land for a part of its timber supply, while supporting more than 19,000 jobs and contributing \$3.3 billion in revenue to Oklahoma; and

WHEREAS, agencies that manage these lands employ hundreds of Oklahomans who pay taxes and contribute to their communities; and

WHEREAS, Oklahoma's prairies, playas, and forests are naturally prone to fire and other disturbances, including periodic large-scale fires and seasonal wet-dry cycles, as part of the ecosystems in which they have evolved over millennia, although increasing occurrences of wildfires and drought are due to fire suppression over many decades; and

WHEREAS, federal and state money to fund firefighting costs and other management practices is essential, including prescribed burning and wetland restoration, to protect communities and public infrastructure, including municipal watersheds, particularly in dry or flood years; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, the U.S. Congress enacted the Great American Outdoors Act which prioritizes maintaining and improving existing public lands and parks; and also enacted America's Conservation Enhancement Act, authorizing the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, which supports voluntary wetland conservation projects that benefit migratory birds and waterfowl; and supports outdoor recreation on Oklahoma's public lands like Hackberry Flat and Drummond Flat Wildlife Management Areas.

WHEREAS, Americans from throughout the country value these public lands as a part of our national heritage; an

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

That the Oklahoma Legislature supports efforts that highlight the importance of public lands to Oklahomans as well as recognizes the benefits public lands have as a critical part of the state's economy.