



VOTE your BOOTS

REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS TAKE HEED: OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS ARE STARTING TO ASSERT THEIR POLITICAL MUSCLE AT THE POLLS. IF POLITICIANS DON'T START HITTING (AND FUNDING) THE TRAILS, THEY MAY FIND THEMSELVES ON THE ROAD OUT.

VOTE SMART WANT TO LEARN MORE? CONSULT THESE RESOURCES BEFORE HEADING TO THE POLLS.

Voters looking for ideas on what questions to ask candidates can consult the **Outdoor Industry Association's** questionnaire and platform. www.outdoorindustry.org.

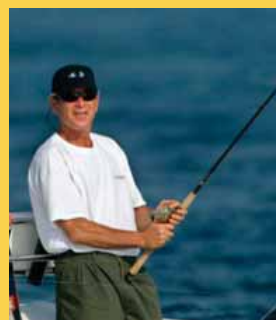
In addition to endorsing candidates for federal office, the **League of Conservation Voters** names congressional "environmental champions" as well as a "dirty dozen." www.lcv.org.

Outdoorsmen and environmentalists are often divided on issues, but the **Sierra Club** was, after all, founded by John Muir—one of the greatest hikers ever. www.sierraclub.org/politics.

Members of the **House Trails Caucus** generally support hiking. For a list of which congressmen have muddy boots, go to www.americanhiking.org and click on 'policy.'

To see how your congressmen voted on the **Get Outdoors Act** (or any other legislation), go to <http://Thomas.loc.gov>. A vote for this bill is an indicator of a politician's support for the outdoors. In the absence of a vote, check whether your representative signed on as a co-sponsor, another way to gauge support.

“...more and more outdoor enthusiasts across the country are mobilizing into a political force, so maybe the presidential candidates should start listening.”



■ *President Bush has yet to convince voters that he loves the outdoors.*



■ *Will John Kerry's love of kitesurfing translate into votes?*

Mountain biker Adam Massey has a message for politicians running for office in November: He values outdoor recreation, and he votes. “I’ll be looking for candidates who have a strong interest in the outdoors,” says the executive director of the Boulder Off-road Alliance (BOA), a group of politically motivated mountain bikers based out of Boulder, Colorado. The organization was founded in 1992 to advocate on behalf of trail users, but it has stepped up its activism in recent years by endorsing candidates for local offices.

The effort is paying off: In last year’s local elections, Massey believes his group’s endorsement helped elect a mountain biker to City Council. Now the BOA is preparing to weigh in on this November’s elections by endorsing candidates for county seats, the Colorado Legislature and maybe even the US House and Senate. “We probably won’t bother with the presidential race,” Massey adds. “I doubt John Kerry and George Bush are going to have much to say about mountain biking in Boulder.” But, like Boulder’s mountain bikers, more and more outdoor enthusiasts across the country are mobilizing into a political force, so maybe the presidential candidates should start listening.

The Quiet Giant Awakes

Move over Soccer Moms—there’s a new and growing force in American politics: outdoor enthusiasts. Call them Mountain Biking Bros, Snowboarding Sisters, Climbing Cousins, Hiking Aunts, Fly-Fishing Neighbors or maybe Outdoor Uncles. Whatever the media moniker, outdoor recreationalists comprise a potentially significant voting bloc. An estimated 149 million Americans participate in outdoor activities every year, fueling \$18 billion in retail sales at 4,000 businesses with half-a-million employees, according to the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), and these lovers of the outdoors are being encouraged to lace up their hiking boots and march to the polls in November.

Other demographic groups, such as gun owners, environmentalists and religious organizations, exert their influence on national politics, so why not Dirtbags? “If the outdoor recreation community decides to flex its muscles, it could make a huge impact,” says Myrna Johnson, Vice President of Government Affairs for the OIA. Unfortunately, hikers, kayakers, cyclists and other nonmotorized outdoor users have traditionally been a political “quiet giant” in American politics, she adds.

But that giant may be waking. One measure of the growing support for the outdoors is voters’ willingness to raise their own taxes to buy

open space. From 1999 through 2003, voters across the US said ‘yes’ to 695 of 804 local and state ballot measures—spending a whopping \$25.53 billion—to buy and protect open spaces, parks and greenways, according to the Trust for Public Land. In addition to voting their wallets, Americans are increasingly “voting their boots,” says Alan Front, a senior vice president for the Trust for Public Lands. Front hopes this support for open space will translate into support for pro-outdoors candidates. “There seems to be a stirring in the blood of the outdoor community to make sure their issues are paid attention to.”

This political potential blossomed last fall, when organizations such as the American Hiking Society and others alerted their members about the House Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee’s vote to strip almost \$300 million in funding for transportation enhancements including suburban and urban hiking and cycling trails. Hikers bombarded members of Congress with calls and emails, and the House eventually voted 327-90 to overturn the committee vote and restore funding. “This clearly illustrates the power of grassroots outreach and mobilization of trail users,” says Celina Montorfano, director of conservation programs for the American Hiking Society.

It’s the Trails, Stupid!

While groups like BOA are pushing their causes at the local and state level, national outdoor organizations are fighting to raise funding for programs that support outdoor activities—from commuter bike paths and rails to trails corridors to land acquisition programs that buy up real estate threatened by development. Taxpayer money is spent to promote many causes and special interests, from subsidies for the oil and gas industry to tax credits for poor parents. In a time of growing obesity, outdoor recreation deserves a bigger chunk of the federal budget pie, supporters say.

The Conservation Trust Fund is the major funding source for outdoor initiatives. Its monies have been used, for instance, to provide matching grants for states and municipalities to build parks, trails and ballfields. The fund has also been tapped to buy properties such as private parcels along the Appalachian Trail. Future expenditures could help complete the Pacific Crest and Continental Divide trails. At press time, Congress was considering legislation entitled the Get Outdoors Act, which would allot \$3.1 billion annually to a range of outdoor initiatives including the Conservation Trust Fund and the Stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund, and give federal land managers \$650 million to improve and maintain trails and other recreation assets. ▶

Another key federal issue is the use of public lands. Outdoor groups are fighting to be recognized on par with the traditional users: ranchers, miners, loggers and oilmen. "Rural America is rapidly transforming into a playground for urban America, and the big issue is who will get access to this terrain," says Dave Scull, a former Democratic state legislator from Maryland and now a member of the Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts (MORE). "Elected officials influence who gets access."

The White House, in particular, dramatically impacts how public lands are used through the administrative rule-making process. Policies pushed by President Bush and pro-industry legislators to open public lands to increased drilling, mining and resource extraction come at the expense of those who climb, fish, hike and camp on these same lands. Even the conservative-leaning magazine *Field & Stream* has criticized the administration's policies, saying they signal "a wide gulf between the Beltway's priorities and those of America's outdoorsmen."

Eyes on the Prize

Despite a growing political acumen, outdoor enthusiasts have yet to influence national elections. But that may soon change.

"We as an industry need to turn up the volume in Washington to make our voices heard," says Paul Gagner, vice president of sales and marketing for Gregory Mountain Products. Earlier this year, Gagner and other gear manufacturers began cranking up the volume by sending letters to the White House that urged the Bush administration to retain the roadless rule that bars logging on 60 million acres of undeveloped national forests. Menno van Wyk, CEO and founder of Montrail, contributed the maximum \$4,000 to Kerry's campaign and helped organize a \$1,000-per-plate fundraising dinner in Seattle over the summer. And in May, the group Climbers4Kerry (www.climbers4kerry.com) formed with the goal of raising \$150,000 for the Democratic nominee by selling T-shirts and bumper stickers and holding fundraisers. Most importantly, the group hopes to encourage climbers nationwide to vote.

So why do Bush and other politicians continue to favor industry over outdoorspeople? "Because they haven't yet had to pay the consequences in the voting booth," says US Rep. Mark Udall, D-Colorado, an active outdoorsman who courts the outdoor vote. But there will be a comeuppance in future years as citizens realize that mountain biking boosts the economy more than mining (think Moab). "People vote their economic interests first and foremost. And at some point there will be a tipping point where people across the West realize the old extractive economy no longer dominates," says Udall.

Protecting unmarred landscapes for hikers, cyclists, backpackers, campers, kayakers, canoeists, cross-country skiers, snowshoers and fishermen may be the most important challenge facing voters in the coming election. Which is why, when asked how he would vote in the upcoming presidential election, an official with one outdoor organization who wished to remain nameless laughed. "You're kidding, right?" **HOOKED**

Keep THEM IN

IF YOU LOVE THE OUTDOORS, THESE POLITICIANS DESERVE YOUR SUPPORT



Mark Udall, D-Colorado

A co-founder of the Congressional Fitness Caucus and a member of the House Trails Caucus who once ran Colorado's Outward Bound program, Congressman Udall skis, climbs, hikes and generally gets his hands dirty on a regular basis in the mountains.



Zach Wamp, R-Tennessee

Congressman Wamp is co-chairman of the Congressional Fitness Caucus and, as a featured speaker at American Whitewater events, gets a thumbs-up from kayakers.



Nick Rahall, D-West Virginia

Rahall fought to expand the federally protected New River Gorge and add other rivers to the National Park System, helping to create the largest network of protected waters for kayakers, fishermen and boaters in the eastern United States.



Sherwood Boehlert, R-New York

Boehlert comes from a long line of pro-outdoors Northeastern Republicans. Earlier this year, he was named a Friend of the Outdoor Industry for his support of the Conservation Trust Fund, one of the major pots of money for trails and land acquisition.



**Earl Blumenauer, D-Oregon,
and James Oberstar, D-Minnesota**

No congressmen have done more for cycling than these two. Both pedal to Capitol Hill and regularly support boosting money for bike paths and cycling initiatives.



Kick THEM OUT

IF THESE GUYS HAVE THEIR WAY, YOUR OUTDOOR PLAYGROUNDS WILL BE PAVED



Richard Pombo, R-California

As chairman of the House Resources Committee, Representative Pombo has fought efforts to create wilderness areas and new trails, and as a newbie politician he even ran for the California Legislature on an anti-trails platform.



Ernest Istook, R-Oklahoma

A member of the House Appropriations Committee and chairman of its transportation subcommittee, Istook led an effort to strip funding for hiking and cycling trails from the 2004 Transportation Bill, advocating the money be used for more roads and highways instead.



Jim Ryun, R-Kansas

A former Olympic runner who once held the record for the fastest mile by a high schooler, 3:55.3, Ryun is no friend of trail runners. He led efforts to eliminate a federal provision that preserves unused railroad rights of way as trails. Had he succeeded, his legislation would have derailed the rails-to-trails movement.