

House Bill 314

By: Representatives Stephens of the 164th, Houston of the 170th, Dempsey of the 13th, Greene of the 154th, and Douglas of the 78th

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Title 12 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to conservation and
2 natural resources, so as to establish the position of director of outdoor recreation in the
3 Department of Natural Resources; to provide legislative findings; to provide for definitions;
4 to provide for powers and duties; to require other public bodies to cooperate with the director
5 of outdoor recreation; to provide for statutory construction; to provide for related matters;
6 to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

7 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

8 **SECTION 1.**

9 Title 12 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to conservation and natural
10 resources, is amended by adding a new chapter to read as follows:

11 "CHAPTER 18

12 12-18-1.

13 The General Assembly finds that:

- 14 (1) The outdoor recreation industry does more than bring joy to millions of Americans;
15 it helps drive our economy. In 2021, the Bureau of Economic Analysis released national
16 statistics that demonstrate the economic output of outdoor recreation to be \$862 billion.
17 Prior to the pandemic, outdoor recreation was surpassing industries such as mining,
18 utilities, farming and ranching, and chemical products manufacturing;
- 19 (2) The outdoor recreation industry is growing rapidly, eclipsing the overall increase in
20 gross domestic product;
- 21 (3) Outdoor recreation generates millions of high-quality, high-paying jobs from coast
22 to coast and across a wide variety of industries, ranging from manufacturing to retail to
23 tourism. These jobs play a critical role in the economic health of local and state
24 economies;
- 25 (4) The state-level data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis show that outdoor
26 recreation in Georgia contributes more than \$13.2 billion to the state's economy and
27 directly supports over 139,000 jobs;
- 28 (5) Georgia's public spaces for outdoor recreation are drivers of tourism to the state;
- 29 (6) Increasing access to the outdoors and participation in outdoor recreation programs
30 and services are critical to improving the health and wellness of all residents, maintaining
31 residents' quality of life, and developing future environmental stewards and
32 conservationists to build on our public lands heritage;
- 33 (7) Promoting and enhancing the state's outdoor recreation economy will benefit all
34 residents and can particularly support rural communities that are gateways to outdoor
35 recreation locations and opportunities; and
- 36 (8) At least 18 states have already created offices or positions dedicated to outdoor
37 recreation to increase investment in and support the booming outdoor recreation economy
38 in their respective states.

39 12-18-2.

40 As used in this article, the term:

41 (1) 'Director' means the director of outdoor recreation.

42 (2) 'Outdoor recreation' means a pursuit that occurs in a natural environment or physical
43 landscape, including, but not limited to, various active and passive, motorized and
44 nonmotorized sports, education, and activities.

45 (3) 'State agency' means any department, board, authority, bureau, agency, commission,
46 or other institution of the executive branch of the government of the State of Georgia.

47 12-18-3.

48 There is created the position of director of outdoor recreation as a position in the
49 department, to be appointed by the commissioner of natural resources.

50 12-18-4.

51 The director, at the direction of the commissioner of natural resources and subject to this
52 article, shall have the power and duty to:

53 (1) Increase outdoor recreation based economic development, education, tourism, and
54 ecotourism by attracting outdoor recreation industries to Georgia;

55 (2) Develop the growth of new businesses in Georgia and marketing, advertising, and
56 securing media promotions that reflect the opportunities for outdoor recreation in the
57 state;

58 (3) Promote the growth of the outdoor recreation economy in Georgia by increasing and
59 promoting access to the outdoors, particularly in underrepresented urban and rural
60 communities, and providing opportunities for stewardship and conservation of natural
61 resources;

62 (4) Coordinate with any federal or state agency or authority, county or municipality,
63 school, or private entity to achieve the purposes of this article;

64 (5) Recommend to the commissioner of natural resources policies and initiatives to
65 enhance outdoor recreation amenities, learning programs, and experiences in the state,
66 help implement those policies and initiatives, and report on the impacts of those policies
67 and initiatives;

68 (6) Develop and support development of data regarding the impacts of outdoor recreation
69 in Georgia while ensuring national data are utilized as a benchmark factor in agency
70 decision making;

71 (7) Promote the health, educational, and social benefits of outdoor recreation;

72 (8) Advocate on behalf of the state for federal funding and participation in federal
73 programs;

74 (9) Create and maintain a state-wide list of lands to be conserved, enhanced, or
75 publicized for outdoor recreation; and

76 (10) Apply for government or private grants to benefit the purposes outlined in this
77 article.

78 12-18-5.

79 All state agencies and all counties, municipalities, or other political subdivisions of the
80 state, regional commissions, and other public agencies or public authorities shall have the
81 power and authority to take all actions which may be necessary or appropriate to cooperate
82 with the director in advancing outdoor recreation opportunities to Georgia citizens, and
83 otherwise to take any action which the commissioner of natural resources or the director
84 may direct or require in carrying out their duties under this article.

85 12-18-6.

86 The provisions of this article shall not be construed so as to permit a state agency to
87 initiate, carry out, fail to perform, or otherwise take actions in any manner which is not
88 authorized by law applicable to such agency or its subject matter. The provisions of this

89 article shall not be construed so as to authorize a state agency to locate, fail to locate,
90 construct, or fail to construct public projects or facilities in any manner which is
91 inconsistent with the directives of the General Assembly as specified in the authorization
92 of such public projects or facilities."

93 **SECTION 2.**

94 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.