

WYLDER

“Force of Nature: The Power of Small Business in America’s Recreational Infrastructure”

Before the House Committee on Small Business
Hearing - 11:30a.m. - Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2360
October 30, 2019

Testimony of: Lindsey B. Davis, CEO of Wylder Goods, Co.

Dear Chairwoman Velázquez, Ranking Member Chabot, and members of the committee:

I’m honored to be here today on behalf of the thousands of small businesses that make up the outdoor recreation industry. This hearing represents the strength and purpose in our business community. Collectively, we are made up of over 100,000 businesses, covering the full breadth of outdoor recreation activities. Our industry accounts for 5.2 million American jobs and 2.2 percent of U.S. GDP. We contribute \$778 billion in economic output, surpassing other sectors such as mining, agriculture, utilities, and chemical products manufacturing.

We’re unlike other industries in that the majority of the recreation economy is made up of small businesses. I am one of them. I am the co-founder and CEO of a women-owned and operated retailer called Wylder Goods. We are the first female founded benefit corporation (B-corp) in the state of Utah, and the only women-owned retailer in the outdoor industry.

In 2015, a Forbes survey showed that 73 percent of millennials were willing to pay extra for more sustainable brands, and preferred companies that made public declarations of corporate citizenship. In 2016, 72 million women ventured into the outdoors to recreate, and yet there was no relevant marketplace created by and for women. We founded our company in response to this fast-growing demographic, and to build a business in the outdoor recreation economy that could benefit both society and the environment.

Wylder is an online marketplace for the modern outdoorswoman. We created a multi-vendor platform for active, adventurous ladies who share a deep love of wild places. Our well-curated online store provides women with relevant, beautiful and functional clothing, gear, and lifestyle goods as well as in-depth gear reviews, packing guides, travel tips, and compelling stories of brave women making an impact in their communities across the globe. The forward-thinking brands we partner with are creating thoughtfully designed, tried-and-true products, and have long since abandoned the ‘pink it and shrink it’ paradigm that’s been prevalent in the outdoor industry.

We incorporated as a benefit corporation to ensure our company would have a triple bottom line in perpetuity: people, planet and profit. As a B-corp, we focus on brands that are building transparency into their businesses and product lines, and that are leading with being profitable and good for the world. Our shopping experience uses icons and product stories to educate our customers and make them aware of their impact. Since our founding in 2016, we’ve worked with over 85 brands, 38 of which are female-founded companies, and 15 of which are also B-corps. Wylder has been recognized by Outside Magazine, Forbes, Fast Company, and B the Change Media. We are also a graduating scholar of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business Program. While there are significant challenges to being a small B-corp in the traditional venture capital and fundraising communities, there is a growing constituency of companies built on this sustainability ethos, and a growing consumer demand for these business ethics.

Conducting business in a way that protects and preserves our natural resources and educates our customer base is core to our mission. In addition to the products we choose, our company is partnered with two nonprofits - Greening Youth Foundation [1] and Outdoor Alliance [2] - to engage our audience in social and environmental justice, and relevant conservation initiatives.

Our platform is designed to utilize collaboration and storytelling to be a microphone for today’s leaders in social and environmental change in order to inspire and educate outdoor enthusiasts. It is our mission to build campaign momentum for our partners and

mobilize calls to action. We work to connect people to wildland, educate for human and environmental health, cultivate outdoor adventure stewards (not just consumers), and conserve and protect wildland to increase ecosystem diversity and resilience.

I came to the outdoor industry after 12 years in the non-profit sector. With a degree in International Studies and Sustainable Development, I spent years working with communities to develop regional solutions to issues of social and environmental justice. This constituency included ranchers, farmers, underserved youth, native tribes, businesses and education institutions. As a lifelong outdoorswoman, I began to see how my consumerism in the outdoors was affecting our human and environmental health, just as climate change was becoming a global issue. I realized I had the unique skill set and vantage point to do something about it and build a mission-driven company as a positive force in our industry.

Our industry is intrinsically connected to issues of sustainability and conservation perhaps more than any other. Federally managed lands and waters are a core component of outdoor recreation, hosting more than one billion visits annually. We directly see the effects of these issues every year in our snowpack, the health of our fisheries, in our oceans, and in our wildlife populations. Collectively, we represent an incredibly impassioned community of businesses, athletes, advocates, stewards, scientists and agencies that all depend on healthy waterways, forests, and wildlife. Thriving ecosystems are the backbone of our economy.

In Salt Lake City, I recreate in the densest wildlife-urban interface in the country, Wasatch National Forest. This area sees nine million visitors a year which is four million more than all five Utah National Parks combined. As an archery hunter and an angler, every year I see first-hand the effects our growing population and economy have on wildlife and habitat. In Salt Lake, we now have more big game hunters than we do carrying capacity in our herds. It is essential that we enact policies that will balance the needs of wildlife alongside recreation, transportation and development.

In my spare time, I work with a coalition of nonprofits and the University of Utah in the

Wasatch Mammal Watch program. We are using citizen science and motion sensor cameras to measure the impact of recreation and development on wildlife. We use the species data we collect to work with developers, recreationalists and the Utah Department of Transportation to enact sound conservation strategies for the region. To date, it is the most successful citizen science project on record, which speaks to the impassioned community of stewards here in our recreation community. I am also working with the National Wildlife Federation to build a non-partisan constituency in our state to protect wildlife populations.

The health of our ecosystems relies on adequate and organized public access and infrastructure by way of trails, waterways and wildlife corridors. Green and blue infrastructure will not only improve visitation, but also make it possible for wildlife and watersheds to continue to thrive and recreationalists to continue building a lifelong relationship to the outdoors. Our sector will benefit tremendously from addressing the maintenance backlog on our public lands and waters. Much of our infrastructure is overused and overlooked, leaving it unsafe and inadequate for this growing population of recreationalists. This hurts not only the outdoor recreation industry, but also the millions of visitors and communities that rely on this industry to survive.

One of the biggest challenges facing the outdoor recreation economy is making sure that Congress allocates enough funding for public lands. Legislation like Restore our Parks and Public Lands Act (H.R. 1225) would address our maintenance needs and provide funding to immediately improve our public lands and waters infrastructure. Similarly, full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund would provide certainty for access projects like parks, trails, and recreation infrastructure around the country which will help businesses and communities plan and invest in recreation.

It is an exciting time in our industry to be aligning user groups from across the spectrum to advocate for the policies and infrastructure businesses like mine depend on. The entire recreation business community is ready to work with you to ensure that the next century of our public lands, waters, and infrastructure evolves to meet the needs of our growing population and climate issues of the next century.

Investments in outdoor recreation today are an investment in American jobs, the economy and the enjoyment and stewardship of America's iconic public lands and waters for years to come. When visitors participate in outdoor recreation, they spend their hard-earned money on gear, equipment, food, lodging and more, and contribute \$65.3 billion in annual tax revenue to federal coffers. Small businesses like mine are taking things into our own hands to address the health of our public lands and waters but can't do it alone. We rely on adequate infrastructure, improved access and sound climate policy to enjoy our wild places and look to Congress as a partner to solve these issues that address the very foundation of this growing sector. Please help us care for our shared outdoor heritage to ensure outdoor recreation and its economic benefits can continue to be foundational aspects of American jobs, the American economy and the American experience.

Sincerely,

Lindsey B. Davis

Lindsey B. Davis
Chief Executive Officer
Wylder Goods, Co.

[1]The Greening Youth Foundation is the leading youth service organization in the US focused on natural resource management careers for diverse young people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

[2]Outdoor Alliance is the only organization in the U.S. that works to unite the voices of outdoor enthusiasts to protect the human-powered outdoor recreation experience and conserve America's public lands.