Senate Bill 228
By: Senators Rahman of the 5th, Robertson of the 29th, Dugan of the 30th, Butler of the 55th, Anderson of the 24th and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

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

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

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

"CHAPTER 18

12-18-1.
The General Assembly finds that:

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(1) The outdoor recreation industry does more than bring joy to millions of Americans; it helps drive our economy. In 2021, the Bureau of Economic Analysis released national statistics that demonstrate the economic output of outdoor recreation to be $862 billion. Prior to the pandemic, outdoor recreation was surpassing industries such as mining, utilities, farming and ranching, and chemical products manufacturing;

(2) The outdoor recreation industry is growing rapidly, eclipsing the overall increase in gross domestic product;

(3) Outdoor recreation generates millions of high-quality, high-paying jobs from coast to coast and across a wide variety of industries, ranging from manufacturing to retail to tourism. These jobs play a critical role in the economic health of local and state economies;

(4) The state-level data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis show that outdoor recreation in Georgia contributes more than $13.2 billion to the state's economy and directly supports over 139,000 jobs;

(5) Georgia's public spaces for outdoor recreation are drivers of tourism to the state;

(6) Increasing access to the outdoors and participation in outdoor recreation programs and services are critical to improving the health and wellness of all residents, maintaining residents' quality of life, and developing future environmental stewards and conservationists to build on our public lands heritage;

(7) Promoting and enhancing the state's outdoor recreation economy will benefit all residents and can particularly support rural communities that are gateways to outdoor recreation locations and opportunities; and

(8) At least 18 states have already created offices or positions dedicated to outdoor recreation to increase investment in and support the booming outdoor recreation economy in their respective states.
12-18-2.
As used in this article, the term:

(1) 'Director' means the director of outdoor recreation.
(2) 'Outdoor recreation' means a pursuit that occurs in a natural environment or physical landscape, including, but not limited to, various active and passive, motorized and nonmotorized sports, education, and activities.
(3) 'State agency' means any department, board, authority, bureau, agency, commission, or other institution of the executive branch of the government of the State of Georgia.

12-18-3.
There is created the position of director of outdoor recreation as a position in the department, to be appointed by the commissioner of natural resources.

12-18-4.
The director, at the direction of the commissioner of natural resources and subject to this article, shall have the power and duty to:

(1) Increase outdoor recreation based economic development, education, tourism, and ecotourism by attracting outdoor recreation industries to Georgia;
(2) Develop the growth of new businesses in Georgia and marketing, advertising, and securing media promotions that reflect the opportunities for outdoor recreation in the state;
(3) Promote the growth of the outdoor recreation economy in Georgia by increasing and promoting access to the outdoors, particularly in underrepresented urban and rural communities, and providing opportunities for stewardship and conservation of natural resources;
(4) Coordinate with any federal or state agency or authority, county or municipality, school, or private entity to achieve the purposes of this article;
(5) Recommend to the commissioner of natural resources policies and initiatives to enhance outdoor recreation amenities, learning programs, and experiences in the state, help implement those policies and initiatives, and report on the impacts of those policies and initiatives;

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

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

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

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

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

12-18-5.

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

12-18-6.

The provisions of this article shall not be construed so as to permit a state agency to initiate, carry out, fail to perform, or otherwise take actions in any manner which is not authorized by law applicable to such agency or its subject matter. The provisions of this
article shall not be construed so as to authorize a state agency to locate, fail to locate, construct, or fail to construct public projects or facilities in any manner which is inconsistent with the directives of the General Assembly as specified in the authorization of such public projects or facilities."

SECTION 2.

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