Senate Bill 619

By: Senators Rahman of the 5th, Robertson of the 29th, Mullis of the 53rd, Butler of the 55th, Harrell of the 40th and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

To amend Chapter 12 of Title 45 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the Governor, so as to establish the Office of Outdoors in the office of the Governor; to provide legislative findings; to provide for definitions; to provide for powers and duties; to require other public bodies to cooperate with the office; 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.
Chapter 12 of Title 45 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the Governor, is amended by adding a new article to read as follows:

"ARTICLE 7

45-12-210.
The General Assembly finds that:

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 (BEA) released
national statistics that demonstrate the economic output of outdoor recreation to be $689 billion. Prior to the pandemic, outdoor recreation was surpassing industries such as mining, utilities, farming and ranching, and chemical products manufacturing;
(2) According to the BEA, the outdoor recreation industry was growing rapidly prior to COVID-19, 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 BEA's state-level data show that outdoor recreation in Georgia contributes over $10 billion to the state's economy and directly supports over 130,000 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 of the outdoor recreation economy 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 17 states have already created offices dedicated to outdoor recreation to increase investment in and support the booming outdoor recreation economy in their respective states.

As used in this article, the term:
(1) 'Director' means the director of the Office of Outdoors.
(2) 'Office' means the Office of Outdoors in the office of the Governor.
(3) '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.

(4) 'State agency' means any department, agency, commission, or other institution of the executive branch of the government of the State of Georgia.

45-12-212.
The Office of Outdoors is created in the office of the Governor.

45-12-213.
The director, at the direction of the Governor 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 business opportunities in Georgia and marketing, advertising, and securing media opportunities 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 Governor policies and initiatives to enhance outdoor recreational 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;

(10) Develop and support development of outdoor based education programs and curricula, including a grant program for schools and organizations to conduct outdoor learning programs; and

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

45-12-214.
The office shall be attached to the Department of Natural Resources for administrative purposes only. The Department of Natural Resources shall provide technical support to the office as directed by the director and approved by the Governor.

45-12-215.
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 office in advancing opportunities to Georgia citizens, and otherwise to take any action which the Governor or the office may direct or require in carrying out their duties under this article.
The provisions of this article shall not be construed so as to permit an 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 the subject matter. The provisions of this article shall not be construed so as to authorize an 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.