

# OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

## TOWN HALL 101

In 2017, the fight over the future of public lands is largely centered in Congress. Over the last eight years, we have learned that meeting with lawmakers face to face is one of the most effective ways to make change. Outdoor Alliance is working hard to educate lawmakers on the importance of public lands for outdoor recreation and the economy, but we know that members of Congress care most about what their constituents back home think. One of the few forums where constituents can meet face-to-face with their Member of Congress is town hall meetings. This is where you come in.

Members of Congress (MoC) regularly hold local town halls or public listening sessions throughout their districts. You can use these meetings to voice your concerns directly to your MoC and to attract media attention.

### How to Prepare

#### **When is your MoC's next town hall?**

If you don't know who your MoC is, use this tool: <http://www.whoismyrepresentative.com/>

Try using this website which keeps track of each MoC's town halls: <http://bit.ly/2kON3LS>

**Send out a notice of the town hall to all your friends and relatives who might want to join you at the town hall.** Feel free to pass along any information you have on your MoC's voting record on public lands etc.

**Prepare several questions for you and your group to ask.** Your questions should be sharp and fact-based, ideally including information on your MoC's voting record, votes he or she has taken, or past statements. Focus your questions on public lands, what they meant to you, your community, the economy, and your passion. Remember that you don't have to be a subject-matter expert to share your values and expectations with your congressperson. Your opinion counts.

Here are a few talking points about protecting public lands that may help you formulate your own questions

- National public lands belong to all Americans. State lands belong to the State—not even the citizens of that state—and are not necessarily public. It can be sold off, developed, exploited, or turned into private real estate. States have no obligation to involve the public in these decisions.

E.g.: “Congressman X, will you commit to protecting our public lands by opposing future efforts to transfer land to the states?”

- Outdoor recreation is an economic powerhouse in the United States, each year generating \$646 billion in consumer spending and supporting 6.1 million direct jobs.

E.g.: “As a small business owner that guides rafting trips on the Gauley River, my livelihood is based off the public lands in your district. And around the country outdoor recreation creates 6.1 million jobs like mine. What are you doing to protect the public lands on which these jobs depend?”

- National Forests and BLM lands in the west are home to 71% of climbing, 43% of paddling, 193,500 miles of hiking trails, and 12,659 miles of biking trails.

E.g.: “As a mountain biker the 12,659 miles of trails on public lands in the West, are the reason that I live here in your district. What are you doing to protect these public lands here in Montana?”

## At the Town Hall

1. **Get there early, and if you planned to meet up with anyone, find that person and get organized.**
2. **Get seated and spread out.** Head into the venue a bit early to grab seats at the front half of the room. Sit by yourself or in groups of two, and spread out throughout the room.
3. **Make your voices heard by asking good questions.** When the MoC opens the floor for questions, members in the group should put their hands up and keep them there. Look friendly or neutral so that staffers will call on you. When you’re asking a question, remember the following guidelines:
  - Stick with the prepared list of questions. Don’t be afraid to read straight from a printout if you need to.
  - Be polite but persistent, and demand real answers. MoCs are very good at deflecting or dodging questions they don’t want to answer. If the MoC dodges, ask a follow-up question. If he or she isn’t giving you real answers, then call him or her out for it.
  - Don’t give up the mic until you’re satisfied with the answer. If you’ve asked a hostile question, a staffer will often try to limit your ability to follow up by taking the microphone back immediately after you finish speaking. If they object, then say politely but loudly: “I’m not finished. The MoC is dodging my question. Why are you trying to stop me from following up?”
4. **Support other allies and reinforce the message.** If someone else in the crowd asks a question that you agree with, applaud to show that the feeling is shared

throughout the audience. Also feel free to build on previous questions — amplifying the fact that you're part of a broad group.

5. **Consider recording things.** Assign someone in the group to use a smart phone or video camera to record other advocates asking questions and the MoC's response. While written transcripts are nice, unfavorable exchanges caught on video are much more compelling. These clips can be shared through social media and picked up by local and national media. Please familiarize yourself with your state and local laws that govern recording, along with any applicable Senate or House rules, prior to recording. These laws and rules vary substantially from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

## After the Town Hall

1. **Reach out to media, during and after the town hall.** If there's media at the town hall, the people who asked questions should approach them afterward and offer to speak about their concerns. When the event is over, you should engage local reporters on Twitter or by email and offer to provide an in-person account of what happened, as well as the video footage you collected.

Example Twitter outreach:

".@reporter I was at Rep. Smith's town hall in Springfield today. Large group asked about stopping the transfer of federal land to states. I have video & happy to chat."

Note: It's important to make this a public tweet by including the period before the journalist's Twitter handle. Making this public will make the journalist more likely to respond to ensure they get the intel first.

Ensure that the members of your group who are directly affected by specific threats are the ones whose voices are elevated when you reach out to media.

2. **Share everything.** Post pictures, video, and your own thoughts about the event, etc., to social media afterward. Tag the MoC's office and encourage others to share widely.

Please tag Outdoor Alliance on Facebook and Twitter (@OutdoorAlliance)