

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

No. DA 23-0575

RIKKI HELD, ET AL.,

Plaintiffs and Appellees,

v.

STATE OF MONTANA, ET AL.,

Defendants and Appellants.

On appeal from the Montana First Judicial District Court, Lewis and Clark County
Cause No. CDV 2020–307, the Honorable Kathy Seeley, Presiding

**BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE
OUTDOOR RECREATION INDUSTRY MEMBERS**

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SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

In the face of a global climate crisis that is threatening ecosystems, businesses, and ways of life known for generations in Montana and beyond, the State of Montana ignored its constitutional mandate to protect its citizens' inalienable right to a clean and healthful environment. After extensive fact finding and testimony documenting the injuries inflicted by climate change on the Youth Plaintiffs, the District Court struck down section 75-1-201(2)(a) of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (the "MEPA Limitation") as unconstitutional under Article II, Section 3 and Article IX, Section 1 of the Montana Constitution. This Court should deny the appeal and affirm that the MEPA Limitation is unconstitutional.

"All persons are born free and have certain inalienable rights."¹ The very first inalienable right enshrined in the Montana Constitution is the right to a "clean and healthful environment."² Changing temperatures and weather patterns are already wreaking havoc on the planet and Montana, its citizens, and local economies.

Amici curiae are members of the outdoor recreation industry and file this brief to highlight the negative impacts that state inaction, which encourages fossil

¹ Mont. Const. Art. II, § 2.

² *Id.*

fuel use and exacerbates climate change, is having on the outdoor recreation economy in Montana. A clean and healthful environment cannot be insured if Appellants continue to approve projects without considering their impacts on climate change.

The U.S. Global Change Research Program (“USGCRP”)—a federal program mandated by Congress to coordinate climate-change research across 13 member agencies—warned in its most recent National Climate Assessment,

Climate change poses risks to seasonal and outdoor economies in communities across the United States, including impacts on economies centered around . . . winter recreation[] and inland water-based recreation.

Projected increases in wildfire smoke events are expected to impair outdoor recreational activities and visibility in wilderness areas. Declines in snow and ice cover caused by warmer winter temperatures are expected to negatively impact the winter recreation industry in the Northwest, Northern Great Plains, and the Northeast. Some fish, birds, and mammals are expected to shift where they live as a result of climate change, with implications for hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-related activities.³

The outdoor recreation industry, which is an \$800 billion industry in the United States, supports tens of millions of jobs nationally. In Montana, the outdoor recreation economy represents 4.3% of total state GDP and employs more than

³ USGCRP, *Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume II: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the United States* (rev. Mar. 2021), 31-32 [hereinafter *Fourth National Climate Assessment*], https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/downloads/NCA4_2018_FullReport.pdf (admitted into evidence as P23, *see* Doc. 399).

29,000 Montana citizens. Climate change is negatively impacting the outdoor industry in Montana, as people lose accessible habitat and species to enjoy and available days to go outside – whether because of extreme heat, toxic air from wildfires, floods, or dwindling ice and snow.

Because the MEPA Limitation allows Montana to avoid its constitutional responsibility to protect a clean and healthy environment, and because that derogation of constitutional duty is already having profound negative impacts on the outdoor industry in Montana, this Court should uphold the District Court’s order and strike down the MEPA Limitation.

INTEREST OF AMICI CURIAE

Amici curiae Patagonia, Inc., The Orvis Company, Inc., Trail Head Inc., School of Trout, LLC, Conservation Hawks, Inc., Yaak Valley Forest Council, The Montana Project, Big Hole Lodge, Brant Oswald Fly Fishing LLC, and R.L. Winston Rod Company (collectively “Outdoor Recreation Industry Members”) are businesses and nonprofits with direct interests in how the State of Montana and its agencies respond to the climate crisis through the Montana Environmental Policy Act and the Constitution. The Outdoor Recreation Industry Members support the passions of their customers and members to explore, recreate in, and preserve the natural world. Climate change is increasingly causing soaring temperatures, extreme weather events, reduced winter snowpack, smoke-filled skies from

wildfires, degraded rivers and lakes, and diminished wildlife populations in Montana. All of these consequences negatively impact the outdoor industry, which is built to facilitate engagement in outdoor activities like fishing, hunting, climbing, skiing, running, and mountain biking among many others.

Patagonia, Inc. plays a leading role in the outdoor recreation economy.

Patagonia was founded in 1973 and has a 50-year history of environmental advocacy. It is now a California benefit corporation, with its purpose of being in business to save our home planet enshrined in its articles of incorporation.

Patagonia employs 38 people in Montana, including 23 people as staff at its retail store in Dillon.

The Orvis Company, Inc. (“Orvis”) is an international, multi-channel retailer with approximately 1,500 employees in the United States. Orvis is primarily a fly-fishing and wingshooting brand, inspired by nature, driven by curiosity, and fulfilled by adventure. As the world leader in fly fishing, Orvis is proud to share offerings in a wide assortment of men’s and women’s sportswear, fine gifts and home furnishings, luggage, and travel accessories. Orvis is committed to leading the sustainable future of fly fishing, wingshooting and the natural world through protecting and restoring habitats, creating sustainable products and enabling next generation participation. In Montana, Orvis has 48 endorsed outfitters and lodges through the Orvis Endorsed Partner network, and 40,000 customers.

Trail Head Inc. operates The Trail Head, a specialty outdoor gear and clothing store based in Missoula for 50 years offering gear for camping, hiking, backpacking, climbing and skiing, and Trail Head River Sports in Missoula, which offers boating gear.

School of Trout, LLC is headquartered in Bigfork and is one of the world's finest and most comprehensive fly-fishing schools. The School of Trout brings together some of the planet's most respected fly-fishing instructors to share their experiences, their knowledge, their passion, and their accumulated wisdom with students during the school's week-long classes.

Conservation Hawks is a Montana-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose mission is to defend our sporting heritage and pass on a healthy natural world to future generations of Americans. Conservation Hawks works to educate and engage both hunters and anglers on the single largest threat we face: anthropogenic climate change.

Yaak Valley Forest Council ("YVFC") works for a wild Yaak through science, education, and bold action. YVFC seeks to help recover the state's endangered grizzly bears—particularly in the Yaak—and to designate the country's first Climate Refuge. YVFC envisions a "Curtain of Green" spreading around the world in a series of protected old and mature forests absorbing up to 12% of the world's annual carbon emissions.

The Montana Project preserves, promotes, and connects Montana’s craft, artisan, and nature communities so as to nurture and protect the natural resources, open spaces, clear skies, clean water, and wildlife that foster and inspire them.

Big Hole Lodge, established in 1984, is one of the classic fly-fishing lodge experiences in the American West. Big Hole Lodge offers world-renowned wild trout fishing and comfortable accommodations in a secluded mountain setting in Wise River.

Brant Oswald Fly Fishing LLC is based in Livingston and has served clients with guided fly fishing on waters around the area, principally on the Yellowstone River and the Paradise Valley spring creeks since 1988.

R.L. Winston Rod Company, based in Twin Bridges, has been a leading manufacturer of fly rods since 1929. Its customers are avid users of Montana’s many blue-ribbon trout streams.

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ARGUMENT

I. Outdoor Recreation Is a Vital Part of Montana’s Economy, Which Faces Increasing Threats From Climate Change.

A. Outdoor recreation plays a critical role in the economic health of the United States and Montana.

Each year Americans spend \$862 billion in the outdoor recreation economy.⁴

This spending includes purchasing products such as apparel, footwear, and equipment to fish, ski, climb, bike, hunt, and more at world-renowned locations all across Montana.⁵ In 2022, the value added from the outdoor recreation industry amounted to 2.2% of the nation’s GDP, which is more than motor vehicle manufacturing, oil/gas/coal, and air transportation *combined*.⁶ In Montana, the outdoor recreation industry is even more significant, accounting for 4.3% of Montana’s GDP, which is the third highest in the nation behind Hawaii and Vermont⁷ and more than the 4.1% contributed to Montana’s GDP by mining,

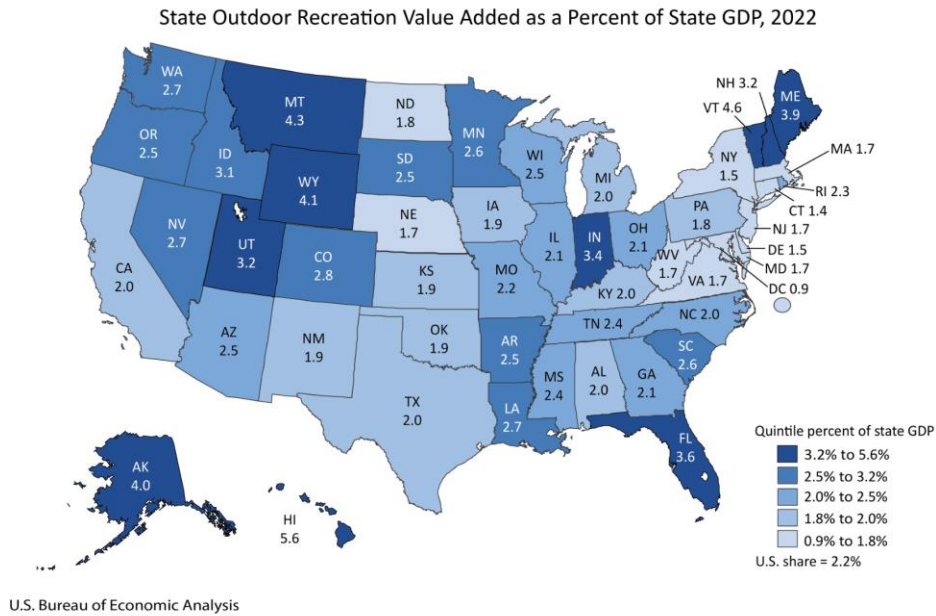
⁴ Outdoor Industry Association, *State of the Outdoor Market Fall 2022* (2022), 1, <https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OIA-State-of-the-Outdoor-Market-Report-Fall-2022.pdf>.

⁵ Outdoor Industry Association, *The Outdoor Recreation Economy* (2017), 5, https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA_RecEconomy_FINAL_Single.pdf.

⁶ Headwater Economics, *The Outdoor Recreation Economy by State* (updated November 2023), <https://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trends-performance/outdoor-recreation-economy-by-state>.

⁷ Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022* (November 2023), 1, <https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/orsa1123.pdf>.

quarrying, and oil and gas extraction *combined*.⁸



*Figure 1: State Outdoor Recreation Value Added as Percent of State GDP, 2022.*⁹

In tandem with its impressive economic output, the outdoor recreation industry was also responsible for providing 4.5 million U.S. jobs in 2021.¹⁰ As of 2022, the outdoor economy provided over 29,000 jobs in Montana with a total of \$1.38 billion in wages,¹¹ compared to fewer than 10,500 jobs and \$650 million in wages provided in Montana by mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction

⁸ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Tools, Interactive Data, Regional Data, GDP and Personal Income, Annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by State, GDP in current dollars, Montana, All statistics in table, 2022, <https://www.bea.gov/itable>.

⁹ Bureau of Economic Analysis, *supra* note 7, at 1.

¹⁰ Outdoor Industry Association, *supra* note 4, at 1.

¹¹ Headwater Economics, *supra* note 6.

combined.^{12, 13} These jobs expand well beyond traditional recreation jobs such as guiding, outfitting, lodging, and park service. The outdoor recreation industry employs product developers, small and large retailers and other professionals creating jobs for highly skilled workers in diverse fields such as technology, product design, manufacturing, sustainability, and global commerce.¹⁴ Tellingly, there are more American jobs in the hunting and fishing industry alone than the entire oil and gas extraction industry.¹⁵

The outdoor recreation economy plays a vital role in the economic and physical health of the United States and Montana. A clean and healthy environment is foundational to the businesses that make up the outdoor recreation economy, and the industry cannot continue to thrive unless government agencies account for the climate impacts of their decisions.

B. Climate change directly threatens the outdoor recreation economy in Montana.

Decreased snowfall and increased temperatures are melting glaciers, like

¹² U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Tools, Interactive Data, Regional Data, GDP and Personal Income, Annual Personal Income and Employment by State, Total full-time and part-time employment by NAICS industry, Montana, All statistics in table, 2022, <https://www.bea.gov/itable>.

¹³ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Tools, Interactive Data, Regional Data, GDP and Personal Income, Annual Personal Income and Employment by State, Wages and salaries by NAICS industry, Montana, All statistics in table, 2022, <https://www.bea.gov/itable>.

¹⁴ Outdoor Industry Association, *supra* note 5, at 6.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 7.

those in Glacier National Park. Glacier National Park may have no glaciers left by the end of the century¹⁶ thereby threatening the estimated \$484 million in economic benefits and over 5,200 jobs supported by the park.¹⁷ In just the last 70 years, 82 percent of Glacier Park’s namesake glaciers have disappeared and the total area of the glaciers has decreased by 70 percent.¹⁸ Glacier National Park is a “major driver of the regional economy and a source of fresh water for countless communities.”¹⁹

Climate change is also impacting fishing in Montana. The direct results of climate change to Montana’s rivers include algal blooms, decreased flows, increased temperatures, fish population declines and die offs, and decreased water quality.²⁰ Montana’s rivers have experienced a 20 percent decrease in summertime flows and a 1 to 2 degree temperature increase compared to 1960 levels.²¹ For fishing, habitat for trout could decline up to 30% by 2028 with an estimated loss of

¹⁶ *Fourth National Climate Assessment*, *supra* note 3, at 1501.

¹⁷ *See Tourism to Glacier National Park Adds \$484 Million in Local Economic Benefits*, NAT’L PARK SERVICE (June 4, 2019), <https://www.nps.gov/glac/learn/news/19-28.htm>.

¹⁸ Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order (Doc. 405) (“Order”), p. 37, ¶ 154.

¹⁹ Order, p. 37, ¶ 152.

²⁰ Order, pp. 41-42.

²¹ Order, p. 40, ¶ 170.

\$192 million in associated spending.²² These degradations can already be seen in Flathead, Missouri, Clark Fork, Yellowstone, Powder, Madison, Blackfoot, Smith, Shields, and Bitterroot Rivers.²³

For hunting, Montana's warmer and shorter winters allow big game to remain in the high county for longer, which increases the time and effort for hunting and dramatically threatens Montana's hunting traditions.²⁴

Due to increased temperatures and resulting rain instead of snow, Montana's snowpack has been in—and will continue to—decline.²⁵ Montana's snow sports will be impacted by shorter winters, as snowpack is projected to melt 41 days earlier with 70 fewer days with snow cover in the upcoming decades.²⁶ Just last month (February 2024), Teton Pass Ski Area announced its closure after operating only four days this season due to a record low snowpack in the Sun-Teton-Marias

²² Thomas Michael Power, Ph.D. & Donovan S. Power, M.S., *The Economic Impact of Climate Change in Montana* (September 2023), 12, https://montanawildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Economic-Impacts-of-Climate-Change-in-MT_Power-Consulting-Inc._Clean-Version_9-27-2023.docx.pdf.

²³ Order, pp. 41-42.

²⁴ Power & Power, *supra* note 22, at 7.

²⁵ Order, pp. 35-36, ¶¶ 145-148.

²⁶ Power & Power, *supra* note 22, at 13-14.

basin “with 42% of the typical amount of snowpack for this time of the year.”^{27, 28}

Elsewhere in the state, Bridger Bowl saw skier visitation drop 40% from last December due to poor snow conditions.²⁹ Taken together, these impacts are projected to result in the loss of more than 8,800 jobs and \$263 million in earnings in Montana *annually*.³⁰

Climate change is also causing increased droughts in Montana. This trend will only continue into the future.³¹ The increased drought conditions exacerbate wildfire risks, which results in a longer fire season with more frequent and more

²⁷ Sara Chernikoff, *Lack of snow forces Montana ski resort to close halfway through season*, USA TODAY (Feb. 14, 2024), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2024/02/14/montana-teton-pass-closes-lack-of-snow/72588888007>.

²⁸ Jim Carlton, *Cold Weather Businesses Suffer in the Winter That Wasn't*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (March 8, 2024), <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/climate-environment/cold-weather-businesses-suffer-in-the-winter-that-wasnt-a59ac42b>.

²⁹ Bryanna Carroll, *Lack of snow has far-reaching impacts for Montana businesses*, NBC MONTANA (Jan. 5, 2024), <https://nbcmontana.com/news/local/lack-of-snow-has-far-reaching-impacts-for-montana-businesses>.

³⁰ Power & Power, *supra* note 22, at 38-39.

³¹ Order, pp. 42-43, ¶ 177.

severe wildfires³² and causes additional losses to the outdoor recreation industry as people avoid outdoor activities to limit smoke exposure.³³

The effects of climate change are not some far off fantasy but are *currently* “*impacting, degrading, and depleting Montana's environment and natural resources*.”³⁴ These impacts are felt by “every sector of Montana’s economy” as a result of “increasing temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, increasing droughts and aridification, increasing extreme weather events, increasing severity and intensity of wildfires, and increasing glacial melt and loss.”³⁵

The District Court provided a comprehensive chronicle of current climate science and projections based on the “informative and credible” testimony of Plaintiffs’ experts,³⁶ including the “overwhelming scientific consensus that Earth is warming as a direct result of human GHG emissions, primarily from the burning of fossil fuels.”³⁷ The amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere has been consistently increasing since 1958, when measurements began, and has been increasing at 3 ppm per year since 2020, whereas it increased only 2 ppm per year between 1960-

³² Order, p. 43-44, ¶¶ 181-183.

³³ MTN News, *Smoke from area wildfires impacting Western Montana air quality*, KPAX.COM (August 2, 2022), <https://www.kpax.com/news/firewatch/smoke-from-area-wildfires-impacting-western-montana-air-quality>; Power & Power, *supra* note 22, at 17-19, 33-35.

³⁴ Order, p. 35, ¶ 140 (emphasis added).

³⁵ Order, p. 35, ¶¶ 140-141.

³⁶ Order, pp. 19-26.

³⁷ Order, p. 19, ¶ 67.

2000.³⁸ The rise in atmospheric CO₂ has resulted in increased global temperatures, with Montana heating faster than the global average due to its high latitude.³⁹

Without a reduction of GHGs, “extreme weather events and other climactic events such as droughts and heatwaves will occur more frequently and in greater magnitude.”⁴⁰ These events negatively impact Montana’s economy.

II. Plaintiffs’ Injuries from Montana’s Unchecked Contribution to Climate Change are Redressable.

Appellants do not refute the seriousness of the climate crisis or its impacts on the citizens and children of Montana.⁴¹ Rather, Appellants take a nihilistic approach, arguing that because rescission of the MEPA Limitation would not solve the climate crisis *entirely*, then the State should not be required to take *any* steps to reduce the State’s contribution to that crisis.⁴² Such pessimism is not a valid basis for avoiding a constitutional mandate. And inaction will not—and cannot—meet the global challenge posed by climate change and the hard truth that governments, including Montana, will need to do their part to meet that challenge.

³⁸ Order, p. 20, ¶ 76.

³⁹ Order, p. 21, ¶¶ 78-79.

⁴⁰ Order, p. 24, ¶ 89.

⁴¹ State Agencies’ Opening Brief (State Agencies Brief’), p. 6 (conceding that Defendants did not dispute “the science and impacts of climate change”); State of Montana Opening Brief (“Montana Brief”), p. 3 (adopting State Agencies’ statement of facts).

⁴² See Montana Brief, pp. 15-17, State Agencies Brief, pp. 30-33.

Instead, Appellants insist that the Youth Plaintiffs lack standing because, in Appellants' view, striking down the MEPA Limitation as unconstitutional would not redress Plaintiffs' injuries.⁴³ Appellants' argument is based on an erroneous assumption that only a ruling that entirely eliminates GHG emissions or reverses climate change would satisfy the redressability prong for standing. That is not so.

Appellants' argument relies on strict application of the *federal* standard for redressability rather than the broader Montana standard.⁴⁴ Under the Montana standard, an injury is redressable where "available legal relief can effectively alleviate, remedy, or prevent" the injury.⁴⁵ As the District Court explained, "The term 'alleviate' means to 'make (something, such as pain or suffering) more bearable' or '*to partially remove or correct* (something undesirable).'"⁴⁶

Accordingly, there is no requirement that striking down the MEPA Limitation must eliminate every injury to the Youth Plaintiffs caused by climate change. Instead, redressability is established where, as here, the remedy would partially relieve the Youths' injuries.

⁴³ State Agencies Brief, pp. 30-34; Montana Brief, pp. 15-17.

⁴⁴ See Order on Motion to Dismiss (Doc. 46) (August 4, 2021) ("Motion to Dismiss Order"), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁵ *Larson v. State*, 2019 MT 28, ¶ 46, 394 Mont. 167, 434 P.3d 241 (citation omitted).

⁴⁶ Motion to Dismiss Order, pp. 15-16 (citing Merriam-Webster Dictionary) (emphasis added).

Moreover, the State ignores the benefits of more informed government decision-making in light of climate impacts. The MEPA Limitation prevents Appellants from obtaining the information needed to make decisions protective of the Youth Plaintiffs' inalienable rights to a clean and healthful environment. Declaring the MEPA Limitation unconstitutional will give Appellants the tool that is needed to approve or deny projects based on the standards imposed by the Montana Constitution. To hold otherwise would render the State's Constitutional mandate toothless and deny the Youth Plaintiffs and other Montana citizens the benefit of its unique protections. The injuries to the Youth Plaintiffs caused by the MEPA Limitation are therefore redressable under Montana's standing requirements. As a result, the Youth Plaintiffs have standing to bring their claim.

Appellants' position also underscores the inertia of those in power that has fueled the current climate crisis. Pointing to the fact that other states and countries such as China will continue to emit GHGs if the MEPA Limitation is removed, Appellants take the position that, unless *everybody* does *everything* to stop climate change, then the State of Montana should do *nothing*. This position is untenable given the environmental, economic, and psychological impacts that climate change is causing and will continue to cause unabated without government action. That other government actors are not doing what they should does not mean that Montana is excused from doing what it is constitutionally required to do. While

averting the climate crisis will require action from local, state, and national governments across the globe, the State of Montana must do its part to reduce *its* contribution to the climate crisis as mandated by the State's constitution.

CONCLUSION

Amici Curiae Outdoor Recreation Industry Members respectfully request that this Court affirm in full the District Court's August 14 Order and hold that Plaintiffs have standing and the MEPA Limitation violates the Montana Constitution's guarantee of a clean and healthful environment.

Respectfully submitted this 14th day of March, 2024.

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CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

Pursuant to Rule 11(4)(e) of the Montana Rules of Appellate Procedure, I certify that this brief is printed with proportionately spaced Times New Roman typeface size 14-point font; is double spaced; and the word count calculated by Microsoft Word is 3,298, excluding the Table of Contents, Table of Authorities, and Certificate of Compliance.

Date: March 14, 2024

/s/ Rebecca L. Davis

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

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Dated: 03-14-2024