April 12, 2016

Rep. Rob Bishop
Chair, Committee on Natural Resources
123 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Raul Grijalva
Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources
1511 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act discussion draft

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva,

We write to express our serious concerns with certain aspects of the “Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act” discussion draft, which the House Natural Resources Committee will consider this week. In particular, we are concerned by the proposed transfer of thousands of acres from the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge to the government of Puerto Rico, which we believe sets a dangerous precedent by facilitating the potential privatization of protected public lands.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of seven member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, the Mountaineers, and the American Alpine Club and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, and backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation’s public lands, waters, and snowscapes. Our members are deeply committed to the protection and responsible stewardship of our country’s public lands.

Outdoor Alliance recognizes that targeted and limited land exchanges or small-scale transfers are an appropriate land management tool under certain circumstances. However, a proposal directed toward the privatization and development of protected public lands as part of a potential solution to a governmental entity’s financial problems is wrongheaded. Public lands—particularly those given additional protections for their ecological or recreational values—are a trust that should be retained in public ownership and managed for benefits in perpetuity, not in response to temporary financial exigencies.
We ask that the Committee carefully consider the dangerous precedent set by this proposed transfer and demonstrate its commitment to America’s public lands by removing this problematic provision.

Best regards,

Adam Cramer
Executive Director
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Brady Robinson, Executive Director, Access Fund
Wade Blackwood, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Mike Van Abel, Executive Director, International Mountain Bicycling Association
Mark Menlove, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Phil Powers, Executive Director, American Alpine Club