

# STATE OF NEW YORK

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8094--A

Cal. No. 311 2019-2020 Regular Sessions

## IN ASSEMBLY

May 31, 2019

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Introduced by M. of A. BARRETT, WALLACE, D'URSO, BLAKE, CUSICK, ASHBY, SANTABARBARA, GRIFFIN -- read once and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs -- ordered to a third reading, amended and ordered reprinted, retaining its place on the order of third reading

AN ACT requiring the division of veterans' services to review issues relating to veterans' abilities to access state parks, lands and facilities; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon expiration thereof

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "outdoor Rx 2 act".

3 § 2. Legislative findings and intent. The legislature hereby finds and 4 declares that protecting the physical, mental and behavioral health of 5 veterans is critical to ensure successful re-entry into civilian life. 6 Studies have shown that time outdoors can be a valuable adjunct therapy 7 in addition to more traditional health care, while also reducing reli- 8 ance on prescription medication. The therapeutic benefits of time spent 9 outdoors is clinically proven and is known to help reduce stress, 10 improve concentration, and promote overall well-being, both physical and 11 mental. Outdoor-based therapeutic programs hold particular promise for 12 people suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Military Sexual 13 Trauma, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Substance Use Disorders. Outdoor 14 programs including adventure therapy, wilderness therapy, horticultural 15 therapy, walk-and-talk therapy, and other nature-based programs, are 16 currently being used by mental health professionals and are shown to 17 have benefits including reduction of stress, restoration of attention, 18 and an improved sense of well-being. New York state is home to natural 19 beauty from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean, and has a significant 20 amount of open space, including the Adirondack and Catskill parks. 21 Recognizing the healing benefits of outdoor-based therapeutic programs

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 to residents of the state, particularly veterans and individuals recov- 2  
ering from substance abuse or a physical or mental trauma, the legisla- 3  
supports the establishment of an outdoor Rx act. 4 § 3. 1. The director of the  
division of veterans' services shall, in 5 consultation with the office of  
parks, recreation and historic preserva- 6 tion, the department of  
environmental conservation, the department of 7 health, and the office of  
mental health, review:

8 a. barriers that exist to provide veterans with increased access to 9 state  
lands and opportunities for medical treatment and nature-based 10 therapy and  
programming, including barriers to transportation, handicap 11 accessibility,  
cultural barriers, mental health stigmas, public aware- 12 ness of state  
outdoor resources, lack of experience in the outdoors, and 13 funding for  
public and private programs;

14 b. current state policies regarding free and discounted access to 15 state  
parks, lands, and recreational facilities by veterans, service- 16 connected  
disabled veterans, gold star families, and other military-con- 17 nected  
individuals;

18 c. opportunities to formalize coordination between the division of 19  
veterans' services, other state agencies, and partner organizations 20  
regarding the use of public lands or other outdoor spaces to facilitate 21  
access, medical treatment and nature-based therapy for veterans;

22 d. state lands, based on veterans' demographics including, but not 23  
limited to, service-connected disabled veterans, that should be prior- 24  
itized for access;

25 e. recommendations, following consultation with appropriate veterans' 26  
outdoor recreation groups, to reduce barriers and better facilitate the 27 use  
of state owned and managed lands for access, preventative care, 28 medical  
treatment, and nature-based therapy; and

29 f. estimated costs of implementing such recommendations and expanding 30  
access/benefits, as well as potential funding sources, including state 31  
funding and public-private partnership opportunities. 32 2. Following such  
review, which shall be completed no later than six 33 months from the effective  
date of this act, the division of veterans' 34 services shall submit findings  
to the governor, the temporary president 35 of the senate, the speaker of the  
assembly, the minority leader of the 36 senate, the minority leader of the  
assembly, the chair of the assembly 37 committee on veterans' affairs, and the  
chair of the senate committee on 38 veterans, homeland security, and military  
affairs. Information shall 39 also be posted in a timely manner on the division  
of veterans' services' 40 website and a link to such document shall also be  
available on the 41 websites of the office of parks, recreation and historic  
preservation 42 and the department of environmental conservation.

43 § 4. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire and be 44  
deemed repealed December 31, 2022.