

# STATE OF NEW YORK

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6706--A

2019-2020 Regular Sessions

## IN SENATE

September 11, 2019

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Introduced by Sen. BENJAMIN -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Rules -- recommitted to the Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs in accordance with Senate Rule 6, sec. 8 -- committee discharged, bill amended, ordered reprinted as amended and recommitted to said committee

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

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

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1 amount of open space, including the Adirondack and Catskill parks.  
2 Recognizing the healing benefits of outdoor-based therapeutic programs  
3 to residents of the state, particularly veterans and individuals recover-  
4 ing from substance abuse or a physical or mental trauma, the legisla-  
5 ture supports the establishment of an outdoor Rx act.

6 § 3. 1. The director of the division of veterans' services shall, in  
7 consultation with the office of parks, recreation and historic preserva-  
8 tion, the department of environmental conservation, the department of  
9 health, and the office of mental health, review:

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

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

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

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

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

31 f. estimated costs of implementing such recommendations and expanding  
32 access/benefits, as well as potential funding sources, including state  
33 funding and public-private partnership opportunities.

34 2. Following such review, which shall be completed no later than six  
35 months from the effective date of this act, the division of veterans'  
36 services shall submit findings to the governor, the temporary president  
37 of the senate, the speaker of the assembly, the minority leader of the  
38 senate, the minority leader of the assembly, the chair of the assembly  
39 committee on veterans' affairs, and the chair of the senate committee on  
40 veterans, homeland security, and military affairs. Information shall  
41 also be posted in a timely manner on the division of veterans' services'  
42 website and a link to such document shall also be available on the  
43 websites of the office of parks, recreation and historic preservation  
44 and the department of environmental conservation.

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