

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-232
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol, S-230
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy,

Thank you for your tireless efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. As Congress continues to craft economic relief and stimulus legislation to help our nation recover, it is important that we provide support for the outdoor recreation industry that serves as the economic engine for many of our local communities. Therefore, we write to request the inclusion of full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and dedicated mandatory funding to address the maintenance backlog on our public lands in future COVID-19 relief packages. These provisions will create jobs, expand access to recreation for all, and support a sustained resurgence in a key economic sector devastated by the ongoing impacts of the pandemic.

The outdoor recreation industry is an important economic driver across the country, supporting millions of jobs and contributing 2.2 percent to our national Gross Domestic Product. However, like other sectors tied to travel and tourism, outdoor businesses are enduring the unprecedented economic impact of COVID-19, facing dramatically decreased sales and revenue, difficulties with production and distribution, and large numbers of furloughs and layoffs. The recovery and continued success of the outdoor industry is closely tied to our public lands and waters. As COVID-19 continues to place unexpected burdens on local and county budgets, federal investment in parks and public lands will aid the recovery of communities that rely on a strong outdoor recreation economy.

Since its inception in 1964, the LWCF program has established many of our nation's most coveted public lands that generate billions of dollars for state and local economies. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation supports \$778 billion in annual consumer spending and 5.2 million jobs across the country. While LWCF enjoys broad support for these clear economic benefits, the program relies on a standing account of the United States Treasury which is subject to constant diversions from its intended purpose. Permanent authorization of

LWCF in 2019 was an important step in addressing these issues, but it did not ensure that all of the funds identified for LWCF are used for their intended purpose. This underfunding has created a backlog of conservation and recreation access needs in every state across the country. Therefore, Congress must pass legislation to provide full and dedicated funding for LWCF at the authorized level of \$900 million.

In addition to the importance of conserving our public places for the economic and health benefits of local communities, deferred maintenance at national parks and public lands throughout the country is a mounting problem that we can no longer afford to ignore. Decades of underfunding and neglect have led to overgrown trails, crumbling roads, and dilapidated buildings, leading to \$11.9 billion of deferred maintenance projects in our national parks alone. Therefore, Congress must address this issue by increasing funds designed to upkeep and rebuild this poorly maintained infrastructure on federal lands. This will both create jobs in the communities surrounding our public places and improve the quality of our parks when they safely open for visitors.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the House of Representatives was steadily making progress to address these issues. Current legislative proposals – including the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act (H.R. 1225, S. 500), the LWCF Permanent Funding Act (H.R. 3195, S. 1081), and the Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422) – have already received strong, bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. Given the clear bipartisan support in both chambers for legislative action on these issues, and the evident economic impact of outdoor recreation on public lands, the time to act is now.

In the face of this crisis, we have an opportunity to create jobs, rebuild our parks infrastructure, and provide a much-needed economic stimulus to outdoor recreation businesses by protecting public lands and parks. Beyond these clear stimulus impacts, the inclusion of these important policy priorities will also help to reinvest in natural infrastructure that decreases demands on federal, state and local government budgets already facing staggering coronavirus-related challenges. Finally, strong investments in protecting and maintaining our nation's public lands will provide greater, more equitable access to the outdoors for Americans coping with this national trauma.

This is a sensible, strategic, and smart addition to any upcoming economic relief legislation. We must ensure that public lands and waters can accommodate a recovering America with ample infrastructure in good, safe working condition. This is the time to make these critical investments.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you on these priorities.

Sincerely,



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Joe Cunningham
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

Jim Costa
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

TJ Cox
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

Anthony Brindisi
Member of Congress

Angie Craig
Member of Congress

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress

Jason Crow
Member of Congress

Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

Matt Cartwright
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress

Sean Casten
Member of Congress

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress

Deb Haaland
Member of Congress

David Cicilline
Member of Congress

Antonio Delgado
Member of Congress

Josh Harder
Member of Congress

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Mike Doyle
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

John Katko
Member of Congress

Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

Andy Kim
Member of Congress

Peter King
Member of Congress

Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

Susie Lee
Member of Congress

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Ben Ray Luján
Member of Congress

Stephen Lynch
Member of Congress

Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

Ben McAdams
Member of Congress

Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Alex X. Mooney
Member of Congress

Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress

Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Grace Napolitano
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress

Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

Chris Pappas
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Kathleen M. Rice
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Francis Rooney
Member of Congress

Harley Rouda
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Xochitl Torres Small
Member of Congress

Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

David Scott
Member of Congress

David Trone
Member of Congress

Donna Shalala
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Susan Wild
Member of Congress

Elise Stefanik
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth
Member of Congress

Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress

Lee Zeldin
Member of Congress