

\* Alpine Lakes Protection Society \* American Rivers \* Cascade Forest Conservancy \* Conservation Northwest \*  
\* North Cascades Conservation Council \* Pacific Rivers \* Pilchuck Audubon Society \* The Mountaineers \*  
\* Trout Unlimited \* WA Chapter – Sierra Club \* Washington Wild \* WildEarth Guardians \*

Glenn Casamassa, Regional Forester  
U.S. Forest Service – Pacific Northwest Region  
1220 SW Third Avenue  
Portland, OR 97204

August 25, 2020

*Subject: Great American Outdoors Act – Deferred Maintenance Priorities*

Dear Mr. Casamassa:

As members of the Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative (WWRI) coalition, we wanted to express our excitement that Congress has finally recognized the need to address deferred maintenance on public lands, including national forests and grasslands. As so many Americans have ventured out this year, while also staying close to home, they have renewed their spirits often on U.S. Forest Service managed lands and streams. However, they also have encountered the problems that you have long struggled with due to lack of funds – deteriorating roads, trails, restrooms, signage, etc.

Since 2007, our coalition has been dedicated to re-establishing and maintaining healthy aquatic and forest ecosystems in Washington’s national forests. We have seen how Region 6 managed Legacy Roads and Trails funding to improve and maintain roads, ensure recreational access and improve watershed conditions. The Region established a good program for prioritizing projects and allocating funds that not only improved watersheds that support clean and safe drinking water, wildlife and fish habitat, but also improved recreation opportunities across Region 6. Staff shared annual outcomes and accomplishments with partners.

The funding associated with the Great American Outdoors Act provides an opportunity to build off of this foundation and expand the success. When setting priorities, we ask that you consider the following:

- Prioritize roads identified in Travel Analysis Reports as “Likely Unneeded” for decommissioning
  - 12% of the Region’s road system was identified as “likely not needed” through the 2015 Travel Analysis Process<sup>1</sup>. Decommissioning roads reduces the deferred maintenance backlog.
- Prioritize maintenance and storm proofing on high value recreational access roads
  - -42% drop in Region 6’s road maintenance (CMRD) funding from 2008-2018<sup>2</sup> and an increase in prioritizing timber access roads have left recreational access roads in highly degraded condition.
- Prioritize roads that are impacting aquatic resources and/or are barriers to fish passage for decommissioning or stormproofing
  - 39% (8,245 miles) of the 21,452 miles of national forest roads in Washington are high risk to aquatics<sup>3</sup>
  - 1,400+ fish passage barriers have been identified on USFS waterways in Washington<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> USFS Region 6 Travel Analysis Outcomes and Next Steps, December 2015.

<sup>2</sup> USFS Pacific Northwest Region data.

<sup>3</sup> USFS Region 6 Year 15 Summary Report for R6 FS and Department of Ecology Clean Water Act MOA, October 2016.

<sup>4</sup> USFS Pacific Northwest Region data.

- Prioritize projects from Watershed Restoration Action Plans, including aquatic organism passage projects
  - 78% of national forest watersheds in Washington are harmed by roads and trails<sup>5</sup>

As you move forward, we request your continued focus and leadership on watershed and aquatic restoration, which still requires a strong investment in order to reduce the impacts from the Agency’s road system, especially in Washington under the umbrella of “shared stewardship”.

We ask that you continue to prioritize healthy watersheds and reliable recreational access and ensure funds are directed to these efforts.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

WWRI Coalition Members (*note: some coalition members were out of the office*)

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Pacific NW Conservation Manager  
WWRI Coalition Coordinator  
WildEarth Guardians

Tom Uniack  
Executive Director  
Washington Wild

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Wendy McDermott  
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Director, Rivers of Puget Sound and Columbia Basin

CC: Gina Owens (Deputy Regional Forester), Lisa Northrup (Deputy Regional Forester), Dan Shively (Director of Natural Resources), Christy Darden (Director of Engineering), Tracy Tophooven (Director of Recreation, Lands, Minerals)

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<sup>5</sup> USFS Watershed Condition Framework. Poor/Fair condition of watersheds from road/trail indicator.