

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Jefferson Drive SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

The Honorable Brenda Mallory
Chair
Council on Environmental Quality
730 Jackson Place NW
Washington, D.C. 20506

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 2050

Dear Secretary Haaland, Secretary Vilsack, Chairwoman Mallory, and Director Young:

Thank you for your strong support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), our nation's most important conservation and recreation program and a primary tool for executing the Biden Administration's ambitious America the Beautiful initiative. As you well know, LWCF supports an array of benefits, from protecting drinking water, improving climate resilience, and conserving natural infrastructure to providing landscape conservation, habitat protection, and outdoor recreation access for all. At this moment of climate and nature crisis, LWCF is critical to making tangible progress on the important goals of the America the Beautiful initiative, but increased investment in Fiscal Year 2024 is necessary to address all of the outstanding conservation and recreation priorities across the country.

This year, the Biden Administration submitted nearly \$1.1 billion in LWCF needs in its budget request (including \$214 million on the ready-to-go supplemental project lists), and hundreds of millions more identified during the budget process were left off the final submission lists. In fact, many projects on the priority lists represent single phases of much larger projects that could be completed in total with additional funding, demonstrating that overall demand for LWCF is even higher. To avoid the loss of irreplaceable natural and cultural resources and missed opportunities for additional carbon sequestration and climate resilience, we recommend that the President's budget request for Fiscal Year 2024 include \$450 million in discretionary funding to complement the mandatory allocations provided by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA).

Dedicated LWCF funding has enabled additional progress on landscape-level conservation, protection of working forests and ranchlands, access to the outdoors for underserved communities, climate resilience, preservation of historic and cultural sites, and other key goals of the America the Beautiful initiative. Still, project demand across the nation far exceeds the steady funding levels provided under GAOA. Increased investment in LWCF, above and beyond those annual dedicated funds, is vitally necessary to combat the constant and damaging overcrowding of our public lands; lack of greenspace in cities; need for natural climate solutions to protect communities; relentless development pressures; reduced carbon storage as forests, grasslands, and wetlands are lost to conversion; and other ongoing threats.

LWCF's \$900 million level was authorized in 1978, when the purchasing power of that amount was more than four times what it is today, and climate science was not prevalent. Since that time, credits to the fund far exceeded annual LWCF appropriations and outlays, leaving an unobligated balance of more than \$22 billion in the LWCF Special Account in the U.S. Treasury. This chronic underfunding of LWCF (prior to enactment of GAOA) created a backlog of unmet conservation and recreation needs and a long line of willing-seller landowners and community stakeholders clamoring for access to these funds.

LWCF's unobligated balance provides an essential opportunity to address this backlog and to advance the President's conservation vision. The unused deposits into the LWCF account are fully available under the law to be appropriated by Congress to augment the funds provided through GAOA. Accordingly, we respectfully request that an America the Beautiful investment of \$450 million in discretionary LWCF funds, in addition to mandatory LWCF funding, be part of the Administration's next budget proposal to address the numerous ready-to-go and now-or-never project opportunities, and to meet the groundbreaking commitment laid out in Executive Order 14008, "Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad," and the America the Beautiful report.

Thank you for your continuing attention to and support for this important program. We look forward to working with you to grow investment in conservation and recreation across the nation.

Sincerely,

American Hiking Society
American Society of Landscape Architects
Appalachian Mountain Club
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Blue Ridge Conservancy
Blue Ridge Forever
Chesapeake Conservancy
City Parks Alliance
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
Conservation Voters for Idaho
Conserving Carolina
Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina
Illinois Environmental Council
League of Conservation Voters
Michigan League of Conservation Voters
Mojave Desert Land Trust
Montana Trout Unlimited
Montana Wildlife Federation
Mountain Mamas
National Park Trust
National Parks Conservation Association

North Country Trail Association
Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve Initiative
Open Space Institute
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable
Parks & Trails New York
Partnership for the National Trails System
Save the Redwoods League
Sierra Club
Society for the Protection of NH Forests
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy
The Conservation Fund
The Lyme Timber Company
The Mountain Pact
The Mountaineers
The Nature Conservancy
The North Shore Land Alliance, Inc.
The Wilderness Society
Trust for Public Land
Washington Wildlife & Recreation Coalition
Western Rivers Conservancy
Wild Montana