



March 16, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Subject: Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations: U.S. Forest Service - Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Initiative

Dear Senator Murray,

The undersigned 183 conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations, elected officials and local businesses are relieved that the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) Legacy Roads and Trails program was reinstated and permanently authorized in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* with a small amount of seed funding. Infrastructure projects on national forests that were shelved for 3 years due to the defunding of the program can now move forward putting people to work improving watersheds. However, the backlog has grown in the years of neglect and with the barrage of storms. This is why we request that the FY 2023 Interior-Environment Appropriations Bill include \$100M for the Legacy Roads and Trails program.

The Legacy Roads and Trails program was a national program that benefitted visitors to national forests and improved waterways across the U.S. for a decade. From 2008-2018, thanks in large part to the support of Washington's Congressional delegation, this unique, job-producing bi-partisan program invested nearly \$32 million in Washington State leading to better water quality in streams, reconnected waterways for fish migration and more resilient road and trail infrastructure. Trails, wildlife and watersheds on USFS lands are often critical to other protected landscapes including neighboring national parks. Moreover, Legacy Roads and Trails created or maintained 330-528 jobs annually across the nation, bringing dollars and jobs into rural communities, and saving America's taxpayers \$3 million per year in road maintenance costs.

Despite the decade worth of progress, and partially due to the lack of funding for three years, there is a large backlog of work to be done. This past winter, the back-to-back atmospheric river events have once again highlighted what happens when national forest infrastructure is neglected: culverts plug, roads wash out, salmon eggs are buried, access is lost and repair costs skyrocket. The Legacy Roads and Trails program is specifically designed to identify, target and fix road and trail problems now before they get exponentially worse.

We are grateful that this cornerstone program has been reestablished and we are seeing positive signs that the Forest Service intends to deliver results. As partners, we are pitching in with volunteer work, matching grants, and additional coordination. With committed funding in FY 2023, we can expect to see progress such as with the following:

- Restored fish passage on key streams by fixing culverts while also protecting roads from storms;
- Improved water quality by reclaiming unneeded roads, preventing sediment from entering waterways; and,

- Ensured access to Forest Service lands by storm-proofing roads and trails.

The Legacy Roads and Trails program helps adapt the Forest Service Road system to a more manageable size over time, reducing fiscal and environmental burdens and enabling the agency to ensure better and more reliable access. It focuses on the key areas where projects improve salmon and trout habitat, improve water quality and ensure road/trail resilience in a changing climate. It's a clear solution to a formidable problem. But it needs funding to succeed.

FY2023 Funding Request Information

- AGENCY: U.S. Forest Service
- SUBCOMMITTEE JURISDICTION: Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
- FUNDING PROGRAM: U.S. Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program (internal Forest Service funding code: "CMLG")
- FY23 REQUEST: \$100 million (inclusive of salary and expenses)
- PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: Since inception in FY 2008, the Legacy Roads and Trails program has significantly enhanced the Forest Service's ability to address key problems associated with its aging and poorly maintained road system. This includes repairing roads and trails needed for public access, replacing failed or undersized culverts to improve fish passage, and retire unneeded roads to prevent harmful water pollution. As climate change impacts become more pronounced, the program can serve as a model of how to deliver funds to address road problems in real time, enabling the Forest Service to efficiently plan, design, and implement restoration treatments. It is a critical tool for leveraging non- federal funds resulting in stronger projects and enhanced community engagement. And because funds primarily go to actual work on the ground, Legacy Roads and Trails creates high wage jobs for contractors, including those who specialize in stream restoration, environmental design, and heavy equipment operation.

We ask for your support of the program by **allocating \$100M to Legacy Roads and Trails in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Interior-Environment Appropriations Bill. Please make a formal request to the Appropriations Committee from your office before the 2023 appropriations request deadline using the information provided in the box above.** This ask is due to the lost ground over the last few years and the growing problem impacting how people access and experience opportunities on our public lands.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director
Washington Wild

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Pacific Northwest Conservation Manager
WildEarth Guardians

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