

# OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

April 10, 2023

Rep. Mike Simpson, Chair  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
2084 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Chellie Pingree, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
2354 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

## **RE: Outdoor recreation community appropriations priorities for FY2024.**

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree,

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, we write to express our support for robust investments in federal land management agencies through a strong Fiscal Year 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. As frequent visitors to our nation's public lands and waters, our organizations are grateful for the funding increases provided to land managers in FY2023. We encourage you to build on these investments in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress to support recreation access, local economies, and resilient public lands and waters.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Federal public lands provide outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation, including at some of the world's most iconic recreation destinations. These opportunities, as well as the irreplaceable cultural, ecological, and scenic values found across public lands, in turn support the growing outdoor recreation



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economy, which accounted for \$862 billion in gross economic output, 1.9 percent of U.S. gross domestic product, and 4.5 million jobs in 2021.<sup>1</sup>

## Summary of Recommendations

Agency	Program Funding Recommendations
Department of Agriculture Forest Service <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness: \$94.367M</li> <li>● Land Mgmt. Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring: \$26.429M</li> <li>● Cap. Improvements &amp; Maintenance, Trails: \$27.857M, including \$11.957M for National Scenic and Historic Trails</li> <li>● Cap. Improvements &amp; Maintenance, Roads: \$109.64M</li> <li>● Legacy Roads and Trails: \$100M</li> <li>● Forest and Rangeland Research: \$413.369M</li> </ul>
Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recreation Resources Management: \$93.398M</li> <li>● Resource Protection and Maintenance—Resource Management Planning: \$97.759M</li> <li>● National Conservation Lands: \$78M</li> <li>● Wilderness Management: \$25.701M</li> <li>● National Trails System: \$13.75M</li> <li>● Abandoned Mine Lands: \$287M</li> </ul>
Department of Interior National Park Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● National Recreation and Preservation: \$118.465M, including \$17.09M for Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance</li> <li>● Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership: \$135M</li> <li>● National Trails System: \$20.964M</li> </ul>
Other Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Land and Water Conservation Fund: \$1.35B</li> <li>● American Conservation &amp; Stewardship Atlas: \$25.5M</li> </ul>

Due to decades of underinvestment, federal land management agencies face staffing and resource challenges that have left them unable to meet modern needs related to recreation access, conservation, and sustainability. In recent years,

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis, BEA 22-55, Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2021 (2022), available at <https://www.bea.gov/news/2022/outdoor-recreation-satellite-account-us-andstates-2021>.

<sup>2</sup> All Forest Service appropriations should be accompanied by a commensurate increase to Salaries & Expenses.



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Congress has provided significant funding for these agencies through the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and most recently the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). These bills all represent enormous accomplishments that followed years of advocacy from multiple stakeholders, including outdoor recreationists. It is important to acknowledge, though, that these pieces of legislation represent temporary investments intended to implement projects like infrastructure upgrades and restoration efforts. Robust baseline budgets remain necessary to ensure that land managers can meet the growing needs of the American public and adapt to the climate crisis and other environmental challenges. Agencies also need adequate operational funds to achieve the maximum return on investment for GAOA, IIJA, and IRA dollars.

In particular, we see a need to increase staffing levels and staff retention across all federal land management agencies. As frequent visitors to public lands, the outdoor recreation community sees firsthand the impacts of inadequate staffing to manage current levels of recreational use and to plan and implement recreation infrastructure and restoration projects. As an example, the Forest Service saw a 27% reduction in fisheries biologists, a 38% reduction in wildlife biologists, and a 49% reduction in forestry technicians (a category that includes seasonal trail crew members) across the agency between 1992 and 2019.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, recent data from the Bureau of Land Management shows that roughly 25% of the agency's overall staff positions remain unfilled.<sup>4</sup> The IRA provided significant one-time funding to fill staffing vacancies at the National Park Service, but this funding needs to be augmented with increased appropriations from Congress to help the agency build the workforce necessary to provide high-quality, sustainable visitor experiences at America's National Parks over the coming decades. Similar funding is also needed at BLM and the Forest Service. These resources are essential to ensuring that agencies have the capacity to plan effectively and efficiently and advance projects—supported by the IRA and IIJA—in a manner that maximizes impact, including for co-benefits like outdoor recreation.

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<sup>3</sup> National Association of Forest Service Retirees, *Sustaining the Forest Service: Increasing Workforce Capacity to increase the pace and scale of restoration on national forest system lands* (2019), available at <https://www.nafsr.org/advocacy/2019/072619%20Workforce%20Capacity%20Study.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Scott Streater, *BLM doc shows 25% of staff positions vacant*, E&E NEWS, Dec. 12, 2022, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2022/12/12/blm-doc-shows-25-of-staff-positions-vacant-00073490>.



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Our specific requests follow.

## **U.S. Forest Service**

Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness: \$94.367M. Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the agency's request for \$94.367M for Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness—the agency's primary account for providing sustainable recreation opportunities to the American public. National Forests have seen a steady increase in recreational visits over the past decade.<sup>5</sup> However, between 2002 and 2020 the Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness program saw a 48% decrease in staffing and a 27% decrease in appropriations adjusted for inflation according to agency budget justification data. Funding at the agency's full FY24 request of \$94.367M will help the Forest Service proactively manage recreational use and deliver the opportunities that support local economies.

Land Management Planning/Assessment/Monitoring: \$26.429M. Forest plans form the foundation for sustainable recreation opportunities and restoration activities across our National Forests. Forest plan revisions are supposed to occur every 15 years, but currently, 99 out of 128 Forest Service land management plans are older than 15 years. The outdoor recreation community supports the Forest Service's efforts to make forest planning more efficient and responsive to stakeholder input through a new national initiative called the Planning Service Organization. An increase to Land Management Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring is needed to put this new organization into action and to initiate more than 30 plan revisions over the next four years, including seven beginning in 2024.

Capital Improvements and Maintenance, Trails: \$27.857M. The Forest Service manages more than 160,000 miles of trails, which provide access to extraordinary scenic, cultural, and ecological resources across the National Forest system. Increasing trails funding will help the agency maintain this irreplaceable trail system, expand the trail system where appropriate, and strengthen partnerships with local trails organizations.

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<sup>5</sup> See, Gwendolyn Aldrich and Evan Hjerpe, The Conservation Funding Crisis, Conservation Economics Institute (2022), at 16, available at [https://www.conservationecon.org/\\_files/ugd/5fc209\\_964863909ec745818cdb5a8643623366.pdf](https://www.conservationecon.org/_files/ugd/5fc209_964863909ec745818cdb5a8643623366.pdf).



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Capital Improvements and Maintenance, Roads: \$109.64M. Forest Service roads, bridges, and parking lots are critical access points for outdoor recreationists. Significantly increased resources are needed to help the agency improve recreation access and increase the resilience of the extensive Forest Service road system to extreme weather events.

Legacy Roads and Trails: \$100M. Outdoor Alliance supports the Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative's request for \$100M for Legacy Roads and Trails. Although Congress permanently authorized this program in the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) at \$50M per year, this number does not meet the existing need for road and trail repair, road decommissioning, and other needs. The Forest Service has identified a backlog of more than \$4.4 billion in deferred maintenance for its road system. The IIJA investments should be augmented with an additional \$100M from the USFS budget to help the agency prevent adverse impacts to water quality, sensitive species, and outdoor recreation from USFS roads.

Forest and Rangeland Research: \$413.369M. Forest Service research is critical to understanding our natural world. This research is more important than ever in a changing climate and with novel pressures facing our national forests and grasslands. An increase in forest and rangeland research funding will bring much-needed capacity to address pressing ecological questions and develop new techniques for forest and rangeland management.

## **Bureau of Land Management**

Recreation Resources Management: \$93.398M. BLM manages innumerable important recreation resources but needs additional capacity to manage the challenges (and opportunities) of increased visitation. BLM plans to launch a new "21<sup>st</sup> Century Recreation Strategy" in FY24 to modernize the agency's approach to managing sustainable recreation. Outdoor Alliance supports an increase in base funding for Recreation Resources Management to at least \$93.398M in order to support implementation of the new strategy, to address ongoing capacity issues for BLM recreation staff, and to account for an increase in the amount and diversity of recreational use across BLM lands.



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Resource Protection and Maintenance—Resource Management Planning: \$97.759M. Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the agency’s request for \$97.759M for Resource Management Planning. Resource management planning is a critical exercise by the Bureau of Land Management for ensuring the best use of BLM lands, including balancing recreation access with other multiple use values. According to agency data, approximately 134 of the BLM’s 169 Resource Management Plans are outdated, and additional plans need to be completed for newly designated National Monuments. Increasing appropriations to \$97.759M for FY24 will enable the BLM to increase the pace and scale of updating RMPs while enhancing the agency’s ability to complete monitoring and data analysis to inform better land use decisions.

National Conservation Lands: \$78M. Outdoor Alliance is grateful for the increase in funding provided for National Conservation Lands in the FY2023 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. The National Conservation Lands system comprises more than 37 million acres of public lands, including Monuments, National Conservation Areas, National Trails, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness. These areas include some of our country’s marquee destinations for outdoor recreation, and investing in these resources is critical for their long-term protection and their ability to deliver economic benefits to local communities. Despite the recent funding increase in FY2023, the budget for the National Conservation Lands account has decreased over the past 20 years accounting for inflation. Meanwhile, the number of acres covered by the National Conservation Lands system has more than doubled over that same period. Outdoor Alliance supports increasing appropriations for National Conservation Lands to at least \$78M in order to account for the substantial increase in acreage protected under the National Conservation Lands system, and to address the backlog of management plans for National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, and other areas protected over the past decade.

Wilderness Management: \$25.701M. Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the agency’s request for \$25.701M for Wilderness Management outlined in the FY2024 President’s Budget. BLM Wilderness lands, which include a network of 263 Wilderness areas and 487 Wilderness Study Areas totaling more than 21 million acres, provide some of the nation’s best opportunities for backcountry recreation. Increased appropriations are needed to help the agency maintain these areas’



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Wilderness character, while sustaining the ecological and cultural resources that these areas provide.

Abandoned Mine Lands: \$287M. The outdoor recreation community is profoundly affected by legacy mining pollution, which poses an ongoing safety and public health hazard across affected watersheds in the western U.S., particularly for water-based recreation. Congress established a new abandoned hardrock mine cleanup program through Section 40704 of the IIJA. Outdoor Alliance supports at least \$287 million in FY24 for BLM to implement the program, which will support the agency's work to inventory abandoned mine lands and increase the pace and scale of remediation efforts.

## **National Park Service**

National Recreation and Preservation: \$118.465M, including \$17.09M for the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program. NPS requires additional resources to meet the challenges of increased visitation, climate change, and other stressors. Additionally, RTCA is an effective and critically important program for helping local communities realize their visions for improved recreation resources.

Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP): \$135M. The ORLP improves access to outdoor recreation opportunities for underserved communities where these investments are most needed. We support the President's Budget request for \$135M for ORLP.

## **Other Appropriations Priorities**

American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas: \$25.5M. Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the administration's request for \$25.5M for the U.S. Geological Survey for the creation of the American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas. The Atlas will be used to establish a baseline of protected areas in the U.S., and will help to ensure restoration and conservation needs are appropriately prioritized. Appropriations are needed to develop a robust, scientifically-informed, and user-friendly Atlas that will guide effective conservation actions that support benefits including increased access for outdoor recreation.



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Land and Water Conservation Fund: \$1.35B. In 2020, Congress guaranteed permanent dedicated funding of \$900M per year to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) through the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act. While significant, this funding is intended as a baseline for LWCF, and the number of important, time-sensitive land conservation projects seeking LWCF funding far surpasses \$900M. Congress should address this need by appropriating an additional \$450M for LWCF in FY24.

National Trails System: We support an increase in appropriations for the National Trails System across agencies, including \$20.964M at NPS, \$13.75M at BLM, and \$11.957M at USFS. This funding will ensure that federal agencies and stewardship partners can keep these iconic trails accessible, maintained, and sustainable.

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide our community's perspective on priorities for FY24 appropriations. We look forward to continuing to work with the subcommittee in support of our country's public lands and waters and the recreation and conservation values they support.

Best regards,



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Policy Director  
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cc: Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance  
Chris Winter, Executive Director, Access Fund  
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Clinton Begley, Executive Director, American Whitewater  
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Kaleen Deatherage, Interim Executive Director, the Mazamas  
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