

December 4, 2024

Senator Patty Murray  
Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Rep. Tom Cole  
Chair, Committee on Appropriations  
2207 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Susan Collins  
Ranking Member, Committee on  
Appropriations  
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Rep. Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member, Committee on  
Appropriations  
2413 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Support for supplemental disaster funding for federal public lands.**

Dear Chairs Murray and Cole and Ranking Members Collins and DeLauro,

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community and the outdoor industry, we write to express support for the Administration's disaster funding request for more than \$9.6 billion for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies that was recently shared with your committees.<sup>1</sup> These funds are essential for helping communities across the country, including those recently affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton, reopen safe public access for outdoor recreation and rebuild their outdoor economies in the wake of historic natural disasters. This letter outlines our support for public lands disaster funding with an emphasis on accounts that are essential for supporting recreation access.

Federal public lands and waters provide innumerable conservation benefits and form the foundation of America's \$1.2 trillion outdoor recreation economy. Communities throughout the U.S. rely on sustainable access to these lands and waters to support quality-of-life and public health benefits for local residents and to attract visitors and associated tourism benefits for local economies. A number of significant natural disasters in recent years have caused extensive damage to public lands and waters throughout the country that will take years to repair and rehabilitate.

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<sup>1</sup> The request is contained in a document titled "Additional Disaster Supplemental Funding Needs" that was shared with members of Congress on Monday, November 25th, *available at* <https://bit.ly/49gl6W4>.

In particular, recent impacts from Hurricane Helene in the southern Appalachians have degraded access to hundreds of miles of trails, rivers, and other recreation resources across multiple national forests and National Park System units. This region's transportation system—critical for accessing these recreation sites—was severely damaged by Helene, including the Forest Service road system and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Hundreds of miles (or more) of trail are currently blocked by fallen trees, and in many cases, trails need to be restored, re-signed, rebuilt, or rerouted, and outdoor infrastructure like campgrounds, kiosks, and viewing platforms need to be rebuilt or cleared of fallen trees. The region's rivers, which support thriving whitewater guiding businesses, need to be cleared of trash and large debris and require ecological restoration to provide for future flood resilience, aquatic habitat, and recreational use. Access to these recreation sites is central to the region's economy and identity. In western North Carolina alone, outdoor recreation visitor spending supports \$4.9 billion in economic output, \$1.48 billion in labor income, and \$197.4 million in county-level tax revenue.<sup>2</sup>

**Given these wide-ranging restoration needs, it is essential that Congress include funding for public lands and outdoor recreation in a disaster relief supplemental before the end of the year.**

Our organizations strongly support the Administration's full \$9.6 billion request for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. In particular, we support the following funding priorities, which are critical for outdoor recreation access:

- **NPS Construction (\$2,262,871,000).** This funding is essential for repairing national parks facilities nationwide, including extensive damage to the Blue Ridge Parkway, the nation's most-visited National Park System unit.
- **USFS, Capital Improvement and Maintenance (\$3,752,000,000).** This funding is needed to repair facilities, roads, and trails on national forests in North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia that sustained damage from wind and flooding during Hurricane Helene.
- **USFS, National Forest System (\$1,070,000,000).** Funding for the National Forest System will help reopen recreation access on National Forests in the southeast and will support longer term ecological recovery of these lands.

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<sup>2</sup> Ash Morgan, Melissa Weddell, and John Whitehead, Made X Mtns Partnership, Western North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey (Feb. 27, 2024), *available at* [https://madexmntns.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/WNC-Survey-Report-FINAL-5\\_28\\_24.pdf](https://madexmntns.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/WNC-Survey-Report-FINAL-5_28_24.pdf).

- **BLM, Management of Lands and Resources (\$76,115,000).** This funding will address impacts to BLM lands and facilities as a result of flooding in Alaska.
- **USFWS, Construction (\$581,057,827).** National Wildlife Refuges provide outstanding access for wildlife-dependent recreation as well as other outdoor recreation pursuits. Funding is necessary to repair federal facilities and roads affected by natural disasters across the country.
- **EPA, Environmental Programs and Management (\$2,360,000).** These funds will support hazardous materials and debris management, as well as public health communications related to air quality, in the area affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

Additionally, we recommend that your committees include direction for federal land managers to prioritize rehabilitation and restoration projects on federal lands and waters in a way that supports the recreation access and the recovery of recreation and tourism-based communities.

Thank you for considering our input. We strongly encourage you to pass a disaster funding package that includes funding for public lands and waters by the end of the year.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman  
Vice President for Policy and  
Government Relations  
Outdoor Alliance



Jaclyn Levy  
Senior Director of Advocacy and  
Government Affairs  
Outdoor Industry Association

## **Our Organizations**

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.

Based in Boulder, Colorado, with offices in Washington, D.C., Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) is a catalyst for meaningful change. A member-based collective, OIA is a passionate group of business leaders, climate experts, policy makers, and outdoor enthusiasts committed to sustainable economic growth and climate positivity while protecting—and growing access to—the benefits of the outdoors for everyone. For more than 30 years, OIA has catalyzed a thriving outdoor industry by supporting the success of every member company across four critically aligned areas: market research, sustainability, government affairs, and inclusive participation. OIA delivers success for its members through education, events, and business services in the form of solutions and strategies, consultation, collaboration, and opportunities for collective action. For more information, visit [outdoorindustry.org](http://outdoorindustry.org).