

March 17, 2025

Sen. Lisa Murkowski

Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

522 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Sen. Jeff Merkley

Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

531 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Rep. Mike Simpson

Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

2084 Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Chellie Pingree

Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

2354 Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Land management agency staff reductions and outdoor recreation impacts**

Dear Sens. Murkowski and Merkley and Reps. Simpson and Pingree:

The undersigned organizations, representing the outdoor recreation community and outdoor industry businesses, are deeply alarmed by recent staff reductions across federal land management agencies, as well as RIF and reorganization plans currently demanded by the administration. These cuts will negatively affect the recreation experience on public lands and waters, harm local economies, and endanger public lands communities. Additionally, we are concerned that these changes contradict the direction and priorities duly enacted through appropriations. We ask you to take all actions available to you to restore lost jobs

and intervene with the administration as necessary to ensure that agencies are adequately staffed to fulfill their stewardship responsibilities.

The USDA Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and other land management and supporting agencies are currently making dramatic reductions in staff. While recent reductions are estimated to be in the neighborhood of 10 percent, at some individual units, 30 percent or more of staff have been laid off, and cuts appear to be falling disproportionately on positions in recreation or for workers engaged in direct, on-the-ground maintenance and stewardship work. These are often low-paying but essential jobs providing critical services like maintaining trails, campgrounds, and other recreation infrastructure. The elimination of these jobs is already having visible impacts on public lands, diminishing access and increasing the risk of resource degradation at a time when outdoor recreation participation is at an all-time high.

The outdoor recreation economy, which contributes more than \$1.2 trillion to U.S. GDP and supports millions of jobs, depends on well-managed public lands and waters. Recreation businesses, gateway communities, and rural economies rely on these landscapes being accessible and well maintained. Without adequate staffing, trails go uncleared, facilities fall into disrepair, and access to recreation opportunities becomes more limited, jeopardizing the economic benefits that outdoor recreation provides.

Additionally, while we understand that the intention has been to avoid cuts to wildfire programs, the overwhelming majority of layoffs at the USDA Forest Service have been of employees “red carded” to work on wildfire response during the fire season. Administrative and other staff that support the wildfire program were also terminated. We are also highly concerned that wildfire risk reduction projects will be delayed or canceled as a result of staffing losses. Recreation staff play a key role in fire management efforts, including maintaining safe access to public lands, assisting with closures during active wildfires, and aiding in post-fire recovery work. Furthermore, terminations at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have left that agency unable to maintain SNOTEL weather stations across the West. Not only does SNOTEL data inform avalanche forecasts, the snowpack information collected through the SNOTEL network is critical to informing the National Interagency Fire Center’s predictive services season outlook. With wildfire seasons growing longer and more intense, cutting these positions now will only exacerbate the challenges our public lands face and further strain agency capacity.

A small set of the examples of cuts we have already seen include:

- In North Cascades National Park, the seasonal backcountry ranger staff has been reduced by more than half due to the terminations, leaving only three rangers to cover the entire park's Wilderness zones. The popular Cascade Pass area, which typically receives high visitation, will not have regular ranger presence, raising concerns about increased resource damage and visitor safety issues.
- In the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument has lost all but one of its recreation and trail crew staff due to the terminations, forcing the indefinite closure of several key access points, including portions of the Loowit Trail and Ape Canyon Trail. Climbing permits for Mount St. Helens, which require staffing for permit checks and trail maintenance, are now in question for the upcoming season.
- In the Sierra National Forest, nearly all the seasonal recreation staff have been laid off, and routine maintenance on trails, campgrounds, and recreation sites is already falling behind schedule. Reports from local partners indicate that several popular trailheads may see "soft closures" this season as trail crews that typically repair storm damage and clear fallen trees are severely understaffed, making access to remote areas increasingly difficult for hikers, climbers, and backcountry users.
- On the Custer Gallatin National Forest, 43 employees were terminated, including the majority of those in the recreation and trails program. As a result, at least 5 recreation rental cabins will not receive critical maintenance (including at least 3 projects already funded by the Great American Outdoors Act), major reconstruction and maintenance on at least 10 distinct trails will not occur, and 2 bridges in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness will not be replaced.

We respectfully request that Congress ask the administration and agency leadership to restore these lost positions and ensure adequate funding for staff within all federal land management agencies. A well-funded and well-staffed recreation program is essential to maintaining the health of our public lands, supporting local economies, and ensuring continued access to outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans.

We appreciate your leadership and your commitment to our nation's public lands. We stand ready to collaborate with Congress to find solutions that will sustain and

enhance our public lands and waters and the outdoor recreation experiences they support for present and future generations.

Sincerely,

Outdoor Alliance

Adventure Travel Conservation Fund  
AgeUpWellTaos  
Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition  
American Canoe Association  
American Hiking Society  
American Hunters & Anglers  
American Mountain Guides  
Association  
American Trails  
American Whitewater  
Appalachian Outdoors Collective  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
Back Country Horsemen of New  
Mexico  
Barkeater Trails Alliance  
Bay Area Climbers Coalition  
Bikepacking Roots  
Boise-Payette Backcountry Alliance  
California Mountain Biking Coalition  
California Outdoor Recreation  
Partnership  
CalWild  
Carolina Climbers Coalition  
Cascade Backcountry Alliance  
Central California Off Road Cyclists  
Central Oregon Trail Alliance  
Cleveland Area Mountain Bike  
Association  
Cog Wild Bicycle Tours  
Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists  
Association  
Conservation Lands Foundation

Conserving Carolina  
Continental Divide Trail Coalition  
Eastside Sports  
El Sendero Backcountry Ski and  
Snowboard club  
Enchanted Circle Trails Association  
Eventus EXP  
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance  
Experiential Consulting, LLC  
Field Institute of Taos  
Flickr  
ForeverGreen Trails  
Friends Of Joshua Tree  
Friends of Plumas Wilderness  
Friends of Rio Grande del Norte  
Friends of the Inyo  
Friends of the Routt Backcountry  
Hipcamp  
Idaho Rivers United  
International Mountain Bicycling  
Association  
KEEN Footwear  
Latino Outdoors  
Linn Area Mountain Bike Association  
Lowelifes Respectable Citizens' Club  
Mid-Atlantic Off-Road Enthusiasts  
(MORE)  
Mountaineers  
NEMO Equipment, Inc.  
Next 100 Coalition  
Nordic and Backcountry Skiers  
Alliance of Idaho

Nordic United  
North Country Trail Association  
Oakridge Trails Allinace  
Oregon Timber Trail Alliance  
Oregon Trails Coalition  
Orogenesis Collective  
Outdoor Industry Association  
Pacific Crest Trail Association  
Partnership for the National Trails System  
Patagonia  
Peak Design  
Placer Group, Mother Lode Chapter,  
Sierra Club  
Protect Our Winters  
Public Land Solutions  
REI Co-op  
Runners for Public Lands  
Rusch Ventures  
Sage trail alliance  
Salt Lake Climbers Alliance  
San Diego Mountain Biking Association  
Saratoga Outdoors  
Sierra Business Council  
Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship  
Sierra Nevada Alliance  
Silverton Singletrack Society  
Snowlands Network  
SoCal 350 Climate Action  
Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association  
SRAM, LLC

Summit County Mountain Bike Alliance  
Sun Valley Mountain huts  
Surfrider Foundation  
Surfrider Los Angeles  
Tahoe Backcountry Alliance  
Tahoe Mountain Sports  
TAMBA  
Tenth Mountain Division Hut Association, Inc  
Teton Backcountry Alliance  
The American Alpine Club  
The Conservation Alliance  
The Mountaineers  
The Radavist  
The Teton Climbers' Coalition  
The Vermont Mountain Bike Association  
Trailkeepers of Oregon  
Trails Magazine  
Ukiah Valley Trail Group  
Verde Brand Communications  
Wasatch Backcountry Alliance  
Washington Trails Association  
Wild Montana  
WildKind Inc  
Winter Wildlands Alliance  
WV TRAIL  
Wyoming Wilderness Association

Cc: Secretary Doug Bergum, United States Department of Interior  
Secretary Brooke Rollins, United States Department of Agriculture  
Sen. Mike Lee, Chair, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Sen. Martin Heinrich, Ranking Member, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chair, House Natural Resources Committee  
Rep. Jared Huffman, Ranking Member, House Natural Resources Committee