

(Submitted online to the Senate Ways & Means Committee)

Thank you Chair Robinson and members of the Committee, my name is Conor Marshall and I am submitting written testimony on SB 5998 on behalf of The Mountaineers, signed in as other.

- The Mountaineers opposes the bill's cuts to critical maintenance and operations funding for public lands – \$2.75 million (General-Fund State) across Washington State Parks, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- The Mountaineers supports the inclusion of funding for Tribal participation and third-party facilitation of the State-Tribal Recreation Impacts Initiative – \$2.125 million (CCA) for tribal capacity grants and \$172,000 (CCA) to continue third-party facilitation services.

The Mountaineers is a nonprofit outdoor education, recreation, and conservation organization that connects youth and adults to the outdoors through recreational activities, including on Washington's approximately 7 million acres of state-managed public lands. These state parks, recreation, and wildlife areas provide both residents and visitors transformational outdoor experiences, positive health and wellness benefits, and connection to the natural world that fosters a stewardship ethic for our shared lands and waters.

At a time when federal public lands are under threat and under-resourced, and as state land managers face growing backlogs of deferred maintenance, it's critically important to adequately fund Washington's three state land management agencies. Maintaining and securing investments in these agencies in the 2026 supplemental operating budget will allow land managers to continue to address maintenance and operations needs on their lands, manage recreation sustainably, and protect natural and cultural resources for all.

Given the state's ongoing budget challenges, we recognize that legislators must make hard decisions this session. As you consider Governor Ferguson's proposed 2026 supplemental operating budget and begin the challenging work of drafting the Committee's budget proposal, we ask that you prioritize the following investments in Washington's public lands.

### **Maintenance and Operations Funding for State Land Managers (M&O)**

Funding for recreation lands maintenance enables agencies to undertake high priority projects as well as plan, manage, and monitor recreation lands. Thank you for including \$7.5 million in ongoing maintenance and operations (M&O) funding for Washington State Parks (State Parks), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) in the final 2025-2027 operating budget.

First passed in 2022, this funding has become a significant percentage of each agency's maintenance and operations spending: approximately 20% for State Parks, 40% for DNR, and nearly 50% for DFW – helping repair trails and parking lots, fix shelters and roofs on visitor facilities, improve campground facilities and much more.

The Governor's proposed budget reduces this funding further on an on-going basis by \$0.5 million for State Parks, \$0.75 million for DNR, and \$1.5 million DFW. This funding has already sustained a one-time 25% cut in the 2025-2027 biennium budget from the \$10 million secured for each agency in the previous biennium.

Further cuts to this critical funding would further hamstring land managers, making the work of maintaining recreation infrastructure extremely difficult. We ask that the Committee fund state agency recreation lands maintenance at the current level of \$7.5 million per agency for the rest of the current biennium.

#### **Funding to Support the State-Tribal Recreation Impacts Initiative (STRII)**

STRII is the ongoing collaborative process between state agencies and Tribal Nations to improve the management of outdoor recreation, better protect natural and cultural resources, and preserve protected Tribal rights on state lands. The outcomes and processes produced by the STRII process will help create a more sustainable future for Washington's outdoors and the tribal rights and cultural lifeways of its first stewards.

The Governor's proposed budget includes \$2.125 million for tribal capacity grants to support the engagement of Tribes in the STRII process, funded by Climate Commitment Act dollars. This one-time, pass-through funding from the Department of Fish and Wildlife's budget. We also support the inclusion one-time funding for \$172,000 to continue third-party facilitation services of the STRII process. Investments in facilitation of and tribal participation in STRII are key to maintaining a thriving process and securing meaningful outcomes that will protect and sustain the health of Washington's state lands in perpetuity.

Thank you for considering our support of these important funding requests to restore public lands and manage sustainable recreation in your 2026 supplemental operating budget.