

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

June 17, 2019

Senator Lisa Murkowski
Chair, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Joe Manchin
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Hearing to examine deferred maintenance needs and potential solutions

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin:

On behalf of the outdoor recreation community, thank you for holding a hearing to address the ongoing challenge of deferred maintenance affecting our country's 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.

As a result of years of inadequate appropriations by Congress for the work of the public lands management agencies entrusted with stewarding our public resources, a substantial backlog of infrastructure and maintenance needs currently exists on our country's public lands and waters. While the need for greater appropriations—both for maintenance and infrastructure needs, as well as for responsibilities like planning and visitor services—remains, we support congressional efforts to redress past inadequate appropriations through investments targeted specifically toward maintenance and infrastructure.



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These necessary investments, from a fiscal standpoint, are exceedingly sound. Our country's public lands and waters are the infrastructure that supports the \$887 billion outdoor recreation economy, sustaining 7.6 million direct jobs and generating \$59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue.¹ According to a recent study by the Trust for Public Land, spending on land acquisition through the Land and Water Conservation Fund produces a return on investment for local economies at rate of 4 to 1.²

In recent years, attention has largely focused on the deferred maintenance needs of the National Park Service, and we strongly support efforts to ensure the sustainability and vitality of those iconic areas. We also believe strongly that Congress must address the needs of other land management agencies, particularly the USDA Forest Service.

According to the Forest Service's FY20 budget justification, the agency currently has \$5.5 billion in maintenance needs due to years of inadequate federal appropriations; this includes nearly \$300 million in trail maintenance needs.³ This legacy of inadequate investment in our public lands affects everything from the visitor experience to the ability to even access certain areas with our National Forests. As one example, from the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest in Washington, a recreation destination accessible to a population of more than 3 million people, the Forest Service is closing dozens of restroom facilities due to a lack of funding for basic maintenance. On the Ranger District closest to Seattle, 281 miles out of 545 miles of total trail face unfunded maintenance needs. Typically, two 5-person crews are hired to address these needs, but this year the Forest Service is only able to provide one crew, and this is largely through a state grant. Frontcountry maintenance needs are also going unmet as the two standard 4-person crews have been scaled back to 2-person crews, which are also being supported by a state grant. Activities including cleaning trailhead and picnic facilities, setting up information booths at trailheads, and educating the public are being reduced. As these basic visitor services and maintenance needs go unmet,

¹ OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION, THE OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY, <https://outdoorindustry.org/advocacy/>.

² THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND, RETURN ON INVESTMENT FROM THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND, <https://www.tpl.org/return-investment-land-and-water-conservation-fund>.

³ UNITED STATES DEP'T OF AGRICULTURE, FY 2020 BUDGET JUSTIFICATION 84 (2019).



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the quality of visitor experiences is diminished and the resource is negatively affected. This is happening at the same time that visitor use is increasing. One trail close to Interstate 90 on the Mt. Baker–Snoqualmie National Forest is seeing 35,000 visitors a year. This is nearly equivalent to the estimated total use for all trails in the area in 1993.

To illustrate the importance of National Forests for outdoor recreation activities, Outdoor Alliance conducted a GIS analysis of recreational resources in Colorado, home to both iconic National Parks and invaluable National Forests.⁴ In Colorado, we found that areas managed by the Forest Service account for more than 4,700 miles of hiking trails in comparison to 478 miles managed by the National Park Service. With regard to mountain biking trails, the difference was even more profound: 4,284 miles of mountain biking trails are under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service versus only 7 miles managed by NPS. For whitewater paddling, 27 miles of paddling is available under NPS jurisdiction, versus 642 miles managed by the Forest Service. For climbers, 251 sites are managed by NPS versus 1,839 sites managed by the Forest Service. The bottom line is that, while NPS units provide important opportunities for outdoor recreation, the vast majority of experiences our community participates in occur on Forest Service lands.

Forest Service lands and the recreational opportunities they provide are also critical to the economy of rural and gateway communities. As part of the ongoing forest plan revision process for Colorado's Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests, Outdoor Alliance commissioned an economic study, which found that climbing, biking, hiking, paddling, and snowsports on those forests produce \$392 million annually in visitor spending, supporting more than 4,100 full time jobs.⁵ Investment in recreational infrastructure and maintenance provides a direct return to local economies.

⁴ Our analysis used the State of Colorado's COTREX data to compare trail use and mileage; American Whitewater's National Whitewater Inventory data for whitewater paddling; and Adventure Project crowd-sourced data for climbing and skiing information.

⁵ OUTDOOR ALLIANCE, THE ECONOMIC INFLUENCE OF HUMAN POWERED RECREATION IN COLORADO'S GRAND MESA, UNCOMPAHGRE & GUNNISON NATIONAL FORESTS 3 (2018), *available at* https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54aabb14e4b01142027654ee/t/5bff483303ce647407356fc1/1543456828876/OA_GMUGNF_SharePiece.pdf.



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Again, we strongly support efforts to address the underfunded maintenance needs at our country's National Parks and other sites managed under the jurisdiction of the Park Service. These areas are iconic and an invaluable part of our national heritage, in addition to supporting prized outdoor recreation opportunities. To address these needs, however, without considering the needs of lands managed by the USDA Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and other agencies would be a missed opportunity.

We appreciate the committee's attention to this important issue, and we look forward to working with you further in support of our country's public lands and waters.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Adam Cramer, Executive Director, Outdoor Alliance
Chris Winter, Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Interim Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Dave Wiens, Executive Director, International Mountain Bicycling Association
Todd Walton, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Phil Powers, Chief Executive Officer, American Alpine Club
Sarah Bradham, Acting Executive Director, the Mazamas
Keegan Young, Executive Director, Colorado Mountain Club
Chad Nelson, CEO, Surfrider Foundation

