



November 30, 2020

Glenn Casamassa, Regional Forester
Region 6, USDA Forest Service
1220 SW 3rd Ave
Portland, OR 97204

RE: Great American Outdoors Act Virtual Listening Opportunity, Region Six

Dear Regional Forester Casamassa,

Thank you for your work on behalf of our public lands as we face unprecedented challenges across the nation. The Mountaineers write to provide comments on the deferred maintenance projects put forth in the U.S. Forest Service Region 6 Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) proposed project list for FY22. As an organization that advocated for the passage of GAOA, we are pleased to see the Forest Service present a robust list of potential projects. These investments are sorely needed, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented demand for outdoor recreation on Forest Service lands.

The Mountaineers, based in Seattle, Washington and founded in 1906, is a nonprofit outdoor education, conservation, and recreation organization whose mission is “to enrich the community by helping people explore, conserve, learn about and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond.” The Mountaineers Books publishing division expands the mission internationally through award-winning publications including instructional guides, adventure narratives, and conservation photography. 1,600 skilled volunteers lead 3,200 outdoor education trips and courses annually for 14,000 members. Our youth programs provide over 10,000 opportunities each year for children to get outside. We are a passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable community that cares about the outdoors, and protects the outdoor experience for current and future generations.

Washington State is experiencing a significant increase in the number of recreationists visiting our public lands and waters. This began even before the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of a growing population and increased interest in outdoor recreation. The increased use, and its corresponding impacts on public lands and waters, is unlikely to subside following the pandemic. At the same time, our National Forests face threats from climate change, forest health, and wildfires. It is more important than ever to invest in our public lands, and we are excited for the opportunity presented by the Great American Outdoors Act.

Given the urgency of responding to increased visitation, we encourage the Forest Service to prioritize projects that will address capacity issues and promote sustainable recreation. These may include toilet



and restroom improvements; rehabilitation of highly used trails and roads; and improvements to popular trailheads, campgrounds, and interpretive sites. Chronically underfunded for years, these recreation facilities are suffering under the weight of skyrocketing use. Focusing investments on projects that most benefit the recreating public will not only help achieve the intent of GAOA, but are urgently needed and time sensitive.

Focusing investment on highly visible and popular recreation sites will also help increase public awareness of the benefits of GAOA. Examples of these projects on potential FY22 project list include the Pacific Crest Trail & Pacific Northwest Trail DM, Heather Meadows Trails DM, Lake Cushman Road Reconstruction, North Cascades Recreation Scenic Corridor DM, and PCT Access Roads Bridges Trails DM. It is essential to quickly demonstrate the benefits of GAOA, in order to build early goodwill and set the groundwork for future investments. This will be important in our efforts to communicate the success of GAOA to Congress and make the case for further investments in our public lands.

Successful execution of these projects is critical to ensure the sustainability of outdoor recreation and keep up with the increasing desire of Washingtonians to pursue recreation opportunities on Forest Service lands. Doing so will also benefit our state's \$26.5 billion outdoor recreation economy and the many jobs, businesses, and rural communities it supports.

The Mountaineers is grateful for funding for local projects from the Great American Outdoors Act, and for the hard work of Forest Service staff. Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Betsy Robblee
Conservation & Advocacy Director
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