

March 13, 2019

The Honorable Ed Markey
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
229 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Markey and Representative Ocasio-Cortez,

Thank you for your leadership in proposing the Green New Deal resolution that highlights the urgent need to address the threat of climate change and establishes a broad framework to reach important goals, including equity and environmental justice.

The Trust for Public Land is particularly heartened that you have made access to outdoor experiences an important component of the Green New Deal. Access to nature is a right, not a privilege—but as your framework recognizes, too many people are denied that right: 100 million Americans, including 28 million children, don't have a park close to home. Not only is that access important, but the benefits it can provide are critical: improved public health, expanded social capital, and climate resiliency.

The Green New Deal presents an overdue opportunity to right generations of environmental wrongs and set clear priorities through specific and measurable policy goals. One of those goals should be to ensure that everyone in America has a great park or open space within a 10-minute walk of home.

The life-threatening reality of climate change instills this issue with incredible urgency. Cities and towns, where 80 percent of Americans now live, are particularly vulnerable to hotter heat waves and more powerful storms, but scientific research has proven the benefits of parks and green space for keeping our cities safe:

- Pavement and buildings trap and magnify heat, so the air in cities can be a lot hotter than in nearby natural areas—but parks and green space can help reduce this “urban heat island” effect. On hot days, the ambient temperature in a green, shady park can be 17 degrees cooler than in surrounding city neighborhoods, and this cooling effect can extend for a half-mile beyond the park's borders.
- Parks and green infrastructure can reduce flooding by slowing and absorbing stormwater runoff. Engineered green infrastructure projects can absorb up to 90 percent of runoff and filter up to 95 percent of major pollutants. These green infrastructure approaches can also save federal, state, and local governments billions when compared to traditional “grey” infrastructure solutions.

- Parks and public lands lock up carbon and filter air pollution. Urban forests remove an estimated 711,000 metric tons of air pollution annually and capture over 90 million metric tons of carbon. Carbon-focused forest and land management could absorb up to 21% of U.S. emissions.

Parks protect people and property from the effects of a changing climate and reduce pollution, while creating healthier, more prosperous communities. But research shows that people in low income areas are less likely to live near high quality parks and green space and are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. This imbalance is why I believe the Green New Deal needs a commitment to building parks within a 10-minute walk of everyone in America. We urge lawmakers to incorporate this goal into any future policies within the Green New Deal framework.

I look forward to working with you on policies that help communities across the country address climate change, health, and prosperity through parks, trails, and open spaces.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane Regas", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Diane Regas
President and CEO