Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 11, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-232
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol, S-230
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy,

Thank you for your tireless efforts in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. As Congress continues to craft economic relief and stimulus legislation to help our nation recover, it is important that we provide support for the outdoor recreation industry that serves as the economic engine for many of our local communities. Therefore, we write to request the inclusion of full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and dedicated mandatory funding to address the maintenance backlog on our public lands in future COVID-19 relief packages. These provisions will create jobs, expand access to recreation for all, and support a sustained resurgence in a key economic sector devastated by the ongoing impacts of the pandemic.

The outdoor recreation industry is an important economic driver across the country, supporting millions of jobs and contributing 2.2 percent to our national Gross Domestic Product. However, like other sectors tied to travel and tourism, outdoor businesses are enduring the unprecedented economic impact of COVID-19, facing dramatically decreased sales and revenue, difficulties with production and distribution, and large numbers of furloughs and layoffs. The recovery and continued success of the outdoor industry is closely tied to our public lands and waters. As COVID-19 continues to place unexpected burdens on local and county budgets, federal investment in parks and public lands will aid the recovery of communities that rely on a strong outdoor recreation economy.

Since its inception in 1964, the LWCF program has established many of our nation's most coveted public lands that generate billions of dollars for state and local economies. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation supports $778 billion in annual consumer spending and 5.2 million jobs across the country. While LWCF enjoys broad support for these clear economic benefits, the program relies on a standing account of the United States Treasury which is subject to constant diversions from its intended purpose. Permanent authorization of

LWCF in 2019 was an important step in addressing these issues, but it did not ensure that all of the funds identified for LWCF are used for their intended purpose. This underfunding has created a backlog of conservation and recreation access needs in every state across the country. Therefore, Congress must pass legislation to provide full and dedicated funding for LWCF at the authorized level of $900 million.

In addition to the importance of conserving our public places for the economic and health benefits of local communities, deferred maintenance at national parks and public lands throughout the country is a mounting problem that we can no longer afford to ignore. Decades of underfunding and neglect have led to overgrown trails, crumbling roads, and dilapidated buildings, leading to $11.9 billion of deferred maintenance projects in our national parks alone. Therefore, Congress must address this issue by increasing funds designed to upkeep and rebuild this poorly maintained infrastructure on federal lands. This will both create jobs in the communities surrounding our public places and improve the quality of our parks when they safely open for visitors.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the House of Representatives was steadily making progress to address these issues. Current legislative proposals – including the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act (H.R. 1225, S. 500), the LWCF Permanent Funding Act (H.R. 3195, S. 1081), and the Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422) – have already received strong, bipartisan support in both the House and Senate. Given the clear bipartisan support in both chambers for legislative action on these issues, and the evident economic impact of outdoor recreation on public lands, the time to act is now.

In the face of this crisis, we have an opportunity to create jobs, rebuild our parks infrastructure, and provide a much-needed economic stimulus to outdoor recreation businesses by protecting public lands and parks. Beyond these clear stimulus impacts, the inclusion of these important policy priorities will also help to reinvest in natural infrastructure that decreases demands on federal, state and local government budgets already facing staggering coronavirus-related challenges. Finally, strong investments in protecting and maintaining our nation's public lands will provide greater, more equitable access to the outdoors for Americans coping with this national trauma.

This is a sensible, strategic, and smart addition to any upcoming economic relief legislation. We must ensure that public lands and waters can accommodate a recovering America with ample infrastructure in good, safe working condition. This is the time to make these critical investments.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you on these priorities.

Sincerely,



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Joe Cunningham
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
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Anthony Brindisi
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Joseph P. Kennedy, III
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Peter King
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Ann Kirkpatrick
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Ann McLane Kuster
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Rick Larsen
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Mike Levin
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Alan Lowenthal
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Stephen Lynch
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Tom Malinowski
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Carolyn B. Maloney
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Sean Patrick Maloney
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Doris Matsui
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Ben McAdams
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Grace Napolitano
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Jimmy Panetta
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