

August 5, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
Chair
Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Yarmuth
Chair
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Chairman Sanders, and Chairman Yarmuth,

We write to urge Congress to include robust funding for the Department of the Interior within budget reconciliation, in addition to other funding priorities under consideration. We appreciate that the bipartisan infrastructure bill included funding for the Department of the Interior, including historic resources for Bureau of Reclamation and tribal water settlements; much-needed funding to Indian Health Services for water and sewer; an investment in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund; and some resources for wildfire mitigation. However, substantial needs remain, and we are concerned by press reports that the budget resolution currently being discussed may leave out meaningful investments for the Department of the Interior. In the context of a \$3.5 trillion reconciliation package, we believe that raising the allocations to relevant committees to provide at least \$80 billion to the Department of the Interior--about two percent of the total package--is both reasonable and necessary, particularly as the West faces record drought and wildfire.

We cannot tackle the climate crisis while ignoring our public lands, waters, and wildlife. Our public lands and the programs that the Department of the Interior manages hold tremendous opportunity to contribute to climate solutions that create jobs and safeguard clean air, water and recreational opportunities for local communities.

The massive increases in visitation are further evidence of the value of our public lands for communities. We have an opportunity to invest in our growing outdoor recreation economy while also addressing equity issues by creating parks in local communities and increasing access to the outdoors. Outdoor recreation generates \$887 billion in annual consumer spending and 7.6 million American jobs.

Funding for the Department could provide low-cost and high-return natural climate solutions, create jobs by restoring and conserving public lands through projects with a Civilian Climate Corps, address wildfire and drought risks fueled by climate change, protect wildlife and many

other critical efforts. Ignoring the Department of the Interior could also leave behind Tribal nations once again as the rest of the country receives historic investments to build back better.

We implore you to seize upon this generational opportunity to turn our public lands into a part of the solution to the climate and nature crisis while creating new jobs in local communities and building a more equitable society.

We look forward to seeing a budget that recognizes the vital role that the Department of the Interior needs to play in solving the climate crisis, addressing equity and environmental justice concerns and creating jobs in local communities. We urge you to prioritize these investments and stand ready to work to make sure this vision is made a reality.

Sincerely,

The Wilderness Society
National Wildlife Federation
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
National Audubon Society
Environmental Defense Fund
Earthjustice
Sierra Club
League of Conservation Voters
Defenders of Wildlife