

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

November 29, 2022

Dear Madam Speaker, Mr. Minority Leader McCarthy, Mr. Majority Leader Schumer, and Mr. Minority Leader McConnell:

We write to urge your support for robust funding increases to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service (USFS), and Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recreation budget line items in FY24 and subsequent budget years to offset the continuing and increasing deficit in these accounts.

Since the turn of the century, and particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, more Americans have found solace, health, and opportunities for rejuvenation in the great outdoors. Despite critical re-investment in deferred maintenance, wildfire mitigation, and recreational infrastructure, the BLM, USFS, and USFWS struggle to meet basic conservation objectives while managing an ever-increasing visitor base. In fact, [recent nonpartisan economic research](#) reveals that visitation has vastly outpaced recreation funding, and that recreation budget deficits have developed across all three agencies. These deficits put the public at risk and degrade the very values people treasure about our public lands.

For instance, over the past dozen years, USFS conservation funding declined by nearly 40%, recreation funding declined by 11%, and average per-visitor funding declined by 25%. Since 2010, the agency would have needed an additional \$814 million merely to keep pace with former funding levels. Over the same period, the BLM faced a shortfall of at least \$114 million. The USFWS has endured an analogous deficit of \$370 million just since 2016. Meanwhile, all three agencies face challenges in hiring and retaining essential staff, as housing costs escalate, inventories diminish, and private sector competition draws down a shrinking pool of qualified candidates.

The United States has grown ever more dependent on public lands for clean air, fresh water, agricultural pollinators, and buffering effects against a rapidly warming and drying climate. Clearly, additional capacity is needed for greater conservation, protection of cultural and ecological resources, regulatory enforcement, ecological restoration, recreational infrastructure, and long-deferred maintenance.

Compounding effects of insufficient management capacity can be seen throughout BLM, USFS, and USFWS units. A few examples include:

- Dilapidated recreation infrastructure, trash, graffiti, frequent search and rescue demands, and undue burden on first responders from rural communities has significantly degraded northern California's BLM King Range National Conservation Area.

- Loss of trailhead ambassadors, campground maintenance staff, backcountry and river rangers has put visitors at risk in southern California's tremendously popular USFS San Gabriel Mountains National Monument and compromised the recreational value of the area.
- Weekend visitor center closures, invasion by exotic and introduced species, diseases affecting rare and threatened species, and loss of hunting, fishing, and other recreational access is now a regular occurrence at the USFWS San Luis National Wildlife Refuge Complex in California's central valley.
- To compensate for a lack of public funding, private donors are financing essential NEPA work necessary to rebuild a severely eroded segment of the Pacific Crest Trail through the extremely popular Mount Jefferson Wilderness in Oregon's Willamette and Deschutes national forests.
- Due to the lack of agency law enforcement personnel, vehicle thefts, arson, vandalism, and illegal camping causes fires, erosion, and pollution on roads and trailheads in the Wild Rivers Ranger District of Oregon's Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.
- Loss of specialist positions following the merger of USFS units, such as Montana's Custer and Gallatin national forests, has led to sharing of critical staff between far-flung ranger districts and severely compromised field coverage.
- In Colorado, lack of adequate visitor management, parking, signage, or bathrooms has led to overcrowding, ecological impacts, human waste, and extreme safety concerns in sensitive alpine habitats surrounding the heralded "14ers" of the White River and San Isabel national forests.

To remedy these problems and to ensure visitor safety and enjoyment of our public lands, we urge you to raise funding in FY24 by:

- Increasing the BLM recreation budget by \$11 million;
- Increasing the USFS recreation budget by \$81 million;
- Increasing the USFWS recreation budget by \$74 million;
- Including funding in each of these three agency budgets to address hiring barriers, support workforce housing in remote locations, and provide cost-of-living wage increases in expensive western states.

America's public lands are more than just shared spaces: they are the envy of the world and a point of national pride, experiencing ever-increasing use. With your help securing enhanced funding, staffing, and resources, our rich assemblage of public lands will continue to provide vital recreational, economic, and ecological services and serve as a critical foundation for the American way of life for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Access Fund
 Active San Gabriel Valley
 Amargosa Conservancy
 American Hiking Society
 American Whitewater
 Amigos de Los Rios
 Anza-Borrego Foundation
 Ascend Wilderness Experience

Back Country Horsemen of America
Back Country Horsemen of Oregon
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Bigfoot Trail Alliance
California Environmental Voters
California Native Plant Society
California Trout
California Wilderness Coalition
Carrizo Plain Conservancy
Central OR Bitterbrush Broads, Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Central Oregon Off Highway Vehicle Association
CNPS Sequoia Chapter
Community Governance Partnership
Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Association
Conservation Funding Project
Conservation Lands Foundation
Day One
Del Norte Trail Alliance
Deschutes Trails Coalition
Folsom Auburn Trail Riders Action Coalition
ForEverGreen Forestry
Friends of Plumas Wilderness
Friends of the Desert Mountains
Friends of the Dunes
Friends of the Eel River
Friends of the Inyo
Friends of the Lost Coast
Friends of the River
Greenisms
Kern River Conservancy
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Lassen Forest Preservation Group
Latino Outdoors
Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition
Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History Foundation
Los Padres ForestWatch
Lowelives Respectable Citizens' Club
Mid Klamath Watershed Council
Mojave Desert Land Trust
National Wildlife Federation
Native American Land Conservancy
Naturalist For You
Nature for All
Northcoast Environmental Center
Oregon Equestrian Trails
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Oregon Trails Coalition

Pacific Crest Trail Association
Partnership for the National Trails System
Peak Design
Potomac Appalachian Trail Club
Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
Public Land Solutions
Public Land Stewards
Resource Renewal Institute
Return of the Natives Restoration Education Project of CSU Monterey Bay
River Partners
Safe Alternatives for our Forest Environment
Sage Trail Alliance
San Gabriel Mountains Trailbuilders
Save the Redwoods League
Sierra Forest Legacy
Sisters Trails Alliance
South Yuba River Citizens League
Southern Sierra Conservancy
Sawyers With Attitude to Spare
Tahoe Area Mountain Biking Association
The Mountain Pact
The Mountaineers
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlands Conservancy
Trailkeepers of Oregon
Tuolumne River Trust
Ventana Wilderness Alliance
Vet Voice Foundation
Waterway Advocates
Western Rivers Conservancy
Wildplaces
Wildlands Network
Winter Wildlands Alliance

CC: Brenda Mallory, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality ; Shalanda Young, Director, Office of Management and Budget