

**Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies for Department of the Interior and U.S Forest Service**

**Testimony of: Kathryn Van Waes, PhD., Executive Director, American Hiking Society and With the full support of American Trails, American Motorcyclist Association, Back Country Horsemen of America, Equine Land Conservation Resource, International Mountain Bicycling Association, National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy**

Chair Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, and members of the subcommittee, on behalf of American Hiking Society and the millions of trail users our collective organizations represent who spend their time, money and energy to get out on trails for recreation, health and wellness, and to volunteer, I thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on the importance of adequately funding our nation's trails and public lands to ensure access for all. We ask the Committee to adopt the following funding requests so the federal government can continue to leverage private contributions and benefit from volunteer labor as well as provide inexpensive, healthy outdoor recreation options for your constituents and all Americans. Appropriations for federal land management agencies requested herein, coupled with the significant resources provided by non-profit partners, serve to accelerate collective stewardship of our nation's public lands and waters and enhance climate adaptability.

**Summary of Requests**

**Forest Service:**

- *Capital Improvement and Maintenance (CMTL), Trails at \$30.51M, including \$11.957M for National Scenic and Historic Trails, and funding for the National Forest System Trail Stewardship Trail Partner Funding;*
- *\$72M to fund Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness;*
- *\$100M to fund Legacy Roads & Trails as a separate line item*

**Bureau of Land Management:**

- *Trails Line Item*
- *National Conservation Lands at \$87.145M;*
- *\$9.644M to fund National Conservation Lands- National Scenic Historic Trails, sub-activity Recreation Resources Management, \$1.5M for deferred maintenance projects on the Iditarod and Pacific Crest Trails, and \$10k for an Indigenous Places Names project on the Arizona Trail*

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:**

- *Refuge Visitor Services at least \$93M*

**National Park Service:**

- *Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program at \$15M;*
- *Park Service Operations for the National Trails System maintained at a minimum of \$22.18M;*
- *Volunteers in Parks programs at a minimum of \$8M, including dedicated funding to the National Trails System;*
- *Visitor Services sub-activity, Youth Partnership Programs at a minimum of \$10.95M, including an acknowledgment of the benefits for trails;*
- *Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) Program, at a min \$125M*

**US Geological Survey:**

- *\$1.5M to fully fund the National Digital Trail Project (NDTP)*

**(Across Agencies) Restore Staffing for Federal Land Managers**

**Forest Service Recommendation:**

National Forest trails benefit everyone and receive increasing public use each year. Collectively, the National Forests provide 159,000 miles of trails for activities ranging from hiking, biking, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle usage, groomed winter trails for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling, and access points for “river trails.” Roughly 120,000 of the 159,000 miles of trails are in need of some form of maintenance or repair.

**Program:** Capital Improvement and Maintenance, Trails

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$30.51M

**FY22 Level:** \$18.5M

**Department:** US Department of Agriculture

**Agency/Account:** Forest Service, Capital Improvement and Maintenance, Trails

**Report Language requested:** “Volunteer groups, Tribal organizations, and non-profit partners are integral to the trail building and maintenance required for the 159,000 miles of trails on National Forest System lands, including more than 10,000 miles of nationally designated scenic, historic, and recreation trails. The Committee supports the Forest Service’s 10-Year Trail Shared Stewardship Challenge and continuing the Trail Stewardship Partner Funding Program to facilitate these efforts. The Committee is aware of the growing need to sustain and increase the capacity for resilient trail building within the outdoor recreation community.”

“National Scenic and Historic Trails.—The Committee directs the Forest Service to continue to provide specific trail operation, maintenance, and construction funding and accomplishment data for the national scenic and historic trails in future budget justifications.”

**Program:** National Forest System Trail Stewardship Trail Partner Funding Program

**Department:** US Department of Agriculture

**Agency/Account:** Forest Service, Capital Improvement and Maintenance, Trails

**Report Language requested:** Within Capital Improvement and Maintenance, Trails the committee supports continued funding for the National Forest System Trail Stewardship Trail Partner Funding Program. Much of the Forest Service’s trail work is accomplished today by volunteer groups and non-profit partners. The Forest Service has a successful Trail Stewardship Partner Funding challenge cost share program that leverages federal funding by 3 to 5:1.

**Program:** Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$72M

**FY22 Level:** \$38M

**Department:** US Department of Agriculture

**Agency/Account:** Forest Service, Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness

**Program:** Legacy Roads & Trails

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$100M

**FY22 Level:** \$5M & restored line item.

**Department:** US Department of Agriculture

**Agency/Account:** Forest Service, Legacy Roads & Trails

**BLM Recommendation:**

The BLM manages 13,468 miles of trails over 245 million acres —more land than any other federal land management agency and contains a diversity of landscapes that often provide the public less structured but nonetheless diverse recreational opportunities. BLM recreation resources and visitor services support strong local economies. More than 120 urban centers and thousands of rural towns (comprising 64 million people) are located within 25 miles of BLM lands.

**Program:** Bureau of Land Management Trails Funding

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** See Report Language Below. **FY22 Level:** Report Language Included

**Department:** Bureau of Land Management

**Agency/Account:** Trails

**Report Language requested:** “The committee directs the Bureau of Land Management to create a trails line item in the BLM budget, including \$9.63M for National Scenic and Historic Trails.”

**Program:** National Conservation Lands

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$87.145M.

**FY22 Level:** \$49.274M

**Department:** Bureau of Land Management

**Agency/Account:** Bureau of Land Management, National Conservation Lands

**Program:** National Conservation Lands-National Scenic Historic Trails, sub-activity Recreation Resources Management

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$9.63M

**FY22 Level:** \$6.547M

**Department:** Bureau of Land Management

**Agency/Account:** Bureau of Land Management, National Conservation Lands

**Report Language requested:** Within National Conservation Lands, unit-level allocations for each of the national scenic and historic trails shall be provided.

#### **FWS Recommendation:**

Refuge Visitor Services provides funding for trail maintenance across FWS-managed land. Located in every U.S. state and territory, and within an hour’s drive of nearly every major U.S. city, National Wildlife Refuges provide incredible opportunities for outdoor recreation, including hiking, hunting, fishing, birding, boating and nature photography across 2,500 miles of trails. More than 37,000 jobs are reliant on refuges. Funding at a level of \$93M will provide for trail maintenance across the land and water trails, refuges, wetlands, and hatcheries, including eleven National Scenic and Historic Trails and forty-four National Recreation Trails.

**Program:** Visitor Services

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$93M

**FY22 Level:** \$77.237M

**Department:** Department of Interior

**Agency/Account:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Visitor Services

#### **NPS Recommendation:**

National Parks, and the world-class experiences their 18,844 miles of trails provide, are one of the most unifying forces in America. Well-maintained trails improve the quality of visitor experiences and enhance visitor safety.

**Program:** Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance (RTCA)

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$15M

**FY22 Level:** Unknown

**Department:** Department of Interior

**Agency/Account:** National Park Service, National Recreation and Preservation

**Report Language requested:** Within, National Recreation and Preservation, \$15M for the Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance program.

**Program:** National Trails System

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$22.18M

**FY22 Level:** \$16.856M

**Department:** Department of Interior

**Agency/Account:** National Park Service, Park Service Operations

**Report Language requested:** Within, Park Service Operations, \$22.18M for administration of the National Trails System.

“National Trails System.—The Committee understands the importance of providing adequate funding to develop and maintain the National Trails System for future generations to enjoy. The Committee urges the Service to continue its efforts to support construction and maintenance projects and volunteer coordination efforts, including activities in support of non-unit National Scenic Trails.”

**Program: Volunteers in Parks**

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$8M

**FY22 Level:** Unknown

**Department:** Department of Interior

**Agency/Account:** National Park Service, Park Partnership Support Functions

**Report Language requested:** The committee recommends funding through Volunteers in Parks be provided for volunteer support of the National Trails System, National Rivers, and National Park Service trails.

**Program: Youth Partnership Programs**

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$10.95M

**FY22 Level:** Unknown

**Department:** Department of Interior

**Agency/Account:** National Park Service, Visitor Services

**Bill Language requested:**

**Report Language requested:** The committee recommends funding through the Youth Partnership Programs be provided for support of the National Trails System, National Rivers, and National Park Service trails.

**Program:** Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** At least \$125M

**FY22 Level:** Unknown

**Department:** Department of Interior

**Agency/Account:** National Park Service, State Conservation Grants

**Report Language requested:** The committee recommends funding through the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program be provided for support of trails, including the National Trails System.

**US Geological Survey Recommendation:**

**Program:** National Digital Trail Project

**FY23 Funding Level Requested:** \$1.5M

**FY22 Level:** \$0.85M

**Department:** U.S. Geological Survey

**Agency/Account:** U.S. Geological Survey, Core Science Systems

**(Across Agencies) Restore Staffing for Federal Land Managers Recommendation:**

Federal land managers, including those overseeing recreation and trails programs across NPS, USFS, BLM, and FWS sites, continue to face staffing shortages impacting the ability to adequately manage, maintain, and conserve the nation’s trails. Across the board land management agency staffing needs to be increased in order to support all aspects of trail management and maintenance, including volunteer engagement and partnerships, land acquisition, on the ground maintenance of trails systems that are desperately in need of attention to reduce maintenance backlogs, ensure that trails are safe and accessible, and address current and anticipated high levels of public use.