



Empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Committee on Energy & Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy & Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

November 15, 2019

Re: Statement in Support of S. 1081, *Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act*, and S. 500, *Restore Our Parks Act*

Dear Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the American Hiking Society, our members, supporters, and the millions-strong hiking community nationwide, we encourage the committee to support legislation under consideration; S. 1081, *Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act*, and S. 500, *Restore Our Parks Act* and oppose any weakening amendments.

Support S. 500, *Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act*

Earlier this year, Congress overwhelmingly passed a permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), ensuring the program will be around for future generations, but that promise does not guarantee it will receive adequate funding each year. Permanent reauthorization has not eliminated threats to LWCF and its many benefits to communities.¹ LWCF funds have been specifically put aside from offshore oil and gas drilling royalties, intended as a reasonable conservation offset for energy development. Yet year after year, on average more than half these funds have been diverted, only to vanish into the general revenue stream with no accountability.

S. 500 would provide full, permanent, and dedicated funding for LWCF, realizing the promise that was made to the American people when first authorized nearly half a century ago: to take the proceeds from natural resource development and invest a small portion in conservation and outdoor recreation. The program has funded nearly one thousand trail projects and thousands of other projects ranging from National Parks, Forests and Wildlife Refuges, to community parks and ball fields in all 50 states. Our National Scenic and Historic Trails, which celebrated their 50th Anniversary in 2018, have benefited from LWCF funding. LWCF funded the completion of the Appalachian Trail and the building of major segments of the Pacific Crest Trail, and at least ten other scenic and historic trails, over 52 different projects. Permanent and dedicated funding is a must to ensure that our nation's trails, public lands, parks, and open spaces remain protected and accessible for generations to come.

¹ For example, despite signing S. 47 (including the permanent reauthorization of LWCF) into law, the Administration proposed a 105% cut to LWCF funding in its FY20 budget proposal.

Support S. 500, *Restore Our Parks Act*, inclusive of Forest Service and other public lands

S. 500 is a first step to address the \$21.5 billion maintenance backlog that exists across all federal lands.² The bill creates a fund that would provide \$6.5 billion over five years from energy development revenues on federal land and water to address the most pressing deferred maintenance needs within the National Park Service (NPS).³

However, unlike its companion bill in the House, S. 500 does not include other federally managed public lands, and despite widespread support, neither bill currently includes the U.S. Forest Service's \$5.5 billion backlog (including \$300 million for trail maintenance) and its 193 million acres of public lands, which encompass 157,000 miles of trails.

We urge the committee, prior to final passage of the legislation, to include the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as part of a comprehensive solution to address deferred maintenance across all federally managed lands.

Additionally, we support the clarifying changes, supported by the sponsors of S.500, that are expected to be offered in the form of a joint staff amendment.

Current Deferred Maintenance Trail Backlogs

When annual maintenance needs go unaddressed, long-term problems arise, seriously hampering the public's access to outdoor recreation. Closed trails, out-of-service restrooms, campgrounds in poor conditions, and impassable roads are only a few of the barriers that hikers face. In turn, local economies that rely on trail recreation suffer. As of 2018, 193,138 miles of trails on federal lands have an estimated \$886 million maintenance backlog.

Agency	Miles of Trails	Trails Deferred Maintenance Amount
USFS ⁴	158,726 miles and 7,156 trail bridges	\$285.8 million (trails and trail bridges)
NPS ⁵	18,844 miles	\$462 million (trails)

² See *Exploring Innovative Solutions to Reduce the Department of the Interior's Maintenance Backlog Before the H. Comm on Natural Resources*, 115th Cong. (2018) (statement of U.S. Dep't of the Interior), available at <https://www.doi.gov/oc/doi-maintenance-backlog>; See also U.S. Dep't of Agric., Office of Inspector Gen., *Forest Service Deferred Maintenance 2* (May 2017), available at <https://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/08601-0004-31.pdf>.

³ This funding includes funds from Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) revenue, which also provides funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

⁴ See *Deferred Maintenance Needs and Potential Solutions on Federal Lands Administered by the Department of the Interior and the USDA Forest Service Before the S. Comm on Energy and Natural Resources*, 116th Cong. (2019) (statement of Lenise Lago, Associate Chief, USDA Forest Service), available at <https://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings?ID=69C0BD6D-0DAD-4CEC-8FE0-06946A0EA883>. See also Carol Hardy Vincent, Congressional Research Serv., *Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2007-FY2016 Estimates and Issues 3* (Apr. 25, 2017), available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43997.pdf>. See also U.S. Dep't of Agric., *FY 2019 Budget Justification 75* (Feb. 2018), available at <https://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/usfs-fy19-budget-justification.pdf>.

⁵ Nat'l Park Serv., *Nat'l Park Serv. Asset Inventory Summary FY17*, available at https://www.nps.gov/subjects/plandesignconstruct/upload/FY17-Asset-Inventory-Summary-AIS-Service-wide_Report_508-3.pdf.

FWS ⁶	2,100 miles (13,300 miles (roads, trails, and bridges combined))	\$52.7 million (trails est. based on % of overall DM \$336 million for roads, trails, and bridges).
BLM ⁷	13, 468 miles (82,000 miles of roads)	\$86.1 million (trails est. based on % of overall DM \$615 million for roads, trails, and bridges). ⁸
All Agencies	(193,138 miles trail specific)	\$886 million est.

Impact on Economic Activity and Recreation Access

The economic impact of trails is significant. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, trail-centered activities directly generate over \$594 billion⁹ and nearly 3.5 million jobs.¹⁰ On federally managed land, outdoor recreation contributes more than \$64.6 billion to the national economy and supports more than 623,000 jobs annually.¹¹ Much of this spending takes place in small communities along each of the trails, communities for which this income is substantial, meaningful, and will remain local. Many of the jobs that trails create cannot be exported offshore: guides and outfitters, hotel staff and restaurateurs, and numerous others directly benefit the community in which they reside. Open and well-maintained trails are essential for this continued economic benefit.

The maintenance and expansion of our nation’s trails is largely supported by trail organizations and citizen volunteers who leverage government resources to maintain and expand our trails. On the National Trails System alone, since 1995, hundreds of thousands of citizen volunteers have contributed more than 19 million hours to build and maintain National Scenic and Historic Trails, and nonprofit trail organizations have contributed more than \$200 million toward trail stewardship projects, a total value of \$577.4 million.¹²

⁶ FWS total includes deferred maintenance not limited to trails as trail specific breakdowns are not publicly available. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Serv., Bureau Highlights (2018), available at https://edit.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fy2019_bib_bh059.pdf; U.S. Dep’t of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Serv., Budget Justifications and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2019 NWRS-10 (2018),

⁷ BLM total includes deferred maintenance not limited to trails as trail specific breakdowns are not publicly available. Carol Hardy Vincent, Congressional Research Serv., Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY2007-FY2016 Estimates and Issues 3 (Apr. 25, 2017), available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43997.pdf>.

⁸ Trail specific data not publicly available. BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, ROADS AND TRAILS TERMINOLOGY 7 (2006), available at <https://www.blm.gov/documents/national-office/blm-library/technical-note/roads-and-trails-terminology>.

⁹ OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION, OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY 18 (2017), available at https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA_RecEconomy_FINAL_Single.pdf. Trail centered activities generated \$594,311,835,880 from including retail spending, salaries, and federal and state taxes.

¹⁰ *Id.* Trail centered activities create 3,476,845 jobs.

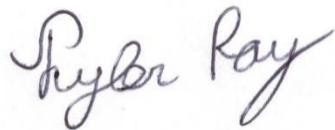
¹¹ OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION, OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY 15 (2017), available at https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA_RecEconomy_FINAL_Single.pdf; “Forest Service Makes it Easier for Visitors to Enjoy National Forests and Grasslands.” U.S. Forest Service, <https://www.fs.fed.us/news/releases/forest-service-makes-it-easier-visitors-enjoy-national-forests-and-grasslands>.

¹² Partnership for the National Trails System, Contributions Sustaining the National Scenic and Historic Trails (2018), <http://pnts.org/new/partnership-for-the-national-trails-system-gold-sheet-of-volunteer-contributions-in-2018/>.

Trails are more than just an economic engine. Since our nation's founding, the outdoors has been a distinctive part of our American experience, and trails are integral to that experience. Whether it's a family out for a hike on a nearby trail, a returning veteran walking off the war, or hunters and anglers accessing their sites, Americans continue to seek places for outdoor recreation, a connection to nature, and healthy exercise. By addressing long overdue improvements to trails, creating and completing trails, and increasing access through expanded guided recreation, Congress can ensure that outdoor recreation remains open and accessible.

Please contact Tyler Ray, Director of Policy and Advocacy, tray@americanhiking.org, 301-565-6704 x705 with any questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tyler Ray". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Tyler Ray
Director of Policy and Advocacy

CC: Members of the Committee