

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 23, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

We are writing to express our strong support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Forest Legacy Program. As you work to craft the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we ask that you ensure effective implementation and oversight of our nation's most important conservation and recreation program by including specific project lists, providing a balanced allocation among programs and protecting prior-year funds from rescissions.

With overwhelming bipartisan support, Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) of 2020 to fully and permanently fund LWCF, ensuring the \$900 million deposited into the LWCF annually will be used for its intended conservation purposes. GAOA also reinforced the role of Congress in determining LWCF funding for its multiple authorized federal agency programs and state grant programs through the annual appropriations process. We look forward to working on a bipartisan basis toward efficient implementation and strong continuing oversight.

The LWCF addresses compelling now-or-never needs in communities across America, and we encourage the Subcommittee to invest the increased resources in a balanced way to successfully implement this valuable, time-tested program. We thank the Subcommittee for its work in FY 2021 to balance allocations among LWCF subprograms according to the formula established by the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act: at least 40% for federal agency conservation priorities, at least 40% for the suite of LWCF state and local grant programs, and the remaining 20% divided between those two sides based on need.

The LWCF and the Forest Legacy Program have contributed to tens of thousands of state and local outdoor recreation projects. From protecting wildlife habitat, natural resource lands, outdoor recreation opportunities, and working forests at the local, state and federal levels, to expanding hunting and fishing access, the LWCF and Forest Legacy Program conserve important lands for current and future generations. Continued investments in these programs help our nation's outdoor recreation economy, which supports 5.2 million American jobs and contributes \$788 billion annually to the U.S. economy.¹

¹ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, [Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2019](#).

For decades, the LWCF receipts have been collected annually to fund federal land acquisition, conserve threatened and endangered species, and provide critical grants to states. The LWCF was designed specifically to not use taxpayer dollars, and the LWCF receipts are not revenues for general purposes, but rather payments to the government specifically intended for conservation spending. The programs funded by the LWCF, including Forest Legacy, the state-side program, endangered species grants, and battlefield protection, provide a diverse array of conservation tools to address national, state, local and regionally driven priorities across the country. These include working lands easements that allow farmers and ranchers to continue acting as stewards of the landscape that sustains their livelihoods. Moreover, Forest Legacy supports working forest projects that help keep critical timberlands forested and accessible, and provides jobs in rural communities.

The LWCF is also a critical tool to acquire inholdings and protect national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, wild and scenic river corridors, national scenic and historic trails, Bureau of Land Management lands and other federal areas.

The companion LWCF state grants program provides crucial support for state and local park acquisitions, recreational facilities, and trail corridors. The LWCF stateside program has funded over 44,000 projects including outdoor recreation facilities, sports fields, and trails in all fifty states. The LWCF state grant is the government's primary investment tool for ensuring that children and families have access to close-to-home recreation no matter where they live and the demand continues to surpass the available funding. Equitable access to local parks and community green spaces are more vital than ever for connecting youth and their families with the outdoors.

These LWCF and Forest Legacy expenditures also create important long-term savings for our federal agencies and the public because they secure land that provides valuable water resources, guard against incompatible development, support private working lands, and reduce fire risk. We hope you will remember that both the LWCF and Forest Legacy leverage and complement state, local, and private conservation investments.

We look forward to working with the Subcommittee in the coming months to ensure that these vital programs are fully funded in FY 2022 to support our longstanding commitment to conservation and to ensure that critical park protection and recreational development opportunities across the nation exist for generations to come. In addition to including balanced allocations between LWCF subprograms and timely project lists with the force of law, we urge that unobligated previous-year discretionary LWCF be retained within appropriated programs rather than being subjected to rescissions. The programs under the LWCF umbrella are oversubscribed, and full funding of LWCF has not eliminated the backlog of time-sensitive conservation priorities. We ask that you recognize these needs by keeping funds in place for viable funded projects within these accounts, and for reinvestment of them through reprogramming in the event specified project needs have changed.

We are grateful for your leadership in ensuring that funds necessary for our conservation and recreation needs across the country will continue to be available at a strong and consistent level for the LWCF and the Forest Legacy Program. As our nation continues to see rapid loss of natural areas to development, and unprecedented use of parks, trails and other outdoor spaces during the

pandemic, the need for investment in equitable access to the outdoors, natural infrastructure, and resilient landscapes to support both people and wildlife has never been more urgent.

Sincerely,



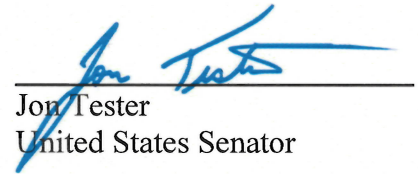
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United States Senator



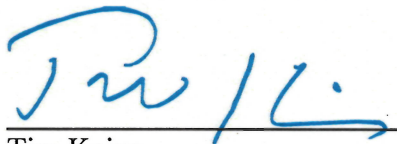
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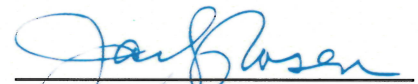
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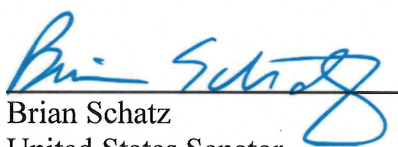
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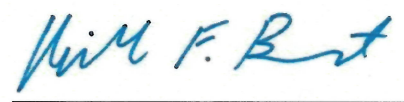

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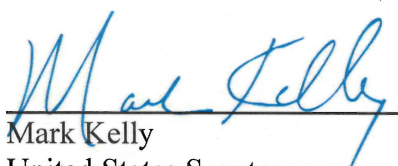

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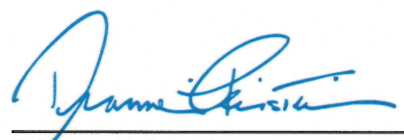

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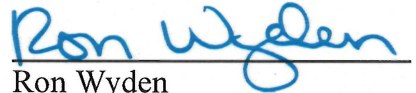
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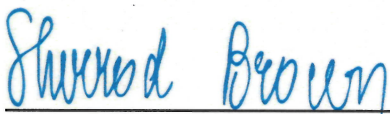
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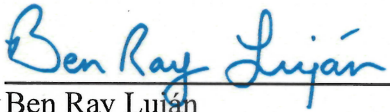
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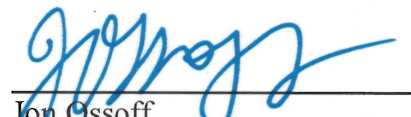
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Robert P. Casey, Jr.
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Jon Ossoff
United States Senator

CC: Senator Patrick Leahy, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations
Senator Richard Shelby, Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations