

Talking Points FY2018 Trails and Recreation Funding

Key takeaways:

- Trails are the primary means for Americans to access their public lands – for camping, hiking, kayaking, fishing, equestrian use, mountain biking, motorized recreation, hunting, and more. Public lands must have public access!
- Congress must better fund trails in order to leverage private-sector donations and volunteer efforts. It should not abandon its responsibility to enhance these important public-private partnerships, which are critical to the rapidly growing outdoor recreation economy.
- The Land & Water Conservation Fund is critical to securing missing sections of trails that currently force hikers, equestrians, and other trail users onto roadways and highways shared by high speed vehicular traffic. LWCF is essential to facilitating strategic land acquisitions that consolidate such fragmented private and public lands and enhancing public recreational opportunities.

Background

Next year, 2018, will be the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the National Trails System, created by Congress as a dynamic experiment in citizen-based public/private trail building for public benefit. Congress's action has inspired and helped to fund trail building and maintenance projects in every state, from local bicycle/pedestrian trails connecting neighborhoods to long-distance paths leading thru some of America's most remote and scenic landscapes and historic places. Over the past 20 years, tens of thousands of citizen volunteers have contributed more than 17 million hours to build and maintain these trails and nonprofit trail organizations have provided nearly \$172 million to help sustain them.

It is exceedingly unfortunate, that as the nation celebrates 50 years of success, the Administration's 2018 budget for trails and the agencies that manage and maintain trails on federal lands would undo much of what has been accomplished. The Administration's budget fails to provide for even the most basic necessities to maintain and manage these critical recreation resources. **Trails are the gateway to nearly every other facet of outdoor recreation, including fishing, hunting, camping, and more.** A failure to maintain and manage our nation's trails directly impacts park visitation, visitor safety, the ability for people to enjoy healthy outdoor recreation, and our nation's economy.

Importantly, trails represent a key attribute that sustains the national recreation economy, as recently reported by the Outdoor Industry Association. For example, outdoor recreation on National Forest lands alone contributes more than \$13 billion dollars to the national economy and supports over 205,000 jobs annually.¹ Whereas national parks, national wildlife refuges, national monuments and other public lands and waters account for \$45 billion in economic

¹ "Forest Service Makes it Easier for Visitors to Enjoy National Forests and Grasslands." U.S. Forest Service

output and about 396,000 jobs nationwide.² These public areas provide significant economic benefits, particularly for nearby rural communities.

Broadly, the Administration's budget:

- Undoes decades of work by state and local governments, volunteers, and nonprofit organizations rather than further leveraging these public-private partnerships; and
- Affects the livelihood of the **1.8 million Americans whose jobs depend directly on trails** and the outdoor recreational opportunities they create.

Forest Service

Just last year Congress passed what was termed "the most bipartisan bill in Congress" when it passed the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act to help reduce the maintenance backlog on 156,000 miles of trails in the National Forests. The Administration's 2018 budget, which cuts trail maintenance from \$77.4M to \$12.7M – an 84% cut and recreation by \$8M, flies in the face of Congressional intent when it passed PL 114-245 (the Trails Stewardship Act).

Asks:

- Fund CMTL budget at \$85M to address trail maintenance backlog and implementation of National Forest System Trail Stewardship Act;
- Fund Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness at \$261M; and
- Restore funding for the Legacy Roads & Trails program to at least \$40M (FY17 enacted).

National Park Service

The National Park Service not only maintains trails within park units such as Yellowstone and Acadia National Parks, but also has administrative responsibility for 23 National Scenic and Historic Trails. Last year 331,000,000 people visited a national park unit and trails were integral to these visits. People hiked, went sightseeing, traveled on horseback, watched wildlife, camped, and learned about America's history and culture on trails that the Park Service manages.

Asks:

- Park Service Operations for the National Trails System must be maintained at a minimum of \$16.5M;
- Fund the Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program at the 2016 enacted level of \$10M;
- Restore the Challenge Cost Share and Volunteers in Parks programs that leverage private donations for public benefit, funding them at \$1.5M and \$8M respectively; and
- Restore funding for the Youth Partnership Programs to the FY2017 level of \$10.95M.

Bureau of Land Management

The proposed 26% cut to the Bureau of Land Management's National Conservation Lands, in the agency's own words, would, "affect visitor services, including maintenance and care of trails and trailheads, grounds maintenance, campground access, river and trail access and interpretive resources." Additionally, the budget seeks to save \$4.5M by focusing on the 384

² Economic Report for Fiscal Year 2015. U.S. Department of the Interior

fee-generating sites while curtailing efforts and operating hours at its 3,200 non-fee generating recreation sites. This shifts the management focus and public access from recreational opportunities and public engagement to a model where tax-payers are only allowed entry if they pay to access land that belongs to them.

Asks:

- Fund National Conservation Lands at \$75M;
- Restore \$4.5M to the subactivity Recreation Resources Management; and
- Restore the Challenge Cost Share program that leverages private donations for public benefit, funding it at \$3M.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Proposed cuts in Refuge Visitor Services would result in a cut of approximately 5% of public programming such as environmental education and birding programs and may impact the hours of operation for some visitor centers. With 37,000 jobs reliant on Refuges this savings could end up costing the economy instead.

Ask:

- Fund Refuge Visitor Services at \$73.2M.

Land & Water Conservation Fund

With an overall 84% cut from 2017 appropriations, LWCF would be unable to fulfill any part of its charter to protect lands that would allow the American public to enjoy them for a variety of recreational pursuits such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and numerous other activities. The cuts would not allow even the trails designated by Congress itself, to be nearer to completion by closing gaps.

The proposed funding cuts, by agency, demonstrate a breach of faith with the public who was promised that in exchange for the depletion of one public resource (off shore energy) they would be provided access to outdoor recreation.

The proposed cuts would be catastrophic for America's trails and are not acceptable:

NPS – 72% cut; no funding for federal land acquisition or recreational access

BLM – 91% cut; no funding for land acquisitions or recreation access

FWS – 75% cut; no funding for land acquisitions or recreation access

USFS – 89% cut; no funding for land acquisitions, Forest Legacy easements to protect working forests, or recreation access

Asks:

- At a minimum, fund LWCF at the \$450M level so that the projects of highest importance can be completed for public benefit; and
- Appropriate \$54.8M for National Scenic and Historic Trails projects in the Collaborative Landscape Proposal
 - Many of the projects offer a unique opportunity to acquire lands that will help protect trails or close existing gaps between sections of these Congressionally-designated trails; and
 - Once land is acquired volunteers and private funding stand ready to build/maintain the trails.