

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

June 24, 2019

**Re: Statement in Support of the Land and Water Conservation Fund**

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 thank the committee for holding a hearing to review the implementation of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and encourage the committee to consider legislation to provide full, dedicated funding to the program.

**LWCF Funds Trail Projects Across the Country, Fueling the Recreation Economy**

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is America's most important program to conserve irreplaceable lands and improve outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the nation. 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.

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, trail-centered activities directly generate over \$594 billion<sup>1</sup> and nearly 3.5 million jobs.<sup>2</sup> On federally managed land, outdoor recreation contributes more than \$64.6 billion to the national economy and supports more than 623,000 jobs annually.<sup>3</sup> 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 restauranteurs, and numerous others directly benefit the community in which they reside. Open, connected, and completed trails are essential for this continued economic benefit.

The maintenance and construction of our nation's trails is largely supported by trail organizations and citizen volunteers who leverage government resources, including LWCF funding, to maintain and expand our trails. On the National Trails System alone, since 1995,

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<sup>1</sup> OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION, OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY 18 (2017), *available at* [https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA\\_RecEconomy\\_FINAL\\_Single.pdf](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.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* Trail centered activities create 3,476,845 jobs.

<sup>3</sup> OUTDOOR INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION, OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY 15 (2017), *available at* [https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA\\_RecEconomy\\_FINAL\\_Single.pdf](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>.

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.<sup>4</sup>

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 and the creation of new trails, Congress can ensure that outdoor recreation remains open and accessible.

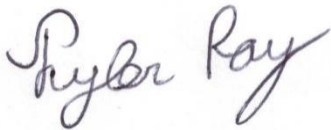
**Full and Dedicated Funding Needed through S.1081, *Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act***

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.1081 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. 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. American Hiking Society urges the committee to promptly consider S.1081.

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

Sincerely,



Tyler Ray  
Director of Policy and Advocacy

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<sup>4</sup> 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/>.

<sup>5</sup> 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.