



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

June 11, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: American Hiking Society Urges Support of the Great American Outdoors Act

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the American Hiking Society, our members, supporters, and the millions-strong hiking community nationwide, I encourage you to vote “Yes” on final passage and any cloture votes on the Great American Outdoors Act.

Great American Outdoors Act Addresses Both Full Funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Public Lands Maintenance Backlog

LWCF Full Funding

The Great American Outdoors Act 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, our most treasured hiking trails, 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.

The legislation will also support continued funding for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) Program. LWCF and ORLP have made progress in expanding access to outdoor spaces for communities in urban areas. Continued support of the ORLP program is needed to ensure that our nation’s natural spaces are available and accessible to urban hikers, especially communities of color whose access to and inclusion in outdoor recreation have been disproportionately negatively impacted by geography, socio-economic status, and other factors. Permanent and dedicated LWCF funding is a must to ensure that our nation's trails, public lands, parks, and open spaces remain protected and accessible for all communities for generations to come.

Public Lands Maintenance Backlog

The Great American Outdoors Act would make strides in addressing the \$20 billion maintenance backlog that exists across all federal lands.¹ The bill creates the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Fund that provides \$9.5 billion in non-taxpayer funds to address the most pressing deferred maintenance needs, including trails, within the National Park Service, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Indian Education.

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. Based on 2018 data, 193,138 miles of trails on federal lands have an estimated \$886 million maintenance backlog.

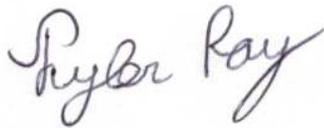
Economic Benefit of the Great American Outdoors Act

The Great American Outdoors Act will provide a much needed jolt to the economy by providing shovel ready projects to increase job creation and economic stability while addressing the maintenance backlog across our public lands.. Addressing deferred maintenance at National Park sites alone, would generate nearly 110,000 jobs, with thousands more likely across all public lands.² Additionally, for every one dollar invested in LWCF could support between 16.8-30.8 jobs.³ By addressing these two related challenges, the Great American Outdoors Act will secure the future of America's public lands legacy, protect visitor safety and recreation access, and sustain thriving local communities.

To protect and preserve the hiking experience and access to our public lands and trails for all, we ask you to vote yes on final passage and any cloture votes on the Great American Outdoors Act.

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

Sincerely,



Tyler Ray
Director of Policy and Advocacy

¹ 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/ocl/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>.

² Cadmus, *Restoring Parks, Creating Jobs* <https://cadmusgroup.com/papers-reports/restoring-parks-creating-jobs/>.

³ *Employment Impacts of Conservation Spending*, May 2020 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341554349_Employment_Impacts_of_Conservation_Spending.