

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 26, 2022

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski,

We are writing to express our support for strengthening the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), our nation's most important conservation and recreation program. LWCF supports an array of benefits, from protecting drinking water and conserving natural infrastructure, to providing landscape conservation, habitat protection, and access to outdoor recreation for all. The program and its many benefits are critical to preserving America's most treasured landscapes for future generations. However, LWCF needs increased investment in Fiscal Year 2023 to address all the outstanding conservation and recreation priorities across the country.

This year, the Administration submitted nearly \$1.1 billion in LWCF needs in its budget request (including \$214 million on the ready-to-go supplemental project lists), and hundreds of millions more were identified during the budget process but left off the final submission lists. Overall demand for LWCF is even higher, with many projects on the priority lists representing single phases of much larger projects. To avoid losing irreplaceable natural and cultural resources, we urge that the FY23 Interior Appropriations bill include \$450 million in discretionary funding, to complement the mandatory allocations provided by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA).

Under GAOA, annual revenues covered into the LWCF account since FY2021 are dedicated for LWCF expenditure, allowing for increased investment in landscape-level conservation, working forests and ranchlands, historic and cultural sites, and access to the outdoors for all. The legislation left intact the ability of future Congresses to appropriate additional discretionary LWCF funds, and over \$22 billion in prior LWCF receipts remain unspent from the LWCF Special Account in the Treasury. Meanwhile, project demand in every state continues to outstrip the level set for the program, with many now-or-never opportunities at risk.

LWCF's \$900 million level was authorized in 1978, when the purchasing power of that amount was more than four times what it is today. Since that time, chronic underfunding of LWCF created a backlog of unmet conservation and recreation needs and a long line of willing-seller landowners and community stakeholders clamoring for access to these funds. GAOA's dedicated funding can begin to address these critical needs. To more fully address urgent conservation priorities and inequities, additional targeted investment is needed from the unobligated balances of the LWCF Special Account.

Now is the time for America to make significant progress towards its conservation goals and to avoid loss of sensitive lands and waters. We urge you to consider an investment of \$450 million in discretionary funds, in addition to mandatory LWCF funding, as part of the House and Senate FY23 Interior Appropriations bills to address the numerous ready-to-go project opportunities. To maintain the strength of the land management agencies and the integrity of their overall work, we ask that these additional

LWCF funds be provided to augment the budgets of these agencies, and not to supplant other necessary operating spending.

Thank you for your attention to this important program and we look forward to working with you to grow investment in conservation and recreation across the nation.

Sincerely,



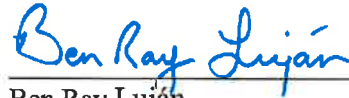
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



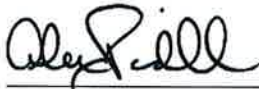
Richard Burr
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator