

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 27, 2022

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

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

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

We are writing to express our strong support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) as you work to craft the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. We appreciate your work in FY 2022 to 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. We encourage you to continue that approach and build on this success by investing the increased resources needed to successfully implement this valuable, time-tested program in FY 2023.

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 to its intended conservation purposes, providing a solid floor for future investment in conservation and recreation. 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 2022 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 (U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service), at least 40% for the suite of LWCF state and local grant programs (State and Local Assistance Program, Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program, Forest Legacy Program, American Battlefield Protection Program, Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund Grants and Highlands Grant Program), and the remaining 20% divided among the suite of 10 programs 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

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 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. LWCF and Forest Legacy leverage and complement state, local, and private conservation investments.

These vital programs support a longstanding commitment to conservation and ensure that critical park protection and recreational development opportunities across the nation exist for generations to come. Importantly, by retaining unobligated, prior-year discretionary LWCF funds within appropriated programs rather than allowing them to be rescinded, the FY22 bill also recognizes that the programs under the LWCF umbrella are oversubscribed and that full funding of LWCF has not eliminated the backlog of time-sensitive conservation and recreation priorities. We appreciate the Subcommittee's commitment to addressing unmet needs by keeping funds in place for viable funded projects within these accounts, and for reinvesting them in LWCF program needs through reprogramming in the event specified project needs have changed. Additionally, with demand continuing to outstrip available LWCF funding, we urge you to retain this approach in FY23.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, [Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2019](#). (most recent pre-pandemic data).

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

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Richard Burr
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



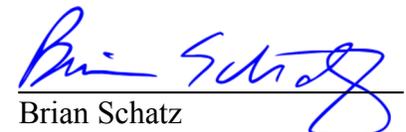
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



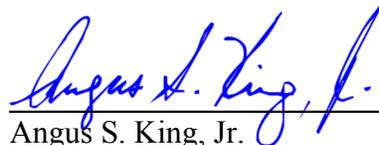
Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



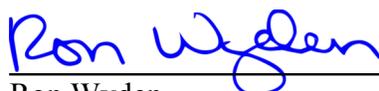
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Robert P. Casey, Jr.
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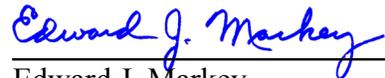
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United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



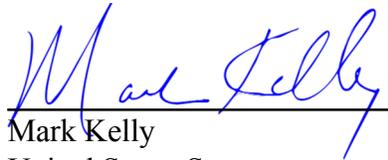
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Richard Blumenthal
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