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February 4, 2019

The Honorable Christopher T. Sununu
Office of the Governor
State House
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Governor Sununu:

Thank you considering these comments regarding the proposed FY 2020-2021 Operating Budget for the State of New Hampshire. The Forest Society recognizes the challenges you and the State Legislature face when crafting the State's budget. We also understand reaching a final agreement does involve prioritizing those programs and services which are important to strengthening the quality of life here.

As you work towards that goal, we would urge you to take into account how the proper stewardship of New Hampshire's natural resources provides economic and environmental benefits. Forested landscapes, for example, support the forest products industry as well as the outdoor recreation and tourism sectors. In addition, they provide important habitats for wildlife. Just as importantly, forested areas help to clean the water we drink and air we breathe. All of these elements contribute to a vibrant economy and a healthy population.

We believe the State plays a key role in strengthening the connection between New Hampshire's quality of life and our natural resources. The next budget represents an opportunity to further this connection through the support of several important programs and initiatives.

First, the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program best illustrates New Hampshire's commitment to protecting our unique natural assets and cultural heritage. We would appreciate your continued backing for its full funding by including \$3.5 million in both FY 2020 and FY 2021.

Second, the mission of the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department is to act as the guardian of New Hampshire's fish, wildlife, and marine resources. Over time the agency's statutory responsibilities have greatly increased, but, unfortunately, the funding available has not kept pace with the cost of delivering services Fish and Game is mandated to provide. As a result, the Department's capacity to steward the State's wildlife resources, to manage public wildlife conservation lands, to enforce Off Highway Recreational Vehicle (OHRV) laws and to lead search and rescue operations is compromised. Therefore, we ask you to support the Department's request for \$3.5 million in General Funds in each year of the biennium to support its mandated operations. This request will allow the Department to hire additional conservation officers, expanding the Department's capacity to enforce laws governing Fish and Game resources and OHRV operators.



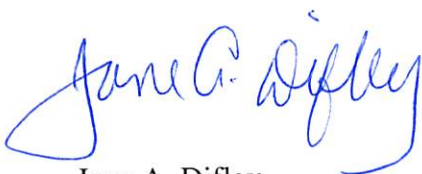
Third, we believe the State should make some one-time investments to address opportunities and challenges posed by the growth of OHRV activity in the State. There is a need for comprehensive recreational trail planning, particularly in Coos County, for all recreational trail users and uses. One goal of this planning should be to assure that OHRV use of the landscape is balanced with other non-motorized recreational trail uses and activities. Another should be to move ATV trails off state and municipal highways, where many are now located. Most stakeholders in the ATV issue seem to agree that OHRV trails should be off highways. There is also a need for an independent assessment of the full balance sheet of economic benefits and costs of expanded OHRV activity, in Coos County and statewide. It may be that the State can partner with other potential funders to get these one-time investments completed. If we are not proactive in addressing these issues, we will be forced to be reactive to increasing conflicts between ORHV enthusiasts, landowners and homeowners and traditional highway vehicles that do not mix well with ATVs on public roads.

Finally, the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) has been working to develop an assessment tool for the long-term management of natural areas within state parks and state forests. Referred to as the Upland Ecological Integrity Assessment (or "Upland EIA"), this tool will help state land managers successfully monitor, manage and conserve exemplary natural communities on state lands. Providing DNCR a one-time appropriation of \$100,000 will allow the DNCR's Natural Heritage Bureau to develop and test this objective and science-based assessment tool. We hope you can include this funding in your budget.

The Forest Society has long valued the strong working partnerships we share today with the State's resource protection agencies. A great example of this relationship is the collaboration at Mount Monadnock State Park, where we lease 4,000 acres of forestland in three towns (including the summit of Mount Monadnock in Jaffrey) to the Division of Parks and Recreation for its operation of the State Park. This partnership highlights how a strong state leadership role in natural resource conservation greatly benefits New Hampshire. We believe the requests we have outlined above will advance the strong collaborations that already occur in New Hampshire concerning the conservation of natural and cultural resources.

Thank you again for your consideration of these comments. We are happy to further discuss any of these items.

Sincerely,



Jane A. Difley
President/Forester



Will Abbott
VP for Policy & Stewardship



Matt Leahy
Public Policy Manager