September 8, 2020

Ms. Margaret Everson
Acting Director, National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Dear Acting Director Everson:

The Partnership for the National Trails System congratulates you on your appointments as Acting Director of the National Park Service and as Chair of the Secretary’s recently formed Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) Coordination and Implementation Task Force. We look forward to working with you in both capacities in the very near future.

The Partnership represents the non-profit partners of the federally designated National Scenic and Historic Trails that make up the flagship components of the National Trails System, which is a key component of a vibrant outdoor recreation economy. An estimated 200 million people live within an hour’s drive of one or more of the 30 National Scenic & Historic Trails – a 55,000-mile network that includes all 50 states – and millions upon millions of Americans walk, hike, ride, or otherwise travel and experience the outdoor recreation, scenic beauty, and historic significance of our National Scenic & Historic Trails. In 2019 alone, the Partnership and these organizations generated almost a million hours of volunteer labor valued at more than $25 million. The National Trails System connects with 84 national parks, 89 national forests, 70 national wildlife refuges and 100 BLM units. Our national trails are a cornerstone of the public lands system that is so important to a healthy economy.

We request that you include the Partnership and its members in the Department’s ongoing activities and discussions with external partners on GAOA implementation, given the importance of the GAOA to the needs of the National Trails, and recognizing the value our National Trails bring to local economies and the leveraging opportunities they generate. We have a longstanding track record of success as a non-profit partner to the federal land management agencies under the Department’s purview and hope that relationship will be enhanced through the GAOA implementation effort.
We are grateful for the Administration’s support of the GAOA and are ready to work with you on its successful implementation. The Partnership actively advocated for many years toward the goal of full and dedicated funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and was pleased that it was linked to dedicated funding to address deferred maintenance needs at National Parks and on other federal lands. Both dedicated funding sources established in the GAOA are important to the health and future of the national trails system and we hope that investments in national trail needs through GAOA funds will be a Departmental priority.

LWCF in particular has been a proven success for over 50 years. We hope you will move quickly to provide Congress with the required FY 2021 program allocations and federal agency land acquisition project lists that will address the backlog of conservation and recreation access needs at every level, including along our National Trails. With full funding, we are excited to be able to address national trail land acquisition needs to increase and improve opportunities for public access and enjoyment that Congress envisioned when it created the National Trails System in the 1968 Act. And with the benefit of secure funding and permanent authorization, the Partnership is also ready to examine synergies that might exist among trail management and protection agencies and partners at the national, state and local levels and invest in related trail planning work.

Through cooperative management agreements authorized under the National Trails System Act, the Partnership and our individual nonprofit national trail organizations work with federal agencies to ensure the proper management, protection and maintenance of the 30 National Scenic and Historic Trails in the system, 23 of which are administered by the National Park Service and one by the Bureau of Land Management, and all of which cut across large swaths of public lands under the purview of your Department. We believe we can play an important role in ensuring the success of the GAOA and look forward to working with you and members of your staff toward that end.

Thank you for consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Valerie Rupp
Executive Director