

February 13, 2017

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations,
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member, House
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on the Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum,

We write to express our support for the National Trails System Collaborative Landscape Planning (CLP) Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) proposal in the FY2017 Budget. This proposal is based on extensive interagency collaboration and is focused on high priority, community-based conservation and recreation access projects. Funding for some of these projects has been included in the FY2017 Appropriations Bills prepared last year by the House and Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittees. Inadequate funding for these important investments jeopardizes access to our National Trails System and has an adverse impact on America's outdoor economy, which contributes \$1.06 trillion to the nation's economy each year. We respectfully urge you to support the complete National Trails System Collaborative Landscape Planning (CLP) proposal by providing sufficient funding for the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill to fully fund this CLP proposal as detailed in several sections of each of the involved agencies' budgets.

In 2015, the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, and the US Fish & Wildlife Service, assembled a comprehensive land protection package focused on national historic and scenic trails projects under the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The package includes 72 parcels in 33 congressional districts in 17 states. Parcels were determined based on their ability to leverage federal funds, their impact in increasing public access by helping to complete trails or conservation priorities, and the level of community engagement and support. The interagency collaboration and public/private cooperation involved in this application are impressive, and should serve as an example for future federal efforts.

These collaborative, high-priority projects will close gaps and protect critical sites along 13 of the 30 national scenic and historic trails, enhance connectivity and public access for recreation and fitness, and support economic development for rural communities along the trails. They will help the Departments of Interior and Agriculture and their local partners meet conservation goals, including protecting critical wildlife habitat and migration corridors along the Kittatinny Ridge in Pennsylvania, the Withlacoochee River in Florida, and within the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. They will encourage public recreation by creating trail access points to connect urban populations to public lands along Hwy 2 in Stevens Pass, Washington and St. Croix, Wisconsin, and will keep hikers off of long stretches of busy roads along the Ice Age and North Country National Scenic Trails. This initiative will protect critical sites necessary to tell the

historic and cultural stories of the trails, including a Lewis & Clark campsite, an important campsite along the route the Overmountain Men marched to the Battle of Kings Mountain during the Revolutionary War, a location where Captain John Smith was held captive, and the lava tube caves where native Hawaiians buried their dead. These projects will help link together 80 national parks and monuments, 70 national wildlife refuges and more than 120 wilderness areas.

Last year another package of 72 land acquisition projects along 12 national scenic and historic trails totaling \$54,832,000 was assembled by the federal agencies for consideration in preparing the LWCF portion of the FY 2018 Budget. The national trails community will be working with the Administration to seek continued funding for the National Trails System in the FY 2018 President's budget for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. As you consider the appropriations for FY 2018 we respectfully ask that you provide enough LWCF money to fund all of these National Trails System projects.

The national scenic and historic trails are some of the most important in our nation's history and for our future. They vividly tell the stories of the major ethnic and cultural communities that make up our Nation. They are examples of how large-scale collaborative stewardship can help leverage federal dollars and enhance public-private partnerships. Each of the 30 trails is developed and sustained through scores of long-term partnerships between Federal agencies, State and local governments, Indian tribes, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners. The handful of Federal staff who administer and manage these trails rely on the contributions of thousands of citizen volunteers to make them available for public enjoyment and reinvigoration. In 2015, volunteers along the National Trails System contributed at least 1,060,000 hours valued at more than \$24,600,000 to sustain the trails. The partner organizations also contributed over \$11,675,000 to benefit the trails. It is clear that the small amount of federal funds needed to help protect and maintain these trails are highly leveraged.

The inclusion of the National Trails System Collaborative Landscape Planning proposal as part of the Land and Water Conservation Fund for FY2017 will protect critical places and resources for public benefit, increase access to public lands, and will help foster and enhance community-based citizen stewardship of conservation and heritage landscapes. This strategic investment of Federal money will leverage additional monetary and in-kind contributions many times over while simultaneously enriching the lives of millions of people and strengthening our communities.

We appreciate your consideration and strongly urge the Committee to recognize the many benefits of the National Trails System and to provide adequate funding for the acquisition of land and easements along these trails through the National Trails System Collaborative Landscape Planning proposal within the Land and Water Conservation Fund appropriations for FY 2017 and 2018.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,