



Partnership for the National Trails System

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March 23, 2020

Honorable Richard Shelby, Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20510

Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20510

Honorable Nita Lowey, Chairwoman
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Members Leahy and Granger,

On behalf of the Partnership for the National Trails System, we respectfully urge that as Congress continues its hard work to address the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, you consider the needs of the many communities dependent on outdoor recreation across the country. In many of these communities, small businesses help sustain their economic vitality by serving the outdoor recreation community. Many trail-related businesses will not survive the impact of widespread travel restrictions and attempts to limit the spread of COVID-19. Economic stimulus legislation under development now in Congress needs to generate the necessary income and workforce development for trail communities to recover quickly.

The outdoor recreation economy plays a critical role in a vibrant national economy. The Bureau of Economic Analysis released a report last year that states outdoor recreation accounts for 2.2 percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product, supports 5.2 million American jobs, and contributes, nationally, \$778 billion in economic output. It is our view that without stimulus funds, we will see many of these operations close with great impact especially to rural communities.

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 in all 50 states. These trails provide spectacular outdoor recreation opportunities, tell important stories of American history and bring significant economic and cultural value to local communities. From long-distance hiking trails that provide world-class outdoor experiences for day hikers and through hikers alike to historic trails that help tell the unique story of America – from colonial settlement to civil rights – our national trails are critical components of the public lands system that is so important to a healthy economy. Investments in public lands – including the national trails system - as part of an economic recovery plan will have long-term benefits.

The non-profit national trail organizations are official partners of the federal agencies who administer the 30 national scenic and historic trails, as authorized by the National Trails System Act. Each of these organizations help ensure the proper management and maintenance of each congressionally designated national trail, made possible through a cooperative management system with federal and state land management agencies - the National Park Service (NPS), United States Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which in 2019 generated almost 1 million hours of volunteer labor valued at over \$25 million.

While these volunteers are the backbone of our work, they cannot do it alone. Caring for and supporting our volunteers creates an incredible economic impact in rural communities. Our 30 member organizations work closely with small businesses up and down the 55,000 miles of trail to support our volunteer force as they address deferred maintenance. This comes in many shapes and sizes ranging from hiring independent contractors to install large infrastructure to purchasing food and construction materials from “mom and pop” shops to support volunteers in the field. Volunteers and the businesses we support carry out our work near remote breathtaking vistas as well as on Main Streets in small communities. In partnership, these volunteers and businesses create, support, and connect open spaces with neighborhoods, creating local jobs and a lifeline of economic vitality for small communities.

The national trails system connects with 84 national parks, 89 national forests, 70 national wildlife refuges and 100 BLM units. Construction, maintenance and infrastructure needs along national trails contribute to the deferred maintenance backlog that Congress is working now to address, and there are annual and future needs as the trail system is built out. Many national trail non-profit partners work closely with Service Corps and employ crews that are well-positioned to address the shovel-ready deferred maintenance projects and help prepare trails for the future. These organizations hire numerous staff from local communities that work to enhance the outdoor recreation resources their communities rely on to draw in tourism dollars. Additionally, many communities along national trails also serve as vital partners to federal agencies by providing trail interpretation and education services and have invested in infrastructure aimed at reaching diverse visitors to their regions.

As Congress formulates additional stimulus legislation, we urge it to address impacts to rural, outdoor-related business by:

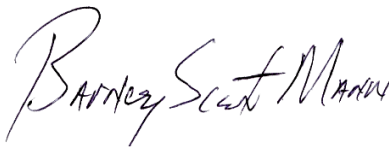
- Making funding available to hire staff members and local contractors who will address deferred maintenance-related assets on national trails and public lands;

- Making funding available for outdoor recreation/conservation stewardship-related capital construction along national trails and in public land gateway communities, including visitor centers, roads, and bridges;
- Supporting the certification and training for those engaging in conservation stewardship career development via public land agencies and their management partners;
- Promoting the recovery of place-based tourism, particularly related to outdoor recreation

Responding to the current pandemic and resulting economic crisis will require the federal, state, and local governments to consider every aspect of economic vitality and address needs as broadly as possible to get Americans working again and revive our dynamic outdoor recreation and rural economies.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please contact Kathy DeCoster, Advocacy and Policy Director, at 571-245-1739.

Sincerely,



Barney Scout Mann
President



Karen Crossley
Interim Executive Director