



Partnership for the National Trails System

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May 5, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the Partnership for the National Trails System, we write to express our deep gratitude to you and your colleagues for the work you have done to address the economic devastation caused by the coronavirus pandemic. We know there will be much more work to do to grapple with the ongoing, all-encompassing financial effects.

As Congress continues its efforts to mitigate this financial distress, we urge you to consider the many communities across the country that are dependent on outdoor recreation and the important role the recreation community will play in our economic recovery. The Bureau of Economic Analysis reported last year that outdoor recreation accounted for 2.2 percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product, supported 5.2 million American jobs, and contributed \$778 billion to the nation's economic output.

We believe our public lands and trails will be integral to our financial recovery and mental health. As Congress formulates additional stimulus legislation, we urge you to consider funding for trail and outdoor recreation programs that can contribute to economic recovery, including:

- Increasing funding to existing DOI and U.S. Forest Service trail partnership programs so that nonprofit partner organizations can employ contractors and seasonal workers to address deferred maintenance and ongoing construction and maintenance needs on national trails;
- Authorizing funding for capital construction projects along some national trails for parking lots, bridges, visitor facilities and other needs that generate short- and long-term jobs in local communities;
- Supporting certification and training for those engaging in conservation stewardship career development;
- Promoting the recovery of place-based tourism, particularly related to outdoor recreation

Our National Trails System 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. 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.

Through cooperative management agreements authorized under the National Trails System Act, individual nonprofit national trail organizations help ensure the proper management and maintenance of the 30 national trails in the system. In 2019, these organizations generated almost a million hours of volunteer labor valued at more than \$25 million.

These nonprofits work closely with small businesses all along the 55,000 miles of national trails to address ongoing management, construction and deferred maintenance needs. This ranges from hiring independent contractors to install large infrastructure to purchasing food and construction materials from local businesses. Many national trail nonprofit partners work closely with Service Corps and employ crews that are well-positioned to pursue shovel-ready deferred maintenance projects and help relocate or build new sections of national trails. In partnership, these volunteers, employees and businesses support and connect open spaces with neighborhoods, creating local jobs and a lifeline of economic vitality for small communities. In fact, several of our National Scenic Trail organizations such as the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the Pacific Crest Trail Association and the Ice Age Trail Alliance have designated nearby towns and counties as official trail communities.

In addition to investing directly in the National Trails System, we urge you to include two bipartisan bills in the next coronavirus economic stimulus package:

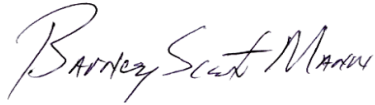
- **The Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422)** has 59 Senate co-sponsors. It would permanently and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to address the backlog of recreation and conservation needs and expand access on our federal public lands, including the national trails, and in every state and county – the foundation of our vibrant outdoor recreation economy. The bill also invests \$9.5 billion over five years to address the backlog of deferred maintenance infrastructure needs on our federal lands, providing shovel-ready projects such as road, bridge and trail construction that increase job creation and economic stability. By addressing these two related public land infrastructure challenges, the Great American Outdoors Act will secure the future of America’s outdoor recreation heritage, protect visitor safety, expand recreation access, and sustain thriving local communities.
- **The RTP Full Funding Act/RTP Funding Transparency Act** would ensure that the remarkable successes of the 1991 Recreational Trails Program will continue to provide safe, enjoyable trails and access to the outdoors for tens of millions of Americans. While the House and Senate versions differ somewhat, both bills affirm the initial Congressional commitment that the nation’s trails should benefit from the federal taxes collected on fuels used for recreation on trails. RTP is partner-based, uniting federal/state/local agencies, trail enthusiasts and the recreation industry. More than 25,000 completed RTP projects contribute to our economy and our health and safety, and provide greater access to our public lands.

Responding to the current pandemic and unfolding economic crisis will require 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. Americans are turning to the outdoors in record numbers during these trying times to seek solace, fresh air and exercise through hiking and other forms of recreation. For those living in cities, close to home access to parks and trails has proven to be essential for their well-being during this crisis. Eventually, when the pandemic abates, millions of outdoor enthusiasts will travel beyond their neighborhoods. They will purchase gas, food and lodging and spend money on gear and supplies. Much of this spending takes place

in rural gateway communities for which this income is substantial and meaningful—and will remain local.

Thank you again for all you are doing to restore the U.S. economy and address individual financial needs, and for your attention to our request. If you have any questions, please contact Kathy DeCoster, Advocacy and Policy Director at kdecoster56@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Barney Scott Mann in cursive script.

Barney Mann
Board Chair

Handwritten signature of Kathy DeCoster in cursive script.

Kathy DeCoster
Director of Advocacy and Policy