



THE  
CONSERVATION FUND



November 20, 2020

*Via electronic mail*

Ms. Margaret Everson  
Counselor to the Secretary  
Exercising the Authority of the Director,  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Ms. Everson,

With the passage and enactment of the John D. Dingell Conservation Act and the Great American Outdoors Act in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the United States has secured the long dreamed-for permanent, full-funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The undersigned organizations could not be more excited about the opportunities that await in land protection, outdoor recreation, and economic development that will be unlocked by this achievement. Realizing the full potential the LWCF provides will require specific attention to the National Trails System and its lands office located in Martinsburg, WV.

Established in 1968 with the passage of its eponymous act, the National Trails System (NTS) created a series of scenic and historical “long trails”—more affectionally known as “linear parks”—that connect public land units in all fifty states. There are 30 national scenic and historic trails between the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, with most Interior-administered trails falling under the National Park Service (NPS). National trails are established by Congress to protect scenic, historic, cultural, and natural resources, and provide unique recreational experiences in each of the fifty states in the Union. While each of these trails has established routes and identified termini, none of the trails are fully connected; some trails only have small stretches located on privately held land while others have hundreds of miles vulnerable to compromise. With the permanent, full-funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, it’s essential that the federal government invest in fully protecting these trail corridors and preserving the scenic, historic, cultural, and natural values that garnered Congressional protection in the first place.

The first step in facilitating the establishment of protected corridors for all of the 30 components of the NTS is investing in the NTS Lands Office in Martinsburg, WV. Established following the 1978 amendments to the National Trails System Act, the office is authorized to acquire land for all Department of the Interior-administered trails, and, subject to agreements with Department of Agriculture-administered trails, to acquire land for them as well. At its zenith, this office had 45 staffers spread over four locations. It currently has 2.5 full-time employees or equivalents (FTE). By adding seven new positions, including a director, a realty officer, realty specialists, surveyor, and administrative officer, the NPS would be able to better effectuate the will of Congress in the NTS, and promote critical conservation corridors and valuable outdoor recreational experiences in each of the fifty states.

We request that as the DOI prepares its Fiscal Year 2022 and subsequent budget proposals, that it add critically needed staff to the Martinsburg Land Office. If you have any questions, please contact Valerie Rupp, executive director for the Partnership for the National Trails System at [vrupp@pnts.org](mailto:vrupp@pnts.org), Brendan Mysliwec, director of federal policy and legislation for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at [bmysliwec@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:bmysliwec@appalachiantrail.org), or Tyler Ray, director of advocacy and policy at the American Hiking Society at [tray@americanhiking.org](mailto:tray@americanhiking.org).

Signed,

American Hiking Society  
American Trails  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
Back Country Horsemen of America  
Partnership for the National Trails System  
The Conservation Fund  
The Trust for Public Land