



June 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, and Members of Congress:

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to urge you to support S. 3422, the Great American Outdoors Act, and oppose amendments so that a clean bill can move quickly to the House and ultimately the President's desk.

The Great American Outdoors Act would provide full, dedicated funding to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) while also providing a needed surge of funds to address the vast deferred maintenance backlog within our National Parks and other public lands. Robust funding for our parks and other public lands will expand access to recreation opportunities, conserve habitat, water resources, and cultural heritage, and bolster our communities to climate change, while putting people to work in every part of the country.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown just how critical our parks, trails and public lands are to the health and economies of communities across the country. S. 3422 would promote economic growth and recovery by putting people to work on infrastructure and other projects, as well as investing in gateway communities and recreation, travel and tourism businesses particularly hard-hit by the current economic crisis. The pandemic has also spotlighted the value of time spent with nature for our emotional and physical health and the inequities of who has access to quality outdoor opportunities. It is clearer than ever that we need to invest in parks and other outdoor spaces to address those urgent needs.

Our national, state and local parks, trails and public lands are a critical economic driver for communities big and small, urban and rural, across the nation. America's outdoor recreation economy supports over 5.2 million homegrown jobs, contributes over \$778 billion in annual economic output, and serves as the lifeblood for countless communities across the country. The LWCF helps fuel those economic opportunities, funding thousands of projects benefiting our National Parks, Forests and Wildlife Refuges as well as community parks and ball fields in nearly every county in the country.

With growing populations needing more recreation opportunities and greenspace, the crises of natural land loss and wildlife extinction, and the value of natural areas in fighting climate change, conservation funding is needed now more than ever. For communities on the front-lines of climate change, the LWCF has protected watersheds that provide natural water storage, reduced wildfire risks, and contributed to climate-smart development. On our coasts, LWCF has also provided funding for wetland buffer zones that protect communities from the potentially damaging storm surges increasingly common with rising sea levels.

For all that the LWCF has done in nearly every community in the country, it has achieved these successes with roughly half of the funding originally envisioned. Moreover, annual uncertainty threatens the complex, multi-party projects made possible by the LWCF. The Great American Outdoors Act will provide needed long-term consistency and predictability, correcting the current system where funding levels fluctuate from year to year and allow ready-to-go projects to linger in limbo or be lost forever.

S. 3422 would also support the conservation and care of our National Parks and other public lands, which represent a uniquely American innovation and set an example for the world. Unfortunately, these national treasures have been underfunded for years, leaving our National Parks, Forests, Refuges, and other public lands with troubling maintenance backlogs, impacting visitors, gateway communities, and natural resources. S. 3422 would invest in shovel-ready infrastructure projects to address those urgent needs, creating local jobs across the country.

We hope Congress will seize this historic opportunity to secure America's preeminent conservation and recreation access program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and tackle the infrastructure repair needs of our National Parks and other public lands. We strongly urge the Senate to pass S. 3422, the Great American Outdoors Act and oppose amendments.

Thank you for considering our views and vote recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Drew McConville". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Drew McConville
Senior Managing Director, Government Relations
The Wilderness Society