



Open Letter to Oregon Congressional Delegation regarding Federal Trails Priorities

March 6, 2020

Dear Oregon Congressional Delegation:

Thank you for your deep commitment to Oregonians in your work in the United States Congress. We are grateful for your leadership.

The Oregon Trails Coalition is a coalition of broad-based, statewide trail interests dedicated to supporting, promoting, and advocating for the preservation, development, and stewardship of a statewide network of sustainable, world class trails that provide access to outdoor recreation and active transportation for all.

Our advisory board includes representatives from more than twenty-five federal, state, and local agencies, trail user groups, outdoor industry partners, and volunteer organizations. We span Oregon's urban and rural communities and represent all trail users from urban, multi-use paths to backcountry trails. We are a coalition of hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, OHV riders, nordic skiers, paddlers, trail runners, mobility device users, and more.

We want to voice our support for the attached budget appropriations requests and other legislative priorities of our national partners in the *Trails Move People* Coalition. The 2019-2023 Oregon Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan demonstrated that trails are a top investment priority for Oregonians, and 74% of Oregonians report using local trails.¹

We are immensely proud of our beautiful, iconic landscapes in Oregon and of our vibrant cities and towns. It is also true that our state has unique challenges to developing and maintaining the trails Oregonians deeply value for recreation, health, transportation, and accessing the beautiful places we hold so dear.

1. With our immense share of federal public lands, Oregonians are especially dependent on federal lands funding to maintain and modernize our USFS and BLM trail systems. For example the CMTL account of the United States Forest Service is woefully underfunded, and our list of decommissioned trails and deferred maintenance needs continues to grow.
2. With our state constitutional restriction on the State Highway Fund to projects in the road right-of-way, federal funding sources such as Transportation Alternatives and the Recreational Trails Program are crucial for trails, off-street paths, and bike and pedestrian bridges that complete major gaps in Oregon communities' transportation system plans and recreation networks. Such trails, paths, and bridges provide critical connections and safe corridors for youth getting to school, families walking and biking in their neighborhoods, commuters getting to and from work, and for Oregonians and visitors alike to access Oregon's iconic landscapes.
3. Outdoor recreation is central to both Oregon's tourism economy and to our identity as Oregonians. Many of our favorite places are beyond carrying capacity, and our land managers lack the resources to invest in sustainable trail systems and trailheads. Our state's Recreation Trails Program is consistently oversubscribed with worthy proposals.

In addition to the priorities named by our national partners (attached), we would like to call out two additional priorities in Oregon:

- Active Transportation for Public Lands Act (H.R. 5642): Set aside 5% of the Federal Land Transportation Program for active transportation to provide funding for construction, planning and design of walking and biking facilities (including trails) to accommodate all non-drivers and provide access to points of interest on federal public lands. With Oregon's large share of federal public land, this bill would especially benefit Oregonians accessing nature, maximizing safety of walking and biking, and minimizing personal vehicle use and the associated carbon emissions.
- Federal Infrastructure funding for a bike, pedestrian, and equestrian path on the Bridge of the Gods: The Bridge of the Gods is a key regional transportation and recreation link in the Columbia River Gorge, where hiking and biking are key components of the recreation-based economy in the region. The Pacific Crest Trail crosses the Columbia River on the Bridge of the Gods, and in 2018 over 7,000 hikers used the bridge crossing. Currently, hikers and bikers must share the narrow 1926 bridge with vehicular traffic; and there is currently no way for equestrians using the Pacific Crest Trail to cross without being met by someone with a horse trailer. There is no safe passageway for hikers, bikers, and equestrians to cross the Columbia River between Portland and The Dalles.

Again, thank you for your leadership. We look forward to continuing to work with the Oregon Congressional delegation in support of legislation that bolsters a statewide network of sustainable trails that connect Oregonians of all backgrounds and abilities to the outdoors, build a culture of environmental and cultural stewardship and healthy recreation, provide an off-street network for traveling within and between Oregon communities, and attract a wide range of users that contribute to Oregon's urban and rural economies.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Noll, Coalition Director

1. *Outdoor Recreation in Oregon: Responding to Demographic and Societal Change: The 2019 – 2023 Oregon Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: Figure 2.6. Priorities for the future, what park and forest agencies should invest in within communities; Figure 2.2. Top ten activities for Oregon residents, 2017, percent population participating,*

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Trails Community Appropriations Recommendations

Adequate Federal Funding for Trails

The [Trails Move People \(TMP\)](#) coalition brings together a diverse cross section of the organized trails community. It is made up of trail-oriented national non-profit organizations, member organizations, and other organized trail advocates. The member organizations of TMP represent millions of Americans who spend their time, money and energy to get out on trails for fun and to volunteer. On behalf of the thousands of diverse trail users our collective organizations represent, we urge appropriators to adequately invest in our nation's trails.

Forest Service (USFS)

National Forest trails benefit everyone and receive increasing public use each year. Collectively, the National Forests provide 158,000 miles of trails for activities ranging from hiking, biking, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle usage, groomed winter trails for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling, and access points for water trails. Yet this trail system is increasingly stressed and maintenance cannot keep pace with the growing demand due to inadequate funding.

- **\$100M to fund Capital Improvement and Maintenance, Trails (CMTL)**
- **\$261M to fund Recreation, Heritage & Wilderness**
- **\$50M to fund Legacy Roads & Trails as a separate line item**

National Park Service (NPS)

National Parks and the world-class experiences their 18,844 miles of trails provide are one of the most unifying forces in America. Well-maintained trails improve the quality of visitor experiences and enhance visitor safety. The National Park Service has administrative responsibility for 23 National Scenic and Historic Trails established by Congress. Adequate funding is essential for keeping these popular trails accessible to the public.

- **\$16.5M as a minimum to fund Park Service Operations for the National Trails System**
- **\$13.478M to maintain funding for the Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program**
- **\$1.5M to restore the Challenge Cost Share program funding**
- **\$8M to restore funding for Volunteers in Parks programs funding**
- **\$10.95M to fund Visitor Services sub-activity, Youth Partnership Programs**

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

The BLM manages 13,468 miles of trails over 245 million surface acres in the United States—more than any other federal land management agency. More than 120 urban centers and thousands of rural towns are located within 25 miles of BLM lands.

- **\$84 M to fund National Conservation Lands**
- **\$9.9M to fund National Conservation Lands- National Scenic Historic Trails, sub-activity Recreation Resources Management**
- **\$3M to increase Challenge Cost Share program funding**

Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS)

Located in every U.S. state and territory, and within an hour's drive of nearly every major U.S. city, National Wildlife Refuges provide incredible opportunities for outdoor recreation, including hiking, hunting, fishing, birding, boating, and nature photography across 2,100 miles of trails. More than 37,000 jobs are reliant on refuges.

- **\$74.227M to maintain Refuge Visitor Services**

Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Across all Agencies Congress recently showed overwhelming bipartisan support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) when it permanently reauthorized the program. Building upon this support, please support full funding of the program. The LWCF has funded nearly 1,000 trail projects and thousands of other projects ranging from National Parks and Forests and Wildlife Refuges, to community parks and ball fields in all 50 states.

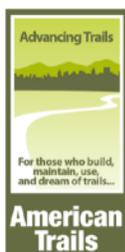
- **\$900M to fully fund LWCF**
- **\$33.4M to include National Scenic and Historic Trails projects within LWCF**

Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account (ORSA)

The Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) publishes the ORSA report marking a critical step forward for the trails and outdoor recreation industry by formally recognizing its economic influence.

- **\$1.5M to fund the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account**

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING AMERICA'S TRAILS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION COMMUNITIES!





The [Trails Move People \(TMP\)](#) coalition brings together a diverse cross section of the organized trails community. It is made up of trail-oriented national non-profit organizations, member organizations, and other organized trail advocates. The member organizations of TMP represent millions of Americans who spend their time, money and energy to get out on trails for fun and to volunteer. Our public lands face a nearly \$21.5 billion maintenance backlog. Our recreation infrastructure supports runners, hikers, bikers, climbers, anglers, paddlers, campers, boaters, RV-ers, snowmobilers, off-road vehicle users and more. Please support the following bills and initiatives:

Solving the Trail Maintenance Backlog

Restore our Parks Act, H.R. 1225 and S. 500

Please support immediate passage of this legislation to address the deferred maintenance and repair backlog of our National Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management, and be favorable to any amendments that would include the maintenance backlog of the US Forest Service.

Connecting America's Active Transportation System Act, H.R.5696

Please support an exciting new bill that provides dedicated federal funds for desperately needed, connected active-transportation infrastructure throughout the United States.

Recreational Trail Program (RTP) Full Funding Act

Funded by \$270M in federal taxes on off-highway vehicle gas purchases, RTP provides funding to states to develop and maintain trail infrastructure. The Federal Highway Administration estimates that the program is funded at a third of the amount—\$85 million annually— that off-road vehicle users pay into the Highway Trust Fund.

Encourage greater use of public-private partnerships

Consider requiring federal agencies to submit requests to the public to operate, improve, or fund outdoor recreation assets with insufficient funding prior to closure — unless there is an imminent health or safety threat.

Promote conservation service corps building recreation infrastructure

We encourage you to continue this focus and make the additional investments necessary to carry its intent forward and put more young adults and veterans to work on the thousands of unmet needs on our public lands.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion through Trails

Trails have an out-sized role to play advancing Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) principles in outdoor recreation. We recommend support and consideration by Congress of the following bipartisan legislation and proposals that include JEDI provisions.

Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Grant Program Act, H.R. 1334

Utilizes funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to fund the creation of public open space in underserved communities with the goal of having outdoor space within 10 minutes of all communities.

Transit to Trails Act, H.R.4273

Provides federal grants to match state funding of transit routes between urban and rural cities and public lands to ensure underserved communities are provided with the health, educational, and recreational benefits of trails, parks, and green spaces.

Recreation Not Red-tape Act, H.R. 3458 and S.1967

Among other provisions to facilitate access to the outdoors, the bill will make it easier for Congress to identify new National Recreation Areas. National Recreation Areas will provide a tool to protect accessible, front country areas, including those in proximity to urban centers providing more outdoor recreation opportunities for urban low-income communities and other communities that have traditionally lacked access to many green spaces.

Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation (SOAR) Act, H.R. 3879 and S. 1665

The SOAR Act will increase opportunities for guided recreation on public lands by improving the outfitter-guide permitting systems of the federal land management agencies. By expanding guided recreation, we provide more opportunities for first time visitors to experience public lands in a positive way and help them develop lifelong connections to the outdoors.

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