



Montana Trails, Recreation and Park Association
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The Honorable Gregg Gianforte
U.S. House of Representatives
1222 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2020

Dear Mr. Gianforte,

The Montana Trails, Recreation and Parks Association requests your support of the bipartisan **Great American Outdoors Act**. The Act would fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at a level of \$900 million every year and addresses the approximately \$20 billion maintenance backlog on federal public lands. The Act would be the single greatest conservation achievement in generations. It would provide jobs to the American people, economic stimulus to communities in need, and protections for the great American outdoors for future generations of Americans.

Full and permanent funding for the LWCF is critical so our land management agencies and communities can better address conservation and growing opportunities for outdoor recreation. Addressing the daunting deferred maintenance needs in national parks is long overdue and the Act will help all of our public land management agencies, cities, counties and states to better provide needed outdoor recreation opportunities and to protect the public lands we all cherish.

The history of the LWCF program can be seen in every small and large town in Montana and throughout the country. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Department says that virtually every town in Montana has benefited from LWCF through the program's history since 1965! Benefits include small and large city parks, state parks, national parks, trails within communities and connecting to and in the backcountry, critical wildlife and natural resource area protection, environmental education and access for people of all ages and abilities.

Never have the American people valued their parks, trails, forests and waters more, turning to them for emotional solace and physical activity in this current time of isolation and anxiety. Montana state parks and fishing access sites experienced a major uptick in visitation as residents recreate outdoors close to home amid restrictions related to the coronavirus. According to Fish, Wildlife & Parks, visitation at state parks in March and April climbed by more than 60%! The pandemic has shown clearly that many communities are woefully underserved. Now more than ever, we need to make sure that every American has close-to-home access to outdoor recreation, that access is expanded to ensure safety without overcrowding, and that these places are protected and maintained so they can continue to provide benefits for decades and generations to come.

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. Data from the Outdoor Industry Association states that outdoor recreation in Montana results in \$7.1 billion in spending in Montana, provides 71,000 Montana jobs and 51% of the total Montana gross product! Nationally, the outdoor recreation economy supports



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over 5 million jobs, contributes \$778 billion in annual economic output, and serves as the lifeblood for countless communities across the country.

LWCF funds have greatly expanded access for sportsmen and women to public hunting and fishing opportunities. This activity contributes another \$119 billion annually to the U.S. economy and supports 1.6 million jobs.

Our National Park System, including Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park, is aging and is suffering from neglected historic sites, crumbling roads and trails, and outdated visitor amenities. Deteriorating infrastructure, exacerbated by increasing visitation pressures and inconsistent annual funding, has led to a nearly \$12 billion backlog in repair needs in America's national parks. This total increases to \$18 billion when overdue maintenance needs on other public lands are included.

This broadly-supported, bipartisan legislation is a direct response to the nation's current crisis and historic and future outdoor recreation needs and would be a momentous achievement for conservation and recreation. All Americans will benefit from passage of this Act. We urge you to support the Great American Outdoors Act.

Respectfully,

Michael Whitaker

President of Montana Trails, Recreation, and Parks Association