

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 22, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment  
and Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment  
and Related Agencies  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

As you work to advance the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we are writing to express our strong support for avoiding rescissions to Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) programs in any final bill. We appreciate your work to ensure effective implementation and oversight of LWCF in the bill approved by the full Committee, and we respectfully request to work with you to prevent rescission of prior-year funds for any portion of this valuable, time-tested program.

Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) of 2020 with overwhelming bipartisan support to fully and permanently fund LWCF, ensuring the \$900 million deposited into the LWCF annually will be used for its intended conservation purposes, providing a solid floor for future investment in conservation and recreation. GAOA also reinforced the role of Congress in determining LWCF funding for its multiple authorized federal agency programs and state grant programs through the annual appropriations process. The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act ensures that this funding is balanced among programs, providing that at least 40% be allocated for federal agency conservation priorities, at least 40% for the suite of LWCF state and local grant programs and the remaining 20% divided among programs based on need.

The LWCF was designed specifically to not use taxpayer dollars, and the LWCF receipts are not revenues for general purposes but rather payments to the government specifically intended for conservation spending. The promise of LWCF has long been to use a portion of revenues derived from the depletion of resources that belong to all Americans to invest in long-term conservation to benefit the public for generations to come. Accordingly, Congress should retain unobligated, prior-year discretionary LWCF funds so that they can be used to support conservation and outdoor recreation as intended rather than allowing them to be rescinded. The suite of LWCF programs are oversubscribed and full funding of LWCF has not eliminated the backlog of time-sensitive conservation and recreation priorities. By keeping prior appropriated funds in place,

Congress can help address compelling now-or-never needs in communities across America. Because once the opportunity to protect a special place is lost, it is often lost forever.

The LWCF State and Local Assistance Program provides crucial support for park acquisitions, recreational facilities, and trail corridors. This program has funded over 44,000 projects including outdoor recreation facilities, sports fields, and trails in all fifty states, leveraging state, local, and private conservation investments. Additionally, the FY23 omnibus allowed for up to 7 percent of LWCF state assistance funds to go toward state administrative support - vastly expanding the states' capacity to administer the program. The LWCF state grant program is the government's primary investment tool for ensuring that children and families have access to close-to-home recreation no matter where they live, and the demand continues to surpass the available funding. Equitable access to local parks and community green spaces are more vital than ever for connecting youth and their families with the outdoors.

These vital programs support a longstanding commitment to conservation and ensure that critical park protection and recreational development opportunities across the nation exist for generations to come. Continued investments in these programs also bolster our nation's outdoor recreation economy, which supports 4.5 million American jobs and contributes \$862 billion annually to the U.S. economy.<sup>1</sup>

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We look forward to working with you to complete the Senate's work on our appropriations bills and to ensure that funds necessary for our conservation and recreation needs across the country will continue to be available.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, [Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2021](#).



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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



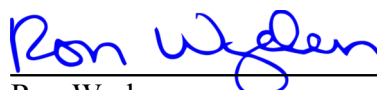
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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



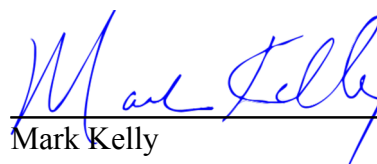
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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



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Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



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Peter Welch  
United States Senator



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Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



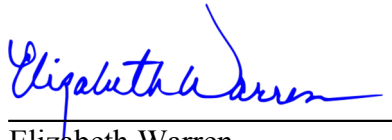
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Jon Tester  
United States Senator



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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Jon Ossoff  
United States Senator