



March 15, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray  
 United States Senate  
 154 Russell Senate Office Building  
 Washington, D.C. 20510

**RE: Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations: U.S. Forest Service - Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Initiative**

Dear Senator Murray,

The undersigned 244 conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations, elected officials and local businesses are relieved that the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) Legacy Roads and Trails program was reinstated and permanently authorized in the *Bipartisan Infrastructure Law* (BIL) with a small amount of seed funding. Infrastructure projects on national forests that were shelved for four years due to the defunding of the program are now moving forward and putting people to work improving watersheds. However, the backlog of road and trail maintenance has grown to a staggering \$4.9 billion after years of neglect and with the barrage of storms that are increasing in both frequency and intensity. Over the last few years, USFS roads all across the state have been battered and damaged by atmospheric river events, wildfires, and other severe weather events. This is why we request that the **FY 2025 Interior-Environment Appropriations Bill include \$100M for the Legacy Roads and Trails program**. Last year's Legacy Roads and Trails funding was not enough to meet the urgent need, providing just \$6 million nationwide.

The Legacy Roads and Trails program is a national program that has benefitted visitors to national forests and improved waterways across the U.S. for more than a decade. From 2008-2017, thanks in large part to the support of Washington's Congressional delegation, this unique, job-producing bi-partisan program invested nearly \$32 million in Washington State

leading to better water quality in streams, reconnected waterways for fish migration, and more resilient road and trail infrastructure. Trails, wildlife, and watersheds on USFS lands are often critical to other protected landscapes including neighboring national parks. Moreover, Legacy Roads and Trails created or maintained 330-528 jobs annually across the nation, bringing dollars and jobs into rural communities and saving America's taxpayers \$3 million per year in road maintenance costs.

Despite the decade worth of progress, and partially due to the lack of funding for four years, a large backlog of work remains. This past winter repeated atmospheric river events have once again highlighted what happens when national forest infrastructure is neglected: culverts plug, roads wash out, salmon eggs are buried, access is lost, and repair costs skyrocket. The Legacy Roads and Trails program is specifically designed to identify, target, and fix or decommission road and trail problems now before they get exponentially worse.

We are grateful that this cornerstone program has been reestablished and we are seeing positive signs that the USFS intends to deliver results. As partners, we are pitching in with volunteer work, matching grants, and additional coordination. With committed funding in FY 2025, we can expect to see progress with the following:

- Restored fish passage on key streams by fixing culverts while also protecting roads from storms;
- Improved habitat connectivity and water quality by reclaiming unneeded roads, preventing sediment from entering waterways;
- Restoration jobs that benefit the local economy adjacent to our national forests; and
- Ensured access to USFS lands by storm-proofing roads and trails.

The Legacy Roads and Trails program helps adapt the USFS road system to a more manageable size over time, reducing fiscal and environmental burdens, and enabling the agency to ensure better and more reliable access. It focuses on the key areas where projects improve salmon and trout habitat, improve water quality, and ensure road/trail resilience in a changing climate. It's a clear solution to a formidable problem, but it requires sufficient investment from Congress to succeed.

Beginning in FY 2022, Legacy Roads and Trails proposals have been included in the annual National Asset Management Program call for projects, submitted by Forests and prioritized by Regional Offices. Although this new pathway may streamline the process, the BIL states that the Secretary shall "solicit and consider public input regionally in the ranking of projects for funding under the Program." However, public engagement has, thus far, been non-existent. **Clarification and transparency around project selection and the allocation of LRT funding is warranted.**

#### **FY2024 Funding Request Information**

- AGENCY: U.S. Forest Service
- SUBCOMMITTEE JURISDICTION: Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
- FUNDING PROGRAM: U.S. Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program (internal Forest Service funding code: "CMLG")
- FY24 REQUEST: \$100 million (inclusive of salary and expenses)
- PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: Since inception in FY 2008, the Legacy Roads and Trails program has significantly enhanced the Forest Service's ability to address key problems associated with its aging and poorly maintained road system. This includes repairing roads and trails needed for public access, replacing failed or undersized culverts to improve fish passage, and retire unneeded roads to prevent harmful water pollution. As climate change impacts become more pronounced, the program can serve as a model of how to deliver funds to address road problems in real time, enabling the Forest Service to efficiently plan, design, and implement restoration treatments. It is a critical tool for leveraging non-federal funds resulting in stronger projects and enhanced community engagement. And because funds primarily go to actual work on the ground, Legacy Roads and Trails creates high wage jobs for contractors, including those who specialize in stream restoration, environmental design, and heavy equipment operation.

We ask for your support of the program by **allocating \$100M to Legacy Roads and Trails in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Interior-Environment Appropriations Bill. Please make a formal request to the Appropriations Committee from your office before the FY25 appropriations request deadline using the information provided in the box above.** This request

is justified due to the lost ground over the last few years and the growing problems impacting watershed health and resilience, and how people access and experience opportunities on our public lands.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

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Washington State Senate

Kevin Van De Wege  
Senator (Dist. 24)  
Washington State Senate

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Senator (Dist. 26)  
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