

*Alpine Lakes Protection Society * Back Country Horsemen of Washington * Bonneville Trails Foundation *
*Cascade Forest Conservancy * Center for Biological Diversity * Conservation Northwest * El Sendero *
*Friends of Mount Adams * Olympic Forest Coalition * Olympic Park Associates * Pacific Rivers *
* Pilchuck Audubon Society * National Parks Conservation Association *
* North Cascades Conservation Council * Sierra Club, WA State Chapter * Spokane Mountaineers *
* The Mountaineers * The Wilderness Society * WA Trails Association * Washington Wild *
* Western Environmental Law Center * Whittaker Outdoors * WildEarth Guardians *

The Honorable Senator Parry Murray
U.S. Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

July 11, 2017

Subject: Fiscal Year 2018 Budget

Dear Senator Murray,

As conservation and recreation organizations we are writing on behalf of the thousands of members we represent to thank you for your appreciation and dedication to Washington's outstanding natural beauty over the years. The Evergreen State's snowy mountains, raging rivers, diverse landscapes, resilient salmon and awesome Puget Sound inspire us every day in our work and in our play. We believe that current residents and visitors benefit greatly from these assets that make up our national public lands and we strive to ensure this legacy continues for many more generations.

We are very concerned about possible cuts to our land management agencies and conservation and recreation safeguards. Budget cuts to these areas lead down the road to selling out our public lands, water, wildlife and wild places to corporate interests at the expense of our own health, economic benefit and values. We believe these programs must be protected so that future generations can enjoy the beauty, learn about nature and experience the outdoors just as we do now. Our organizations, and the many thousands of members that we represent, do not support any cuts targeted to erode conservation and recreation safeguards, or our land management agencies.

As Congress moves forward in developing a budget for Fiscal Year 2018, we wish to thank you for your work to protect our public lands, clean air, water, and outdoor opportunities. Please continue to pursue budget options that reflect these American values embodied in our public lands.

We want to highlight a few specific public lands budgets that were proposed for cuts but need to be defended:

U.S. Forest Service Maintenance Budgets. In a poll completed by the Colorado College in 2015, 72% of voters in the West say the lack of resources to properly maintain and care for public lands is a serious problem with 33% saying this is an extremely serious problem.¹ However, the Administration's Proposed Fiscal Year 2018 Budget completely disregards

¹ Colorado College. Conservation in the West Poll. 2015. Available here:
<https://www.coloradocollege.edu/dotAsset/5e3d4978-4cb7-4784-bf36-b086cf332fc9.pdf>

voters and ignores this clear problem. Instead, the funds needed to fix aging infrastructure to ensure access and to protect rivers and wildlife is proposed to be completely slashed.

- Capital Improvement and Maintenance budget cut 73% (from \$363M to \$99M)
- Legacy Roads and Trail program cut 100% (from \$40M to \$0)
- Trail Maintenance budget cut 83% (from \$77M to \$13M)
- Road Maintenance budget cut 56% (from \$172M to \$75M)
- Deferred Maintenance budget cut 100% (from \$3.1M to \$0)
- Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program eliminated

Despite what Forest Service Chief Tidwell said during recent Senate and House budget hearings, we know that agency goals cannot be met with these types of cuts. If Congress were to proceed with these cuts, Americans would lose even more access to our public lands as roads, bridges, and trails deteriorate to unsafe conditions.

National Park Service (NPS) Budgets. During the past five years, visitation to our National Parks has steadily increased as more and more people are looking to explore and enjoy America's iconic landscapes. The Administration's budget proposes a \$2.55 billion budget for NPS in Fiscal Year 2018, a cut of \$379 million from the 2017 omnibus package. This budget reduction would cut the equivalent of 1,242 full-time positions if Congress passes the administration's budget.² Since 2011, more than 2,300 NPS jobs have been lost – even though National Park visitation has skyrocketed.

The Administration's budget also proposes to reduce the Park Service's facilities operations and maintenance funds to \$685.9 million, a cut of \$92.7 million from the 2017 package. These funds support the rehabilitation of high-priority park infrastructure projects as well as routine maintenance work, including work done on roads and trails within our national park system.

If Congress were to enact the Administration's budget, this would be the steepest cut to National Parks since before World War II.³

Recently, the Secretary of Interior has called for increasing Park fees to make up for proposed budget cuts to the Department of Interior. This would result in decreased access to our federal public lands (with fewer Americans being able to afford access), and a worse experience once there, with less staff and resources to maintain these places.

Land and Water Conservation Fund. For over a half a century, the Government has kept its promise to the American people and directed some of the royalties from offshore energy development for conservation and recreation. The Administration's proposed budget would siphon off at least 80% of those dollars to other unknown and unintended purposes, which is completely unacceptable.

- Land and Water Conservation Fund cut 84% (from \$400M to \$64M)

² National Park Service green book, which is prepared by NPS and Interior budget office staff, 2017.

³ National Park Conservation Association.

Conservation and recreation programs within Federal agencies have been severely underfunded for years, despite the overwhelming benefit they bring to the American public. With 12 million visitor days a year to Washington's public lands contributing over \$535 million in annual expenditures⁴, steep cuts in budgets would effectively eliminate access and hurt the recreation economy – much of it in rural areas.

We thank you again for your leadership and ask you to continue to stand up for healthy lands and waters, healthy lifestyles, and diverse economies by rejecting proposed cuts to these important programs and agencies and supporting strong budgets.

Sincerely,

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⁴ Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State. Earth Economics. January 2015.

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