

May 20, 2021

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
House Transportation & Infrastructure
Committee
2165 Rayburn
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
House Transportation & Infrastructure
Committee Resources Committee
2164 Rayburn
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
1329 Longworth
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman DeFazio, Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Graves, and Ranking Member Westerman,

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of hunters, anglers, boaters, wildlife specialists, and outdoor enthusiasts, write to request your support for the inclusion of critical conservation measures in forthcoming infrastructure investment and job creation legislation. Conservation and natural infrastructure provide durable, lasting investments in both ecological and societal health, supporting habitat improvement and connectivity, climate resilience, clean water, and importantly jobs.

We believe investments in conservation infrastructure are also consistent with the objective of job creation in rural America articulated in President Biden's American Jobs Plan, which calls on Congress to maximize the resilience of land and water resources to protect communities and the environment. As demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the outdoor recreation economy, including fishing and boating, remain one of the fastest growing aspects of the national economy. It is estimated that for every \$1 billion invested in conservation infrastructure, there are 15,000 – 28,000 jobs created, creating an impact well beyond the growing outdoor economy. We urge you to seize this opportunity to energize the American economy through the commitment of much needed resources to improve the health of our natural ecosystems.

We encourage the inclusion of the following conservation infrastructure funding and conservation policy provisions in the infrastructure and job creation legislation now being drafted by your Committees:

1. **Reauthorize the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund**

We urge Congress to ensure more than \$650 million annually in funding for local fish habitat conservation as well as boating and fishing access by reauthorizing the existing Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, which has relied on the surface

transportation bill for reauthorization since 1984. Through excise taxes collected on fishing equipment, electric trolling motors, and motorboat and small engine fuel, this program is the largest source of aquatic-specific funding for state agencies to fulfill their obligations to anglers, boaters, the public, and to conserve our aquatic natural resources.

2. **Fully Fund State Wildlife Action Plans / Recovering America's Wildlife Act**

Outdoor recreation, particularly hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing, is dependent on healthy fish, wildlife, and plant populations. However, state, tribal, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies have collectively identified approximately 12,000 species that are considered at-risk. We urge Congress to provide \$1.397 billion annually to foster on-the-ground, collaborative restoration and conservation projects through the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. By acting now, Congress can conserve at-risk species before more costly measures, including litigation and Endangered Species Act listing are necessary.

3. **Fund Wildlife Crossings and Habitat Connectivity**

It is widely believed that current estimates for wildlife-vehicle collisions – 300,000 annually – are severely underreported as the U.S. Department of Transportation estimates there are one to two million collisions annually between vehicles and large animals. In 2018, approximately 200 Americans died from collisions with wildlife, and the associated costs with wildlife-vehicle collisions are estimated at \$8 billion annually. We encourage Congress to take steps to improve habitat connectivity and address the continued threat posed to animal and human health by wildlife-vehicle collisions. Namely, by adopting bipartisan-driven proposals that provide the strongest funding levels possible to a grant program for state and tribal governments and regional transportation authorities to carry out innovative wildlife-crossing projects. We further urge the pursuit of research into collision reduction strategies and issuance of guidance to states and tribes on best practices for mitigation efforts.

We urge Congress to provide the Secretary of Transportation at least an additional \$25 million over a 5-year period to establish, in partnership with a nonprofit organization, a science based, competitive matching grant program for identifying, piloting, and implementing innovative approaches for reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions. Such a program would foster collaboration among states and investment from the private sector to decrease wildlife-vehicle collisions that cost billions of dollars in damages annually.

Much like how our highway system has fragmented habitat for species across the US, our nation has over 2 million dams and other barriers that block fish migration. Many fish populations have declined as a result. The US Forest Service Aquatic Organism Passage Program (USDA), the US Fish and Wildlife Service National Fish Passage Program (DOI) and NOAA's Habitat Restoration Grants each have proven successful at removing fish passage barriers and reconnecting aquatic migration corridors. We urge Congress to significantly increase funding to these programs.

4. **Green Infrastructure Reserve – Clean Water Act State Revolving Fund**

As Congress works on a bipartisan basis to reauthorize the critical Clean Water Act State Revolving Fund, we strongly urge inclusion of a provision codifying the Green Project Reserve contained in Section 10 of the Water Quality Protection and Job Creation Act approved unanimously by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the 116th Congress. This measure ensures that recipients of Clean Water Act State Revolving Funds “will not use less than 15 percent of such funds for projects to address green infrastructure.” These funds will support wetland and riparian habitat restoration projects across the nation, providing significant reductions in nutrient and sediment loadings in streams, rivers, and lakes. These natural infrastructure water quality improvement projects will also reduce flooding and create substantial fish and wildlife habitat.

5. **Support Coastal and Place-based Restoration Initiatives**

Ongoing watershed restoration efforts in the Chesapeake Bay, Everglades, and Great Lakes are vital to the health of fisheries, water quality, and habitat and human health. The importance of these ecosystems extends beyond local fishing and tourism economies and are essential to regional economic well-being.

- We urge Congress to provide no less than \$725 million for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Everglades restoration efforts, aligning federal commitments with those made by the State of Florida and supporting all approved projects on the Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS).
- We urge Congress to fully fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative at the authorized level of \$475 million.
- Congress is encouraged to provide \$365 million toward the implementation of the Chesapeake Bay Program through Fiscal Year 2025.

Moreover, our organizations support the development of a coastal restoration and resilience fund for shovel-ready projects that restore critical habitat and protect vulnerable communities from the threat of climate change, as included in H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act passed by the House in the 116th Congress.

6. **Fund Efforts to Address Growing Invasive Species in U.S. Waters**

Aquatic nuisance species are an ongoing threat to America’s native aquatic ecosystems, important recreational fisheries, and the American economy. Control of species that have become established, such as hydrilla, zebra and quagga mussels, and Asian carp, cost the nation hundreds of millions of dollars each year. We request Congress increase funding for the USFWS aquatic nuisance species prevention and control program to \$25 million including \$10 million directed to the State and Interstate Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan (SIANSMP) grant program. In addition, we support continued funding for Asian carp control at the \$25 million level authorized by the Water Resources Development Act of 2020 for the US Army Corps of Engineers pilot program for the Tennessee-Cumberland Watershed, and fully funding the five-year, \$20 million authorization for the USFWS Asian Carp Eradication Program.

7. **Addressing Federal Maintenance Backlogs**

Access to Public Lands and the management of these lands is directly linked to the quality and availability of road infrastructure. We support full funding for the repair and maintenance of roads within National Forests, National Parks, Bureau of Land Management and National Wildlife Refuges. We encourage the inclusion of funding to complement the investments made by the Great American Outdoors Act.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is one of the nation's leading federal providers of outdoor recreation with more than 400 lake and river projects across 43 states, totaling 14% of all recreational freshwater fishing in the US. In total, more than 270 million recreational visits each year to USACE project facilities generate \$11 billion in economic contributions. However, many access facilities are in disrepair or have been closed entirely due to the enormous maintenance and construction backlog facing the USACE, including \$20 billion for dam safety and \$76 billion in new construction backlogs. We encourage Congress to add a USACE dedicated set aside for recreational access to the Federal Lands Transportation Program, as well as extend fee retention authority to the USACE under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.

Additionally, the Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program provides a targeted approach to addressing the USFS multi-billion-dollar maintenance backlog. Supported by partner funds, a federal investment of \$100 million would support the reclamation of decommissioned roads, improve the maintenance of trails, and support the restoration of fish passages while providing jobs and lasting improvements to the lands and waters central to rural economies.

The National Fish Hatchery System (NFHS) was established in 1871 to address declining fish populations and to compensate for the loss of fish, habitat, and recreational opportunities because of federal water resources projects. It is estimated that for every tax dollar invested in the NFHS, there is a return of \$28 to our national economy because of the sport fishing opportunities generated. We request that Congress provide \$170 million to the USFWS NFHS to address maintenance backlogs, improve hatchery production, and further increase the return on investment to the American economy.

8. Fund Natural Infrastructure Solutions

Restoring and conserving habitat on private and public lands will not only enhance fish and wildlife populations, but also increase access opportunities for sportsmen and women. We encourage Congress to dedicate no less than 5 percent of the overall infrastructure investment and job creation package toward natural infrastructure. Specific examples of proven investments include: The North American Wetlands Conservation Act, abandoned mine reclamation, forest restoration, coastal and floodplain restoration, reduction of fire risks on federal lands, and investing in Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans, among others.

9. Investing in America's Coastlines and Marine Fisheries Habitats

Our organizations recommend adopting reforms to the Gulf of Mexico Security Act (GOMESA) to dedicate more existing offshore energy production revenue from the Gulf towards coastal restoration and resilience. We urge Congress to lift the \$500 million cap

on currently shared revenues and ensure that Gulf States receive 50% of generated revenue for restoration efforts that benefit fish and wildlife habitat and coastal resiliency. Likewise, for coastlines beyond the Gulf of Mexico, we support the dedication of a portion of offshore wind royalties to coastal restoration in nearby states using a similar model to GOMESA.

10. Rebuild State Outdoor Recreation and Public Safety Infrastructure

Over the decades state fish, wildlife, and park agencies have made significant investments in providing opportunities for our citizens to access and enjoy fish, wildlife, their habitats, outdoor recreation, and the necessary infrastructure that supports those activities including hunting, recreational target shooting, fishing, boating, wildlife watching and photography, imperiled species restoration, habitat management, hiking, camping, reconnecting people with nature, and more. With challenging state budgets persisting over the years, these state agencies have often struggled to obtain additional funds for their growing deferred maintenance expenses in order to keep these lands, waters, facilities, and infrastructure functioning for society. The cost of these existing “shovel-ready” state maintenance needs have grown to billions of dollars, and if not addressed soon these facilities will be forced to close which will hurt the local outdoor recreation economy and our nation’s economic recovery. These state-based deferred maintenance needs would create jobs on par with deferred maintenance projects, support local businesses and contractors, and jump start local and rural economies. We urge you to provide grants to state fish, wildlife, and park agencies to address these immediate state outdoor recreation infrastructure maintenance backlogs to support our nation’s continued outdoor recreation activities.

The Covid-19 pandemic showcased how invaluable our natural resources and environment are to the well-being of the American people. In the year ahead, we expect outdoor recreation to be a critical component of our national economy as Americans continue to take to our lands and waters. We appreciate your bipartisan leadership and consideration of the above priorities that will serve to ensure these precious resources remain available for generations to come. We look forward to working with you to continue this time-tested tradition of conservation investment during the 117th Congress.

Sincerely,

Angler Action Foundation
American Sportfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Bass Anglers Sportsman Society
The Billfish Foundation
BoatU.S.
Bonefish and Tarpon Trust
Camp Fire Club of America
California Waterfowl
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Coastal Conservation Association

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Council to Advance Hunting and Shooting Sports
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited
Fly Fishers International
Grassland Water District
Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation
Houston Safari Club
International Game Fish Association
Izaak Walton League of America
Major League Fishing
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Deer Association
National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Professional Anglers Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
North American Falconers Association
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion: The Hunter's Institute
Outdoor Industry Association
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Texas Wildlife Association
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Whitetails Unlimited
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi
Wild Salmon Center

CC: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi
House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Steve Scalise Whip Scalise