

**American Hiking Society * Appalachian Mountain Club * Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Chesapeake Conservancy * Connecticut Forest & Park Association
Continental Divide Trail Association * Environmental Action Committee of West Marin
East Bay Regional Park District * Endangered Species Coalition
Evangelical Environmental Network * Friends of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park
Friends of Saguaro National Park * GreenLatinos * Hispanic Access Foundation
Hispanic Federation * Ice Age Trail Alliance * International Inbound Travel Association
League of Conservation Voters * Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation
Los Padres ForestWatch * Marin Audubon * Marin Conservation League
National Park Hospitality Association * National Park Partners
National Parks Conservation Association * National Tour Association
North Country Trail Association * Oregon-California Trails Association
Partnership for the National Trails System * Public Lands Conservancy
Public Land Solutions * Resources Renewal Institute * Rocky Mountain Conservancy
Scenic America * Southeast Tourism Society
The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
United States Tour Operators Association * Wild Cumberland * Yosemite Conservancy**

June 14th, 2022

Dear Chairs Merkley and Pingree and Ranking Members Murkowski and Joyce,

We, the undersigned groups supporting conservation, communities, the environment and businesses request additional funding in the FY23 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill for critical needs within the National Park Service (NPS). We were encouraged by the Biden Administration's FY23 \$3.6 billion discretionary budget request for NPS, and we urge meeting that request as well as targeted staff and resources for this considerably underfunded agency.

Additional operating funding is pivotal to restoring NPS operational capacity lost over the last decade. NPS operational capacity has been reduced by more than 15 percent since FY10 while over the same time Congress has added 33 units to the national park system and visitation has grown by over 40 million visits. This growth has led to park superintendents not being able to hire field-oriented positions in law enforcement, interpretation, maintenance, and many other critical areas. Overwhelmed NPS staff has led to low morale, reduced visitor experiences, and major visitor safety concerns. Simply put, park areas are at a significant tipping point and cannot continue to fully serve the American public and adequately care for these national treasures.

With these challenges, we strongly urge additional consideration of two specific areas where NPS funding needs to be enhanced in FY23:

1) **Enhancing and Building NPS Operational Capacity.** We believe NPS' highest priority is to restore the lost staff capacity over the last decade. The Biden Administration has included funding in its FY23 budget request to address a part of this shortfall through some specific

initiatives to enhance staffing levels. However, we believe the proposed increases miss parks and programs that are still suffering their loss of staff capacity and cannot sustain adequate levels of service. We urge Congress to place a priority on meeting these staffing needs for struggling parks across the nation, along with some funding to replace lost program and central office staff capacity that assists many parks in the system. This investment could also support parks that preserve the stories of underrepresented communities, Human Resource capacity to foster workplace inclusion, and other efforts to support the administration's initiative on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in the federal workforce.

2) **Natural and Cultural Resource Conservation.** The Biden administration's FY23 budget includes a \$179.8 million request for the **Natural Resources Conservation Initiative**. This request takes an important step forward to address the critical challenges of our time by increasing scientific capacity, resource management programs at the park level, and improving resource planning to leave lands and waters preserved for future generations to use and enjoy. The Conservation Initiative directly supports several priorities that focus on mitigating climate change impacts and creating projects to adapt park systems for future climate scenarios.

Equally important is doing something to replace the loss of almost 30 percent of cultural resource management positions in our national parks and programs in regional offices. Many cultural resources—including historic buildings, museum objects, and archeological sites—are unmaintained, severely threatened, or degraded. The president's FY23 budget request recommends some small increases in cultural resources capacity. We urge additional funding above that request to save historic structures, archeological sites, and cultural landscapes that represent our nation's cultural heritage.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We appreciate your efforts to protect America's greatest treasures. We look forward to continuing to work with you during the development of the final FY23 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

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