

February 24, 2020

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Members of the Committee:

As members of the outdoor recreation community we write to encourage your consideration for addressing longstanding recreation-related infrastructure needs in major surface transportation legislation due for reauthorization this year.

As the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee moves forward this month with reauthorization of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST) and the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), the undersigned organizations request the Committee's consideration for ensuring infrastructure legislation includes a comprehensive Recreation Title. Reauthorization of major infrastructure packages represents an extraordinary bipartisan opportunity to not only rebuild our crumbling roads, bridges and airports, but also to advance signature green and blue recreation infrastructure policy to advance federal road systems, greenways, campgrounds, trails, marinas, and bike access that interconnect our communities, improve safety, enhance quality of life and drive forward recreation economies for rural and urban areas alike.

The benefits of investing in recreation infrastructure are clear and compelling. Outdoor recreation is a major economic engine in America, growing faster than the economy as a whole, accounting for 2.2 percent of GDP, supporting 5.2 million jobs – many of which are in rural communities – and contributing \$778 billion in economic output, surpassing other sectors such as utilities, mining, agriculture and chemical products manufacturing. Outdoor recreation is an economic multiplier. It helps attract new businesses, recruit and retain employees, and improve quality of life by supporting rural economies, connecting urban populations with our natural treasures and helping people build healthy lives.

Sadly, many of the roads, trails, marinas, campgrounds and other recreation infrastructure our industry depends on are worn out or desperately in need of maintenance and modernization. Simply put, we have Eisenhower-era recreation infrastructure at a time when visitors depend on safe roads and trails, clean and navigable public waters, and 21st century amenities. The outdoor recreation community supports improving the green and blue infrastructure on National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Forest Service (FS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and other federally-managed lands and waters to support recreation infrastructure for rural communities across the country but also to ensure urban communities are able to access the great outdoors.

It's a fact that our economy relies on much more than just roads and bridges – the infrastructure that powers outdoor recreation serves as a pillar for the broader economy. As Congress tackles

our nation's infrastructure challenges, outdoor recreation needs to be at the table. The outdoor recreation community is working to provide contemporary and thoughtful solutions that will improve the health and vibrancy of communities and economies across the country. These concepts range from recognizing recreation as an economic benefit in project prioritization and utilizing recreation fee revenue as a funding source for investment in recreational assets and services, to reauthorization of key conservation programs and addressing trail and campground modernization and expansion needs across America's beloved federal lands and waters.

We look forward to working with you on opportunities to invest in projects and programs that will improve recreation infrastructure, economic productivity and quality of life across our nation. We encourage you to consider including a Recreation Title in reauthorization of FAST and WRDA to ensure the outdoor economy continues to grow and all Americans have access to safe public lands and waters and healthy outdoor recreation experiences for generations to come.

Sincerely,

American Horse Council
American Sportfishing Association
American Trails
Archery Trade Association
Association of Marina Industries
Boat Owners Association of the United States
CHM Government Services
Diving Equipment & Marketing Association
International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas
National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds
National Forest Recreation Association
National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Park Hospitality Association
PeopleForBikes
REI Co-op
RV Dealers Association
RV Industry Association
The Corps Network
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

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Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act of 2020 Policy Recommendations

I. Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP)

Our national parks, forests and public lands and waters provide iconic outdoor recreation experiences and generate billions of dollars for local economies in tourism dollars, jobs and tax revenue. Repairing and maintaining them is a smart investment, and will create additional infrastructure-related jobs, as well as preserve visitor access and resources.

Unfortunately, deferred maintenance costs are stacking up at key federal land agencies like the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service (FS). The NPS has the largest share at nearly \$12 billion. According to the most recent NPS Asset Inventory Summary there is over \$6.5 billion in deferred maintenance directly affecting roads, bridges, and water systems on NPS lands and waters, with \$4.7 billion identified as high and highest priority road, bridge, tunnel and parking lot projects that should be addressed immediately. Additionally, deferred maintenance negatively affecting FS roads, bridges and trails is nearing \$4 billion. This backlog impacts every aspect of the FS mission, including wildfire fighting, active management of our nation’s forests and access for the millions of Americans who depend on these forests for their livelihoods and recreation.

We urge the committee to address years of backlogged infrastructure maintenance on our beloved public lands and waters by authorizing funding of the FLTP at a level of \$5.5 billion over 5 years, and request that funding is allocated appropriately to those federal agencies with the most critical traditional and active transportation and infrastructure needs. This essential funding will ensure that all Americans continue to have safe and reliable access to unparalleled outdoor experiences on and around federally managed lands and waters.

II. The Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects (NSFLTP)

The Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Projects Program (NSFLTP) of The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) (Pub. L. 114-94, section 1123), provides funding for the construction, reconstruction, and rehabilitation of nationally significant projects within, adjacent to, or accessing federal and tribal lands. This program provides an opportunity to address significant transportation “mega projects” within National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Tribal lands, and are defined as those projects that go beyond the scope of core agency funding.

The FAST Act authorized this program at \$100 million per year for five years. Transportation projects eligible for funding must have a price tag of at least \$25 million, with those costing \$50 million or more given priority. The first phase of the current grant cycle received 39 grant applications that would have a total of approximately \$2 billion in NSFLTP program costs, far exceeding the existing authorized and appropriated amounts.

We urge the committee to fund the NSFLTP at no less than the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee-passed level of \$350 million in annual funding which totals \$1.75 billion over 5 years. From that amount, we ask that at least \$200 million per year be designated as mandatory spending. This will provide managers with the consistent and reliable funding they need to plan and execute these significant projects that visitors and residents of our federal and tribal lands depend on.

III. Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP)

The Federal Lands Access Program (Access Program) was established in 23 U.S.C. 204 to improve transportation facilities that provide access to, are adjacent to, or are located within Federal lands. The Access Program supplements state and local resources for public roads, transit systems and other transportation facilities, with an emphasis on high-use recreation sites and economic generators.

The Access Program is designed to provide flexibility for a wide range of transportation projects in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

The Access Program is funded by contract authority from the Highway Trust Fund and subject to obligation limitation. Funds will be allocated among the States using a statutory formula based on road mileage, number of bridges, land area, and visitation.

We urge the committee to authorize funding for FLAP at no less than the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee-passed level of \$1.45 billion over 5 years.

IV. Reauthorize the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (SFRBTF)

The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund serves as the backbone for fisheries conservation funding in the United States and is a critical funding pool for a diverse set of important state and national recreational fishing and boating programs. Taxes on fishing tackle and equipment, motorboat fuel, imported boats and fishing equipment, and small engines are pooled together to create this fund of about \$650 million a year. In turn, the money is then allocated to federal and state programs for recreational boating safety, fisheries management, habitat conservation, vessel pump-out stations, water and boating access infrastructure programs, and aquatic resource education programs, among others.

The bi-partisan Sport Fish Restoration and Recreational Boating Safety Act of 2019 (H.R. 4828) would extend the authorization of the SFRBTF to 2024 and direct the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study the use of non-motorized vessels, how increased use on non-motorized vessels is impacting motorized and non-motorized access, use conflicts on waterways access points, and the amount of SFRBTF funds used to improve non-motorized access and boating safety programs. Unless Congress acts, the

trust fund is set to expire in 2021. *The FAST Act of 2020 should include H.R. 4828 to reauthorize the program and ensure the program begins addressing modern issues impacting the recreational boating community.*

V. Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program (LRT)

The purpose of LRT is to perform critical maintenance and urgent repairs and improvements on U.S. Forest System's roads, trails, and bridges to primarily improve public safety, water quality, wildlife habitats, grazing, fish habitats, and recreational access.

The U.S. Forest Service manages a massive road and trail system which includes more than 370,000 miles of roads 159,000 miles of trails, and more than 13,000 bridges.

The number of miles of new roads being built on FS lands has dropped significantly since the early 1990s, while the quality of new or relocated roads and road segments increased, resulting in less environmental impacts on-the-ground. The current road network still includes older roads built to lower environmental standards. There is a significant backlog of maintenance on roads the American public relies on to access outdoor recreation opportunities as well as decommissioning needs to older dilapidated roads that are no longer being used and may have a negative impact on the environment.

According to a recent study, *Mile By Mile: Ten Years of Legacy Roads and Trails Success*, between 2008-2018 the Legacy Roads and Trails has accumulated an impressive track record of success with over 18,000 miles road maintained and/or storm-proofed, 1,030 culverts replaced to open up fish habitat, and over 5,000 miles of trail repaired, 137 bridges constructed or reconstructed and 7,053 miles of excess roads retired (improving habitat, reducing pollution, and saving taxpayer dollars).

We urge the committee to fund LRT at \$90 million per year (which represents the 2010 funding level when the program was most effective).

VI. Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

We urge the committee to include the Recreational Trails Program Full Funding Act - bipartisan legislation that requires a study to determine the best available estimate of the total amount of off-highway recreation fuel taxes paid into the Highway Trust Fund (HTF).

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is currently funded through the HTF at \$85 million annually. This is only a portion of the \$270 million annually that the Federal Highway Administration conservatively estimates motorized trail users pay into the HTF through fuel taxes for use in nonhighway recreation. RTP is a user-pay, user-benefit

program that benefits all recreationists and serves as the primary funding mechanism for thousands of motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities. This legislation would provide authorizing committees with an accurate assessment of what trail users pay into the HTF and help inform Congress in continuing to authorize the program.

VII. Improve Broadband Access in Federally Managed Lands and Waters to Support Recreational Safety and Enjoyment and Small Business Growth

According to the Brookings Institution, at least 10 percent of Americans lack access to a broadband internet connection. Many those Americans live in what would be considered "rural" areas. *Broadband coverage of major federal front country sites and key road corridors is needed to supply visitors and rural outdoor businesses with the reliable internet and cell service they require.* This advanced service will supply Americans and international visitors with reliable connectivity and in return will provide:

- Consistent Wi-Fi coverage at front country campgrounds;
- A means to contact emergency services in remote areas;
- Real-time weather alerts;
- Enhanced maps to safely navigate trails and waterways (without harm to the environment);
- The ability to access online reservations and rentals while traveling in rural areas;
- Access to valuable interpretive and educational information;
- Increased marketing and promotion of iconic federal lands via social media, and much more.

Specifically, for recreational boating and angling, access to broadband is a critical safety and enjoyment issue for navigating our nation's waterways. Lack of broadband can put boaters at perilous risk without information about navigational channels, changes in weather and access points. For example, lack of broadband access at Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary has posed a risk for some boaters in obtaining accurate weather during changing conditions. This can pose as a serious safety concern for vessels on the water. From a user enjoyment perspective, broadband access improves the overall recreational experience on land and water, allowing consumers to connect with others and boost their enjoyment and allowing rural outdoor businesses to market their products/activities and keep pace with consumer needs.

VIII. Help Underserved Communities Access the Great Outdoors

We urge the committee to help remove barriers to outdoor recreation opportunities so all Americans can access and experience the Great Outdoors by including Transit to Trails Act (H.R. 4273). This bill directs the Department of Transportation (DOT) to establish the Transit to Trails Grant Program to award grants to certain governmental and private entities for projects that increase transportation access to public lands, waters, parkland, or monuments for critically underserved communities.

IX. Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program

According to the Federal Highway Administration's *Wildlife-Vehicle Collision Reduction Study*, America's highways allow people and products to travel to every corner of our nation. Along the way, these roads cut across the habitat of many native wildlife species. When these paths cross, collisions occur, and in greater numbers than most people realize. This presents a real danger to human safety as well as wildlife survival. State and local transportation agencies are looking for ways to find a balance among travel needs, human safety, and conserving wildlife.

We urge the committee to authorize a competitive grant program with at least \$50 million annually totaling \$250 million over 5 years to be directed toward the planning, design, and construction of wildlife crossing projects.

We also encourage the committee to include a workforce development and technical training program and utilize volunteers and national service programs to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and to improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species.

Water Resources Development Act of 2020 Policy Recommendations

I. Enhance federal initiatives to combat aquatic invasive species

The spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) is a national problem that Congress must address. The damage caused by invasive fish is estimated to cost the U.S. \$5.4 billion each year, yet the federal government only spends approximately \$260 million each year to combat AIS. Congress needs to assess effectiveness of existing federal funding towards combatting AIS as well as funding shortfalls, and identify successful projects and programs funded with federal dollars and determine where and how those practices could be applied to other agencies.

In 2015, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that federal members of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (Task Force) spent, on average, \$260 million annually to combat AIS. Despite this price tag, it is estimated that the damage caused by invasive fish alone is estimated to cost the U.S. \$5.4 billion each year while invasive quagga and zebra mussels cost the U.S. \$1 billion annually. These are just a few examples of the billions of dollars of damage that the thousands of different AIS species can cause the U.S. each year. *Building upon GAO's 2015 report, we request that GAO*

update its past work on this topic by studying the efficacy of current AIS programs and funding, projects and programs in need of additional resources, and identify improvements to coordination and communication among federal agencies of jurisdiction.

II. Enact comprehensive U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) project prioritization that recognizes recreation as an economic benefit

The USACE and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) cost benefit ratio (BCR) analysis used to prioritize USACE projects does not account for recreation as an economic benefit. This flawed system fails to properly account for the value created by access for recreational activities – effectively putting boaters and the recreational boating industry’s \$170.3 billion annual economic activity at a disadvantage. Small recreation-based ports are critical access points for marinas and coastal communities where businesses depend on marine recreation-based economic activity.

ACOE and OMB BCR methodologies should be aligned, and the prioritization process should be structured to ensure critical navigation and dredging projects are funded on an equitable, sustainable, and needs-based system that comprehensively factors in all existing economic benefits, including recreation. *SHORE Act should be included in comprehensive BCR reform to ensure recreation’s economic benefits are accounted for.*

III. Improve resiliency of the nation’s coastlines and study impacts to the outdoor economy

There must be a concerted effort among the federal government, states, and coastal communities to understand where and how recreational infrastructure and outdoor industry businesses are impacted by increasing challenges posed by coastal storms and changing sea levels combined with aging infrastructure and a dynamic socioeconomic environment. Recreation is a key fixture to coastal economies across the country and impacts to access and the businesses that support the industry can take a toll on local economies that depend on recreational activities.

To best adapt communities to coastal hazards, the Government GAO should conduct an assessment to identify impacts to the recreational boating ecosystem including but not limited to environmental effects, infrastructure challenges, and fiscal burdens on marine businesses, and provide recommendations on adapting planning and development practices to mitigate vulnerabilities from coastal hazards that would ultimately results in saved lives and resources, and build stronger, more resilient communities.

IV. Remove and prevent marine debris

America's boaters are the original conservationists, and we know that keeping our nation's waters healthy and clean is critical to preserving our way of life. Unfortunately, according to the United Nations, every year eight million metric tons of plastic bottles, straws, bags, fishing gear, and abandoned vessels are dumped into the ocean. This marine debris causes harm to coastal economies, endangers marine life, proliferates the spread of AIS, and creates hazardous conditions for the maritime and recreational boating industries. Some studies have estimated that by the year 2025 our oceans will be so polluted that they will consist of one pound of plastic for every three pounds of fish.

Last year, Congress unanimously passed the bipartisan Save Our Seas Act to reauthorize the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Debris Program through FY2022 at \$10 million annually. The Save Our Seas 2.0 Act (S. 1982/H.R. 3969) builds upon this success through improving the domestic response to marine debris, incentivizing international engagement to address marine debris, and strengthening domestic infrastructure to prevent the creation of new marine debris. *Clean, healthy waterways and aquatic ecosystems are critical to water resources infrastructure and as such we encourage inclusion of S.1982/H.R.3969 language in WRDA to address the growing global marine debris crisis.*

V. Create important incentives for natural infrastructure

Natural infrastructure not only helps communities meet their infrastructure needs, but it also provides substantial co-benefits such as improved fish and wildlife habitat, enhanced recreational opportunities, and improved water quality. We believe that Congress should create important incentives to increase the use of natural infrastructure through providing consistency in cost-sharing requirements. In the upcoming WRDA bill, Congress should clarify that natural infrastructure projects receive the same cost-share requirements as nonstructural projects.

The current BCR process used by USACE also underestimates the benefits of natural infrastructure projects and does not take into account the costs associated with lost ecosystem services from the construction of traditional infrastructure projects. *Congress should modernize the criteria used to assess the costs and benefits, and direct outside technical review of USACE BCRs to ensure accuracy.*